

# Expanding the Conceptualization of Workplace Violence: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

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**Abstract** *Workplace violence* generally refers to interpersonal aggression, sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of discrimination and oppression occurring within the confines of the *paid* workplace. Workplace violence affects women across the globe, resulting in a wide range of health, economic, and social problems. We advocate for broader, transdisciplinary, intersectional, and transnational conceptualizations of *workplace violence* in research, policy, and practice. Supported by findings from research conducted around the globe, we argue that workplace violence occurs not only within the context of women's *paid employment in the formal workplace*, but also within the contexts of other types of work in which women of all ages engage. An expanded, more inclusive conceptualization of women's *workplaces* in research, policy, and practice will promote broader recognition and acknowledgement of women's experiences of interpersonal violence in the contexts of their multiple work roles in unpaid and informal work, as well as the paid labor force. Incorporating intersectional, transnational, and transdisciplinary perspectives into research, policy, and practice related to workplace violence will expand understandings and interpretations of women's experiences of workplace violence across the lifespan; within their own multi-faceted cultural contexts and racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities; and will facilitate transnational, cross-cultural comparisons. Implementation of policies based on expanded conceptualizations of workplace violence can contribute to more effective education and prevention efforts, improved

reporting procedures, and enhanced post-violence support services and treatment programs that meet the needs of women across a wider spectrum of workplace contexts.

**Keywords** Workplace violence · Sexual harassment · Bullying · Interpersonal violence · Women's work · Intersectionality

## Introduction

Interpersonal violence that occurs within the context of the formal, paid workplace affects women (and men, to a lesser degree) across the globe, resulting in a wide range of health, economic, and social problems (Krug et al. 2002; Pina and Gannon 2012; Waters et al. 2005). In this paper we argue the case for reconsidering the current conceptual definitions of *workplace*, *co-workers*, and *workplace violence* by scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners, with the aim of promoting a more holistic understanding of the complex relationships between women's diverse workplaces and their health and well-being. We contend that a broader conceptualization of *workplace*—including intersectional, transdisciplinary, and transnational approaches and analyses—in research, policy, and practice will enhance the understanding of women's experiences of violence in the context of the performance of their multiple work roles. As noted by Messias and colleagues (1997), women perform various types and forms of work across the span of their lives, only a portion of which occurs within the context of a formal, paid workplace. For example, women commonly engage in domestic work, home and family work, and care work in both formal workplaces and informal workplaces, such as their own homes or others people's homes. Although women of all ages engage in community work, volunteer work, and schoolwork, the locations where these activities occur are often not recognized as *workplaces*

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because the work is not for pay (Messias et al. 1997; Messias et al. 2005). A restrictive definition of *workplace* violence means that interpersonal violence and aggression occurring within the context of women's work outside the formal, paid workplace could be invisible to or unaccounted for by researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners. Furthermore, the perpetration of workplace violence is not limited to *co-workers* but may involve patients, patrons, clients, family members, students, faculty members, peers and individuals not directly associated with the workplace, such as a person committing an assault or robbery (Huerta et al. 2006; Jackson et al. 2002; LeBlanc and Kelloway 2002; Matchen and DeSouza 2000; Timmerman 2003).

By challenging the andocentric definition of work as paid employment we advocate for more inclusive conceptualizations of women's workplaces, types of work, and the individuals who perpetrate aggression and violence. Expanding the conceptualization and measurement would broaden the scope and dimensions of research, policies, and practices related to workplace violence. In making our case for an expanded conceptualization of workplace violence, we begin with an overview of the global extent of the phenomenon and the contextual factors frequently associated with workplace violence. We base our argument that workplace violence occurs not only within the context of women's *paid employment in a formal workplace*, but also within the contexts of other types of work in which women of all ages engage (Messias et al. 1997), on research conducted in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States. We begin with an examination of the impact of workplace violence on women's health, well-being, and work, and then present our argument for expanding the concept and measurement of workplace violence. In the final sections, we discuss the research, policy and practice implications of an expanded conceptualization of workplace violence that incorporates multiple dimensions of the phenomenon in terms of work settings, gender, sexual orientation, age, and geography.

