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Workplace incivility as a social process: how witnessing incivility relates to uncivil conduct, well-being, job satisfaction and stress

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between witnessed workplace incivility from both colleagues and supervisors, and instigated incivility. How witnessed workplace incivility from colleagues and supervisors relate to psychosocial factors such as well-being, job satisfaction and stress was also investigated. An online-based questionnaire was issued to members of the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, with 2647 respondents, rendering a response rate of 16.5 %. Scales measuring witnessed incivility from colleagues and superiors and personally instigated incivility, together with measures of well-being, job satisfaction and stress-levels were included in the questionnaire.

Four separate multiple regressions revealed witnessed colleague and supervisor incivility to significantly explain variance in all four models, relating witnessed colleague and supervisor incivility to instigated incivility, lower levels of well-being, lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of stress. The implications of these findings were discussed.

Keywords: workplace incivility, well-being, job satisfaction, stress

Over the recent years, a growing body of research has taken an interest in the phenomenon of workplace incivility. As the dynamics of work life has changed, and issued new demands on individuals (Yrkesinspektionen, 2002), new qualities naturally emerges, warranting updated and fresh research. Workplace aggression has previously been studied from several different angles, such as workplace bullying, deviance and counterproductive work behaviour (Ferguson & Barry, 2011; Finne, Knardahl & Lau, 2011; Jex & Sakurai, 2012, for a review see: Arbetsmiljöverket, 2011), yet incivility still remains in the metaphorical cradle of research, still being considered a comparatively new field (Hamrahan & Leiter, 2014). A growing prevalence of incivility has been shown in the United States (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008), and similar findings have been made in Asia (Lim & Lee, 2011). Mapping a growing phenomenon is thus of utmost importance, seeing as incivility in the work environment has been linked to several detrimental effects, such as lower job satisfaction (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Reio & Ghosh, 2009), stress (Lim et al, 2008), lower well-being (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001; Lim et al, 2008; Reio & Ghosh, 2009) and lower work commitment (Smith, Andrusyszyn, & Spence Laschinger, 2010).

        Expanding our knowledge on the phenomenon must thus include reaching new demographics, exploring the phenomenon in different cultures, work places and from different perspectives. A small amount of research on the field has yet been conducted in Sweden, calling for a closer examination on a relatively unexplored demographic (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2011).

        In order to distinguish workplace incivility from other kinds of workplace aggression, it has been defined as: "Workplace incivility is low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others." (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457).

        The clear demarcation includes an ambiguity of the phenomenon, not necessarily a harmful intent of the behaviour, as well as lower intensity (Pearson et al., 2001). Incivility can thereby, due to its abstract nature, be harder to detect and investigate (Lim & Lee, 2011). Examples of behaviours that could pass for uncivil, is interrupting someone rudely, yelling at someone, not saying thank you nor please, or ignoring a person waiting to be noticed (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2011; Andersson & Pearson, 1999). A similar definition was offered by Zauderer (2002, p. 38), stating: "Incivility in organizations is evidenced by disrespectful behavior that undermines the dignity and self-esteem of employees and creates unnecessary suffering. In general, behaviors of incivility indicate lack of concern for the well-being of others and are contrary to how individuals expect to be treated". As the definition offered by Andersson & Pearson (1999) is more comprehensive, this

will constitute the basis for incivility in the current study.

Incidence reports of incivility varies across samples, but previous measures in the US have shown reports of 78 % experiencing supervisor incivility, and 81 % being subjected to co-worker incivility over the past year (Reio Jr & Sanders-Reio, 2011), likewise supported by 71 % of public sector employees over the past 5 years (Cortina et al., 2001). Numbers as high as 91 % have been reported, when considering incivility over the past 5 years in a sample of an Asian culture (Lim & Lee, 2011). Further studies in Asia has issued rates of 77 % over the past year (Yeung & Griffin, 2008). Although this present study is not concerned with the actual frequencies of incivility, rather the potential relationships of the phenomenon and instigated incivility, well-being, job satisfaction and stress, it could be interesting to grasp how prevalent incivility is, in order to understand the proportion of the phenomenon.

Incivility as a social process

In their early publication, Andersson and Pearson (1999), lifts the issue of incivility and how it may manifest in the form of a social process, reciprocal in nature, in a 'tit for tat'-manner between involved individuals. The authors theorised around a negative spiral, where incivility, despite being low in intensity, can create escalating responses of growing workplace aggression where interpersonal conflicts are established and nourished (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Further research has since supported this notion, indicating that the destructive spiral of workplace incivility may be a building block in a negative work environment (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000; Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2005).

