
META-ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE SILENCE AND ABUSIVE SUPERVISION

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SUMMARY

Employee silence has received growing attention in the organizational behavior literature. However, conceptual and methodological issues remain, particularly in the context of abusive supervision. This study examines how measurement decisions influence the heterogeneity of empirical findings regarding the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence through an exploratory psychometric correlational meta-analysis. Twenty independent studies ($k = 20$; $n = 6,990$) reporting Pearson correlations between abusive supervision and employee silence were identified. The results revealed extremely high het-

erogeneity, hypothetically attributable to differences in the operationalization of employee silence. The mean effect indicated a moderate positive correlation, although the prediction interval suggests that future studies may show effects ranging from negative to strongly positive, highlighting the potential influence of different forms of silence. The findings suggest that evidence on employee silence depends on the definitions and measurement approaches employed, underscoring the need to distinguish among subdimensions such as defensive, acquiescent, and pro-social silence, as well as other forms of silence.

Introduction

 Employee silence, understood as the deliberate withholding of information in the workplace (Dyne *et al.*, 2003), has received growing attention in the

organizational behavior literature over the past two decades, becoming a central variable in multiple theoretical and empirical models (Knoll *et al.*, 2021; Morrison, 2011, 2014, 2023). However, alongside this expansion, the literature has revealed persistent difficulties concerning its conceptual boundaries and the

consistency between its theoretical definition and empirical operationalization (Brinsfield, 2009; Sabino and Cesário, 2019), resulting in a field characterized by substantial fragmentation (Hao *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the employee silence construct presents challenges related to content validity and cumulative

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replicability, hindering the coherent integration of research findings.

This study specifically addresses measurement issues in employee silence, focusing on a particular context: abusive supervision, defined as the sustained manifestation of hostile behaviors by a supervisor toward subordinates (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, 2000).

To illustrate how measurement decisions influence the variability of results, an exploratory psychometric correlational meta-analysis of the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence is conducted. This relationship serves as a case study for examining the conceptual and methodological challenges in the field, given the persistence of contradictory empirical findings regarding the association between these two variables (Cheng *et al.*, 2024).

Accordingly, this exploratory study aims to illustrate how measurement decisions may plausibly be related to the heterogeneity of findings when employee silence is examined only partially in the context of abusive supervision. Based on the psychometric correlational meta-analysis, the study reflects on the need to distinguish more precisely among different forms of silence, thereby strengthening conceptual validity and the systematic accumulation of knowledge in this field.

Literature Review

Current measurement issues surrounding employee silence are not new; rather, they can be traced back to the origins of the organizational silence literature (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Since then, a discrepancy has been observed between theoretical definitions of the construct and the various measurement approaches employed in empirical studies. This heterogeneity has resulted in instruments that capture qualitatively distinct motivations and behaviors under the same nominal label of employee silence, thereby complicating academic debate: there is not always consensus regarding what is actually being measured when researchers claim to assess employee silence (Brinsfield, 2009; Morrison, 2011, 2014, 2023; Sabino and Cesário, 2019).

This issue can be examined in research on employee silence in the context of abusive supervision, given the inconsistency of empirical findings (Cheng *et al.*, 2024). In this study, a relevant source of this inconsistency is proposed to lie in the lack of systematic consideration of differences among the types of silence being measured. Accordingly,

the exploratory meta-analysis conducted in this study aims to examine how different operationalizations of the construct contribute to the heterogeneity of observed effect sizes.

Empirical evidence confirms this dispersion (Cheng *et al.*, 2024). Some studies report positive associations between abusive supervision and silence. For example, Kiewitz *et al.* (2016) conducted three independent studies using the defensive silence subdimension proposed by Dyne *et al.* (2003), obtaining small to moderate correlations ($r = 0.38, 0.14$, and 0.31). Within this framework, defensive silence is conceptualized as a self-protective strategy motivated by fear of retaliation, whereby employees withhold relevant information to avoid adverse consequences arising from their supervisor's hostile behavior, thus constituting a form of self-protective behavior.

Similarly, Xu *et al.* (2015) reported a positive correlation ($r = 0.36$), interpreting silence as a strategy for conserving emotional resources. However, these authors used a unidimensional scale adapted from Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), which was derived from Dyne *et al.*'s (2003) instrument, without explicitly distinguishing among the different motivations underlying silence. As a result, defensive silence and other dimensions were collapsed into a unidimensional employee silence variable.