### The Global Contexts of Workplace Violence

Workplace violence is a global women's health issue that encompasses multiple forms of interpersonal aggression, impacts people across the lifespan, occurs in communities across the globe regardless of level of economic and social development, and transcends national borders (Krug et al. 2002; Messing and Östlin 2006). The negative health, economic, and social impacts of workplace violence are evidenced in research and scholarship conducted across the globe, from Australia (Hegney et al. 2006) to Taiwan (Wei and Chen 2012), Ethiopia (Marsh et al. 2009), Brazil (DeSouza and

Cerqueira 2009), and the United States (Krieger et al. 2008). Although men and boys are subjected to violence within the contexts of their formal and informal work, working women are at higher risk for more frequent and severe sexual harassment (Berdahl and Moore 2006; IPEU et al. 2004; Nielsen et al. 2010; Pina and Gannon 2012; Sears et al. 2011; Street et al. 2007; Stock and Tissot 2012). A meta-analysis of 71 studies conducted in a wide range of United States academic, private, government, and military organizations indicated high rates of employed women reporting nonsexual harassment (58 %) and sexual harassment (24 %; Ilies et al. 2003).

Workplace violence affects women of all ages, social status, and power, although women who are younger, employed in low-status jobs, and those with lower social power are at higher risk for workplace violence (Pina and Gannon 2012). A survey of female faculty and staff in Ethiopian colleges indicated 86.3 % of the participants experienced both abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace, including being yelled and sworn at, treated as an inferior, exposed to unwanted physical contact or sexual suggestions, and mistreated because of their gender (Marsh et al. 2009). Employment exposes young women to the risk of violence. Among a sample of employed female adolescents in the United States, 52 % reported workplace sexual harassment (Fineran and Gruber 2009). Yet young women also engage in the (unpaid) work of learning, spending a considerable amount of their time in school, where they also face risks of sexual harassment, bullying, or other forms of intimidation (Wei and Chen 2012). For example, research conducted in Taiwan with students between the 7th and 9th grades found 20 % of the girls had been subjected to unwanted sexual remarks or jokes and 5 % had been inappropriately touched at school (Wei and Chen 2012). In the United States, undocumented immigrant women working in agriculture and food processing industries are at especially high risk of persistent sexual harassment and other abuses (Bauer and Ramírez 2010). Older women providing home-based care to others, as paid employees, volunteers, or family caregivers, are another group at risk for exposure to workplace violence (Choi et al. 2007).

Women with low social status and those working in non-traditional workplaces such as domestic workers (who work and sometimes live in their employers' homes) are at high risk for workplace aggression and sexual harassment. Domestic workers' exposure to workplace violence has been documented in research conducted in Canada (Aronson and Neysmith 1996; Hutchinson and Wexler 2007), Indonesia (Silvey 2006), Sweden (Elwér et al. 2010), and the United States (Allen and Ciambone 2003). To assess domestic workers' experiences of sexual harassment, DeSouza and Cerqueira (2009) surveyed domestic workers in a large metropolis in southern Brazil, using a Portuguese language version of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Stark et al. 2002). More than a quarter of the participants reported having experienced

some form of sexual harassment at work within the previous 12 months. The investigators also inquired if the women were familiar with Brazil's legal definition of sexual harassment, to which 92 % responded in the affirmative. The majority (61 %) considered domestic work rendered them more vulnerable to sexual harassment than other types of work. Interestingly, researchers in Canada reported similar findings from a survey of *professional* women who worked in other people's homes, in nursing, social work, child management, and behavior management (Barling et al. 2001). Respondents reported having heard sexual comments (28.9 %), received sexual compliments (28.3 %), having been subjected to sexist remarks (18.3 %), sexually propositioned (15.1 %), or been touched in an unwanted way (19.9 %). These professional women working in others' homes also experienced nonsexual workplace aggression, which included being the target of verbal aggression (32.8 %), being yelled or sworn at (17.4 %), threatened by a knife (11.9 %), or hit (6.1 %). The researchers reported a high correlation ( $r=0.92$ ) between sexual harassment and workplace aggression, which supports the notion that these forms of violence co-occur and that they may be measured together (Barling et al. 2001).

