

Tziner, Aharon; Bar-Mor, Hadara; Geva, Lilach; Levi, Haim; Shkoler, Or

## Article

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## ABUSIVE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR: BEHAVIORAL AND LEGAL INSIGHTS

Aharon Tziner<sup>1\*</sup> , Hadara Bar-Mor<sup>2</sup> , Lilach Geva<sup>2</sup> , Haim Levi<sup>2</sup>   
and Or Shkoler<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1)</sup> Peres Academic Center, Rehovot, Israel

<sup>2)</sup> Netanya Academic College, Netanya, Israel

<sup>3)</sup> HEC Montréal, Montréal, Canada

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### Abstract

Workplace abuse is a widespread, worldwide social phenomenon and the topic is highly germane, given the established link between employment quality and mental and physical health and the changes developing in the labor market, including globalization processes, economic recession influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid technological innovation, and demographic variations that potentially cause fluctuations in the labor market. The primary objectives of this paper were to explore definitions and theoretical frameworks of workplace abuse and also to examine the international legal aspects of such abuse. We employed Tepper's Abusive Supervision Survey Questionnaire to detect manifestations of abusive behavior toward employees in two large organizations, one public and one private, and one smaller national organization in Israel, while expanding its scope beyond its current use in extant legislation and legal literature. Finally, we aimed to offer practical measures to cultivate an organizational culture that encourages employees to overcome the "trust gap" and speak up without fear of retribution. As this is an exploratory study, no hypotheses are propounded. Analysis of the data indicated that the incidence of abusive workplace behavior in the respondents' organizations was not high. Women managers exhibited fewer abusive behaviors than men, although the mean differences between men and women were very modest. This might be explained on the basis of the theory of "ethics of care", where women, in contrast to men, tend to support cooperation and shared decision-making rather than overly strict supervision. We further found that abusive behavior was more prevalent in the private concern than the public organizations. It is possible that regulation in public organizations contributes to the reduction of abuse in the workplace. In addition, we found that workers reported more cases of abuse than managers but that the mean differences between employees and managers were minor. Men reported more cases of abusive behavior than women, but the differences we found were insignificant. Indeed, the differences found in all the comparisons were insignificant and cannot serve to form conclusions indicating a trend. Nevertheless, we advocate that governments raise awareness of the issue and the desired outcomes while enhancing workers' protection and dignity. To that end, the relevant authorities should employ uniform terminology and promote applicable legislation.

**Keywords:** workplace abuse, bullying, harassment, legal harm, dignity, health, safety.

**JEL Classification:** D23, K31, M54, O15.

\* Corresponding author, Aharon Tziner – e-mail: [aetziner@gmail.com](mailto:aetziner@gmail.com)



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## Introduction

### *Components of abusive workplace behavior*

Work relationships have the potential to foster inappropriate, abusive, and even violent behavior among all players involved: employers, managers, supervisors, and employees – the latter including not only regular employees but also those working irrespective of their contractual status – those in training, including interns and apprentices, and contingent workers not on the payroll, such as independent contractors and freelancers.

Three major types of hostile acts in the workplace have attracted the attention of researchers, namely, incivility, harassment, and bullying:

- Incivility is conceived as low-intensity, interpersonal, deviant behavior. Offenders direct their scorn at targeted individuals, doubting their judgment and addressing them in unprofessional terms with rudeness and disrespect (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Cortina et al. (2013) reported the results of a survey questionnaire that consisted of twelve manifestations of supervisor incivility, including “Shouted at you,” “Ignored or failed to speak to you,” and “Accused you of incompetence.” It has been found that when targeted individuals are subjected to these incivilities over an extended period, the perceived abusive behavior leads to low job satisfaction, increased withdrawal from work, and intention to quit (Cortina et al., 2001, 2013).
- Harassment encompasses systematic and repeated unethical acts that lead to recipients experiencing helplessness as they feel unable to prevent, counter, or terminate this victimization. Harassment manifests in various forms, such as defamation of character, excessive monitoring of work performance, and unreasonable criticism. Specifically, harassment can affect the target person’s mental and physical health (Lee et al., 2016). In addition, the victims of harassment are often targeted based on their race, religion, gender, age, or disability.
- Bullying comprises negative verbal and nonverbal behaviors repeated over an extended period. Following Lee and Lim (2019), bullying consists of one or more of the following behaviors: intentionally and persistently offending and insulting; socially excluding; deliberate, frequent emotional abuse; humiliation in private or public; ignoring the target person; gossiping; and spreading rumors. Like victims of harassment, victims of bullying may be identified based on their race, religion, gender, age, or disability, among other personal characteristics.

