

Article

The Role of Organizational Efforts in Mitigating the Adverse Effects of Workplace Mistreatment on Attitudinal Responses

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Abstract: Despite increasing attention to workplace mistreatment in organizations, few studies have investigated the consequences of such negative experiences on employees. Using the Canadian Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) data (about 80,000 observations), this study examines the relationships between workplace mistreatment and outcomes at work and the moderating role of organizational efforts in preventing and handling workplace mistreatment among Canadian federal government employees. Empirical results of an OLS regression and logit model document that perceived workplace mistreatment, in terms of workplace harassment and discrimination, is negatively related to job satisfaction and continuance organizational commitment and positively related to turnover intention. The analysis also shows that the linkages between workplace mistreatment and the three outcomes were weaker when organizational efforts aimed at dealing with workplace mistreatment were perceived to be high. Implications of these results for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: workplace mistreatment; injustice; harassment; discrimination



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1. Introduction

Governments and business corporations have made considerable strides in preventing workplace mistreatment and handling employee grievances resulting from misapplications of organizational policies and experiences of workplace injustice. The codes of conduct for workers in the private and public sectors articulate that employees should not engage in discriminatory practices and should help make a workplace free from harassment and violence. Yet, despite the accumulated legal and organizational efforts, recent organizational research indicates high incidences of misapplication and mistreatment experienced by different social groups [1–3]. For example, the study of Fekedulegn et al. [2] documents the prevalence of workplace mistreatment among middle-aged (over 48-years-old) workers employed across various occupational groups in the U.S. Surveys conducted by Cortina and associates found that 79 percent of a law-enforcement sample [4] and 71 percent of a court-employee sample [5] reported that they had experienced some forms of unfair and uncivil conduct or mistreatment at work.

The prevalence of overt and subtle forms of workplace mistreatment, including harassment and discrimination, has serious negative consequences for employees and organizations [6–10]. The consequences of abusive behavior and mistreatment experienced by employees include impaired mental, physical, and social health [11–13], as well as adverse job-related outcomes, including reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and increased stress levels and work withdrawal behaviors [14–18]. Research also found that observers of mistreatment (e.g., coworkers of the target employee) report lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment and higher levels of burnout and turnover intention [19]. Moreover, perceptions and incidences of mistreatment can disrupt social relationships, hamper cooperation in workgroups, and lead to costly lawsuits in government organizations. Inadequate organizational attention to identifying and resolving

such problems can also diminish public trust in government and tarnish the reputation of public agencies.

Despite being an important and relevant topic, the negative consequences of workplace mistreatment and the potential contribution of organizational efforts in handling such mistreatment have received limited attention in organizational behavior research. Several studies extensively examined whether employee personal characteristics such as age, race, gender, marital status, and job type influence the likelihood of being targets of workplace discrimination, harassment, or incivility [20–22]. However, there has been limited research on how unsatisfying and threatening workplace experiences affect employee work attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, employee perceptions and reports of workplace mistreatment are influenced by how organizations structure and handle employees' experiences of mistreatment in the workplace [1]. Accordingly, the present study examines the effects of perceived workplace mistreatment on public employees' satisfaction with their job, continuance commitment to their workplace, and the likelihood of remaining in their organization.

Moreover, we aim to contribute to the literature by examining whether organizational efforts undertaken to prevent and handle incidences of mistreatment buffer/moderate adverse effects on employees' negative attitudinal and behavioral reactions. We examine these linkages with data collected in 2008 from about 80,000 public employees working in over 50 agencies in the Canadian Federal government. Results of this study support the prevalence of workplace mistreatment and its negative outcomes, such as reduced job satisfaction and reduced intention to stay (continuance organizational commitment) or increased intention to leave organizations, associated with experiences of mistreatment at work. In addition, this research provides evidence on the moderating role of organizational efforts of reducing tolerances of workplace harassment and discrimination and handling employee complaints and grievances of harassment effectively.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Workplace Mistreatment

We operationalize workplace mistreatment, in a broader term, as counter-normative interpersonal actions [1], ranging from subtle maltreatment and misapplication (i.e., discrimination) to overt bullying and violence (i.e., harassment). Such counter-normative actions reflect a misapplication or misinterpretation of an organization's policy as well as incidences of a broad range of workplace injustices, including harassment and discrimination based on individual socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, and socioeconomic position). Organizational researchers have noted that the experiences of workplace mistreatment tend to have similar anecdotal accounts [23–25] and lead to outcomes such as decreased employee work satisfaction and organizational commitment and increased work withdrawal behaviors [14,18,26]. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the effects of incidences of two forms of workplace mistreatment (i.e., harassment and discrimination) rather than focusing on just one. Additionally, we consider workplace mistreatment to be a generic term encompassing all specific mistreatment forms. The experiences of various workplace mistreatment are generally concurrent, suggesting that they might not be additively separable or multiplicatively derivable based on particular demographic domains (e.g., [24,27]). Relatedly, researchers have attempted to validate the construct of generalized workplace harassment (e.g., [28,29]) and generalized workplace discrimination (e.g., [30]), and even generalized workplace mistreatment (e.g., [1]) to assess the cross-cutting commonality inherent in numerous target groups.

