

Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion in the Relationship of Work Incivility and Workplace Deviant Behavior

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Abstract

Workplace incivility has emerged as an important organizational concern because subtle forms of interpersonal mistreatment may generate psychological strain and contribute to undesirable employee behaviors. This study examines the relationship between workplace incivility and workplace deviant behavior, with emotional exhaustion proposed as a mediating mechanism. The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design and collected empirical data from managers/owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan. The target SMEs were identified from enterprises listed with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and SMEs registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on standardized measurement scales and a five-point Likert scale. A total of 466 usable responses were obtained from 711 distributed questionnaires. The sample size was determined with consideration of the requirements of the proposed mediation model. The findings indicate that workplace incivility has a significant positive relationship with workplace deviant behavior and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion is significantly associated with workplace deviant behavior. The results also confirm the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between workplace incivility and workplace deviant behavior. Thus, all four proposed hypotheses were supported. The study contributes to the organizational behavior literature by explaining how workplace incivility may translate into deviant behavior through employees' emotional exhaustion, particularly within the context of Pakistani SMEs. The findings provide implications for SME

managers and owners regarding the importance of reducing uncivil workplace interactions and addressing employee emotional strain to minimize workplace deviance.

Keywords: Workplace Incivility; Emotional Exhaustion; Workplace Deviant Behavior; SMEs, Pakistan.

Introduction

More and more organizations are getting aware that the work environment has a significant impact on employees' conduct and health (Arboh et al., 2026). While much focus has been paid to more serious forms of negative interpersonal behavior, including bullying, harassment and aggression in the work place, there are also relatively subtle forms of negative interpersonal behavior which can have important consequences for employees and organizations (Williams, 1997). Work incivility (WI) is one such behavior, defined as low-intensity acts of disrespect, discourtesy or rudeness that violate commonly accepted behavioral norms at work (Khan, 2026). This could be ignoring a colleague, speaking disrespectfully, making demeaning remarks, interrupting others, and excluding someone from workplace interaction alike. Each of these behaviors in isolation might seem harmless, but when they become common, they can make the work environment a stressful and psychologically unhealthy atmosphere (Setiawan, 2026).

The issue of WI is gaining significance because it can have lasting consequences, beyond mere feelings of dissatisfaction and discomfort in the workplace. A pattern of disrespectful treatment by employees could lead to feelings of undervalued, excluded and exhausted employees (Khalid et al., 2026). Especially, if the incivility is chronic, workers may have to expend significant mental effort to regulate their negative emotions, to deal with the stress of relationships and with respectful behaviors. Repeatedly drawing on emotional resources can lead to emotional exhaustion (EE), where workers feel emotionally and mentally drained from their tasks (Eman et al., 2025). EE is especially relevant because it is a more serious state than just being tired: it means feeling emotionally depleted and lacking of energy to cope with constant demands at work (Chaves-Montero et al., 2025). A more concerning association to WI and employee outcomes is its possible impact on workplace deviant behavior (WDB). WDB is defined as any voluntary employee behavior that is counter to behaviors expected in an organization and may damage either the organization, its employees or both (Küçükali, Bas, & Tarsuslu, 2026). These may include deliberate decreases in performance, breaches of company guidelines, but can also involve interpersonal issues, including being hostile, verbally aggressive or treating others badly. There are several reasons why employees may behave defiantly at work, but the negative interpersonal treatment that they experience and the psychological strain they endure may be important in determining their reaction (Varga, Van Vaerenbergh, & Debrabandere, 2026). If disrespect is pervasive and consistent, staff could become frustrated, resentful or feel that they are not being treated fairly, increasing the likelihood of them acting in ways that are not acceptable in the workplace.

EE is a potentially important pathway by which work incivility can lead to deviant behavior. Exponents of repeated incivility may slowly deplete emotional and psychological resources (Cao et al., 2026). When these resources are depleted, staff members might struggle more and more to keep their emotions under control, stay motivated, and handle issues in the workplace in a positive way (Andersen et al., 2025). As a result, there may be low employee engagement, low expectations met by employees, or negative interpersonal behavior. According to Peng et al., (2016), WDB do not only appear to be a response to WI; they may also result from a workplace situation that has been emotionally stressful due to the prolonged experience of WI.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is a useful theory to explain these relationships. According to COR theory, people try to gain, maintain, and defend valuable resources - such as emotional energy, self-esteem, social support, and psychological well-being (Hobfoll, 2011). Stress happens when these resources are threatened, lost or inadequate to respond to the demands of the workplace (Hobfoll & Freedy, 2017). Disrespectful behavior at work may be considered a resource-threatening experience because employees need to mobilize psychological and emotional resources to deal with the stress of working with others who are rudeness (Sommovigo et al., 2026). Exposure to any such experience may then result in emotional resource depletion, as manifested in EE. If employees feel their resources are constantly under threat and are emotionally exhausted, they may react defensively or compensatory, by engaging in actions that may be counter to both interpersonal and organizational norms.

