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The effects of abusive supervision and social support on workplace aggression

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THE EFFECTS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND

SOCIAL SUPPORT ON WORKPLACE AGGRESSION

A Capstone

Presented in

Fulfillment of the

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By

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my family, thesis chair Dr. Annette Towler and committee member Dr. Joseph Ferrari for their guidance, patience, encouragement and understanding while working with me throughout this project. Thank you kindly for all you have done.

VITA

       Kimberly Denise Reynolds was born in Chicago, Illinois, September 28, 1971. She graduated from George Henry Corliss High School, received a Bachelor of Science degree from DePaul University in 2003. She is currently pursuing a Master of Science degree in Psychology from the same university.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, numerous studies have been conducted on antisocial

behaviors in the workplace (Kennedy, Homant & Homant, 2004; LeBlanc & Kelloway,

2002; Milam, Spitzmueller & Penney, 2009). Episodes of workplace violence peaked to a

high of 1,281 in 1992 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992). Accordingly,

research on physical violence in the workplace has increased.

While media coverage gives the impression that workplace violence is a common

and disturbing occurrence, brutal acts of violence concerning direct physical assaults in

the workplace are rare. More incidents of verbal and passive forms of aggression are

reported than physical and active forms (Baron & Neuman, 1995).

Workplace violence is a small part of a much bigger issue that researchers have

named *workplace aggression* (Baron & Neuman, 1998). Workplace aggression is any

form of behavior directed by one or more persons in a workplace toward the goal of

harming one or more others in that workplace (or entire organization) in ways the

intended targets are motivated to avoid (Neuman, 2003/2004). Workplace aggression can

go from covert and more inconspicuous forms of behavior to overt blatant acts of

defiance which can include confrontation, damage to property belonging to the

organization and physical assault. Workplace violence is a very important topic and

deserves attention; this study focused on workplace aggression. Workplace aggression is

an important topic to study because several small acts of workplace aggression can

eventually lead to workplace violence (Baron & Neuman, 1998).

Because of the severity of workplace aggression and its negative impact on individuals within the organization, researchers have focused on ways to identify situational factors and individual factors that predict workplace aggression. Tepper, Duffy and Shaw (2001) researched workplace aggression on two personality types, agreeableness and conscientiousness their results found that individual differences account for 53% variance in workplace aggression. This indicated individual differences play a major role in workplace aggression. Another study by Baron, Neuman & Geddes (1998) reported high incidence workplace aggression with individuals who have a type A personality. Additional research also proposes that situational factors play a critical role in predicting workplace aggression (Baron, et al. 1998; Dupre & Barling, 2001). One example of a situational factor is abusive supervision. Baron, et al., (1998) found that acts of abusive supervision such as expressions of hostility like belittling others' opinions and talking behind the target's back accounts for 33.3% of the variance in workplace aggression. Additional studies suggest that situational factors such as the lack of social support accounted for 51% of the variance in workplace aggression (Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002).

Past and present research on workplace aggression focuses on individual differences and situational factors as predictors of workplace aggression (Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2008; Tepper, et al., 2001). However not much research has been done on the effect that abusive supervision and social support has on workplace aggression. Further research is needed to examine the buffering effect social support has on workplace aggression. Past studies have indicated that targets of abusive supervision have responded to such abuse in a retaliatory manner (Tepper, et al., 2001) other studies

looked at social support as a means to ameliorate workplace aggression. For example, Schat and Kelloway (2003) tested the buffering effects of instrumental and informational support on workplace aggression. Their study examined both personal and organizational outcomes. Results indicated that both forms of support served as a mediator for psychological aggression and serves as a good intervention to workplace violence. However, the current study looked at how social support affects the outcome of workplace aggression with individuals who are targets of abusive supervision, social and work retaliation victimization.

The Effects of Abusive Supervision on Workplace Aggression

Tepper (2000) defines abusive supervision as subordinates perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (178). Abusive supervision can take on many different forms such as ridiculing, undermining, and yelling at subordinates.

