



# Abusive Supervision: A Systematic Review and New Research Approaches

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Abusive leaders affect employees' emotions and health and produce counterproductive behaviors that cause economic damage to organizations. The literature has focused predominantly on the antecedents of abusive supervision and its negative impact, providing knowledge on mechanisms that link abusive supervision to consequences for subordinates. There has been limited research on the supervisor perspective, on the group level, and on recovery. This review makes three contributions: first, we examine the theoretical approaches used by previous research studies to understand abusive supervision. Second, we analyze the types of mechanisms that explain how and when an abusive supervision process occurs. Third, we identify and discuss applied methodologies and limitations. Based on the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis guidelines, and transactional well-being process perspective, we analyzed 171 empirical manuscripts and 239 samples between 2010 and July 2020. We identified a growth in abusive supervision research between 2018 and 2020 and found 101 different theories. Most of these theories view abusive supervision from a social, relational, or affective perspective, but seldom from an emotional perspective. We classified four types of mechanisms: simple relations between abusive supervision and antecedent-consequences (12), moderators (47), mediators (26), and a combination of mediators and moderators (86). We found that research has mostly been performed at the employee level or on dyads; studies that analyze the team level are rarely found. We identified two methodological problems: cross-sectional designs, which do not allow the analysis of its causality, and the increased risk of common method variance that may influence the results obtained *via* single-source data. In conclusion, the theories used have focused on employee perceptions, which have not enabled the broadening of the abusive supervision concept to include the supervisor's perspective and a recovery-related perspective. Research on how and when abusive supervision occurs analyzed with complex mechanisms using emotional variables and appropriate daily methodologies has been scarce. We propose a theoretical expansion including emotional theories to uncover emotional consequences of abusive supervision and the recovery concept to provide a deeper insight into abusive supervision process. We contend that longitudinal and diary designs that include teams and supervisor levels are necessary.

**Keywords:** abusive supervision, theoretical framework, mechanisms, methodology, recovery

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Abusive supervision (AS) is an important organizational concept that is present in empirical leadership research over the last 2 decades (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). AS is a type of destructive leadership that is seen in the literature as a relevant, prevalent, and toxic phenomenon that negatively impacts direct subordinates, teams, and the entire organization (Rousseau and Aubè, 2018). It leads to a wide variety of negative responses, such as workplace deviance, destructive attitudes, and daily counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) (Bormann, 2017; Eissa and Lester, 2017; Oh and Farh, 2017; Zhang and Liu, 2018). For example, employees under AS have increased turnover, emotional exhaustion, and aggression and reduced performance (Tepper, 2000; Aryee et al., 2008; Oh and Farh, 2017). According to Tepper et al. (2006), AS cost to U.S. employers \$23.8 billion per year, originated by absenteeism and legal expenses. Years later, Sharma (2018) on U.S. almost the fifty percent of workers has been suffered abuse. Also, AS was associated with loss of well-being for employees and increasing healthcare cost for companies and the 65-75 % of employees consider their supervisor to be the worst part of their job (Zhang and Liao, 2015; Zhang and Bednall, 2016).

For these reasons, since AS began to be investigated, scholars and researchers have raised the question “What is AS?” Since 2010, researchers have focused more on the antecedents of AS to understand and clarify why AS occurs (Tepper et al., 2017). AS is part of the dark traits of destructive leadership behaviors including authoritarian and laissez-faire supervisors who differ mostly with the level of negative effect over employees, distinguish the authoritarian leaders by the supervisor who employs total control and authority over subordinates, and the laissez-faire supervisors conversely are characterized by procrastination, elude responsibilities, and do not interact with employees (Tepper et al., 2017; De Vries, 2018; Breevaart and Zacher, 2019; Kelemen et al., 2020). Thus, AS is differentiated and defined as a process that is conceptualized as “subordinates’ perceptions, as the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Studies about AS have been performed from the self-regulation perspective to analyze the loss of stress-related internal resources, such as mental energy when subordinates blame the organization for the abuse received, the development of contradictory emotions, poor sleep quality, and damage to work-life balance as a precedent of AS (Bowling and Michel, 2011; Tepper et al., 2017), focusing mainly on the employee perspective. Mawritz et al. (2014a) mentioned the importance of organizational climate as antecedent of AS, as a hostile climate can produce hostile behaviors. In the next phase, the question “What are the consequences of AS?” was raised based on social theories such as social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), social learning theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977), and identity theories (Oh and Farh, 2017; Tepper et al., 2017). After 2013, researchers began to incorporate relational and affective theories to understand the negatives effects of AS on employees’ work engagement, psychological health, and well-being (Zhang and Liao, 2015).