Although there has been increasing research interest in WI, there is still a need to understand the psychological pathway leading to incivility's role in deviant behaviors at work. Previous studies have shown that WI can be detrimental to employee attitudes, well-being, and behavioral outcomes (Mastroianni & Storberg-Walker, 2014; Hellgren et al., 1997; Pires, 2025), and that EE has been shown to have a negative effect on employee behaviors on their own. But, considering EE as a mediation process can offer a more complete understanding of how relatively benign interpersonal mistreatment can ultimately lead to more negative behavioral outcomes. This is significant especially because the incivilities may be trivial at micro-level but taken as a whole are insidious and may go unnoticed by the organization. It is also significant for the managers to understand this process. Organizations can be very concerned with serious misconduct and neglect to pay much attention to the day-to-day interactions between people. But when people experience the same situation over and over again, it can begin to erode their emotional health, and that can have a negative impact on their actions in the workplace. A helpful way for managers to recognize that the impacts of incivility can be subtle and take time is to understand that it is a mechanism that can be identified. Successful organizational interventions must therefore target not only instances of overt behaviors that may occur at work, but also the common interpersonal behaviors that can be the cause of employees' EE.

Based on this, the current study aims to develop a model that links WI to WDB with the mediation of EE. Specifically, the research analyzes whether employee exposure

to incivility leads to increased EE, whether EE leads to increased incivility in the workplace, and whether EE is a mediator between incivility at work and deviant behavior. The study is based on the COR theory, and strives to present a more complex analysis of the relationship between negative interpersonal experiences and their effect on the employees' psychological resources and their subsequent behavior. The results can also help inform the body of knowledge on WI, employee well-being, and workplace deviance, as well as help inform the practice of organizations looking to develop healthier, respectful, productive work environment.

Literature Review

Workplace Incivility

WI has become an important issue in organization behavior because even minor behaviors of interpersonal relations can have a tremendous impact on employees and organizations (Alriyami, & Kampouris, 2026). WI is behavior that is typically interpersonal, low intensity, rudeness, lack of consideration, and/or discourtesy in the workplace (Chakraborty et al., 2025). While incivility is often associated with a clear intent to harm, this is not always the case in more severe cases of workplace mistreatment. This may be the failure to include an employee in the conversation, using an inappropriate tone, interrupting others, speaking to someone rudely, or completely ignoring a colleague, among other things (Morgan, 2025). Even though the incidents might seem unimportant, exposure to these behaviors can over time develop an unwelcome and stressful work climate.

One key element of WI is the relatively vague definition of what it is. Sometimes an employee won't know if a specific act was a deliberate affront to the dignity of the patient or just a lack of care, pressure or communication and this can make it difficult to decide on whether a restriction or limitation is appropriate. This type of confusion can make it very challenging to deal with an incident of incivility because the individual may not want to confront the perpetrator or report it to management. Meanwhile, repeated experiences can lead to the workplace's perception of being unfair, disrespectful and psychologically unsafe. Therefore, the experience of incivility in the workplace can be seen not as a one-off incident, but as a sustained long-term interpersonal experience that can influence how employees perceive their workplace (Qin et al., 2025).

According to Alnoor et al., (2025, iIncivility in the workplace can come from a variety of people, such as supervisors, coworkers, subordinates, customers and other people within the organization. Supervisor-invicted behavior may be especially harmful because supervisors have the authority and influence over employees' work experiences. Likewise, co-worker incivility can damage relationships and decrease employee satisfaction with their place in the organization (Geldart et al., 2025). In either scenario, staff may need to expend a lot of emotional and cognitive effort to deal with these negative exchanges while also fulfilling their regular work obligations. Past studies have linked WI to numerous employee characteristics such as decreased job satisfaction (khan et al., 2021; Hendryadi et al, 2026), less organizational commitment (Choi et al., 2026; Rehman et al., 2026), psychological withdrawal

(Schilpzand et al., 2016), psychological distress (Islam et al., 2026), decreased performance (Omotoye et al., 2025), and negative workplace behaviors (Dongmo & Tanova, 2025). The consequences imply that incivility is not only a social or interpersonal issue, but an organizational problem which may impact employee attitudes, well-being, and behavior (Alriyami & Kampouris, 2026). Thus, it is an essential factor for betterment of organizational performance.

Emotional Exhaustion

EE is a key aspect of psychological strain among employees and is likely of major concern when exploring the impact of adverse work experiences (Ilyas et al., 2025). It is a condition of emotional and psychological exhaustion that occurs when a worker has been overwhelmed by work-related stressors and demands for an extended period of time (Seidler et al., 2024). Emotionally drained workers may feel like they do not have enough resources to manage their work, relationships and everyday situations. It is not just physical tiredness; it is a more profound emotional tiredness.

EE can be a result of work environments that involve interpersonal conflict, disrespect, excessive demands and poor social relationship (Ilyas et al., 2025). Aside from their office work, employees must also control their emotions and conduct themselves in a professional manner when handling tough situations (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). If negative interactions are repeated, the employee may have to expend more psychological effort to manage frustration, to avoid conflicts, to keep the professional relationships intact, and to preserve their self-esteem (Abdelghani et al., 2025). These recurrent requests over time might lead to emotional fatigue.

