

Personality and Social Psychology

Effects of abusive supervision on employees' innovative behavior: The role of job insecurity and locus of control

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Wang, D., Li, X., Zhou, M., Maguire, P., Zong, Z. & Hu, Y. (2019). Effects of abusive supervision on employees' innovative behavior: The role of job insecurity and locus of control. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 60, 152–159.

Drawing on the Conservation of Resources Theory by Hobfoll, we examined the relationships between abusive supervision, job insecurity, locus of control, and employees' innovative behavior. Using self-reported data collected from employees among four enterprises in China ($N = 641$), we found that abusive supervision was positively correlated with job insecurity. In contrast, both job insecurity and abusive supervision were negatively correlated with employees' innovative behavior, with the impact of abusive supervision on innovative behavior being mediated by its effect on job insecurity. Having an external locus of control that served as a buffering factor for employees, mitigating the relationship between abusive supervision and job insecurity. These findings complement the existing research on the impacts of abusive leadership, providing practical information for enterprises on how to enhance levels of innovation and vitality among employees.

Key words: Abusive supervision, conservation of resources theory, employees' innovative behavior, job insecurity, locus of control.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the topic of abusive supervision has received increasing attention in the area of organizational management. An Internet survey carried out by Sina network platform shows that about 70% of employees in China have been subjected to abusive supervision, including neglect, criticism, intimidation, and other abusive supervisory behaviors (Yao, Li & Xia, 2014). Among them, 44.5% of them reported that they were neglected by the leaders, and 29.2% of them were often assigned tasks that were unable to be completed by their leaders. Abusive supervision has adverse effects on the physical and mental behaviors of the subordinate (Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter & Whitten, 2012), leading to an overall negative impact on the organization. Although some organizational managers have no doubt in realizing the adverse effects of abusive supervision on employees and organizations (see Sulea, Fine, Fischmann, Sava & Dumitru, 2013; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell & Marrs, 2009), the question remains as to why this style of supervision persists in the workplace. One possible explanation is that leadership in organizations emphasizes discipline and authority (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008), with leaders tending to control the great majority of valuable resources. In many organizations employees need to unquestionably respect or even obey the orders and demands of their leaders. Over the passage of time, employees may develop a higher tolerance for abusive supervision, leading to a prevalence of this style of leadership. This research is carried out in the context of enterprises. The importance of innovative behaviors to enterprises and organizations is self-evident. Such input is needed to inject new vitality, and plays an important role in the growing prosperity of an organization. Although existing research has established a connection between abusive supervision and work-

related behaviors such as intention to quit (Tepper, Carr, Breaux, Geider, Hu & Hua, 2009), compulsory citizenship behavior (Chen, Gao & Yu, 2015), workplace deviance behavior (Nie & Zou, 2014; Thau *et al.*, 2009), and counterproductive work behaviors (Sulea *et al.*, 2013), it remains to be seen whether abusive supervision is linked to other work behaviors, especially favorable ones. As one of the most important favorable behaviors performed in the workplace, employee innovation plays a critical role in organizational survival and success.

On the basis of previous research, we focus on the mediating role of job insecurity. Through available literature, we can see that abusive supervision has a negative impact on job insecurity. According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, job insecurity causes employees to consume energy to cope with this insecurity and thus does not have enough resources to innovate. Job insecurity is a variable that has received much attention in the workplace in recent years; with increases in work stress, insecurity in the workplace is rising, bringing with it higher rates of deviant employee behavior, burnout, and intention to quit (Sulea *et al.*, 2013; Tepper *et al.*, 2009; Thau *et al.*, 2009).

According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, people have the basic motivation to preserve, protect, and build resources that they value (Hobfoll, 2001). In the workplace, the leader is an important resource for employees, someone to whom they pay much attention (Boekhorst, 2015). The relationship that they have with their leader provides a foundation for the emotional bond between an employee and their organization (Hon, Chan & Lin, 2013). Any damage to this relationship inflicted through abusive supervision is likely to have a negative effect. As such, we propose that abusive supervision should be negatively related to employees' innovative behaviors, and that job insecurity (i.e., a

perception of lack of security in one's work; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002) serves as a mediating mechanism in this relationship. Meanwhile, research on people's locus of control suggests that differences in individual attributional styles can help alleviate a range of negative perceptions and behaviors resulting from resource threats (Shanteau, 1987). Consequently, we further propose that locus of control serves as a buffering factor that mitigates the relationship between abusive supervision and increased job insecurity, as well as the negative effect of job insecurity on employees' innovative behaviors.