However, the applied frameworks lead to inconsistent results when approaching emotion-related variables, combining increased negative and reduced positive emotions under the same theory. Positive emotions are stronger in relation to well-being, and negative emotions are stronger in relation to a problematic situation that needs to be changed (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Different theoretical frameworks should be used to adequately analyze the relationship between AS and emotions. To answer the question “How and when AS occurs as a process?”, new theoretical approaches using pure emotions (not mood or feelings), including resource theories, have been adopted to explain how emotions diminish employees’ capacity for self-control or how self-regulation serves as an employee resource (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Most of the research has employed moderators such as demographic factors, neuroticism, leader-member exchange (LMX), and employee empowerment or analyzed mediators such as intrinsic motivations, anger, and psychological distress. However, no studies have included recovery constructs as a mediator or moderator mechanism. The research mechanism focus has remained at the individual level (employees) (Garcia et al., 2015; Mackey et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015; Zhang and Liao, 2015; Meng et al., 2017; Haggard and Park, 2018). Thus, research that analyzes moderating–mediating mechanisms on dyads, for example, AS on both subordinates and a supervisor ( $N = 0$ ), and at the team level (mechanisms focusing on the AS perception of an entire group, including the group’s supervisor) is rare (Rousseau and Aubè, 2018; Taylor et al., 2019; Ogunfowora et al., 2021). From the methodological point of view, until now, the majority of prior investigations on AS have used a cross-sectional design and failed to establish causality or follow the cycle of mistreatment behavior. Additionally, most of the studies have been characterized by measurement bias and common method variance as the data were self-reported and obtained from the same source (employee). The results of these studies present methodological concerns for future research because they can be influenced by variable effects (Zhang and Liao, 2015; Zhang and Bednall, 2016). Hence, to answer the question of how and when AS occurs requires appropriate advanced research designs, such as longitudinal methods, daily studies, and multilevel analysis (Mackey et al., 2015). Since 2015, experimental laboratory studies of AS have appeared and have subsequently increased, and they now represent a new methodological resource that provides greater insight into abusive behavior (Kelemen et al., 2020). Moreover, previous systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the AS literature still do not offer a useful theoretical overview, focus only on few theoretical perspectives, and center purely on antecedents or just consequences (Zhang and Liao, 2015; Zhang and Bednall, 2016; Tepper et al., 2017). Also, previous studies did not apply the guidelines of the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) to analyze a complete panorama highlighting important aspects of previous research to offer a practical guide of empirical evidence for scholars and future research.

To address these shortcomings, this review analyzes the evolution of empirical research over the last 10 years regarding AS and its impact on subordinate outcomes. Well-being is

reflected under the sustainable development goals 3 of the United Nations (Nunes et al., 2016) as an important challenge. It is well-known that leadership styles impact employee well-being and health (Arnold, 2017; Inceoglu et al., 2018). Not only positive leader behaviors were found to be important but also abusive leaders can be considered an important organizational stressor leading to negative employee's affective outcomes (Yagil et al., 2011; Katana et al., 2019) and to unhealthy behaviors (Kelloway and Barling, 2010) impacting employee well-being. From the stress literature, we understand psychological well-being as subjective employee well-being (Keyes et al., 2002; Arnold, 2017), related to stressors from a transactional perspective of stress (Lazarus and Folkman's, 1984). Due to this fact, we review AS research under the theoretical transactional framework of occupational stress and psychological subjective employee well-being. To do so, we analyze AS definitions and the evolution of the diverse theories to explain the concept and relationship as well as its detailed mechanisms and conditions linking AS with employee well-being.

From our point of view, AS research needs improvement in three important aspects. First, the existing theoretical approaches seem to be limited in their consideration of emotions and recovery outcomes. In our opinion, future research should integrate these areas into a new theoretical model to understand more aspects of the AS process. Our review examines these previously used theoretical approaches and we propose future research approaches novel emotional theories. This allows us to see how emotional and resource theories from a positive resource perspective can help future research consider recovery methods and raise the question "How to recover from AS?" Here, we find a clear gap that should be observed because only a few studies understand AS as a process in which the employee can restore his or her internal resources and recover from a stressful situation that involves working under an abusive leader (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). Second, combined mechanisms are seldom analyzed pertaining to the entire team's perception. We contribute by identifying the lacuna of existing mechanisms in which research on AS, as a cycle process, can obtain detailed knowledge on how and when AS occurs as a process. Third, advanced research methods appropriate for analyzing complex processes and causalities are rarely applied, but they are necessary in diverse samples and contexts. We address this by summarizing the existing research designs highlighting what has been performed and what is needed to investigate AS in the future. To achieve these aims, we structure our review in three main sections: first, the theoretical approaches; next, the researched mechanisms; and finally, the methodological issues. We end with a discussion of the findings, and we provide suggestions for scholars and future research.

