



# Impact of Workplace Incivility on Work-Family Conflict: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion and Moderating Role of Job Experience

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**Abstract:** *This study tests the role of emotional exhaustion as a mediating mechanism between workplace incivility instigated by three sources (i.e., customers, co-workers and supervisors) and work-family conflict (WFC). We test the role of job experience as a boundary condition affecting the indirect relationship between supervisor incivility and WFC via emotional exhaustion. The sample consists of 235 front-line restaurant workers employed in casual and fine-dining restaurants in Lahore, Pakistan. Structural equation modeling is used to test the hypothesized relationships. Customer incivility, co-worker incivility and supervisor incivility are positively associated with WFC. Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace incivility instigated by the three sources listed above and WFC. Job experience strengthens the positive indirect effect of supervisor incivility on WFC via emotional exhaustion. However, job experience does not affect the positive indirect effect of customer incivility and co-worker incivility on WFC via emotional exhaustion. The WFC literature mostly employs job experience as a control variable. This study is the first to examine job experience as a boundary condition affecting the indirect link between supervisor incivility and WFC via emotional exhaustion.*

**Keywords:** Workplace incivility, work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, job experience, restaurant servers, Pakistan.

**JEL Classification:** M50, M51, M52, M54.



# **Impact of Workplace Incivility on Work-Family Conflict: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion and Moderating Role of Job Experience**

## **1. Introduction**

Workplace incivility is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the workplace and has serious consequences for individuals as well as organizations (Agarwal et al., 2023). Nearly everyone in the workplace has experienced workplace incivility at some point in their working life (Han et al., 2022). Workplace incivility is defined as 'low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect' (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). It is a mild or subtle form of mistreatment whereby the intention to harm the interaction partner is not immediately obvious. Workplace incivility affects employees' sales performance (Sliter et al., 2012), job satisfaction and turnover intention (Chen & Wang, 2019; Han et al., 2016; Parray et al., 2023), absenteeism (Sliter & Boyd, 2015), counterproductive work behavior (Sakurai & Jex, 2012; Zahoor et al., 2019), job performance (Rhee et al., 2017), physical health (Cortina et al., 2022; Jorgensen et al., 2023), sleep quality (Demskey et al., 2019), unhealthy eating behavior (Liu et al., 2017) and maladaptive shopping behavior (Song et al., 2018). Workplace incivility also leads to work alienation (Xia et al., 2022), workplace loneliness (Kuriakose et al., 2023), emotional exhaustion (Sliter et al., 2010), psychological distress (Adams & Webster, 2013), marital dissatisfaction (Ferguson, 2012) and work-family conflict (WFC) (Lim & Lee, 2011; Zhou et al., 2019).

Workplace incivility has become pervasive and an area of concern for organizational scholars and practitioners (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Most research in Pakistan's context has examined the impact of uncivil workplace treatment on turnover intention (Mahfooz et al., 2017) and counterproductive work behavior (Zahoor et al., 2019). Few studies in the Pakistani context (Raja et al., 2018; Zahoor et al., 2019) have examined the impact of workplace incivility on employees' WFC.

Studies in Western contexts report inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between workplace incivility and WFC (Lim & Lee, 2011; Zhou et al., 2019). While Lim and Lee (2011) find that supervisor incivility is linked to WFC, Zhou et al. (2019) find that the variables are unrelated. Moreover, Zhou et al. (2019) report co-worker incivility to be linked to the target's perception of WFC. However, Lim and Lee (2011) find that co-

worker incivility is unrelated to WFC. This study examines job experience as a boundary condition affecting workplace incivility and the WFC relationship via emotional exhaustion. We propose to resolve these inconsistent findings by examining how and when workplace incivility impacts workers' WFC.

WFC is defined as 'a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect' (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). The literature provides evidence that work issues permeate the family domain more easily than family issues do the work domain. This is because work boundaries are formally defined and strictly enforced, and family boundaries are less formally defined and not as strictly enforced. The literature has empirically tested the impact of organizational citizenship behavior (Bolino et al., 2023), authoritarian leadership (Yao et al., 2023), social stressors (Pluut et al., 2022), workload (Babic et al., 2019), workaholism (Andreassen et al., 2013) and job pressure (Annor & Burchell, 2018) on WFC, but the effect of interpersonal workplace stressors, such as workplace incivility, has not been widely studied.

