

# The Impact of Abusive Supervision on Quiet Quitting: The Moderating Role of Conscientiousness Personality Trait

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### Abstract

This study examines the effect of abusive supervision perception on quiet quitting. The study also examined whether conscientiousness personality trait has a moderating role in this effect. In this context, the concepts of abusive supervision, quiet quitting and conscientiousness personality trait were explained in a broad manner and research hypotheses were formulated for the relationships between the variables in line with the studies and theoretical theories. In study, the data were collected from public employees in a province in Turkey (Siirt) by using convenience sampling method. After eliminating those with missing data from the questionnaires, the remaining 156 questionnaires were deemed suitable for analysis. The findings of the study showed that abusive supervision positively affects quiet quitting and conscientiousness personality trait plays a moderating role in this effect.

*İstismarcı Yönetimin Sessiz İstifa Üzerindeki Etkisi: Sorumluluk Kişilik Özelliğinin Düzenleyici Rolü*

### Öz

Bu çalışmada istismarcı yönetim algısının sessiz istifa üzerindeki etkisi ele alınmıştır. Çalışmada ayrıca sorumluluk kişilik özelliğinin bu etkide düzenleyici bir role sahip olup olmadığı da incelenmiştir. Bu kapsamda istismarcı yönetim, sessiz istifa ve sorumluluk kişilik özelliği kavramları geniş bir biçimde açıklanarak, yapılan çalışmalar ve teorik kuramlar doğrultusunda değişkenler arasındaki ilişkilere yönelik araştırma hipotezleri oluşturulmuştur. Araştırmada veriler kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak Türkiye'de bir ildeki (Siirt) kamu çalışanlarından anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Anketler içerisinde eksik veriye sahip olanlar elendikten sonra kalan 156 anket analiz için uygun görülmüştür. Araştırma bulguları istismarcı yönetimin sessiz istifayı olumlu yönde etkilediğini ve sorumluluk kişilik özelliğinin de bu etkide düzenleyici bir rol üstlendiğini göstermiştir.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, the performance levels, organizational commitment and productivity of employees are directly related to the management styles and policies adopted in the workplace. One of these management styles is abusive supervision, which is emphasized to be very effective in the attitudes and behaviors of employees. Abusive supervision is defined as negative managerial behaviors such as ignoring, humiliating and belittling employees (Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervision, which refers to keeping employees under control in a way that triggers fear and feelings of worthlessness among subordinates, is also associated with discouragement and negative reactions (Bell et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2021). Although the way abusive supervision is exhibited is verbal, employees who are exposed to such behaviors may choose to cope with this situation in a counterproductive way (Ghandour et al., 2019). One of these counterproductive behaviors is quiet quitting.

In recent years, the concept of quiet quitting, which refers to employees' reactions to negative conditions in the workplace, has been defined as a situation in which employees fulfill only the minimum job requirements and avoid extra effort and responsibility (Klotz & Bolino, 2022). This behavioral model becomes more prominent especially in abusive management environments and jeopardizes the sustainability of organizational success. In addition, employees' reactions to abusive supervision style may vary according to their personality traits. Conscientiousness, one of these personality traits, reflects employees' tendencies to be planned and self-disciplined and can create positive outcomes in a challenging work environment (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Investigating whether conscientiousness personality trait plays a moderating role in the effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature. This study aims to examine the effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting and the moderating role of conscientiousness personality trait in this effect. The results of the study are expected to provide important implications for shaping management practices and policies and contribute to the literature to better understand the impact of individual differences on workplace behaviors.

## 2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

### 2.1. Abusive Supervision

The concept of abusive supervision, which was introduced to the management literature by Tepper (2000), is defined as subordinates' perceptions of the degree to which managers continuously exhibit hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors without physical contact. In the context of this definition, it is useful to mention the characteristics of abusive supervision. The first of these characteristics is that

abusive supervision practices vary according to the perceptions of employees. In other words, while one employee may see these practices as harassing, another employee may not see them as disturbing. Second, abusive supervision behaviors refer only to the behaviors themselves, not to the intentions of the actions (Xiong, et al., 2021). At this point, there is also the possibility that the action may have been carried out with the aim of increasing employee efficiency and productivity. Finally, it is emphasized that abusive supervision behavior is exhibited continuously, not just once. It is assumed that abusive management will continue until (a) the target terminates the relationship, (b) the abuser terminates the relationship, or (c) the abusive manager changes his/her behavior (Tepper, 2000).

