




REVIEW ARTICLE



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# Workplace mistreatment for US women: best practices for counselors

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Workplace mistreatment for women increases depression, anxiety, burnout, low self-esteem, low life satisfaction, and psychological distress, and decreases work productivity. Additionally, victims and bystanders of workplace mistreatment are likely to leave an organization. To fulfill the objective of documenting the current best practices that could assist counselors working with and advocating for US women experiencing workplace mistreatment, a systematic literature review (SLR) of materials published in the past 15 years was conducted. The 21 articles found resulted in two major themes. The first theme, *Addressing Female Mistreatment in the Workplace*, had three sub-themes. Four materials discussed *Workplace Interventions*, eight discussed *Workplace Training*, and three discussed the *Reporting of Workplace Mistreatment*. The second theme, *Counseling Women Experiencing Workplace Mistreatment*, was supported by 11 articles. When working with employers, counselors can encourage year-round improvements in workplace recruitment, orientation, and inclusion of culturally diverse employees; offer bystander training; and create a comprehensive program to report and resolve workplace mistreatment concerns. Counselors working directly with women experiencing workplace mistreatment will want to help the client focus on productive cognitive processes, obtain social support, directly confront the workplace mistreatment, and negotiate the unfortunate realities of workplace mistreatment.

## Introduction

In an ideal workplace, diversity is embraced rather than tolerated, and individuals are not required to hide characteristics of themselves. However, workplace diversity in the US is more of an aspirational goal than reality because diversity is often not embraced or universal (Neault and Mondair, 2011). Gender, race, spirituality, political affiliations, childlessness, and sexual orientation are just some of the personal characteristics that can lead to workplace mistreatment (Neault and Mondair, 2011) perpetrated by supervisors, co-workers, as well as customers (Shannon et al., 2007). Workplace mistreatment negatively impacts employees by reducing employee effectiveness and wellness (Walsh and Magley, 2014).

The disparate impact doctrine recognizes that unconscious bias permeates workplace practices because assumptions are made about individuals based upon their multiple, and often uncontrollable, group affiliations (gender, race, sexual orientation, and religion) as a means to decide the allocation of resources at work (Hirsh, 2014). Stereotypes regarding gender and racial appropriateness of holding specific jobs often segregate women and minorities to less desirable

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and less powerful positions in the workplace (Neault and Mondair, 2011; Ronzio, 2012). Examples include employers treating applicants differently, presuming job commitment and competency, as well as assigning specific employees to jobs based on their multiple group affiliations (Hirsh, 2014; Offermann et al., 2014; Smith, 2014). Since workplace mistreatment claims have been rising over the last several years (Segal, 2021), counselors must understand how to counsel clients who have been the victims of workplace mistreatment. As such, a systematic review of the literature has been conducted.

### The four clusters of workplace mistreatment

Workplace mistreatment is defined as unsolicited, unwelcomed, and offensive behaviors that result in disrespectful treatment towards that individual (Cullen et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2007). Workplace mistreatment includes several forms of conduct, including harassment, incivility, bullying, verbal aggression, physical aggression, disrespect, exclusion, isolation, threats, or bribes (Cullen et al., 2014; Salin et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2007; Walsh and Magley, 2014). Workplace mistreatment can be classified into four clusters (Walsh and Magley, 2014). One cluster consists of covert, passive forms of generalized harassment and incivility, while a second cluster includes overt, verbalized, generalized harassment and incivility. Sexual harassment and physical hostility form the third and fourth clusters.

Generalized harassment includes *overt, verbal hostility*, such as yelling or swearing; *covert hostility*, such as being ignored by co-workers; *manipulation*, which includes actions intended to control other employees; and *physical hostility*, which can be any form of physical aggression, such as hitting (Walsh and Magley, 2014). Incivility and verbal aggression are more common than other legally forbidden forms of workplace mistreatment, such as physical aggression (Sommovigo et al., 2019). The generalized workplace mistreatment prevalence rate is 55% for women and 30% for men (Shannon et al., 2007). Perpetrators of generalized workplace mistreatment are most often supervisors or peers, but subordinates and customers can also be perpetrators (Salin et al., 2014). Men are more likely to be mistreated by men (66%) as compared to women (34%) (Salin et al., 2014). However, women are just as likely to be mistreated by women (45.5%) and men (54.5%) (Salin et al., 2014). Both women and men perceive generalized workplace mistreatment as a personal attack, and victims are likely to personalize the mistreatment and make negative internal attributions about themselves (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). Generalized workplace mistreatment, more than sexual harassment, significantly lowered job satisfaction, supervisor satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological well-being while increasing job stress and an intent to find a new job for women (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010).

Sexual harassment, which has legal protections, can come in three forms: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Walsh and Magley, 2014). Gender harassment includes any comments or gestures that degrade women (Walsh and Magley, 2014). Unwanted sexual attention includes sexually charged comments or physical actions (Walsh and Magley, 2014). Lastly, sexual coercion refers to both subtle and overt activities of a sexual nature (Walsh and Magley, 2014). Women view a broader range of behavior as sexual harassment as compared to men. Half of the women in the workforce report experiencing sexual harassment compared to 14–19% of men (Shannon et al., 2007). Furthermore, women perceive sexual harassment as threatening their status in the workplace and attacking their gender identity. In contrast, men perceive it as reinforcing their gender identity and unlikely to jeopardize their status (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). Women who are victims of sexual harassment

are likely to depersonalize the mistreatment and blame the perpetrator (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). Sexual harassment, more than generalized harassment, significantly increased work withdrawal or neglect for women (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010).

### Fundamentals of workplace mistreatment

Sadly, anti-workplace mistreatment policies and legislative measures have not impacted overall rates of workplace mistreatment (van Heugten, 2012). Nearly half of all US workers are either victims of mistreatment or witness mistreatment as a bystander (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). *Bystanders* witness workplace mistreatment but are not the primary aggressor or victim (Ehie et al., 2021; van Heugten, 2011). The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported receiving 67,448 charges of workplace discrimination in 2020 and secured \$439.2 million for victims of workplace mistreatment in the private sector and state and local government workplaces (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). Salin (2003) suggested that certain preconditions and organizational processes must exist for workplace mistreatment to occur. The preconditions include (a) a power imbalance between the aggressor and the target, (b) the aggressor perceives that there will be few consequences for their behavior, and (c) the aggressor is frustrated with the work environment. The organizational processes needed for workplace mistreatment to thrive include (a) a highly competitive workplace culture, (b) a win-at-all-costs rewards system in place, and (c) no accountability for aggressive behaviors.

