

Unraveling the Impact of Abusive Supervision on Emotional Exhaustion: A Serial Mediation Model of Stress, Relational Conflict, and Toxic Workplaces

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Abstract

Workplace dynamics play a crucial role in shaping employee well-being, productivity, and overall organizational success. However, negative leadership behaviors, such as abusive supervision, can create a toxic work environment that significantly impacts employees' psychological and emotional health. Abusive supervision, characterized by sustained hostile behavior from supervisors, has been linked to various negative workplace outcomes, including emotional exhaustion, heightened stress, increased relational conflict, and exposure to illegitimate tasks. Additionally, toxic workplaces, where hostility and negativity prevail, further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for employees to maintain motivation and job satisfaction. Understanding the complex relationships among these variables is essential for organizations seeking to create a healthier work environment and reduce the long-term consequences of destructive leadership. This study aims to explore how abusive supervision influences emotional exhaustion through the mediating effects of stress, relational conflict, illegitimate tasks, and toxic workplace conditions, providing insights into both theoretical implications and practical strategies for organizational improvement.

1. Introduction

Evils of abusive supervision is a form of workplace mistreatment characterized by sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors displayed to subordinates excluding physical violence (Tepper, 2000)) are well known and theoretically informing, at worst the damage does upon individual as well as organization effectiveness. It creates an unhealthy workplace where employees experience serious psychological and emotional effects, particularly emotional exhaustion, which is defined as chronic fatigue, loss of occupational efficiency, reduction in empathy, high cynicism towards work (Maslach and Leiter,2016). Different workplace stressors, such as relational conflict, stress, toxic workplaces, and illegitimate tasks, are significant mediating variables of the association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion, which is known as a predictor of burnout. Relational conflict, which is interpersonal discord stemming from personality clashes, communication breakdowns, or hostility in the workplace (Jehn, 1995), is especially common in environments where abusive supervisors establish a negative environment and incivility at work and interpersonal disputes

will be practiced (Liu et al., 2012). Such conflicts can not only cause disruption of team cohesion with its negative social impacts but also consistently remain as a source of emotional distress, putting employees at a higher risk of exhaustion. Likewise, stress, a physical and psychological reaction to perceived threats or stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), is an essential mediator within this process. Chronic stress among employees exposed to abusive supervision is attributed to increased job insecurity and lack of control, and fear of retaliation leading to emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll, 1989). In addition, workplaces that breed negative energy, poor ethical conduct, and lack ethnic safety (Einarsen et al. 2016) only serve to perpetuate this vicious cycle, draining the employees of psychological and emotional reserves through poisonous environment. In these contexts, employees exhibit higher levels of stress, relational threats and emotional fatigue that commonly result in lower job involvement, absenteeism, and turnover intentions (Mackey et al., 2017). Another prominent mediating factor, illegitimate tasks, relates to work tasks perceived as superfluous or unreasonable which outrage professional norms and employees' sense of role requirements (Semmer et al., 2015). Abusive supervisors often assign illegitimate tasks to employees in an effort to exert control over them or undercut their work, creating frustration and psychological distress that feed emotional exhaustion (Eatough et al., 2016). This web of astronomical social toxicities acts synergistically to form an upward spiral, whereby abusive supervision nourishes and sustains a toxic, conflict-ridden workplace, precipitating higher levels of employee stress and exposure to illegitimate tasks, each of which adds fuel to the emotional exhaustion fire. Considering that all of these variables have noticeable impact on employee well-being and organizational results, organizations need to lead intervention programs, like leadership training, conflict regulation system, and psychosis support manipulation to mitigate toxic influences of abusive supervision and cultivate a healthier environment. In the domain of abusive supervision in relation to emotional exhaustion, mediated by relational conflict, stress, toxic workplaces, and illegitimate tasks, its significance is both theoretical and practical in the field of organizational behavior and employee well-being. Abusive supervision is defined as a pattern of hostile attitudes, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, but excluding physical violence (Tepper, 2000), is identified as one of the primary workplaces stressors that adversely affect employees' psychology and professional wellbeing. As an intangible asset, positive employee affect has become a condition for business success and the sustainability of the workplace (Dulebohn et al., 2019); therefore, it is important to understand the consequences of abusive supervision fully as it transcends various industries (Mackey et al., 2017). Emotional exhaustion, the most important constituent of burnout, indicates chronic psychological strain arising from exposure to stressors that are inherent to the workplace context and is associated with lowered performance, elevated turnover, and psychological distress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Examining emotional exhaustion as the dependent variable is essential, as the harmful effects on a single employee are often not limited to that individual; instead, they lead to company's outcomes such as financial losses, less innovation, and a weaker work culture (Shin et al., 2014). Relational conflict, one of the mediators, is defined as interpersonal tension and disagreement, and it is amplified in abusive contexts of supervision (Jehn, 1995). Relational conflict as a mediator is important because it can intensify workplace stress, disturb team dynamics, and leads to lower job satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). First, stress, which is defined as psychological and physical responses to perceived threats (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), represents a vital mechanism explaining the relationship between abusive supervision and employee outcomes. Chronic stress at work not only has a negative impact on the individual level but also leads to dysfunction at an organizational level which includes absenteeism and loss of organizational commitment (Hobfoll, 1989). Another successful mediator, toxic workplaces defined by unethical, unsupportive, and negative workplace cultures (Einarsen et al., 2016), amplifies the damaging consequences of abusive supervision by legitimizing hostility, promoting toxic relations, and limiting psychological safety. Organizations seeking to create intervention strategies that reduce the spread of toxic behaviors