While abusive supervision can take on many forms, it is important to look at the reasons for abusive supervision. Tepper, Duffy, Henle and Lambert (2006) theorized supervisor's procedural injustice would lead to abusive supervision. Individuals who experience procedural injustice are deprived of having a voice and lack decision control. This in turn can lead to resentment and the desire to retaliate against those who appear to be the cause of the injustice. Individuals of procedural injustice experience feelings of not being valued by their organization (Tyler 1989). Folger & Kass (2000) found that individuals of procedural injustice encounter feelings of not belonging and being a valued member of the group. These individuals also experienced diminished self-efficacy and

depression (Tepper, 2000). The feelings of having no power or control are associated with depression and can promote aggressive behavior (Bennett, 1998).

The aggressive behavior displayed by abusive supervisors is their attempt to gain control and power. Subordinates are viewed as safer targets because of the risk of negative consequences such as job or career loss is minimal as compared to retaliating against a higher ranking official.

An important factor for abusive supervision is the target's perception. If the target does not feel as if they are being mistreated, abusive supervision is rendered nonexistent (Tepper, 2001). If the target does feel as if they are being mistreated, a chain reaction occurs. The target will begin to view themselves as a victim. Aquino & Bradfield (2000) define victimization as the individual's self-perception of having been exposed, either momentarily or repeatedly, to aggressive acts emanating from one or more other persons. After the target begins viewing themselves as a victim, they begin to experience high amounts of psychological distress (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Heightened psychological distress can create a spiraling effect which could ultimately lead to negative consequences for both the organization and the victims' coworkers (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Unfortunately, when a person perceives themselves as a victim, they tend to 'adopt' certain characteristics as a consequence to their perceptions. Aquino and Bradfield (2000) found *negative affectivity* to be associated with such perceptions. Victims of abusive supervision will display high levels of negative emotions including anger, aggression, fear or anxiety. Victims of abusive supervision are *chosen* by abusive supervisors because they display weakness and seem to be a susceptible target for wrongly treated supervisors to displace their anger (Spector, 1978). These subordinates

are often high in negative affectivity. Subordinates high in negative affectivity present themselves as submissive victims. Supervisors prone to hostility may feel that targeting subordinates with high negative affectivity will render fewer consequences than abusing a subordinate low in negative affectivity. Individuals that are high in negative affectivity also frequently experience greater amounts of psychological distress as a consequence; they are more likely to contravene rules of social engagements. Individuals high in negative affectivity will also have performance problems. Targets of abusive supervision also exhibit behaviors that appear as disrespectful and aggravating to other coworkers therefore making them a prime target for abusive supervision and social victimization.

Each consequence of abusive supervision can eventually lead to greater actions by the target. Subordinates may respond to their abusive supervisors by the use of two resistance strategies, conforming or not conforming (Tepper, et al., 2001). Conformity by executing the requests of their supervisors can be seen as an attempt by the subordinate to ameliorate the problems brought on by the supervisor's abuse. Nonconformity (resisting the supervisor's request for example) could be an attempt by the subordinate to form lines of communication between themselves and the supervisor. Nonconformity can also be identified as dysfunctional. The term *dysfunctional* is used for this behavior because dysfunctional resistance can have negative consequences such as a disruption in workflow, an overloading of work on one's coworkers or pulling supervisors away from their duties and responsibilities (Tepper, et al., 2001). These dysfunctional actions in addition to the use of passive-aggressive strategies (i.e. appearing too busy to carry out the requests of one's supervisor) all meet the criteria of Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly and Collins' definition of *dysfunctional organizational behavior*.

Dysfunctional organization behavior is defined as "motivated behavior by an individual that has negative consequences for an individual with the organization, a group of individuals with the organization, and/or the organization itself". A set of *good* resistance strategies which are designed to reestablish good relations, rectify mistakes and help rather than harm other individuals within the organization (Bies & Tripp 1998).

