

Leaders' Irrational Rationalization for their Abusive Conduct towards their Employees

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Abstract

Purpose: A leader's verbal and non-verbal abuse can have a detrimental consequence on employees' wellbeing, including their mental health, personal life, and professional life. Even though the problem of abusive supervision is prevalent across different countries and sectors, still the dark side of leadership is under-researched. This study used a concept, moral disengagement mechanism, developed by Dr. Bandura, to understand the justifications and rationalizations leaders use for their abusive behavior towards employees.

Methodology: In response to a call of Johnson & Buckley (2015), for conducting a study to understand how leaders use this mechanism, this study adopted qualitative methodology. In-depth interviews with 21 managers from three continents (Asia, Australia, and America) across seven different sectors and four different countries (Bangladesh, America, Canada, and Australia) of both genders, reveal that managers and leaders use mainly six types of moral disengagement mechanisms for their abusive behavior.

Findings: The most adopted mechanisms are Attribution of blame, Disregard of consequence, Advantageous Comparison, and Moral Justifications. However, Dehumanization and Diffusion of responsibility are not used as justifications for abusive behavior by managers and leaders. The other two mechanisms are moderately used by managers. As abusive managers can be present in any type of organization in any sector in the world, this research has implications for all types of organizations in all different sectors across the world.

Keywords: Moral Disengagement Mechanism, Abusive Leader, Leadership, Dark Side of Leadership, Negative Leadership Behavior, Qualitative Research

Introduction

"You should quit. If you stay in this position, your life will be a misery." This was a saying by a manager of Amnesty International ("Amnesty Loss Five Bosses", 2019). "You are an unproductive employee and the company is wasting money by keeping you. You should go home and do some unproductive work that you are meant to do," said a manager to the colleague who used to work with me at my first job. These are typical examples of negative managers' behavior in the workplace. Over the years many employees of Amnesty International have committed suicide due to bullying and stress caused by their manager ("Amnesty Loss Five Bosses", 2019). Amnesty International is not the only one with immoral managers. Many other companies have managers involved in such acts. Nineteen employees of France Telecom took their lives and twelve attempted to commit suicide in three years due to moral harassment faced by their leaders at the workplace (Osborne, 2019). These incidents shed light on the importance to study negative leadership behavior in the workplace. The existing research on the negative aspects of leadership has primarily focused on two main areas: the antecedent and the consequence of such behavior. This study focused on the rationalizations and justifications, leaders implement after being abusive with the subordinates using in-depth interview which has not been studied before.

Different authors defined negative leaders using different terms over the years. Lipman-Blumen (2005) defined leaders with negative traits as toxic leaders, Tepper (2000) as abusive, Einarsen et al. (2007) as destructive, and Kellerman (2004) as bad. Toxic leaders are those leaders who demonstrate detrimental behaviors and use cruel strategies toward their employees that cause employees to lose their spirits and self-respect (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). However, Tepper (2000) described abusive leaders as those leaders who are brutal verbally and nonverbally. They take part in ridiculing their employees and in throwing tantrums at them, in addition to doing partiality and oppression. In addition, Einarsen et al. (2007) defined destructive leaders as those leaders who use active physical force and passive force to hurt employees and the organization. Even though all these authors have used different terms to describe leaders with negative behavior, they all defined all those leaders who are damaging to the employees in one way or the other.

Gap in the Literature

This study intended to address the research gap identified by Johnson and Buckley (2015) regarding the moral disengagement mechanisms employed by leaders. It recognized the limited empirical research focusing solely on leaders and moral disengagement. Understanding the moral disengagement of leaders in organizational settings is crucial for selecting, training, developing, and remediating individuals, thereby preventing moral disengagement among leaders and followers (Johnson & Buckley, 2015).

While previous studies have explored various aspects related to leaders' involvement in moral disengagement mechanisms, such as motivation, beliefs, organizational settings, personality, situation, and responses to abusive leaders (Baron et al., 2015; Hinrichs et al., 2012; Loi et al., 2015; Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014; Knoll et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2020), the specific focus on individual-level moral disengagement by leaders has been lacking in empirical research (Johnson & Buckley, 2015).

Additionally, although research has been conducted to examine the effects of negative leader behavior, there is a limited understanding of why and how such negative behaviors manifest in the first place (Tepper, 2007). The use of the moral disengagement mechanism theory to explain leaders' abusive behavior towards their subordinates has not been explored in prior studies.

This study, therefore, responded to Johnson and Buckley's (2015) call to investigate leaders' moral disengagement mechanisms. It aimed to bring the concept of moral disengagement mechanisms (Bandura, 1986) into the literature of behavioral ethics, focusing on how respected leaders and managers in organizations employ these mechanisms to justify and rationalize their abusive behavior towards employees without experiencing guilt.

To gain a deeper understanding of leaders' moral disengagement, this research adopted qualitative approaches, as there is a limited number of studies that utilize qualitative methods to examine unethical behavior (Castro et al., 2020). Moreover, while many of the earlier studies have employed quantitative research designs and experiments, this research used a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth understanding of how leaders and managers engage in moral disengagement mechanisms following their abusive behavior towards employees. By conducting interviews, this study aimed to uncover how leaders utilize various forms of moral disengagement mechanisms on a daily basis to justify their abusive behavior towards employees, which may not be easily comprehensible through quantitative methods alone.

Significance of the Study

Understanding how leaders morally disengage themselves after being abusive is crucial to develop policies, training, and other strategies for organizations to handle the situation of abusive leadership behavior at the workplace. As abusive leaders or managers can be present in any type of organization, in any sector, in any department, and at any level, it is incumbent to know more about their behavior and the justifications they use for their negative behavior. Getting a better grasp on abusive leaders' mechanisms to morally disengage themselves might also help employees to handle their emotions and their abusive managers better. Without understanding what goes in the mind of abusive leaders and how they might handle their guilt, abusive leaders' problems are hard to solve. Once it is understood in depth how leaders and managers justify their negative behavior, better strategies can be adopted to stop such behavior. Therefore, this study aims to understand such negative behaviors of leaders and managers. This study will be beneficial for organizations of all types starting from the white-collar industry to the blue-collar, from the educational sector to manufacturing, from the private sector to private to not-for-profit organizations, as abusive leaders can be present in any type of organization.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the moral disengagement mechanism leaders use after being abusive to their subordinates. This current research is a response to a call by Johnson and Buckley (2015) for research on leaders and moral disengagement mechanisms in organizations that have not been studied in-depth earlier (Johnson & Buckley, 2015). Using the lens of the constructivist perspective, the focus of the study was to understand the justifications and rationalizations leaders use after their abusive behavior toward their subordinates.

