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When rudeness goes home: the impact of supervisor incivility on employees' work–family conflict

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Abstract

This study uses the frustration-aggression theory to examine how supervisor incivility relates to employee interpersonal incivility toward customers and co-workers and work–family conflict. Work–family conflict refers to the incompatibility between the demands and responsibilities of an individual's work role and their family role. Service employees from the banking industry (N = 750) participated in the study's daily multisource questionnaires over a continuous two-week period. The study's findings, based on multilevel structural equation modeling, show that supervisors' hostility toward subordinates increases employee interpersonal deviance toward customers and co-workers, as well as work–family conflict. Additionally, the study found in a parallel mediation that the association between supervisor-initiated incivility and work–family conflict is mediated by employee interpersonal deviance toward co-workers and customers. These findings indicate the detrimental effects of incivility from supervisors on both the workplace and employees' personal lives. The study suggests that workplace incivility causes a negative spiral of mistreatment where a target of incivility may respond by mistreating other, resulting in a toxic work environment. However, organizations can mitigate the negative effects of incivility and promote productivity and success for employees and organization by investing in employee well-being and creating a respectful work culture.

Keywords Work–family conflict, Supervisor incivility, Interpersonal deviance, Frustration-aggression theory, Spillover effect

Introduction

Service industry employees commonly experience incivility at work, which is defined as “low-intensity behaviour and interpersonal mistreatment with ambiguous intent to harm in violation of the workplace norms for respect” [3, 32, 71]. Though workplace incivility includes

less egregious behaviors, such as interrupting others or making demeaning comments, it wreaks havoc on an employee's health and workplace productivity [83]. Research indicated that experiences of incivility have negative effects on task performance and citizenship behavior [72], decreases engagement [11], and undermines health and well-being of employees [12]. This results in significant financial losses for companies each year [71]. Additionally, researchers have revealed that workplace incivility is not limited to having negative effects on health- and work-related outcomes, but rather has an important influence on targets' non-work lives [83].

Despite the fact that research on incivility has so far yielded many valuable insights, there is still much to learn about the underlying processes that explain how

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incivility affects both work-related and non-work-related outcomes for its targets. For example, while some studies have linked incivility to job satisfaction and mental health, there is a lack of research on the relationship between incivility and work–family conflict, which is defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” [, p. 77].²⁸

To fill this gap, this study aims to examine the relationship between incivility initiated by supervisors in daily work, which is a common form of incivility experienced by service workers, and work–family conflict. This study further helps to understand the process that contributes to this connection. Specifically, the study investigates the occurrence of target-instigated incivility toward co-workers and customers as potential underlying processes that explain the link between supervisor incivility and work–family conflict [80]. The study also explores the timing and reasons for incivility leading to further incivility and intervening in the non-work domain.

Based on the frustration-aggression theory assumptions [15], we argue that daily exposure to supervisor incivility develops frustration in employees and provokes them into aggressive actions. Because supervisors have considerable control over employee resources (e.g., promotion, rewards; [81]), targets of incivility tend to avoid direct confrontation with the supervisor and are more likely to displace their frustration onto others such as co-workers or customers. However, the study posits that when victims of supervisor incivility exert their aggression on a co-worker, the latter will fight back to correct perceived mistreatment because both the initial target of incivility and their co-worker, hold equal positions within an organization. Likewise, employee mistreatment toward customers evokes anger in the customer and may motivate the customer to “get even” with the employee, thus creating negative exchange spirals [30]. In this situation, tense interaction with the co-worker or customer will drain the original target’s psychological resources and reduce their self-control, whereas their frustration will further increase [80]. As a result, the target is less likely to accomplish their family responsibilities, increasing the likelihood of affecting their personal life [19].

The study presents significant contributions to the current debate about workplace incivility. First, it examines the impact on incivility on the non-work (family) sphere to further the conversation on supervisor-initiated incivility [38]. Although existing literature tells that supervisor incivility impacts workplace outcomes [49, 72], limited investigation motivated us to understand how supervisor incivility goes beyond the organizational realm and creates spillover effects.

