



## Does workplace incivility affect the satisfaction of employees? Evidence from small and medium enterprises

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### Abstract

There are few empirical studies that have examined whether workplace incivility affects employees' satisfaction of small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) in Nigeria, despite the fact that we acknowledged the strong extant literature on the relationship between workplace incivility and employees' contentment. Consequently, this study investigated whether workplace incivility affects the satisfaction of employees among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. The study employed a survey design, utilising a questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire was circulated among six hundred (600) respondents. Out of the six hundred questionnaires distributed, five hundred and eighty (580) were successfully completed and returned. Data obtained in the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics (simple percentages, frequency counts, mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and Pearson correlation), post-estimation statistics (variance inflation factor), and inferential statistics (multiple regression). Findings revealed that supervisors' incivility ( $t = -9.17$ ; Prob.= 0.000) and co-workers' incivility ( $t = -7.44$ ; Prob.=0.000) negatively and significantly affect employees' satisfaction. The study concludes that workplace incivility affects employees' satisfaction of small and medium scale enterprises. The suggestion posits that individuals who own small and medium enterprises, as well as human resource professionals, have the potential to mitigate instances of uncivil conduct and practices, thereby fostering a culture of civility within the workplace.

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## 1. Introduction

In modern organizations, incivility in the workplace has amplified plausibly due to the demanding inimitability of contemporary society, millions of employees are victim of uncivil treatments by management, supervisors and co-workers. Djoko, Ardi, Felicitas, and Doddy (2021), asserted that incivility in the workplace has become a common practice in most of the organizations, whether they are small, medium or large corporation. Xiao et al. (2023) and Guidetti et al. (2021) contended that incivility exists because of the inability of management, supervisors and co-workers to organize activities in the workplace.

Han, Harold, Oh, Kim, and Agolli (2022) see incivility as an abnormal behavior, and the violation of workplace norms with insufficient evidence to harm an individual Hassan (2021) showed that incivility at workplace is associated with chaos bedlam, pandemonium and disarray and it is partially due to the breaching of workplace culture and norm. Fundamentally, there are three partakers in workplace incivility – instigator, target and observer (Adil, Hamid, & Waqas, 2020; Khan, Elahi, & Abid, 2021; Razzaq, Bowra, & Khan, 2023);

Therefore, in order for uncivil behaviour to manifest within the workplace, these three factors are involved in the overall process.

Workplace incivilities are of different kinds including those that are started by co-workers, customers, other customers' customers, supervisors and management, online incivilities, etc. (Al-Hawari, Shaker, & Samina, 2020; Bacile, Wolter, Allen, & Xu, 2018; Boukis, Koritos, Daunt, & Papastathopoulos, 2020; Raza, Imran, Rosak-Szyrocka, Vasa, & Hadi, 2023). Pu, Ji, and Sang (2021) and Ribut, Dian, and Tantri (2020) affirmed that incivility in the workplace significantly influence the satisfaction of employees.

Employees' satisfaction connotes the attitude or behavior that is related to the perception of prior events and reward to existing feeling about a job (Monica, Christine, Charles, & Brian, 2022; Tahira, Muhammad, Shagufta, Muhammad, & Shahid, 2021). Tricahyadinata, Hendryadi, Saida, and Sukisno (2020), established that incivility in the workplace has intensified due to surmounting nervousness and impractical work roles assigned to employees by supervisors or management. Extant literature (Dahri, Asif, & Mallah, 2020; Tricahyadinata et al., 2020; Vasconcelos, 2020) suggested that incivility in the workplace negatively affects the satisfaction of employees. In the human resource management (HRM) literature, the most domineering workplace incivility is related to supervisors and co workers simply due to their level of placements in the organizational hierarchy (Daniels & Jordan, 2019; Deni, Noermijati, Aisjah, & Indrawati, 2023).

