

## **EFFECT OF WORKPLACE INCIVILITY ON WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIOR OF IT EMPLOYEES**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Workplace incivility refers to implicit, ambiguous behaviour characterized as discourteous that could be targeted or untargeted. It is the core aspect of disguised employee violence that can have chronic effects on the organization as a whole if left unchecked. With growing complexity and competitiveness, workplace especially in the field of Information Technology has become so taxing that such unacceptable actions are hard to be identified. With managements also considering it to be a case of trivial element, incivility is a major cause of concern, that has become a crucial and necessary part of awareness among working people at all levels. Uncivil behavior could be in the shape of absence of gratitude, blunt messages, ignorance, petty acts of rudeness etc. Such behaviors when accumulated could have negative repercussions on affected employees manifesting in the form of deterioration in psychological well-being, withdrawal behaviors such as poor performance, showing lack of commitment towards work and may even go to the extremity of turnover intentions. Based on the response of 55 IT employees, an analysis was made on the relationship between Incivility and multiple aspects of withdrawal behavior to find the intensity of impact it has on such behavior. It was observed that different sub-factors of uncivil behavior had varying implications on employees.

**KEYWORDS:** Incivility, Withdrawal behavior, Privacy, Hostility, Ignorance, Commitment, Performance, Wellbeing, Turnover.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Workplace incivility refers to any form of deviant behavior, low in intensity and unclear intentions to harm the target. Such behaviors are discourteous, show a lack of respect and a violation of workplace norms (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Such intra- organizational actions are often overlooked due to their low intensity as they are considered as not worth the time. However when they accumulate over a period of time, it causes withdrawal symptoms among affected employees at varying degrees. This article focuses on how certain uncivil factors such as violating employees' privacy, ignorance etc. have a pernicious effect on working employees causing them to pull themselves back from their regular work life.

With growing complexity and competition in the globalized world, organizations, especially management tends to ignore this low-level problematic antisocial organizational behaviour such as aggression and toxicity in workplace, undermining, petty abuse, noxious supervision etc. Though it resides at its core between the involved parties, it affects the people associated and the work performed by creating a toxic work climate. When it is observed at a chronic

stage in any workplace, it plagues the organization with extreme withdrawal behavior such as high employee's turnover rate.

Due to the absence of mutual respect and courtesy towards others, they are a violation to organizational norms but are not illegal. What separates incivility from violence or harassment where there is a typical perpetrator and victim is the ambiguous nature of intention to cause harm? Some organizations have started to address this issue by including Incivility into their Human Resource policies thought it is not enough.

With the recent COVID-19 pandemic and work from home culture due to fast paced technology, there is a growing concern towards cyber incivility exhibited in computerized and web mediated behaviors such as blunt mails.

There are two types of workplace incivility- Direct and interpersonal where there is a clear target for the perpetrator (one who displays uncivil behavior). The other type being victimless where the uncivil actions are not immediately impacting other person such as a care-free attitude at the workplace.

Incivility involves actions of low intensity but of high frequency with the tendency to compound overtime and cause deteriorating effect on employees and organization's well-being. Some of the personal outcomes are stress, decreased psychological well-being, and organizational outcomes such as decreased satisfaction, deteriorating performance, absenteeism etc.

A unique aspect of Incivility is the "Spiralling effect" as expressed by (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) where a retaliation by the victim to uncivil behavior causes a 'Tit for Tat' manoeuvre. This in turn leads to escalated forms of deviant gestures resulting in violence and aggression. It has a potential of snowballing into an organizational level problem, a stage where restoration of normalcy becomes difficult. Similar researches have been conducted by many authors (Benita, 2021; Monica, 2021; David, Ahmed, Ganeshkumar & Sankar, 2020; Kumar, 2020; Kumar & Shree, 2019; Monica & Supriya, 2019; Mahesh & Uma Rani, 2019; Mahesh, Gigi, & Uma Rani, 2019; Robert & Monisha, 2019; Kumar & Shree, 2018).

The research focuses on IT employees as not much research has been done in it- the highest employing service sector field in India that faces growing stress in balance with booming technology. It also paves way for future research to be done with focus on causes of Incivility and the perpetrators' nature and perspective.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day & Gilin (2009) provides detailed insights into the detrimental effects of incivility on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intentions. There is a strong relation between incivility and employee burnout- physical and mental exhaustion. Commitment, satisfaction and engagement towards work are associated with the psychosocial well-being of employees. Empowering employees with access to organizational information on policies, access to support and resources to working employees provides a

positive relationship to be associated to their job role. Further supervisor civility has been proven to improve retention and colleague civility is observed to have equal importance. On the contrary, supervisor incivility expressed over subordinates as power imbalance and no control over their behavior has led to higher turnover rate wherever observed.