Second, the study deepens our understanding of how and why work–family conflict is linked to rudeness initiated by supervisors. Previous studies demonstrate a connection between supervisor incivility and familial outcomes of a target of incivility (e.g., [101]). However, less is known about the fundamental mechanism by which these impacts occur. The current research seeks to address this gap by identifying instigated incivility toward co-workers as a process through which supervisor incivility influences family outcomes.

Third, by using within-person daily-diary method with a repeated measure approach contributes to the literature on supervisor-initiated incivility and work–family conflict. This approach provides a more nuance of the short-term and dynamic relationship between perpetrator and target of incivility and work and non-work outcomes. This improves the understanding of stakeholders especially policymakers and help them to empathize the emotions a service employee experiences in their daily work and personal domain [63].

Lastly, by exploring new factors that create imbalance between work and family life and trigger incivility toward co-workers and customers (precipitated by supervisor incivility) adds to the organizational behavior and conflict literature. Identifying workplace predictors of work–family conflict is pertinent because an imbalance in between work and family can significantly impact how employees behave at work. Extant research has linked work–family conflict with turnover [97], employee job performance [99] and absenteeism (e.g., [42]). Thus, by demonstrating how supervisor-initiated incivility adversely influences work–family balance, the study serves to deepen scholars’ and practitioners’ understanding of an additional supervisor behavior (i.e., incivility) that may have detrimental effects on an employee’s work–family life.

Frustration-aggression theory

According to Dollard et al. [15] seminal work, individuals may engage in aggressive behavior due to frustration, which can trigger various forms of aggressive drive and subsequently provoke individuals to engage in aggressive actions. Fox and Spector [22] proposed a new model of frustration-aggression and applied it to the work context. The model suggests that situational constraints can lead to workplace aggression, with frustrating events, emotional reactions, and constraints acting as mediators in this process. Empirical evidence gathered through observation supports the Fox–Spector model, indicating that the interaction between situational constraints and behavioral reactions such as interpersonal and organizational deviance, is mediated by emotional response responses, such as anger [39, 75]. This improved theoretical advancement of the earlier frustration-aggression

hypothesis helps to understand workplace incivility initiated by supervisors. As an instance, target employees of supervisor incivility may be hesitant to respond in the same manner, as they may fear further negative responses from the supervisors. Therefore, to vent such frustration, employees engage in other forms of negative behavior to vent the frustration caused by their supervisor's uncivil behavior [95].

The available empirical evidence supports the idea put forth in the Fox and Spector [22] model that an emotional response explains relationship between situational constraints and response behavior. From this perspective, daily exposure to supervisor-initiated incivility may provoke the target subordinate into aggressive actions including verbal attacks and discourteous behaviors toward co-workers, customers, and in family domain [5].

This study theorizes supervisor-initiated incivility as a situational constraint and frustrating event, leading to a target employee becoming a perpetrator to co-workers, customers, and family members [76]. The concrete theoretical and analytical foundation of the model suggests that testing updated iterations of the model could lead to new theoretical insights and provide empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of its variables as leverage points for administrators and personnel experts seeking to reduce the incidence of civil behaviors. For this purpose, the study considers the frustration-aggression hypothesis an appropriate framework for exploring supervisor-initiated incivility as a stressor in explaining behavioral outcomes [52].

Hypotheses development

Supervisor-initiated incivility refers to hostile behavior initiated by a supervisor toward their subordinates, which encompasses both verbal and nonverbal form of uncivil conduct. Example of such behavior may include ridiculing their ideas or contributions, undermining their work or authority, yelling at them or using an aggressive tone, demeaning or belittling them in front of others, or invading the privacy of subordinates by micromanaging or monitoring their activities [34, 95]. Research on supervisor-initiated incivility recently gained researchers attention as it has serious consequences on employees job outcomes (e.g., performance) [38], and researchers pointed out its prevalence in the services industry [84]. However, it is understood that the effect of supervisor-initiated incivility does not remain at the workplace, but possibly travel to non-work domain particularly in the family [51].