In this exploratory paper, the term “abusive behavior” describes these negative behaviors in the work environment. In the current study, we focus our attention on the types and incidences of abusive behavior of managers toward their subordinates concerning (1) respondent’s gender; (2) manager’s gender; (3) type of organization; and (4) managerial role.

### *Mechanisms to eliminate the “trust gap”*

Deterrence mechanisms include tools to prevent inappropriate behaviors, and punishment of abusers, depending on the quality and degree of exposure to the abuse. Notably, although workplace misbehaviors have become commonplace worldwide, workers often do not complain to their employers. This reticence is because workers fear their complaints will not

be taken seriously or investigated appropriately or that their griping might harm their future employment. This phenomenon has been labeled the “trust gap.”

By way of example, Vault Platform (2021) examined office workers in the U.S. and U.K. They defined the “trust gap” as workers being reluctant to speak up for fear of not being taken seriously, while employers were equally concerned about reputational damage or worse.

The current paper proposes a mechanism – Tepper’s Abusive Supervision Survey Questionnaire – to detect abusive behavior toward employees in organizations and provide valuable information to help eliminate the “trust gap” between employers and employees. We consider this instrument likely to tap into all three components of abusive behavior – incivility, harassment, and bullying. We anticipated that the questionnaire responses would provide insights on various manifestations of offensive conduct at work. Additionally, we expanded the use of the questionnaire beyond its use in the extant legislation and legal literature to facilitate the achievement of two further goals of this paper, namely:

- Preventing abusive workplace behaviors by recommending the appointment of officers responsible for eradicating abusive behaviors in the workplace to whom employees can complain. This kind of appointment mirrors that of officers who deal with complaints about sexual harassment.
- Vigorous court responses against perpetrators of abusive workplace behavior. We recommend assigning a court-appointed expert to examine allegations elicited through Tepper’s (2000) Abusive Supervision Survey. The expert would interview the complainant’s coworkers who experienced or witnessed the conduct of both the abuser and complainant to validate whether the behaviors revealed in the questionnaire indeed occurred. Notably, these individuals would help the organization and the judges identify abuse, especially where all the behavioral aspects of the violation were not yet included in the legal definitions.

Section 1 describes the various definitions and facets of workplace abuse, primarily to illuminate possibilities for its prevention. Notably, not every incidence of inappropriate behavior at work is abusive, nor should every employee complaint reach the level of a justified grievance about an employer or colleague. Consequently, it is germane to define precisely the dimensions of “abusive behavior,” to which end, therefore, we dedicate an entire section.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) refers to abusive behavior as violence and harassment, defined more precisely as:

“Unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment” (Article 1).

In this paper, we identified unacceptable workplace behaviors as ‘workplace abuse that includes incivility, harassment, and bullying.’ Notably, the Convention, a legal document, does not incorporate the terms ‘incivility’ and ‘bullying’ in its definitions. Thus, in Section 1, we shall refer to workplace abuse as conceptualized worldwide and in everyday research.

In Section 2 – which treats the conceptualization of workplace abuse as legal harm and compares legal arrangements of workplace abuse around the world – we shall refer to the

Convention and other legal definitions that forge the legal path to our proposals regarding appointing an officer and expert in the courts.

Section 3 discusses the incidences and outcomes of workplace abuse to explain the necessity of the solutions we offer.

Finally, sections 4 and 5 demonstrate how Tepper's instrument can be used to draw conclusions about abusive behavior. The final section concludes with some recommendations for future research

## **1. The Various Facets of Workplace Abuse**

### **1.1. Definitions of workplace abuse**

Although there is no universally accepted definition of workplace abuse, the phenomenon may be expressed as follows: Psychological abuse; humiliation; attempts to sabotage someone's work; slandering colleagues to coworkers or superiors; ostracizing coworkers or shaming them in work social-media groups (Amichai-Hamburger, 2021).

Typical scenarios include verbal abuse, shouting, excessive monitoring, overly harsh or unjustified criticism, threats, and intimidation. Although during the recent COVID pandemic, work interactions were transformed – primarily because people were working from home – abuse has remained extant and even intensified on electronic networks (McKinsey and Company, 2021). Because, during COVID, most communications were on-screen, people were possibly less inhibited than if their conversations were face-to-face. Furthermore, the electronic nature of social media, such as work WhatsApp groups, creates a situation whereby offenses are documented and provable. Therefore, incidents of abuse on social media should be included in definitions of abuse. Considering the ambiguity of such occurrences, however, we would like to suggest a broader scope for the definitions.