There has been a broad range of organizational efforts and government policies prohibiting and decreasing gender-, race-, or age-based mistreatment at work. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 (the U.S.), the Equality Act of 2010 (United Kingdom), the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 (Australia), and similar legal advancements in other countries represent a decreasing tolerance for any form of workplace mistreatment. In Canada, according to the 1985 Canadian Human Rights Act, workers are protected from discrimination based

on race, national origin and ethnicity, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability, and conviction for an offense for which a pardon has been granted. The 1985 Canadian Human Rights Act also defines harassment as a discriminatory practice of harassing an individual on a prohibited ground of discrimination. Workplace harassment refers to “any improper conduct by an individual directed at and offensive to another person or persons in the workplace, and that the individual knew, or ought reasonably to have known, would cause offense or harm. It comprises any objectionable act(s), comment(s) or display(s) that demean, belittle, or cause personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat [31]”. Regarding the distinction between harassment and discrimination from a legal perspective, harassment encompasses abusive behaviors that cause harm and contribute to a hostile workplace, whereas discrimination is the net result of harassment [32]. More specifically, discrimination occurs when “harassment creates a hostile working environment or affects the terms, conditions, or ability to do one’s job disparately for members of a protected class [27]”.

The understanding of mistreatment as a broad psychological construct has another benefit, of enabling research on understudied groups in organizations that have not been recognized as members of minorities. Most studies focused on sexual harassment typically characterized along the target’s sex/gender lines [14,33,34] and on racial discrimination along the target’s race/ethnicity lines [35], due to their visibility and ease of measurement. However, these studies are limited in capturing the effects of subtle forms of misapplication as well as mistreatment experienced by certain groups because of their gender identity or sexual orientation (e.g., gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people) [25,36]. Research indicates that the power imbalance between victim and perpetrator changes over time [37,38]. This means that there is a possibility that supervisors or members of majorities, traditionally assumed to be the perpetrator, would be the target of workplace mistreatment, depending on power differences between supervisor and subordinate, between groups of employees, or among peers. For instance, a recent study by Riccucci and Saldivar [39] shows that the vast majority of the race, gender, and ethnic discrimination lawsuits against city police and fire departments in the United States were actually “reverse discrimination” suits filed by white men, not women and people of color. Therefore, by focusing on the overall experience, not a particular type, our study seeks to minimize the coverage gap in the analysis of the effects of workplace mistreatment on public sector employees.

2.2. Experiences of Workplace Mistreatment

There are two bodies of literature that are related to mistreatment in the workplace: the organizational context of workplace mistreatment and the consequences of perceived negative experiences in private and public sector workplaces. Although the studies of the occurrence of mistreatment have been conducted separately, their findings have provided a reasonably coherent list of variables reflecting employees’ vulnerability to either workplace harassment or workplace discrimination. This includes employees’ socio-demographic variables, such as age, gender, sexuality, nativity, primary language, and employment class (e.g., supervisory and non-supervisory employee); organizational contexts, such as the composition of membership (e.g., worksite gender composition and racial/ethnic composition, and same-sex (race) and opposite-sex (race) supervisor and employee); type of worksite; and workplace climate/environment [40–43]. These studies, taken together, have identified the role of workplaces in determining the likelihood that employees would experience single or combined mistreatment in the workplace. Specifically, employees who are in relatively disadvantaged groups, such as young, non-white, female, less-educated, less-tenured, and non-managerial workers, are found to be more likely to suffer workplace mistreatment. Building on relevant research, we reasoned that there would be gender, age, and class differences in the likelihood of experiencing workplace mistreatment among public sector employees.

Hypothesis 1a. *Female public employees more often experience workplace mistreatment than male public employees.*

Hypothesis 1b. *Younger female public employees more often experience workplace mistreatment than older female public employees.*

Hypothesis 1c. *Female public employees in clerical occupations more often experience workplace mistreatment than female public employees in executive and professional occupations.*

2.3. Effects of Perceived Mistreatment on Employee Work Behavior

A substantial body of organizational research has assessed the detrimental effects on workers, individually or as a group [18,29,44,45]. Research showed that immediate consequences of misapplication of organizational policies, mistreatment, or abusive behavior experienced by employees are anger, fear, anxiety, perceptions of injustice, and injured social identity [11–13]. These negative feelings and reactions, in turn, adversely affect employees' mental and physical health [46]. Experiences of injustice and incivility have been shown to relate positively to higher blood pressure and incidences of heart disease, lower self-esteem, and higher occurrences of depression [34,47,48]. Studies also found that those who experience mistreatment report lower levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance, and higher levels of turnover intention [17,23,29,36,44].

In the current study, we examine connections of perceived mistreatment to job satisfaction, continuance organizational commitment, and turnover intention of employees working in diverse organizations in the Canadian Federal Government. We focus on employee responses to workplace mistreatment regarding not only employees' satisfaction with the job but also employees' intention to stay or remain in the workplace because of their close associations with important organizational outcomes. While organizational commitment refers to a set of three facets of an employee's attachment to the organization [49], this study pays particular attention to the continuance component of organizational commitment. Considerable research conducted in public and business organizations found that the extent to which employees are satisfied with their job affects their in-role and extra-role performance [50] and the effectiveness of their workgroups and organizations [51]. Research also showed that skilled employee turnover has serious negative consequences, including the loss of valuable intellectual capital, diminished organizational performance, and increased costs for recruiting and training employees that could otherwise be used for valuable public programs [52–55]. Based on these findings, we propose and test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *Public employees who experience workplace mistreatment will report lower levels of job satisfaction and continuance organizational commitment and higher levels of turnover intention.*

2.4. The Moderating Role of Organizational Efforts

A key goal of this study is to assess the role of organizational efforts in mitigating the adverse effects of perceived mistreatment on job satisfaction, continuance organizational commitment, and turnover intention of public employees. Existing research indicates that the extent of maltreatment experienced by employees in organizations is a function of the environmental tolerance for unjust practices or behaviors, the commitment of organizational leaders to address complaints of such problems effectively, and the implementation of policies and mistreatment procedures to prevent incidences of mistreatment [7,56–58]. In a work environment where either subtle or overt mistreatment forms are tolerated, such problems are likely to be higher. Similarly, how victims of mistreatment will feel and respond is likely to depend on their perceptions about the level of risks involved in lodging complaints about such incidences, the likelihood that their complaints will be taken seriously, and that the perpetrators will be reprimanded [59,60]. The importance

of organizational efforts to deal with workplace mistreatment was acknowledged among scholars [61–63].