## 2 METHODS

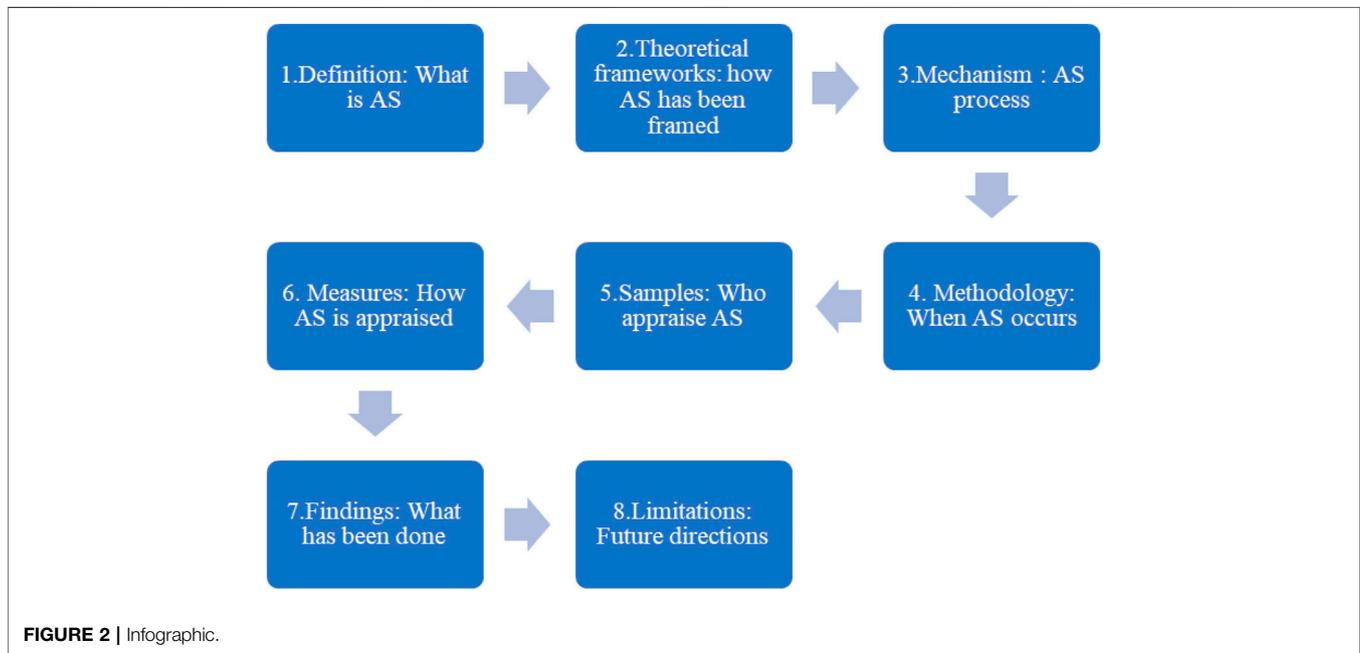
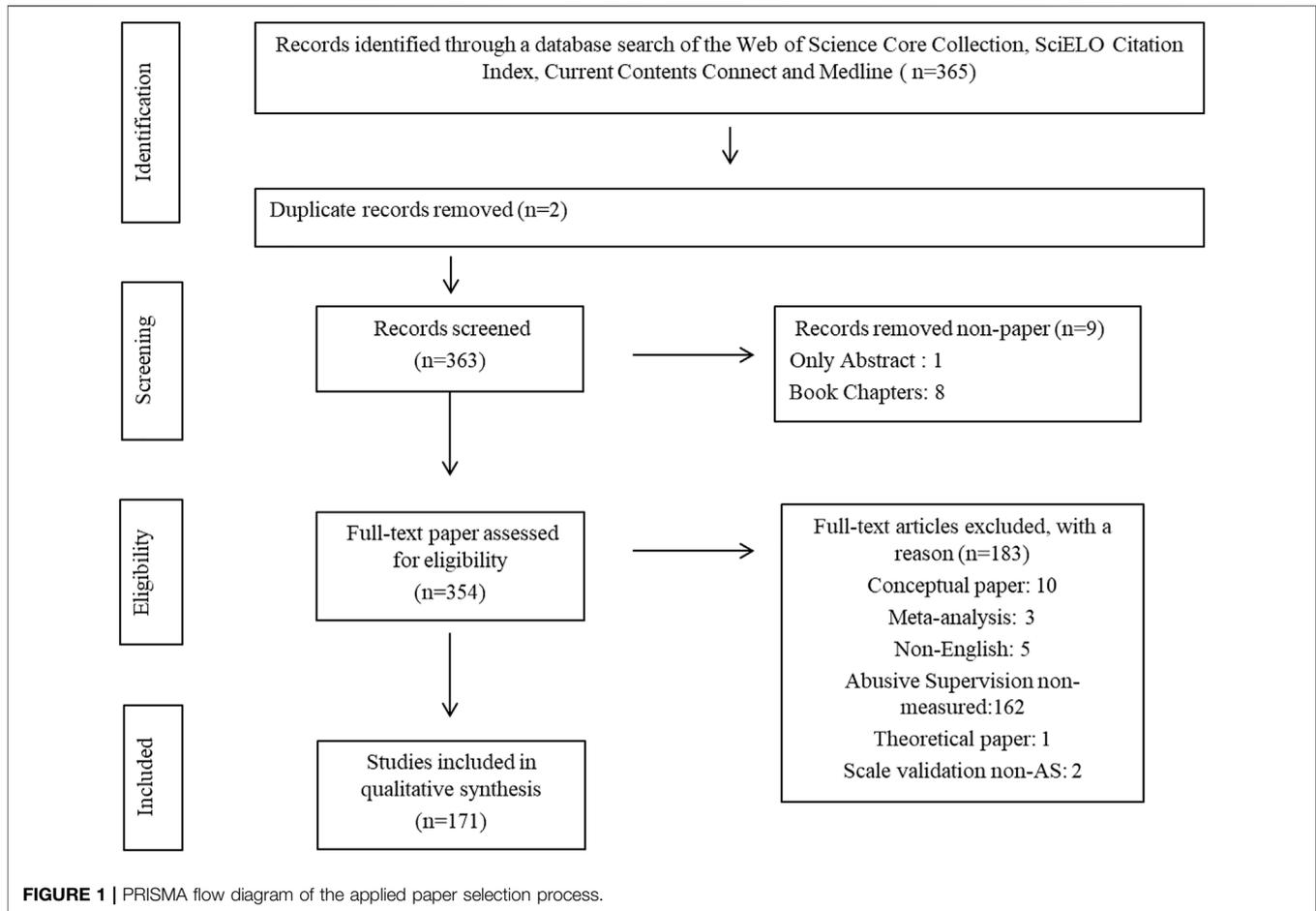
### 2.1 Literature Search and Inclusion Criteria