need to better understand the role of toxic workplaces. Finally, illegitimate tasks, defined as work assignments viewed as unreasonable or unnecessary, infringe on employees' professional identity and contribute to experiences of workplace frustration (Semmer et al., 2015). Illegitimate tasks, which are tasks that are often assigned by an abusive line manager in an effort to exert control, are more stressful and lead to emotional exhaustion (Eatough et al., 2016), confirming their relevance as a mediating factor. By looking at these six variables together we can see how abusive supervision affects your subordinates in a broader sense. It is an important study as it offers a better understanding of how the negative impact of workplace abuse can be abated, what work-related training programs can be implemented for the leaders adopting abusive supervisory behaviors and how workplace intervention program for creating a non-toxic organizational culture can be sustained through effective policy dissemination and effective practices. Our research is of importance to both academia and industry, as organizations that proactively examine these factors can not only improve workplace culture, but do so while improving employee engagement and reducing the costs associated with burnout. When it comes to understanding how abusive supervision affects employees, the mechanisms involved remain relatively-underexplored. Abusive supervision refers to prolonged aggravated behavior on the part of supervisors, and has been associated with several detrimental outcome variables, and especially emotional exhaustion (Tepper, 2000). Emotional exhaustion, as one of the three key elements of burnout, arises from employee's prolonged psychological fatigue resulting from the adverse influence of job conditions (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). That said, the mechanism by which abusive supervision produces emotional exhaustion is a complex one that is likely mediated by a number of theoretical and empirical candidates such as relational conflict, stress, toxic workplace, illegitimate tasks, etc. Relational conflict, which reflects interpersonal tensions among colleagues or between employees and supervisors is worsened by abusive leadership and contributes to a hostile work climate (Jehn, 1995). Stress, another typical reaction to workplace incivility, escalates under abusive supervision and is linked to cognitive and affective loading (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Toxic worksites, that are steeped in pessimism, abandonment, and impropriety, also exhaust individuals emotionally (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012). Illegitimate tasks (those deemed unnecessary or unreasonable) also have a bad effect on subordinates by decreasing their feelings of competence and job satisfaction, and raising their stress and disengagement (Semmer et al., 2015). Although abusive supervision and its effects have been the object of a considerable amount of research in the work context, the existing literature has not explored how these mediators act collectively to explain the link between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. To address this gap, this study analyses these factors along with each other to present a framework through which the negative impact of abusive leadership can be alleviated. Thus, the main research question that this study seeks to explore is as follows: Do relational conflict, stress, toxic workplace environments, and illegitimate tasks mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion? The current study, therefore, has three major objectives, namely as (1) examining how abusive supervision directly leads to emotional exhaustion, (2) exploring the mediating role of relational conflict, stress, toxic workplaces, and illegitimate tasks in this relationship, and (3) revealing effective organizational solutions that can reduce the harmful effects of abusive supervision. This research will enhance the literature of organizational psychology by determining the mechanisms through which abusive supervision leads to emotional exhaustion, and provide evidence-based advice for policymakers and companies to encourage healthy and productive work conditions. As awareness of workplace mental health issues continues to rise, it is important to address the influence of abusive supervision on employee well-being through various mediators so that interventions can be implemented in a way that promotes resilience, fairness, and employee engagement in the workplace (Harvey et al., 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion, the mediating roles of relational conflict, stress, toxic workplaces, and

illegitimate tasks. This paper is organized in the following manner. Initially, a detailed literature review is presented from definition of each variable to existing research on their relationship with one another. Abusive supervision is the experience of being subjected to hostile behaviors by superiors is associated with emotional exhaustion, the core dimension of burnout that exhausts the employees' psychological resources (Tepper, 2000; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This review further examines the role of mediators relating to relational conflict, stress, toxic workplace environment, and illegitimate task in the context of this relationship, specifically alluding to correction of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) & job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001). The methodology section describes the research design, sampling, data collection methods, and analysis to test the proposed relationships. Using quantitative methodology, the study employs validated scales to measure the constructs and structural equation modeling (SEM) for data analysis. The results section provides empirical results of the direct and indirect effects of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion. The findings are discussed in the context of existing studies, and theoretical and practical contributions are provided, with recommendations for organizations on how to reduce the negative outcomes of abusive supervision. Finally, the conclusion offers key insights, limitations of the study, and directions for further research. This study advances in the field of organizational psychology by providing a nuanced perspective on the interplay among work stressors and their effects on employee wellbeing, ultimately guiding policies that promote healthier workplaces (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Semmer et al., 2015).

2. Literature Review and hypotheses development

The workplace of today is known to be a pressure pan for the individual and collective strain on the employees. Abusive supervision, illegitimate tasks, toxic workplaces, stress, relationship conflict, and emotional exhaustion are often cited as common and significant contributors to employee well-being. These factors are interrelated in complex ways and contribute to negative psychological outcomes such as burnout and emotional exhaustion. The literature review outlines all these variables, their relations and relevance for the individual employees and organizations.

2.1. Emotional Exhaustion:

Emotional Exhaustion is the feeling of being drained and overwhelmed to the point of not being able to cope with whatever the work or the life demands are "Drive to Feel Free". This is one of the 12 basic dimensions of burnout and indicates a depletion of emotional resources as a consequence of chronic stress or demands (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The growing emotional fatigue is intense fatigue, which is caused by excesses of anxiety and stress from relationships and work. It is also part of the core syndrome of burnout, a psychological syndrome caused by chronic stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The term "Emotional exhaustion" refers to individual's feeling of being unable to cope with the emotional and psychological demands, leading to a decline in energy levels, motivation, and emotional resilience, chronic fatigue and low energy. In work-life or personal relationship or disconnection, heightened annoyance or frustration with other people who find it hard to focus and make decisions. Factors related to work are high workload is abundant responsibilities and prolonged working hours (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Emotional exhaustion is the central feature of burnout, characterized by a sense of emotional depletion or being overwhelmed as a result of chronic stress and excessive demands. Technical factors behind anxiety is one of various factors recognized as individual and environmental contributors. He or she should ensure that a personality trait which can also have an impact on emotional exhaustion is not present at individual level such as high neuroticism or even perfectionism, which have shown to increase the risk of emotional exhaustion (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Inadequate coping methods, particularly avoidance or denial, as well as low resilience, further prevent recovery from challenges. On the environmental level, toxic workplaces with abusive

supervision, bullying, or poor organizational culture greatly contribute to increased stress. Work-life imbalance is the experience of not making time for personal lives outside of work is also a leading cause of emotional burnout of employees. Volume arises as exhaustion from perpetual exposure to stressors without an adequate recovery period (Sonnetag, 2003). Meanwhile, emotional labor, which is a form of emotional management that entails the regulation of emotions to meet the expectations of the workplace, also depletes some of its emotional resources (Grandey, 2000). An absence of autonomy in decision-making or task control promotes helplessness, while under-recognition and perceived inequity in workload, recognition, or rewards aggravate emotional strain. Emotional exhaustion contributes to outcomes of two types which are at the level of the individual, and at the level of the entire organization. At the individual level, it causes mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) and physical health problems such as cardiovascular problems, headaches, and sleep disturbance (Melamed et al., 2006). Another consequence is cognitive decline, with impaired memory, attention, and decision-making. At an organizational level, emotional exhaustion leads to lower productivity due to less engagement and motivation, higher absenteeism or presenteeism, and increased turnover rates as dissatisfied employees quit the workplace. Dealing with emotional exhaustion calls for both systemic and individual solutions. Organizations can encourage work-life balance by providing flexible schedules and reasonable workloads, encouraging a supportive leadership style, positive culture in the workplace, and implementing stress management programs such as employee assistance programs. You can take care of you at an individual level that comes down to self-care, sufficient sleep, exercise and eating well. Practicing mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques, as well as seeking social support from personal and professional networks, can help build resilience and further mitigate emotional exhaustion. Therefore, organizations and individuals should aim to create a healthy environment to avoid emotional exhaustion by addressing these factors.

