

Gender Effects of Interpersonal Workplace Harassment

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The phenomenon of interpersonal workplace harassment (IWH) has recently begun to emerge as a growing stream of literature. Researchers have investigated various aspects including the frequency of its occurrence and the specific negative acts committed. However, gender effects with respect to experiencing or committing interpersonal workplace harassment are little known or understood. The present study examined gender differences regarding the exposure to and commission of IWH behaviors. While I found no gender differences in aggregate, female respondents experienced and committed a greater number of person-focused IWH behaviors than did male respondents. Because harassment can lead to claims of employment discrimination, it is important to understand this phenomenon from a gender perspective and to alert organizations to the potential for litigation or employee complaints of illegal sex discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Deviant workplace behavior is a term that encompasses a broad spectrum of actions in the workplace that violate organizational norms and are counterproductive to the organization's effectiveness (Robinson and Bennet, 1995). Interpersonal workplace harassment (IWH) is a subset of deviant workplace behavior that represents purposeful, ongoing negative behaviors directed at a specific target in the organization. In recent years, scholars have begun to focus research in this area and a growing stream of literature has begun to emerge.

IWH is defined in this study as intentional and repeated, long-term negative behavior that is offensive, intimidating, abusive, and/or harassing that is directed at a target employee and that threatens the target's job performance and physical and personal well-being. IWH is a form of interpersonal counterproductive workplace behavior between members of the organization. IWH behaviors are committed by members of the organization against other members of the organization.

Whether organizations recognize it or not, decreases in productivity and employee commitment and increases in absenteeism, turnover, and legal expenses resulting from IWH events have negative bottom-line impact (Knapp, Faley, Ekeber, and DuBois, 1997; Leymann, 1990). Workers who are subjected to workplace bullying, incivility, IWH, and sexual harassment report a wide range of physical, psychological, and social complaints that prevent

them from effectively performing on the job. Targets of harassment experience more negative consequences such as higher absenteeism (Lewis, Coursol, and Wahl, 2002), higher employment turnover (Jennifer, Cowie, and Ananiadou, 2003), lower job satisfaction (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997), higher levels of work stress, symptoms of clinical anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2003), deleterious drinking outcomes (Richman et al., 1999), and physical and psychological complaints as a result of the harassment (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Hjelt-Back, 1994; Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996).

Manifestation of Harassment

Various forms of interpersonal workplace deviance manifest in organizations. Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) found that IWH behaviors tend to cluster into two categories; those focused on the target's personal and social existence and those focused on the target's task or work performance. Typical manifestations of personal or social attacks are verbal abuse, spreading rumors, ignoring opinions, teasing, socially isolating, and excluding the target from organizational events. Task or work performance attacks consist of blaming the target for poor work performance or errors, sabotaging the target's work, devaluing the target's effort and work product, assigning the target to menial tasks, and taking credit for the target's successful work product or ideas.

The IWH experience often evolves over time in an escalating fashion with increasingly harmful behaviors being directed at the target (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). It may begin with the target being attacked now and then, and gradually the frequency and intensity increase so that after a prolonged period of time, the target may be harangued on a daily basis by one or more perpetrators (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996). IWH is planned, systematic persecution of the target that typically involves multiple harassing behaviors (Einarsen, 2000; Rayner and Dick, 2004).

IWH is not a dichotomous phenomenon; rather it occurs along a continuum from relatively benign teasing to outright physical assault (Salin, 2001). Some IWH behaviors may be relatively mild, such as interrupting the target during conversations or meetings. Other behaviors may be more severe such as threatening the target physically by pushing or shoving the target or stealing the target's personal protective equipment or other safety gear. The level of severity is influenced by many factors including the power differential between the target and perpetrator, the frequency of the behaviors, the number of perpetrators, and other personal and situational factors that comprise the IWH event. While no published studies have investigated the perceived severity of particular IWH behaviors, Keashley and colleagues (1994) assessed the impact of various behaviors on the target and found some evidence to support the notion that abusive interpersonal behaviors vary with respect to severity.

The frequency of experiencing IWH events varies substantially based upon the nation studied, the definition of harassment used, temporal parameters of the event, and other methodological differences. Incidence rates in Scandinavian samples range from 3% to 24% of workers (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Hjelt-Back, 1994; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1990). British researchers report incidence rates closer to 50% of workers (Rayner, 1997). And in one of the few American studies, 14% of subjects reported feeling emotionally abused (Keashly et al., 1994). It is impossible to compare incidence rates across these studies as no standard instruments, definitions, or methods were used in the various investigations. This is not uncommon in a nascent field of study but we must recognize this lack of conformity within the literature and interpret results cautiously.