A meta-analysis by Hershcovis et al (2007), found a significant link between individual conflict and aggression, further supporting the point of how an aggressive spiral can grow out of a conflicting climate in the work environment. Furthermore in the findings of Porath & Pearson (2012), concerning the emotional responses to incivility, a bond was established between being targeted with incivility and experiencing negative affects such as anger, fear and sadness. Anger was in turn associated with a higher degree of aggressive behaviour, whereas fear was associated with higher levels of indirect aggression towards the instigator (Porath & Pearson, 2012). This illuminates how stepwise escalation, due to emotional responses, may lead to an increased hostility, both subtly and openly. Behaviours, that in turn may be reciprocated.

In an attempt to shed more light on the escalating nature of workplace aggression, Taylor and Kluemper (2012), reported findings further supporting the relation between perceived incivility and workplace aggression, when seen as a mediator between role stress and aggression. A stressful environment would thus induce higher ratings of perceived incivility, leading to further 'tit-for-tat'-

reciprocal behaviours, resulting in increased aggression. Despite these findings, actual workplace aggression was considered a rare phenomenon in the conducted study, although incivility occurrences were frequently reported (Taylor & Kluemper, 2012). Thus, the severity of the spiralling nature of incivility may be put in a new light, warranting further investigation of the social process it implies, and its consequences.

Bystander perspective of incivility

Within the framework of incivility as a social process, an interesting angle emerges in shape of the bystander perspective. Research has been conducted, and discussions has been held surrounding both the target and instigator-perspectives of incivility (Cortina et al., 2001; Jex & Sakurai, 2012; Reio & Ghosh, 2009), in an attempt to explore the phenomenon. Yet, a surfacing factor of importance is that of the bystander. If incivility is considered a social process of spiralling negative actions, the entire climate of the workplace is of relevance to study, not merely focusing directly on concerned parties such as targets and instigators. If a general atmosphere, or way of treating each other in a work environment further would affect everyone subjected to that environment, it is necessary to investigate how, and if this manifests in the workplace. Andersson and Pearson (1999), discusses the possibility of the incivility spiral affecting the entire organization, seeing as observable behaviour may come to erode current norms and terms of conduct in the workplace, in what they refer to as *secondary spirals*. If it were to bear any relevance, the effects of an uncivil work environment could prove to be worse than first anticipated, and potentially needed to be dealt with in a more extensive fashion. Not much research has yet been conducted on the bystander perspective of incivility, which emphasises the importance of the topic at hand.

However, Lim et al. (2008), found evidence to support that incivility affected individuals beyond being personally subjected to it. In an organization with teams working closely and cohesively, the presence of incivility appeared to impact the entire work group in form of lower levels of job satisfaction and mental health, even when controlling for job stress (Lim et al., 2008). Reports have also been made of employees experiencing emotional drain when witnessing unpleasant interactions between co-workers. The effects were larger when witnessing the interactions first hand, and shows how a bystander in a unpleasant environment can be drawn in by ongoing events, although not directly targeted by them (Totterdell, Heshcovis, Niven, Reich & Stride, 2012). Seeing as an uncivil environment, especially if escalating in nature, may be considered unpleasant, these observations are not to be taken lightly, as it may come to permeate the entire organization, and culture of work. This conclusion, regarding the potential spill-over effect of incivility, is further supported in a qualitative interview-study concerning incivility, and its

implications, by Pearson et al. (2001). The study issued reports of witnesses to incivility, where behaviour was modelled after the observations, and where empathy for the targeted individual could create a need to retaliate on the targets' behalf – a behaviour that consequently could come to influence the entire organization (Pearson et al., 2001).

Lifting the focus from traditional individually focused incivility, Griffin (2010), conducted a large analysis on a sample of over 34,000 employees, investigating incivility as a group-level phenomenon. It was reported that incivility could manifest within the organization, in the shape of a shared stressor, creating an uncivil environment. This in turn, was related to turnover intentions of the employees, indicating how incivility affects not only direct targets, but also their surroundings (Griffin, 2010).

Given the potentially destructive nature of incivility, on an individualistic basis as well as on an organizational level, a gap of research emerges in the area of bystanders and the immediate work environments response to incivility. It is therefore crucial to further elaborate on the notion, in order to discover the true nature of the phenomenon.

Related constructs and research on workplace aggression

Due to the lack of research directly aimed at the bystander perspective, and the fairly recent contributions made regarding incivility and negative effects, one can turn to related fields in order to attain a better overview. As incivility carries a more lucid definition, the potential overlap or confusion with other constructs is an issue to be addressed (Pearson et al., 2005). However, these related fields, and general research on workplace aggression, can also be an added hint as to the consequences of bystander-effects, and a general negative work environment. Especially so, considering the aforementioned spiral, and escalating aggression – where what once started as uncivil conduct, ultimately could risk resulting in open conflict.