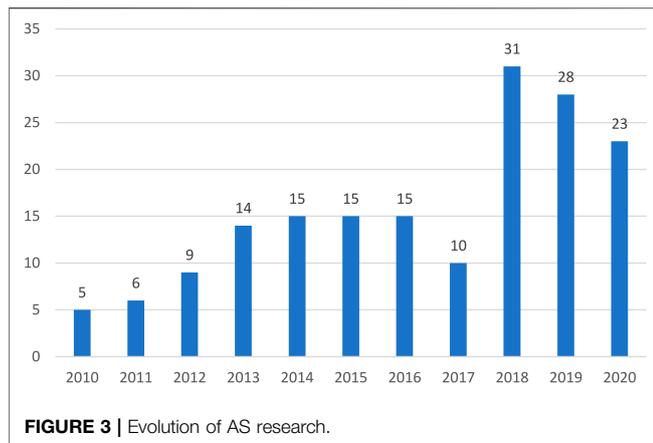
Following using the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, we assure to clearly identify, select, collect, and integrate results to analyze the

data included (Moher et al., 2009); we conducted our search *via* Web of Science (WOS) on relevant online databases (Core collection, SciELO Citation Index, Current Contents Connect, and Medline). We focused our search on articles that were published from 2010 until July 2020. Applying the search terms "abusive supervision" and/or "abusive supervisor," we screened and restricted our search for these terms to only the title, and we permitted auto-suggested publications. Following the indicators of previous reviews (Mackey et al., 2017), our search was limited to articles published in English. The first screening identified 456 relevant studies. Consequently, to minimize any bias from duplicate articles, we performed a second search by document type to identify only articles; according to Mackey et al. (2017), under these criteria, we can guarantee that a peer-expert review process of the included data has been applied, serving as a second filter by language (English). The second screening resulted in 365 potential articles.

### 2.2 Coding Procedure

In our process, the complete search procedure was replicated by a research colleague to avoid any bias and ensure the reliability of the process. In the next step, we focused our attention on screening and coding only those empirical articles that 1) included quantitative data samples, 2) incorporated AS as a measured variable, and 3) analyzed the relation between AS and other variables (Zhang and Liao, 2015; Zhang and Bednall, 2016; Mackey et al., 2017). Conceptual dissertations, abstracts, books, and unpublished studies were excluded. The screening resulted in a total of 171 articles that included 239 samples; these articles represented the final sample of publications that fulfilled our inclusion criteria. Below, complete and detailed information about the screening process is provided in a flow diagram (Figure 1). The final articles and samples were analyzed by the first author and reviewed by all three authors. Additionally, Fleiss' kappa was computed ( $\kappa = 0.98$ ). Under the theoretical perspective of subjective employee well-being, we first analyze and categorize the used definitions of AS to ensure they investigate AS to clarify the construct. Second, to identify how previous research framed AS, we code categories for the diverse applied theoretical frameworks. Third, we code the mechanisms that analyze the AS process and how the study is performed. Fourth, we analyze whether the study of these mechanisms and conditions was conducted with appropriate methodology (cross-sectional, longitudinal, and diary). Fifth, to understand who appraises AS, we analyze the samples (e.g., individual-dyads). Sixth, we analyze how AS is measured to investigate who assesses AS (e.g., employee, supervisor). Seventh, we summarize the findings on theory, mechanisms, and methods to highlight what was research. Finally, we categorize the limitations of previous research to present what is needed to investigate AS in the future. Based on the results, we make suggestions to expand existing theories and to offer suggestions for new research in AS. The following infographic shows the different steps (see Figure 2). The mechanisms were categorized as positive or negative in accordance with the outcomes. For studies that included more than one sample, we examined only the samples that measured and analyzed AS.





Following that, the authors and one external researcher expert on the topic reviewed the manuscripts to identify any discrepancy.