Work–family conflict (WFC) is a type of conflict and refers as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually

incompatible in some respect” [10, 20, 28]. The present study contends that supervisor incivility creates spillover effect and causes WFC for two main reasons. First, employees cannot reciprocate supervisor incivility with uncivil behavior due to the structural authority of supervisors. Research suggests that workplace incivility from supervisors is more noticeable when there is a greater hierarchical distance between supervisors and employees. Additionally, this incivility may have spillover effects on the non-work domains of employees, such as their personal lives or relationships outside of work [26]. Second, a victim of supervisor incivility may have to spend extra time, cognitive resources, and energy addressing negative experience even outside of work hours [14]. This can result in employees having less availability and cognitive capacity to address work-related frustrations or cope with family demands by intensifying arguments with family members [53, 94, 98, 101], ultimately leading to WFC [47].

Preliminary research suggests that workplace incivility and job violence are positively intertwined with WFC. Demsky, Ellis, and Fritz [13] found in a recent analysis that hostility and aggression in the workplace contribute to increased difficulties in managing personal/family events and can escalate WFC. For example, if a supervisor is abusive, then it also creates a spillover effect and increases work–family conflict [94]. Similarly, Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, and Whitten [9] found that frustrated events such as supervisors' verbal and nonverbal hostility cause burnout and work–family conflict. Frustration-aggression theory [22] suggested that frustration events instigate different forms of aggressive drive and, subsequently, can provoke individuals to engage in aggressive actions at work (e.g., sabotage team morale) and non-domain (e.g., undermining one's family and WFC) [36].

According to the frustration-aggression hypothesis, a supervisor's uncivil behavior with subordinates can lead either venting of frustration in the workplace or the transmission of displaced hostility to family members through intensified arguments [68], negative emotional states [40], and confrontations [41]. Venting workplace frustration at home is likely because when the provocateur is the supervisor, it is unlikely that employees can strike back due to fear of further abuse [57]. In the frustration-aggression model, supervisor incivility is the precursor to exposure to a non-work contextual constraint (i.e., work–family conflict), which is intervened by an emotive state response (frustration). If employees routinely experience uncivil behavior from supervisors, it is more likely that they will shift this frustration to the family [77]. In light of the above, the study hypothesizes:

H1: Daily supervisor-initiated incivility positively influences subordinates daily work–family conflict.

Recent studies have shown that workplace incivility can have detrimental consequences on employees' well-being. Employees may become more angry and frustrated at work, which could cause them to withdraw from social interactions or personal relationships [50, 58]. Consistent with previous research, workplace aggression has been found to be a significant predictor of WFC [13], highlighting the negative association of incivility and employees' family life. Studies thus far have examined the effects of incivility at work, particularly the supervisor's role in work and non-work domains and found it causes burnout, psychosomatic stress [9, 101], and cynicism [2]. Researchers are urged to investigate the supervisor–co-worker–WFC link, particularly in the service settings because service employees are confronted with severe emotional demands from managers [83]. The relationship between different sources of incivility and WFC has mixed findings [51, 101], highlighting the need for further investigation and a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics play.

Conceptualizing theoretical arguments of the frustration-aggression model in the incivility perspective, supervisor incivility may cause anger, anxiety, and negative behavioral responses (i.e., interpersonal deviance in the workplace) [22, 33]. A subordinate may not be able to reciprocate supervisor-initiated due to structural authority and/or further experience of incivility but instead create spillover or cascade to co-worker(s) and family [21, 93]. Researchers highlighted that victims of incivility engage in bullying in the workplace [36]. The study posits that supervisor incivility leads to negative affective states (such as lethargy and reduced emotional energy), heightened frustration, and increased anxiety among service employees [6]. In such situations, the power differential between the supervisor and subordinate reduces the likelihood of confrontation with supervisors. This increases the likelihood of interpersonal deviance to reduce the frustration from confrontation in the workplace [31, 44]. The potential for detrimental cascade effects of workplace incivility is highlighted by research at the team level, which demonstrates that individuals who experience incivility are more likely to engage in it with others, particularly those who are not routinely targeted [25]. It is equally likely that employees who face supervisor incivility vent their frustration to co-workers due to a reduced or equal power differential, resulting in co-workers reciprocating with similar negative behaviors [34, 79]. This potentially impairs the work–family environment due to accumulated frustration from supervisors to co-workers. Therefore, according to the generalized reciprocity in incivility as an effective behavioral rule, an

employee's daily uncivil behavior toward co-workers can act as a central mediating process to release the frustration at home [93]. Thus, based on the frustration-aggression hypothesis, the study proposes that:

H2: Employees' daily incivility to co-workers will positively mediate between daily supervisor incivility and work–family conflict. Studies related to supervisor mistreatment of subordinates indicate that employees lose their behavioral balance and engage in counterproductive work behavior when they are the recipients of uncivil behavior from supervisors [55, 82]. Similar to customer incivility where customer views as a perpetrator, this study argues that victim of supervisor-initiated incivility may wrangle customers as they do with their co-workers [88]. Such employees might not intended to harm customers, but they could be aggressive with the customers to vent their frustration caused by the supervisor's incivility. Consistent with stress literature and the frustration-aggression hypothesis, supervisor-initiated incivility creates stress at work, triggering reactions such as workplace aggression [46, 92]. Venting frustration to customers by dealing with uncivil behavior increases the likelihood of customer-instigated incivility that drains the employees emotional and psychological resources, increasing the likelihood that employees vent their work frustration at home. Experiencing multiple interpersonal stressor amplifies the reinforcing effect of the stressor, leading to heightened frustration and emotional exhaustion. In simpler terms, the process of emotional regulation depletes the emotional resources of service employees, leading to a state of frustration and anger that negatively impacts customers and their families. Therefore, this study proposes that:

H3: Employee's daily incivility to customers results in increased daily supervisor-initiated incivility and work–family conflict.

Figure 1 shows the hypothesized model and direction of relationships.

Methods

Data and Participants

To test the hypotheses, study researchers contacted frontline banking employees “tellers” working at different branches in Lahore by using an experience sampling design and ecological momentary assessment [35, 80, 85]. The banking profession is a highly stressful and challenging career particularly for frontline employees (i.e., tellers) because their jobs involve high interaction between customers, co-workers and supervisors (e.g., [70, 87, 88]).

The present study utilizes individual research design methodology (level-1) with repeated measures. Researchers recommended that 10–30 clusters with a

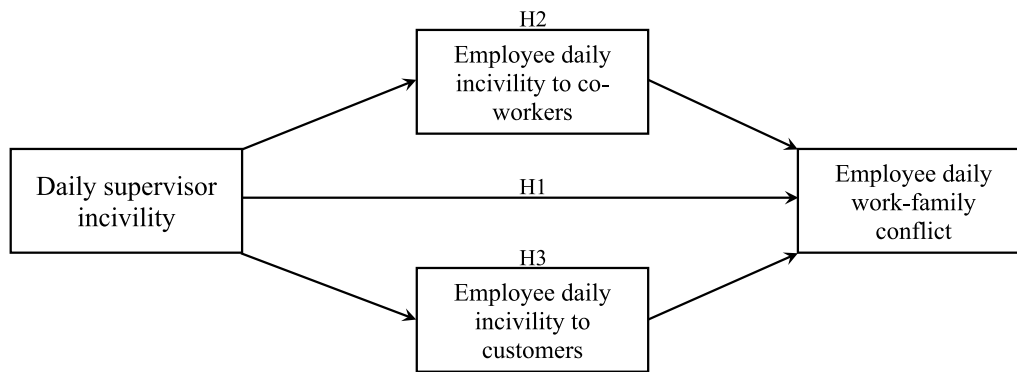


Fig. 1 Hypothesized model

cluster size of 5–30 are adequate for such studies [56, 89]. The study researchers used G*power (v. 3.1.9.2) to estimate the sample size. The study researchers estimated the sample on the bivariate regression with t test (slope $H1 = 0.15$, α error probability = 0.05, power = $1 - \beta$ error probability) [18]. The result of a priori test highlighted that a sample of 472 was enough to achieve the sufficient power (Df = 470, non-centrality parameter = 3.296). It means that the study should engage with a minimum 48 participants for the two consecutive weeks to achieve the desired statistical power. Based on researchers’ recommendations and G*power results, initially 120 tellers from different branches were initially contacted through professional and personal references of the second author and a total of 75 participants were recruited for two consecutive weeks (Monday to Friday). A repeated measure approach was utilized in light of the researcher’s recommendation and based on the sample size, which was above the threshold needed to achieve the desired power according to G*power analysis ($N = 750$, actual power ≥ 0.80) [35].