This study is innovative because it assessed workplace incivility as a social practice among co-workers and supervisors and empirically examined if rudeness from co workers and managers affects workers' commitment. This current study takes a dissimilar viewpoint from extant studies where emphasis of extant studies had been on how workplace incivility influences the satisfaction of employees in medium and large-sized corporations. Thus, this study focused on how workplace incivility interacts with employees' satisfaction among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1. Workplace Incivility**

Empirical studies had revealed that uncivil workplace behaviour have the tendency to influence employee's commitment with the work like commitment, performance, productivity, satisfaction, intention to stay, retention, etc). Baker and Kim (2020), emphasized that incivility in the workplace manifests in the form of violation of norms, culture, disrespect and rudeness by supervisors and co-workers. Hence Cheng, Dong, Zhou, Guo, and Peng (2020) believed that incivility undermine employees' satisfaction, thus resulting in low productivity and performance.

Guo and Kumar (2020), observed that incivility in the workplace can be easily noticeable; however, when keen attention is not given to it, it could cripple employee-related outcomes. The literature indicates that incivility in the workplace can be categorized into experienced, instigated and witnessed incivilities. Experienced-incivility is likened to supervisors' incivility while witnessed-incivility and instigated-incivility connotes uncivil workplace behaviour among employees (Bani-Melhem, Quratulain, & Al-Hawari, 2020; Chen & Wang, 2019; Hamid, Ismail, Azam, & Muhamad, 2021; Raza et al., 2023).

Incivility in the workplace has recently been studied, but few studies have looked at whether supervisors' and co-workers' rudeness affect employees' contentment with SMEs. For instance, Mehmood et al. (2021) indicated that experienced-incivility results in reciprocating behaviour. In the same vein, Pap, Virga, and Notelaers (2021) workplace incivility is linked with deviant behaviour from supervisors and co-workers, which tends to influence employees' satisfaction.

Notwithstanding the categorization of workplace incivility, Jamal and Siddiqui (2020) and Saleem, Malik, Asif, and Qasim (2022) distributed incivility in workplace into four sub-forms: hostility, invasion of privacy, gossiping and exclusionary. The categorizations of workplace incivility as suggested by Bani-Melhem et al. (2020) and Chen and Wang (2019) were employed in this study. As observed by Saleem et al. (2022), supervisors' incivility implies uncivil behaviour by supervisors on subordinates. Interestingly, Saleem et al. (2022) and Kim and Qu (2019) showed that supervisors' incivility bring disrespect and humiliation to employees. On the other hand, Mao, Chang, Johnson, and Sun (2019) suggested that supervisors' incivility negatively influence employees' satisfaction.

Hyeon-Dal and Yoon-Jung (2018), observed that co-workers-incivility takes forms like maltreatment of employees, and disrespect between co-workers caused by in civic behavior. According to Alola, Olugbade, Avci, and Öztüren (2019), co-workers-incivility is a mild form of uncivil behavior which may be unnoticed in the organization. The spiral incivility and social exchange theories support the study of workplace incivility; as both theories see incivility in the workplace as a major threat to employees' satisfaction.

While spiral incivility theory views workplace incivility as a fascination for retaliation owing to undesirable behaviour or perceived uncivil behaviour by employees, social exchange theory sees workplace incivility as a social shift or constructs (means of reciprocation between co-workers) (Adil et al., 2020; Djoko et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2022). Hence, to avert co-workers' and supervisors' incivility, proactive leadership is necessary. According to Guidetti et al. (2021) and Guo and Kumar (2020), proactive leadership can avert the spiralling effect of workplace incivility on employees' satisfaction.