Our study aims to make a novel contribution to the existing research on abusive supervision. First, although the connection between abusive leadership and employees' work-related behaviors is well established, our study addresses the connection abusive supervision and favorable work-related behaviors, such as innovative behavior, to which less attention has been paid. Second, we seek to explore and model the precise mechanism by which abusive supervision impinges on employees' innovative behavior, by integrating the conservation of resources theory and the locus of control theory. As well as furthering the theoretical understanding of how abusive supervision negatively affects employees, we hope these results will be of practical value to organizations.

The present study aims to develop a model for expressing the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior, thereby clarifying the mechanism between the two. In particular, we examine how abusive supervision reduces employees' innovative behaviors, with focus on the mediating role of job insecurity and the moderating role of locus control. This work paves the way for follow-up interventions to address employees' behavior.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Abusive supervision, job insecurity and innovative behavior

Tepper (2000) defined abusive supervision as subordinates' perception of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact. Examples of abusive supervision include humiliating, mocking, or taunting employees in public, rudeness, violating promises, and engaging in other inappropriate behaviors. According to Tepper (2000), abusive supervision is characterized as being chronic and prolonged, rather than temporary or transient. It also depends on an employees' subjective assessment, as two subordinates might differ in their evaluations of the same supervisor's behavior.

Abusive supervision results in unfavorable consequences. It places stress on employees, potentially leading to adverse psychological experiences of their work environment (Wu & Hu, 2013). Job insecurity, defined as employees' worry and anxiety as to the loss of existing work (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002), is one such subjective stressor. In contrast to actual job loss, job insecurity refers to the perception that the nature and continued existence of one's job are at risk (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). According to the conservation of resources theory, an increase of abusive supervision in the workplace causes the energy of employees' psychological resources to decline. Due to the limited nature of personal resources, employees then lose the ability to

cope with threats and challenges in the workplace. This in turn increases the employees' sense of job insecurity. In such environments employees will perceive a greater number of negative factors, with the evaluation of their work also being negatively biased. Being under psychological pressure, they may perceive the threat of a loss of resources, producing undesirable behaviors and experiencing negative feelings such as job insecurity. Given these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1. Abusive supervision is positively related to job insecurity.

Employees' innovative behavior is defined as a series of processes by which employees recognize problems, create ideas or solutions, and finally create products (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Examples of such behavior include solving problems independently, autonomous decision-making, active application of new technologies and methods, and creating new results (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Employees' innovative behavior is an important factor in overall organizational innovation and development. Identifying potential antecedents, such as job insecurity, may shed light on how to enhance the levels of such behavior within an organization.

According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, individuals seek to accumulate resources such as self-esteem, status, and social support, which can be applied to withstand or overcome threats. Stressful or traumatic events consume these resources, thereby enhancing susceptibility to any subsequent negative events. In order to protect their resources from harm, people who experience a threat of resource loss should strive to reduce their exposure to risk, thereby minimizing resource damage (Hobfoll, 2001). Job insecurity, which refers to a sense of lack of security in one's work (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002), constitutes a threat of resource loss. Individuals who are exposed to this kind of threat will consume psychological resources, leading to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, decreased enthusiasm about work, hopelessness, and feelings of entrapment, each of which contributes to a reduction in active behaviors (Hobfoll, 2001; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Once an employee no longer believes they have the ability to sustain their work, they will no longer give it their best effort. Even worse, they will have less or no enthusiasm and initiative to complete their work, resulting in a dearth of innovative behaviors. While previous studies (e.g., Sulea *et al.*, 2013; Tepper *et al.*, 2009; Thau *et al.*, 2009) suggest a positive relationship between job insecurity and deviant employee behavior, such as burnout or intention to quit, it remains unclear how job insecurity affects innovative behaviors. In light of existing evidence, and in line with the conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 2001), we posit that job insecurity may cause negative psychology and behaviors, thereby reducing individual positive behaviors. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2. Job insecurity is negatively related to innovative behavior.

