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COMMENTARY

How well are we doing at addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the science and practice of I-O psychology? Reflections on the SIOP 2023 conference

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The focal article by Mullins and Olson-Buchanan (2023) urges industrial-organizational (I-O) psychologists to use our unique expertise and perspective to make more meaningful contributions to societal change and help organizations and individuals adapt to rapidly changing work conditions. Among other things, Mullins and Olson-Buchanan challenge us to consider how I-O psychologists can be agents of change in helping to address the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (referred to from here forward as SDGs). Their call to action is provocative and timely, considering the myriad of social justice issues, environmental concerns, economic crises, and political instability occurring across the globe.

In this commentary we provide a snapshot of the extent to which SIOP members are engaged in research and practice related to the UN SDGs. This is accomplished by systematically reviewing and coding 1,124 sessions from the 2023 Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) Annual Conference Program. We focus on the degree to which researchers and practitioners are (a) focusing on SDGs in their science (symposia, papers in symposia, posters) and (b) having professional conversations (panel discussions, ignite sessions, debates, communities of interest) about topics of relevance to the UN SDGs. We focus on 9 of the 17 SDGs (https://sdgs.un.org/goals) that have high relevance for work and employment:

- 1. no poverty
- 2. good health and well-being
- 3. quality education
- 4. gender equality
- 5. decent work and economic growth
- 6. industry, innovation and infrastructure
- 7. reduced inequalities

All original data and data used for post hoc analyses, plus the code book used to categorized SIOP 2023 conference sessions can be found at https://osf.io/xnvuz/.

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- 8. climate action
- 9. peace, justice, and strong institutions.¹

From this analysis, we draw tentative conclusions regarding the SDGs that SIOP members are most and least actively engaged with at the 2023 Annual Conference. We also use these data to identify high priority areas that researchers and practitioners can focus on in service of the greater good.

Method

All data and the code book are available at https://osf.io/xnvuz/. Data were obtained from the 2023 online SIOP conference program (https://www.siop.org/Annual-Conference). All symposia (n = 105), papers in symposia (n = 337), posters (n = 513), panel discussions (n = 140), debates (n = 4), ignite sessions (n = 13), and communities of interest (n = 12) were coded, for a total of 1,124 sessions and 10,116 codes (9 SDGs × 1,124 sessions)². A spreadsheet was created that contained information directly from the SIOP program: date, time, format (symposium, paper in symposium, poster, panel discussions, ignite, community of interest), title, and lead author(s).

Coding taxonomy

The UN SDGs website lists each UN SDG, along with brief descriptions (https://sdgs.un.org/goals). Based on the definition of the SDGs provided on the UN SDGs website, a coding taxonomy was developed for the nine SDGs of interest. Because the UN SDGs website definitions provided are brief, and to facilitate reliable coding, two researchers with PhDs in I-O psychology independently generated examples of I-O topics that could serve as examples of each SDG. The examples were then reviewed by the entire team and a final set of (nonexhaustive) examples were identified for each of the nine SDGs to guide coding. In so doing, care was taken to help ensure no overlap among the nine SDGs (see Table 1). Because a SIOP session could focus on more than one SDG (e.g., good health and well-being as well as gender equality), coding was not mutually exclusive. Each session was coded on each SDGs (e.g., 0 = climate action absent; 1 = climate action present; 0 = gender equality not present, 1 = gender equality present)³; as such, the score for a single session could range from 0 to 9.

Coding process

Three graduate students with experience conducting content analysis coded sessions from the 2023 SIOP Annual Conference. Preparation included reading the focal article, reviewing the UN SDGs website, and meeting with the lead author to review the coding taxonomy and discuss examples. A total of 15 sessions were independently coded by the three students with 84.4% agreement. Due to high agreement in initial coding, the remaining one third of the sessions were independently coded by one of the graduate students. The majority of sessions were coded based on the title of the session. In cases where there was ambiguity based on the title alone, coders also

¹The other eight SDGs (zero hunger; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and air pollution; life below water; life on land; partnerships for these goals) were discussed by the research team and deemed to be largely outside the scope of sessions typically presented at SIOP and less clearly tied to work or employment.