Torkelson, Holm, Bäckström, & Schad (2016) have studied about incivility which not only breach the norms within which the organization functions, it also attacks the human integrity. Much of this work behavior is implicit and passive in nature. Some of the frequent acts of incivility observed in the workplace are negative comments, ignorance, insults, negative body language signs, spreading rumors etc., which could be either targeted or untargeted, and the intent to cause harm remains ambiguous and is mostly observed as a part of the organization's climate than as an individual incident which makes it hard to identify. Uncivil behavior acts as a distraction in the workplace, by forcing the victim (employee) to get drawn away from his/her tasks. Such subtle behaviors create an atmosphere of rudeness and disrespect within the organization. Incivility is present at multiple levels and affects those who experience it directly and the observers of such behaviors indirectly. Incivility is communicative in nature as it changes the organizational climate of the immediate environment of the action, which includes the sender, receiver and observers.

Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout (2001) describes incivility as a form of psychological aggression with less apparent intentions. Such behavior displays a lack of regard for others. The problem with ambiguity of incivility could also be misinterpretation or hypersensitivity of target which could be attributed as accidental in such cases. The snowballing effect experienced by victims when exposed to periodic and repetitive uncivil behaviors impairs their mental wellbeing. It is observed that repeated micro events accumulate to create more impact than major stressors for which coping mechanisms can be developed comparatively easily. Individuals lacking resources such as power, personality characteristics, etc and employees with low social power, gender, lower position within organizational hierarchy are said to be vulnerable and more prone to workplace incivility. However, the demographic and psychographic nature of instigator is not much known or investigated about.

Incivility causes cognitive deviations and fear in targets reverberating as alienation with superiors, colleagues and work itself, decreased organizational citizenship and a rise in retaliatory behavior among its victims. A decline in work-life balance, productivity, anxiety, depression have been common observations in their study. Somatic afflictions commonly observed were migraines and ulcers which in-turn affects individual's productivity. Disrespect and social exclusion were the most affecting factors of uncivil behavior. Job related effects were found to last longer than personal effects on the affected employees which raises a question of whether employee assistance programs would be effective in minimizing implications.

Pearson, Andersson, & Porath (2005) through their research opine about the close association between technology and "No time to be nice". In contemporary times, there has developed a "me first" attitude and people seem to have less time to interact and express gratitude and kindness. The problem aggravates when incivility is accepted as it is considered very trivial to

complaint about. Thus lack of regard for others, violating organizational norms go unrecognized as it is not mentioned in any policy nor are they illegal. The affected employees respond in manner costly to the organization. It diminishes individuality, motivation, creativity and puts the employees' dignity on the pedestal. Further the negative implications of incivility cannot be quantified as it is enacted covertly. Like any other form of harassment, the time and energy of target is wasted, effort invested into work reduces over time ending up in thoughts of turnover. Even if tried to address such issues, it becomes hard to identify any proof for incivility, whilst the perpetrator may also deny such actions and this spreads and plagues the organization over a period of time giving rise to toxic work cultures. Managers too don't get involved in as they consider it to be a messy interpersonal conflict or so called "personal matters". Employees also lose work time worrying about future interactions which they cut back in work efforts if they interpret incivility as intentional. It is observed in their research that power plays are common forms of incivility where the target is most likely a subordinate-at a lower position to the instigator. It becomes more dangerous when it is habitual for the instigator.

Sliter, Sliter, & Jex (2012) explains withdrawal behavior as any form of intentional aversion from work or work related sociopsychological activities. It also includes reduction in interest towards organizational goals and organizational citizenship. Two ways an affected employee might react to incivility exposure- withdrawing from the organizational setting or reduction in performance.

Demsky, Fritz, Hammer, & Black (2019) Some commonly observed effects of incivility are decrease in work effort, time spent at workplace is reduced, insomnia and depression symptoms and the common reason to be rumination-a constant repetitive thought of a particular incident among the victims where the mind gets preoccupied.

Tsuno, Kawakami, Shimazu, Shimada, Inoue, & Leiter (2017) describes how supervisory, coworker and instigated incivility are the customary forms observed in service sectors. Most of these are practised in association with arrogant and rude behaviors.

He, Costa, Walker, Miner, & Wooderson (2019) have studied about how individuals have little choice about who their coworkers would be, and who they interact with within an organization. When there is divergence of opinion or interest such as in a political theme, or incompatible interpersonal interaction, it tends to manifest as uncivil behaviour by any of the parties. With respect to difference of opinion, it usually instigates from the roots of political perspective or heterogenous communities.

Jha & Sud (2021) have studied about trickledown effect starting from abusive supervisors that flows down to be manifested as incivility over coworkers and subordinates. Further uncivil behavior creates an unjust environment. A tyrannical or dictatorial boss initiates this chain of incivility by constantly asserting power over those reporting to him or her which can be called as strategic bullying or despotic leadership where one uses power distance for constructive purposes using abrasive behavior. This not just affects the subordinates' performance, but also instigates a series of uncivil behavior that pulsates down the organizational structure.