### The Gendered Dimensions of Workplace Violence

Across the lifespan, gender is a critical dimension of workplace violence. Sexual harassment and bullying begin during childhood and impact heterosexual boys and girls, as well as lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in the United States (Gruber and Fineran, 2008; Patrick et al. 2013). Among a sample of mostly White, middle and high school students in the northeastern United States, Gruber and Fineran (2008) found differences in rates of sexual harassment and bullying at school, with lesbian, gay, and bisexual students reporting more bullying than their heterosexual peers. Although heterosexual students reported being bullied more often than they were sexually harassed, lesbian, gay, and bisexual students reported more incidents of sexual harassment than bullying. The researchers measured the association of health outcomes with experiences of sexual harassment and bullying in school and found poorer health outcomes among girls when compared to boys and among lesbian, gay, and bisexual students when compared to heterosexual students. There is evidence that these forms of violence perpetrated in United States schools persist into adulthood and occur in various other contexts among women and sexual minorities (Hill and Silva 2005; IOM 2011; Sears et al. 2011).

Women in highly gendered professions, such as nursing, teaching, domestic work, sex work, and other service professions are frequently targets of workplace violence, as evidenced by research conducted in Canada (Croft and Cash 2012; Wang et al. 2008), Brazil (DeSouza and Cerqueira

2009) and other countries (Krug et al. 2002). Rates of reported workplace violence among nurses ranged from 16.2 % in Italy (Camerino et al. 2008) to nearly 60 % in Australian elder care settings (Hegney et al. 2006) and 62 % among Taiwanese hospital nurses (Lin and Liu 2005). Across these various settings, nurses identified patients and their family members as the most frequent perpetrators of verbal abuse and harassment (Hegney et al. 2006; Lin and Liu 2005). Camerino and colleagues (2008) surveyed nurses in eight European countries (i.e., Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia). Their findings indicated nurses experienced harassment and discrimination related to their national, sexual, racial, religious, or political characteristics, which was perpetrated by both colleagues and supervisors. Similarly, women working in the service industry in the United States reported harassment by clients and customers (Gettman and Gelfand 2007).

### Organizational Factors and Workplace Violence

Beyond the gender and sexual orientation of workers, certain workplace settings and organizational factors are associated with greater risks of sexual, physical, social, and economic violence. A recent review of the international literature by Pina and Gannon (2012) indicated organizations with both a higher ratio of men to women and more male-oriented jobs had higher rates of sexual harassment incidents than other types of organizations. In the United States, other workplace and organizational characteristics associated with higher rates of workplace violence include role conflict, ambiguity, work overload (Bowling and Beehr 2006), and greater power differentials among levels within the organizational structure (Ilies et al. 2003). Internationally, communication technology has not only changed traditional workplaces and practices but created new, virtual work spaces, where women employed as professional journalists and bloggers—and those who conduct other paid or unpaid work on the internet—are increasingly exposed to cyber bullying, sexual harassment, stalking, threats, and other forms of interpersonal violence (Citron 2009, Hess 2014).

Employers who do not follow policies and procedures to keep employees safe from harassment contribute to the proliferation of hegemonic processes and structures that create hostile work environments and a culture of violence (Hertzog et al. 2008; Jackson et al. 2002; Pina and Gannon 2012). Earlier research conducted in the United States indicated women who believed their organization was tolerant of sexual harassment tended to experience higher levels of workplace harassment than those employed in organizations that took complaints seriously and disciplined people who engaged in sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al. 1997). The negative impact of sexual harassment in the workplace extends beyond

the targeted individual. For example, a misogynistic work environment may also lead to increased withdrawal among others in the organization (Miner-Rubino and Cortina 2007). These findings support our argument that an expanded conceptualization of workplace violence must take into consideration diverse workplace contexts and the wide range of potential perpetrators.

