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### EXPATRIATE EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION IN SAUDI ARABIA

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Saudi Arabian industries and different kind of businesses have grown in a remarkable way recently. The more business and industries grow the more employees are needed to fulfil the achievements of these industries in the Saudi economy. In order, to have eligible employees who make a positive difference in organizations and to combine talents, expatriates' employees are highly needed in the Saudi organizations. This study analyses expatriate's perception of abusive supervision in Saudi Arabia and to examine if male and female employees have similar perceptions regarding the abusive supervision in the areas of nationality, age, qualification among others. A questionnaire has been conducted on a sample population of 100 employees consisted of expatriate males and females employed in private sectors in Saudi Arabia, Jeddah. The result concluded that there are some factors which may affect the perception of abusive supervision including age, nationality, education, years of experience, and others. It is more importantly concluded that there is a gap between theory and implementation regarding the policies of abusive supervision. In other words, there is a difference between setting a policy or having it written on a manual and implementing it. Therefore, the organization is recommended to pay attention to this, and consequently ensure that the HR department takes necessary action against abusive supervisors.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

An expatriate is a person who leaves the country to work in another. Global mobility is the movement of workers from one county to another to gain new positions in their career jobs usually offer salaries higher than the available in their countries. This opportunity gives them the chance to discover the world and learn new cultures and experience. In today's economy, the global

movement of employees is essential. Getting the right people to the right places at the right time, with proper support, is critical to the success of wide-reaching business. Expatriates have to deal with different people having different beliefs than the ones they are used to in their countries. The expatriates experience the challenges of social tension, family, lack of acquired skills, reverse culture shock and loss of status (Daily et al., 2000; Caligiuri, 2000; Stahl et al., 2002). It could be a big added value for them if they respect and follow the rules of the country. In addition, this experience will be a unique piece of their career. The only drawback in this issue is if they could not accept the change that might end their dream faster.

The important antecedent of employee's job satisfaction is the relationship with immediate supervisor included the subordinates' feelings, well-being, and contributions (Dupre & Day, 2007). (McCormack et al. 2006; Gagnon & Judd, 2004). Besides that, employee has higher satisfaction and organizational commitment when there is a supportive relationship between employee and supervisor. (Firth, et al., 2004; Gagnon & Judd, 2004, McCormack et al., 2007). Xiao-li (2013) outlined that the antecedents of abusive supervision include supervisors' procedural justice and subordinates' negative affectivity, supervisors' perceived contract violation, supervisors' interactional justice and supervisors' authoritarianism (Xiao-li, 2013). There is growing evidence regarding the impacts on the employees' work and family outcomes even though the abusive supervision constitutes a low base rate phenomenon (Y. Feng & J. Liu, 2010) The impacts include unfavourable work attitudes, psychological distress, work-family conflict, resistance behaviour, family undermining (J. M. Hoobler & D. J. Brass, 2006)

The development projects may lead to recruit foreign manpower as local manpower was rare in terms of quantity and quality at that time. This has led to increase the number of foreign manpower both in governmental and private sector. This rapid development was accompanied by establishing the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the issuance of labour regulations which are derived from the Islamic Sharia and all its teachings of equalization, justice, and duties of work owners and labours. However, this could not remove some of the problems between the employer and the expatriate employees such as the abusive supervision. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the expatriate's perception of abusive supervision in Saudi Arabia and examines if male and female employees have similar perceptions regarding the abusive supervision.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

An online survey is used in this study and has been conducted to number of expatriate's employees then results collected to reach to an answer to help in the conclusion.

### ***Population and Sample***

The sample population for this study consisted of expatriate male and female employees from a private sector in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This sample is

selected because it exemplifies the population work for a wide variety of organizations in different industries. The sample consisted of 100 employees who comprised field employees, office staff and middle management.

### *Questionnaire Construction*

The data of this study is collected using an online survey since it provides an easier way for people to understand and participate. The survey gives the respondents a chance to add any additional information if required. In addition, they can contact by E-mails to add any separate feedback or suggestions if necessary.

The survey questionnaire of this study is created after meeting with some higher management employees to support in choosing the correct questions to be included. It is designed to be answered in less than five minutes. Though, respondents are given an open time to work on the questionnaire based on their preferences.

In order to assure that all respondents are relevant to the study sample and that the criteria of individual answers are fulfilled, the questionnaire is designed to be started with screening questions. As respondents received the link, they start answering the screening questions asking about their personal details such as nationality, age, job position, years of employment and level of education. The next part of the survey, statement questions, are questions regarding the supervision at work environment and using this authority for the abuse if any.

