

The Dark Side of Leadership in Academia: How Abusive Supervision Influences Faculty Well-Being

Темна сторона лідерства в академічному середовищі: як аб'юзивне керівництво впливає на благополуччя викладачів

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Purpose. to analyze the impact of abusive supervision on the well-being of faculty members in higher education institutions, considering the mediating role of work alienation and the moderating effect of willpower within the framework of Affective Events Theory.

Method. The study employs a quantitative research approach. Data were collected from 311 faculty members of private universities in Bangladesh using a two-wave (time-lagged) design. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied using SPSS v27 and AMOS v24. Reliability (Cronbach's alpha), convergent and discriminant validity (CFA, AVE, CR) were assessed, and bootstrap analysis (5,000 samples) was conducted.

Findings. The results indicate that abusive supervision has a statistically significant negative effect on employee well-being and is positively associated with work alienation. Work alienation partially mediates this relationship. Willpower acts as a buffer, weakening the negative impact of work alienation on well-being. Thus, all proposed hypotheses (H1–H5) are supported.

Theoretical implications. The study extends the application of Affective Events Theory (AET) in the higher education context by integrating destructive leadership, work alienation, and individual psychological resources into a unified explanatory framework. It also clarifies the mechanism through which negative managerial practices translate into reduced well-being via emotional and cognitive processes.

Practical implications. The findings highlight the need to implement policies aimed at preventing abusive supervision, enhancing leaders' emotional intelligence, and fostering a supportive organizational climate. The development of programs aimed at strengthening employees' psychological resilience and willpower is recommended to mitigate the adverse effects of destructive leadership.

Paper type. Empirical.

Мета дослідження. Аналіз впливу аб'юзивного керівництва на благополуччя викладачів закладів вищої освіти з урахуванням медіаційної ролі відчуження від роботи та модераторного ефекту сили волі в межах теорії афективних подій.

Метод дослідження. Дослідження виконано з використанням кількісного підходу. Дані зібрано від 311 викладачів приватних університетів Бангладеш у два етапи (time-lagged design). Для аналізу застосовано методи структурного моделювання (SEM) із використанням SPSS v27 та AMOS v24. Перевірено надійність (Cronbach's alpha), конвергентну та дискримінантну валідність (CFA, AVE, CR), а також проведено бутстреп-аналіз (5000 вибірок).

Результати дослідження. Встановлено, що аб'юзивне керівництво має статистично значущий негативний вплив на благополуччя працівників та позитивно пов'язане з відчуженням від роботи. Відчуження частково медіює цей зв'язок. Сила волі виступає буфером, послаблюючи негативний вплив відчуження на благополуччя. Таким чином, підтверджено всі висунуті гіпотези (H1–H5).

Теоретична цінність дослідження. Дослідження розширює застосування теорії афективних подій (AET) у контексті вищої освіти, інтегруючи деструктивне лідерство, відчуження від роботи та індивідуальні психологічні ресурси. Обґрунтовано механізм трансформації негативних управлінських практик у погіршення благополуччя через емоційні та когнітивні процеси.

Практична цінність дослідження. Результати підкреслюють необхідність впровадження політик протидії аб'юзивному керівництву, розвитку емоційного інтелекту керівників та формування підтримуючого організаційного клімату. Рекомендується впровадження програм розвитку психологічної стійкості та сили волі працівників для мінімізації негативних наслідків деструктивного лідерства.

Тип статті. Емпірична.

Key words: Abusive Supervision, Work Alienation, Employee Wellbeing, Willpower, Education Sector, Bangladesh.

Ключові слова: аб'юзивне керівництво, відчуження від роботи, благополуччя працівників, сила волі, сектор освіти.

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the development of individuals and the progress of society. Within this system, teachers serve as key contributors to intellectual, social, and emotional development, making their effectiveness essential for long-term societal advancement (Aboramadan et al., 2021). To perform this role successfully, teachers need to work in an environment that supports both their professional development and psychological well-being (Hossain et al., 2024). When institutions provide a supportive and healthy work environment, educators are more capable of maintaining motivation, commitment, and engagement in their professional responsibilities (Ayati et al., 2025). A critical factor that influences teachers' work experiences is the organizational climate. Organizational climate reflects employees' shared perceptions of workplace practices, leadership behaviors, and the overall work environment. Prior research suggests that a positive climate contributes to important employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment (Almaqableha & Omarb, 2024; Oleksa-Marewska & Springer, 2025; Yiming et al., 2024). In academic institutions where collaboration, knowledge exchange, and interpersonal interaction are central to daily work, a supportive climate can help teachers remain engaged and committed to their profession while enhancing their ability to contribute to student learning and institutional success. Conversely, when the organizational climate is characterized by negative leadership practices, the consequences can be detrimental for both employees and organizations (Chihora, 2024). Such conditions may increase psychological strain among employees and foster negative outcomes such as work alienation and reduced well-being (Al-kashab, 2024).

