

# A Study on Relationship Between Subordinates' Perceptions of Destructive Leadership and Upward Bullying

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### Abstract

*Many studies have been conducted to understand the existence of workplace bullying in subordinate-supervisor relationship in relation with leadership. However, not many studies have focused on the study of bullying caused by subordinates to the managers (upward bullying) and which behavior of the leader or subordinates leads to this bullying.*

*Upward bullying includes bullying behaviors such as threats or malicious accusations shown by subordinates to their supervisor and destructive leadership includes behavior that undermines motivation or work-related satisfaction of subordinates. The purpose of this study is to explore a significant relationship between subordinate perceptions of destructive leadership and upward bullying. A questionnaire of scales consisting of 34 items was used where upward bullying was found out by using Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R) scale and to measure destructive leadership, rater form of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used. One hundred and ninety-three software engineers who are employed in digital (IT) firms have completed an on-line questionnaire of their perceptions of the leadership style and behavior of their immediate supervisor, and the frequency with which they are engaged in specific bullying behaviours targeting their supervisor.*

*The results of the study helped to explore the lacked evidences of upwards bullying and to know the subordinates' perceptions due to destructive leadership at work environment. The findings revealed that subordinates' perceptions of destructive supervisory leadership were moderately correlated with an increased incidence of upward bullying. This paper offers support for prevalence of upwards bullying which can be a response to destructive leadership, and as this research is done with a specific sector, it further enhances need of future researches. Few recommendations like educating employees about workplace behaviours at organisations are discussed. Practical implications to be taken by the managers such as self-assessment of managers to improve leadership skills are discussed.*

**Keywords:** Upward bullying, destructive Leadership, subordinate, supervisor, workplace bullying

### Introduction

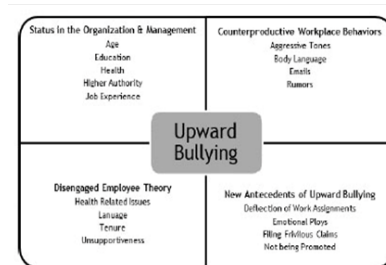
#### Background

Across the globe, workplace bullying has become an increasingly significant and costly problem both for organizations and employees.

However, despite an increase in research into workplace bullying in the recent decades, little is known about managers who are bullied by their staff. This form of bullying is referred to in this paper as ‘upwards bullying’. (Branch , Ramsay , & Barker, CAUSES OF UPWARDS BULLYING: MANAGERS’ PERSPECTIVES) The aim of the present research is to enhance awareness and understanding of the nature of upwards bullying by exploring the relationship between supervisory leadership behaviour and the incidence of upward bullying in the workplace

### Upwards bullying

Bullying to supervisors caused by the staff is termed as Upwards Bullying. Below picture determines various factors which are antecedents and theory for upwards bullying.(Boiling, 2019)



### Destructive Leadership

Counterproductive leadership behaviours that undermine and/or sabotage the organizations goals, tasks, resources and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being, or work-related satisfaction of subordinates in a supervisor/subordinate relationship defines Destructive leadership . (Wallace B. , Bullying the Boss: Upwards bullying as a response to destructive supervisory leadership in the workplace, 2009)Many concepts have been used to describe destructive forms of leadership, such as ‘abusive supervision’ and ‘petty tyranny’ referring to leaders who behave in a destructive manner towards subordinates, by intimidating subordinates, belittling or humiliating them in public or exposing them to nonverbal aggression . However, these concepts mainly focus on control and obedience, and less on the abusive aspect of leadership. In accordance with the above definition, the Destructive Leadership model (below) describes four main kinds of destructive leadership behaviour targeting either subordinates and/or the organization. (Aasland, 2010)(Padilla, 2007) describes destructive leadership as a self-orientated process that focuses on meeting leader-driven objectives and goals, as opposed to the needs of constituents and the larger social organization

