

## Percieved Workplace Incivility: A Predictive Study of Emotional Regulation and Marital Status among Administrative Staff of Nigerian Universities

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**Abstract:** This study examined Emotional Regulation and Marital Status as Predictors of Perceived Workplace Incivility among Administrative Staff of Nigerian Universities. Conceptual model hypothesized that emotional regulation and marital status will both significantly predict perceived workplace incivility. The participants comprised two hundred and seventeen (217) workers who were drawn from a population of administrative staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam both in Anambra State, Nigeria. They included 83 males and 134 females whose ages ranged from 27 to 58 years, with a mean age of 34.12yrs and standard deviation of 3.70. The method of sampling was simple sampling technique. Two instruments were used for the study namely; Incivility Scale by O'Reilly (1982) and Emotional Regulation Scale (ERS) by Gross and John. This study is a cross-sectional survey research using predictive design and multiple regression analysis as appropriate design and statistics to analyze the data obtained from the field. The result confirmed that only emotional regulation significantly and negatively predicted workplace incivility at  $\beta = -2.54^*$ ,  $p < .05$ , ( $n = 217$ ). The finding implies that as emotional regulation of the employees improved, workplace incivility was reduced.

**Keywords:** Workplace incivility, emotional regulation, marital status, human interaction and organizational effectiveness

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### INTRODUCTION

The workplace has interestingly become a challenging social arena with hyper complex human socialization for the advancement of socio-economic enterprise. Over the years, the evolution of work and the working environment as characterized by hyper technological advancement has made the workplace and the working conditions more volatile, interactive and competitive especially with intriguing human differences in socialization process [1]. Within this enterprising arena, authors of this current study assert that the ability to manage and regulate one's emotion in the workplace (perception of an emotion and control of one's feelings and outburst within the context of the perceived emotion [2, 3] is critical organizational asset which is consequential to organizational progress.

Workplace evolution has distinctly deepened the socialization process of human interaction and has helped re-classify work and working environment into several roles and segments to optimize performance and productivity [4]. The inevitability of this interaction is real as the working process ensures that workers work together in various units within and outside the organization for the purpose of achieving organizational mandate. Reich and Herscovis [5] opined that this unique human interaction in the workplace has often been marred sadly by a range of uncivil behaviours with severe personal, job and organizational consequences to the detriment of all and sundry.

The nature of human interactions in the workplace and the organizational social exchanges without doubt presents far-reaching consequences for personal, job and organizational outcomes [6, 7]. This is in consideration that organizational members are recruited from diverse socio-economic and cultural background. Significantly, factors of difference include but not limited to socio-economic status, educational and ethnic background, age, gender and personality. Against this backdrop, the inevitability of workplace incivility can be appreciated as a fundamental organizational and management problem.

Thus, having ability to regulate one's emotions against raging impulse and spontaneous behaviors which threaten good relationship among workers becomes a necessity if uncivil behaviours are to be avoided. This situation may further be predicated by emotional regulation and marital status within other intervening variables in the organization.

### THEORETICAL REVIEW

Workplace incivility is a low-intensity disrespectful behaviour that does not regard the dignity and self-esteem of other individuals that runs contrary to expectations of the individual and workplace norms for mutual respect [8, 9]. Incivility is a social interaction that can be interpreted differently by the parties involved because the intent of the harm-doer is

ambiguous in the eyes of the target, observers, or even the instigator [6, 8]. For example, an individual may perceive that his supervisor constantly cuts him off when he speaks at departmental meetings. However, the instigator may claim that any harm experienced was due to oversight or ignorance on his part; or, the instigator can deny harmful intent by claiming that the target has misinterpreted the behavior or that the target is hypersensitive. This is due to the fact that behavior which a person may perceive as cold, brusque, or rude, may be viewed as ideal by another [6].

Incivility wherever it is found can take escalating, spiraling, or cascading forms [10]. It can be a tit-for-tat exchange of behaviors of equal intensities (non-escalating, uncivil exchange) or it can escalate into a spiral of more aggressive behaviors with each exchange escalating spiral of incivility [8, 11]. Incivility may be also be re-directed towards a co-worker or subordinate (direct displacement of cascading pattern of incivility) when the victim does not dare to retaliate directly against the instigator. This often happens when the instigator is of higher status (i.e., one's supervisor) than the victim. Although, the instigator of incivility can be at the same, higher, or lower level than the target, instigators of incivility are three times more likely to be of higher status than the target [10].

The manner and form in which incivility can occur is endless and this is particularly of concern to both management and organizational members. These forms appear to be explained by Spiral theory of incivility propounded by Andersson and Pearson [12]. More often, uncivil act is acknowledged and perceived as uncivil by an individual due to violated norms or unacceptable conducts [12] which may be caused by victim's reaction and desire for revenge triggered by negative affect. It is also caused by a decision to depart from the organization, which could take place at any point during incivility episodes. Depending on its antecedents and the people involved, incivility spiral can further reach epidemic proportions. Based upon the spiral theory of incivility, it can be concluded that incivility is a vicious cycle which can be triggered from a minor issue and escalate to severe coarseness. Incivility spirals may be discontinued by establishing a civil culture reconciliation, forgiveness and zero-tolerance climate towards incivility [6, 9-11].

