

New study finds stressed employees become too depleted to properly recover

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In an ideal workplace, organizations should strive to protect employees from abusive supervisors, but for employees who experience this type of intense workplace stress, new research from the University at Buffalo

School of Management offers insight and coping strategies.

Available online ahead of publication in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, [the study](#) examines whether employees can recover from supervisory abuse during [leisure time](#), and if individual personality traits impact the restoration process.

"Abusive supervision is detrimental to employees' well-being. Victims experience increased emotional exhaustion, job stress, [negative emotions](#), and [physical symptoms](#) like pain, weakness, fatigue and shortness of breath," says study co-author Min-Hsuan Tu, Ph.D., assistant professor of organization and human resources in the UB School of Management. "Our study clarifies why and under what conditions abused employees engage in certain activities to recover after work."

Gathering data from 203 full-time employees in Taiwan, the researchers analyzed more than 1,500 daily responses over 10 consecutive working days to measure employee perception of nonphysical aggression from a boss or manager, such as humiliating or threatening subordinates or taking credit for their work.

Researchers also measured whether employees felt an urgent need to take a break from job demands; which of their [leisure activities](#) increased happiness; levels of enthusiasm and optimism the following day; and whether extroverted personality traits affected this process.

The data supports the recovery paradox phenomenon—when [employees](#) need to recover from abuse, they are too exhausted or depleted to proactively engage in beneficial recovery activities, such as social or physical activity.

"Our findings indicate that introverts, in particular, are able to recover effectively by participating in leisure activities that demand minimal

energy, such as reading a book, watching television or relaxing on the couch," says Tu.

To ensure employee well-being and prevent long-term consequences, the study confirms that it is critical for organizations to inhibit and remove abusive supervision—and to support victims' recovery processes. Tu says organizations should offer more training on leadership competence and emotional engagement. They also should support leisure time and work-life balance by discouraging work-related communications during nonwork time.

More information: Min-Hsuan Tu et al, How and when abusive supervision leads to recovery activities: The recovery paradox and the conservation of resources perspectives, *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/job.2757](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2757)

Provided by University at Buffalo

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