Think Twice About No Time for Nice: Understanding and Dealing with Workplace Incivility

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Workplace Incivility

"Incivility refers to rude, condescending, and ostracizing acts that violate workplace norms of respect, but otherwise appear mundane."
(Cortina et al., 2017, p. 299)

- Subtle but pervasive
- Low-intensity
- Characteristically rude and offensive
- Displaying a lack of regard for others

Source: Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001, 2017; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001

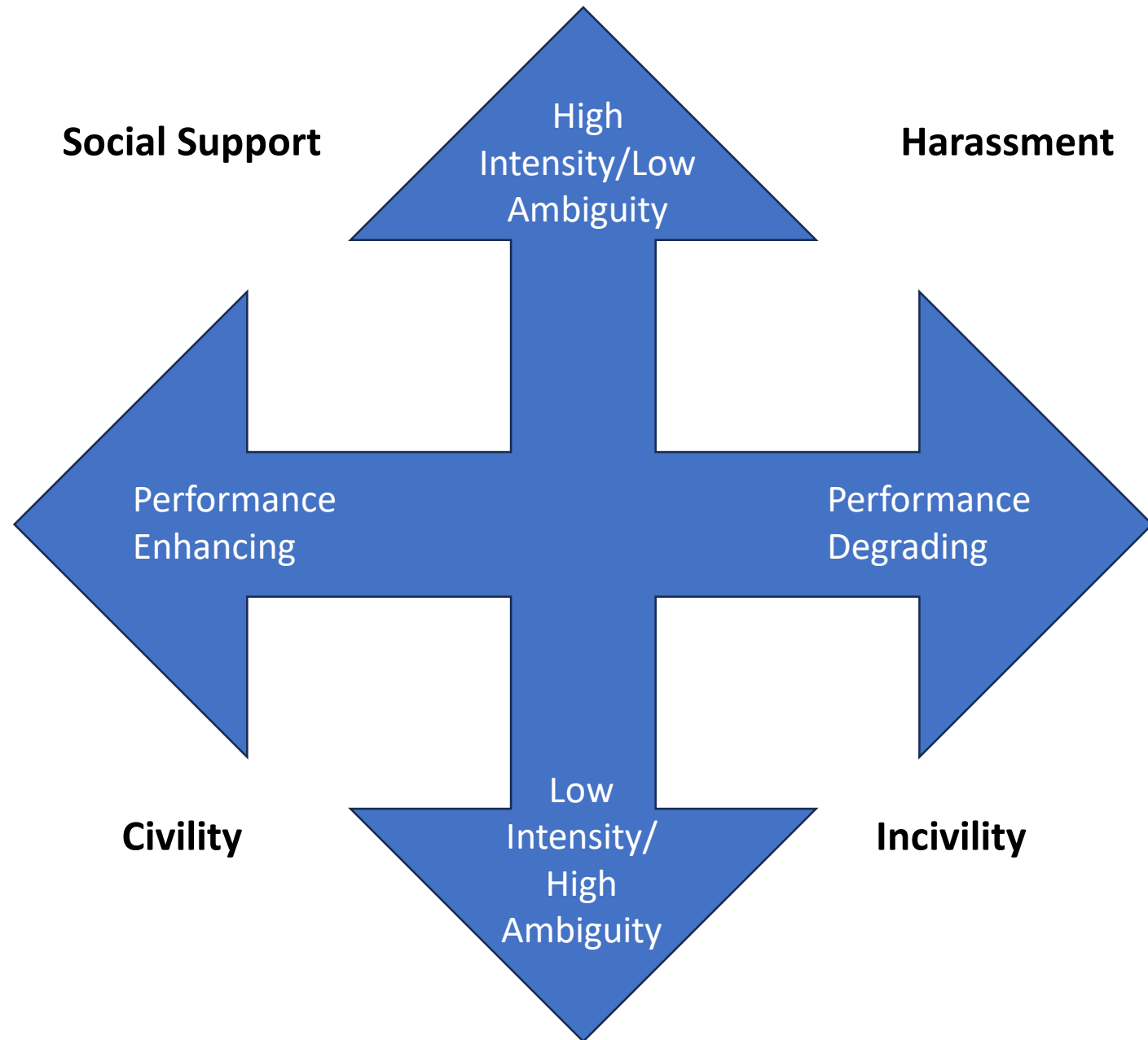# Examples of Incivility

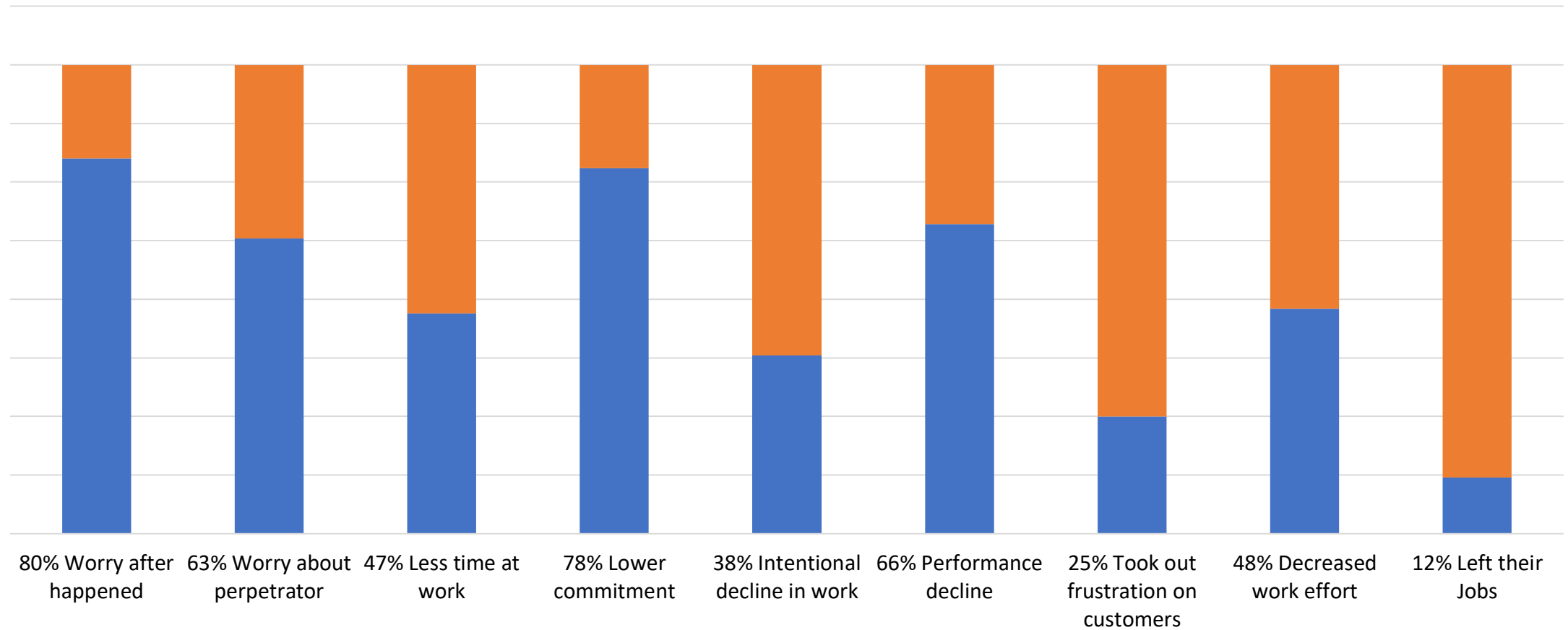| Covert	Overt
• Not responding to someone (e.g., a hello) • Passing blame on to another individual • Excluding someone • Belittling the efforts of others • Failing to return phone calls or respond to emails • Avoiding someone	• Making rude/derogatory remarks about someone • Gossiping about someone • Undermining credibility • Being disruptive in meetings • Not giving credit when due • Leaving a rude note

Interpersonal Organizational Behaviour

Social Support

High Intensity/Low Ambiguity

Harassment

Performance Enhancing

Performance Degrading

Civility

Low Intensity/High Ambiguity

Incivility

Outcomes of Workplace Incivility:
800 Managers Across 17 Industries

80% Worry after happened | 63% Worry about perpetrator | 47% Less time at work | 78% Lower commitment | 38% Intentional decline in work | 66% Performance decline | 25% Took out frustration on customers | 48% Decreased work effort | 12% Left their Jobs

Targets and Sources of Incivility

- Supervisors, coworkers and customers
- Some support for notion that certain "types" are more harmful
- But in many cases, studies find effects are equally harmful

Source: Cortina et al., 2017; Estes & Wang; Pearson & Porath, 2009; 2010; 2013; Schilpzand et al., 2016

How Common is Incivility at Work?

