

Bullying bosses negatively impact employee performance and behavior

March 7 2019



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Employees bullied by their bosses are more likely to report unfairness and work stress, and consequently become less committed to their jobs or even retaliate, according to a Portland State University study.

The findings, published recently in the *Journal of Management*, highlight

the consequences of abusive supervision, which is becoming increasingly common in workplaces, said Liu-Qin Yang, the study's co-author and an associate professor of industrial-organizational psychology in PSU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Yang and her co-authors reviewed 427 studies and quantitatively aggregated the results to better understand why and how bullying bosses can decrease "[organizational citizenship behavior](#)"—or the voluntary extras you do that aren't part of your job responsibilities—and increase "counterproductive work behavior." Examples of such behaviors include sabotage at work, coming into work late, taking longer-than-allowed breaks, doing tasks incorrectly or withholding effort, all of which can affect your team and coworkers.

The researchers attribute the negative work behaviors to either perceptions of injustice or [work stress](#).

With perceptions of injustice, employees bullied by their boss see the treatment as unfair relative to the effort they've put into their jobs. In response, they're more likely to purposely withhold from the unpaid extras that help the organization, like helping coworkers with problems or attending meetings that are not mandatory. They're also more likely to engage in counterproductive work behavior such as taking longer breaks or coming in late without notice, Yang said.

Having an abusive boss can also lead to work [stress](#), which reduces an employee's ability to control negative behaviors or contribute to the organization in a positive way.

The researchers found that fairness (or the lack thereof) accounted more for the link between abusive supervision and organizational citizenship behavior, while work stress led to more counterproductive work behavior.

"Stress is sometimes uncontrollable. You don't sleep well, so you come in late or take a longer break, lash out at your coworkers or disobey instructions," Yang said. "But justice is more rational. Something isn't fair, so you're purposely not going to help other people or when the [boss](#) asks if anyone can come in on a Saturday to [work](#), you don't volunteer."

Yang and her co-authors recommend that organizations take measures to reduce or curb abusive supervision. Among their suggestions:

- Launch regular training programs to help supervisors learn and adopt more effective interpersonal and [management skills](#) when interacting with their employees
- Implement fair policies and procedures to reduce employees' perceptions of injustice in the organization
- Ensure employees have sufficient resources to perform their job, such as by offering stress management training

More information: Yucheng Zhang et al, Why Abusive Supervision Impacts Employee OCB and CWB: A Meta-Analytic Review of Competing Mediating Mechanisms, *Journal of Management* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0149206318823935](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318823935)

Provided by Portland State University

Citation: Bullying bosses negatively impact employee performance and behavior (2019, March 7) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-03-bullying-bosses-negatively-impact-employee.html>

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