To the best of our knowledge, the psychological mechanisms underpinning the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior remain unclear. According to the

Conservation of Resources Theory, people have the basic motivation to preserve, protect, and build resources that they value (Hobfoll, 2001). When individual resources suffer the threat of loss or actual loss in an organization, it results in psychological discomfort and stress. If resources are not made up immediately, there will be a shortfall, leading to a series of negative results (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, when leaders in an organization adopt an abusive supervision management style, whereby relatively vulnerable subordinates are treated as an object of anger to suppress and bully (Tepper, 2000), employees' resources will be continuously depleted. Over the course of time, employees who suffer such hostile treatment will feel threatened and experience negative emotions (Wu & Hu, 2013). When this negative emotion accumulates to a certain level, it leads to emotional exhaustion (Tepper, Duffy & Shaw, 2001), resulting in burnout, loss of motivation, and loss of hope in the workplace, leading finally to job insecurity (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). If job insecurity is not effectively alleviated and becomes chronic, employees may enter a relatively conservative state, being unable to maintain their original active behavior, and ultimately reducing their levels of innovation. Consequently, we believe that job insecurity may serve as a mediating mechanism for how abusive supervision affects employees' innovative behavior. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3. Job insecurity mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior.

The moderating role of locus of control

The question arises as to whether the impact of abusive supervision on employees' innovative behavior is universal, or whether it differs from person to person. Certain idiosyncratic traits may play a role in determining how an individual is affected. Locus of control, which can impact individual cognition (Shanteau, 1987), is the extent to which people believe that they have control over the outcomes of events in their lives, as opposed to being subject to external forces beyond their control. It represents the personality traits of an individual's attribution tendency (Judge & Bono, 2001), such as whether they attribute success and failure to internal or external factors (Spector, 1982). Internal controllers tend to attribute their successes and failures to themselves, whereas external controllers tend to attribute successes and failures to the outside environment (Howell & Avolio, 1993). According to the Locus of Control Theory, individuals with different locus of control take different measures and adopt different strategies when faced with a threat from the workplace (Ding, Zhu, Gu & Liu, 2012). Locus of control, as a form of individual trait (Judge & Bono, 2001), may affect the connection between the threat of resource loss (i.e., abusive supervision and job insecurity) and individual attitudes and behavior outcomes (i.e., job insecurity and employees' innovative behaviors). Specifically, individuals with external control might have a relatively positive response to workplace threats, choosing a more active coping strategy to relieve and control their adverse mood and deviant behaviors. Having a more positive coping strategy allows people to better cope with the threat of resource loss (i.e., abusive supervision and

job insecurity), thus reducing the detrimental consequences for job attitudes, organizational attitudes, and health (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). In contrast, people with internal control, who lack a positive coping strategy, are more vulnerable to such threats and thus less likely to maintain positive attitudes and behaviors (Ajzen, 2010). In contrast, people with internal control, who lack a positive coping strategy, should be less able to deal with these threats. Their desirable attitudes and positive behaviors are thus more likely to be adversely affected (Kaye, White & Lewis, 2013). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. Locus of control moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and job insecurity, such that the relationship is weaker for individuals with external control.

Hypothesis 5. Locus of control moderates the indirect effect of abusive supervision on employees' innovative behavior via job insecurity, such that the indirect effect is weaker for individuals with external control.

Figure 1 illustrates the variables and hypotheses that constitute our research model.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

This study was conducted across four enterprises in China. We collected data via paper-and-pencil surveys during work hours, with the help of human resource personnel in the various organizations. First, participants were informed of the aims of the study and were guaranteed anonymity. Second, the researchers outlined specific requirements for filling out the questionnaires, and asked the respondents to answer questions based on their actual situation. Third, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires covering abusive supervision, job insecurity, locus of control, and innovative behavior. Finally, all completed questionnaires were returned immediately to the researchers and their assistants.

A total of 700 employees were asked to participate in the surveys. The final sample consisted of 641 participants, 549 women and 92 men, with an ultimate response rate of 91.6%. Among these participants, 72.1% were married. Their average age was 29.06 ($SD = 0.80$) years, while the average number of years spent in education was more than 12 ($SD = 0.73$).

Measures

In order to ensure accurate translation of the English-based measures into Chinese, we adhered to the conventional back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980).

Abusive supervision. Abusive supervision was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Tepper (2000), which consists of two dimensions, Ridicule and neglect concealment, and uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in our study for this scale was 0.91.