Research has addressed the frequency of exposure to harassing behaviors (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Hjelt-Back, 1994; Einarsen, 2000; Rayner and Dick, 2004), coping mechanisms employed by targets (Cortina and Magley, 2003; Knapp et al., 1997; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002b), negative outcomes (Cortina and Magley, 2003; Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2003), and the dimensional structure of the construct (Brodsky, 1976; Rayner and Dick, 2004; Zapf, Knorz, and Kulla, 1996). As this is a relatively new stream of literature, there are many unexplored dimensions of the phenomenon that have yet to be investigated. In particular, the gender effects of experiencing IWH and committing IWH are noticeably missing from the literature.

Gender Effects

To date, with the exception of Cortina et al.'s (2002) study on incivility, research on gender effects of IWH has been conducted primarily with non-US samples. In that study, gender differences in the experience of uncivil acts were found, with female attorneys experiencing a greater percentage of such behavior than their male counterparts. As previously elucidated, incivility is a distinct subset of deviant workplace behavior that is often unintentional and not systematic abuse. Incivility is often ambiguous with respect to intent and is not necessarily part of a premeditated plan of attack against the target. Unlike incivility, IWH is purposeful, intentional, and systematic harassment of a selected target. Therefore, while Cortina et al. (2002) is informative regarding gender effects, it does not represent the final word on this issue with respect to IWH and its occurrence.

Research in sexual harassment has shown that females and males assess the situation differently (Pesta, Dunegan, and Hrivnak, 2007). In their recent meta-analysis, Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett (2001) showed that a significant gender difference exists with respect to perceptions of severity of sexual harassment behaviors. They concluded that females perceive a broader range of behaviors as harassing than do males. Gender differences are lower for unambiguous acts of harassment such as sexual proposition or sexual coercion than for ambiguous acts such as those that constitute a hostile work environment.

The present study adds to our understanding of how gender of both the target and perpetrator of IWH behaviors influences the experience. Specifically, I investigate the exposure to IWH both as a target and perpetrator and analyze the differences between the genders.

Experiencing IWH

Research to date on the gender effects of experiencing IWH has been inconclusive. In various studies, men and women were targets of workplace bullying and generalized workplace harassment in roughly equal proportion (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Esen, 2004; Keashly et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002a, 2002b; Vartia, 1996). Conversely, Cortina and colleagues (2002) found that female attorneys were subjected to substantially more incivility than were males.

Findings in sexual harassment research continue to show that the vast majority of targets are women (EEOC, 2006). Reports of the annual number of sexual harassment charges filed directly with the EEOC and with state and local fair employment practices agencies around the U.S show that in 1997, 88.4% of these charges were filed by women and 11.6% were filed by men. In 2006, 84.6% were filed by women and 15.47% were filed by men. Therefore, although the percentage of charges filed by men is on the increase, sexual harassment remains a predominantly female issue in U.S. workplaces (EEOC, 2006).

In the realm of IWH, or non-sexual harassment, females do not appear to be subjected to a substantially greater proportion of abuse. The weight of existing evidence indicates that female and male targets experience similar levels of IWH.

H1: Female and male targets will experience an equal number of total IWH behaviors.

Committing IWH

Perpetrators of IWH tend to be male, but not exclusively so. Zapf (1999) found that 26% of targets were harassed by male perpetrators, 11% were harassed by female perpetrators, and 63% were harassed by both male and female perpetrators. A similar pattern of findings was reported by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) who found that 49% of targets were harassed by male perpetrators, 30% by female perpetrators, and 21% by both male and female perpetrators. While male perpetrators harass both male and female targets, female perpetrators tend to harass only female targets (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1996; Rayner and Hoel, 1997). Because male perpetrators appear to attack targets of both genders, males have more targets available for abuse and hence are likely to commit more IWH behaviors in total.

H2: Male perpetrators will commit more total IWH behaviors than will female perpetrators.

Behaviors committed

The effect of gender may be more complex than simply which gender is more likely to experience or commit harassing behaviors. The choice of specific harmful actions taken against the target seems to be related to the perpetrator's gender. Female perpetrators tend to use strategies that affect communications, social relationships, and attacks on the target's reputation, while male perpetrators tend to use strategies that affect the target's work (Hoel and Salin, 2003; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, and Vartia, 2003). Likewise, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Lagerspetz (1994) found that while perpetrators overall use rational-appearing aggression, female perpetrators' preferred strategy was social manipulation, which they used significantly more often than did males.