Abusive supervision behaviors include using threats to intimidate, humiliate or violate another person's privacy, publicly criticizing, being rude, throwing tantrums, making threats, taking rash actions, coercion, withholding important information, and mocking in front of colleagues (Camps et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2019). Studies have shown that high perception of abusive supervision reduces positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and psychological well-being (Peng et al., 2014; Zellars et al., 2002; Fischer et al., 2021), on the other hand, it has been revealed that it increases undesirable outcomes such as deviant behaviors, turnover intention and counterproductive work behaviors (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Haar et al., 2016; Wei & Si, 2013).

## 2.2. Abusive Supervision and Quiet Quitting

Quiet quitting refers to employees' minimal fulfillment of their duties, as well as their reluctance to put forward new ideas, work overtime, and show up to work earlier than usual (Galanis et al., 2024). Quiet quitting is also generally defined as an employee's refusal to perform extra performance due to an organization's inability to establish a meaningful relationship with its employees (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023). Employees who prefer quiet quitting do not actually resign from their jobs, but they minimize their performance and try to avoid tasks that are not within their job descriptions (Formica & Sfodera, 2022).

The concept of quiet quitting originated in 2022 with a TikTok post by a user named Zaid Khan. In this post, Zaid Khan said, "You still fulfill your duties, but you no longer subscribe to the hustle culture mentality that work should be your life. The truth is, it's not and your value as a person is not defined by your labor." In this post, Zaid Khan played an important role in making silent resignation a widespread trend, especially among young people (Kerse, et al., 2024). When the reasons that lead employees to quiet quitting are examined; career barriers, not valuing employees, lack of employee autonomy, excessive workload, managerial attitudes and wage policies come to the fore (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023; Hetler, 2022). In addition, although quiet quitting is generally associated with Generations Y and Z with the

increasing trend, it can also affect employees from previous generations who are dissatisfied with organizational practices (Ellis & Yang, 2022).

The relationship between abusive supervision and quiet quitting can be explained by the “social exchange theory”. This theory suggests that there is a relationship between employers and employees based on mutual interest and benefit (Blau, 1964). Accordingly, abusive supervision damages employees' perception of organizational support and justice, which may lead to quiet quitting behavior by disrupting the mutual benefit relationship. In other words, an employee who is exposed to abusive supervision practices may stop making extra effort and show his/her reaction in the form of quiet quitting by thinking that the mutual benefit has been violated.

Tepper (2000) stated that abusive supervision leads to psychological disengagement from the job by reducing the emotional commitment of employees. This situation may result in employees performing only basic tasks without making extra effort. Mackey et al. (2017) argued that abusive supervision practices reduce organizational citizenship behaviors, which refers to voluntary contributions that go beyond the job description. Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) emphasized that abusive supervision negatively affects the social exchange relationship that employees establish with their organizations and this leads to a decrease in the level of effort of employees. In another study, it was found that employees who frequently encounter abusive supervision practices take less initiative in work-related issues and do not want to go beyond the tasks specified in the job description (Lian et al., 2012). Based on this theoretical framework and empirical findings, the following hypothesis was developed:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Abusive supervision positively affects quiet quitting.