There are two common themes reoccurring as a consequence of abusive supervision, negative affectivity and perceived victimization and retaliation. As mentioned earlier, supervisors who are prone to abuse seek out their victims by choosing those high in negative affectivity. The victims of abusive supervision will retaliate in ways that will not only affect their job performance, but could also negatively affect the workflow of their coworkers and supervisors. This will eventually hinder the organization's productivity.

Work Retaliation Victimization and Social Retaliation Victimization

Work retaliation victimization is defined as adverse work-related actions that have the purpose or effect of negatively altering the target's job and that are intended by the instigator or perceived by the target to be a reprisal for target's behavior (Cortina & Magley, 2003). Examples of work retaliation victimization are: the act of demoting someone, passing over an individual for a promotion or giving a poor or unfair performance appraisal. Supervisors or individuals with a higher rank than the victim are normally the only individuals within the organization that has the authority to commit such actions. Therefore, it is safe to assume that these actions can be seen as act of abusive supervision.

Social retaliation victimization involves antisocial behaviors that have the purpose or effect of negatively altering the target's interpersonal relations with other organizational members and that are intended by the instigator or perceived by the target to be a reprisal for the target's behavior (Cortina & Magely, 2003). Individuals who are targeted for social retaliation victimization may experience incidents such as being excluded from an activity other organizational members are engaging in. They may also experience being shunned or slighted by other organizational members.

Work retaliation victimization and social retaliation victimization are both designed to hinder the target from flourishing or establishing good relationships within the organization.

Social Support versus Social Undermining

Relationships are the sine qua non of any organization. They determine how efficient and productive an organization will perform and how an organization responds to its external environment. Interpersonal relationships and the interactions among associates within an organization is an extremely important aspect to the functionality of an organization.

Interpersonal relationships and social engagements can be multifaceted. Each exchange can manifest a wide range of emotions (Rook, 1992). Positive social interactions between colleagues can be beneficial to both the colleagues engaged in the interaction as well as the organization itself. To understand social exchange and how exchanges influence work-related outcomes, both positive and negative social exchanges must be studied. Therefore, in order to have a clear understanding of social support, social undermining must also be studied.

Social Undermining

Social undermining can be defined as behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation (Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, (2002).

Social undermining behaviors are deceitful and are designed to make the target vulnerable over time. For this reason, blatant actions such as homicide, physical assaults and damaging and defacing property may be intentional but do not fall within the parameters of social undermining. For instance, physically assaulting someone may hinder interpersonal or other relationships but it is a conspicuous act with immediate and extreme consequences and therefore would not be considered undermining.

Undermining behaviors which are committed one or two times may not necessarily tear down an interpersonal relationship, ruin an individual's reputation or hinder them from professional success if the behaviors are done infrequently, there is no obvious pattern and the target as well as others may be forgiving and no permanent damage is done and the relationship remain intact.

Types of Social Undermining

Social undermining can take on many different forms and the manner in which it negatively affects a relationship may vary as well. The first form is *direct* actions. Direct undermining actions are actions in which the perpetrator will excoriate, make denigrating comments about, outright reject, or belittling a person or their ideas. Actions such as these can hamper relationships or ruin someone's character. Keeping information or failing to defend a coworker or subordinate is another form of undermining.

Other variables to social undermining such as verbal and physical forms include making derogatory remarks about a coworker or verbally slighting them and are considered an active form of undermining. Giving someone the "silent treatment" or failing to give essential information to a co-worker would be considered a passive form of undermining. Physical forms of undermining include refusing critical work resources or engaging in counterproductive work practices in an attempt to harm the target.

Social undermining behavior is deliberate by definition. Furthermore, it can only be considered social undermining if the target of these behaviors perceives it to be social undermining regardless of the intent of the actor. Finally, there are three major goals of social undermining in the workplace, to deliberately inhibit the target's ability to establish and maintain good, healthy workplace relationships, achieve work related success and to gain favorable reputation in the workplace.