Participation was voluntary and without financial reward. Nevertheless, participants were informed that the results of this study could enhance the overall effectiveness of the organization. Each participant provided informed consent after being fully briefed on the research goals and purpose prior to participation. Furthermore, data confidentiality and respondent anonymity were ensured.

Due to the nature of the study and the demographics of the participants, a paper-and-pencil daily survey was deemed more appropriate than a web survey. The participants were employees in banks in Pakistan, where internet access and computer literacy may vary widely among employees. Furthermore, the banks in Pakistan often use intranet systems that are restricted for communication

outside of the organization, making a web survey logistically difficult. Additionally, the use of *paper-and-pencil* surveys allowed for a more personal touch, as the second author was able to remind participants daily to complete the survey at two specific points in the day. The survey was conducted out in English language as it is an official language in Pakistan and serves as the medium for all written communication in banks, making the paper-and-pencil format more accessible and familiar to participants. Demographic data revealed that 48% of the sample were male and 39% were female. 44% of the sample were between the ages of 20–35 years, 41% were between 36 and 51 years, and 15% were above 52 years. 94.7% of the sample have university degrees, and only 5.3% have a higher secondary or intermediate degree.

Measures

In this study, supervisor incivility was defined as any uncivil act initiated by a supervisor, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal hostile behaviors such as demeaning, ridiculing, and yelling, or invading subordinates’ privacy [34, 95]. *Supervisor incivility* was measured through a 15-item scale adapted from the abusive supervision scale developed by Tepper [94]. Although the abusive supervision scale was originally designed to measure abusive behaviors by supervisors, our use of this scale is for measuring supervisor incivility for several reasons. First, our definition of supervisor incivility aligns with the definition used by Tepper et al. [95] and Hoobler & Brass [34], which includes verbal and non-verbal hostile behavior directed by supervisors toward subordinates. This similarity in definition suggests that the abusive supervision scale may be a suitable measure for supervisor incivility as well.

Second, recent studies (e.g., [4, 86]) have measured the perceived supervisor incivility using a 4-item scale adapted from customer/co-worker scale developed

by Sliter and Jex [87] that directly collinear with other variables customer and co-workers incivility in our model. In addition, the recently used scale was limited to few behavioral aspects, such as rude, disrespectful, or condescending behaviors toward subordinates; the 15-item scale developed by Tepper [94] specifically captures supervisor behavior and comprehensive measure supervisor incivility. Third, Mitchell and Ambrose [59] research demonstrated a positive correlation between the abusive supervision scale and measures of incivility, indicating that the scale may be a suitable measure of supervisor incivility. Finally, we adapted the scale to fit our specific research question and sample, which helped to establish the validity and reliability of the scale in our study.

Respondents completed the related questionnaire after the end of the workday, and responses were recorded in a binary format where participants were asked to report the experience of the supervisor’s incivility on that day. A sample item is “Today, my supervisor put me down in front of others”. $\alpha = 0.79$.

Work–family conflict was measured through a five-item scale adapted from Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian [64]. The responses were recorded on a seven-point anchor. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaire the following day particularly before the beginning of the workday. In addition, a text message was sent fifteen minutes before the start of the office day to remind participants to complete the questionnaire which focused on time spent at home after work. A sample item is “The demands of my work yesterday interfered with my home and family life”. $\alpha = 0.83$.

Employee-initiated incivility to customers was measured through a 10-item customer incivility scale developed by Burnfield, Clark, Devendorf, & Jex, (2004). This rated the co-worker on a binary format. A sample question is “Today, your colleague showed irritated or impatient behaviour with customers”. $\alpha = 0.88$.