The connection between incivility in the workplace and EE can be understood from the resource perspective. There are very few resources available to the employees for emotional and psychological coping, which are required for functioning effectively (Zampetakis & Gkorezis, 2023). Incivility poses a risk to these resources because it adds to the demands employees face in their workplace relationships (Gu et al., 2024). An employee who is repeatedly treated disrespectfully might be preoccupied for a long time with the incident, doubt others' intentions, try to suppress negative thoughts/sensations, or expect further disrespectful interactions from others. These can slowly be emotionally exhaustion.

There is also the literature to indicate that EE can impact on how employees react to subsequent workplace situations. It is evident from literature that if employees have sufficient emotional resources, they can be more likely to ignore minor negative experiences, control their emotions, and act in a positive way (like see: Khan, Li, Akram, & Akram, 2023; Lapalme-Pertuzé, 2023; Li, Chen, & Yuan, 2025; Ng & Yang, 2024). However, as people get emotionally drained, they may be less able to withstand further stress. This can make things more frustrating than they were before. EE thus can prove to be a significant psychological pathway by which working stress can affect employee actions.

Workplace Deviant Behavior

WDBs are actions that are taken by workers that are voluntary, which go against the expectations of the organization and that could cause some harm to the organization or to the workers themselves (Abbasi & Amran, 2023). This can be demonstrated by deliberately lowering the work done (Kim et al., 2023), ignoring rules set by the organization (Popescu et al., 2025), wasting of organizational resources (Abbasi & Amran, 2023), the conscious delay of work (Abbasi et al., 2025), aggressive behavior towards co-workers (Chen & Wu, 2022), the dissemination of harmful information and any other actions that run counter to organizational standards of behavior (Popescu et al., 2025). Deviance in the workplace may be directed at the person or the organization.

The significance of WDB is that organizations rely on the cooperation, trust, productivity, and respectful relationship that is fostered through the adherence to formal and informal norms by employees (Cortez et al., 2026). The effects of deviant behaviors on employees could reach beyond the employee. Interpersonal deviance can destroy relationships between coworkers and organizational deviance can decrease organizational efficiency, organizational costs and organizational performance (Abas et al., 2025). Furthermore, deviant behaviors may affect other workers through the creation of a negative workplace culture and deviant behavior becomes more acceptable.

There are several possible causes of workplace deviance. Employees can act in a deviant way due to dissatisfaction (Haider & Yean, 2023), perceived injustice (Huang et al., 2025), interpersonal conflict (Kundi et al., 2023), stress (Garg et al., 2025), frustration or negative treatment by others (Chen & Wu, 2022; Kim, Cohen, & Panter, 2023). Sometimes, deviant behavior is a way to make the world feel more of a level playing field, or may be a reaction to a perceived form of mistreatment (Kim et al., 2023). If, for instance, someone feels that another employee or supervisor has been disrespectful to them, they might react in one or more of the following ways: withdrawal, decreased performance, hostility, or some other negative response. The workplace deviance, therefore, can be a behavior reaction to negative workplace experiences of the employees and not just a manifestation of their personality traits.

There are multiple factors that affect EE. One of them is WI as incivility is an interpersonal stressor that can continually deplete the emotional resources of employees (Raza et al., 2023). Staff who have been treated disrespectfully may feel devalued, rejected and powerless to change the situation. This can lead to frustration and stress when repeated. The employee will be required to carry out their duties, but additionally deal with the emotional effects of negative interpersonal interactions.

According to the CRT, people strive to acquire, maintain, and defend valuable resources. Emotional energy, psychological health, social support and positive interpersonal relationships are all considered to be valuable resources (Chen et al., 2024). The incidence of WI poses a threat to these resources through its negative social interactions and demands more emotional resources from employees in dealing with it. If resources are not replenished or increased through the loss process, employees can be emotionally exhausted (Aziz et al., 2025; Shahid & Kundi, 2022).

The connection between this relationship and the wider literature on the relationship between WI and its psychological effects are also supported. Also, research has shown that EE can be an important mechanism through which incivility relates to several employee outcomes (like see: Parray et al., 2023; Shahzad et al., 2023; and Yan et al., 2023). Thus, workers who are exposed to more WI should feel more emotionally exhausted.

EE could also impact employees' ability and willingness to meet organizational demands. Emotionally exhausted employees may not have psychological resources to control their emotions, regulate their emotions, or solve problems creatively (Opoku et al., 2023; Qian et al., 2024). As fatigue builds, workers can become impatient, disinterested, and more disposed to negative reactions to workplace demands. This means that EE can raise the risk of behaviors that are in opposition to the organizational or interpersonal norm.

On the other hand, if the employee is emotionally exhausted, they may resort to deviant behaviors to deal with the frustration they are feeling. Employees might simply withdraw from work (Tang et al., 2024), neglect duties (Rubaca & Munir, 2025) or be socially unarguable (Eman et al., 2025) to respond to issues in their work environment. This can give employees a temporary outlet to relieve emotional stress or to release frustration, but can cause further issues for the employee and organization.

