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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Understanding Coping Strategies and Behaviors of Employees Affected by Toxic

Leadership

by

Jerry Morris

MBA, Ashford University, 2009

BS, Kaplan University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

February 2019

Abstract

Toxic leaders affect nearly half of the U.S. employee base and create environments in which followers, peers, and staff might be less effective due to stress, devaluation, and potential job loss. A multiple case study approach was used to understand what coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace; and to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. The purposeful and snowball sample consisted of 29 participants within the United States, ages 30 to 65, who worked within two or more organizations and who either directly experienced a toxic leader or observed someone who did. The theoretical framework was based on betrayal trauma theory, conservation of resources theory, and the cognitive theory of trauma. Research questions focused on how affected employees coped during and after the toxic event and any coping differences between sample groups. Data were collected via one-on-one telephone interviews. Data were analyzed via data organization, acquaintance, classification, coding, and interpretation. The major themes that emerged were emotional reaction, coping strategies used, effects at work and home, and resulting health issues for both person and family. Seeking resource help was identified as the most effective coping strategy when dealing with a toxic leader. Toxic leadership can have lasting negative effects on both organizations and employees that can extend beyond the workplace. Organizations have an organizational and social responsibility to address toxic leader behaviors and provide resources to employees to counteract toxic leadership to create a more positive work environment where employees can find work rewarding and fulfilling.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to every employee who has experienced a toxic leader and felt the stress, frustration, and hopelessness connected with the feelings brought on by that experience. Additionally, I dedicate this study to all the toxic leaders who, I pray, have found the errors of their ways and have made positive changes. Finally, I dedicate this research to wife and my children. I hope they will never experience a toxic leader, nor become one.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God. If it were not for him, the rest of the people on this list and their actions would not have been possible. I thank my wife for pursuing me to continue my work and often taking the kids out so that I have a place to work. She has given me support and sanity when I thought I should give up. I thank the rest of my family for understanding why I cannot always attend family functions and cheering me on when I felt there was no point.

I would also like to thank my committee members: Dr. Donna Brown (chair), Dr. Barbara Turner (method advisor), and Dr. Patricia Fusch (University Research Reviewer). Dr. Brown and Dr. Turner taught me doctoral research and how to write a dissertation. Finally, I must thank my editor, Jenny Murnane, who came in during the last few months of the process to help me write scholarly and to University Standards. She also heard me vent during numerous revisions and did so very graciously.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As of 2014, 10% to 15% of employees in the United States were affected by toxic leaders at any given time, with over half of all employees experiencing a toxic event in their lifetime (Vickers, 2014). Toxic events create pain and suffering of the affected employee and impact the wellbeing of the organization (Rock, 2014). For the purpose of this study, *toxic leadership* is defined as an action or practice by leaders or systems that creates pain and suffering in others and in the organization (Frost, 1999).

In response to toxic leadership, employees may exhibit *workplace deviance*, which is voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and threatens organizational well-being (Bolton & Grawitch, 2011). Workplace deviance behaviors include employees shirking hours, quitting their jobs, or purposefully extending overtime to retaliate against the organization for allowing toxic events to occur (Glambek, Matthiesen, Hetland, & Einarsen, 2014; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies.

The following sections include an introduction to toxic leadership, past studies on coping strategies, and the problem statement for this study. Additionally, I explain this study's significance and describe the coping strategies and behaviors of employees who are affected by toxic leadership.

Background of the Study

An effective leader is someone who engages in constant development to encourage employees to better themselves while encouraging two-way feedback (Baker, Anthony, & Stites-Doe, 2015). In contrast, toxic leaders are ineffective at best, and often destructive. Effective leaders can manage metrics and policy but can also lead by using their talent as visionaries who guide others through positive influence and help followers rise up to become leaders (Daft, 2015). The leader-member exchange concept, in conjunction with emotional intelligence, embodies effective leadership theory (Day & Miscenko, 2015). Followers' perceptions of their leader are often associated with the leader's success (McWorthy & Henningsen, 2014).

Toxic leadership, in contrast, is akin to bullying. A toxic leader may not be very effective because toxic leadership results in negative interactions between leaders and followers (Higgs, 2009). Toxic leadership is not about being a success or failure in relation to metrics or production; rather, it is about having negative effects on followers that elicit adverse actions and behaviors (Edwards, Schedlitzki, Ward, & Wood, 2015).

In some cases, the toxicity of a leader may be contingent upon the employee's perception. For example, if an employee consistently underperforms and does not accept the leader's constructive criticism, the leader may have to terminate that person's employment. The employee may view the conversations leading to the termination as toxic, even though the leader was simply performing his or her duties. The difference

between an effective leader and a toxic leader resides in how such conversations occur (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015).

Unlike a toxic leader, an effective leader maintains employees' self-esteem while showing errors made or production targets missed (Ferris, Lian, Brown, & Morrison, 2015). A toxic leader, in contrast, might publicize employees' lack of ability in a derogatory manner or ridicule employees in private (Powers, Judge, & Makela, 2016). Toxic leadership is not always intentional. For example, leaders with negative traits, such as poor communication or little experience, may be ineffective in their role, which may subsequently lead to unintentional toxicity (Gallagher, Mazur, & Ashkanasy, 2015).

Furthermore, ineffective leadership is not always toxic to organizations. Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) suggested that ineffective leadership negatively affects the quality of life of the follower and lowers performance in the workplace. As Maner and Mead (2010) argued, leaders who work toward their personal agendas or self-interest may be ineffective in fostering organizational growth; however, this type of ineffectiveness is not necessarily toxic. Sharma and Kirkman (2015) contended that ineffective leadership is the result of an imbalance of strengths, such as overdeveloping one trait while others have been underdeveloped.

In the 1990s, toxic behavioral research focused on employees in the bottom ranks of an organization (Gallus, Walsh, van Driel, Couge, & Antolic, 2013). In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was insufficient research on toxic leadership at all organizational levels (Ashforth, 1994). As the amount of research on leadership behavior increased, the focus

of this literature tended to remain on the positive attributes of leadership (Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014). Until the first decade of 2000, most toxic leader studies focused on the effectiveness of leaders, and on the loss of leadership effectiveness due to toxic leadership (Glaso, Einarson, Matthiesen, & Skogstad, 2010). Furthermore, increased incidence of toxic leadership in the workplace led to more scholarly research in this area (Griffin & Lopez, 2005).

Toxic leadership may manifest in several forms including public criticism, rudeness, inconsiderate actions, and other actions causing negative emotions in employees (Pelletier, 2009). Pelletier (2009) claimed that 46% of employees have experienced or witnessed toxic leadership, indicating a need to remedy the situation. Without a remedy, individual performance will decrease, and stress and attrition will increase. According to Kusy and Holloway (2009), a toxic leader is not the same as a difficult person at work; rather, a toxic leader is someone who affects others' job performance and quality of life at work.

Due to the major impact of toxic leadership on organizations, studies are needed to gain an understanding of this problem and offer effective solutions (Glaso et al., 2010). My review of the literature indicated a research gap concerning effective strategies that employees can use to cope with toxic situations. Lipman-Blumen (2005) and Glaso et al. (2010) noted that the major gaps in this literature were associated with the coping strategies of affected employees. My study helps fill this research gap and may provide data that is useful to organizations dealing with toxic leadership. The results of the study

may help organizations reduce the effects of toxic leadership and prevent it from having a harmful impact on employees.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors result from these strategies. In the following sections, I present this study's problem statement about toxic leadership and its impact on affected employees, detail how I conducted the study, and describe the study's significance. Additional information in the following sections includes operational definitions, and discussion of the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

Problem Statement

Despite efforts over decades to remove toxic leadership from organizations, this problem has persisted. Carden and Boyd (2013) reported that 39% of American workers encountered bullies at work in 2012. Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2003) conducted a study that showed over 74% of employees reported being affected by a toxic event as either a victim or a witness. Lipinski and Crothers (2013) indicated that a lack of understanding by organizations often led to undesired toxic outcomes for both employees and organizations. The general problem is that over half of the workers in the United States are currently under toxic leadership. The specific problem is that some employees lack coping strategies needed to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on

themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. These negative effects are delivered in the form of behaviors displayed by the affected employee.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. Because the coping strategies and resulting behaviors may be the same phenomenon, I combined the two aims into a multiple case study. This study may encourage positive social change by indicating solutions to improve work environments, thereby increasing productivity and employee well-being, and reducing turnover rates in organizations.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was: What coping strategies do employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves and the workplace as a whole, and what are the resulting employee behaviors? I then divided this question into the following sub-questions.

SQ1: How did employees under toxic leadership cope with the situation as it was happening?

SQ2: How did employees cope following the initial incident during a designated coping phase (one year or less after the initial event)?

SQ3: What were the differences, if any, between how affected employees coped and how the witnesses viewed the affected employee's coping strategies?

Theoretical Framework

It is possible that about half of employees in organizations will experience a toxic leader in their lifetime (Carden & Boyd, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. Researchers have used a number of theories in the research literature to illustrate toxic leadership, such as betrayal trauma theory, the cognitive theory of trauma, and the conservation of resources theory (Freyd & DePrince, 2013). Among these theories, betrayal trauma theory seemed to be most suitable for my study.

The application of betrayal trauma theory assists in explaining concepts related to toxic leaders and affected employees (Freyd & DePrince, 2013). This theory focuses on the ways in which toxic behavior may significantly violate or negatively affect trust or well-being. Freyd and DePrince (2013) posited that coping strategies and behaviors might correlate to feelings of betrayal, including hurt feelings, fright, or anger at the leader or organization itself. Such hurt feelings, fright, or anger may cause traumatic mental injury for affected individuals.

Betrayal trauma theory indicate that toxic leadership affects the organization through consequences such as decreased productivity or loss of talent as employees seek

to cope with the situation (Glaso et al., 2015). Affected employees often become emotionally exhausted, which may result in undesirable behaviors (Xu, Loi, & Lam, 2015). Betrayal trauma theory helped me to explain these resulting behaviors and ascertain the relationship between toxic leader events and subsequent behaviors of affected employees from a cause-and-consequence lens (Glaso et al., 2015). By exploring the coping and behavioral aspects of employee behaviors using a deductive lens, I hope to gain insight into how victims cope with toxic events, thereby gaining information that could help to reduce the impact of resulting adverse behaviors.

In this study, the bounded system was a population of victim participants who experienced toxic leadership and displayed behaviors that were detrimental to their employment and the organization. Within this framework, I attempted to understand (a) how affected employees coped with a toxic leader and situation, and (b) the behaviors they displayed as a result of coping. Using telephone interviews, I collected data on coping strategies and work behaviors to develop an in-depth understanding of the social setting, activity, and perspective of the participants. I identified the demographics of the victims involved, the delivery of the event (public or private), the type of event, the event outcome, the coping strategies, and the behaviors resulting from the toxic event.

With betrayal trauma theory, employee behaviors that may result from a toxic event include not wanting to work or perform, and displaying dissatisfaction with the organization (Jerido, 2014). Basic coping strategies may include one or more forms of the following: (a) avoiding the leader, (b) seeking help, (c) confrontation, or (d) doing

nothing (Aubrey, 2012). Expected outcomes from the behaviors include decreased performance (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015), lack of satisfaction and motivation (Mehdi, Raju, & Mukherji, 2012), being disruptive or withdrawn, and contemplating resignation (Glambek, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2015). Research on coping strategies and behaviors may provide a better understanding of toxic leadership handling and avoidance.

To validate perceptions of toxic events by affected employees, I gathered eyewitness accounts of toxic events. Additionally, I accounted for how employees perceive leaders who exercise toxic leadership (see Pilch & Turska, 2015) and how leaders demonstrate attributes of their leadership (Daft, 2015). To balance the data from the lived experiences of these affected employees, I collected and analyzed data from those who witnessed toxic leadership to explain how they coped and behaved. These concepts are further reviewed in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. This was a multiple case study of employees affected by toxic leadership and those who witnessed a toxic event but were not affected directly. Researchers have used a phenomenological lens to understand how subjects perceived situations they experienced (Kasapoglu, 2016). In this study, the multiple case study approach enabled me to understand the intricacies of the lived experience or

phenomenon. It is appropriately suited for studies that seek to find out why, what, and how events took place (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). The analysis and interpretation of case study explains the occurring phenomenon (Pedrosa, Pires, Carvalho, Canavarro, & Dattilio, 2011). The multiple case study design helped me understand the reality of the participants in the toxic leadership environment (Harland, 2014). A multiple case study design is not linear by time or historical events (Snyder, 2012). There were two populations of participants in my study: those who were directly affected a toxic leader, and those who witnessed someone being affected by a toxic leader. Participant selection criteria required participants to be between 30 and 65 years old and to have worked as a paid employee in at least two organizations of any type or size. In this study, I did not focus as much on the participants' perception of toxic events but rather on how and why they coped with the situation resulting in related behaviors.

I collected primary data via telephone interviews with self-proclaimed victims of toxic leadership and categorized, analyzed, and interpreted the data to determine contextual meaning. I also collected secondary data from a secondary sample population in my study to guide the data analysis and resulting discussion. I used data triangulation on the primary data, secondary data, and study data from Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004). I used my analysis of related research data as the secondary data set. Organizations may use the findings from my study to identify affected employees and deal with toxic leaders. I offer recommendations and suggestions based on the results,

which organizations may use to assist employees with improving their coping behaviors and reducing job turnover rates.

This qualitative multiple case study involved a purposive or snowball sample of 15 victim participants who experienced toxic leader or leader-bully events in their organizations. It included an additional 14 witness participants who had witnessed toxic events, which may have been the same or different events as those of the victim participants depending on participant recommendations of witnesses during snowball sampling. I recruited participants online, and they came from many locations and organizations across the country. Advertising for study participants on various career, social media, and toxic leadership websites continued until I reached data saturation, which was expected at around 30 participants. The employees recruited were hourly, exempt, non-leaders, or leaders in organizations. I asked the participants to participate in a structured telephone interview regarding the toxic events and the behaviors that occurred during and after the events.

Both primary and secondary data collection from interviews continued until the data reached saturation, meaning that the interviewees began repeating the same type of responses (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After completing primary data and secondary data collection from participant interviews, I analyzed the data through data coding and interpretation to find themes comparable to information found from the secondary data (see Harland, 2014). I developed a hierarchy of terms and common labels used by participants, and categorized the data into useful information, or nodes, to answer the

research questions and create themes associated with participants' understandings of their experiences. I organized the data using Leximancer software to form themes and developed a conceptual schematic for further data interpretation of both data sets.

Definitions

This section includes terms I used in this study, including acronyms and terms that have special meaning in the context of the study.

Affected employee: The subordinate or person affected by the toxic leader.

Coping strategies: The sums of cognitive and behavioral efforts, which are constantly changing, that aim to handle particular demands, whether internal or external, that are taxing or demanding (Frydenberg, 2014).

Corporate bully: Continued attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another person or persons (targets). It is this treatment that persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates, or otherwise discomforts another person that may also prevent work from getting done (Namie, Christensen, & Phillips, 2014).

Mindfulness: Intentional consciousness, awareness, or a way of being attentive in the present moment through meditation (Chiesa, 2013)

Resulting behaviors: Actions taken by the affected employee after the toxic event that can be observed by others as they relate to the workplace. Examples of resulting behaviors may include but are not limited to a decrease in performance, sudden job

dissatisfaction, reduction of social interaction in the workplace, or resignation (Glambek et al., 2015).

Toxic event: The act of a toxic leader upon a follower or employee that causes stress and other adverse effects through harassment, belittlement, fright, or other mechanisms (Carden & Boyd, 2013).

Toxic experience: Resulting through a toxic event, and the toxic experience encompasses the entire scope of stress, feelings, behavioral display, and coping strategies of the affected employee (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Pelletier, 2009; Rotter, 2011).

Toxic leadership: A form of leadership that harasses, belittles, and frightens employed persons, mainly followers, which causes undue stress or pressure leading to decreased performance and other undesired behaviors (Pelletier, 2009; Reed, 2004).

Assumptions

I made four primary assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that there would be enough employees affected by toxic leadership to achieve a suitable sample size. Cheang and Applebaum (2015) stated that an increasing number of organizations are recognizing the presence of toxic leaders and are adapting to detect the behavior before harm affects other employees. Vickers (2014) estimated that 10% to 15% of employees are affected by toxic leaders at any given time, with over half of all employees experiencing toxic leaders in their lifetime. Vickers estimation indicates that I would be more than able to find a sufficient number of participants for this study. I used snowball sampling to assist in obtaining the required number of participants. Tye-Williams and

Krone (2015) found that many participants came forward to share their experiences, including coworkers witnessing but not supporting the affected employees. With this in mind, it was difficult to secure the number of witness participants I needed for this study.

My second assumption was that the participants in the study were willing to participate. Specifically, I assumed that participants had a desire to participate in research geared toward finding a way to help organizations detect and reduce toxic events through recognition of toxic behaviors. Based on Vicker's estimate (2014) of the number of employees affected by toxic leaders, I anticipated that I could reach affected employees willing to participate in the study.

My third assumption was that the participants would remain emotionally stable during the interviews and would be honest when answering the interview questions. There is no guarantee that the participants were of sound emotional state or were being honest with their responses to the telephone interview questions during the data collection stage of this study. I am not a mental healthcare professional; however, if a participant were to have become emotionally overwhelmed during the interviews and could not regain composure or reschedule, I would have ended the interview. I would have documented the incident and the triggering factors and retained the data. I was also prepared to notify the appropriate authorities if the interviewee indicated that they were going to harm themselves or were planning to harm others involved in the toxic events. None of the participants became emotional and none harmed themselves or anyone else.

My final assumption was that the participants would exhibit outward behaviors as a response to the toxic events. Although not impossible, it would have been extremely rare for employees affected by a toxic event to neither display any behaviors nor cope with the situation. It is also logical to assume that participants had to cope with a toxic event brought in by a toxic leader and to have resulting behaviors. If a participant agreed to an interview but did not come forward with any answers to the interview questions, then I would not have used that data for the study from that specific participant, but I would have made and saved a note in my data collection files. This scenario did not occur during the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study covered employees who had worked within two organizations in any industry in the United States and who were affected by toxic leadership and attempted to cope with the situation in order to resolve it. The only interaction to obtain data from the participants was through telephone interviews. Participants were allowed to discuss any and all data related to the toxic event. The results may help organizations identify affected employees, manage assistance, and generate recovery paths to help and retain affected employees. In addition, the results may help organizations provide a better workplace for staff and potentially reduce costs accrued through poor performance, lower productivity, and employee turnover. I studied the affected employees' coping mechanisms and resulting behaviors because toxic leadership is a common feature of many sectors or industries; therefore, the results can be

transferable to multiple organizational contexts. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) stated that transferability occurs if readers can make judgments from adequately described context and detailed findings. Society may benefit from organizations that are healthier, more efficient, and productive workplaces.

The first delimitation of the study involved recruiting witness participants related to toxic events. While this may provide validation of events related to coping strategies and resulting behaviors, the witness participants were not likely related to the victim participants. My use of unrelated witnesses somewhat reduces the usefulness of data; however, since no disclosure of organizational or leader names occurred, I was not able to determine the relationship between victim and witness participants. The second delimitation involved the research question set. Since the questions were designed to help me understand the lived experiences of the affected victims, they did not target the toxic leaders. The witness participants could have focused on the toxic leaders and not the affected victims, even though I attempted to guide the witness participants to focus more on the victims. Finally, the third delimitation was gaining insight from the affected victims to understand the toxic leaders. Since the toxic leaders related to the victim participants were not interviewed, the insight from gaining an understanding of the toxic leaders was delimited.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study, which was outside of my control, was the availability of participants. The sample only included paid staff members in

organizations. The organizations were of various sizes, industries, and locations.

Studying paid employees removed the possibility of exploring participants who may have

experienced toxic events in another environment, such as volunteering at a church or

being involved in charity organizations. This limited the transferability of the findings to

paid work environments and no others. Non-employment types of toxic leadership are

better suited for a separate study.

The second limitation was a lack of control over organizational conditions and

climate. For example, factors that are repeatedly promoted, tolerated, and over-looked by

senior leaders and human resources might be control parameters (McKay, 2011). These

factors may have occurred in the past in organizations, which was outside of my control.

Asking more information about the organizational conditions may have provided an

additional dimension to the study but also moved my focus away from affected

employees. Only if mentioned by the study participant during the telephone interview

were these above factors discussed, but not collected as data. Since it was uncertain

whether the participants had any organizational information relevant to the toxic

leadership, I did not consider these factors.

The third limitation was the mental or emotional state of the participants involved

in the study. Variations in mental states may have skewed the results. A mental disorder

may have been present, prohibiting a participant from coping. However, I am not a

psychologist, nor a psychiatrist, and cannot diagnose any mental disorders, making it a

limitation of the study. For example, a participant with an unstable mental state may be

unable to cope with stressful events. I did not administer a personality test in this study, so a potential participant mental disorder is a limitation. Additionally, the personalities of participants may have limited the data collection. For example, a participant may have a false perception of the leader, and incorrectly deemed an interaction as toxic due to differences in personality. Without having a mental health professional administer a personality or psychological test, I was not able to confirm the mental state of the participants. Additionally, without interviewing the toxic leaders involved, I was not able to determine if the participants misread the situations as being toxic events or they were simply receiving coaching on their performance. If I found that the participants were uncontrollably overwhelmed and did not continue the interview, I did not use their data for this study. At no time during any interview did any participant become uncontrollably overwhelmed.

The fourth limitation was the integrity of the participants. Participants may have been dishonest or held grudges against a former leader that they deemed to be toxic, when it may have been a misunderstanding. In the study I assume that the participants were honest and openly discussed the events based on their identity being confidential. If the participants appeared to be dishonest, I asked the same question in a similar, but different fashion to check for the correction or had the participants reconsider an answer and check for similarity. At no time during any interview did I determine that the data lacked integrity.

The fifth limitation of this study was the possibility that the reported toxic events did not happen. This was a possibility because I did not confirm the toxic event through the toxic leader's perception of the event, but rather the employees' perceptions as to how they coped with the event. For example, the participant may have been a consistently poor performer who received multiple disciplinary actions and retaliated against the leader involved in the event. I discussed employment good standing and performance of the participant in the interview to determine if there were any concerns with this limitation. If so, I reviewed the data and discussed it with my dissertation committee.

Confirmation bias can occur in social research when the researcher is close to the collected data (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I have not experienced a serious toxic event but have witnessed two of them. These experiences and the organizational outcomes triggered my interest in conducting this study. Having served as a leader in several Fortune 100 organizations, I have seen employees negatively impacted by toxic leaders. It is my responsibility to control any researcher bias, and I did not allow my experiences to affect how I interpreted the data.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

In their 6-month study, Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2003) found that 74.7% of the participants had at least one toxic experience involving a manager or supervisor. To cope with the toxic events, 60% of the affected employees left their jobs (Rotter, 2011). Organizations may be able to use the data obtained from related research to effectively

identify toxic leadership while reducing attrition, performance issues, and employee stress caused by toxic events.

For example, a study showed that 60% of involved nurses experienced work-related stress including depression, anxiety, nervous habits, overeating, hopeless thoughts, and alcoholism (Rotter, 2011). In the extreme cases, two employees who did not participate in the study but experienced the same leader committed suicide (Rotter, 2011). Others have gone so far as to shoot and kill their leaders because of toxic events (Burke & McShane, 2012; Hays & Dobnik, 2012; Rogers, 2012). The violence may not happen if coping strategies or resulting behaviors are regulated effectively by human resource managers and organizations. Identification and assistance for employees dealing with toxic leadership may prevent tragedy from occurring.

Another study on performance and productivity reduction of employees affected by toxic leadership showed that affected employees had the strongest negative reactions to public ridicule and job security (Pelletier, 2009). One of the main arguments for toxic leadership reduction is that employees may become more productive and satisfied with their work environment. A greater understanding of coping strategies and displayed behaviors under toxic leadership may reduce the impact of toxic leadership.

Organizations are beginning to develop strategies to address toxic leadership and are implementing employee training and development programs (Lunsford & Padilla, 2015). Employee training is developed to reduce toxic leadership, and to help employees discuss concerns with their human resources department (Lunsford & Padilla, 2015).

Power itself may create a toxic leader; therefore, leader behavior should be monitored and leader personalities should be tested. According to Kusy and Holloway (2009), organizations must integrate values into policies, focus on leadership development, have skip-level evaluations, and have 360° feedback systems to help control potential leadership toxicity.

Significance to Theory

Most research on leadership has focused on new leadership styles, distance team transformation, self-efficacy achievement, and effective leader performance. Kouzes and Posner (2002) conducted one of the first studies to examine leadership from the followers' perspective. Very few studies have been conducted on the employee-side of coping with toxic leadership (Spain et al., 2014). In this study, I explored toxic leadership through the lens of how employees respond to toxic leadership immediately after an event until an undetermined period afterward based on the participants' responses to interview questions.

Most studies on toxic leadership have focused on why toxic leadership occurred, what traits or characteristics were present in toxic leaders, and the effects of toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Pelletier, 2009; Rotter, 2011). Researchers conducted these past studies to understand toxic leaders and events, and how to detect and reduce the number of events, but they have rarely addressed coping strategies (Glaso et al., 2010; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). In attempt to fill the literature gap, I tried to understand coping

strategies commonly used by employees under toxic leadership, as proposed by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004).

These mechanisms include: (a) seeking help, (b) avoidance, (c) assertiveness (retaliation or deviance), and (d) doing nothing. I aimed to understand behaviors displayed that map the path to forgiveness and reconciliation and determine if these coping strategies were identifiable in my study data. When mapping which types of leaders are more toxic than others, Glaso, et al. (2010) argued that both passive and active destructive leadership should be studied because these types of leaders often have a long-lasting psychological impact on employees. I aimed to understand the effects of passive and active destructive leadership on employees through the employees' displayed behaviors. Findings from this study may contribute to the understanding of potential work behaviors related to toxic leadership and coping strategies. Data results obtained from this study may be used by human resources professionals and organizational leaders to generate recommendations and suggestions to develop solutions to the effects of toxic leadership.

Significance to Social Change

Toxic events are increasingly recognized as a detriment to employee well-being to the extent that they interfere with performance and productivity. Researchers can aid organizations in understanding toxic leaders and factors affecting employees (Escartin, Salin, & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2015). For example, Lipmen-Blumen (2005) argued that human resources or other administrative groups can monitor leaders interacting with their

followers to gauge the appropriateness of communication and action to ensure a safe, healthy, and productive environment. If elimination is impossible and reduction is slow, understanding and helping employees cope with toxic leaders may assist in their well-being and lead to reduced attrition and improved performance.

The human resources department in an organization is the governing body over toxic situations (Pelletier, 2009). Human resources managers deploy several strategies to help contain toxic leadership, such as policies and training to prevent toxic events. However, the literature calls for alternative and more effective coping strategies (Glaso et al., 2010). My study may contribute to identification of undesired behaviors, their impact on employees, and coping strategies. The dual themes of prevention and management of workplace bullying are repeatedly emphasized in prior studies; an understanding of the processes and moving from conceptualization to good practice is only starting to gain momentum (Branch, Ramsey, & Barker, 2013). My study may ultimately contribute to positive social change in communities by providing organizational leaders information they can use to better manage toxic leadership and understand employee well-being, resulting in better work environments and better-performing organizations.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I focused on explaining the purpose of the qualitative study and the research problem. Toxic leadership and literature gaps regarding coping strategies associated with it compelled me to conduct this study to find solutions for addressing this issue. To fill the literature gap, I chose a qualitative multiple case study to understand the

coping strategies and resulting behaviors of affected employees. I collected primary data

from interviews of victims and secondary data from interviews of witness participants. I

analyzed the collected data to understand how and why the affected employees coped,

and their behaviors associated with coping. I used the results to generate

recommendations to promote the reduction of toxic leadership in organizations. Findings

from this study may aid organizations in their efforts to reduce toxic leadership and

improve business performance. In Chapter 2, I review the literature related to toxic

leadership, coping strategies, and employee behaviors. I used the literature information as

theoretical support and guidance throughout the study process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. Toxic leaders affect employees and cause a loss of revenue through resulting behaviors such as decreased employee performance and productivity (Leon-Perez, Notelaers, Arenas, Munduate, & Medina, 2014). Organizations have limited means of identifying employees affected by toxic leadership; however, researchers have conducted a great deal of research to examine the effects of toxic leadership on employees, leaders, and organizations (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015).

I found a research gap in the area of coping strategies and resulting behaviors of affected employees (Glaso et al., 2010). To address the literature gap, I conducted a multiple case study to understand how affected employees cope with toxic leadership and the behaviors that result from coping. This chapter contains an overview of leadership, the types of toxic events, the types of coping strategies, and possible behaviors related to toxic leadership. I reviewed limited scholarly work on coping strategies and resulting victim behaviors and the perception of these toxic events from witnesses. I conclude this literature review with a summary of this chapter and a transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a literature search online via Walden University's library to find peer-reviewed publications related to toxic leadership in databases such as ABI/INORM

Complete (ProQuest), Business Source Complete, Emerald Management Journal, SAGE Premier, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and Academic Search Complete, as well as search engines like Google Scholar. The search terms and keywords I used included, but were not limited to: *toxic leadership, workplace toxicity, workplace bullying, corporate bullying, coping strategies, coping with toxic leaders, workplace bullying outcomes, resulting behavior, employee performance, employee productivity,* and *employee attrition*. Books and additional sources were also obtained from public libraries in Boone County, Kentucky. Whenever possible, I used the most recent related literature in this review. Most of the sources I used for this literature review were obtained electronically. Approximately 75% of the sources were from 2012 to 2017, and a minimum of 85% were peer reviewed. Because of the limited research on coping strategies and resulting behaviors of those affected by toxic leaders, 25% of the sources were older than 2012.

Theoretical Framework

It is possible that about half of employees in all organizations will experience a toxic leader in their lifetime (Carden & Boyd, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. Researchers have used a number of theories to understand toxic leadership, including betrayal trauma theory, the cognitive theory of trauma, and the conservation of resources

theory (Freyd & DePrince, 2013). Among the theories, I determined that betrayal trauma theory was most suitable for my study.

To explain the theory behind the reactions of the affected employees, Freyd and DePrince (2013) suggested the application of betrayal trauma theory. The focus of this theory is on the idea that toxic leadership occurs when employees' trust or well-being is significantly violated by another person representing the organization (Freyd & DePrince, 2013). Freyd and DePrince posited that coping strategies and behaviors might correlate to feelings of betrayal including hurt feelings, fright, or anger at the leader or organization itself. Additionally, the hurt feelings, fright, or anger in affected employees may cause them to mentally traumatize or injure themselves or others.

According to betrayal trauma theory, toxic leadership affects the organization through decreased productivity or loss of talent as affected employees seek to cope with the situation (Glaso et al., 2015). These employees often reached emotional exhaustion, resulting in undesirable behaviors (Xu et al., 2015). The betrayal trauma theory may help me explain these resulting behaviors and determine the correlation between toxic leader events and subsequent behaviors of affected employee from a cause and consequence lens (Glaso et al., 2015). Looking at resolution from coping and behavioral aspects in a deductive lens, I provided results to help employees cope with the situation and change their behaviors. The theory combined with my results may help uncover a possible solution to repair the trust of employees who have experienced betrayal trauma and alleviate other feelings causing negative reactions in employees.

With betrayal trauma theory, employees who have suffered a workplace betrayal or trauma display behaviors that include not wanting to work or perform, and outward dissatisfaction with the employing organization (Jerido, 2014). Basic coping strategies include one or more forms of (a) avoiding the leader, (b) seeking help, (c) confronting the leader, or (d) doing nothing (Aubrey, 2012). The expected outcomes from the employees' behaviors include decreased performance (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015), lack of satisfaction and motivation (Mehdi et al., 2012), being disruptive or withdrawn, and contemplation of resignation (Glambek et al., 2015). Further research on coping strategies and behaviors may provide a better understanding of handling and or avoiding toxic leadership.

In this study, the bounded system is a population of victim participants who were forced to cope with a toxic event initiated by their leader(s), and these victims consequently displayed behaviors that were detrimental to their employment and the organizations for which they work. Using this framework, I attempted to understand how affected employees coped with the toxic leader and situation as well as what behaviors they displayed because of coping. I collected data on coping strategies and work behaviors to develop an in-depth understanding of the social setting, activity, and perspective of the participants through telephone interviews. I determined the victims involved, the delivery of the event (public or private), the type of event, the event outcome, the coping strategies, and the behaviors resulting from toxic events.

To use this framework, I needed to understand what differences and similarities exist between an effective leader, an ineffective leader, and a toxic leader. To validate affected employees' perceptions of toxic events, I gathered eyewitness accounts of toxic events. In addition, I needed to account for how employees perceive toxic leadership (Pilch & Turska, 2015) and how leaders demonstrate attributes of their leadership (Daft, 2015). To help balance the lived experiences data collected from these affected employees, I collected and analyzed data from those who witnessed toxic leadership to gain the witnesses' perceptions of how the targeted employee coped and behaved. I further review betrayal trauma theory and coping strategies in the next section of the literature review.