### 2.2. Employee Satisfaction

In the HRM literature, employees-related outcomes (such as satisfaction, performance, intention to stay, productivity, etc) have been extensively documented (Deni et al., 2023; Egberi & Olufolahan, 2021; Raza et al., 2023). According to Chen and Wang (2019) and Dahri et al. (2020), employees’ satisfaction is a pleasant emotional state generated by evaluating the employee job role. Numerous dynamics have been considered to influence the employees’ satisfaction. The Studies of Dahri et al., (2020); Hyeon-Dal and Yoon-Jung, (2018) and Jamal and Siddiqui (2020) had shown that incivility in the workplace influence employees’ satisfaction. Contemporary researches had shown that employees who experiences hassles in work-routine would experience deterioration in morale (Khan et al., 2021; Pap et al., 2021).

Notably, extant literature supports the connection between uncivil behaviour (mistreatment, hostility, bullying and abusive supervision) and employees’ satisfaction (Bani-Melhem et al., 2020; Dahri et al., 2020; Hyeon-Dal & Yoon-Jung, 2018; Jamal & Siddiqui, 2020; Ribut et al., 2020). Similarly, Tahira et al. (2021) and Tricahyadinata et al. (2020) showed that workplace incivility results in dwindled employees’ satisfaction. Research has shown that the main sources of lack of employees’ satisfaction is connected with incivility or harmful treatment of supervisors and management (Khan et al., 2021; Pap et al., 2021). Hence, uncivil behavior in the workplace among supervisors, employees, and co-workers may serve as a dynamics adversely influencing employees’ satisfaction.

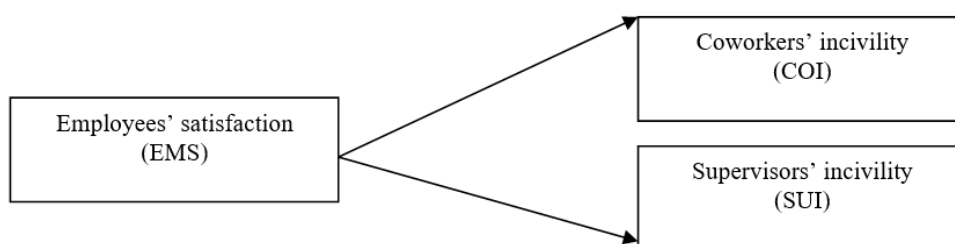


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study.

Source: Conceptualized by the Researcher (2023).

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the variables of employees’ satisfaction (dependent variable) and workplace incivility (independent variable).

### 3. Methods

This study used the descriptive research design which examines workplace incivility and its effect on employees’ satisfaction of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The study population consists of the aggregate workforce of SMEs in the four (4) Oregions of the Nigerian federation (North, South, East and West). Given the disproportionate number of SMEs in Nigeria, a convenience sampling technique was used to select a sample of 600 SMEs.

The major instrument of data collection was the questionnaire, which was administered on SMEs employees. The questionnaire focused on supervisor-incivility, co-workers-incivility and employee satisfaction items. The workplace incivility and employees’ satisfaction items are likened to those employed by Cortina, Magley, and Langhout (2001) and Griffin, Neal, and Parker (2007). The questionnaire was designed on a reversed 5-point scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree and was physically administered. Besides this, Cronbach Alpha reliability test was carried out to determine the internal consistency of the research instrument as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cronbach alpha reliability results.

S/N	Variables of the study	Cronbach alpha coefficients
1	Co-worker-incivility (COI)	0.78
2	Supervisor-incivility (SUI)	0.69
3	Employee satisfaction (EMS)	0.81

This study adapts the models of Dahri et al. (2020) and Khan et al. (2021); hence, the following empirical models is specified to ascertain the link between workplace incivility (supervisors and co-workers incivilities) and employees’ satisfaction:

$$EMS = f(COI, SUI) \tag{1}$$

Equation 1 is the implicit form of the multiple regression model; however, Equation 2 is expressed in its explicit form as follows:

$$EMS_i = \delta_0 + \delta_1 COI_i + \delta_2 SUI_i + u_i \tag{2}$$

Where:  $\delta_1, \delta_2 > 0$ ; EMS is employees' satisfaction (dependent variable); COI is co-worker-incivility; SUI is supervisor-incivility (independent variables);  $U_i$  is error term;  $\delta_1 - \delta_2$  are coefficient of variables. The obtained data was analysed via descriptive (percentages, frequency counts, mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis and Pearson correlation); post-estimation (variance inflation factor, Ramsey regression specification-error test for omitted variables, and Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for Heteroskedasticity); and inferential (multiple regression) statistical tools. The statistical test was carried out via Statistics and Data software (STATA 16.0).