### Impact of Workplace Violence on Women's Health, Well-Being, and Work

Documented health effects of workplace violence range from mild to severe and include emotional, mental, and physical distress, lower overall health satisfaction, and death (Chan et al. 2008; Dehue et al. 2012; Gunnarsdottir et al. 2006; Krug et al. 2002; O'Donnell et al. 2010; Wasti et al. 2000). Bowling and Beehr (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of workplace violence using 90 sources (e.g., scholarly articles, books and chapters, dissertations, theses, unpublished studies from 1987 through 2005). They identified role conflict, ambiguity, and overload as the primary antecedents of workplace harassment. Consequences of workplace harassment included strains, anxiety, depression, burnout, lower self-esteem, and lower life satisfaction (Bowling and Beehr 2006). In another meta-analysis of 41 published and unpublished studies, Willness and colleagues (2007) found similar problems related to workplace sexual harassment, such as low physical and mental health and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Other research conducted in Brazil with female domestic workers (DeSouza and Cerqueira 2009) found low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression among participants who were sexually harassed. Sexual harassment was associated with neck pain among a weighted sample of working women in Quebec, Canada (Stock and Tissot 2012). Women employed at a university in the United States reported injury, illness, and assault as the result of sexual harassment occurring within the previous 12 months (Rospenda et al. 2005).

Experiences of workplace violence may also impact women's economic, career, and academic status. A recent Canadian study of 467 employed women indicated workplace sexual harassment was more strongly associated with work withdrawal and negative psychological health indicators, than were other forms of workplace aggression (Dionisi et al. 2012). Lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bowling and Beehr 2006; Chan et al. 2008; Willness et al. 2007), higher job stress (Chan et al. 2008) and withdrawal (Chan et al. 2008; Willness et al. 2007) were reported in cross-country meta-analyses. A survey conducted in the Netherlands indicated employees who had experienced workplace bullying had more work absences than those who did not report being subjected to bullying behaviors (Dehue et al.

2012). In a survey of female adolescents at a suburban United States high school, Fineran and Gruber (2009) used a modified version of the SEQ (Fitzgerald et al. 1995). They found the majority (58 %) were employed outside of school, primarily in food service and retail jobs. Girls who experienced sexual harassment at work had rates of work stress, low job satisfaction, academic withdrawal, and school absences that were significantly higher than other employed adolescents. The researchers also noted that the frequency of sexual harassment (52 %) reported by this sample of employed adolescents was much higher than rates reported in the published research using the same instrument among adult women.

The widespread incidence of sexual harassment and workplace bullying means millions of women face difficult, complex, and multifaceted decisions related to how to respond to the violence and maintain their personal safety, health, and well-being (O'Donnell et al. 2010; Pina and Gannon 2012). Common responses include remaining silent, seeking to ignore the perpetrator, or submitting to the violence. When they felt it was safe and worth the risk, some Canadian women took direct actions to counter the aggression (Pina and Gannon 2012). The discrepancy between how women would like to respond to and how they actually respond may be associated with the perceived risks of responding, other social concerns of constraints, perceived social norms, or individual personality characteristics. Brinkman and colleagues (2011) reported women in the United States who chose *not* to actively respond to workplace violence had lower levels of distress than women who responded confrontationally, which suggests that in some cases, direct action may result in further stress and health risks.

A cross-cultural study of employed female workers with prior personal experiences of workplace violence in Turkey and the United States indicated responses varied across different cultural groups (Cortina and Wasti 2005). Among women who reported avoiding the situation and attempting to negotiate with the aggressor, more than two-thirds were Turkish and Hispanic Americans. In contrast, Anglo-American women tended to cope by detaching themselves from the stressor. Regardless of culture or class, the majority of women employed a variety of personal coping methods without filing a formal complaint.

