Leader’s Toxicity at Workplace: How Leader’s Decadence Affect Employees? A Pakistani Perspective

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Abstract
Several studies have found adverse effects of abusive leadership on employees and organizations in the recent past. However, the cultural norms in Pakistan demand an abusive leadership approach. Pakistani culture is high in power distance, abuse of power is a norm, and people are accustomed to autocracy. Since most of the studies addressing the negative effects of abusive leadership were conducted in the west, it is necessary to examine whether abusive leadership is an effective leadership approach in the cultures that experience high power distance. There is a paucity of literature addressing the issue in question. In addition, existing literature does not explain how abusive leaders affect employees’ attitudes and behaviors with clarity. This research makes an ontological contribution and discusses the philosophical origins of abusive leadership theory. Furthermore, this research draws the inference using the groundings of conservation of resource theory, leader-member exchange theory, and aggression displaced theory to propose that abusive leaders deteriorate employees’ quality of working life experience. Employees with poor working-life experience are more likely to be involved in counterproductive work behavior, planning to leave the organization, and are less likely to show organizational citizenship behavior. Dyadic data were collected from 474 respondents based on purposive sampling technique from private sector organizations in Pakistan. Results of structural equation modeling using AMOS v23 supported all the proposed hypotheses. Results imply that the moral content of leadership requires special attention, and abusive leadership is not an appropriate leadership approach because of its adverse effects on employees’ attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords
abusive leadership, philosophy, quality of working life, counterproductive work behavior, turnover intention, organizational citizenship behavior

Introduction
Historically, the idea of leadership entails a person of dynamic character who changes the course of history (Yukl, 2013). Although the concept of leadership had been prevalent in the military for centuries (Uhr, 2017), it has evolved with the passage of time (Zhu et al., 2019). Specifically, leadership gained scholars’ attention worldwide in the last century, and the intellectual community started using the term rigorously in the business domain (Northouse, 2016). In addition to being an essential aspect of individuals or nations, leadership is now regarded as the sine qua non for organizational success (McCaffery, 2018).

John C. Maxwell explains the leadership essence by saying, “Leadership is not bossing people around or manipulating people. Rather, leadership is inspiring people to achieve what they want to achieve but could never achieve without the influence of an inspiring, guiding individual” (Williams, 2015). Peter F. Drucker, who has been titled “the modern-day Aristotle,” argued for the similar code of ethics for entire society and leaders are no exceptions. Drucker’s emphasis on leadership character is of significant value in business literature (Kurzynski, 2012).

Drucker’s philosophy got little attention from the business community until they witnessed the global financial crises in the last decade. Melt-down of the big companies like Enron, Global Crossing, TycoLehman Brothers, and several

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others was strongly linked with the unethical decision of business leaders heading these organizations (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Findings of the investigation probing the underlying reasons for the failures of these large corporations shocked the entire world. Most of the decisions and judgments of the business leaders were making huge compromises on several ethical and moral grounds, having severe implications for individuals, organizations, and the entire society (I. Ahmad & Gao, 2018). The literature in the recent past has indicated a strong association between leadership character and failures of several businesses (Kiel, 2015). Trust in leaders depends on their credibility (Qiu et al., 2019). Unfortunately, leaders lose their credibility and trust among their followers when they adopt inappropriate and unethical behavior during business activities (Rosenthal et al., 2009).

Abusive leadership is an exemplary manifestation of leadership inadequacies, which is considered as a destructive and unethical type of leadership associated with several negative consequences for individuals and organizations (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2016; J. B. Shaw et al., 2015; Woestman & Wasonga, 2015).

Despite the destructive consequences of negative leadership, the people-oriented and ethical leadership practices are ineffective in countries, such as Pakistan, where people experience high power distance (Donia et al., 2016; Iqbal & Rasheed, 2019; Khilji, 2002). People in Pakistan are acclimated to a power-driven, autocratic leadership style (Simkins et al., 2003). Consequently, abuse of power is considered a regular exercise in business practices. Machiavellianistic leadership approach such as abusive leadership seems to be effective in such cultures (Rafiq Awan & Mahmood, 2010). Although abusive leadership may lead to the same consequences that the corporate world witnessed during global financial crises, it has recently gained the attention of several research scholars from Pakistan based on its relevance to their society. These include Nauman et al. (2020), Jabbar et al. (2020), De Clercq et al. (2020), Khattak and Rizvi (2021), and Ehsan (2020).

