Workplace Injustice, Burnout, and Deviance: The Moderating Role of Employee Age
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BACKGROUND

Injustice, Burnout, and Deviance: Perceptions of workplace injustice lead directly to intentions to engage in workplace deviance, as well as to psychological states such as burnout that can decrement the self-control required to refrain from deviance; the latter implies that psychophysiological variables like burnout can mediate the effect of injustice on deviance.

Injustice has this effect because it threatens at least two human needs: outcome injustice threatens employees' needs for security and control, and interactional injustice threatens employees' needs for social belonging.

However, not all people are equally invested in the fulfillment of these two needs; the extent to which people are concerned with these needs should determine the extent to which they experience threat and burnout as a result of injustice, and thereby also the extent to which they engage in workplace deviance.

Age-Related Changes in Needs: Research on human aging suggests that as people age their concerns shift from an orientation toward control and security needs, to social belonging needs. Thus, we suggest that employee age will determine the extent to which different forms of injustice lead to burnout, and therefore also the extent to which burnout mediates the relations between forms of injustice and workplace deviance.

RESEARCH QUESTION & HYPOTHESES

Does employee age determine the effect of different forms of workplace injustice on psychological burnout and workplace deviance?

Does burnout mediate the effect of injustice on employee differently for employees of different age groups?

H1a and H1b) Employee age will moderate the relation between perceptions of different forms of injustice and employee burnout, such that a) the relation between outcome injustice and burnout will be stronger for younger employees and b) the relation between interactional injustice and burnout will be stronger for older employees.

H2) Burnout will mediate the relation between outcome injustice and deviance for younger but not older employees.

H3) Burnout will moderate the relation between interactional injustice and deviance for older but not younger employees.

METHOD

Outcome and Interactional Injustice: 11 and 9 items from Colquitt’s scale (2001; e.g., “Are your outcomes justified, given your performance?”; “Has your supervisor treated you with respect?”), α = .95 and .94, respectively

Burnout: Wharton & Erikson’s (1995) 6 item scale (e.g., “I feel used up at the end of the day.”), α = .94

Deviance: 10 items from Bennett & Robinson (2001) rating the frequency with which employees engaged in various behaviors (e.g., “Put little effort into work.”), α = .91

Controls: gender, income, tenure, negative affect.

RESULTS

Outcome injustice predicted burnout for younger but not older employees. Therefore Hypothesis 1a was supported.

Interactional injustice predicted burnout for older but not younger employees. Therefore Hypothesis 1b was supported.

In support of Hypothesis 2, employee burnout mediated the effect of outcome injustice on workplace deviance for younger but not older employees.

In support of Hypothesis 3, employee burnout mediated the effect of interactional injustice on workplace deviance for older but not younger employees.

DISCUSSION

The current study provides support for the multiple needs model of justice by providing evidence that different forms of injustice can affect different people in different ways.

Extends the justice and deviance literatures by showing that burnout mediates the relation between perceptions of workplace injustice and deviance. This suggests that deviance may not simply be a function of negative intentions.

Supports the aging and development literature by extending the research into a theoretically relevant workplace context.

REFERENCES


Colquitt, J. A. (2001). The justice and deviance literatures: Extending the justice and deviance literatures by showing that burnout mediates the relation between perceptions of workplace injustice and deviance. This suggests that deviance may not simply be a function of negative intentions.

Supports the aging and development literature by extending the research into a theoretically relevant workplace context.