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## POLICY BRIEF

# **COMBATTING ABUSIVE SUPERVISION TO BOOST JOB SATISFACTION AND RETAIN TALENT**

## Executive Summary

Abusive supervision—a pattern of hostile behavior by supervisors—drains productivity, erodes employee satisfaction, and drives up costly turnover. This study, conducted in Trinidad’s retail sector, reveals that abusive supervision significantly reduces job satisfaction and increases the likelihood of employees wanting to leave. Depression worsens the impact on job satisfaction, amplifying the urgency for mental health support in toxic environments. With these findings, employers can adopt practical solutions to cultivate a positive work culture, reduce turnover, and improve the bottom line.

## Problem Statement

Abusive supervision leads to low morale, disengagement, and a revolving door of talent. Organizations paying the high price of employee turnover and poor morale cannot afford to overlook this issue, particularly in sectors that rely on customer-facing roles where employee well-being directly impacts customer experience and business outcomes.

## The Study

A quantitative survey was completed by two hundred and twenty-one (221) frontline employees across the retail sector in Trinidad. The survey evaluated employee perceptions about the extent to which their supervisors/managers were viewed as hostile, their associated levels of satisfaction on the job, their desire to leave their current jobs, and the extent to which they feel psychologically distressed in the workplace or otherwise. This study can be replicated across other sectors in Trinidad since abusive supervision and employee well-being are costly issues for all workplaces regardless of sector.

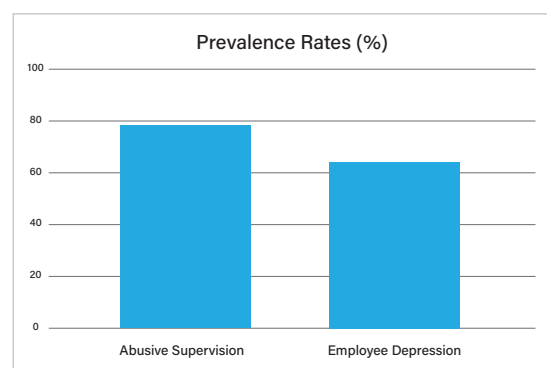
## Key Findings

Figure 1 shows high rates of abusive supervision and employee depression reported by the respondents. In fact, approximately eighty percent (80%) of the sample reported high levels of perceived abusive supervision and more than sixty percent (60%) reported some form of employee depression.

Amidst such high prevalence rates, the data also shows:

- 1. Reduced Job Satisfaction:** Abusive supervision diminishes job satisfaction, resulting in a disengaged workforce. When employees feel unsupported or mistreated, their motivation and productivity suffer.
- 2. Increased Turnover Intentions:** Employees exposed to abusive supervision are more likely to look for jobs elsewhere. High turnover rates disrupt operations, drive up recruitment costs, and affect team stability.
- 3. High Impact of Depression:** Depression intensifies the negative effects of abusive supervision on job satisfaction. Employees facing both depression and an abusive supervisor are especially vulnerable, highlighting the urgent need for mental health support in workplaces.

**Figure I: Abusive Supervision and Employee Depression in T&T**



## Conclusion

Ignoring abusive supervision is costly; addressing it is transformative. By adopting these proactive strategies, organizations can boost morale, retain talent, and demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being that sets them apart in the marketplace. Prioritizing a healthy, respectful work environment isn't just an investment in employees—it's an investment in your organization's long-term success. The findings of this study are generalizable to other employees, organizations, and workplaces regardless of sector or industry since employee perceptions of supervisory hostility, job satisfaction, intentions to quit, and employee well-being are employee perceptions, intentions, attitudes and emotions that persist in today's contemporary workplace.

For further information about this work, to arrange a diagnostic study of supervision for an organization or any other projects, please contact any of the authors at:

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The full study is available at this link:

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ebhrm-08-2022-0213/full/html>

## Policy Recommendations

Organizations that act now on these recommendations position themselves as leaders in workplace wellness and productivity:

### 1. Establish Supportive Supervisory Practices

Transform supervisors into strong, supportive leaders through targeted training. Empowering supervisors with skills to recognize and eliminate abusive behaviors will foster a healthier work environment and boost team morale. Implement regular feedback loops, including employee feedback on supervisors, to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

### 2. Invest in Mental Health Resources

Supporting mental health isn't simply good ethics—it's good business. Offering accessible counseling and wellness programs can help employees cope with workplace stress and increase resilience. With a healthier, happier workforce, companies can expect improved performance and stronger employee loyalty.

### 3. Promote a Culture of Open Reporting

Create a trusted, third-party reporting system that allows employees to report abusive behaviors without fear of retaliation. Empower employees to share concerns openly, creating an environment of transparency and trust. When employees feel safe to speak up, organizations benefit from reduced conflicts, faster resolutions, and a stronger culture of respect.

## References

1. Singh, R., Deonarine, V., Balwant, P. and Ramdeo, S. (2024). "The relationship between abusive supervision and job satisfaction and turnover intentions: the moderating role of employee depression". *Evidence-based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*. DOI:10.1108/EBHRM-08-2022-0213.



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