### Literature Review

This literature review compiles prior research on upward bullying and leadership style According to (Björklund, Hellman, Jensen, Åkerblom, & Brämberg, 2019), The bullying of managers is part of a complex social exchange relationship. The formal power is held by a manager and bullying could be used as a weapon against the management to voice employees’ dissatisfaction with organizational changes or other matters and following factors were identified in the study which represents major causes of upwards bullying being new to the managerial role or having recently returned from parental or sick leave, having unclear roles and responsibilities, taking over responsibility for work groups in which there were pre-existing interpersonal conflicts; and being involved in a workplace reorganization. The Factors that were identified in the study responsible for the bullying to continue: Bystander behavior ,Higher-level management supporting the perpetrators, bystanders

## Impact of Upward Bullying

In (Branch, Ramsay, Barker, & Sheehan, Exploration of Upwards Bullying: An interview study, 2005) Eight of the managers interviewed expressed a concern about the lack of support that was available for managers. a few of the managers stated that they were especially frustrated with the lack of support they received from their immediate manager (a few suggested their immediate manager may have fueled the situation) a number of the interviewees expressed that when they did approach their senior manager for assistance they were helpful in terms of advice and suggestions on how manage the situation.

Impact on Mental Health: (Branch, Upwards bullying on the rise) supported some strong points for impact of Upwards Bullying, revealed that upwards bullying has the potential to damage a manager's mental health and wellbeing as bullying can cause psychological stress, anxiety, and in some extreme cases, even depression. Managers may also lose confidence in their abilities and feel less satisfied in their jobs.

## Research Gaps

From the study, we can conclude the following research gaps:

- With around 7% of managers in Britain suffered from upwards bullying, it is necessary to know about the factors that lead to upwards bullying. Further researches can be done to explore the area of Upwards Bullying
- It has been observed from studies that demographic variables are also responsible for workplace bullying but no research has been done to know about significance of demographic factors in upwards bullying.
- From many researches it was found out that leadership style is responsible for workplace bullying but there was lack of study done on leadership behaviors that exert upwards bullying

## Research Design And Methodology

### Research Question

Does the subordinates' perceptions about destructive leadership behaviour shown by their immediate supervisor can be one of the reason for subordinates to initiate upward bullying?

**Objective :** To explore a significant relationship between subordinates' perceptions of destructive leadership and upward bullying

**Ho1:** Subordinates' perceptions of destructive leadership shown by their supervisor are not significantly related to occurrence of subordinate initiated upward bullying.

**Ha1:** Subordinates' perceptions of destructive leadership shown by their supervisor are significantly related to occurrence of subordinate initiated upward bullying.

The present study has a quantitative design. Quantitative questionnaire study for data collection and analysis is well suited to explore phenomenon such as upwards bullying in a real-life setting. The selection of sample size was guided by a random sampling procedure as it is easy to cut a smaller sample size from a large population and according to previous researches, random sampling is much accurate.

**Sample Population and Sample size:** The sample size taken is 201 respondents (according to Krejcie and Morgan formula for sample size, 1970). Data used for analysis comprised of 193 respondents as the responses for the questions from other respondents were either redundant or missing. The sample size consists of work-based subordinate Employees: The age of participant in years is between with a range of participant being an adult i.e. 18 years to beyond 65 years. Also, the designation of participants would be Software engineers in IT sector of India

**Variables used:Dependent Variable:** Upward Bullying

**Independent Variables:** subordinates' perception of destructive leadership

**Demographic Variables: It includes:**

- Age: Age groups of below 25 years, between 25-35 years, between 35-45 years, between 45-55 years, between 55-65 years, above 65 years
- Gender: Male, Female, LGBTQ, prefer not to say
- Job Level: Early level, intermediate level, middle-level, top- level
- Work Experience: experience between 0-5 years, between 6-10 years, between 11-20 years and above 20 years