In contrast, Dyne *et al.* (2003), whose items were adapted by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), explicitly distinguished among three types of silence: defensive silence, as a self-protective strategy; acquiescent silence, based on disengagement and low self-efficacy; and prosocial silence, aimed at benefiting others. Unlike Xu *et al.* (2015), Lam and Xu (2019) distinguished between defensive silence ($r = 0.17$) and acquiescent silence ($r = 0.27$), demonstrating that the magnitude of the effect size varies according to the underlying motivation, although they did not incorporate all the dimensions proposed by Dyne *et al.* (2003).

Other studies have reported even greater heterogeneity in effect sizes. Cheng *et al.* (2023) reported a stronger association ($r = 0.46$) using an adaptation focused on defensive silence, whereas Khalid (2023) reported an unusually large effect size ($r = 0.726$) based on a unidimensional conceptualization, without specifying the instrument used. In contrast, Rafferty and Restubog (2011) found a negative relationship ($r = -0.19$) when using the prosocial silence dimension from the same instrument developed by Dyne *et al.* (2003). This finding is conceptually consistent, given that this

form of silence is motivated by altruism rather than fear or resignation. Accordingly, abusive supervision is associated with lower levels of prosocial silence aimed at benefiting others. Likewise, several studies employing unidimensional conceptualizations of silence have reported highly variable results, ranging from weak to strong associations (e.g., Khalid, 2023: $r = 0.726$; Lee *et al.*, 2022: $r = 0.53$; Park *et al.*, 2018: $r = 0.15$; Xu *et al.*, 2020: $r = 0.30$; Zia and Ahmed, 2024: $r = 0.42$).

Furthermore, some studies have found no significant relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence. For example, Cheng *et al.* (2024) used the scale developed by Vakola and Bouradas (2005), in which silence is conceptualized as a behavioral dimension embedded within the broader construct of organizational silence climate. In its full conceptualization, this approach assesses perceptions of managerial attitudes and organizational communication opportunities, shifting the focus from individual motivation to the organizational context and examining employee silence from a behavioral perspective.

However, the potential of this scale for group-level analysis was not leveraged in Cheng *et al.* (2024) study. This is consistent with the majority of studies on employee silence in the context of abusive supervision, which adopt an individual-level approach without considering multilevel methodologies. Exceptions include Al-Hawari *et al.* (2020), who analyzed customer orientation climate as a collective-level variable moderating individual responses to abuse, finding stronger effects in contexts characterized by low customer orientation; and Xu *et al.* (2020), who conducted analyses nested by human resource managers to examine whether HR systems influenced the relationship between supervisor abuse and individual employee silence. The latter study found that certain high-performance work systems intensified the abuse-silence effect.

Nevertheless, no study has examined silence dynamics at the group level, with existing research focusing only on individual differences among employees. This overlooks the fact that employee silence constitutes one component of the broader phenomenon of organizational silence, which encompasses, among other factors, organizational policies, culture, and climates (Vakola and Bouradas, 2005; Morrison, 2000, 2011, 2014, 2023). Thus, evidence from various studies suggests that the magnitude, direction, and even statistical significance of the relationship between abusive

supervision and employee silence may depend on the instrument and dimension used. Furthermore, certain forms of silence, such as opportunistic silence, which is aimed at obtaining individual benefits (Knoll and Van Dick, 2013), remain unexplored in this context, along with other dimensions.

Moreover, as noted above, employee silence climate in the context of abusive supervision has not been empirically investigated. This is particularly relevant because each supervisor interacts simultaneously with multiple employees, meaning that an abusive supervisor may influence group dynamics, such as silence climates (Cheng *et al.*, 2023; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005; Morrison, 2000, 2011, 2014, 2023). Consequently, silence behavior may be subject to collective, rather than exclusively individual, influences, potentially giving rise to shared beliefs regarding the dangers or futility of speaking up in response to supervisor abuse (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020).

Accordingly, abusive supervisors may foster climates of fear and hostility (Camgoz *et al.*, 2024; Kiewitz *et al.*, 2016), leading employees to share experiences and adopt the beliefs and perceptions of their peers. Lam and Xu (2019) found evidence that highly politicized organizational contexts influence how employees respond to their supervisors. Nevertheless, abusive supervision has predominantly been studied in relation to silence from an individual-level perspective, thereby generating a partial view of organizational silence as a whole, without distinguishing among the different types of silence examined.