Workplace abuse includes direct and indirect negative behaviors that embody aggression, hostility, intimidation, and harm. These undesirable actions, typically persistent, are performed by an individual or group towards another individual group at work, privately or publicly, in real and in virtual ways (D'Cruz, 2015; D'Cruz, Noronha and Lutgen-Sandvik, 2018).

Additionally, workplace abuse is also known as harassment in the workplace or emotional abuse (Fox and Spector, 2005). D'Cruz and Noronha (2016, p. 409) described the known types of emotional workplace abuse, maintaining that abuse may be of an interpersonal or depersonalized nature (pp. 412-413); moreover, the offensive behavior may be internal or external to the workplace (p. 414). The authors emphasized that any of these types of workplace abuse could be face-to-face or cyber, and described them as traditional and virtual bullying, respectively (see also D'Cruz, 2015, p. 8; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2013).

### **1.2. Theoretical frameworks of workplace abuse**

Existing theoretical frameworks incorporating definitions of abusive workplace behavior are based on one of two approaches: (1) harm to one's dignity and (2) harm to one's mental and physical health and safety. However, these categories are insufficient to capture the injustice

involved in workplace abuse or to provide guidance to policymakers and regulators for countering abuse.

In general, however, it can be said that workplace abusive behavior is inappropriate conduct that causes damage to people's dignity and mental and physical health and safety. Indeed, the desire to protect human dignity and freedom is one of the key constitutional values of most legal systems – and the law is committed to preventing such damage to individuals.

It is appropriate to remark that abusive workplace behavior is not limited to individual cases and that considerable parts of the workforce are exposed to offensive actions in various situations and at varying times. Consequently, dealing with this phenomenon cannot remain only at the organizational level, although many organizations prefer to keep these issues internal.

Moreover, people exposed to abusive behavior at work may suffer severe damage to their quality of life, with implications for their families and the broader social environment. This vast range of fallout represents an additional worrying concern that should engender the need to revamp appropriate workplace behavior norms (Guerrero, 2004).

### **1.3. Three foundations for delineation of workplace abuse**

The discussion above leads us to consider workplace abuse a multifaceted concept; additionally, international dilemmas and peculiarities are involved in its delineation. Notably, research to delineate workplace abuse is in its preliminary stages and has yet to achieve the conceptual analysis that sexual abuse has engendered. We believe, however, that accurate delineation of abuse that informs an employee's quality of life at work should be based on three foundations: physio-psychological, administrative-sociological, and legal.

The physio-psychological foundation deals with personal-mental, physical, and safety-related injuries.

The administrative-sociological foundation is anchored in Schneebaum's (2021) proposal to base the definition of abuse on Max Weber's ([1921] 1978) conception of the authority of office, inspired by crimes of the abuse of power in criminal law. Schneebaum contends that modern labor laws identify structural power gaps in labor relations. The laws organize economic work conditions and address entry (employment) and exit (dismissal) points but focus entirely on the relationships between the employers who own or run the means of production and employees.

The burgeoning regulations (e.g., Protection from Harassment Act 1997, U.K.; Procedure for Addressing Allegations of Workplace Harassment 2015, USA) against workplace abuse shed light on hierarchical relationships at work. They indicate, for instance, that the power embedded in the authority of office should be regulated by the state rather than being left to the mercy of self-regulation. In other words, employers should not be free to decide whether and to what extent internal authority positions should be regulated. To prevent abuse, the legislator should dictate a web of authority relationships that neutralizes the empowerment of employers and other positions of power (Schneebaum, 2021).

Schneebaum's (2021) theory is in line with our assumptions. We argue that workplace abuse creates a sense of employment insecurity when the abuser is a manager or superior. However, when a coworker perpetrates the abuse, it does not generate employment vulnerability

because the victim has the tools to deal with cases of abuse. We also assume that abuse by a superior does not affect the horizontal solidarity between workers if the worker's colleagues are not part of the abusive relationship. However, according to social interaction theory, abuse by one's coworkers does affect workplace solidarity (Itzkovitz and Heilbrunn, 2016b).

Finally, the legal foundation deals with the legal-constitutional aspects of damage to human dignity. The theoretical foundations for examining workplace abuse as legal harm are usually not addressed directly in the literature (Schneebaum, 2021). The underlying assumption behind existing research (D'Cruz et al., 2014) is that workplace abuse is unacceptable. In that context, research primarily focuses on locating abuse, often by creating legal mechanisms to correct the problem and providing victims with the defence they deserve. However, the two core frameworks for conceptualizing workplace abuse as legal harm can be gleaned from those studies.