²We acknowledge that papers are nested within symposia and therefore are not completely independent. We took this approach to provide insight into whether symposia presented at SIOP aligned with the SDGs, recognizing that not all papers in a symposium might align with the same (or any) SDGs.

 $^{^{3}}$ Coders also could indicate 2 = unsure. In total, 1.25% were noted by coders as unsure. All unsure codes were examined by the lead author and discussed with the coder to reach consensus and replaced with either 0 (absent) 1 (present) in the final dataset.

Table 1. United Nations Sustainable Goals (SDGs) Coding Taxonomy

SDG	SDG definition	Selected I-O examples
1. No poverty	End poverty in all forms everywhere	 Poverty Unemployment Job insecurity Working poor/low-income workers Low-wage work/economic or financial hardship
2. Good health and well- being	Ensure healthy lives and promote well- being	 Physical health Occupational health (e.g., burnout, work-family conflict) Life satisfaction Work-life balance Work-family enrichment
3. Quality education	Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	Learning and development programs/practices Training and upskilling Internships Standardized test bias in educational settings Alternative to standardized testing in educational settings
4. Gender equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	 Glass ceiling/glass cliff Sex/gender discrimination/sexual harassment Gender/sex-based stereotypes or stereotype threat LGBTQ+ related to any aspect of work/employment DEI and/or inclusion specific to sex/gender/LGBTQ+
5. Decent work and economic growth	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	Workplace safety/safety climate/psychological safety Voice/participative decision making/labor unions Interpersonal CWB & deviance/ostracism/bullying Dignity at work Stable employment General DEI (not specific to a particular group) Servant leadership/supportive supervision/compassionate supervision
6. Industry innovation and infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive industrialization and foster innovation	Creativity Innovation Entrepreneurship Job creation
7. Reduced inequalities ^a	Reduce inequality within and among countries	 Discrimination other than gender/sex (e.g., age, race, disability) Stereotypes and stereotype threat other than gender/sex Intersectionality Stigmatized identity management DEI and/or inclusion specific to group other than sex/gender/LGBTQ+

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

SDG	SDG definition	Selected I-O examples
8. Climate action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	Green/ecofriendly/ pro-environmental behavior Green training Employee/supervisor environmental commitment Recycling intentions/behaviors Power conservation intentions/behaviors
9. Peace, justice, and strong institutions	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for all, promote access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	Criminal justice system/policing/ law enforcement Organizational fairness/justice Legal system/legal decision making Adverse impact/employment law Leader/supervisor integrity or ethics

Note. SDG definitions from https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Sessions Focusing on Each SDG Based on Format Type

SDG	Symposia (n = 105)	Papers in symposia (n = 337)	Posters (n = 513)	Panel discussions (n = 140)	Debates (n = 4)	Ignite (n = 13)	Communities of interest $(n = 12)$	Row totals $(N = 1,124)$
Decent work and economic growth	16 (15.24%)	53 (15.73%)	66 (12.87%)	19 (13.57%)	1 (25.00%)	1 (7.69%)	4 (33.33%)	160 (14.23%)
Good health and well-being	11 (10.48%)	44 (13.06%)	78 (15.20%)	4 (2.86%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (15.38%)	2 (16.67%)	141 (12.54%)
Gender equality	9 (8.57%)	42 (12.46%)	35 (6.82%)	5 (3.57%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (15.38%)	0 (0.00%)	93 (8.27%)
Reduced inequalities ^a	8 (7.62%)	30 (8.90%)	39 (7.60%)	6 (4.29%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (8.33%)	84 (7.47%)
Quality education	10 (9.52%)	27 (8.01%)	24 (4.68%)	14 (10.00%)	1 (25.00%)	1 (7.69%)	0 (0.00%)	77 (6.85%)
Industry innovation and infrastructure	14 (13.33%)	33 (9.79%)	15 (2.92%)	10 (7.14%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (7.69%)	0 (0.00%)	73 (6.49%)
Peace, justice, and strong institutions	5 (4.76%)	15 (4.45%)	12 (2.34%)	19 (13.57%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (8.33%)	52 (4.63%)
No poverty	2 (1.90%)	9 (2.67%)	4 (0.78%)	2 (1.43%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	17 (1.51%)