Methodology

An exploratory psychometric correlational meta-analysis was conducted to estimate the population-level magnitude of the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence, correcting the effect sizes for measurement error (Spearman, 1904). The procedure followed methodological guidelines for correlational meta-analysis in organizational research, incorporating correction for attenuation and Fisher's *z* transformation for aggregate estimation.

The studies were identified through a systematic search of the Web of Science database using the Boolean search term "employee silence." No other similar terminology was used because this construct is clearly defined under this nomenclature. Web of Science was selected because it is considered a database that indexes high-quality publications. The search was conducted on

February 28, 2026, including records from the beginning of indexing through the search date. The search yielded 576 initial records. Subsequently, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied in two stages: (a) preliminary methodological screening: only empirical quantitative studies that explicitly reported Pearson correlations (*r*), sample sizes, and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha, α) for the relevant variables were selected. This stage reduced the sample to 178 empirical articles; (b) the 178 studies were subsequently analyzed using selective coding (Webster and Watson, 2002; Wolfswinkel *et al.*, 2013) in ATLAS.ti software to identify studies that explicitly examined the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence. This process resulted in a final sample of 20 independent studies meeting the inclusion criteria for the meta-analysis. Some articles reported more than one independent study; therefore, each study was treated separately rather than each article being considered the unit of analysis.

For the 20 selected independent studies, a second selective coding procedure was conducted to extract the correlation magnitude (*r*) between abusive supervision and employee silence, the sample size (*n*), and the corresponding Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) for both variables. The extracted data were tabulated in a matrix for subsequent statistical processing.

Because the objective was to estimate the population psychometric correlation between the constructs, the observed correlations were corrected for attenuation using the classical Spearman (1904) formula: $r_c = r_{xy} / \sqrt{\alpha_x \alpha_y}$, where r_c is the reliability-corrected correlation, r_{xy} is the observed correlation, and α_x and α_y are the reliability coefficients of the two measures.

This correction is necessary in psychometric meta-analyses because observed correlations are systematically attenuated by the imperfect reliability of measurement instruments, leading to an underestimation of the true relationship between constructs.

The corrected correlations were transformed into Fisher's *z* scores to stabilize the variance and approximate a normal distribution of effect sizes. The meta-analysis was subsequently conducted under a random-effects model, in which study weights were assigned based on the combination of each effect size's sampling variance and the estimated between-study variance (τ^2). Finally, the aggregated results were converted back to Pearson's *r* coefficients to facilitate interpretation.

This procedure made it possible to estimate the average magnitude of the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence while correcting for measurement error and accounting for heterogeneity potentially associated with differences in construct operationalization. Table 1 presents the detailed results of the article selection process.

In summary, to estimate the psychometric relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence, the observed correlations were first corrected for attenuation using the Spearman formula, based on the reliability coefficients reported for the measures of both constructs. The corrected correlations were subsequently entered into the meta-analytic database and transformed into Fisher's *z* scores using the `escalc(measure = "ZCOR")` function from the `metafor` package in R. This procedure also allowed the sampling variance of each effect size to be estimated based on the sample size. The synthesis of effect sizes was conducted using a random-effects model estimated by restricted maximum likelihood (REML), implemented through the `rma()` function from the same package. Consequently, the weights assigned to the studies did not depend exclusively on sample size, but rather on the combination of the sampling variance of each effect and the between-study variance. The pooled results were subsequently converted back from Fisher's *z* to correlation coefficients (*r*) to facilitate substantive interpretation. This strategy made it possible to integrate the correction for attenuation of the correlations, the stabilization of their distribution through the Fisher transformation, and the estimation of between-study heterogeneity within a random-effects model.

Results

A random-effects model was estimated using the REML estimator in RStudio, incorporating 20 independent effect sizes (*k* = 20; *n* = 6,990), previously transformed into Fisher's *z* scores. The results showed high heterogeneity across studies, as expected. The *Q* statistic was significant ($Q_{19} = 653.34$, $p < 0.0001$), indicating that the observed variability exceeded that attributable to sampling error. Between-study variance was $\tau^2 = 0.0904$ ($SE = 0.0306$), with $\tau = 0.3007$, while the I^2 statistic reached 96.88%, suggesting that approximately 97% of the total variability was attributable to genuine differences between studies. The H^2 value of 32.03 indicated that total variability was approximately 32 times greater than would be expected from sampling error.

