Studying Negative Aspects in Educational Leadership: The Benefits of Qualitative Methodologies

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Abstract	Article Info
The aim of this paper is to encourage researchers to employ qualitative methodologies when studying the negative aspects in educational leadership. To this end, I focus on one negative aspect in organization – abusive leadership and use it to exemplify the benefits of qualitative research and its potential methodologies. More specifically, I pose two questions: (1) How can the qualitative research improve our understanding of abusive leadership in schools; (2) what are the practical tools to study abusive educational leadership from a naturalistic perspective? Through qualitative research methods, researchers are likely to explore the complexity of human behavior and thereby generate deeper understanding of leaders' negative behaviors as well as of toxic interactions in the school. In this paper, I emphasize the epistemological contributions of qualitative methodologies to the research on abusive educational leadership and probe into the kind of knowledge we may gain when employing these methodologies.	

Introduction

The research on the negative elements in organizations has received much attention in recent years. Researchers have studied workplace violence, workplace harassment, psychopathic employees, abusive leadership, toxic environments, narcissistic leadership and so forth (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2022; Oplatka, 2016; Neall & Tuckey, 2014; Pelletier, 2010). Regardless of the term used, this kind of research focused on the negative aspects in the organizational life, exploring the 'dark side of leadership' or examining the effects of organizational maltreatment on employees and stakeholders, including teachers. These negative elements have been found also in schools worldwide (Khumalo, 2019; Oplatka, 2016; Wang et al., 2023)

However, most of the research on the negative elements relied heavily on quantitative research studies to provide its evidence base (Fischer, Wei-Tian, Lee & Hughes, 2021), and consequently there are concerns that limited methodologies are used to explore complex emotional and leadership issues in the workplace. A lack of interpretive, inductive knowledgebase is evident and the voice of the qualitative paradigm is missing, though.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to encourage researchers in educational administration and leadership to employ qualitative methodologies when studying the negative aspects in the school, be it on the teacher or the educational leader levels. To this end, I focus on one negative aspect in organization – abusive leadership and use this

organizational phenomenon to exemplify the benefits of qualitative research and its methodologies. This model of destructive leadership is most studied, according to the review written by Fischer et al. (2021). More specifically, I pose two questions: (1) How can the qualitative research improve our understanding of abusive educational leadership; (2) what are the practical tools to study abusive leadership from a naturalistic perspective?

Through qualitative research methods, researchers are likely to explore the complexity of human behavior, according to Johnson and Waterfield (2004), and thereby generate deeper understanding of leaders' negative behaviors as well as of toxic interactions in the organization. In this paper, I emphasize the epistemological contributions of qualitative methodologies to the research on abusive educational leadership and probe into the kind of knowledge we may gain when employing these methodologies.

In the rest of the paper, the model of abusive leadership is discussed to allow readers understand the current state of the art in the literature, followed by an analysis of the limitations of the quantitative methodologies used by and large to study this model. Then, the value of the qualitative research to understand abusive leadership is emphasized and practical tools to explore this kind of leadership are suggested. The paper ends with some ethical considerations.

The model of abusive leadership

Leaders are considered to be powerful individuals in organizations who wield influence over many aspects of employees' working lives (Fischer et al., 2021). Unfortunately, nevertheless, some leaders exploit and mistreat followers (Schmid et al., 2019) and ignore ethical and moral values. One model of leadership that has been

considered to have detrimental effect on staff is abusive or destructive leadership. Several definitions were suggested to depict this model:

> A subjective evaluation resting on "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000, p. 178).

> Volitional behavior by a leader that can harm or intends to harm a leader's organization and/or followers by: (1) encouraging followers to pursue goals that contravene the legitimate interests of the organization; and/or (2) employing a leadership practice that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers, regardless of justifications for such behavior (Krasikova et al., 2013).

> Destructive leadership in this sense would be defined as behaviour that directly or indirectly prevents organizational (e.g. quality and quantity of work) and personal goal attainment of followers (e.g. job satisfaction) (Chilling, 2009, p.103).

Tepper's (2000) original definition states clearly that abusive leadership does not refer to leader behaviors but to followers' subjective evaluations of these behaviors. After all, one employee could view a manager's behavior as abusive while another employee may view it as non-abusive behavior. But, sometimes the leader's unethical behavior is unquestionable; abusive leaders may engage in consistent hostile verbal and non-verbal actions towards a follower (Richard et al., 2020).