Literature Review

In this section, I review the differences between effective leadership and toxic leadership in the workplace. I also review the causes of toxic leadership, its effects on employees, and witnesses' perceptions of toxic leaders. Next, I review coping strategies and resulting behaviors from employees coping with toxic leaders. I also review how organizations' respond to toxic leadership.

Effective Leadership

Effective leadership is a positive factor in organization performance. Daft (2015) defined effective leadership as an influential relationship between leaders and their followers to reflect their shared purposes. Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010) tested a mediation model linking effective leader charisma to organizational citizenship

behaviors via work engagement. Using 91 participants, Babcock-Roberson and Strickland found significant correlations between charismatic leaders and worker engagement, worker engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior and charismatic leaders. The authors indicated that charismatic leaders used worker engagement to influence organizational citizenship behavior.

Factors affecting effective leadership. Personality is an influencing factor in effective leadership and organizational effectiveness (Hogan et al., 1994). The themes in Hogan et al.'s (1994) study on the relationship between personality and leadership were (a) born leadership is considered a phenomenon; (b) effective leadership must encompass team, group and organization performance; and (c) personality can predict the success and performance of a leader. Hogan et al. believed that personality has a profound effect on leadership and team performance, which in turn affects followers' engagement and well-being.

Factors other than personality also have a considerable impact on effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Kouzes and Posner found that the following factors were crucial for an effective leader to carry out: (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart. Evolving into an effective leader does not necessarily mean expansion. Rather, as Kouzes and Posner suggested, it means gaining a better understanding of oneself. One

way to achieve personal growth is to understand one's personal beliefs; this can be accomplished by exploring both shadow and conscious beliefs (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Shadow beliefs are manifestations of hidden, unexplored, or unresolved psychological dynamics, which could prohibit effective leadership (Cashman, 2008). On the other hand, Cashman stated conscious beliefs are those that an individual is aware of and that can assist in being an effective leader. By examining and evaluating these beliefs, a leader can grow from a personal standpoint into controlling his or her leadership effectiveness. Achieving a better comprehension of these beliefs and values is one measure of a leader's commitment to better leadership (Burnison, 2012). Effective leadership has a great impact on other's lives, in turn generating a wealth of personal fulfillment.

Effective leadership models and theories. Redick, Reyna, Schaffer, and Toomey (2014) developed a model for effective leadership in a project-based environment. The authors of the model divided leadership competencies into the four different categories of self-leadership, managing others, psychological factors, and environmental factors. Results of their qualitative study called for the development of managerial skills and supported the development of a personal leadership philosophy which led to a model reflecting the four factors above. Redick et al. further defined the four factors as individual components based on personal traits of the leaders.

Another model was created to show how effective leaders can be categorized into charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic (CIP) models of leadership (Hunter, Cushenbery,

Thoroughgood, Johnson, & Ligon, 2011). In this model, leader transparency was seen as a trait of effective leadership. Vogelgesang, Leroy, and Avolio (2013) proposed that organizations that promoted transparent leadership possessed a competitive advantage, which was found based on the positive outcomes of operating in a fishbowl environment. The transparency of leadership in the organization, external stakeholders, and the leader's followers lends itself to more effective efforts.

Effective leadership theories have been researched by a variety of authors. Dinh et al. (2014) used content analysis to examine ten academic journal publications on leadership traits to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of current leadership theories. The authors concluded that a great deal of research about leadership traits exists, but little is known about the emergence and development of these traits. As shown by Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2014), leadership trait studies fell into two categories: developmental theories and longitudinal studies. They found that leadership development is a dynamic process and is best observed over time, or longitudinally, to capture the greatest understanding.

Effective leadership models are available for leadership improvement. For example, Antonakis and House (2014) conducted a study to explore several existing leadership models, including transformational, transactional, and laizzez faire. The authors explored the validity and reliability of the leadership models of four different sample populations in diverse settings. They found that current leadership models were limited and that they need to be expanded to include a fuller range of leadership traits.

The most important contribution of this study was the creation of a reliable instrument that can be used to assess effective leadership traits.

      Effective leadership styles. Effective leaders were found to have five dominant styles in communication with their followers: aggressive, assertive, mid-assertive, low-assertive, and submissive by Cornelius (2006). These styles are not always exclusive of one another and may be blended with each other to some degree. Effective leaders are in charge of the workplace and do not submit to all employee needs (Cornelius, 2006). Cornelius stated that because submissive persons were driven to avoid conflict and are reluctant to rock the boat they might perceive leaders who communicate aggressively as toxic. Cornelius claimed this to be a gray area since perceived toxicity might not mean real toxicity. Most transformational leaders who are deemed effective by their peers and followers can be both aggressive and assertive while having open communication to cultivate an atmosphere of self-assurance and confidence amongst employees (Arachchi, 2012).

      If aggressive transformational leaders included followers in decision making and opinion valuing, employees did not perceive any ill will from the leaders (Arachchi, 2012). For example, Reimer (2014) conducted a study that explored the successful attributes of an aggressively effective school leader focusing on the transformative leadership traits that were necessary to bring the school from a low-performing one into a high-performing one. The leader in this study used aggressive leadership by accepting decision making and opinion valuing from a group of teachers, counselors, and office

staff. Working effectively in an open atmosphere surrounded by supportive followers, the leader was functioning with well-confirming competencies consisting of attributes required of a successful leader.

Blended leadership, as one of the effective leadership styles, was studied in a higher education sector and highlighted employees' viewpoints on blended leadership as elements of traditional hierarchal leadership with more contemporary aspects of distributed leadership (Collinson & Collinson, 2005). In Collinson and Collinson's (2005) study, employee followers considered that leaders needed to create conditions to assist staff in completing their jobs and preferred their leaders to express a clear vision. The results showed a need for a more subtle and sophisticated form of leadership. The authors concluded that effective leadership encompasses the ability to connect with staff and share a vision of where the organization is heading.

Data from multiple studies detail comparisons of effective and ineffective leadership styles. For example, Schyns and Schilling (2011) suggested that future research needs to distinguish more carefully between leadership styles depending on the goals. The authors used a descriptive design to observe and compare effective and ineffective leadership styles from previous studies focusing on the characteristics comprised of implicit leadership styles. The results suggested that the follower's perception of leaders differ depending on leadership styles, and no standardized measure exists that can differentiate effective from ineffective leaders. However, as different types of effectiveness vary with the leadership style comparison, so may the perception of

toxicity amongst followers (Schyns & Schilling, 2011). An additional point from their study was the tendency for leaders to possess virtuous qualities as one of the traits of effective leadership.

Leadership training might improve leader effectiveness. Santos, Caetano, and Tavares (2015) compared the effectiveness of leader training in enhancing the effectiveness of teams through functional leadership training. Using 90 teams, with six individuals each, they illustrated how team leaders trained in functional leadership improved their performance compared to untrained leaders. Using situation clarification, strategy clarification, and leadership coordination functions, team leadership training enhanced the effectiveness of teams through enhancing leadership performance, which included coordinating roles and tasks between members, and principles of functional leadership (Santos et al., 2015).

Comparison of effective and toxic leadership. One person's perception of effective leadership can be another's perception of toxic leadership (Steele, 2011). Additionally, it is possible that toxic leadership is effective for an organization's overall mission. Steele (2011) explored this concept to study the risks of toxic leadership to the soldiers' mission accomplishments and well-being in the U.S. Army. One finding of the study was a need to identify and maximize toxic qualities, as some of the reported toxic behaviors are positive and effective when used under the right circumstances such as screaming at a soldier in front of others during combat situations to save lives. Steele

concluded that a toxic leader might be considered effective in a given circumstance, such as the frontline of war.

Similar to the Steele's (2011) research on the U. S. Army, Owoyemi conducted a study to determine the effects of toxic leadership and bullying on U. K. para-military organizations (Owoyemi, 2011). The author found that toxic leadership and bullying are effective as traditions and norms in the para-military organizations by using descriptive methods to describe the exact qualities of bullied individuals and to accuse the management authority. Owoyemi concluded that policies should be implemented to aim at ensuring people's work and safety in a military environment.

To summarize the effective leadership section, the literature suggested that leadership effectiveness should be considered based on specific situations. Leaders were not uniformly effective or ineffective, and effectiveness varied accordingly (Schyns & Schilling, 2011). Factors affecting effective leadership were not limited to personality and inherent traits; they encompass behaviors and trainable skills (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Effective leadership models and theories are available for leadership improvement (Antonakis & House, 2014). Research of leadership style indicated that if leaders using the aggressive transformational style included followers in decision making and opinion valuing, it could be effective without causing harm (Arachchi, 2012). The literature focused on the importance of effectiveness providing the foundation of the understanding the difference between effective and toxic leadership. This difference is reviewed by me in the following section.

Toxic Leadership

In this section, I review the concept and background of toxic leadership. I provide

the definition of a toxic leader and review the different types of toxic leaders. Finally, I

explore toxic leader theories, cause and effects of toxic leadership, and how witnesses to

toxic leadership may perceive the event.

Concept and background. Toxic leadership can be defined in many ways and is

perceived differently by those affected. Frost (1999) proposed two types of toxic

leadership. One is a form of action and practice by leaders and systems that created pain

and suffering in others and in organizations. The other associated leaders with showing

compassion to employees in organizations leading to reduced performance (Frost, 1999).

Showing compassion versus taking corrective measures may worsen an undesired

leadership trait (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Other authors defined toxic leadership as

occurring in an environment with a leader who harasses, belittles, and frightens another

person, mainly a follower, which caused undue stress or pressure, leading to decreased

performance and other undesired behaviors (Pelletier, 2009; Reed, 2004).

Divergences and disagreements in institutions are common in every society, as

they are a part of human nature (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011). However, when these

occurrences were one-sided and had adverse effects on a subordinate, the outcomes were

devastating. Hoel et al. (2003) conducted a study that showed over 74% of employees

reported being affected by a toxic event as either a victim or a witness. With three out of

four employees being affected by toxic leadership, it is necessary to understand and

distinguish the differences between toxic and effective leaders and its effects, to reduce toxicity and increase performance.

Unlike a corporate or workplace bully, toxic leadership does not target a particular person. As found by Namie and Curry (2014), a toxic leader can maintain the same demeanor and activities of a workplace bully, but do not usually directed his or her behavior towards a single, targeted individual. The affected employees of toxic leadership possibly are exposed to hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors; but not to any physical contact. Pelletier (2009) found that toxic leader actions include angry tantrums, public ridicule, non-contingent punishment, inconsiderate actions, favoritism, and coercion. According to Bowling, Camus, and Blackmore (as cited in Sonnetage, Perrewe, & Ganster, 2015) toxic event may exist in the form of emotional abuse, mistreatment (Shantz, Alfes, & Latham, 2014), incivility, and aggression (Ben-Sasson & Somech, 2015).

Pelletier (2009) conducted a qualitative study examining 200 participants as either victims or witnesses. The author found eight behavioral dimensions tied to toxic leadership. These eight dimensions included attacks to self-esteem, lack of integrity, abusiveness, social exclusion, promoting inequality, a threat to security, and a lasissez-faire approach to leading. Pelletier integrated the findings into a 51-item assessment of leader behavior that was created to measure how harmful each dimension was to the participants. Of these 51 items, five of them topped the list as public ridicule, blaming others for mistakes, mocking employees and threatening the employee's job.

Different forms of bullying in toxic leadership were studied. Dobry, Braquehais, & Sher (2013) studied various forms of bullying including public and private seeking those most likely to happen in a typical work environment and the effect that these forms of toxic leadership have on employees. The researchers evaluated demographic factors across the organization with the intention to determine how these factors promote various forms of bullying. Dobry et al. (2013) elaborated on how various psychological problems result in the experience of bullying in the workplace, such as decreased performance and job satisfaction. The researchers gathered further information from health care institutions concerning the effects of people who have experienced bullying at one point or another. The authors evaluated the long-lasting effects of bullying in the workplace such as suicide, constant fear of losing jobs, and not being able to trust leaders.

Taken together, the research background of toxic leadership paints a picture of toxic leadership as widespread and affecting not only the victims who experienced the abuse, but also those who witnessed it. Toxic leadership also has a wide range of manifestations from favoritism to verbal abuse and physical aggression (Pelletier, 2009). The review up to this point has focused on toxic leadership as a concept and its background in general; however, a large body of research on toxic leaders as individuals were reported, which follows in the subsequent chapter subsections.

Toxic leaders. Egan (2004) reported different types of toxic leaders as accidental, destructive-narcissistic, and psychopathic leaders. Accidental toxic leaders were those who are truly unaware of the effect of toxic actions on others (Egan, 2004). This type of

toxic leader caused harm by lacking patience or using inappropriate comments or actions towards others. When confronted, this type of toxic leader apologized and retreated from his or her behaviors (Egan, 2004). Destructive-narcissistic toxic leaders were those who portray themselves as possessing self-importance, causing others to perceive them as acting superior and self-domineering. Egan claimed that toxic behaviors made the leaders manipulate and exploit others to move ahead and attain *ideal* fantasies. Though this type of toxic leader is very reluctant to change, he or she may change with time and persistence. Finally, psychopathic toxic leaders bullied others for fun and lacked feelings of remorse, guilt or empathy (Mathieu & Babiak, 2016). This type of toxic leader was the most dangerous because he or she lacked insight into personal behaviors and were unwilling to change (Egan, 2004).

Researchers paid attention to workplace bullying from different viewpoints. Pilch and Turska (2015) analyzed workplace bullying in 117 workers and argued that the victims and bullies exhibited specific traits prescribing their roles, in which the victims willingly assumed a submissive role while the perpetrator exercised dominance. The authors determined that when dominance is coupled with a negative or non-deterring organizational culture, workplace bullying flourished. The experiences of population and adhocracy cultures were negatively related to workplace bullying, while the perception of hierarchy culture was positively related to it. This determination was similar to the stereotype of bullying found in a typical American high school where a group of *cool kids* was reported to be the bullies to a group of *nerds* (Pilch & Turska, 2015).

Workplace bullies valued egocentric motivations, had cynical beliefs about people, and exercised pragmatic morality (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Schyns and Schilling highlighted the detrimental effects of toxic leaders and their destructive leadership by establishing a distinction between a toxic leader and destructive leadership. A leader who repeats a negative, undesired behavior as defined by the organization is considered destructive as it provides no value. In their study Schyns and Schilling illustrated the complexity between individual behavior outcomes and leadership outcomes, due to the impacts they each had on the overall performance of workers. They advised based on their results that the leaders may not be destructive but have experienced personal issues leading to toxic behaviors. Like Pilch and Turska, Schyns and Schilling concluded that destructive leadership affects worker commitment, attitude, well-being, individual performance and turnover rates.

The personality of leaders is considered important in toxic leadership. A study focused on interpersonal problems between leaders and their employees. Glaso et al. (2010) distributed personality questionnaires to 2,539 leaders supervised a minimum of five other employees yielding a 57% of the return. On the other hand, the same personality questionnaires were completed by 654 psychiatric patients treated for personality disorders as a comparison. The results illustrated that 30% of the leaders exhibited elevated profiles of personality characteristics regarding interpersonal problems, on a level comparable to that of the psychiatric patients with personality

disorders (Glaso et al., 2010). The authors concluded that severe personality problems might be responsible for toxic leadership.

Toxic leaders may have antisocial personality disorder. To understand this, Orr (2013) conducted a study to examine the relationship between leaders working in places with bullying and development of antisocial personality disorder. The research aimed to determine psychopathology among the executives in various organizations. The findings showed that executives in organizations are more susceptible to psychopathology where workplace bullying is prevalent, in comparison to other people in the nation (Orr, 2013). The study did not examine why the workplace bullying in the organizations was so widespread.

To further understand toxic leadership, research attempted to determine different kinds of toxic leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Egan (2004) stated that, in some cases, toxic leadership is circumstantial or accidental; the behaviors it manifests may recur over time, but its effects may be constant. In other cases, toxic leadership may be more akin to a personality trait or inherent quality of a person (Egan, 2004). Furthermore, different theories were explored to explain toxic leadership (Jerido, 2014).

Toxic leadership explored through theory. This study is not directly focused on toxic leadership, but there is value in understanding what toxic leadership is and how it is created. The below four theories in various social disciplines have some aspects that, when put together in a framework, can explain forms of toxic leadership. These include Karl Marxist theory, feminism theory, elitism theory, and interpersonal theory (Jerido,

2014). First, Karl Marxist theory on conflict explained that change came about from the conflict between social classes. When transposed onto the workplace, the conflict has two dimensions. The first is the dominance over subordinates to secure advantages. The second one is an organization's interest in the bottom line over its employees' protection. When related to toxic leadership by Jerido, the Karl Marx theory on conflict emphasized that toxic leaders dominate affected employees through toxic events to secure the advantage of authority.

Feminism theory, regardless of gender, approached toxic leaders in regard to the privilege of masculinity. Jerido (2014) defined privilege as being masculine and others who are not masculine as vulnerable; therefore, susceptible to being bullied. Being masculine and in power versus being feminine and not in power is a social construct that is experienced in the workplace. Dunn, Clark, and Pearlman (2015) supported the concept that those who were masculine would overpower those who were feminine. This concept prevailed in the workplace as a bully overpowers a subordinate. Croft and Cash (2015) eluded that this type of behavior was institutionalized and accepted by toxic leaders. Loi, Loh, and Hine (2015) found that, when women experienced workplace incivility, it resulted in decreased work behaviors versus no relationship for men. This workplace incivility happened due to ingrained socialization patterns and corresponding expectations, and assertive women who may be on the receiving end of harsh judgments from other people (Gilbert, Raffo, & Sutarso, 2013).

Elitism theory consists of a small, special class of those who dominate the workplace politically. Jeirdo (2014) stated that this small class controls other classes as well as the power dynamic. In alignment with elite theory, the cause of toxic events may depend on how certain toxic leaders view their status in organizations and their desire to be in control (Domingues, 2013). Subordinates challenging toxic power may become the target of toxic leaders.

Interpersonal conflict theory indicates an interpersonal incompatibility between two persons. As it relates to toxic leaders, this interjects power and vulnerability issues into the equation between workers and subordinates. Jerido (2014) considered that no communication or interest exist in solving the conflict as toxic leaders see themselves in power and thus on the winning end of any situations. Glaso et al. (2010) and Qureshi, Rasli and Zaman (2014) both argued that interpersonal conflicts cause personality characteristics of toxic leaders and affected employees. The authors combined elitism theory and interpersonal theory to illustrate that toxic leaders may take themselves as elitists who create conflict with affected employees who challenge the toxic leader resulting in toxic events. After given the concept of toxic leadership and its theories, it is important to review its causes to deepen its understanding.

Causes of toxic leadership. Scholars developed hypotheses of the cause of toxic leadership. Einarsen, Raknes, and Matthiesen (1994) suggested two separate hypotheses, as frustration-aggression and social interactionist hypothesis. Frustration-aggression hypothesis refers to leaders' aggressiveness derived from frustration due to the highly

stressful work environment. The social interactionist hypothesis refers to the unconstructive work environment with work conditions that may foster violations of acceptable organizational culture from distressed employees leading to the perception of weakness.

Other authors confirmed these hypotheses and found that abusive leaders often downplay the role of organizational citizenship to create an environment conducive to toxic leadership (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). The authors reported that the more followers equated organizational citizenship behavior as an extra role, the more likely toxic leaders become abusive without recourse. Most organizations that foster in-role organizational citizenship reported less tolerance for toxic leadership, making the environment less conducive to toxic events. However, organizational citizenship behavior seemed to provoke toxic leaders, as an opportunity for a toxic event (Adams, 2014). The derived toxic leadership ignored the organizational citizenship in which *weaker* employees should be helped but not harmed. Employees who were displaying good organizational citizenship traits were viewed as weak and easy targets by toxic leaders.

Relationship plays a role in the conflict between toxic leaders and the affected employees. Qureshi et al. (2014) explained that relationship-based factors such as social climate, leader personality, and especially interpersonal conflict were strong independent predictors of toxic events. Other task-based factors such as decision authority or demands of the job showed significant but weaker relationships with toxic events. Clarke (2014)

defined conflict as opposing desires, mismatches, uncertainty, deadlines, pressures, incompatible goals, uneasiness, and tension.

As such, the worker-leader relationship may have an impact on toxic leadership. Iftikhar and Qureshi (2014) analyzed the connection between organizational environment, bullying in the workplace, and employees' well-being at 17 institutions of higher education in Pakistan. The authors found that bullying occurring in the workplace mediated organizational environment and employees' well-being whereby the organizational environment that facilitated bullying in the workplace caused poor worker health. Using the AMOS program and Cronbach coefficient alpha scores, Iftikhar and Qureshi illustrated the extent to which an organizational climate was deficient in fostering worker well-being. This deficiency facilitated workplace bullying, leading to poor health outcomes for workers.

Other authors defined the causes of toxic leadership as personality issues, workplace stress, poor leadership training, and ineffective leadership skills (Astrauskaite, Kern, & Notelaers, 2014). The authors aimed to gain an understanding of causes leading to toxic leadership events. The study gave a clear understanding of different psychological aspects based on family origin, belonging, superiority, inferiority domains, social lifestyle, and organizational context. Key drivers were being pampered or neglected as a child and having higher aggression with low self-esteem. The authors found that various psychological factors were determinants for toxic leadership (Astrauskaite et al., 2014). It was possible that psychological aspects of a leader's

personality may lead to toxic events, no matter at home or in the workplace. It is worth

noting that stress was considered by multiple studies as a main cause of toxic leadership,

besides personality and skills.

   Stress as a cause of toxic leadership. In the desired state, a workplace should

offer most employees with a sense of job satisfaction (Hillebrandt, 2008). In reality, a

workplace can be a source of stress and anxiety. Hillebrandt defined work stress as an

unpleasant reaction to the individual experience, due to severe or seemingly impossible

demands placed on their employment. It is important to note that, while not all work-

related stress was negative, the effects on the employee were so. This definition held true

for leaders who must meet deadlines, correct an employee's behavior, and downsize a

team. Stress can manifest itself in undesirable forms, such as the appearance of toxic

behaviors. In extreme cases, the toxic event-related stress may lead to physical ailments

for both leaders and employees (Hillebrandt, 2008).

   Multiple signs can be used to indicate that an employee is experiencing work-

related stress. Cornelius (2006) attributed aggressive leadership to resentment,

dissatisfaction, and conflict in the workplace, as a result of stress. In addition, an overly

stressed employee might hastily complete work, attempt to satisfy many others at once,

not take breaks or lunches, finish work at home, leaving less time for rest or relaxation,

and possibly turn down holidays, or vacation, in favor of work to complete tasks (Chan,

2007).

Stress models were developed to assist in the understanding of the causes of toxic leadership. Mackay, Carey, and Stevens (2011) developed a stressor-emotion model to explain the concept of workplace bullying. This model stated that stressors stimulate negative emotions in bosses (Omizo, Omizo, Baxa, & Miyose, 2006). The stimulation of negative emotions may force leaders to engage in aggressive behaviors towards others, primarily their subordinates, who have a greater incentive not to retaliate.

This aggressive engagement was due to the process of stress triggering emotions leading up to toxic behavior that depends on whether individuals perceive their leaders to be in control of the problem, generating or inducing the experience of stress (Mackay et al., 2011). Research showed that factors such as decision authority, role ambiguity, role conflict, and interpersonal conflict all played a part in fueling cases of bullying (Omizo et al., 2006). Organizational climate may also cause a trickle effect in which one toxic leader may create another toxic leader creating a trickle-down effect on multiple leaders as one leader releases anger or stress on another (Hoobler & Hu, 2012).

Other causes of workplace bullying, and toxic leadership included forced cooperation, monotonous tasks, lack of goal clarity, and high workload (Mackay et al., 2011). All these antecedents were thought to cause organizational stress and may directly result in stress on leaders, causing the toxic situation to occur. Stress, in turn, facilitated the development of negative emotions; and such emotions were underlying causes of bullying. In addition, the aforementioned antecedents can cause interpersonal conflict. Such conflict induces negative behavior, which in turn increases workplace bullying and

toxic leadership (Mackay et al., 2011). Work stress encouraged leaders to develop toxic behaviors by stimulating negative emotions that encouraged the development of aggressive behaviors towards others. After reviewing the concept of toxic leadership, and the potential causes of toxic leadership, the details on consequences of toxic leadership follow in the next section.

Effects of toxic leadership on employees. Xu et al. (2015) studied 152 affected employees and found the impact of toxic leadership resulted in the behaviors of encouraging silence and complacency followed by emotional exhaustion. The authors also found that a high leader-follower exchange rate accelerated the adverse effects of abusive supervision. Xu et al. concluded that toxic leadership cripples worker satisfaction by emotionally exhausting workers into *silent worker bees* devoid of autonomy or opinions.

Oladapo and Banks (2013) conducted research about the experience of workplace cyberbullying and the witnessing of cyberbullying in major work organizations. The authors found that the affected employees had decreased performance, lacked job satisfaction, and even feared for their jobs. The study showed that 45% of participants affected employees experienced workplace bullying, and 75% of them witnessed at least one event of workplace bullying. Oladapo and Banks suggested that witnesses to toxic events may be affected similarly to those victims. Witnesses and victims of toxic leadership may have different perceptions of the toxic event.

Victim perceptions of toxic leaders. In a workplace, one employee may perceive an event as toxic or bullying, while another employee may perceive the same event as efficient (Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2011). It is possible that the employee's perception of a toxic situation makes the employee a false victim. For example, the leader may have given constructive criticism to an employee. The employee receiving the criticism may believe it was unfair criticism and felt he or she was a victim of toxic leadership. Martinko et al. studied the relationship between individual differences in perceptions in subordinates and variability of supervisory abuse. In particular, the study evidenced that hostile attribution styles among subordinates had a positive correlation with subordinate perceptions of supervisory abuse. On the other hand, such attribution styles negated subordinate perceptions on leader-follower exchange. Accordingly, an inverse relationship between abusive supervision and leader-follower exchange perceptions emerged. Since employee reactions may influence the perception of toxicity, it is important to determine how employees react to leader behaviors.

Studies examined communications between leaders and followers to determine follower perception. Chua and Murray (2015) analyzed the different ways that 381 men and women processed information from their leaders in a workplace. The authors determined that workers are less tolerant of negative messages and behaviors from supervisors of a different gender. For example, women considered toxic male leaders as bullies more often than their male colleagues did. Similarly, men considered female toxic leaders as bullies more than their female counterparts did. Based on these findings, Chua

and Murray concluded that gender-based sensitization of communication might enhance worker perception of toxic leadership.

An additional study attempted to determine employee perception through examining factors contributing to bullying. Salin (2015) conducted an extensive study of risk factors contributing to workplace bullying and disproved popular assumptions. The author made three claims of contemporary contributions to workplace bullying. The first claim was the existence of an inverse relationship between performance pay and workplace bullying. The second claim was that both poor physical and psychosocial environments contribute to bullying. In the third claim, like Chua and Murray, Salin argued that gender incongruence existed in perceptions of bullying, based on the tasks assigned especially gender-specific or gender-perceived tasks.

There are different forms of toxic leadership, and each has an impact on follower perception. Samnani, Singh, and Ezzedeen (2013) studied various forms of toxic leadership in response to claims that various forms of harassment in workplaces are hard to detect, as they exist in a form difficult to denote. The study explored whether various attributions yield different levels of follower perception and found that different follower perceptions may enhance different forms of bullying, which may end up unnoticed or over-reacted. Examples included employees who felt they deserved punishment or were timid which caused them to be more susceptible to toxic perception or events. Besides victim perception of toxic leadership, witness perception might be confirmation of victim perception due to the complexity of toxic leadership.

Witness perception of toxic leadership. Even though bullying at work had the greatest impact on followers, it affected other workers who witnessed toxic events (Kerzner, 2013). Lutgen-Sandvik and Namie (2010) stated bystanders witnessed most toxic events, which meant that a larger number of employees were affected with similar damage besides victims. Witnessing a toxic event was defined as a communal act, where employees witness the mistreatment of other employees (Lutgen-Sandvik & Namie, 2010). Witnessing toxic leadership may cause the perception of abuse in witness workers to trigger emotional responses. Chaplin (2010) claimed that employees who witnessed toxic leaders attacking their peers were adversely affected and can be secondary victims.

The most common adverse effects on witnesses included psychological and mental stress, destabilization of working associations, increased conflicts, and extra work. In more extreme cases, those who witness bullying may become actively involved or have a fear of retaliation in the web of toxic leaders, whether attempting to help the victims or siding with the toxic leader. The definition of the *web* was the witness's involvement, which may result in experiencing adverse events.

Witnesses can be passive accomplices of toxic leadership even when they fail to report or respond to the event regardless if directly involved which categorizes them as accomplices to employee mistreatment (Sawyer, 2015). Lutgen-Sandvik and Namie (2010) considered toxic leadership and bullying to be a collective act where witnesses and administrators contribute to its prevalence. Witnesses experienced different emotions when they saw their colleagues being mistreated (Groeblinghoff & Becker, 1995).

However, a negative perception of the toxic event may prevent them from acting. Hakojärvi, Salminen, and Suhonen (2014) found that toxic events resulted in consequences, possibly psychological and physical, in student victims and witnesses in academic settings. In this case, psychological effects of toxic events included anger, anxiety, fear, and loss of self-esteem; and physical effects included headaches, sweating, stomach pains, and sleeping disorders. In addition, the student victims' motivation for learning dropped drastically.

A study on ineffective toxic leaders found sleep disturbances in both the affected employee and witnesses exposed to the toxic leadership event. In the study, Hansen (2016) supported Hakojärvi et al. (2014) and found evidence that sleep disturbances affected concentration and resulted in poor performance the following day. The affected victims and witnesses also experienced psychological and physical problems. Some victims developed neurosis and adverse somatic problems. These problems caused some victims to leave their jobs because the work climate was harsh, and they felt threatened. Witnessing a toxic event caused job insecurity where the witnesses became concerned about the permanence of their job due to the threatening situation (Glambek et al., 2014).

Further research found that toxic acts had effects on the victims, witnesses, and organizations in general (Glambek et al., 2014). The derived problems included mental health, physical health, and psychological health issues, as well as negative financial outcomes. Okechukwu, Souza, Davis and de Castro (2014) claimed that witnesses of the harassment in organizations experienced mental and psychological-related risks. Some

experienced stress, which may lead to neurotic disorders; and others experienced job dissatisfaction due to harassment, causing witnesses to leave their jobs.

When observing mistreatment of their co-workers, witnesses often felt hurt and helpless. Witnesses of toxic leadership had higher stress levels and lower job satisfaction rates, compared to co-workers who claimed to have not experienced toxic or bullying events (Lutgen-Sandvik & Namie, 2010; McKay, 2011). The witnesses to toxic events often felt frustrated because of the lack of power to prevent the situation, causing them to stand by and watch helplessly as the event occurred. One of the reasons that witnesses did not report toxic events is leadership ignorance of toxic leadership, which discouraged witnesses from speaking out, leaving them with the only option as sympathizing with the victims (Lutgen-Sandvik & Namie, 2010).

Other research showed that some witnesses took actions against toxic leaders on behalf of affected employee. According to Evans and Smokowski (2015), 10% - 19% of toxic event witnesses defended the affected employee, in which 17% - 31% of witnessed reports were effective in victim protection when human resources were involved. Evans and Smolowski explained that this might be due to the social capital theory where people build social networks with the expectation of fulfilling goals such as being defended or protected in toxic events. Groeblinghoff and Becker (1995) reported that when witnesses became active participants in toxic activities, the result was often mobbing. Chaplin (2010) described mobbing as an act in which bystanders launch an emotional attack aimed at disrespecting, shaming or harming a certain targeted individual, often the bully.

Moreover, *mobbing* occurred through spreading rumors, public condemnation, insinuations, which create a very hostile working environment.

Research has shown that mobbing adversely affected work performance. Ashraf and Khan (2014) conducted a study on 242 workers to determine the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on moderating efforts of mobbing on employee performance at work. The study described EI as the ability of bullied employees to come up with creative ways to manage the bullying and maintain acceptable levels of job performance, even amid frequent mobbing incidences. Ashraf and Khan showed that high levels of EI helped victims withstand bullying without affecting their performance at work. They found that bullied workers who have high levels of EI continued to demonstrate high levels of productivity, even under regular incidences of mobbing. They concluded the higher level of productivity was because they were better suited to adjust their behaviors and devise strategies to manage bullying environment effectively. By contrast, job performance of participants with low levels of EI was grossly affected by bullying behaviors.

GolParvar and Rafizadeh (2014) identified a positive correlation between different forms of mobbing at work and the well-being of nurses in Iranian hospitals. The authors reported that bullying in the workplace whether it was verbal, psychological, or physical, negatively affected the mental and spiritual well-being of the nurse victims. More specifically, they found that nurses who experienced frequent cases of mobbing suffered from psychological stress and displayed unruly behaviors, such as revenge and

contempt for others. Consequently, GolParvar and Rafizadeh recommended the

development and implementation of strategies to deal with workplace mobbing, to

ameliorate and promote the spiritual and psychological health and safety of workers.

