

Abusive supervision and work tension as predictors of counterproductive work behaviour among Nigerian police.

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Abstract

The study investigated abusive supervision and work tension as predictors of counterproductive work behaviour among police officers. Two hundred and fifty Police officers participated in the study, who were randomly drawn from Ebonyi State Police division, Abakaliki. Their age ranged between 24years to 60years. Three instruments were used for data collection: Abusive Supervision Scale, Work Tension Scale and Counterproductive Work Behaviour Scale. Three hypotheses were stated and tested. The result of the regression analysis showed that all the null hypotheses were rejected implying that the abusive supervision, work tension significantly predicted CWB. It was concluded that abusive supervision and work tension are positively associated with CWB. Implications and limitations were discussed and suggestions were made for further studies.

Keywords: *Abusive supervision, work tension, counterproductive work behaviour, police officers*

In the past and present, with the development of the society, human are getting better understandings of the concept of organization. Researchers devote their effort not only in the studying of positive aspects of organization such as the sense of responsibility and supportive organization, but also in studying negative behaviour like abusive supervision, work tension such as stress, distress and counterproductive work behaviour (An & Wang, 2016). Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is one of the negative responses of employees to abusive supervision and

work tension (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) and it includes such acts as shoplifting, sabotage, verbal abuse, withholding of effort, lying, lateness, theft, absenteeism refusing to cooperate and physical assault. Zhang and Liu, (2009) defined counterproductive work behaviour as an employee's behaviour that goes against the goal of an organization. This behaviour can be intentional or unintentional and result from a wide range of underlying causes and motivations. According to Sackett and De-Vore, (2001) counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is any intentional behaviour on the part of an organizational member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests. Examples of such counterproductive behaviour include theft, sabotage, withdrawal, harassment, and drug use. Counterproductive work behavior also known as workplace deviance, is a component of job performance that has been defined by Fox and Spector (2005) as the spectrum of actions that harm employees or organizations. Over the years, researchers have investigated similar set of behaviours using different terminologies which included: organizational delinquency (Robert, 2006), organization-motivated aggression (O'Leary-Kelly, 1996), organizational retaliatory behaviours, workplace aggression and workplace deviance (Steven, 2007), revenge and intimidation (Gallagher, 2008) and antisocial behaviour in organizations (Griffin & Yvette, 2005). Most researches in this area have focused attention on identifying environmental antecedents of counterproductive work behaviour such as job stressors and identifying personality traits such as affectivity that may increase an individual's propensity to engage in counterproductive work behaviour (Penney & Spector, 2005). Although, many researchers agree on the interactionist perspective in investigating the contributions of both interpersonal and environmental variables in predicting behaviour, few

have studied both in relation to counterproductive work behaviour in the same study (Penney & Spector, 2005).

Moreover, while a number of studies in this area have examined the relationships between job stressors and counterproductive work behaviour, few studies seems to have been conducted in Nigerian organizations. The growing interest in CWB stemmed from the fact that CWB is a common occurrence in organizations and can have a tremendous negative impact on both organizations in terms of low productivity, increased insurance costs, lost or damaged property and decreased turnover (Lindberg, 2008). Other current researches that may predict counterproductive workplace behaviour include individual differences such as employees' personal traits and abilities (Salgado, Moscoso, & Anderson, 2013), job experiences (Chernyak-Haz & Tziner, 2014; Kulas, McInnerney, DeMuth, & Jadwinski, 2007), and work stressors such as difficult work conditions, harsh supervision, role ambiguity, role and interpersonal conflicts (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Kulas et al., (2007) reported that abusive supervision is prone to influence employees' propensity to engage in negative employee behaviour intended not only to harm the abuser but also to cause damage to the organization (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Workplace stressors are likely related to sabotage, interpersonal aggression, hostility, and complaints (Chen & Spector, 1992). A useful framework for understanding CWB is the social exchange theory (SET) framework. The theory posits that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis. Its basic propositions are that people tend to repeat actions that were rewarded in the past, and the more often a particular behaviour has resulted in a reward the more likely it is that a person will implement it. SET claims that social relationships

are based on trust that gestures of goodwill will be reciprocated. Social exchange theory was used to understand workplace behaviour.