H1: Abusive supervision significantly positively relates to emotional exhaustion

2.2. Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision is the continued and hostile behaviors of a supervisor toward subordinate, which may involve being belittling, insulting, or undermining to that person's work (Tepper, 2000). These types of behaviors are often much more insidious and can be subtler, making it a lot trickier to deal with in organizational environments. Abusive supervision is defined as a long-lasting manifestation of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors by supervisors towards subordinates, but excludes physical confrontation (Tepper, 2000). It includes public humiliation, mockery, threats and unequal treatment. The behaviors poison the well-being, productivity, and morale of employees, effectively turning the workplace into a hostile environment. Examples of abusive supervision might include verbal abuse, such as harsh criticism or derogatory language, and emotional abuse, such as belittling employees or ignoring their contributions. It also includes unrealistic expectation - placing impossible demands on others and favoritism includes biased decisions and unfair treatment. Several factors lead to abusive supervision. At the individual level, supervisors with certain traits such as narcissism, low emotional intelligence, or high neuroticism are more likely to demonstrate abusive behaviors (Martinko et al., 2013). Stress and burnout in supervisors can lead to the projection of frustration with their own circumstances down to the subordinate level. Organizational conditions like toxic workplaces and ineffective monitoring that cultivate similar behaviors contribute to abuse. Subordinates who wield low power or status or have performance problems tend to be particularly vulnerable to such maltreatment. Abusive supervision has many different causes. One of the major causes, role ambiguity, is when people do not understand what is expected of them and cause themselves, and others, frustration and blame shifting (Tepper, 2007). Furthermore, organizational cultures focusing on goal achievement at the expense of employee welfare tend to legitimize abusive practices

(Harvey et al., 2007). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), supervisors are likely to imitate their abusive managers. Other supervisory abuses derive from perceived threats to authority, leading some supervisors to urinate all over their employees to show everyone who's boss. The impact of abusive supervision is extensive, not only to the employees but also to the organization. Employee suffering from abusive supervision frequently suffer from psychological distress, such as elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout (Tepper et al., 2017). People working under these conditions also show behavioral signs of this phenomenon by decreased productivity, increased turn-over, lower employee engagement and poor work performance, as well as counterproductive behaviors like absenteeism or sabotage (Harris et al., 2011). In addition, many individuals report physical health problems including disruptions in sleep and headaches (Khan et al., 2015). On an organizational level, abusive supervision results in increased employee turnover, damaged team cohesion, and monetary costs related to diminished productivity and higher recruitment expenses. Abusive supervision to other variables is significantly correlated with various organizational and psychological variables. By failing to promote psychological safety, it enhances relational conflict, as employees confront hostile and untrusting environments that often lead them to project irritations onto coworkers, fueling interpersonal conflict (Mackey et al., 2017). Abusive supervision has other important outcomes as well, and stress is one of them. Employee public shaming and unreasonable demands in the workplace are associated with increased job strain, anxiety, and psychological distress (Harris et al., 2007; Kessler et al., 2008). Abusive supervision also fosters toxic workplaces, marked by not only dysfunctional cultures and hostility but also lack of organizational support. Such environments breed the coarsening of behaviors, dampen employee morale, and erode trusts in leaders (Harvey et al., 2007), abusive supervision also can prompt illegitimate tasks, which transgresses employees' roles and contributes to role stress (Semmer et al., 2015). Abusive supervision directly leads to emotional exhaustion, a psychological feeling of fatigue that occurs under long-term stress. Abusive behaviors and their drain on emotional resources cause burnout and job dissatisfaction, which can affect workers' well-being and productivity (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Abusive supervision acts as a core stressor that triggers a ripple effect in numerous workplace variables. It creates relational discord, triggers stress, gives rise to toxic workplace cultures, assigns tasks illegitimately, and eventually causes emotional draining. Conclusion is that address effective and abusive supervision with organizational policies, leadership education and intercom work environments combat its pervasive adverse effects.

H2: Abusive supervision has a positive relationship with relation conflict.

H3: Abusive supervision has a powerful positive influence on stress.

2.3. Stress

Stress refers to the physical, emotional, and psychological reaction to an individual perceive threats or demands that exceed someone's capacity. At work, stress can stem from job demands, uncertainty in a given role, conflict with others or changes within the organization (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress is a psychological and physiological reaction to internal or external pressures that exceed an individual's capacity for effective coping. It may result from actual or perceived threats to one's physical, emotional, or psychological well-being, and is commonly accompanied by activation of a body-wide stress-response system, including release of cortisol and adrenaline (Selye, 1956). Stress could be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term) and has different effects on an individual's health and performance. Stress is a multifactorial burden, and many factors contribute to it, such as factors of environmental or psychological, social or biological in origin. Environmental stressors including workplace challenges, financial pressure and poor living conditions can also play a major role in stress. Psychological aspects such as personality patterns, for example, type A behavior, cognitive appraisal, and individual perceptions of stress are also equally important. These also include

social elements such as disputes with family and friends, significant life changes and resource availability. Moreover, biological factors too, like genetic history and long-term health ailments, can aggravate stress reactions. Stressors can come from both outside factors like workplace demands, significant life changes (death or financial loss) and environmental stressors (pandemics), or from within, like negative thinking, unrealistic expectations, and poor time management. Stress affects our physical, psychological, and behavioral well-being. Chronic stress can result in cardiovascular problems, weakened immune systems and sleep disorders. Psychologically, stress is associated with mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, as well as cognitive deficits, such as impaired memory and attention. On the behavioral front, stress can exacerbate substance abuse, social withdrawal, and reduced engagement in social activities. On the job, stress lowers productivity, causes absenteeism and adds to disputes between co-workers. Stress is a multifactorial psychological and physiological response that is determined by environmental, psychological, social, and biological factors. Workplace stressors (e.g., high workload, poorly defined roles), financial stressors (e.g., economic downturn, job loss), and environmental stressors (e.g., noise pollution, overcrowding) are environmental factors that can contribute to stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Psychosocial aspects such as type A behavior, characterized by competitiveness and urgency, and cognitive appraisal, regarding the extent to which situations are perceived to threaten or exceed personal control, also contribute significantly to stress (Friedman & Rosenman, 1959; Lazarus, 1991). Also, stress is further increased with social factors such as relational conflicts and life transitions (Marriage, Divorce, Relocation) (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Genetic predisposition and chronic health conditions (e.g., cardiovascular disease) are biological factors that are known to make people more vulnerable to stress (Kendler et al., 1995; McEwen, 1998) and the stress response is broken into external and internal causes. External stressors may be related to work-related issues, life-altering turning points (e.g., death, economic loss), and environmental stressors (e.g., pandemics, global crises), while internal factors are related to excessive thinking, unrealistic goals, and inappropriate time management (Chrousos, 2009). Stress has widespread effects on physical health, mental well-being, and social relationships. On the physiological side, stress is involved in cardiovascular diseases, immunosuppression, and sleep disorders (Chrousos, 2009; McEwen, 1998). On a psychological level, chronic stress leads to mental health problems including anxiety and depression, and cognitive symptomology including poor memory and concentration (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). On the behavioral level, individuals who are stressed may either engage in substance use or avoid socializing (Shirom, 2003). Workplace stress leads to decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and workplace conflicts (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Stress management is key, and this must work on both a personal and organizational level. People can handle stress using mindfulness exercises, correct time management, and living a healthy lifestyle (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). At an organizational level, reducing stress has proven to be substantial, whether it is through a more supportive work environment, helping through stress-reducing programs, or encouraging work-life balance (De Dreu, 2008). In addition, it relates to relational conflict and emotional exhaustion. Difficulties with emotion regulation both heightened by workplace stressors contribute to interpersonal tensions and misunderstandings, the latter in turn compounding as a chronic organizational stressor (Spector & Jex, 1998; Barsade, 2002). In demanding work environments, stress itself plays a direct role in causing burnout through emotional exhaustion by draining emotional resources and decreasing resilience, leading to a downward spiral (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Additionally, emotional exhaustion amplifies stress by diminishing coping ability, which feeds back into the stress-burnout cycle (Shirom, 2003). Given the interplay between stress, relational conflict and emotional exhaustion, targeted interventions are needed. In organizations, stress management programs, conflict resolution training, and workplace support systems can be implemented (De Dreu, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Implementing these strategies can be a great way to manage the adverse effects of stress on people and help maintain the wellbeing and productivity of