The negative consequences of workplace bullying are widely known, in terms of psychological distress, both short and long term (Finne et al., 2011). The long term implications is an indication of the strong nature of bullying, and its influence on the individual in the working environment, as distress can remain over years (Finne et al., 2011). The literature on bullying is far more extensive than that of incivility, whereas bystander-effects in bullying has been more thoroughly examined. An example of this, is the finding that not only being targeted by bullying, but also observing it, was associated with higher stress-levels among police officers (Tuckey, Dollard, Hosking & Winefield, 2009). Furthermore, in previous investigations of a Swedish sample, witnessed bullying has been tied to both increased anxiety and feeling less support from supervisors (Hansen et al., 2006). The lack of support is discussed in the study, as a potential indication of more

frequent bullying in work places which are considered to have a negative climate (Hansen et al., 2006). The factor of a negative climate could be of interest in relation to the negative spiral of incivility, as a potential antecedent of increasing workplace aggression.

Expanding on this, there are several other related constructs of workplace aggression, such as *workplace deviance* and *quarrelsomeness*. Workplace deviance refers to a behaviour that is voluntary, violating the norms of the organization and which can be considered harmful (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). As a deviant behaviour stands out of the ordinary, bystander effects of the construct are quite thoroughly reported. One study, particularly aimed at the bystanders, reported deviance to increase among bystanders at a subsequent time, if indirectly informed about another co-workers deviance. Yet, observing deviance directly did not lend any significant effect (Ferguson & Barry, 2011). Ferguson and Barry (2011), also included incivility within the framework of deviance in their study, providing an interesting angle to study the phenomenon.

Quarrelsomeness is a behaviour focused on keeping a distance from another party, and being psychologically disconnected from them, which can manifest in such ways as not responding, raising ones voice or acting impatient (Albert & Moskowitz, 2014). The construct is similar in nature to that of incivility. It has likewise been shown to impact the organization overall, as well as individuals, and that quarrelsome behaviour can invoke more quarrelsome behaviour in others (Albert & Moskowitz, 2014), thus implying a spiralling nature of workplace aggression also in this sense.

Although these constructs to some degree differ from incivility, the research on workplace aggression in general may lend some clues to applicable factors in terms of incivility, the bystander perspective, and consequences thereof. Further, this also supports the notion of a gap to bridge in the field, highlights and emphasises the need for more research on workplace incivility, the social process and a bystander perspective.

Incivility and the psychosocial work environment

Incivility and stress. Returning once more, to the construct of incivility, the available literature has put certain weight behind another traditional psychosocial factor of the working life – namely stress. The role of incivility on stress levels has been investigated, and various publications has treated the matter in the form of a *"daily hassle"* (Lim et al., 2008; Cortina, 2008). Daily hassles are minor stressful elements which one come across on a daily basis, slowly accumulating to eventually result in larger consequences such as health problems both concurrent and subsequent (DeLongis, Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). As incivility is a behaviour of low intensity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), the daily hassle-paradigm serves a suitable framework. Some support has been

reported for the notion that frequent incivility could gradually increase stress, to a similar degree of negative consequences as other constructs of workplace aggression (Cortina & Magley, 2009), indicating the impact of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Lim and colleagues (2008), found a significant correlation between stress and incivility, considering incivility to be a stressor of human design. Beyond this notion, as previously mentioned, incivility has been shown to manifest in the shape of a shared stressor in the organization (Griffin, 2010), emphasising the bond between stress and incivility further. The role of social support has also been examined in relation to unfair treatment in the workplace, as it may have a stress-buffering effect, serving as a relief from psychological distress when perceived mistreated (Sloan, 2012).

The research on stress and incivility has thus been explored to a certain degree, yet there is still more to be discovered around the bond the factors share. More supportive evidence for the bond is warranted, as well as research on the implications of incivility-induced stress, and particularly how this affects a potential bystander to the incident.

Incivility and job satisfaction. Several studies have reported that individuals subjected to incivility in the work place, from both a target and instigator perspective, negatively relates to the facets of job satisfaction (Cortina et al., 2001; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005; Reio & Ghosh, 2009). Job satisfaction was also described in one study as a factor that potentially could mediate physical well-being and turnover intentions in employees (Lim et al., 2008). Despite this fairly emphasised finding, little attention has yet to be turned to how merely witnessing incivility in the work environment affects job satisfaction in the individual employee.

Incivility and well-being. Likewise, the study of well-being and its relation to incivility is to a certain extent well mapped, whereas higher levels of incivility in the work place is negatively related to measures of well-being, both mentally and physically (Reio & Ghosh, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Lim, et al., 2008). Yet the lacking evidence of health outcomes of incivility from a bystander-perspective is a gap in need of bridging, in the current state of the art.

The effects on psychosocial factors of the work environment in relation to incivility is thus a fairly researched field. However, the processes are complex to fully explore, as there may be certain degrees of mediation and overlap among the variables, potentially making it harder to fully grasp. Yet, the bystander-perspective of these factors has not yet been thoroughly examined, leaving new knowledge outcomes still to be attained, in the continuous research of incivility.

