

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT

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The workplace is as likely as any other context to breed harmful interpersonal behaviors in a number of forms (e.g., bullying, harassment, incivility). However, each has largely been studied in isolation. Consequently, the goal of this study is to utilize multidimensional scaling techniques to identify the underlying dimensionality that best describes the relationship among three types of workplace mistreatment: sexual harassment, generalized harassment, and incivility.

The construct known as workplace aggression is useful as a means of integrating sexual harassment, generalized harassment, and incivility because, generally speaking, workplace aggression encapsulates all organizational behaviors which have the potential to harm others (Neuman & Baron, 1998). Buss proposed a framework for human aggression which distinguished aggressive behaviors on three dimensions, two of which are potentially useful in the current study: verbal/physical and active/passive. Verbal aggression has the potential to cause harm through the use of words whereas physical aggression entails physical action by the aggressor. Active forms of aggression entail some sort of action on the part of the aggressor (e.g., yelling at a coworker) whereas passive forms of aggression are characterized by a lack of action. All forms of sexual harassment, generalized harassment, and incivility may be categorized under the aforementioned dimensions. As such, Buss's (1961) dimensionality of workplace aggression is a useful starting point for anticipating how these behaviors might potentially be related or distinguished. However, it is possible that these dimensions are not sufficient to fully describe the relationship among the constructs. For instance, it seems plausible to expect that mistreatment forms may be distinguished based on their nature as either sexual or nonsexual behaviors. Whether the dimensions outlined above are able to completely capture the relationship among these forms of mistreatment is an empirical question, and due to the explicit exploratory nature of multidimensional scaling, the above predictions are regarded as exploratory.

Final participants in the study will include roughly 115 undergraduates from a medium-sized Northeastern university in the United States. In the study, participants first rate how dissimilar all possible pairs of 17 items are from one another. The 17 items comprising the 136 paired comparisons were selected (based on factor loadings) from the following validated measures: the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995), the Generalized Workplace Harassment Questionnaire (GWHQ; Rospenda & Richman, 2004), and the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001). In general, findings from this study will begin to clarify the relationship among forms of workplace mistreatment.

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