employees, thus creating a healthy and social workplace environment. Stress management is both an individual and organizational endeavor. At the individual level, effective time management, mindfulness practices, and remaining physically healthy (exercise, nutrition, sleep) are all ancillary measures to stress-induced tension. On an organizational level, provide a conducive work environment, conflict avoidance, stress-management techniques, etc., to reduce workplace stress and the sources of stress response are classed as external versus internal. External stressors might be related to work-related issues, life-changing turning points (death, economic loss), and environmental stressors (pandemics, global crises), and internal factors may be overthinking, unrealistic goals, and inappropriate time management (Chrousos, 2009). Stress has its pervasive effects on both physical health and mental well-being as well as social relationships. Physiologically it has a role in cardiovascular diseases, immunosuppression and sleep disorders (Chrousos, 2009; McEwen, 1998). Chronic stress manifests itself in mental health problems such as anxiety and depression as well as cognitive symptomology like poor memory and concentration (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) on a psychological level. At the behavioral level, the stress may lead to either substance use or social avoidance (Shirom, 2003). Workplace stress reduces productivity, increases absenteeism, and further causes workplace conflicts (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) It is all about how you manage your stress and this has to work on an individual and an organizational level. Mindfulness exercises, managing time properly, and living a healthy lifestyle can help people cope with stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). At an organizational level, the decrease of stress has been found to have far reaching implications, whether creating a more positive environment, assisting through stress reducing programming or even just promoting work-life balance (De Dreu, 2008). It also has to do with relational conflict and emotional exhaustion. Difficulties with emotion regulation both exacerbated by workplace stressors contribute to interpersonal tensions and misunderstandings which, in turn, exacerbate as a chronic organizational stressor (Spector & Jex, 1998; Barsade, 2002). In high demands work environments, stress as such acts as a direct contributor to burnout via emotional exhaustion, depleting emotional resources and dropping resilience (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Furthermore, emotional exhaustion also augments stress as the ability to cope diminishes, thereby propelling the stress-burnout process (Shirom, 2003). Because of the interplay between stress, relational conflict and emotional exhaustion, targeted interventions are a necessity. In organizations, a stress management program could be established, interest and training in conflict resolution could be enhanced, and workplace support systems could be initiated (De Dreu, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Using these techniques can be a wonderful method to address the negative consequences of stress on individuals and work at the well-being and profitability of representatives, and ultimately ensure a healthy and social workplace. Stress management at the workplace is a challenge both at an individual level as well as at an organizational level. On a personal level, proper time management, mindfulness exercises, and staying physically fit (exercise, nutrition, sleep) are all supplementary to stress-related anxiety. On an organizational level, reduce workplace stress by providing a conducive work environment, conflict avoidance, stress-management techniques, etc.

H4: Stress has a powerful positive influence on emotional exhaustion.

2.4. Illegitimate Tasks

Such illegitimate tasks are ones that employees find unacceptable, unwarranted, or not included in their job description. Such tasks do not add to the expertise of the worker nor help the organization reach its objectives (Semmer et al., 2015). Illegitimate tasks are often perceived as a type of organizational injustice. Illegitimate tasks are work requests that are viewed as unreasonable, unnecessary or beyond the scope of an employee's role and responsibilities. These obligations cross professional lines and violate expectations, which ultimately make employees feel underappreciated and disrespected. The SOS theory (Semmer et al., 2007) asserts that illegitimate tasks violate an individual's sense of self and professional

identity, in which it can be broadly divided into unreasonable tasks in the workplace and unnecessary tasks. Unreasonable tasks include duties that go beyond an employee's job description or area of expertise, such as asking a manager to do janitorial work. This task becomes seen as unnecessary due to its perceived avoid ability or redundancy, for instance having to repeat the same report several times because of issues related to communications. Illegitimate tasks are common for a number of reasons. Organizational factors such as ambiguous job roles, poor communication, and hierarchical power imbalances by which supervisors can assign unsuitable tasks to their subordinates are all implicated (Semmer et al., 2015). Leader-related factors (abusive supervision, micromanagement), where leaders assign menial tasks as a way to control employees (Mackey et al., 2017). Cultural aspects like workplace expectations of unquestioned obedience and limited resources compound the problem. The root causes of illegitimate tasks often stem from role ambiguity (Semmer et al., 2007). Additional factors include power dynamics (where employees are afraid to speak up or challenge the status quo), workplace inefficiencies such as ineffective processes and under-resourced teams, and 'task bleed' (when employees are asked to do jobs that fall outside their core competence because of downsizing or outsourcing). Illegitimate tasks affect employees and organizations to a large extent. At individual level, these activities are the sources of increased stress, frustration and emotional exhaustion, posing a risk to professional identity and job satisfaction (Semmer et al., 2015; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). From an organizational point of view, they result in lower productivity, greater turnover rate, and counterproductive work behaviors, including absenteeism or lowered effort. At multiple levels, interventions are needed to solve these problems, to prevent role ambiguity, organizations should clearly define job descriptions, create opportunities for transparent communication and task allocation. A leadership training can provide supervisors the skills to assign and monitor assignments. Long as giving employees the authority to decide if the task they're given is illegitimate, and if they feel that this is a common act, give them a grievance path. Illegitimate tasks also interact with other workplace variables, leading to cascading effects. This contributes to escalated interpersonal conflict enhancing a vicious cycle that promotes frustration in dynamic interactions (Semmer et al., 2015). Such assignments are important stressors as they go against professional standards and contribute to heightened emotional burden (Meier & Semmer, 2018). In toxic workplaces, where healthy accountability practices do not exist, illegitimate tasks represent both a symptom and a cause of dysfunction that erodes trust and respect (Semmer et al., 2015). Furthermore, continuous performance of illegitimate tasks can also be stripping the emotional resources and resulting into depression and emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Legitimacy theory thus posits the emergence of illegitimate tasks as central stressors that erode workplace harmony and employee well-being as part of an integrated model. They raise relational conflict, elevate stress levels, drive toxic workplace regimes, and eat away at emotional resilience. Organizational, leadership and employee-based approaches to addressing illegitimate tasks.