One possible response to workplace violence is the decision to not participate in or not be present for certain work-related tasks (O'Donnell et al. 2010; Pina and Gannon 2012; Willness et al. 2007). If socially and economically feasible, some women may change jobs or quit work altogether. Although not definitive solutions to avoiding harassment, other strategies include being absent or taking sick leave in order to begin the healing process. In exploring the lived experience of sickness absence through in-depth interviews with Canadian women, O'Donnell and colleagues (2010) found some women eventually were able to make sense of the connection between a problematic work environment and

their health. The researchers also reported cases of women dealing with the ongoing personal dilemma of whether or not to return to work, given the realization that absence from work, in and of itself, would not resolve the situation. Throughout the process, these Canadian women evaluated their various priorities related to work and health and sought to move forward with plans to seek health-related services, return to work, quit, retire, or go on long-term disability. In the global context, the ability to make such choices would of course depend on local labor policies and availability of legal and social resources.

Labor and social policies may impact women's decisions and responses to workplace violence, particularly regarding whether or not to report the incidents to authorities through informal or formal processes. While some victims of workplace violence may feel comfortable confiding in friends, co-workers or relatives (Cortina and Wasti 2005; Pina and Gannon 2012), formal reporting is not always feasible, safe, or in women's perceived best interests. As a result, women rarely file formal reports or complaints (Pina and Gannon 2012). Data from the 2002 United States National Organization Survey (a national probability survey of workplaces) indicated only 29 % of the companies with a sexual harassment policy in place had received a complaint of sexual harassment (Hertzog et al. 2008). The organizational environment may not only foster or inhibit workplace violence but may also moderate the rate at which women report incidents (Vijayasiri 2008). Registering a report of harassment or aggression in the workplace can result in retaliation, lower job satisfaction, and increased psychological distress for victims (Bergman et al. 2002). As discussed above, there is substantial evidence of the detrimental economic, health and relationship impacts of workplace violence in women's *physical and mental health, work lives and personal lives*.

### Expanding the Concept and Measurement of Workplace Violence

Most current definitions of workplace violence include physical or psychological violence by co-workers, manifest in sexual harassment, aggression, bullying, intimidation, assault, or other forms of discrimination or oppression (Jackson et al. 2002; Krug et al. 2002; Waters et al. 2005). Some definitions of workplace violence distinguish between sexual and non-sexual forms of interpersonal violence (Rospenda et al. 2005). While sexual harassment can rise to a legal violation (U.S.E.O.E.C. 2009), bullying and other forms of workplace incivility often do not violate the law in the United States (Lim and Cortina 2005; U.S.E.O.E.C. 2009). Sexual harassment usually refers to some combination of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other types of unwanted sexual conduct that creates a hostile or offensive work

environment (European Union et al. 2004; U.S.E.O.E.C. 2009). Although not always explicit, an underlying assumption in these definitions is that the interpersonal violence occurs within the context of paid employment (Rospenda et al. 2005).

Other terms used to refer to nonsexual workplace harassment include workplace bullying, lateral violence (Croft and Cash 2012), workplace harassment, workplace abuse (Krieger et al. 2008), and horizontal or lateral violence (Vessey et al. 2010). Gender, sexual orientation, race, class, language, or other power differentials between perpetrator and victim often play a part in nonsexual workplace violence (Sue 2010). Within the nursing profession, where both perpetrators and victims tend to be women but differentials related to years of professional experience or age often exist, lateral or horizontal nonsexual violence is a widely recognized phenomenon (Croft and Cash 2012).

Measurement challenges include the co-occurrence of aggressions, especially the relationship between workplace incivility and sexual harassment (Barling et al. 2001; Dionisi et al. 2012; Lim and Cortina 2005). In Canada, Dionisi and colleagues (2012) noted that more women reported experiencing both sexual harassment and other forms of aggression at work than women who reported just one form of workplace violence. Furthermore, there are wide variations among specific measures of workplace violence. Worker's Compensation Claims data, surveys, and secondary incident reports are common sources of information used in calculating the incidence and prevalence of workplace violence (Wang et al. 2008). Yet definitions and measures of *workplace violence* vary widely. In a survey conducted in Iceland, investigators asked participants if they had ever experienced sexual harassment, bullying, physical violence, or threats at work (Gunnarsdottir et al. 2006). In contrast, a survey of Canadian women inquired about experiences of physical violence, workplace intimidation, or unwanted sexual attention (Stock and Tissot 2012). Researchers often inquire about negative interactions with people in the workplace, persistent psychological or physical abuse in the workplace, and work environments that are perceived as offensive, hostile, or intimidating (O'Donnell et al. 2010; Rospenda et al. 2005; Saunders et al. 2007).