When employees become victims of workplace mistreatment, their productivity declines, absenteeism increases, and the quality of their work can suffer (Ng et al., 2019). When high performing victims leave an organization, it costs the organization money directly from the loss of a good employee as well as indirectly because good employees positively influence other employees at the organization (Jensen and Raver, 2020; Madden and Loh, 2020; Ng et al., 2019; Tye-Williams et al., 2020). Silent and victim supportive bystanders report significantly more stress, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, burnout, poor communication channels at work, and unsupportive work environments than those from workplaces without mistreatment (Coyne et al., 2017; Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013; Mulder et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2020). As such, bystanders also leave organizations with high workplace mistreatment rates. Overall, workplace mistreatment is estimated to cost the US \$300 billion annually (Lassiter et al., 2021). Despite all this data, between 72% and 88% of employers do not believe workplace mistreatment is an issue (Lassiter et al., 2021).

**Bystanders.** Bystanders subconsciously process three fundamental questions when processing workplace mistreatment (Ng et al., 2019). First, they determine the severity of the workplace mistreatment. Bystanders were more likely to support the aggressor when workplace mistreatment was work-related and took place online (Coyne et al., 2017). Next, they will decide if the victim deserves the workplace mistreatment (Mulder et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2019). Bystanders are more likely to support the aggressor or victim if they are a close friend of the aggressor or victim (Madden and Loh, 2020). Finally, bystanders will determine if their actions will make a meaningful impact (Ng et al., 2019). The workplace culture defines the tolerability of workplace mistreatment and, therefore, the behavior of bystanders (McDonald et al., 2016). If bystanders perceive supervisors and executives as open, just, and trustworthy leaders who will take action to stop workplace mistreatment, they are much more likely to directly confront and report unacceptable behavior (Rowe, 2018;

Tye-Williams et al., 2020). Additionally, bystanders are more likely to intervene if it is apparent to the bystander that the victim is being harmed, if the victim asks for help, if the victim is a high performer, and if the bystander is not overwhelmed with a high workload (Jensen and Raver, 2020). Supervisor bystanders watching clear workplace mistreatment behaviors among subordinates were significantly more likely to support the victim and confront the aggressor than co-worker bystanders (Jensen and Raver, 2020).

*Types of bystanders.* Victims describe three types of bystanders: some colleagues who align with the aggressor (active destructive), a majority of colleagues who are silent when witnessing workplace mistreatment (passive destructive), and a few colleagues who support the victim through being supportive of the victim (passive constructive) or standing up to the aggressor (active constructive) (Aggarwal and Brenner, 2019; Coyne et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2019; van Heugten, 2011). *Silent bystanders* (passive destructive) remain passive in the face of mistreatment because they expect others to stop the mistreatment, do not understand how to confront workplace mistreatment, expect the victim to stand up to the aggressor, fear an attack by the aggressor if they intervene, feel overwhelmed by their workload, fear making matters worse for the victim if they intervene, or believe the victim deserves the mistreatment (Aggarwal and Brenner, 2019; Coyne et al., 2017; Jensen and Raver, 2020; Martinez et al., 2017; McDonald et al., 2016; Paull et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2020; Tye-Williams et al., 2020; van Heugten, 2011). Further, bystanders are less likely to take action as the number of bystanders who witness a workplace mistreatment event increases (Greitemeyer and Mügge, 2013; Madden and Loh, 2020).

*Victim supporting bystanders* (passive constructive) are more likely to provide social support to the victim but are not more likely to take action against the aggressor (D’Cruz and Noronha, 2013; Thompson et al., 2020). They often ask the victim if they can help the victim report the behavior, stand or sit near the victim, listen to the victim’s concerns, assure that the victim no longer has contact with the aggressor, or suggest workplace mistreatment training without identifying an aggressor (Aggarwal and Brenner, 2019; Ehie et al., 2021; Rowe, 2018; Tye-Williams et al., 2020).

*Bystanders who directly confront* (active constructive) an aggressor about their behavior with a victim are more persuasive in changing the problematic behavior, elicit in other bystanders negative reactions toward the aggressor’s inappropriate behavior, and receive lower levels of retaliation as a result of confronting the aggressor (Martinez et al., 2017). As such, bystanders should interrupt incidents of workplace mistreatment, interrupt situations that often result in workplace mistreatment, challenge aggressors, report the aggressor to supervisors, and work to change the workplace culture to put an end to workplace mistreatment (Aggarwal and Brenner, 2019; Ehie et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2016; Rowe, 2018; Tye-Williams et al., 2020). Bystanders must be aware of how to confront an aggressor properly to ensure productive change. Bystanders who engaged in hostile, direct confrontations received more negative ratings from witnesses than those who engaged in non-hostile yet direct confrontations with aggressors (Martinez et al., 2017). Bystanders were more likely to hold negative evaluations of aggressors after witnessing another bystander engage in non-hostile yet direct confrontations with an aggressor. Further, bystanders were more likely to confront workplace mistreatment in the future when witnessing non-hostile yet direct confrontations with aggressors (Martinez et al., 2017).

Sadly, bystanders rarely directly confront aggressors (Aggarwal and Brenner, 2019; Ehie et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2016; Rowe,

2018; Thompson et al., 2020; Tye-Williams et al., 2020). Additionally, many bystander attempts to take action are tentative, temporary, delayed, or ineffective, which results in limited effectiveness in reducing workplace mistreatment (McDonald et al., 2016). However, bystanders who directly confront an aggressor or report an aggressor (active constructive) experience no mental and physical health complaints after witnessing workplace mistreatment (Nielsen et al., 2021)

**Victims.** Victims rarely consider their behavior regarding workplace mistreatment; however, bystanders are very aware of the victim’s behavior (Mulder et al., 2014). Most victims are motivated by personal resource (maintaining privacy or personal freedom), identity (face-saving and preserving self-image), and social justice (fairness) goals when confronted with workplace mistreatment (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). However, different victim profiles are motivated by some goals more than others.

Victims are likely either aggressive provocative, assertive provocative, submissive, or rigidly conscientious (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). *Aggressive provocative victims* are conflict-prone, less agreeable, and create friction with co-workers (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). Aggressive provocative victims are often motivated by power goals in conflicts and want to establish influence and dominance over others. However, increasing dominance over others often increases workplace mistreatment. *Assertive provocative victims* readily speak their minds, have high logical reasoning, or have experience or expertise, which makes the aggressor feel threatened and increases workplace mistreatment (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). Assertive provocative victims are often motivated by personal goals in conflicts and speak up to protect their right to free speech, personal freedom, and choice. However, vocalizing their personal boundaries often increases the workplace mistreatment perpetrated by the aggressor.