Another theory is that EE decreases the employees' capacity to control their conduct. Employees need to regulate their emotional responses, be patient, work collaboratively with others, and adhere to organizational expectations in the workplace, even when facing stress. This ability can be undermined by emotional fatigue. This can make workers more likely to act impulsively or negatively in response to other stressors in the workplace.

The available literature indicate that WI might affect the WDB via EE. The proposed relationship is that an uncivil interaction does not always lead to deviant behavior by employees. Rather, negative interpersonal experiences can impact employees psychologically by draining them of their emotions, which can in turn affect their ability to perform their job. Rather, multiple negative interpersonal experiences can be psychologically draining, depleting emotional resources and thus impacting the ability to do the employee job. When employees are emotionally drained, they may be less likely to be able to respond to workplace needs in a constructive manner and more likely to respond negatively or in a deviant way.

CRT is of particular value to understanding how this mediated relationship occurs. WI is a potential source of resource loss. Staff have the responsibility to utilize emotional and psychological resources to manage their response to the disrespectful interaction, to be professional and to continue to carry out their responsibilities. Ongoing resource depletion can lead to emotional depletion. When staff feel their resources are becoming significantly low, they can engage in defensive or protective behaviors. Deviant behavior in the workplace can thus be one of the outcomes of the growing depletion of resources.

The proposed model also offers a helpful explanation as to why relatively small interpersonal behaviors can have large organizational consequences. Incivility can seem less of an issue than bullying, harassment or outright aggressiveness. It is often-repeated use can lead to a building up of the burden. EE is the process by which repeated experiences can be manifest in behavioral consequences. Recent studies also suggest that EE can be a key factor in the downward spiral of the effects of WI, as well, suggesting that exhaustion might be a tipping point in employees' reactions to negative workplace interactions.

Thus the existence literature suggests that WI, EE, and WDB are closely related experiences in the workplace. The negative consequences of WI are interpersonal stress, a threat to psychological resources for the employees, EE, which is the result of the psychological resources being depleted, and WDB, which is a possible behavioral outcome of the prolonged stress. Therefore, it is important to examine EE as a mediator to get a fuller understanding of the relationship between WI and WDB. The proposed structure helps to deepen the understanding of how interpersonal problems can build up over time to affect employee behavior, and how seemingly insignificant interpersonal issues can become significant. It also emphasizes that culture should build safe and respectful workplace environments that allows staff to have adequate social and psychological resources to manage routine workplace tasks.

Based on above discussion, model is given as under:

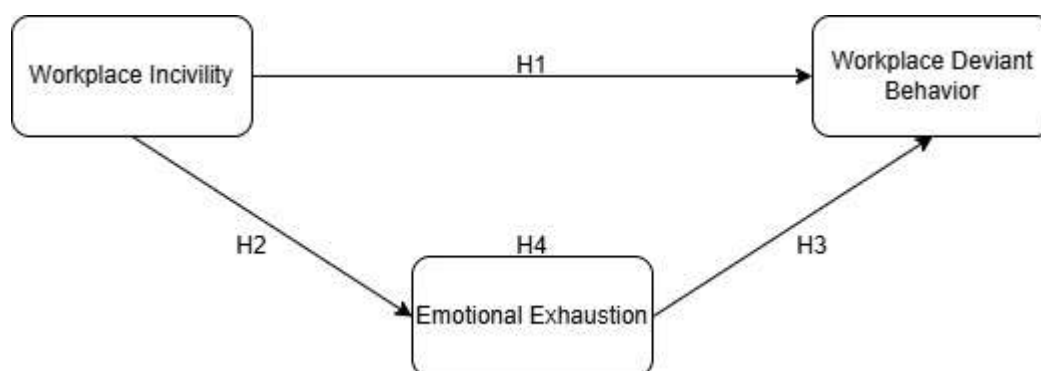


Figure 1, *Model of the study.*

Methodology

This is an empirical study, which used cross sectional research design to test the following proposed relationships among the study variables. The data were gathered from the managers/owners of different SMEs of Pakistan. Standardized scales were used to collect data to ensure consistency and validity of the measurement. The sample was selected from those SMEs listed with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and SMEs registered with SMEDA. From 21 October 2025 to 22 December 2025, data collection was conducted. Because the study utilized the mediation model power analysis was performed to decide on an appropriate sample size for the study that would yield statistically significant results.

Following the suggestions of Wolf et al. (2013), 450 responses were needed to test the proposed mediation model.

During the first round of data collection, 511 questionnaires were sent to the targeted respondents, with 357 questionnaires being completely filled out. A second round of data collection was undertaken to achieve the desired sample size, in which another 200 questionnaires were sent out. In this second phase, 109 questionnaires were completed. As a result, a total of 466 responses were received and used in the study, with an overall rate of about 65%.

Data analysis was done by creating composite variables through 'Construct Variable' function in SPSS v25. Finally, for subsequent analyses, the mean score of each measurement item was computed. The validity of the data for factor analysis was examined by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy before further statistical analysis. The KMO value obtained in the analysis was 0.78, which means that the data was suitable for factor analysis as it had an acceptable level of sampling adequacy.