Abusive leadership is contrary to the teachings of Islam, which is the declared state religion according to the constitution of Pakistan (Ahmed & Brasted, 2021). Islam strictly prohibits misuse of power (S. Ahmad et al., 2021) and promotes serving behavior (Faris & Abdalla, 2018). Islam stresses acts of kindness, courteous behavior, and giving value to all human beings, and helping others (Qureshi, 2019). Islam is part of the culture in Pakistan, where more than 95% of the population is Muslim (Jahanzeb et al., 2019). Therefore, abusive leadership is counterculture, and it is less likely to prevail in countries like Pakistan. However, literature suggests that abusive leadership is on the rise in Pakistan (Islam et al., 2020). The deleterious effects of abusive leadership are evident in the literature. For example, Raja et al. (2020) found that leadership practices entailing authoritarianism, exploiting employees, and serving a leader’s self-interest deteriorate employees’ wellbeing and hinder job performance. Similarly, a recent study in Pakistan found a strong relationship between abusive leaders’ mistreatment and employees’ tendency to harm others with conscious intent. They found that abusive leaders damage the relationship with their subordinates by violating psychological contract, and in return, employees engage in aggressive behavior toward others in workplace (Malik et al., 2020). Employees working with abusive leaders are prone to hide information in retaliation to leaders’ mistreatment that ultimately negatively affects organizational performance (Islam et al., 2020). People with high emotional intelligence are not even able to cope with the toxicity of abusive leadership (Jabbar et al., 2020). However, abusive leadership behavior affect employees to a lesser extent who practicing Islamic work ethics (Raja et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding the literature covers a strong association between the ethical crisis of leadership and the massive business meltdown, there is little empirical evidence in this respect, specifically in cultures where the power-driven leadership approach seems to be effective, and power distance is high. A recent attempt made by Qureshi et al. (2019) provided great insight into the perspective of leadership character and its consequences. Indeed, it is unclear whether abusive leadership is an effective paradigm in such cultures or just conventional wisdom. Furthermore, it is also essential to know how abusive leaders affect different attitudes and behaviors of employees. This gap in the literature has also been addressed in this research.

**Contribution and Originality**

This research makes several contributions to the existing body of knowledge addressing abusive leadership practices and their consequences. First, to the best of our knowledge, this research is the first of its kind that discusses the philosophical origin of abusive leadership theory and contributes to its ontological understating. Second, this research introduces quality of working life experience as a mechanism that channels the influence of abusive leadership on different attitudes and behaviors of employees. Third, this research evaluates the effect of abusive leadership on employees’ counterproductive work behavior. The novelty of the proposed research model lies in the mediating role of quality of working life and counterproductive work behavior as its outcome, which has not been explored so far to the best of our knowledge. A recent attempt from Khattak and Rizvi (2021) in this respect lacks rigor in research methodology, having a less diversified sample drawn from the population sharing similar characteristics. This research attempts to overcome this deficiency. Previously, Mullen et al. (2018) studied workplace incivility demonstrated by abusive leaders as supervisory mistreatment. However, it is yet to be determined whether employees working with abusive leaders are more likely to demonstrate counterproductive work behavior or not. Fourth, this research uses conservation of resource
Literature Review
Abusive Leadership
Abusive leadership is often described as destructive leadership (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2016), was initially defined as the leadership that primarily based on the controlling the other based on creating the fear and intimidation (Harland, 1996). Later, Tepper (2000) defined the abusive leadership concept as “subordinates’ perception of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of the hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact.” Based on these definitions, Harris et al. (2007) described abusive leadership through the following characteristics “First, abusive supervision is a subjective assessment which means that while one subordinate may view a supervisory action as abusive, another may not. Second, abusive supervision refers to a sustained display of negative supervisory behaviors, not just a one-time event. Third, abusive supervision refers to both hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, but not physical contact. Physical contact would fall under the spectrum of violent behaviors. Finally, abusive supervisory behaviors do not refer to the intentions of the actions, but only to the behaviors themselves.”