The WFC literature mostly employs job experience as a control variable. This study contributes to the literature by examining job experience as a boundary condition. The findings indicate that job experience exacerbates the effect of emotional exhaustion on WFC. Individuals possess different types of personal resources. Physical resources include health, vitality and energy; psychological resources include mental resilience, self-efficacy and optimism; affective resources include a positive mood, empathy and gratitude; intellectual resources include knowledge, skills, abilities and experience; and capital resources include time and money (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

The results indicate that despite the wide repertoire of skills, knowledge and competencies gained through years of job experience, long-tenure employees experience greater emotional exhaustion and WFC than short-tenure employees. It can be inferred that although long-tenure employees can accumulate a wide range of cognitive-intellectual resources throughout their working lives, these resources are insufficient to effectively cope with emotional work demands and improve employees' functioning in the family domain.

This study supports the conservation-of-resources (COR) theory in that social stressors (i.e., workplace incivility) in the work domain provoke

negative affective reactions (i.e., emotional exhaustion) among employees, which subsequently leads to poor functioning in the nonwork (family) domain, leading to WFC. Moreover, it appears that the cognitive resources (i.e., job experience) accumulated in employees' working lives are insufficient to effectively cope with the emotional demands (i.e., emotional exhaustion) elicited by supervisor incivility. This implies that emotional support resources are required to better cope with emotional work demands and that cognitive resources are required to deal with cognitive job demands more effectively. These findings have implications for organizational leaders and practitioners.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

COR theory contends that individuals have limited emotional and psychological resources that they seek to protect and conserve (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources can be classified into physical objects, personal dispositional characteristics, conditions and energies. Physical objects can include a house or a car; personal characteristics include a sense of optimism and self-efficacy; conditions include a good marriage; and energy includes money, time and physical health (Hobfoll, 1989). The COR literature has described the conditions under which stress occurs and role performance can be compromised: (a) the employee perceives the potential threat of resource loss, (b) the employee experiences actual loss of valuable resources, (c) the employee perceives their role demands to be greater than their reservoir of resources, and (d) the employee fails to replenish their resources after significant investment of emotional resources in work role demands (Hobfoll, 1989).

Borrowing insights from the COR theory, this study contends that workplace incivility depletes emotional resources, which increases emotional exhaustion for employees. Emotionally exhausted employees conserve their remaining personal resources by limiting their participation in the family domain, thereby experiencing increased WFC. A front-line service employee interacts with customers, co-workers and supervisors on a regular basis. Therefore, it is imperative to take into account different sources of incivility (customers, co-workers and supervisors) to provide a more holistic understanding of this phenomenon.

## **2.2. Customer Incivility and WFC**

Sliter et al. (2010, p. 468) define customer incivility as 'low-intensity deviant behavior, perpetrated by someone in a customer or client role, with ambiguous intent to harm an employee, in violation of social norms of mutual respect and courtesy.' In a study conducted on Taiwanese tourist hotel chefs, workplace incivility was found to result in high turnover intention, while job satisfaction mediated this relationship (Chen & Wang, 2019).

Using a sample of nurses, Zhou et al. (2019) show that burnout transmits the impact of uncivil customer treatment on WFC. This study argues that workers prone to interactional workplace stressors feel compelled to spend more energy, time and emotional resources on work to avoid negative consequences, such as losing their jobs. Restaurant servers devoting maximum time and energy to deal with workplace stressors will have less time and energy to participate in the family domain. In light of the reviewed empirical findings, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1a:** There is a positive relationship between customer incivility and restaurant servers' perceptions of WFC.

## **2.3. Co-Worker Incivility and WFC**

Co-worker incivility refers to uncivil behaviors perpetrated by co-workers, such as ignoring others or neglecting to say 'please' and 'thank you' (Pearson et al., 2001). Co-worker incivility threatens the target's need for belongingness and causes them to experience social exclusion and psychological distress (Abubakar, 2018). Demsky et al. (2019) show that negative work rumination explains the effect of co-worker incivility on workers' deteriorated sleep quality. The effect of ruminative thinking on insomnia symptoms weakens when psychological detachment is high. Lim and Lee (2011) indicate that co-worker incivility decreases the target's satisfaction with uncivil co-workers and increases the target's depression and perception of having received unfair treatment.

