

Media Relations

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Entitlement-Minded Workers More Likely to Claim Bosses Mistreat Them, New UNH Research Shows



Paul Harvey, associate professor of management at the University of New Hampshire.

DURHAM, N.H. – Employees who have a sense of unjustified entitlement are more likely to say that their bosses are abusive and mistreat them than their less entitlement-minded coworkers, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire.

The research was conducted by Paul Harvey, associate professor of organizational behavior at UNH, and his research colleagues Kenneth Harris from Indiana University Southeast, William Gillis from the University of South Alabama, and Mark Martinko from the University of Queensland. It is presented in The Leadership Quarterly journal in the forthcoming article “Abusive Supervision and the Entitled Employee.”

The researchers found that employees who had higher levels of entitlement were more likely to claim their managers were abusive. The researchers also found that when they compared the responses of employees supervised by the same manager, entitled employees were more likely to report higher levels of abuse from their managers, even when their less-entitled coworkers did not.

People who exhibit “psychological entitlement” have unjustified positive self-perceptions and are reluctant to accept criticism that would undermine their rosy views of themselves, Harvey said.

They can be selfish, narcissistic and believe that they deserve

many more rewards and much more praise for their work than are warranted by their performance.

Harvey and his co-authors conducted two surveys for this research. The first queried 396 full-time employees about workplace abuse who, on average, had been with their company for seven years. The second survey asked the same questions as the first survey, but included additional questions for a coworker of each respondent. The second survey resulted in data on 81 pairs of employees and coworkers who had the same supervisor and who worked together for an average of about 21 hours a week.

Inaccurate perceptions of supervisory abuse fueled by a sense of entitlement by employees can be a significant problem for managers, Harvey explains. “These managers might find that any critical feedback or unpopular decisions are met with heightened abuse perceptions, impairing their ability to conduct these difficult, but occasionally necessary, aspects of their jobs,” he said.

And the potential for entitlement-minded employees to take retaliatory action against a supervisor “might pose a threat to the careers and livelihoods of managers if it provokes abusive behaviors or causes employees to view legitimate managerial behaviors, such as giving constructive negative feedback, as abusive,” Harvey said.

“The adage ‘perception is reality’ may apply in that entitled employees who believe they are abused by supervisors, accurately or inaccurately, will likely respond in negative psychological and behavioral ways,” Harvey said. “For this reason, eliminating abusive behaviors by supervisors might not completely eliminate the perception of abuse or the associated emotions and stress that can motivate retaliation by employees.”

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PHOTO

Paul Harvey, associate professor of management at the University of New Hampshire.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/harvey.jpg>

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