

Supervisors' Toxicity As Predictor Of Subordinates' Counter-Productive Work Behavior In Nigerian Public Hospitals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to empirically examine the association of Supervisors' Toxicity and Subordinates' Counter-productive Work-behaviour in the Nigerian Public Hospitals. Counter-productive Work -behaviour (criterion variable) is further operationalized using five measures – abuse, production deviation, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal. The cross-sectional survey design is adopted and data is generated using the structured questionnaire. 197 respondents comprising doctors, nursing staff, lab technicians and other administrative staff selected from an accessible population of 402 staff provided responses to the questions. A total of five hypotheses are proposed and tested using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Results indicate significant relationships in all hypothetical instances, thereby implying an association between Supervisors' Toxicity and Subordinates' Counter-productive Work- behavior. The study therefore concludes that Subordinates are quick to reciprocate Supervisors' Toxicity through Counter-productive Work-behavior of transferring aggression to either peers or other identifiable assets of the organization. The study further recommends a more emotionally oriented approach to the management of superior-subordinate relationships with emphasis on the training and retraining of supervisors regarding emotional intelligence as well as conflict and human relations issues.

Keywords: Supervisors' Toxicity; Subordinates; Counterproductive behaviour; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Army leaders must set high standards, lead by example, do what is legally and morally right, and influence other people to do the same. They must establish and sustain a climate that ensures people are treated with dignity and respect and create an environment in which people are challenged and motivated to be all they can be.

U.S. Army Field Manual 22-100

Workplace deviance, counterproductive behavior, antisocial behavior or workplace incivility as it is alternatively referred (Robbins and Judge 2007), is a negative behavior that has been and still currently prevails in many contemporary workplaces. Consequently, counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) has become a popular field of acute interest among many, including; researchers in industrial and organizational studies, managers, business stakeholders and the general public as a whole. Literature has espoused these behaviours as representing a set of distinct acts that share the characteristics of being volitional as opposed to accidental or mandated; having the potentials to harm or intend to harm organizations and/or organization stakeholders, such as clients, co-workers', customers, and supervisors (Fox & Spector 2005; Spector 2011).

Literature posits that some of these behaviours are:- reading of lotto papers, fidgeting of phones instead of working, abuse of the organization's internet by the downloading non work related materials to list a few. Pradhan and Pradhan (2014) had observed that in the recent wake of several corporate scandals, unethical and deviant workplace behaviour has become a prevalent problem in organization across the world. It has also been estimated that between 33 and 75 percent of all employees have at one point or another engaged in serious or minor deviant behaviours such as theft,

fraud, vandalism, and sabotage at least once in their professional life (Harper, 1990). Another report mentioned other types of harmful deviant behaviours such as lying (DePaulo & DePaulo, 1989), spreading rumours (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001), withholding effort (Kidwell and Bennett, 1993) and absenteeism (Johns, 1997).

Due to the harsh and enormous socio-economic aftermaths associated with deviance workplace behavior (See Akikibofori, 2013, Appelbaum et al, 2007; Robbinson and Bennet, 1995, Fisher, 2003, Peterson, 2002, Muafy, 2011 and Lawrence and Robbinson, 2007), growing interests has been stimulated among both the academicians and executives in considering its burgeoning prevalence and consequences (Bennett & Robbinson, 2003). In this light, two streams of research have focused on ascertaining the causes of these behaviors. Spector and colleagues (Chen & Spector, 1992; Fox & Spector, 1999; Spector 1975, 1978; Storms & Spector, 1987) have portrayed CWB as an emotion-based response to stressful organizational conditions; whereas Greenberg and colleagues (e.g., Greenberg, 1990, Skarlicki and Folger 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999) have taken an organizational justice perspective, viewing CWB as a cognition-based response to experienced injustice. These two perspectives according to Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) are not incompatible, because Spector (1978) noted links with the equity (justice) concept, and Greenberg (1990) also noted links with frustration theory.