#### 4. Results

This study investigated whether workplace incivility affect employees' satisfaction among selected SMEs in Nigeria. A sample of six hundred (600) respondents were selected for this research and out of which five hundred and eighty (580) were fully completed and retrieved. Thus resulting in 96.7% response rate of the administered questionnaires; Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents.

**Table 2.** Results of demographic characteristics of respondents.

Items	Variables	Parameter	Frequency=580	Percent (%)
1	Gender	Male	240	41.4%
		Female	340	58.6%
		Total	580	100%
2	Age brackets	20-25years	99	17.1%
		26-30years	222	38.3%
		31-35years	176	30.3%
		> 36years	83	14.5%
		Total	580	100%
3	Educational qualification	OND/NCE	175	30.2%
		B.Sc./HND	334	57.6%
		M.Sc./MBA	71	12.2%
		Total	580	100%

**Note:** OND – Ordinary national diploma; NCE – National certificate in education; B.Sc. – Bachelor of science; HND – Higher national diploma; M.Sc. – Master of science; MBA – Masters in business administration.

In Table 3, the demographic characteristics of respondents were presented and it was shown that 240(41.4%) were males while majority of the respondents representing 340(58.6%) females; an indication of a high number of female SMEs owners. The average age of the respondents reveals that 99 individuals (17.1%) fell within the age spectrum of 20-25 years, while 222 individuals (38.3%) fell within the age range of 26-30 years. Additionally, 176 individuals (30.3%) were between the ages of 31-35 years, and 83 individuals (14.5%) were 36 years old or older.

Furthermore, the educational qualification of respondents showed that 175(30.2%) and 334(57.6%) had obtained OND/NCE and B.Sc./HND degrees while 71(12.2%) possessed M.Sc./MBA degrees; an indication that the respondents are well educated in providing adequate response to the items in the questionnaire.

**Table 3.** Summary of descriptive statistics results.

Statistics	Co-worker incivility	Supervisor incivility	Employee satisfaction
Mean	3.40	3.48	3.46
Standard deviation	0.24	0.19	0.17
Skewness	-0.20	-0.01	-0.03
Kurtosis	2.48	3.02	2.45
Observations	580	580	580

Table 3 showed the summary of descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis) of the aggregate perceptions of respondents on workplace incivility (co-workers and supervisors) and employee satisfaction of SMEs in Nigeria. The mean values for co-worker-incivility (3.40), supervisor-incivility (3.48), and employee satisfaction (3.46) depict that respondents shared similar views on the research theme and that the questionnaire items are good indicators of assessing the linkage between workplace incivility and employees' satisfaction.

Additionally, the standard deviation revealed that the highest standard deviation was recorded by co-worker incivility (0.24) and the least by employee satisfaction (0.17); this result implies that respondents perceive co-worker-incivility as the most dominating among SMEs. Also, the standard deviation value revolves around 0.17 (minimum) and 0.24 (maximum), suggesting that respondents' perceptions are not too dispersed from each other

Furthermore, the results showed that the variables of co-worker (-0.20), supervisor (-0.01) incivilities and employees' satisfaction (-0.03) were negatively skewed, suggesting that workplace incivility and employee

satisfaction moved together in one direction. The kurtosis values for both the dependent and independent variables indicate that the data meets the normality assumption, as all the variables' kurtosis values are reasonably close to 3.