Social Support

The aspect of social support and its effect on the well being of individuals in an organizational setting has been studied extensively (Henderson & Argyle, 1985; Harris, Winskowski & Engdahl, 2007; Sundin, Bildt, Lisspers, Hochwalder & Setterlind, 2006). The deleterious nature of stress in the workplace and its profound effect on physical health and mental well-being that can lead to other factors such as high turnover rates, lower job satisfaction, poor work performance, poor attendance and workplace aggression provide tangible reasons to study the buffering effects of social support in the workplace.

The presence of social support systems within an organization has been proven to be effective deterrents to stressors, somatic and psychological illnesses, high employee turn over, absenteeism and workplace aggression (Henderson & Argyle, 1985; Sundin & et.al, 2006, Schat & Kelloway, 2003). Just as it is important that social support be present, the source of the support and type of support is equally important. House and Wells (1978) found a major effect of supervisor social support on subordinate outcomes. The same study also found a correlation between perceived work stressors and support from supervisors and co-workers, but there was no correlation between perceived work stressors and non-work support. One of the possible reasons behind the different outcomes in social support could be of the different sources of social support. Individuals who receive support on work related stresses from a non-work support source may find little comfort from their work related woes because the source of the support may not have a complete understanding of work related stressors (Beehr, 1985).

Defining social support can be challenging due to its dynamic nature. The source of social support and the type of support being employed should be taken in consideration in order to provide a working definition of social support. The definition provided by Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, (2002) defines social support as positive behaviors and actions with the purpose of fostering positive interpersonal relationship provides a definition that encompasses the many ways social support is used while encompassing the many types of social support in the workplace and beyond.

Types of Social Support

Various types of social support have been identified. House (1981) identified four major types of social support: emotional, appraisal, instrumental and informational.

Instrumental support is essentially helping people to help themselves (House, 1981)

Examples of instrumental support are: showing a co-worker how to use a copy machine

instead of making copies for them.

Emotional support is defined as the act of providing care, trust and empathy

(House, 1981). Emotional support which is categorized differently from the other forms

of support is suggested to be related with all forms of support. In a study by Barling

MacEwen. (1988) participants responded that all forms of social support were related to

emotional support.

Informational support is defined as providing a person with information that the

person can use in coping with personal and environmental problems (House, 1981, p.

25). The information can be provided in two ways, formally or informally. An example

of providing formal information is through training. Providing information through

manuals or standard operating procedures are both examples of informal informational

support. The major difference between instrumental support and informational support

is instrumental support involves direct involvement. The source of the instrumental

support provides direct assistance. Informational support involves providing individuals

with the informational necessary for them to help themselves or making their tasks

easier (House, 1981).

Appraisal support involves providing individuals with the information that is

useful in assisting them to make accurate self – evaluations (House, 1981).   Appraisal

information can be used to assist individuals in clarifying any concerns they may have

involving the organization or the individuals within the organization. It can also be used

as a guide to help individuals improve their job performance and assess their possible career choices both within and outside of their present organization.

Workplace Aggression and Social Support

Perceived organizational support is being measured as a buffering effect on workplace aggression. Previous research has demonstrated the buffering effects of perceived organizational support by reducing employee tardiness, absenteeism and workplace aggression (Schat & Kelloway, 2003, Henderson & Argyle, 1985; & Sundin & et. al, 2006). It should be noted that employee tardiness and absenteeism could also be interpreted as forms of workplace aggression.

Empirical literature on the presence of social and organizational support serve as mitigating factors to the consequences of workplace aggression, perceived victimization and abusive supervision (Schat & Kelloway, 2003; Shanock & Eisenberger). Research conducted by Harlos & Axelrod (2005) found that mistreatment from the organization stems from work obstruction and emotional neglect. Hence, an organization's lack of support to their employees and not providing the necessary resources in order for employees to perform their duties is perceived as a mistreatment and creates non-productive and hostile environment. Because of the synergistic nature of social & organizational support and workplace aggression, it is important to research possible causes of workplace aggression. The current study looked at abusive supervision, social retaliation and victimization and work retaliation victimization as three possible causal factors of workplace aggression and the effect organizational support had on them.