Previous research on deviant behavior have focused on organization structure (Yen & Teng 2013, Henle, 2005), procedural justice (Dineen et al, 2006; Skarlicki & Folger 1997), work related factors (Ferguson, 2007), personality factors (Fieldman, 2008); and ethical ideology (Henle et al, 2005) as antecedents of deviant workplace behavior and counter productivity. Many of such studies are based on organizational or firm level dynamics. Only a few studies have focused on managers and superiors' personality as factors that could promote employee counter productivity and deviant behavior (Lipman-Blumen 2005, Kellerman 2004). In this paper, we are looking at counterproductive work behaviours through the lens of leadership style, especially, supervisors' toxicity as a predictor of counterproductive work behaviors. This study was informed by the scarcity of scholarly attention on the proposed relationship in the Nigerian context. The purpose of the paper therefore is to empirically investigate the association of supervisors' toxicity and subordinates' counterproductive work behaviour in Public Hospitals in Port Harcourt. To achieve this broad purpose, the study shall specifically seek to:

1. Ascertain if supervisors in the Nigerian public hospitals exhibit toxic syndromes at work.
2. Ascertain the association of such toxic behavior and subordinates' abuse of responsibilities.
3. Ascertain the association of toxic behaviors and production deviance
4. Ascertain the association of toxic behavior and subordinates' disposition toward theft of organizations properties.
5. Ascertain the association of toxic behavior and subordinates' sabotage of organisation's interests
6. Ascertain the association of toxic behaviours and subordinates withdrawal from the organization.

LITERATURE

Supervisors' Toxicity

Toxicity is derived from the word "toxic". The New Explorer Encyclopedic Dictionary associates the word "toxic" to poison. Hence, anything toxic can be described as poisonous as well, because it reserves the potential to harm its target victim. Positive stories of organizational leaders might highlight leaders who motivate employees to achieve their goals and inspire them to do more than they thought was possible. The negative accounts include stories of leaders who ridicule their employees in public, force employees to endure physical hardships, and promote divisiveness between work groups or individuals. These stories depict behaviors of leaders who inflict serious physical and/or psychological harm on their subordinates while providing supervision at work. It is quite possible that some persons working for these leaders view these same authority figures with respect and admiration while others also perceive them as toxic. These differences in perceptions and attributions suggest we still have much to learn about how people view leadership, since one person's toxic leader may be another person's hero (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

In Walton's (2007) view, toxic leadership is behavior which is exploitive, abusive, destructive and psychologically - and perhaps legalistically—corrupt and poisonous. Schmidt (2008) offered a working definition of toxic leadership

that: toxic leaders are those who: (1) display a wide range of extreme emotions in an unpredictable pattern (2) lack emotional intelligence (3) act in ways that are culturally and/or interpersonally insensitive (4) are primarily motivated by self-interest (5) influence others by employing negative managerial techniques (for example: micromanagement - that is, not having trust in subordinates' ability to finish tasks unsupervised). Accordingly, these behaviors are exemplified as- the forced imposition of unrealistic workloads as prevalent in the marketing targets given to bankers in Nigeria, workplace bullying and harassment, deception and fraud in addition to deliberate workplace misinformation and misrepresentation.

Lipman- Blumen (2005) further describes corruption, hypocrisy, sabotage, manipulation, as well as other assorted unethical, illegal, and criminal acts to be part of the poisonous repertoire of toxic leaders. One major difficulty, however, is how to differentiate between *toxic* leadership and *over-zealous* leadership as many of the attributes toxic leaders possess, when not used to excess or inappropriately, are the same as those exhibited by successful non-toxic leaders. The situation is further complicated as some behaviours—now acknowledged as toxic—may have previously been excused, denied, or even encouraged, because of the results delivered and this may have (i) reinforced the 'acceptability' of such behaviour, (ii) encouraged its continuing use, (iii) discouraged others from challenging the unacceptable behaviours experienced, and (iv) generated a groupthink and/or acceptant mentality offering little possibility for improvement (Janis, 1982).

