

# **Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying in the Workplace: Contribution of Workplace Injustice to Occupational Health Disparities**

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# Definitions

**Workplace injustice:** discrimination, harassment and bullying based on sociodemographic characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender identity, health condition, and job title/position within the workplace

## Workplace Discrimination

- When institutions and/or individuals within them enact unfair terms and conditions that systematically impair the ability of members of a group to work

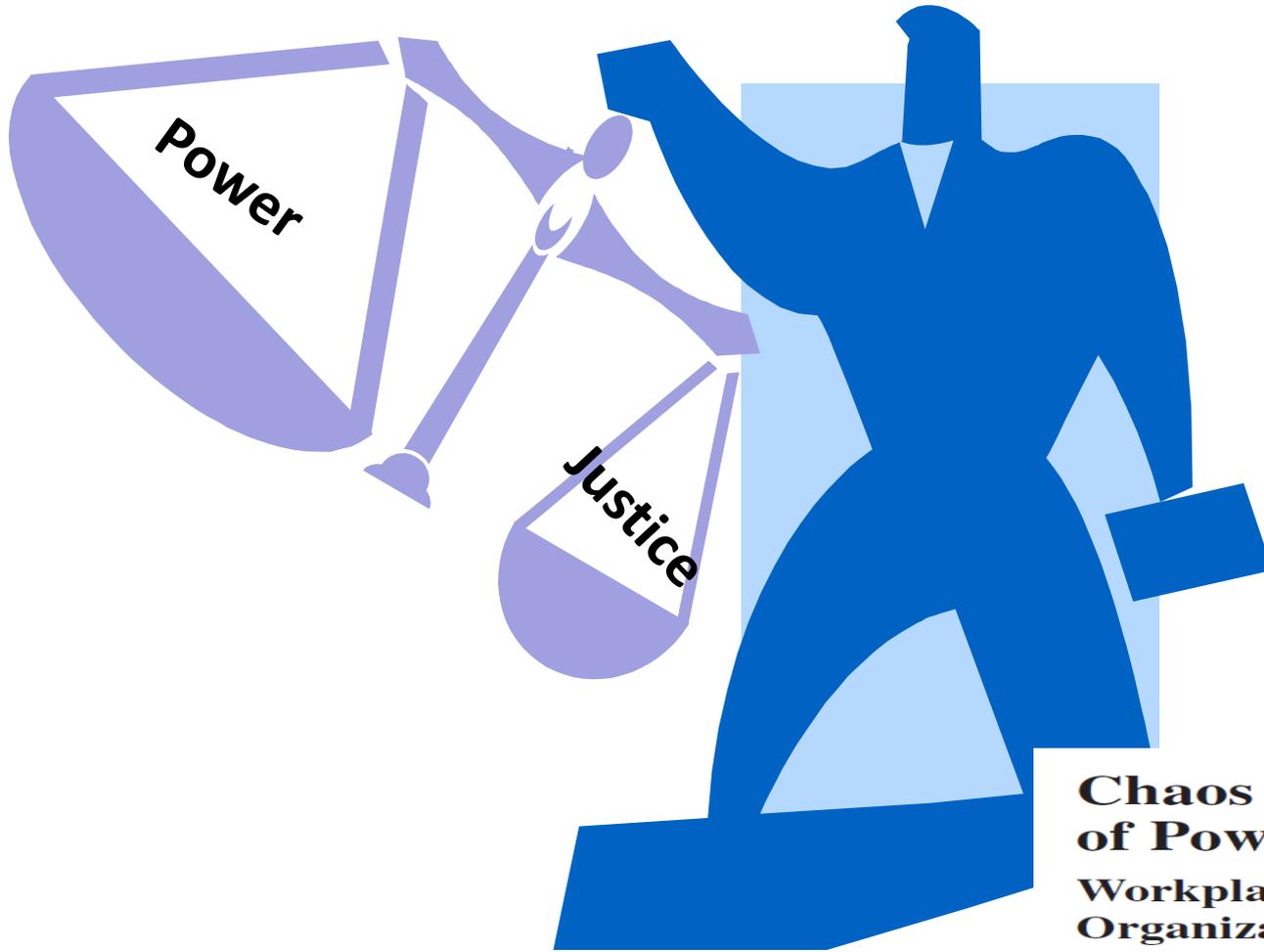
## Workplace Harassment

- Behaviors that contribute to a hostile work environment (not status blind)