Given the empirical literature on workplace aggression and abusive supervision as previously mentioned, indicates that abusive supervision can be a causal factor in workplace aggression. Therefore, the following was predicted:

Hypothesis I: There is a positive relation between abusive supervision and workplace aggression.

Victims of abusive supervision are high in negative affect which makes them easier targets for abusive supervision. Victims of abusive supervision will adopt behaviors that are not beneficial to the organization or its employees. These actions can have deleterious consequences one of which is how the victim is treated by their coworkers (Tepper, Duffy, Henle & Lambert, 2006).

Hypothesis II: Social retaliation victimization and work retaliation

victimization is related to victims of abusive supervision.

Empirical literature suggests that targets of abusive supervision are high in negative affect (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000). These individuals do not perceive themselves as recipients of organizational support (Tepper, et al., 2006). From this, the following inference can be made:

Hypothesis III: *Individuals who are receiving organizational support will be less likely to see themselves as victims of abusive supervision.*

Recent research has suggested that organizational support enhance workplace relationships and improved job satisfaction (Schat & Kelloway, 2003, Cohen & Wills, 1985). Given the above information, a conclusion can be made that improved job satisfaction means a decrease in abusive supervision. Thus, the following prediction was made:

Hypothesis IV: *Individuals who are receiving organizational support will be less likely to view themselves as victims.*

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

A total of 93 individuals participated in the study. Participants in this study were individuals who are employed full time in varying occupations. Of the respondents, 76 were female, 16 were male and 1 unreported The ages of the participants were reported in ranges with the youngest range being 22 – 25 and the oldest being 61 and over (M_{age} = 41-45, SD = 2.47). The length of employment for the participants ranged from 0-3 months to 21 years – over (M = 2-5, SD = 2.0). The 93 participants, 51 was African American, 31 Caucasian, 3 Hispanic or Latino, 3 Asians, participants who identified their race/ethnicity as *other* both were reported at 3.1%. Native American participants reported at 1.1%.

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision scale (Tepper, 2000) measured the nonphysical aspect of abusive supervision (M = 1.60, SD = .724) Measuring the nonphysical aspect of abusive supervision was important because past studies have shown that it is the nonphysical acts that can lead to workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1995; Neuman, 2003, 2004; Tepper, Duffy & Shaw, 2001). The items on this measure were rated on a 5-point scale where participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which their current supervisors engaged in the 15 listed behaviors (see Appendix A). The responses were 1, "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me", 2, "He/she very seldom uses this behavior with me"; 3, "He/she occasionally uses this behavior with me"; 4,

"He/she uses this behavior moderately often with me"; and 5, "He/she uses this behavior very often with me." Tepper's (2000) internal consistency reliability was (α) 0.90.

Social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization

The social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization were assessed using Cortina & Magley (2003) Social retaliation victimization (M = 2.21, SD = .720) and Workplace retaliation victimization (M = 2.31, SD = .737) scales. The items were measured on a 3-point scale (*1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=no*). Participants were instructed to choose which of the retaliatory behaviors happened to them, after reporting or resisting one situation. This particular measure was chosen for this study because of its focus on victimization. Past research showed individuals who perceive themselves as victims can experience high levels of psychological distress with this can create a chain reaction which could eventually lead to workplace aggression (Anderson & Pearson, 1999; Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Aquino & Bradfield, 2000). The first 7 items in the measure had statements pertaining to social retaliation victimization (SRV). Statements for this category included such items as *"I was shunned or excluded by others at work"*. The second half of the survey contained items relating to work retaliation victimization (WRV). Items included such statements as *"I was given less favorable job duties"*. It is important to point out that the items in the second half of this survey are all actions that must be carried out by an individual that ranks higher than the participant. Therefore, the items in the second half of the Social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization measures can be identified as a form of nonphysical abusive supervision. Cortina & Magley's (2003) internal reliability consistency (α) for

Social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization measures are 0.87 and 0.85 respectively.