Another important variable in this research that tends to associate with counterproductive work behaviour is abusive supervision. According to Tepper (2000), abusive supervision is describe as hostile behaviours of employers that employees can perceive, including continuous insulting words and behaviours, but excluding physical contact. Such behaviours include humiliating employees, blaming employees to shift responsibility etc.

Abusive supervision refers to subordinates perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000) and it is an important factor that contributes to deviant behavior (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008; Tepper et al., 2009; Inness et al., 2005). The researchers made use of reactance theory to explain how abusive supervision associate with CWB. According to this theory, individuals have behavioural freedom that they believe they can engage in. The freedom helps define an individual's self-identity (Worchel, 2004) and helps establish his or her sense of control over the environment (Brehm & Brehm, 1981).Events that threaten or lead to loss of behavioural freedom generate a motivational state (reactance) aimed at reinstating the freedom in question. The importance of the threatened or eliminated freedom and the degree of threat determine the degree of reactance. The attractiveness of a forbidden behaviour and the motivation to display that behaviour increase when there is a threat or elimination of freedom. Based on this theory, it can be argued that employees experiencing abusive supervision usually feel that they have little or no control over the environment and to restore this personal control, they engage in deviant

behaviour. Feng (2013) investigated counterproductive work behaviours toward the organization is examined. Using a sample of 198 dyads employees and their immediate supervisor ($N = 396$) from a multinational company in China, the researcher found that abusive supervision results in increased levels of sabotage, withdrawal, production deviance, and theft. This research also examines the moderating effects of locus of control and perceived mobility on the relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' CWB toward the organization. The results suggest that locus of control moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and sabotage, production deviance and theft, but not abusive supervision and withdrawal; perceived mobility moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and withdrawal and theft, but not abusive supervision and sabotage and production deviance. Sulea (2013) administered measures of abusive supervision and counterproductive work behaviour to one hundred and forty (140) police officers purposely selected from United States of America (USA). Data were analyzed using multiple linear regressions. Results showed abusive supervision positively correlated with counterproductive work behaviour.

Faique (2014) examined a research to find out the impact of abusive supervision on organizational citizenship behaviour .A total of 205 responses were gathered for the study. Simple regression, Multiple Regression and Baron and Kenny tests was used to test the stated hypotheses. The results indicated that the mediating variables did not have any relationship with the dependent variable. Due to this, no mediation existed among the dependent and independent variable. Abusive supervision was found to be in a positive relationship with Organizational citizenship behaviour. Also there was a positive relationship was also found between abusive supervision and 3 mediating variables (job tension, emotional exhaustion and turnover intention).

June and Ukm (2011) examined the direct and interactive effects of abusive supervision and coworker support on work engagement. Employees from diverse organizations in Malaysia (N= 140) were surveyed. Multiple regression analysis results showed that abusive supervision related negatively and coworker support related positively with work engagement but did not interact with each other to predict work engagement. Results found that there was no support for a buffering effect of coworker support on the relationship between abusive supervision and work engagement. Meanwhile, a more buffering effect was seen in the study by Feng (2013), who found that abusive supervision is related to both counterproductive work behaviours toward organization and counterproductive work behaviour towards persons. In this current research, work tension which is also known as job stress is assumed to be a predictive factor of counterproductive behaviour of workers in an organization. Work tension had been associated with counterproductive work behaviour (Blaug, Army & Rohit, 2007). Work tension, depression and anxiety is often found in all people(s) association and in organizations or industrial. This work tension is regarded as enemy of human in an organization, but in real situation it is very significant in human nature. This work tension is very important and healthy for change and growth to occur. Work tension is implicated in this research due to its association with counterproductive work behaviour. Work tension has to do with stress at work which is defined as experience of unpleasant, negative emotions in an organization. It is sign and symptom of excessive job and workplace stress which include: Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed, apathy, loss of interest in work, problems sleeping, fatigue, trouble concentrating, using alcohol or drugs to cope, muscle tension or headaches, stomach problems, social withdrawal, and loss of sexual drive. All these work related tensions and stress are potential causes of CWB. Common