Ferguson (2012) finds that stress transmission explains the effect of co-worker incivility on targets' marital satisfaction. Sakurai and Jex (2012) find that co-worker incivility lowers the work effort of the targeted employees. Negative emotions do not allow individuals to concentrate on focal tasks because their attention is fixed on issues pertaining to co-worker incivility. Sliter et al. (2012) argue that co-worker incivility strengthens the

positive relationship between customer incivility and absenteeism as well as exacerbates the negative relationship between customer incivility and sales performance.

For a sample of Pakistani college employees, Zahoor et al. (2019) find that WFC exacerbates the positive relationship between workplace incivility and counterproductive work behavior. Employees who jointly experienced greater WFC and uncivil workplace treatment were more likely to exhibit counterproductive work behavior. This study argues that co-worker incivility can permeate into the nonwork domain when the targets of co-worker incivility spend extra time and mental energy reflecting on uncivil work encounters after working hours, robbing them of the cognitive and emotional resources needed to participate in the family domain effectively. Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2a:** There is a positive relationship between co-worker incivility and restaurant servers' perception of work-family conflict.

#### *2.4. Supervisor Incivility and WFC*

Pluut et al. (2022) argue that stressful workplace interactions (i.e., workplace incivility, abusive supervision and interpersonal conflict) have ripple effects on social interactions outside of work. Specifically, workplace social stressors elicit burnout symptoms among employees who have a greater propensity to trust their interaction partners. Uncivil workplace interactions deplete the self-regulatory resources of employees with a trusting disposition, making them less sociable and more withdrawn at home and increasing their risk of WFC.

Lim and Lee (2011) indicate that targets of supervisor incivility experience heightened WFC and lower supervisor satisfaction. The effect of workplace incivility depends on the job status of the instigator. Subordinates tend to be more sensitive to supervisors' behavior due to the latter's position of power and status within the organization. Therefore, employees experiencing incivility from supervisors report greater WFC. In line with Lim and Lee (2011), this study proposes that supervisor incivility depletes low-status restaurant servers' emotional resources where the state of exhaustion motivates them to conserve their psychological and emotional resources by reducing their participation in the family domain and as a result experience WFC. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 3a:** There is a positive relationship between supervisor incivility and restaurant servers' perceptions of WFC.

### ***2.5. Emotional Exhaustion as Mediator in the Customer Incivility and WFC Relationship***

Greenbaum et al. (2014) find that emotional exhaustion explains the effect of customers' unethical behavior on employees' perception of WFC. Mahfooz et al. (2017) state that workplace incivility leads to turnover intention, with burnout mediating this relationship. Kern and Grandey (2009) find a significant positive relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion. White employees are more likely to perceive uncivil treatment from customers as unfair and undeserving compared to Black employees. Moreover, while white employees were found to respond to customer incivility, minority employees were less likely to do so.

Zhou et al. (2019) find that burnout mediates the relationship between outsider incivility and WFC. In the healthcare context, outsider incivility refers to uncivilized behavior perpetrated by patients and visitors. Nurses who perceive a strong need to regulate their emotions in response to outsider incivility experience job-related burnout. Raja et al. (2018) find that job burnout transmits the effect of workplace bullying on WFC in a sample of government sector employees in Pakistan. Drawing on the COR theory, this study argues that customer incivility depletes workers' emotional and psychological resources. Emotionally exhausted employees conserve their emotional and psychological resources by limiting the time they spend with friends and family. Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1b:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between customer incivility and restaurant servers' perceptions of WFC.