Abusive leadership is a constant pattern of abusive or hostile behaviors that occur regularly, not occasionally (Harvey et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000). About 15% of employees complain that they regularly experience abusive leadership in their organizations (Tepper et al., 2004). Abusive leaders are claimed to be self-serving leaders (Harvey et al., 2014) who negatively affect employees and organizations through their rude behavior that often include the verbal/non-verbal communication with their hostile behavior (Mathieu & Babia, 2016). The main characteristics of abusive leadership consist of impolite behavior, criticizing subordinates in public, breaking promises, concealing valuable information when required, using defamatory language, and intimidating tactics (Bies, 2001; Zellars et al., 2002). These characteristics have hostile effects on subordinates attitudes and behaviors (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2016). In addition, people working with abusive leaders experience adverse effects on their psychological wellbeing (Mullen et al., 2018) and perceive themselves as powerless and less proactive (Li et al., 2021).

Abusive leaders are as toxic in Pakistan as in the western context. Abusive leadership and employees’ negative behaviors are closely linked in Dominance-orientated cultures, which is based on power, status, social hierarchy, and the pursuit of personal self-interest (Shao et al., 2011). Research suggests that adverse impacts of abusive leadership are more potent in Anglo Asian culture, which are further moderated by power distance orientation (Vogel et al., 2015). However, if Islamic work ethics are practiced to some extent in organizations, the toxicity of abusive leaders is weaker (Khalid et al., 2018). A recent study also endorses this perspective, suggesting that abusive leaders are responsible for hindrance in knowledge sharing, while this relationship is weaker in the presence of Islamic work ethics (Islam et al., 2021).

Furthermore, female subordinates are more likely to be affected by abusive leaders’ toxic supervision than men as they are not good at exercising political skills in a male-dominated society (Rizvi & Azam, 2021). Finally, the tendency among employees to leave the organizations is not subject to any contextual or territorial limitations. Employees working with abusive leaders suffer from emotional exhaustion, and as a consequence, they start looking for alternative options and eventually quit the organization (I. Ahmad & Begum, 2020).

Philosophical Origin of Abusive Leadership Theory
Modern business practices are widespread across the globe and are not limited to the USA, which is considered the birthplace of contemporary business management (Selekman, 1959). Businessmen in America were acquainted with different models such as proprietorship, partnership, apprenticeship, but the concept of wage-workers was less prevalent. Since slavery was common until the mid-19th century, business organizations quickly accepted the idea of using humans as mere “resources.” Using people instrumentally as “resources” got social acceptance, and it became the dominant organizational paradigm (Dent & Bozeman, 2014). The role of Herbert Spencer in the instrumentalization of human resources is quite noticeable. He extended the theory of natural selection by Charles Darwin to the social context. According to Herbert Spencer, human beings are not only subject to biological evolution, but their evolution is also “social,” resulting in the emergence of different social classes. Consequently, the exploitation of less-developed “social species” was considered as justified as the exploitation of less-developed biological species (D. R. Johnson, 2010).

The philosophy of using humans as a resource to accumulate one’s wealth got justified (Martin, 2012). As a result, several business tycoons such as J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Huttleston, and John Rockefeller have established financial dynasties since the 18th century while paying little consideration for the people working for them (Dent & Bozeman, 2014). Back in the late 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy justified the exploitation of humans to achieve one’s ends. He is not ready to treat all humans equally, and according to him, the essence of life is “will to power.” He further extends the idea of “will to power” to the concept “Übermensch,” a man more than a “man” who does not find any morality, and whatever he does becomes moral (Alam, 2016). The ideas presented by Herbert Spencer and Friedrich Nietzsche provided fertile soil to nurture destructive leadership approaches such as abusive leadership.
Quality of Working Life

Quality of working life (QWL) emerged out of the movement to improve working life in Europe and North America in the second half of the 20th century, specifically in the late 1960s (Grote & Guest, 2017). Quality of working life refers to the influence that the workplace makes on employees' working life, non-working life, and overall life in general (Sirgy et al., 2001). QWL is closely related to the working environment, and employees witness higher WQL experience if provided with good working conditions (Rose et al., 2006). Furthermore, working conditions have a strong connection with employees' need fulfillment (Narehan et al., 2014). Therefore, need fulfillment and QWL has been the subject of interest of most of the motivation theories, from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1981) to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Perception of need fulfillment enhances the working life experience of employees (Cook & Wall, 1980; Taylor, 1977) and results in better job performance (Dolan et al., 2008).