*Submissive victims* are introverted, anxious, dependent upon others, approval seekers, and unlikely to defend themselves (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). Submissive victims are often motivated by functionality (resolve conflicts in a constructive way) and relationship (maintain or protect good relationships with others) goals in conflicts. However, keeping silent about workplace mistreatment and trying not to upset anyone usually increases workplace mistreatment. *Rigidly conscientious victims* come across as condescending due to an inflexible, perfectionist approach to work and adherence to rules (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). Rigidly conscientious victims are often motivated by power goals and want others to recognize the importance or moral value of the issue. They often involve higher authorities as allies in the conflict with the aggressor. This strategy can work against the aggressor and stop the mistreatment, or alienate the individual from everyone and increase the mistreatment.

### Women at work

The ideal worker in the US is not responsible for caring for others outside of work and can work long hours on short notice (Smith, 2014). Workers who do not fit this profile are often mistreated. Research outcomes suggest that women experience more workplace mistreatment than men (Cortina et al., 2013) because mistreatment towards women may be enacted both as a general kind of mistreatment and as a way of selectively targeting women as minorities (Settles and O’Connor, 2014). According to The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), occupational sex and race segregation considerably amplified incidences of sex and race discrimination charges by women and persons of

color (Hirsh, 2014). Women experiencing workplace mistreatment usually have (a) an overlapping of vulnerabilities and privilege, (b) a racially and sexually charged working environment, and (c) composition and mobility asymmetries at work (Hirsh, 2014). Female workplace mistreatment often limits women from being hired for competitive jobs and obtaining leadership positions (Ronzio, 2012).

Hiring evaluators were more likely to recommend males over females, regardless of being family-devoted or work-devoted (Aranda and Glick, 2014). Further, hiring recommendations were less favorable for females who presented themselves as family devoted (Aranda and Glick, 2014). Additionally, perceived gender performance drives workplace mistreatment even more than perceived work performance (Berdahl and Moon, 2013). Men's treatment at work is based on how much others respect them as workers and as men (Smith, 2014). Women's treatment at work is based on how much others respect them as workers and like them as women (Smith, 2014).

Women without children experience the most workplace mistreatment, followed by women who do little caregiving for their children (Berdahl and Moon, 2013). Additionally, Miner et al. (2014) found that childless women were the most negatively affected by mistreatment at work, followed by women with three or more children, and lastly, women with one or two children. While women without children were seen as ideal, highly competent, and dedicated workers, they were not liked as women. They experienced significantly more workplace mistreatment than mothers providing high caregiving to children (Berdahl and Moon, 2013). Women providing the most caregiving to children were seen as poor workers but good women and experienced significantly less workplace mistreatment. In their study, Miner et al. (2014) stated that childless women reported more mistreatment than childless men, and mothers reported more mistreatment than fathers. Smith (2014) proposed that this disparity occurs because male co-workers feel threatened by non-traditional women in the workplace. Whether perpetrated by a woman or a man, traditional sexist hostility is perceived similarly by women.

Workplace mistreatment towards women can also manifest in paternalistic benevolent behaviors, such as being revered and protected (Jones et al., 2014). Paternalistic benevolent workplace mistreatment dictates that women should conform to traditional gender roles, such as being nice or pretty, while directing them away from traditional masculine roles, such as competence and assertiveness (Jones et al., 2014). For example, women are often given fewer challenges than men in the same occupation, which undermines their advancement (Jones et al., 2014). When men engage in paternalistic benevolent behavior, women perceive it as a condescending attack on women in general, which reduces their ability to reach personal goals and accomplish specific tasks at work (Jones et al., 2014).

Additionally, specific job roles, personal characteristics, and workplace cultures can also impact women's experience of workplace mistreatment. Women reported experiencing more sexual harassment in organizations that are tolerant of workplace mistreatment than organizations with functioning anti-workplace mistreatment policies (McDonald et al., 2016; Van De Griend and Messias, 2014). Women have reported that domestic work makes them more vulnerable to sexual harassment than other kinds of work (DeSouza and Cerqueira, 2009). Women who held clerical positions and were victims of sexual harassment described the organization as an "all men" or "boys club" (Hirsh, 2014). Heterosexual females reported being bullied more than sexually harassed at work, while non-heterosexual females reported being sexually harassed more than bullied at work (Van De Griend and Messias, 2014). For all of these reasons, women face significantly more workplace mistreatment than men and are more likely to

experience threats and retaliation (Berdahl and Moon, 2013; McDonald et al., 2016; Salin et al., 2014; Tye-Williams et al., 2020).

### Racial minorities at work

Racial discrimination occurs when an individual is mistreated due to their racial or ethnic background (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). Employees of color typically report experiencing more mistreatment than European American employees (Salin et al., 2014). Racial discrimination involves verbal, behavioral, or environmental *microaggressions* that can be intentional or unintentional indignities to people of color (Offermann et al., 2014). There are three forms of microaggressions. *Microinvalidations* are communications that dismiss or invalidate the thoughts, feelings, experiences, or realities of persons of color (Offermann et al., 2014). *Microinsults* directly demean a person for their race, such as assuming a person of color is a service worker instead of a working professional (Offermann et al., 2014). *Microassaults* are obvious statements or actions that display racism, such as using racial slurs (Offermann et al., 2014). While microinvalidations and microinsults are subtle behaviors, they can cause severe distress, which can affect the victim's morale and performance in the work setting (Offermann et al., 2014).

Color blindness plays a role in racial discrimination and consists of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues (Offermann et al., 2014). *Racial privilege* denies the existence of White privilege in the United States. *Institutional discrimination* denies the existence of institutional forms of racism and implies that organizational policies such as affirmative action are not necessary (Offermann et al., 2014). *Blatant racial issues* suggest a general ignorance of racism and its impact on US society (Offermann et al., 2014). Research indicates that color-blind attitudes change a person's perception of workplace exchanges and that these worldviews cloud perceptions of racial discrimination (Offermann et al., 2014). Non-Hispanic European Americans were much less likely to acknowledge institutional discrimination and blatant racial issues than African Americans. The more people ignored the existence of institutional discrimination, the less likely they were able to perceive any of the three types of workplace microaggressions. People who did not acknowledge the existence of racial issues could not identify blatant examples of racism.