50% of employees have reported experiencing at least once a week.

While reports vary, as many as 98% say they have experienced incivility themselves at work, and 99% of respondents have said they have witnessed incivility at work.

Researchers report that over 80% of employees think workplace incivility has increased.

How Does Incivility Affect Those who are Targeted?

Attitudes towards work/workplace
- Reduced satisfaction in many areas
  - Job
  - Work conditions
  - Leader
  - Coworkers
- Reduced commitment and motivation

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

"I was hurt and angry and a little scared. At first I wanted to get even, but there was too much at stake. I tried to respond in a calm, logical way, and that set him off more. As he blew up again, I knew that he had crossed a line -- things wouldn't be the same again. I stayed another two years, but I never worked as hard again. I just didn't care as much."

Pearson et al., 2001

https://www.pexels.com/search/sad%20at%20work/

How Does Incivility Affect Those who are Targeted?

Workplace Behaviours

- Distracted – focused on incivility events
- Avoidance and increased intent to leave
- Performance and teamwork deteriorates
- Increased counterproductive work behaviours (e.g., intentionally reducing output)

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

Impact on Creativity

Experimental studies

- Examined different forms of rudeness
  1. rudeness instigated by a direct authority figure
  2. rudeness delivered by a third-party
  3. imagining a situation in which a perpetrator was rude to them

- Same effects:
  - Rudeness reduced performance on <u>routine tasks</u> (anagrams) as well as <u>creative tasks</u> (as many uses of a brick as possible).
  - Rude behavior decreased helpfulness
  - Disruption to cognitive processes

https://www.pexels.com/photo/assorted-color-great-board-decor-lot-1539581/

https://www.pexels.com/photo/brick-wall-2098595/

Source: Porath & Erez, 2007

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Medical teams exposed to rudeness perform worse than those not exposed to rudeness in their diagnostics and in all their procedures with patients. (Riskin et al., 2015)

There was this doctor "who was never very respectful, especially to junior staff and nurses...this one particular interaction where this doctor shouted at a medical team. Right after the interaction, the team gave the wrong dosage of medication to their patient...the information was right there on the chart, but somehow everyone on the team missed it...they lacked the attention or awareness to take it into account..."

Porath (2019). Why being respectful to your coworkers is good for business.

How Does Incivility Affect Those who are Targeted?

Health and Well-Being

- Psychological distress, loneliness, sadness
- Anxiety, depression
- Learning, memory
- Anger, fear, and worry
- Job stress

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

I felt isolated. Was I the only one who could see [the instigator] for what he truly was? I got tired of hearing others' excuses for him. I emotionally pulled away and didn't offer to assist him with anything.

Pearson et al., 2001

https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-sitting-on-bench-1666779/

The Costs of Incivility

- Loss of productivity
- Increased turnover
- Increased absenteeism
- Increase in health costs (stress)
- Legal costs – potential litigation
- Potential loss in customers/clients/patients/students

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

"I asked the woman at the front desk a question. She looked up the answer in my account in the computer. She looked puzzled at the screen and called over another employee to clarify what she saw. Then, she began harshly questioning the other employee about why she did what she did in regards to inputting my information. The tone of voice she used, her body language, and her facial expressions seemed cold, tense, and condescending."

Porath et al., 2010, p. 292

Indirect Effects of Incivility

- Little focus on the larger social context
- Focus tends to be on the perpetrator and direct target
- However, many are indirectly exposed

Source: Dupré et al., 2007, 2014

Indirect Effects of Incivility

Developed and test a model of the effects of direct and indirect exposure to customer enacted acts of incivility among over 400 employed individuals in various organizations (mean age 39; 70% women)