The methodological variations and wide range of worker and workplace contexts add to the complexity of comparing rates of workplace violence across studies, time, and regions (Ilies et al. 2003; Nielsen et al. 2010; Wang et al. 2008; Waters et al. 2005). There is evidence to suggest that the definition of workplace violence, the survey methods used, and the sampling procedures all may impact women's responses to survey questions (Ilies et al. 2003). Analysis of responses to a random-sample survey of Norwegian employees indicated fewer participants responded in the affirmative when asked directly if they had experienced sexual harassment than when asked a range of questions about behavioral experiences in the

workplace (Nielsen et al. 2010). In a study comparing experiences of United States and Brazilian college students, the Brazilians were more likely than Americans to rate a scenario of heterosexual woman-to-woman harassment as sexual harassment that should be investigated (DeSouza et al. 2007). These findings suggest that individuals construct, define, and interpret experiences of workplace violence in different ways.

Although not all negative workplace interactions should be labeled workplace violence, it is important to recognize that workplace violence is not limited to overt acts of aggression but also includes ongoing incidents of microaggression. Microaggression is a form of interpersonal violence manifest in subtle verbal insults or behavioral slights that occur repeatedly over time and are often directed at women and persons of racial, ethnic, class, gender, or other minorities (Sue 2010). The effects of multiple, seemingly nebulous acts of aggression are cumulative and can result in significant harm (Sue 2010).

### **Redefining Workplace Violence: Implications for Research, Policy and Practice**

Because most current workplace violence research, policies, and practices focus primarily on the formal, paid labor force (Gettman and Gelfand 2007), there are major knowledge gaps regarding workplace violence occurring within other work contexts and types (e.g., domestic, caring, volunteer, school, community, online work). Our proposed expanded conceptualization of workplace encompasses the multiple dimensions of women's work throughout the lifespan and across settings. Beyond the formal, paid workplace, women may be subjected to violence, aggression, and discrimination in the context of unpaid or volunteer work, domestic work, childcare, community work, school work or education, work at home, work outside of the home, and work in both formal and informal workplaces (Messias et al. 1997). Confining the definition of workplace violence to the context of formal employment ignores women's involvement in multiple forms of work throughout their lifespan, work that occurs in various settings. By expanding the concept of workplace violence, researchers may be able to better identify commonalities and differences across diverse contexts and propose more appropriate and tailored interventions.

To more fully understand the scope and characteristics of workplace violence, future research should incorporate an expanded conceptualization that better reflects the diverse realities of women's work and workplaces, as well as women's multiple identities within those contexts (Messias et al. 1997). An expanded conceptualization would encourage more in-depth explorations of interpersonal violence in a wider range of workplaces and types of work, as well as critical examinations of the various dimensions of diversity that may be targeted through workplace oppressions. To both

prevent and effectively intervene in cases of workplace violence, there is a need for more critical examinations of the multiple dimensions of difference (e.g., gender, race, class, language, age) that may be involved in workplace aggression. An expanded conceptualization would broaden the examination of workplace violence beyond gender-based aggression to include discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, and assault related to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, or other dimensions of unequal social status, position, and power.

The incorporation of an expanded conceptualization of workplace violence into research, policy, and practice will foster the consideration of harassment tied not only to gender but race, sexuality, nationality, language, religion, and other dimensions of difference, as well as diverse cultural meanings and personal constructions of work, work environments, and interpersonal relationships (Wasti et al. 2000). There is increasing consensus among feminist scholars that the intersectional nature of women's oppression, in which gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, language, national origin, ability, and other dimensions of difference interact and are interwoven complex ways (Crenshaw 2008; hooks 1984; Spelman 2008, Weber 2010).

