



Supervisor undermining and driving errors in truck drivers: A moderated mediation model



Paul Sârbescu*, Coralia Sulea, Daniela Moza

Psychology Department, West University of Timișoara, Romania

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the detrimental impact of supervisor undermining behaviors at work on driving errors for truck drivers, arguing for the mediating role of burnout. Moreover, this research highlights the moderating role of general self-efficacy in the relationships between supervisor undermining and burnout, and between burnout and driving errors, respectively. The data collected from a sample of 190 Romanian drivers supported a moderated mediation model in which burnout partially mediates the relation between supervisor undermining and driving errors, while self-efficacy moderates both aforementioned relationships. The conditional indirect effect of supervisor undermining on driving errors was significant when self-efficacy was low and non-significant when self-efficacy was high. Overall, our results emphasize the negative impact that supervisor undermining and burnout have on driving errors, while also highlighting the buffering effect of self-efficacy.

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1. Introduction

Sometimes, people are targets of disrespectful acts from colleagues or supervisors such as being talked down or insulted. Such actions are coined under a broad term – interpersonal mistreatment at work, which includes various negative interactions among people (at work) that are costly and found in a variety of industries and countries (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2009). For example, negative acts from colleagues and supervisors represent an important stressor for bus drivers (Glasø, Bele, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2011). Interpersonal mistreatment plays a detrimental role for both employees and organizations (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010) and is studied under various forms (e.g., bullying, undermining and incivility). Such interpersonal acts have serious implications for relevant individual and organizational outcomes, such as strain and performance. For example, targets of mistreatment tend to avoid the perpetrator and are focused on dealing with such experience, therefore having fewer resources for job performance (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). In the following, we provide the rationale for deciding to study the way workplace experiences such as supervisor undermining impact driving outcomes.

1.1. Supervisor undermining, burnout and their consequences

Healthy and supportive relationships at work are valuable resources for individuals' well-being and performance (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2009). Recent research indicated that when being a target of negative acts at work, there is a serious

* Corresponding author at: Psychology Department, West University of Timișoara, Bld. V. Pârvan, 4, 300233 Timișoara, Romania.

E-mail address: paul.sarbescu@e-uvt.ro (P. Sârbescu).

potential threat of losing these kinds of work-related resources (e.g., [Glasø et al., 2011](#)). Specifically, undermining is defined as “A behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation” ([Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002, p. 332](#)). As supervisors play the most important role in coordinating and supporting truck drivers’ work, therefore the experience of supervisor undermining might negatively affect drivers’ well-being. We also believe that truck drivers are particularly at risk for supervisor undermining because they perform a somewhat socially isolated job, with reduced opportunity for contact with other co-workers. Therefore, in this study we focus on supervisor undermining (e.g., talking down to, belittling ideas) as a form of interpersonal mistreatment with possible direct/indirect consequences on driving outcomes.

The experience of supervisor undermining is related to burnout ([Sulea, Filipescu, Horga, Orțan, & Fischmann, 2012](#)). Burnout is a work-related stress reaction ([Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003](#)) which traditionally consists of three components: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of personal accomplishment ([Maslach & Jackson, 1981](#)). Recent research trends show a tendency towards the use of exhaustion (i.e., feelings of being emotionally drained and unable to recover; [Maslach & Leiter, 1997](#)) and cynicism (i.e., a negative and distant reaction to various work aspects; [Bakker et al., 2003](#)) as core dimensions of burnout (e.g., [Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006](#); [Kleinsorge, Diestel, Scheil, & Niven, 2014](#)).

Burnout has been acknowledged as a severe work-related hazard for almost four decades ([Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009](#)). Among its main antecedents, we find interpersonal factors, such as low level of peer and supervisor support ([Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986](#); [Kalliath & Beck, 2001](#)) and interpersonal mistreatment ([Maslach & Leiter, 1988](#); [Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & Melnerney, 2010](#); [Sulea et al., 2012](#)). Conservation of Resources theory (COR, [Hobfoll, 1989](#)) provides us with understanding of the link between supervisor undermining and burnout because when resources are at risk to be lost, actually lost, or inadequate for meeting work demands, burnout is likely to occur ([Wright & Hobfoll, 2004](#)). Moreover, continuous resource depletion is considered to be central in the burnout process ([Shirom, 2003](#)).

Furthermore, previous studies have argued for the mediating role of burnout between work stressors and turnover (e.g., [Leiter & Maslach, 2009](#)) or quality of care (e.g., [Van Bogaert, Meulemans, Clarke, Vermeyen, & Van de Heyning, 2009](#)). Recently, there has been growing interest in examining the effects of burnout on work outcomes, such as errors in the medical field ([de Oliveira et al., 2013](#); [Kang, Lihm, & Kong, 2013](#); [Prins et al., 2009](#); [Shanafelt et al., 2010](#)). However, implications for the transportation field have not been studied yet, does creating a research gap for the way workplace experiences impact driving outcomes. As driving errors often have critical consequences (e.g. traffic accidents; [de Winter & Dodou, 2010](#)), it seems quite important to verify the role that burnout might have between stressors and driving errors. Therefore, the first aim of our study is to examine the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between supervisor undermining and driving errors.

1.2. *The outcome: driving errors*

A widely used theoretical framework for studying driving behavior was introduced in 1990 by [Reason, Manstead, Stradling, Baxter, and Campbell](#). The aberrant driving behavior theory distinguishes between errors and violations through examining their different underlying mechanisms. Errors reflect drivers’ performance limitations related to attentional, perceptual and information processing abilities, whereas violations represent aspects of driver style and habits, developed after years of driving.

The relationships between both errors and violations and road accidents have been confirmed by a relatively recent meta-analysis ([de Winter & Dodou, 2010](#)). Although both forms of driving behaviors were previously used within models trying to explain road accidents, only a limited number of studies have been concerned with explaining driving errors. Furthermore, most of these studies focused on the relationships between personality factors and driving errors, very few centering on negative workplace experiences (e.g. undermining or burnout). Only limited research has been carried out on the relationship between pressure and speeding violations, showing a positive association between them in various age groups ([Møller & Hausteijn, 2014](#)). Thus, taking into account the detrimental effects of undermining as a significant interpersonal stressor, we focus on its relationship with driving errors, while also taking into account the potential mediating role of burnout.

The choice of using driving errors instead of violations is not a random one: because they represent performance limitations related to several abilities (rather than driving habits), it is more likely that they might be affected by undermining or burnout, rather than violations. Furthermore, as mentioned before, burnout appears to have an impact on work-related errors in the medical field (e.g. [de Oliveira et al., 2013](#)); thus, it is possible that it could also have an effect on work-related errors in the transportation field.

1.3. *The moderating role of self-efficacy*

Personal characteristics have been found to play a role in the relationships between work conditions and work outcomes. Particularly, self-efficacy plays a relevant role for better adjustment to one’s environment, with lower levels of strain and burnout across various professions ([Consiglio, Borgogni, Alessandri, & Schaufeli, 2013](#)). According to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), self-efficacy refers to “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” ([Bandura, 1997, p. 2](#)). More specifically, it is an individual difference aspect which refers to stable and global confidence in one’s coping ability across a wide range of demanding situations ([Schwarzer, Bäßler, Kwiatek,](#)

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