Furthermore, General strain theory [13] identified stressors or strains as the cause of incivility. Workplace stressors are more than capable of fostering negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and depression [14] and transferring same to other persons in the organization in various forms of uncivil behaviour. This is because, negative emotions create pressure for corrective action and uncivil behavior is

one of the ways some individuals respond to these stress-laden pressures. The central mechanism of strain-caused incivility is the negative treatment by others, inability to achieve goals, and the loss of valued possessions among others. Strain is unassailably found within causes of deviance topology which can be correlated with high incidences of corporate crime, police deviance, suicide, bullying, and terrorism [14].

Among the academia, factors that stimulate higher incidents of workplace incivility have been gaining scholarly corporate attention globally. Such factors both include intrinsic and extrinsic factors like: emotional regulation, marital status, level of educational qualification, self-esteem, gender, length of service, personality, organizational politics, organizational climate and culture etc. For the purpose of this study, emotional regulation and marital status have been prioritized as predictors of workplace incivility among university administrative staff.

### **Emotional Regulation**

Salovey and Meyer [2] conceptualized ability to regulate one's emotions as a form of intelligence with emphasis to initiating, inhibiting and moderating one's behaviour in a given situation. They opined that it is "the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotions to facilitate thought, understand emotions and to regulate emotions to promote growth." Although, there are three facet models; ability, mixed and trait model of emotional intelligence, there seems to be one grasp to all – using it to regulate and checkmate one's emotional excesses [3]. Weiss and Cropanzano [15] identify how emotions and moods influence employees at their work place using Affective Events Theory. The theory proposes that effective reactions of employees are caused by proximal events in the organization. By implication, things happen to people in work setting and people often react emotionally to these events either positively or negatively depending upon their perceptual ability of what has happened. The model increases the understanding of links between employees and their emotional reactions to things that happen to them at work as antecedents of incivility. Organizational climate which trip this are: hassles, autonomy, job demands, and emotional labour and uplifting actions of their reactions, thus mood created is an important component of job attitudes and an important predictor of workplace behaviours such as incivility [16].

Furthermore, Bar-On [17] emotional social intelligence model opined that to be successful in any environment, understanding oneself and others, relating well to people and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings is natural intelligence which develops over time [17] and that it can be improved

through training, programming and therapy. No doubt, outside regulation of emotion which implicates several behavioural outcomes with critical situations in the workplace such as incivility; workplace incivility may still be fueled by other subjective factors such as marital status.

### **Marital Status**

Marital status is the civil status of each individual in relation to the marriage laws or customs of their country or state. It also refers to as socio-cultural classification of persons in relation to legal union of living together as husband and wife. It is also classification for persons whose opposite same sex spouse is living.

Marital status in most cultural societies connotes degree of responsibility. Those that are married are seen to be a bit more responsible in words, thoughts and action than those that are single and are believed to be more aware of the considerable risks which their actions and inactions may bring to themselves or others. Akinbode (2009) contented that being married pre-dispose employees to over bearing burden of mis-behavior. Also, Lim, Ilies, Koopman, Christoforou and Arvey [11] linked experience-sampling study examining the spillover of workplace incivility on employees' home lives. Specifically, the authors moderated mediation model whereby discrete emotions transmit the effects of workplace incivility to specific family behaviors at home. Correlation was found between employees' home lives and behaviours in the workplace. Marital status has been at the center of many workplace studies because there is the belief that many married employees are so saddled with family responsibilities that most times their duties in the family may conflict with their workplace tasks. This may perhaps bring the possibilities of such workers mis-behavior may emanate from home pressures. However, single employees might only be obsessed with the idea of peer competition from their counterparts for organizational resources of either, time, recognition, material or manpower (Ariani, 2013).

In line with the above theoretical background, the following hypotheses will guide the study:

- i. Emotional regulation will significantly and negatively predict workplace incivility.
- ii. Marital status will significantly predict workplace incivility.

### **METHODS**

The participants comprised two hundred and seventeen (217) workers who were drawn from a population of administrative staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe

University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam both in Anambra State, Nigeria. They included 83 males and 134 females whose ages ranged from 27 to 58 years, with a mean age of 34.12yrs and standard deviation of 3.70. The method of sampling was simple sampling technique. Demographic data of the participants showed that as regards marital status, 135 participants were married while 82 were single. In terms of educational qualification, 63 have SSCE, 19 have Ordinary Diploma (ND), 26 have HND, 74 have B.sc/B.A, and 27 have Masters while 8 had Ph.D.

### **Measurement**

Two instruments were used for the study namely; Incivility Scale by O'Reilly (1982) and Emotional Regulation Scale (ERS) by Gross and John (2003). Incivility Scale by O'Reilly (1982) is a 30-item scale which is a revised version of the previous 42-item scale by the same author. It contains subscales that measure different types of uncivil behaviours in order of severity. The items are rated on a 5-point response format of strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. All items are direct item scores. The author obtained an alpha validity coefficient of .76. Emotional Regulation Scale was developed by Gross and John [3]. It is a 10-item direct response scale which measures the relative control and management of one's emotion in the course of events that happen in one's life. Example of items from the instrument include: "I keep my emotions to myself", "I control my emotion by not expressing them". The response format is 7-point likert from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree. The scale has an internal consistence of .86. In addition, other demographic variables such as marital status, level of educational qualification, age, ethnicity and religious background were included in the overall instrument used in the study in order to extract the demographic characteristics of the sample.