Employee incivility to co-worker was measured through a 7-item scale of Cortina et al. [12]. The scale was adapted to measure the daily disrespect, rudeness, and condescending attitude of participants toward co-workers. This scale was rated by the co-worker at the end of the day. A sample item is “today, your colleague put co-workers down or was condescending to other co-workers?” $\alpha = 0.91$.

Analytical strategy and hypotheses testing

In the first step, descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliability were checked through Psych package in R [78]. Table 1 shows within-person correlations and descriptive statistics, supervisor incivility positively related to employees’ incivility toward customers ($r = 0.21$), employees’ incivility toward co-workers ($r = 0.18$), and work–family conflict ($r = 0.12$). The intra-class correlations of three variables were adequate (ICC: Supervisor incivility = 0.25, incivility to co-worker = 0.42, WFC = 0.93) except customer incivility = 0.03. However, Bliese [7] demonstrates that strong relationships can be detected even if the ICC is low.

Results

Multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) (1–1–1) was used for hypotheses testing through Mplus (v. 7.11) [74]. MSEM possesses the capability to decompose the variance into latent components within and between levels, allowing for an independent model where these variance components can be assessed through structural and measurement models [54, 61]. Within a level, multilevel structural equation modeling leverages to define variables with random intercepts and slopes, which vary across teams. By utilizing this approach, MSEM effectively addresses the issues of inflated variance within and between levels, offering more accurate estimation of indirect path effects through the decomposition of components variance within and between levels [74, 100]. Similar models have already been tested with multilevel

Table 1 Correlations and descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	1.71	0.71	–						
2. Gender	1.52	0.50	0.02	–					
3. Education	3.28	0.56	0.41**	–0.19	–				
4. Supervisor Incivility	8.77	1.54	0.00	0.08	–0.01	–			
5. Incivility to customers	6.62	1.42	0.04	–0.02	0.06	0.21**	–		
6. Incivility to co-workers	3.92	1.05	–0.07	–0.08	0.16	0.18**	0.10**	–	
7. Work–family conflict	4.96	0.98	–0.16	0.17	0.01	0.12**	0.08**	0.06**	–

structural equation modeling and published in reputed outlets (e.g., [62, 63, 65, 66]).

The results of the direct path show that daily supervisor incivility increases daily work–family conflict (estimate=2.756, $p \leq 0.000$), supported by hypothesis 1. Further, results of the indirect path indicate that employees’ incivility positively mediates between daily supervisor incivility and work–family conflict (estimates=4.144, $p \leq 0.000$), lending support to hypothesis 2. Likewise, the analysis revealed that employees utilize daily incivility toward customers due to the uncivil behavior from supervisors (estimate=0.174, $p \leq 0.05$) but does not mediate between supervisor incivility and work–family conflict (estimate=0.079, $p = n.s.$). Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Table 2 shows the complete results of direct and indirect effects.

Discussion and implications

The findings revealed, as hypothesized, that employees who are frequently exposed to supervisor uncivilized behaviors experience high WFC. Supervisor-instigated incivility evokes negative emotions and frustration that invades victims’ non-work domain and elicits work–family conflict [1, 24, 90]. While limited research has established a causal relationship between supervisor-initiated incivility and work–family conflict, there remains a gap in our conceptual understanding of the behavioral mechanisms that connect supervisor incivility to both work-related and non-work-related domains.

Findings of the present study extend the existing frustration-aggression hypothesis, which was tested, earlier by Fox and Spector [22] and explain that supervisor-initiated incivility is detrimental to business. Responding to supervisors with incivility is a situational constraint for employees, but interpersonal deviance is a possible outcome Fox and Spector [22]. Mistreatment from supervisors leaves employees more psychologically vulnerable and frustrated, which is not only a threat to employees’ well-being, but has a negative effect on the business and home environment at the same time.

Relationships between supervisor-initiated incivility with employee-initiated incivility and co-worker and customers and a further spillover in the family domain indicate a potential role of culture. Though the study did not explicitly account for the role of culture, previous research suggests that an employee in a high power distance culture is less likely to retaliate against the supervisor resulting in an accumulation of frustration which they vent in the other domains [16, 48].