Toxic leaders can have great appeal, and attract followers, because of the high level of engagement and energy they display. They will 'make it happen', 'get things done', sort out 'the road block', 'cut away the dead wood'—yet *how* they may go about this can be profoundly damaging to many around them and, potentially, to the business itself. Indeed the literature is awash with suggestions that the most frequently reported disruptive executive behaviours are characterized by dramatic, histrionic, emotionally demanding, narcissistic, aggressive and somewhat grandiose leadership behaviours (Conger, 1990; Dotlich & Cairo, 2003; Finkelstein, 2003; Kellerman, 2004). In his study however, Schmidt (2008) developed six dimensions of toxicity which we consider appropriate here; they are:

- **Abusive Supervision:** involves leaders' hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors to their subordinates. Examples of such behaviors include public demonstrations of anger, personal ridicule, and destructive feedback. This does not include physical abuse.
- **Authoritarian Leadership:** involves leader behaviors that restrict subordinate autonomy and initiative. Toxic leaders micromanage their subordinates. It is "their way or the highway". They do not empower their staff to take sole ownership of work and are often unwilling to delegate anything except the most basic, routine work. Authoritarian leaders demand total compliance with their own agendas and operating procedures.
- **Self-Promotion:** involves behaviors that promote leaders' own interests (especially to higher level superiors) and that decrease threats from rivals and/or talented subordinates.
- **Unpredictability:** involves enacting a wide range of behaviors that reflect dramatic shifts in mood states. This is further explained by the fact that toxic leaders easily switch mood, they are warm and welcoming one moment, then vicious and cruel the next. Employees are by this behavior kept confused, not knowing the behavior to expect, and this unpredictability keeps everyone on edge all the time. In fact, this creates a psychological effect that was earlier described as "learned helplessness", (Seligman, 1967).
- **Unprofessional Behaviors:** show that leaders lack task competence, personal and professional integrity, and collegial respect for peers and subordinates.
- **Narcissism:** involves having a grandiose self-image, an inability to empathize with others, and contempt for the abilities and efforts of others. They often ignore and minimize their employees' suggestions, assuming that if the idea is not theirs, it is simply not good. Toxic leaders also assume they are above the rules and blatantly ignore policies. But of course, they expect everyone else to follow standard procedures.

Management scholars and practitioners have increasingly identified interrelationships between leadership and organizational dysfunction (e.g. see Frost, 2003; Kellerman, 2004; Levinson, 1972, 1976; Lowman, 2002; Lubit, 2004;

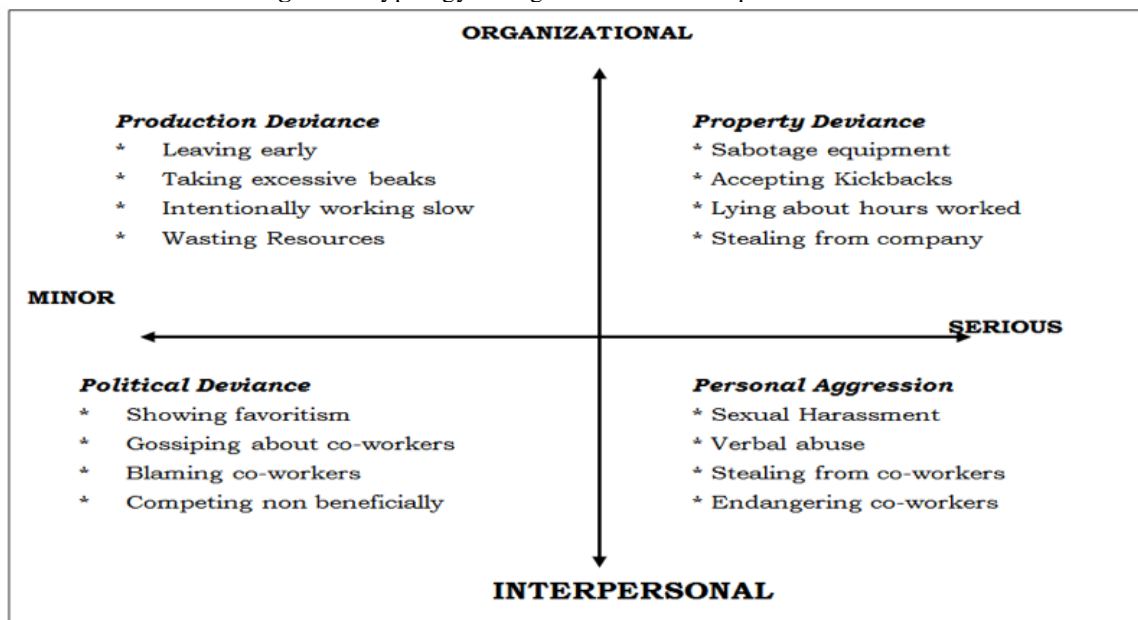
Fox and Spector, 2005); notably absent in the analysis of dysfunction is an explicit, systematic examination of high toxicity leadership and its impact upon organizational systems (e.g. see Goldman, 2005).