TABLE I
SELECTION OF INDEPENDENT STUDIES

N	Authors	Year	r	p	n	Instrument X	Instrument Y	alpha X	alpha Y
1	Zia and Ahmed	2024	0.419	0.464266	433	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.903	0.902
2	Xu <i>et al.</i>	2020	0.3	0.35035638	456	Tepper (2000)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.94	0.78
3	Xu <i>et al.</i>	2015	0.36	0.40022241	152	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.93	0.87
4	Wang <i>et al.</i>	2020	0.39	0.41945184	233	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.91	0.95
5	Park <i>et al.</i>	2018a	0.15	0.15790349	222	Tepper (2000)	Dyne and LePine (1998)	0.96	0.94
6	Park <i>et al.</i>	2018b	0.16	0.17681987	402	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Dyne and LePine (1998)	0.89	0.92
7	Mensah and Okeke-Uzodike	2025	0.43	0.53232664	227	Tepper (2000)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.87	0.75
8	Lee <i>et al.</i>	2022	0.53	0.55498143	555	Tepper (2000)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.96	0.95
9	Khalid	2023	0.726	0.87090123	484	Not reported	Not reported	0.883	0.787
10	Khalid <i>et al.</i>	2024	0.53	0.61354758	120	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.82	0.91
11	Kaur and Mittal	2024	0.201	0.22312518	420	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Peng (2013)	0.936	0.867
12	Camgoz <i>et al.</i>	2024	0.255	0.29616905	896	Tepper (2000)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.936	0.792
13	Bayhan <i>et al.</i>	2024	0.19	0.22429128	734	Tepper (2000)	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	0.92	0.78
14	Kiewitz <i>et al.</i>	2016a	0.38	0.4158037	143	Tepper (2000)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.96	0.87
15	Kiewitz <i>et al.</i>	2016b	0.14	0.15054634	267	Tepper (2000)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.94	0.92
16	Kiewitz <i>et al.</i>	2016c	0.31	0.34140224	162	Tepper (2000)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.97	0.85
17	Lam and Xu	2019	0.17	0.1827957	159	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.93	0.93
18	Cheng <i>et al.</i>	2023	0.463	0.54509532	475	Tepper (2000)	Vakola and Bouradas (2005)	0.836	0.863
19	Al-Hawari <i>et al.</i>	2020	0.36	0.42123274	335	Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.83	0.88
20	Rafferty and Restubog	2011	-0.19	-0.19902108	175	Tepper (2000)	Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.98	0.93

N: sequential number assigned to the article in the meta-analysis sample; Authors: authors of the selected study; Year: year of publication and, if the article included more than one independent study, a letter was added to differentiate the effect sizes; r: observed Pearson correlation; p: Pearson correlation corrected for Cronbach's alpha; n: sample size of the independent study; Instrument X: instrument used to measure abusive supervision; Instrument Y: instrument used to measure employee silence; α X: Cronbach's alpha of the abusive supervision variable; α Y: Cronbach's alpha of the employee silence variable.

alone. These indicators show an extremely high level of heterogeneity, hypothetically associated with differences in the operationalization of the employee silence construct.

This is consistent with the heterogeneous findings in research on employee silence in the context of abusive supervision, as results have varied in magnitude, with some studies reporting nonsignificant and even negative relationships (Cheng *et al.*, 2024; Rafferty and Restubog, 2011). When an instrument combines multiple dimensions into a single measure, thereby collapsing its dimensionality, the effects of

these dimensions may counteract or distort one another, which could explain part of this variability.

Nevertheless, despite the heterogeneity, the average effect size on the z metric was positive and significant ($z = 0.4060$; $SE = 0.0687$; $z\text{-value} = 5.91$; $p < 0.0001$; 95% CI = 0.2714–0.5405). When converted to Pearson's r coefficient, the mean effect was $r = 0.385$ (95% CI = 0.265–0.493), indicating a moderate positive association between abusive supervision and employee silence.

The 95% prediction interval (–0.196 to 0.766) suggests that, in future studies, the true effect could

range from a small negative relationship to a strong positive association. This range reflects the observed heterogeneity and points to the likely presence of moderators associated with differences in construct measurement, such as types of silence or contextual factors. For example, in addition to differences in how silence was measured across studies, cultural differences in tolerance of supervisor abuse may play a relevant role (Cheng *et al.*, 2024).

In summary, although the average effect indicates a positive and significant relationship, its magnitude and direction may vary depending

on the context and methodology employed. This highlights the importance of specifying how employee silence is operationalized and of measuring potential moderators associated with its different dimensions.