Overall, the experience of abusive leadership is subjective, including hostile and non-hostile verbal or non-verbal behaviors

towards subordinates that are not always intended, yet have some individual and organizational implications (Starratt & Grandy, 2010). For example, abusive leaders might inflict serious and enduring harm on their employees by using malicious tactics of influence that decay their moral, motivation and self-esteem (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Examples of these behaviors include demeaning teachers by criticizing their work or ideas in public, going behind teachers' back to attain their goals, concealing critical information needed to perform work tasks effectively, or negating the teacher's attitudes or abilities.

The model of abusive leadership is both dispositional (part of the leader's personality) and contextual (Krasikova et al., 2013). Abusive leadership may occur when a leader's goals are thwarted and threatened or when the leader's self-image and competence are on the line (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2022). Likewise, abusive leaders have a dispositional inclination to promote self-interest above the interests of others or the organization.

Numerous outcomes have been examined in relation to abusive supervision. It was found that abusive leadership influences direct subordinates, teams, and the entire organization and leads to workplace deviance, destructive attitudes, and daily counterproductive work behaviors (Bormann, 2017; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Many employees report losing their mental energy, blaming the organization for the abuse received, developing contradictory emotions, and experiencing damage to work-life balance due to their abusive leader (Bowling and Michel, 2011; Tepper et al., 2017). Abusive supervisors consistently humiliate their direct employees, undermine their privacy, remind them of their past mistakes or failures, break promises made to them, and put them down in public.

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While quantitative methodologies have provided much knowledge about abusive leadership and its antecedents and effects in a wide variety of organizations, based on large-scale survey, Gallegos et al. (2022), nevertheless, highlighted the gap in research on the outcomes of abusive leadership:

> 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 (p.1).

Their criticism leads us to the next section in which I analyze the limits of the current literature about abusive leadership due its overemphasis on positivistic, quantitative methodologies, at least in my view as a qualitative researcher.

The limits of the (quantitative) research on abusive leadership

Abusive supervision research, like many studies about the negative aspects in organizations, has been largely driven by quantitative studies, most of which have employed correlational designs (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2022). In many of the studies researchers have asked employees to make subjective assessments of leader behaviors instead of acknowledging their existence in their work life. Based on Tepper's (2000) 15-irwm measure of abusive supervision, researchers collected a single assessment of abusive supervision via employee ratings of their leader or leader self-ratings (Fischer et al., 2021).

According to Bhattacharjee & Sarkar (2022), the methodologies

used to examine abusive leadership raise several questions; how do the perception and subsequent rating of abusive supervision vary between individuals? Is abusive leadership a sustained phenomenon or changes every day? In their criticism of Tepper's scale they further illuminated the weaknesses and limitations of current researches on abusive leadership that do not necessarily reflect the reality:

> Different items in the 15-item scale have varying severity and consequently, they do not rise to the level of abuse. For example, one item in this scale, "My supervisor lies to me" differs in severity from "My supervisor ridicules me". A supervisor lying to his or her subordinate is an unethical act but it may not be deemed as abuse by the subordinate. On the other hand, a supervisor ridiculing his or her direct report would be perceived as abuse by the direct report. Since the 15-item scale comprises items that could be perceived as abusive supervision mixed with items that may not be perceived as abusive supervision, it becomes hard to interpret the total abusive supervision score when the frequencies of these items are summed up (p.4).

The weakness of subjective assessments of abusive leadership is reflected in other items in Tepper's (2000) scale. For example, 'ridicules me' (p.189) requires employees to judge if a concrete behavior can be classified as ridiculing. However, perceiving and acknowledging the existence of single behaviors is insufficient (Fischer et al., 2021). Some employees may consider a certain leadership behavior as a joke while others as ridiculing. Thus, in the spirit of Tepper (2000, "[t]he same individual could view a supervisor's behavior [here: a leader's joke] as abusive in one context and as non-abusive in another context, and two subordinates could differ in their evaluations of the same supervisor's behavior [here: joking]" (p. 178). Hence, conflating evaluations of leader behaviors with the behaviors

themselves impede both theoretical and empirical precision. Similar critiques have been levied previously and retorted (Tepper et al. 2017).

Likewise, 91% of the studies utilized survey-based, using convenience or snowball samples of participants drawn from a range of organizations, and many sought to examine causal hypotheses (e.g., employees' evaluations of abusive supervision cause employee turnover) (Fischer et al., 2021). The abusive leadership literature has centered on linking moderators or mediators with result-orientation to work overload, job strain, frustration, turnover intentions, employee frustration and authoritarian leadership (Gallegos et al., 2022). However, questions such as, when do we speak of abusive leadership? What are the negative/abusive intentions of these leaders? What are the contexts in which abusive leadership grows? Or what are the consequences of abusive leadership behavior? Remain relatively unanswered. Qualitative research may help fill the gap in this respect.