### 3 RESULTS

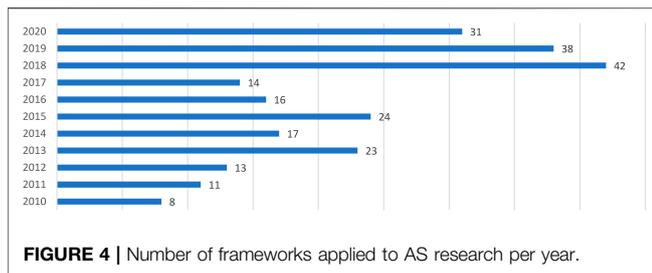
#### 3.1 Theoretical Approaches

First, our literature search provides evidence of a notable growth in AS research from 2018 to 2020 (see **Figure 3**). The literature examines the question “What is AS?” mostly from the individual’s (subordinate’s) perspective, analyzing antecedents and negative consequences (see **Supplementary Material**). We identified two prevalent types of theoretical approaches: the social-relational theories (e.g., SET, SLT) and affective theories (e.g., conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989) on the one hand and the affective events theory (AET) (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996)) on the other hand. Until 2015, AS studies predominantly used social-relational theoretical frameworks to analyze how supervisors emulate abusive behavior from familiar role models as an antecedent of AS and how employees engage in withdrawal actions, such as reactions in response to the abuse condition (Zhang and Liao, 2015; Tepper et al., 2017). Our literature search found 78 studies that reflected a workplace where AS occurs as part of the employees’ social context with relations and social support between individuals (Oh and Farh, 2017). However, these studies failed to address the behavior of the abuser and captured only the perspectives of the social-relational cycle of the employee and his or her coworkers, even when the supervisor had the most direct and close working relation with the employee. Further, it seems to be necessary to study whether AS is, based on the organizational culture, a learned process. This was, to our current knowledge, only studied by Mawritz et al. (2014a), approach organizational hostile climate as antecedent of AS. Generally, SET and SLT were applied to explain the AS concept (the 9.9%). We distinguished 27 studies that employed SET (6.4%) to investigate the interactions and relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate. Subordinate behaviors are influenced by supervisors and how supervisors treat them (Kim et al., 2015). Interestingly, none of these studies explicitly examined the supervisor’s perception under the SET framework. We

identified ten studies that, applying SLT (3.5%), showed how aggressive behavior can be learned. Additionally, none of the studies investigated the application of SLT to supervisors’ own perceptions of abusive behavior.

Second, to answer the question “What negative consequences do AS have?“, we observed that among health impairment and emotional exhaustion studies, the focus was on the loss of resources. These studies mainly used affective frameworks with COR (8.8%) or AET (3.5%), while stress and emotion theories were usually not applied. For example, with regard to research on internal resources (gain or loss), well-being, emotions, and exhaustion, our analysis showed 21 studies that mainly cited COR. Through COR, these studies approached the question of how the demanding condition of having an abusive leader absorbs the personal resources of followers and causes and increases their distress (Agarwal, 2019) and strain, which can lead to negative attitudinal and behavioral reactions (Lee et al., 2018; Park et al., 2018; Akram et al., 2019) and increased turnover intention (Pradhan et al., 2018). When positive and negative emotions as outcomes were analyzed, studies based on the COR perspective were unsuccessful because they analyzed both emotions as if they are the same without taking into account that some emotions can drive employees to different responses, such as assigning external culpability or taking internal responsibility (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). The AET perspective enables researchers to better consider that emotions differ from another, for example, anger and fear generate different responses and cannot be considered under the same negative dimension (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Through AET, we identified only six studies that analyzed whether individuals could have different responses and behaviors depending on the different affect-related events or experiences they confronted. Moreover, the studies analyzed how work overload affects supervisors and can cause them to have negative feelings, such as frustration, and engage in abusive behaviors (Eissa and Lester, 2017). Both the affective theoretical perspectives COR and AET show limitations when analyzing emotions. AET and even COR treat affective experiences, moods, and emotions in the same way, but they are different. An example is job satisfaction: it is not a pure emotion but an attitude; it involves cognitive aspects and behavior, but it is often analyzed only as an emotion (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Additionally, each emotion must be researched as a unique variable related to a unique emotional reaction (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Furthermore, the frameworks need to consider whether the variables are static or dynamic as AS involves continued mistreatment and, therefore, requires a specific daily study design and other frameworks for longitudinal measures. Additionally, the variables analyzed as events, affective reactions, and emotions that are short-term constructs can change continually, and these continual variations need to be captured and examined according to dynamic theoretical frameworks (Kelemen et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, we noticed a major evolution that seems to reflect an expansion toward other theoretical frameworks and may bring changes to future research perspectives: research started from social perspectives that perceived AS mostly as