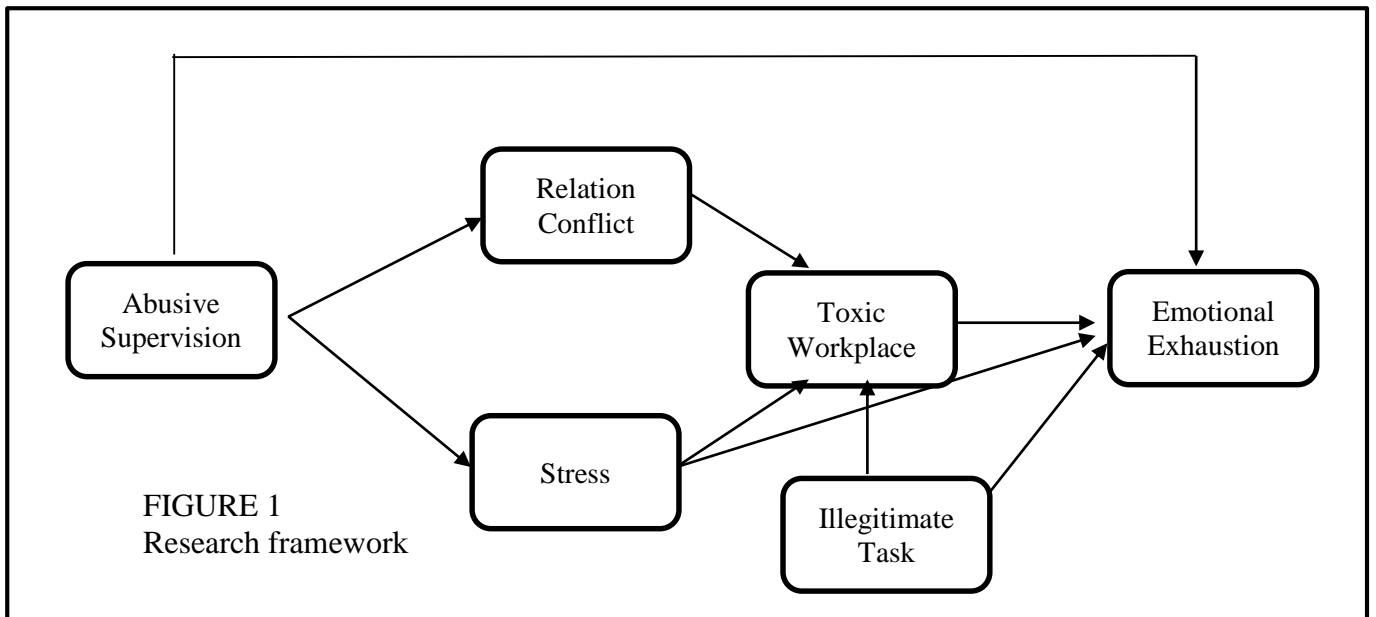
H5: Illegitimate task has a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion.

2.5. Relationship Conflict

Indeed, relationship conflict denotes interpersonal disputes, misunderstandings, and emotional friction among individuals in connection, a group or organization. This conflict may stem from different values, goals, or communication styles (Jehn, 1995). Relational conflicts are interpersonal or networks of disputes describing a state of tension, friction or negative emotional interactions between persons. Such conflicts usually stem from perceived incompatibilities (between values, attitudes, or personal behaviors) and most commonly present themselves through hostility, mistrust, or animosity (Jehn, 1995). Workplace relational conflicts can get in the way of successful collaboration and productivity while also getting in the way of employee well-being. These relational conflicts arise from a range of individual, organizational, and situational issues. Personality traits (high levels of neuroticism, low levels

of agreeableness, or type A behavior) and issues with emotional regulation (low self-control or emotional intelligence) can contribute to conflict propensity (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Mayer et al., 2008). Role ambiguity and competitive work environments as organizational factors make misunderstandings and interpersonal disputes likely (Katz & Kahn, 1978; De Dreu, 2006). Also, situational events such as lack of resources or cultural differences are significant contributors to tensions that become relational conflict (Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1992). Some of the common sources of relational conflict are miscommunication, differences in values, power dynamics, and individual stress. Miscommunication, which refers to exchanges that are unclear, incomplete or that leave room for interpretation, often creates misunderstanding and discord (Gibb, 1961). Competing priorities, beliefs, or values e.g., work ethics; decision-making styles also give rise to tension (Jehn, 1995). Relational conflicts are often fueled by power imbalances, for example micromanagement or favoritism (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Personal stressors, including financial straits and personal difficulties, also drain emotional capacity, making individuals increasingly vulnerable to conflict escalation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The consequences of relational conflicts are extensive, affecting the individuals, teams, and organizations involved. Relational conflicts are associated with emotional distress, stress, anxiety and burnout (Sonnentag et al., 2010). In groups, ongoing conflicts diminish cohesion, trust, and collaboration, which ultimately leads to a drop in productivity as a whole (Jehn, 1997). At the organizational level, if not resolved, disputes lead to higher turnover and reputational risk from toxic workplaces (De Dreu, 2006). Comprehensive strategies in the domain of prevention, management, and resolution are needed to deal with relational conflicts. Preventive measures might involve training employees in communication and conflict resolution and in setting clear policies to help clarify roles and expectations (De Dreu, 2008). Bakker et al. (2005) suggest conflict management techniques such as mediation and support systems such as counseling to help address disputes constructively. Strategies for resolution can involve the use of restorative practices and structured feedback to facilitate reconciliation and accountability (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The association of relational conflict with emotional exhaustion has been thoroughly investigated, especially in the work or intimate contexts. In fact, relational conflict is a source of emotional exhaustion as it increases stress and negative feelings like frustration, anxiety and anger. This emotional experience diminishes people's emotional reserves in the long run, putting them at risk of burnout (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Taris, 2006). Even small, unprocessed conflicts can build up and leave you emotionally exhausted (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Such poor emotional regulation or ineffective conflict resolution strategies leads to emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). Relational conflict in both work-related (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2003) and intimate (Piko, 2006) contexts precipitate higher levels of emotional strain that, over time, culminate in burnout and reduced well-being. Psychologically, relational conflict is a major stressor that depletes emotional resources and contributes to burnout, according to burnout theory (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The psychological demands of conflict, by requiring the resolution of conflict problems and the self-control to regulate emotions, may result in overload on cognitive and emotional resources, thereby contributing to the risk of emotional exhaustion (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Finally, interventions designed to help resolve the conflict, improve communication, and foster social support can attenuate the adverse impact of relational conflict on emotional exhaustion (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; House, 1981). Such approaches can greatly alleviate sentimental overload, and improve physical health.

H6: Relation conflict has a powerful positive influence on emotional exhaustion.