The following discussion relates to the main characteristics of workplace abuse and critically assesses their suitability to conceptualize workplace abuse as legal harm. One option is to define workplace bullying as a safety issue dealt with by health and safety regulations, emphasizing preventing injuries and burdening the employer with the responsibility for all risk-creating practices. The other option is to identify workplace abuse based on the right to dignity, focusing on the humiliation of the bullied persons (Schneebaum, 2021).

The trinity of foundations outlined above can help outline accurately the parameters of abusive workplace behavior and serve to operate the mechanisms that identify offensive incidents. In the next section, we critically assess how suitable the foundations are for conceptualizing workplace abuse as a "legal harm."

## **2. Conceptualizing Workplace Abuse as a Legal Harm**

Implementing the mechanisms of protection and elimination of hostile acts at work draws its legitimacy from international and local regulations. In several countries, specific legislation has been passed to address the phenomenon. In others, the phenomenon is treated utilizing existing legislation regarding the prohibition of discrimination, protection of health and safety at work, or within the criminal or damages regulations that deal with specific behaviors that are considered harassment or bullying (such as assault, libel). Generally, it can be said that for conduct to be considered abusive, it should be diagnosed as unwanted or unreasonable, damaging to one's dignity, creating a hostile work environment, or endangering a worker's health or safety. Each law emphasizes a different characteristic in the definition of abuse.

The prominence attached to the issue of workplace abuse is reflected in the global adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), which entered into force on June 25, 2021. Countries ratifying the convention undertake to "respect, promote and realize the right of everyone to a world free from violence and harassment" (Article 4). Indeed, the very existence of the law can (and should) help shape attitudes and behaviors (Committee on the Biological and Psychosocial Effects of Peer Victimization, 2016).

The Convention defines abusive activity as harassment and recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free of violence and harassment. As cited in the Introduction above, particular emphasis is placed on the fact that harassment can consist of one-time events,

recognizing even a single occurrence of abuse may cause mental and physical damage. Countries that have ratified the convention accept a one-time action as an element of proving offensive behavior. Notably, those countries that have not yet ratified the convention require the criterion of recurring behavior, whose burden of proof is much more complicated.

The applicability of the Article is very broad and is the focal point of our references to abusive workplace behavior:

“[The] Convention protects workers and other persons in the world of work, including employees as defined by national law and practice, as well as persons working irrespective of their contractual status, persons in training, including interns and apprentices, workers whose employment has been terminated, volunteers, job seekers, and job applicants, and individuals exercising the authority, duties or responsibilities of an employer.” (ILO, 2019, Article 2)

Several countries that have not ratified the convention have passed specific legislation that prohibits workplace abuse or determines mechanisms to address the phenomenon. One model is the application of the constitutional human rights and equality track to protect bullied employees; another model of prevention is labor legislation; a third model is the application of the criminal offenses track.

Due to the variety of paradigms language is non-uniform regarding abusive behavior; the terms “harassment” and “bullying” are often used interchangeably. However, the threatened person – bullied, intimidated, or humiliated – may be part of a protected class (such as race, gender, age, disability, or sexual orientation). In the U.S., for instance, bullying is considered harassment, which is illegal and covered under federal laws (for example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

Israel has an extensive legislative framework concerning discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace (e.g., the Employment [Equal Opportunities] Law of 1988 and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law of 1998). However, no Israeli law currently incorporates bullying or harassment as an actionable cause for a claim and compensation, although, notably, there is a draft law in the process.

We recommend that countries that have ratified the Convention include in their legal enactments the terms “bullying” and “incivility” in addition to harassment and violence to unify the international terms.

The first basis for any workplace abuse lawsuit is factual proof of the events. However, even in countries that do not have the relevant legislation, courts have the tools to examine these claims, whether by virtue of the duty to uphold a work contract in good faith or through damages awarded for distress.

On the other hand, workers might bring abuse or harassment charges without a factual basis because of subjective feelings or personal objectives such as preventing dismissal. Either way, the court must address whether workplace abuse did or did not occur. In that respect, legal field of workplace abuse still requires a great deal of work in courts to verify or reject the data.

We advocate that governments raise awareness of the issue and the desired outcomes while enhancing workers’ protection and dignity. To that end, the relevant authorities should employ uniform terminology and promote applicable legislation.



### 3. Incidences and Outcomes of Workplace Abuse

Recent studies (e.g., Liao et al., 2021) have indicated that abusive workplace behavior is a widespread problem, including in the U.S. and Canada, Europe, the UK, Israel, and South Africa. Cowan's (2013) comprehensive investigation of the topic concluded that H.R. professionals seem to attribute bullying to both internal factors (personality, management style, and communication skills) and external factors (culture and contemporary society) seen as neither under control – nor the volition – of the actor (either the target or bully). Furthermore, objective circumstances, such as promotion schemes and comparative performance review systems, appear to contribute to a “winner-takes-all” culture that promotes workplace bullying (Baker, 2013).