Note. Row total exceeds percent of sessions focusing on one or more SDG because each session could be coded into multiple SDGs. aTo ensure mutually exclusive coding, the SDG of reduced inequalities does not include inequality related to sex/gender/LGBTQ+ (see gender equality).

used the session summary (available for all sessions except posters) to inform coding. Papers within symposia were coded separately from symposia because a symposium might address an SDG even though one or more papers within the session do not (and vice versa).

Results and discussion

Of the 1,124 coded sessions, 613 (54.54%) were coded into one or more of the SDGs listed in Table 1. Among sessions focusing on one or more SDG, they averaged 1.16 SDGs (SD = .71, range 1–9). Symposia (61.90%) were most likely to focus on one or more SDG, followed closely by papers in symposia (61.72%), and communities of interest (58.33%). About half of the panel discussions (51.43%), debates (50.00%), and posters (49.51%) focused on one more SDG. Ignite sessions (38.46%) were least likely to focus on one or more SDG. Table 2 illustrates how often each

^aTo ensure mutually exclusive coding, the SDG of reduced inequalities does not include inequality related to sex/gender/LGBTQ+ (see gender equality).

SDG was the focus of different session formats. Recall that sessions were coded on all nine SDGs, such that a session could be classified into multiple SDGs. In Table 2, we report the breakdown by session format. The percentages indicate the relative representation of each SDG by session type as a function of the total number of sessions in each format (e.g., the denominator for symposia is n = 105, the total number of symposia presented at SIOP).

SIOP sessions were most likely to focus on the SDGs of decent work and economic growth (e.g., workplace safety/safety climate, labor unions; 14.23%), and good health and well-being (e.g., occupational health, work-life balance, work-family enrichment; 12.54%). Combining gender equality (e.g., sex/gender discrimination, gender-based stereotypes or stereotype threat; LGBTQ+; 8.27%) and reduced inequalities (e.g., discrimination other than gender/sex, stereotypes or stereotype threat other than gender/sex, intersectionality; 7.47%) with a post hoc count of sessions in decent work and economic growth that focused on general DEI (n=72,6.41%) finds that 22.15% of sessions broadly focused on diversity, equality, and inclusion-related topics⁴. The other five SDGs were less well represented: quality education (e.g., learning or development programs/practices, standardized test bias in educational settings; 6.85%); industry innovation and infrastructure (e.g., creativity, entrepreneurship; 6.49%); peace, justice, and strong institutions (e.g., policing/law enforcement, organizational fairness/justice; adverse impact; 4.63%); no poverty (e.g., job insecurity, low-wage work/economic or financial hardship; 1.51%); and climate action (e.g., eco/ecofriendly/pro-environmental behavior, conservation intentions/behaviors; 1.25%). Table 3 provides example sessions in each SDG category.

At the request of a reviewer, we also conducted a post hoc analysis to explore the percentage of sessions that focused on one or more SDG and examined topics that are not typically on the agenda of I-O psychologists. This allows us to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the extent to which novel UN SDGs have started to penetrate our field. Four SDGs were identified that contained examples that likely represented topics that are typically outside the purview of I-O research. This includes the SDGs of no poverty (examples poverty, working poor/low-income workers, low-wage work/economic or financial hardship, immigrants/refugees), decent work (stable employment, dignity at work), climate action (all), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (criminal justice system, excluding law enforcement, which has been the subject of I-O practice for decades; see Table 1). Our results indicated that very few sessions (n = 25, 4% of sessions that included one or more SDG) addressed topics traditionally outside the purview of I-O psychology.

