Cyber and Face-to-Face Incivility and Employee Well-being: A Daily Investigation

(ERC 2010-2011 Pilot Research Project)

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What is workplace Incivility?

A form of “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect.” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999)
Rude

Disrespectful

Inconsiderate

EXCUSE ME. . . . REMEMBER ME???
Why study workplace Incivility?

- One of the most prevalent forms of mistreatment at work (Cortina et al., 2001)

- Multiple sources (e.g., superiors, subordinates, coworkers, customers/clients, etc.)

- Consistent research findings on the negative effects of experiencing incivility on well-being (psychological physical), job attitudes, job performance and productivity (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Lee, 2011; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2001; Porath & Erez, 2008; Sliter et al., 2010)

Q1: Is workplace incivility a meaningful everyday stressor affecting employees’ daily well-being at work?
What is Cyber Incivility?

- Uncivil behaviors manifested through email interactions (Lim & Teo, 2009)
  - Sending emails using rude/discourteous tones
  - Saying something hurtful in an email that one would not say in person
  - Using CAPS to shout at someone via emails
  - Using emails for time-sensitive issues
  - Ignoring an email request

Image source:
- testkitchen.colorado.edu/.../06/rudecomputer.jpg
- img.ehowcdn.com/article-page-main/ehow/images...

- Over 60% working adults use emails at work

- Inappropriate and disrespectful content and/or email behaviors cause stress

- Respondents reported…
  - They have received email sent in anger
  - Their boss have used email to avoid difficult face-to-face conversations

- NORA calls for research on
  - Potential harms of emerging technologies to employees
  - Three-fifths of the technologies are info/communication tech.
Cyber Incivility

- Research findings (Lim & Teo, 2009; Lim et al., 2009)
  - Low levels of job satisfaction & organizational commitment
  - Counter productive work behaviors (behavioral response to stress)

Q2: Is cyber incivility distressing to employees above and beyond face-to-face incivility?

- Characteristics of email communication (Byron, 2008; Freidman & Currall, 2003)
  - Less control over incoming messages
  - Politeness norms are less salient in email communication
  - No containing social cues for message senders to self-correct
  - Delayed responses and feedback from senders
  - Reviewable → excess attention
Hypotheses

- Based on Affective Event Theory framework (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996)

**H1**: Day-specific *face-to-face incivility* is positively related to day-specific distress on the job (affective, physical distress).

**H2**: Day-specific *cyber incivility* is positively related to day-specific distress on the job above and beyond face-to-face incivility.
Method

- 143 full-time employees using email at work completed initial one-time survey via online (measuring demographics, negative affective disposition)

- 125 out of 143 participants completed 2 daily online surveys for 5 workdays (87% response rate)

- $50 online gift certificate provided

- Final sample: 117 people yielding 566 matched daily responses for analysis

- 56% Female, 86% White, 43.9 years old ($SD = 11.8$), 44.67 work hours per week ($SD = 7.7$)
# Method (Diary design)

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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency of Assessment</th>
<th>Time of Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
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<td>Negative affective disposition</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2 weeks before daily surveys</td>
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<td>Baseline</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>Upon arrival at work in the Morning (between 7am-10am)</td>
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<td>Workload &amp; email load</td>
<td>5 days</td>
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<td><strong>IV</strong></td>
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<td>Face-to-Face &amp; Cyber Incivility</td>
<td>5 days</td>
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<td><strong>DV</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distress outcomes</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>Afternoon before leaving work (between 4pm-7pm)</td>
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Method

- 9 items of face-to-face incivility (Cortina et al., 2001): “Today, someone at work put me down.”

- 14 items of cyber incivility (Lim & Teo, 2009): “Today, someone at work sent me an email using a rude and discourteous tone”

- 14 affective distress items: “annoyed” “frustrated” “depressed” (Mackay et al., 1978)

- 14 physical symptoms (e.g., “headache” “upset stomach” “fatigue” (Spector & Jex, 1998)

- Multilevel analysis with a hierarchical linear modeling
  1. Null model: Intercept only model
  2. Model 1: Control variables (Negative affectivity, daily workload, email load, morning baseline)
  3. Model 2: Face-to-face incivility
  4. Model 3: Cyber incivility
Results

- H 1 was supported with face-to-face incivility predicting affective distress ($\gamma = .82, p < .001$) and physical distress ($\gamma = .16, p < .05$) above and beyond control variables.

- H 2 was supported with cyber incivility predicting affective distress ($\gamma = .36, p < .01$) and physical distress ($\gamma = .19, p < .01$) above and beyond face-to-face incivility and control variables.
Discussion

- Workplace incivility is a meaningful day-to-day stressor affecting employees’ daily well-being

- Cyber incivility inflicted additional distress on employees over and above face-to-face incivility

- Given the prevalent use of email for work and business communication, researchers and organizations should pay more attention to this electronic form of incivility

- Possible interventions: code of conduct policies, email communication policies, trainings on incivility
Future Directions

- Given the blurring boundaries between work and family due to info./communication technologies (e.g., smart phones), negative effects of cyber incivility can spillover to the family domain or crossover to other family members.

- Why people are uncivil?
  - workplace norms on civility/interpersonal respect
  - job characteristics conducive to incivility occurrences

- Coping patterns to incivility (Cortina et al., 2009)

- Efficacy of incivility trainings
Thank you!

Any questions?

“This research study was supported by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Pilot Research Project Training Program of the University of Cincinnati Education and Research Center Grant #T42/OH008432-05.”
Reference


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