**FIGURE 4 |** Number of frameworks applied to AS research per year.

social-contextual; it then shifted to the relational perspective, and it is currently moving toward affective theories, which are more focused on capturing the individual process in an AS (see **Figure 4**). In general, the evolution of AS research has been valuable and notable, highlighting how abusive supervisors directly harm individuals and organizations. Based on our review, further theoretical expansion is necessary to consider more affective and emotional theories. Taking the aforementioned into account, we can conclude the following. First, the use of social-relational theories can be considered a limitation because studies used these theories to consider just the individual perception when the social context requires interactions between individuals, for example, studies that include dyads, teams, or family members. Second, the use of affective theories can be considered a limitation because they examine static outcomes based on dynamic variables, e.g., emotions as being a short-lived variable. For future research, we encourage scholars to consider theoretical frameworks that include dynamic constructs and examine the relationship between AS and subordinates' subjective psychological well-being. Furthermore, we recommend daily studies that include emotional variables examined under the novel emotional process theory (Oh and Farh, 2017). Under this theory, employees' daily reactions and behavior modulations in an abuse process can be captured. Additionally, when researching includes studying the LMX as the construct, we recommend considering the AET framework based on how it was developed by Cropanzano et al. (2017), which integrates AET with the development of the LMX construct. These perspectives provide a very useful outline of how employees in an abusive situation will probably experience negative effects on work performance and quality of the LMX relationship and will, subsequently, experience feelings of injustice in comparison to teammates. See the appendix table for a complete analysis overview.

### 3.2 Researched Mechanisms in the Relationship Between AS and Its Outcomes

To answer the question "How and when does the AS process occur?", researchers have analyzed a large number of mechanisms that explain the relationship between AS and its consequences (see **Table 1**). We observe an evolution in AS studies ( $N = 171$ ), ranging from the individual level to more complex multilevel mechanisms as dyads and teams. Based on these studies, our results reveal that only twelve studies had simple relations and did not analyze any moderator or mediator, focusing on underlying simple relations between variables. Of these studies, five underlined organizational

**TABLE 1 |** Most frequent variables identified as antecedents and consequences of AS.

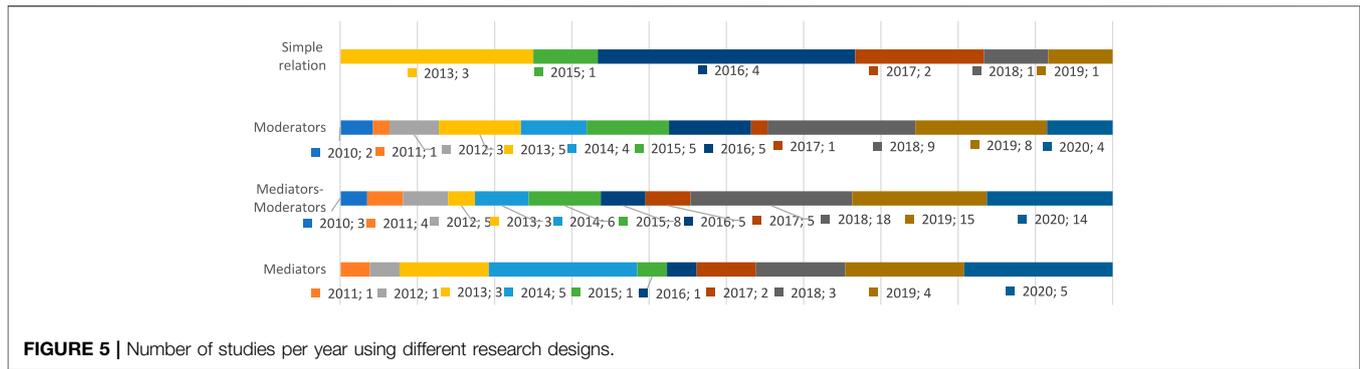
Variables as antecedent of AS	Variables as consequences of AS
Abusive supervision/supervisor	CWB
Family (support, conflict, and aggression)	Deviance (interpersonal, organizational)
Performance	Emotional exhaustion
Psychological (contract, entitlement, and safety)	Intentions (to quit, turnover)
Workplace (gossip, harassment, and stress)	Job (performance, withdrawal)

**TABLE 2 |** Most frequent variables identified as mediating/moderating AS.

Variables who mediate the AS model	Variables who moderate the AS model
Abusive (supervision or supervisor)	Abusive supervision
Anger	Attributions
Anxiety	LMX
LMX	Organizational (attributions, support, and tenure)
Psychological (distress, strain)	Performance
Self (control, esteem, and regulation)	Self (control, esteem, and directed)

constructs, such as the relation between AS and cohesion or type of resignation (Decoster et al., 2013; Klotz and Bolino, 2016), and seven studies examined individual approaches, such as creativity (Lee et al., 2013). These studies contended that AS emphasizes the relational aspect among the supervisor, the subordinate, and the immediate environment as a family. Additionally, we found 75 studies that examined AS at the individual level; they employed inadequate single-source data to study a social interrelation. By considering AS as a social-relational process that also includes an abusive leader, research can examine causal inferences that cannot be investigated with single-source data (Mackey et al., 2017).

