

EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE INCIVILITY ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND HEALTH

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Incivility at work has received increasing attention. Focus groups among postal workers suggested it was a problem, so we conducted a survey to determine the extent of incivility and its effects. To our knowledge this is the first study to distinguish incivility from co-workers, supervisors and customers, and the first in postal workers.

We used the Workplace Incivility Scale, asking about incivility in the previous year. Other work characteristics (including job control, psychological demands, and social support) were measured, as well as health and psychological distress. We selected a multi-stage sample of 12 locals of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and up to 225 workers within each local, classified as inside, outside and maintenance workers. The questionnaire was revised after pilot testing. We used Dillman's approach to maximize response rate. The response rate was 50% (965/1,926). All analyses allowed for the sampling design.

Respondents were primarily male (60%) and the mean age was 47 years. Eighty five percent of respondents reported at least some incivility in the previous year. It was slightly more common from supervisors than from co-workers (74% vs 70%). Over half of the outside workers reported some incivility from customers. However, discrimination was uncommon in the sample.

Regression analyses with health and psychological distress as dependent variables showed that demographic characteristics and job type had very little explanatory power. After controlling for those variables and job strain and social support, incivility explained significant additional variation for burnout, anxiety, depression and hostility, with increases ranging from 7% for burnout to 10% for hostility. Job satisfaction was better explained by job strain and social support than by incivility. The odds of experiencing incivility decreased with age.

Strengths of the study include the large sample size and the representation of workers across the country and in different job classifications. Limitations include the cross-sectional design and possible common method variance – workers reported both independent and dependent variables.

Still, incivility was common. Future research could establish longitudinally if incivility precedes the health and distress measures, and check if the findings are replicated in other populations.

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