The possible epistemological-ontological contributions of qualitative research

What are the benefits of qualitative research to the study of abusive educational leadership? What kind of knowledge could be produced if researchers decided to explore abusive educational leadership from the view of the qualitative paradigm?

First, qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or open observations can help us initially understand employees' interpretations and their reactions to abusive leadership behaviors and how they respond to daily changes in these behaviors. Such studies involving small numbers of individuals selected on the basis of purposeful sampling can generate hypotheses to be more rigorously tested on larger numbers of participants, in order

to develop generalizable conclusions and test theory, as Thyer (2012) indicated. Thus, qualitative studies may enlarge our survey methods and include more elements and aspects of abusive leadership than we know todays.

Above all, qualitative research takes the view that reality is socially constructed by each individual and should be interpreted rather than measured (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Attention, then, is paid to diversity of perspectives of the participants (Fink et al., 2004) and their interpretations of the studied phenomenon are analyzed in light of the contexts in which they live and work.

In this sense, instead of trying to control extraneous variables when examining abusive educational leadership, qualitative research may explore the subjective interpretations given by teachers to an 'abusive behavior' and 'abusive leadership.' Their interpretive voices may extend our common definitions and constructions of abusive educational leadership, much beyond scholars had already conceptualized as 'abusive leadership behavior.' A support in this methodological conjecture we receive from Pelletier's (2010) study in which the researcher asked: "what are the behaviors and rhetoric of leaders that followers perceive to be harmful to their psychological or organizational well-being?" (p. 378). In addition, based on followers' social constructions of leadership, as illustrated by the basketball coach example, Pelletier further asked: "do followers agree as to what constitutes harmful leader behavior and rhetoric?' (p. 379). These questions allowed him to suggest a manifold view of abusive educational leadership that is based on psychological aspects of the observer or relational elements characterizing the leader-follower dyad.

Qualitative research may contribute also to our understanding

of the determinants and consequences of abusive educational leadership because it enables employees provide their subjective interpretations of the relations between abusive leadership and personal and organizational conditions/states much beyond what had been constructed in common scales of abusive leadership. For example, Chilling (2009) aimed to explore the experiences of leadership practitioners concerning the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences of negative leadership. He showed the impressive complexity of negative leadership, its antecedents and consequences, as explained below:

> The named antecedents emphasized obstacles to effective leadership rather than facilitators of destructive leadership. The most salient antecedents were the followers, the leader's immediate working field and role, and organizational processes, structures, and resources. The underlying idea is that the influence of leaders is rather limited: if the followers lack motivation, work ethics and competence, are fearful, and are not accepted by their co-workers, then the leader will not be able to execute effective leadership (p. 112).

The complexity of negative leadership (e.g., abusive leadership) and its subjectively- held relationships with personality and context is illustrated in Chilling's results. Similarly, in a qualitative study of 30 recruits in the Canadian service and manufacturing industry, Starratt and Grandy (2010) revealed that new workers had experienced emotional fallout from abusive leadership that included hopelessness, humiliation, anxiety, and physical consequences such as retaliation against the organization, distancing oneself from the abusive leader and leaving the organization. They also found that abusive leadership was detrimental to the organization as a whole, due to high employee turnover and the development of a destructive

organizational culture. Needless to say, the interpretive, narrative data allowed the researchers find new impacts of abusive leadership that had not necessarily indicated by past research that examined the relations between abusive leadership and predetermined dependent variables.

After all, researchers cannot hypothesize every potential impact of abusive educational leadership. We can just imagine how the results of Lavoie-Tremblay et al., (2016) indicting that abusive leadership practices had a negative influence on the quality of patient care and nurses' intentions to quit their job would look like if they used also a qualitative research design. Most probably, it would enable them better understand the subjective interpretations of 'quality of patient care' and the interpretive elements consisting 'intentions to leave the nursing profession altogether.' They would have received a manifold view of personal intentions within a larger context (e.g., the moment nurses began to develop intentions to leave, the abusive leader's behavior that broke their heart, and so on).