Furthermore, we observe that the literature has predominantly focused on analyzing mechanisms that include moderators, mediators (see **Table 2**), or both related to AS-outcomes or outcomes-AS (159 studies) (see **Figure 5**). The AS literature has focused on linking the mechanisms with result-orientation to work overload, job strain, frustration, turnover intentions, and the consequences of subordinate frustration or authoritarian leadership (Kiazad et al., 2010; Eissa and Lester, 2017). Moreover, of the 159 studies mentioned above, thirteen examined AS as a mediator variable in research models with outcomes such as core self-evaluation and employee deviance (e.g., Klueemper et al., 2019). Also, eight studies investigated AS as a moderator of primary psychopathy and outcomes (Hurst et al., 2019). We also noticed that the mechanisms were based on different approaches: 61 studies adopted a personal resource view, and 55 had an organizational focus. Forty studies adopted an affective perspective, and only three employed a health approach. These studies showed improvements in terms of providing advanced knowledge on complex mechanisms: we found 78 studies that included dyad mechanisms; however, we did not find any studies that analyzed mediator-moderator



models that employed a complete dyadic-AS relation assessment of subordinate's and supervisor's own perception of AS. Only three studies provided a dyadic perception of abuse from subordinates and coworkers. Studies of complex mechanisms aiming to capture the entire team's perception of abusive behavior are scarce ( $N = 18$ ). With regard to the dyadic mechanism, we did not find any mechanism model that assessed AS for the entire team, including supervisors' own perception. A handful of studies attempted predominantly to analyze repetitive constructs (e.g., CWB, LMX, or intention to quit). This repetitive use of the same variables and outcomes can be seen as a potential issue in the AS literature as new evidence of and knowledge about AS are limited.

Additionally, AS research does rarely consider recovery: First, the AS literature has not attempted to include recovery outcomes in the mechanism. Only two studies included variables to examine how a supervisor can decrease his or her own abusive behavior and how subordinates can recover from an abuse situation. Second, AS research has not explored potential issues related to overcoming abuse. A limited number of studies ( $N = 2$ ) have attempted to analyze recovery factors, but they do not provide sufficient knowledge to determine how employees can recover from the damage caused by their leaders. Additionally, none of the previous research investigations of AS have considered a cyclical and continued process of mistreatment: for example, work overload may increase subordinate and supervisor stress levels, which can activate AS and, in turn, lead to low subordinate performance and increased work overload. This occurs because a continuous cycle of abusive behavior over time changes positive relations into negative and distasteful working relations (Simon et al., 2015). From our perspective, in many ways, AS research is still lacking with regard to two important mechanisms: examining AS as a cycle process and analyzing how employees under abuse

conditions can recover or how any negative outcomes can be reserved and lead to recovery outcomes. We encourage researchers to conduct future studies that explore this major problem, from the assumption that the negative phenomenon could be reduced or eliminated, to include mechanisms with positive variables and to consider recovery outcomes to ensure and improve the employee's health.

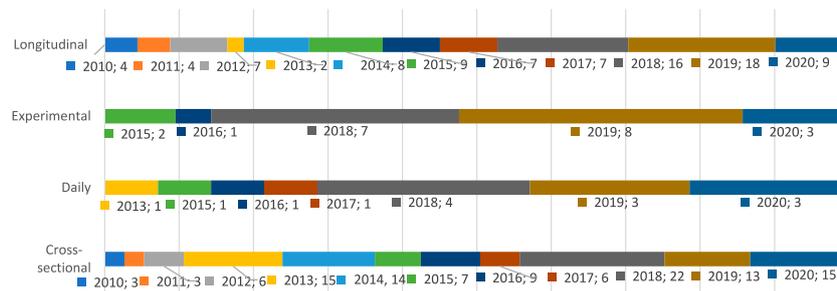
### 3.3 Methodological Issues

We found some interesting methodological issues. First, the studies we found mostly used an inadequate cross-sectional study design to study AS as a process. Even though AS has been found to be a dynamic, repetitive, and cyclical process and, therefore, must be approached as a continued mistreatment behavior (Oh and Farh, 2017), studies have continued to investigate AS as a static construct using a cross-sectional approach (113 samples), and these studies were limited by a cross-sectional design that involved collecting data at only one point in time rather than over time. It would be interesting to analyze these variables with longer-term data to allow us to see whether the damage caused by abusive leaders is persistent or just highlights unique patterns (see Table 3).

Second, we found 91 studies that used a longitudinal design to analyze the relationships between AS and outcomes and their causality, and this type of research continues to grow (74 samples were found after 2014). Also, this longitudinal-type study does have limitations: measuring using the correct time interval between waves is important because measuring at an incorrect lagged time can influence the variables (Jian et al., 2012). It is also important to conduct longitudinal studies when the AS process includes emotions and stress that vary over time and, therefore, require daily study. Third, we identified only a small number of daily studies (14 samples) since 2015. This sample is too small to gain a deep insight from the short-term construct perspective, and more studies are, therefore, needed to understand the dynamics of the daily AS process. Furthermore, we observed limitations such as time separation and missing control variables for the days (Wheeler et al., 2013; Barnes et al., 2015). We identified 13 studies with 25 samples that assess leaders' own perception of abusive supervisory behavior ( $N = 13$  cross-sectional,  $N = 6$  longitudinal and  $N = 6$  daily). We, therefore, call for more studies that apply multi-source design to appraise the leader's own perception as well as coworkers' reactions to understand

**TABLE 3 |** More frequent methodological issues.

Methodological issues	
Data	From the same source, online panel
Measures	Individual level, self-reported
Sample	Field, majority of one gender, size
Studies	Cross-sectional, hypothetical scenario
Variables	Influence from other variables, rather low, manipulated



**FIGURE 6** | Number of studies using different study designs.

how abusive situations are seen by the various employees who are involved (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Additionally, we found that the first experimental laboratory study appeared (3 samples) between 2015 and 2017. This methodological design increased between 2018 and 2020 (18 samples) (see **Figure 6**). These novel designs in AS research will allow future scholars and researchers to gain more insight into AS scenarios (Kelemen et al., 2020).