Existing studies were used as a basis to develop standardized scales. For quantitative data, a closed-ended questionnaire will be created that use a five-point Likert scale, with a 1 denoting strongly disagree and a 5 denoting strongly agree. Scale adapted from the study conducted by Tsuno et al. (2017) was used to assess WI. The EE scale was adapted from the scale designed by Ala et al. (2024). The study of Galperin (2012) was used to develop the scale to measure WDB.

Analysis and results

Data analysis

Data analysis in this research using descriptive statistical analysis technique then calculated SEM using Smart PLS software. The SEM analysis was carried out in two steps: Firstly, measurement model was evaluated to test the reliability and validity of constructs used in this study, and secondly, structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs in this study.

Table 1, Descriptive Analysis

Sample Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent%
Gender	Male	294	82.12
	Female	64	17.87
Age	25-30	16	4.46
	31-40	245	68.43
	41-50	86	24.02
	51 and Above	11	3.07
	undergraduate	153	42.73
Education	Graduate	128	35.75
	Post graduate	77	21.50
Experience	Under 10 Years	76	21.22
	10-20 Years	202	56.42

20-30 Years	43	12.01
30 Above	37	10.33
Total	358	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The respondents were male and female of various SMEs from FPCCI and SMEDA. The number of male and female respondents was 294 and 64, respectively, and the difference between these numbers is statistically significant. Another factor of interest was the age. The 25-30 age group is the second largest group of the respondents which was approximately 4.46%. The age group 31-40 years has the highest percentage (68.43%) of the respondents followed by age group 41-50 years with 24.02% of the respondents. The respondents aged above 50 years were only 3.07% of the total number of respondents. 358 answers were given for qualifications. Among the respondents, 153 had an undergraduate qualification, 128 had graduated and 77 had post graduate qualifications. As far as professional experience is concerned, 21.22% respondents had less than 10 years of experience and the maximum percentage (56.42%) had 10-20 years of experience. At the same time, 10.33% possessed 30 years or more of professional experience and 12.01% of the respondents had 20 to 30 years of experience in their profession. demographic characteristic. About 4.46% of the respondents were in the age group 25 to 30 years. The respondents were mostly 31-40 years (68.43%) followed by 24.02% that were 41-50 years. There were only 11 respondents (3.07%) aged over 50 years. Educational qualifications were the topic of 358 responses. Of the respondents, 153 had undergraduate training, 128 obtained graduation and 77 acquired postgraduate training. From the perspective of professional experience, the highest number of respondents (56.42%) had 10 to 20 years of experience and, 21.22%, had less than 10 years of experience. Also, 12.01 percent had 20–30 years of experience, while 10.33 percent of the respondents had 30 years or more of professional experience.

This study made the evaluation of the measurement model based on the steps recommended by Hair et al. (2014). The four criteria were evaluated are indicator reliability (outer loadings), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted (AVE)), and discriminant validity. The Hair et al. (2017) criteria that are used for acceptable reliability levels are the indicator loadings (0.70 or higher) and the composite reliability levels (0.50 or higher for acceptable convergent validity). The results in Table 1 indicated that the indicators had good reliability with the outer loading of all indicators higher than the recommended value of 0.70. Similarly, all of the constructs had Cronbach's alpha score values above 0.70 and composite reliability score values above 0.60, suggesting good internal consistency for all constructs. Furthermore, the AVE scores for all constructs were positive, exceeding the suggested cut-off of 0.50, thus making it more reliable for all constructs for convergent validity. The loading weights of the indicators on their constructs were compared to the loading of other constructs to assess the discriminant validity. All the indicators loaded high on their respective constructs and comparatively low on the other constructs as is shown in

Table 2, which support discriminant validity. Overall, the results presented in Tables 1 and 2 indicated that the measurement model can be considered as acceptable according to the following criteria: 1) All four criteria values fall within the recommended acceptable limits. The results show that the measurement model has a satisfactory reliability and validity, which is needed for the next step of the structural model analysis. The researcher had first tested the reliability and validity of the measurement scales used in this study before testing the hypotheses. This was to ensure that the items of the questionnaire would sufficiently and uniformly assess the three constructs: WI, EE and WDB. Based on the outcome in Table 2, it was found that each construct had alpha value of more than 0.70, which means that there was consistency among the items of each construct. The internal consistency of the measurement scales was also supported by CR values which were higher than 0.70. The factor loadings of the measurement items were also greater than 0.60, which means that the items were well related to the constructs that they were supposed to measure. In addition, the AVE values were above 0.50 indicating acceptable convergent validity. This means that the content of each construct was a good sample of the construct. Furthermore, to ensure content validity, the measurement scales used were adopted from previous academic studies which were developed and validated. All of these results generally indicated that the instruments used in this study were reliable and valid enough and provided a valid basis for hypothesis testing.