Managers may influence employees' perceptions about their organization's climate by clearly communicating anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, describing the formal mistreatment procedure, and offering protection from retaliation. Several studies found that organizations in which managers are proactive in addressing problems related to sexual harassment have fewer sexual harassment problems than organizations in which managers are less proactive [64,65]. Additionally, prior studies found that employees in organizations that used multiple methods to address sexual harassment problems were more willing to report such problems than those with fewer or no formal procedures [56,57]. An organization's efforts to address and prevent problems of workplace mistreatment may also have an indirect benefit by mitigating the effects of negative work experiences on employee attitudes and behavior. While previous studies have examined the direct impact of organizational efforts in reducing mistreatment occurrences [56,57,64,65], recent research has shifted its attention to whether organizational efforts buffer or moderate the adverse effects of mistreatment experiences on employee outcomes. For instance, Miner, Settles [66] also show that employees who experienced workplace incivility reported better job satisfaction and other work outcomes when they felt higher levels of organizational support.

All employees expect that their employing organization will provide them with a work environment where neither subtle nor overt forms of mistreatment are tolerated and that the organization will protect them from being victimized. When there is a violation of this expectation, an employee is likely to feel a sense of injustice or betrayal [67,68]. Then, the employee may attribute the cause of mistreatment to his/her manager or the organization or even blame himself/herself [17]. Hence, an employee's evaluation of the ways his/her organization or manager deals with mistreatment is likely to be closely related to his/her perceptions of organizational fairness, particularly procedural fairness [69–72]. Employee perceptions about their organization's efforts to prevent and handle mistreatment may mitigate or buffer their negative effects on employee work attitudes, including job dissatisfaction, organizational de-commitment, and turnover intention. Prior research on procedural fairness, for example, showed that when employees receive/experience negative outcomes, they tend to respond more favorably if they feel a sense of fairness or justice. In contrast, a sense of unfairness or injustice accentuates the negative effects of the unfavorable outcome or decision [73–75]. In addition, studies by Triana, García [76] found that organizational support for diversity moderated the effects of perceived racial discrimination on employee affective commitment and turnover intention. Given these results and theoretical reasoning, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. *Organizational efforts to reduce and handle mistreatment incidences will increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment but decrease the turnover intention of public employees.*

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Sample and Procedures

To test the research hypotheses, we rely on the 2008 Canadian Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) data that Statistics Canada collected for the Canadian federal government. While the PSES has been conducted every three years since 1999, most recently in the fall of 2020, only the 2008 PSES data were provided in complete form with all relevant variables. In 2020, about 11% and 7% of employees indicated that they had been victims of harassment and discrimination, respectively, a decrease from 25% and 15% in 2008. However, despite the decreasing pattern of perceiving and experiencing harassment and discrimination at work from 2008 to 2020, a significant portion of employees still suffer from workplace mistreatment. This study focuses more on the moderating effect of organizational actions for preventing and handling mistreatment at work than the reliable estimate of the prevalence

of workplace mistreatment. Therefore, using data collected from the large and population-based survey provides an opportunity to understand the role of organizational efforts in mitigating the adverse effects of counter-normative workplace mistreatment.

The PSES was administered to assess Canadian federal employees' perceptions about their work climate as well as their work attitudes, including job satisfaction and intention to quit. We use the Canadian PSES data for several reasons, including relatively less coverage error and a high response rate. To reduce coverage error, Statistics Canada surveyed all federal employees, including temporary employees such as students, Governor-in-Council appointees, and other part-time employees. In addition, the 2008 PSES included a number of questions that asked employees about their experiences of harassment and discrimination and their perceptions of their organization's efforts to reduce harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Using the PSES dataset, therefore, will allow us to assess the main and interactive relationships between perceived harassment and discrimination and organizational efforts on employee job satisfaction and turnover intention.

The 2008 PSES was administered electronically to most federal employees (95%). Five percent of the federal employees who did not have internet access were provided with paper and pencil surveys. A total of 257,778 employees received the survey; 169,572 completed the survey, resulting in an overall response rate of 65.8%. After excluding missing, unknown, or refused responses, the total number of valid respondents was 113,367. The gender composition of the sample was 58.5% female. Of the respondents, 33.03% were under 40 years old, and 51.47% had at least a university degree. More than three-quarters (76.65%) of the respondents were in non-supervisory/managerial positions, 64.94% were professionals, and 23.04% were clerical and technical support employees. Moreover, more than half of the respondents worked outside the national capital region (60%).