### **2.3. Conscientiousness Personality Trait as a Moderating Variable**

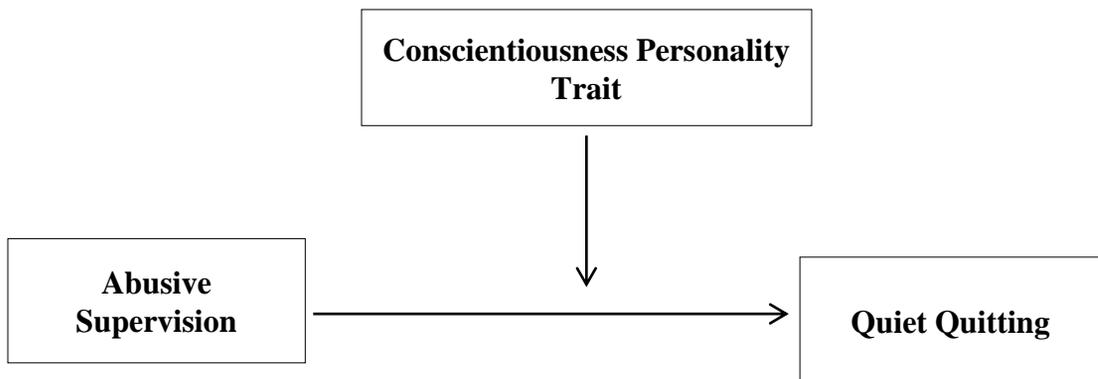
Conscientiousness is defined as individuals being cautious, organized, hardworking, thrifty, self-controlled, obedient and moral (Srikanth et al., 2022). It is also suggested that people with high levels of conscientiousness are less likely to be aroused by transient emotions (Kalokerinos et al., 2020). According to a study, conscientiousness personality trait is positively related to job performance, job commitment and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and conscientious individuals are able to control work-related activities even when faced with difficult conditions (Chen et al., 2020). In another study, Judge et al. (1999) suggest that employees with high levels of responsibility tend to fulfill their duties even in stressful environments. Smith et al. (2015), on the other hand, found that employees with a

sense of responsibility can maintain their job commitment despite being exposed to abusive supervision.

The relationship between conscientiousness personality trait and abusive supervision and quiet quitting variables can also be explained by the “social exchange theory” (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory provides a framework for understanding quiet quitting behavior of employees exposed to abusive supervision as a strategy of withdrawal from the relationship. The conscientiousness personality trait may play a moderating role in this process because an individual's personal values and sense of duty may shape his/her response to imbalances in the relationship. Accordingly, employees with high levels of conscientiousness may resort to quiet quitting when confronted with abusive management practices, despite the fact that they see the fulfillment of their duties as both a necessity of the social change process and a sense of duty. On the other hand, employees with low levels of conscientiousness may not resort to quiet quitting in response to abusive supervision because they already have difficulties in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. In this direction, the following hypothesis can be proposed in line with the mentioned studies and theories:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Conscientiousness personality trait has a moderating role in the effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting.

**Figure 1. Research Model**



## 3. METHOD

### 3.1. Sample of the Study

The population of the study consists of individuals working in public sector in a province in Turkey (Siirt). In this context, since it was not possible to reach the entire population, 156 employees were reached through convenience sampling. Although there are different opinions in the field, it is emphasized that a sample size of at least 100 will ensure the reliability of the analysis (Memon et al., 2020). When the demographic information of the employees who participated in the survey was analyzed, it was determined that most of the employees were male (62.7%) and married (65.8%). In terms of education level, bachelor's degree (53.8%) and in terms of age, 35 years and below (58.9%) were predominant. When the experience variable was analyzed, it was determined that the rate of employees with 9 years and above (35.4%) was high.

### 3.2. Scales

The data in the study were obtained through questionnaire technique. The first part of the questionnaire, which consists of two parts, includes questions about demographic variables, and the second part includes questions about the concepts of abusive supervision, quiet quitting and conscientiousness. In the study, the one-dimensional 5-point Likert-type "Abusive Management Scale" developed by Harris et al. (2011) and adapted into Turkish by Güğərçin (2024) was used to measure abusive supervision; the one-dimensional 5-point Likert-type "Quiet Quitting Scale" developed by Anand et al. (2024) and adapted into Turkish by Kerse et al. (2024) was used to determine the perception of quiet quitting. Finally, the one-dimensional 5-point Likert-type "Conscientiousness Personality Scale (2 items)" developed by Gosling et al. (2003) and used by Atak (2013) was used to determine the level of conscientiousness.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Scale Reliability and Validity Findings

Reliability analysis was conducted to determine the reliability of the scales used in the study. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for the scales in the study using AMOS 22 statistical program. The findings of the confirmatory factor analysis for the scales are given in Table 1 and it was determined that the index values were compatible with the values taken as reference and model fit was found. As a result of the analysis, the Cronbach's alpha values of the scales (CI = 0.964; SI = 0.856; SR = 0.631) are greater than 0.60. In addition, the reliability and validity of the scales were ensured as the CR values (SD = 0.970; SI = 0.890; SR = 0.720) were greater

than 0.70 and the AVE (Average Variation Extracted) values (SD = 0.850; SI = 0.540; SR = 0.570) were greater than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). These values indicate that the scales used in the study are reliable.

**Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Findings Regarding Scales**

Indexes	CMIN/DF	RMR	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
<b>Reference Value</b>	$0 < \chi^2/SD \leq 5$	$\leq .10$	$\geq .90$	$\geq .90$	$\geq .90$	$\leq .08$
<b>Three Factor Model</b>	1.860	.078	.953	.954	.944	.074

## 4.2. Testing Hypotheses

In the study, correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the variables. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Correlation analysis findings**

Variables	1	2	3
Abusive Supervision	1		
Quiet Quitting	,294**	1	
Conscientiousness Personality Trait	-,254**	-,318**	1

\*\*p<0,01

The findings obtained from the correlation analysis (Table 2) reveal that there is a positive relationship between employees' perception of abusive supervision and the variable of quiet resignation. Accordingly, it is concluded that regression analysis can be used for hypothesis testing.

Hypotheses were tested using Model 1 developed by Process Macro software and Hayes (2013). Abusive supervision was selected as the independent variable, quiet quitting as the dependent variable, and conscientiousness personality trait as the moderating variable. The findings obtained for Model 1 are given in Table 3.

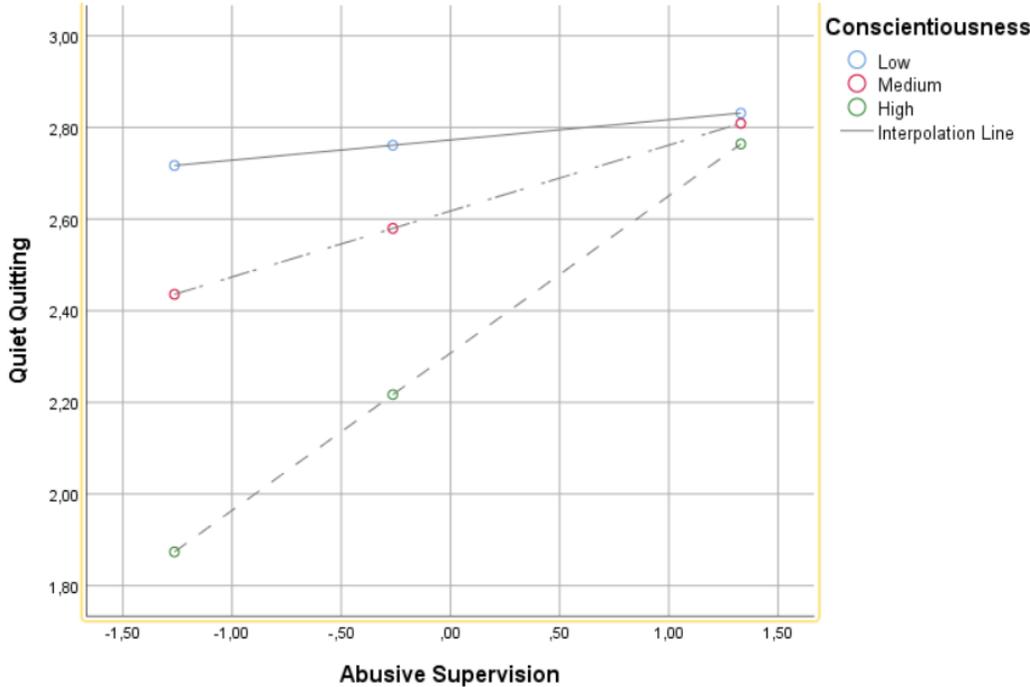
The findings in Table 3 reveal that abusive supervision has a positive and significant effect on quiet quitting (b= 0.182; p=0.004) and H1 is supported. Furthermore, conscientiousness personality trait negatively and significantly affects quiet quitting (b= -0.310; p=0.002); and the interaction term (abusive supervision x conscientiousness) has a significant effect on quiet quitting. Therefore, while increases in conscientiousness personality trait decreases quiet quitting, conscientiousness personality trait has a moderating role in the effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting.