Research has documented the psychological damage of abuse and its economic implications for the abused victims, the workplace, organizational productivity, and the entire economy. For example, financial consequences for organizations can arise because those experiencing abuse often adopt behaviors that harm productivity, including taking extended breaks, damaging property, working slower, reporting more workplace accidents, and missing more workdays (Heilbrunn and Itzkovitz, 2017). Furthermore, Itzkovitz and Heilbrunn (2016a) found that abusive behavior at work is a sector- and gender-crossing phenomenon and that abusive behaviors occur at varying frequencies.

The question arises of whether overly strict or abusive supervision should be included in the reports of abuse. Tepper (2000, p. 178) defined abusive supervision as a subjective evaluation resting on “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact.” Tepper emphasized that this definition relates not to the superiors’ actual behavior but to how subordinates perceive it. This distinction is particularly germane because the same behavior can be interpreted contrarily by different workers or even by the same worker at various times (Fischer et al., 2021).

Fischer et al. (2021) found that in the U.S., 13% of the interviewees reported they had experienced psychological abuse at least once a week. However, the researchers’ further review of specific studies on abusive supervision indicated that less than 2% of these incidents had been officially reported.

When examining the effect of workplace abuse on horizontal solidarity and a sense of employment security, Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) approach distinguishes between two types of reactions to stressors: responses focused on (1) emotions; and (2) responses focused on problems. “Emotional reactions” are based on pessimism related to the unlikelyhood of coping with the problem, while individuals expressing “problem-centered reactions” tend to deal with the specific issue at hand. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also examined the relationship between “a sense of workplace insecurity” and “horizontal solidarity,” indicating that these outcomes stemmed from two sources of abuse: the superiors and the coworkers.

Following Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) theory, it can be surmised that workplace abuse causes employment insecurity when victims do not feel they have the means to cope with the threats posed by the abuse. If the abuser is the worker’s manager, the abuse is construed as employment insecurity because the manager controls most of the employee’s socioeconomic resources. On the other hand, since one’s coworkers do not manage existing or future resources, their abuse should not lead to employment insecurity.

Cortina and colleagues (2001) used the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS) to measure “experiences of disrespectful, rude, or condescending behaviors from superiors or coworkers” (p. 68) on a seven-item list of incivilities using a four-point scale ranging from 1 = “Almost never” to 7 = “Most of the time.” The respondents were asked:

“During the PAST FIVE YEARS ... have you been in a situation where any of your superiors or coworkers: Put you down or were condescending to you? Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion? Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you? Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately? Ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie? Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you have responsibility? Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of personal matters?” (Cortina et al., 2001, p. 70, Table 2)

The results indicated that uncivil supervision creates a sense of employment insecurity, while incivility by horizontal coworkers does not, although it has some effects. Furthermore, uncivil supervision does not impair or damage the horizontal solidarity between work colleagues. If the abuse continues for extended periods, however, it affects the welfare and social fabric of the workplace (Heilbrunn and Itzkovitz, 2017).

Following these observations, we conducted an exploratory study in Israel to demonstrate how Tepper’s instrument might be used to draw conclusions about abusive behavior in its various manifestations.

As the study was investigative, no hypotheses were formulated.

## 4. Survey Method

### 4.1. Procedure

Using organizational WhatsApp groups, we contacted the Katzrin Local Council and Tigbur Ltd. employees, a recruitment company (“large organizations”), and a small national organization in Israel. The message described the questionnaire indicating that it was anonymous for an academic paper and that participation was voluntary.

We used Tepper’s (2000) Abusive Supervision Survey Questionnaire, translated into Hebrew. The questionnaire included 15 statements with a five-point response scale: 1 = “I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me”; 2 = “He/she very seldom uses this behavior with me”; 3 = “He/she occasionally uses this behavior with me”; 4 = “He/she uses this behavior moderately often with me”; and 5 = “He/she uses this behavior very often with me” ( $\alpha = .97$ ,  $M = 1.81$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). We conducted a factor analysis to ensure statistical validity and found that the items did not split into well-formed and distinct factors. Consequently, the findings are based on “abuse” as a global variable ( $KMO = .92$ ,  $R^2 = 69.18$ ). It should be noted that the loadings of the items on one factor were very high ( $> .65$ ), which overcomes the relatively small sample size (MacCallum et al., 1999).