Racial composition plays a significant structural role in organizations, which impacts an individual's perceptions of equity and fairness in the workplace (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). Job satisfaction is higher in homogeneous racial groups than in heterogeneous groups (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). Racial discrimination can prevent forming social bonds and trust, which reduces attachment to co-workers and employers (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). Having a same-race manager diminished reported racial discrimination by 42% compared to a cross-race manager (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). For European Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans, perceived racial discrimination reduced employer loyalty and increased job search intentions (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). African Americans and Hispanic Americans are more likely to experience workplace discrimination than European Americans at a rate of 6.41 for African Americans and 3.86 for Hispanic Americans (Stainback and Irvin, 2012). However, in this study, only European Americans appeared uncomfortable working in organizations where they were the numeric minority (Stainback and Irvin, 2012).

### Intersection of race and gender on workplace mistreatment

Given the prevalence of workplace mistreatment for US women, it becomes essential to understand race's impact on female

workplace mistreatment. Previous research states that employees of color typically report experiencing more mistreatment than European American employees (Salin et al., 2014). While women are less likely to be promoted than men, African American women are less likely to be promoted than European American women (Ronzio, 2012). Further, female-headed households have the highest unemployment rate, and racial minority female-headed households have the lowest net worth of any American household (Ronzio, 2012). Since most European American women are likely to be of the same race as those in power, they may be less likely to have as many negative group affiliation expectations thrust upon them by the powerful at work. As such, they may not feel as mistreated at work because of their gender compared to African American women. Professional counselors need to consider that African American women will likely experience dual stereotypes regarding gender and racial appropriateness of holding certain jobs and positions. Further, women of any race who do not conform to heterosexual, Christian, childrearing, ableism, or other US female traditional norms may experience workplace mistreatment resulting from (a) an overlapping of vulnerabilities and privilege, (b) a racially and sexually charged working environment, and (c) composition and mobility asymmetries at work (Hirsh, 2014; Tye-Williams et al., 2020). Professional counselors will want to be mindful of how multiple negative stereotypes will negatively impact all women at work, which can lead to workplace mistreatment.

### Outcomes of workplace mistreatment

The highest correlation between occupational hazards and health hazards occurs among persons of color and women who have the least power in US society (Krieger et al., 2008). Sexual and generalized workplace mistreatment has been linked to mental, psychological, and physical issues (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010; Shannon et al., 2007), and more absenteeism at work (Paull et al., 2020; Van De Griend and Messias, 2014). Hostility, depression, suicidality, anxiety, PTSD, burnout, immune deficiencies, digestive and lower bowel disturbances, musculoskeletal problems, cardiovascular health problems, diabetes, weight loss, weight gain, low self-esteem, low life satisfaction, and psychological distress can occur for individuals experiencing any form of workplace mistreatment (Coyne et al., 2017; Ehie et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2019; Van De Griend and Messias, 2014).

Targets of workplace mistreatment respond in a variety of ways; (a) conflict avoidance (avoided the perpetrator), (b) denial (denied the behavior was problematic), (c) confrontation (talked to the perpetrator), (d) social support (talked to co-workers, friends, family, and counselors), and (e) advocacy (supervisor/workplace or legal interventions) (Salin et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2007). Confrontation and advocacy directly address the perpetrator's behavior, while conflict avoidance, denial, and social support indirectly help the individual cope with workplace mistreatment (Salin et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2007). Direct responses to workplace mistreatment occur most often when workplace mistreatment is severe (Salin et al., 2014). For example, women experiencing sexual harassment most often used advocacy and social support services (Shannon et al., 2007). As generalized harassment in the US is not illegal, women have fewer advocacy options than when they face illegal sexual harassment (Shannon et al., 2007). Sadly, victims most often use social support (63.0%), followed by conflict avoidance (54.2%), denial (44.0%), confrontation (29.6%), and filing formal complaints (3.2%) when confronted with workplace mistreatment (Salin et al., 2014).

Experiencing vulnerability causes employees to hesitate to use direct responses for fear of losing their jobs, retaliation, stigma, mistrust of leadership, or missing opportunities for advancement

within the organization (Hirsh, 2014; Mills and Scudder, 2020). Victims are often less assertive when they are subordinates due to fear of retaliation (Salin et al., 2014). Victims who are superiors are often less assertive due to a lack of organizational support/policies, protecting the perpetrator, or wanting to be seen as fair by colleagues (Salin et al., 2014). Ethnic minorities who experience workplace mistreatment are very unlikely to use direct approaches (Salin et al., 2014). As such, women experiencing workplace mistreatment most often use indirect coping responses by staying silent, ignoring, or denying the forms of mistreatment they encounter at work (McDonald et al., 2016; Salin et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2007). However, these indirect forms of coping are highly ineffective (Mills and Scudder, 2020) and lower the psychological well-being of victims (Salin et al., 2014). Using confrontation and advocacy as coping strategies gave victims satisfaction by restoring self-esteem and educating the offender, even if the mistreatment continued or they experienced retaliation (Salin et al., 2014).

### Purpose

Workplace mistreatment includes covert (passive) and overt (verbalized) generalized harassment, incivility, sexual harassment, and physical hostility. There are physical and psychological consequences that victims and bystanders experience when exposed to workplace mistreatment. Women and women of color are especially prone to experience workplace mistreatment. To fulfill the objective of documenting the current best practices that could assist counselors working with and advocating for US women experiencing workplace mistreatment, a systematic literature review (SLR) of materials published in the past fifteen years was conducted.

### Methods

The author used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model for systematic review studies (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA model offers theoretical and methodological guidance on developing systematic review studies. To begin this process, a series of inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to find relevant journal articles and book chapters for inclusion. The criteria considered are shown in Table 1 as well as subsequently described.

The inclusion criteria began by finding keywords to search for journal articles and book chapters concentrating on working with or advocating for women experiencing workplace mistreatment that were published between 2006 and 2021. Fifteen years was chosen as part of the inclusion criteria to assure that the suggestions offered to counselors would offer comprehensive and wide-ranging treatment suggestions. Additionally, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and former settler colonies of the British Empire were included as these countries share cultural, diplomatic, and military similarities.

An asterisk (\*) was used in search terms to capture all variations of a word, such as couns\* returning results for counselor, counseling, and counseling. The keywords included couns\*, treat\*, bystander, upstander, advoc\*, woman, women, female\*, mistreat\*, discrim\*, rac\*, work\*, employ\*, divers\*, job\*, and harass\*.