Our study supported the relationship between supervisor-initiated incivility and work–family conflict, which in turn resulted in employee-initiated incivility toward co-workers. This finding highlights the negative impact of workplace incivility on both employees’ family life and their interactions with colleagues, underscoring the importance of addressing and preventing workplace incivility. This is because engaging in deviant behavior particularly toward co-workers, allows for a displacement of aggression and a *tit-for-tat* (spiral of deviance) without direct retaliation against the supervisor [59]. Such hostility toward co-workers in a high power distance culture, as reported in the literature, is because of the unequal power distribution between supervisors and subordinates [43].

The hypothesis on supervisor-initiated incivility and work–family conflict resulting in employee-initiated incivility toward co-workers was not supported. A closer look at Table 2 revealed that employees initiate incivility toward customers because of the supervisor’s uncivil behavior but the path of employee-initiated incivility toward customers was insignificant. It is plausible that Asian service organizations may exhibit a prevalent culture of incivility toward customers [8]. As a result, acts of incivility originating from various parts of the organization increases further incivility and to become a norm of organization [60]. These findings align with the concept of a *spiral of incivility* discussed in previous research on internal organizational incivility [3, 69]. This concept suggests that incivility can lead to a negative spiral in which one act of incivility can trigger subsequent acts of

Table 2 Direct and indirect effects

Path	Estimates	S.E
Supervisor incivility → Employee incivility to co-worker	0.584***	0.07
Employee incivility to co-workers → WFC	7.094***	0.65
Employee incivility to customers → WFC	0.456 ^{n.s.}	0.97
Supervisor incivility → Work–family conflict	2.756**	0.98
Supervisor incivility → Employee incivility to customers	0.174**	0.07
Supervisor incivility → Employee incivility to co-worker → WFC	4.144***	0.70
Supervisor incivility → Employee incivility to customers → WFC=	0.079 ^{n.s.}	0.17

75 clusters (N = 750), WFC = work to family conflict, *** $p < 0.000$, ** $p < 0.001$, n.s. = not significant

incivility among employees. Our findings also align with the targets similarity model of mistreatment [45, 67], which explains how employees who experience mistreatment from one source may respond by engaging in similar mistreatment toward others who are similar to the source. Together, these findings underscore the importance of preventing and addressing workplace incivility to prevent the negative cascading effects on employees and the organization as a whole.

The current study offers a theoretical foundation based on the frustration-aggression model proposed by Fox and Spector [22] and demonstrates that supervisor incivility, as a negative workplace experience, makes perpetrator of incivility to customers and co-workers. Our findings contribute to the conflict and organizational behavior literature by elucidating how employee responses to supervisor incivility are utilized to displace aggression [67]. Prior studies have established a direct link between supervisor incivility and work–family dynamics by examining the role of emotions as a source mechanism, as proposed by the conservation of resources theory [101]. However, this study with multiscore responses from service employees presented another view through the frustration-aggression hypothesis to understand the rarely discussed nexus of supervisor incivility–WFC. In addition, the study shows that employees' displaced aggression within work and non-work domains can be detrimental to organizational productivity and employee well-being simultaneously.

Organizations and human resource professionals can take advantage of this study and take a number of measures to reduce the likelihood of uncivil behavior. A comprehensive hiring and promotion process of hiring should include mechanisms to filter out people with negative characteristics such as autocratic, narcissistic, manipulative or intimidating at the entry level [11]. Given the negative impact of workplace incivility on productivity and well-being, it is important that organizations should take proactive measures to prevent and address such behaviors. One effective approach may be to conduct training programs for existing employees to develop their conscientiousness, as research has shown that high levels of conscientious employees are better equipped to handle workplace incivility from co-workers, customers, or supervisors [44, 91]. These employees are more likely to remain focused, productive, and engaged in their work, even in the face of rude comments or other forms of mistreatment. By investing in the development of conscientiousness among employees, organizations can foster a more positive and productive workplace culture while also supporting the well-being and success of their employees. Likewise, organizations should prioritize employees' mental