### 4.2. Participants

The final sample included 105 respondents, 39% men and 61% women, aged 23-66 ( $M = 42.02$ ,  $SD = 11.06$ ). Regarding education level, 14.3% had less than 12 years of education; 17.1% had 12 full years; 10.5% had tertiary education; 40% had a bachelor’s degree, and

18.1% had a master's degree and above. 28.6% of the respondents held managerial positions; 71.4 % did not. Their job tenure ranged between 0.5 and 42 years ( $M = 10.48$ ,  $SD = 9.38$ ). 66.7% of the respondents were employed in a public organization, 28.5% in a private organization, and 4.8% in a national organization. The participants in the national and private organizations were combined in the findings section to avoid the problem of unbalanced groups. Finally, the managers' gender balance was almost equal: 50.5% men vs. 49.5% women.

## 5. Findings

To examine the relationships between the abuse items (listed in detail in Tables 2 and 3) and the general latent variable, and their intercorrelations, Pearson correlations were performed (Table 1). Additionally, t-tests for independent samples (with Bonferroni corrections for multiple comparisons) were performed to compare (1) the respondent's gender, (2) manager's gender, (3) the type of organization, and (4) managerial role with each of the abuse items, including the general abuse variable (see Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 1. Pearson correlations**

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Item 1	(-)														
Item 2	.93	(-)													
Item 3	.79	.82	(-)												
Item 4	.70	.79	.81	(-)											
Item 5	.63	.69	.74	.84	(-)										
Item 6	.60	.65	.66	.71	.68	(-)									
Item 7	.52	.59	.68	.75	.66	.71	(-)								
Item 8	.43	.50	.65	.78	.70	.70	.84	(-)							
Item 9	.45	.56	.69	.77	.71	.66	.79	.87	(-)						
Item 10	.44	.55	.64	.79	.68	.68	.83	.85	.82	(-)					
Item 11	.38	.50	.57	.74	.71	.69	.74	.83	.82	.87	(-)				
Item 12	.44	.50	.62	.77	.71	.66	.79	.83	.78	.89	.90	(-)			
Item 13	.50	.60	.63	.58	.56	.40	.47	.48	.52	.48	.44	.47	(-)		
Item 14	.46	.54	.58	.61	.56	.43	.52	.59	.60	.56	.59	.57	.58	(-)	
Item 15	.61	.66	.75	.79	.64	.59	.78	.76	.71	.78	.70	.80	.62	.65	(-)
Abuse (general)	.69	.77	.84	.92	.84	.80	.87	.89	.88	.89	.86	.88	.65	.70	.87

Note: All correlations are significant at  $p < .001$ ;  
a full description of items may be found in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 1 shows that all the correlations were high, positive, and significant. Below is a list, in descending order, of the individual items that predicted abuse. The numbers 1-15 in square brackets denote the item numbers as shown in Tables 2 and 3:

[4] Puts me down in front of others ( $r = .92$ ).

[8] Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment and [10] expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason ( $r = .89$ ).

[9] Breaks promises he/she makes and [12] is rude to me ( $r = .88$ ).

[7] Doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort and [15] lies to me ( $r = .87$ ).

- [11] Makes negative comments about me to others ( $r = .86$ ).  
 [3] Gives me the silent treatment and [5] invades my privacy ( $r = .84$ ).  
 [6] Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures ( $r = .80$ ).  
 [2] Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid ( $r = .77$ ).  
 [14] Tells me I'm incompetent ( $r = .70$ ).  
 [1] Ridicules me ( $r = .69$ ).  
 [13] Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers ( $r = .69$ ).