**Scales to Measure**

**Multifactor Leader Questionnaire:** The MLQ 5X short contains of a self form and a rater form. Here, we have taken rater form as subordinates would be rating the supervisor as described in (Wallace B. , Bullying the boss : upwards bullying as a response to destructive supervisory leadership in the workplace, 2009). The 36 behavioural items constitute three subscales of leadership style: transformational leadership (20 items), transactional leadership (8 items), and destructive leadership (8 items). Research is focused on destructive leadership style so those 8 items are included for research. Respondents are indicated on a likert-type scale with the frequency that their supervisor exhibits with each of the 8 attributes where 1 =not at all; 2 =once in a while; 3 = sometimes; 4 = fairly often; 5 = frequently, if not always. The items have shown high internal consistency as their Cronbach's alpha is 0.91. Prior to completing the questionnaire respondents received the instruction note:”Please rate the frequency with which YOU have engaged in each of the following behaviours while interacting with your immediate workplace supervisor in the past 6 months. Please check the appropriate frequency box on the scale provided”.

**Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R):** NAQ-R was developed by Einarsen and Hoel's (2009) Negative Acts Questionnaire was applied in this research as a measure of the prevalence of specific acts of upward workplace bullying. There are 22 items in NAQ-R. Prior to completing the questionnaire respondents received the following instructions:

“Please rate the frequency with which YOU have engaged in each of the following behaviours while interacting with your immediate workplace supervisor in the past 6 months. Please check the appropriate frequency box on the scale provided”.

Responses were recorded on a five point likert-type scale where 1 = never; 2 = now and then; 3 =monthly; 4 =weekly; 5 =daily. A mean score across the 22 items needs to be calculated for each respondent, representing the frequency with which the respondent engaged in some form of upwards bullying directed towards their immediate supervisor.

**Statistics Used**

Reliability analysis: It is used to check the consistency of items in a questionnaire and how items are co-related to each other. Correlation is used to analyse association between destructive leadership and upwards bullying and how it is inter-related to each other. Therefore, with this test is used to check influence of subordinate perception of destructive leadership on upward bullying. Regression is used to find the changes in upwards bullying due to destructive leadership.

**Procedure**

The questionnaire as described above is to be distributed through LinkedIn, WhatsApp, E-mails and administered through Google Forms. Approximately, maximum of 10 minutes is required to

complete the survey, which can be accessible from any computer/ smartPhone with an internet connection.

**Pilot Study:** A pilot study was conducted on 29 software engineers working in IT sector of India. Reliability in Pilot Testing was 0.92. Sample size was of 29 respondents.

Sample population: software engineers in IT sectors of India

No. of items= 30 Total no. of items including demographic variables= 34. Cronbach's alpha= 0.92

## Data Analysis

### Reliability Analysis

**Table 1**  
**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.942	.949	30

From Table 4.2 which shows the Reliability Analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.942 for 30 items which indicates a strong level of internal consistency for our scale with this specific sample

### Correlation Analysis

Association of Upward Bullying and Destructive leadership has been analysed. (refer APPENDIX). The correlation coefficient is 0.40 which represents positive moderate degree of correlation as discussed in (Dancey C.P., 2007)

### Regression Analysis

Linear regression would be used to predict changes in Upward Bullying due to Destructive Leadership:



Here R<sup>2</sup> was 0.162 means that the linear regression explains 16.2% of the variance in the data. (refer tables in APPENDIX). The F-ratio in ANOVA tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The table shows that the independent variables statistically predict the dependent variable,  $F(1,191) = 36.846$ , P-value  $(0.000) < 0.05$ , i.e. the regression model is a good fit of the data.

### Regression equation -> $y = a + bx$

Upwards Bullying (y) = 1.009 + Destructive Leadership (0.284). If Destructive Leadership (is by 1 unit, Upwards Bullying will increase by 28.4%

## Discussion & Findings

### Observations From The Study

Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a significant positive correlation between subordinate perceptions of destructive supervisory leadership and upward bullying. A significant positive correlation between the destructive leadership scores from the MLQ and the NAQ scores were found,  $r(193) = .40$ ,  $p < .05$ , indicating that the greater the subordinate's perception of his or her supervisor's leadership as destructive, the more supervisor-directed upward bullying behaviours/



he engaged in. Also, if destructive leadership would increase by 1 unit, Upwards Bullying will increase by 28.4%. Additionally, beta coefficient value 0.40 indicates that a change of one standard deviation in Destructive Leadership results in a 0.40 standard deviations increase in upwards bullying, showing significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between destructive leadership and upward bullying, supporting Hypothesis 1.