The aim of the present study

Based on the aforementioned literature, the present study sets out to investigate a so far undisclosed part of the field. The novelty of this study is twofold, on one end serves as **i)** examining the

phenomenon of incivility on a Swedish population, exploring the impact of incivility on instigated incivility, well-being, job satisfaction and stress in Sweden. Secondly, the present study focuses fully on **ii)** the bystander-perspective of incivility, and the consequences thereof. A large focus is put on whether witnessed incivility may be related to instigated incivility, in light of the discussed findings of an uncivil spiral. By this novel perspective, the present study demarcates from previous work, adding new contributions of information to an already existing knowledge-base of incivility. As some supportive evidence has been found on incivility being more frequent from supervisors, or individuals higher in rank within the organization, rather than colleagues (Lim & Lee, 2011; Estes & Wang, 2008), the present study seeks to differentiate between the two constructs, in order to further elaborate on the inner workings of incivility. As the study conducted by Lim and Lee (2011), was conducted on a sample representing an eastern culture, the present study further provides merit to the cause of investigating potential differences between colleague and supervisor incivility on a Swedish demographic.

Research questions and hypotheses. The following questions are to be explored in the present study:

1. *Is witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues related to behaving uncivil in the workplace?*

2. *Is witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues related to lower levels of well-being among employees?*

3. *Is witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues related to lower degree of job satisfaction?*

4. *Is witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues related to perceived stress in employees?*

In relation to the research questions, the following is hypothesised:

A. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues predicts instigated uncivil behaviour in the employee.*

B. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues predicts lower levels of well-being among employees.*

C. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues predicts a lower degree of job satisfaction.*

D. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues is positively related to perceived*

stress in employees.

Method

Participants

Participants were sourced through the membership registries of the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, in order to achieve a wide sample with various kinds of employees. 2648 individuals completed the study, issuing a response rate of 16.5 %. Participants ranged from the ages of 16 to 70, with a mean age of 35.80 ($SD = 12.10$), and a total of $M = 6.48$ ($SD = 7.1$) years worked at their current occupation. The sample largely consisted of service personnel such as waiters/waitresses and receptionists (42 %) and kitchen personnel (37.2 %), with some minor prevalence of facility workers (9.8 %), amusement park employees (1.5 %), security personnel (0.3 %), and park or animal care employees (0.1 %). An additional 8.8 % listed their occupation as "other".

Measures

The study consisted of an online-based questionnaire, measuring workplace incivility – witnessed and instigated – as well as levels of well-being, work satisfaction and stress. Furthermore, demographic variables were allocated to thoroughly understand the sample as described in the aforementioned section. The demographics consisted of questions regarding gender, age, nationality, full time employment, amount of years worked, as well as an inquiry if the employee posited any executive status.

      Workplace Incivility. In order to measure workplace incivility on a Swedish demographic, the workplace incivility scale (WIS), originally produced by Cortina et al., (2001), was used in form of a Swedish translation (Schad, Torkelson, Bäckström & Karlson, 2014).

      The WIS-scale utilizes a 5 point Likert-range, for participants to rate from options *never* = 0 to *most of the time* = 4. Furthermore, the scale entails a total of 3 sections of witnessed, as well as instigated incivility. Thereby encapsulating incivility from a bystander and instigator perspective, as well as making a distinction between co-workers, executives and personal actions. Each of the 3 item sub-sections comprises 7 questions. The questions are general of nature and concerns uncivil conduct in the work place. An example of a question is (in relation to co-workers or executives): *"Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion?"*

The present study utilizes a shorter time-frame for measures of incivility, only including observations of incivility participants made during the last year, in comparison to the original WIS, that uses a 5 year period. Due to the potential risk of memory distortion regarding workplace aggression, a shorter time-frame is warranted (Budd, Arvey, & Lawless, 1996; Cortina & Magley, 2009). Cronbach alphas were .95, .96, and .83 for witnessed incivility from colleagues, witnessed incivility from supervisors, and instigated incivility respectively.

Well-being. Well-being was measured through the WHO-Five Well-Being Index (Bech, Olsen, Kjoller & Rasmussen, 2003), an instrument designed to measure levels of well-being, rather than negative affects such as psychological distress. A Swedish version of the instrument was used (Psykiatric Center North Zealand, 2014). The scale consisted of 5 questions, rated on a 6-point Likert-scale, ranging from *never* = 0 to *all of the time* = 5. An example of a question is: *"I have felt cheerful and in good spirits"*. The Cronbach alpha was .87.

Job satisfaction. The scale concerning job satisfaction consisted of 4 items, rated on a 4 point Likert-scale, ranging from *very unsatisfied* = 0 to *very satisfied* = 3. An example of a question is: *"(how pleased are you with) your job as a whole, everything taken into consideration?"* The Cronbach alpha was .87.

Stress. Stress was measured over 4 questions on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from *never/almost never* = 0 to *always* = 4, and concerned ratings over the last 4 weeks. An example of a question is: *"How often have you had problems relaxing?"* The scale held a Cronbach alpha = .91.