Literature Review

People might wonder how leaders do inhumane and abusive behavior with their subordinates and still live in tranquility with themselves. To understand inhuman behavior, Bandura et al. (1996) developed the theory of Moral Disengagement and described ways how people rationalize and justify their immoral behavior. Research has found a link between moral disengagement mechanism and many other unethical behaviors such as crimes of obedience in war by political astute (Beu & Buckley, 2004), violence towards animals (Vollum et al., 2004) cyberbullying (Runions & Buk, 2015) and many more. Even though research tried to understand different immoral behavior through the lens of moral disengagement mechanism theory, to the best of knowledge, no study has been conducted to see how leaders use moral disengagement mechanisms for their abusive behavior toward their subordinates. As mentioned earlier, most studies that tried to link leadership with moral disengagement mechanism, mainly focused on how employees use this mechanism (Valle, 2019; Fehr et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2020; Ebrahimi & Yurtkoru, 2017) and most of them used a quantitative approach. As the prevalence and consequences of abusive leaders are huge and terrible, this research felt the need to have an in-depth analysis of the moral disengagement mechanism that leaders adopt for their abusive behavior towards their employees through a qualitative study.

Consequences of Negative Leaders

Employees tend to have higher organizational citizenship behavior when they perceive that they are treated with justice (Mohammad et al., 2010) but when they perceive leaders to be unjust and abusive, the opposite often happens. Just the way, a transformational leader can bring high-performance in the organization that exceeds organizational expectations (Trmal et al., 2015) abusive leaders can lower employee performance. Abusive leaders harm employees

in a wide array of ways which is why understanding abusive or negative leaders are crucial. When employees experience abusive leaders, they tend to get stressed and their performance at work tends to suffer (Khan, 2014). Some employees react to these leaders by being silent at the workplace which often happens due to the emotional exhaustion that negative leaders bring to their employees (Xu et al., 2015). Some employees lose their intrinsic motivation to work by working under a bad leader and start to find their work boring (Tariq & Ding, 2018). Some employees start to look for jobs elsewhere by being exposed to such leaders (Matos et al., 2018), some experience job dissatisfaction (Qian et al., 2017), some look for career turnover (Xu et al., 2018), and some employees turn themselves to be hostile (Lian et al., 2014). In addition to having the above-mentioned issue, when an employee perceives his/her leader to be abusive, their work effort and trust get highly impacted (Vogel et al., 2015). Being emotionally exhausted, these employees often start to become abusive to their coworkers (Wheeler et al., 2013) and workplace deviance also takes place due to abusive supervision (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). To the extreme, some employees find no option but to commit suicide in the face of abusive managers (Osborne, 2019).

Antecedents of Negative Leader

Many studies tried to understand the reasons and factors that work as an antecedent to forming abusive leaders in the workplace. Many studies found that there is a big connection between things that happen in leaders' personal lives and the way they behave in the workplace. Kiewitz et al. (2012) found that leaders who experienced insults or silent treatment are more likely to be abusive as a leader and they have higher chances of being perceived as abusive by their followers. According to Courtright et al. (2016) when leaders have competing roles between their personal lives and their work lives, they often turn abusive at the workplace. When emotional exhaustion takes a toll, leaders also turn abusive in the workplace (F & Huang, 2017). Similarly, Barnes et al. (2015) found an indirect connection between a leader's quality of sleep and his abusive behavior at the workplace. However, some authors took a different route to understanding the abusive behavior of leaders.

Rather than focusing on factors that make leaders abusive, Henle and Gross (2014) tried to find traits of employees who have higher chances of bringing out abusive nature in their leaders. In other words, some employees are more susceptible to abusive leaders than others. Their study found that those employees who have less emotional stability and consciousness tend to report abusive leaders more than those who have higher levels of emotional stability and consciousness. Liang et al. (2016) on the other hand mentioned that leaders are abusive to subordinates when the performance of the followers is unsatisfactory, whereas Lian et al. (2014) blamed the deviant behavior of subordinates to be the culprit for bringing out abusive behavior in leaders. Employees who are on low agreeableness and extraversion tend to be more deviant which brings abusive behavior from the leaders (Wang et al., 2015).

Moral Disengagement Mechanisms

Being the leader of the psychology profession, Dr. Bandura, developed a model of moral agency. According to the model, when an individual does an offensive behavior, his behavior is regulated by social and self- sanctions. Social sanctions involve the fear of getting punished and self-sanctions involve guilt and self-loathing. Dr. Bandura also found that people selectively disengage themselves morally from their offensive and abusive acts and as a result, people can do offensive acts without feeling guilt or any distress (Bandura, 2016; Bandura et al., 1996). Moral disengagement mechanisms are a set of social-cognitive mechanisms which permit a person to justify and rationalize their offensive actions to maintain their self-image (Bandura, 1986). Moral disengagement nurtures negative behavior by decreasing pro-

socialness and anticipatory self-censure and by encouraging cognitive and affective reactions related to transgression (Bandura, 2016; Bandura et al. 1996). Eight moral disengagement mechanisms were developed by Dr. Bandura (Bandura, 2016, 1990, 1996).

Moral Justification. People do moral justification by depicting their offensive conduct as serving social or moral purposes.

Euphemistic Labeling. People do moral disengagement by verbally manipulating words in such a way that the cruel act seems less severe.

Advantageous Comparison. People do moral disengagement by comparing their offensive conduct with something so egregious that their own conduct seems very less offensive or even good.

Displacement of Responsibility. People justify their offensive acts by believing that those acts were done due to social pressure or others cue them to do such rather than taking personal responsibility for their actions.

Diffusion of Responsibility. People often get involved in moral disengagement for their offensive acts by diffusing their responsibility by blaming the group and by taking away the role of oneself in the negative act. To make one's own role in a hostile act look less severe, one transfers the responsibility to the group.

Disregarding or Distorting the Consequences. People do moral disengagement by avoiding seeing the consequence of their offensive act or by minimizing the effect of their action when the offensive acts are done for personal motives or social influence. People selectively ignore, minimize, distort or disbelieve the deadly consequence their offensive act brings to others.