Counter Productive Work Behavior

Counter productive work behavior (CWB) can be described as volitional behavior that harms or contains the potentials to harm organizations or their stakeholders (Fox and Spector, 2005; Spector, Bauer and Fox, 2010; Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, and Kesler, 2006). Researchers have given these behaviors many different names; including workplace deviance counterproductive behavior, antisocial behavior (Appelbaum and Matousek (2007), and workplace incivility Robinson and Judge (2007). According to Robinson & Bennett (1995) typology, workplace deviance varies along two dimensions, namely ‘interpersonal versus organizational’ and ‘minor versus serious’.

The result of Robinson and Bennett’s research established a two dimensional chart which organizes counterproductive workplace behavior into four quadrants labeled: *production deviance*, *property deviance*, *political deviance* and *personal aggression*, see Figure 1. Organizational deviance is a grouping of behaviors between the individual and the organization that involves things such as theft, sabotage, lateness, or putting little effort into work. On the other hand, interpersonal deviance is a behavior displayed between individuals in the workplace and involves behaviors such as: belittling others, playing pranks on others, acting rudely, arguing, and physical aggression, the first dimension typology which is the organizational-interpersonal dimension, has the axis ranges from deviance directed towards individuals to deviance directed towards the organization.

Figure 1. Typology of negative deviant workplace behavior



Similarly, Chand and Chand (2014) used the following to measure CWB:

- **Abuse** –this consist of harmful behaviours directed at coworkers and others that harm either physically or psychologically through making threats, nasty comments, ignoring the person, or undermining the person’s ability to work effectively.
- **Production deviance:** it is the purposeful failure to perform job tasks effectively the way they are supposed to be performed.
- **Sabotage:** it involves defacing or destroying physical properties belonging to the employer; intentional wasting of the material in the organization and purposely dirtying or littering of the workplace.

- **Theft:** stealing something belonging to the employer and delaying role performance to attract extra pay or other kinds of rewards.
- **Withdrawal:** this consists of behaviors that restrict the amount of time working to less than is required by the organization. It includes absence, arriving late or leaving early, and taking longer breaks than is approved. In the study of Rishipal (2012), different levels of managers have been compared for managerial effectiveness and counterproductive work behaviours. Findings revealed that they differ significantly in their mean values with respect to their psychological characteristics of CWB and managerial effectiveness as well as there is significant correlation between the tendency of CWB and managerial effectiveness among the different levels of managers.

Supervisors’ Toxicity and Subordinates’ Counterproductive Work Behaviour

The consequences of destructive, toxic leadership behaviors at the organizational and subordinate level are ubiquitous. Subordinates look up to their managers who they see as leaders; the actions or inactions of these managers have direct and indirect consequences on subordinates’ attitude to work. At the organizational level, researchers have found increases in workplace deviance by subordinates who report working for abusive supervisors (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). These counterproductive behaviors tend to be attributed to negative reciprocity, that is, the employee’s effort to ‘balance the scale’ of perceived injustice by inflicting harm back onto the company. Retaliatory behaviors can include sabotaging operations, providing inaccurate or misleading information, and withholding citizenship behaviors (Aquino et al., 2001; Bies and Tripp, 1996; Tripp et al., 2002).