Table 2, Results of reliability and validity test

Variables	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Workplace incivility	WI1	0.876	0.915	0.920	0.707
	WI 2	0.870			
	WI 3	0.680			
	WI 4	0.703			
	WI 5	0.788			
	WI 6	0.889			
	WI 7	0.856			
Employee Exhaustion	EE1	0.914	0.889	0.778	0.723
	EE 2	0.828			
	EE 3	0.804			
	EE 4	0.808			
	EE 5	0.872			
Workplace Deviance Behavior	WDB1	0.819	0.879	0.942	0.781
	WDB 2	0.710			
	WDB 3	0.830			
	WDB 4	0.834			
	WDB 5	8.903			

The correlation matrix and the results of the discriminant validity criterion (Fornell–Larcker) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3, Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity

Construct	WI	EE	WDB
Workplace Incivility	1(0.840)		
Employee engagement	0.577**	(0.850)	
Workplace Deviance Behavior	0.548**	0.595**	1(0.883)

To establish discriminant validity there should be less correlation between each construct with the square root of the construct than between each of the constructs in the model on this criterion. In Table 4, the diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE for WI (0.840), EE (0.850), and WDB (0.883). The values are bigger than the correlation between the constructs, therefore the constructs explain more variance of the constructs' own items than they explain variance other constructs' items. Furthermore, the correlation results indicated that the study constructs had positive and significant correlations. The correlation between EE and WI was positive ($r = 0.466$, $p < 0.05$) and there was a significant positive correlation between WDB and WI ($r = 0.595$, $p < 0.01$). Overall, the findings showed that the constructs had good level of discriminant validity and variables were positively related but conceptually different. The measurement model has a good discrimination validity; thus it can provide a basis to analyze the structural model later. The hypothesized relationships among the study variables were tested using SEM. Several goodness-of-fit indices were used to examine the goodness-of-fit of the overall structural model. The results of the model fit up to satisfactory level and all the results reported in Table 4 are within the proposed threshold range. This consequently results in an appropriate model of the structure with satisfactory goodness of fit, and these relationships between WI, EE and WDB are considered appropriate for analysis. The model fit indices further demonstrate that the proposed model provides an adequate representation of the observed data ($\chi^2/df = 2.37$, GFI = 0.928, AGFI = 0.891, CFI = 0.959, TLI = 0.951, NFI = 0.935, RMSEA = 0.062, and SRMR = 0.053).

Table 4, Structural Model Assessment; model fit indices

Fit Index	χ^2/df	GFI>	AGFI>	CFI>0.90	TLI>0.90	NFI>0.90	RMSEA<0.08	SRMR<0.08
	<3	0.90	0.80					
Results	2.37	0.928	0.891	0.959	0.951	0.935	0.062	0.053

The standardized path coefficients were analysed to test the postulated hypothesized model. The result of the Structural Path Analysis which was carried out in order to obtain the direct relationship between the constructs in this study is shown in Table 5. Standardized path coefficients (β), critical ratio (C.R.) and p-value were used to test all hypothesized relationships. The findings indicate that WI has a significant positive effect on WDB ($\beta = 0.545$, C.R. = 14.122, $p < 0.001$). From the results of the statistics, it can be concluded that the WI has positive and significant effect on EE (β

= 0.590, C.R. = 15.252, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the results indicated that EE also had a direct positive and significant impact on WDB ($\beta = 0.579$; C.R. = 15.985; $p < 0.001$). The findings from this analysis validated direct links between WI, EE and WDB. Thus, the results of the study confirmed H1, H2 and H3.

Table 5, Structural Path Results

Hypothesis	Structural Path	B	C.R.	p-value
H1	WI→WDB	0.545	14.122	<0.001
H2	WI→EE	0.590	15.252	<0.001
H3	EE→WPD	0.579	15.985	<0.001

A bootstrapping procedure, with 5000 resamples, was used to investigate the role of EE as a mediator between WI and WDB. The statistical results of the mediation analysis to validate the mediation model of the indirect effect of WI on WDB through EE are presented in Table 6. The significance of the indirect effect was determined using the bootstrapping approach and 95% confidence intervals (CI). The results indicate that EE has a significant effect on the intermediate variable between WI and WDB, ($\beta = 0.181$, $p < 0.001$), the 95% CI of which does not contain zero (0.113, 0.271). In general, the results presented here attest to the role of EE as a mechanism for WI to have an impact on WDB. This study's results also correlated with H4.

Table 6, Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Indirect Association	β	95% Confidence Interval	p-value
H4	WI → EE → WDB	0.240	[0.113, 0.271]	<0.001

Discussion of Findings

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between WI, EE and WDB and specifically to explore the mechanism by which WI contributes to WDB, which is EE. Results support the four hypotheses that were made in the study. The results show that WI is positively correlated with EE and EE is also positively correlated with WDB. Moreover, mediation analysis shows that EE plays significant mediation role between WI and WDB.

The results of the measurement model showed that the constructs used in the study were reliable and valid. The factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Fornell–Larcker results were consistent with the recommended criteria, and the Fornell–Larcker results showed evidence of the discriminant validity. The findings suggest that WI, EE and WDB were empirically different constructs. As a result, the following structural relationships can be interpreted with reasonable confidence in that the measurement instruments sufficiently represented the intended concepts.