Literature review

Among the various leadership behaviors that can harm the workplace environment, abusive supervision has received increasing attention in organizational research. Abusive supervision refers to employees' perceptions that supervisors engage in sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors toward subordinates, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000). These behaviors may include ridicule, public criticism, intimidation, or the withholding of important information. In work environments that rely heavily on interpersonal relationships, such as educational institutions, the impact of such behaviors can be particularly damaging. In higher education settings, where teaching quality and academic performance depend strongly on faculty morale and leadership support, abusive supervision can create a toxic work atmosphere that undermines teachers' motivation and emotional resources (Chakraborty & Alam, 2024; Tepper, 2007). Teachers who experience hostile supervisory behaviors may feel undervalued and unsupported, which can generate significant emotional and psychological strain (Wang et al., 2024). Over time, repeated exposure to such negative leadership behaviors may also lead teachers to feel psychologically detached from their work. This condition, commonly referred to as work alienation, reflects a state in which employees experience a loss of meaning, involvement, and connection with their work roles. When teachers become alienated from their work, their sense of purpose and enthusiasm for teaching may decline, ultimately affecting their overall well-being and effectiveness within the institution. Against this background, the present study investigates the effect of abusive supervision (AS) on employee well-being (EW) among faculty members working in private universities in Bangladesh. Abusive supervision refers to subordinates' perceptions of sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors from supervisors, such as ridicule, intimidation, or public criticism, which undermine employees' psychological functioning (Tepper, 2000; Lin et al., 2013; Zellars et al., 2002). Employee well-being reflects individuals' overall satisfaction and emotional experiences across work and life domains, serving as a comprehensive indicator of psychological functioning (Zheng et al., 2015). The study further examines work alienation (WA) as a mediating mechanism through which abusive

supervision affects well-being. Work alienation occurs when employees feel psychologically detached from their work roles, experience reduced meaning in their tasks, and feel disconnected from the organizational environment (Shantz et al., 2014). According to Affective Events Theory, repeated exposure to negative workplace events, such as abusive supervision, triggers adverse emotional reactions that can evolve into longer-term attitudinal states like alienation, which in turn diminish employee well-being (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Finally, the study considers willpower (WP) as a moderating factor that may buffer the negative effects of work alienation on employee well-being. Willpower, a core component of hope, represents an individual's goal-directed determination and self-regulatory capacity to pursue desired outcomes despite obstacles (De Clercq et al., 2018; Luthans et al., 2007). Employees with higher levels of willpower are expected to cope more effectively with feelings of alienation and maintain their psychological stability, whereas those with lower willpower may experience a stronger decline in well-being (Tepper et al., 2017). By integrating these variables e.g., abusive supervision, work alienation, employee well-being, and willpower, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how destructive leadership behaviors influence faculty members' psychological experiences and overall well-being in higher education institutions. By doing so, this study makes several important contributions to both the leadership and educational management literature. First, it extends the application of Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) by demonstrating how negative leadership behaviors, such as abusive supervision, function as affective workplace events that trigger emotional reactions, foster work alienation, and ultimately reduce employee well-being in higher education contexts. Second, it identifies work alienation as a mediating mechanism, providing empirical evidence of the psychological process through which abusive supervision affects teachers' well-being (Shantz et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2015). Third, by examining willpower as a moderating factor, the study highlights the role of personal motivational resources in buffering the adverse effects of work alienation, offering insight into individual differences in responses to destructive leadership (De Clercq et al., 2018; Luthans et al., 2007). By addressing these gaps, the study not only advances theoretical understanding of the mechanisms linking abusive supervision to employee well-being in academic settings but also provides practical guidance for improving teacher retention, psychological resilience, and organizational climate in higher education institutions.

Materials and Methods

1 Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

1.1 Abusive supervision and employee well-being

Although leadership research has largely focused on constructive and positive leader behaviors, it is equally important to examine behaviors that harm subordinates and organizations (Aryee et al., 2007; Tepper, 2007; Watkins et al., 2019). Increasing attention has been directed toward the darker side of leadership, including constructs such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), and destructive leadership (Erickson et al., 2015; Ahmad et al., 2024). Among these, abusive supervision has emerged as a central construct in understanding how hostile leader behaviors affect employees. Abusive supervision refers to subordinates' perceptions that supervisors engage in sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000). Such behaviors may include ridicule, public criticism, withholding necessary information, intimidation, and the use of derogatory language (Lin et al., 2013; Zellars et al., 2002). These behaviors create a psychologically threatening work environment and signal disrespect, unfairness, and a lack of interpersonal value. A growing body of research demonstrates that abusive supervision is associated with detrimental employee outcomes, including psychological strain, anxiety, depression, and reduced well-being (Tepper et al., 2007, 2017). While earlier research often treated abusive supervision as a stable leadership style with cumulative long-term effects, more

recent perspectives recognize that supervisory hostility may also fluctuate depending on situational factors and leader states (Barnes et al., 2015; Liao et al., 2021). Regardless of its stability, exposure to abusive behaviors constitutes a significant interpersonal stressor that can undermine employees' psychological functioning.

The relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being can be explained through Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). AET posits that workplace events trigger emotional reactions, which in turn influence employees' attitudes and well-being. Abusive supervisory behaviors represent negative affective events that evoke emotions such as anger, frustration, humiliation, and anxiety. These emotional responses accumulate and shape employees' overall psychological experiences at work. Over time, repeated exposure to such negative affective events diminishes employees' emotional resources and reduces their sense of well-being. Employee well-being reflects individuals' overall satisfaction and emotional experiences across work and life domains (Zheng et al., 2015). It encompasses psychological, workplace, and life-related dimensions and represents a comprehensive indicator of employees' quality of functioning. Because well-being is sensitive to employees' emotional experiences, it is particularly vulnerable to hostile and demeaning supervisory behaviors. Drawing on Affective Events Theory, abusive supervision can be understood as a recurring negative workplace event that triggers adverse emotional reactions, ultimately impairing employees' psychological well-being. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Abusive supervision is negatively related to employee well-being

1.2 Mediating Role of Work Alienation

Although abusive supervision directly undermines employee well-being, its influence may also operate through employees' internal psychological states. One important mechanism that can explain this process is work alienation. Work alienation refers to a condition in which employees feel psychologically detached from their work roles and emotionally disconnected from their work environment. Even though they remain physically present, they experience reduced meaning, involvement, and identification with their work.

As discussed earlier, abusive supervision involves sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as ridicule, public criticism, and intimidation (Tepper, 2000; Lin et al., 2013; Zellars et al., 2002). These behaviors constitute negative interpersonal workplace events that threaten employees' sense of dignity and value. According to Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), workplace events generate emotional reactions that shape employees' attitudes and subsequent outcomes. When employees are exposed to hostile supervisory behaviors, they are likely to experience emotions such as anger, humiliation, and frustration. Repeated exposure to such negative affective experiences may gradually alter employees' attitudes toward their work. Instead of feeling engaged and psychologically invested, employees may withdraw emotionally as a coping response. This psychological withdrawal manifests as work alienation, characterized by feelings of detachment, meaninglessness, and reduced involvement. In this way, abusive supervision does not only trigger immediate emotional reactions but also shapes more enduring attitudinal states. Thus, consistent with Affective Events Theory, abusive supervision as a negative workplace event is expected to increase employees' sense of work alienation.

H2: Abusive supervision is positively related to work alienation

Work alienation, in turn, has important implications for employee well-being. Earlier, employee well-being was defined as a comprehensive construct encompassing individuals' emotional experiences and satisfaction across work and life domains (Zheng et al., 2015). Research also suggests that well-being is sensitive to employees' daily affective experiences (Bakker et al., 2019; Cangiano et al., 2019). When employees feel detached and disconnected from their work, their sense of purpose, psychological fulfillment, and positive emotional experience declines.

From an Affective Events Theory perspective, affect-driven attitudes such as alienation shape broader evaluative outcomes. Therefore, employees who experience higher levels of work alienation are likely to report lower levels of psychological well-being.

H3: Work alienation is negatively related to employee well-being

Integrating these arguments, abusive supervision functions as a negative affective workplace event that evokes adverse emotional reactions. Over time, these reactions foster work alienation, which subsequently diminishes employees' well-being. Hence, work alienation serves as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being.

H4: Work alienation mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being

1.3 The Moderating Role of Willpower

Although abusive supervision fosters work alienation, which in turn undermines employee well-being, employees do not respond uniformly to such experiences (Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2017). Individual characteristics may shape how strongly alienation translates into reduced well-being. One such personal resource is willpower, a core component of hope (De Clercq et al., 2018). Willpower reflects goal-directed determination and an individual's motivational drive to pursue desired outcomes despite obstacles (De Clercq et al., 2018). It represents a self-regulatory capacity that enables employees to remain focused and persistent when facing workplace adversity. According to Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), negative workplace events trigger emotional reactions that subsequently influence employees' attitudes and well-being. As discussed earlier, abusive supervision constitutes a negative interpersonal event that evokes adverse emotional responses (Lin et al., 2013; Zellars et al., 2002; Tepper et al., 2007). These affective reactions may gradually foster work alienation and diminish well-being (Zheng et al., 2015). However, Affective Events Theory also suggests that individual differences influence how employees interpret and regulate emotional experiences.