**Table 4. Pearson correlation results.**

Parameters	Employee satisfaction	Co-worker-incivility	Supervisor incivility
Employee satisfaction	1.00		
Co-worker-incivility	-0.04	1.00	
Supervisor incivility	-0.02	-0.02	1.00

Table 4 showed the Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between co-worker-incivility and supervisor-incivility. The results indicated a negative correlation between these variables, with Pearson r values of -0.04 for co-worker-incivility and -0.02 for supervisor-incivility. These findings suggest that there is a negative association between workplace incivility (specifically, co-worker and supervisor incivilities) and employees' satisfaction.

It is noteworthy that none of the Pearson coefficients for the independent variables surpasses 0.8, indicating the absence of multicollinearity among the pairs of independent variables in the study.

**Table 5. Variance inflation factor (VIF) results.**

Variables	VIF	1/VIF
Co-worker-incivility	1.01	0.99
Supervisor incivility	1.07	0.93
Mean VIF	1.04	

Table 5 showed the VIF results; the mean VIF is = 1.04, which is less than the accepted VIF of 10.0, indicating the nonexistence of multicollinearity problem in the empirical model of workplace incivility and employees' satisfaction. Hence the dataset is good enough to conduct inferential test.

**Table 6. Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg tests for heteroskedasticity.**

Ho: Constant variance
Variables: Fitted value
Chi2(1)=2.69
Prob. > Chi2=0.10

Table 6 showed the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg for heteroskedasticity result; the result Chi2(1) = 2.69 with Prob. > Chi2 = 0.10 offered support against the proposition that  $t=0$  in  $Var(e) = \sigma^2 \exp(z)$ . Hence, the regression disturbances are independent and statistically significant at 0.05% level. The implication is that there is nonexistence of heteroscedasticity problem in the empirical model of the study

**Table 7. Ramsey regression specification-error test for omitted variables.**

F(2, 577)=	0.49
Prob. > F=	0.71

Table 7 showed the Ramsey regression specification-error test for omitted variables and fitted values of the variables (Co-worker-incivility, supervisor-incivility) and employees' satisfaction. The result F (3, 577) = 0.49 with Probability > F = 0.71, indicates that the empirical model has no omitted variables and hence fits adequately well.

**Table 8. Multiple regression results on workplace incivility (Coworkers-incivility & supervisors-incivility) and employees' satisfaction.**

Equation	Obs.	R-squared	F-value	Probability
EMS	580	0.87	16.5	0.00
Parameters	Coefficients	T-value	Prob.	
COI	-0.04	-7.44	0.00	
SUI	-0.04	-9.17	0.00	

Table 8 showed the multiple regression results for workplace incivility (co-workers and supervisors) and employees' satisfaction; the R-squared of 0.87 showed that workplace incivility explained about 87% of the systematic variation in employees' satisfaction. On the other hand, the t-values for co-worker-incivility (t = -7.44; Prob. = 0.00) and supervisor-incivility (t = -9.17; Prob. = 0.00) indicated that workplace incivility dimensions negatively and significantly affect employees' satisfaction

Furthermore, the negative coefficient values imply that a unit decrease in workplace incivility will result to an increase in employees' satisfaction. Overall, the F-ratio established that workplace incivility is significant at 0.05% (F-value = 16.5; p-value = 0.00), thus providing evidence that there is a significant relationship between workplace incivility and employees' satisfaction among the SMEs in Nigeria.

## 5. Discussion

In the literature, it has been well acknowledged that when employees face any form of behaviour in the workplace which they consider uncivil, their mental wellness and performance is negatively affected. Similarly, when employees' mental states are impacted, their behaviours and attitudes undergo changes, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm in their response towards achieving the organization's goals and objectives (Egberi & Olufolahan, 2021; Monica et al., 2022). One rationale for this is that the workforce may have the need to engage in behaviours where faking affirmative emotions are required and an avenue that breeds incivility.