Implications for using the science and practice of I-O psychology for greater good

It is encouraging that over half of the sessions at the 2023 SIOP Annual Conference focused on topics related to one or more UN SDG. However, as Mullins and Olsen-Buchanan lament, "could we be doing better, and if so, how?" Almost one quarter (22.15%) of SIOP sessions focused on issues broadly related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This aligns with SIOP's public support of diversity, equity, and inclusion (https://www.siop.org/) and corporate investment in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Given current trends, it may be useful to reflect on why diversity, equity, and inclusion is not *better* represented given its relevance to many aspects of work and employment. There is clearly a need for I-O psychologists to go beyond documenting DEI-related problems (e.g., adverse impact in cognitive ability tests, discrimination) to identify ways to intervene in the cognitive and behavioral processes that lead to discrimination. We could also consider ongoing societal changes as they relate to the intersection of the workplace and DEI, such as by examining the impact of the repeal of Roe v. Wade on women's education and career decisions.

⁴This may be an underestimation because the SDG of decent work and economic growth also included sessions focusing on interpersonal CWB and deviance/ostracism/bullying, some of which may have discussed gender/sex, race, or other groups as targets even if not mentioned in session title.

Table 3. Example Sessions by SDG

SDG	Session title	Lead author(s)	Session type
No poverty	When Doing Good Isn't Good Enough: Public Service Motivation and Loan Forgiveness	Oney	Poster
	A Meta-Analytic Investigation of Financial Stress and Employee Job Experiences	Phetmisy	Poster
	Better Days Ahead: The Role of Positive Expectations and Debt in Worker Health	Graham	Poster
	Relationships Between Debt and Well-Being: The Role of Career Attitudes	Siddiqui	Poster
Good health & well-being	New Directions in Challenge-Hindrance Stress Research	Ganster & Gabriel	Symposiu
	The Science and Practice of Creating Well Work Environments	Rizzuto	COI
	Treating Mental Health in the Workplace	Reichman	Symposiu
	The Psychological Characteristics of Stressful Work Events	Saef	Poster
Quality education	Cutting-Edge Practice in Development Assessments	Collins & Reynolds	Symposiu
	Rejecting the Dull: Teaching Students to Know and Love Statistics	Black & Brawley	Ignite
	Mattering Predicts Graduation Intentions: A Self- Determination Theory Approach	Hurley	Poster
	Impact Evaluation: From Employee Training to Leadership Development	Но	Panel
Gender equality	It's Women's Work: Gender-Based Task Segregation Evidence in Job Analysis Survey Data	McHugh	Poster
	Gender Differences in Sexual Harassment Perceptions Over the Last 20 Years: Perceptions Have Changed, but the Gap Remains	Zhou	Paper
	Development and Validation of the LGBTQ+ Meta-Stereotypes Scale	Magalona	Poster
	ADVANCE-ing Gender Equity Among STEM Professors Through I-O Psychology	Horvath	Symposiu
Decent work & economic growth	A Critical Review of Organizational Allyship: Issues in Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Definitional Sources	Liguori	Paper
	Addressing Attitudes Toward Unions: Development of a Construct-Valid Scale	Levey	Poster
	Using Machine Learning to Predict Occupational Accident Rates From O*NET Data	Kumar	Poster
	Unheard and Undervalued: The Unexamined Consequences and Predictors of Employee Voice	Dumlao & Payne	Symposiu
Industry innovation & Infrastructure	Driving Innovation Without Going Off the Rails: Implementing Ideas and Fostering Change	Blocker	Panel
	Novel Approaches to Managing Creativity in Organizations	Todd	Symposiu
	Entrepreneurship Performance in Startups: Development of a Behavioral Taxonomy	Blacksmith	Poster
	Artificial Intelligence and Embodiment of Synthetic Teammates in a Brainstorming Task	Naber	Paper