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Indirect
Incivility ──┐
             ├──→ Fear ──┬──→ Affective ──→ Turnover
Direct      ─┘           │    Commitment      Intentions
Incivility               │
                         └──→ Mental ──→ Physical
                              Health       Health
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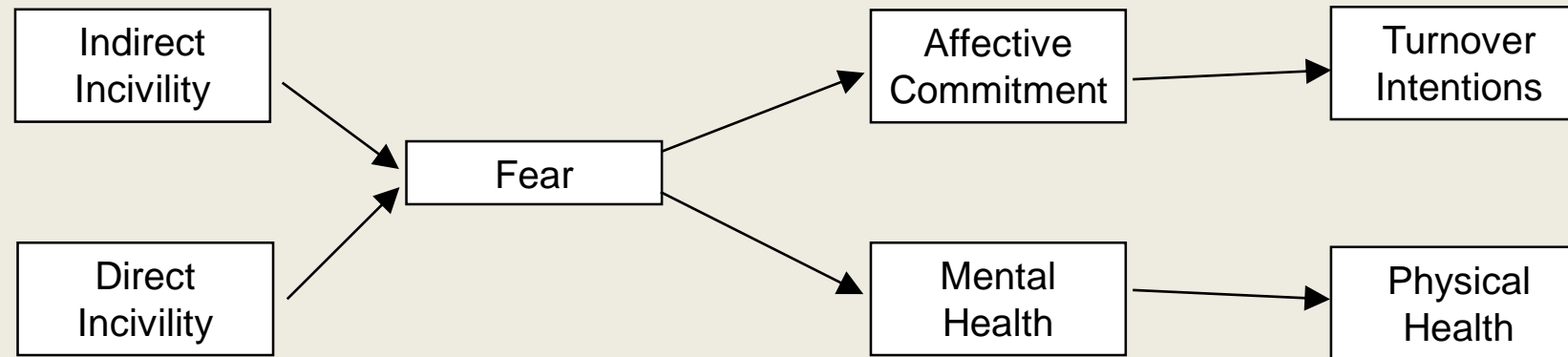
Spillover of Incivility

- Does workplace incivility influence one's personal life?
- Two studies addressed the link between workplace incivility and parenting
  - Study 1: 148 working mother-spouse dyads.
  - Study 2: 175 working parent-spouse dyads.

https://www.pexels.com/photo/smiling-black-family-embracing-near-fence-in-countryside-5727778/

https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-woman-and-her-children-lying-on-bed-4473871/

Source: Dionisi & Dupré, 2012, 2023

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Spillover of Incivility

Working
Parent Reports

Spouse
Reports

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┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────────┐          ┌────────────────────────┐
│              │ ───────► │  Parenting   │ ───────► │  Permissive Parenting  │
│  Workplace   │          │   Burnout    │          └────────────────────────┘
│  Incivility  │
│              │ ───────► │  Parenting   │ ───────► │ Authoritarian Parenting│
└──────────────┘          │ Self-Efficacy│          └────────────────────────┘
                          └──────────────┘
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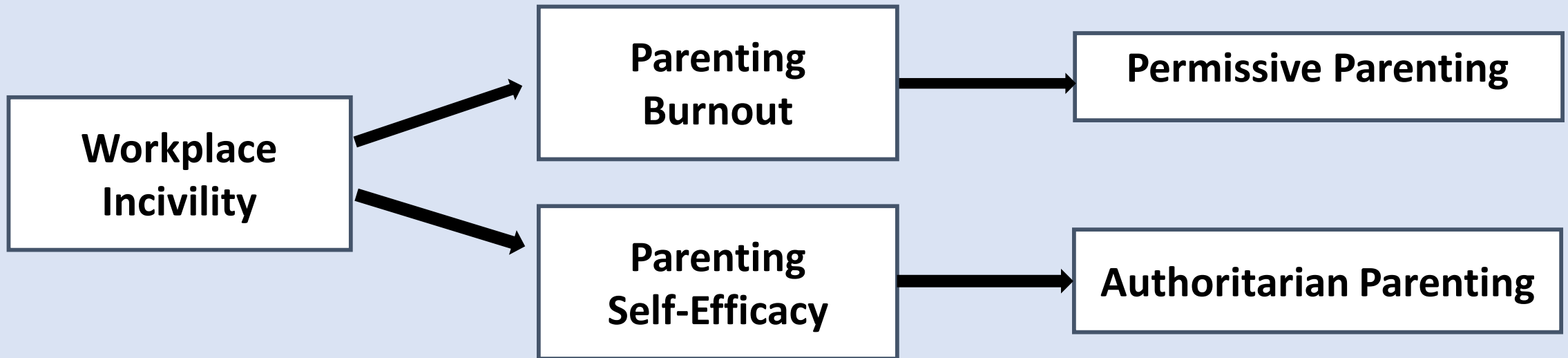
Differential Impact

Workplace incivility is a hazard to people's well-being, and their feelings of psychological safety. This is especially true for many groups of employees.