Some of the reasons for gaining considerable attention among scholars and practitioners is that employees with high QWL experience are more loyal to their organization (Salehi et al., 2020), their commitment is higher, and they are more satisfied with their jobs (Orgambídez et al., 2020). The vast majority of employees spend much time performing job-related activities. Many individuals plan their daily activities around their job demands, and their identity is closely related to their work (Van der Berg & Martins, 2013). However, the presence of low QWL makes the workplace less conducive to poor employees’ performance (Nauman et al., 2020). Abusive leaders create an aggravating working environment for employees (Lin et al., 2013) that increases employees' turnover intention by deteriorating their quality of working life (Mosadeghrad et al., 2011; Nauman et al., 2020). Depression and anxiety resulting from depleted psychological resources are common among people working with abusive leaders because of leaders' hostile verbal and non-verbal behavior (Demerouti et al., 2010). Furthermore, employees perceive their leaders' abusive supervision as unjust and are less likely to involve in pro-social behaviors (Burton & Hoobler, 2011; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011). It is, therefore, hypothesized that abusive leadership deteriorates employees’ quality of working life.

Counterproductive Work Behavior

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is somehow the intentional act that harms individuals and organizations. Several acts like bullying, wasting time in the office, spreading rumors, irregularity, lack of punctuality, and using official resources for non-productive work or personal work are part of counterproductive work behavior. Apart from these, CWB also includes some severe acts such as theft, fraud, even embezzlement (Hu et al., 2017). Counterproductive work behavior is considered a prevalent and costly phenomenon (Fida et al., 2015). It is not only a reaction to negative experiences, but a volitional response to the events that occur due to certain workplace experiences (Shoss et al., 2016).

Employees have a specified set of duties to perform in an organization, and these duties may be threatened due to aversive working conditions. Unfavorable circumstances, experiencing a leader’s negative attitudes (Spector, 2011), and frustration due to abusive leadership can contribute toward CWB (Meier & Spector, 2013). Research has also suggested that the rate of CWB is high among those employees who receive low consideration from their leaders (Holtz & Harold, 2013). Interpersonal conflicts and organizational constraints have a positive relationship with CWB (Zhou et al., 2014). CWB can be gender-specific, that is, males contribute more to violence; similarly, age is also one of the characteristics that contribute to CWB. Young employees are more likely to contribute toward CWB compared to their senior fellows. These factors are somehow beyond the control of the organizations (Hu et al., 2017). Besides these factors, one’s emotions, such as aggression, can also lead to CWB (Hu et al., 2015).

Turnover Intention

Turnover intention (TI) has grabbed the attention of the research community in the field of psychology, sociology, and management for decades and is still relevant in business research (Hancock et al., 2013). The relationship between inappropriate leadership practices and turnover intention is strong (Gray & Niehoff, 2000). Turnover intention is considered a proxy for actual turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000) and has a relentless impact on organizational performance (J. D. Shaw et al., 2005). The turnover cost is estimated at around 250% of the annual salary that employees draw (Mello, 2014). Organizations led by abusive leaders experience higher turnover while their customer satisfaction is lower (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2016). A recent study by Lyu et al. (2019) revealed that abusive supervision makes employees’ ability to influence their job-related outcomes compromised. Employees feel less relevant to their job, and consequently, there is an increased tendency among employees to leave their organizations.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Organizations today expect more discretionary efforts from employees in order to maintain a competitive edge than before. Increased business competition has given birth to such demands. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is one of the discretionary behaviors that has become more critical in this regard (Detert & Burris, 2007). OCB is defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of
the organization” (Organ, 1988). OCB is a crucial behavior that involves “going beyond the job description” for organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Farooqui, 2012). Employees are expected to perform tasks that are neither formally rewarded nor part of job requirements for the betterment of the organization (Liden et al., 2014).

How abusive leaders treat their followers creates a perception of injustice that triggers a poor social exchange. As a result, employees are prone to respond to leaders mistreatment negatively, affecting their job performance, and they are less likely to demonstrate OCB. When employees start perceiving that they are being exploited, they respond to the situation unfavorably (Aryee et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2012), such as not demonstrating OCB. Similarly, employees’ reward expectations are also hurt by abusive leaders, which as a consequence, ceases them to demonstrate OCB (Zeng et al., 2018).