Dehumanization. People do hostile acts towards others by separating the victim of human qualities. "Once dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects. They are portrayed as mindless "savages," "gooks," "satanic fiends," and the like.

Attribution of Blame. People do moral disengagement by blaming other people or other factors for their transgression. They deny taking personal responsibility for their action.

The first three moral disengagement mechanisms: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, and advantageous comparison are mainly the ones with which offensive behavior is portrayed as less offensive (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 2001). The next three which include displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, and avoiding the consequences are the ones where the offender tries to keep himself separate from the consequences of his offensive act (Bandura et al., 2001). The final two are dehumanizing the victim and attributing blame to the victim are the ones where attention is shifted to the recipient (Bandura, 1986). By dehumanizing the recipient and by blaming the victim for the offensive act the offender removes his guilt from his action (Shaw et al., 2020).

Use of Moral Disengagement Mechanism at Workplace

Moral disengagement mechanisms are used in organizations both by employees and by leaders. The use of this mechanism tends to have a wide variety of impacts in many different aspects which are mostly negative and detrimental. When leaders are moral, they can reduce employees' moral disengagement propensity which eventually reduces employees' immoral decisions and deviant behaviors at the workplace (Moore et al., 2019). Employees don't use moral disengagement mechanisms when managers are ethical (Liu & Loi, 2012). When employees don't use moral disengagement mechanisms the chances for employees to get involved in deviant workplace behavior shrink (Liu & Loi, 2012). However, when the leader is abusive, it forces employees to get involved in deviant behavior at the workplace through moral disengagement without ruining their reputation of being a "good person" (Valle et al., 2019). It is not only abusive leaders who force employees to do unethical activities at the

workplace through moral disengagement mechanisms. When the leader gets involved in unethical pro-organizational behavior, employees have a higher chance to get involved in moral disengagement mechanisms (Lian et al., 2020). Chances are high among those employees who have high power distance orientation (Lian et al., 2020). Getting involved in moral disengagement mechanisms allows them to do unethical activities in the workplace (Lian et al., 2020).

Leaders and Moral Disengagement Mechanisms

Just the way employees have the propensity to use moral disengagement mechanisms, even leaders have the same. Though there are eight mechanisms of moral disengagement developed by Dr. Bandura (Bandura, 2016, 1990, 1996), Hinrichs et al. (2012) focused on the displacement of responsibility mechanism and its association with leadership beliefs. Their findings indicated that leaders who do not perceive themselves as true leaders, are diplomatic, or underestimate the qualities required for effective leadership are more likely to displace responsibility onto others when justifying unethical actions. Conversely, leaders who have higher beliefs in their own leadership abilities and are encouraged to lead demonstrate a lower tendency to displace responsibility.

Similarly, Baron et al. (2015) examined the link between leader motivation and moral disengagement. They found that entrepreneurs driven primarily by financial motivations were more prone to using moral disengagement mechanisms to justify unethical decisions. On the other hand, motivation for self-realization was negatively associated with moral disengagement, indicating that leaders with a stronger intrinsic drive for personal growth and fulfillment were less likely to engage in such mechanisms.

Knoll et al. (2016) explored the role of individual differences in moral disengagement and its influence on managers' tendency to engage in immoral behavior. Their study revealed that moral disengagement mediated the relationship between managers' authenticity and their inclination towards immoral behavior, particularly in situations where appropriate behavior was unclear. Managers high in authenticity, driven by a desire for self-expression, exhibited a reduced likelihood of moral disengagement and, subsequently, immoral behavior. Conversely, traits such as a creative mindset, low honesty, and low humility were associated with a higher likelihood of moral disengagement and potentially immoral behavior, as discussed in studies by Qin et al. (2020) and Ogunfowora and Bourdage (2014).

Furthermore, Loi et al. (2015) examined how organizational standards can influence managers to engage in abusive behavior towards employees through moral disengagement mechanisms. Their study highlighted that abusive supervision can be a result of unethical organizational standards. When an organization's standards promote unethical behavior, it triggers moral disengagement mechanisms among managers, leading to abusive conduct towards their subordinates.

As abusive supervision is unethical (Hannah et al., 2013) and even slight abusiveness can hurt an employee's wellbeing (Faulk et al., 2018), this study aimed to understand the justifications abusive managers use for their abusive behavior by using moral disengagement mechanisms. As almost all previously mentioned studies focused on a quantitative approach to studying leadership and moral disengagement mechanism, this current study adopted the qualitative with the majority of its focus on the qualitative aspect.

Methodology

Qualitative Study

The qualitative study intended to explore and to get an in-depth understanding of how leaders in organizations use moral disengagement mechanisms after their abusive behavior with their

subordinates. In this study both the leaders and managers who believed they have been abusive to their employees in the past, were studied. Most prior studies focused on understanding how moral disengagement mechanisms are used in organizations. In addition, some previous studies focused on how it is being used by employees. Very few studies tried to see how managers and supervisors use this mechanism (Johnson & Buckley, 2015). However, a few of the studies that have tried to see how leaders use moral disengagement mechanisms, conducted quantitative studies. To fully understand how leaders adopt moral disengagement mechanisms after their abusive behavior towards employees, it is crucial to get an in-depth understanding of their rationale and justifications which is difficult to achieve only with quantitative methods. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative approach to determine how leaders in organizations use this moral disengagement mechanism. This study was based on recommendation for conducting a study of a leader's moral disengagement mechanism in organizations (Johnson & Buckley, 2015).

Reasons for Qualitative Study

There are several reasons why this study is qualitative. Through semi-structured interviews, the respondents would get a chance to share details about their experience of being abusive to subordinates. Furthermore, as not much has been done regarding how leaders in organizations adopt this mechanism, this is valuable to have a qualitative component in it as a qualitative study is suitable for those topics which have not been researched much but have a significant need to be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Moreover, Crutchfield (2015) suggested that to get a better understanding of complicated topics such as toxic leadership, a qualitative study is needed to better understand the phenomenon. A qualitative study can collect information regarding toxic leadership in an effective exploratory manner which cannot be collected through surveys in a quantitative study.

According to (Yates & Leggett, 2016) qualitative study can succeed in understanding the *why* and *how* component of a research question which quantitative research fails to do. As the topic is sensitive, adding a qualitative component to the interview will be effective as Mealer and Jones (2014) mentioned that qualitative interviews are good for sensitive topics. The purpose of the quantitative part, which is the survey, was basically to collect demographic information, to recruit individuals for in-depth interviews, and to triangulate the study. Therefore, this study is a qualitative study (interpretive phenomenology-interviews) that includes a quantitative (survey) component to explore how leaders in organizations use moral disengagement mechanisms after their abusive behavior towards their employees.