Employees high in willpower are more likely to regulate their emotional responses and remain committed to their goals despite feelings of detachment. Even if abusive supervision generates negative emotions and contributes to alienation (Tepper, 2000; Lin et al., 2013), strong goal-directed determination may help such employees maintain psychological stability and preserve their sense of purpose. Consequently, the negative association between work alienation and employee well-being (Zheng et al., 2015) is expected to be weaker among employees with high willpower. In contrast, employees low in willpower may lack the motivational persistence necessary to cope effectively with alienation. When confronted with hostile supervisory behaviors and subsequent detachment (Tepper et al., 2017), they may experience intensified negative emotions, leading to a sharper decline in well-being. Therefore, willpower is expected to buffer the detrimental effect of work alienation on employee well-being.

H5: Willpower moderates the relationship between work alienation and employee well-being such that the negative relationship is weaker when willpower is high.

The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

2 Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Participants and Procedures

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among the study variables. Data were collected from full-time faculty members working at several private universities in Bangladesh, including institutions located in Dhaka and Khulna. The participants consisted of professors, associate professors, assistant professors, senior lecturers, and lecturers.

Questionnaires were distributed personally by the research team, and respondents were given one day to complete them. To reduce the likelihood of common method bias, the data were collected in two separate phases following the recommendation of Podsakoff et al. (2012). During the first phase (Time 1), demographic information and perceptions of abusive supervision were

measured. Out of 655 distributed questionnaires, 379 usable responses were returned, representing a response rate of 57.86 %.

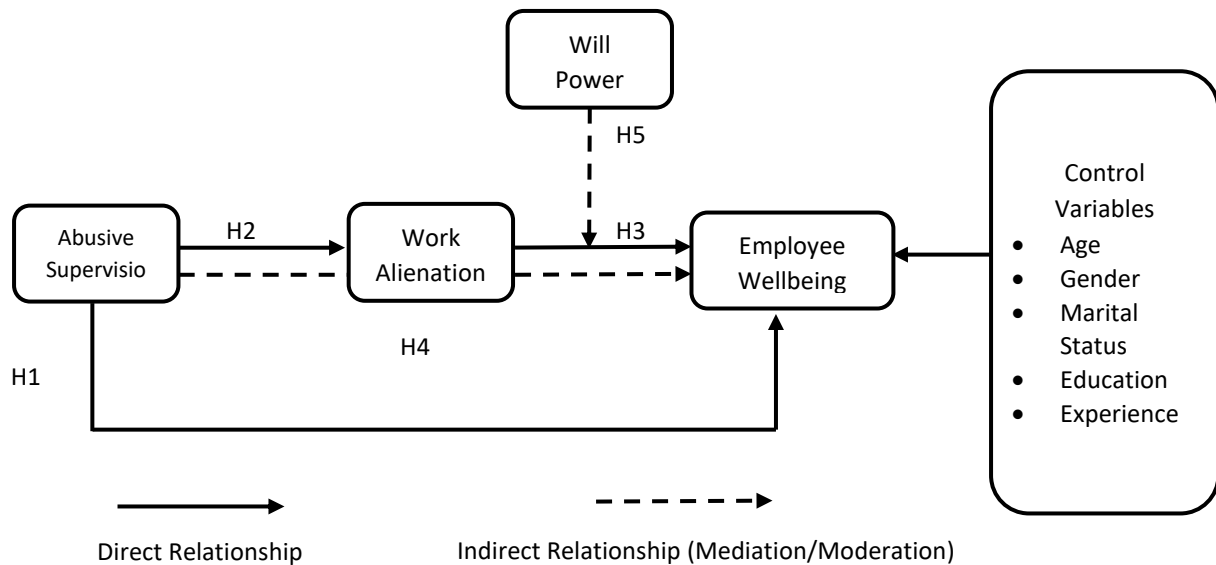


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Research

Two weeks later, the second phase (Time 2) was conducted with the same group of participants to measure emotional exhaustion, resilience, and turnover intention. In this stage, 329 questionnaires were returned. All questionnaires were coded to match the responses across the two waves. After screening the data, 13 responses were removed because of incomplete information. The remaining 316 responses were further examined for outliers using the Mahalanobis distance test at $p < 0.001$, which resulted in the removal of 5 additional cases due to extreme values (Kline, 2011).

To further evaluate potential common method bias, Harman's single factor test was performed. The results indicated that the largest variance explained by a single factor was 29.38 %, which is below the recommended threshold of 50 %. This suggests that common method bias was not a significant issue in the dataset (Fuller et al., 2016).

After the data screening process, the final sample consisted of 311 valid questionnaires, resulting in an overall response rate of 47.48%. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the confidentiality of respondents was assured. Support for the data collection process was provided by the heads of the respective university departments. The results indicate that 65.5 % were male. The majority were aged 31-35, 79.8 % were postgraduate, 83.3 % persons were married, the job experience of most of the sample varied from less than 5 years and in terms of designations, the majority are Lecturers (47.3 %).

2.2 Measures

All study variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.2.1 Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision was assessed with a six-item scale developed by Harris et al. (2011). A sample item is: "My supervisor is rude to me." The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.883.