Reed (2004) introduced the negative consequences of toxic leadership in a military context by articulating that these leaders erode unit cohesion and deflates esprit de corps. At the individual level, studies have shown abusive leadership to be positively related to turnover intentions and psychological distress, and related negatively to affective and continuance commitment, job and life satisfaction (Rayner and Cooper, 1997; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler and Endsley, 2004; Aryee, Sun, Chen, and Debrah, 2007). Further, employees subjected to leaders who attack their self-esteem tend to feel low self-worth and a diminished sense of self-efficacy (Kusy and Holloway, 2009) that could lead to deteriorations in performance and morale. It is based on the foregoing that we hypothesize that:

Ho₁: Supervisor’s toxicity has positive and significant association with five measures of counter productive work behavior.

These hypothesized relationships are further depicted in a conceptual model. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Operational framework of the study

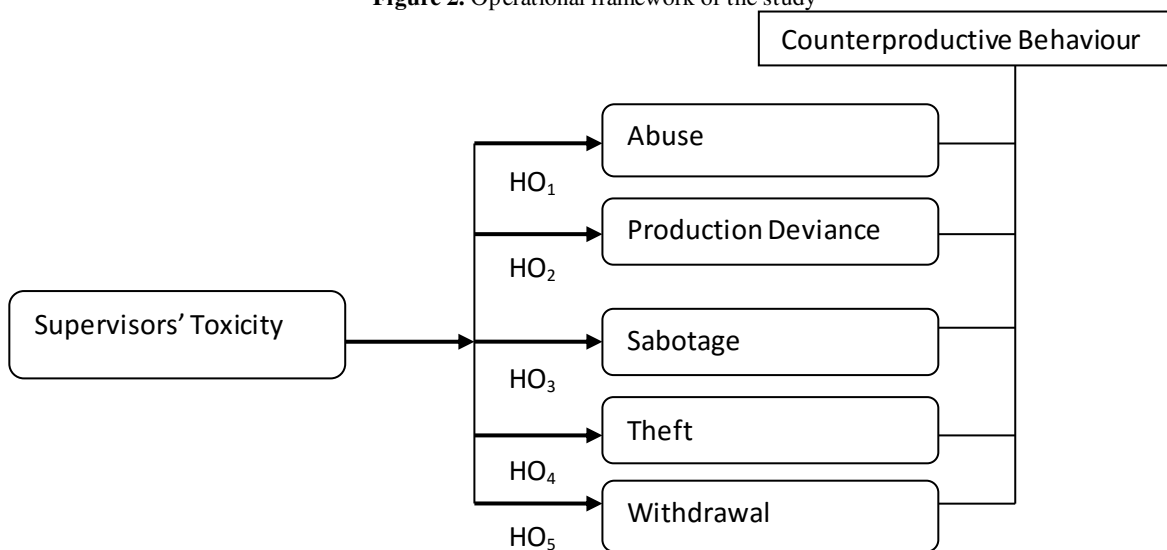


Figure 2 illustrates the operational framework for the study upon which the following hypotheses are postulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and abuse among subordinates of Nigeria public hospitals

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and production deviance among subordinates of Nigeria public hospitals

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and sabotage among subordinates of Nigeria public hospitals

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and theft among subordinates of Nigeria public hospitals

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and withdrawal among subordinates of Nigeria public hospitals

METHODS

Population and Sampling

The population of the study comprises four hundred and seventy one (471) workers of four hospitals namely - Braithwaite Memorial Hospital, University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospitals, First Rivers Clinic and New Mile One Hospital with a sampling frame encompassing Doctors, nursing staff, lab technicians and other administrative staff within the target hospitals. The Taro Yamane’s (1967) formula was used to obtain a sample size of 216 participants while sampling was achieved using the simple random sampling method based on the homogenous nature of the sub-populations being hospitals (see Okpu & Kpakol, 2015).

Measurement and Instrumentation

The survey instrument is the structured questionnaire with the scale for the predictor variable – supervisors’ toxicity, adapted from the work of Schmidt (2008) while the scale for the criterion variable – counterproductive behaviour is adapted from the work of Chand and Chand (2014) with five dimensions namely – abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft and withdrawal. Variables are scaled on a five point scale of (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) undecided (4) agree (5) strongly agree.