Witnesses of toxic leadership are significant in that they are the necessary source

of evidence to guide proper authorities in discovering and reducing toxic events or

eliminating toxic leaders. McKay (2011) claimed that, in any commercial organizations,

the management should consider the needs of both victims and witnesses of bullying

when designing strategies and policies about workplace bullying. Witnesses of toxic

leadership can also exhibit behaviors similar to victims of toxic events.

Online bullying is a newly reported, emerging form of toxic leadership in health

care professionals. O'Donnell (2015) suggested different ways in dealing with online

bullies. The author implied that the best way to fight bullies is from witnesses who can

come up with a narrative to counter misinformation or lies perpetuated by toxic leaders.

O'Donnell believed that if witnesses to toxic events can honestly and truthfully respond

to toxic events online, they greatly helped the victims and other people to form a

balanced view of the affected employee. In turn, this may enable the victims to develop

positive emotional responses, even at times of frequent online bullying. In addition, it

will discredit the bullies, forcing them to desist from their bullying behaviors.

Reducing toxic leadership. With almost all leaders, stress levels varied based on

leaders' positions in organizational hierarchy (Hicks & Caroline, 2007). It is important to

deal with stress through identifying the sources of stress instead of allowing stress to

manifest as toxic behaviors. In addition, untreated stress can cause a reduction in performance and eventually lead to additional problems including health issues (Aniţei, Burtăverde, Mihăilă, Chraif, & Georgiana, 2007).

To confirm the relationship between stress and toxic leadership, Yang and Salmivalli (2015) analyzed the effectiveness of an anti-bullying program in Finnish schools. The program employed universal targeting techniques and indicated actions to sensitize and educate students on different forms of bullying, focusing on specific case studies to enhance student understanding and reception of anti-bullying efforts, while providing intervention measures for victims. The authors concluded that victim-bullies might be under abnormal stress from being bullied in the past. To cope, the victims bullied others. Corporate leaders who create toxic environments experience this abnormal stress as well should they also experience toxic leadership.

In some cases, leaders who experienced too much stress at work masked their issues with toxic behavior towards their employees. This behavior was much to theirs and the employee's disadvantage. Hicks and Caroline (2007) stated that employees adapted to a situation of too much work-related stress by covering their behaviors, allowing the situation to go unobserved by their leadership. This behavior manifests in ways that can cause more damage to the employee's and organization (Segal, Smith, Robinson, & Segal, 2011). It had a severe impact on the health of the leader, as well as the subordinate who received the consequence of leader stress.

Taking time off can help leaders reduce stress in the workplace. Once stress occurs, it will require a period of time to release and regain composure as a leader (Hicks & Caroline, 2007). If taking time off from work is not feasible, taking time out during the workday to relax will often reduce mental fatigue and the potential for toxic behavior. In case these approaches do not suffice, requesting assistance from a leader or co-worker may help diffuse the stress and its possible toxic outcomes (Olafsson & Johannsdottirs, 2004). Collins and Jackson (2015) stated that the duty of leadership was to take a rational initiative to settle situations where stress was the underlying cause of an action, especially when the source of stress was the leader. In most cases, work-related stress can be dealt with if leaders discuss the concern with their bosses and take time off from duties to deal with the situation (Hillebrandt, 2008).

Collins and Jackson (2015) developed a leadership process model for testing leaders in bully prevention. Collins and Jackson (2015) used the model to compare task difficulty levels and their relationship to bully traits in 161 leaders. The study found that difficult tasks made leaders destructive when they could not control their emotions which caused actions that adversely affected employees. Less toxic behaviors contrasted this finding with less difficult tasks in which leaders were able to control emotions and actions; therefore, becoming constructive. The authors concluded that leaders with self-regulating capacity might choose to become workplace facilitators instead of bullies through inspiring and deterring subordinate participation and devotion to organizational goals.

Some employees affected by toxic leadership might realize a reduction of stress-induced bullying by enhancement of job satisfaction and reduction of burnout. A study found that empowerment reduced work incivility and burnout (Laschinger, Wong, Cummings, & Grau, 2014). The authors argued that their results give the best explanation of the impact of stress reduction compared to positive and supportive leadership in a workplace, which assisted in empowering employees, decreasing leadership stress, and reducing workplace incivility such as bullying.

Research indicated the prevalence of bullying in the global workforce. Harvey, Treadway, and Heames (2006) reported a number of bullying phenomena and their studies in different countries indicating the prevalence of bullying in the global workforce. The study indicated a need for global organizations to understand how to address the extensive problems related to bullying activities in multiple cultures. Results from the study encouraged global organizations to examine propositions, such as leaders with possible toxic behaviors should not be assigned to positions with ambiguous roles and tasks, witnesses submit easily to toxic leaders may allow the existence and growth of toxic events, and denial or ignorance of toxic leaders by an organization may encourage the behavior and allow the growth of toxic leaders and increased toxic events (Harvey et al., 2006).

To summarize the toxic leadership section, the causes of toxic leadership are personality issues, workplace stress, poor leadership training, and ineffective leadership skills (Astrauskaite et al., 2014). Toxic leadership reduces worker satisfaction,

performance, and productivity (Xu et al., 2015). The perception of toxic leadership is different between victims (Chua & Murray, 2015) and witnesses (Kerzner, 2013), and witnesses of toxic leadership are significant because they provide the necessary evidence to guide proper authorities in reducing toxic events or eliminating toxic leaders (McKay, 2011).

Leadership improvement strategies are available. From the perspective of the leaders, an enhanced self-regulating strategy may induce leaders to become workplace facilitators instead of bullies (Collins & Jackson, 2015). Leaders with personality as psychopathic traits or who are suffering easily from stress at work should seek help since these traits or stressors can lead to toxic leadership.

From the perspective of the employee, not all employees can identify toxic behaviors, which can exacerbate toxic events. Co-workers cannot help an affected employee if they do not know how one might behave. It is important that employees be able to develop coping strategies to deal with toxic leadership. The next section reviews the limited literature on employee coping and resulting behaviors.

Coping Strategies of Employees and Organizations

Coping strategies are used by employees and organizations to cope with toxic leadership situations. The coping strategy is how the affected employee deals with the toxic leader after the toxic event occurs. This section reviews currently available coping theories, coping strategies from employees, and coping strategies from organizations.

This section supports this study with the most recent research background on coping mechanisms.

Coping theories. Coping theories were reported in the literature. These theories included betrayal trauma theory, cognitive theory of trauma, and conservation of resources theory. Different theories provide different hypotheses and solutions for coping with toxic leadership, as described as follows.

Betrayal trauma theory. Betrayal trauma theory consists of sudden and unexpected betrayal or loss of trust from a significant person in the affected person's life (Freyd & DePrince, 2013). This person may be a family member, person of cultural authority, a co-worker or leader, or a good friend. The person is someone who can have a great effect on someone else's life. According to DePrince et al. (2012), betrayal trust can have serious, long-term consequences for the affected person. People who experienced betrayal trauma were prone not to trust others whom they met currently or in the future and often altered how they remembered the traumatic betrayal event (Gobin & Freyd, 2013).

This theory is easily transposed onto a toxic leader event. Chughtai, Byrne, and Flood (2014) described employee trust in their leader as critical to organizational success and resulting in desirable employee behaviors, which opened a level of vulnerability on both parts. Akhtar and Long (2015) concluded that a lack of trust increased employee intention to quit among other behaviors. Employees affected by a toxic leader may

experience betrayal trauma and cope through reducing or removing all trust in the leader or organization causing undesired behaviors.

Cognitive theory of trauma. Being traumatized is sometimes fair and acceptable in the workplace, as bad things happen to good people (Wilkins, 2013). People attempted to alleviate the emotional impact of a negative event through cognitive reappraisal, which was a method of regulating emotions that consist of mental interpretation. Cognitive reappraisal as coping strategies is a way that assisted the affected employee in breaking down the event and *making sense* of what happened (Szasz, Szentagotai, & Hofmann, 2011). In the cognitive theory of trauma, affected employees are enabled to change attributes of the toxic leaders or events so that there is no adverse effect on the employee's self-esteem. However, through cognitive rehearsal more external emotional venting as the stable self-esteem prompted the affected employee to confront the perpetrator.

Conservation of resources theory. Conservation of resources theory is used to understand how people deal with stress. Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke (2011) advised that while dealing with stress, people often had a tendency to expand resources and draw in those who are close to them. Ng, Fong, & Wang (2011) argued that those who coped via this theory were motivated to acquire, protect, and retain resources to deal with the stressful situations as they arise. As this related to those affected by toxic leaders, the affected employee may shut out coworkers and those willing to help them cope with the toxic situation (Fontinha, Chambel, & Cuyper, 2012). In turn, this loss or gain of support

resources may create feelings of exhaustion, job insecurity, and inability to find other employment (Alarcon et al., 2011). The affected employee may feel betrayed based on the betrayal trauma theory and can only trust a smaller group of resources, thus limiting contact with others outside of the circle.

Employee coping strategies. Affected followers employed a variety of coping strategies to deal with toxic leaders. Many of these coping strategies or strategies depended on the age and gender of victims, and level of intensity of toxic events (Simons & Sauer, 2013; Upton, 2010). These strategies may be related to the psychological state of victims during or after toxic events (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). Bushman and Huesmann (2010) concurred that the response from victims depended upon their personality, the specific circumstances around the event, and the relationship between leaders and victims.

Multiple studies attempted to understand the coping strategies. Vitkova and Zabrodska (2014) reviewed other research studies to understand the concept of toxic workplace events, and strategies that affected employees use to manage the events. The authors examined mobbing from three different perspectives as functionalist, interpretative, and critical; and suggested that victims need to use different strategies to deal with mobbing. The authors categorized the strategies into active and passive types. In actively engaged strategies, victims proactively choose exiting and confrontational ways to alleviate or eliminate toxic situations. In passive strategies, victims chose to give

in to toxic behaviors through resignation, because they lacked the means to deal with the

behaviors (Glambek et al., 2015).

Coping strategies for workplace stress were also studied. Malinauskiene and

Einarsen (2014) explored how Lithuania's family physicians managed workplace stress

and health consequences related to toxic events. Since bullying was highly prevalent

among health professionals, the authors reported that post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD) could develop when the affected employees fail to come up with appropriate

coping strategies. Initially, the affected employees became psychologically

uncomfortable with the toxic events. With time, this discomfort developed into feelings

of hopelessness and regular phobic responses, which eventually resulted in PSTD

(Malinauskiene & Einarsen, 2014). The severity of the PTSD varied with regard to the

harshness and frequency of toxic events.

Five coping strategies were found to be used by victims to cope with mobbing at

work. These strategies include blaming themselves for the toxic event, avoiding contact

with toxic leaders, and avoiding workplace situations or areas common for toxic

incidences (Karatuna, 2015). Affected employees often used avoidance strategies to keep

away from the toxic leader and to minimize reoccurrence. Victims also relied on

confrontation strategies, such as ignoring provocations by perpetrators, standing up to the

toxic leader, threatening the toxic leader, and letting the toxic leader know the unfairness

of toxic behaviors. In addition, victims sought assistance from people around them to

deal with bullying. Conversely, victims may also revert to destructive strategies such as

withdrawing from relationship or situations to manage mobbing and its related consequences (Karatuna, 2015). In the case of a severe toxic event, affected employees either became toxic themselves or quit their workplaces.

Coping strategies may be different for victims with different genders. A study examined 20 Atlantic Canadian male workers and found that men rely on a wide range of techniques to deal with bullies in the workplace (O'Donnell and MacIntosh, 2015). Some men sought for help from workmates and their superiors in the workplace and labor unions. Others avoided seeking help or report bullying cases in fear of risks and negative consequences. In addition, the majority of men within the 20-participant study resorted to informal coping strategies, such as avoiding bullying situations; seeking help from medical facilities, close relatives and friends, and other organizations such as legal professionals and advocacy organizations; engaging in drug abuse and withdrawing from bullying environments.

Various coping strategies are present in the workplace (Dauber & Tavernier, 2011). Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) studied coping strategies from 398 participants, and four major findings used as coping strategies: (a) seek help, (b) avoidance, (c) assertiveness, and (d) do nothing. Although the study focused on targeted corporate bullying, the results of coping strategies were transposed to toxic leadership, because bullying events and toxic events are similar in nature from the employee's perspective (Aubrey, 2012). The results showed that the coping strategies used by most employees were *seeking help*, followed by *avoidance*, *doing nothing*, and *assertiveness*. Sarıçam,

Çardak, and Yaman (2014) identified *forgiveness* as a fifth coping strategy which

occurred when affected employees can put the situation behind them, forgive the toxic

leader and move on with little to no stress in the workplace as time passes. The five

following coping strategies were reviewed to provide a deeper understanding of this

study.

　　　Seek help. The seek help or communication strategy of coping involved seeking

assistance from friends, co-workers, another leader, or human resource department

(Dauber & Tavernier, 2011) and was the most common employed. Employees actively

reached out for help to handle the situation (Aubrey, 2012). Most followers *seeking help*

talked to a representative at work from a union or human resource department (Olafsson

& Johannsdottir, 2004). Bushman and Huesmann (2010) claimed that reporting the

matter to proper authorities resulted in the best outcomes due to most organizations

having a *no retaliation* policy. Accessing influential action was an alternative option,

where affected employee filed a complaint to authorities as a method of seeking help

(Lutgen-Sandvik & Nmaie, 2010). Simons and Sauer (2013) advised that seeking help

might be the most appropriate form of coping as all toxic events must be addressed, even

if the result seems unfavorable.

　　　Avoidance. Avoidance is a passive coping strategy used by followers who prefer

to reduce or eliminate contact with the toxic leader. Richardson (1995) defined avoidance

as ignoring conflict by withdrawing or suppressing one's feelings and avoiding the topic

of what had happened or is happening. Avoiding difficult individuals or situations

minimizes the risk of conflict or a repeat toxic event. This coping strategy also includes keeping an emotional distance by isolating themselves from the toxic leader (Dauber & Tavernier, 2011). Depending on the victim's personality, it may be easier to use avoidance rather than aggression regardless of the stress levels experiencing. Even though avoiding toxic leaders was a passive withdrawal from potential conflict and confrontation, active avoidance occurred when victims dealt with toxic leaders by physically staying away. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to avoid these leaders in the workplace, particularly if the leader is one's supervisor (Richardson, 1995). In such cases, victims avoided conflict by suppressing their opinions; and adopted *avoidance* as a preventative measure and solution for dealing with toxic leaders.

Avoidance was the most difficult coping strategy to accomplish when employees work directly for toxic leaders. Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) believed that this coping strategy, when confronted with a toxic leader, is a part of the fight or flight mentality. In a study by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004), *avoidance* was the second most used coping strategies; and it is simply easier and less stressful to avoid the bullying of a superior. Winn (2014) found that stress becomes magnified and subsequent events may be more exuberant when an affected employee did not succeed in avoiding the toxic leader.

Wilkin (2013) confirmed avoidance as a coping strategy in a study where nurses cognitively suppressed emotions resulting from a toxic event. The study found that victims used *avoidance* to process and analyze the situation and to understand the cause. This method allowed the participants to cope through reinforcing positive behaviors and

self-esteem in themselves versus dwelling on the toxic event. Wilkins also found other participants using *avoidance* through humor, which allowed the affected employees to cope with undesired emotions resulting from the toxic event through laughter. In extreme cases, the avoidance coping strategy led to job reassignment within the organization, retiring, or finding new employment (Webster, Brough, & Daly, 2014).

  Assertiveness. Affected employees use assertiveness to directly confront toxic leaders about the toxic event, effects, and behaviors. Aubrey (2012) referred to assertiveness as retaliation or deviance from acceptable leader-follower relationships (Aubrey, 2012). Out of all coping strategies, assertiveness was used least frequently when communicating directly with the toxic leader. Assertiveness towards a leader who caused the employee stress may relieve the stress by reducing the toxic behavior (Chan, 2007). This action may cause adverse effects on the employees, however, as assertiveness often leads to increased occurrences of toxic events or bullying. Bushman and Huesmann (2010) found that assertive victims of toxic events may become aggressive when confronting the leaders, which may result in shouting, verbal insults, and physical intimidation. Simons and Sauer (2013) argued that assertiveness in the form of confrontation is an effective way of coping as it often stops the bullying.

  Dauber and Tavernier (2011) also described resistance as a form of assertiveness. Affected employees may publicly reject, contradict or actively confront the leader. Active reactions involved assertive retaliation (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004), or aggressive retaliation (Vitkova & Zabrodska, 2014) by the victims. Employees who react passively

do not retaliate against the toxic leaders but instead withdraw through avoidance (Aubrey, 2012). Lutgen-Sandvik and Namie (2010) discussed various forms of aggression that employees used to retaliate against toxic leadership and considered aggression a counter measure to bully tactics. On the other hand, passive reaction happened when affected employees felt insecure in their positions and resigned from their posted as an act of coping with retaliation (Glambek et al., 2014).

The use of aggressive forms of coping strategies manifests in collective or disorganized actions. Affected employees often embraced pejorative labeling as a common retaliation act or aggressive action (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). This type of retaliation involves giving the toxic leader derogatory labels in the workplace as *troublemaker* or *bully*. Direct retaliation included confronting the leader with character assassination through verbal attacks from affected employees to other employees (Webster et al., 2014). In extreme cases, victims of continued toxic leadership or corporate bullying threatened to physically harm others, as a means to stop the situation (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). The assertive coping strategies, such as face-to-face confrontations, were characteristic of aggressive behavior at the extreme end of the assertive strategy triggered by anger, fear, and being emotional scarred.

Forgiveness. Another coping strategy used by victims of toxic leadership is to forgive toxic leaders and simply move on from the situation. This coping strategy may result in the least stress if affected employees can truly move forward without harboring resentment towards the toxic bully. Using 436 teachers from Sakarya in Turkey, Sarıçam

et al. (2014) showed how bullying is related to forgiveness. They examined forgiveness

of self and other people, as well as how a situation influenced different forms of bullying,

including sexual abuse, barriers in communication, discrimination, and humiliation. Their

findings showed that teachers who forgave themselves were more likely to forgive others

and situations, compared to those who did not forgive themselves. The study did,

however, establish a negative influence of the different kinds of forgiveness on the

numerous forms of mobbing.

Anti-forgiveness tendencies, on the other hand, can be developed in people who

are frequently bullied in the workplace. Sarıçam et al. (2104) indicated that the bullying

acts forced them to learn not to forget and forgive themselves, bullies, or the situations

leading to the bullying. Similarly, people who did not forgive easily were more likely to

be regular bullies than those who easily forgive. These individuals may have coped

previously by utilizing submission or ingratiation coping mechanisms (Webster et al.,

2014). The researchers argued that forgiving people was best suited to cope with

workplace bullying because they exhibited effective skills to communicate and resolve

conflicts, create and sustain social relationships, and learn necessary peace concepts.

Do nothing. The do-nothing strategy of coping may be the most stressful method.

Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) found that the toxic events were likely to continue

causing stress, reactions, and behaviors derived from the toxic event to continue and

potentially grow. This coping strategy may lead to the worsening of negative effects of

toxic leadership and was the least used of the four coping strategies identified in the

authors' study. The do-nothing strategy is closely related to the adaption (Dauber &

Tavernier, 2011) and the accommodation or reframing strategy (Webster et al., 2014).

These coping strategies fall under the cognitive theory of trauma in which you reason

through the event by restructuring your perception then adapting versus coping in another

fashion.

   Organizational coping strategies. Coping strategies from organizations were

studied such as corporate policies and measures designed to promote employee health

and safety. Kwan, Tuckey, and Dollard (2014) explored how psychosocial safety climate

influenced copy strategies used by affected employees. The authors examined four

strategies commonly used to manage mobbing including exit, voice out, acquiescence,

and negligence. Affected employee choices of the strategies depended on the

psychosocial climate present in the organizations. The results indicated that workplace

with appropriate climate predisposed victims to voice out strategy, while those with

lower climate levels forced victims to rely on the other three strategies (Kwan et al.,

2014). The study supported the argument from Zellers et al. (2002) that in-role corporate

citizenship discourages toxic leadership.

   The toxic situation pushed the victim to cope with toxic events with no outside

intervention. As Reed (2004) explained, these victims were left to reconcile; and if they

were not able to, they experienced signs of increased stress. This stress may cause

psychological problems, decreased production, and ultimately the loss of their

employment. The literature showed that, unsurprisingly, most affected employees were

working in the same organization after toxic events took place. The external effects of the situation may manifest in a variety of behaviors resulting from toxic leadership.

To summarize the section of coping strategies from employees and organizations, coping theories provided hypotheses and coping solutions for toxic events, such as betrayal trauma theory (Freyd & DePrince, 2013), cognitive theory of trauma (Wilkins, 2013), and conservation of resources theory (Alarcon et al., 2011). Employees employed a variety of coping strategies to deal with toxic leaders (Simons & Sauer, 2013). Five coping strategies were found to be used by victims to cope with mobbing at work. These strategies included blaming themselves for the toxic event, avoiding contact with toxic leaders, and avoiding workplace situations or areas common with toxic incidences (Karatuna, 2015). Kwan et al. (2014) described organizational coping strategies as corporate policies and measures designed to promote employee health and safety. Under different coping strategies, employees and organizations displayed different behaviors resulting from toxic leadership.

Resulting Behaviors of Employees and Organizations

An extensive literature review reveals that both employees and organizations were affected by toxic leadership. As a part of the affected employee's coping strategy, certain adverse behaviors might be displayed. The impact on each differs in perspective and scope. In each case, the consequences were detrimental to success.

Employee behaviors resulting from toxic leadership. Employees often displayed various behaviors in response to a toxic event. These behaviors were frequently

seen as a withdrawal from jobs, ineffective performance and decreased productivity (Harcourt, Hannay, & Lam, 2013). The resulting behaviors often caused additional contact with the toxic leader, potentially loss of employment or other harm to the affected employee's well-being.

Withdrawal from jobs. One of the earliest behaviors affected by toxic leadership is how the employees feel about their jobs. Zellars et al. (2002) found that employees who perceived their leaders to be toxic or experienced abusive leaders were more likely unsatisfied with their jobs, and less likely to display other positive behaviors expected by the organizations. Glaso et al. (2015) examined the cause and effect of toxic leaders on the affected employees. The authors proposed that the features of a work environment may affect the toxic event which created *affective reactions* based on the disposition of the affected employee. In attempting to understand this dynamic, the researchers attempted to correlate effective reactions to affect driven behaviors, work attitudes, and judgment-driven behaviors (Glaso et al., 2015). Negative behaviors of employees affected by toxic leadership include, but are not limited to, decreased commitment to the organization, decreased performance, workplace deviance, absenteeism, increased display of health issues, and possibly acts of bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).

Toxic leadership makes work environment unbearable to affected employees. This unbearable environment is evidenced by higher turnover rates in organizations where toxic leadership occurs (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Heppell, 2011). A three-phase workplace bullying model was used to explain some of the factors that precipitate toxic

leadership resulting withdrawal from jobs (Omizo et al., 2006). The model asserted that toxic leadership could take place at intrapersonal levels, interpersonal levels, and intergroup levels (Mackay et al., 2011). In all these levels, both the perpetrators and the victims performed dismally because of the effect from the toxic event or events that occurred.

A study by Daniel and Metcalf (2015) developed an in-depth analysis of toxic leadership on early departure in the US Army. Daniel and Metcalf (2015) compared different types of leaders and the innate conditions of military life to both constructive and toxic leadership environments. The authors determined that toxic leadership was a major contributor to an early departure from the Army resulting in 75.6% (31 out of 41) of the participants contemplating early departure, because of toxic superiors. Daniel and Metcalf concluded that highly caring officers were not able to distinguish toxic leaders from tough, exceptional leaders. The overall result was the loss of qualified officers leaving the Army creating a less effective Army.

Ineffective performance and decreased productivity. In research studies, most employees did not have effective coping strategies to deal with toxic leadership; and this was because they feared to face the leader and to discuss the issue (Omizo et al., 2006). Instead, employees distanced themselves from their work situation causing frustration and violating the norms in the workplace. Such victims ended up less motivated and performed poorly. Qmiza et al. argued that the lack of performance can cause other work-related issues, leading to termination. The ineffective performance created other issues,

such as financial distress, feelings of betrayal by the employer, and a sense of hopelessness (Harcourt et al., 2013).

Victims of toxic leadership manifested new undesired behaviors, showed increased absenteeism, increased turnover rates, and a decreased level of performance (Mackay et al., 2011). When facing a toxic situation, one of the leading employee behaviors was absenteeism. This happened because the employee preferred to stay away, rather than attending a job where there was little motivation. Toxic leadership also forced some of the employees to leave the workplace after attempting to cope with the situation, resulting in unacceptable attendance (Mackay et al., 2011). Eventually, the organization lacked the adequate personnel to complete required work resulting in low productivity.

Toxic leaders have a direct effect on the health and well-being of the affected employee. While attempting to cope with a toxic event, the employee experience post-traumatic stress, job burnout, increased intentions to leave the department or organization, lowered self-esteem and weakened peer relationships (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Mental and emotion stress contributes to the outwardly visible negative behaviors displayed by the affected employee as mentioned above. Nielson and Einarsen (2012) concluded that toxic events had a traumatic effect on employees, creating or extrapolating negative behaviors.

The above contents of this literature review focus on individuals and their coping strategies and resulting behaviors to toxic leadership. Besides individuals, research

showed that organizations suffered from toxic leadership as well. The following section discusses organizational responses to toxic leadership.

Organizational behaviors resulting from toxic leadership. In most organizations, workplace toxic leadership and bullying were considered serious issues. This section reviews the roles of human resource management in toxic leadership, its costs for organizations, and factors affecting the organizational management of toxic leadership, as follows.

The roles of human resource management. Organizational authorities, usually human resource departments, take the responsibility of developing policies designed to eradicate toxic and aggressive practices at workplaces. McKay (2011) revealed that toxic leadership and bullying at workplaces had several detrimental effects on organizations as a whole, such as anxious or traumatized employees who become dysfunctional. Most human resource departments also had the propensity to implement investigative, lawful, and educational sets of procedures pertaining to toxic leadership and bullying, as opposed to considering the specific needs of the perpetrators and victims (McKay, 2011). Depending on the levels of the toxic leaders, human resource investigators may not fully examine the issue in fear of retaliation or adverse relationships with higher leadership levels.

A study used a psychological approach to analyze workplace bullying. Astrauskaite et al. (2014) appraised antecedent factors of workplace bullying to include these factors were socio-cultural origins, social atmosphere, diverse social interests,

superiority and inferiority dynamics, and conflicting lifestyles. Based on the analysis, Astrauskaite et al. stated that, if employees of an organization adopted effective leadership traits, bullying would decrease inside the organization based on common approaches and thought process, regardless of position, outside of the organization and in the confines of their personal social realm.

Workplace bullying was more prevalent in workplaces without anti-bullying policies as compared to those with anti-bullying policies. When policies did not guide employee efforts to identify, report, and manage the bully, they failed to provide safeguards on whistleblowers which favored workplace bullies (Regnaud, 2014). Human resource (HR) management's role in addressing toxic leadership within an organization was to highlight issues, yet that action did not eradicate toxic leadership but mitigated it between the toxic leader and the affected employee (Maxwell, 2015). Maxwell's in-depth analysis of the HR management of toxic leadership found that senior officials were the toxic elements. Maxwell unveiled a feasible strategy to mitigate, and eventually eradicated the negative effects of toxic leadership through the restructuring of leadership and transformation of the work environment. This strategy promoted positive social change among the affected workers and the toxic leaders. Maxwell warned that this strategy might not be effective if toxicity presents at the highest level of leadership in organizations.

Other strategies were confirmed effective by human resource departments to curb toxic leadership and bullying. The first was the formulation and implementation of

organizational policies, rules, and regulations deterring bullying and defining punitive actions on toxic leaders (McKay, 2011). Such policies not only deterred bullying at the workplace but also acted as a guide for the employees on how they should react to toxic events. The second strategy was educating the employees on topics of workplace aggression, as well as the available communication frameworks in the organization. Finally, the third strategy was training leaders on how to respond and report on toxic leadership (McKay, 2011). A major challenge for the human resource department is that managing bullying, and toxic leadership is costly.

Toxic leadership is costly for organizations. Bullying in the workplace often has effects on job performance that are in direct relation to the toxic event. Becker, Catanio, and Bailey (2014) found that bullying has substantial effects on organizational costs such has decreased performance leading to lost revenues. Since bullying results from power struggles in organizations and other social values demonstrating significant costs, organizations attempt to over-emphasize performance results and balance corporate citizenship. Becker et al. believed organizations with better strategies and implementation mechanisms could eliminate the practice of bullying in workplaces even though it is costly. Multiple factors could affect the organizational management of toxic leadership.

Factors affecting organizational behaviors. Regnaud (2014) noted that leaders with egotistic or selfish behaviors condoned workplace bullying because they tended to be unfriendly or violent towards both victims and bullies as well as other employees. This relationship existed because of leaders with narcissistic behaviors likely ignored any

incidences of bullying and failed to take appropriate action to remedy the situation. As a result, bullies continued to victimize their targets, while the targets learned to live with both the positive and negative consequences of workplace mobbing and the individual effects of toxic leadership.

Mitigation strategies and anti-bullying programs can help organizations. Skehan (2015) discovered that many toxic employees were leaders (72%) and 33% of them suffered from toxic events themselves and, endured for more than 12 months. Both victims and witnesses of bullying contemplated leaving the nursing profession (Skehan, 2015). Coupled with the high cost of worker turnover of 21-28 million dollars per annum, the implementation of mitigation strategies and programs were considered vital to organizational success. By extrapolating anti-bullying programs for schools, Skehan argued that such programs should be implemented in the nursing industry, to educate all nurses on the adverse effects of workplace bullying, while encouraging positive interactions between superiors and subordinates. Trepanier, Fernet, and Austin (2015) supported this conclusion stating that workplace bullying significantly contributed to job dissatisfaction leading to higher turnover rates. Nothing in the study suggested these measures would not be successful in any industry.

To summarize the section of resulting behaviors from employees and organizations, higher turnover rates in organizations where toxic leadership occurred was a significant behavior (Heppell, 2011). Other employees ended up with less motivated and ineffective performance (Harcourt et al., 2013). Eventually, the organizations lacked

the adequate personnel to work resulting in low productivity. In most organizations, the roles of human resource management were responsible for developing policies designed to eradicate toxic and aggressive practices (Astrauskaite et al., 2014). A major challenge for the human resource department was that managing toxic leadership is costly (Becker et al., 2014). Several literature gaps remain as described in the following section.

Literature Gap

A literature gap was identified in my literature review on research related to coping strategies for dealing with toxic leadership. In regard to discovered coping strategies being effective and ineffective, many studies were conducted on toxic leadership and its impact on organizations (Edwards et al., 2015, Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015), but few studies identified effective and ineffective coping strategies for toxic leadership. Lipman-Blumen (2005) and Glaso et al., (2010) considered that the major gaps in the literature central to the coping strategies of the affected employees. In this current study, I focused on coping strategies used by the affected employees and their resulting behaviors from coping activities in the lived experience immediately after toxic events. The coping strategies and their resulting behaviors were focused together because they might be the same phenomenon in some circumstances.

Summary and Conclusions

A number of theories were reported in the literature to illustrate toxic leadership (Freyd & DePrince, 2013). Among the theories, betrayal trauma theory seemed to be most suitable for my study, since the literature suggested that leadership effectiveness

should be considered based on specific situations (Schyns & Schilling 2011) versus the trauma induced by toxic events. The literature focused on providing the foundation for understanding effective and toxic leadership (Antonakis & House, 2014).

The causes of toxic leadership identified in the literature were personality issues, workplace stress, poor leadership training, and ineffective leadership skills (Astrauskaite et al., 2014). Toxic leadership is harmful to organizations because it reduces worker satisfaction, performance, and productivity (Xu et al., 2015). Improvement solutions are available to reduce toxic leadership. From the leader's side, leaders with self-regulating capacity may choose to become workplace facilitators instead of bullies (Collins & Jackson, 2015). From the employee's side, it is important to develop coping strategies to deal with toxic leadership.

Both employees and organizations employed a variety of coping strategies to deal with toxic leaders (Simons & Sauer, 2013). Several coping strategies were found to be used by victims to cope with mobbing at work. These strategies included blaming themselves for the toxic event, avoiding contact with toxic leaders, and avoiding workplace situations or areas common with toxic incidences (Karatuna, 2015). On the other hand, organizations tended to use coping strategies as corporate policies and measures designed to promote employee health and safety (Kwan et al., 2014).

Heppell (2011) found that organizations with toxic leadership had a significantly higher employee turnover rate by the affected employees. Other employees ended up being less motivated and having ineffective performance (Harcourt et al., 2013).

