

Exercise has charms to soothe a savage boss

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lying, making fun of you in public and generally putting you down, he or she may benefit from some exercise, according to a new study by James Burton from Northern Illinois University in the US and his team. Their work shows that stressed supervisors, struggling with time pressures, vent their frustrations on their employees less when they get regular, moderate exercise. The research is published online in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

In the current [economic climate](#), it is not unusual to come across stressed supervisors. But does that mean that they have to transfer their frustrations onto the people they supervise? Research shows that when a supervisor experiences workplace stress, his or her subordinates feel they bear the brunt of that frustration. Burton and his team's study is the first to examine how exercise can buffer the relationship between supervisor stress and employee perceptions of abusive supervision or hostile behavior towards them.

A total of 98 MBA students and their 98 supervisors from two universities in the Midwestern United States completed [questionnaires](#). Students rated their perceptions of how abusive their current supervisor was, for example "my supervisor tells me my thoughts or [feelings](#) are stupid" or "my supervisor puts me down in front of others." Supervisors answered questions about how often they exercised and about their workplace stress, for example "working my current job leaves me little time for other activities" or "I have too much work and too little time to do it in."

The researchers found that, as expected, when supervisors were stressed, their subordinates felt more victimized. However, analyses also showed that when supervisors experienced stress, but engaged in exercise, their subordinates reported lower levels of abusive supervision. Interestingly, only moderate levels of exercise were necessary to minimize abusive [supervision](#), such as one to two days of exercise per week, and the type of exercise seemed to make little difference.

The authors conclude: "It appears that the simple act of exercising minimizes the negative effects of supervisor workplace stress on subordinates. Wellness programs, often inclusive of [exercise](#) components, have been advocated to control workplace stress for years. This study adds support to their specific relevancy in smoothing supervisor-subordinate relationships."

More information: Burton JP et al (2012). Supervisor workplace stress and abusive supervision: the buffering effect of exercise. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. [DOI 10.1007/s10869-011-9255-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9255-0)

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