Reliability

The Cronbach alpha reliability was adopted in estimating the internal reliability of the instruments. The results are presented in table 1. Below:

Table 1. Cronbach reliability coefficients

Variables	No. of items	Alpha coefficients
Supervisors’ toxicity	7	.839
Abuse	5	.830
Production deviance	5	.715
Sabotage	5	.800
Theft	5	.884
Withdrawal	5	.776

Source: Research data, 2015

RESULTS

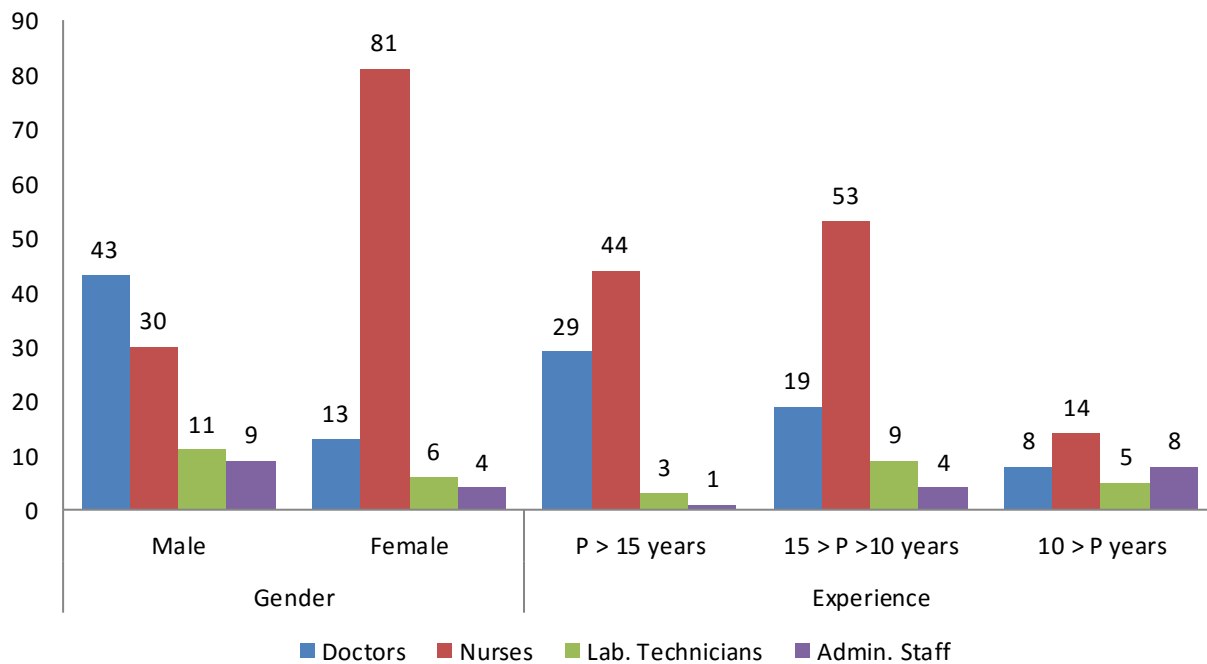
Survey

Questionnaire copies were personally administered to the respective public hospitals and followed up as a result of proximity to the researcher. Distribution and retrieval of copies within the selected hospitals was carried out through the assistance of various administrative correspondences who served as contact points in the target hospitals. Out of a total of 216 (100%) copies of the questionnaire distributed, 197 (91%) copies were successfully retrieved and utilized in the data analysis.

Demographic

The target of analysis was the individual staff members of the target hospitals as these members served as units of measurement in the study. The sample characteristics revealed that out of a total of 197 participants; 104 (53%) were female and 93 (47%) male; 56 (28%) doctors, 111 (56%) Nurses, 17 (9%) lab technicians and 13 (7%) administrative staff; while for experience and tenure with the particular hospital of work, 77 (39%) of the participants had worked with their respective hospitals for more than fifteen (15) years, 85 (43%) had worked between ten (10) to fifteen (15) years, while only 35 (18%) had worked for less than ten (10) years. The detailed distribution is described in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3. Bar Chart for Demographics



Where P = experience; P > 15 years = experience of more than 15 years; 15 > P > 10 years = experience of between 10 – 15 years; 10 > P = experience of less than 10 years.