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

SDG	Session title	Lead author(s)	Session type
Reduced inequalities ^a	Behavioral Reactions to Neuroatypical Employees in the Workplace	LeFevre-Levy	Poster
	From Research to Practice: Intervention Strategies for Workers With Disabilities	McGonagle & Santuzzi	Panel
	Leveling the Playing Field: Practical Considerations for Testing and Accommodations	Allen & LoVerde	Panel
	Forgotten Minorities in the Workplace: Overlooked and Understudied	Lukaszewski, Stone, & Murray	Symposium
Climate action	Advancing Research on Social and Environmental Responsibility of Organizations	Dilchert & Hessen	Symposium
	A Meta-Analysis on the Effect of Green Leadership on Employee Green Behavior	Bentler	Paper
	Organizations' Socially Responsible Behaviors: An Analysis of the Domain and Measures	Hessen	Paper
	I-O's Role in Pursuing the Triple Bottom Line: Boosting Our Green Game	Carruth & Stuhlmacher	Panel
Peace, justice, and strong institutions	Do the Doable: Practical Tips for Implementing I-O Solutions in Federal Organizations	Heinen	Panel
	AI Ethics and AI Legislation in the 21st Century Workplace: Ready, Set, Go!	Ruiz de Huydobro	Panel
	Adapting the Uniform Guidelines for Today's Workplace	Colosimo	Panel
	Leveraging I-O Psychology to Improve Law Enforcement Practices	Tarantino & Reichin	Symposium

 $\mathit{Note}.\ \mathsf{COI} = \mathsf{Community}\ \mathsf{of}\ \mathsf{interest}.\ \mathsf{Paper} = \mathsf{Paper}\ \mathsf{in}\ \mathsf{symposium}.\ \mathsf{Panel} = \mathsf{Panel}\ \mathsf{discussion}.$

I-O psychologists are also discussing issues related to health and well-being (12.54% of sessions), such as remote worker well-being, work-life balance, and burnout. Given the extensive discussion of challenges to worker well-being during the recent pandemic (Rudolph et al., 2021), it is surprising that the number of sessions was not greater. As the world of work continues to develop postpandemic, it will be important for I-O psychologists to study the health and well-being implications of new forms of work such as hybrid workplaces, virtual teams, and workplace preparedness for manmade and natural disasters. Of course, many of these topics could focus on other SDGs; for example, the transition to remote work affords organizations the opportunity to support climate action by reducing the carbon footprint associated with commuting to work and power conservation as onsite office use is reduced.

I-O psychologists are engaged in some research and practice around decent work (14.23% of SIOP sessions), but there is room for improvement. For example, very few sessions focused on labor unions as a way to promote decent work. Some industry sectors (e.g., arts, entertainment, and recreation, agriculture and related industries) have recently seen increased unionization, and this has been almost exclusively among workers of color (Shierholz et al., 2023). Because the motivations for unionizing often focus on improving wages, benefits, and working conditions, I-O psychologists could play a key role in the science and practice of unionization. As another example, the demand for a skilled workforce whose competencies match today's employment

^aTo ensure mutually exclusive coding, the SDG of reduced inequalities does not include inequality related to sex/gender/LGBTQ+ (see gender equality).

opportunities is a critical issue that I-O psychologists can help address by the creation of assessments to evaluate the match between workforce needs and employee competencies, as well as training programs to address the skills gap. Supporting employee skills development is also an important way to support the SDG of quality, inclusive education, and lifelong learning, as well as address concerns about poverty-related issues.