To assess model robustness and the potential influence of outlying studies, key diagnostic statistics for the correlational meta-analysis were examined, including studentized deleted residuals (rstudent), DFFITS, Cook's distance, COVRATIO, estimates of τ^2 with each study deleted (tau2.del), contributions to heterogeneity (QE.del), hat values, weights, and DFBETAS. The results are presented in Figure 1.

For the detection of outliers in the meta-analytic models, studentized deleted residuals (rstudent) were used. Study 9 in the sample (Khalid, 2023) presented a value of 4.54, clearly outside the acceptable range of -2 to 2 , whereas Study 20 (Rafferty and Restubog, 2011) showed a value of -2.19 , slightly beyond the threshold.

Methodological differences partially explain these discrepancies: Rafferty and Restubog (2011) measured only prosocial silence, excluding other types of silence included in unidimensional conceptualizations, whereas Khalid (2023) did not report the instrument used, making it impossible to determine which dimensions of employee silence were assessed. Although indexed in Web of

Science, Khalid's (2023) study presents replicability limitations that hinder the transparent integration of its findings into the meta-analysis.

Consistently, Cook's distance identified the same studies as influential: Khalid (2023) = 0.5313; Rafferty and Restubog (2011) = 0.2087, whereas the remaining studies presented values below 0.05. Excluding these studies affected the between-study variance (τ^2): in the full model, $\tau^2 = 0.0904$, which decreased to 0.0751 when Rafferty and Restubog (2011) was excluded and to 0.0421 when Khalid (2023) was excluded.

The contribution to heterogeneity (QE.del) decreased substantially after excluding Khalid (2023) (225.60 versus 653.34), confirming its central role in the extreme heterogeneity observed ($I^2 \approx 96.88\%$).

DFFITS values also reflected this influence: 1.04 for Khalid (2023) and -0.50 for Rafferty and Restubog (2011), indicating strong influence for the former and moderate influence for the latter. Hat values and weights were relatively homogeneous ($\approx 5\%$), suggesting that the influence of Khalid (2023) is attributable to its atypical effect size rather than to disproportionate weight resulting from its sample size.

Likewise, its COVRATIO = 0.5143 confirms an impact on model precision. Overall, the influence analysis indicates that Khalid (2023) is a highly

influential study that accounts for a substantial proportion of the observed heterogeneity, whereas Rafferty and Restubog (2011) exert a moderate influence. The remaining studies exhibit stable and consistent behavior.

Therefore, as part of a sensitivity analysis, an alternative model was fitted by temporarily excluding Khalid (2023) and Rafferty and Restubog (2011) to assess the robustness of the pooled effect size. This exploratory comparison does not imply that these studies should be permanently discarded; in particular, the findings of Rafferty and Restubog (2011) offer critical conceptual evidence regarding the relationship between abusive supervision and prosocial silence.

In addition, the forest plot in Figure 2 presents the 20 independent effect sizes corresponding to the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence, estimated as Pearson correlations with 95% confidence intervals under a random-effects model.

Figure 2 illustrates a statistically significant, moderate positive association between abusive supervision and employee silence. The diamond representing the pooled effect is positioned to the right of the line of no effect, and its confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that the population-average effect differs from zero. However, the plot shows substantial variability across