2.2.2 Work Alienation

Emotional exhaustion was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Shantz et al., 2014. A representative item is: "Today, I had become disillusioned by my work." The reliability of this scale was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.860.

2.2.3 Employee Wellbeing

Turnover intention was evaluated using a three-item scale proposed by Diener et al. (2009). One example item is: “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life” The scale showed satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.746.

2.2.4 Will Power

The items used for the operationalization of the willpower came from Luthans et al. (2007). contained 3 items. These items were also used in previous empirical pieces (e.g., Rego et al., 2012). Sample items are “*I am energetically pursuing my work goals*” The scale showed satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.823.

2.2.5 Control variables

Following earlier empirical research (Roy & Islam, 2025; Roy & Islam, 2026), employees' Marital status, designation, experience, and education were evaluated as control factors.

Results

1 Measurement Model Assessment

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate the extent to which the proposed measurement model fits the observed data. Consistent with the recommendations of Hair (2009), Hu and Bentler (1999), Henseler et al. (2015), and Kline (2011), multiple model fit indices were examined, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). A model is generally considered acceptable when the CFI and TLI values exceed 0.90 and the RMSEA and SRMR values remain below 0.08. The CFA findings presented in Table 1 indicate that the proposed four-factor model demonstrates a good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.705 < 5$, TLI = 0.963, CFI = 0.970, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.0441). All items showed factor loadings above the minimum acceptable level of 0.50 (Hair, 2009). Although factor loadings higher than 0.70 are generally recommended (Vinzi et al., 2009), lower loadings are often observed in social science research. In such cases, items should not be removed automatically; instead, their removal should be evaluated based on potential improvements in composite reliability, content validity, and convergent validity. Items with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should only be considered for deletion if their removal leads to an increase in composite reliability (CR) or Average Variance Extracted (AVE) beyond recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2016).

In the present study, removing item EW2, EW3 (loading = 0.646; 0.693) did not lead to any meaningful improvement in CR or AVE, as the construct values were already above the recommended levels. Therefore, no item was retained. To further assess discriminant validity, the proposed four-factor model was compared with several alternative models, as reported in Table 1. The results indicate that the hypothesized model provides a better fit to the data than the alternative models, supporting the distinctiveness of the constructs used in this study. Additionally, the CR values ranged from 0.749 to 0.883, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011). The AVE values ranged from 0.500 to 0.674 (see Table 2), which are higher than the minimum criterion of 0.50 suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Moreover, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was satisfied, as the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than the correlations among the constructs (see Table 3). These findings confirm adequate discriminant validity.

2 Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were examined using structural equation modeling with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The results presented in Table 5 show that abusive supervision (AS) has a significant positive effect on Work Alienation (WA) ($\beta = 0.173$, SE = 0.066, $p < 0.05$) and negative impact on Employee Wellbeing (EW) ($\beta = -0.209$, SE = 0.066, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, Work Alienation was found

to significantly and negatively influence Employee Wellbeing (EW) ($\beta = -0.219$, $SE = 0.054$, $p < 0.01$). These results support Hypotheses H1–H3.

Table 1: Confirmatory factor analysis

| Model | χ^2 | df | χ^2/df | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | SRMR |
|--------------------|----------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Null model | 2103.766 | 105 | | | | | |
| One-factor model | 1187.914 | 90 | 13.199 | 0.451 | 0.359 | 0.198 | 0.1915 |
| Two-factor model | 695.291 | 89 | 7.812 | 0.697 | 0.642 | 0.148 | 0.1458 |
| Three-factor model | 450.544 | 87 | 5.179 | 0.818 | 0.780 | 0.116 | 0.0944 |
| Four-factor model | 143.241 | 84 | 1.705 | 0.970 | 0.963 | 0.048 | 0.0441 |

Note(s): CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual; AS = Abusive Supervision; WA = Work Alienation; EW = Employee Wellbeing; WP = Willpower; Four-factor model: Baseline model; Three-factor model: WA and WP were combined into one factor; Two-factor model: WA and WP were combined into one factor and AS and EW were combined into another factor; One-factor model: All variables combined.

Source: Authors' own work, 2026

Table 2: Factor loading, Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE)

| Construct & Indicator | Loading | Cronbach's alpha | CR | AVE |
|----------------------------|---------|------------------|-------|-------|
| Abusive Supervision | | 0.883 | 0.883 | 0.557 |
| AS1 | 0.748 | | | |
| AS2 | 0.749 | | | |
| AS3 | 0.764 | | | |
| AS4 | 0.715 | | | |
| AS5 | 0.763 | | | |
| AS6 | 0.738 | | | |
| Work Alienation | | 0.860 | 0.861 | 0.674 |
| WA1 | 0.868 | | | |
| WA2 | 0.814 | | | |
| WA3 | 0.778 | | | |
| Employee Wellbeing | | 0.746 | 0.749 | 0.500 |
| EW1 | 0.773 | | | |
| EW2 | 0.650 | | | |
| EW3 | 0.693 | | | |
| Will Power | | 0.823 | 0.829 | 0.619 |
| WP1 | 0.723 | | | |
| WP2 | 0.863 | | | |
| WP3 | 0.767 | | | |

Note(s): AS = Abusive Supervision; WA = Work Alienation; EW = Employee Wellbeing; WP = Willpower; CR = Composite reliability; and AVE = Average variance extracted.