Participants

Participants for this study were required to be managers, supervisors, and/or leaders who had managerial experience of five years and who consider themselves to have been abusive with their employees. There were 21 male and 1 female respondent from Bangladesh, the United States, Australia, and Canada. The ethnicity and race of the participants were Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, and Black Americans who represented many different sectors: healthcare, hospitality, financial, manufacturing, arts and entertainment, collection agency, and government. As research on cross-cultural leadership is limited (Brown & Mitchel, 2010; Eisenbeiss, 2012), the study intended to have diverse respondents.

Data Collection

Once the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received, an anonymous survey link was posted on the social media account of the researcher. The target for the anonymous survey was to find the right candidate for the interview who had managerial experience, was

abusive to employees, and was willing to share the stories. As the study needed those leaders and managers who self-identified themselves to have been abusive with employees in the past, the anonymous survey was expected to bring a large number of participants for the interview. The survey questionnaire assisted the researcher to identify who is the right candidate for the interview. In the fifteen-item Likert scale of Tepper (2000), those who claimed to have mistreated the employee “frequently” and “often” and scored an average of 4 in all those 15 Likert item questions, were reached out for the interview. The informed consent of the respondents was taken before the survey and they were asked for permission if they wanted to take part in an in-depth interview.

Interview Protocols

Those who gave consent were reached out for an interview. Before the interview, consent was taken again. A total of seven phone and fourteen Zoom interviews were done as face-to-face interviews were not an option due to Covid-19. The average time of the interviewees was about thirty minutes, with the longest being an hour. With the interviewees’ consent, all the conversations were audio recorded for using in coding phrases and to ensure accuracy. For those interviewees who did not have access to Zoom, phone interviews were conducted, as studies found no significant difference in transcripts between face-to-face interviews and phone interviews (Midanik & Greeneld 2003; Sturges & Hanrahan 2004). All through the interview, descriptive and reflective notes were taken and proper interview protocol was followed. All the respondents were thanked for their time at the end. All the recordings were later transcribed word for word.

Sampling

The survey relied on convenience sampling by posting the survey link on social media of the researcher, due to limited time and resources. However, the survey was open to the public for higher participation rates. The interview, on the other hand, relied on purposive sampling as it was clear to the researcher who needed to be interviewed so, from all the survey takers, the researcher purposively chose only those individuals who were abusive to their employees in the past and was willing to share their stories.

Because the topic of this study is sensitive and there was a possibility that interviewees might have been uncomfortable opening up about their past negative behavior, all respondents were assured confidentiality and anonymity. For anonymity, the name of the interviewees was changed to pseudonyms. Being able to keep themselves anonymous is hoped to reduce respondents’ chance for social desirability bias and impression management. In addition, being able to participate in the interview via phone was also expected to reduce such biases. At the time of the interviews, the interviewees’ rationalization and justification they had for those behaviors.

As the study needed to know the experience of a leader or manager mistreating their employees, they all were requested to share in detail an incident where they believe they have mistreated the employee to a large extent. Even though there was the possibility that the incident had taken place many years ago, it was believed that leaders and managers would be able to recall them due to their weight. However, to make the recalling process easier, interview questions were sent to the interviewee several days before the interview. Interviewees’ recollections of incidents can supply rich and vivid insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Gremier, 2004). They were given the option to choose which incident they wanted to talk about. Allowing the interviewee the choice to self-select the incident they wanted to share often enhances research which is related to ethics (Liedtka, 1992). To ensure that the themes that come up from the data represent the whole sample and not a random occurrence, the same

questions were asked to all the interviewees (Locke, 2001). The themes that came up during the interview were expanded more to support related lines of inquiry (Linehan & Walsh, 2000).

Instrumentation

The survey relied on Tepper's (2000) fifteen-item scale of abusive supervision with four open-ended questions and nine demographic questions in the survey. The interview portion relied on six semi-structured open-ended questions. As the topic is sensitive, it was believed that having a semi-structured interview would make participants more comfortable than a formal one. In addition, a semi-structured questions permit respondents to share their stories without putting an obstacle to their answers (Roter, 2011).

For this study, the research collected self-reported data from the leaders, managers, and supervisors as they are the right person to talk about their own abusive behavior as they are the best to know about it (Deng et al., 2020). Collecting data from abused employees, which the majority of earlier studies did, often does not bring the right psychological responses (Deng et al., 2020). Moreover, Qin et al. (2019) suggested that leaders and managers are the right people to know about their demeanor toward the employees. Furthermore, Tepper (2017) also recommended adopting a self-reported method to study abusive supervision, so this study relied on self-reported data from managers and leaders who were abusive to employees in the past.

Data Analysis

The survey was conducted first to recruit respondents for the interview and to triangulate the study. The four open-ended questions from the survey were similar to the questions asked during the interview and their responses were analyzed, for triangulation. Once all the data from the interview were collected, all the data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the six-step process of thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). The study adopted manual coding to analyze data through keywords-in-context (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) because computerized software often can not identify subtle themes which manual coding can (Carter & Baghurst, 2014).

From 21 interviews as the researcher had a huge amount of data, the researcher did winnowing of data which is a process of organizing the data where the researcher focuses on one part of the data and omits the rest (Guest et al.2012). All the notes that were gathered from the interviews were consulted during data analysis.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study certain steps were taken. First, for triangulation, four questions which were asked during the survey were repeated during the interview. Triangulation can prevent biases and brings credibility to a qualitative study (Hadi & Jose Closs, 2016). Second, peer debriefing was done where the researcher involved another Ph.D. colleague to code the data and randomly forty percent of the codes were cross-checked to ensure internal validity. Cross-checking the codes that are conducted independently brings huge credibility to the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Third, once the interview was finished, feedback from the respondents were taken to ensure that whatever the researcher interpreted is actually what the respondents meant and that was done to ensure external validity. Forth, even though the interviews were conducted either via phone or zoom, contextual details were also taken into account such as a pause or giggle, to go deeper into the data. Lastly, for extra reliability, twenty percent of the transcribed interview data were randomly collected and checked for accuracy with audio.