Multiple searches in major online databases (PsycINFO, Scopus, and ProQuest Central) were performed by using multiple combinations of the keywords to locate as many journal articles and book chapters as possible. Scopus was selected as it is a multidisciplinary database with over 75 million records. ProQuest Central was chosen as it is a multidisciplinary database with over 12 million records. PsycINFO was used as it is a psychology

**Table 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.**

*Inclusion criteria*

1. Materials concentrating on working with or advocating for women experiencing workplace mistreatment
2. Materials published between 2006 and 2021
3. Journal articles or book chapters in English
4. The search engines PsycINFO, Scopus, and ProQuest Central
5. Materials that had been peer-reviewed
6. Materials from Sweden, the United Kingdom, and former settler colonies of the British Empire

*Exclusion criteria*

1. Materials not concentrating on working with or advocating for women experiencing workplace mistreatment
2. Materials published before 2006
3. Materials that were not journal articles or book chapters
4. Materials not printed in English
5. Search engines that are not PsycINFO, Scopus, and ProQuest Central
6. Materials that were not peer-reviewed
7. Materials not from Sweden, the United Kingdom, and former settler colonies of the British Empire

database with over 5 million records. The search for sources ended on 3 January 2022.

Reference review (backward snowballing) was also used to ensure that no materials were missed (Jalali and Wohlin, 2012) by reviewing the reference list of every source. Items on those reference lists that did not meet the criteria were excluded, and those that met the inclusion criteria were kept.

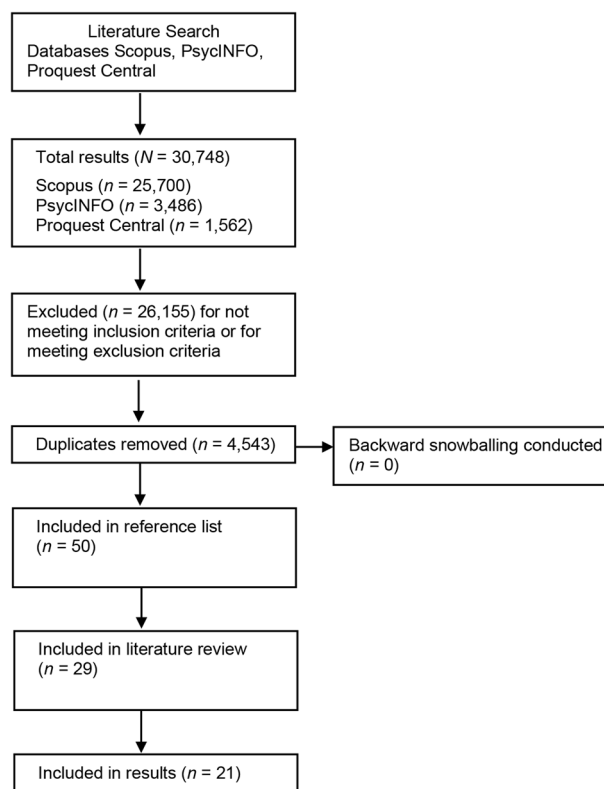
In terms of exclusion criteria, the search results were reviewed, and only those focusing on working with or advocating for women experiencing workplace mistreatment were kept. Additionally, duplicate journal articles were removed.

**Results**

At first, 30,748 journal articles and book chapters were identified. Of those, 26,155 met exclusion criteria. Another 4543 items were removed for being duplicates. Duplicates were identified using the Mendeley bibliographic manager. Backward snowballing was conducted on the remaining materials. However, no new items were found. Ultimately, 50 materials were cited as they provided relevant information specific to the purpose of this article (Fig. 1). However, only 21 items directly provided guidance to counselors working with and advocating for US women experiencing workplace mistreatment (Table 2). Of those items, 20 were journal articles, and one was a book chapter.

Of the 21 materials found directly guiding counselors working with and advocating for US women experiencing workplace mistreatment, 14 (67%) were research articles, four (19%) were theoretical articles, two (9%) were best practices articles, and one (5%) was a theoretical book chapter. Of the 14 research articles, three (21%) were scenario, three (21%) were qualitative, two (14%) were longitudinal, two (15%) were experimental, two (15%) were survey, one (7%) was mixed-methods, and one (7%) was Delphi research. Subjects for the 14 research articles came from the US ( $n = 10$ ; 72%), New Zealand ( $n = 2$ ; 14%), Australia ( $n = 1$ ; 7%), and Sweden ( $n = 1$ ; 7%). Of the 14 research articles, subjects were college students ( $n = 5$ ; 37%), victims ( $n = 3$ ; 21%), adults ( $n = 2$ ; 14%), higher education faculty ( $n = 2$ ; 14%), company managers ( $n = 1$ ; 7%) and experts ( $n = 1$ ; 7%). Of the four theoretical articles, authors came from Australia, Canada, the US, and the UK. Of the two best practices articles, one author came from the US, and one was Canadian.

When looking at all 21 materials combined, six materials discussed topics related to diversity and discrimination in the workplace: a context-oriented update to theories of discrimination ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), workplace mistreatment from a personal resources perspective ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), the consequences of benevolent sexism ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), best practices for supporting



**Fig. 1 PRISMA model for systematic review studies flow chart.** Flow chart of the processing of journal articles and book chapters for this systematic literature review.

workplace diversity ( $n = 2$ ; 9.5%), and perceptions of micro-aggressions ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%). Eight materials discussed topics related to bystanders and workplace training: responses to mistreatment ( $n = 2$ ; 9.5%), a sensemaking model of bystander actions ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), how victims view bystander actions ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), bystander intervention training ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), the efficacy of bystander training ( $n = 2$ ; 9.5%), and bystander intervention frequency ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%). Seven materials discussed topics related to counseling women experiencing workplace mistreatment: potential ways to bolster laws to promote inclusive workplaces ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%); conflict motivations and tactics of victims, bystanders, and bullies ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%); training to overcome barriers ( $n = 1$ ; 5%); the efficacy of sexual harassment training ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%), outcomes of responses to mistreatment ( $n = 1$ ;