A significant positive correlation between destructive leadership and upward bullying was found for females ( $r(107) = .438, p < .05$ ), whereas for males it was  $r(82) = .377$  that predicts moderate relation. Also, for LGBTQ community, it was found out to negative correlation due to less sample size  $r(4) = -.829$  so statistically it is not significant. According to job-level, in entry-level subordinates there was a strong correlation of .738 depicting strong relationship between destructive leadership and upward bullying whereas subordinates of mid-level and intermediate level were having moderate values of correlation i.e. .388 and .237 respectively.

### Findings from the Empirical Study

The findings of the current paper reveal that subordinates may initiate upward bullying as a response to destructive supervisory leadership in a workplace environment. For entry level employees the rate of involvement towards upward bullying was higher than that of mid-level and intermediate level subordinates. Females have higher rate of involvement towards upward bullying than that of males, which can support the fact that woman form more of such perceptions or they receive more of destructive leadership behaviour from their supervisor at workplace.

### Managerial Implications

Feedback and self-assessment might also help identify supervisors at greater risk of engaging in destructive leader behaviour. Training in areas such as negotiation, anger management, and emotional intelligence should be provided. Equally, subordinates must be educated in terms of the expectations and responsibilities associated with supervisor-subordinate relationships and the relationship between leader and follower. There should be a proper mental and well-being forum for managers where they can fill their experiences and organisation can work upon it as in earlier studies some of the managers interviewed reported unease about where they can go for assistance when presented with bullying behaviors by a staff member/s, as it appeared there was nothing currently available for them. (Branch, Ramsay, Barker, & Sheehan, Exploration of Upwards Bullying: An interview study, 2005)

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# SPSS Output

## 1. Correlation Analysis

Correlations			DestructiveLeadership	UpwardsBullying
DestructiveLeadership	Pearson Correlation		1	.402**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.0
	N		193	193
UpwardsBullying	Pearson Correlation		.402**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.0	
	N		193	193

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### According to Gender

Correlations					
Gender			DestructiveLeadership	UpwardsBullying	
Female	DestructiveLeadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.438*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.0	
		N		107	107
	UpwardsBullying	Pearson Correlation		.438*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.0	
		N		107	107
Male	DestructiveLeadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.377*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.0	
		N		82	82
	UpwardsBullying	Pearson Correlation		.377*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.0	
		N		82	82

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### According to Job-level

Correlations					
Job Level			DestructiveLeadership	UpwardsBullying	
Entry level	DestructiveLeadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.738*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
		N		58	58
	UpwardsBullying	Pearson Correlation		.738*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
		N		58	58
Intermediate	DestructiveLeadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.237*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.025	
		N		89	89
	UpwardsBullying	Pearson Correlation		.237*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.025	
		N		89	89
Mid-level	DestructiveLeadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.388*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.011	
		N		42	42
	UpwardsBullying	Pearson Correlation		.388*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.011	
		N		42	42

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## 2. Regression Analysis

**Variables Entered/Removed<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	DestructiveLeadership <sup>b</sup>	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: UpwardsBullying  
b. All requested variables entered.

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.402 <sup>a</sup>	.162	.157	63841

a. Predictors: (Constant), DestructiveLeadership  
b. Dependent Variable: UpwardsBullying

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.017	1	15.017	38.846	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	77.845	191	.408		
	Total	92.862	192			

a. Dependent Variable: UpwardsBullying

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.009	.125		8.096	.000	.763	1.255
	DestructiveLeadership	.284	.047	.402	6.070	.000	.192	.376

a. Dependent Variable: UpwardsBullying