Why is Your Boss Making You Sick?
A Longitudinal Investigation

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INTRODUCTION

“My boss really drove me up the wall to a point where I started developing stomach problems, which my doctor linked to stress.”

• It has been suggested that “long term and frequent exposure to destructive behavior from a person that is in charge is likely to cause stress and lead to lower well-being” (Schyns et al., 2012, p. 143). Yet this conclusion is entirely premised upon cross-sectional data.
• We make an effort to understand the causal direction of the association between abusive supervision and employee health by employing a longitudinal cross-lagged design (Finkel, 1995).
• We also tested four potential mediating mechanisms that reflect prominent theoretical accounts of how abusive supervision may negatively impact subordinate health:
  ➢ Cognitive theories of rumination
  ➢ Self-determination theory
  ➢ Group value model of justice
  ➢ Social exchange theories

Hypothesis
The time-lagged effect of abusive supervision on subordinate somatic complaints will be mediated by rumination, basic need satisfaction, interpersonal justice, and organizational social exchange.

METHOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time 1 Survey</th>
<th>Time 2 Survey (4 months later)</th>
<th>Time 3 Survey (4 months later)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV Abusive Supervision (Tepper, 2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediators Rumination (Thau &amp; Mitchell, 2010)</td>
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<td>Basic Need Satisfaction (Deci et al., 2001)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Justice (Colquitt, 2001)</td>
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<td>Organizational Social Exchange (Shore et al., 2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DV Subordinate Somatic Complaints (Ganster, Fusilier, &amp; Mayes, 1986)</td>
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RESULTS

✓ Rumination mediated the cross-lagged effect of abusive supervision on somatic complaints.
✓ There were no significant mediation effects of the other hypothesized mechanisms, including basic need satisfaction, interpersonal justice, and social exchange.

DISCUSSION

• While the majority of research on abusive supervision focuses on its psychological and behavioral outcomes (Tepper, 2007), our work adds methodologically rigorous evidence to a small body of work showing that abusive supervision is harmful to subordinates’ physical health.
• Our study furthers existing knowledge of the directionality of abusive supervision, its associated outcomes, and the mechanisms that mediate its effects.
• In testing the relative explanatory power of four theoretically-relevant mechanisms of abusive supervision and subordinate health, we found support for the mediating effects of rumination, but not for the effects of the other constructs.

Practical Implications

• It is possible to help employees to limit the impact of abusive supervision on their physical health, by making use of a variety of interventions that have been shown to reduce rumination.

Model fit: $X^2_{[143]} = 2327.89$, CFI = .92, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .06
Indirect Effect = .02, 95% CI [.01, .04]


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