This brings us to discuss another major benefit of qualitative research - thick description of the reality that provides a detailed narrative and report of the researched phenomenon rather than a narrow part of it. In fact, qualitative research has a strong orientation to everyday events and/or the everyday knowledge of those under investigation. Data, according to Filck et al. (2004, p. 8), "are collected in their natural context, and statements are analyzed in the context of an extended answer or a narrative, or the total course of an interview, or even in the biography of the interview partner." Thyer (2012) further explains the contribution of qualitative methods to social work and implicitly illuminates some points that are relevant to the research on abusive leadership:

Qualitative methods can provide social workers with rich insights into the lives of clients and other participants in social work research. By talking with them clinically, informally, or within the context of a research interview, we can learn about their lives, their experiences with mental illness or psychosocial challenges such as poverty, sexual assault, abuse, and other issues. This information can be sifted using conventional methods of qualitative analysis for themes, commonalities, discrepancies, and convergences" (p. 120).

In other words, by talking with teachers informally and within their daily contexts we can learn about their experiences in the school, in general, and about their relationship with and perceptions towards their educational leaders, in particular. Thus, abusive leadership behavior can be analyzed within a larger context rather than a sole phenomenon in their working life and, thereby better grasp the place and influence of these negative behaviors on their work and well-being in life.

In this sense, qualitative research enables exploring how and when the process of abusive educational leadership occurs. Consistent with Bhattacharjee and Sarkar (2022) who reviewed leadership studies involving qualitative designs and noted that such designs help to examine how a leadership behavior changes in response to circumstances, researchers could trace the development of abusive leadership within a mosaic of contexts and along different stages. In this way, we could learn more about changes in abusive educational leadership in the long-run, and how it is influenced by evolving situations in the school and in its environments.

Qualitative research not only gives entry to employee perspectives, but also suggests a rich range of methods to explore varied aspects of abusive educational leadership. Our knowledge

about this kind of leadership should come from small, in-depth qualitative studies, as well as from information generated through a large-scale survey. For example, educational leaders and teachers can have quite different understandings of abusive behaviors, and these differences can lead to "ruptures in communication," resulting in pressure and distress. In this sense, the epistemological principle of qualitative research is the understanding of complex relationships rather than explanation by isolation of a single relationship (Flick et al., 2004). Let's exemplify these advantages through Fischer et al.'s (2021) insights into the research on abusive leadership:

> …The research base should be able to provide us with evidence relating to questions such as: How much, and how frequently does leader 'wrongdoing' result in evaluations of abuse? Should we invest time and money in selecting out abusive leaders and/or training leaders to be non-abusive? Should we focus less on leaders and more on increasing employee resilience or changing organizational culture? (pp. 1-2)

While quantitative methods are likely to answer the 'how much/frequency' questions, the practice-oriented questions in the citation may gain a lot from qualitative methodologies. For example, semi-structured interviews may generate subjective interpretations of abusive vs. non-abusive leadership behaviors and unearth the process through which an abusive leadership behavior emerges. Interviewees may expose how they responded to abusive educational leadership in a certain negative event in the school or elaborate on the ways in which they minimize abusive leadership behaviors in their workplace. This, in turn, will help researchers answer the second and third questions posed above by Fischer et al. (2021).

Practical tools to study abusive leadership from a qualitative stance

Of the common methods in qualitative research, the semi-structured interview and open observation can contribute a lot to our understanding of abusive educational leadership. But, it is suitable to research design whose sample focuses on a particular group of participants, i.e., those teachers who have experienced abusive educational leadership in their workplace and are ready to talk about it with the researcher.

The semi-structured interview. This type of interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, including a set of topics to be discussed in depth through a careful questioning and listening approach. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) emphasized the strengths of this interview:

> The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations (p. 1).

The interview allows disclosing the interviewee's personal experiences, life histories, and feelings, and is useful for gaining in-depth information about sensitive topics and contextual influences upon the researched phenomenon (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011) such as abusive leadership. The interviewee can provide rationales, explanations, and justifications for their actions, feelings, and attitudes, as Tracy (2013) explains:

> Qualitative interviews provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energizing… They can explain why they employ certain clichés, jargon, or slang (p.132).

Back to our issue, through a semi-structured interview, the researcher may receive information about the jargon or clichés teachers use when feeling abused by their educational leaders or when evaluating a certain leadership behavior as non-abusive. Teachers as interviewees can be asked to reflect on abusive experiences in the school and connect them to their broader life experiences, colleagues, personality, personal histories, and so forth.