### *Sections of the questionnaire*

This questionnaire is divided into three sections as follow:

#### Section 1: Demographics:

First section few questions asked regarding demographic variables to help the researcher determine what factors may influence respondents' answers. Questions covered aspects of participants' demographics like personal, family related, and work-related demographics.

#### Section 2: Company Policies regarding Abusive Supervision:

Second section was formed to measure employees' perception of company policies in relation to human resources and employees' equality. Participants expressed their level of agreement to the statements using participants where they had to choose between scales of five varying from strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5).

#### Section 3: Opinions on Statements about the Supervisor:

The purpose of part three of the questionnaire is to seek opinions of the respondents regarding their supervisor at work.

### *Questionnaire layout*

#### Section 1: Demographics:

- a. Gender: (Male / Female).
- b. Nationality: (Indian / Pakistani / Filipino / Sudanese).
- c. Age Group: (20-30 / 30-40 / 40-50 / 50-60).
- d. Level of Education: (Secondary School / Diploma / University Degree).
- e. Marital Status: (Single / Married).
- f. Years of Employment: (Below 2 years / 2-5 years / 5-10 years / More than 10 years).
- g. Job Category: (Labour / Office Staff / Middle Management).

#### Section 2: Company Policy regarding Abusive Supervision:

1. My organization has many programs and policies designed to help employees report any abuse from supervisors.
2. My organization makes an active effort to help employees when there is injustice to any of them.
3. My organization puts money and effort to make clear policies about equality among employees.
4. My organization takes serious measures against abusive supervisors.

#### Section 3: Opinions on Statements about the Supervisor:

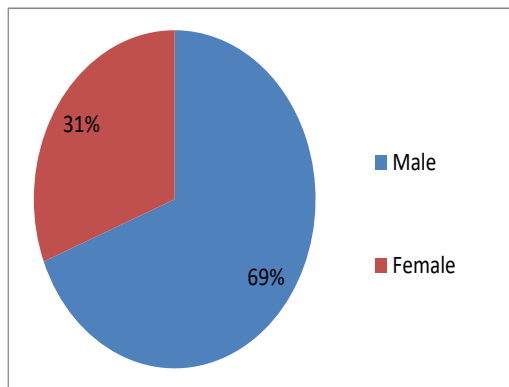
1. My supervisor ridicules me.
2. My supervisor tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.
3. My supervisor gives me the silent treatment.
4. My supervisor puts me down in front of others.
5. My supervisor invades my privacy.
6. My supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.
7. My supervisor does not give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of efforts.
8. My supervisor blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment.
9. My supervisor breaks promises he/she makes.
10. My supervisor expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason.
11. My supervisor makes negative comments about me to others.
12. My supervisor is rude to me.
13. My supervisor does not allow me to interact with my co-workers.
14. My supervisor tells me I am incompetent.
15. My supervisor lies to me.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

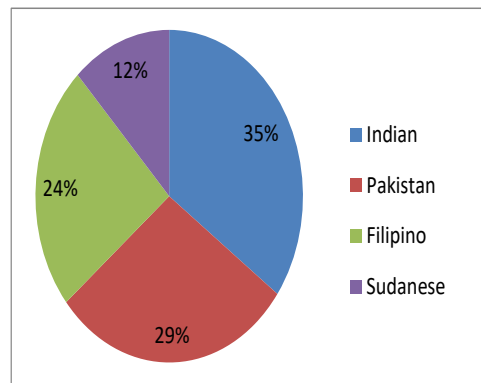
### ***Results of the Demographics***

Fig. 1 shows the gender demographics on the study sample consist 69% of male and 31% of females which reflected by the fact that the number of male employees in this organizations is higher than female respondents. Fig. 2 shows the nationalities of the respondents of this survey are 35% Indians, 29% Filipinos, 24% Pakistanis and finally 12% Sudanese. The nationality factor is important in the perception of abusive supervision to know whether a certain nationality is being subjected to abusive supervision more than the others. It has been noticed that nationalities have no great effect on supervisors' abuse against subordinates. Thus, this can be considered as the position to be as a strong factor in this study. For example, an Indian labour will face more

abusive supervisory acts than the Indian Administrative Assistant due to the position factor.