**Table 2. t-test results for gender of managers and employees (means and S.D.)**

Item	Employees			t-test	Managers			t-test
	Men (n = 53)	-	Women (n = 52)		Men (n = 41)	-	Women (n = 64)	
1. Ridicules me	1.73 (1.28)	>	1.31 (0.73)	2.13*	1.74 (1.18)	=	1.33 (0.83)	1.72
2. Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid	1.80 (1.29)	>	1.36 (0.80)	2.18*	1.96 (1.24)	>	1.38 (0.84)	2.05*
3. Gives me the silent treatment	1.98 (1.33)	>	1.48 (0.87)	2.29*	2.02 (1.28)	>	1.25 (0.86)	2.79***
4. Puts me down in front of others	1.95 (1.34)	>	1.44 (0.97)	2.27*	1.91 (1.21)	>	1.38 (0.91)	3.61**
5. Invades my privacy	1.93 (1.21)	>	1.47 (0.99)	2.12*	2.36 (1.51)	>	1.62 (1.29)	2.49*
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures	2.54 (1.73)	>	1.64 (1.10)	3.24**	2.72 (1.68)	>	1.54 (1.04)	2.72***
7. Doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort	2.56 (1.70)	>	1.86 (1.32)	2.37*	2.68 (1.63)	>	1.56 (1.11)	4.31***
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment	2.49 (1.66)	>	1.89 (1.35)	2.02*	2.55 (1.44)	>	1.56 (0.98)	4.12***
9. Breaks promises he/she makes	2.39 (1.50)	>	1.84 (1.16)	2.10*	2.57 (1.42)	>	1.33 (0.86)	4.12***
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason	2.29 (1.52)	>	1.73 (1.14)	2.14*	2.62 (1.47)	>	1.38 (0.87)	5.40***
11. Makes negative comments about me to others	2.51 (1.57)	>	1.69 (1.10)	3.17**	2.60 (1.51)	>	1.35 (0.88)	5.24***
12. Is rude to me	2.41 (1.56)	>	1.70 (1.19)	2.64**	1.66 (1.09)	>	1.38 (0.99)	5.19***
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers	1.61 (1.16)	=	1.47 (0.98)	0.67	1.87 (1.06)	=	1.25 (0.65)	1.35
14. Tells me I'm incompetent	1.66 (1.06)	=	1.50 (0.84)	0.85	2.40 (1.25)	>	1.33 (0.88)	3.60***
15. Lies to me	2.07 (1.23)	=	1.73 (1.17)	1.42	2.22 (1.08)	>	1.40 (0.78)	5.07***
<b>Abuse (general)</b>	<b>2.13 (1.17)</b>	<b>&gt;</b>	<b>1.61 (0.88)</b>	<b>2.60*</b>	<b>1.74 (1.18)</b>	<b>&gt;</b>	<b>1.33 (0.83)</b>	<b>4.47***</b>

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3. T-test results for type of organization and management roles  
(means and S.D.)**

Item	Type of organization		t-test	Management role		t-test
	Private (n = 35)	Public (n = 70)		No (n = 41)	Yes (n = 64)	
1. Ridicules me	1.80 (1.05)	> 1.31 (0.94)	2.40*	1.48 (0.96)	= 1.47 (1.11)	0.06
2. Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid	2.03 (1.12)	> 1.29 (0.90)	3.66***	1.53 (0.99)	= 1.53 (1.17)	0.00
3. Gives me the silent treatment	2.31 (1.13)	> 1.36 (0.93)	4.61***	1.67 (1.07)	= 1.70 (1.18)	0.14
4. Puts me down in front of others	2.43 (1.33)	> 1.24 (0.81)	5.66***	1.72 (1.26)	= 1.43 (0.82)	1.15
5. Invades my privacy	2.23 (1.33)	> 1.36 (0.83)	4.11***	1.72 (1.17)	= 1.47 (0.90)	1.07
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures	2.83 (1.52)	> 1.57 (1.21)	4.59***	2.15 (1.54)	= 1.60 (1.10)	1.77
7. Doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort	3.17 (1.52)	> 1.61 (1.22)	5.67***	2.11 (1.48)	= 2.20 (1.63)	0.28
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment	3.37 (1.59)	> 1.50 (0.97)	7.45***	2.24 (1.59)	> 1.83 (1.21)	1.26*
9. Breaks promises he/she makes	3.14 (1.42)	> 1.51 (0.86)	7.30***	2.12 (1.37)	= 1.90 (1.21)	0.77
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason	3.00 (1.37)	> 1.43 (0.94)	6.89***	2.01 (1.40)	= 1.80 (1.13)	0.74
11. Makes negative comments about me to others	3.20 (1.39)	> 1.41 (0.86)	8.11***	2.20 (1.44)	> 1.53 (0.97)	2.33*
12. Is rude to me	3.11 (1.45)	> 1.41 (0.94)	7.24***	2.12 (1.48)	= 1.63 (1.07)	1.64
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers	1.91 (1.12)	> 1.33 (0.96)	2.79***	1.44 (0.93)	= 1.73 (1.28)	1.30
14. Tells me I'm incompetent	2.29 (1.02)	> 1.20 (0.63)	6.74***	1.57 (0.90)	= 1.53 (1.01)	0.20
15. Lies to me	2.74 (1.04)	> 1.43 (1.03)	6.15***	1.88 (1.16)	= 1.83 (1.32)	0.18
<b>Abuse (general)</b>	2.64 (0.97)	> 1.40 (0.78)	7.09***	1.86 (1.07)	= 1.68 (0.91)	0.83

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Analysis of the data indicates that the incidence of workplace abuse in the respondents' organizations is not high; the mean of the reported abuse was relatively low (1.81). We presume that such behavior could be interpreted as abuse by one individual and not as abuse by two or more coworkers. Circumstances might also matter: a given statement could be perceived as an incidental remark in one setting and harassment in another context. Notably, meager reporting frequency on the part of the abused victims does not necessarily mean that the abuse does not occur. As noted, Fischer et al. (2021) found that abusive supervision is underreported, albeit that they adduce that conclusion to a statistical-research challenge rather than indicating that workplace abuse is absent at work.