Results

Data analysis revealed that managers who are abusive to their subordinates use up to six types of moral disengagement mechanisms of Bandura (1980), where some techniques are widely prevalent and some techniques are less commonly practiced. Managers in this study were found to be abusive both verbally and non-verbally and got involved in behaviors that were also found common among abusive leaders in earlier studies by Tepper (2000), Ashforth (1994), and Hornstein (1996). Behaviors that were found common were making fun of employees in front of others, coercing employees, throwing anger tantrums (Tepper, 2000), trying to keep control (Hornstein, 1996), blaming employees (Ashforth, 1994), favoring one's race over other race, doing nepotism, getting physical, giving the silent treatment, disregarding employee's concern, not acknowledging employee, not correcting employee and backbiting about the employee to others, verbally abusing and much more. Managers notably blamed organizational factors and/or personal factors for all those abusive behaviors.

The four moral disengagement mechanisms: attribution of blame, disregard of the consequence, moral justification, and advantageous comparison were found more often among abusive managers in the study. The other two mechanisms: euphemistic labeling and displacement of responsibility were moderately common among managers as a justification technique for their abusive behavior toward the employees. However, dehumanization and diffusion of responsibility were not found to be a mechanism of moral disengagement among managers after their abusive behavior towards employees. The rest of the section discussed each of these moral disengagement mechanisms.

Attribution of Blame

This mechanism of moral disengagement was exploited the most by the managers for their abusive behavior towards their subordinates. Almost 95 percent of the managers used this technique along with other techniques and all the managers blamed different factors for bringing out their offensive behavior towards employees. This is at par with the findings of Tepper (2000) and Ashforth (1994) who also found abusive and tyrannical leaders to be blaming others for their mistakes. This study confirmed those earlier findings and found that abusive leaders indeed blamed different individuals (family members, seniors' management) and different factors (organizational stress and personal stress) for their abusive behavior.

The official situation was blamed by the majority of the managers where they mentioned that excess work pressure, being too busy, unrealistic work expectations, negative work environment, scarcity of resources, bringing unwanted employees to the department, and nepotism by management were responsible for bringing out their abusive behavior.

For instance, one manager said:

Most of the cases it depends on how we are working in an environment. If I have a lot of assignments to complete and no one is focusing on it, that situation actually make us to do the negative behavior (Chartreuse).

In another instance, in blaming official target and work pressure, one manager confessed:

We have quotas and expectations to meet because the company wants to bring in so much money online. And there have been times recently that I have been very resentful and reacted very poorly to people working under me (Lime).

I am working for a commercial bank and we have to work with a budget each and every day with team target, financial target, as well as compliance target, so sometimes there are number of occasions, when I got short tempered with my colleagues (Fallow).

These findings were at par with earlier findings that workload makes managers abusive (Eissa & Lester, 2017). However, the type of abusive behavior brought by the official situation in a

white-collar sector was different than what is for a pink or blue-collar sector. In the blue-collar sector, official stress often made managers get verbally abusive to the point where they would use curse words freely. For instance, one respondent working in plumbing said, “*Yea, I kind of cursed at him, told him ‘what the fu.k he is doing’ and specifically I told him ‘he was incompetent’*” (Purple).

This study confirms earlier studies that abusive managers do get involved in many abusive activities such as bullying employees, forcing them to quit, ridiculing them in public, yelling at them and that abusive behavior can be both verbal and non-verbal (Tepper, 2000). This study found that abusive managers give abusive treatment in the form of abusive words (such as calling an employee an idiot or asshole), or abusive behavior (such as forcing the employee to quit or embarrassing the employee in public), or through silent treatment. However, the main difference between abusive managers in the white-collar sector and the ones in the blue or pink-collar sector is that they rarely yell at employees or say any curse words which are prevalent in the pink and in blue-collar sectors. The most prevalent form of abusive behavior in the white-collar sector is negative word of mouth where the manager, without saying any bad words directly to the employee, tries to ensure that the employee is fired or does not get hired again by backbiting about the employee to others. For instance, one respondent working in academics manifested:

I was upset with the person, it was not that I was rude to the person. I didn’t want to tell him that I didn’t want to see your face anymore. He was not hired again. I made sure to tell my colleague from the department that how bad was the service he provided (Majenta).

In another instance, another individual working in Movie college mentioned how he was unwilling to train new employees who were in the department about the rules and regulations of movie making and if he felt that the employees did a mistake, he would choose to hire a new employee by firing him rather than giving the employee a chance to fix himself or by providing him training. For instance, one respondent said, “*It’s a 35-40 year old person and I don’t have time to babysit people. I am just going to move on to the next person*” (Violet).

In addition to being abusive to employees and blaming organizational stress, managers from all sectors also blamed different personal factors. Starting from mentioning how one was drunk when the abusive behavior took place, managers blamed their upbringing, their impatience, higher work standard, their family members-father, their lack of maturity and knowledge in handling different situations of life, their family stress, their insecurity, their fear of losing their job, and their lack of sleep to be just a few for bringing out their abusive behavior. Some of these factors were consistent with earlier findings such as Barnes et al. (2015) also found a link between sleep deprivation and abusive supervision.

In blaming personal factors one respondent vented:

I could have gone to my boss and explained to him the situation and what was going on and had him take care of it which would have been the right thing to do. I did not do that because being the nature of who I am as a drunk and my ego demands that I tear people down when absolutely it’s not necessary (Blue).

Many managers even blamed the victim either for their inappropriate behavior or for their overconfidence, or for hurting the pride, for their abusive behavior as can be seen in the below text:

“It was their negative or crazy behavior that caused my response” (Violet).

“She hurt my pride. And I reacted” (Silver).

I don’t like the feeling when those that work under me, felt that they know better even though they don’t and they don’t have as much experience with these situations. The employee come across as very immature and therefore I also feel that I should fire them (Violet).

In one event when we were having a very rush hour in our outlet, one of my employee was watching cricket in his mobile and he was not attending the customers properly. His concentration was on the game. So I reacted very hard on him (Flandango)

Even though all managers blamed either their organizational stress or personal issue or the employee for bringing out their negative behavior, many managers also accepted the fact that the most notable thing that they blamed was allowing their negative thought about their employee to come into action, as can be seen from the text, *“When they didn’t do as I asked. I would express how their actions negatively impacted the business. Allowing feelings to dictate my actions” (Paula).*

This shows that even though many managers who were abusive to their employee, did have self-realization of their actions later point in time.