3.2. Measures

For the dependent variables of this study, job satisfaction was measured with two items of the PSES: (1) "Overall, I like my job" and (2) "I get a sense of satisfaction from my work". The internal reliability coefficient of the job satisfaction scale was reasonably high ($\alpha = 0.90$). Then, we measured continuance organizational commitment using a single item of the PSES: "I would prefer to remain with my work unit, even if a comparable job was available elsewhere in my department or agency". The three-component model of commitment, proposed by Meyer and Allen [49], splits an organizational commitment into three definable components as follows: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Among these three components of organizational commitment, this study focuses on the continuance component reflecting dimensions of high sacrifices and high alternatives. These three items (two items for job satisfaction and one item for continuance organizational commitment) were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Before conducting any analysis, we reverse-coded the items so that higher values indicate higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Although satisfaction and commitment are complex constructs, as this study does not primarily focus on the concept, the use of a few items or a single item was deemed sufficient [76–79]. Despite its disadvantages in theory, the use of single-item (SI) measures could utilize practical advantages over the use of multiple-item (MI) measures when the constructs are relatively homogenous [80], clear, straightforward, and simple (one-dimensional) [77]. The present study attempts to address the possibility of ambiguous constructs by focusing on overall job satisfaction and the continuance component of organizational commitment. Then, we measured turnover intention with a single item from the PSES: "do you intend to leave your department or agency in the next two years?" (1 = yes, 0 = no). Approximately one-fifth of respondents (18.47%) reported that they intended to leave their agency/department within two years. The comparison of continuance commitment and turnover intention offers an opportunity to examine whether and how employee experiences of workplace mistreatment and their perceptions of organizational efforts and investments differently

affect employees' intentions to remain in or leave their organizations when they have alternative employment opportunities.

For the independent variable of workplace mistreatment, we focus on employees' experiences of workplace harassment, as a form of unfair and uncivil conduct, and workplace discrimination, as a form of misapplication and mistreatment at work. We relied on a single item of the PSES ("In the past two years, have you been the victim of harassment on the job?") to measure workplace harassment. Workplace discrimination was also measured with a single item from the PSES ("In the past two years, have you been the victim of discrimination on the job?"). Prior to responding to these two questions, participants were provided with and asked to read the definitions of mistreatment noted in the 1985 Canadian Human Rights Act. The response choices for both questions were 2 = more than twice, 1 = once or twice, and 0 = never. To measure mistreatment, we created two dummy variables and re-coded the responses 1 and 2 as 1 (i.e., yes) and 0 as 0 (i.e., no). We measured organizational efforts aimed at reducing and handling incidences of workplace mistreatment with the three items from the PSES: (1) "My department or agency works hard to create a workplace that prevents mistreatment", (2) "I am satisfied with the way in which my work unit responds to matters related to the mistreatment", and (3) "I am satisfied with the way in which my department and agency responds to matters related to the mistreatment". All three items were measured with a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). The value for Cronbach's alpha for the three items was 0.92. We reverse-coded the values for these items so that higher values indicate higher levels of organizational efforts.

To isolate the effects of organizational efforts and perceived mistreatment on employee job satisfaction, continuance commitment, and turnover intention, we included a number of control variables in the analyses. Prior research has shown that supervisor support and career advancement opportunity are important predictors of employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention [81–84]. Hence, our analyses controlled for supervisor support and career advancement opportunity. We measure supervisory support ($\alpha = 0.88$) with three items of the PSES: "I receive useful feedback from my immediate supervisor on my job performance", "My immediate supervisor keeps me informed about the issues affecting my work", and "I receive meaningful recognition from my immediate supervisor when I do a good job". Career advancement opportunity was measured with the following two items of the PSES ($\alpha = 0.84$): "I believe I have opportunities for promotion within my department or agency, given my education, skills, and experience" and "I believe I have opportunities for promotion within the public service, given my education, skills, and experience". The supervisory support and career advancement opportunity items were measured with a five-point agreement scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Prior to conducting analyses, we reverse-coded the values for these items so that the higher values indicate higher levels of supervisory support and career advancement opportunity. Additionally, we included several socio-demographic controls in the analyses, including an employee age (1 = 40 years and over, 0 = less than 40 years), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), an education level (1 = baccalaureate degree or higher, 0 = else), and a job type (senior managerial/executive: 1 = yes, 0 = no; professional: 1 = yes, 0 = no; clerical/technical support: 1 = yes, 0 = no).

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analyses and Descriptive Statistics

To assess the validity of the measures, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus for the variables of job satisfaction, organizational efforts, supervisory support, and career advancement opportunity. The hypothesized measurement model provides an excellent fit to the observed data (CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04, and SRMR = 0.02). All 10 scale items loaded highly on their respective latent factors; factor loadings ranged from a low value of 0.75 to a high value of 0.98. Additionally, we checked for a possible common method variance (CMV) with Harman's single factor test [85]. The

results of Harman's single factor test through CFA indicated the poor data fit (CFI = 0.58, TLI = 0.49, RMSEA = 0.24, and SRMR = 0.12). These results indicated that problems typically associated with using the same source data did not materially affect the results of our analysis.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the predictor and outcome variables included in the current study. More than one-fifth (22.14%) of the male and one-fourth (28.16%) of the female respondents reported that they had experienced harassment once or more in the workplace in the past two years. Furthermore, 14.78% of the male and 16% of the female respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination once or more in the workplace in the past two years. The scores for employee job satisfaction and continuance organizational commitment were slightly negatively skewed, with means of 4.14 and 3.82 and standard deviations of 0.96 and 1.20, respectively. Approximately 23 percent of the respondents indicated that they considered leaving their agency in a few years.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations (S.D.), and Correlation Coefficients.