Scales concerning stress and job satisfaction were both taken from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (COPSOQ II), developed to measure the psychosocial work environment (Pejtersen, Kristensen, Borg, & Bjorner, 2010). A Swedish version of the scale was used (National Research Centre for the Working Environment, 2014). Previous versions of COPSOQ has been used internationally, and has been recognized as the standard measure of psychosocial work environment in several countries (Pejtersen et al., 2010), thus posing an apt tool for the present study.

As the present study is part of a larger research project, data was collected on measures not used in this particular study. Thus, some items from the questionnaire, mostly involving further use of COPSOQ II-scales and measures of turnover intention and perceived incivility, were not subjected to analysis as they lacked relation to the present research questions.

Procedure

The survey was online-based, produced on the platform of the services provided through http://www.webbenkater.com. Thus, employing an online methodology, a link to the survey could

be distributed to a wide amount of individuals through very simple means. The link to the survey was presented in a letter directed to the participant where information was given about the study, alongside contact information and informed consent. Emphasis was also put on the voluntary nature of participation, full anonymity and that data would be treated confidentially. Participants were free to withdraw at any point, and completing the study was considered consenting to participation.

The survey and letter was forwarded to an affiliate contact person at the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, where it was distributed at one occasion per email through the membership registries. The affiliate was asked for information regarding amount of individuals contacted in total to calculate the response rate, and some basic categories concerning types of employment among their members. After one week the affiliate was asked to reissue the original request as a reminder, in order to assure that the target group was properly made aware of the surveys existence.

First the demographics were presented, followed by each page with blocks of questions as previously described. After completing the survey, participants were thanked for their participation, and asked to close the browser window, thus concluding the experimental procedure. Participation took roughly 10 to 15 minutes of time.

Ethical considerations. The present study is part of a larger research project ongoing at Lund University, which has been granted ethical approval by the Central Ethical Review Board (EPN) in Sweden, dnr 2012-0138. The study has thereby been approved for use, and is considered ethically sound. No particular harm or any other potential negative consequence is expected to fall on the participant for partaking in this project.

Analytical considerations

All statistical analysis was carried out on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Data was controlled for outliers and missing values, 12 cases were excluded after being concluded as univariate outliers, 2 cases were removed after considered as multivariate outliers, and 1 participant was excluded from analysis due to incorrect data entries, leaving $N = 2647$. Some z-values mildly exceeded >3.29 by an excess up to .03 on the variable of instigated incivility, yet were still included in the analysis, as large samples to some degree are expected to have a few cases surpassing the scores yet still being part of the population (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Data was also controlled for assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, as well as multicollinearity and singularity prior to analysis. The variable measuring job satisfaction was moderately skewed (1.22), with moderate kurtosis (1.12), and thus transformed with a logarithm to achieve normality. With new values of skewness (-.10) and kurtosis (-.94), the variable still differed significantly from

a normal distribution. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), however states this as a common issue in large sample sizes, as the null hypothesis of normality likely is rejected even with minor deviations, thus not posing a threat to the following analysis.

Results

The relationships between witnessed incivility from colleagues, witnessed incivility from supervisors, instigated incivility, stress, job satisfaction and well-being, were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (see table 1). All six variables were significantly related to each other on the $p < .01$ level.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients among the study variables

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*Mean*	*SD*
1. Instigated incivility	-						.42	.44
2. Well-being	- .22**	-					2.54	1.15
3. Job satisfaction	- .23**	.61**	-				1.34	0.74
4. Perceived stress	.28**	- .70**	- .58**	-			2.3	0.99
5. Incivility from colleagues	.48**	- .33**	- .33**	.38**	-		1.20	0.96
6. Incivility from supervisors	.37**	- .43**	- .50**	.47**	.53**	-	1.21	1.06

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the p < .01 level (2-tailed); $n = 1960 – 2442$.

In order to test hypotheses A – D, four standard multiple regressions were conducted in two steps (see table 2), on the dependent variables of instigated incivility, well-being, job satisfaction and perceived stress. The first step controlled for demographic variables of age, gender, years worked at the current employment, born in Sweden, full time employment and executive role within the work. In the second step the independent variables of witnessed incivility from co-workers, and witnessed incivility from supervisors were added to the model.

Demographic variables explained 1.6 % of the variance in instigated incivility. After entry of witnessed incivility from co-workers and witnessed incivility from supervisors at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model was 26.4 %, F (8, 1975) = 88.36 p < .001, ΔR^2 = .25, F change (2, 1975) = 331.74 p > .001. β-values were significant for gender (β = -.10, p < .001) and both witnessed incivility from co-workers (β = .40, p < .001), and witnessed incivility from supervisors (β = .15, p < .001), thus supporting hypothesis A.