**Table 2 Resources selected for inclusion.**

First author (year)	Design	Country	Purpose	Sample	Primary outcome
1. Brennan (2013)	Best practices	USA	Supporting workplace diversity	No sample	Naming of specific diversity measurement metrics
2. Buckner et al. (2014)	Research study	USA	Efficacy of sexual harassment training	209 managers	Training increased recognition sensitivity to sexual harassment
3. Coker et al. (2011)	Research study	USA	Efficacy of bystander training	7945 undergraduates	Intervention led to more active bystander behaviors
4. Haynes-Baratz et al. (2021)	Research study	USA	Efficacy of bystander	63 faculty training members	Intervention led to more active bystander behaviors
5. Hirsh (2014)	Theoretical article	Canada	Context-oriented update to theories of discrimination	No sample	Remedy to discrimination must include the systems of vulnerability and privilege, and workplace cultures that disadvantage women and minorities
6. Jones et al. (2014)	Research study	USA	Consequences of benevolent sexism	124 undergraduates	Benevolent forms of sexism must also be recognized and challenged
7. Lassiter et al. (2021)	Research study	USA	Bystander intervention training	17 experts	Best practices included senior management committed to lead the way; victims, targets, and bystanders need to be protected; and confidentiality must be maintained
8. Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher (2013)	Book chapter	USA	Conflict motivations and tactics of victims, bystanders, and bullies	No sample	Describes three targets (provocative, submissive, and rigidly conscientious), three bystanders (bully allies, target allies, and neutral), and three bullies (accidental, narcissistic, and psychopathic) who have unique motivations and tactics
9. McDonald et al. (2016)	Research study	Australia	Bystander intervention frequency	74 descriptions	Documents methods and frequency of bystanders responding to sexual harassment
10. Mills and Scudder (2020)	Research study	USA	Outcomes of responses to mistreatment	283 adults	Lists effective communication practices to stop sexual harassment without derailing the victim's career the victim's career
11. Neault and Mondair (2011)	Best practices	Canada	Supporting workplace diversity	No sample	Explains the Supporting Employers Embracing Diversity (SEED) Tool kit
12. Ng et al. (2019)	Theoretical article	UK	Sensemaking model of bystander actions	No sample	Model explains how bystander behaviors change over time in response to repeated incidents and how bystanders' responses affect other bystanders
13. Offermann et al. (2014)	Research study	USA	Perceptions of microaggressions	387 undergraduates	Higher levels of color-blind worldviews were associated with lower likelihoods of perceiving microaggressions
14. Salin et al. (2014)	Research study	USA	Reflections on responses to mistreatment	737 faculty members	Victims regretted responding to mistreatment passively with most victims responding with passive and social support-seeking strategies

**Table 2 (continued)**

First author (year)	Design	Country	Purpose	Sample	Primary outcome
15. Shannon et al. (2007)	Research study	USA	Professional services used by victims	2151 adults	Sexual harassment was associated with legal, spiritual and work-related services, while generalized harassment was associated with overall, mental health, and spiritual services
16. Sinclair (2021)	Research study	Sweden	Outcomes of responses to mistreatment	240 adults and students	Women reacted more strongly to an incivility incident and were more willing to support and defend their co-worker
17. Smith (2014)	Theoretical article	Australia	Potential ways to bolster laws to promote inclusive workplaces	No sample	Laws need to be put in understandable language, examples given of what is and is not allowed under law, and best practice guidance should be given to companies
18. van Heugten (2011)	Research study	New Zealand	How victims view bystander actions	17 social workers	Bystanders socially excluding victims lowered confidence, levels of trust, and communication in the workplace
19. van Heugten (2012)	Research study	New Zealand	Resilience as outcome of mistreatment	17 social	Resilience enhanced when workers victims' sense of control over the situation improved and they were supported by others
20. Wheeler et al. (2010)	Theoretical article	USA	Workplace mistreatment from a personal resources perspective	No sample	Bullies seek to protect their power, status, and values and companies must use reporting mechanisms to eradicate bullying
21. White (2009)	Research study	USA	Efficacy of training	91	Training resulted in believing undergraduates they knew how to be a world class professional as a professional of color



4.7%); professional services used by victims ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%); and resilience as an outcome of mistreatment ( $n = 1$ ; 4.7%).

These 21 articles resulted in two major themes. The first theme, *Addressing Female Mistreatment in the Workplace*, had three sub-themes. Four materials (19%) discussed *Workplace Interventions*, eight materials (38%) discussed *Workplace Training*, and three materials (14%) discussed the *Reporting of Workplace Mistreatment*. The second theme, *Counseling Women Experiencing Workplace Mistreatment*, was supported by 11 materials (52%).

## Discussion

The systematic review of the literature found 21 articles that directly guided counselors working with and advocating for US women experiencing workplace mistreatment. Based on those 21 articles, the following recommendations are organized below into two areas: addressing female mistreatment in the workplace and counseling women experiencing workplace mistreatment.

**Addressing female mistreatment in the workplace.** Unfortunately, anti-discrimination laws have not stopped workplace mistreatment against women (Smith, 2014). Further, sexual harassment remains a persistent problem despite US laws requiring employers to implement programs to prevent it (Buckner et al., 2014). Most employers meet these mandates with training programs (Buckner et al., 2014). However, annual diversity training workshops or short-term diversity awareness initiatives are highly unlikely to end workplace mistreatment (Neault and Mondair, 2011). For example, sexual harassment training can help employees better classify behavior as sexual harassment, but it does not improve taking appropriate action once it has occurred (Buckner et al., 2014). There are several areas where counselors can assist employers in reducing workplace mistreatment.

*Workplace interventions.* Counselors must advocate for various activities to occur throughout the year to combat workplace mistreatment and create workplaces where diverse workers are welcomed, appreciated, and encouraged to contribute (Neault and Mondair, 2011). The various methods employed must challenge deeply embedded racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, or other alienating attitudes and beliefs (Neault and Mondair, 2011). For example, the disparate treatment doctrine stipulates that workplace mistreatment is a complex multilevel, contextual, and interactional process that occurs among workgroups, individuals, and employment practices (Hirsh, 2014). Mapping workplace power relations, culture, and compositional group asymmetries are required to bring forth these hidden dynamics of vulnerability and privilege in the workplace (Hirsh, 2014). Smith (2014) suggests that employers might mistreat women because they dismiss gender equality and work-family integration, do not understand how current practices create an atmosphere of discrimination, or lack resources to develop different workplace practices. The concept of workplace mistreatment can be abstract to those with power and privilege, and employers may lack the ability to fully understand how workplace mistreatment unfolds in their workplace (Smith, 2014). Workplace mistreatment cannot be addressed and resolved if the employer cannot identify concrete ways employees are mistreated (Smith, 2014). Smith recommends that female and minority workers assist in making educational materials to help employers understand what workplace practices create an atmosphere of mistreatment and the specific steps that could be taken to change those workplace practices. These educational materials are developed for specific employers to illustrate how seemingly harmless practices in that specific workplace can negatively impact women and minorities. They also offer best practice guidance on more inclusive workplace practices that have not previously been considered (Smith, 2014).