causes of excessive workplace stress include: Fear of being laid off, more overtime due to staff cutbacks, pressure to perform to meet rising expectations and pressure to work at optimum levels all the time without increase in job satisfaction, take-home and other remuneration, could perhaps lead to CWB. Michael, Remus and Erin (2006) in their study on work tension and turnover on counterproductive work behaviour among registered nurses. The participants comprising of 156 registered Nurses. The results revealed that counterproductive work behaviour, was related negatively to voluntary turnover, propensity to leave, work tension and positively to work satisfaction. The correlations of counterproductive work behaviour with voluntary turnover, propensity to leave and work satisfaction were not significant for nurses who are supposedly classified low on work related tension. The correlations were significantly higher for Nurses with a high work related tension. The correlations between work tension and counterproductive work behaviour were significant for both subgroups of nurses when both subgroups are merged. The concepts of work tension, the rigidity of counterproductive work behaviour and conditions of work tension specificity as opposed to the processes of counterproductive work behaviour, in this context were however examined with regard to organizational change. Measures of counterproductive work behaviour have also been found to relate to satisfaction and reduced work tension (Bukhari, 2009). As the above study found, workers who reported having inadequate information about plant activities or about their own position in the eyes of their foremen also reported more nervousness than workers having a clearer picture. Abdul, Alwi and Aizzat (2012) in their study investigated the impact of work tension characteristics on counterproductive work behaviour. Three forms of counterproductive work behaviour are identified: Interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour, production

counterproductive work behaviour and property counterproductive work behaviour. The regression analysis carried out on a sample of 355 employees showed mixed results. Work tension significantly demonstrated a significant and negative relationship with production counterproductive work behaviour. The relationship between work tension feedback, interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour and property counterproductive work behavior was postulated. Likewise, work tension identity demonstrated a significant and negative relationship with organizational counterproductive work behaviour. There is a significant negative relationship between skill variety, and both organizational counterproductive work behaviour and interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour. Other studies that supported the association between work tension and counterproductive work behaviour (Samuel, 2010; Lyle, 2007; Mariekevan, 2010; Carsten & Bianca, 2005; Michie, 2002).The researchers observed that previous studies were partially related to the present study. This therefore, contributes to research endeavour on counterproductive work behaviour. To curb counterproductive work behaviour, employees or supervisors should understand some of the values they share and tackle them properly for a better organization as reviewed in the related literatures. From the forgoing literature, therefore it could be postulated that:

- i. Abusive supervision will not statistically significantly predict counterproductive work behaviour.
- ii. Work tension will not statistically significantly predict counterproductive work behaviour.

Method

Participants

A total of two hundred and fifty (250) police officers, selected from seven divisional police stations participated in the study. These include Central police station Abakaliki, Kpirikpiri police division Abakaliki, Ekumenyi Police Division, Ishielu police division, Ishieke police division, Ohaukwu police division, Ezza South Division. The police divisions were all located in Ebonyi State, South-Eastern Nigeria. Both random sampling and accidental sampling methods were used in the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sampled police Divisions while accidental sampling technique was used to select the participants. The ages of the participants were between 25 to 59 years, with average mean age of 40.75.

Instruments

Three sets of instruments were used in the study. These includes: Abusive Supervision Scale, Work Tension Scale, and Counterproductive Work Behaviour Scale.

Abusive Supervision Scale: This is a 15-item scale designed by Tapper (2000) to measure abusive supervision as perceived by subordinates. Participants were required to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the statements made in the questionnaire ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. For instance: 1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Undecided (U), 4=Agree (A), 5 = Strongly Agree (SA) (Tapper, 2000). Tapper (2000) reported reliability index for the Scale as.95.

Pilot study was conducted using eighty (160) participants from police headquarter Abakaliki. The result of pilot study showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

Work Tension Scale: This is a 7-item scale designed by Rizzo (2013) to measure work tension and an employee's psychological or psychosomatic symptoms associated with tension experienced at work. It includes the extent to which tension from work tends to keep employees awake at night and be constantly on an employee's mind. Responses are scored as follows: 1_false, 2_ coded 1, 3_ coded 2, 4true (House & Rizzo, 2013). The alpha reliability ranges from .71 to .89 as reported by House and Rizzo (2013).