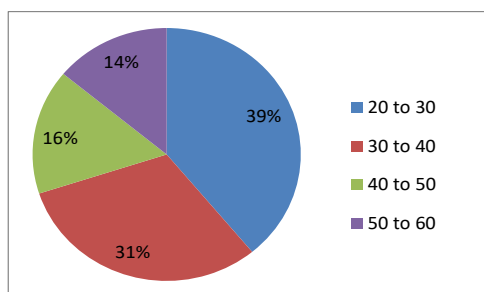


**Fig. 1.** Gender of the participants

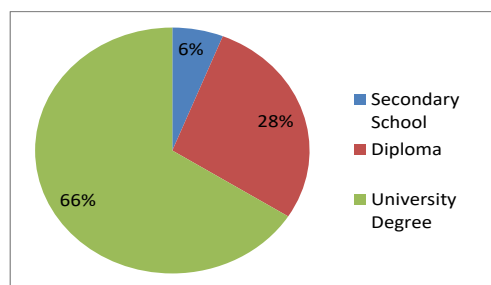


**Fig. 2.** Nationality

Fig. 3 shows the age group of the sample population indicates that 39% fall between 20 to 30 years old, followed by 31% between 30 and 40, 16% between 40 and 50 and finally 14% from 50 to 60 years old. The age factor is important in the perception of abusive supervision because it is more likely to happen against young age employees more than other. Fig. 4 shows this difference in percentage between respondents who have university degrees and the rest of them might be better explained by the fact that most of the employees in the organizations nowadays are university graduates about 66%. The respondents from secondary school and diploma background are 6% and 28% respectively.



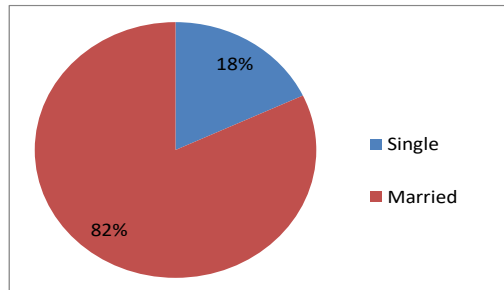
**Fig. 3.** Age Group



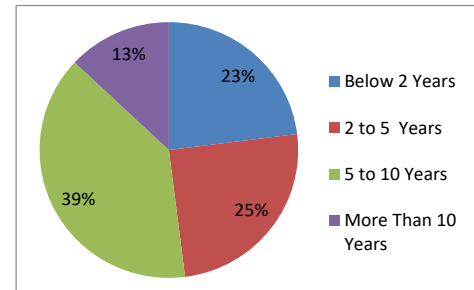
**Fig. 4.** Level of Education

Fig. 5 shows about 18% of the respondent is single and 82% are married. It is found that there is no relation between abusive supervision and the employee being married or single. The marital status has no effect as the individual could be single and get abused, and also be married and get abused from the supervision authority. However, married individuals are more likely to tolerate the supervision abuse because they fear loss of their jobs would affect their families. On the other hand, single individuals are more inclined to reject abuse. Fig. 6 shows the highest percentage about 39% of the sample is between 5 to 10 years of employment; follow by 25% between 2 to 5 years of employment. The experienced employees are more aware of company policies and know their rights. As such, it is likely that new employees who do not have much working experience are the ones to suffer more from the abusive

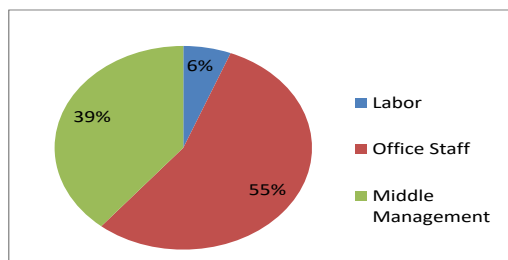
supervision. Fig. 7 shows the highest percentage is 55% respondents who work in office management or administration jobs, followed by 39% middle management and only 6% labours. These results are matching relatively with the level of education. It is likely that lower positions are more subject to abusive supervision than higher ones.



**Fig. 5.** Marital Status



**Fig. 6.** Years of Employment

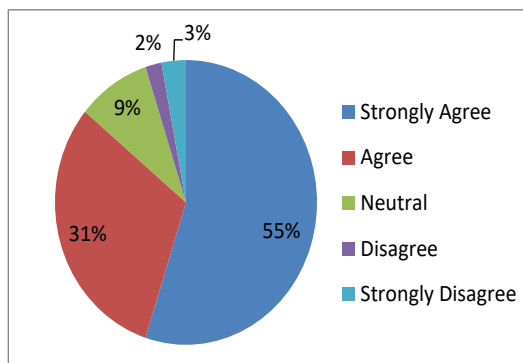


**Fig. 7.** Job Category

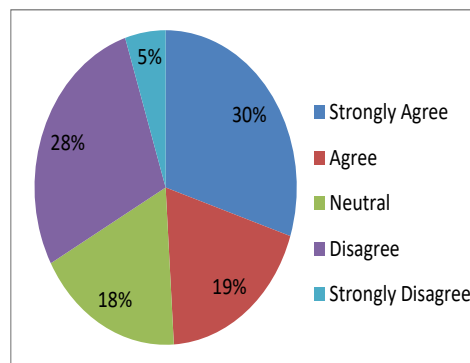
### ***Results of the Statements on Abusive Supervision***

Fig. 8 shows about 55% respondents strongly agree that their organization has many policies and procedures designed to help employees report any abuse from supervisors. Next, about 31% of the respondent agreed to the statement. There are only 5% who disagree and strongly disagree. This is an indication that the organization has the rules in place to protect their staff against any abusive acts.