Workplace Aggression

To evaluate the occurrence and the prevalence of workplace aggression, an 8 item inventory by Rogers and Kelloway (1997) was employed (M = 2.49, SD = .758). The items for this measure was rated on a 4-point scale (*0= never, 3=four or more times*). Participants were asked to indicate how often they had these thoughts about their current workplace. Items in the measure included statements such as "*I understand why people at work behave as they do*". Workplace aggression is important to study because past research has shown workplace aggression to be a precursor to workplace violence (Anderson & Pearson, 1999 & Schat & Kelloway, 2000). Rogers & Kelloway (1997) internal consistency of the scale was α = 0.90

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) was assessed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986) Perceived Organizational Support inventory (M = 4.63, SD = 1.38). Perceived organizational support was rated on a 7-point scale (1= *strongly disagree*, 7= *strongly agree*). Respondents were asked to choose the answer that best relates to their current job situation. (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson and Sowa's (1986) internal consistency reliability was α = 0.86.

Procedure

Data was collected from 93 individuals that are currently employed full time working in various types of occupations. The survey was administered online. A snowball procedure was employed. That is, participants received the survey by email

and were asked to forward the survey to other individuals who matched the criteria. The survey contained a cover letter explaining the nature and the purpose of the study which followed a link instructing individuals who agreed to take the survey to click the link. The link routed participants to a cover page were they were given instructions about taking the survey and information concerning details of the survey. Participants were instructed to select "yes" if participants agreed to continue with the survey. They were also informed that the survey would take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Some individuals reported that they were able to complete the survey in 8 minutes. The survey was posted on line for four weeks in which 93 individuals responded. Participants were given a series of four measures to complete. No incentives were given to participate in the study.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The descriptive   statistics and correlations for the four measures workplace

aggression, abusive supervision, social retaliation victimization/work retaliation

victimization and perceived organizational support are listed in table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Abusive Supervision	1.60	.725	(.90)				
SRV	2.21	.720	-.295	(.90)			
WRV	2.31	.737	-.321	.740**	(.91)		
Workplace aggression	2.49	.758	.200	.052	-.025	(.80)	
Perceived	4.61	1.38	-.231	.083	.147	.001	(.86)
Organizational Support							

n=93
**$p<.01$
Cronbach's alpha coefficients appear in parenthesis along the diagonal

Linear regression analysis was performed to determine the significance of the four

hypotheses. Hypothesis I stated *There is a positive relation between abusive supervision*

and workplace aggression. The regression model accounted for 40% of the variance in

workplace aggression, $F(15, 90) = 3.57$, $p = .056$. Therefore, abusive supervision is not a

significant predictor of workplace aggression and Hypothesis I was not supported. The

positive direction of the betas (Table 2) indicates relationship between workplace

aggression and abusive supervision indicating that as abusive supervision increases,

workplace aggression increases.

Hypothesis II stated *Social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization is related to victims of abusive supervision*. Beta for the relationship was negative indicating as abusive supervision increases, social retaliation victimization decreases ($\beta = -.292$, $t(89) = (-2.80)$, $p = .006$ Work retaliation victimization was significant as a predictor for abusive supervision, $F(7,89) = 5.434$, $p = .004$. Results Hypothesis II was supported for work retaliation victimization but not for social retaliation victimization.

Hypothesis III stated *Individuals who perceive themselves as victims of abusive supervision, but believe they are receiving organizational support will be less likely to display workplace aggression.* Social support is significant factor of workplace aggression, $F(34,88) = 4.198$, $p = .008$. Beta (Table 2) is negative which indicates workplace aggression increases when perceived organizational support decreases. This finding indicates a buffering effect of organizational support on workplace aggression; Therefore Hypothesis III was supported.