There is a need for further research on how various dimensions of power differentials potentially mediate or moderate the effects of workplace violence. Intersectional identities need not be controlled for one another, but should be considered inextricable (Crenshaw 2008; hooks 1984; Spelman 2008). For example, perpetrators of microaggression often target women's various identities (Sue 2010). A study with African American women illustrated how critical it is to examine the multiple forms of harassment that women face because the co-occurrence of racial and sexual harassment impact occupational and psychological outcomes (Buchanan and Fitzgerald 2008). Research with Black, Asian, and minority ethnic women in the United Kingdom indicated these women believed race and culture were important factors in their experiences of workplace violence (Fielden et al. 2010). Many women ascribed to the premise that they would not have been sexually harassed if they were White or from a different culture. Similarly, a survey of men and women from five organizations located in a North American city indicated women experienced sexual harassment more often than men; minority workers more than White workers; and minority women more than any other race and gender combination (Berdahl and Moore 2006). Women in the United States with low incomes, members of the working class, and multi-racial/ethnic women have high rates of sexual harassment, which is significantly associated with poor health outcomes (Krieger et al. 2008). Unpacking the ways in which women's multiple identities are targeted in the various forms of sexual and nonsexual harassment and violence may lead to better understanding of the interconnectedness among these oppressions

in women's formal and informal work lives, and personal lives. Filling gaps in the literature regarding the effects of discrimination based not only on gender, but on the intersections of various dimensions of difference and power differentials is critical to understanding and effectively addressing workplace violence and preventing future occurrences.

Because sexual and nonsexual harassment are interpreted differently in various cultures, it is also important to consider these differences when defining terms and choosing measurement questions. Using both emic and etic constructs and measurements will help researchers understand the contextual nature when examining sexual and nonsexual harassment of working women. Historically, bullying and sexual harassment developed through separate disciplines (Gruber and Fineran 2008) and were studied as separate issues (Lim and Cortina 2005). Bullying was concentrated in the field of psychology and sexual harassment or sex discrimination in the field of feminism and women's studies (Gruber and Fineran 2008). These forms of violence, among others, are now studied across various disciplines (Gruber and Fineran 2008). Because women may experience harassment, bullying, aggression, violence, and microaggression in a variety of different contexts and at the same time, these phenomena should be studied together in transdisciplinary ways.

Expansion of transdisciplinary and transnational research on workplace violence is another area that warrants attention. Examples include collaborations between professionals in gender studies, economics, workforce, medicine, sociology, psychology, and public health. Using an expanded, more inclusive definition of workplace violence will enhance researchers' abilities to test and validate comprehensive measures that are more comparable across studies, disciplines, organizations, regions, cultures, and time. This will allow scholars to draw more reliable conclusions about the incidence of workplace violence, moderating factors associated with workplace violence, and importantly, prevention measures.

A model for transnational, transdisciplinary research on workplace violence is a multi-country collaborative study of domestic violence supported by the World Health Organization (García-Moreno et al. 2005). The research protocol for this 10-country study allowed for country-specific minor adaptations, such as additional questions or modified response options, without jeopardizing comparability. With the aim of enhancing understanding of the global prevalence of violence against women, health outcomes, risk factors, and service-seeking, the research team collected data from over 24,000 women, using similar questionnaires in each country. The study was culturally relevant, yet comparable across countries (García-Moreno et al. 2005). To examine workplace violence transnationally, behavior-specific questions could be developed and examined across a wide range of work environments.

The conceptual definitions and measures researchers use in studies of workplace violence influence how human resources specialists, practitioners, and policy-makers understand the connected nature of women's work, sexual harassment, and bullying within the context of women's health. Policy makers and human resource specialists should continue to refine relevant safety guidelines to protect employees from workplace violence and improve reporting processes and procedures. These legislative interventions and policies should recognize and incorporate women's multiple and interwoven identities. Furthermore, studies of the cultural aspects of workplace violence should include both emic and etic constructs and measurements. This may offer scholars more insight into the experiences of women within the context of women's cultures (Wasti et al. 2000).