## Workplace Bullying

- Involves status blind actions that harass, offend or socially exclude a worker or group of workers or that have a negative effect on work tasks

# The Powerful Role of Power



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## **Chaos and the Abuse of Power**

**Workplace Bullying in  
Organizational and  
Interactional Context**

**POWER, STATUS, AND ABUSE AT WORK:  
General and Sexual Harassment Compared**

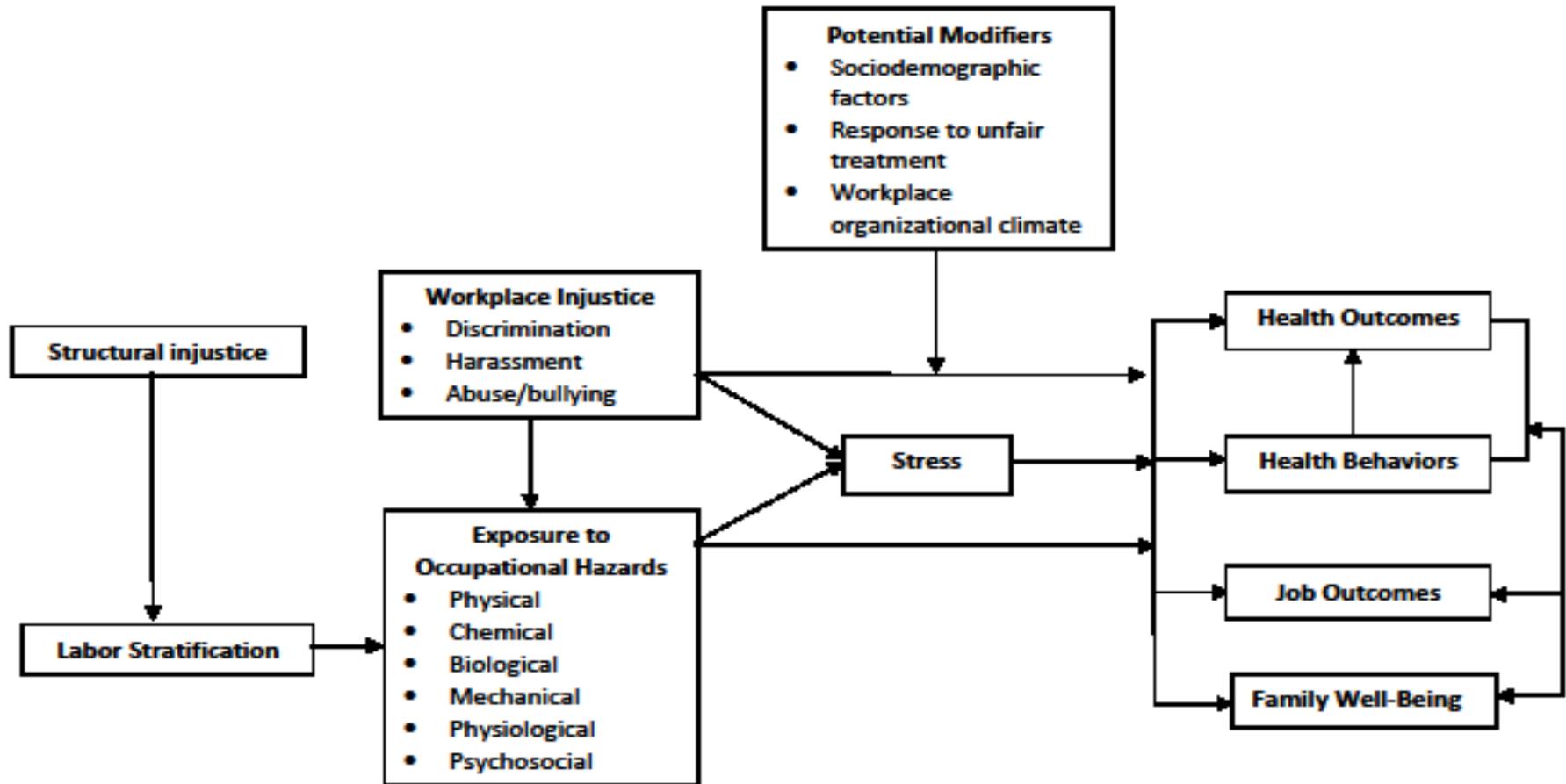
# The Powerful Role of Power

Minority women report a higher mean level of sexual harassment than non-minority women with Native American women and black women reporting the highest rate of sexual harassment

(Bergman and Drasgow 2003; Krieger, 2006)

# Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: A Model of Workplace Injustice and Occupational Health Disparities



Note. This model is based on the work of Krieger ((Krieger, 1994; Krieger et al., 2008).

# Types of Workplace Injustice

## Institutional

- Normative, sometimes legalized, part of culture and often manifest as inherent disadvantage for a particular group

## Interpersonal

- Can be intentional or unintentional, and includes acts of omission and commission

# Structural Injustice

**Unequal access  
to  
labor market**

Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination

*By* MARIANNE BERTRAND AND SENDHIL MULLAINATHAN\*

**Disproportional  
exposure to  
occupational  
hazards**

AJPH, January 1998 88(1), 40-44

Race and the risk of fatal injury at work

Dana Loomis, PhD and David Richardson, PhD

**Differential  
enforcement of  
safety regulation**

Risk Amid Recovery:

Occupational Health and Safety of Latino Day Laborers in the Aftermath of the Gulf Coast Hurricanes

Linda Delp, Laura Podolsky, and Tomás Aguilar

# Workplace Injustice has direct effect on health

Broader literature on stress and health show strong evidence of effects on physical health, mental health and health behaviors