Hypothesis IV indicated *Individuals who are receiving organizational support will be less likely to view themselves as victims*. The regression model accounted for 10.9% of the variance in work retaliation victimization and only 8.7% of the variance is accounted for in social retaliation victimization. Organizational support alone does not support the hypothesis for either measure, $\beta = .077$, $t(89) = .747$, $p = .457$ and $\beta = .015$, $t(89) = .146$, $p = .885$ respectively. Hypothesis IV was not supported. These findings indicate that perceive organizational support is not a factor in whether individuals perceive themselves as victims of social and work retaliation.

Table 2
Regression analysis of Workplace aggression, SRV & WRV and the effects of abusive
supervision and perceived organizational support

Predictor	Abusive Supervision	Perceived Organizational Support	R^2
Workplace Aggression (DV)	.132	-.297	.124[*]
SRV (DV)	-.292	.015	.296[*]
WRV (DV)	-.304	.077	.330[*]

n= 93, [*]p<.05
Note: Beta coefficients are listed for each regression analysis

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated possible reasons for workplace aggression and how perceived organizational support can act as a buffer. In this study, four possible predictions were made. The first prediction made was there is a positive relation between workplace aggression and abusive supervision. Findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between workplace aggression and abusive supervision but abusive supervision is not a predictor of workplace aggression. Hypothesis I was rejected. Two suggestions for this outcome are individuals who are victims of abusive supervision may fear the consequences of their negative behaviors (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001). Second, individuals who experience abusive supervision may have experienced other behavior types by their supervisors that were not included in the abusive supervision scale.

The second prediction stated individuals who perceive themselves as victims of abusive supervision will score higher on social retaliation victimization & work retaliation victimization scales than those who don't perceive themselves as a victim. The findings suggest that individuals who perceive themselves as victims of abusive supervision also perceive themselves as victims of social and work retaliation. Hypothesis II was supported for workplace retaliation victimization but not for social retaliation victimization. The relationship between workplace victimization retaliation and abusive supervision was negative. The negative relationship might be an indicator of those individuals who fear retaliation would be less likely to report being victimized. Also, those who are victims of abusive supervision but who are outwardly expressive and

escape retaliation were less likely to feel victimized therefore, the probability of them to report being a victim would be low (Cortina & Magley, 2003).

The third hypothesis stated that there was a relationship between workplace aggression and social support. The result of this prediction supports that organizational support does serve as a buffer to workplace aggression. This finding is crucial because knowing that organizational support can serve as a buffer to workplace aggression, organizations can find ways to offer the support required by their employees to prevent violence in the workplace. The buffering effects of organizational support were also supported in a study by Schat and Kelloway (2003). They found that there was an effect between organizational support and three types of violence, physical violence, psychological aggression and vicarious violence.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that individuals who score high on social retaliation victimization & workplace retaliation victimization scale will score lower on perceived organizational support. This prediction was not supported by regression analysis. One possible explanation for this outcome is individuals who view themselves as victims seek support, advice or assistance with mistreatment from their colleagues. According to House (1981) it is not how much or how little support a person receives, it is only as effective to the extent it is perceived. Although the support is being sought out by the victim, it serves as a buffering effect for any mistreatment the victim may have experienced.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that could have affected its outcome. There were more female participants than male participants that responded to the survey.

Female participants made up 81.7% of the present survey respondents while males only made up 17.2% of the respondents. There might be a difference in the way males view themselves as victims and also on the way supervisors who may be prone to abusive supervision would interact with respond to male subordinates.

Another limitation to this study is we cannot identify the types of organizational support which would prove to be most valuable in causing the buffering effects of workplace aggression. House (1981) identifies four main types of organizational support, *instrumental, informational, appraisal and emotional*. Being able to identify which types of organizational support were most beneficial could aid in future studies and could help provide solutions to implement them to reduce the frequency of workplace aggression.