Job insecurity. Job insecurity was measured with the seven-item scale developed by Borg and Elizur (1992), containing two

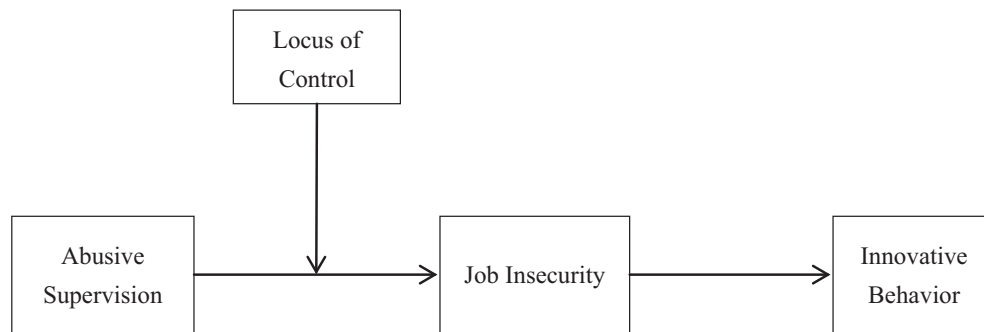


Fig. 1. Research model.

dimensions, cognitive job insecurity and affective job insecurity. All items were rated on a seven-point scale (from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in our sample was 0.79.

Locus of control. Locus of control was measured using Spector's (1982) 16-item scale, comprising two dimensions, internal control and external control, and using a six-point scale (from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in our study was 0.73.

Innovative behavior. Innovative behavior was measured using a 12-item scale taken from Kleysen and Street (2001), which consists of two dimensions, idea generation, and concept execution. These were rated using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in our study for this scale was 0.86.

Control variables. We controlled for the possible effects of participants' gender, age, education, and marriage, which previous studies have suggested may influence job insecurity and employees' innovative behaviors (e.g., Ouyang, Lam & Wang, 2015).

Our study used path analytic procedures (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007) and Mplus 7.0 to analyze the collected data.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and correlations for all of the variables in our study are presented in Table 1. All variables have acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients of above 0.70. Abusive supervision was positively correlated with job insecurity ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$), and negatively correlated with employees' innovative behaviors ($r = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$). Job insecurity was negatively correlated with employees' innovative behaviors ($r = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$). These findings provide preliminary support for our hypothesized relationships. All of the predictor variables were standardized before performing the analysis.

Test of measurement model

Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted in order to examine whether the measured constructs are mutually distinguishable.

Results showed that the four-factor model (including abusive supervision, job insecurity, innovative behavior, and locus of control) offered an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(916) = 2220.68$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.08. All of the items were found to load significantly on their corresponding factors. The hypothesized measurement model provided a superior fit to the data than the 16 constrained models in which any two of the four factors were combined, yielding a significantly better fit to the data ($1231.13 \leq \Delta\chi^2$ [$\Delta df = 6$] ≤ 5253.30 , $ps < 0.01$). These results uphold the distinctiveness of our selection of measures.

The single factor test of Harman was carried out by exploratory factor analysis. The results show that 10 eigenvalues are more than 1, and the variance of the first factor is 17.49%, which is far less than the critical value (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003; Zhou & Long, 2004).

Tests of hypotheses

Tests of mediation effects. We tested our hypotheses using path analytic procedures (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Preacher *et al.*, 2007). A bootstrapping analysis was carried out in order to assess the significance of any indirect effects (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). After taking control variables into account, we found that abusive supervision is positively related to job insecurity ($\beta = 0.20$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$), and job insecurity is negatively related to innovative behavior ($\beta = -0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. Testing our mediation hypothesis, we found that the indirect effect of abusive supervision on innovative behavior via job insecurity was -0.03 , with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of $[-0.05, -0.01]$. And the total effect of abusive supervision on innovative behavior was -0.05 . These results reveal that job insecurity mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and innovative behavior, supporting Hypothesis 3.