2.6. Toxic Workplaces

A toxic workplace is defined as a place of negative social behaviors such as bullying, lack of support, lack of fairness, and an overall culture of mistrust and low morale. At the same time, employees in such environments frequently encounter high emotional distress and a high risk of mental health disorders (Hakanen et al., 2006). A toxic workplace is an environmental condition found in an organization that may be marked by great negativity and abnormal behavior. They are characterized by toxic leadership, interpersonal conflict, lack of trust, gossip, disrespect and other unprofessional behaviors that are unproductivity-sapping and damaging to the physical and mental health of employees. Unethical practices, discriminatory behavior, exploitation etc. are common features of the toxic workplace that creates a work environment marked by fear, burnout, and dissatisfaction (Harvey et al., 2007). Toxic work places are institutions in which one individual does not like another, creating an ecosystem where negativity, hostility, and lack of respect are prevalent, resulting in many negative consequences for employers and employees. At the center of toxic environments are issues of leadership (Tepper, 2000) abusive supervision, bullying, harassment and microaggression are a major cause (Tepper, 2000). If leaders do not confront unethical behaviors, they condone that toxicity. Interpersonal conflicts complicate the situation as well; relational conflicts including unresolved tensions and workplace incivility (sarcasm, gossip, exclusion) erode harmony and trust among team members (Jehn, 1995; Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Stress and mistrust thrive in unhealthy work practices, including those with excessive workloads, unrealistic expectations, and poor communication. Moreover, cultural and systemic issues such as inequity and discrimination as well as job insecurity create an environment that is biased on exclusive and hostile (Mayo et al., 2020).

H7: Stress mediates the association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion.

There are various reasons why toxic workplaces happen. A common source of workplace dysfunction is poor leadership in organizations lacking emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012). Thus, cultures of profit over people create oppressive environments, and failings of employee empowerment only deepen perceptions of devaluation and disempowerment (Harvey et al., 2007). Additionally, the societal acceptance of harmful actions, such as bullying and harassment, creates a vicious cycle of toxicity. The impact is bitter both for employees and strings. While toxic workplaces put employees at psychologically risk of anxiety and depression, and physically at risk for sleep problems and heart diseases (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). These types of environments also result in low job satisfaction, lack of engagement and increased turnover rates and for organizations, toxicity translates into reduced productivity, loss of reputation, and higher legal and financial exposure from harassment and discrimination incidents.

H8: Relational conflict mediates the association between abusive exhaustion and emotional exhaustion.

Toxic workplaces are best addressed with a multi-layered strategy. Leadership interventions covering emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, and so on are vital. Establishing zero-tolerance policies around toxic behaviors bring accountability. Just as critical is to create a positive work culture around inclusivity, fairness, transparency. Development-related empowering with grievance settlement opportunities helps employees get out of helplessness. Organizational policies, such as codes of conduct and ethics training, should be necessary tools for creating a healthy workplace. Toxic workplaces have strong correlations with relational conflict, stress, and emotional exhaustion with cascade results. They fuel relational aggression and road rage, and they are often a consequence of bad leadership (Harvey et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000). These conflicts contribute to what is known as chronic stress (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012), a situation in which poor management, unreasonable demands, and job insecurity compound the psychological strain as well as the anxiety and depression associated with it. All of these stressors can lead to chronic emotional exhaustion (the chronic depletion and fatigue of emotions), which can undermine employees' performance and well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). An integrated model shows how toxic workplaces can serve as catalysts for relational conflict, escalating stress and ultimately leading to emotional exhaustion. Implementing screening processes, providing employee assistance programs, and training leadership to manage conflicts may help alleviate these effects, but organizations need to instill and encourage positive workplace cultures. Toxic behavior needs to be addressed, there must be a line that you do not cross, and clearly defined policies, which are consistently enforced, will reduce such behavior and help maintain a healthy and productive workplace.

H9: Toxic workplace mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion.

H10: Toxic workplace mediates the relationship between relation conflict and emotional exhaustion.

H11: Toxic workplace mediates the relationship between stress and emotional exhaustion.

TABLE 1. Theoretical literature for measuring latent variables and number of questions.

Latent variable	Number of questions	Theoretical resource
Abusive Supervision	15 items	Tepper, (2020)
Relation Conflicts	12-15 items	Aldan, R. J., & Fuller, S. R. (1993)
Stress	10-14 items	Sheldon Cohen, (1983)
Toxic Workplaces	16 items	Williams, Prentice, & Murtagh (2016)
Illegitimate Tasks	9 items	Stefan Bern (2010)
Emotional Exhaustion	22 items	Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson (1981)

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Measures

The measurement scales applied in this investigation were tested and validated with previous researchers. The responses of the students were scored using a 5-point Likert scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Table 1 and Appendix A1 provide an overview of the theoretical literature and empirical questions regarding latent variables.

3.2. Pilot survey sampling technique

A pilot survey is an incubate study that information before the actual study which help research team to test study feasibility and reliability of research tool (Connelly, 2008). A pilot survey is carried out in this study for employees of plastic manufacturing companies of Gujranwala to refine the questionnaire, highlight the problems and ensure accuracy of data. A pilot survey of 40 respondents (10% of the main sample of 400) is drawn from a population of 1,000 employees to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire (Hassan et al., 2020). Feedback from the pilot survey is also useful in fine-tuning any ambiguities in questions Ask and adjust the wording so no know can answer incorrectly. It will help ensure that everything goes well when the final count begins, and that the survey questionnaire realizes what it is meant to achieve, namely measuring abusive supervision, emotional exhaustion, relational conflict, stress, toxic workplaces, and illegitimate tasks. From the target population of 1,000, an appropriate number of 278 employees are selected for the main study. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table which provides a sufficiently large sample size with respect to population size. To ensure representation from various departments within plastic manufacturing firms, stratified random sampling is employed, which minimizes selection bias and increases generalizability (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Iqbal et al., 2024). This method constructs relevant employee subgroups (viz., production, administration, quality control) and with assistance of a random sampling selects participants within each stratum ensuring a range of perspectives on workplace stressors and supervisory behavior. Sampling percentage calculation: Sample = 40 respondent out of 400 survey respondents, the 40 respondents are the preacher survey respondents (10% of survey). 278 employees constitute the main survey sample (27.8% of the whole population (1,000 employees)). This percentage is enough to generalize the findings while maintaining reliability and statistical power. A response rate of at least 70-80% is however expected, accounting for potential non-responses (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation are followed to ensure ethical research.

4. Results

Two main statistical techniques were applied in this research is structural equation modeling (SEM) and mediation analysis. Structure Equational Modeling (SEM) is a statistical approach that allows to analyze complex relationships among observed and latent (unobservable) variables. It is used a lot in social sciences, psychology, economics, and other fields to study causal relations, and where the hypothesis involves a multitude of variables. SEM can help researchers formulate and modify theoretical models by measuring how well the model correlates with the observed data of the relationships among the variables. It is a flexible approach that combines aspects of factor analysis, path analysis, and regression analysis into a single framework. Mediation analysis, a particular form of structural equation modeling (SEM), models the mechanism through which an independent variable affects a dependent variable (the end point) via one or more intermediate variables known as mediators. Through mediation analysis, researchers examine the process or pathway by which an effect occurs.