Measures	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5
1. Turnover	0.23	0.42	0	1					
2. Organizational Commitment	3.82	1.29	1	5	−0.37				
3. Job Satisfaction	4.14	0.96	1	5	−0.36	0.53			
4. Harassment	0.26	0.44	0	1	0.13	−0.22	−0.20		
5. Discrimination	0.16	0.36	0	1	0.14	−0.22	−0.20	0.41	
6. Organizational Efforts	3.95	1.01	1	5	−0.20	0.36	0.37	−0.42	−0.38

Note: All correlations were significant at $p < 0.01$.

As anticipated, the bivariate correlations between measures of perceived mistreatment and job satisfaction and organizational commitment were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and negative ($r = -0.20$ and -0.22 for both forms of workplace mistreatment). The two predictor measures also had significant ($p < 0.01$) positive correlations with turnover intention ($r = 0.13$ and 0.14 , for harassment and discrimination, respectively). Organizational efforts aimed at reducing and handling incidences of workplace mistreatment were also related positively to employee perceptions of job satisfaction and organizational commitment ($r = 0.36$ and 0.37 , $p < 0.01$) and negatively with turnover intention ($r = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$).

4.2. Tests of Research Hypotheses

4.2.1. Antecedents of Workplace Mistreatment

In order to examine the gender, age, and class differences, a χ^2 test was conducted by comparing the actual proportion of employees in this study who have ever experienced workplace mistreatment. χ^2 and t -tests were used to compare the public employees with and without experience as to the following variables: sex, age, and occupational groups, as a proxy for the social class of employees. The results of the χ^2 and t -tests are reported for significant differences between males and females, younger and older workers, and executives, professional, and clerical employees (see Table 2). As shown in Table 2, the likelihood of experiencing workplace mistreatment was greater for female than male employees. The χ^2 test results also support the class difference, but not age difference, in employees' perceived experience of workplace mistreatment. As expected, clerical employees were found to be more likely to suffer workplace mistreatment than professional and executive employees, while executives appear to least likely be the target. Additionally, we examined whether age would matter to the experience of workplace mistreatment among males and females. The test results indicate that younger employees would be likelier to be victims of workplace mistreatment for females, whereas older employees for males. The gender difference in experiencing both forms of workplace mistreatment was also reported for professional and clerical employees, but the gender matters only to the experience of workplace harassment for executives.

Table 2. Pairwise Comparisons of Incidences of Workplace Mistreatment.

Pairwise Comparisons	Perceived Harassment		Perceived Discrimination	
	% Difference	χ^2	% Difference	χ^2
Female vs. Male	6.02%	511.62 **	1.21%	30.38 **
≤40 Years vs. >40 years	0.03%	0.01	0.29%	1.59
Executive vs. Clerical	8.14%	83.65 **	6.31%	74.51 **
Executive vs. Professional	11.83%	157.01 **	8.63%	121.36 **
Clerical vs. Professional	3.68%	121.41 **	2.33%	70.76 **
Younger (≤40 years) vs. Older (≥40 years) Female	1.56%	17.87 **	1.62%	29.16 **
Younger (≤40 years) vs. Older (≥40 years) Male	−2.66%	41.17 **	−14.84%	23.73 **
Female vs. Male Executive	4.53%	8.27 **	0.85%	0.52
Female vs. Male Professional	7.08%	333.66 **	1.59%	24.93 **
Female vs. Male Clerical	4.57%	63.83 **	1.94%	16.47 **

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

Building on the models of Newman, Jackson and Baker [22] and Jackson and Newman [21], we also conduct logit analysis to assess whether and how socio-demographic factors, particularly gender, affect the experience of mistreatment. We also estimated the marginal effects of the multivariate logit models for each socio-demographic factor. The test results confirm that gender differences existed regarding mistreatment (see Model 1 in Table 3). In the subsample analysis (Model 2 and Model 3), we found that college education is negatively associated with harassment for men but not women. Somewhat surprisingly, a college education is positively associated with discrimination for both men and women ($p < 0.01$). Regarding the influence of age, an older age increases the likelihood of harassment for men ($p < 0.01$ for all age groups) but only partially for women ($p < 0.01$ only for those over 49 years of age) and the likelihood of discrimination only for men ($p < 0.01$) but not for women ($p > 0.1$). The occupation appears to operate similarly for men and women. Relative to senior managers and supervisors, clerical workers are much more likely to be harassed and/or discriminated. The analysis also revealed that interaction terms between gender and college education ($p < 0.01$) and gender and age ($p < 0.01$) for the risk of suffering workplace mistreatment (see Model 4 in Table 3). However, the interaction terms between gender and occupation are partially significant for harassment but not discrimination. These test results confirm the hypotheses about socio-demographic factors and experiences of workplace mistreatment (H1a and H1b).

Table 3. Socio-demographic Determinants of Perceived Workplace Mistreatment.