well-being because it strongly influences performance. Supervisor incivility can potentially decrease employees' morale and detrimental to psychological well-being [38] and encourage employees to engage in deviant behavior [73]. An environment free from incivility can create a mutual win; therefore, organizations should invest in managers through emotion regulation training. Several emotional regulation strategies are identified and can be useful in this context, particularly for employees with supervisory roles (e.g., situation selection and modification, antecedent-focused emotion regulation, attentional deployment) and even response-focused emotion regulation strategy [29]. Such training can be delivered irrespective of organizations operating in western or non-western cultures because increased levels of incivility have a detrimental effect on the subsequent behavioral reactions of service workers, thus reducing their positive job outcomes [17, 31]. Improving managers' emotional regulations can help maintain employees' psychological well-being and performance standards, particularly inform a leader–member perspective [27]. Researchers have suggested that organizations can reduce supervisors' uncivil behavior toward subordinates through meetings where supervisors and subordinates sit together and discuss their performance goals and ways to achieve them [86].

In order to prevent and address workplace incivility, it is crucial for organizations to take a strong stance and send a clear message that such behavior will not be tolerated. One effective approach may be to implement a zero tolerance policy for uncivil behavior, regardless of whether the individual is a supervisor or employee. This policy should be communicated clearly to all employees, with specific examples provided of what constitutes uncivil behavior. By establishing such a policy, organizations can create a more positive and respectful workplace culture, while also promoting employee well-being and productivity. Additionally, a zero tolerance policy can help to prevent the negative cascade effects of incivility, as discussed in previous research. Overall, a zero tolerance policy can be an effective tool for promoting a healthy and productive workplace environment. Strict action against such behavior will discourage individuals, particularly managers, to avoid such behaviors and de-emphasize status differences [73]. By implementing zero tolerance for incivility, an organization can create an environment of mutual respect where the supervisor–subordinate can develop a healthy working relationship.

Limitations and future research directions

The results of this present study should be taken with caution. First, there exists a possibility of reverse causality. The sample was adequate to perform the analysis.

However, a larger sample size from diverse industries could provide greater insights. For example, surface acting is common in healthcare, particularly in doctors and nurses, and displayed rules can increase individual negative behavior, including turnover [96]. Therefore, it is likely that displayed rules can aggravate the work–family conflict. Second, these data were collected from Pakistan, a country with high power distance, characterized by a saturated labor market and fewer job opportunities are available. However, perceived employability can keep employees from engaging in deviant behavior and switching jobs because of supervisor incivility [37]. Third, the study explored how employees engage in deviant behavior toward customers and co-workers because of supervisor incivility and its impact on an employee's personal life. However, a potential avenue for future researchers is to see if a reversal relationship exists between family–work conflict and employee incivility toward customers and co-workers within the frustration-aggression model. Similarly, the study has not accounted for the role of personality (supervisor or subordinate) that may be crucial to handling stressful events (supervisor incivility). For example, employees, particularly from a gender perspective, who are high on psychological hardiness (a personality trait) are better able to cope with daily incivility and stressful situations throughout the day [23]. Future researchers may investigate the role of personality as a boundary condition in the same model.

Conclusion

The managerial role is crucial in today's high pressure working conditions particularly in the services industry. This study showed that rude behavior from a supervisor is detrimental to an organization because subordinates may transfer the unsociable behavior to co-workers and customers that they receive from their supervisor. This aggression from the supervisor, and the resulting frustration among subordinates, can be reduced through behavioral training of supervisors, so a healthy relationship between supervisor–subordinate can be initiated. However, it is the responsibility of the policymakers and/or human resource professionals to identify and timely address the behavioral issues within an organization. Thus far, workplace incivility has mainly been studied in generic terms, but we hope that this study will spur research by looking at outcomes of specific sources of workplace incivility rather than using work incivility as a general construct.

Abbreviation

WFC Work–family conflict

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Author contributions

HI was involved in idea generation, designing the research, writing the manuscript, and analyzing and interpreting the data. NB was involved in data curation and writing. TS contributed to idea generation, writing, and reviewing the manuscript. All authors reviewed the manuscript before submission.

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Availability of data and materials

The dataset used and/or analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval of this study has been obtained from the Internal Reviewer Board of Riphah School of Business & Management, Riphah International University, Lahore Campus. The informed consent from the respondents was obtained.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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