H3a: Female perpetrators will commit more person-focused IWH behaviors than will male perpetrators.

H3b: Male perpetrators will commit more task-focused IWH behaviors than will female perpetrators.

Behaviors experienced

While some research has been conducted on the overall experience of IWH based upon target gender, limited research has been done with respect to how target gender influences the specific harassing behaviors experienced. Simpson and Cohen (2004) found that the particular IWH behaviors inflicted on a target were related to the gender of the target with women experiencing more overruled decisions than male targets. Because female perpetrators primarily attack female targets and female perpetrators tend to use social and personal attacks more than task attacks, it is logical to assume that female targets will experience a greater number of IWH behaviors focused on their social and personal domains. Likewise, male perpetrators commit more task attacks and male perpetrators are far more likely to attack male targets than are female perpetrators. Therefore, male targets are more likely to be attacked by male perpetrators who use task attacks to a greater extent.

H4a: Female targets will experience more person-focused IWH behaviors than will male targets.

H4b: Male targets will experience more task-focused IWH behaviors than will female targets.

STUDY METHOD

Participants

Data were collected via a self-report survey as part of a larger study. Respondents for the larger study were drawn from two distinct samples, university students and working adults. Students were recruited from both undergraduate and graduate classes at a large Midwestern university. Working adults were recruited from two sources, human resource professionals participating in professional development events and managerial employees of a large Midwestern retail chain.

The sample used in the present study was a subset of the larger study sample; those respondents that had either experienced or committed at least one IWH behavior. The present study sample consisted of 217 of the 519 respondents to the larger study. Not surprisingly, a much greater number of respondents had experienced IWH than had committed IWH behaviors. Of the original 519 respondents to the larger study, 210 had been targets of IWH behavior while 56 admitted to committing IWH behaviors. Individuals targeted by IWH often respond in kind and perpetrate such acts. Consistent with the literature, 87% of the perpetrators in the present study also reported being targets of IWH behaviors.

Demographics of the larger study and present study samples are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Larger study sample n = 519	Students n = 299		Combined adult n = 220		HR adults n = 95		Non-HR adults n = 125	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Age	23.26	4.85	38.11	10.28	42.02	10.07	35.14	9.55
Years work experience	5.94	4.24	17.24	10.32	19.59	10.66	15.45	9.65
Gender*	.49	.5	.5	.5	.79	.41	.27	.44
Race**	1.23	.789	1.16	.577	1.27	.786	1.08	.329
Present study sample n = 217	Students n = 120		Combined adult n = 95		HR adults n = 41		Non-HR adults n = 54	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Age	23.67	5.06	38.23	11.12	44.61	10.60	33.39	8.90
Years work experience	6.63	4.62	17.20	10.49	20.85	10.49	14.33	9.65
Gender*	.45	.50	.52	.50	.80	.401	.30	.463
Race**	1.33	.938	1.22	.764	1.46	1.098	1.04	.192

*Gender was coded as Male(0), Female(1).

**Race was coded as White(1), Black(2), Hispanic(3), Asian(4), American Indian(5), Other(6).

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and univariate tests of the present study sample showed that the working adults were older, had more years of work experience, were more likely to be female, and were more racially diverse than the student sample. Because of these demographic differences among the samples, MANOVA and univariate analyses were conducted to assess whether the samples were equivalent or different on the number of IWH behaviors experienced and committed by respondents. The multivariate test was significant (Hotelling's

criterion, $F[4,412] = 3.79, p = .005$). Univariate tests showed that the students experienced significantly fewer IWH behaviors than did working adults.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the samples. Because of difference in the dependent study variable the samples were analyzed separately.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF IWH BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED AND COMMITTED BY SAMPLE

	Students			Adults		
	n	Mean	s.d.	n	Mean	s.d.
Number IWH behaviors experienced	113	3.45	3.29	92	4.75	3.98
Number IWH behaviors committed	32	3.03	3.31	23	1.96	1.30

Procedure

The research project and procedures were explained to potential participants and voluntary cooperation was requested. Volunteers received paper and pencil survey instruments which they completed immediately. The survey instrument consisted of thirty-two items depicting equal numbers of task-focused and person-focused behaviors. The items represented twelve unique behaviors which were presented three times to present three different perpetrators, a supervisor, a sole coworker, and a group of coworkers. Table 3 details the behaviors included in the study instrument.