Also notable is the dearth of sessions focusing on no poverty (1.51%). This is surprising given global inflation, the cost-of-living crisis (International Monetary Fund, 2022), and the recent focus on financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Sinclair et al., 2021). Additionally, the UN reports that in 2020, the working poverty rate rose for the first time in two decades, jumping from 6.7% to 7.2% and pushing an additional 8 million workers into poverty (https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1). I-O psychologists could help address issues of poverty through research and consulting that focuses on the needs of the low-wage workforce, such as occupational training programs that target welfare-to-work transitions. We might also partner with agencies that service the unhoused, victims of intimate partner violence, and those who suffer from substance use disorders to offer programs that support the job search process. Another approach is to examine whether research findings from primarily higher income, white-collar samples are applicable to understanding the experience of work and employment among low-income workers. For example, there may be unique associations among working conditions, physical health complaints, and low-income status among racial minorities due to less access to comprehensive medical coverage and race-based health disparities.

Another missed opportunity is limited I-O sessions at SIOP focused on peace, justice, and strong institutions (4.63%). Topics of potentially high relevance to I-O within this SDG include effective policing strategies, employment-related caselaw, and promoting ethical leadership. I-O psychologists could help with the development of selection and assessment tools to help law enforcement organizations eradicate problems related to racism and police brutality. I-O psychologists also have unique expertise to share in governmental hearings on topics related to strengthening the armed services, law enforcement, increasing accountability among banking executives, and reducing health disparities in the healthcare system.

Climate action was also poorly represented (1.25%). This is surprising given organizational efforts at climate action are often part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) called for research on the microfoundations of CSR in 2012, and a year later a special issue of *Personnel Psychology* was published on this topic (Morgeson et al., 2013). Yet, it appears that there is still plenty of opportunity for I-O psychologists to engage in the study of climate action. Given concerns expressed by young members of society about climate change, new entrants to the workforce may hold their employers more accountable for developing and implementing pro-environmental policies.

Finally, I-O psychologists could support the development of new employment pathways that emerge in the realm of green technology and novel applications of artificial intelligence to improve organizational outcomes, supporting the SDG of resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive industrialization, and fostering innovation. For instance, the transition to clean energy is creating new jobs related to sustainability and the AI revolution will open up a multitude of jobs (World Economic Forum, 2023). The workforce of the future will require people with the competencies to develop and effectively utilize these AI tools, as well as engage in their ethical application to foster inclusive economic opportunities. I-O psychologists can also help organizations examine how the workforce will change and understand how to select and train a workforce for jobs that did not exist in the past. In addition, worker creativity and an ability to engage in ongoing learning may be particularly important competencies that need to be developed to support a transition in the economy related to the AI revolution.

Although our review of the 2023 SIOP conference program offers insight into the extent to which I-O psychologists are focusing on nine of the UN's SDGs, several caveats exist. Obviously, the SIOP program alone provides only a snapshot (both in time and scope) of our field's

engagement with the UN's SDGs. However, using the SIOP program offers several advantages. The publication process is lengthy, so examining research and practice in real-time affords a perspective of what I-O psychologists are working on right now. The SIOP program also allowed us to capture not just research related to the UN's SDG but also practice-related work, which is important given the scientist–practitioner model in our profession. Another limitation is that focusing only on the SIOP program does not capture current research being done in allied areas (e.g., Academy of Management, American Psychological Association annual meetings), where there may be different (or perhaps greater) emphasis on the UN SDGs. For example, we suspect that the Academy of Management program may be more likely to include sessions on green employee behavior and organizational social responsibility in divisions such as Social Issues in Management. Another limitation is that we only had online access to the session title. Because of this we do not know if some SIOP sessions focused on the other eight SDGs (e.g., clean water and sanitation, responsible consumption and production) or the level of analysis associated with each session (e.g., individual, team, organizational).

In short, we applaud Mullins and Olson-Buchanan for starting a much-needed conversation about how the science and practice of I-O psychology can better support the UN SDGs. In this commentary our aim was to show where we already work to support these goals and to suggest strategies to better align with these important goals. I-O psychologists can and should help enable the world of work to adjust to the ongoing social, environmental, and technological changes around us.

Competing interests. We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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