**Theoretical Framework**

The conservation of resource (CoR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 1990; Hobfoll & Schumm, 2002) provides a theoretical foundation as to how abusive leaders impact their subordinates’ lives. CoR asserts that individuals tend to protect and retain their physical, social, and psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Abusive leadership, as a workplace stressor (Lin et al., 2013), depletes subordinates’ physical, social, and psychological resources (Wu & Lee, 2016). Therefore, it is contended that employees under abusive supervision with a lack of necessary resources experience poor QWL, which negatively affects their attitudes and behaviors as a consequence. In such an environment, employees start thinking about leaving their organization because their safety and security is compromised. Further, this research draws on the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). This theory posits that subordinates or the followers of a leader try to manage the social exchange process in response to how their leaders treat them (Blau, 1964; Diensche & Liden, 1986). Since leaders in high power distance possess a higher degree of authority over their employees and employees cannot question their leadership, they seek to redirect their response to other organization domains. This behavior of employees is explained through the aggression displaced theory (Dollard et al., 1939). This theory states that people are prone to divert aggression toward those factors where retaliation is less likely to occur. In other words, instead of a direct response to a leader’s abusive behavior, people redirect their reaction to other organizational domains, such as avoiding organizational citizenship behavior or wasting or destroying organization resources. Based on the arguments developed in the theoretical framework, this research proposes the following hypotheses and conceptual framework (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

\[ H_1: \text{Abusive leadership negatively influences the employees Quality of Working life experience.} \]

\[ H_2: \text{Abusive leadership positively influences Counterproductive Work Behavior.} \]

\[ H_3: \text{Abusive leadership positively influences turnover intention.} \]

\[ H_4: \text{Abusive leadership negatively influences OCB.} \]

\[ H_5: \text{Quality of working life mediates the influence of abusive leadership on counterproductive work behavior, turnover intention, and organizational citizenship behavior.} \]

**Research Methodology**

The appropriate research paradigm for studies assessing human behavior is post-positivism. While the positivist research paradigm focuses on absolute objectivity and the discovery of general laws describing the permanent relationship between variables, the post-positivist research paradigm...
challenges the derivation and application of such laws on human behaviors and advocates the probabilistic nature of truth rather and certainty (Mertens, 2015). Positivism does not consider the researcher’s context, while post-positivism emphasizes that knowledge interpretation is connected to a specific social-cultural context (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2020). To investigate the causal relationship for predicting the employees’ attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in response to abusive leadership. The suitable research design for testing the causal relations is the quantitative design (Creswell, 2013). Like positivism, the post-positivist research paradigm gives value to the numerical measurement of concepts but considers it fallible (Cleland, 2015).

**Questionnaire Development**

This study adopts widely used instruments to measure variables with adequate validity and reliability scores. The questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale. A five-item scale of abusive leadership developed by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) has been adopted to measure abusive leadership behavior. Quality of working life has been measured through 16 items with seven sub-dimensions of quality of working life (QWL) inventory developed by Sirgy et al. (2001). To measure CWB, this study uses a 10-item scale adapted by Ciampa et al. (2021) and Horan (2016) from the 32-item version from the work of Spector et al. (2006). A three-item construct proposed by Becker (1992) has been used to measure turnover intention. Finally, the scale proposed by Lee and Allen (2002) has been used in this study to measure OCB.

**Sampling**

Since there are a large number of organizations operating beyond the tax net in Pakistan, it is difficult to draw a probability-based sample (Wajeeh, 2017). These unregistered firms operating in rural and urban areas of Pakistan contribute to 71% of the GDP (A. Khan & Khalil, 2017). These unregistered firms are also reluctant to share their data. Therefore, non-probability sampling is an appropriate technique for this research. Using purposive sampling, this study gathers dyadic data from leaders and their immediate subordinates. Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling techniques in academic research (Cohen et al., 2013).

**Sample Size**

Literature lacks in providing a consensus on the arguments related to the minimum sample size criteria. Therefore, different scholars’ opinions exist in suggesting the minimum sample size criteria (Saunders, 2011). Thompson (2004) suggested a sample of a minimum of 200 respondents as appropriate for factor analysis. Hair et al. (2010) suggests that a sample larger than 200 respondents is adequate for SEM. Wolf et al. (2013) have suggested that 460 cases sample size is appropriate particularly when mediation is being tested. Since this research employs mediation analysis, a sample of 474 respondents has been drawn from private sector organizations. These organizations fall in all the major sectors of the economy in terms of their contribution to the DGP, including the service sector, industrial sector, and agricultural sector.