Our findings indicate that women managers exhibited fewer abusive behaviors than men, although mean differences between men and women were very modest (between 0.28 and 1.25 difference in the mean scores, in absolute value). We found no direct support in the literature for this finding; however, Miller, Krek and Zohar (2012) suggested that the female management style is perceived to be characterized by “ethics of care” in the organizational arena, and ethical theory that holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relations and care as a virtue, which leads women, in contrast to men, to support cooperation and creativity.

Additionally, we found that abusive behavior was more prevalent in the private organization than in the public concerns. Although we found no support in the literature for this finding, we assume that regulation in public organizations reduces the possibility of abuse. Our investigation further revealed that workers reported more cases of abuse than managers. However, the mean differences between employees and managers were slight, between 0 and 0.67 in the mean scores in absolute value. Finally, we observed that men reported more cases of abusive behavior than women. The mean differences were insignificant and cannot serve to form conclusions indicating a trend.

### **Conclusions**

Addressing the topic of workplace abuse topic is essential given the changing and developing labor market. We found, however, that reports of the phenomenon were scant, despite increasing awareness. Consequently, we presume that instances of abusive behavior could be assigned to one individual rather than by one or more coworkers or supervisors. We further recognized that “offensive statements” could be variously perceived depending on the observer and the circumstances. For instance, what could be perceived as an incidental remark by some employees might be harassment to others.

Section 2 on legal harm indicated that a proper comprehensive solution to the issue of workplace abuse is still absent. Rulings in Israel, for instance, suggest that the courts easily recognize abuse, connect it to injured human dignity, and examine the occurrences in consideration of (1) the standards of frequency over time and (2) the creation of a hostile work environment. However, although the courts relate to the professional literature, typically psychological, they do not apply psychological discourse or examine the alleged victim’s personality.

Labor courts do not require a law to prevent workplace abuse; they generally deal with the phenomenon with the tools they have at their disposal. Indeed, it appears that the courts have succeeded in anchoring their rulings in their overall authority. Consequently – even though it would be appropriate if labor court rulings relied on primary legislation – the courts deal with workplace abuse cases without legislation. However, since labor courts have undertaken to resolve the issue through judicial legislation, we urge that they should adopt uniform terminology and call the phenomenon “employment harassment,” “offensive employment,” or “workplace abuse” as defined by the relevant bill. Consequently, when and if the national labor court is asked to rule on the issue, their ruling based on the uniform terminology would guide the regional labor courts.

Finally, we recommend cultivating an organizational culture that eradicates the “trust gap,” a culture that encourages employees to speak up without fear of retribution. To this end, we reiterate our recommendation for appointing officers responsible for eradicating abuse in the

organization to whom employees can complain. Second, to help courts identify abusive behavior when an employee files a lawsuit against the perpetrator, we recommend assigning court-appointed experts to examine the abuse allegations employing the statements in Tepper's (2000) questionnaire.

### **Implications for future research**

On the research level, we propose continuing research efforts related to workplace abuse and related methodological tools for identifying and measuring the quality and frequency of such events. Specifically, we recommend the following future research endeavors:

- Consider the impact of cultural values on the relationship between abusive supervision in the workplace and its effect on employees, customers, shareholders, and the community.
- Investigate the impact of organizational culture in reducing and eliminating abusive workplace behavior.
- Explore further the nature and frequency of abusive behavior between employees (i.e., antecedents, manifestations, process, and psychological outcomes), and
- Recommend strategies and programs to circumvent workplace offensive behaviors based on the findings of these research efforts.

Governments should promote relevant legislation. Public discourse should continue to raise awareness of workplace abuse and the desired outcome of increased protection of workers and their dignity. Moreover, as one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper has suggested, future investigations should:

- Shed light on whether women managers display more or less abusive behavior at work than male managers.
- Look more deeply into the sources of abusive behavior at work; and
- Examine how various HRM practices (e.g., performance management procedures, organizational hierarchies, and tournament promotion) foster abusive behaviors at work. Underlying this recommendation is the notion that unless root causes of workplace abuse are investigated, a legal remedy will never be sufficient.

### **Author note**

A previous version of this paper was presented at the annual Eastern Academy of Management (May, 2022) and as granted the 'best paper award' in HR division.

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