4.1 Reliability, validity, and multicollinearity

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), these conditions need to be satisfied to assess a survey's validity and reliability through SEM analysis. To pass this validity test, each latent variable in the study must have a Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7. According to Table 2, all Cronbach's alpha value of latent variable fits to criteria that support the validity of this study. Besides, the most widely used reliability index used is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). For the acceptance of dependability Segars (1997) proposed that the index value should be greater than 0.5. The index thus meets the recommended ideals and standards. This confirms the reliability of the study model. You need to check if there is no linear link between the elements of the structural model before getting into the structural model (Hair et al.,2019) suggested that VIF values below 5 may be accepted. According to Hair et al., (2019) and

Fornell & Larcker (2011), ideal discriminant validity can be defined by the square root of the AVE of each construct (latent variable) being greater than its correlation coefficient values with the other constructs. As shown in Table 3, strong discriminant validity was found across the six variables which are abusive supervision, emotional exhaustion, stress, toxic workplace, illegitimate tasks and relational conflicts, according to the study's findings.

TABLE 2. Reliability, validity, and multicollinearity analysis.

Variables	Cronbach alpha	AVE	VIF
Abusive Supervision	0.712	0.523	(4.16, 4.84)
Relation Conflict	0.821	0.624	(5.22, 5.33)
Stress	0.766	0.756	(3.78,4.67)
Toxic Workplaces	0.825	0.667	(3.11, 2.66)
Illegitimate Tasks	0.817	0.712	(4.45, 5.15)
Emotional Exhaustion	0.756	0.546	(4.76, 5.18)

TABLE 3 Discriminant validity.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1- Abusive Supervision	0.568					
2- Relation Conflict	0.435	0.638				
3- Stress	0.514	0.634	0.742			
4- Toxic Workplaces	0.623	0.487	0.432	0.469		
5- Illegitimate Tasks	0.564	0.654	0.365	0.213	0.465	
6- Emotional Exhaustion	0.243	0.312	0.289	0.324	0.511	0.555

TABLE 4. Direct estimations.

Hypotheses	Relationships	Standardized Estimates	Critical (C.R)	ratio	p-value
H1	AS → EE	0.322**	5.43		<0.001
H2	AS → RC	0.523**	6.45		<0.001
H3	AS → S	0.476**	8.53		<0.001
H4	S → EE	0.491**	7.76		<0.001
H5	IT → EE	0.543**	5.65		<0.001
H6	RC → EE	0.743**	8,76		<0.001

4.2. Structural model

Results showed direct and significant positive effect of entrepreneurial education on Abusive Supervision (Beta = 0.322, C.R = 5.43). So H1 was approved. Moreover, abusive supervision (Beta =0.532, C.R = 6.45) has a direct and significant positive effect on emotional exhaustion. So, H2 was accepted. Abusive supervision had a direct positive and statistically significant effect on stress (Beta = 0.476, C.R = 8.53). As a result, H3 was approved. Moreover, the findings reveal a direct and significant positive effect of stress on emotional exhaustion (Beta = 0.491, C. R = 7.76). Moreover, H4 was accepted as well. In addition, illegitimate tasks were directly, positively, and significantly related to emotional exhaustion (Beta = 0.543, C. R=5.65). Therefore, H5 was approved. Additionally, relational conflict was also positively and statistically significantly correlated with emotional exhaustion (Beta = 0.743, C.R = 8.76). Thus, proposition H6 passed. Tested directly the proposed hypotheses (results in table 4). To test the indirect effect among the research variables, a bootstrap test was used with 5,000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals (CI) of the lower (LLCI) and upper bounds (ULCI). The process was computed based on the guidance of Preacher and Hayes (2008). Analyses were performed to assess the significance of the indirect effect. As seen in Table 5, the path from entrepreneurial education to entrepreneurial intention through both entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurial inspiration is a positive indirect effect. Thus, H7 and H8 hypotheses have been accepted. Also, this study showed abusive supervision a significant and positive intermediary effect on stress, emotional exhaustion and relational conflict.

Hence hypotheses H9, H10, and H11 were also accepted.

TABLE 5. Indirect estimations.

Hypotheses	Relationships	Standardized	(LLCI, ULCI)	p-value
		Estimates		
H7	AS → S → EE	0.325	(0.321,0.222)	0.001
H8	AS → RC → EE	0.311	(0.101,0.234)	0.001
H9	AS → TW → EE	0.232	(0.321,0.320)	0.04
H10	RC → TW → EE	0.266	(0.219,0.324)	0.01
H11	S → TW → EE	0.219	(0.213,0.132)	0.02

5. Discussion

The negative impact of abusive supervision on employees' mental health and performance at work has made it an important topic in the study of organizational behavior. Abusive supervision, defined as the persistent demonstration of hostile conduct by supervisors (excluding physical violence), creates a poisonous workplace that adversely affects employees (Tepper, 2000). Emotional exhaustion, a state of chronic fatigue resulting from prolonged exposure to workplace stressors (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), is one of the most severe consequences of abusive supervision. However, this relationship is not always straightforward, and a number of mediating factors determine the effect of abusive supervision on employees. These mediators are the factors that best explain how abusive supervision results in emotional exhaustion, relational conflict, stress, toxic workplaces, and illegitimate tasks. It broadens understanding of these mediating mechanisms that will help organizations devise strategies for buffer the dark side of the abusive supervision. Abusive supervision creates an environment of violence and intimidation in which the employee feels unappreciated, unprepared, and forced to work under duress. When workers are repeatedly abused by their bosses, they cannot help but have difficulties with coworkers. One of the main types of stress that abusive supervision is said to amplify relational conflict, which refers to interpersonal tension and disagreement among colleagues. Co-workers in conflict with those experiencing abusive supervision may also become frustrated and desperate, and thus conflict more with co-workers (Chi & Liang, 2013). These controversies can occur due to misunderstanding, rising irritability, or a global antagonistic work environment. Studies suggested that relational conflict causes psychological distress intermediating less teamwork and productivity in the workgroup, which in turn increases their emotional exhaustion (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Ashraf et al., 2021). When employees endlessly go through workplace conflicts, then focusing on their work becomes troublesome and an additional trigger for frustration and burnout. Workplace stress is another important mediator in the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. Stress arises when employees feel that the job demands exceed their level of coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) resulting in a psychological strain. Abusive supervision leads to an environment of work that is filled with stress, where employees feel like they are being watched constantly, frightened that anyone will attack them and not knowing if they will have a place to work tomorrow. According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, excessive allocation of demands met without the resources means employees are more likely to burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Stress strips mental and emotional reserves, resulting in employees being mentally tired and emotionally spent. Furthermore, chronic workplace stress has been associated with diminished job satisfaction, more absenteeism and greater turnover intentions (Sun & Pan, 2020; Ashraf et al., 2024). Research suggests that when employees suffer from high levels of stress by their supervisors acting abusively, these difficult experiences are very hard to recover for the employee and thus they are more susceptible to burnout. Furthermore, illegitimate work is the work that employees deem unnecessary or outside of the scope of their job is also a significant mediator of the abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion relationship. Abusive supervision is associated with the task assignment that does not fall under the description of employees' jobs as punishment or a control measure over employees (Eatough et al, 2016). Such tasks are then seen as unfair and unreasonable, which ends up stressing and aggravating individuals. However, according to the role stress theory, employees when assigned tasks that are out of their expected job role, tend to face role conflict as well as dissatisfaction from the job which leads more to emotional exhaustion (Semmer et al., 2015). Illegitimate tasks inflict extra work-related stress, as well as diminish employees' motivation and self-worth (Schilling et al., 2019). Being constantly given tasks they cannot do resulting in having to type things they just have to copy paste tasks and demoralizing experience can be emotionally exhausting. This is also linked to abusive supervision because the combined experience of relational conflict, stress, and illegitimate tasks becomes more burdensome for employees who encounter this unacceptable behavior. It