The demographic variables explained 2 % of the variance in well-being. Significant contribution was made to this dependent variable from "born in Sweden", (β = -.09 p < .001). After entry of witnessed incivility from co-workers and witnessed incivility from supervisors at Step 2, 21 % of the variance was explained, F (8, 2040) = 68.82 p < .001, ΔR^2 = .19, F change (2, 2040) = 247.92, p < .001. β-values were significant for both witnessed incivility from co-workers (β = -.15, p < .001), and witnessed incivility from supervisors (β = -.34, p < .001), thereby supporting hypothesis B.

Demographic variables explained 2.3 % of the variance in job satisfaction. Whether or not the employee posited an executive function contributed significantly to the model (β = -.8 p < .001). After entry of witnessed incivility from co-workers and witnessed incivility from supervisors at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 27 %, F (8, 1926) = 91.275 p < . 001, ΔR^2 = .25, F change (2, 1926) = 334.45 p > .001. β-values were significant for both witnessed incivility from co-workers (β = -.10, p < .001), and witnessed incivility from supervisors (β = -.44, p < .001). The results supported hypothesis C.

Demographic variables explained 5 % of the variance in perceived stress. Gender (beta = .07 p < .001) and age (β = -.17 p < .001) contributed significantly to the model. After entry of witnessed incivility from co-workers and witnessed incivility from supervisors at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model was 29 %, F (8, 1975) = 100.64 p < .001, ΔR^2 = .23, F change (2, 1975) = 324.45 p > .001. β-values were significant for both witnessed incivility from co-workers (β = .17, p < .001), and witnessed incivility from supervisors (β = .38, p < .000). Hypothesis D was supported by the analysis.

Table 2

Hierarchical mulitple regression analyses predicting instigated incivility, well-being, job satisfaction and perceived stress

		Dependent Variables						
		Instigated incivility		Well-being		Job satisfaction		Perceived stress
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.02**		.02**		.02**		.05**	
Demographic data								
Gender		-.10**		.00		-.01		.07**
Age		-.04		.06		.06		-.17**
Years worked		.01		.03		.02		-.04
Born in Sweden		.02		-.09**		-.02		.03
Full-time employment		.03		.02		.03		-.04
Executive function		-.02		-.02		-.08**		-.03
Step 2	.25**		.19**		.25**		.23**	
Witnessed incivility from coworkers		.40**		-.15**		-.10**		.17**
Witnessed incivility from superiors		.15**		-.34**		-.44**		.38**
Total R^2	.26**		.21**		.27**		.29**	
n		1984		2049		1935		1984

Note. ** p < .001, * p < .01. Demographics were coded as, gender (*male* = 1, *female* = 2), born in Sweden (*yes* = 1, *no* = 2), full time employment (*yes* = 1, *no* = 2), executive function (*yes* = 1, *no* = 2).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between witnessing uncivil acts from colleagues and supervisors, and instigating uncivil acts, levels of well-being, degree of job satisfaction as well as levels of stress on a Swedish population. The investigated hypotheses were:

A. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues predicts instigated uncivil behaviour in the employee.*

B. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues predicts lower levels of well-being among employees.*

C. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues predicts a lower degree of job satisfaction.*

D. *Witnessed job incivility from supervisors and from colleagues is positively related to perceived stress in employees.*

These were addressed and the results supported hypothesis A through D, showing that witnessed incivility from colleagues and supervisors was related to A) instigating uncivil acts, B) lower levels of well-being, C) lower levels of job satisfaction and D) higher levels of stress, thus answering the research questions of the present study, when controlling for demographic variables. Particularly important for instigating uncivil acts was witnessing incivility from colleagues, whereas supervisor incivility seems to play a larger part in well-being, low job satisfaction and stress-levels.

As merely witnessing incivility from colleagues and supervisors may not issue the same need in the individual for retaliation for being unjustly treated, it would rather stand to reason that the uncivil acts related to witnessing such behaviour is due to a misplacement of workplace norms. Being part of a larger climate, where incivility is present and perhaps even accepted in the workplace, could contribute to setting the tone for the individuals own actions. Seeing as the β-value for incivility from colleagues (β = -.40) contributed more to the model than that of supervisors (β = -.15), this may be due to an individual workers way of identifying themselves with their coworkers, and thus adopting their standards of behaviour, values and moral. That simply witnessing incivility relates to uncivil conduct, indicates that a sense of injustice or negative climate in the organization could expand beyond a single subjected individual, and potentially affect a much larger clientèle than that originally targeted by the negative behaviour.