Independent Variables ^a	Model 1 Full Sample		Model 2 Male Subsample		Model 3 Female Subsample		Model 4 Multiplicative Model		Model 5 Marginal Effects	
	H ^b	D ^c	H	D	H	D	H	D	H	D
Female	1.37 *	1.13 *					1.50 *	1.14 †	0.06 *	0.02 *
College Graduate	0.97	1.21 *	0.90 *	1.07 †	1.01	1.28 *	0.90 *	1.07 †	−0.01 †	0.02 *
40–49 years old	1.09 *	1.05 **	1.24 *	1.20 *	1.02	0.98	1.24 *	1.20 *	0.02 *	0.01 †
Older than 49 years	1.00	1.09 *	1.14 *	1.24 *	0.92 *	1.01	1.14 *	1.24 *	0.00	0.01 *
Clerical	1.19 *	1.20 *	1.25 *	1.14 *	1.14 *	1.21 *	1.25 *	1.14 *	0.03 *	0.02 *
Supervisor	0.88 *	0.69 *	0.84 *	0.68 *	0.90 *	0.70 *	0.84 *	0.68 *	−0.02 *	−0.05 *
Senior Manager	0.71 *	0.64 *	0.74 *	0.63 *	0.70 *	0.65 *	0.74 *	0.63 *	−0.06 *	−0.05 *
Female × College Graduate							1.13 *	1.20 *		
Female × 40–49 years							0.82 *	0.81 *		
Female × over 49 years							0.81 *	0.82 *		
Female × Clerical							0.91 †	1.06		
Female × Supervisor							1.07 †	1.04		
Female × Senior Manager							0.95	1.03		
Constant	0.29 *	0.16 *	0.27 *	0.16 *	0.41 *	0.18 *	0.27 *	0.16 *		
lls	−45,924	−34,560	−17,807	−13,812	−28,080	−20,724	−45,888	−34,536		
LR chi-square	692.4	486.2	256.8	214.5	112.0	272.3	763.8	533.4		
Observations	80,041		33,379		46,662		80,041		80,041	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$. For purposes of estimation and statistical comparison, the reference categories are “less than university”, “under 40 years old”, “non-supervisor”, and “professional”. a. Perceived Harassment; b. Perceived Discrimination; c. The marginal effects of the independent variables with all other variables held at their means are shown.

4.2.2. Consequences of Workplace Mistreatment

We performed ordinary least squares regression analyses (OLS) to test the direct and interactive effects of perceived mistreatment and organizational efforts to handle mistreatment on employee job satisfaction and continuance commitment. The analyses utilized a single item of continuance component of organizational commitment and a composite scale score of job satisfaction as the dependent measure, factor scores of organization efforts, and two dummy variables for perceived mistreatment as the predictor measures. Factor scores for supervisor support, career advancement opportunity, and five dummy variables (i.e., age, gender, supervisory status, senior manager/executive, and clerical/support) were also included in the OLS analyses as control variables. The results of the OLS regression analyses are shown in Table 4. To assess the direct and interactive relationships between organizational efforts, perceived harassment, perceived discrimination, and turnover intention, we performed a logistic regression analysis, as shown in Table 5. While performing logistic regression analysis, we also included the factor score for job satisfaction as a control variable because previous research has consistently found a strong connection between job satisfaction and both intended and actual turnover [86,87]. To assess whether multicollinearity adversely affected our results, we estimated the variance factor scores (VIF) after running the regression models. The VIF scores in all regression models were much lower than the typical threshold value of four [88], indicating multicollinearity did not have a negative influence on our regression results.

Table 4. Results of OLS Regression for Job Satisfaction and Continuance Commitment.

	Job Satisfaction			Continuance Commitment		
	Model 1 Control	Model 2 Harassment	Model 3 Discrimination	Model 1 Control	Model 2 Harassment	Model 3 Discrimination
Main and Interaction Effects						
Workplace Mistreatment		−0.20 **	−0.23 **		−0.23 **	−0.26 **
(W.M.)		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.02)
Organizational Effort (O.E.)		0.11 **	0.15 **		0.22 **	0.27 **
(O.E.)		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)
W.M. × OE		0.08 **	0.04 **		0.10 **	0.02
		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.02)
Controls						
Supervisor Support	0.28 **	0.24 **	0.25 **	0.52 **	0.48 **	0.48 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Career Advancement	0.23 **	0.21 **	0.20 **	0.24 **	0.22 **	0.21 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender (1 = Female)	0.06 **	0.08 **	0.07 **	−0.04 **	−0.02	−0.03 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age (1 = 40 & over)	−0.18 **	−0.17 **	−0.17 **	−0.21 **	−0.20 **	−0.20 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Education (1 = College)	−0.12 **	−0.11 **	−0.10 **	−0.14 **	−0.12 **	−0.12 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Supervisor (1 = Yes)	0.16 **	0.12 **	0.11 **	0.16 **	0.11 **	0.10 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Executive	0.16 **	0.12 **	0.11 **	0.09 **	0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Clerical/Technical	−0.01	0.01	0.00	0.03 **	0.05 **	0.05 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	4.19 **	4.26 **	4.24 **	3.92 **	4.00 **	3.97 **
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Observations	51,572	51,572	51,572	50,388	50,388	50,388
R-squared	0.13	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.23	0.23

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4 shows the results of three separate OLS regression models that we estimated to test the hypothesized relationships between perceived mistreatment, organizational efforts, employee job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Model 1 estimates the effect of control variables; Model 2 estimates the direct and interactive effects of perceived harassment and organizational efforts on job satisfaction and organizational commitment; and Model 3 estimates the direct and interactive effects of perceived discrimination and organizational efforts on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. As shown in Model 2 and 3 in Table 4, perceived mistreatment had significant negative associations with job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.20, -0.23$, for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = -0.23, -0.26$, for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$). Organizational efforts aimed at reducing incidences of mistreatment had a positive link with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.11, 0.15$, for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.22, -0.27$, for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the effect for the interaction of organizational efforts and perceived workplace mistreatment was positive and significant for job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.08, 0.04$ for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$) and positive but partially statistically significant for organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.01$ for harassment, $\beta = 0.03, p > 0.1$ for discrimination).