Photo from Pixabay

15 Semi-Structured Interviews

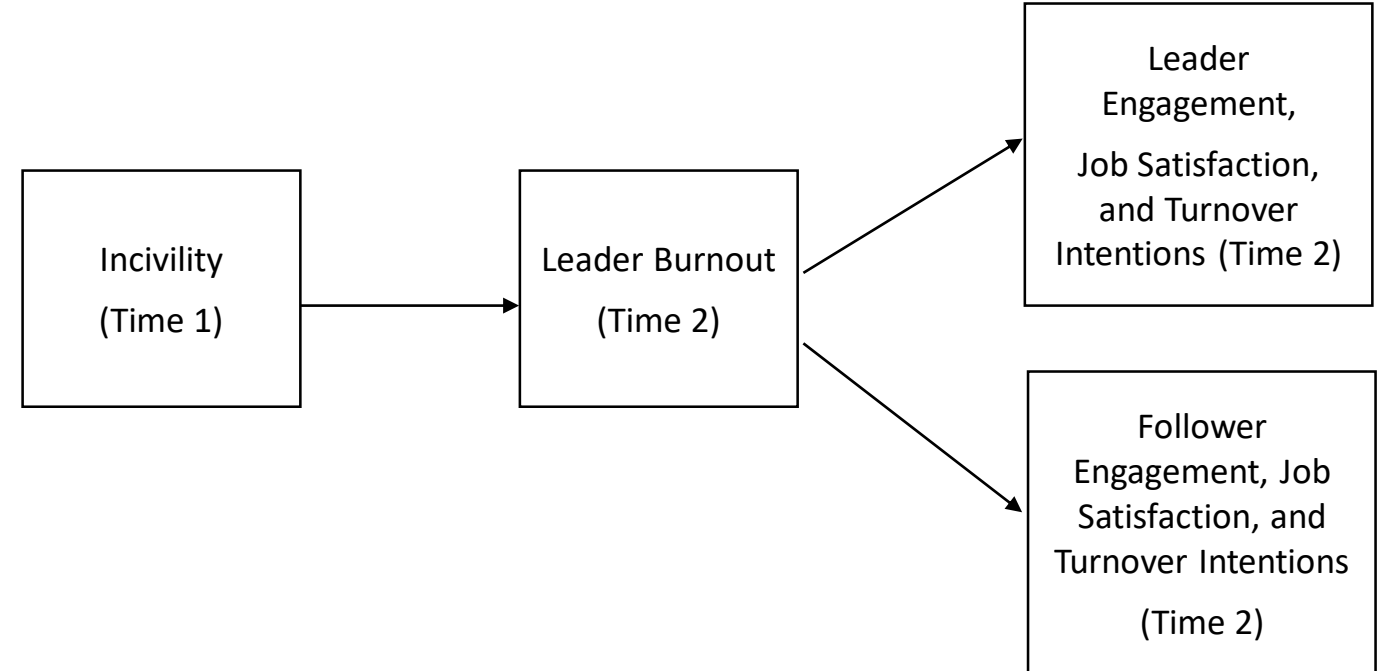| Theme	Example Quote
Negative Self-Perceptions and Strained Social Relationships	*"I felt like I couldn't do things. I was stupid. I was incompetent."* *"I was trying to keep that interaction to a minimum, unless, again, it was absolutely necessary."*
Depletion and Withdrawal	*"We'd also have work get togethers and stuff as well, that I would just not participate in."* *"I definitely had some sleep issues …after that."*
Poor Mental Health	*"It just made me feel sad and depressed that they were treating me the way that they were."* *"It broke my heart. It hurt me."*

Incivility Outcomes at Work

- Previous research on incivility has largely focused on effects for followers

- Need to understand the experiences of leaders to contribute to effective leadership

https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-low-angle-shot-of-women-wearing-blazers-in-different-colors-7202781/

Incivility Outcomes at Work

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┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌────────────────────┐
│  Incivility  │───────▶│Leader Burnout│───────▶│Leader Engagement,  │
│  (Time 1)    │        │  (Time 2)    │        │Job Satisfaction,   │
│              │        │              │        │and Turnover        │
└──────────────┘        └──────┬───────┘        │Intentions (Time 2) │
                               │                └────────────────────┘
                               │                ┌────────────────────┐
                               └───────────────▶│Follower            │
                                                │Engagement, Job     │
                                                │Satisfaction, and   │
                                                │Turnover Intentions │
                                                │(Time 2)            │
                                                └────────────────────┘
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Outcomes of Workplace Incivility

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┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ Workplace   │ ──►  │ Emotional/  │ ──►  │ Health,          │
│ Incivility  │      │ Cognitive   │      │ Behavioural,     │
│             │      │ Response    │      │ Attitudinal      │
│             │      │             │      │ Outcomes         │
└─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
                  ▲              ▲
              ┌───┴──────────────┴───┐
              │    Moderators        │
              └──────────────────────┘
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Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

What Causes Workplace Incivility?