Source: Authors' own work, 2026

Table 3: Descriptive statistics, correlations, and discriminant validity (HTMT criterion)

| Variables | Mean | SD | AS | WA | EW | WP |
|-----------|--------|---------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| AS | 2.1897 | .81469 | <u>0.746</u> | | | |
| WA | 2.6945 | 1.04656 | 0.121 | <u>0.821</u> | | |
| EW | 3.7621 | .86831 | -0.289 | -0.476 | <u>0.707</u> | |
| WP | 3.4223 | .71212 | 0.407 | -0.328 | 0.407 | <u>0.787</u> |

Note(s): N = 311. Underlined and bold elements on the diagonal are the square root of AVE. Values below the diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs. SD = Standard Deviation; AS = Abusive Supervision; WA = Work Alienation; EW = Employee Wellbeing; WP = Willpower.

Source(s): Authors' own work

To test the mediating role of Work Alienation, the indirect relationship between AS and EW was examined. The indirect effect was calculated by multiplying the path coefficient between AS and WA ($\beta = 0.173^*$) with the path coefficient between WA and EW ($\beta = -0.219^{**}$), resulting in a significant indirect effect ($\beta = -0.038$, $p < 0.05$). The confidence interval for this indirect effect did not include zero (LL = -0.002 UL = -0.097), indicating the presence of mediation. Therefore, Hypothesis H4 was supported.

The moderating role of willpower was also investigated by including an interaction term (WA · WP) in the model to determine whether Willpower influences the relationship between WA and EW. The results revealed a significant positive interaction effect ($\beta = 0.400$, $p < 0.01$, LL = 0.540, UL = 0.572), confirming the presence of moderation. A simple slope analysis (Figure 3) further clarifies the interaction pattern. When willpower is low, the relationship between WA and EW is strong and negative. As WA increases from low to high, EW decreases sharply (from around 4.1 to about 2.9), indicating a steep downward slope. In contrast, when willpower is high, the relationship between WA and EW becomes weak and slightly positive, with EW increasing modestly as WA increases. The interaction plot shows that the two lines converge as WA increases, suggesting that willpower changes the strength and direction of the WA–EW relationship. Specifically, individuals with higher willpower experience a weaker association between WA and EW, whereas those with lower willpower show a much stronger relationship (see Figure 2). This pattern supports the moderating role of willpower, indicating that variations in willpower alter how WA relates to EW. thereby supporting H5.

Table 4: Results of hypothesis testing

| Variables | β | S. E | C. R | Bootstraps at 95% | |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|--------|-------------------|--------|
| | | | | LL CI | UL CI |
| AS -> EW | -0.209** | 0.066 | -3.181 | -0.373 | -0.069 |
| AS -> WA | 0.173* | 0.087 | 1.990 | -0.005 | 0.367 |
| WA-> EW | -0.219** | 0.054 | -4.024 | -0.334 | -0.104 |
| | | | | | |
| Indirect effect | | | | | |
| AS -> WA -> EW | -0.038* | 0.014 | -2.714 | -0.002 | -0.097 |
| Moderation analysis | | | | | |
| WA | -0.219** | 0.054 | -4.024 | -0.334 | -0.104 |
| WP | -0.467** | 0.076 | -6.163 | -0.338 | -0.198 |
| WA*WP -> EW | 0.400** | 0.076 | 5.274 | 0.540 | 0.572 |

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. AS = Abusive Supervision; WA = Work Alienation; EW = Employee Wellbeing; WP = Willpower; SE = Standard error; CR = Critical ratio; BC = Bias-corrected; CI = Confidence interval.

Source: Authors' own work, 2026

This study examined how abusive supervision influences employee well-being by investigating the mediating role of work alienation and the moderating role of willpower. Drawing on Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the study proposed that abusive supervisory behaviors act as negative workplace events that evoke adverse emotional reactions, which subsequently shape employees' attitudes and well-being. The results indicate that abusive supervision significantly reduces employee well-being and increases work alienation. Furthermore, work alienation was found to negatively affect employee well-being and partially mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being. Finally, the findings reveal that willpower moderates the relationship between work alienation and employee well-being such that the negative association becomes weaker when employees possess higher levels of willpower. These results provide several theoretical and practical implications.