Most of the literatures reviewed have used linear regression to find association in terms of frequency or intensity between incivility and multiple aspects of withdrawal behavior or negative implications somatically and psychologically. The primary objective of the study is to study and analyze workplace incivility among IT employees and how it has an impact on the withdrawal behavior of employees.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The article uses descriptive research methodology. Online questionnaires were sent to 55 IT employees of various organizations and the answers were measured using 5-point Likert scale. The purpose of study and assurance of confidentiality was clearly explained to the respondents and was filled out without any form of coercion or influence. The collected data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 46. The statistical tool used for analysis of data was Regression.

**Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents**

Demographics	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	18	32.7
Female	37	67.3
Total	55	100
<b>Age</b>		
20-30years	37	67.3
31-40years	12	21.8
41-50years	3	5.5
More than 50years	3	5.5
Total	55	100
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Undergraduate	24	43.6
Postgraduate	31	56.4
Total	55	100
<b>Experience</b>		
1-2years	22	40
3-4years	18	32.7
5-6years	5	9.1
More than 6 years	10	18.2
Total	55	100.00
<b>Income Level (per month)</b>		
Below 20,000	6	10.9
20,001- 40,000	20	36.4
40,001-60,000	17	30.9
Above 60,000	12	21.8
Total	55	100.00

Majority of the respondents were female (67.3%). 67.3% of age level falls in the category of 20-30 years followed by 31-40 years (21.8 %) and 41-50 years (5.5%) and more than 50 years (5.5%). The experience of employees ranges from 1-2 years (40%), 3-4 years (32.7%), 5-6 years (9.1%) and more than 6 years of work experience (18.2%). Income level of employees

(monthly) ranges between 10.9% in the category below 20,000, 36.4% earning between 20,001-40,000, 30.9% in 40,001-60,000 category and 21.8% above 60,000.

**Table 2: Mean Analysis**

S. No	Factors of Incivility	Mean	Rank
1	Hostility	2.66	1
2	Ignorance and Indifference	2.59	2
3	Privacy Violation	2.51	3

The mean score and ranks of respective variables are displayed in Table 2. ‘Hostility’ variable has the highest mean score of 2.66 and ranks the highest while 2.59 mean score for Ignorance followed by 2.51 mean score for Privacy violation.

**Regression Analysis**

**Table 3: Model Fit Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.933 <sup>a</sup>	.871	.863	.36280

**Table 4: ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.252	3	15.084	114.598	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	6.713	51	.132		
	Total	51.965	54			

**Table 5 Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.001	.149		-.009	.993
	Privacy Violation	.423	.108	.417	3.922	.000
	Ignorance, Indifference	.191	.087	.198	2.205	.032
	Hostility	.385	.101	.376	3.807	.000

R is the correlation coefficient and its value is 0.933. R square is the degree of determination, its value is 0.871. The degree of determination shows the extent to which factors of privacy violation, ignorance and indifference, hostility has an influence on the withdrawal behavior.

Here the withdrawal behavior is determined to an extent of 87.1 % by privacy violation, ignorance and indifference, hostility. Table 5 also shows the values of beta and the significant value. A significant value less than 0.05 denotes an association between the three variables individually with withdrawal behavior. High beta value signifies a strong association and influence by the factor. It is clear that all the three variables, privacy violation, ignorance and indifference, hostility have their significant value less than 0.05 so it is influencing the withdrawal behavior. Privacy violation having the highest beta value thus signifying to have the highest influence of the three variables.

### **DISCUSSION:**

From the results of the regression analysis, it is observed that privacy violation influences employee withdrawal behavior, with a beta value of 0.417(from table 5). This is similar to the study of Tsuno et.al., (2017). Hostility also has a significant impact on IT staff withdrawal behavior, similar to the study of Sliter et.al., (2012) with a beta value of 0.376. Of the three factors, Ignorance and indifference with a beta value of 0.198, has relatively less impact on withdrawal behavior such as lack of commitment, decreased performance etc, which is similar to studies of Andersson et.al., (1999).

### **CONCLUSION:**

It is observed from the analysis that workplace incivility has a high level of association with withdrawal behavior among IT employees. Privacy violation variable of workplace incivility influences withdrawal behavior of employees the most.

It is clear that incivility in its multiple forms is incredibly harmful for both employees and for the employing organization. Researchers suggest that in comparison to incivility, civility is relatively new. Management should create a civil and respectful culture and maintain it constantly. Managements should set a tone and example for organization- modelling behavior. While recruitment, it is imperative to check and focus on people skill and past rude behavior.

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