Disregard the Consequence

This is the second most adopted moral disengagement mechanism that managers adopted after their abusive behaviors towards subordinates. This was mainly done by managers by saying that their abusive actions did not do much harm to the employee either financially or emotionally or mentally. Even though almost all managers experienced some form of guilt, either immediately or after some time, after their abusive behavior, which was also at par with earlier findings that managers feel guilt after their abusive behavior (Tangney et al., 2007), the majority of the managers in the study disregarded the consequence of their abusive behavior. Some managers denied that the employee was even hurt and some claimed that even if the employee was hurt, it was temporary, and some denied knowing if the employee was hurt, claiming that it’s impossible to know if one is hurt emotionally. For instance, one manager declared, *“I think that there may have been a temporary very temporary financial crisis. He might have suffered financially very temporarily. Emotionally, I don't believe so” (Green).*

When the managers used any curse words or did something very abusive to the employee, the majority of the time, they tried to think that no huge suffering (emotional, financial, or mental) had taken place. However, to reduce their guilt many times the manager would completely deny accepting that the employee might have suffered severely due to their abusive behavior/action. For instance, one manager in the below scenario assumed that the employee did not suffer after he ridiculed the employee in front of customers by stressing, *“I didn't notice any outward suffering of any sort” (Black).*

However, in situations where the manager has neither used any curse words nor did anything abusive such as bullying or threatening to fire an employee, silent treatment which is also another form of non-verbal abusive behavior (Tepper, 2000), was considered not abusive and in those cases, the manager completely denied that their behavior even impacted the employee in one way or the other. One respondent claimed:

No, I don't, I don't think so. I think again they would have been benefited if I had addressed it because then there could have been some kind of mutual understanding between us but since it was more just “silence” and no major reaction from me, I don't think they suffered or anything (Majenta).

Moral Justification

The third most adopted moral disengagement mechanism was moral justifications and seventy percent of the managers have used it. Earlier research has found similar results. The study of Umphress and Bingham (2011) found that employees do bad things for good reasons which were at par with the findings where instead of employees, managers have claimed to have done abusive behavior but for good reasons. Lipman-Blumen (2005) found that toxic leaders present toxic agendas as noble vision and this is similar to what we have found that abusive leaders

present their behavior as something that was done to serve a noble vision/purpose. Throughout the coding process, two codes appeared the most which were security and safety. In explaining the reason for their abusive behavior, 15 managers mentioned that it was necessary to maintain the safety and security of the work environment, including the safety of the customers and employees. As the employees are not always obedient and follow directions, many of those managers claimed that their abusive behavior towards the employee was needed to teach them a lesson and to teach the employee the importance of safety and security of the work environment.

In explaining why he/she was abusive to the employee, most managers (respondents) have also mentioned that the abusive behavior was brought about to meet a higher-order need which was to prevent workplace hazards and accidents. For instance, one manager in the healthcare sector said, *“I finally fired her but you know I was inappropriate that day but I lost my temper with her and she was continuously making too many mistakes that could have cost patients their lives”* (Grey).

In explaining, the reason for negative behavior towards the employee, one manager said the following implying that his negative behavior was for the safety of the customers *“He dropped the tray, dropped the beverages all over a bunch of guests at a table. I yelled at him and sent him home when he did that”* (Pink). Another vented:

I got mad at a subordinate because they were not responding as quickly as I believed they should have. It was a fire drill and the employee was, from my perspective, seeing as either an annoyance or a hum drum routine exercise. When we got back in the office, I banged my fists on the table. I was frustrated (Baize).

In the above cases, after admitting that their behavior was wrong the managers gave justification that the negative behavior was for the greater good (safety and security) of others. However, some managers even denied accepting that their negative behavior was even negative and claimed that it was for the safety and security of the company as the employee could have done the company harm, for instance, one respondent said, *“I would not call it a negative behavior but rather addressing a negative outcome from a subordinate.”* (Brown).

One interesting thing that was observed among managers adopting moral justifications for their abusive behavior was that they all apologized to their employees after their misbehavior, which was not always found among managers adopting other techniques. Lin et al. (2016) found that ethical leaders also often turn abusive, and as ethical managers do apologize after their wrongdoings (Byrne et al., 2014), managers in this study who adopted moral justifications after their abusive behavior probably had more ethicality in them than others.

Advantageous Comparison

People who get involved in abusive or negative behavior with others often tend to rationalize or justify their transgression by comparing their transgressed act with an even more ethically questionable act. In this study, managers often described situations where they have used this mechanism of moral disengagement after their abusive behavior towards subordinates. Almost half of the managers in this study used this mechanism and claimed that they could have fired the employee on spot or could have taken rather harsh measures but rather chose not to do so. Through advantageous comparison, managers try to make their abusive behavior sound acceptable to others, as they believe that firing an employee is more severe compared to unjustified demotion at the workplace or scolding or yelling at an employee. One respondent said, *“The reality is, I could have fired her. I chose not to fire her, I chose to move her in a new role”* (Brown). Another claimed, *“We had the option of terminating her. I decided not to do that because she was not a terrible employee”* (Brown).

In all cases where the manager did their abusive behavior in the form of demoting the employee unethically, or in the form of using curse words or abusive behavior through yelling in public, the managers felt that all those were better than firing the employee or threatening to fire them. Research has also found that bad managers force employees to quit their job or they threaten to fire the employee (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). The trend that many managers demonstrated in this study is that firing the employee or threatening to fire them are often considered to be the ultimate bad one can do to an employee and all other negative behavior in the form of yelling or cursing are way better than that and should not be considered abusive.

Euphemistic Labeling

Not as prevalent as the above four, but some managers have used words in such a way that their abusive behavior seemed less harsh. People act in a more hostile way when their abusive actions are verbally sanitized than when they are called abusive (Diener et al., 1975). These findings matched earlier studies that found that leaders use euphemisms in the form of coded language to report unethical activity to a higher authority (Lucas & Fyke, 2014). In explaining an incident where an employee did not perform as expected, the manager complained and made the employee suspended for two months, but he said, *“Then the university has put him into two months’ notice and said, go get relaxed at home”* (Azure).

Rather than saying that the manager complained to top management to have the employee suspended from his work for two months, the manager manipulated the word in such a way by saying the employee was sent home for two months so that the abusive action of the manager seems less abusive.