Tests of moderation effects. We investigated the moderation effects of varying levels of locus of control (1 *SD* above the mean and 1 *SD* below the mean) using Mplus 7.0. The results supported our proposed moderation effect. Specifically, we found that the interaction between abusive supervision and locus of control was significant in predicting job insecurity ($\beta = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients, and correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	—	—								
Age	2.34	0.80	0.18**							
Education	3.04	0.73	0.27**	0.28**						
Marriage	1.27	0.46	0.05	−0.27**	0.04					
Abusive supervision	1.47	0.56	0.10**	0.02	0.07	0.07	(0.91)			
Job insecurity	3.17	1.02	−0.06	−0.09*	−0.11**	0.10*	0.20**	(0.79)		
Locus of control	4.23	0.49	0.08*	0.01	0.05	−0.03	−0.26**	−0.32**	(0.73)	
Innovative behavior	3.92	0.45	0.11**	0.05	0.13**	−0.03	−0.09*	−0.20**	0.32**	(0.86)

Notes: *N* = 641. Gender was coded “1” for women and “2” for men, education was coded “1” for junior high school diploma, “2” for high school diploma, “3” for associate degree, “4” for undergraduate diploma, and “5” for master diploma.

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01.

Table 2. Moderated regression analyses predicting job insecurity with locus of control as moderator

	Job insecurity	Innovative behavior
Intercept	0.55*(0.23)	−0.60*(0.23)
Gender	−0.15(0.11)	0.20(0.11)
Age	−0.08(0.05)	−0.00(0.05)
Education	−0.12(0.06)	0.12*(0.06)
Marriage	0.15(0.08)	−0.05(0.09)
Abusive supervision	0.16**(0.04)	−0.02(0.04)
Job insecurity		−0.07(0.04)
Locus of control	−0.24**(0.04)	0.23**(0.04)
Abusive supervision × Locus of control	−0.09*(0.04)	
<i>R</i> ²	0.14	0.05

Notes: *N* = 641.

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01.

In addition, we applied the simple slopes test (Preacher, Curran & Bauer, 2006) to evaluate the effects of abusive supervision on job insecurity at varying levels of locus of control. High locus of control was designated as 1 *SD* above the mean, while low locus of control was designated as 1 *SD* below the mean. Results demonstrated that abusive supervision was positively related to job insecurity when individuals' locus of control was internal control (simple slope = 0.25, *t* = 4.07, *p* < 0.01). In contrast, abusive supervision was not significantly related to job insecurity when individuals' locus of control was external control (simple slope = 0.07, *t* = 1.42, *p* = 0.16). Figure 2 shows the pattern of the interaction. In sum, the results indicate that locus of control moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and job insecurity, supporting Hypothesis 4.

We also examined the conditional indirect effect of abusive supervision on employees' innovative behavior via job insecurity at varying levels of locus of control (1 *SD* above the mean and 1 *SD* below the mean) using Bauer, Preacher and Gil's (2006) method. The conditional indirect effect for abusive supervision via job insecurity on employees' innovative behavior was −0.01 with a 95% CI of [−0.028, 0.002] for external control, as opposed to −0.04 with a 95% CI of [−0.072, −0.015] for internal control. The difference between these indirect effects for the two conditions was −0.03 with a 95% CI of [−0.032, −0.002]. These results expose a significant moderating effect of locus of control on the indirect effect. Accordingly, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

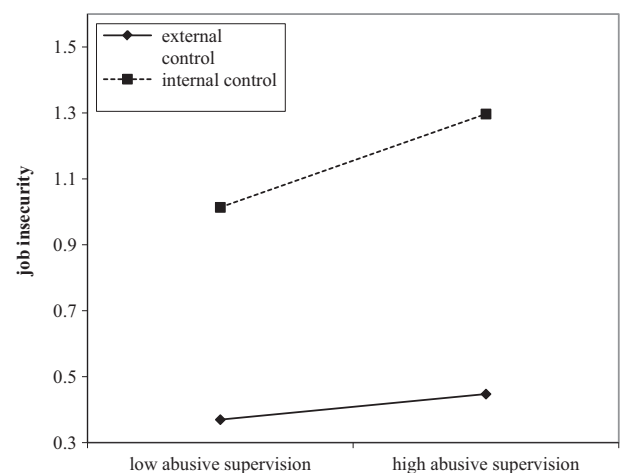


Fig. 2. Interaction effect of abusive supervision and locus of control on job insecurity. High and low levels of abusive supervision and locus of control represent one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical contributions