**Table 3. Regression Analysis Findings (Model 1)**

Variables	B	Se	t	p
	.182	.063	2.912	.004
	[.0585, .3050]			
Conscientiousness Personality Trait (CPT)	-.310	.096	-3.231	.002
	[-.4998, -.1205]			
Abusive Supervision (AS) x Conscientiousness Personality Trait (CPT)	.200	.098	2028	.044
	[.0052, -.3937]			
R= .414	R <sup>2</sup> = .171	AS x CPT R <sup>2</sup> = .022		
*** p < .001	** p < .01	* p < .05		

Therefore, H2 is accepted. Moreover, in order to better see the moderating effect of conscientiousness personality trait, the following graph was obtained by conducting the necessary analyses (Figure 2):

**Figure 2. Graphical Representation of Responsibility Personality Trait**



The findings in Figure 2 reveal how abusive supervision affects employees' quiet quitting behaviors at low, medium and high levels of responsibility. The perception of abusive supervision affects quiet quitting behaviors more in employees with high levels of responsibility. In other words, this effect is stronger in individuals with high responsibility personality traits. On the other hand, the perception of abusive supervision has a very low effect on quiet quitting behavior in employees with low responsibility personality traits. Therefore, when the responsibility personality trait changes from high to low, the effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting behavior also decreases.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In today's competitive business environment, changes in employees' work motivation and commitment have a direct impact on the success of organizations. In this context, the concept of quiet quitting, which refers to employees fulfilling only their minimum duties, attracts the attention of both researchers and managers because it causes negative effects on organizational commitment and job performance (Güler, 2023; Kerse, et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to reveal the factors that cause quiet quitting behavior. On the other hand, the most important factor affecting the behavior of employees is the management styles that reflect the attitudes and behaviors of managers. One of these management styles is abusive supervision, which is defined as managers' continuous hostile, condescending and unsupportive behavior towards their subordinates (Tepper, 2000). When the literature is examined, the negative effects of abusive management on employees' satisfaction levels, commitment and turnover intentions (Harvey et al., 2007; Martinko et al., 2013) are discussed in detail. However, there is no study directly addressing the impact of abusive supervision on quiet quitting. This study focuses on the effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting and the moderating role of conscientiousness personality trait in this relationship. The following findings and conclusions were reached in the study.

Firstly, the finding revealed that abusive supervision leads to an increase in employees' tendency towards quiet quitting behaviors. Therefore, it can be stated that abusive supervision behaviors such as making employees feel worthless at work, not being appreciated and constantly criticized strengthen their tendency to quiet quitting. This finding is consistent with the negative effects of abusive supervision on job performance, commitment and turnover intention (Tepper, 2000; Martinko et al., 2013).

Another finding of the study revealed that the perception of abusive supervision leads to an increase in quiet quitting behaviors among employees with high conscientiousness personality traits. This finding also shows that responsibility personality trait has a moderating role in the effect of abusive supervision on employees' quiet quitting behaviors. When the graph is examined on the basis of

levels regarding this moderating role, it is found that abusive supervision has a higher effect on quiet quitting behavior in employees with responsibility personality trait compared to employees who do not have this trait. In other words, employees with low responsibility level tend to quiet resignation when they encounter negative and disturbing managerial practices. On the other hand, it can be stated that employees with high responsibility level are more affected by negative management attitudes and practices and tend to quiet quitting behaviors. This result shows that personality traits are an important factor in understanding the behavior of individuals working under negative management conditions.

The findings of the study have important implications for managers and organizations. First of all, it is clear that preventing the negative effects of abusive supervision on the performance of employees in the long term is essential for competitive advantage and success. At this point, practices such as leadership trainings, employee support units or coaching programs can be used to prevent managers' disturbing attitudes and behaviors. In addition, selecting employees with responsibility personality traits in recruitment processes can increase resilience against disturbing attitudes and behaviors encountered in the work environment. Finally, future research on the subject can be conducted in different sectors and cultures to provide new perspectives.

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