### ***2.6. Emotional Exhaustion as Mediator in the Co-Worker Incivility and WFC Relationship***

Zhou et al. (2019) find that burnout explains the link between co-worker incivility and WFC. Rhee et al. (2017) find that emotional exhaustion fully mediates the relationship between co-worker incivility and front-line hotel employees' job performance. According to the job demand resource model, co-worker incivility is conceptualized as a job demand that deprives the target employee of emotional and psychological

resources, leaving them emotionally exhausted. According to the COR theory, employees experiencing co-worker incivility attempt to protect their leftover resources by withdrawing from job tasks. In a similar vein, we argue that co-worker incivility is a social stressor that depletes restaurant servers' limited emotional and psychological resources. In response to the threat of loss, servers attempt to conserve their finite resources by limiting participation in the family domain and experiencing greater WFC. In light of the above arguments, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2b:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between co-worker incivility and restaurant servers' perceptions of WFC.

### ***2.7. Emotional Exhaustion as Mediator in the Supervisor Incivility and WFC Relationship***

Supervisor incivility refers to uncivil behaviors perpetrated by supervisors, such as publicly embarrassing and ostracizing subordinates, passing hurtful comments or gossiping about subordinates (Reio, 2011). These behaviors signal to subordinates that their supervisors do not value their contributions, which depletes subordinates' emotional and social energy and results in psychological distress (Abubakar, 2018). Yao et al. (2023) find that authoritarian leaders arouse negative emotions among employees who are expected to refrain from expressing negative emotions in the workplace. Employees may spend considerable cognitive effort in suppressing negative emotions and continue to experience a cognitive burden until the negative emotion is released in a psychologically safe environment. The home and family domain is considered a psychologically safe nonwork environment that allows employees to vent their feelings. Employees burdened by emotional suppression have few personal resources available to fulfill family duties and are likely to experience greater WFC.

The research suggests that leaders' behaviors affect employee attitudes and behaviors outside the boundaries of work. Some leader behaviors may make it difficult for employees to manage their work-family interface (Tepper, 2000). Li et al. (2017) indicate that employees susceptible to supervisors' unethical behavior are prone to experiencing WFC. In a study on hotel managers and their partners, Krannitz et al. (2015) find that emotional exhaustion transmits the effect of a manager's surface acting at the workplace to a partner's perception of family conflict. Surface acting at the workplace affects employees' experiences at home, which is explained

by resource and spillover mechanisms. The resource mechanism posits that work activities deplete an individual's resources, hindering effective participation in the family domain. The spillover mechanism refers to the cross-domain transmission of moods, behaviors and experiences from one major sphere of life to another. Work events elicit emotions and moods that the employees carry to the home domain, which affects their experience at home (Bakker et al., 2009).

Supervisors have the authority to control important organizational resources such as promotions, rewards and compensation (Abubakar, 2018). Restaurant workers experience greater power imbalances and a lack of job control in response to supervisor incivility (Bradley, 2007). Supervisor incivility lowers subordinates' intrinsic motivation and job performance and increases their emotional exhaustion (Han et al., 2021). Drawing on the job demands and resources model, Guidetti et al. (2021) postulate that supervisor incivility as a job demand contributes to job-related burnout. In light of the reviewed empirical findings, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 3b:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between supervisor incivility and restaurant servers' perceptions of WFC.

### ***2.8. Job Experience as a Moderator in the Supervisor Incivility-WFC Relationship through Emotional Exhaustion***

Kim et al. (2021) test the impact of developmental job experience on workers' innovative work behavior. Developmental job experience allows individuals to perform novel, diverse, complex, challenging and unfamiliar tasks to enhance their competencies and interpersonal skills. Job experience results in a personal learning experience that builds employees' sense of mastery, resilience and self-efficacy and promotes innovative work behavior. Drawing on transactional stress theory, job assignments perceived as a challenge induce positive psychological states while job assignments perceived as a threat induce negative psychological states.

Job assignments that are perceived as a challenge allow individuals to accumulate psychological capital because they expect to receive future gains from performing difficult tasks. In contrast, job assignments that are perceived as threats deplete employees' cognitive, emotional and psychological resources. Developmental job assignments yield benefits in the long but not short run. Employees who perform ambiguous and

complex job tasks are exposed to prolonged periods of stress and experience nervousness and anxiety. Complex job assignments deprive workers of psychological resources and, as a result, cause them to experience burnout, which undermines innovative work behavior.