The economic survey of Pakistan suggests that 53.86% of total GDP is contributed by the service industry, followed by the 22.04% of GDP that is contributed by the agriculture sector (Pakistan—GDP Distribution across Economic Sectors 2019, n.d.); Pakistan (2017). Clark and Creswell (2010) raised the concerns over a 60% or below response rate due to its impact on generalizability of the results. The respondents were approached using the personal references due to which a better response rate was achieved than expected. Total 657 questionnaires were disseminated among the respondents out of which 474 (72%) filled questionnaires were received. The respondents from manufacturing sector filled 104 (22%), from service sector filled 282 (60%), and from agriculture filled 88 (19%) of the questionnaires.

**Data Analysis Methods**

**Normality, validity, and reliability.** Skewness and Kurtosis are basic measures of normality (Hair et al., 2021). This study uses both the measures considering the acceptable range between ±2.5 (Hair, 2010). The assessment of the validity of the instrument is also preferable when the cultural context is different from the one where the instrument was developed. To address this issue, this study ascertains construct validity through testing the discriminant and convergent validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015) using the statistical tests suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Criteria for confirming the convergent validity includes the tests of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The acceptable threshold values are $CR > 0.7$ and $AVE > 0.5$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Whereas, discriminant validity condition is met when $AVE > MSV$ (Maximum Shared Variance) and the $\sqrt{AVE}$ of each construct is found to be greater than the corresponding correlation coefficients of other constructs. Moreover, the acceptable condition of Composite reliability (CR) confirms the internal consistency (reliability) of the data (Peterson & Kim, 2013).

**Structural equation modeling (SEM).** SEM is a statistical method to model relationships between variables (Hoyle, 2012). This study uses AMOS v.23 to perform SEM that simultaneously conduct CFA and tests hypotheses (Hair, 2010). This study uses most frequently reported fit indices that include $\chi^2$ (non-significant), $\chi^2/df = 3$ (Kline, 2015), $SRMR < 0.05$ (Iacobucci, 2010), $RMSEA < 0.05$, $CFI > 0.95$, and $GFI > 0.90$. To ensure the discriminant validity and convergent validity of the measures, the following conditions were met: $AVE > CR > MSV$, and $AVE > 0.5$. To assess the overall model fit, the following indices were considered: $\chi^2/df$, $SRMR$, and $RMSEA$. The indices were found to be within the acceptable range, indicating the good fit of the model.
CFI > 0.95, TFI > 0.95 (Hair et al., 2014). Considering the parsimony fit, NNFI > 0.50 and PCFI > 0.50 (Lomax & Schumacker, 2012).

Mediation analysis. Mediator variable intervenes between the independent construct on the dependent construct and helps in transmitting the effect of independent construct on the dependent construct (Hayes, 2009). Following the approach proposed by SPSS macro PROCESS has been used in this study to measure mediation developed by Hayes (2013). Model-4 was selected to test hypotheses in PROCESS.

Results

Respondents’ Profile

The respondents’ age was identified between 20 and 58 years (Median = 32, SD = 8.24), and the majority of the respondents were male (320). As long as the marital status of the respondents is concerned, the majority were married (378). The experience of respondents ranges from 2 to 25 years (M = 4.6, SD = 5.6). The leader-followers ratio is 90 (19%) and 384 (81%) respectively.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the data fulfilling the normality requirements suggested by Hair (2010).

Construct Validity

Table 2 below presents the results of construct (convergent and discriminant) validity meeting the cutoff criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). The results of Table 2 are confirmative to the convergent and discriminant validity requirements of all the constructs. The values of CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.5, and CR > AVE suggest that all the items in each construct measure only their corresponding construct and thus confirm convergent validity. AVE > MSV and the √AVE > r for each construct in the model confirm discriminant validity, suggesting that each construct is unique and distinctive.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis—CFA

CFA was performed to confirm the fitness of the model using the measurement and structural model in AMOS. Figure 2 below depicts the parameters of structural model.