Displacement of Responsibility

Under this mechanism, the abuser sees their action as arising from dictates of authority. This study confirms the earlier findings of Hinrichs et al. (2012). In their study, it was found that a leader’s belief has a connection with the extent they shift their responsibility to those in senior positions. Only one manager has used this technique. Managers in this study used it by claiming that they were just doing their work and were following orders and denied taking personal responsibility for their actions. In explaining how to fulfill official quotas, targets, and work expectations of seniors, one manager behaved negatively with a subordinate, one manager confessed: *We have quotas and expectations to meet because the company wants to bring in so much money online. And there have been times recently that I have been very resentful and reacted very poorly to people working under me because I felt they weren't producing an effective rate* (Lime).

In another incident, another manager made a similar claim that to meet the target of the bank, the manager reacted poorly to its employees. For instance: *I am working for a commercial bank and we have to work with a budget each and every day with team target, financial target, as well as compliance target, so sometimes there are number of occasions, when I got short-tempered with my colleagues. This is because they were not able to meet my expectations, they were not able to meet their budgeted target* (Aqua). In displacing the responsibility, in every case, the manager seemed to have blamed the senior or top management for giving them excess work pressure or target and put the responsibility on them for their action, rather than taking personal responsibility for their action. This finding was also at par with earlier findings that abusive and toxic leaders blame others for their mistakes (Tepper, 2000; Ashforth, 1994) and deny responsibility for their actions. They displace the responsibility for their abusive actions on others by blaming them.

Dehumanization

It is easy to abuse people when the perpetrator believes that the victim is not viewed as a human who might have feelings and emotions. When someone is called ‘dogs’ or “worms” or anyone refers to them negatively or does not consider them equal due to their gender, ethnicity, race, etc., they become victims of dehumanization. This technique allows people to look at others in a way as if they don’t have feelings and emotions and as if they are objects. This is one of the mechanisms that was not adopted by managers in this study. Earlier research found a link between abusive supervision and organizational dehumanization perception (Caesens et al., 2019). However, contrary to earlier research, no such connection was found in this study between abusive leaders and dehumanization. No managers in this study have used dehumanization mechanisms towards their employees. This was probably because all the managers in the study shared an incident from the past where they were abusive and shared the things they have done and said. As most managers have realized that their past behavior was abusive, and they have done self-realization, they probably preferred not to use dehumanizing words to describe their employees during the interview.

However, one manager seemed to have called their employee “woman”, “needy”, and “childish” in such a way as if they were lower in value or respect than others. In describing an incident where the manager gave an unreasonable demotion to employees, the manager said “*She was going through some health issues and throughout that time, she became extremely needy and self-centered and it was always like, she would need hours of time*” (Brown).

Even though no manager in this study has gotten involved in dehumanization as a moral disengagement mechanism, many of the incidents they shared portrayed that their employees considered the manager to be dehumanizing them as can be seen from the text: *A subordinate was absent from work for 2 straight days. Instead of asking how they were doing, my first contact was to remind them that they didn't have any PTO time. The subordinate actually confronted me about it, which made me feel awful. They felt like a piece of labor and not a person. I agreed that I could've been more compassionate* (Salsa).

This was at par with earlier findings. Caesens et al. (2019) found that abusive supervision causes organizational dehumanization perception among employees and this study confirms earlier study. When the managers are less compassionate, many employees perceived themselves to be the victim of dehumanization. Even though this manager was not very abusive but was indifferent and was less compassionate about the condition of employees which gave the impression to the employee that he is not considered a “human”.

Diffusion of Responsibility

This happens when a manager blames the team or other group members for their abusive behavior. Like dehumanization, this mechanism was not found to be prevalent among managers in this study. This was probably because all the managers in the study had full control over their employees. In general, as there are no two managers responsible for one employee, this mechanism was less applicable in this study. The managers in this study did not have the scope to blaming the group or other managers for their abusive behavior towards employees as they were the sole manager for their employees and their abused employees did not have two managers. However, one manager said in explaining the incident of demoting an employee, “*It was not just me, it was me and the vice president, we kind of co-supervised her and we both felt the same way*” (Brown).

This shows that if managers had the option of co-supervising employees, they have the potential of getting involved in the diffusion of responsibility as a form of moral disengagement mechanism.

Conclusion and Implications

The study intended to investigate how managers and leaders from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds, working in various organizations across different sectors and countries, employ moral disengagement mechanisms to rationalize their abusive behaviors towards employees. The researcher responded to the call made by Johnson and Buckley (2015) to conduct a qualitative study examining how organizational leaders adopt moral disengagement mechanisms. By addressing this research gap, the study sought to contribute to the existing literature, which has predominantly focused on either the antecedents or consequences of abusive leadership.

The primary objective of this study was to gain insight into the cognitive processes and mechanisms employed by abusive managers and leaders to alleviate their guilt or responsibility for their abusive actions. Understanding these underlying mechanisms is seen as essential before effective measures can be implemented to address the issue of abusive leadership. Given the significant negative impact that abusive leadership has on employees worldwide, it is crucial to comprehend the reasons behind leaders' abusive behavior and their motivations for engaging in such actions. Consequently, this study aimed to explore how managers and leaders utilize moral disengagement mechanisms as defense mechanisms for their abusive behavior and identify the most prevalent mechanisms employed.

By conducting a qualitative investigation, the researcher expected to gather rich, in-depth data from leaders and managers in diverse organizational settings, sectors, and countries. This approach will provide a nuanced understanding of the moral disengagement mechanisms used by abusive leaders, shedding light on the complexities and variations in their justifications for their behaviors. Ultimately, the findings of this study can contribute to the development of targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating abusive leadership and improving the well-being of employees in various contexts.

The most important contribution of this study is understanding the moral disengagement mechanism leaders use after their abusive behavior towards the employees, which was never studied before. This study found that leaders and managers use attribution of blame, moral justifications, advantageous comparison, and disregard of consequence to a very large extent to get away with the guilt of being abusive and to justify their abusive behavior. However, dehumanization and diffusion of responsibility were not found to be used by managers in this study and that was partly because they were less applicable to managers who solely manage employees without co-managing them and those who already did self-realization for their abusive past behavior towards employees. The other two which were displacement of responsibility and euphemistic labeling were moderately used. Half of the managers in this study seemed to have used those mechanisms. It is note mentioning that all managers did use more than one mechanism after their abusive behavior and some managers even used three or more mechanisms to justify their negative actions.