TABLE 3
BEHAVIORS INCLUDED IN STUDY INSTRUMENT CLASSIFIED BY FOCUS

Behavior	Focus
Supervisor sabotages/steals work	Task
Supervisor withholds information	Task
Supervisor excludes you from meetings	Task
Supervisor aggressive physical gestures	Person
Supervisor yells/angry outbursts	Person
Supervisor hateful/malicious rumors	Person
Peer sabotages/steals work	Task
Peer withholds information	Task
Peer excludes you from meetings	Task
Peer aggressive physical gestures	Person
Peer yells/angry outbursts	Person
Peer hateful/malicious rumors	Person

Group sabotages/steals work	Task
Group withholds information	Task
Group excludes you from meetings	Task
Group aggressive physical gestures	Person
Group yells/angry outbursts	Person
Group hateful/malicious rumors	Person

Respondents were asked to assess (1) whether each item represented IWH, (2) how severe the behavior was on a 9-point Likert type scale, (3) whether or not they had experienced the behavior, and (4) whether or not they had committed the behavior. The experience of and commission of each behavior was measured as a dichotomous variable with (0) representing a “No” answer and (1) representing a “Yes” answer.

Analyses

All analyses were conducted in SPSS v. 15. As previously explained, analyses were conducted separately for the student and adult samples. Summative scales were created to measure the dependent variables, the total number of IWH behaviors experienced and committed, and subscales measuring each according to the focus of behavior, task or person.

Hypothesis 1 was tested by one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and was accepted if the difference in mean scores for the total number of IWH behaviors experienced by male and female respondents was not significant ($p < .05$). Hypothesis 2 was tested by ANOVA and was accepted if the mean score for total IWH behaviors committed by males was greater than the mean score for females ($p < .05$). Hypothesis 3a was tested by ANOVA and was accepted if the mean score for total person focused IWH behaviors committed by females was greater than the mean score for males ($p < .05$). Hypothesis 3b was tested by ANOVA and was accepted if the mean score for total task focused IWH behaviors committed by males was greater than the mean score for females ($p < .05$). Hypothesis 4a was tested by ANOVA and was accepted if the mean score for total person focused IWH behaviors experienced by females was greater than the mean score for males ($p < .05$). Hypothesis 4b was tested by ANOVA and was accepted if the mean score for total task focused IWH behaviors experienced by males was greater than the mean score for females ($p < .05$).

Results

Hypothesis 1

Table 4 shows the behaviors experienced by sample type, focus of behavior, and gender. The dependent variable was the total number of IWH behaviors experienced. Hypothesis 1 predicted that female and male targets would experience an equal number of total IWH behaviors. The differences in mean scores for both student and adult groups were not

**TABLE 4
BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY SAMPLE TYPE, FOCUS OF BEHAVIOR, AND
GENDER**

	Students				Adults			
	n	Total	Task	Person	n	Total	Task	Person
Males	62	3.00	1.19	1.81	43	4.56	2.33	2.20
Females	51	4.00	1.45	2.55	49	4.92	2.35	2.57
Difference		1.00	.26	.74*		.36	.02	.37
Total	113	3.45	1.31	2.14	92	4.75	2.34	2.40

*Significant at $p < .05$

statistically significant and therefore H1 was supported. Female and male targets experience similar levels of IWH behaviors; therefore no gender effect was found at the aggregate behavior level.

Hypothesis 2

Table 5 shows the behaviors committed by sample type, focus of behavior, and gender.

**TABLE 5
BEHAVIORS COMMITTED BY SAMPLE TYPE, FOCUS OF BEHAVIOR, AND
GENDER**

	Students				Adults			
	n	Total	Task	Person	n	Total	Task	Person
Males	15	3.07	1.53	1.53	16	1.88	1.06	.76
Females	17	3.00	.76	2.24	7	2.14	.57	1.57
Difference		.07	.77	.71		.26	.49	.81*
Total	32	3.03	1.13	1.91	23	1.96	.91	1.00

*Significant at $p < .05$

The dependent variable was the total number of IWH behaviors committed. Hypothesis 2 predicted that male perpetrators would commit more total IWH behaviors than female perpetrators. Sample sizes for both the student and adult groups were quite small and therefore results must be interpreted cautiously. The student sample showed virtually no difference in the number of IWH behaviors committed by male and female perpetrators. The adult sample showed that although females committed more total IWH behaviors the difference was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 2 was not supported and I conclude that male and female perpetrators commit an equal number of total IWH behaviors.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b