In conclusion, when looking at the distribution of methods employed over the last 10 years, we saw advancement from cross-sectional to longitudinal designs and the introduction of some daily designs. Additionally, movement from the individual level to multilevel studies was observed. However, more multilevel studies are needed to investigate the coworker and supervisor perspectives. The outcomes of our review show a promising future for research method AS methodology.

Our review results demonstrate the importance of the development of longitudinal measures. We encourage researchers to continue using these methods. Furthermore, the daily measure studies conducted at the individual level did not include victim and coworker perceptions. Measures of the supervisor's own assessment of abusive behavior are also underdeveloped. Measuring the effects of abuse on the victim and the victimizer is fundamental to understanding the entire abuse cycle. Tepper et al. (2017) point to the necessity of including the supervisor's self-reports of AS in relevant variables. Furthermore, we suggest researching the well-being of both, that is, the supervisors to show how to enhance his/her behavior and of the employee to reduce the damage. Finally, Farh and Chen (2014) mention the need to understand how AS is displayed within teams and impacts members' behaviors.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Our review contributes to the AS literature by providing a helpful overview of the last 10 years of research.

First, we identified that research on AS increased considerably from 2018 to 2020. Forty-eight percent of the total AS research was performed during these years. Research investigating AS has been based on four prevalent theories: social-relational theories, SLT (3.5%) and SET (6.4%), until 2015 and affective theories, COR (8.8%) and AET (3.5%), since 2016. There is evidence of a change

from the social perspective to the affective perspective of AS from 2010 to 2020, but related research measured AS as static and is rarely investigated as a process or as organizational behavior patterns, learning the abuse as a result from the organizational culture. More importantly, studies related to internal-individual resources and stress among subordinates are increasing and changing in their focus from self-regulation theory to resource-related theories, such as COR. This is because abusive leaders require more resources from employees, demand greater effort in relation to the workload, and expect employees to stay motivated, demonstrate good behavior, and remain engaged. To assess emotional variables to enhance the employees' psychological well-being, current research is mostly based on COR and AET (12.3%). Future studies should focus on the emotional arena to analyze emotions as outcomes using AET frameworks that integrate the development of LMX (Cropanzano et al., 2017) or the emerging emotional process theory (Oh and Farh, 2017), which will help in understanding AS as a process; studies should also include recovery outcomes. We encourage the use of moderation–mediation models that link AS with recovery outcomes, attempt to measure AS as a cyclical process, and assess more emotions as positive.

Second, the study results suggest complex mechanisms analyzing AS as an antecedent, consequence, moderator, and mediator. We also found a considerable number of multilevel studies that examined dyadic relationships ( $N = 78$ ). The principal problem we saw in the current literature is how dyadic models are studied. The dyadic mechanisms used in previous studies include dyadic relations in the model and structure but do not include dyadic measures. Researchers have failed to examine dyad samples by applying different variables relating to supervisors and subordinates. Future research needs to consider dyadic mechanism measures, and multilevel analysis needs to include supervisors' own assessment of abusive behavior. Additionally, future studies need to address AS at the team level.

Finally, under the theoretical perspective of transactional psychological well-being, our review recognizes that applied research designs are still insufficient. Many studies use single-source data, which results in common method variance, and these data are inadequate for capturing the relational nature of the AS process.

Research designs have seldom addressed the nature of the AS process because they have generally been cross-sectional, and fewer studies have used a longitudinal design. Even so, the use of

longitudinal designs has increased in recent years, although studies that collect daily data to help analyze the emotional aspects of the AS process—remain scarce. Future studies should apply more daily and multi-source measures to obtain better insight into the daily emotional dynamics of the AS process.

## 4.1 Limitations

As with other reviews, our current study has several limitations. First, we examined only empirical published manuscripts. This limitation did not allow us to analyze unpublished studies from scholars and investigations presented at conferences. Second, we focused only on AS research and did not include other studies on negative forms of leadership related to the abusive behavior of leaders. Finally, this review included data only from Web of Science (WOS).

## 4.2 Conclusion

Our review found and identified important aspects of AS framing our review under the theoretical perspective of transactional psychological well-being. We clarified the AS concept through the use of theoretical approaches. We synthesized, analyzed, and revealed how and when the AS process occurs, and which methodologies have been used; we also provided a detailed overview of what researchers have found and what is still missing in AS research. We hope these contributions will offer guidance and valuable theoretical and practical information to encourage scholars and researchers to continue the advancement of AS research.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/**Supplementary Material**; further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the study and approved it for publication.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2021.640908/full#supplementary-material>

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