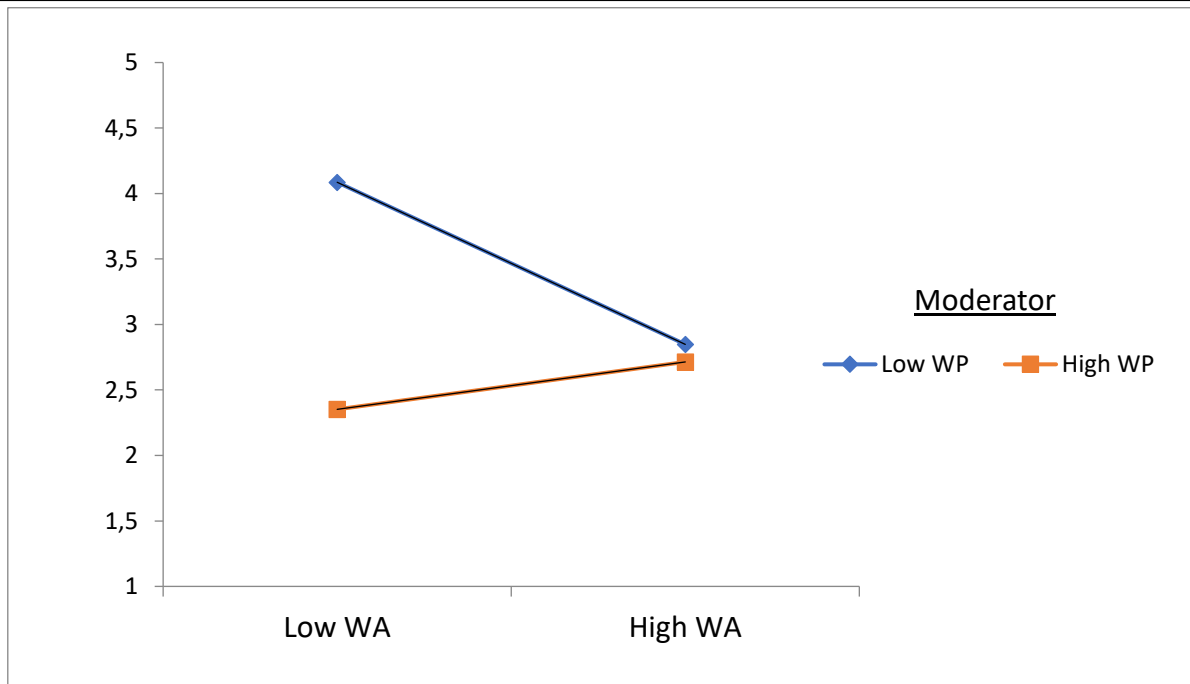


Figure 2: Slope of moderation

Source: Authors' own work, 2026

3 Theoretical Implications

This study offers several contributions to the literature on destructive leadership, employee well-being, and workplace attitudes. First, the findings support Hypothesis 1, which proposed that abusive supervision is negatively related to employee well-being. The results show that when employees perceive their supervisors as hostile or disrespectful, their psychological well-being significantly declines. This finding is consistent with earlier research indicating that abusive supervision generates psychological strain, anxiety, and emotional distress among employees (Tepper et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). Previous studies have largely emphasized the harmful emotional consequences of abusive supervisory behaviors, demonstrating that such behaviors create stressful and hostile work environments. The present study extends this line of research by confirming these effects within the context of private universities in Bangladesh and by linking abusive supervision more explicitly to employee well-being through the lens of Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). By doing so, the study reinforces the idea that repeated exposure to negative supervisory behaviors functions as an affective workplace event that undermines employees' psychological functioning.

Second, the results support Hypothesis 2, which predicted a positive relationship between abusive supervision and work alienation. The findings indicate that employees who experience abusive supervisory behaviors are more likely to feel psychologically detached from their work. This result aligns with prior research suggesting that hostile leader behaviors erode employees' sense of belonging, respect, and value in the workplace on the other hand positive leadership and supervisory support and proper human resource management reduce that (Roy et al., 2024; Roy et al., 2025; Noor et al., 2025). Earlier studies have suggested that abusive supervision can lead employees to disengage from their work roles as a coping mechanism. The current study contributes to this literature by empirically demonstrating that abusive supervision is an important antecedent of work alienation. Consistent with Affective Events Theory, negative interpersonal interactions with supervisors generate adverse emotional reactions that gradually shape employees' attitudes toward their work, leading to feelings of detachment and disconnection.

Third, the findings provide support for Hypothesis 3, which proposed that work alienation is negatively associated with employee well-being. The results indicate that employees who feel detached and disconnected from their work report lower levels of well-being. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that work alienation reduces employees' sense of purpose, fulfillment, and positive emotional experience at work (Bakker et al., 2019; Cangiano et al., 2019). When employees no longer perceive their work as meaningful or engaging, their psychological satisfaction and overall well-being decline. The present study reinforces this relationship by demonstrating that work alienation represents an important attitudinal state that directly influences employees' well-being outcomes.