Eventually, the organizations in Heppell's (2011) study lacked the adequate personnel to work, resulting in low productivity. For organizational behaviors derived from toxic leadership, a major challenge for the human resource department was costs incurred while managing toxic event outcomes (Becker et al., 2014).

Since toxic leadership harmed both individual employees and organizations, effective solutions are required. However, when I searched the literature, a research gap was found in effective coping strategies for affected employees, which was considered as the major gap in the literature (Glaso et al., 2010; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). To fill the literature gap, I focused on coping strategies used by the affected employees, and their resulting behaviors from coping activities in the lived experience immediately after toxic events. Furthering the understanding of how affected employees cope and how they behave, a qualitative multiple case study with its research methodology is outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 describes the research design, methodological guidelines, data collection procedures and data analysis plan, as well as the issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. Toxic leadership has a negative impact on the well-being employees and organizations (Cheang & Applebaum, 2015; Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015; Vickers, 2014). For organizations, toxic leadership results in lower production through decreased performance and potentially lower revenue. In this chapter, I describe the research design, research methodology, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan. I also describe issues of trustworthiness in my study.

Research Design and Rationale

Toxic leadership is prevalent in organizations. The rate of employees affected by toxic leadership reached 56% in 2014 with over 53 million people in the United States (Namie et al., 2014). Researchers have found that workplace stress, poor leadership training, ineffective leadership skills, and personality traits are the primary causes for the development of toxic leadership (Himmer, 2016). Himmer (2016) found that toxic leadership yielded negative outcomes not only in employees, but also in organizations. Employee victims and witnesses experienced significant negative impacts such as psychological and mental stress, destabilization of work associations, and increased conflicts. In addition, organizations experienced a significant reduction in creativity and productivity (Himmer, 2016).

In the limited scholarly archive on the topic, researchers have found that coping strategies include: (a) seeking help, (b) avoiding toxic leaders, (c) doing nothing, (d) confronting the toxic leader, and (e) forgiving the toxic leader (Karatuna, 2015; Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). Job dissatisfaction was associated with increased absenteeism, increased turnover rates, and a decreased level of performance (Erickson, Shaw, Murray, & Branch, 2015). Boddy (2015) examined the negative impacts of toxic leadership on employees and found that it was unclear how the workers coped with their stress and negative feeling derived from toxic leadership. Thus far, few studies have addressed the behaviors displayed by the employees during the coping phase (Himmer, 2016; Salin, 2001). Researchers called for more studies to assist in understanding coping strategies (Glaso et al., 2010).

To fill the literature gap, I answered three research sub-questions:

SQ1: How did employees under toxic leadership cope with the situation as it was happening?

SQ2: How did employees cope after the initial incident during a designated coping phase strategies up to 1 year or less after the initial event?

SQ3: What were the differences, if any, between how affected employees coped and how witnessed viewed the coping strategies?

For this study, I considered two research approaches: phenomenological and multiple case study. In phenomenological studies, researchers focus on meaning construction of essential elements in a lived human experience (Patton, 2014). According

to Pedrosa et al. (2011), phenomenological researchers extract the fundamental nature of experience felt by humans regarding a phenomenon. Phenomenological research is used to detail experiences and identify the *hows* and *whys* of a phenomenon.

On the other hand, researchers use case study to delve into the *how, what*, and *why* of a situation through reviewing data based on background, programs, snap-shot conditions, and environmental interactions that provide new insights into existing or emerging theories to explain human social behavior (Yin, 2012). Yin (2012) explained that a case study emphasizes phenomena through data collection in natural settings to capture real-life context. A case study requires in-depth data collection from multiple sources (Patton, 2014). Case and Light (2011) explained that a case study is an examination of a single class of phenomena. Zivkovic (2012) noted that a case study design could include more samples than other qualitative approaches. Thomas (2012) observed that case studies are more useful when comparing current and previous studies.

A multiple case study can help researchers understand phenomena through the lived experience of participants; therefore, I decided to adopt a multiple case study design. I studied the individuals and events to understand the how and why of coping strategies and behaviors. I did not focus on factors that impact the participants regarding the environment or events outside of the organization.

I interviewed those who witnessed toxic leadership as a third party but who were not directly affected by the toxic event. The witnesses who observed toxic leadership provided an additional perspective to how employee victims coped and behaved during

and after toxic events. This additional perspective from witnesses enhanced the validity of data obtained from victims. My goal was to understand how the affected employees coped with toxic leadership and the resulting behaviors, which may have been the same. The affected employee's coping strategy may determine his or her behavior as a result of the toxic event. In this study, I followed the qualitative research approach from a prior study (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004), as reviewed in Chapter 2.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was that of the researcher. In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. I collected both primary data and secondary data by conducting telephone interviews with participants from two different perspectives on my topic, and I analyzed and reported the data. I clarified assumptions about the study, removed preconceived beliefs of outcomes, and developed detailed steps for data collection, the decision process, and node determination.

I did not anticipate having any professional, academic, or personal relationship with any of the participants. If such a relationship did exist, I documented it. Additionally, if any participant worked with any of my former employers, I documented that as well. Little bias was introduced by my relationship with the participants given that I had neither a prior personal relationship, nor a shared employer. I believe little bias existed in the data collection and analysis; however, in Chapter 4 I have appropriately documented any bias.

I recruited participants online, and they came from multiple locations and organizations in the United States. Residents of other countries were not accepted as participants in the study. I used online research participant pools, social media, and websites with forums identifying participants dealing with relevant experiences of toxic leadership or corporate bullies. For those participants who agreed to an interview, I sent a formal request for contact information of colleagues or friends who may have also experienced or witnessed the toxic event. This sampling method used was the snowball technique.

I requested participant permission to share the study results with the university and via publication. I obtained the name, telephone number, and email address of study participants, which I have not and will not share with the university or any other entity. I coded participant names to protect their identity. I gathered limited demographic data on the participants based on the sensitive nature of the topic and to reduce any fear of retaliation from the toxic leader. I required participants to sign a consent agreement before the telephone interview to maintain participant confidentiality. I requested written permission from career and corporate bullying website owners to post the study description and my contact information. I electronically obtained permission through emails. I provided the collection of website owner emails granting me permission to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) with my full application. I obtained IRB approval before data collection began.

Methodology

Social science studies are either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. Quantitative research involves the collection of numeric data to test a hypothesis (Kupers, 2014). Data for this case study included the perceptions of the participants, and a case study derives meaning from the interpretation of collected data as opposed to testing hypotheses (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, the quantitative approach was not appropriate.

I chose a qualitative multiple case study design to explore what motivates employees to use various coping skills when confronted with toxic leadership behavior. Although qualitative research is used in a variety of disciplines, Whiteley (2012) stated that it is most commonly used in social science research. Qualitative research provided the best method for studying the effects of toxic leadership to understand types of coping strategies and resulting behaviors.

Qualitative research is intended to explore a targeted population's perceptions and behaviors related to the research topic (Snyder, 2012). It is based on the understanding that reality is made by individuals through their interactions with the social world. Qualitative researchers strive to understand the meaning individuals construct regarding their experiences and how they understand their world (Snyder, 2012). The qualitative nature of a case study enabled me to collect in-depth and detailed data from multiple sources (Snyder, 2012). I used a multiple case study design to research employees' coping strategies and behaviors when dealing with toxic events.

The participants recruited for this study included both victims of and witnesses to toxic events. Witnesses may also be significantly affected by the toxic events leading to the development of psychological and mental stress; therefore, the perspectives of witnesses may confirm or disconfirm the victims' perspectives. I used data from witnesses to verify whether the affected employees misunderstood the situation or were being too sensitive. Witnesses might harbor bias toward the toxic leaders due to factors such as loyalty, similar personality traits, or hatred of the victims. I chose witnesses independently of each other, and they were not connected to the same toxic event, if possible, to avoid biased results. Yet, with snowball sampling, a connection might still have occurred. To my knowledge, no established links between the witnesses and the victims existed. If one existed, I was unaware, and I did not make any reference to the other participant or data collection and discouraged any conversation of such.

Participant Selection Logic

Identifying coping strategies and resulting behaviors of employees affected by toxic leadership was at times difficult because many affected employees and witnesses were reluctant to discuss details openly. Some feared being discovered and terminated or avoided disclosure due to embarrassment. I kept participants' identities confidential by securing only first name, email, and telephone information. I destroyed first name and telephone information after data collection. During data analysis, a numbered code replaced the participant name on the consent form. I placed this number on the

transcribed audio data and used it to reference the participant without revealing subject demographic data. The consent forms will remain locked in a cabinet in my home office.

The primary and secondary samples helped achieve data saturation and consisted of 29 participants, including 14 affected employees, 13 witnesses, and participant 3 who was both an affected employee and a witness. Yin (2014) noted that a case study focuses on a small number of participants. I limited participants to those between the ages of 30 and 65, working or having worked as a paid employee in at least two organizations of any type or size, willing to participate in a telephone interview, and not associated with me personally or with Walden University in an employment capacity. Students are exceptions. The participants must have experienced what they perceived as a toxic leadership event directly or as a witness as defined for the study on the study information sheet (Appendix C). I conducted validation of participant selection criteria using the definition of a toxic leader and experience as either recipient of or witness to at least one toxic leadership event.

The desired sample for this study was approximately 30 total participants, and I recruited them online from research pools, social media, and blog-based websites on toxic leaders or corporate bullies. Interviews continued until saturation was achieved at a total of 29 participants. Most researchers agreed that 10 to 15 interviews are sufficient for saturation (Baker & Edwards 2012; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006;). All the data I found referenced interviewing in general to reach saturation. Affected employees often search for other employment; therefore, solicitation for participants was posted on job seeking

websites. A sample size of 29 total participants allowed for data saturation and a good

representation of the overall primary and secondary populations of victims of and

witnesses to toxic leadership. Once I had interviewed all of the affected employee and

witness participants, I did not acquire any new or different data; thus, obtaining saturation

(Baker, Edwards & Dodge, 2012; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006;). In the telephone

interviews, a toxic event was explained to me by the participant. The answer to this first

open-ended question clearly determined if the participant experienced or witnessed this

type of event (Appendix A).

Through encouraging the snowball technique of sampling, I asked the participants

to forward my contact information to anyone that they know who have experienced or

witnessed a toxic event. This technique has been used in various studies such as one

conducted by Johnson, Boutain, Tsai, and Beaton (2015). I believe this was very valuable

as participants knew the victim of the event or some who witnessed it.

The participant treatment adhered to guidelines compliant with Walden

University. Kraemer and Blasey (2015) stated that the researcher should always put the

well-being of the participant before the research. During the interview, if a participant

became emotionally overwhelmed, I ended the interview and gave the participant the

option to gain composure. After the participant regained composure, I gave the

participant an opportunity to continue the interview or withdraw from the study. If a

participant did not regain composure or were to potentially harm to themselves or me, I

was prepared to contact emergency medical response authorities based on participant

telephone number to assist the participant. I followed all NIH guidelines on both participant protection and data collection as outlined by Walden University. I obtained IRB approval before any study actions.

Instrumentation

I was the data collection instrument in this qualitative multiple case study. I collected the primary data using semistructured interviews guided by open-ended questions. I collected the secondary data from interviews of a secondary population of participants who had not directly experienced toxic leadership but witnessed others experiencing a toxic event. The primary and secondary data sources are among the required sources for a case study based on Yin (2012).

Data collection instruments collect data from research participants to gather useful data information for social studies (Shea, Grinde, & Elmslie, 2011). Instrumentation is pivotal in a qualitative study and its process because it is the only process providing the necessary information required for the study (Xu & Storr, 2012). As the only and primary data collection instrument, I collected data from interviewing participants while making every effort to minimize bias through constant monitoring and self-evaluation. Because of the in-depth literature review, I did foresee a potential bias threat as confirmation bias in which the researcher forms a belief and uses the participant's responses to confirm that belief. To avoid this bias, I constantly reevaluated participant data to challenge any preconceived assumptions I might have formed from the literature review. Yin (2011) suggested that the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument, and Leedy and

Ormrod (2013) argued that within data collection the researcher needs to develop new instruments or re-use existing instruments. In a qualitative study, researchers facilitate conversation during interviews to make sense of research data, which is considered a function of the primary person as a research instrument (Chereni, 2014)

I conducted this study using one primary data source collected from interviews. The semi-structured interviews were designed to use prepared interview questions guided by identified themes from the literature review with a systemic and consistent manner and with meaningful probes to enable elaborate responses from interviewees (Yin, 2014). The interview protocol (Appendix A & B) was designed because it is the key for topic focus and reliability enhancement purposes. As suggested by Yin (2014), the interview protocol of a case study consists of an overview, data collection procedures, interview questions, and a guide for the case study report.

I allowed each participant to choose the date and time for the one on one semi-structured interviews. The telephone interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes in data gathering process since this is a standard length of time in most interviews with open-ended questions. I audio recorded all conversations related to the research topic. In addition to the audio recording, I maintained handwritten notes on observed verbal queues detailing the emotional status of the participants through listening to their voice tone. In an interview, qualitative researchers need to detail confirmability through an audit trail, reflexivity, and triangulation (Black, Palombaro, & Dole, 2013). I compared the data gathered from audio recordings with my written interview notes and the data

from my secondary source population and data from Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) in the literature review, which was confirmed useful by Oleinik (2011). I obtained secondary data from a secondary population in my study who witnessed someone experiencing a toxic event and is discussed further in the Data Analysis Plan section.

Transcript review is a process consisting a raw data review from the participant who supplied the data. I requested that participants review my interpretation of their data once analyzed. Mero-Jaffe (2011) stated that transcript review is critical to ensuring the data collected is accurate. I requested participants check transcribed audio of their interview via email within two weeks of the interview. Also, a process called member checking is considered important in an interview study, which is a participant validation process to ensure accuracy and credibility of stories reported (Koelsch, 2013). This process is also called data cleaning to ensure no useful data are missing and no additional wrong data is included (Yin, 2014). I requested the participants return any data and interpretation corrections within two weeks of receipt in the same delivery mode, though these efforts will be at different time during the study. I re-entered the verified and confirmed data into data collection set. I processed this data using Leximancer data analysis software. The data analytics software coded and interpret the data into themes and analyzed data then exported as Excel files.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I collected data via telephone interviews. Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury (2013) stated that telephone interviews, as opposed to face-to-face interviews, have advantages and

disadvantages of in qualitative research. The advantages of a telephone interview are that it saves time and travel costs, allows for greater confidentiality on sensitive topics, and does not yield significantly different data compared to a face-to-face interview (Irvine, et al., 2013). It does bear some disadvantages, such as lacking face-to-face contact to which restricts rapport development, noting visual responses to questions, and missing a natural encounter. Irvine et al. concluded and suggested that a valuable component to a telephone interview on qualitative mode is the inclusion of interviewees' views on their experience. The advantages of telephone interviewing well suits this study, since it has greater with greater confidentiality on sensitive topics versus in-person interview where researchers need to acquire the participant's home address in order to conduct the interview. However, I conducted all interviews over the telephone to remain consistent. Conducting the interview over the telephone versus in-person may also provide for greater participant comfortability. I took the suggestion from the Irvine, et al. to pay more attention and include interviewees' views on their experience while conducting the interviews.

Most importantly the interview questions must be open-ended to capture complete narratives of the participant which can be logically categorized and analyzed further (Silverman, 2000). I designed and executed the interview questions so that any potential bias is eliminated (Appendices C & D). Otherwise, the data can be easily skewed and distorted resulting in inaccurate and unreliable data results (Cunliffe & Locke, 2015). I rehearsed asking the interview questions with my family members before the first interview to ensure I conveyed a confident yet comforting tone.

In this research, the primary data gathering method was telephone interviews. Waters (2012) explained that in a case study, data could be collected in a fashion that detailed the participants' lived experience. Once participants were recruited and before conducting the study, I asked the participants to read the interview instructions and research consent that they received via email. The first part of the interview (Appendix A) was close-ended questions to gather demographic information from participants. The second part of the interview (Appendix B) was open-ended and contains questions about the toxic event, coping strategies, and the resulting behaviors. The demographic information obtained in Appendix A allowed me to gain a full picture of the environment and circumstance at the time of the toxic. It also allowed me to determine if a participant's coping strategy was somewhat successful based on his or her interview responses in comparison with a portion of the demographic information obtained.

I scheduled participants for the interview during a contact time of two weeks. I informed the participants that they might leave the study at any time. No participants left nor scheduled a subsequent interview, nor did any withdraw from the study. If participants chose to leave the study, then they would have been asked for a brief explanation over the telephone at that time. Had any participant left the study, I would have recorded the participant's explanation for leaving the study. During the interviews, I advised participants not to mention any organizations or leaders by name. If that occurred, I removed the name data from the transcript and noted the confidentiality policies, which protect the participants, the organizations, and the leaders.

During the interview, I sought to obtain a description of the toxic event as remembered by the affected employee through their lived experience as for how it made the employee feel, how they coped with the situation and the noticeable behaviors that they displayed resulting from the coping strategies. During the witness interview, I sought to obtain a description of the toxic event as remembered by the witness through their lived experience as a witness as for how the victim coped with the toxic event, and the noticeable behaviors from the victim. In case a follow-up session was needed due to time constraints, I asked the participant permission to schedule a subsequent session within two weeks from the date of the interview.

At the end of each interview, I asked if the participants had any questions about the study, shared the anticipated completion date, and ensured that the participants have the correct email to request a copy of the study. The frequency of the interviews depended on the participant responses to solicitations for the research participants. In consideration of participant time, each interview was limited to approximately 60 minutes unless the participant communicated a strong desire to share further details or collected data lead to additional questions. I recorded the interviews using a Dictaphone 8GB digital telephone interview recording device. Should the participants have changed their mind about me recording the interview, even after reading the study information and signing the consent form, I recorded their responses by written documentation.

Based on the requirement of qualitative research and the need to group various outcomes and perceptions of the participants, interview questions were designed as open-

ended and clearly depict the study area. The interview allowed for data collection of lived-experiences leading to data analysis (Silverman, 2013), which answered the general research questions of how affected employees coped with toxic leadership and what resulting behaviors exhibited derived from toxic leadership.

The data collection and analysis specifically answered the following research questions: (a) how did employees under toxic leadership cope with the situation?, (b) how did employees behave under toxic leadership during the coping phase?, and (c) what are differences among affected employees and other employees on viewing the coping strategies?

After data gathering, I performed transcript reviews by requesting all participants examine the audio transcription files to ensure no useful data are missing and no extra and wrong data are included. I accomplished the transcript review by emailing the transcribed data to the participant and requesting any revisions, and the confirmation of accuracy be emailed back to me within two weeks. The requirement of transcript review is suggested by Mero-Jaffe (2011). I re-entered verified and confirmed data into data collection after the transcript review, and I processed the checked data using Leximancer Text Mapping Software Program for data analysis as confirmed useful in data analysis by Sotiriadou, Brouwers, and Le (2014). I coded the data and interpreted them with themes, and I exported analyzed data as Excel files.

I conducted interviews with a secondary population of participants who did not directly experience toxic leadership but did witness someone experiencing a toxic event

to obtain and conduct my analysis of secondary data. I analyzed primary and secondary coping strategy data collected through telephone interviews with study data from Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) to complete the data analysis. The data analysis warranted confirmation that the data gathered are convincing through credibility and validity, and the data analysis is aligned with the literature, research questions, and current requirements from the research field. If not, an error in the study may have occurred.

I stored collected data in alignment with the IRB requirements. I stored data on a password protected external hard drive and will be the only personnel with exclusive and password guarded access to all data. I locked the hard drive with the saved primary, the secondary data, and the interview printed files in a locked, fire-resistant steel cabinet in my residence. Only I will possess the access key to the cabinet. I stored an electronic copy of all data and forms on a password-protected, external hard-drive locked in a safety deposit box located in the basement of my residence. Only I will have key access. This additional storage is for data redundancy should copies of the original data be stolen or lost in a disaster during or within 5 years of the study. I manually deleted all audio recordings after transcription via the audio recording device and record static over the digital hard drive. I deleted participant emails on my local machine and on the Walden University email server once the study was published. I destroyed all collected hard copy paper files and notes via document shredding.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative research design of a multiple case study is employed when the research is related to awareness of a specific event based on the subject's perception of the reality (Reiners, 2012). The main goal of a case study was to describe a given phenomenon. The research design attempts to describe lived experiences in the way that is more of a humanistic approach when compared to other research designs, such as experimental and correlational research designs (Hancock & Algozzine, 2015). A case study design does not depend on previous assumptions since it relies on the description given by the participants.

I collected data from multiple sources and performed data analysis as recommended by Yin (2014). In this study, I gathered data from multiple employees of more than one organization; and included primary and secondary data from different sample populations within my study. This approach is suitable because when performing an integrated study across units, specifics and differences between units are needed to obtain unbiased data to achieve unbiased conclusions (Yin, 2014).

The data analysis method resulted in increased internal validity through accurate analysis of information from affected employees about their coping strategies, in which the evidence from the occurrence of an event may reflect or have an influence on another event in the same or a different organization (Heale & Forbes, 2013). In this case, an integration study provides a clearer picture of reality in the interviewed populations instead of restricting it to one single population. Based on the literature, evidence from

only one population, or organization, may be limited and misleading and reach incorrect conclusions. Gathering evidence and information across organizations rather than focusing on one provides a greater understanding of toxic events and their coping strategies.

During the analysis, I mapped free nodes back to the appropriate interview question as the data corresponded to a particular research question. I used the Leximancer Text Mapping software program to organize the transcribed data for analysis. It is a text mining software that is used to create a conceptual map of themes and their interrelationships from the data extracted from text documents, such as interview transcripts. Compared to Nvivo and other qualitative data analysis software programs the Leximancer software program is superior because it can produce conceptual schematics to help visualize complex themes and concepts (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014).

I coded the data with confidential participant names replaced by code numbers as participant numbers from 1 to 30. I determined codes, nodes, and themes using Leximancer software to identify word meaning and frequencies. I conducted data analysis following the analysis steps recommended by Rowley (2012) as data acquaintance; data coding; data set classification, organization, and interpretation. Finally, after completing the data analysis, I performed the data report.

I separated data into assigned codes, merged the codes into nodes, regrouped the nodes into themes, completed an information assessment, and developed conclusions based on analyzed data results. In the final step of data analysis, I assessed the primary

and secondary data with themes to organize and analyze data results based on the theoretical framework of betrayal trauma theory. I drew conclusions and developed findings from exploring the coping strategies from victim employees and compared them to the witness' opinions of coping strategies, the literature data, and the data analysis from multiple sources. At the end of the data analysis, I made recommendations and suggestions to affected employees and organizations to assist in future management of toxic leadership.

<div align="center">**Issues of Trustworthiness**</div>

Credibility

As one of the critical requirements in issues of trustworthiness of qualitative research, credibility is the goal of increasing credit and minimizing errors (Perry, 2012). To maintain credibility, it is important that a researcher helps the participants maintain the consistency by responding with the same answers to the same questions (Trotter, 2012). For this purpose, I followed credibility criteria from the beginning to its end to ensure that the credibility requirements were met (Morse, 2015). I have elaborated on interview methods to make them stable and maintain similarity throughout all time periods of this study. I have discussed transcript review in which participants validate the data collection was accurate. I have also outlined a process of accurate interpretation of participants' responses increasing the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to transfer the findings and conclusions to other frameworks. Transferability is defined as the possibility of a research study to be transferable and applicable to other settings or populations (Thomson, Petty, Ramage, & Moore, 2011). I analyzed the detailed account of the background of this study to determine if the conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions are transferable to other employees and organizations suffering from toxic leadership. This analysis will help the reader make his or her own conclusion on transferability. The process involved comparing the specific details and methods of this study with similar studies from literature publications.

Dependability

Dependability of data results was validated by literature review to obtain guidelines (Perry, 2012). I explored the appropriate selection of relevant factors and theories within a chosen context, which further warranted the dependability of this study. Additionally, since higher response rates in a social study increases dependability, as higher response rates indicate higher dependability and significance from data (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). I ensured data saturation dependability by continued recruitment of participant candidates and focusing on response rates in the participant recruitment. The size of the sample does not ensure saturation but when no new data is obtained, leading to no additional themes, then data saturation is achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A novice researcher, such as me, may not realize when data saturation has been achieved (Fusch &

Ness, 2015) and because of this, I consulted with my dissertation committee for advice and guidance to confirm data saturation was achieved and that I did not require a larger sample size. To strengthen the dependability of the study, I compared coping strategies of two different populations within my study with study data from Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) as a means to verify the research findings (Carter, Bryatn-lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a requirement to ensure that the study is conformably shaped by the participants, but not by bias, motivation, or interest of researchers (Thomson et al., 2011). It is a narrative account of steps taken from the beginning to the end of a study. I maintained confirmability of this study starting from data gathering and through all research processes. One of the techniques in confirmability establishment is using an audit trail. To create a data audit trail, I asked an external auditor to transcribe the recorded audio of the telephone interviews in addition to me transcribing the same recording. The purpose of employing an external auditor is a method of attesting to the confirmability of the study. I also performed transcript reviews to ensure that all data collected was accurate. Once I had interpreted the final data set, I completed member checking to ensure all interpretations were confirmed and checked by participants.

Validity

The validation process for a case study is relatively different from other research types and includes internal validity, external validity, and trustworthiness (Leedy &

Ormrod, 2013). Internal validity concerns the factors affecting the research site and participants, and data collection devices and procedures. I achieved internal validity in this study through interpretive validity and trustworthiness. The most important part of internal validity is to ensure that the samples represent the research population. I ensured internal validity by recruiting interview participants that represent victims and witnesses of toxic leadership.

Trustworthiness is another vital aspect of case study research design (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, et al., 2015). Trustworthiness of a case study can be evaluated using data set comparison, transcript review, and chain of evidence. In data triangulation, multiple data sources are used, such as primary and secondary, from difference sources to verify research findings (Carter, Bryatn-lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). I used the data set comparison to support or refute data obtained and used member checking by restating the summary interpretation of the collected information to the interview participants to ensure that my understanding is correct. Furthermore, I used a chain of evidence to organize the research question, procedures, raw data and data results.

In addition, data validity could be enhanced when the data is systematically organized so that a sensibly wise person will reach the same or similar conclusions (Mackay, Carey, & Stevens et a., 2011). Pattern matching, representative checking, and code checking could be strategies for this purpose (Saldana, 2013). I achieved systemic organization using outlier analysis, which requires accounting for highly dissimilar cases.

I also used pattern matching, representative checking, and code checking to enhance data validity.

Ethical Procedures

As an ethical study, an important and critical aspect is to protect participants (Kaye et al., 2015). I followed the International Research Board (IRB) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) guidelines for ethics in social science research to protect the participants through signing informed consent, confidential handling of personal information, obtaining agreement from participants and allowing voluntary withdrawal. Data collection did not begin until IRB approval was obtained. The IRB approval certification number is # 06-01-17-0152896. I sent an informed consent to all participants informing their rights of privacy to protect their identity and personal information and to avoid physical or emotional harm. I required all participants agree to the informed consent before beginning their participation.

I assured the participants that the information collected will only be used for research purposes and will keep the personal information of the participants confidential. I made the participant identity confidential by replacing their names with a participant number. I will not disclose participants' names and the names of their organizations, if accidentally given, for which they work in any other studies. I learned the National Institute of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research guidelines and completed the NIH Web-based training course of Protecting Human Research Participants. I locked the hard drive with all data in a locked, fire-resistant steel cabinet; and only I will have

access to the key. I will delete and destroy all collected files completely post 5 years from study publication. I acquired approval from the IRB at Walden University before any research actions are taken.

Qualitative research requires that researchers obtain permission from each participant before conducting interviews (Rowley, 2012). It is necessary to have the participants sign the informed consent form before interviewing begins, which serves as an agreement for the participant to participate in this study, to indicate that the participants agree to participate and agree to release their information (Yin, 2014). I emailed the informed consent form to each participant and ensured all consented via returned email before any interviews began. I reviewed each returned informed consent email to verify the agreement of the participation before the interview started. When each of the telephone interviews started, I asked if the participant agreed with the informed consent and reminded the participant of the use of a recorder to record the conversation in the interview as outlined in the participant consent form.

Qualitative researchers are advised to provide participants with a copy of the interview transcript after interviews to ensure the accuracy and reliability (Rowley, 2012). I sent interview transcripts to each participant via email to review and proofread for accuracy and reliability purposes. In a social study, participants need to understand the study purpose and their rights to withdraw voluntarily by sending emails to me or calling me at any given time (Schwieter, 2011). I notified each participant about their

withdrawal rights. I informed the participants that they will not receive any incentive or compensation when participating in this study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand what resulting behaviors and coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. Toxic leadership is prevalent in organizations. Literature called for more research to assist in the understanding of coping strategies, which was the major gap in the literature (Glaso et al., 2010). To fill the literature gap, I chose a multiple case study to understand how the affected employees coped with the toxic leadership and the resulting behaviors. My role in this study was the researcher. I chose qualitative research because it can build an understanding of human behaviors and its motivation (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I sought to assimilate a composite and gain knowledge and build an understanding of human behaviors and what motivates the behaviors.

In this study, a sample size of approximately 26 participants consisting of 15 victims and 11 witnesses was used. This sample size is supported by both Yin (2014) and Baker & Edwards (2012), as a case study focuses on a small number of participants. I was the data collection instrument to collect primary and secondary data from different sample populations, victims of and witness to toxic leadership, using semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions. The data collection occurred via telephone

interview. Leximancer Text Mapping Software Program helped to organize the data for analysis.

My intent was to conduct an honest and unbiased study. I followed credibility criteria in this study from the beginning to its end to ensure that the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability requirements are met (Morse, 2015). In addition, I followed ethical research guidelines and validation process when conducting this study.

Chapter 4 contains details of the data collection, the data results, and the data analysis. Participant demographic data are accounted for within the data collection. The following chapter also details evidence of trustworthiness from this study as well as a summary of the overall data analysis section.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping

strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves,

other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors

that result from these strategies. Chapter 4 details the results of this study as well as the

process for data collection and analysis. I used a multiple case study to discover how and

why affected employees cope with toxic leaders and what employee behaviors ensued

(Zainal, 2017). In what follows, I present the results to understand each coping

mechanism and behavior. I also describe the data analysis steps and rationale for each

step. Finally, I discuss how a toxic event might have carried over into the affected

employee's home life.

Study participants were paid employees of organizations where they encountered

a toxic leader or witnessed another employee encountering a toxic leader. The

overarching question guiding this study was the following: What coping strategies do

employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves and the

workplace as a whole, and what are the resulting employee behaviors? The following

research sub-questions apply:

SQ1: How did employees under toxic leadership cope with the situation as it was

happening?

SQ2: How did employees cope following the initial incident during a designated

coping phase (one year or less after the initial event)?

SQ3: What were the differences, if any, between how affected employees coped and how the witnesses viewed the affected employee's coping strategies?

Research Setting

I collected research data via telephone interviews, which prohibited me from seeing visual cues that might have been given by the participants or observing organizational conditions if the interviews were held at their places of employment. None of the interview questions asked the participants about organizational conditions or climate. I have no personal knowledge of any organizational variables that would have impacted the participants in this study or their responses. Other than the participant consent form and data collected during the interview, no personal or organizational data were captured. The rationale behind my decision not to collect this data was that this study focused on coping strategies, not the psyche of the participants or the organizational climates. That information might be useful to include in a subsequent study on the topic of toxic leadership.

Demographics

The demographics of the participants who directly experienced a toxic leader are shown in Table 1. This group of participants was called Population 1.

Table 1

Population 1 Affected Employee Demographics–Age, Gender, & Industry

Participant no. (n = 15)	Participant age	Participant gender	Toxic leader gender	Industry
1	31 - 35	Female	Female	Healthcare
3	20 - 25	Female	Female	Pharmacy
4	36 - 40	Female	Male	Education
5	41 - 45	Female	Female	Insurance
6	41 - 45	Male	Female	Healthcare
7	31 - 35	Male	Male	Healthcare
8	46 - 50	Male	Male	Healthcare
9	41 - 45	Female	Female	Education
13	31 - 35	Male	Female	Finance/banking
15	31 - 35	Female	Female	Military
16	46 - 50	Female	Male	Molding distribution
17	18 - 19	Male	Male	Military
18	31 - 35	Male	Male	IT
19	26 - 30	Male	Male	Automotive
21	31 - 35	Female	Female	Retail

Population 1 consisted of 53.3% female participants and 46.7% male participants. Of the 15 participants in this population, there were 10 different industries represented, with healthcare being the dominant industry at 26.7% of the total. Same-gender toxic events were more dominant with 40% of them being female-to-female, and 33% of the toxic events being male-to-male for Population 1. Female participant/male leader toxic events scenarios and male participant/female leader toxic event scenarios both comprised 13.3% of Population 1.

Participants' ages were self-reported and indicative of the age in which they encountered the toxic leader. The most predominant age range for affected employees

was between 31 and 35 years old. All of the participants indicated they were residents of

the United States and no further geographic information was asked of them.