The dependent variables were the total number of person focused and task focused IWH behaviors committed, shown in Table 5. Table 6 shows the specific behaviors committed by perpetrator gender.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCY OF BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY SAMPLE TYPE, FOCUS OF
BEHAVIOR, AND TARGET GENDER

Behavior	Focus	Students		Adults	
		Females N = 51	Males n = 63	Females n = 49	Males n = 44
Supervisor sabotages/steals work	Task	1	6	5	4
Supervisor withholds information	Task	11	9	22	20
Supervisor excludes you from meetings	Task	9	6	20	10
Supervisor aggressive physical gestures	Person	11	9	13	7
Supervisor yells/angry outbursts	Person	16	19	19	9
Supervisor hateful/malicious rumors	Person	7	3	10	4
Peer sabotages/steals work	Task	11	6	7	10
Peer withholds information	Task	15	15	15	18
Peer excludes you from meetings	Task	7	6	16	13
Peer aggressive physical gestures	Person	14	15	14	11
Peer yells/angry outbursts	Person	22	23	24	13
Peer hateful/malicious rumors	Person	21	11	15	18
Group sabotages/steals work	Task	6	7	5	4
Group withholds information	Task	9	9	12	18
Group excludes you from meetings	Task	5	11	13	9
Group aggressive physical gestures	Person	10	9	10	9
Group yells/angry outbursts	Person	12	14	10	10
Group hateful/malicious rumors	Person	17	12	11	16

Hypothesis 3a predicted that female perpetrators would commit a greater number of person focused IWH behaviors than would male perpetrators. Consistent with this prediction, female perpetrators in both the student and adult samples committed more person focused IWH behaviors than did male perpetrators. The difference was significant for the adult sample but not

for the student sample. Hypothesis 3b predicted that male perpetrators would commit a greater number of task focused IWH behaviors than would female perpetrators. While the results show that males in both samples committed more task focused IWH behaviors than females, the differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, I found some support for Hypothesis 3a and no support for Hypothesis 3b.

TABLE 7
FREQUENCY OF BEHAVIORS COMMITTED BY SAMPLE TYPE, FOCUS OF BEHAVIOR, AND PERPETRATOR GENDER

Behavior	Focus	Students		Adults	
		Females n = 17	Males n = 15	Females n = 7	Males n = 17
Supervisor sabotages/steals work	Task	1	2	0	1
Supervisor withholds information	Task	2	3	0	1
Supervisor excludes you from meetings	Task	1	1	0	4
Supervisor aggressive physical gestures	Person	5	4	0	2
Supervisor yells/angry outbursts	Person	2	1	0	3
Supervisor hateful/malicious rumors	Person	2	1	0	0
Peer sabotages/steals work	Task	2	3	0	1
Peer withholds information	Task	2	3	2	3
Peer excludes you from meetings	Task	2	3	0	4
Peer aggressive physical gestures	Person	6	4	2	2
Peer yells/angry outbursts	Person	5	3	2	0
Peer hateful/malicious rumors	Person	5	2	3	0
Group sabotages/steals work	Task	1	3	1	0
Group withholds information	Task	1	2	1	4
Group excludes you from meetings	Task	1	3	0	4
Group aggressive physical gestures	Person	5	3	0	3
Group yells/angry outbursts	Person	3	2	3	1
Group hateful/malicious rumors	Person	5	3	1	2

Hypotheses 4a and 4b

The dependent variables were the total number of person focused and task focused IWH behaviors experienced, shown in Table 4. Table 7 shows the specific behaviors experienced by target gender.

Hypothesis 4a predicted that female targets would experience a greater number of person focused IWH behaviors than would male targets. Consistent with this prediction, female targets in both the student and adult samples experienced more person focused IWH behaviors than did male targets. The difference was significant for the student sample but not for the adult sample. Hypothesis 4b predicted that male targets would experience a greater number of task focused IWH behaviors than would female targets. The results show virtually no difference in the number of task focused IWH behaviors experienced by male and female targets in both samples. Therefore, I found some support for Hypothesis 4a and no support for Hypothesis 4b.

DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of non-sexual harassment, or IWH, differs markedly from sexual harassment regarding the influence of gender on both target and perpetrator exposure. Unlike sexual harassment, IWH targets are as likely to be female as male. Likewise, perpetrators are equally likely to be female or male. This is in stark contrast to the sexual harassment literature which consistently shows that males are the primary perpetrators and females are the primary targets. The present study provides evidence from U.S. based samples that supports findings from European research. The international convergence on the gender neutrality of overall IWH distinguishes between sexual and non-sexual harassment on an important dimension.

The present study further showed that females experience and commit a specific set of IWH behaviors; those focused on the target's person or social context. This supports the limited prior research and sheds additional light on the underlying structure of IWH. Table 6 is particularly informative as it shows the frequency with which targets are attacked by their supervisor or peers acting alone and in groups. Females appear to be subjected to a greater number of supervisor-instigated negative acts than are their male colleagues. The gender of the supervisor was not captured in the survey. I can only speculate that if the typical respondent reports to a male supervisor these results might be evidence of differential treatment of subordinates based on gender which might constitute illegal sex discrimination.

Supervisors clearly do not have a monopoly on behaving badly. Peers commit a substantial number of IWH behaviors (see Table 6). The preponderance of peer behaviors are person focused negative acts and females experience a high percentage of angry peers lashing out or spreading rumors about them. This type of abuse might constitute a hostile work environment. However under current civil rights legislation the existence of such a hostile work environment does not create an actionable claim by the target. Male targets are not exempt from abusive peers and appear to experience similar person focused behaviors by their coworkers. Interestingly, adult males do not report being yelled at or subjected to angry outbursts by their supervisors or peers, while male students do report greater exposure to angry and physically aggressive supervisors and peers. The "ganging-up" phenomenon exhibited by a group of coworkers appears to be targeted more frequently at males than females.

Behaviors committed by study respondents were somewhat disturbing. As shown in Table 7, the most frequent behavior students of both genders reportedly exhibited was physical aggression against a peer or subordinate, acting either alone or as part of a group. On a positive note, adult

respondents did not use physical aggression as a primary harassment technique. It may be that students are young and less sophisticated in dealing with problems in the work setting and as they mature they find subtler means of abusing others. Students' primary means of attack were all person focused behaviors, with female students committing a wider range of such negative acts than male students. Likewise, female adults committed person focused behaviors more frequently than task focused behaviors. Of note is how frequently adult male perpetrators utilized task focused behaviors as a primary means of harassment. The most highly endorsed items for that group involved restricting information or access to meetings to a subordinate or peer.

Small sample sizes of perpetrators result in a loss of statistical power and may be producing spurious results. I do not wish to infer too much from these results. However, the present study offers some corroboration to the European research showing the pattern of IWH behaviors is differentiated by perpetrator gender. Rather than offering a conclusion to this line of inquiry, I believe it paves the way for further investigations to substantiate or contradict what I found.

Limitations and Future Directions

The results of this study add to the growing body of literature on non-sexual workplace harassment and demonstrate that gender may play a role in the manifestation of IWH events for both targets and perpetrators. Use of both student and working adult samples strengthens the findings of this study by allowing for comparison of the two distinct groups and how their experiences with IWH are similar to and different from one another. Unfortunately, separating the samples reduced the statistical power especially regarding analysis of perpetrator data. While broad trends can be identified for those groups, the results are not generalizable to a larger population and must be replicated with a larger sample before drawing meaningful conclusions. The use of self-report surveys may lead to response bias and problems of objectivity and recall. However, this research stream is in its infancy and as researchers develop standard measures and instruments, a wider variety of data collection techniques can be employed to complement early research studies.

The phenomenon of IWH while bearing some similarities to sexual harassment, is indeed a unique, definable type of dysfunctional workplace behavior. The equal opportunity nature of this type of harassment means that it is not a "women's issue". Perhaps this will lead to greater attention by organizational leaders and managers. The data in the present study hint at some bias against females with respect to the specific behaviors committed against them, especially those committed by supervisory personnel. This is of concern within the context of civil rights and discrimination in the workplace. Organizations must be vigilant at identifying and eliminating not only discriminatory actions but negative interpersonal events. Workers can only contribute at their optimum level of performance in an environment free from discrimination and mistreatment.

Further research is clearly needed to delve deeper into the dimensions of IWH behaviors, the gender influence on both target experiences and perpetrator actions, patterns of behaviors, and the possible covert discrimination that may occur as a result of differential treatment of male and female workers. This study seeks only to begin the discussion on how gender influences exposure to IWH and how these harassing events contribute to discriminatory treatment in U.S. workplaces.

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