Fig. 9 shows about 30% respondents strongly agree that the organization makes an active effort to help employees when there is injustice to any of them. However, 28% disagree and 5% strongly disagree to the statement. This is an alarming Fig. especially if added to the 18% are not sure. Absence of justice in Human Resource is a sign for future problems and low performance on all levels. The HR department in the organization should ensure that penalty or corrective action is announced for the employees so that they build a relationship of trust between the organization and its employees.



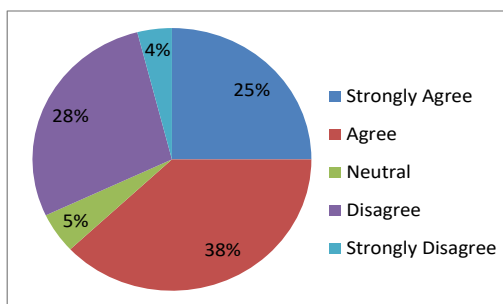
**Fig. 8.** Policies to Report any Abusive Supervision



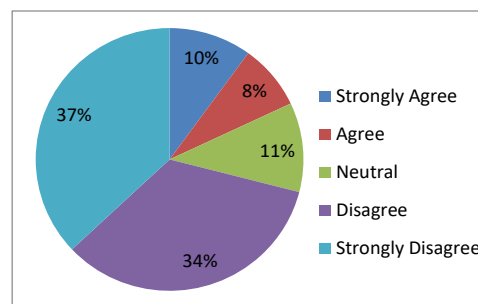
**Fig. 9.** Helping Employees in Case of Injustice

Fig. 10 shows about 25% respondents strongly agree that the organization puts money and effort to make clear policies about equality among employees. This is followed by 38% who also agree to the statement. On the other hand, about 28% disagree and 4% strongly disagree to that. This gives us the assumption that the organization has the policies set clear to enhance equality among the employees. However, setting the policy does not necessarily mean implementing it, and that is what will be highlighted in the next question and responses.

There is a difference between setting a policy or having it written on a manual and implementing it. Fig. 11 shows about 37% respondents strongly disagreed and 34% disagreed that the organization takes serious measures against abusive supervisors. This is compared only to 10% who strongly agree and 8% who agree to the statement. Hence, there is a gap in this area between theory and implementation. The organization should pay attention to this, and consequently ensure that the HR department takes necessary action against abusive supervisors.