Table 2 shows the position of the affected employees, the position of the toxic

leaders, and the reporting relationship between the two for Population 1.

Table 2

Population 1 Witness-Reported Affected Employee Demographics–Age, Gender, & Industry

Participant no. (n = 15)	Participant position	Toxic leader position	Reporting relationship
1	Nurse	Nurse manager	Direct leader
3	Pharmacy supervisor	Pharmacy director	2nd level leader
4	Data coordinator	Superintendent	2nd level leader
5	Nurse team lead	Nurse manager	2nd level leader
6	Workforce supervisor	Workforce director	Direct leader
7	Workforce administrator	Consultant	2nd level leader
8	Operations manager	Director	2nd level leader
9	Professor	Dean	Direct leader
13	Financial analyst	Finance manager	Direct leader
15	Research assistant	Principle investigator	Direct leader
16	Sales supervisor	Sales manager	Direct leader
17	Jet Mechanic	Sergeant	Direct leader
18	Programmer	Programmer	Direct leader
19	Service specialist	Service manager	Direct leader
21	Lead cashier	Customer service supervisor	2nd level leader

Of the participants for Population 1, 33.3% were leaders themselves. Of the toxic

leaders, 60% were the participants' direct leaders and 40% were in management and

supervisory positions hierarchically above the participant's direct leader. Of the toxic

leaders' positions, 80% of them suggested more formal leadership titles, while the

remaining titles (programmer, consultant, principle investigator) were less obvious.

The demographics of the affected employees as reported by the participants who

witnessed a toxic event or events are shown below in Table 3. This group of participants

was called Population 2.

Table 3

Population 2 Witness-Reported Affected Employee Demographics–Age, Gender, &
Industry

Participant no. (*n*=14)	Participant age	Affected employee gender	Toxic leader gender	Industry
2	41 – 45	Female	Female	Finance
3	20 – 25	Female	Female	Pharmacy
10	36 – 40	Female	Male	Construction
11	41 – 45	Female	Male	Healthcare
12	36 - 40	Female	Male	Education
14	41 - 45	Female	Female	Family Law
28	36 - 40	Male	Female	Pharmacy
20	26 - 30	Female	Female	Entertainment
22	20 - 25	Female	Female	Entertainment
23	36 - 40	Female	Female	Healthcare
24	31 - 35	Male	Female	Construction
25	41 - 45	Male	Female	Automotive
26	36 - 40	Female	Male	Military
27	31 - 35	Male	Female	Retail

The participants in Population 2 reported the gender of the affected employees they

witnessed as 71.42% female and 23.1% male. The specific genders of the participants

who observed the affected employees were captured but not thought to be of consequence

to the observation and, therefore, not analyzed as part of this study. Of the 14 participants in this population, there were ten different industries represented with no dominant industry. Participants supplied the age at which they witnessed the toxic leader. The predominant age range of affected employees that Population 2 participants witnessed was between 36 and 40 years old. All the participants indicated that they themselves and the observed affected employees were residents of the United States which conforms to the sampling parameters and IRB study approval.

Table 4 shows the affected employee's position, the toxic leader's position, and the reporting relationship.

Table 4

Population 2 Witness-Reported Affected Employee Demographics–Positions & Reporting Relationships

Participant no. (*n*=14)	Affected employee position	Toxic leader position	Reporting relationship
2	Operations supervisor	Operations director	Direct leader
3	Pharmacy supervisor	Pharmacy director	2nd level leader
10	Event planner	Partner	Direct leader
11	Nurse	Nurse manager	Direct leader
12	Teacher	Principle	Direct leader
14	Paralegal	Law partner	2nd level leader
28	Supervisor	Corporate manager	Direct leader
20	Scheduler	Manager	Direct leader
22	Secretary	Manager	Direct leader
23	Nurse	Nurse manager	Direct leader
24	Payroll clerk	Office manager	-
25	Salesman	Sales manager	Direct leader
26	Sergeant	Captain	2nd level leader

27	Department lead	Department manager	Direct leader

Of the affected employees for Population 2, 26.7% were leaders themselves. Of the toxic

leaders, 83.3% were the affected employee's direct leader, and 16.7% were a leader

above the affected employee's direct leader. One witness was not able to recall the

position of the toxic leader of the affected employee. All of the toxic leaders witnessed by

Population 2 participants held official leadership titles.

Data Collection

A total of 29 participants provided data that were included in the data analysis.

Population 1 consisted of 15 employees who were affected by a toxic leader and

Population 2 consisted of 14 employees who witnessed another employee being affected

by a toxic leader. Initially I estimated that 30 participants (15 per population) would be

necessary to reach data saturation. Data saturation for Population 2 was achieved with

only 14 participants. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) stated that the number of participants

and saturation might not equate to a standard of research quality. For this study, no new

information was learned in subsqent interviews, so no additional participants were

deemed necessary.

I used the following criteria for participant selection: (a) being between the ages

of 30 and 65, (b) working or having worked as a paid employee in at least two

organizations of any type or size, and (c) having experienced or witnessed someone

affected by a toxic leader as described in Chapters 1 and 3. It is necessary to clarify that

the participants did not need to be at or above the age of 30 at or during the time of the

toxic event. This age range was set to ensure participants had worked within at least two organizations and could understand the concept of toxic leadership and how it differs from being coached on performance or other work-related issues.

I recruited participants for this study by making postings on the Internet and over social media. Each interested participant was required to read the participant consent form and reply via email stating his or her consent, or sign and return the participant consent form via United States Postal Service. Of the total participant count, 86% used email to consent, while the remaining 14% mailed a signed copy of the consent.

The method used for data collection with this study was the telephone interview. On average, and regardless of population, each interview lasted 60 minutes with the longest one running almost two hours. Interviews were scheduled for 2 hours. Most participants answered questions as asked but were eager to end the interview. This might be due to the sensitive nature of the study. I did ask probing and follow up questions as needed. After each interview was transcribed, I sent the transcription to the participant to review for accuracy, giving each participant the opportunity to add additional information or correct information given during the interview. The majority of the transcript reviews (86%) were returned from the participants by email and the remaining were returned via mail. Of the total transcribed interviews, only two made changes to their interview transcription. These changes were simple and clarified items such as exact position title.

I followed all of the items listed on the approved IRB application, with the exception of obtaining a total of 30 study participants due to only 29 participants being

necessary to reach data saturation. Precautions were taken to ensure the confidentiality of

the subjects by deleting their names, phone numbers, and email addresses once the study

was complete. No reportable issues occurred during the data collection phase of the

study. As noted in Chapter 3, I stored data on a password protected external hard drive

and I am the only personnel with exclusive and password guarded access to all data. I

locked the hard drive with the saved primary data, secondary data, and printed interview

files in a locked, fire-resistant steel cabinet in my residence. Only I possess the access

key to the cabinet. This method of storing data occurred during and after the interviews

were concluded and will be held there for no less than 5 years after the conclusion of the

study.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand what coping

strategies employees use to reduce negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves,

other employees, and the overall workplace; and the behaviors that result from these

strategies. The data analysis used the following the coding steps recommended by

Rowley (2012): (a) data organization; (b) data acquaintance to include classification,

coding and interpreting; and (c) data presentation and write-up. Through these steps of

analysis, I was able to provide a narrative of the data. Data analysis was performed using

the Leximancer software.

I extracted quotations from the participant-reviewed transcriptions stored as a

Microsoft Word document to understand participant experiences described within the

interviews. Following a data analysis path similar to Maxwell (2015), I divided the

process into four main sections: (a) the interview process and documentation; (b) the

presentation of codes and themes; (c) a report of how those affected by toxic leaders

cope, then behaved from those experiencing a toxic leader directly and those who

witnessed toxic events; and (d) an overall narrative of the data collected. The data is

provided first, followed by an account of coping and behaving per the lived and

witnessed experiences of the participants.

After interviewing and recording all participants, I transcribed interview

recordings into multiple Microsoft Word documents. I transcribed all of the recordings

within two weeks of the interview. To ensure the quality of transcription, I also employed

REV transcription service to transcribe the audio recordings and merged the

transcriptions, noting and reviewing any differences. Next, I relistened to the audio to

ensure I captured the correct verbiage. Each participant was sent a copy of the

transcription to review and edit if needed. Of the 29 participants, only two sent back

edited copies. Of the edited copies, there were no deletions, but only data additions such

as that describe effects of the toxic leader. For example, Participant 16 of Population 1

clarified that she was demoted before termination thus creating issues in her home life

due to decreased wages. By serving in a capacity as the interviewer and transcriber, I was

able to accurately interpret meaning from each participant's responses.

I recorded all participant demographic data on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and

I uploaded the transcribed recordings into the Leximancer software. Leximancer (n.d.)

software is useful for mining text, creating conceptual maps, and forming themes based on the researcher's direction using relationships or concepts. The use of data analysis software is important for forming accurate themes, creating concepts, and saving time based on the large amount of available data (Nunez-Mir, Iannone III, Pijanowski, Kong, & Fei, 2016). Using the Leximancer software, I was able to code and label data while the application matched the codes and labels to corresponding passages in the transcription documents. Afterwards, I was able to detect patterns and trends using the software and move further into the data analysis to discover common themes.

The Interview Process and Documentation

All interviews were conducted over the telephone because of the disparate geographical locations of the participants and to maintain consistency with the interview medium throughout the study. Of the 29 participants, most preferred to initiate the phone call to me and communicate for scheduling purposes via text messaging. I scheduled each interview for two hours; however, only four interviews reached or exceeded the two-hour mark. Each interview was digitally recorded. The average interview length was about one hour, with four of them lasting just over 30 minutes. The shorter interviews occurred because of either participant time constraints or the participants giving very few details in their responses. In some cases, where I received very few details I would repeat or rephrase questions to attempt to obtain more usable data. At the beginning of each interview, I stated the purpose of the study and that the interview was being recorded and confidential per the participant agreement; I reviewed the participant's understanding of

toxic leadership; and I reminded the participant to let me know if he or she felt uncomfortable at any time during the interview. None of the participants voiced concerns over being uncomfortable during any interview.

During each interview, I noted certain responses to follow up on with the participant and noted the time of the recording to ensure proper attention and interpretation. All interview recordings were transcribed and stored as Microsoft Word documents on a secure USB flash drive in a personal safe within my home office. A second copy of the study data was also stored in a safety deposit box in the basement of my home for redundancy. No personally identifying marks were made on any document to keep all participant identification confidential.

Interview Data

The data for this study was collected through participant interviews. During the interviews, I heard toxic leaders described as *terrible, mean, and evil* people who negatively affected organizations. The participants also discussed how they coped, how they felt, and how the toxic leaders affected their lives. Population 1's participants experienced toxic leaders themselves and gave very descriptive accounts of toxic leader events. Population 2 consisted of those participants who witnessed others encountering toxic leaders. The following section will detail the study results by population as they align with the research question.

Coding, Classifying, and Themes

Analysis was done on two sets of data, each within its own population (Population 1 and Population 2). The dataset for Population 1 consisted of participants who directly experienced a toxic leader. The second dataset for Population 2 consisted of participants who witnessed a toxic event. I followed Rowley's (2012) process for data analysis that included: (a) organizing the data set, (b) getting acquainted with the data; (c) classifying, coding, and interpreting the data; and, then (d) presenting and writing up the data.

Data were separated by participant responses to the open-ended interview questions. Statements and entire passages were pulled from the interview transcriptions and placed under each corresponding question within a Microsoft Word document. A multi-level, numerical coding system was applied to organize and better visualize the data. I used a single number digit for each sub-research question. I then assigned a two-digit number to question elements from interview questions relating to the sub-research question, followed by a three-digit code for emerging themes with four-digit codes being assigned to free nodes. Figure 1 best illustrates the coding method used to organize the data for analysis.
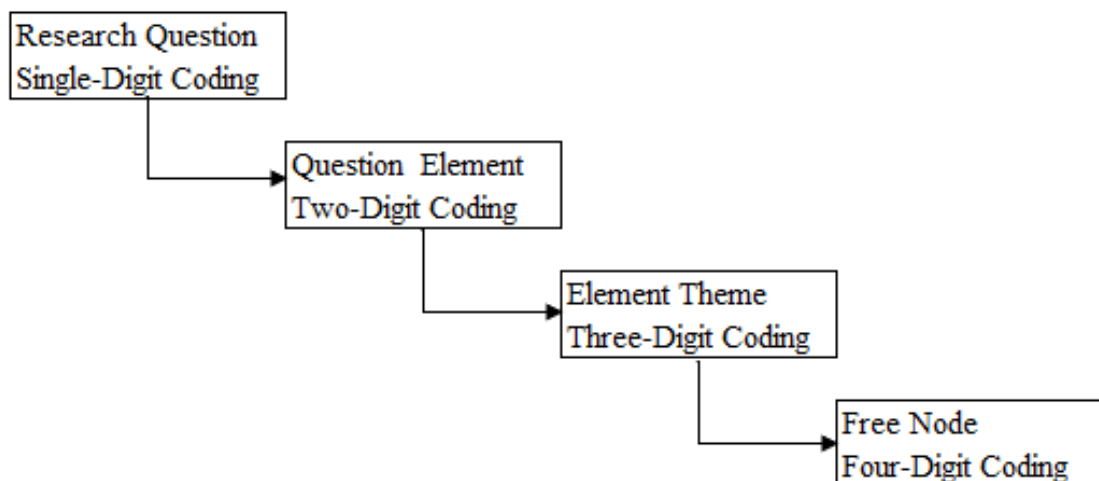
Figure 1. Multi-level, numerical coding system for data analysis.

      Once the transcript data was grouped with each interview question, using the Leximancer software I combined commonly used words or phrases together to begin to organize and analyze the data. In certain cases, statements were grouped under multiple questions as they contained answers to more than one question. No predetermined set of codes existed to remove any potential bias in the data analysis. The Leximancer software allowed me to enter a seed word or phrases from the most common synonyms or phrases and attach adjectives to create a map from all of the transcribed interview text. This map converged like terms and phrases into themes. The adjective free node function was used to combine and form themes via the Leximancer software for the various question elements. Next, I grouped the themes to the appropriate question element under the proper research question. Evidence of the data analysis process is illustrated through tables and figures below in the Study Results section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is critical in assessing the value of the research. The components of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

In qualitative research studies, the researcher must establish credibility. According to Cope (2014), qualitative research is met with criticism on its credibility due to a perceived lack of rigor when compared to quantitative research. To ensure the credibility of this study, I had participants complete a transcript review and member checking to validate my interpretation of their experience. Koelsch (2013) stated that member checking is an important process for a study that uses interviews for data collection. Transcript and member checking verification help ensure the credibility of this study.

Transferability

The ability to transfer findings of a study is critical to the usefulness of the findings. Transferability is the ability to take the findings from a study and apply them to another group or setting (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy, 2013). According to Cope (2014), qualitative studies successfully meet transferability requirements if the findings have sufficient detail to enable others to apply the results to their own experiences.

Dependability

I established dependability in this qualitative research study through data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Dependability was enhanced by digitally recording the interviews, writing comments in an interview journal as the interviews occurred, and including an external transcription service to validate my transcriptions. To increase the level of dependability, I triangulated the data of both Population 1 and Population 2 with study data from Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004), finding similar data in each population that led to comparable interpretations (Carter, Bryatn-lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Confirmability

I achieved confirmability through consistent documentation and clear traceability of research questions to the interpreted data (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). The data can be easily traced from interpretations to the interview questions, and then back to the research questions. I further ensured that the study analysis and results were based on the participants' lived experiences, views, and meaning and did not include my own bias or other interests consistent with Thomson et al (2011).

<div align="center">

Study Results

</div>

Distinct themes emerged from the interview data obtained from each population. This section reviews the analysis of that data leading to themes found per population under each research question as categorized by the research question and the open-ended

interview question elements (Appendix B). A high-level view of themes for both populations is shown in figure 2 and discussion in the following sections. The question element is also shown for easy mapping back to the research question. The tables that follow in this section contain supporting data from interviews as examples of the individual life experiences of the participants. Excerpts were chosen based on their relevance to support one or more themes or to demonstrate the degree in which the participant experienced an emotion, described a coping strategy, or displayed a behavior as a result of the toxic event. As stated above, some participants experienced multiple emotions, used multiple coping strategies, and displayed multiple behaviors. Some excerpts from the same participants might be used within the same example or for multiple tables. Also, some excepts might support two or more themes.

Question Element	Population One Theme	Population Two Theme
Emotional Reaction	Embarrassed Upset Betrayed Targeted	Embarrassed Upset Afraid Sad
Initial Coping Strategy	Take No Action Confrontation Avoidance Sought Resource Help Try Harder/Please	Take No Action Confrontation Avoidance Sought Resource Help
Long-term coping Strategy	Take No Action Confrontation Avoidance Sought Resource Help	Take No Action Confrontation Avoidance Sought Resource Help
Effects on Work	Performed Worse Worked Harder Job Satisfaction No Change	Performed Worse Worked Harder Job Satisfaction No Change
Effects on Home Life	Stress Health Started Drinking Depression No Change	Stress Depression Started Drinking No Change Observed

Figure 2. High-level theme outline by population.

Both populations shared many themes across all question elements suggesting the affected employees and witnessed told similar stories of the toxic experience as viewed through the affected employee lens. To best describe the data the next section details the participants employment situation proceeding the toxic event.

Situational Data

Before gathering data on the lived experiences and observation of lived experiences from witnesses, I gathered additional demographic data about the affected employee's current employment status, the employee's post-toxic-event employment emotional status, and if the toxic events were public or private. The participants provided their current employment status with the organization in which the toxic events occurred. I referred to this as situational data based on the affected employee's particular case.

To determine the post-toxic event emotional status of the affected employee, I asked if the employee was happy or sad if they left the organization. Due to subsequent interview questions as a result of participant detail and to be consistent, I asked if the toxic event occurred in public, in private, or if the event occurred both publicly and privately. Some witnesses in Population 2 did not know the answer to some questions based on their observational only involvement though some did describe having conversations about the toxic leader with the affected employee. These questions were: (a) Number that were terminated, (b) Number that left for other reasons, and (c) Number that was not happy they left. This data is represented in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Employment Status, Separation Reason, Post Emotions, & Toxic Event Locale

	Population 1 (*n* = 15)	Population 2 (*n* = 14)
Total number still employed at organization	3	7
Total number that left organization	12	7
Number that voluntarily resigned from organization due to toxic leader	10	6
Number that were terminated or forced resigned due to toxic leader	2	1
Number that left for other reasons	3	1
Number that were happy they left	10	5
Number that were not happy they left	2	1
Number of public only toxic events	7	13
Number of private only toxic events	3	1
Number of public and private toxic events	5	0

From the data received from interviewing, of those that left the organization I found that most had resigned because of the toxic event. Of this group, 3 were terminated or forced to resign due to performance. This set of affected employees claimed the event was mostly carried out in public. Also, of those that did leave, most stated or implied feelings of joy or happiness since leaving. This situational demographic data might be a result of how effectively the employee coped with the toxic leader. This does not mean effective coping strategies would lead to job retention and happiness. It might mean the opposite, that an employee left his or her job as a means to effectively cope with the toxic leader and find happiness outside that organization and away from that leader. Affected employees in this study coped in a variety of ways but were still similar to those found in other studies.

Population 1

  SRQ1. The initial coping strategy consisted of two elements: 1) how the affect affected employ felt, or the emotional reaction to the toxic leader and 2) the initial coping strategy. The first part might affect the second based on impulse. The below sections are separated into these two parts.

  Emotional reaction. Before acquiring participant data on how they coped with the toxic leader as it was occurring, I asked the participants to describe how they felt during and after the toxic event, this was the first question element. This led to data about the emotions felt by the participant during the time of the toxic event. These emotions affected how the participants coped. The second interview question asked relating to SRQ1 was how the affected employees coped with the toxic leader. Answers to this question detailed what the affected employee did, intentionally or not, to deal with the situation. Gualdo, Hunter, Durkin, Arnaiz, and Maquilón (2015) stated that those not affected by a bully, or toxic leader, underestimate the emotional impact of the situation on those affected.

  Table 6 details the common phrases and keywords obtained from interview data that were grouped with the interview question element, *Reaction to Toxic Leader*, for Population 1. Many participants had more than one reaction or coping strategy. Some participants also used more than one term to describe the reaction or coping strategy.

Table 6

Population 1 Emotional Reaction Data

Question elements	Free nodes
Reaction to toxic leader	Embarrassed, mortified, distressed, demeaned, belittled, afraid, scared, intimidated, fearful, upset, mad, angry, furious, depressed, disappointed, unhappy, betrayed, distrust, caught off guard, targeted, deceiving, disbelief, never had my back, betrayed

According the data analysis plan mentioned above, these free nodes were then organized into themes. Figure 3 illustrates which free nodes were grouped and what theme emerged.
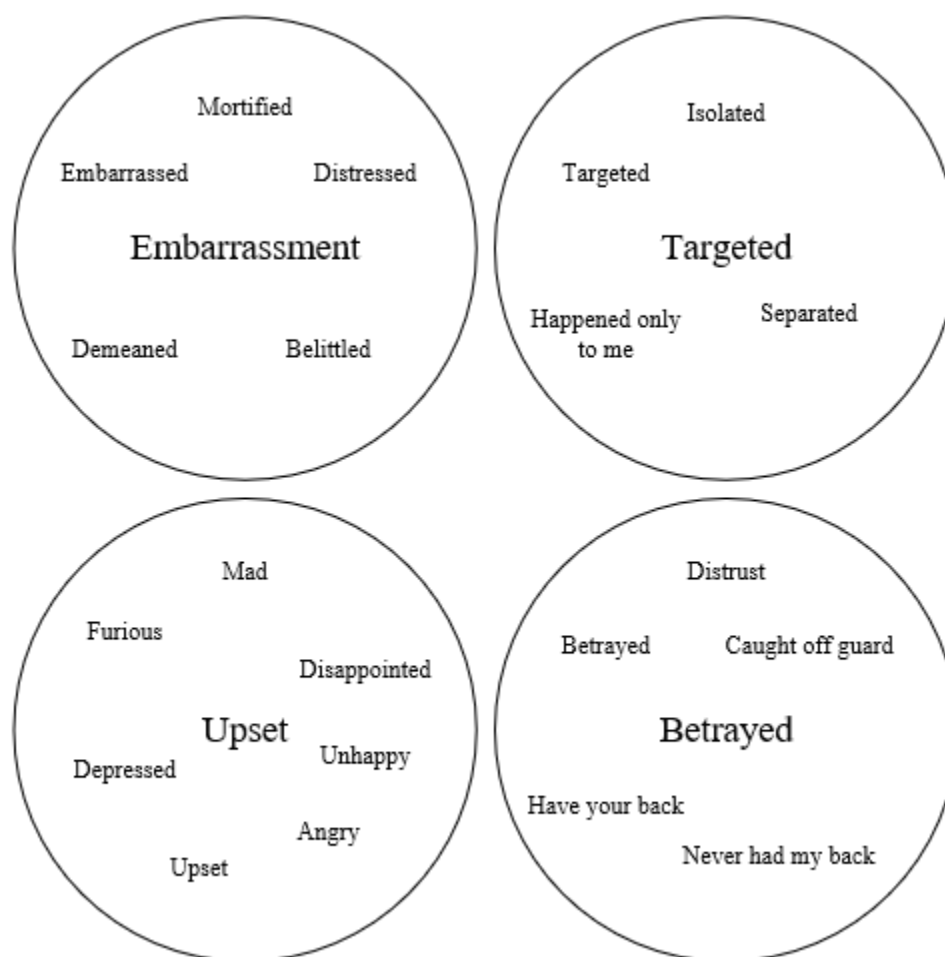
Figure 3. Population 1 emotional reaction themes.

Table 7 below shows Population 1 had four major themes for how the affected employee initially reacted emotionally due to the toxic leader. It lists the participants describing that type of emotional response and gives supporting example excerpts from participants interview.

Table 7

Population 1 Emotional Reaction Themes

Question element	Major themes/Free nodes	Participants
Emotional reaction to toxic leader	Embarrassment	3, 5, 7, 13, 21
	Targeted	1, 5, 17, 18, 15
	Upset	1, 6, 9, 19, 21
	Betrayed	4, 6, 8, 13, 18, 19, 21

Textural description. She chose to seclude me, isolate me, more so I would say, pick on me, I feel. That's where it started to become worse and worse. She would call and yell at me, or I did this, I did that. I felt like I always had a not so good schedule. I would get the bad appointments. There was a lot of favoritism, obviously not towards me, but towards others versus myself. Like I said, I felt completely isolated. When I would go to talk to her, everything would be fine and hunky dory and then she would turn around and start saying things behind my back. So, it was kind of not something that I thought a manager should do within our department. I felt like she never had my back as a nurse, or came to me first and asked, "Hey, what happened? What can I fix? What's the concern?" Everything just got pushed under the rug (P1).

Textural description. I was very angry, upset. I was hurt because I felt like policies and procedures were being broken (P6).

Textual description. I was confused because I just didn't understand why I had a manager who talked so highly of her employees and said, "Oh, I'll be there. I'll always have your back," to your face. Then when something like this happened, she didn't (P4).

Textual description. I was mad. We used to be cool, I looked up to him like a brother. Then, wow, stabbed in back. He embarrassed me in front of the guys and, I don't know, I couldn't trust him anymore. I didn't trust any of them (P8).

Major themes for the affected employee's initial reaction were (a) embarrassed, (b) targeted, (c) upset, and (d) betrayed.

Six total participants within Population 1 described a resulting emotion of toxic leadership as embarrassment. In Population 1, Participant 21 described initial embarrassment when the toxic event occurred, stating the overall thought of being in that situation made her feel demeaned. As she attempted to cope with the toxic leader, this sadness continued and developed into possible depression, stating, "I couldn't go to her with anything because she'd demean me. It made me really depressed." This participant had a good relationship with the toxic leader prior and being belittled in front of others created a sense of betrayal which lead to embarrassment immense sadness.

Population 1 consisted of five participants that felt targeted by the toxic leader during the toxic event. One participant stated, "she chose to seclude me, isolate me, more so I would say, pick on me, I feel." This described being the only employee to encounter this type of behavior from the leader, giving her feelings of being isolated from others and feelings, "completely isolated."

Five participants belonging to Population 1 felt upset about the toxic event. Participant six stated, "when it happened, I think at that particular time, I think I was clearly upset and frustrated and angry." Participant 19 described is angry is the interview stemming from the betrayal since he saw his leader to be like a brother to him. This participant was both made at the situation and the leader due to the betrayal factor.

Seven total participants within Population 1 discussed how they felt betrayed by their leader once the toxic event occurred. Participant one stated, "I was confused because I just didn't understand why I had a manager who talked so highly of her employees and said, "Oh, I'll be there. I'll always have your back," to your face. Then when something like this happened, she didn't." This participant reference an incident when another employee disrespected her in a public setting and her leader did not stop it or ask her how she was doing afterwards. She felt her leader did not want to create issue for herself, which contradicted the premise of the trust they had built based on the leader stating she would, "have her team's back."

Of the 15 participants within Population 1, all but three, or 80%, had multiple feelings that were experienced during the initial toxic event. Some of the feelings mentioned were shock, hurt, and being afraid. The other 20% experienced at least two different emotions and up to four different emotions, such as Participant 19 above who described feeling upset and betrayed. Many different keywords were used to describe the emotions felt by the affected employees. Through the data analysis process, these emotional descriptors were converged and categorized into six single emotions. The three participants who claimed to have only experienced one emotion experienced being afraid (2) and betrayed (1). The major emotional reaction themes with the most participant responses were a) embarrassed, b) upset, c) targeted, and d) betrayed. A difference between the two population was with feeling targeted and afraid. Population 1 participants overall felt more targeted than afraid whereas Population 2 participants did

not describe affected employees as being targeted as much as being afraid. Table 8 below

shows the six overall initial emotions felt as discussed and the number of participants that

experienced them, illustrating that multiple emotions were experienced while processing

the toxic event.

Table 8

Population 1 Affected Employee Emotional Reaction

Emotion	Participants (*n*=15)
Afraid	3
Belittled	4
Embarrassed	5
Upset	5
Targeted	5
Betrayed	7

The emotions described by those in Population 1, who directly experienced the

toxic leader, were somewhat relived by some participants during the interview. The toxic

events were very tough for these employees as none of them expected the event to occur.

Because of the impact on the affected employee, their initial emotional response may

correlate to their coping strategy.

Initial Coping Strategy. At the beginning of this study, the separation of initial

and long-term coping strategies was not known. The initial coping strategy is the first

action taken to cope with the situation. Table 9 below show the common phrases and

keywords obtained from interview data that were grouped with the interview question

element, *Reaction to Toxic Leader*, for Population 1. Many participants had more than

one initial coping strategy. Some participants also used more than one term to describe

the reaction the coping strategy.

Table 9

Population 1 Coping Strategies Data

Question elements	Free nodes
Coping strategies	Did nothing, let it go, go on like it didn't happen, moved on, avoided, stayed away, dodged, tried not to talk, confront, talked to him, discussed with leader, asked why, stood up for myself, talked with family, talked with friends, talked with coworkers, talked to senior/other leaders, went to HR, wanted to please leader, better prepared, worked harder, thought it was me so tried to please, worked more hours, asked what I can do

Figure 4 below shows the emerged themes from common and like terms and phrases

found the Population 1 interview data.
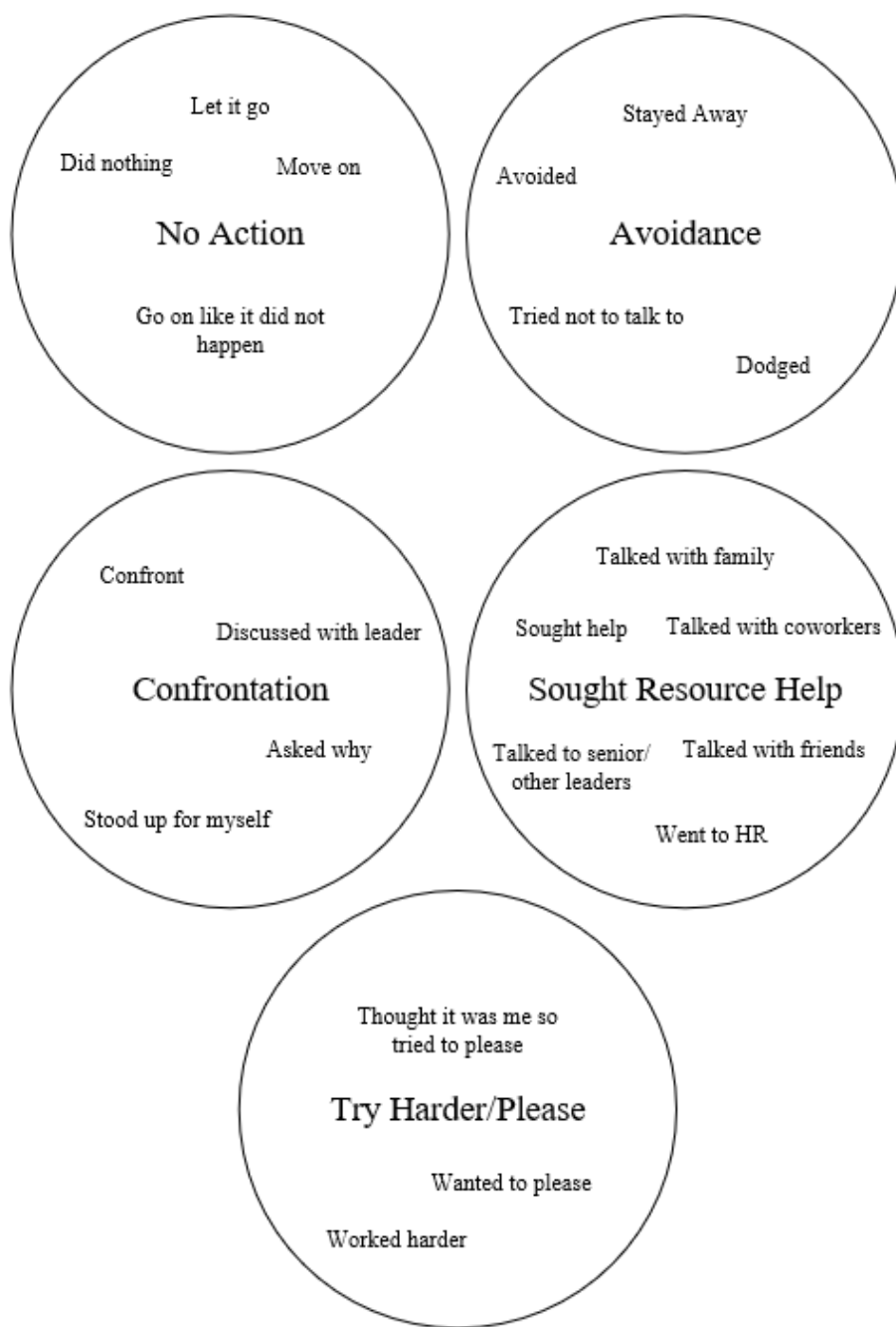
Figure 4. Population 1 initial coping themes.