As far as a semi-structured interview is concerned, its flexibility by questioning and structure allows the emergence of new topics and findings during the conversation, but at the same time requires thorough preparation before the interview meeting begins and careful listening throughout the conversation (Gillham, 2005). Thus, although an interview meeting about abusive behaviors and destructive leadership might evoke negative emotions among interviewers (Oplatka, 2018), the interviewer should be on the alert and listen very carefully to the interviewee in order to be able to ask questions in response to his or her statements, stories, feelings, interpretation, and meanings. The questioning, then, is not based on a set of questions that must be asked in a particular order. For example, in their study about child abuse, Hoskins & Kunkel (2020) used ethnographic interviews to trace the abusive experiences of their participants. The following citation illustrates the flexible aspect of the qualitative interviewing:

> …Interviews were conducted with a foundational knowledge about interview participants that informed the use of the interview protocol and allowed for individualized and nuanced follow-up questions. For example, when a participant mentioned in the weekly group meeting that they had their first experience of childhood adversity when they were only 5-years-old, [the interviewer] was able to use that information to make questions more focused and precise in the interview

process. Instead of asking, "When was the first time you remember experiencing abuse?" [The interviewer] was able to ask, "In group, you mentioned that your first memory of abuse was when you were 5-yearsold? Would you mind telling me more about that experience?" This strategy allowed for greater fluidity and depth in the conversation and resulted in more efficient use of time and arguably a greater degree of disclosure from participants (p. 1031).

Note, however, that as a result of taking part in the interview, any employee (i.e., the interviewee) may start thinking about aspects of abusive educational leadership and in a new or different way, thereby allowing new knowledge and understanding about this and related negative elements in the workplace. The questions in Table One may help researchers write an interview guide in their study about abusive leadership and still remain flexible, asking further questions during the interview meeting. They are formed based on current surveys of abusive leadership and reshaped to accommodate the principles of qualitative research. I encourage researchers to use them in their research on abusive leadership in educational organizations.

Table 1.
A sample of questions from an interview Guide:

1	Could you indicate several harmful behaviors in your workplace? Whose behaviors are they? (e.g. co-workers, superiors)
2	What would you consider 'a toxic work environment'? Why? Please explain.
3	How would you define an abusive or toxic leadership? Why?
4	What kind of behaviors abusive leaders express in the workplace?
5	Have you ever experienced abusive leadership in your job? If not, how could you explain your good luck? If yes, why do you think it was abusive?

6	Can you describe your relationships with your boss/superior/manager? What are the good/bad aspects of it? What are the destructive/abusive aspects in these relationships?
7	When is the first time you can remember being treated cruelly in the workplace?
8	How did you feel after experiencing an abusive leadership behavior?
9	How does it feel to talk about it?
10	Could you think of any positive consequences of abusive leadership?
11	What, in your view, caused your manager to express abusive behaviors?
12	How did you react when feeling abused by your manager?
13	How do leaders demean or intimidate their subordinates? Have you ever experienced these behaviors in your workplace?
14	How is it to work with a manager who marginalize and demoralize subordinates?
15	How does an abusive leader look like?
16	Who are the victims of abusive leaders?

The interview guide includes questions designed to elicit types and prevalence of adverse leadership behaviors and experiences. It also contains questions that encourage storytelling, one of the richest methods of data collection, because it enables employees to 'tell it as it was' and facilitates an understanding of the richness of a personal event and the factors surrounding it. The personal story enables putting the abusive behavior in context, providing insight into the abusive event per se.

Observation. Consistent with Chai et al. (2021), the observational method is particularly suitable in exploring situations in which discrepancies exist between what people do and what they say (e.g., the leader denies behaving abusively), and in complex interactions that involve an environment or physical context (e.g., abusive leadership behaviors may occur in particular contexts or be disguised by other behaviors).

Observation is used as a research method in two distinct ways – structured and unstructured (Pretzlik 1994). While the former way pertains to the positivistic paradigm, the latter is grounded in the naturalistic one and is used to understand and interpret cultural behavior within a particular context (Mulhall, 2003). Researchers using unstructured methods usually enter 'the field' with no predetermined notions as to the discrete behaviors that they might observe. Thus, unstructured observations can provide insight into interactions between abusive educational leaders and their subordinates (i.e., teachers) individually or with a group of employees and are likely to illustrate the whole picture of abusive leadership behaviors, from their beginning through employees' responses until their end. Thus, unstructured observations may capture the context in which abusive educational leadership acts as well as the process through which educational leaders and teachers are engaged in abusive behaviors and their consequences. Researchers who observe abusive leadership behaviors in the workplace may also trace a sequence of events/activities that precede these behaviors as well as the various results of them.