Our study extends previous work on abusive supervision and the conservation of resource theory. The present study explores the impact of abusive supervision on employees' innovation behavior, and further explores the mechanism of the relationship between the two, namely the mediating effect of job insecurity and the moderating effect of locus of control. First, the present study found that abusive supervision has a significant negative effect on innovation behavior. This result is consistent with the results of former studies (Ouyang *et al.*, 2015; Rousseau & Aubé, 2016; Xu, Huang, Lam & Miao, 2012). In the past decade, Chinese economic and social development has entered the “high-speed rail” era. In order to maximize profits, enterprise managers must activate employees' innovative behaviors, however, leaders neglected leadership and then, leading to abusive supervision, which neglects the emotional needs of employees, hindering their innovative desires and behaviors. According to the Leadership-member Exchange theory, employees may carry out negative behavior if they experience negative psychological feelings toward their leaders (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Because of the imbalance

of power between leaders and subordinates, employees who experience abusive supervision will be reluctant to confront their leader directly. Instead, they will reduce their innovative activity.

Our study also uncovered significant gender differences in abusive supervision experienced by employees. Specifically, men ($M = 4.04$) experienced more abusive supervision than women ($M = 3.89$), a result which differs from previous studies (Wang, Jiang, Yang & Shing Chan, 2016). Wang *et al.* (2016) reported no significant gender difference in the frequency of abusive supervision experienced by employees. One explanation for the differences we observed may be that, in China, the idea that men dominate matters outside the home, while women retain responsibility for matters arising within the family (Chen, 2003). If men are expected to maintain a dominant status in the workplace, they may feel more sensitive than women to neglect and criticism from their leaders.

Second, the current study also demonstrates that job insecurity mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior, again making the link with the conservation of resource theory. In particular, it implies that individuals who are exposed to abusive supervision in the work domain are more likely to experience job insecurity, and thus are less likely to demonstrate innovative behavior in workplace. Consistent with the current study, Otto, Thomson and Rigotti (2018) found that abusive supervision will increase employees' job insecurity, thereby reducing employee's psychological resources. According to the conservation of resources theory, employees will consume psychological resources to cope with insecurity, thus reducing the amount of resources they have left to invest in innovative activities in the workplace.

Finally, the discovery of a moderating effect of locus of control is potentially significant, in that it provides some of the first insights into how locus of control, as a type of individual factor or individual attribution style, may help employees to better cope with negative threats of resource loss in the workplace. External control weakens the influence of abusive supervision on job insecurity. According to attribution theory (Sullivan & Weiner, 1975), individuals with external control personality attribute the failure of a task to the external environment and other people, thus producing positive psychological feelings. On the other hand, individuals with internal control personality attribute the failure of a task to their own internal factors, resulting in negative psychological feelings (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Therefore, compared to the internal control group, external control individuals attributed the abusive supervision they experienced to their leader, or to other factors. Because of their perspective, these employees were less vulnerable to job security, and thus did not experience an adverse effect on their resources.

Furthermore, the discovery of a moderating relationship contributes to the conservation of resource theory by not only providing some of the first empirical support that individual factors can attenuate the negative relationship between threats of resource loss and personal positive behaviors, but also by extending the theory to include a neglected factor, namely job insecurity, as an individual perspective.

Practical implications

These results have a number of implications for managerial practice. First, abusive supervision has been found to negatively

affect employees' innovative behavior, suggesting that it is worthwhile for organizations to take stock of the harmfulness of this leadership style. Workplaces would benefit from establishing interventional mechanisms and public opinion listening systems, to effectively identify and prevent abusive supervision at source. For example, human resources departments should give careful consideration before awarding managerial positions to those with a high-abusive supervision disposition. Managers should be encouraged to listen to employees, and encouraged to correct inappropriate leadership style in their workplace (Harris, Kacmar & Zivnuska, 2007).

Second, given that high levels of job insecurity mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior, organizations should seek to implement reasonable and fair practices and policies, as well as striving to build an open and friendly work climate. With such measures in place, employees perceive lower levels of job insecurity from their organization (Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone & Duffy, 2008; Thau *et al.*, 2009; Zellars, Tepper & Duffy, 2002). In cases where abusive supervision occurs and is experienced by employees, appropriate channels of assistance, such as, for example, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), counseling hotline or counseling workshop, should be in place in order for workers to seek guidance. Such channels can help resolve any psychological or behavioral problems experienced by employees and their family members. Furthermore, they can provide a "spiritual welfare for employees," reduce stress and job insecurity, improve staff morale, improve organizational atmosphere, enhance organizational culture, and lower management costs of the organization, thus improving overall organizational performance.