All Population 1 initial coping themes for SRQ1 are represented in Table 10 with the

participants who described utilizing that strategy. Also, included in Table 10 are

supporting quotations from participant interviews.

Table 10

Population 1 Initial Coping Themes

Question element	Major theme/ Free nodes	Participants
Coping strategies	Take no Action	17
	Avoidance	15, 21
	Confrontation	4, 6, 8, 18, 19
	Sought resource	3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18
	Try harder/Please	15

Textural description. Mostly, I stayed away from him as much as I could. I tried to stay away from him as much as possible. He was very misogynistic. He was very ... it was the good ol' boys type of thing (P21).

Textural description. As far as her, she was my direct [leader]. I had to be around her. I tried to be as nice as I could be, but whenever I felt like she was being unfair to me, I would voice my concerns to her. (P4).

Textual description Well, I did kind of the opposite of some of my peers because a lot of my peers were a little afraid of it, but I went to ... I went ahead and called and explained the situation with the employee line, whatever they called it exactly there. And so, of course, they did their little investigation in regards to him and try and keep me behind the scenes and all so he wouldn't know (P7).

Textual description. I did talk to my sister about it as it went on. Then a coworker who had seen it happen said I needed to go to HR but I felt it would come back on me so I waited thinking it would just go away. It didn't, so I did call our HR department and tell them everything (P13).

Textual description. I would just want to please her so it would stop. So, I would do whatever was necessary to either get her to calm down or to minimize the situation. And then, when I would go home, I would cry, and I would be like, "What the hell just happened today?" (P15).

When the 15 participants in Population 1 were asked how they initially coped, or dealt, with the toxic leader or event, 86.7% reported that they only employed one method to cope. The other 13.3%, or two participants, coped in two different ways. There were four main categories of coping strategies used by the participants: (a) take no action, (b) avoidance, (c) confrontation, (d) and sought resource help. There was one outlying, unexpected strategy theme, *try harder/please*. The following section includes brief definitions of the coping strategies with excerpts from interviews to explain the participants' lived experiences.

Take no action. The affected employees made no effort to remedy the situation or deal with personal emotions or concerns. Participant 17, a jet mechanic in the U.S. military, stated he did nothing about the situation because he felt targeted and afraid. He was young and assumed that was the way the military operated.

Avoidance. The affected employees made efforts to reduce interactions with the toxic leader by staying away and not speaking to that leader. Participant 5 stated that, "I found myself over time just not wanting to communicate with her at all." This participant continued to say she would sit in the corner during meetings and not say anything to the leader.

Confrontation. The affected employee told the toxic leader how the toxic event affected them and that it needed it to stop. The confrontation either occurred in person or via email. Participant 4 stated that "there were a few times where I'd stand up for myself" often documenting the concern and sending an email to the toxic leader.

Sought resource help. The affected employees discussed the toxic leaders and associated events with friends, family, co-workers, and even their organization's human resources department. Participant One, who directly experienced a toxic leader, went to other leaders for help and eventually discussed the matter with the organization's human resources department.

The *try harder/please* strategy of participant 15 was a desperate attempt to win the approval and repair the damage to the relationship b the participant. She felt she had caused the toxic event to occur. This participant stated, "I would just want to please her so it would stop. So, I would do whatever was necessary to either get her to calm down or to minimize the situation. And then, when I would go home, I would cry, and I would be like, "What the hell just happened today?" No other participant used this strategy in either population and was an unexpected theme when related to prior research.

Table 11 shows the individual coping strategies and the number of participants who employed each. Some participants attempted more than one type of coping strategy initially.

Table 11

Population 1 Affected Employee Initial Coping Strategy

Strategy	Participants (*n*=15)
Try harder/Please	1
Take no action	1
Avoidance	2
Confrontation	5
Sought resource help	8

SRQ2: How did employees cope following the initial incident during a designated coping phase (one year or less after the initial event)?

To acquire data on how participants coped with toxic leaders after the initial event, I asked the interview question, "How did you [affected employee] cope with the toxic leader, days, weeks, and months after?" Based on the timeline for the coping strategy, this question might have been asked again or rephrased during the interview to obtain additional detail from the participant. Though there were anticipated changes, if the participants did not describe a resolution I wanted to understand if they attempted varying methods of coping. This also enabled me to have a better segway into obtaining the employee's work performance and work life later in the interview. A break-down of the data obtained through interview questions, mapping to SRQ2 is presented in the next section.

Long-term Coping Strategy. As the study progressed, I discovered that the affected employees did not use just one coping strategy. Some used many at once and progressed until one strategy worked, personal satisfaction occurred, or the employee gained the ability to cope with a positive outcome. The long-term copy strategy of Population 1 did change for some participates according to descriptions given in interviews. Table 12 shows the themes that emerged with supporting excerpts from the interview data about long-term coping strategies.

Table 12

Population 1 Long-Term Coping Themes

Question element	Major theme/ Free nodes	Participants
Coping strategies	No action taken	17
	Avoidance	1, 4, 5
	Confrontation	19
	Sought resource	3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21
	Try harder/Please	N/A

Textural description. I talked to him about it. We used to be cool like that so I asked what was up. He told me nothing (P19).
Textural description. I did speak to the CEO, and things like that, about her behavior. I went to employee relations and expressed my feelings, my concerns, what was being done in the department (P1).
Textual description I did have some conversation with HR that I did not initiate, but, yeah, I did receive calls from HR and it was very apparent who all they were talking about though they never told you who it was about. I can tell you that after that toxic leader left for another role that the whole culture kind of changed to a degree. I [could] actually feel it and you could sense the difference (P8).
Textual description. I did not feel comfortable talking with her at all. I did not go to her and try to fix anything. (P4).
Textual description. The reason why we banded together, and there was only like a few of us that did it, was because we didn't want he to be able to come back and do this to anybody else. We wanted it to stop. Where she could not be put back into this powerful position and that other people would be exposed to her. So, that's why, and I forget exactly what the title of this department was that we went to, it's kind of like their Internal Affairs, maybe it was called Internal Affairs, I forget (P15).

The participants in Population 1 described changes in how they coped with the

toxic leader in the long-term. Out of the five initial coping strategy themes, all but *take no*

action, was subsequently changed as participants moved to a long-term coping strategy.

The initial coping strategy *try harder/please,* was not used on a long-term basis by any

participant. S*ought resource help* moved from an initial coping strategy by 47% of the affected employees to a long-term coping strategy used by 58.8% of the affected employees, indicating that they eventually sought help to deal with the toxic leader. Participant 15, who initially utilized the *try harder/please* coping strategy, move to *sought resource help* after her initial strategy failed. According to this participant, "The reason why we banded together, and there was only like a few of us that did it, was because we didn't want he to be able to come back and do this to anybody else. We wanted it to stop. Where she could not be put back into this powerful position and that other people would be exposed to her. So, that's why, and I forget exactly what the title of this department was that we went to, it's kind of like their Internal Affairs, maybe it was called Internal Affairs". The strategy avoidance was used by three participants who did not attempt it prior, with one participant stating, "I did not feel comfortable talking with her at all. I did not go to her and try to fix anything."

Table 13 shows the long-term coping strategies and the number of affected employees that used each strategy. Four of the participants from Population 1 did not change their initial coping strategy.

Table 13

Population 1 Long-term Coping Strategy

Strategy	Participants (*n*=15)
Try harder/Please	0
Confrontation	1
Take no action	1
Avoidance	3

Sought resource help	10

Population 2

SRQ1: How did employees under toxic leadership cope with the situation as it was happening?

Similar to Population 1, the initial coping strategy identified by Population 2 consisted of two parts: 1) the emotional reaction to the toxic leader and 2) the initial coping strategy. The first part might affect the second based on impulse. These two parts had similar findings and are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Emotion*al Reaction.* Population 2 interview data was analyzed in the same fashion as Population 1 by extracting like terms and phrases and grouping them to discover themes. Table 14 shows the terms and phrases from the interview data related to the initial emotional reaction question element.

Table 14

Population 2 Witness-reported Emotional Reaction Data

Question element	Free nodes
Reaction to toxic leader	Demeaned, belittled, separated, embarrassed afraid, scared, frightful, fearful, only me, mad, angry, disappointed, unhappy, defeated, distrust, caught off guard, shocked, disbelief

From these terms, four different themes emerged as represented in the below Figure 5.

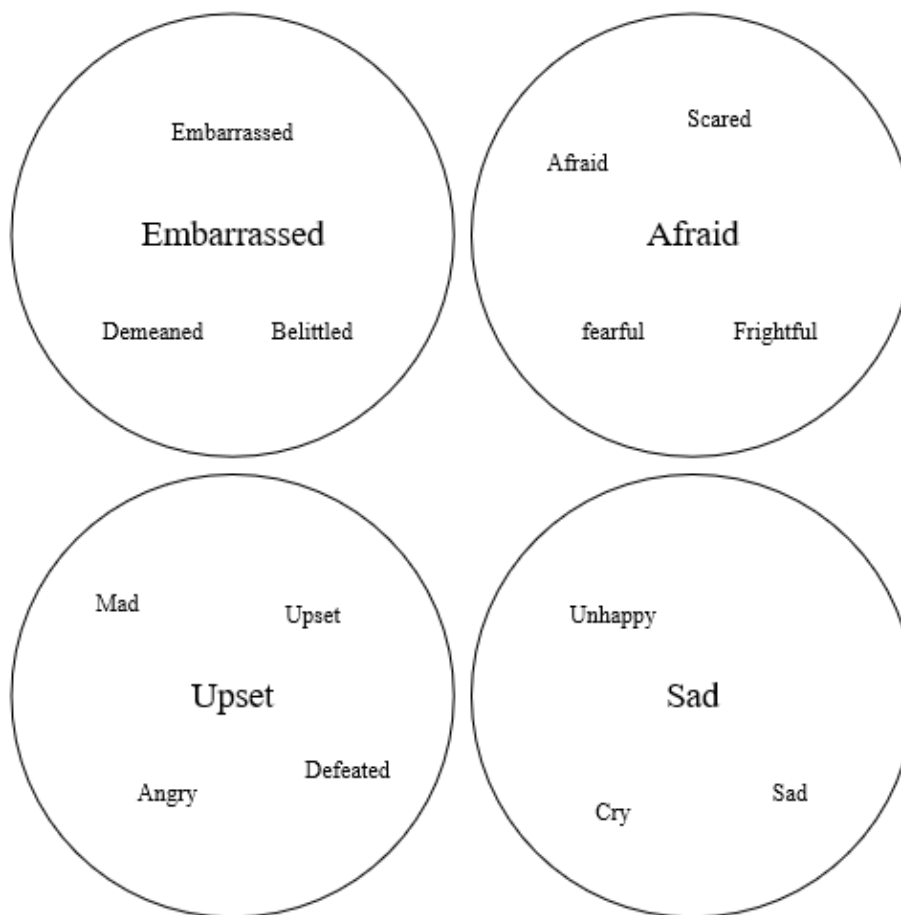*Figure 5.* Population 2 witness-reported emotional reaction themes.

Table 15 reflects the four major themes and associated interview responses from Population 2 participants (similar to Population 1) as to how the affected employee initially reacted emotionally due to the toxic leader.

Table 15

Population 2 Witness-reported Emotional Reaction Themes

Question element	Major theme	Participants

Emotional reaction to toxic leader	Embarrassment	2, 5, 25, 26, 27, 28
	Afraid	3, 10, 14, 20
	Upset	3, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26
	Sad	10, 12, 11, 18, 20

Textural description. I felt helpless because I couldn't really say or do anything in front of that person. Outside of those meetings, I can go console them because it would get to the point where people would cry and be physically upset and scared to even go into meetings expecting this backlash (P3).

Textural description. You could see it physically on her, she was stressed out. It was something that started to take a toll on her mentally, as far as where she was questioning her ability as supervisor, questioning her own judgment and she just ... it embarrassed her in front of her team and in front of the other supervisors that were present, or that reported to this director as well (P2).

Textual description. Very sad, she'd ask us what she had done to her to deserve it. She was a very good nurse and nice to everyone. A really good, all around person (P24).

Textual description. Terrible, very sad and afraid. On break she tells us all about it and tears up. We tell her to go talk to {NAME DELETED} to fix it but she won't, she's too afraid (P20).

Participant 3 from Population 2 described the employee she witnessed experiencing a toxic leader as displaying signs of helplessness. This participant recounted conversations with the affected employee that detailed defeated and feelings of no way out. This participant described an experience of abandonment by the organization for which the affected employee worked. Participant three stated the affected employee she observed, "would cry and be physically upset and scared to even go into meetings expecting this backlash."

Participants also experienced or witnessed another employee being afraid after encountering the toxic event. An example is Participant 20 who claimed the affected

employee he observed was afraid of the toxic leader as a person. The affected employee also discussed being afraid of losing her job. According to the participant, this fright carried over into hours after work and affected sleep and other relationships. Being afraid for her job affected financial decisions and she "never went out or spent money" p. 3) .

Most of the participants, whether directly affected or describing a witnessed experience, described stress. Participant 29 described witnessing a pharmacy supervisor who experienced a toxic leader causing a great amount of stress. This affected employee displayed anxiety and tension after the event, resulting in reduced effort and decreased job satisfaction. The participant discussed how the affected employee became jumpy (interpreted as nervous) and talking about not being good enough for the job.

In Population 2, all but two of the 14 participants, or 85.7%, listed at least two types of emotions observed in the affected employee when witnessing the toxic event. Participant three claimed the affected employee she observed felt afraid and upset due to the toxic event. In the interview, participant 12 in Population 2 stated, "she was very sad and almost defeated." Participant 24 in Population 2 claim that, "she was so upset I don't think she could think straight." In each of these two cases, the participants had direct conversation with the affected employee. This conversation supported their claim. A total of 14 separate keywords were used to describe the observed emotional response to the toxic leader. After converging like terms, I found seven emotional categories emerged. Table 16 illustrates the seven basic emotions experienced and the number of observed

affected employees that witnessed them, illustrating that multiple emotions were experienced.

Table 16

Population 2 Witness-reported Affected Employee Emotional Responses

Emotion	Participants (*n*=14)
Betrayed	1
Helpless	2
Stressed	2
Afraid	4
Sad	5
Embarrassed	6
Upset	8

Initial Coping Strategy. Population 2 reported several coping strategies they witnessed in the affected employees. Table 17 shows the terms and phrases from the interview data related to the participants' witnessed coping strategies.

Table 17

Population 2 Witness-reported Coping Strategies Data

Question elements	Free nodes
Coping strategies	Did nothing, let it go, avoided, stay away, try not to talk to, use other access, confronted, discussed with toxic leader, lit into her, stood her ground, talked with family, talked with friends, vent to us, talked to senior/other leaders, went to HR

Figure 6 illustrates how these terms and phrases were further categorized as themes emerged on the initial coping themes of the affected employees. Like that of the emotional reactions, the initial coping strategies of both populations had similarities.
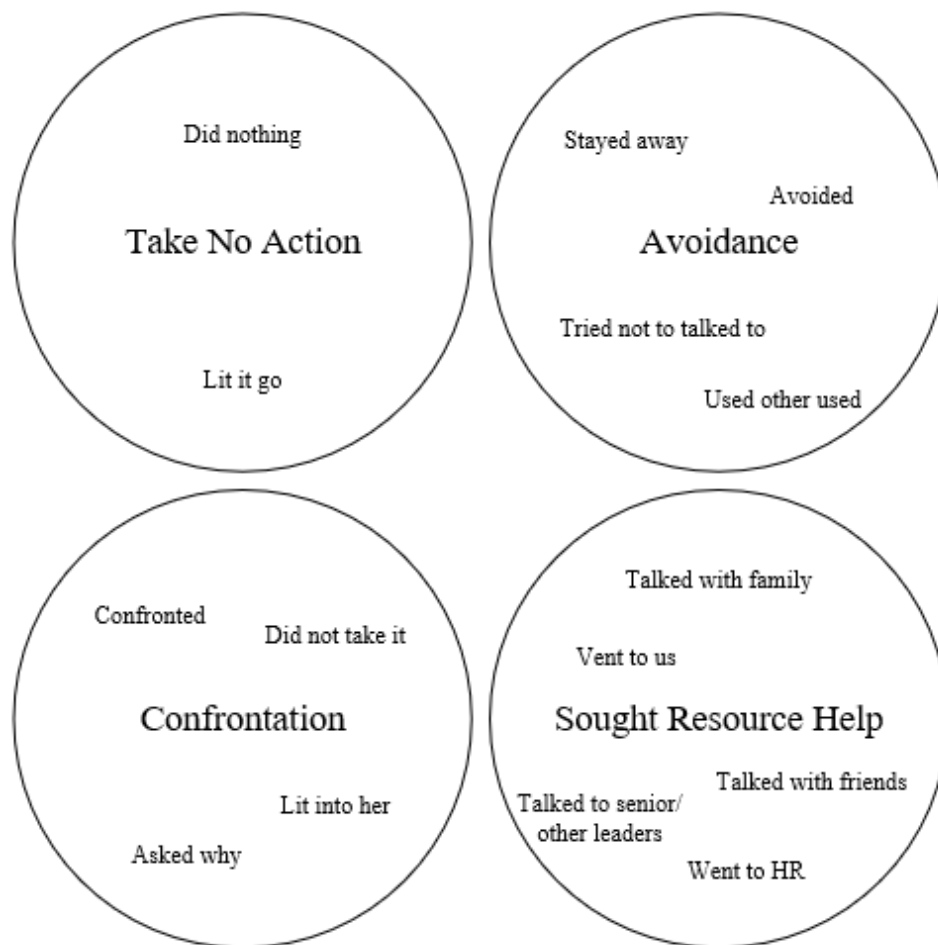
Figure 6. Population 2 witness-reported initial coping themes.

Population 2 reported four types of coping strategies in the affected employees they witnessed. Table 18 shows observed, affected employee's initial coping strategy divided into four groups – *take no action, avoidance, confrontation, and sought resource help.*

Table 18

Population 2 Witness-reported Initial Coping Themes

Question element	Major theme	Participants
Coping strategies	Take no action	3, 25
	Avoidance	2, 11, 12, 14, 20, 23, 24, 27, 28
	Confrontation	2, 5, 26
	Sought resource help	10, 20, 23, 24, 27

Textural description. He just seemed to let it go. I guess he coped by not coping? It drove me crazy but I guess to each their own. I know it bother him but he just moved on so he didn't make it worse (P25).

Textural description. She avoided the partner when she could and wouldn't speak up. She was afraid on getting confronted by the partner. She avoided her at all cost (P23).

Textual description. I guess it must have been the third or fourth call that he got tired of being belittled and questioned and lit into her. He questioned her logic for questioning him about sales numbers on an IT call in front of people who had nothing to do with sales multiple times then just went silent. It was obvious she was steaming (P26).

Textual description. A fellow platoon leader would get nailed by our captain almost daily. This wasn't boot camp or deployment so there was no need. He was a jerk. We all liked her and she did a damn fine job. We tried to get her to report him, but she would only vent to us about it. She was old school and back in the day it would mean big trouble if you did that. (P27).

The toxic leadership witness group observed only one initial coping strategy per affected employee. For Population 2, no witness observed any affected employee trying harder or attempting to please the toxic leader as a result of the toxic event. Participant 3 observed a mail order pharmacy operations supervisor encounter a toxic leader who was the director of operations. This participant witnessed the pharmacy operations supervisor taking no action when belittled by the director of operations in meetings, and then later be

questioned about performance issues by the toxic leader in front of others. The participant

knew the affected employee was not normally one to take such abuse but did in this case.

Participant 14 observed an affected employee being afraid "she would be

confronted by the partner. She avoided her at all cost." In both instances, the affected

employees took efforts not to come in contact with the toxic leader. Participant 26

recalled the affected employee being observed confronted the toxic leader, stating, "I

guess it must have been the third or fourth call that he got tired of being belittled and

questioned and lit into her. He questioned her logic for questioning him about sales

numbers on an IT call in front of people who had nothing to do with sales multiple times

then just went silent. It was obvious she was steaming." Participant 20 stated the

employee he observed experiencing a toxic leader vented to her coworkers when a toxic

event occurred. Other participants discussed talking with family or friends to help them

deal with the situation. This coping strategy correlates to the conservation of resources

theory where the affected employees might pool resources close to them in order to deal

with the toxic leader (Fontinha, Chambel, & Cuyper, 2012).

Table 19 below shows the total participant count per strategy which equals the

total participant count of 14 for Population 2. Each participant only observed a toxic

event for one affected employee, having a one-to-one ratio.

Table 19

Population 2 Witness-reported Initial Coping Strategy

Affected employee strategy	Participants (*n*=14)
Take no action	2
Confrontation	2
Avoidance	4
Sought resource help	6

SRQ2: How did employees cope following the initial incident during a designated coping phase (one year or less after the initial event)?

      Long-term Coping Strategy. Table 20 below shows the major themes from the observed, affected employee's long-term coping strategy with two outliers and one initial coping strategy which is no longer employed.

Table 20

Population 2 Witness-reported Long-Term Coping Themes

Question element	Major theme	Participants
Coping strategies	Take no action	3, 25
	Avoidance	11, 12, 20, 23, 24, 27, 28
	Confrontation	2, 26
	Sought resource help	10, 18

Textual description. The one thing I encouraged her to do was to just stand her ground. I think initially it was something that was uncomfortable for her she has the type of personality to where she's not a confrontational person, she's very jovial, very kind hearted. A lot of times you have to do that just to be sure that you know, that you're setting healthy boundaries. So, she did start exercising that a little bit again, initially it was something that was difficult for her, because again that just wasn't her personality and that director just wasn't expecting that from her either, so it was kind of a culture shock for both of them (P2).

Textual description. He was a pretty normal guy but when you've had enough, you've had enough. After that first altercation on our tech call he said she approached him again and he stood his ground. I think she knows not to mess with

him in that fashion now. However, she's just not a nice person. I'm sure someone else is getting it. Just not him. He had enough (P6).

Textual description. I noticed after the talk with us settled down she avoided the captain as much as possible. It didn't stop, but since she didn't approach us, we didn't talk about it. We let her do her thing. If she wanted to stay away from him when possible, that was her choice (P27).

Results for Population 2 differed from those of Population 1. The participants who observed employees being affected by a toxic leader were less likely to see a change in coping strategies. *Take no action* and *sought resource help* was originally observed by witnesses but not observed as a long-term strategy used by the affected employees. Witnesses observed no changes in coping strategy with 63% of the affected employees. The largest reduction in strategy was *sought resource help*. Initially, six participants witnessed affected employees seeking resource help but in the long-term, four of those affected employees moved to the strategy of avoiding the toxic leader. The other two affected employees who initially sought resource help continued to do so long-term. Those affected employees who remained unchanged in their coping strategy used *avoidance* as their initial strategy. Three of these affected employees avoided the toxic leader long-term. The forth affected employee who initially used *avoidance*, changed to *confrontation* as a strategy, as observed by the witness. Participant 2 stated that the observed affected employee eventually started standing their ground, though it was not typical of her personality, but her director, who was the toxic leader, took notice that the behavior was not going to be tolerated. Table 21 detailed the long-term strategy and number of affected employees who utilized that strategy as observed by the witnesses in Population 2.

Table 21

Population 2 Witness-reported Long-Term Coping Strategy

Affected employee strategy	Participants (*n*=14)
Take no action	0
Sought resource help	0
Confrontation	1
Avoidance	4
No change in strategy	9

As mentioned in Table 21, many affected employees had no change in strategy which signified the feeling of an effective method in which to deal with the toxic leader. However, some of these affected employees might have incorporated a resignation into that strategy early in the process. This means they left the organization before attempting to employ another method to deal with the situation. Population 2 had the largest number of affected employees with no change which could be a limitation of the study. The witness might not have been engaged or observing at this point. In Population 1, most changes in strategy were towards that of *sought resource help* to cope with the toxic leader.

Coping with toxic leadership is not easy and has negative effects on those employees involved. These negative effects are also signs to outsiders that toxic leadership might be present. The next section explores what type of behavior an affected employee might display once a toxic event has occurred.

Population 1 and Population 2

SRQ3: What were the differences, if any, between how affected employees coped and how the witnesses viewed the affected employee's coping strategies?

This research sub-question purposefully combines both populations from this study. The section compares and contrasts the lived experiences of those participants who encountered a toxic leader (Population 1) and those participants who witnessed toxic leaders affecting other employees (Population 2). I asked the question, "How did those behavior changes affect your life at home and work?" This question enabled additional conversation and data gathering on how resulting behaviors might have affected the employee's work status and home life.

There was only one coping strategy difference seen between the two populations, which was that of "try harder/please" the toxic leader. This strategy was only realized in the initial strategy by a single participant in Population 1. There was no other difference in how affected employees coped and how the witnesses viewed the affected employee's coping strategies in regard to what those strategies were.

Of the five total coping strategies, four were consistent across both populations. These four coping strategies were also consistent from the initial coping strategy to the long-term coping strategy. Only the "try harder/please" strategy was dropped as affected employees moved into their long-term coping strategy.

Another difference was found in how affected employees changed their coping strategy as time passed. For Population 1, those participants who chose the initial coping strategy of "try harder/please" or "take no action" moved to the "sought resource help"

strategy in the long term. The "sought resource help" strategy was used most frequently initially and long-term by Population 1.

For Population 2, the participants who identified the affected employees as initially using "take no action" or "sought resource help" did not identify these as long-term strategies. One affected employee was observed by a witness in Population 2 to have moved from being confrontational to taking no action. While Population 1 had more employees who moved to the "sought resource help" category, Population 2 witnessed most affected employees moving to the "take no action" category for long-term coping strategies.

Although the two populations had "sought resource help" as the most utilized coping strategy, each differs in terms of the second highest discussed coping strategy. Population 1 confronted the toxic leader, yet the observed affected employee in Population 2 chose to avoid the toxic leader. Participant 15 within Population 1 stated the main strategy initially utilized was "working harder" in an attempt to please the leader due to the feeling of rejection. All participants but participant 15 in Population 1 had a strategy that mirrored and validated previous data found in studies on toxic leadership.

Some affected employees had no change in their strategy over time, meaning it worked effectively for them. Others did change their strategy as time went on because the initial coping strategy yielded no change and it was not effective.

Additional Population 1 and Two Analysis. The additional analysis of compared population data is to find any information pertinent to understanding how

affected employees coped with the toxic leader. Building on the population data comparison around SRQ3, another observation from the data analysis was the way in which each group described emotions tied to the toxic events. While the participants in Population 2 detailed the observed emotions they witnessed in the affected employees, these conversations lacked the same intensity found in Population 1. Both populations displayed similar emotions when experiencing the toxic event. The most obvious difference between the two populations was the type of emotion they discussed. For those who participants who directly experienced the toxic leader, betrayal was the most mentioned emotion. For those who participated in a witness capacity, the most discussed emotion was anger or being upset. This might be due to the witness not understanding or knowing the relationship between the affected employee and the toxic leader. During the interview a theme did arise for Population 1 and those who experienced feelings of betrayal. The theme represented when the participant had a good, trusting relationship with the leader who became toxic; a heightened sense of betrayal was felt on the part of the participant.

Initial emotions found in this study mirror and validate those found in prior studies on toxic leadership. The results show that affected employees respond emotionally in different ways. Just as situational data might be an indicator of how effectively an affected employee coped with a toxic leader, the emotions they felt could be a predictor of how the affected employee might initially cope.

Population Comparisons

This study consisted of two sources of data which included Population 1 consisting of participants who directly experienced a toxic leader and Population 2 consisting of participants who witnessed an employee being affected by a toxic leader. I validated data components within each population dataset including: initial reaction data, coping data (immediate and long-term), and long-term effects at home data. Initial reaction data included how the affected employee felt immediately upon experiencing the toxic leader. Coping data addressed how the affected employee coped initially and then long-term. Finally, long-term effects at home data were any effects realized by the affected employee at home.

  Emotional Reaction. Reaction data from both populations were very similar with four common reactions found: (a) embarrassed, (b) afraid, (c) upset, and (d) betrayed. Population 1 contained additional reactions such as feeling belittled and feeling targeted. Population 2 had three additional reactions witnessed in the affected employees that included feeling ill, feeling sad, and feeling stressed. The reaction data from both populations is shown below in Table 22.

Table 22

Reaction Data Population Comparison

Combined reaction data	
Population 1 (*n*=15*)*	*Population 2* (*n*=14*)*
Belittled	Ill
Embarrassed	Embarrassed
Afraid	Afraid
Upset	Upset

Betrayed	Betrayed
Targeted	Helpless
	Sad
	Stressed

Coping Data. In the initial phase of coping with a toxic leader, there was only one difference discussed between Population 1 and Population 2 in the interviews. A single participant in Population 1 detailed how she tried harder to please the toxic leader she encountered. Population 2 witnesses did not describe this affected employee coping strategy in any interview.

The comparison of long-term coping strategies for both populations was very similar to the initial coping strategies discussed. The only change found was that Population 1 dropped the "try harder/please" used as an initial coping strategy data in the long-term coping strategy. No other changes in coping strategies were found. Table 23 details the long-term coping strategies used by Population 1 and observed by Population 2. Table 23 depicts the similarities between the long-term coping strategies used by Population 1 and observed by Population 2.

Table 23

Long-term Coping Strategy Population Comparison

Long-term coping strategy	
Population 1 (n=15)	*Population 2 (n=14)*
Take no action	Take no action
Avoidance	Avoidance
Confrontation	Confrontation
Sought resource help	Sought resource help
No change	No change

As stated above, when comparing data from Population 1 and Population 2 for both initial and long-term coping strategies, the only change in strategy themes was Population 1 not using the try harder/please strategy long-term. This shows the similarity of coping strategies employed by both populations.

Work Behavior Data. Bolton and Grawitch (2011) discussed affected employees' response to toxic leadership as being evidence of workplace deviance. This voluntary behavior violates significant organizational norms and threatens organizational well-being. Organizational deviance consists of employees shirking hours, quitting their jobs, or purposefully extending overtime to retaliate against the organization for allowing toxic events to occur (Glambek et al., 2014). In addition to deviant behaviors, affected employees may encounter job dissatisfaction, become socially withdrawn at work, and allow their performance to become negatively affected (Mackay, et al., 2011; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).

During the interview process I asked Population 1 participants what effect the toxic leader had on their work behavior. Table 24 below contains a list of many terms and phrases captured for this element.

Table 24

Population 1 Effects on Work Data

Question element	Free nodes

Effects on work	Performed worse, missed deadlines, worked less, demoted, dissatisfied with job, taking more time off, dreaded going in, looking for other jobs, communicated less, did not speak up, work relationships changed for worse, stayed to self, worked longer hours, cautious about performance, documented everything, tried to perform better, did not affect work, no change to performance

Figure 7 illustrates how these terms and phrases were further categorized as themes emerged on how affected employees were affected at work by the toxic leader.
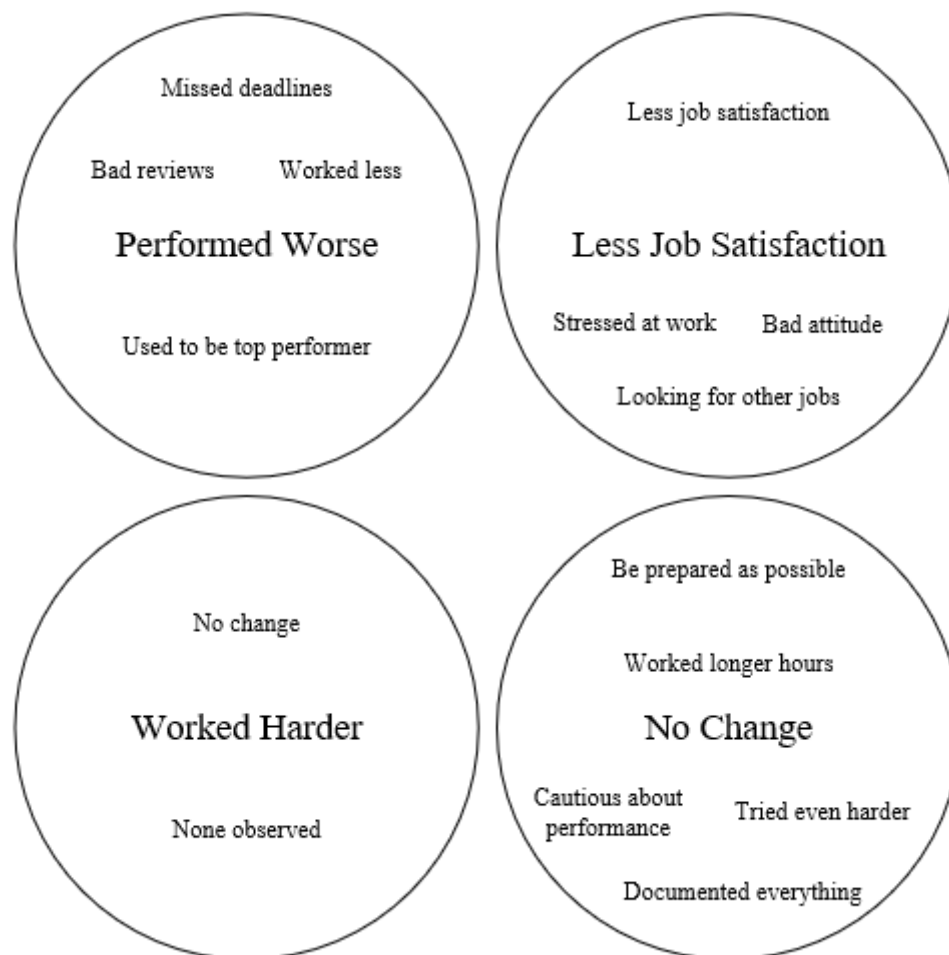
Figure 7. Population 1 effects on work themes.