The additional psychosocial factors investigated in the present study, well-being, job satisfaction and stress, also illustrates the impact of incivility. If higher levels of uncivil conduct in the workplace produces an environment where this is related to a less healthy and satisfied staff,

with higher levels of stress, the risk of detrimental consequences could increase. The present study suggests that being part of a work environment where individuals feel disrespected, frustration is induced and individuals feel the need to reciprocate in a similar fashion, could make an individual feel less satisfied with being a part of that organization. Low mood among the colleagues, and particularly so from supervisors could also dishearten and reduce the confidence and feeling of pride in an individuals' work effort, where their sense of well-being could become lowered. As previous work found a relationship between lower levels of well-being, coupled with incivility (Reio & Ghosh, 2009; Pearson et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008), the present study expands on this and indicates a similar relationship between well-being and simply witnessing incivility. Likewise, the relation between lower job satisfaction when subjected to incivility (Cortina et al., 2001; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005; Reio & Ghosh, 2009), was in this study found to occur also for witnessing uncivil conduct in the workplace.

This study supports that the relationship between incivility and stress found by Lim et al. (2008), also is prevalent in parts of a Swedish population, and related to witnessing uncivil acts, even when not necessarily being part of them. Facing conflict on a daily basis in what DeLongis et al. (1988) refers to as *daily hassles*, although not direct or necessarily intense, could over time accumulate to become an added stressor in the work environment. Instead of relying on colleagues for support, an atmosphere prone to incivility and norms in violation of mutual respect could contribute to an individuals' feeling of stress. In addition to this, it is also fully plausible that individuals overlook basic courtesy towards one another when particularly stressed, or when not feeling well, likewise when not satisfied with the work, perhaps not feeling invested in what they are doing, or who they are doing it with.

In addition to this, gender appeared to play some part in reported instigation of uncivil acts, where males were more prone to this behaviour than females. Previous studies have found some support for gender differences, where women endured more incivility than men (Cortina et al., 2001). Although the findings of the present study were on the performance of incivility rather than being subjected to it, it leaves and indication of potential gender differences to be further explored by future research. Whether the participant was born in Sweden or not, also contributed significantly to explaining variance in levels of reported well-being, and positing a supervisor position related to reported job satisfaction.

Limitations

Some natural limitations protrude in a study of this nature, the first and most obvious one being that of causality. As the study is employing a cross-sectional design, no causal connections can be

established through these findings. As the research questions concern potential relations, this is not directly affecting the current investigation, yet future research will have to address the issue of causality and workplace incivility in order to build on the foundation that these results indicate, in order to fully unravel a potential spiral of incivility.

Utilizing a self-reported online-survey design also carries certain implications, such as the problematic effects concerning social desirability, a factor that may be of importance as the topic regards potentially sensitive situations in a near-personal environment, as well as scrutinizing personal actions, in combination with the actions of peers and supervisors. Some research indicates that individuals are less prone to report acts of incivility in self report measures (Penney & Spector, 2005), as it may carry consequences for them personally, such as the risk of losing employment, or accepting that they have behaved in an unsatisfactory manner towards another individual. This may not concern reports of witnessing incivility among colleagues, yet some individuals may feel uncomfortable with reporting negative behaviour about their peers or supervisors. However, the lack of monitoring participants, by using an online questionnaire, could also reduce the risk of social desirability or any potential observation effects on the ratings, as participants can respond privately. How this fully may have affected the outcome of the study is impossible to say, yet it should be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study.

Studies have also indicated that people respond differently to incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2012; Bunk & Magley, 2013). Particularly differences in personality traits such as neuroticism and agreeableness have been shown to affect incivility (Milam, Spitzmeuller, & Penney, 2009), where perceptions of severity may differ between individuals. What is uncivil conduct for one person, could be considered fair play by another. Such definitional issues in a study that consists of subjective experiences cannot be avoided.

The online-tool also calls for certain caution, as Internet access may be limited to a certain population, or some individuals may have a particular proneness to either participate or ignore an e-mail from their union. The diversity of the sample did however not indicate anything of this nature, as a variety of ages and individuals were represented. When issuing an online-based study, no guarantee of the accuracy of the data left by participants is ensured by the researcher, as participants partake at the time and location of their own choosing. Trust must be given in the fact that the information provided by the participant is correct, and that their interpretation of the study is in alignment with the proposed idea.

The diversity should also be regarded with the background of the target demographic being largely focused on restaurant and hotel service workers. Certain manifestations of stress, uncivil conduct and other psychosocial factors may be largely prevalent or exclusive to this particular

group, whereas further research must include more diverse samples, branches and environments.

Considering the fairly low response rate, a large amount of the demographic remained excluded from this particular study. Why such a large amount of individuals chose not to participate is unknown, yet it could be due to a number of factors, such as the e-mail being posted from their union, lack of interest in the topic at hand, or an unwillingness to disclose any information of their working life, regardless of the confidentiality and anonymity at hand. Further testing of workplace incivility within this particular demographic may be of aid in shedding light on this phenomenon.