Emotional exhaustion comprises three components: a person-specific stable trait that is time-invariant, an event-specific transitory state stimulated by a critical situational factor, and a malleable autoregressive trait that reflects the slow development of emotional exhaustion over time (Dicke et al., 2022). The three components represent how state-level emotional exhaustion metamorphoses into stable trait-level emotional exhaustion over the life course.

Starting from state-level emotional exhaustion, the temporal aspect plays a vital role in the development of stable trait-level emotional exhaustion. Dicke et al. (2022) suggest that early-career school principals experience state and autoregressive levels of emotional exhaustion while late-career school principals experience trait-based emotional exhaustion. With increasing levels of job experience over time, autoregressive emotional exhaustion transforms into more stable trait-level emotional exhaustion. Differences in job experience reflect a maturation effect whereby emotional exhaustion is malleable until individuals reach early adulthood, after which emotional exhaustion becomes more stable and trait-like.

In line with Dicke et al. (2022), this study contends that late-career restaurant servers experience stable trait-level emotional exhaustion compared to novice restaurant servers. We speculate that restaurant servers' emotional exhaustion is exacerbated in proportion to their job tenure. Mid- and late-career restaurant workers are likely to have encountered more instances of supervisor incivility and experienced greater emotional exhaustion than early-career restaurant workers. Compared to early-career restaurant workers, mid- and late-career restaurant workers will attempt to conserve finite resources by limiting their participation in the family domain and experiencing greater WFC. Based on the reviewed literature, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 4:** Job experience moderates the relationship between incivility instigated by the supervisor and WFC through emotional exhaustion, such that employees with longer tenure in customer service roles experience greater emotional exhaustion and thereby greater WFC.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Sample and Procedure**

We employed a self-administered paper-and-pencil survey to collect data at a single point in time from front-line restaurant employees who interacted with customers, co-workers and supervisors on a daily basis in casual and fine dining restaurants in Lahore, Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select the restaurants, while convenience sampling was used to select the study participants.

The researcher visited the head offices of two restaurants based in Lahore to solicit permission for data collection. The relevant human resource personnel agreed to share their contact information. Emails were sent to the respective human resource departments to obtain official permission for data collection. The researcher waited approximately two weeks until one restaurant formally provided permission to collect the data.

In the meantime, the researcher visited coffee houses, food courts and fine dining restaurants located in two big malls in Lahore. The researcher met shift managers and explained the purpose of the research. The shift manager granted permission for the data collection and offered space within the vicinity of the restaurant to solicit responses. One study participant would appear at a time, and the researcher would read out the instructions, statements and answer choices clearly, to which participants responded verbally and the researcher recorded the responses. After completion of the survey, the respondents received a cash award of PKR100 as compensation for participating. Expenses related to the data collection were borne by the researcher.

After two weeks, a big fast-food restaurant in Lahore formally gave permission to survey restaurant employees. The researcher abandoned the walk-in data collection process and opted to collect data through official means. A vacant room at the restaurant site was allocated for the purpose of data collection. The restaurant manager sent in five to six participants at a time. The researcher distributed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire to each study participant, explained the purpose of the study, and ensured the anonymity of the responses. The researcher read the instructions and questionnaire statements clearly and participants were given a few seconds to record their responses. Employees at this restaurant did not accept cash incentives as the management did not allow them to accept tips.

The literature on workplace incivility employs a varied sample size. In previous studies, the sample size ranged from 59 respondents (Walker et al., 2014) to 226 respondents (Chen & Wang, 2019). Based on past studies and evidence, we employ a sample size of 235 respondents. Out of 400 questionnaires that were distributed, 235 were considered usable for analysis.

### **3.2. Measures**

A close-ended questionnaire was used to solicit participants' responses. All the constructs were measured using pre-existing and pre-established scales. The scales were available in English and adapted into Urdu through translation and back-translation. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a sample of 14 respondents. After repeating the activity 14 times, it appeared that respondents took longer to understand certain words, and the meaning of these words had to be explained by the researcher. As a result, difficult words were replaced with easy-to-understand words. Overall, no major flaws in wording were found. None of the items used in the questionnaire were reverse-coded. Except for demographic variables, participants' responses were obtained on a 1–5-point Likert scale.