Five major themes emerged from Population 1. These themes are: a) performed worse, b) less job satisfaction, c) withdrawn, and d) no change. The most described behavior realized because of the toxic leader was noticeable, negative change in the affected employee's performance. Some participants, such as participants seven and thirteen, had multiple work behaviors altered due to the toxic leader. Table 25 below shows the five major themes, the participants who spoke of these work behaviors, and supporting interview excerpt data.

Table 25

Population 1 Affected Employee Effects on Work Themes

Question element	Major theme	Participants
Effects on work	Performed worse	1, 4, 7, 13, 17, 19
	Less job satisfaction	9, 19, 21
	Withdrawn	7, 8, 13, 18
	Worked harder	3. 15, 16
	No change	5, 6

Textural description. I always take pride in my work. I'm an overachiever, and I had a responsibility, so I wanted to make sure that I fulfilled my responsibility, and that nobody could say that I was slacking professionally. But constantly I was struggling (P4).

Textural description. I guess out of my job satisfaction diminished dramatically honestly um during that 18-month time frame and I was so dissatisfied that I made the decision to resign. Or you know attempt to get out of my contract. That was mi-year and I did not even have another job lined up at that point. But I was I was and um a colleague of mine was in the same situation and both of us were so dissatisfied that we knew we just needed to get out of there rather than no matter what happens you know rather than stay (P9).

Textual description. I'm sure it did affect my work because I didn't care as much. The quality was still there I can assure you, but I did not volunteer for as many projects nor talk to leadership as much (P18).

Textual description. The quality of my work did not change. Um, but I was more stressed out. Working overtime and, um, just trying to complete things. Like they needed to be completed (P5).

Of the participants in Population 1 claiming the toxic leader had a negative effect on their performance, participant two initially stated there was no visible change in her performance but as the interview continued, she claimed to be prideful and admitted, "constantly I was struggling" with performance. Participant nine within Population 1

resigned due to the toxic leader creating an environment in which she felt *less job satisfaction* from doing her job, stating, "my job satisfaction diminished dramatically honestly um during that 18-month time frame and I was so dissatisfied that I made the decision to resign." Her dislike for her job because of the leader reached a level in which she resigned without other employment arranged. Other participants described the toxic leader causing them to become withdrawn. Participant 18 stated, "I did not volunteer for as many projects nor talk to leadership as much." Other participants either worked harder to ensure no ill consequence. Only 2 out of 15, or 13.3%, of the participants from Population 1 stated there were no effects on their work behavior.

I asked Population 2 participants the same question but related to the affected employee they had observed with the toxic leader. Participants did provide information but not all participants had direct knowledge of any change or new behavior outside of that provided to them by the affected employee. Below in Table 26 are the terms and phrases from the Population 2 interviews for this question element.

Table 26

Population 2 Witness-reported Effects on Work Data

Question element	Free nodes
Effects on work	Missed deadlines, bad reviews, worked less, used to be top performer less job dissatisfaction, taking more time off, stressed at work, looking for other jobs, bad attitude, worked harder, worked longer hours, prepared as possible, cautious about performance, documented everything, no change, none observed

Figure 8 illustrates how these terms and phrases were further categorized as themes emerged on how affected employees were affected at work by the toxic leader.
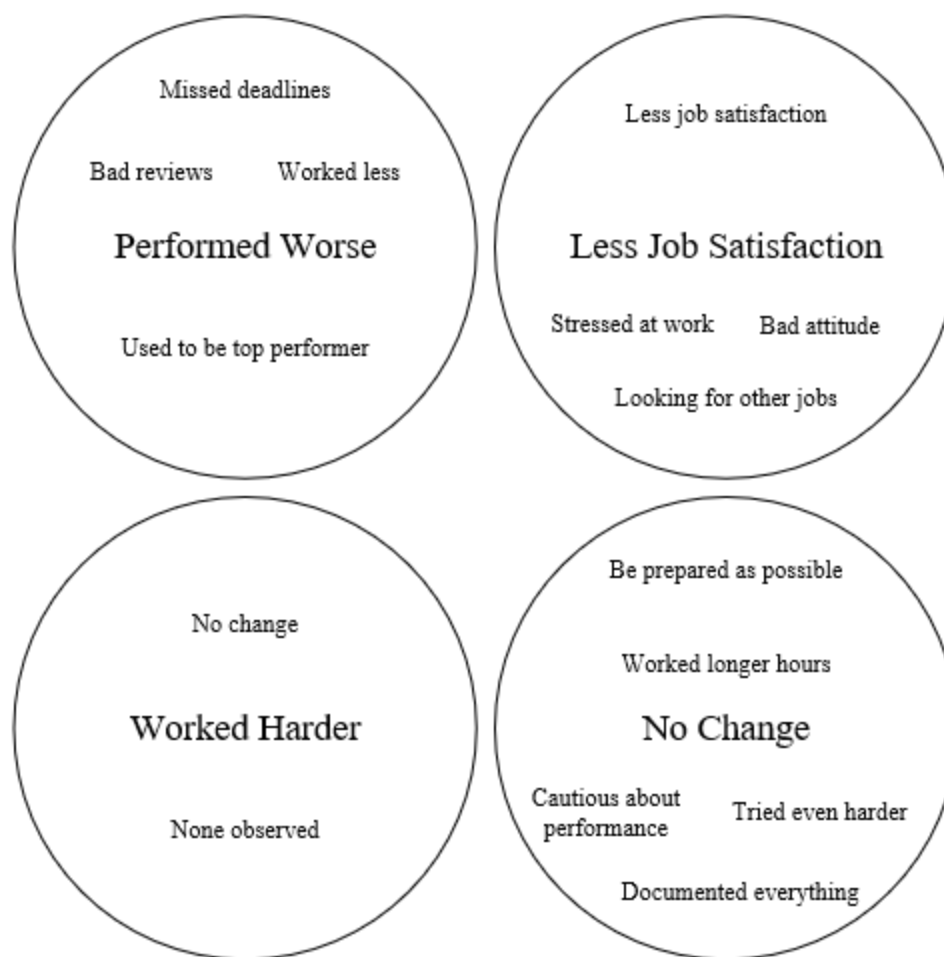

Figure 8. Population 2 witness-reported effects on work themes.

Table 27 shows four major themes for observed affected employee's work behavior as a result of the toxic leader from Population 2 interview data. These themes are supported by the Participants who observed the behaviors and support interview excerpts.

Table 27

Population 2 Witness-reported Effects on Work Themes

Question element	Major theme/Free nodes	Participants
Effects on work	Performed worse	10, 12, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26 , 27, 28
	Less job satisfaction	11, 12, 14, 24, 26, 27, 28
	Worked harder	3, 10. 11
	No change	18

Textural description. Poor thing used to be a top performer, getting some good bands in and rarely having cancellations but now, she is barely hanging on her job. (P20).

Textural description. They were the type of people that would try even harder so that they wouldn't be that target and would try and get on that person's good side and things like that (P3).

Textual description. They would go in and be as prepared as they could be in case of any questions that were going to be thrown their way so they essentially armored themselves with everything that they could in regards to anything that could have been going on from the day to day business so that they were quickly able to react and answer questions so that they wouldn't get that backlash or get yelled at in front of everyone or embarrassed in front of everyone. I talked to my family and work friends about it (P3).

The most described work behavior effected by the toxic leader for Population 2 observed affected employees emerged as the *performed worse* theme. A total of 9 witness claimed to have observed the affected employee *performed worse*. This count represents 64.2% of the total population sample. When describing the decreased performance of the affected employee he observed, participant 20 stated, "poor thing used to be a top performer, getting some good bands in and rarely having cancellations but now, she is barely hanging on her job."

Though similar in many themes and affected employees experiencing multiple behaviors to Population 1, the *withdrawn* theme did not emerge, or was not observed. Various categories of work behaviors displayed by affected employees were shared across both sample populations with many employees discussing multiple behaviors. Population 1 and Population 2 shared six behavior categories, derived from the free nodes during data analysis, describing how the affected employee behaved at work after the toxic event which include the following: (a) poor performance, (b) worked harder, (c) missed work, (d) poor job satisfaction, (e) cautious/walked on egg shells, and (f) no change. Population 1 had five more behavior categories than Population 2, with fewer instances per participant. Population 2 observed more affected employees missing work than what was found to have occurred in Population 1. This is interesting because Population 2, being witnesses, might not have had insight into the observed employees work schedule or time off. Table 28 below shows the behavior categories for each population and the number of affected employees displaying each behavior post toxic event:

Table 28

Work Behavior Population Comparison

Combined work behavior		
	Population 1 (*n*=15)	*Population 2* (*n*=14)
Poor performance	6	9
Worked harder	2	3
Missed work	1	2
Poor job satisfaction	3	5
Cautious/Walked on egg shells	2	1

No change	3	1
Spoke up less	1	0
Worked less (No OT)	2	0
Worked More (OT)	1	0
Bad attitude (in general)	1	0
Worsened work relationships	2	0

Similar to themes found in other parts of this study, participants often experienced multiple facets of work-related effects due to the toxic leader. Participant 13 in Population 1 said, "I eventually did start to miss deadlines and my quality of work was not there. I had no desire to be there and do anything for her." Participant 13 experienced both *worse job performance* and *less job satisfaction.*

Effects on Home. In addition to long-term coping strategies, I asked participants if the toxic leader or event had any personal effect at home. For Population 1, 13 of the 15 participants, or 87%, realized some effect on their home life. For Population 2, 10 of the 14 participants, or 71.4%, reported that the affected employee they witnessed had some effect on their home life from the toxic leader or event. Population 2, or the witness group, had responses dependent upon the relationship that existed with the observed, affected employee. Two of the four witnesses stated they did not know the affected employee outside of the workplace. Therefore, they had no insight into any long-term personal effect the affected employee might have felt at home. Table 29 below displays the terms and phrases from the Population 1 interviews that described the negative effects on the affected employee at home.

Table 29

Population 1 Effects on Home Interview Data

Question element	Free nodes
Effects on home	Attitude towards family changed for worse, lifestyle was less, argued with spouse, health worsened, went into hospital, lost weight, become ill more, less sleep, feeling of suicide, emotional/crying more, emotionally distressed, fear of going to work, started drinking, drinking more, spending time with others drinking, spending money on alcohol, no change allowed at home, no effect at home

Figure 9 illustrates how these terms and phrases were further categorized as

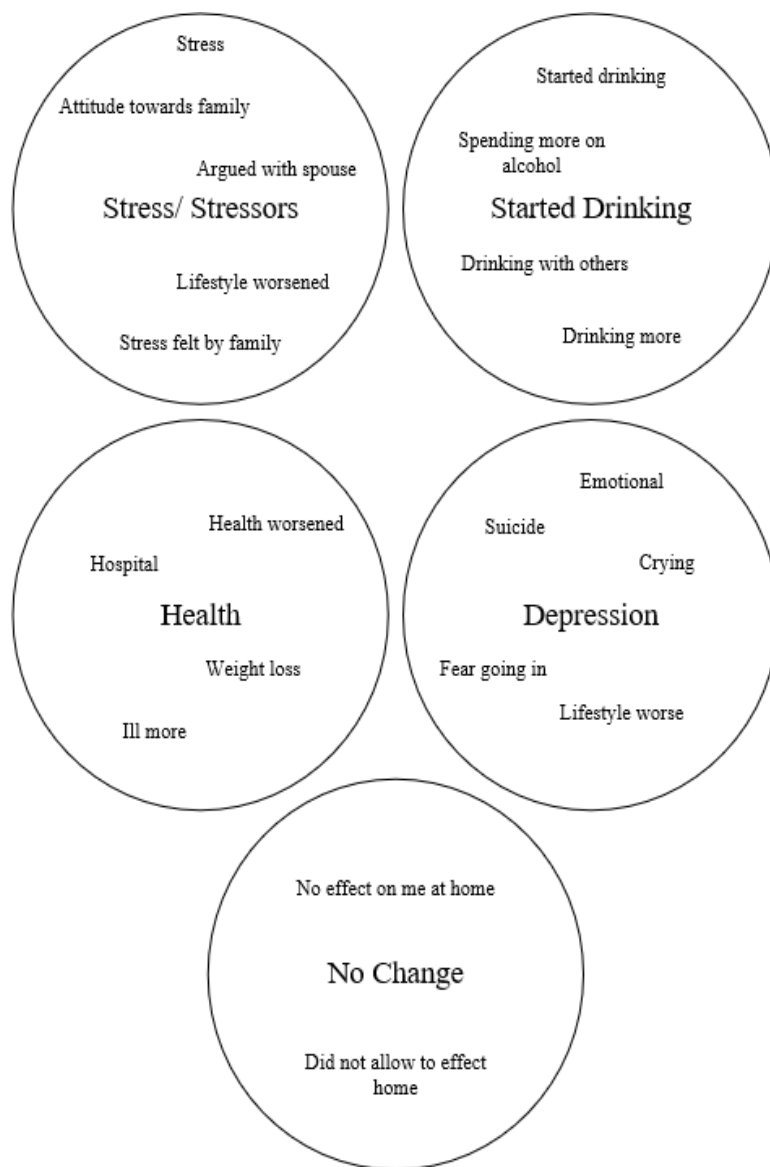themes emerged on how affected employees were affected at home by the toxic leader.

Figure 9. Population 1 effects on home themes.

Table 30 consists of major themes for Population 1 and shows what effects the affected employee felt at home as a result of the toxic leader. Participants that experienced the negative effect at home as well as supporting interview excerpts are included in this table.

Table 30

Population 1 Affected Employee Effects on Home Themes

Question element	Major theme/ Free nodes	Participants
Effects on home	Stress	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 16, 19
	Started drinking	18
	Health	6, 7, 13, 16
	Depression	3, 6, 13, 15, 16
	No change	17, 21

Textural description. Going home and being stressed out over it and then worrying about it until the next day and worrying that it's going to happen tomorrow and dreading going in because you know, "Oh what's going to happen from this person today? What are they going to say to me?" (P3).

Textural description. I guess I was just more stressed. I would kind of fly off of the hinges real fast, I guess. Those kind of things. Instead of now where I leave all my work stuff at work and come home, I'm fine, I would bring a lot of my work stuff home with me at the other job. Plus, I did a lot of charting at home, so it made it a little bit easier. I was really short with my fiancé and with my son, and I did not like that at all (P1).

Textual description. I guess I may have been a little on edge before going into work but that didn't affect anything at home really. I help it bottled up. I was depressed but I don't think anyone saw that (P21).

Textual description. Actually, two things that stay in the mind because one guys a good friend of mine. He's actually vice president of Boys Club of America. But he came into town for ... He was visiting, but we had dinner that night. But he noticed something that he thought I should go to the hospital because he was concerned that I was going to be committing suicide. And I left and went to the bathroom and he said, "We've got to get him help like tonight." (P6).

Two-thirds of the Population 1 participants experienced stress as an effect on their home life. Participant one stated, "going home and being stressed out over it and then worrying about it until the next day and worrying that it's going to happen tomorrow and dreading going in because you know, "Oh what's going to happen from this person today?

What are they going to say to me?" Depression was nearly fatal to participant six as he was experiencing the toxic leader, recounting an evening with a friend, "he noticed something that he thought I should go to the hospital because he was concerned that I was going to be committing suicide. And I left and went to the bathroom and he said, "We've got to get him help like tonight." Participants also discussed ill-effects to their health and other mentioned no effect to their home life. Participant 18 described in detail how he started drinking with comments such as, "I found myself wanting to go to the bar more, I started drinking a lot."

The major themes found during the data analysis phase for how these Population 1 affected employees were affected at home were (a) stress felt by family, (b) started drinking alcohol or drinking more, (c) affected health, (d) depressed, and (e) no effect or no change. The two most prevalent themes were *stress* and *depression*. Table 31 shows the terms and phrases from the Population 2 interviews that described the negative effects on the affected employee at home.

Table 31

Population 2 Witness-reported Effects on Home Interview Data

Question elements	Free nodes
Effects on home	Family stress, worse attitude towards family, stressed out, health became worse, went into hospital, become ill more, looked unhealthy, depressed, emotional/crying, difficult sleeping, loss of appetite, emotionally distressed, on edge all the time, getting drunk, started drinking, go drink, spending time at bar, didn't see change, none observed

Figure 10 depicts the further categorization of emergent themes related to the

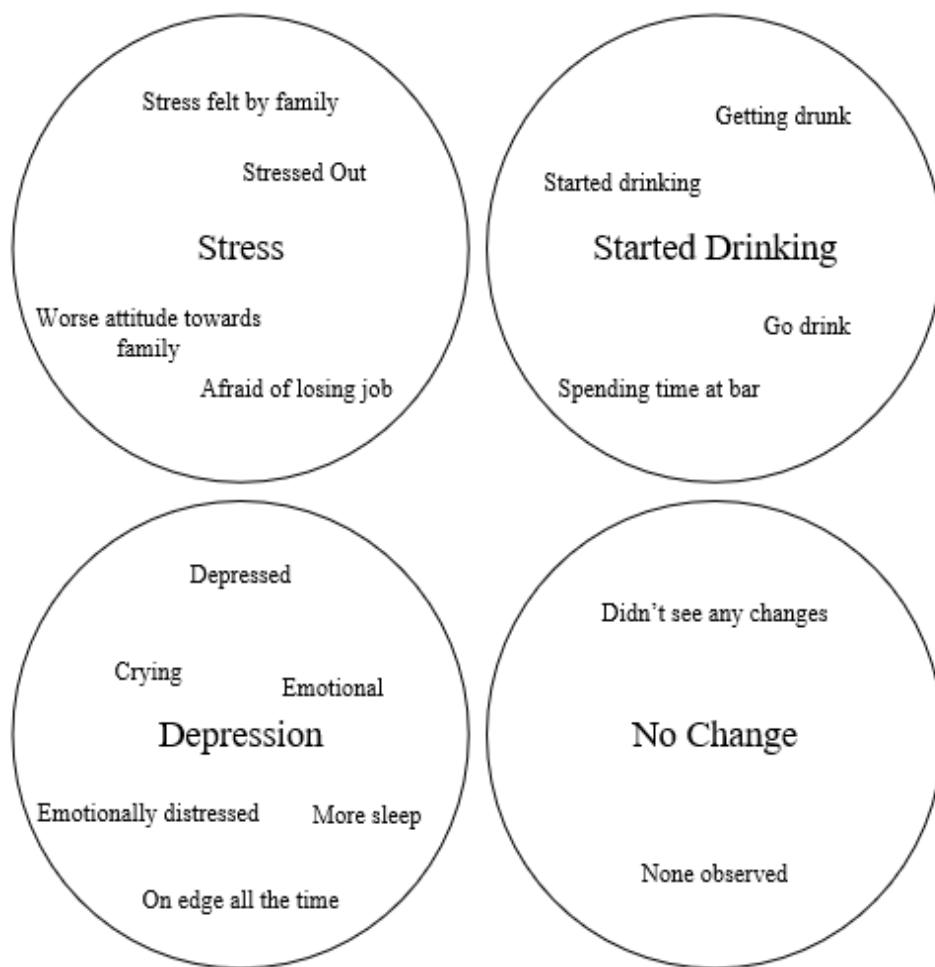observations about the effects on home life.

Figure 10. Population 2 witness-reported effects on home themes.

Table 32 is the last classification table presented and contains major themes for the

effects felt at home by the affected employee as a result of the toxic leader as observed

by Population 2 participants.

Table 32

Population 2 Witness-reported Effects on Home Themes

Question element	Major theme/Free nodes	Participants
Effects on home	Stress	2, 11, 12, 24, 25, 27
	Started drinking	2, 23, 27
	Health	2, 18, 25, 27
	Depression	2, 11, 12, 20, 24
	No change	3, 10, 26, 28

Textural description. Yeah, she was afraid of losing her job, so she never went out or spent any money. Dropped off the face of the earth (P20).

Textural description. Actually yes, because I think her husband was employed there as well. She and I spoke often and whenever the times she was out I would ask him, you know how she was doing, because I knew kind of what was going on and everything. He shared with me that she was just stressed out, concerned situation, she was having difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite. Just things you would normally would have whenever you're dealing with a stressful situation (P2).

Textual description. It got to the point where she was stressed out that she started going to the [inaudible] she went out on an FMLA, just because it started to affect her health. She confided in me that she actually started seeing professional counseling just to kind of assist with the psychological effects of the … of she was kind of experiencing. So, she was, again you could tell that it was really affecting her, she ... it was horrible to watch (P2).

Textual description. It seemed to consume her life from when it started until she transferred out. She would vent to me and others constantly about it. I guess it's how she dealt with it? It's all she wanted to do – go drink and talk about it (P23).

Textual description. We are pretty good friends and I didn't see any change outside of work. I mean, I was not there a lot, but didn't see or hear of anything out of the norm. He kept work away from his family from what I knew (P26).

Stress and *depression* were the number one and two worst effects on home life that Population 2 observed of the affected employees. Participant two stated, "It got to the point where she was stressed out that she started going to the [inaudible] she went out on an FMLA, just because it started to affect her health. She confided in me that she actually started seeing professional counseling just to kind of assist with the psychological effects of the … of she was kind of experiencing. So, she was, again you could tell that it was really affecting her, she ... it was horrible to watch (P3). Participant two explain that these issue created a negative situation at the affected employee's home in which she often would discuss with the participant at work when seeking help. This was a unique situation because participant two also worked this the affected employee's husband. When participant two asked about the affected employee out of concern, he was told, "she was having difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite. Just things you would normally would have whenever you're dealing with a stressful situation." Other participants stated affected employees *started drinking* and some experience negative effects on their *health* due to the toxic leader. Others noticed no change. It is possible that the Population 2 participants who stated there was no observed change simply were not privy to seeing any changes.

Much like the coping data and effect on work behavior, the long-term personal effect data from both populations were similar. A total of five effects across each

population were similar: (a) stress, (b) no effect or no change, (c) affected health, (d)

depressed, and (e) started drinking alcohol or drinking more. Population 1 had five

additional effects, whereas Population 2 had two additional effects. From a combination

of both populations, 23 of the 29 participants reported effects at home in multiple aspects.

The number one effect realized at home was the *stress* of the affected employee. This was

followed by *depression*. Table 33 compares both populations and categorizes how

Population 1 experienced effects at home and Population 2 witnessed or discussed

personal effects of the toxic leader with the affected employee. These categories were the

further analyzed, using related interview data into the themes listed above.

Table 33

Personal Effects Data Population Comparison

Combined personal effects	
Population 1 (n =15)	*Population 2 (n =14)*
Stress felt by family	Stress felt by family
No effect/no change at home	No effect/no change at home
Affected health	Affected health
Depressed	Depressed
Started drinking alcohol/drinking more	Started drinking alcohol/drinking more
Slept less	Slept more
Lost weight	Worry felt by family
Attitude towards family worsened	
Lost pay/worse lifestyle	
Thoughts of suicide	

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand what coping

strategies employees use to reduce negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves,

other employees, and the overall workplace, as well as the behaviors that result from these strategies. One important factor realized during the data analysis phase was the different perspectives between Population 1 and Population 2. Population 1 consisted of those who directly experienced a toxic leader. This group's participants recounted their lived experiences and discussed how they emotionally responded, coped, behaved at work, and were affected at home as a direct result of a toxic leader. Population 2 consisted of participants who witnessed another employee being affected by a toxic leader. While recounting their lived experiences, they shared their perspectives on how the affected employees reacted, coped, and were affected at home. In some instances, the Population 2 participant did not know the answer, such as how the toxic leader affected the employee at home. In other cases, this information was known either through a close relationship or conversations between the participant and the affected employee.

Both populations had similar emotional reactions to toxic events and leaders. Most participants felt or witnessed the affected employees feeling betrayed, embarrassed, upset, targeted, afraid, or upset. Outlying initial reactions were those of feeling belittled, helpless, sad, or ill. Just under 50% of Population 1 felt betrayed by their leader while just over 50% of Population 2 observed the affected employee being upset. These were the most commonly discussed reactions by the participants.

The analysis of coping strategies was categorized by short-term and long-term coping strategies as described by participants during the interviews. Both populations had the following similar initial coping strategies: a) take no action, b) avoid, c) confront, and

d) seek resource help. An additional initial coping mechanism of "try harder/please" was employed by participant 15 of Population 1. This coping mechanism was identified in the participant's interview through their description of trying harder to satisfy the needs of and please the toxic leader. This coping strategy was an outlier and not expected based on findings from prior research. Another unexpected finding was the lack of the *forgiveness* strategy discussed in chapter two. No participant in either population mentioned this in any interview.

The second part of the coping strategy was the long-term strategy used by the affected employee. The strategy of *try harder/please* did not come up as a long-term strategy in either population even though it was identified as an initial coping strategy. Both populations realized different movement from initial to long-term strategies with Population 1 having the most change. Population 1 had a dramatic change in using the confrontation strategy. The participants who used confrontation initially abandoned that strategy long-term as most shifted to *sought resource help*. In Population 2, most participants observed affected employees moving from seeking resource help to avoiding the toxic leader.

I discovered that there were subcategories of *sought resource help*. Seeking resource help meant a) talking to family or personal, non-work-related friends to vent and find comfort but not a solution; b) talking with co-workers, other leaders, or human resources in order to find a solution; or c) a combination of both. It was when the affected employee utilized strategies involving work-related resources that the strategy seemed

most effective. However, this was not discussed in great detail in each interview in every situation based on the atmosphere and direction of the interview. I would recommend this strategy be explored more in future studies.

Another aspect of the data acquired from both populations was how the toxic leader or event affected the employee personally, or at home. This dataset had the largest span of categories. Of the 12 different categories, five of them spanned across both populations. Population 2 participants observed two additional effects at home: (a) slept more and (b) worry by family; whereas Population 1 had five: (a) slept less; (b) lost weight; (c) attitude toward family worsened; (d) lost pay/worse lifestyle; and (e) thoughts of suicide. Four participants of Population 2 had no insight into how the toxic leader affected the affected employees at home.

Overall, data analysis showed more similarities than differences between Population 1 and Population 2. Both populations encountered similar reactions, coping mechanisms, and toxic leader experienced or observed personal effects at home. To a lesser extent, the main difference found was the change in coping mechanisms that occurred over time. Many participants revealed in the interviews that the way in which affected employees coped shifted from the initial strategy to the long-term strategy. Population 1 moved to seeking more resource help, while Population 2 observed the affected employees moving toward seeking less resource help.

In the next chapter, the interpretations of analyzed data will be synthesized and interpreted. Excerpts from certain interviews will be shared to explain and add rich

description to the interpretation. I discuss the limitations of this study as discovered from the data collection stage through the interpretation. Also, I present recommendations for practical application of the study results as well as recommendations for further research. The discussion ends with a conclusion of the findings and interpretations.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace. I also sought to understand the behaviors that result from these strategies. I found that most employees affected by a toxic leader eventually sought the help of another resource to effectively cope with the toxic event. These resources were either friends, family, coworkers, other leaders, or human resources professionals. The most effective resources sought by affected employees were the human resources professionals found within their organization. In this chapter, I detail the limitations of the study and discuss my interpretations of the analyzed data, including recommendations and implications.

Toxic leader are harmful to the affected employee and destructive to the organization. Destructive leaders repeat negative actions than create no value to the organization (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Destructive leaders with volatile behavior can harm an organization (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). In part, this harm includes turnover of affected employees due to multiple issues such as job disatifaction and decreased performance (Schmidt, 2014; Self & Self, 2014). A study by Vickers (2014) showed that 14% of an organizations's employees are affected by toxic leadership at any given time. The toxic leader's effect on employees is like a poison that spreads through the organization causing much damage, which could amount to millions of dollars depending on organizational size (Low & Teo, 2015; Too & Harvey, 2012). With the

number of employees and organizations being harmed by toxic leaders, it is imperative to help affected employees better cope with and work toward reducing toxic leadership.

Interpretation of the Findings

Deductive findings from my research validate findings from previous studies on the ill-effects of toxic leadership on affected employees while furthering the scholarly understanding of how employees affected by toxic leadership cope (see Valentine, Fleischman, & Godkin, 2015). In the following sections, I review the employee's emotional reaction to the toxic leader, the initial and long-term coping strategies, any effect on the employee at work, and finally any effect on the employee at home.

Emotional Reaction to the Toxic Leader

The reactions to toxic leadership I found in this study are similar to those discussed in prior studies about toxic leadership, and they provide further data to improve scholarly understanding of the topic. The initial reactions voiced by both employees affected by toxic leadership (Population 1) and witnesses to toxic leadership (Population 2) were emotional as they described the toxic leader and toxic event or events. The four common reaction themes experienced or witnessed by both populations were: (a) embarrassed, (b) afraid, (c) upset, and (d) betrayed. Five additional emotional reactions detailed in the participant interviews were: (a) belittled, (b) targeted, (c) helpless, (d) sad, and (e) stressed, which were associated with the main themes. Xu, Loi, Lam, (2015) explained that employees affected by abusive leadership reached emotional exhaustion. The participants described the emotional reaction as very deep and as having permanent

effects. Though many affected employees felt multiple emotions, the four main reaction themes were expressed by most participants across both populations. The remaining five sub or outlying emotional reactions were felt by only one or two participants. Experiencing these undesirable emotions created by a person of authority in what should be an otherwise safe environment was traumatic for these participants.

Three theories may provide insight into why affected employees reacted or coped as they did when first encountering a toxic event. Freyd and DePrince (2013) detailed the following theories in their discussion of those affected by toxic leadership: (a) betrayal trauma theory, (b) the cognitive theory of trauma, and (c) the conservation of resources theory. Gobin and Freyd (2013) explained that betrayal trauma theory is about someone experiencing shock due to a sudden break in trust.

Most participants mentioned their initial emotional response as *being upset*, with 45% of the participants listing that as a secondary feeling experienced or witnessed. Those affected employees who had *upset* as a response explained this with a great deal of emotion and often repeated themselves, possibly due to their recounting of the story and associated emotions felt at that time. The second most discussed emotion was being embarrassed at 38%. Those affected employees who described being embarrassed about the toxic event usually experienced it in public and were also caught off guard with no warning or leading clues as to why the toxic event happened. This feeling of shock had an underlying feeling of betrayal as participants could not initially accept the leader was taking toxic actions towards them.

Finally, the betrayal categories were mentioned eight times and felt by 28% of the affected employees. Participants discussed betrayal in the most detail with additional terms used such as *trust*, *disbelief,* or *shock*. Betrayal trauma theory explains the disbelief and shock felt when the toxic event occurred for these participants as he affected employee has some level of trust established with the leader which was abruptly broken. During the time of the interviews, most of these affected employees who felt betrayed were leaders themselves, had tenure with the organization, and respected the toxic leader before the toxic event occurred.

Consequently, these affected employees mostly used the *confrontation* coping strategy initially, describing a trust-like relationship. Most of these affected employees felt they were owed an explanation or remedy. Participant 18 felt betrayed by the toxic leader. The trust that Participant 18 had for the leader to do the right thing and support the participant's best interest was broken. This participant felt that because of the long-term and good leader-follower relationship, there was no reason to suspect that he would be a target, thus exacerbating the feelings of betrayal. The participant discussed the loyalty and trust that once existed toward the leader but was now diminished. It is possible certain employees construct a false sense of trust with the leader, or trust people will do the what the employee considers to be the right thing. This false sense of trust can be related to the cognitive theory of trauma. When that false trust or the right thing is not done, these employees might feel betrayed. Though the trust or wrong-doing is heighten by the trauma, their perception of the toxic event and feelings are real.

Coping Strategies

My findings regarding coping strategies align with and validate the data in Olafsson and Johannsdottir's (2004) study. Prior researchers (Aubrey, 2012; Olafssonan & Johannsdottir, 2004) indicated four main strategies for coping with a toxic leader: (a) avoiding the leader, (b) seeking help, (c) confrontation, or (d) doing nothing. In this study, I did not anticipate different stages of coping, such as initial and long-term, and no similarities to any other study ensure there was no bias. I found similar strategies, with the addition of and outlier strategy used only by one participant: *try harder/please*. The main coping strategies found in my study were: (a) take no action, (b) avoidance, (c) confrontation, (d) and sought resource help. For instance, Participant 15 discussed her attempts to try harder and please the toxic leader. She stated that the situation seemed surreal and the more the leader belittled her in front of others, the harder she worked to please the leader to stop the toxic events. The participant felt that by pleasing the toxic leader, he would eventually stop. Her initial coping strategy did not help, and the participant's long-term coping strategy became that of *sought resource help*, which resolved the issue.