Fundamentally, an ever-increasing problem that can have severe consequences at the individual, group and organizational level, is incivility in the workplace (Sürücü, 2021). Workplace incivility can emanate from a number of factors/sources like from supervisor and co-workers to customers (Deni et al., 2023; Hamid et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2023). More importantly, it has been found that incivility in the workplace has negative influence on people who witness uncivil behaviour directly (Raza et al., 2023; Razzaq et al., 2023).

Furthermore, as observed by Andersson and Pearson Tit-for-Tat paradigm of workplace incivility, isolated instances of uncivil behaviour or attitude can result to employees' satisfaction (Raza et al., 2023; Razzaq et al., 2023). Thus, there are ample reasons to infer that incivility is connected with numerous negative occupational, psychological, physical health, and organizational outcomes (Raza et al., 2023; Razzaq et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2023). Regardless of the viewpoints shared in the existing literature on the impact of workplace incivility on performance, mental wellness and other organizational outcomes, it is important to note that there is a lack of empirical evidence to definitively confirm or refute the influence of workplace incivility on employee satisfaction, particularly within the context of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria, hence a research gap exists in this specific area.

SMEs occupy a central place in Nigeria, thus how employees respond to uncivil behaviour is a major issue of concern to the success of SMEs (Okoro, 2016). The main goal of this study was to assess how employees of SMEs respond to uncivil behaviour in the workplace. The survey design was used and questionnaire was administered on six hundred (600) respondents out of which five hundred and eighty (580) were fully completed and retrieved. The obtained data was analysed via descriptive, post-estimation, and inferential statistical tools.

First, the study found no statistical problem with the data obtained as observed from the descriptive and diagnostic statistics see Tables 3-7. Second, we found that Pearson r for co-worker-incivility and supervisor-incivility were negatively linked, thus indicating a negative link between workplace incivility (co-worker and supervisor incivilities) and employees' satisfaction; however, this result does not connote any statistical problem, since the Pearson r values were not above 0.8 as recommended by Gujarati (2003) cited in Okoro and kwueme (2021) and Okoro and Ihenyen (2020).

In general, the inferential statistical findings demonstrate that both supervisors' incivility ( $t = -9.17$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and co-workers' incivility ( $t = -7.44$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) have a significantly negative impact on employee satisfaction. These t-values align with the results obtained from the Pearson correlation analysis are shown in Table 8. The findings of the empirical investigation corroborates in part with the results of Saleem et al. (2022); Djoko et al. (2021) and Adil et al. (2020) who found that workplace incivility had negative influence on employees' satisfaction; however, the study disagrees with the results of Sürücü (2021) and Xiao et al. (2023) who found that incivility in the workplace had positive and insignificant effect on outcomes such as employees' performance, job satisfaction, determination, wellbeing, and life-domain satisfaction.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the relationship between workplace incivility (using incivility dimensions of co-worker and supervisor) and employees' satisfaction; the empirical investigation was assessed for five hundred and eighty (580) respondents who are employees of selected SMEs in Nigeria. The study was motivated due to the absence of empirical studies on whether workplace incivility affects employees' satisfaction among SMEs and the need to see if workplace incivility negatively or positively affects employees' satisfaction. Thus, using the multiple regression statistical tool, we found that supervisors-incivility and co-workers-incivility negatively influence employees' satisfaction.

In line with the results of the study, it was recommended that SMEs should discourage workplace incivility between supervisors and employees in order to enhance the satisfaction of employees. As a way of discouraging incivility in the workplace, there should be a demarcation in supervisors' and employees' roles/tasks, particularly where their roles are over-lapping in the organization.

This paper makes a valuable contribution to the field of management by examining the correlation between workplace incivility (specifically, incivilities from co-workers and supervisors) and employee satisfaction. This particular relationship has not been extensively explored in the existing literature on Human

Resource Management in the Nigerian context. The empirical results of the study can be used by SMEs owners, government and human resource (HR) practitioners seeking to find ways of curbing uncivil behaviours, attitudes and practices in order to promote civil behaviour in the workplace and hence trying to enhance the satisfaction of employees.

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