Fourth, the results support Hypothesis 4, which predicted that work alienation mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being. The findings indicate that abusive supervision not only directly undermines employee well-being but also indirectly influences it by increasing employees' feelings of alienation from their work. This result supports the process proposed by Affective Events Theory, which suggests that negative workplace events first generate emotional reactions and attitudes that subsequently influence broader outcomes. Although prior research has documented the harmful effects of abusive supervision on employee attitudes and behaviors, fewer studies have examined work alienation as an explanatory mechanism linking abusive supervision to employee well-being (Fauzi, 2026). By identifying work alienation as a mediating mechanism, the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of how negative leadership behaviors translate into diminished employee well-being.

Finally, the findings support Hypothesis 5, which proposed that willpower moderates the relationship between work alienation and employee well-being. The results indicate that the negative relationship between work alienation and employee well-being becomes weaker among employees who possess higher levels of willpower. This finding suggests that willpower functions as an important personal resource that helps employees regulate their emotional responses and maintain psychological stability despite experiencing feelings of alienation. This result is consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of personal psychological resources in buffering the adverse effects of workplace stressors (De Clercq et al., 2018; Luthans et al., 2007). Employees with stronger goal-directed determination may remain focused on their work objectives and cope more effectively with negative workplace experiences. In contrast, employees with lower willpower may be more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of alienation, leading to a stronger decline in well-being (Matos et al., 2018). By identifying willpower as a boundary condition, the present study extends the literature on abusive supervision and employee well-being by highlighting how individual motivational resources shape employees' responses to negative workplace experiences.

Together, these findings contribute to the literature by integrating destructive leadership, work alienation, and personal psychological resources within the framework of Affective Events Theory. The study not only confirms the harmful consequences of abusive supervision but also clarifies the psychological process through which these effects occur and the conditions under which they may be weakened.

4 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for university administrators and organizational leaders seeking to promote employee well-being and create healthier work environments.

First, the results demonstrate that abusive supervision significantly undermines employee well-being. This highlights the importance of promoting respectful and supportive leadership practices within academic institutions. University management should establish clear organizational policies that discourage hostile supervisory behaviors and emphasize professional conduct in leader–subordinate interactions. Training programs focused on leadership development, interpersonal communication, and emotional intelligence can help supervisors become more aware

of how their behavior affects employees' psychological experiences at work. By fostering a respectful leadership culture, institutions can reduce the likelihood of abusive behaviors and improve employees' well-being.

Second, the findings indicate that abusive supervision contributes to work alienation, which subsequently decreases employee well-being. This suggests that organizations should monitor employees' psychological connection with their work and address early signs of disengagement. University administrators can create a more supportive work environment by encouraging open communication, providing opportunities for participation in decision-making, and recognizing employees' contributions. Such practices can strengthen employees' sense of belonging and reduce feelings of detachment from their work roles.

Third, the mediating role of work alienation implies that organizations should pay attention not only to direct leadership behaviors but also to the psychological states employees develop in response to those behaviors. Managers and department heads should regularly assess employees' perceptions of their work environment and identify whether individuals feel disconnected or disengaged from their roles. Interventions such as mentoring programs, supportive supervision, and constructive feedback may help restore employees' sense of purpose and engagement.

Finally, the moderating role of willpower suggests that individual psychological resources can help employees cope with negative workplace experiences. Organizations may benefit from initiatives that strengthen employees' motivational resources and goal-directed persistence. For example, training programs that focus on personal development, goal setting, and resilience building can enhance employees' capacity to manage workplace challenges more effectively. Encouraging employees to develop stronger personal motivation and goal commitment may reduce the detrimental impact of work alienation on well-being.

Overall, the findings emphasize that improving leadership behavior, strengthening employees' psychological connection to their work, and fostering personal motivational resources are important steps for enhancing employee well-being in academic institutions. By addressing these factors simultaneously, organizations can create healthier and more supportive work environments.

Conclusion

Like any empirical study, this research has several limitations that should be acknowledged, which also open avenues for future investigation. Although the study provides important theoretical and practical insights, some constraints remain.

First, the study relied on a time-lagged survey design, which restricts the ability to establish clear causal relationships among the variables. Although data were collected in two phases to reduce common method bias, future research could employ longitudinal or experimental research designs to more effectively examine the causal relationships among abusive supervision, work alienation, employee well-being, and willpower over time.

Second, this study primarily examined work alienation as a mediating mechanism and willpower as a moderating factor in the relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being. Future studies could extend this framework by incorporating additional mediating and moderating variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms. For example, variables such as job satisfaction, psychological safety, or perceived organizational support may provide further insight into how abusive supervision influences employees' psychological outcomes.

Finally, although several procedural remedies were implemented to reduce common method bias, the study relied primarily on self-reported data, which may introduce potential response biases such as social desirability. Future research could address this limitation by collecting

data from multiple sources, such as supervisors or colleagues, or by utilizing objective organizational records.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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