Often associated with a combination of workplace and individual factors.

https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-sitting-in-front-of-macbook-313690/

What Individual Factors are Associated with Workplace Incivility?

- Higher levels of power
- Being in a protected position or position of authority
- Trait anger
- Dominant conflict management style
- Previous victim
- Perceived unfairness
- Not feeling respected
- Intolerance of individual differences

https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-people-watching-on-laptop-1595385/

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001, 2017; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

What Organizational Factors are Associated with Workplace Incivility?

Excessive demands in workplace
Workplace stress

- Rapid technological changes
- Company restructuring/change
- Difficulty balancing the demands of job and home
- Being overworked
- Job insecurity

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001, 2017; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

https://www.pexels.com/photo/unrecognizable-colleagues-during-workday-in-contemporary-office-3415148/

Prevention of Workplace Incivility: What can Organizations do?

More awareness and higher standards

- What kind of behaviour is/is not appropriate

- Outcomes associated with treating others unfairly, or without respect and dignity

Training and coaching

- Identify problem areas, jobs, and potentially repeat offenders

- Social skills and coping helps to buffer incivility on health

https://www.pexels.com/photo/colleagues-shaking-each-other-s-hands-3184291/

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001, 2017; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

Prevention of Workplace Incivility: What can Organizations do?

Organizational policies, procedures, and practices

- Guidelines of acceptable behavior and general conduct

- Open communication and feedback, where reporting is encouraged, along with improved channels for expressing grievances

- Employee Assistance Programs

- Clear description of disciplinary actions/plans associated with unacceptable behaviours, along with how this will be put in place if incivility occurs

https://www.pexels.com/photo/employees-having-a-board-meeting-1181355/

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001, 2017; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Yao et al., 2022

Spirals and Escalation of Incivility

https://www.pexels.com/photo/worms-eye-view-of-spiral-stained-glass-decors-through-the-roof-161154/

https://www.pexels.com/photo/escalator-on-an-airport-19415894/

Source: Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Barling & Dupré, 2004; Dupré et al., 2006

Prevention of Workplace Incivility: What can Leaders do?

Standards of incivility – show employees what type of behaviour is valued in the workplace

- Model behaviour

Open communication – provides feedback, social support and may ultimately buffer negative outcomes

Sources: Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001, 2017; Han et al., 2022; He et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Oyet et al., 2019; Park & Martinez, 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016 ; Vasconcelos, 2020; Walsh et al., 2012; Yao et al., 2022

Managing Incivility

National Post article in November, 2013: Civility clause in 3rd year psychology course

"discriminatory, rude, threatening, harassing, disruptive, distracting and inappropriate behaviour and language will not be tolerated"

- 10% reduction in final mark for first offence

Threat to academic freedom and discourage students from speaking out

https://www.pexels.com/photo/room-chair-lot-356065/

Prevention of Workplace Incivility: What can Employees do?

Very few organizations can enforce no incivility

Lack of support for retaliation, revenge, or confrontation

But we can work to improve well-being at work
- Cognitively and affectively
  - Pay attention to focus on the incivility
  - Mentors may help, as well as other positive relationships
  - Health behaviours
  - Focus on life outside of work

https://www.pexels.com/photo/cheerful-woman-smiling-while-sitting-at-table-with-laptop-4467687/

Source: Cortina et al., 2017; Hershcovis et al., 2017; Porath, 2016

https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-people-looking-on-laptop-3182812/

https://www.pexels.com/photo/female-and-male-runners-on-a-marathon-2402777/

Workplace Incivility: Concluding Thought

"Incivility abounds in organizational life. Such mundane indignities can erode one's well-being."

Cortina, Hershcovis & Clancy, 2022, p. 739

Although incivility at work is widespread, organizations and individuals can be better armed to manage the effects.

Thank you

Psychology
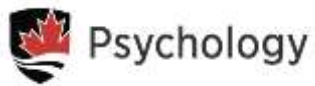
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