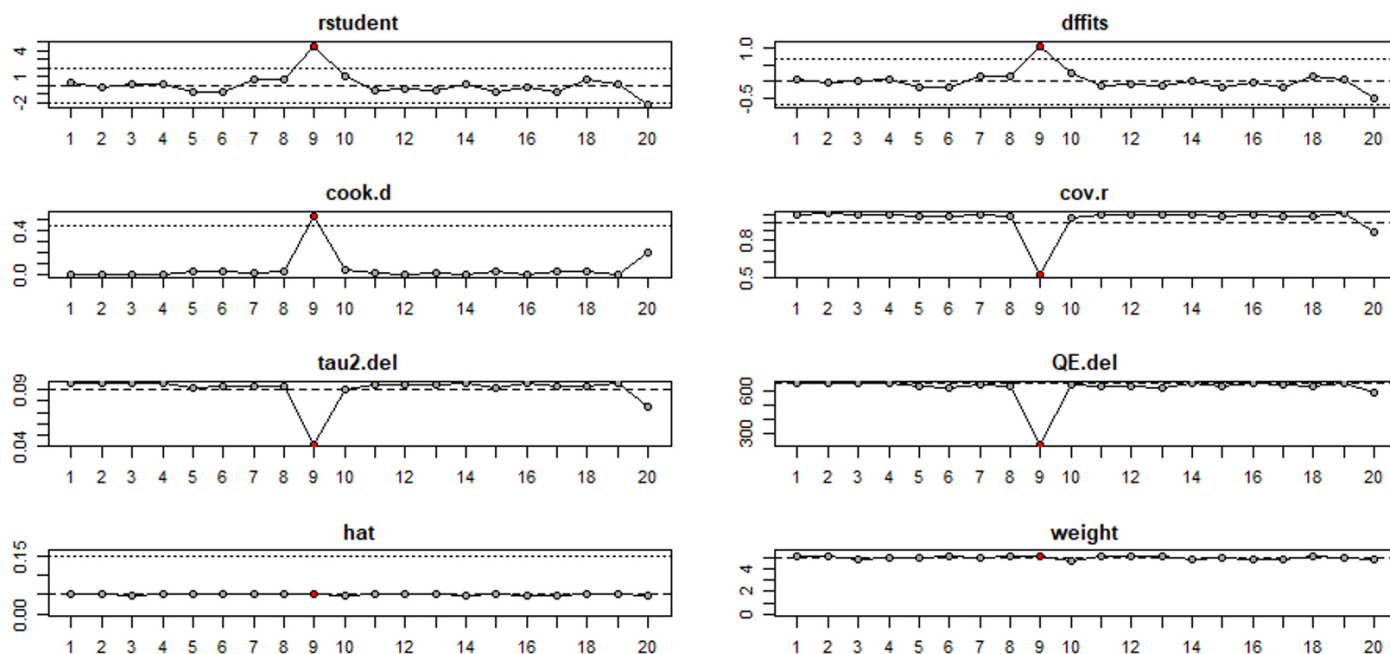


Figure 1. Diagnostic statistics. Source: Author's own elaboration.

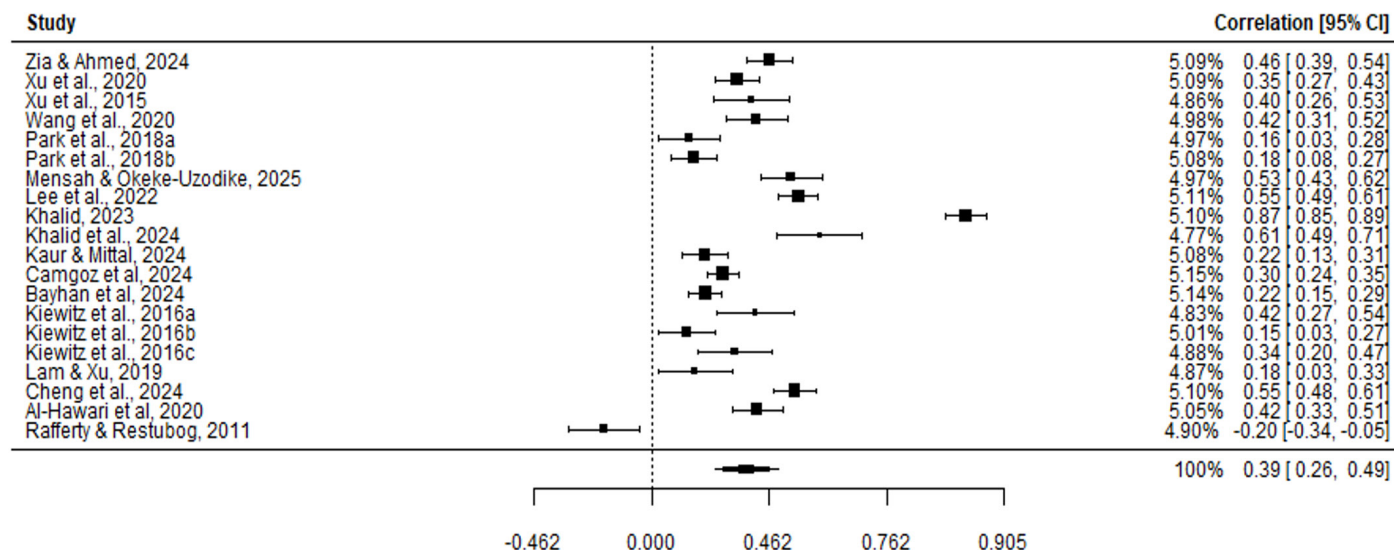


Figure 2. Forest plot. Source: Author's own elaboration.

studies, consistent with the previously reported heterogeneity ($I^2 \approx 97\%$).