The descriptive analysis for the variables examines the central tendency and variability of responses using the mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (s). A base mean of $\bar{x} > 3.0$ is adopted in the identification of agreement levels to indicators which are all stated in the positive while $\bar{x} \leq 3.0$ is adopted as an indication of disagreement levels to the indicators. $n = 197$; and confidence interval is set at 95%. Analysis is carried out using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Test.

Table 2. Descriptive and correlation results

	Mean (x)	SD (S)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Toxicity	3.8942	.69901						
Abuse	3.9076	.86224	.652**					
Deviance	3.9543	.68997	.421**	.674**				
Sabotage	3.8487	.74427	.975**	.681**	.370**			
Theft	3.9208	.93951	.722**	.964**	.575**	.758**		
Withdraw	3.9442	.73757	.399**	.734**	.948**	.354**	.598**	

Where $p < .05^*$ = significance at a 0.05 level; and $p < .01^{**}$ = significance at a 0.01 level.

Table 2. above illustrates the output for the descriptive and correlation analysis on the variables with mean (x) values indicating average levels of agreement on all six (6) variables while the standard deviation (s) for all variables carry low values of $s < 1.0$ and r values indicating significance at a $p < .01$ level.

H₀₁: Supervisors’ toxicity is not significantly associated with abuse

Findings reveal a significant relationship between supervisors toxicity and abuse with an $r = .652$ and a probability value $p < 0.01$ significant at a 0.01 level. Based on the findings, the hypothetical statement of no relationship is hereby rejected as the findings reveal a significant and strong relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and abuse. This implies that outcomes of abusive behaviour as expressed within the organization are closely linked to toxic supervisory actions, attitudes and personality.

H₀₂: Supervisors’ toxicity is not significantly associated with production deviance

The results indicate a significant association between supervisors toxicity and production deviance with an $r = .421$ and a probability value $p < 0.01$ significant at a 0.01 level. Therefore the previous tentative statement of no relationship between both variables is rejected implying a link between supervisors toxicity and production deviance within the organization.

H₀₃: Supervisors’ toxicity is not significantly associated with sabotage

The findings reveal a significant relationship between supervisors toxicity and sabotage with an $r = .975$ and a probability value $p < 0.01$ significant at a 0.01 level. The coefficients suggest this is a stronger association relative to other instances therefore the previously hypothesized statement of no relationship is hereby rejected as the findings reveal a significant and strong relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and sabotage; thus implying that incidences of purposive sabotage within the organization are closely linked to toxic supervisory actions, attitudes and personality.

H₀₄: Supervisors’ toxicity is not significantly associated with theft

The findings show that there is a significant relationship between supervisors toxicity and theft with an $r = .722$ and a probability value $p < 0.01$ significant at a 0.01 level; based on these result the previously hypothesized statement of no relationship is hereby rejected as the findings reveal a significant and strong relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and theft; thereby implying a correlation between supervisors toxicity and theft at the workplace.

H₀₅: Supervisors’ toxicity is not significantly associated with withdrawal

The results of the analysis reveal a significant relationship between supervisors toxicity and withdrawal with an $r = .399$ which is the weakest level of association compared to other relative instances with a probability value $p < 0.01$ significant at a 0.01 level; based on this result the previously hypothesized statement of no relationship is hereby rejected as the findings reveal a significant and strong relationship between supervisors’ toxicity and withdrawal; thereby implying an association between supervisors toxicity and withdrawal at the workplace.