Third, in order to improve employees' innovative behavior, organizations should provide an EAP to enable employees to better identify and cope with the effects of abusive supervision. Employees benefit from being trained in interpersonal relationship skills and anger management (Xu *et al.*, 2012). For example, organizations can provide training to employees with the aim of enhancing their psychological capital, by instilling optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy. Adopting a more positive psychological attitude strengthens the ability of employees to resist external pressures, and can also inspire similar attitudes among other related personnel, thus enhancing overall employee creativity and performance across the organization.

Finally, organizations should take note of our finding that employees with an internal locus of control are more vulnerable to the effects of abusive supervision. An EAP focusing on attribution training might prove valuable in this regard. Employees trained to recognize and evaluate themselves objectively would be better protected from the impacts of negative leadership and its connection with job insecurity and reduced innovative behaviors.

Limitations and future research

There are several limitations associated with this study. First, our data collection was carried out during a single time period, and might therefore be susceptible to common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In addition, although it is acceptable to

collect data on subjective perceptions such as abusive supervision, job insecurity and locus of control using self-reports, an alternative external evaluation would be more desirable, providing greater levels of objectivity. The fact that the measures of the focal constructs were separated in time goes some way toward alleviating this concern, given that such separation is effective for minimizing common method variance (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Podsakoff & Lee, 2003). For future studies, statistical controls and program controls (with different time points for data collection) could be used in combination to further reduce any common method bias.

Second, all of our data were collected within a group of organizations which all shared the same characteristics, being state owned enterprises. This limits the external validity of our findings and means that the results should be interpreted with caution. Research conducted across a more diversified sample of organizations would allow the generalizability of our hypothesized model to be tested.

Third, while it is clear that abusive supervision has detrimental effects on the performance of employees, as well as adverse impacts on their physical and mental health, it remains unclear what leads managers to behave in this way in the first place. Examining how abusive supervision takes root and develops within an organization is thus a fruitful direction for further research. Moreover, research on how abusive supervision can be controlled, attenuated, or even eradicated is much needed: getting rid of abusive supervision altogether is the most direct route toward promoting the healthy and steady development of organizations and their employees.

Fourth, although abusive supervision leadership style is undoubtedly an international phenomenon, it may be particularly prevalent within Chinese culture. This study is based on the influence of abusive supervision on employee's innovative behavior in a Chinese work environment. Future studies might thus consider cross-cultural factors and compare the impact of abusive supervision across different countries.

Fifth, future studies might investigate male subjects and female subjects separately in order to explore any differences in their responses to abusive supervision.

Sixth, the question of the path by which abusive supervision influences innovative behavior is an interesting issue that needs to be explored. The present study simply explores the mediating effect of job insecurity and the moderating effect of locus control based on the framework of the Conservation of Resources Theory. Future researchers should explore other potential paths by which abusive supervision impinges on innovative behavior. For example, regarding the framework of the Leader-member Exchange Theory, future work might examine the role of leader-member exchange in the relationship of abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior. Furthermore, based on the framework of social information processing theory, future researchers might explore the effects of psychological empowerment and psychological security on the relationship of abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior.

Finally, while this research has drawn together the conservation of resource theory and the Locus of Control theory, future research might seek to explore the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior from additional perspectives.

CONCLUSION

In summary, our study has extended the conservation of resource theory in a novel direction by examining the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' innovative behavior. It has highlighted that job insecurity plays the role of mediating mechanism in this relationship. It has also identified that locus of control moderates the connection between abusive supervision and job insecurity, with external locus of control acting as a protective factor for employees. To conclude, our theoretical model and its associated empirical support establish a foundation for further research and theoretical development toward the goal of understanding how abusive supervision in the workplace negatively impacts on employees.

This study was supported by National Natural Science Fund of China (grant no. 31471002), Natural Science Foundation of Shandong Province of China (grant no. ZR2014CM033), Key R & D program in Shandong Province of China (grant no. 2015GSF120015), Young People of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Ministry of Education of China (grant no. 15YJC190006), Key Construction Project of Applied Psychology of Shandong, Normal University of China and "The 12th Five" Emphasis Subject of Development and Education Psychology of Shandong Province of China. Dawei Wang and Mengmeng Zhou Share the first authorship.

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Received 12 May 2018, accepted 8 November 2018

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