It is worth pointing out the difference between the current study and other studies. Even though research on leadership and moral disengagement is scarce (Johnson & Buckley, 2015), some studies were conducted on some mechanisms of moral disengagement are adopted by leaders. Hinrichs et al. (2012) found that leaders use displacement of responsibility as a form of moral disengagement mechanism. Leaders who have shared orientation and have affective and non-calculative motivation to lead ten to use moral disengagement mechanisms through the displacement of responsibility. Lucas and Fyke (2014) found leaders use euphemisms in the form of coded language to report unethical activity to authority. Caesens et al. (2019) found that abusive supervision causes organizational dehumanization perception among employees. In contrast, the current study found that managers don't use dehumanization mechanisms after

their abusive behavior but they use displacement of responsibility, euphemistic labeling, and six other mechanisms of moral disengagement.

This study shed light on the fact that even leaders and managers use moral disengagement after their abusive behavior to get away with the guilt of being abusive. This study is intended to contribute to the literature on leadership by bringing in the concept of the moral disengagement mechanism which has mainly been explored in behavioral science literature. Furthermore, this study proved that managers do morally disengagement themselves such that sometimes they follow orders of their seniors blindly without realizing what they are doing is wrong. Sometimes they might think that what they are trying to do has a moral purpose but they might forget that in fulfilling to do moral work, one might turn abusive and these managers might be completely unaware that they are doing it. This study can help those managers to understand how they might be falling into this pothole of being morally “disengaged” consciously or unconsciously. In addition, this study is expected to help people in organizations to understand how leaders use moral disengagement mechanisms so that suitable training (specifically ethics training) can be offered both in business schools and in organizations (Bonner et al., 2016). This study will shed light on the urgency for ethics training and subjects in schools and organizations (Bonner et al., 2016). Many managers and leaders might use different mechanisms of moral disengagement but training both employees and managers can help them understand when they might fall into the trap of using this technique at the workplace and how they should be careful of not getting into moral disengagement mechanisms. Knowing that managers are prone to using this mechanism can help make better policies and effective planning and counseling in the organizations.

Leaders can be abusive in all sectors starting from agriculture, to education, to banking, to healthcare not only in small organizations but also in established corporations which could be both public, private, non-profit, and even religious. Therefore, this study would have significance for all types of organizations in the world. Leaders can be abusive irrespective of race or country they belong to so starting from leaders to employees to management to policymakers can be benefited from this study. The significance of the study ranges widely from policy to leadership.

No matter how much an organization invests in infrastructure, in modern technology, in bonuses, or fixtures and fittings, if employees are abused by their supervisor they would be upset and it will impact their job performance so the organization would suffer. Therefore, this study would help organizations and their top management to realize that solving the problem of leaders’ abusive behavior is crucial for employees to be productive. By understanding more about the abusive nature of leaders and their justification, many organizations will be tremendously benefited because they would be able to identify individuals about their way of justifying certain things during the screening stage of hiring. In this way, companies can save themselves from hiring leaders who might have more tendency to be abusive towards their employees at work. By understanding how leaders justify their abusive behavior, better strategies and policies can be placed into effect. As many societal problems such as alcoholism (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006) and mental stress (Tepper, 2000) are linked to abusive supervision, by exploring more about leader’s abusive behavior, the whole society can be benefited as frustration at the workplace often spill over at family life. This study can also help organizations save a tremendous amount of money in various ways. As abusive supervision and employee turnover intentions are linked (Haar et al., 2016), from this study organizations can not only benefit from less turnover but also from cutting down expenditures in hiring and training new employees. This study can help not only the hiring team but also the training team in identifying leaders with more justification but also in developing strategies to handle those leaders. For developing better training programs for leaders with higher tendencies to justify

their behavior, first, it is important to understand how leaders justify their behavior and this study would help identify those elements so that organizations can have a more productive and efficient workforce. Moreover, employees would be better able to understand the leader's abusive behavior so they can better cope with them. Supervisors would also be able to know and realize how they might have been using rationalizations consciously or unconsciously to justify their abusive behavior towards the employee so they can also adjust their behavior accordingly.

Finally, this study can help organizations know the importance of having a strict policy for supervisors' abusive behavior. Even though organizations often have many policies such as policies on what employees can wear or how they should handle a customer complaint, many times organizations don't have any policy about how supervisors or managers should treat their employees and what would be considered right, and what would be considered wrong. This research can help organizations to adopt policies on leaders' appropriate and acceptable behavior towards the employee. Therefore, this research would benefit all types of organizations, managers, leaders, and employees of diverse natures.

Limitations

Like all research studies, this study also has some limitations. The first limitation is that all the interviews were conducted either in Zoom or over the phone. Due to Covid-19, conducting face-to-face interviews was not an option. However, the researcher ensured that all descriptive and reflective words were taken from the zoom interview to bring the best out of the interview. However, though no huge difference is observed between face-to-face and phone interviews (Midanik & Greeneld 2003; Sturges & Hanrahan 2004). It is believed that phone interview often reduces social desirability biases and chance for impression management in many individuals. The second big limitations were the fact that out of 21 interviewees, all 20 respondents were male and only one female was there. Future studies should try to have respondents equal to both genders. Even though in this study the gender was dominated by male respondents, the study was diverse in all other areas. Respondents were from three different continents from four different countries, from seven different sectors, and of diverse ethnicity. The third limitations was the fact that convenience sampling was done for the survey due to limited time and resource. However, to get maximum respondents for the survey eventually for the interview, the survey was open to the public. In addition, the researchers did not solely rely on survey takers to recruit interviewees. The researchers also did purposive sampling for the interviews. Those interviewees who were recruited from purposive sampling also had to take part in the survey. The fourth limitations was that the research required managers to recall a past incident of abusive behavior. It is crucial to recognize that relying on participants' memory to recall past events brings potential biases and inaccuracies to the data. Recall biases often takes place as the participant's recollections might differ from what actually happened (Ross, 1989). To mitigate the impact of such biases, interview questionnaire were sent a few days before the interview so respondents had the time to recall the incident they wanted to share. The final limitation that we have identified is the fact that the number of respondents for the survey was only 62 which made the quantitative analysis not so effective. Even though the major weight of the study was on the qualitative part as the study was mainly about exploring, finding more respondents for the quantitative part, would have been better in terms of giving equal weight to both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study.

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