Counterproductive Work Behaviour Scale: This is a 29-item scale designed by Suzy & Spector (2003) to measure integrity, emotion, violence and intentional acts of individuals in work place or counterproductive work behaviour. Responses are obtained and scored on a five point Likert response format as 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = everyday, 4 = every weekend, 5 =every two weeks (Suzy & Spector, 2003). The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale as reported by Suzy and Spector (2003) ranges from .88 to .94.

Procedure

The researchers selected twenty rank and file police officers from seven Police Divisions in Abakaliki police command making a total of two hundred and fifty (250) participants using random sampling method and selected participants for the study using accidental sampling method. Having obtained the informed consent of the divisional police officers, the questionnaires were administered to the officers in their respective divisions and collected after filling them within a period of two weeks. Three research assistants also helped in the study. Of

the two hundred and eight (280) questionnaires distributed by the researcher, two hundred and fifty (250) were properly filled and 30 was discarded due to improper filling of the questionnaire. The remaining 250 questionnaire was used for data analysis.

Design/Statistics

The study employed a cross sectional survey approach in assessing if abusive supervision and work tension predicts counterproductive work behaviour

Results

Table 1: Regression model summary showing abusive supervision and work tension as predictors of counterproductive work behaviour.

Model	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	SE	R ² change	F-change	Df ₁	Df ₂	Sig
1	0.30 ^a	0.70	0.06	2.40	0.70	6.00	3	260	0.001*

*Significant P< 0.001

Table 1 showed positive association between abusive supervision and work tension on counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). It indicated that the R, R² and adjusted R² for the association as 0.30, 0.70 and 0.01 respectively. The regression model summary above indicated that abusive supervision and work tension was implicated by 6% in counterproductive work behaviour.

Table 2. Showed the regression analysis for prediction of abusive supervision and work tension through counterproductive work behaviour.

Model	B	STD Error	Beta (β)	t	Sign
Abusive supervision	0.270.70	0.25	3.02	0.5**	
Work tension	0.29	0.58	0.19	0.20	0.001*

** = $P < .05$; * $P < .001$

Table 2 showed a positive significant association between abusive supervision and CWB ($\beta=0.25, t= 3.02, P<0.05$) and work tension and CWB ($\beta=0.29, t = 0.20, P <0.001$)

Table 3. Showed a correlation matrix for prediction of abusive supervision and work tension through counterproductive work behaviour.

Variable	1	2	3
CWB			
Abusive supervision	0.500**		
Work tension	0.36*	0.38*	

Note: * = $P < .05$; ** $P < .001$

The association table above indicated positive correlation between abusive supervision and CWB ($r = .50, P < .001$) and work tension and CWB ($r = .36, P < .05$)

Discussion

Abusive supervision was shown to significantly associate with CWB ($\beta=0.25, t = 3.02, P <0.05$) It is based on this finding that the null hypothesis which sated that abusive supervision will not statistically significantly predict counterproductive work behaviour was rejected. This

result is in an agreement with the findings of Feng (2013) whose results suggested that locus of control moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and sabotage and production deviance. This implies according to Sulea (2013) that abusive supervision positively correlated with counterproductive work behaviour. From the above findings, it could be deduced that counterproductive work behaviour correlates with abusive supervision of individuals in work place. In support of the above findings, Mary (2012) observed that when confronted with stressful conditions, individuals high with abusive supervision may ascribe more malicious motives to the actor leading to increased negative emotional arousal which may lead to counterproductive work behaviour. Individuals low in displaying abusive supervision, on the other hand, may give the actor the benefit of doubt and attribute the behaviour to more causes, enabling them to proceed without feeling the need to respond or retaliate with counterproductive work behaviour. Also, there are other research evidences to show that abusive supervision mediates or moderates the relationship between counterproductive work behaviours (Sulea, 2013). Other research findings have strengthened the result of the present study that persons under stressful condition, who report high levels of abusive supervision, are more likely to report counterproductive work behaviour (Stavroula, Amanda, & Tom, 2003).