Professional counselors can also facilitate workshops, hold “lunch-and-learn” sessions, develop and distribute educational resources, and individually coach workers struggling to embrace diversity (Neault and Mondair, 2011). Supporting Employers Embracing Diversity (SEED) (Neault and Mondair, 2011) is a virtual tool kit of resources to improve workplace recruitment, orientation, and inclusion of culturally diverse employees. SEED offers employers support by outlining the benefits of diversity, legal considerations, a get started guide, how to consistently maintain a diversity focus, how to integrate diverse workers into the workplace, the successful recruitment of diverse workers, and how to create diverse workplace orientations. In addition to these resources, SEED encourages employers to designate a *Diversity Champion* who would be familiar with diversity resources, increase diversity awareness in the workplace, and advocate for needed diversity changes. SEED developed a *Diversity Champion’s Backgrounder and Guide* to assist in creating this work role (Neault and Mondair, 2011). SEED also offers a *Cultural Diversity Yearbook*, which helps the *Diversity Champion* create wide-ranging diversity awareness initiatives that include cultural diversity messages, activities, and events throughout the year. The yearbook offers options for weekly quotes, monthly discussions, quarterly events, and a calendar that identifies diversity-related dates and special events.

Additionally, counselors can use concepts found in the Leadership and Professional Development (LPD) course to assist minority women experiencing workplace mistreatment. LPD helps participants to (a) develop personal leadership, personal management, and interpersonal leadership skills, as well as (b) expose students to the intricacies and nuances of being African American in corporate America (White, 2009). LPD consists of lectures, team exercises, guest speakers, role plays, workshops, and a community service project. Class topics include racism, prejudices, stereotyping, and biases that result in lower earnings; occupational and job segregation; disparities in employment decisions and performance evaluations; and barriers to informal networks and mentoring (White, 2009). Guest speakers allow minority executives to share their experiences of persistence in the workplace and the methods they used to overcome workplace mistreatment. The workshops use roleplays to help students prepare to successfully negotiate mistreatment regarding the job application process, performance evaluations, supervisor mistreatment, sexual harassment, and same-race supervisor–employee conflict. While the LPD class was created for individuals identifying as African American, the concept could easily be transformed to directly address the needs of Asian American, European American, Hispanic American, and other female races.

*Workplace training.* Workplace mistreatment training includes providing general education about the impact of workplace mistreatment and active bystander training (van Heugten, 2012). Workplace mistreatment training should be advertised as a dialog and educational tool about what employees ought and can do to benefit and protect others, themselves, and the organization (Haynes-Baratz et al., 2021; Lassiter et al., 2021). Routine, comprehensive bystander training to stop workplace mistreatment is essential (Lassiter et al., 2021). Training must include what workplace mistreatment looks like with specific examples that address differences in perceptions about what is considered workplace mistreatment based upon a person’s gender identity, race, class, age, sexuality, and other lived experiences (Haynes-Baratz et al., 2021; Lassiter et al., 2021).

For example, workplace sexism training must address both hostile and benevolent sexism. It is possible to reduce the endorsement of benevolently sexist beliefs by making people

aware of benevolent sexism's harmful consequences through workplace training (Jones et al., 2014). Employee color-blindness attitudes must be challenged because these attitudes reduce perceptions of workplace mistreatment, which reduces minority workers' trust in the workplace (Offermann et al., 2014). Diversity training can increase appreciation of the differences created by distinct group memberships and encourage taking a multicultural view. Workers completing these types of trainings said more positive comments about women and minorities, which increased workplace engagement by women and minorities (Offermann et al., 2014).

Specifically, the Green Dot program provides bystander intervention training to organizations to prevent sexual assault, stalking, harassment, and other forms of workplace mistreatment (Coker et al., 2011). It increases the rate of bystander interventions by guiding them on what to do and say when witnessing workplace mistreatment, which leads to improved bystander self-efficacy (Coker et al., 2011; Haynes-Baratz et al., 2021). The program also seeks to shift organizational norms away from supporting workplace mistreatment so that social, physical, economic, and professional growth opportunities exist for all stakeholders.

Sadly, after most workplace training, evaluations focus on employee satisfaction with the training rather than determining what was learned or if workplace mistreatment decreased after the training (Buckner et al., 2014). Brenman (2013) offers an extensive list of ways to determine if workplace mistreatment initiatives demonstrate positive results. Some ideas include measuring to determine if there are increases in the representation of minorities at all management levels, fewer discrimination complaints filed, increased job satisfaction scores for minority and women workers, better retention rates for minority and women workers, increased career development opportunities for minority and women workers, decreases in pay disparities for minority and women workers, and decreases in social distancing, prejudiced thinking, and unconscious bias in workers. Successful bystander intervention trainings show them acting as active constructive bystanders three months to a year after training (Haynes-Baratz et al., 2021; Lassiter et al., 2021).

*Reporting of workplace mistreatment.* Workplace mistreatment, bystander intervention, and diversity trainings are not enough to stop workplace mistreatment. If victims, bystanders, and employers do not comprehensively and proactively identify and seek to resolve workplace mistreatment when it occurs, the behavior is likely to continue, and the perpetrator will likely harm again (Salin et al., 2014). All employees must believe that workplace mistreatment investigations are just, timely, impartial, discreet, comprehensive, and proficient (Coker et al., 2011; Lassiter et al., 2021). Erroneous accusations must be handled as appropriately as justifiable accusations (Lassiter et al., 2021). As such, employers need to create a culture of encouraging bystanders and victims to come forward early, not experience retaliation for expressing concerns, find solutions within the company, and have confidence in the employer's procedural justice (Salin et al., 2014). Bystanders and victims benefit if they can confidentially consult with another individual at the organization to discuss their concerns about workplace mistreatment and anonymously or formally report concerns about workplace mistreatment (Coker et al., 2011; Lassiter et al., 2021). Supervisors must be trained to listen to bystanders and victims, affirm the bystander's and victim's feelings, and remain neutral about facts discussed by the bystander and victim (Lassiter et al., 2021). Organizations should regularly communicate to employees how workplace mistreatment reporting mechanisms work; how all stakeholder's rights are managed; on average, how long workplace

mistreatment investigations last; and the results of workplace mistreatment complaints while protecting stakeholder confidentiality (Lassiter et al., 2021).

### **Counseling women experiencing workplace mistreatment.**

There are several topics that counselors should be aware of when counseling women experiencing workplace mistreatment. First, ruminating about workplace mistreatment increases stress for victims (van Heugten, 2012). Counselors will want to help clients redirect their mental energy toward the more productive topics that are outlined in this section. Professional counselors can help women label negative workplace experiences as mistreatment to help them identify, legitimize, and take action to attempt to resolve these issues (Shannon et al., 2007). For example, counselors will want to help female victims not to personalize the mistreatment and make negative internal attributions about themselves but instead depersonalize the mistreatment and blame the perpetrator (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). To accomplish this, having victims read information about other victims of workplace mistreatment helps them to externalize the problem and allows the victim to distance themselves cognitively and emotionally from the aggressor's behaviors (van Heugten, 2012). Additionally, becoming familiar with the problem of workplace mistreatment improves victims' sense of control and self-efficacy (van Heugten, 2012).