Three main patterns can be identified in the plot: (a) consistent moderate effects ($r \approx 0.30$ – 0.50), with most studies concentrated within this range, indicating a relatively stable positive association across a substantial portion of the literature; (b) extremely large effects, highlighted by one study with $r \approx 0.87$, corresponding to the study identified as highly influential (Khalid, 2023), whose disproportionately large effect contributes substantially to the observed heterogeneity; and (c) effects close to zero or negative, with one study reporting $r \approx -0.20$ (95% CI $[-0.34, -0.05]$), reflecting differences in the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence when only prosocial silence is measured (Rafferty and Restubog, 2011). In this case, abusive supervision is negatively associated with extra-role behaviors, such as withholding information for prosocial purposes. This pattern supports the notion that different forms of silence are not uniformly associated with abusive supervision.

Therefore, the forest plot offers insights into patterns consistent with the central theoretical argument: while an overall positive effect is observed, the dispersion of effect sizes aligns plausibly with qualitative differences in the types of silence (defensive, acquiescent, or prosocial), the measurement instrument used (multidimensional versus unidimensional), cultural differences (power distance), and methodological factors. It is important to note that although most studies reporting moderate and

consistent effects used the instrument developed by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), some studies using the same scale reported different effect sizes, such as Bayhan *et al.* (2024), with $r = 0.19$.

In this context, to evaluate the stability of the mean effect size, a sensitivity estimation was performed by omitting these two highly influential studies (Khalid, 2023; Rafferty and Restubog, 2011). While Khalid (2023) presents reporting limitations, Rafferty and Restubog (2011) represents a substantive conceptual variation—focusing on prosocial silence—rather than a methodological flaw. The estimated average effect was $Z = 0.385$ (SE = 0.041; $z = 9.31$; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI $[0.304, 0.466]$), equivalent to $r = 0.367$ (95% CI $[0.295, 0.435]$), indicating a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation. This result is consistent with the initial analysis including the outliers, supporting the robustness of the estimated average effect.

However, heterogeneity remained high, although it was lower than in the full model: $\tau^2 = 0.0269$ (SE = 0.0105), $\tau = 0.164$, $I^2 = 90.28\%$, $H^2 = 10.29$; $Q(17) = 169.94$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that approximately 90% of the variability reflects genuine differences across studies. The prediction interval ($r = 0.053$ – 0.615) suggests that, in future comparable populations, the true effect could range from a small to a large correlation while remaining consistently positive in direction.

Therefore, the average positive association remains robust after excluding the extreme studies, although the persistent high heterogeneity suggests

as a plausible hypothesis that conceptual or methodological factors could account for part of the observed variability. The entirely positive prediction interval further supports the directional stability of the effect. The divergence and inconsistency in effect sizes across studies could be related to the unidimensional reduction of the phenomenon, whereby different dimensions may compete with and counteract one another to varying degrees depending on contextual moderators.

Discussion

The findings of this exploratory meta-analysis indicate that the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence is positive and moderate in magnitude ($r \approx 0.37$ – 0.39), supporting the notion that employees tend to withhold information in contexts of hostile leadership. However, the results also reveal extremely high heterogeneity across studies, suggesting as a plausible explanation that the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance of this relationship might depend on how employee silence is conceptualized and measured.

In particular, the observed variability is hypothetically linked to two main explanatory factors: (a) differences in construct operationalization, with the inclusion of specific dimensions, such as the prosocial silence examined by Rafferty and Restubog (2011), illustrating how abusive supervision may be negatively associated with altruistic silence while being positively associated with defensive responses; and (b) contextual and cultural factors, such

as power distance, organizational politicization, human resource systems, and workplace climates, which may influence how employees perceive and respond to abusive supervision.

Furthermore, these conceptual and measurement challenges are particularly relevant to organizational research in Latin America and the Caribbean. In regional workplace contexts, often characterized by distinct cultural dynamics such as higher power distance, paternalistic leadership traditions, and a high value placed on interpersonal relationships, the distinction between defensive, acquiescent, and prosocial silence becomes particularly critical. Relying on unidimensional or unvalidated scales adapted from other cultural settings risks misclassifying culturally shaped silence motives as uniform employee compliance or resistance. Therefore, advancing multidimensional and contextualized measurement approaches is essential for developing a more robust, regionally sensitive organizational science in Latin America.