The first hypothesis was that there was a positive and significant effect of WI on WDB. The results strongly support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.545$, C.R. = 14.122, $p < 0.001$). The standardized coefficient for the WI is relatively large and suggests that there is a strong correlation between the employee's experience of higher levels of WI

and the experience of WDB. The results indicate that even the less overt forms of interpersonal mistreatment (disrespectful communication, rudeness, dismissiveness, and discourtesy) need not be considered as harmless interactions in the workplace. While certain acts of incivility might seem trivial on the surface, they can foster frustration, resentment and reactions among employees when they are experienced repeatedly. The experiences employees may have over time can result in behaviors that are contrary to the organizational norms, or behaviors that have a negative impact on other organizational members. The finding is in line with the operationalization of WI as put forward by Park and Martinez (2022) who argued that incivility can set a stage for reciprocal negative behavior. The concept of the incivility spiral that they have is that one negative comment, one rude act can lead to a series of negative comments and rude acts, which can result in a higher likelihood of incivility in interpersonal relationships. The present results suggest, in this regard, that WI can be more than purely interpersonal discomfort and consequently, linked to behaviors that are harmful to the organization.

The finding can also be explained by the social exchange theory. Employees form their perceptions of the treatment they receive from their organization and other organizational members. If the working relationship has been consistently disrespectful or discourteous, then the employee may feel the relationship is not a positive one. These perceptions can decrease their motivation to continue positive behavioral exchanges with the organization and its members. This means that negative or deviant behavior could be a reaction to the negative or wrong experiences that the employees have had at work. Therefore, the finding with H1 suggests that WI is still a relevant interpersonal variable to be taken into account in trying to explain workplace deviance, for organizations.

The second hypothesis was that WI positively impacts EE. The results provide strong support for this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.590$, C.R. = 15.252, $p < 0.001$). One of the direct relations explored in the study is between WI and EE. The discovery shows that when employees hear rude, disrespectful or discourteous behavior, again and again, it can take up their emotional and psychological reserves. Those who regularly have to manage interpersonal conflict might be required to put more of their emotional energy into conflict management, managing how to react, keeping their cool, acting professionally, and dealing with stress in the workplace. These demands can be a cause of EE over time. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 1997) can be used to best explain this finding. COR theory suggests that people are looking to gain, preserve, and defend valuable resources, in this case, emotional energy, emotional health, social support, and positive interpersonal relationships. WI can be a draining experience as workers have to invest their emotional energy to manage negative inter-personal situations. If this resource loss does not get mitigated over the period of time, the employee can suffer EE. The discovery also aligns with the general stress literature, in which enduring interpersonal issues are identified as major stresses in the workplace. Importantly, the results show that incivility is not a problem of "workplace manners". It can have important implications for the psychological reality of employees. Thus, H2 offers evidence that EE reduction initiatives for organizations

will not be successful if they are restricted to the formal job demands to workload and working hours, and do not include an analysis of the interpersonal demands within the work environment.

The third hypothesis was that EE will positively and significantly influence WDB. The results strongly support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.579$, C.R. = 15.985, $p < 0.001$). The discovery may indicate that workers who are emotionally drained are more prone to conduct that could be contrary to the organization's norms or harm other workers. EE is a state in which the employees are psychologically exhausted and have little emotional resources to handle demands in the workplace. In this instance, it can become challenging for personnel to control their responses, support positive interpersonal behaviors, and reliably meet organizational expectations. Again the finding can be understood by using the CRT. If employees are significantly depleted of resources, they may be unable to put in extra resources to engage in positive organizational actions. Those working with EE may have less psychological resources to manage themselves and to cope in positive ways. This means that negative behavioral reactions could increase in frequency. The relationship can also be viewed in terms of Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Negative work experiences can create negative emotional conditions, which, in turn, can impact employee attitudes and actions. The negative state of EE is an important psychological state which can affect the reaction of the employees to the work environment. The finding thus shows that workplace deviance does not necessarily have to be seen as a conscious choice of behavior, apart from the psychological state of workers. The findings suggest that the emotional experiences of employees can be an important antecedent to deviant behavior.

The fourth hypothesis was that EE is a mediator of the relationship between WI and WDB. The mediation analysis confirms the support for H4 with the results below: The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.181$, $p < 0.001$), and the 95% confidence interval [0.113, 0.271] did not include zero. This is an important contribution of the study as it gives an idea on how and why WI may be related to WDB. The results did not just suggest a direct link between EE and deviance, but that EE is a psychological process that may mediate deviant behavior. The findings also indicate that the first response of those who have WI is psychological and emotional exhaustion. This EE may then contribute to the risk of WDB being raised in the future. That is, WI may be an emotionally challenging setting that can lead to fatigue and increased chances of negative behavioral reactions. This is especially crucial since the mediation results link the interpersonal and behavioral components of the research model. WI is an interpersonal stressor at work, EE is an employee psychological response, and WDB is a behavioral outcome. The results thus follow a logical flow in which a negative experience in the workplace is linked to psychological depletion, which is linked to negative behavior in the workplace.