Figure 4. Line graph showing mean correlation between supervisors’ toxicity and counterproductive behaviour

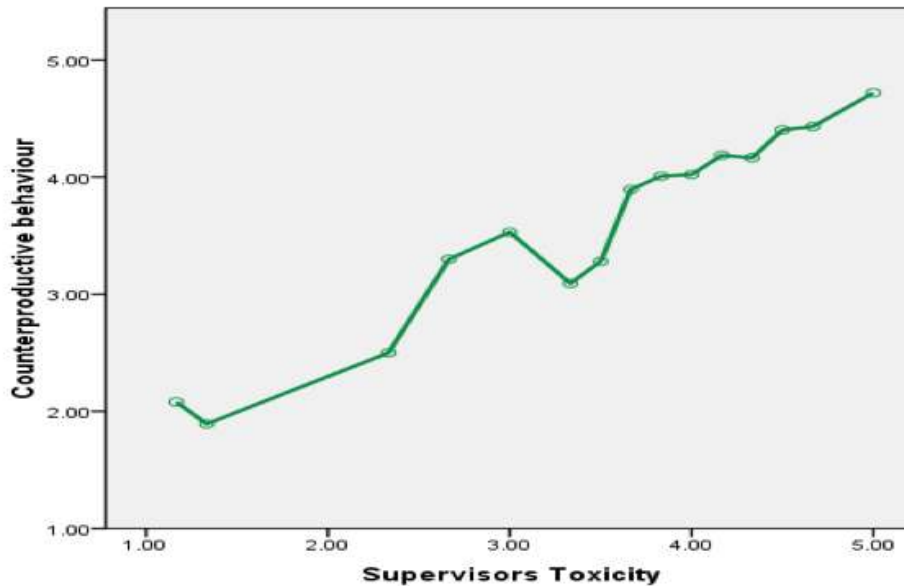


Figure 4 illustrates the association between supervisors’ toxicity and counterproductive work behaviour based on mean values. The diagram summarizes the correlation tests for both variables as points indicate associated mean values relative to both variables.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this study was the empirical assessment of the association between supervisors’ toxicity and counterproductive work behaviour in Nigerian public hospitals. This study observed the presence of toxic postures among superordinates of the organizations under focus. Such result is in clear tandem with Jaja’s (2000, 2015); who argued that subordinates are in the want of comfort, stability, and solutions from their managers, but that such expectations appear as an optical illusion in the African workplace because African managers rather prefer to knock their subordinates out of their comfort zone through toxic tendencies. Consequently, the prevalence of toxic dispositions among supervisors was observed to have significant relationships with all five measures of counterproductive work behavior namely – *abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft and withdrawal*. Although all relationships are significant; The results reveal higher levels of correlation between supervisors’ toxicity and sabotage; and supervisors’ toxicity and theft; implying a tendency for subordinates to “hit back” through destructive activities.

The findings are further corroborated by the studies of Aquino et al., (2001) and Tripp et al., (2002) in which instances of retaliatory actions are considered reciprocal to perceived forms of maltreatment and injustice at the workplace. Subordinates; as suggested by the findings; would most likely opt for counterproductive actions as self-gratification alternatives when confronted with toxic behaviour as expressed by managers or supervisors. Implications are that; although such actions may not be confrontational; they would purposively aim at inflicting losses, damage and waste. Most importantly, innocent patients and their relatives bear the brunt of these counterproductive work behaviours because affected workers often would transfer their frustration on them.

In conclusion, we find that supervisors’ toxicity at the workplace is often times reciprocated through counterproductive behaviour which are adopted as a means of payback for treatments deemed abusive, degrading or insulting. Subordinates are prone to transferring aggression to either peers or identified properties and assets of the hospital accompanied by actions ranging from outright sabotage to destruction of hospital property, theft, withdrawal and an inclination towards continuance commitment. On the reverse, treating employees with sense of humanization as

observed by Gabriel *et al* (2015) would encourage them to display positive behaviors at work because it effectively communicates that they are valued and trusted and that they are important to the organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Steps should be taken to train managers within the context of dealing emotionally with subordinates and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect both for authority and individual contributions.
- Bosses should not by their conducts dehumanize their subordinates because the consequences can be very detrimental against the organization at large.
- Organizations should train their staff on skills that will enable them develop emotional resilience so that they can absorb the toxic syndromes of difficult bosses.
- Organizations must create an atmosphere that guarantees subordinate safety if they report toxic behaviors of their superiors to management.
- Supervisors who are found to be toxic in dealing with subordinates must be made to face severe consequences ranging from negative appraisal to any other organizationally applicable discipline.

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