As predicted, Hongping (2014) explained that subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision were negatively related with their counterproductive work behaviours. With regards to the various dimensions of counterproductive work behavior, abusive supervision had significant negative relationship with counterproductive work behaviour directed to the organization and to the individuals but was not significantly related to role-prescribed behaviours. Work tension significantly predicted CWB ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 0.20$, $p < .001$). With this

result, the null hypothesis which stated that work tension will not statistically significantly predict counterproductive work behaviour was rejected. This result means that employees who are working under tension are likely to encounter CWB. This finding was confirmed by Blaug, Amy and Rohit (2007) who found that work tension may have an adverse effect on executive's attitudes. This is however in consonant with Michael, Remus and Erin (2006) who found that perceived counterproductive work behaviour, was related negatively to voluntary turnover, propensity to leave, work tension and positively to work satisfaction. The correlations of counterproductive work behaviour with voluntary turnover, propensity to leave and work satisfaction were not significant for Nurses who are supposedly classified low on work related tension. Abdul, Alwi and Aizzat (2012) confirmed that work tension significantly demonstrated a significant and negative relationship with production counterproductive work behaviour. The relationship between work tension feedback, interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour and property counterproductive work behaviour was postulated. In similar manner, work tension identity demonstrated a significant and negative relationship with organizational counterproductive work behaviour. Thus, there is a significant negative relationship between work tension characteristics (work tension autonomy, work tension identity, work tension feedback, work tension significance, skill variety) and counterproductive work behavior (organizational counterproductive work behaviour, interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour). There is a significant negative relationship between work tension autonomy, and both organizational counterproductive work behaviour and interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour.

Furthermore, job satisfaction was positively related to the high quality of the work relationship and low levels of tension in the organizational climate and hassles, while the level of satisfaction with the organization was associated with the work-family balance and the organizational climate. This is similar to Jilie, Amanda & Goodman (2008) who found in a laboratory group that less group productivity in addition to less satisfaction, increased defensiveness, and counterproductive work behaviour.

Implications of the Study

CWB have been seen to adversely affect organizational behaviour and organizational procedures. Specific CWBs include abusive behaviour against others, aggression (both physical and verbal), purposely doing work incorrectly, sabotage, theft and withdrawal (example, absence, lateness and decreased turnover). Other examples of CWB are emotional abuse, bullying, mobbing, deviance, aggression, retaliation and intimidation (Blaug, Army & Rohit, 2007). A number of job stressors have been linked to the performance of CWB including role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, organizational constraints and interpersonal conflict (Blaug, Army & Rohit, 2007). Thus, the findings of the study could however be generalized to other sample but the same research could be replicated with other larger sample before such a generalization. The study could also be a guide for further study on CWB in relation to abusive supervision, work tension, work overload and family work conflict.

Recommendation for further study

On the bases of the findings of the study, future studies in the area could consider experimental approach. Thus, conditions could be created such that that a group of workers (participants) will be assigned to abusive supervision condition while another groups is assigned

to non-abusive supervision condition. The two groups will be reassigned into work tension group and non-work tension group. However, the difference group will be tested on counterproductive work behaviour. This manipulation if controlled in order to avoid interfering variables will help to established if there is any cause-effect between abusive supervision and CWB. And work tension and CWB. Moreover, future studies in this area should broaden the scope of this study by drawing sample from other organizations. This will help to cross validate the finding of this study.

Conclusion

CWB have been seen to adversely affect organizational behaviour and organizational procedures. Findings of this study have shown that Police officers in the selected State Commands display some levels of CWB as a result of both abusive supervision and work tension. Specific CWBs include abusive behaviour against others, aggression (both physical and verbal), purposely doing work incorrectly, sabotage, theft and withdrawal (example, absence, lateness and decreased turnover). Other examples of CWB are emotional abuse, bullying, mobbing, deviance, aggression, retaliation and intimidation (Blaug, Army & Rohit, 2007). A number of job stressors have been linked to the performance of CWB including role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, organizational constraints and interpersonal conflict (Blaug, Army & Rohit, 2007). The rate at which employees work under tension or stress could trigger CWB in organizations. So also work overload in a particular work description can predispose employees into exhibiting CWB. Thus, the findings of the study could however be generalized to other sample but the same research could be replicated with other larger sample before such a

generalization. The study could also be a guide for further study on CWB in relation to abusive supervision and work tension.

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