Table 5 shows the results of three separate logistic regression models we estimated to test the hypothesized relationships for turnover intention. Model 1 estimates the effects of control variables; Model 2 estimates the direct and interactive effects of perceived harass-

ment and organizational efforts on turnover intention; and Model 3 estimates the direct and interactive effects of perceived harassment and organizational efforts on employee turnover intention. As indicated in Table 5, perceived workplace mistreatment had significant positive influences on employee turnover intention (Odds Ratios = 1.03 and 1.04 for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$). As anticipated, organizational effort was found to significantly reduce the odds of leaving the organization (Odds Ratio = 0.97, 0.96 for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the effect for the interaction of organizational efforts and perceived workplace injustice was found to be statistically significant (Odds Ratio = 0.97, 0.98 for harassment and discrimination, respectively, $p < 0.01$).

Table 5. Results of Logistic Regression for Turnover Intention.

	Model 1 Control	Model 2 Harassment	Model 3 Discrimination
Main and Interaction Effects			
Workplace Mistreatment (W.M.)		1.03 ** (0.00)	1.04 ** (0.01)
Organizational Effort (O.E.)		0.97 ** (0.00)	0.96 ** (0.00)
W.M. × OE		0.97 ** (0.00)	0.98 ** (0.01)
Controls			
Job Satisfaction	0.87 ** (0.00)	0.87 ** (0.00)	0.87 ** (0.00)
Supervisor Support	0.94 ** (0.00)	0.94 ** (0.00)	0.94 ** (0.00)
Career Advancement	0.94 ** (0.00)	0.94 ** (0.00)	0.95 ** (0.00)
Gender (1 = Female)	1.02 ** (0.00)	1.01 ** (0.00)	1.01 ** (0.00)
Age (1 = 40 & over)	1.02 ** (0.00)	1.02 ** (0.00)	1.02 ** (0.00)
Education (1 = College)	1.04 ** (0.00)	1.03 ** (0.00)	1.03 ** (0.00)
Supervisor (1 = Yes)	1.01 ** (0.00)	1.02 ** (0.00)	1.02 ** (0.00)
Executive	1.13 ** (0.01)	1.14 ** (0.01)	1.14 ** (0.01)
Clerical/Technical	0.96 ** (0.00)	0.96 ** (0.00)	0.96 ** (0.00)
Constant	1.25 ** (0.01)	1.23 ** (0.01)	1.23 ** (0.01)
Observations	51,572	51,572	51,572

Notes: Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses, ** $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion

5.1. Implications

The results of this study demonstrated that perceived workplace mistreatment, in terms of general forms of discrimination and harassment, negatively affects employee work attitudes [16,18,23]. The analyses indicated that the federal employees who ever experienced harassment or discrimination had lower levels of job satisfaction and continuance organizational commitment and higher levels of turnover intention than those who did not have such negative experiences. We also found that organizational efforts to mitigate such incidences positively influenced job satisfaction and continuance of organizational commitment and negatively influenced turnover intention, which is consistent with previous findings [65,89].

New and interesting findings of this study are the significant interaction effects between perceived workplace mistreatments and organizational efforts for dealing with such mistreatments on the three outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Specifically, we found that the connections between perceived harassment and job satisfaction, between perceived harassment and continuance commitment, and between perceived harassment and turnover intention were weaker when organizational efforts to reduce such incidences were perceived to be high. However, the effect of the interaction between organizational efforts and perceived discrimination on continuance organizational commitment was not statistically significant, whereas they were significant for two other outcomes. One possible explanation for these results is that while harassment is a form of discrimination, a hostile work environment is closer to harassment than discrimination. Employees may also weigh mistreatment differently in their experiences [90]. Indeed, in our dataset, experiences of harassment (26%) were more likely to be reported by male and female public employees than discrimination (16%).

While some gender differences in workplace mistreatment corroborate previous findings, the analysis indicates that the effects of such incidences and organization efforts aimed at reducing them are not different between male and female employees. While not reported in our analysis, workplace mistreatment has more severe adverse effects on job satisfaction and continuance organizational commitment but mixed impacts of discrimination on the turnover intention for males than females. These results can be understood as the recognition of gender differences in the perception of mistreatment as frightening or burdensome experiences. Evidence shows that male workers were likely to see harassment as either frightening or burdensome, whereas frightening for female workers [91]. This explains why the negative effects of mistreatment on job satisfaction and organizational commitment were greater for males than females but the mixed effects on turnover intention.

The results contribute to research in several ways. As previously noted, there has been limited empirical research on the consequences of perceived mistreatment on employee work attitudes. Several studies investigated characteristics of public employees who are targets of harassment or discrimination [20–22], but none investigated the direct effects on employee work attitudinal outcomes. While several studies in business work settings examined the direct influence that organizational efforts have in reducing occurrences of mistreatment [56,57,64,65], there is sizeable research on whether such efforts buffer or moderate the adverse effects of mistreatment on employees. For instance, a study conducted by Triana, García and Colella [76] found that organizational support for racial diversity buffered the adverse effects of racial discrimination on employee affective commitment and turnover intention. Therefore, the current study's findings extend earlier research by showing that organizational efforts play an important role in moderating the adverse effects of perceived workplace mistreatment on job satisfaction, continuance organizational commitment, and turnover intention of public sector employees.