Pituch and Stevens (2015) suggest that studies testing hypothesized models should report fit-indices from Absolute, Relative, Comparative, and Parsimonious Fit Indices. Following this recommendation, this study reports fit indices from all the suggested categories. This study reports Chi-Square, Relative Chi-Square, Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI), and Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index (PCFI). The Chi-Square statistic (χ²) supports the model (goodness of model-fit) when it is insignificant (p ≥ .5) (Kline, 2015). However, χ² sensitivity associated with the sample size results in insignificance in most cases (Iacobucci, 2010). Same is the evident in this study (χ² [1064] = 2197.10, p < .05). This deficiency is well-addressed with Relative Chi-Square (χ²/df) (Hooper et al., 2008). The goodness of model fit is attained when χ²/df < 3.0 (Kline, 2015). The results of this study fall within this threshold (χ²/df = 2.06) and satisfy the requirement of the goodness of model fit.
SRMR is another determinant of model fit among frequently reported absolute fit indices with the cutoff values of \( \leq 1 \). However, the value of SRMR around 0 represents a perfect model fit (Hoyle, 2012). The values of RMSEA (90% CI) should be closer to 0.00 in the ideal case. However, the value of RMSEA < 0.05 is acceptable (Weston & Gore, 2006). This study results report RMSEA = 0.05. The value of TLI = 0.93 and CFI = 0.94, while PNFI = 0.84 and PCFI = 0.88 in this study. For CFI and TLI, the value \( \geq 0.90 \) suggests the adequate model fit, while for PNFI and PCFI, values closer to 1.0 indicate good model fit (Kline, 2015).

**Results of Hypotheses Testing**

The conceptual model developed in this study has been tested using the covariance-based SEM approach. Hypotheses were formulated as: ABL negatively influences QWL (H1) and OCB (H4), ABL positively influences CWB (H2) and TI (H3), and QWL mediates the influence of ABL on CWB (H5a), TI (H5b), and CWB (H5c). Table 3 depicts the summary of Mediation Analysis.

Table 3 depicts that results support the hypotheses proposed in this study. ABL significantly influences QWL (\( \beta = -.63, p < .05 \)), that confirms the first assumption of mediation, hence it supports H1. This result indicates that abusive leaders negatively affect (deteriorate) the quality of working life experience of employees working with them. ABL significantly influences CWB directly (\( \beta = .39, p < .05 \)) and mediates through QWL (\( \beta = .39, p < .05 \)), indicating that there exists a partial mediation of ABL, because \( \beta \) value remained significant, when mediator (QWL) is present, and thus support H2 and H5a. This result suggests that in addition to providing poor working life experience translated into negative behaviors, abusive leadership practices directly induce employees to demonstrate counterproductive work behavior. Similarly, ABL significantly influences TI (\( \beta = .43, p < .05 \)) and mediates through QWL (\( \beta = .12, p < .05 \)), that again confirms that there exists a partial mediation because \( \beta \)
remained significant, hence results support H4 and H5c. These findings imply that it is not only the poor quality of working life that employees experience at their workplace; abusive leadership alone is also responsible for employees’ turnover intention. Finally, ABL significantly influences OCB directly (β = −.26, p < .05) and through the mediation of QWL (β = −.24, p < .05). These results indicate partial mediation and thus support H4 and H5c. The conclusion that can be drawn from this result is that employees working with abusive leaders are not prone to take on any job role other than their job description and that bad experience of abusive supervision also contributes to avoiding additional job roles to some extent.

Discussion

This study extends the understanding of abusive leadership and introduces a unique mediating mechanism that helps in explaining how abusive leadership influences different attitudes and behaviors of employees working with them. For this reason, this study introduced the quality of working life experience as a mediator. Based on CoR theory, LMX theory, and aggression displaced theory, this research hypothesized that abusive leaders unfairly treat their employees. In this respect, abusive leaders use unethical means such as intimidation and hostility to exert their influence and get work done. Such treatment deteriorates the perception of resourcefulness, and as a consequence, employees experience poor quality of working life. This experience leads employees to demonstrate counterproductive work behaviors in response to such toxicity of abusive supervision.