**Fig. 10.** Setting Clear Policies of Equality

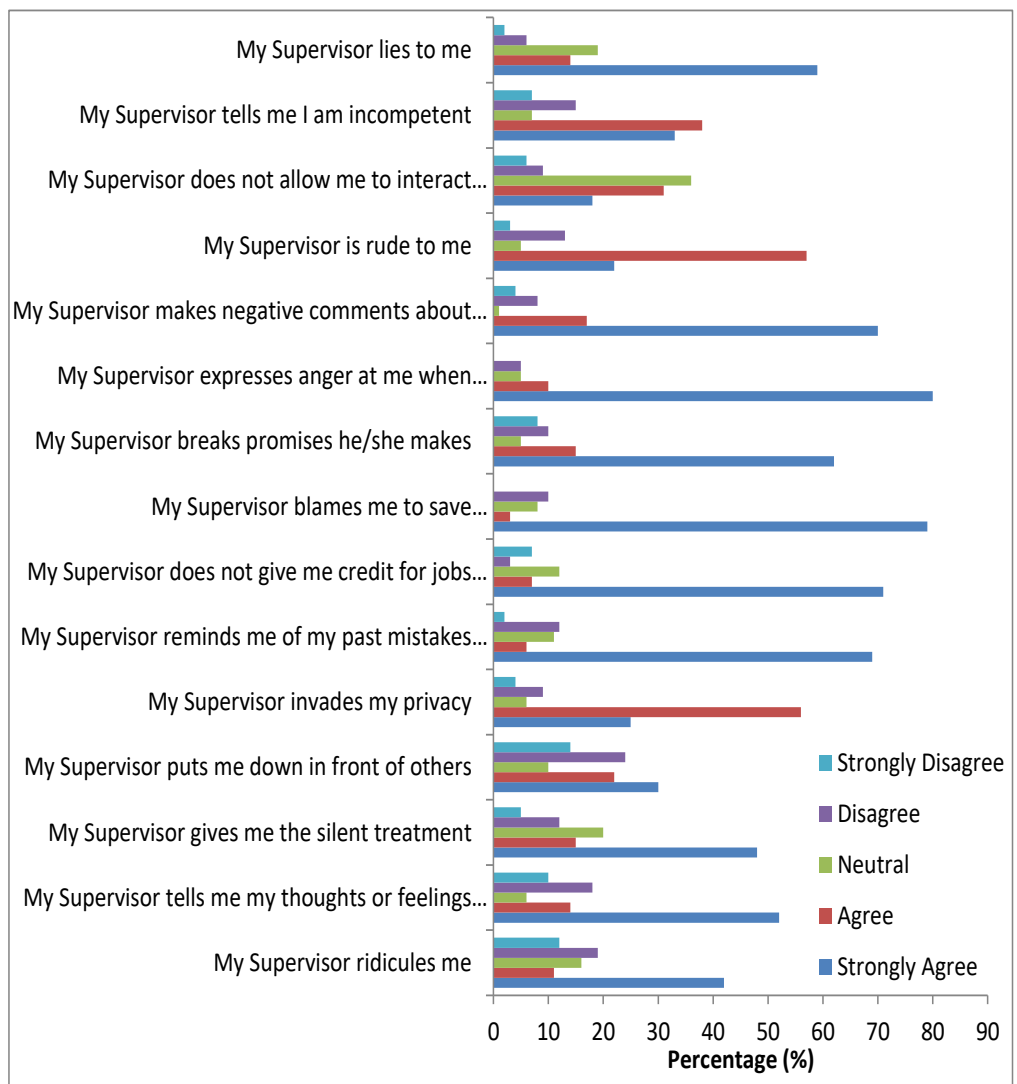


**Fig. 11.** Measures taken against Abusive Supervision

***Results of the Statements on the Supervisor***

The purpose of part three of the questionnaire is to seek opinions of the respondents regarding their supervisor at work. The results illustrate the fact that abusive supervision is a pain for most of the respondents. The statements

emphasize dominant abusive power for supervisors over their employees. Fig. 12 shows the responses on this part of the questionnaire.



**Fig. 12.** Statements on Supervisors

As results of this research, it has been noticed that the gender, age, educational and marital status will not give the wanted indications of which the abusive acts do really relate to them. For instance, a percentage of 69 male will not necessarily indicate that male face more abuse than female. It might only show that this organization in precise have more male employees than female. Thus, the screening questions were not taken into consideration while building the theory of this study.

On the other hand, the statement questions concentrated on the subject itself, have given very strong results that helped in clarifying the relation between expatriates and abusive supervisions. The findings from this part of survey have stated clearly that abusive acts are not being governed as proper in the organization. Policies are being listed with a lack of real implementation and that would in part result in increasing the percentage of abusive incidents.



Policies and procedures' main aim is to prevent the happening of abusive acts such as these indicated in (Fig. 12).

Some minor abusive acts have apparently been occurred more often and that can be concluded from the high percentages of some of them. For example, the case in which supervisors expressed anger with no clear reason have high percentage of 80 in compare to the other actions. Such acts could definitely have negative impacts on the performance of the employees and could likely have been prevented by assuring that the policies are being implemented in first place.

As the economy of this country is growing in different aspects, it was necessary for the organizations to accommodate with this rapid change by applying many theories such as expatriate employment. This movement has indeed resulted in many advantages and positive outcomes. However, it has also brought to attention other important disadvantages to be studied and researched such as the abuse acts faced by expatriates in Saudi Arabia. This topic has been a centre of focus for HR studies in precise, since it involves the human capitals and their rights which is one of HR major roles.

In having a more detailed study about the subject, this study has been conducted to further analyse abusive supervision from all sides and relate it to the previous proven theories. Several steps were performed to assure that all areas, factors and results have been included in the research. As a starter, a survey in which multiple questions were listed has been established. Those questions were carefully chosen to cover all the factors that might have any effect on the main subject of the research. The first part of the survey was developed only to clarify the status of the respondents and give a clearer idea of the nature of the answers.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study has clarified and proved that there is a serious issue that needs to be resolved in order to reach optimum successful results without jeopardizing the human rights. The main problem has been addressed clearly to prove the true occurrence of such issue and in order to find solutions some recommendations could be mentioned.

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