Sarıçam, Çardak, and Yaman (2014) identified forgiveness as a coping strategy for teachers who decided to move on and do nothing to remedy the situation. This coping strategy was not described by any of the directly affected employee participants nor any of the witness participants in my study. Nor did I find it any in other study. Two differences I found between this study and prior studies were that (a) coping strategies are

reported by both affected employees and witnesses to toxic leader occurrences, and (b)

coping strategies are evaluated both immediately and after the initial toxic event. The

initial coping strategies used by all affected employees, regardless of the population,

were: (a) take no action, (b) avoidance, (c) confrontation, and (d) sought resource help.

The initial coping strategy discussed by Participant 15 from Population 1 that was not

discussed with any Population 2 participant was *try harder/please*. Much like the initial

reaction to the toxic leader, coping strategies found in this study might be explained by

betrayal trauma theory, cognitive theory of trauma, or conservation of resources theory.

Initial coping strategy. The initial coping strategies utilized by the Population 1

participants and witnessed by the Population 2 participants were similar in most cases.

Those affected employees who discussed a change in how they coped, seemed to have

impulsive reactions to the toxic event which led to the immediate coping strategy. This

was often not realized by the affected employees until they had changed how they were

coping and, in some cases, not until they discussed it in the interview (Population 1).

The most utilized coping strategy in both populations was *sought resource help*

which supports findings from (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004) who referred to this

coping strategy as *seeking help.* A total of 14 affected employees from both populations

sought help when initially experiencing the toxic leader. Participants described talking

with, venting to, and seeking advice from family, friends, coworkers, and their human

resources departments. This approach helped calm the affected employee and find

direction for a resolution. This coping strategy aligned with the conservation of resources

theory of seeking out those who may help in times of crises (Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke (2011).

The conservation of resources theory involves people reaching out to close personal resources and drawing them in when help is needed (Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke, 2011). For example, Participant 8 of Population 1 recounted having a conversation with his direct boss about the toxic events occurring with a toxic leader who was a leader above both of them. Unfortunately, this participant's leader was also feeling some effects of the toxic events; however, by discussing the events they felt calmer about the situation.

Eventually, this led to each discussing the events with a human resources professional. Conservation of resources theory may also account for the affected employee oversharing his or her emotion with friends and family as he or she processed what was happening. This theory is related more closely to the sought resource help coping strategy and will be discussed later in this chapter. Conservation of resources theory and betrayal trauma theory theories were represented within the findings of the current study, but only betrayal trauma theory applied to the participants' initial emotional reactions to the toxic leader.

The second most used coping strategy was *confrontation*. This finding was in contrast to other studies regarding the number of affected employees that used this strategy to deal with toxic leaders Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004), Simons and Sauer (2013), Dauber and Tavernier (2011) found that employees affected by toxic leadership

rarely confronted the leader compared to other coping strategies. In the present study, *confronting* the toxic leader represented 24% of the participant identified coping strategies, with most of the 24% coming from Population 1. It is possible that the participants either felt like they confronted the toxic leader or wanted to portray this ability in the interview. When Participant 18 of Population 1 confronted his leader because he felt betrayed, he was never given a definitive reason or feedback on the toxic events. No explanation for the event was given to satisfy the affected employee's concerns or excuse what had happened. When the affected employees using this coping strategy realized that *confrontation* was not the answer, most *sought resource help* to attempt a resolution. Depending on the discussed resource, this type of help was in the form of (a) emotional support or venting to a friend or family member not related to work; or (b) support to continue working, confront the leader or speak with human resources if a work-related resource. In many cases, human resources were utilized as a resource by the affected employee to remedy the toxic situation because confrontation was attempted without success.

The *avoidance* coping strategy was used by those affected employees who could not bear to see or interact with the toxic leader. Dauber and Tavernier (2011) describe avoidance as coping through isolation whereas the affected employee distanced themselves from the toxic leader emotionally and physically. The affected employees in this research utilizing the *avoidance* coping strategy had an emotional reaction of embarrassment or being afraid. Data suggested these affected employees were mostly

social within the organization with no previous concerns with their leader. All but one of these affected employees left the organization voluntarily. Otherwise good, engaged employees became embarrassed by and fearful of their leader due to a toxic even which eventual lead to them leaving the organization.

The avoidance coping strategy was the third most used by Population 1 and second most used by Population 2, being third most used overall. According to Olafsson & Johannsdottir (2004), however, avoidance is used more than confrontation. That prior finding contradicts the finding in this current study which is discussed more in the long-term coping strategy section below. Avoidance might temporarily relieve the effects of toxic leaders, in these cases the affected employees found themselves still coping. The issue was not resolved.

The *take no action* coping strategy was only found to be used by three affected employees overall within both populations initially. This coping strategy involved simply taking no action to remedy the situation or relieve any ill-effects created by the toxic leader. Olafsson & Johannsdottir (2004), also found this coping strategy to be to least utilized of all available options. All three of the affected employees had no avenue to resolve the issue and resigned. This was not due to the size of the organization but lack confidence in those who could help. This coping strategy was not effective and resulted in voluntary job loss accompanied by a feeling of isolation with no help being available. Data indicated a failure on the part of the organization to properly highlight employee options for resolve in cases of toxic leadership.

The outlying, or unexpected coping strategy was try harder/please used by participant 15. Population 1 revealed an additional strategy not found in Population 2 or in prior research - *try harder/please*. Participant 15 from Population 1 detailed actions used in this particular coping strategy as those which would satisfy the toxic leader's needs to gain favor and remedy the situation. The participant initially felt her performance but more so relationship with the leader was lacking, and the toxic events stemmed from that issue. The cognitive theory of trauma includes people reframing a traumatic incident to make sense of what happened, skewing their perception to ensure they can cope and move past the incident (Szasz, Szentagotai, & Hofmann, 2011). In Population 1, Participant 15 discussed that initially it was hard to understand what was happening between her and the leader. She felt she and her leader had a very good relationship and she needed to work harder for the toxic leader.

The participant's initial perception of what was truly happening was skewed by her disbelief that her leader would actually treat her in that fashion and it was in response to a lack of performance, not that her leader disliked her or was toxic. Dauber and Tavernier (2011) found that employees affected by ineffective leaders cope through a learning process as they attempt to understand why their superiors behave in a certain way. In this case, participant 15 assessed the situation and determined damaged the leader-follower relationship and needed to work harder to repair that relationship. As the participant learned harder work would not remedy the situation, she attempted to please the leader to minimize the negative effects felt until she could seek help.

Long-term Coping Strategy. When asked how the participants or observed affected employees coped days, weeks, or months after the initial toxic event, I captured multiple longitudinal data on coping strategies leading to the understanding of the long-term coping strategy. Most affected employees did not effectively cope with the situation when it initial occurred, creating the need to adjust their strategy and, thus, a longer-term coping strategy. It does make sense to make a change if an action is not yielding desired results, I do not anticipate the amount of affected employees who would make a change because their initial attempt to cope did not work. This indicated they did not know how to handle the toxic situation. Furthermore, it led to the conclusion that organization are not properly preparing their staff. Conversely, Dauber and Tavernier (2011) found that devising a strategy to cope with an effective leader often worsens the leader-follower relationship, often leading to termination of the affected employee. This was evident in this study as 12 of the 29 participants who had no change from their initial coping strategy that was *avoidance* or moved to *take no action* or *avoidance* coping strategy.

While both populations utilized the same type of coping strategies, Population 1 had more change in the long-term than Population 2. This may have been a flaw in the research due to the witness group not being privy to the affected employees changed coping strategy. Population 1's largest change came from participants moving from a *confrontation* strategy to *sought resource help* strategy. Olafsson & Johannsdottir (2004) stated that those affected by toxic leader who cope in a more assertive manner initially tend to avoid the leader long-term if issues continue. This contradicted the findings in this

study as only one affected employee moved from initial confrontation to long-term avoidance.

Once participants were not able to remedy the situation on their own, they sought the help of others, eventually moving to help from human resource type professionals. Most affected employees observed by the Population 2 participants who utilized the *sought resource help* strategy changed to avoiding the toxic leader. Again, this may have been observed without knowledge of the affected employee continuing to seek help from other resources or being told by human resource professional to void the leader while an investigation ensued. The *avoidance* coping strategy replaced the *confrontation* coping strategy as the second most utilized long-term coping strategy.

Population 1 affected employees were observed moving from seeking the help of friends or family to seeking help form organizational professionals such as human resource departments. Some participants from Population 1 suggested in their interviews that the shift from other strategies to the *sought resource help* strategy was due to the initial coping strategy not resolving the issue with the toxic leader and the toxic events continuing. Many described a breaking point or exhaustion point and needed help finding relief.

As mentioned above, Participant 15 from Population 1 initially utilized the try harder/please coping strategy to deal with the toxic leader. Over time, this strategy was replaced with the *sought resource help* strategy, which became the most effective coping strategy per participants. According to Participant 15, once it was evident that no level of

performance would please the leader, so she did not want to repair what she felt was a damaged relationship, the participant discussed the issue with family before going to the organization's human resources department. A change in strategy was discovered with most participants in Population 1 and some within Population 2.

The *sought resource help* coping strategy was the most successful strategy for two reasons. The first was if the resource was an organizational professional such as a leader or human resources professional and there was intervention and the toxic event(s) did not reoccur. Olafsson & Johannsdottir (2004) stated that professional such as those within "HR" are more equipped and expected to provide practical help in these types of scenarios. The second reason was, even if the toxic event reoccurred, that the affected employee was able to talk about the situation. Participants discussed the toxic event creating stress at home due to sharing details with family members but it also helped calm the affected employee. This helped them reframe the situation, find the strength to find another job, or simply move on.

Overall, the coping strategies from both Population 1 and Population 2 were comparable to those found by Olafsson and Johannsdottir in 2004. Prior studies did not examine the change in coping strategies over time as researched in this study. Olafsson & Johannsdottir (2004) stated, "further longitudinal study should aim toward tracing the suggested progressive change in the choice of coping strategies" (p. 331). More research might be needed on the use of forgiveness when affected employees truly appear to take no action when coping with a toxic leader. The coping strategy that was utilized most

effectively and that yielded affected employee satisfaction was *sought resource help*. However, this coping strategy was not utilized by all affected employees initially. This coping strategy may be the key to helping affected employees better cope with toxic leaders and possibly reduce the after affects and frequency of toxic events.

Work Behavior

Expected behaviors from employees affected by a toxic leader include decreased performance (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015), lack of satisfaction and motivation (Mehdi, Raju, & Mukherji, 2012), being disruptive or withdrawn, and contemplating resignation (Glambek et al., 2015). Work behaviors resulting from a toxic leader in the present study were the same as those found by Glambek et al, further validating each study.

In both Population 1 and Population 2, poor performance was the top behavior occurring as a result of the toxic leader. From both populations, 48.3% of affected employees performed at a lower level once the toxic event occurred. Of the affected employees who cited poor performance as a resulting behavior of having a toxic leader, 52.4% also claimed to have a decreased level of job satisfaction. A decrease in job satisfaction was never cited as the only behavior by any of the participants. Job dissatisfaction always followed another behavior, though participants stated it was a result of the toxic event. The pattern of discussion from both populations suggested that the toxic event created a lack of job satisfaction that created most other negative workplace behaviors. This contradicts the actual order of detail given in the interviews. Not all affected and witnessed employees realized a decrease in job satisfaction, they still

enjoyed the work they did and organization, but did perform less because of working for a toxic leader.

The second most discussed behavior was a *lack of job satisfaction*. Employees who have experienced abusive leaders such as those who are considered toxic are more likely unsatisfied with their job and display undesirable organizational behaviors (Glaso, Einarson, Matthiesen, & Skogstad, 2010). As stated above, this behavior was the main driver of poor performance after the toxic event. Out of all affected employees who claimed to have a toxic leader-related decrease in job satisfaction, 70% eventually resigned as a direct result of the toxic leader. This percentage is slightly higher than the 60% of affected employees who left their jobs in a previous study (Rotter, 2011).

Of those who did move on to other organizations, 83.3% reported being happier after leaving the organization with the toxic leader. The main reason for being happy was not having to cope with the toxic leader. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) found that employees react to toxic leaders and workplace bullies through lack of commitment to the organization and leave said organization to minimize personal effects. Glambek et al. (2015) found that employees affected by toxic leadership consideration resignation an option for resolution. Over 50% of all affected employees, whether directly affected or observed, resigned from the organization. Of that resignation subset, only two of the resignations, once from each population, were not related to the toxic event. The affected employees were mostly afraid or humiliated and half of this group also resolved the issues through seeking resource help with the organization's human resources

department. Still, these affected employees voluntarily resigned because of the overall

toxic leader's effect on their work and personal lives. In the minds of these affected

employees, the damage was done and irreversible.

Poor job satisfaction seemed to have been a catalyst for other behaviors, such

missing deadlines or not taking available overtime, as well though the participants did not

confirm the existence of poor job satisfaction or a decrease in job satisfaction. Therefore,

I did not assume poor job satisfaction was a behavior for those participants.

Some participants did attempt to work harder as a result of the toxic leader while

attempting to cope with the situation. This was not described as a coping strategy as it

was with the single Population 1 participant 15 detailed prior in the study. This was to

repair what Participant 15 thought was a broken relationship between her and her leader

and subsequently reduce the frequency of toxic events or not be seen as weak while

searching for a remedy.

In summary, toxic leadership creates great potential for job dissatisfaction which

increases the risk of affected employees performing at a lower level. These employees

may display several behaviors such a withdrawing from social work events, working less,

or being difficult to get along with after the toxic event occurred. Xu, Loi, Lam, (2015)

stated the trauma of experiencing a toxic leader can encourage silence from those

affected, hence causing withdrawal at work or lack ot seeking help. Many affected

employees, who were otherwise happy with the organization and type of work,

eventually resort to resignation in order to remedy the situation and reduce other issues caused by the toxic leader.

Effect on Home Life

Of the themes discovered of how affected employees were affected at home, the most frequently mentioned one was *stress*. Stress may have been felt by the affected employee's family or the affected employee or both at home. This was contrasted with the *no change* theme at home. The most extreme and unique example in this section was the participant 6 from Population 1 became depressed and had thoughts of suicide which was also ascertained by his friends from conversation. Participant 6 have the most detail of any participant and focused on the being belittled at work which made him feel beneath his peers. This led to a fear of losing his job and stress between him and his spouse at home. This participants experienced illness to the point of hospitalization. The many ill affects felt at home by Participant 6 of Population 1 created additional stress between him and his spouse. Most affected employees had multiple issues at home as a result of experiencing a toxic leader. These findings were similar to Rotter's (2011) study that found nurses affected by toxic leadership experienced increased stress, depression, anxiety, nervous habits, overeating, hopeless thoughts, and alcoholism.

Four affected employees in this study started drinking or drinking more alcohol to cope with the feelings outside of the workplace generated because of the toxic leader. None of these participants expressed a prior alcohol problem and those that were observed were said to have no support group outside of work. Two utilized avoidance at

some point while at work with one turning to the confrontation coping mechanism. Piasecki, Cooper, Wood, Sher, Shiffman, Heath, (2014) stated that people drink alcohol to affect certain physiological processes that can suppress emotions. This can further affect these employees by leading to alcoholism. These affected employees expressed embarrassment and some sought resource help to cope with the toxic leader. Three other participants described their stress hitting a point to where they would take out frustrations on their family though the anger stemmed from the toxic leader's actions. Several others explained the ill effects the toxic event had on their health with one affected employee being hospitalized. Others slept more, slept less, or lost weight due to the emotional turmoil felt. Most dealt with multiple negative affects at home but the toxic leader's actions that occurred at the workplace.

The effects on employees experiencing toxic leaders were very traumatic. During the interviews the tone of most participants in Population 1 changed from frustration to hopelessness as they talked about how their life negatively changed outside of work due to the toxic leader. Participant 6 in Population, while maintaining he was okay, recalled dinner with friends while his toxic situation was occurring, stating, "…he was visiting, but we had dinner that night. But he noticed something that he thought I should go to the hospital because he was concerned that I was going to be committing suicide." And I left and went to the bathroom and he said, "We've got to get him help like tonight [P4]." The participants in Population 2 also had a tone change to one of pity for the affected

employees. It was apparent from the interviews and data analysis that the effects on people experiencing toxic leadership extend well beyond the workplace.

Limitations of the Study

Three of the five limitations discussed earlier in this study remained: (a) organizational conditions, (b) integrity of the participants, and (c) whether a real toxic event occurred. The other two original limitations of participant availability and emotional state were not limitations upon the conclusion of the study. The original participant sample size was only one short of the desired sample count, though completing interviews with the 29 participants did take much longer than anticipated.

During the interviews only, a few participants mentioned the organizational climate or working conditions, even though this was not one of the interview questions. Because this data was not observed by me personally, I did not include it in the interview data. Though participants may not have been completely honest, I had no basis to doubt their responses as none gave contradicting or questionable responses.

An additional limitation of the study is not knowing if a toxic event actually took place at all. Though the interview data from each participant suggested a toxic event did occur, without interviewing the toxic leader for a complete view of the situation I cannot confirm the events were not initiated by workplace deviance on the part of the participant or observed affected employee.

Finally, a limitation discovered during the data collection phase of the study was the integrity of the data given by Population 2. This sample of participants observed

affected employees as they encountered toxic leaders. During the interview some participants responded by stating they did not know the answer. Others gave vague answers and did not have additional detail. For example, many of the affected employees observed by Population 2 participants indicated no changes to long-term coping strategies. This was in direct contrast with the data from affected employees of Population 1. It might be possible that the participants in Population 2 stated there was no change in the observed affected employees' long-term coping strategies, but in actuality they simply did not observe it. Without interviewing those observed affected employees, I was not able to confirm that data, hence it was a limitation.

Recommendations

I recommend further study on this topic with the inclusion of the both the toxic leader and the affected employee. This would afford a more complete picture of the leader-follower relationship as well as the toxic events. Also, I would suggest an on-site observation of the workplace in a future study in which the toxic events occurred to understand if the culture promoted or attempted to reduce toxic leadership. This observation might give the researcher insight into what tools are used by the organization to recognize and prevent toxic leadership as well as assist those affected by toxic leaders. Perhaps a survey by employees on organization culture might be a useful tool to correlate how they perceive the organization's operations in terms of processes, the way people are treated, and job satisfaction by departments. Such a study may be difficult to complete based on obtaining information from both the toxic leader and the affected employee,

especially if both are still employed with that organization. Conversely, if they are not still with the same organization, the organization may be hesitant to share contact information for former employees if other means of contact are not successful.

Another opportunity for future research on coping with toxic leadership might be to separate the data collected by industry. Through the present study there were findings that might suggest some industries have a higher percent of toxic leadership and the employees of those industries may have better tools to cope than others. Researching this information further might help researchers recommend best practices across industries to continue the recognition and reduction of toxic leader behavior and the affects felt by employees and the organization as a whole. This research could be expanded from industry type to include how employees affected by toxic leadership also coped with the situation at home. Though no participant mention divorce as a result of the toxic event, many described a large amount of stress caused to their spouse which included fighting and time away from home.

A final opportunity to further this study would be to study the coping strategies more closely as they relate to affected employee personality types. For example, the *please/try harder* coping strategy might insinuate the affected employee is more prone to be targeted by toxic leaders. If a toxic leader thinks the targeted employee will simply try harder or make attempts to please them, then this may trigger toxic actions. The coping strategy, forgiveness, as discovered by Sarıçam, Çardak, and Yaman (2014) was not validate by my study but might explain why affected employees move on or *take no*

action. These coping strategies might be studied further to gain additional understanding into who gets bullied at work and who does not as well as who best copes with toxic leaders on their own.

Implications

One out of every ten employees are affected by a toxic leader (Vickers, 2014). A study by Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2003) showed that three out of four employees in the United States have experienced or witnessed a toxic leader. Toxic leadership is not effective and causes serious damage to both the affected employee and the organization.

Nielson and Einarsen (2012) concluded that toxic leadership causes trauma to affected employees. Employees affected by toxic leaders, in turn, results in negative consequences to the organization as well. Lipinski and Crothers (2013) found that organizations do not fully understand the effects of toxic leadership and how to help affected employees.

Affected employees must be found and helped sooner by the organization in which toxic leadership is allowed to occur (Lipmen-Blumen, 2005; Pelletier, 2009). Organizations cannot wait for affected employees to seek help but must understand the coping signs and intervene whether by human resource professionals or through training of leadership. Failure to act will allowed continued and possibly worse harm to both affected employees and organizations.

Organizational waste, through increased cost effectiveness, could be reduced. Employee productivity increases operational costs when performance targets are not met.

The cost of recruiting and training a new employee outweighs the cost of retaining a current employee (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, (2017). This cost, as related to toxic leadership could be reduced or eliminated if organizations had a better understand of how their employees cope with such leaders and intervene early and avoid the loss of that employee.

Positive Social Change

The major implication of this study suggests the need and opportunity for organizational leadership, co-workers, and human resource personnel to more quickly recognize an affected employee by actions or displayed behaviors and intervene. These actions, as found in this study, are changes in performance, attitude, socialness, or attendance that are out of place or that changed suddenly. In addition to recognition of an employee affected by a toxic leader, witnesses, other leaders and human resources professionals need an understanding and knowledge of actionable tasks that are necessary to help an employee move from initial and long-term coping stages and manage the resulting behaviors. This could occur through additional training of employees at all levels to recognize the potential results of a toxic leader to address the issue and inform the proper authorities of the situation. This study provides evidence supporting the effectiveness of work-related resources helping affected employees cope with toxic leaders.

Several participants stated that usually when a resource was trusted, a change occurred. Whether that resource was a friend, co-worker, another leader, or a human

resource professional, some type of positive change occurred for the affected employee. A higher level of changed was achieved; however, if that resource was work-related. Confiding in friends or family usually led to the affected employee leaving the organization much sooner that if the resource sought out was within the organization's human resources office. Confiding in organizational personnel had a positive effect for the employee and the organization. This usually occurred with the toxic leader leaving the organization; being transferred; or possibly being reprimanded and no longer exhibiting toxic traits.

This is a cue for human resource professionals and senior leaders to make resources available to those affected by toxic leadership early in the coping process and is support by prior findings by Pelletier (2009). To reduce the time of discover and overall resolution. This may be through proactive advertising resources or training before any toxic event occurs. Taking this action might reduce negative effects on the organization and the employee because they would receive help from a resource earlier, limiting prolonged effects. By reducing the effects of toxic leadership, the affected employee can regain a sense of well-being much sooner and can start rebuilding trust with leadership. This will translate into better performance and loyalty from the employee. Finally, the negative effects realized by the organization are also minimized through a quicker resolution through a more effective coping strategy for the affected employee.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand what coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on themselves, other employees, and the overall workplace, as well as the behaviors that result from these strategies. This objective was completed using two sample populations consisting of 29 total participants and data from Olafsson and Johannsdottir's 2004 study found in the literature review section. This section will summarize the completed study through a detailed recount of the findings, interpretations, and social implications.

Toxic leadership remains an issue in U.S. organization as of the date of this study. In 2003, Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2003) stated that 74% of United States employees reported either being a victim of or witnessing someone being a victim of toxic leadership. In 2013, Carden and Boyd (2013) reported that 39% of American workers encountered bullies at work. In 2014, Vickers (2014) found that during any given time period, approximately 10% to 15% of employees in the United States actively experienced some form of toxic leadership or corporate bullying. Both toxic leadership and corporate bullying negatively affect employees and the organization in which they work. While it would be ideal to not hire toxic leaders, toxic leadership is difficult to detect and sometimes is triggered even in well-adjusted leaders by events in their lives such as pressures on them from corporate goals, stress at home, and illness (Mackay, Carey & Stevens (2011). There may be a need for training and counseling for toxic leaders which could take years. However, eliminating or identifying predictors of toxic

leadership is a research topic in and of itself and not the focus of my study. There are employees currently suffering from toxic leaders and my study focuses on how they can cope in the presence.

The current study validated various prior study results from Pelletier (2009) on the effects of toxic leadership. I found affected employees shared similar feelings and reactions of being upset, sad, scared, and betrayed. This study also validated previous study results of Olafsson & Johannsdottir (2004) on coping strategies such as avoiding the toxic leader, confronting them, seeking help, or doing nothing at all. Finally, I found the issues created for the affected employees at home were consistent with those found by Boddy (2014) because of the toxic leader were also similar to previous research.

In both populations, affected employees felt many emotions as they first reacted to the toxic event. The reaction most frequently experienced by Population 1 participants was betrayal. The most frequently witnessed reaction by Population 2 participants was being upset. All reactions of affected employees were negative. However, these reactions most likely did not gain attention of others in the organization who could have intervened and assisted the affected employee with coping.

Of the three theories Gobin and Freyd (2013) reviewed that might have explained how affected employees coped, betrayal trauma theory addressed participants' mistrust, shock, and disappointment with their leader. The cognitive theory of trauma, which leads to people purposely misinterpreting the toxic event was not found to relate to any data or

interpretation within the study. The third and final theory, the conservation of resources theory, was discovered in the form of seeking resource help as the coping strategy.

The study data uncovered a coping strategy not found in previously reviewed studies in which the affected employee attempted to try harder to please the toxic leader in order to stop the toxic behavior. My study also found a progression of coping strategies over time. Most of the affected employees eventually moved to the "sought resource help" strategy over time from some other type of strategy. The participants indicated their initial strategy did not yield the desired results and help from other resources was needed into order to cope with the toxic leader or event. However, once the majority of affected employees sought resource help from friends, family, coworkers, leaders, or human resources, a more satisfying outcome was found. Work-related resources yielded the most satisfying results of all resource help.

During the coping phase, affected employees displayed multiple negative behaviors at work. Through the interview conversations the participants discussed poor performance as occurring the most, followed by an outward display of job dissatisfaction, and missing work. These negative behaviors displayed as a result of the toxic leader have negative effects on the organization. Poor performance and missed work can lead to a decrease in quality, output, and eventually revenues.

The issues the affected employees felt at home due to the toxic leader also negatively affected the employees' families in most cases. Family stress was the number one problem discussed outside of work. Family stress manifested as arguments between

the affected employees and family members or through the affected employees distancing themselves from their family. Some affected employees turned to alcohol which created family stress. This was followed by health issues felt by the affected employees leading to hospital stays and weight loss. These issues experienced outside of work are evidence of the serious problems toxic leaders create for their victims. These issues highlight the need for expediency of resolution as well.

There is evidence that toxic leaders create an undesirable atmosphere that is unhealthy for both employees and the organization. Affected employees are forced to endure financial issues, moral and emotional issues, and performance issues. Issues for these affected employees often persist for months or years. Performance issues can lead to loss of employee create financial hardships and loss of homes. These employees might suffer serious emotional trauma leading to temporary or permanent health issues, even suicide. This also translates into additional organization costs due to employees exiting the organization. Organizations owe their employees protection from the ill effects of toxic events and cultures and assistance to cope with such leaders should they be experienced. My study offers a solution through understanding what coping strategies worked best long-term that can retain and rehabilitate the affected employee, increasing their well-being and that of the organization. By understanding the best coping strategy and organizations promoting that upfront, affected employees can utilize that strategy first versus wasting time and absorbing the negative effects of the toxic leader.

In conclusion, I found that employees affected by toxic leaders need help coping. Initially, the affected employee attempted to cope using other means with a less desirable outcome. This initial coping strategy was used, in part, due to a feeling of betrayal and being in shock at what just occurred. When affected employees eventually sought out help from friends, family, coworkers, or human resource professionals they reported a more satisfying outcome. Yet, the most satisfying conclusions were discovered when that resource was work-related, such as another leader or human resource professional. In these cases, most of the affected employees discussed in this study remained employed at the organization and the toxic situation was remedied. The *sought resource help* coping strategy within the workplace must be highlighted, taught, and advertised by within organizations to ensure employees affected by toxic leaders have the knowledge, tools, and access to resource help to reduce negative affects to themselves and regain a positive sense of well-being. The major social significance of this study is a decreased resolution time of toxic situations, thus a reduction in the serious negative impacts to the affected employee's life whether that is personal, work-related, or both, while also minimizing the negative effects brought upon the organization. Toxic leadership can have lasting negative effects to both organizations and employees that can extend beyond the workplace. Organizations have an organizational and social responsibility to address toxic leader behaviors and provide resources to employees to counteract toxic leadership to create a more positive work environment where employees can find work rewarding and fulfilling.

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Appendix A: Closed-Ended Demographic Questions

Toxic Leadership Research   Date: XX-XX-XXX

Jerry Morris, Ph.D. Candidate, Walden University

Subject Interview – Closed-ended questions for demographic data

1. At the time of the toxic event:
    a. Your (or observed employee) age:
    b. Your (or observed employee) position within the company:
    c. The toxic leader position within the organization:
    d. The industry type you (or observed employee) worked in:
    e. The toxic leader's relationship to you(or observed employee):
2. Your gender (or observed employee):
3. Are you (or observed employee) still with the organization where the event occurred?
4. If you answered yes to question #3:
    a. What is your (or observed employee) current position:
    b. Have you (or observed employee) moved to another department since the toxic event:
        i. If so, was the toxic event the reason for the move:
    c. Have you (or observed employee) been promoted:
    d. Is the toxic leader still employed with the organization:
    e. Is so, what is the toxic leader's current position:
    f. Do you (or observed employee) still have contact with the toxic leader:
5. If you answerd no to question #3:
    a. Was your (or observed employee) departure voluntary or involuntary:
    b. Was your (or observed employee) departure directly related to the toxic event:

      c. Are you (or observed employee) happy or sad you are no longer with the organization:

This is the end of the close-ended questions. We will proceed to the open-ended questions.

- Variation of closed-ended questions based on population being interviewed

Appendix B: Open-Ended Interview Questions

Affected Employee Group

1. Based on your understanding, did you have a toxic leader experience?

2. Describe how you felt during and after the toxic event? Please provide as much details as possible.

3. How did you react and cope with the toxic event or leader, days, weeks, and months after? Please describe if you coped differently as time passed.

4. What were the changes in your behavior, days, weeks, and months after; at home and at work?

5. How did those behavior changes affect your life at home and at work?

Witness Group

1. Based on your understanding, describe what happened and who experienced it?

2. Describe how you percieved the affected employee feling during and after the toxic event? Please provide as much details as possible.

3. How did the affected employee react and cope with the toxic event or leader, days, weeks, and months after? Describe any changes you observed in how this person coped as time passed.

4. What were the changes in their behavior, days, weeks, and months after; at home and at work?

5. How did those behavior changes affect their life at home and at work?

Appendix C: Study Information Sheet

Toxic Leadership Research   Date: XX-XX-XX

Jerry Morris, Ph.D. Candidate, Walden University Subject Interview

Study Information/Instruction Page

      I am conducting research to explore how employees cope with toxic leadership

and the resulting behaviors through understanding the lived-experience of the subject

through this event in their life. I hope to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon

to aid employees with future events. A toxic leader is someone who may act as a

corporate bully by harassing, belittling and frightening other employees. A toxic leader

usually targets a person, mostly a subordinate, within their organization leading to this

person to be under stress or pressures leading to decreased performance and other

undesired behaviors that manifest both in the workplace and outside of the workplace.

Other employees may be affected due to these toxic events.

      Questions are both closed-ended and open-ended, and there is no limit to your

responses. Feel free to elaborate on your personal feelings, use whatever language you

feel is appropriate and please pose additional questions that you feel are relevant and

want to answer. Please be honest when answering. During the interview, I will get

various aspects of your lived experience through the information you provide. You are

encouraged to listen to all the questions if needed before you start the interview. After the

interview is completed and documented, you will receive a transcript to review for

accuracy, and you may add, delete or correct information as needed. Transcript review is

required ensure the interviewer has accurately captured what information you shared during the interview. Once the data is confirmed to be accurate, I will analyze to a develop an interpretation of that said. At this point a process of member checking will be completed which requires the participant to review my interpretation and confirm it is accurate. Also, you may participate in the interview if you have only witnessed a toxic event and the outcomes of the person affected. In this case, you are answering the questions as a witness.

This interview is confidential and will remain confidential. None of your personal information is shared and only used to communicate a phone interview time with you. Neither your employer, former employer nor the university will have access to your personal information. I will delete participant information and a coded number will replace your name. You will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement for subject protection before the interview ensuring all your information is kept confidential. This agreement is sent to you before the agreed upon interview date and time. It must be signed and returned before the interview starts.

You may obtain the copy of the completed study by emailing a request to Jerry Morris at jerry.morris@waldenu.edu after completion of the study, tenetatively February, 2019. If you know of anyone who has experienced a toxic event as described on this page and you think they would willing to participate, please forward the researcher's email to them.