COR theory has the view of this process as a mechanism of loss of resources. WW is a drain on employees' emotional resources; ongoing resource depletion can lead to EE; and emotionally drained employees can then engage in deviant behavior. The finding of mediation is therefore in line with the empirical evidence that negative

interpersonal experiences have an impact on employee behavioral outcomes, and that EE is a vital process between these experiences and outcomes. Additionally, it should be noted that the outcome of the mediation does not mean that all employees who are experiencing incivility will engage in deviant behavior. On the contrary, the statistical results suggest that for the average child, higher WI is related to higher EE, which is related to higher WDB.

Theoretical Implications

The study has a number of theoretical implications. The results support the use of Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) in the relationship between WI, EE and WDB. The relationship between WI and EE is significant and thus incivility can be a source of resource depletion. Staff need to employ emotional and psychological strategies to deal with disrespectful interactions. These experiences can build up to a point where they deplete an individual's emotional reserves and lead to exhaustion. The key relationship between EE and WDB also implies that there could be behavioral implications for resource depletion. Therefore, the results have implications for expanding the use of COR theory, as they indicate a potential sequence of interpersonal stressors. The findings also add to the incivility at work literature by providing evidence that incivility is not just a relationship or interpersonal problem. It is strongly related to EE and WDB, and the relationship indicates that incivility may have organizational implications. This implies that apparently low level negative acts may have consequences that are more than just for the interaction between the individuals concerned. The mediation finding contains theoretical analysis of EE's role. The study goes beyond simply considering EE as a consequence of negative workplace conditions, and shows how EE can be used as a tool to link workplace experiences with employee behavior. This helps to bring about a more process-based understanding of employee deviance. The findings imply that the psychological mechanisms that take place between workplace stressors and behavioral outcomes should be taken into account when researching this topic. The study combines theories from workplace-incivility literature and theories related to workplace-deviance and employee well-being. The model shows that negative interpersonal treatment can be related to employee behavior via an emotional channel. As a result, the study offers guidelines for future research into other psychological pathways that might connect negative workplace events with employee behaviors.

Practical Implications

The results of this study also have several implications for managers, HR professionals, and decision makers. *First*, organizations need to acknowledge WI as a crucial organizational issue and not as just an interpersonal disagreement. Management can create explicit policies of the workplace that outline behaviors that are not acceptable including disrespectful communication, humiliation, insulting language, unnecessary hostility and persistent discourtesy. Employees need to be familiar with what behaviors are inappropriate and how they can report inappropriate behaviors. The potential for concealing WI should not be overlooked, as employees may not have safe reporting channels, and organizations should provide confidential

ways to report inappropriate interpersonal behavior. Reporting systems should offer reasonable protections against retribution to employees, and should ensure that complaints are dealt with by following organizational procedures.

Managers and supervisors play an important role in the prevention of WI. Emotional intelligence, interpersonal sensitivity, and incivility prevention training should be offered for the organizations. It is also critical for supervisors to be aware that their communication can create norms in the workplace. Given this important link between WI and EE, it is essential for organizations to monitor their employees' psychological workload and emotional strain. Such interventions need to be in addition to an effort to identify and remove the source of incivility. In fact, interventions for supporting employees should be implemented in addition to preventive measures.

There is a strong correlation between EE and WDB, meaning that early signs of employee exhaustion should be of concern for organizations. While it is true that managers can intervene once deviant behavior happens, and often do, they can also intervene as soon as signs of excess emotional strain, withdrawal, interpersonal conflict or frustration are observed in employees. There is a need to actively build norms of respect, dignity, fairness and professional communication within the organization. Organizational policies, leadership behavior, performance management systems, and employee training can all help to reinforce respectful workplace norms. Importantly, organizational leaders need to set the example for their employees. Senior managers can set a tone for the organization, and if disrespectful behavior is accepted, formal organizational policies might not be very effective in practice.

These findings show that there is a relation between the employees' well-being and the behavior of the employees. HR teams should thus incorporate employee wellness into the company's overall policy, rather than tackling it as a standalone concern. Organizations can be alert to new issues through regular employee surveys, climate assessments, confidential feedback systems, and periodic EE assessments.

Recommendations for future research

There are also a number of avenues for future research which emerged from the findings. *Firstly*, further research could explore more intervening factors between WI and WDB. Other factors including psychological distress, job stress, anger, organizational identification or perceived organizational support may offer additional understanding of the mechanisms by which employees respond. *Secondly*, there is still a need to explore moderating factors that could attenuate or strengthen the link between WI and EE. The following may serve as potential moderators: perceived organizational support, emotional intelligence, organizational justice, leadership style, and coworker support. *Third*, future researchers might use a longitudinal research design. Current relationships are based upon the observed data, while longitudinal studies might investigate the exposure of a repeated exposure to WI that leads to EE and other behavioral responses over time. *Fourth*, in the future there is scope for using multi-source data, especially in the case of WDB. When possible, rather than employee self-reports only, employee responses could be used in conjunction with a supervisor's response or organizational records. *Lastly*, the model could be applied in

other sectors, occupations, size of organizations and cultural settings in future studies. This research can help to establish if the relationships noted are consistent in other organizational settings.

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