Incivility and Counterproductive Work Behavior: A Moderated Mediation Model of Emotional Regulation and Psychological Distress

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to extend the literature on stress by exploring the relationship between incivility and employees’ counterproductive work behavior (CWB). We investigate the mediating role of psychological distress (PD) to understand the relationship of family and workplace incivility with CWB. The study also evaluates the moderation effect of emotional regulation between incivility and PD. Analysis of three-wave lagged data (N=328), collected from bank employees in Pakistan, indicates that PD mediates the effect of family and workplace incivility on CWB and emotional regulation moderates the effect of family and workplace incivility on PD. Our findings highlight the fact that emotional regulation and PD are important mechanisms in the incivility–CWB relationship. The inclusion of these two constructs is a key to understanding the relationships among family incivility, workplace incivility, and work-related outcomes. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications.

KEYWORDS

Counterproductive Work Behavior, Emotional Regulation, Incivility, Psychological Distress

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a growing interest in understanding incivility and its economic and behavioral consequences (Bai, Lin & Wang, 2016; Porath & Pearson, 2013a). Incivility bears economic and behavioral costs (Porath & Pearson, 2013a), especially when it converts into counterproductive work behavior (CWB) (Fine, 2012). That is why several researchers have steadily focused on the work–family conflict and its consequences, but such research has been slow-paced during the last decade (Glaveli, Karassavidou, & Zafiropoulos, 2013; Lim & Tai, 2014; Lu, Tjosvold, Shi, & Wang, 2012). A few researchers investigated the relationship between family and workplace outcomes, which helped provide insights into the practical and theoretical implications for addressing the familial and workplace conflicts (Bai, Lin, & Wang, 2016; Lim & Tai, 2014). Some researchers thought differently

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and viewed that the work environment is a social dimension of relationship (social relational setting) (Glaveli et al., 2013; Mossholder, Richardson, & Settoon, 2011), and therefore the hostile relationships in the workplace were thoroughly studied by researchers. Social interactions were examined and analyzed through different lenses also, for example focusing on harassment (McCabe & Hardman, 2005), aggression (Schat & Frone, 2011), and emotional abuse (Harris, Harvey, & Booth, 2010). Such conduct may significantly affect organizations, especially when it yields CWB which is reflected in decreased productivity, withdrawal intentions, and unexpected behavior caused by physical and psychological stresses (Penney & Spector, 2005). As one of the key elements of deviant behavior, CWB is considered detrimental to organizational survival and success (Jawahar & Stone, 2015; Penney & Spector, 2005).

Stress has always been a focal research area in the field of organizational psychology. Many studies have highlighted the impact of work stressors on workers’ individual behavior, while some researchers have highlighted the family stressors and/or workplace stressors to clearly understand the individual behavior (Bai et al., 2016; Michel, Mitchelson, Kotrab, LeBreton, & Baltes, 2009). There is growing interest in how to manage family and work-related stress and their impact on individual behavior. Generally speaking, every meaningful relationship, whether it is in personal, professional, academic, or organizational life is underlain by a code of civility and courtesy. Building successful workplace relationships, in particular, necessitates a conducive and respectful environment where everyone respects others and they work together happily and efficiently. In the workplace, some manifestations of incivility are refusing to work with certain colleagues, looking at someone with aggression, or making disrespectful remarks. Previous studies revealed that incivility has severe consequences on individual and organizational outcomes. Victims of incivility show strong psychological distress (PD), low job satisfaction, high job stress, and workplace deviance (Bai et al., 2016; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Lim & Tai, 2014).

Typically, incivility (unlike explicit violence and physical aggression) is a lesser level of mistreatment that still harms organizations significantly (Baron & Neuman, 1996). Such low-intensity deviant behavior that harms employees and organizations is known as workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Workplace incivility is perceived by employees when other coworkers are doing/showing incivility. Incivility also exacerbates the low productive behavior because demeaning language is used, and fellow workers are ignored or disregarded (Pearson, Andersson, & Wagner, 2001). Recently, Sguera, Baggozi, Huy, Boss, and Boss (2016) concluded that workplace incivility silently damages organizations and their workers. It is, therefore, worth understanding the relationship of incivility (both in the family and at work) and CWB in its entirety.

Executives of 1000 organizations reported that 13% of their valuable time is spent dealing with evaluating the negative outcomes of incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2013a). Porath & Pearson, (2013b) stated that a substantial amount of time is wasted in addressing incivility issues, equaling almost seven work weeks per year. Organizations also spend time worth millions of dollars annually in efforts to resolve incivility-related problems (Porath & Pearson, 2013b). These situations underscore the need to understand the workplace incivility and its effects on employees. Despite the fact that ascertaining “incivility” and its effects are decisive for organizational success (Bai et al., 2016), there is a scant literature that has addressed such conduct and its outcomes (van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). In this regard, our work primarily addresses the concerns of workplace and family incivility because we believe related findings will help organizations repair strained relationships and thereby improve organizational growth.

Family incivility, which is defined as the “low-intensity deviant behaviors with the ambiguous intent that violate the norms of mutual respect in the family”, has a negative correlation with job performance (Lim & Tai, 2014). Family incivility is a lesser and subtle mistreatment and is considered to be a chronic form of interpersonal behavior which is a general phenomenon among the family
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