The findings have implications for practice in government agencies as well. As noted previously, studies have shown that the extent of mistreatment experienced by employees in organizations is a function of the tolerance for unjust practices or behaviors, the commitment of managers to address complaints of mistreatment effectively, and the implementation of policies to prevent future incidences of mistreatment [45,46]. In a work climate where harassment or discrimination is tolerated, such problems are likely to be higher. As shown in the current study results, the ways in which victims feel and respond attitudinally also depend on their views about whether the organization handles complaints of maltreatment in a how sincere manner and whether the organization takes necessary steps to prevent future occurrences.

While establishing anti-harassment or anti-discrimination policies is often the common organizational response to complaints, our study suggests that organizations should also spend considerable effort on fairly implementing these policies. The results suggest that managerial practices may play an important role in attenuating the adverse effects of perceived harassment by supporting the victims and holding perpetrators accountable

for their actions. Managers may also influence employee perceptions of organizational support by clearly communicating to subordinates about the organization's policies and expectations for appropriate behavior in the workplace. While fairness in implementing these practices is important, managers must also seriously consider the privacy of victims and reporters. Research shows that victims of workplace mistreatment are less likely to report or avoid it due to the fear of reporting, which does not improve, and sometimes worsens, their well-being and other job-related outcomes [92].

5.2. Limitations and Future Directions

Like most studies, this study has some limitations, and additional research would be useful to verify our findings. One obvious limitation is the use of measures of generalized mistreatment due to data limitations. The mistreatment can take a variety of forms and target sex, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, nationality, and religion. Because the measures we used in the current study were not about specific forms of harassment or discrimination, we were unable to assess the unique effects of a particular type. Additionally, individuals may perceive whether they were harassed or discriminated against differently depending on their personal characteristics and situational factors. For instance, research showed that the effects of harassment or discrimination might vary based on employee race [15], but we were unable to examine such effects because the PSES dataset excluded information about respondents' race to protect their anonymity.

In addition, some of the scales of this study were based on a few items or a single item and did not rely on the validated scales by selectively using related items of the PSES. The use of single-item (SI) measures is not generally recommended for developing theory and validating complex and multi-dimensional psychological constructs. However, some scholars argue that the use of SI measures is appropriate when the research objective is to gain a general view of the construct of interests; diverse employees of different organizations participate in the study; and the construct of interest is clear, less ambiguous, and not the major focus of the study [79,93–95]. The intended analysis of this study is aimed at determining associations between experiences of workplace mistreatment, organizational efforts at dealing with mistreatment, and subsequent employee attitudes among federal employees with diverse backgrounds from various departments and agencies. The present study also focuses on the predictive validity of two general forms of workplace mistreatment (i.e., harassment and discrimination) and organizational efforts at handling such negative experiences in the workplace. In addition, employee attitudes of job satisfaction, continuance commitment, and turnover intention (the dependent variables of this study) are well-understood concrete constructs, warranting that the use of a few items or a single item may suffice and have some practical advantages such as face validity and flexibility [78]. Furthermore, these variables have often been measured with a single item (see Wanous, Reichers [77] for job satisfaction, Shouksmith [96] for continuance organizational commitment, and Tett and Meyer [86] for turnover intention).

Although the use of a single or a few items of measures is less than ideal, the reliability of these measures proved to be acceptable in the present study and the confirmatory factor analysis results support the discriminant validity between variables. Considering that the purpose and contribution of this study is on the empirical examination of the moderating role of organizational efforts, using a multi-item scale, the present study gains practical advantages from the use of single-item measures of dependent variables by examining the main and joint effects of workplace harassment and discrimination and organizational efforts aimed at handling such workplace mistreatments. Nevertheless, the current measures of variables have limited construct validity, and the readers thus should be cautious in interpreting the findings of this study. Future research should utilize more reliable scales to examine whether the measurement may influence the strength and pattern of the findings obtained from this study.

Research has also showed that organizational climate or culture might influence perceptions of mistreatment and the effects on employee work attitudes (e.g., [97]), which

we did not assess in the current study. An interesting question that future research may examine is whether the diversity climate moderates the effects of perceived mistreatment on employee behavior. While the results of this study are generalizable, given the data were collected from a large sample of employees working in 80 different agencies in the Canadian federal government, cross-sectional studies like this are unable to demonstrate causal connections. Especially the questions used to measure the experience of workplace mistreatment did not specify whether their experiences occurred in the employee's previous or current job. Despite the time span between the predictor and outcome variables, we were unable to control the possibility of the mismatch between the previous work environment where harassment and/or discrimination occurred and the current work environment. This issue should be explored further in future research. Finally, because data for both the predictor and criteria measures were collected from the same source at the same time, we are unable to rule out the presence of common source bias in the results [85]. However, the confirmatory factor analysis results and the relatively moderate correlations among the measures provided some assurance that such problems did not materially affect the results.

In conclusion, workplace mistreatment has serious detrimental effects on both employees and organizations. Therefore, it is important to identify effective ways to minimize such problems and attenuate the negative effects. The findings of our study show the adverse effects of perceived mistreatment on employee organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to continue working in their agency, as well as provide some initial empirical evidence that organizational efforts in government organizations may play an important role in mitigating the adverse effects of harassment on employee commitment, satisfaction, and turnover intention. However, more research is needed to validate our findings and identify specific practices that are more effective than others in reducing the incidences and effects of mistreatment on public sector employees.

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