Socio-psychological theories and contemporary research: Can unmet needs contribute to victimization in the workplace?

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Abstract

The following paper seeks to uncover potential support for workplace victimization through an examination of employee's needs and needs-based motivation theories. An inductive thematic analysis was utilized to explore a sample of 721 anonymous web-based comments relating to workplace harassment and conflict. The researchers conclude that if underlying workplace needs can be identified, victims of workplace harassment can be empowered through the development and attainment of unmet needs such as belonging and self actualization. The study calls for further research, and consideration of, a managerial shift in practice regarding workplace harassment. Specifically, based on the study's conclusions, managers should contemplate a proactive development approach to employees' needs by seeking to empower victims of workplace mistreatment.

Research Questions

RQ1: What needs themes are evident in women's online commentary about harassment in the workplace?

RQ2: Do the identified needs themes evidenced in women's online commentary about harassment in the workplace align with previously established theories about the needs of employees in the workplace?

Method

In order to expand on the academic literature regarding lacking needs and victimization, this study applied descriptive phenomenology using an inductive thematic analysis approach to explore women's online, public self-reflection about harassment in the workplace. Themes describing emotional experiences were created from the inductive analysis and compared with existing literature to identify any consistencies and discrepancies.
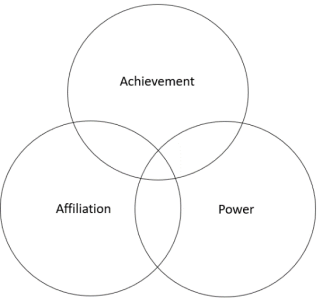
Needs Based Theories

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
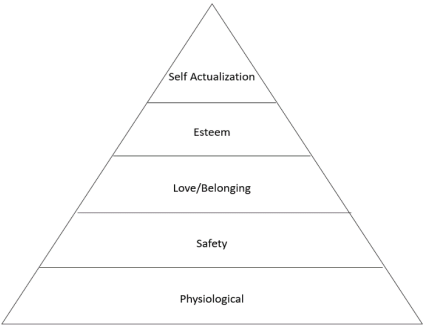
McClelland's Theory of Needs

Conclusions

Harassment in the workplace is a complex issue to manage, exploring innovative options for resolution is valuable. One option for managers to consider is to support the workplace harassment victim in gaining specific personalized needs.

Significance of the Study

The study has significance in specifically examining female employees and the prevalence of their workplace victimization. If unfulfilled employee needs explain female victimization in the workplace, managers can gain another method for addressing workplace harassment, and develop a proactive needs development approach focused on empowering victims.

Results
Unmet Needs of the Victim Alignment with Literature

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Bullying Theme		Maslow/Victim Need
Sexual harassment	28	Needing Safety/Belonging
Lactating, pregnancy, maternity issues	26	Needing Physiological
Promotion	19	Need to Belong/Esteem
Boys club	14	Need for Belonging
Sexism	13	Need for Belonging
Discrimination	9	Need for Belonging
Verbal harassment	8	Need for Safety/Belonging
Assault at work	5	Need for Safety
Misogyny	3	Need for Safety
	12	
Total	5	

McClelland's Theory of Needs

Bullying Theme		McClelland/Victim Need
Sexual harassment	28	Affiliation
Lactating, pregnancy, maternity issues	26	Affiliation
Promotion	19	Achievement
Boys club	14	Affiliation
Sexism	13	Affiliation
Discrimination	9	Power
Verbal harassment	8	Power
Assault at work	5	Power
Misogyny	3	Power
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Total	5	

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