continues to navigate the maze of mediators that reinforce our loyalty to one "side" or the other, actually creating a work environment in which employees are trapped in a cycle of negativity. Abusive supervision creates stress that obstructs an individual's ability to have positive interactions with others, which results in relational conflict. Meanwhile, illegitimate tasks create collateral frustration, exacerbating the emotional exhaustion of employees. In line with the stressor-strain model, stressors occurring at the same time can add together to produce an increased level of psychological strain, leading to a greater vulnerability to burnout and disengagement (Jex & Beehr, 1991). When employees are repeatedly exposed to abusive supervision, they not only suffer direct mistreatment from their supervisors but also encounter increased interpersonal conflicts, excessive stress, and unreasonable job demands, exhausting their emotional resources. This highlights the importance of organizations taking abusive supervision seriously and taking steps to combat its harmful effects. Training stronger leaders is one of the keys to preventing abusive behaviors is training leaders to be more ethical and supportive (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Ashraf et. al., 2023). What do employees learn in conflict resolution training (in addition to managing workplace CMS)? Employees are trained to deal effectively with relational conflicts causing high workplace tensions. Employee stress management programs can also support employees in coping with workplace stress and avoid burnout, such as mindfulness training and counseling services. They should define clear job descriptions and setup fair allocation of tasks to avoid assignment of illegitimate tasks to individuals. Providing a transparent, support system in the workplace can help impact the side effects of abusive supervision and ultimately improve the overall wellbeing of the employee. Lastly, through a mediation model, we found that the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion is explained by relational conflict, stress and illegitimate tasks, as important mediators. This may lead to workplace conflicts, high levels of stress, or having to do tasks they feel are unfair. These mediators work together to shape an organizational climate in which employees feel burned out, less satisfied with their work and less motivated and to be able to step up to these challenges, an organization needs to take preventive measures to avoid abusive supervision, ensure good interactions in the workplace, and make sure that there are ways for the employees to cope with the stress and work that will be required from them. When organizations create a positive and supportive work environment to minimize the risks of emotional exhaustion this can go a long way in improving employee well-being and workplace productivity.

6. Conclusion

Impact of abusive supervision on employees' emotional exhaustion is evidence from a serial and a parallel mediation model. The hostility and unfair treatment of employees by their superiors create a mental burden which eventually drains their emotional resources. Chronic fatigue and feeling overwhelmed are two major examples of the emotional exhaustion that develops from experiencing workplace mistreatment over a long period. However, the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion is not always straightforward. The relationship is heavily mediated by several factors, with relational conflict, stress, and illegitimate tasks having the most significant role. These mediators pool their efforts to magnify the harm caused by abusive supervision, rendering employees increasingly susceptible to burnout and disengagement. One of the most immediate consequences of abusive supervision is relational conflict. Mistreated workers may have difficulty maintaining positive workplace relationships. The negative work environment promotes misunderstanding, mistrust, inter-personal turmoil, and frequent conflict. Another dimension in which employees are stressed is because of those conflicts but employees are realizing that they haven't their stress from their over job and love to do their job to the best. More relational conflict creates added emotional weight, contributing to a sense of emotional exhaustion in the employee. Another key mediator in this relationship is workplace stress. Abusive supervision increases stress for employees by introducing uncertainty, fear and lack of control over their work environment. The ongoing scrutiny and disdain slowly erode employees' mental and emotional resilience, rendering them prone to

burnout. Chronic stress is a cash-for-performance model that not only impacts employees' performance at work but also has longer-term health consequences, such as anxiety and depression. A major contributor to this inequity in work is illegitimate tasks, which contribute to the sense of feeling undervalued and treated unfairly amongst employees. Abusive management frequently gives out requests that are unreasonable or stray outside of employees' job roles, resulting in frustration and a feeling of injustice. Tasks like these sap motivation and add to burnout, as workers take on the perception their time is being squandered. Abusive supervision influences emotional exhaustion by relational conflict, stress and illegitimate tasks. Organizations only need to realize these damaging effects and take active steps toward fair and supportive leadership, workplace conflict reduction, and safeguard a healthy working environment to mitigate employees' mental health.

7. Implications and limitations

The results of this research provide significant theoretical and practical implications for the mediation mechanisms between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion, as mediated by relational conflict, stress, and illegitimate tasks. From a theoretical perspective, this paper adds to the COR theory by illuminating the mechanism in which abusive supervision consumes employees' psychological resources, causing emotional exhaustion. It further validates the job demands-resources (JD-R) model by showing that when employees don't have enough resources to avoid burnout, too many jobs demand, e.g., workplace stress and illegitimate tasks, can be linked to burnout. Importantly, while the study identifies toxic leadership, the role of relational conflict as a social stressor confirms that the impact of toxic leadership reaches beyond any one employee on the receiving end of a leader's cruelty by disrupting the relationships and the overall relational health of the workplace and teams. In this way, the study unites these theories and offers a full picture of the cascading effect of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion. At the practical level, the results highlight the importance for organizations to work against abusive supervision and to limit the detrimental consequences of abusive supervision. Companies could set up leadership development programs that educate supervisors about how to be ethical and supportive in their management approaches, thereby decreasing the incidence of abusive behavior. This will enable employees and managers to resolve relational conflicts effectively. In addition, organizations should concentrate on various methods of stress management (e.g., employee assistance programs, mindfulness training, work-life balance initiatives,) that can help employees deal with workplace stress. When job roles are defined, it can help in allocating the right task to the right person thus, levying no illegitimate task on employees and preventing that they be burdened with unnecessary tasks. As these issues are addressed, organizations can create a healthier work environment that reduce emotional exhaustion while promoting employee well-being and productivity. In spite of its contribution, this study has some limitations. A limitation of this study is the nature of self-reported data which can lead to response bias, whereby employees may exaggerate or down play their experience of abusive supervision, stress and burnout. It opens the door for future research to utilize multiple data streams, like supervisor ratings or peer evaluations, as a mechanism for validating these findings. One of the constraints is that it concentrates on a single industry or geographical setting, which may impact the extent to which the results can be applied to other workplaces. Future studies could explore different types of organizations to see if the impact of abusive supervision is the same across various industries and cultures. Moreover, the study did not include potential moderating variables like personality traits or organizational support which may further affect employees' reactions to abusive supervision. Such future research could examine these factors to lend a more nuanced understanding around individual differences to workplace mistreatment responses. In sum, this study contributes to the existing literature by elucidating the processes through which abusive supervision leads to emotional exhaustion through relational conflict, work stress, and illegitimate tasks; but future research may mitigate the limitations of the current paper to better inform the theory and impact practice in this domain. Therefore, organization

should clearly spotlight this to avoid abusive supervision and encourage a good environment by implementing supportive policies.

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