Social support from colleagues, friends, and family is important for victims. Female victims are more likely to receive social support from others as compared to male victims when they disclose workplace mistreatment (Sinclair, 2021). Victims stated that they experienced lower levels of confidence, trust, and communication in the workplace when they were socially excluded by bystanders (van Heugten, 2011). Female victims of workplace mistreatment should be encouraged to reach out to others for support.

Sadly, workplace mistreatment is often perpetrated away from witnesses (McDonald et al., 2016), so bystanders may not be available to intervene when workplace mistreatment occurs. Additionally, most bystanders will not act when witnessing workplace mistreatment. Bystanders feel less support and more resentment towards victims who are passive in the face of mistreatment (e.g., stay silent, miss work, socially withdraw, or reduce work capacity) as opposed to victims who actively confront the aggressor and report mistreatment (Ng et al., 2019). Further, using only indirect coping mechanisms to deal with workplace mistreatment lowers psychological well-being more than those who experience retaliation for using direct approaches (Salin et al., 2014). Most workplace mistreatment victims regret not being more assertive against the mistreatment when it occurred, even if they initially used the direct approaches of confrontation and advocacy (Salin et al., 2014).

Counselors need to help women actively confront all forms of workplace mistreatment such as sexual harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, gender-based firing, a lack of promotion opportunities, and hiring and promotion discrimination. Clients need to be coached to use direct coping mechanisms of confronting the perpetrator. They should also advocate through supervisors, unions, the workplace, colleagues, or legal interventions in response to workplace mistreatment (McDonald et al., 2016). When directly confronting perpetrators, *assertive* and *assertive-empathic* responses were found to be most effective for victims (Mills and Scudder, 2020). *Assertive responses* directly stand up to workplace mistreatment behaviors and include phrases such as "It bothers me when..." "I'd appreciate if you would stop..." and "When you... it causes me to..." *Assertive-empathic responses* include simultaneously standing up to workplace mistreatment

behaviors while also acknowledging the aggressor's feelings. Examples include using phrases such as "I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but it bothers me when...", "I enjoy working with you, but I'd appreciate it if you would stop...", and "I know that you may see this differently than I do but when you... it causes me to..." Additionally, counselors will want to educate victims on the four victim styles (aggressive provocative, assertive provocative, submissive, or rigidly conscientious), have the client identify how they are currently behaving, and help the client understand how the goals associated with the four victim styles can create problems for victims.

Ultimately, counselors will need to prepare victims for the realities of their situation. Workplace mistreatment often focuses on affective (e.g., threatening identity, personal values) rather than rational (e.g., focusing on ideas, tasks) types of conflict (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). While problem-solving and compromising solutions work well for rational conflicts, they do not work well for affective conflicts and, therefore, often make workplace mistreatment worse (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). This is because aggressors in the workplace believe that their status, power, and personal values justify their behaviors, and they will likely attack to protect themselves, their claims, and their behavior (Wheeler et al., 2010). Workplace mistreatment often worsens if the victim speaks with the aggressor about problem behaviors, reports the behavior, changes their communication strategies with the aggressor, works harder, cuts off communication with the aggressor, or takes a vacation or sick leave (Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013). When the victim's attempts at solutions were ineffective, they resigned from the organization (van Heugten, 2012). Victims report that once they announce leaving the company, current or former colleagues speak with them about the mistreatment at work. It lowers their feelings of isolation and helps them make sense of their mistreatment experiences (van Heugten, 2011). However, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts can remain after a victim leaves the organization. Cognitive behavioral therapy is helpful if the victim seeks treatment after leaving the organization (van Heugten, 2012).

### Limitations

Systematic literature reviews, such as this publication, have limitations, such as a risk of selection bias. Publication bias can also occur because it is desirable to publish studies with statistically significant results. As such, studies without statistical significance may have important clinical information to offer counselors, but they are not published. Additionally, materials were excluded that were not in English, published before 2006, and not journal articles or book chapters. Different results would occur if these elements were included in the systematic literature review. Lastly, different results may have been achieved if other major online databases were used.

### Conclusion

Anti-discrimination laws have not stopped workplace mistreatment against women. Ultimately, workplace mistreatment takes a significant psychological toll on victims and reduces their effectiveness as an employee. Additionally, both victims and bystanders are likely to leave an organization with workplace mistreatment issues. This paper documents the best practices that could assist counselors working with and advocating for US women experiencing workplace mistreatment by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) of materials published over the last 15 years. Twenty-one articles were identified and resulted in two major themes.

The first theme, *Addressing Female Mistreatment in the Workplace*, had three sub-themes. *Workplace Interventions*

included mapping workplace power dynamics; providing year-round workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives from onboarding to retirement; and providing courses to assist minority women in developing personal leadership and management skills. These recommendations help the workplace to change its culture to become more inclusive of the needs of women. The challenge of workplace mistreatment cannot be resolved for women without an organizational culture change. While workplace interventions focus on the workplace as a whole, workplace training focuses on the individual employee. *Workplace Training* recommendations included bystander training and sexism training at regular intervals. Research has found that offering trainings once to an employee is not sufficient to create lasting change. Employers must be willing to routinely offer trainings to employees to ensure meaningful change at the individual level. While the first two sub-themes are important, they will not be effective without clear workplace reporting procedures. The *Reporting of Workplace Mistreatment* focuses on employers establishing policies and procedures that comprehensively and proactively identify and seek to resolve workplace mistreatment when it occurs. If there is no clear, fair, and confidential reporting procedure, workplace mistreatment will continue to be an issue because perpetrators will be allowed to re-offend without consequence.

The second theme, *Counseling Women Experiencing Workplace Mistreatment*, found that counselors will want to help women focus on productive cognitive processes, obtain social support, directly confront workplace mistreatment, and negotiate the realities of workplace mistreatment. To not do these activities with women jeopardizes their recovery from the mistreatment. Ruminating about workplace mistreatment and being in isolation will only further injure the victim. It is also essential to help victims understand which communication patterns are most productive to use with the bully as well as colleagues when communicating about the mistreatment. Lastly, it is critical to help the victim understand the outcomes of various ways of coping with workplace mistreatment when an organization does not have policies and procedures that comprehensively and proactively identify and seek to resolve workplace mistreatment when it occurs.

### Data availability

All data generated or analyzed for this article are included in this published article.

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### Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

### Ethical approval

Ethical approval statement is not applicable to this work as it consists of a review of published literature.

### Informed consent

Informed consent statement is not applicable to this work as it consists of a review of published literature.

### Additional information

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