A final limitation lies with the survey program itself. A glitch was discovered by some of the participants who stated that each time they answered a question, their previous answer would auto delete. The survey was downloaded again and resent to those participants many who still had the same issue to occur again. Therefore, some of the responses were left blank and were then coded for the missing information.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to discover some possible reasons for workplace aggression. Once some possible reasons can be uncovered, organizations can possibly use this information to put newer policies in place to alleviate some of the stressors that can cause workplace aggression.

Organizational support is also a strong predictor of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction can improve productivity, quality of job output, and coworker support (Eisenberger et. al, 1986; Harris et. al, 2007). Job satisfaction can also reduce employee tardiness & absenteeism (Eisenberger et. al, 1986).

Implications for workplace aggression

Past research has shown that workplace aggression negatively affects the organization and individuals within the organization (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Kenney, Homant & Homant, 2004; Martin & Hine, 2005). Anderson and Pearson (1999) stated that workplace incivility on the part of the organization can create a spiraling effect where the intended target perceives the incivility which causes a negative affect and can eventually lead to coercive behaviors on the part of the target towards the organization and its personnel. The results from these empirical sources can serve as resources to organizations in helping ameliorate workplace aggression.

Organizations wanting to improve relationships between both the employees and the organization itself can implement several forms of informational support. For example, training programs or workshops can be conducted by organizations so that its employees can become more knowledgeable about workplace aggression. Furthermore, organizations can support and advertise Employee Assistant Programs (EAP). EAP can serve as a form of emotional support for employees needing to address problems that could eventually manifest into forms of workplace aggression. Any of these intervention methods supported by an organization can serve as a buffer for workplace aggression.

Future Direction

As the current study supports and past research has indicated, organizational support is an important factor in job satisfaction and buffering workplace aggression. Based on these findings, two suggestions for future research are presented. First, further research can be done on different aspects of organizational support. House (1981) defined four different types of support, instrumental, informational, appraisal and

emotional. Although emotional has been shown to be confounded with other types of

support (Schat & Kelloway, 2003), knowing how effective one type of support is versus

another could be useful in helping organizations implement new strategies to help

increase job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships and decrease workplace aggression.

Second, research on predictors for abusive supervision is needed. The effects of

abusive supervision cause the target to develop a negative affect which can have

deleterious consequences on an organization and its employees (Aquino & Bradfield,

2000). Finding causal factors of abusive supervision gives an organization the power to

exercise preventive maintenance techniques thereby eliminating any abusive actions

carried out by the supervisor.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

This paper investigated the buffering effects of organizational support on workplace aggression. This paper examined how three potential causes of workplace aggression; abusive supervision, social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization can be ameliorated by organizational support. With respect to workplace aggression, four predictions were made, (1) there is a positive relation between abusive supervision and workplace aggression; (2) Social retaliation victimization and work retaliation victimization is related to individuals who perceive themselves as victims of abusive supervision; (3) Individuals who are receiving organizational support will be less likely to display workplace aggression; (4) Individuals who are receiving organizational support will be less likely to view themselves as victims.

A survey of 93 employed full-time individuals responded to a series of four surveys via email. The responses provided support for work retaliation victimization part of hypothesis 2. It also supported hypothesis 3 however hypotheses 1 and 4 were not supported by the data. Hypothesis 1 although not supported, does show that there is a positive relationship between workplace aggression and abusive supervision.

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Appendix A

Abusive Supervision Scale

The following items were prefaced with the statement, "My boss…" Respondents were asked to use a five-point scale to answer the following responses by choosing: 1 "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me", 2 "He/she very seldom uses this behavior with me", 3 "He/she occasionally uses this behavior with me," 4 "He/she uses this behavior often with me", and 5 "He/she uses this behavior very often with me."

1. Ridicules me
2. Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid
3. Gives me the silent treatment
4. Puts me down in front of others
5. Invades my privacy
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures
7. Doesn't give me credit for job requiring a lot of effort
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment
9. Breaks promises he/she makes
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason
11. Makes negative comments about me to others
12. Is rude to me
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers
14. Tells me I'm incompetent
15. Lies to me