Furthermore, positive behaviors like OCB are less likely to be demonstrated, and employees do not prefer to stay in this environment and have a strong desire to leave. This study’s findings are in line with the assertion that although abusive leadership appears to be an effective approach in counties like Pakistan, it has detrimental effects on employees’ attitudes and behaviors. The findings of this research are consistent with the perspective of De Clercq et al. (2020) that holds abusive leadership responsible for employees’ deviant behavior. Similarly, cultural context (e.g., high power distance) shapes the employees’ perception regarding the abuse of their leaders (S. N. Khan, 2014), confirming that the submissive behavior of employees allows mistreatment from abusive leaders. The findings of this study are also in line with the findings of Qaiser Danish et al. (2019) who found strong support in favor of the negative association between abusive leadership and OCB.

Finally, this study supports the findings of Hussain et al. (2020), suggesting that abusive leadership depletes the psychological wellbeing of employees. As a consequence, there is an increased tendency among employees to leave their organization. It is important to note that depleted wellbeing is the proxy of poor quality of working life experience in our case. The findings of Arif et al. (2017) also support the positive relationship between abusive leadership and turnover intention. The adverse effects of abusive leadership are so severe that even employees with the potential to recover from negative emotion and ability to adjust according to the situation find no escape from the toxicity of abusive leadership and have firm intention to leave such an organization (Dai et al., 2019).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Advancing the literature addressing abusive leadership, the findings of this study confirm the importance of CoR theory, suggesting that abusive leaders, through their hostile behavior, deplete their followers’ perception of resourcefulness and hence are responsible for the poor quality of working life experience. The work of Jabbar et al. (2020), supporting CoR theory, also confirms the role of abusive leadership in devastating employees’ physical, social, and psychological resources through abusive leadership practices. The support for CoR theory implies that leadership development programs require more emphasis on the character development of business leaders. There should be an ethical tome from the top to ensure the perception of safety and security among
employees (Schwartz, 2013). This research signifies the norms of reciprocity (LMX theory) that employees tend to maintain when suffering from the toxicity of abusive leaders. However, employees are more likely to channel their response to other organizational domains such as involving in counterproductive work behavior or not demonstrating OCB, or intending to leave the organization, hence supporting the role of aggression displaced theory. Supporting both theories, the findings of Holtz and Harold (2013) and Ju et al. (2019) highlighted the presence of a higher degree of counterproductive work behavior among employees suffering from abusive leadership. Previous research, such as Zhang et al. (2019), incorporated different mechanisms to understand how abusive leadership is related to OCB. This finding is also in conformity with Eissa et al. (2020) and supports the role of LMX theory in this respect. The phenomena that employees are dissatisfied with the working environment created by abusive leaders and consequently showing deviant behavior and not showing OCB also have strong support in Pakistani culture (Hassan et al., 2019), where culture is masculine with high power distance orientation and authoritative and hostile leadership style is the norm and not subject to any question. Following this assertion, depletion of the psychological resources of employees working with abusive leaders is also connected with employees’ intention to leave. The findings of Lyu et al. (2019) are in line with this assertion. The findings of this study affirm that negative leadership styles such as abusive leadership are not an appropriate and effective approach. On the contrary, positive leadership practices such as servant leadership, authentic leadership are desirable leadership paradigms for better organizational as well as employees’ attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Hassan & Qureshi, 2019; Qureshi et al., 2019; Qureshi et al., 2018; Qureshi & Hassan, 2019). Additionally, the practice of Islamic work ethics can reduce abusive leadership practices, as suggested by Islam et al. (2021) and Khalid et al. (2018).

**Limitations and the Agenda for Future Research**

Unsurprisingly, most of the research in social sciences is based on cross-sectional data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2011), and it is difficult to make any strong claim based on such a data set (Neuman, 2005). Cross-sectional data was collected in this study, future research considering longitudinal data can further strengthen the findings of this research. Another constraint of this research was the difficulty in accessing business leaders. Non-conducive research environment hinders access to respondents. Therefore, a non-probability sampling technique was employed for this research. However, the vigor and authenticity of the research were not compromised while employing the purposive sampling technique (Sarstedt et al., 2018). In addition, Seddon & Scheepers (2012) arguments in favor of a non-probability sampling for theory testing provided firm support to this research. Since the Pakistani society is masculine and has a high power distance orientation (Hofstede, 2018), it is important to consider the moderating role of such cultural values while conducting future research. Comparing positive and negative leadership styles in a single study can also provide insight into which leadership practices are more effective in the given cultural context and why.

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