We also recommend the broader application of tailored, theory-based workplace violence prevention and education interventions. Researchers in Hong Kong implemented a successful school-based sexual harassment intervention based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991). The aim was to encourage girls (ages 13–17) to protect themselves from sexual harassment by peers (Li et al. 2010). Tailored programs are needed for adolescent and adult women, as well as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and transgender people working and studying in formal and informal workplaces, schools, and communities. With a better understanding of the magnitude and effect of the problem, targeted and appropriate intervention strategies can be instituted in a variety of contexts to address issues from primary prevention to post-aggression support in communities across the globe (Krug et al. 2002).

## Conclusions

Globally, workplace violence occurs in a wide range of work contexts (Dionisi et al. 2012; Rospenda et al. 2005; Wasti et al. 2000). It involves multiple types of interpersonal aggression perpetrated by individuals in diverse relationships with victims (Huerta et al. 2006; Jackson et al. 2002; LeBlanc and Kelloway 2002; Matchen and DeSouza 2000; Timmerman 2003). Going beyond conventional definitions that limit workplace violence to interpersonal violence occurring in conjunction with paid employment in the formal sector, we propose an expanded conceptualization of *workplaces* where women of all ages and other vulnerable individuals may be exposed to interpersonal violence. These workplaces include paid and unpaid work in the informal sector and in other contexts, including community service, family care giving, schooling and education (Dionisi et al. 2012; Rospenda et al. 2005; Wasti et al. 2000). This broader conceptualization reflects women's lived experiences of personal and work lives that are interwoven and seamless rather than distinct dichotomies (Messias et al. 1997).

Application of an expanded conceptualization must involve the acknowledgement and incorporation of various workplace contexts (e.g., formal, informal, community, educational institutions), diverse forms of work (e.g., paid, unpaid, volunteer service) and multiple types of interpersonal aggression into research, policy and practice. Current definitions of workplace violence acknowledge the diverse types of aggression (e.g., sexual, physical, emotional, racial) but these are often studied separately (Lim and Cortina 2005). The incorporation of more interdisciplinary research into the field will enhance understanding of the dynamics of multi-faceted workplace aggression.

Increasing awareness of workplace violence using a broader, more contextual definition could contribute to more effective policies, interventions, and programs. A better understanding of the broad scope and multiple dimensions of workplace violence should guide prevention and education programs tailored to women employed in wage work in formal and informal workplaces, as well as those engaged in unpaid work in homes, schools, and communities. Targeted and appropriate intervention strategies can be instituted in a variety of contexts to address issues from primary prevention to post-aggression support in communities across the globe (Krug et al. 2002).

We argue that employing an expanded conceptualization of women's workplaces will help to fill knowledge gaps (Marsh et al. 2009; Miner-Rubino and Cortina 2007), and contribute to more thorough descriptions of the global extent (Ilies et al. 2003), nature (Hertzog et al. 2008), and cost (Waters et al. 2005) of gender-based violence. This, in turn, may improve transnational comparisons of the incidence, contexts, policies, and practices, enabling policy-makers and employers to develop more applicable regulations to prevent workplace violence, facilitate reporting, and improve follow-up procedures. In practice, a broader conceptual framework of workplace violence should foster the implementation of more effective screening and more comprehensive assessments of risks and exposure to physical, sexual, and emotional aggression in paid and unpaid workplaces (e.g., schools, homes, on farms, in brothels, in the community) among women across the lifespan. Enhancing public awareness of the extent and nature of the many forms and contexts of workplace violence is an important first step and one that will enhance prevention efforts (Krug et al. 2002).

Incorporation of intersectional, transnational, and transdisciplinary perspectives into research, policy, and practice will expand understandings and interpretations of women's experiences of workplace violence across the lifespan and within their own multi-faceted cultural contexts and racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities, facilitating transnational and cross-cultural comparisons (Crenshaw 2008; hooks 1984; Spelman 2008, Weber 2010). The intent of an expanded conceptualization of workplace violence is not to erase or

minimize distinctions and differences across the types and contexts of violence against women and other vulnerable individuals. Rather, the aim is to heighten awareness, expand research, facilitate transnational and cross-cultural comparisons, enhance policy initiatives, and improve education and prevention interventions and treatment options.

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