## Physical Health

- Cross sectional studies: pain, aches, and self-rated health
- Strongest evidence for cardiovascular outcomes (experimental and longitudinal studies)
- Biomarkers of stress and immune response

## Mental Health

- Cross sectional: anxiety, hostility, suicidal thoughts, psychological distress
- Experimental and longitudinal studies: PTSD, psychological distress, depression,

## Health Behaviors

- Fewer studies and mostly cross-sectional studies
- Racial discrimination → Smoking
- Sexual harassment → Heavy alcohol use
- Workplace bullying → Heavy alcohol use

# Workplace Injustice also has indirect effects on health

## Job Outcomes

- Wage gap by race, gender, sexual orientation
- Increase in sickness absence from work
- Counterproductive work behaviors (coming in late, leaving early)

## Family Well-Being

- Kick the dog phenomenon: abused workers engaged in family undermining at home
- Men's report of workplace racism corresponding to depressive symptoms in partners

# Workplace injustice has stronger influence on socially disadvantaged populations compared to dominant groups

- African Americans report significantly higher emotional response to racial/ethnic bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005)
- Bullying results in increase in drinking to intoxication for women but not men
- Less acculturated families show higher risk of depressive symptoms when fathers experience workplace racism (Crouter et al, 2006)

# Recommendations and Conclusion

- We need innovations in study design: incorporate multiple reporters and explicitly examine interaction between exposures
- Much of the research on workplace injustice has NOT focused on health outcomes
- Dire need for design and evaluation of interventions focused on workplace injustice

Current evidence suggests that workplace injustice plays a key negative role on the health of all workers but it particularly contributes to health disparities for socially disadvantaged workers and their families.