### **Validity and Reliability**

For its use in this study, 53 participants were used for reliability studies and a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .71 and .74 was obtained during the pilot studies by the researcher respectively for Workplace incivility and emotional regulation scale.

### **Statistics**

This study is a cross-sectional survey research using predictive design and multiple regression analysis as appropriate design and statistics to analyze the data obtained from the field.

### **RESULTS**

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviations of the variables tested in the study**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Workplace incivility	44.8160	1.452040	217
Emotional regulation	37.6142	1.075454	217

**Table 2: Multiple regression analysis for predictive effects of emotional regulation and marital status on workplace incivility Coefficients (a)**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	$\beta$	
1	(Constant)	.920	1.140		1.00	.000
	Emotional regulation	-2.658	1.854	.913	-2.08	.029
	Marital status	.984	1.660	-2.54	1.19	.108
				.712		

a Dependent Variable: Workplace incivility

The result as presented in the multiple regression table above confirmed that hypothesis I which stated emotional regulation will significantly and negatively predict workplace incivility was confirmed at  $\beta = -2.54^*$ ,  $p < .05$ , ( $n = 217$ ). The finding in hypothesis I implies that as emotional regulation of the employees is increased (improved upon), workplace incivility is reduced.

However, it is also highlighted from the above table that hypothesis II which stated that marital status will significantly and negatively predict workplace incivility was not confirmed at  $\beta = .712$ ,  $p > .05$ , ( $n = 217$ ). The above finding in hypothesis II implies that marital status did not significantly predict workplace incivility.

**DISCUSSION**

Negative predictive effects as found in hypothesis I confirm emotional regulation as an organizational factor which is negatively associated with deviance behaviours in the organization e.g. incivility. Particularly, the finding found support in Affective events theory which highlighted that proximal events in the organization are the leading causes of all forms of employee deviant behaviours e.g. workplace incivility. These proximal events require the intelligence of the employees to react less with emotions as articulated by Bar-On, [17]. Bar-On [17] opined that to be successful in any environment, the employees ought to deepen the understanding oneself and others, relating well to people and adapting to and coping with the challenges of the immediate surroundings. The later is what Salovey and Meyer [2] called emotional intelligence while Gross and John [3] contended that such adaptation is as a result of emotional regulation. There are also empirical support to these findings e.g. Porath and Pearson, [8] found connections between emotional and behavioral responses to workplace Incivility and the impact of hierarchical status. Based on appraisal theory, incivility

targets reported greater reported anger, fear, and sadness. Also, targets' anger was associated with more direct aggression against the instigators; evidence of poor emotional regulation. Targets' fear was associated with indirect aggression against instigators, absenteeism, and exit; and targets' sadness was associated with absenteeism.

In Nigeria organizational setting, the current finding agrees in part with the findings of Ogungbamila [18] who compared the participants of his study on dispositional traits including emotional and environmental disposition on workplace deviance. Ogungbamila [18] found that most times dispositional traits are what engineer a person's reaction mechanisms especially emotionally and the immediate environmental factors that influence behaviours especially deviant behaviours.

In hypothesis II, marital status did not significantly predict workplace incivility. Although the finding is not in tandem with most empirical result of similar study; socio-cultural differences of the Nigerian organizational environment with the reported finding makes it easy for understanding. Critically, the current finding is not in consonance with the works of Miner, Pesonen, Smittick, Seigel, & Clark, [19] which explored workplace incivility as a function of motherhood status which showed that mothers with 3 children were treated more uncivilly than women with fewer children and that mothering mitigated negative outcomes associated with being the target of incivility. In addition, mothers reported more incivility than fathers and childless women reported more incivility than childless men. Childless women were also the most negatively affected by incivility at work. Although, these situations may still be found in Nigeria organizational environment, they may not necessarily reach significant proportions owing to cultural variation and workplace climate.

### **Implication of the Study**

Workplace incivility is an unpalatable organization deviance behaviour which can virtually grow into magnified proportions with uncharismatic job, employee and organizational consequences e.g. conflict, cynicism, distrust, counterproductive workplace behaviour, and general ineffectiveness. Without the ability to develop and control one's emotion, employee conflict and hostility is inevitable in the organization with critical ineffectiveness and productivity.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explored emotional regulation and marital status as predictors of workplace incivility among administrative staff of Nigerian universities. In line with both the conceptual and theoretical models, following findings the tested hypotheses, it was found that only emotional regulation significantly and negatively predicted workplace incivility among the participants of the study. This finding compliments several theoretical and empirical studies x-rayed in the review. It was found that proximal factors in the organizational environment task the emotional competence of the employees and may be orchestrated by dispositional factors and other subjective personal factors of the employee.

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