Note, however, that observational data, rather more than interview data, are subject to interpretation by the researcher (Mullhall, 2003). After all, observers have a great degree of freedom and autonomy regarding what they choose to observe (e.g., the meetings of the executive management or the operation department), how they filter that information (e.g., what will be considered abusive leadership), and how it is analyzed. To face this weakness, I would recommend presenting the data collected during the unstructured observation to the observed subjects and ask whether they agree with your interpretations of them. For example, you observed an interaction

between a principal and one of his/her teachers in which he called her 'lazy'. Is this considered to be an abusive leadership behavior in the studied school? Is this a normal behavior? While the observer may attach negative meaning to such a behavior, teachers (i.e., interviewees) may consider it a non-abusive behavior, because it reflects the low performance of this teachers or because the principal uses much more insulting words than that in his/her interaction with his teachers.

Ethical considerations

Studying abusive educational leadership is related, explicitly and implicitly, to the literature about researching sensitive topics defined as those that might cause harm to participants, arouse powerful negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, embarrassment), and increase distress among researchers and respondents (Sieber and Stanley, 1988). Lee (1993) defined sensitive research as "research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it" (p.4), conceptualizing "sensitivity" as an emergent rather than an inherent feature of the relationship between topic and research. Some authors have paid attention to the emotional well-being of the researchers, rejecting a model of the research as detached and objective, and warning that researchers of sensitive issues might experience dire emotional consequences (Lee & Lee, 2012). The study of abusive educational leadership is very sensitive, given the potentially dire consequences of discussing the negative aspects in the workplace.

To face the hazards of doing a research on sensitive topics like abusive leadership, researchers suggested employing strategies such as building rapport (e.g., promising full anonymity), avoiding personal questions that might expose the interviewee, beginning the

interview with self-disclosure, planning the interview very carefully (e.g., beginning with general questions about educational leadership and abusive leadership), and supporting the interviewee in extremely sensitive situations such as a personal distress (Lee, 1993).

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study (Mohd-Arifin, 2018), and particularly in a study that explores negative sensitive organizational phenomena that might cause harm to the participants due to their vulnerable position. The interviewees and the observed subjects may become stressed while expressing their feelings towards and experiences with abusive leaders in their organization.

To follow ethical rules in studies about abusive leadership, interviewees have to be adequately informed about the research (e.g., the negative aspects of leader-followers / employee relations), comprehend the information (e.g., the negative implications of abusive leadership), and have a power of freedom of choice to allow them to decide whether to participate or decline, particularly if they are afraid to be personally harmed by their participation in the study. Likewise, the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees must be preserved by not revealing their name, position, social identity and any other detail that might expose the interviewees in the collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings. Privacy and confidentiality of the interview environment have to be managed carefully during telephone communication, interview session, data analysis and dissemination of the findings. This is particularly important when sensitive topics come up in semi-structured interviews about abusive educational leadership and its impact on the school and its members and stakeholders. Interviewers must build

rapport with teachers and establish trustful relationships with them prior to the beginning of the interview.

Conclusions

In their review of the research on abusive leadership, Zhang and Liu (2018) concluded as follow:

> The preceding review shows that various new trends emerge in the examination of abusive supervision. All six of these new trends share similar mechanisms that point to the possible positive effects of abusive supervision. The findings on the possible positive effects of abusive supervision are of the greatest importance and interest to us. We believe that this stream of research may lead to novel thoughts and ideas about the development of abusive supervision and may guide this topic to a new developmental stage" (p.730).

Indeed, new streams of research may generate new ideas and understandings of abusive educational leadership. However, methodology matters; new streams of research should include multiple research paradigms and methodologies that are critical to any progress in knowledge production. Therefore, the research on the negative aspects in educational leadership should be open to new research paradigms and foster qualitative methodologies as a means to enlarge our knowledge of abusive leadership and its factors and consequences in organizations.

More specifically, I encourage researchers in the field of educational administration and leadership to initiate research programs about abusive (and related) educational leadership from an interpretive point of view. Thus, instead of focusing on correlations and cause-and-effect relations, researchers may want to consider the

unique behaviors of abusive leaders in the educational contexts, based on the subjective voices of teachers, students, and stakeholders, explore the determinants facilitating the growth of abusive leadership in schools, or tracing the implications of abusive educational leadership for student achievement, teacher moral, or parents' tendency to be involved in the schooling process. After all, the educational organization has particular aspects that are likely to influence the patterns and behaviors of abusive leaders in education.

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