These findings indicate that treating employee silence as a homogeneous construct may lead to misleading conclusions, distorting its relationship with abusive supervision depending on the silence subdimension considered, while failing to reveal the underlying motivational mechanisms that drive employee silence in contexts of hostile leadership. In this regard, the analysis highlights the need to systematically distinguish among different forms of silence and to consider both individual- and group-level analyses, including the influence of silence climates and collective dynamics, aspects that have yet to be explored in the context of abusive supervision.

Finally, although the average association is positive and consistent, the high heterogeneity suggests the presence of relevant moderators that should be incorporated into future research on employee silence in contexts of abusive supervision. This study highlights that the measurement and conceptualization of employee silence constitute plausible interpretative factors in understanding how its relationship with abusive supervision varies across studies, a principle that may extend to other variables or outcomes associated with employee silence. Therefore, future research should prioritize multidimensional approaches, group-level analyses, and consideration of contextual factors in order to strengthen theoretical and empirical validity in this field.

Conclusions

There is a positive and moderate relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence, but its interpretation fundamentally depends on how the construct is measured. The high heterogeneity observed suggests as an interpretative hypothesis that unidimensional approaches might distort findings by combining distinct motivations for silence. Consequently, the adoption of multidimensional models, together with the incorporation of contextual factors and group-level analyses, is recommended to achieve greater theoretical and empirical validity.

The main limitations of this study concern publication bias, whereby nonsignificant studies may not have been included because they were not published, as well as the exclusive use of Web of Science as the sole scientific database, which may have limited the identification of additional relevant results.

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METAANÁLISIS DE LA RELACIÓN ENTRE EL SILENCIO DE LOS EMPLEADOS Y LA SUPERVISIÓN ABUSIVA

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RESUMEN

El silencio de los empleados ha recibido creciente atención en la literatura sobre comportamiento organizacional. Sin embargo, persisten problemas conceptuales y metodológicos, particularmente en el contexto de la supervisión abusiva. Este estudio examina cómo las decisiones de medición influyen en la heterogeneidad de los hallazgos empíricos respecto de la relación entre la supervisión abusiva y el silencio de los empleados, mediante un metaanálisis correlacional psicométrico exploratorio. Se identificaron veinte estudios independientes ($k = 20$; $n = 6.990$) que reportaron correlaciones de Pearson entre la supervisión abusiva y el silencio de los empleados. Los resultados revela-

ron una heterogeneidad extremadamente alta, hipotéticamente atribuible a diferencias en la operacionalización del silencio de los empleados. El efecto medio indicó una correlación positiva moderada, aunque el intervalo de predicción sugiere que futuros estudios podrían mostrar efectos que varían de negativos a fuertemente positivos, lo que destaca la posible influencia de diferentes formas de silencio. Los hallazgos sugieren que la evidencia sobre el silencio de los empleados depende de las definiciones y los enfoques de medición empleados, lo que subraya la necesidad de distinguir entre subdimensiones como el silencio defensivo, aquiescente y prosocial, así como otras formas de silencio.

METANÁLISE DA RELAÇÃO ENTRE O SILÊNCIO DOS EMPREGADOS E A SUPERVISÃO ABUSIVA

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RESUMO

O silêncio dos empregados tem recebido crescente atenção na literatura sobre comportamento organizacional. No entanto, persistem questões conceituais e metodológicas, particularmente no contexto da supervisão abusiva. Este estudo examina como as decisões de mensuração influenciam a heterogeneidade dos achados empíricos relativos à relação entre a supervisão abusiva e o silêncio dos empregados, por meio de uma metanálise correlacional psicométrica exploratória. Foram identificados vinte estudos independentes ($k = 20$; $n = 6.990$) que reportaram correlações de Pearson entre a supervisão abusiva e o silêncio dos empregados. Os resultados revelaram heterogenei-

dade extremamente alta, hipoteticamente atribuível a diferenças na operacionalização do silêncio dos empregados. O efeito médio indicou uma correlação positiva moderada, embora o intervalo de predição sugira que estudos futuros possam mostrar efeitos variando de negativos a fortemente positivos, destacando a possível influência de diferentes formas de silêncio. Os achados sugerem que as evidências sobre o silêncio dos empregados dependem das definições e das abordagens de mensuração empregadas, ressaltando a necessidade de distinguir entre subdimensões como o silêncio defensivo, aquiescente e pró-social, bem como outras formas de silêncio.

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