Other potential issues with this study primarily concerns instrumentation, and the scales used as measurements of the included variables. The use of the WHO-Five scale in order to measure levels of well-being rather than distress may have been beneficial in comparison to other scales, yet more avid testing of the Swedish version of the scale is warranted. In a recent publication, Löve, Andersson, Dea Moore and Hensing (2013), tested a slightly modified version of the Swedish Who-Five-scale. The study involved a minor rephrasing of one item, yet reported the scale to be psychometrically sound (Löve et al., 2013). Although not exactly transferable, this lends certain merit to the qualities of the instrument. The intention behind employing the WHO-Five was to retain a positive valence in the well-being measures, in order to not let focus soar around lack of mental health, to rather encompass other aspects of well-being, for a more accurate measurement of the phenomenon. Previous studies have shown that using the WHO-Five rather than other instruments may reduce the risk of ceiling effects (Bech et al., 2003), issuing less extreme ratings. A factor that otherwise could risk inducing a false image of severity among the measures. The qualities of the Swedish translation of the WHO-Five was in addition examined in a student paper, showing good reliability (Hammer & Kronberg, 2013). The aforementioned factors may to some extent have limited the present study, and needs to be considered when interpreting the results as presented.

Construct of incivility

The workplace incivility scale created by Cortina and colleagues in 2001, has since been extensively used and rigorously validated (Cortina et al., 2001; Martin & Hine, 2005; Lim et al., 2008). Arguably however it has been proposed that the WIS-scale is unidimensional in its design, which may fail to fully encapsulate the entire phenomenon of workplace incivility (Martin & Hine, 2005). In addition to this, a large amount of the current research on workplace incivility is based on the original definition as proposed by Andersson & Pearson (1999). Although not necessarily problematic, granted that the proposed definition of workplace incivility is apt for the purpose of describing the behaviour, one should be aware of the risk that the focus is so heavily dependent on a

single operationalization. If other aspects of workplace incivility have been excluded as they do not fit in to the original definition, this could pose a problem to the field, rendering a too narrow focus. To illustrate this point, the alternative definition of workplace incivility suggested by Zauderer (2002), has received very little attention from other scholars. The definition proposed by Andersson and Pearson (1999), is by no means insufficient, yet further light can be shed on the definitional matters of incivility in the future, in order to clarify the construct, and what actually is being measured. This point is especially important, as highlighted by Hershcovis (2011), as the WIS-scale makes no attempt at measuring intensity nor frequency of incivility, despite the fact that these are key aspects of the definition proposed by Andersson and Pearson (1999). These estimations are left to the individual to assess when responding to the scales, yet leaves a very open and clear weakness in the Workplace Incivility Scale. This issue could potentially need attention in further studies of the field.

Future research

Seeing as the field of workplace incivility remains in a very young state, it still has a far way to reach before being more comprehensively understood. Having been researched in North America and to some extent in Asia, an attempt at a cross-cultural exploration of the phenomenon has been made. A study of this nature, exploring parts of the Swedish population and the state of incivility thus comprises an added benefit in such an undertaking, adding to the bulk of cross-cultural research. Incivility however still needs to be more thoroughly examined in Sweden, on several demographic groups and perhaps even with other measures than the one presently used.

Furthermore, a particular focus should be added on exploring causal directions of incivility and factors such as instigating uncivil acts, well-being, job satisfaction and stress, in order to conclude whether or not a negative spiral is itself instigated by the acts of incivility, or if they are a consequence of the climate. Continuing to explore incivility from a bystander perspective, and adding to a larger knowledge-base of the phenomenon is warranted in order to see how and if incivility expands from an individual level, and permeates an entire organization. If this carries a corrosive nature that goes beyond the single individual, and infects a social climate in full, more evidence of the implications of witnessing incivility is required, before it can be described, understood and finally combated. This gap could be complemented with longitudinal studies of workplace incivility, and measures concerning prevalence of incivility's consequences, coupled with the current investigation of relationships between variables.

Conclusion

In line with the hypotheses the present study revealed that witnessing incivility from colleagues as well as supervisors related to reports of instigated incivility, lower levels of well-being and job satisfaction, as well as higher levels of stress.

The findings when viewed from the framework of a social spiral (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), paints a picture of how a negative work climate could be manifested also in Swedish organizations, and the potentially damaging effects this may bring. There is no indication of the prevalence of instigated incivility, as the present study merely is measuring relationships of variables. Yet, as being a bystander makes employees more prone to act uncivil themselves, this could contribute to the infection of an organization that a negative work climate can provide, and it is of importance to ensure that these behaviours, and perhaps even norms, are changed before further escalation for the organization. As witnessing incivility relates to the individuals conduct, incivility in the workplace becomes relevant to the entire organization, and cannot be viewed as an isolated phenomenon, only involving certain individuals. It would thus need to be addressed at an organizational level. An attempt at amending these influences could be issued through creating a larger awareness of the phenomenon, setting clear guidelines for acceptable workplace norms for employees, as well as having supervisors act as role-models in interpersonal interactions. If the spiral is escalating in nature, then breaking this spiral as early as possible is of utmost importance for the success of the enterprise.

Acknowledgement

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