Wilson and Holmval's (2013) scale, consisting of ten items, is used to measure customer incivility. An example of a sample item is 'Customers often blame me for a problem I did not cause.' The scale developed by Cortina et al. (2001), which consists of seven items, is used to measure co-worker incivility. An example of a sample item is 'My co-workers often put me down and treat me condescendingly.' Similarly, the scale developed by Cortina et al. (2001), consisting of seven items, is used to measure supervisor incivility. An example of a sample item is 'My supervisor often puts me down and treats me condescendingly.'

Maslach and Jackson's (1981) scale, consisting of eight items, is used to operationalize emotional exhaustion. An example of a sample item is 'I feel frustrated by my job.' The scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000), consisting of three items (strain-based measures), is used to operationalize the WFC construct. Studies involving emotional exhaustion and WFC have employed strain-based measures of WFC (Wagner et al., 2014). Therefore, strain-based WFC is used as a first-order construct in the current study. An example of a sample item is 'I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family.' Lastly, Wang et al. (2011) measure job experience as the number of years and months spent working as a customer service officer at a call center. We

define job experience as the number of years and months spent working as a customer service representative. Job experience is measured with the help of the following question: 'Please indicate the number of years you have worked as a customer service representative (e.g., four years).'

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Smart PLS 3.0 is used to perform confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis, and the SPSS PROCESS Macro is used to perform moderated mediation analysis. Approximately 87 percent of the respondents were male and 13 percent were female. The mean age of respondents was approximately 23 years. About 74 percent of the respondents were not married and 26 percent were married. The sample represents a clear majority of unmarried male respondents. The mean number of years of formal education attained was 11.697 years, suggesting that respondents' average level of education is up to the intermediate level. The respondents' average job experience was 4.197 years and the average salary was approximately PKR23,097.

In the measurement model, indicator reliability is assessed by checking the outer loadings of the indicator variables, as shown in Table 1. Consistent with Hair et al. (2009), a cut-off level of 0.6 is used; items with factor loadings below 0.6 are removed and those above 0.6 are retained. After deleting the items with low factor loadings, the measurement model achieved a satisfactory fit to the data (CMIN/df = 1.949,  $p = 0.000$ , RMSEA = 0.064, NFI = 0.880, TLI = 0.916, CFI = 0.936).

**Table 1: Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity and Factor Loadings**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>AVE (Convergent Validity)</b>	<b>Discriminant Validity</b>	<b>Factor Loadings</b>
Customer Incivility (CI)	0.510	0.714	Retained 3 items from a total of 10 items 0.820 0.629 0.678
Co-worker Incivility (CWI)	0.635	0.797	Retained 3 items from a total of 7 items 0.879 0.730 0.775

Variable Name	AVE (Convergent Validity)	Discriminant Validity	Factor Loadings
Supervisor Incivility (SI)	0.527	0.726	Retained 4 items from a total of 7 items 0.639 0.768 0.777 0.711
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.628	0.792	Retained 4 items from a total of 8 items 0.826 0.739 0.820 0.781
Work-Family Conflict (WFC)	0.749	0.866	Retained all 3 items as follows 0.880 0.911 0.803

Convergent validity is assessed by the average variance extracted (AVE). Consistent with Hair et al. (2009), the cut-off point for convergent validity is 0.5 in the current study. The AVE of all the latent constructs is found to be above 0.5, as shown in Table 1. Discriminant validity measures the degree to which a given latent construct is different from other latent constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2009). The square root of AVE is greater than the inter-factor correlations of that factor with all other factors, indicating that discriminant validity holds. The VIF values of all latent constructs are less than 3.0, suggesting multi-collinearity is not present (Hair et al., 2009). The summated factor scores of each construct are created using items in the measurement model, and these factor scores are used to conduct path analysis.

#### 4. Empirical Results

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients and correlations of the study variables. All the latent constructs are found to be positively correlated with each other and all the correlations are significant except one. The highest positive correlation occurs between supervisor incivility and co-worker incivility ( $r = 0.607$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The customer incivility construct has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.515, co-worker incivility has a value of 0.727, supervisor incivility has a value of 0.721, emotional exhaustion has a value of 0.803, and WFC has a value of 0.831.

The selected cut-off point of Cronbach's alpha in the current study is 0.7 (Hair et al., 2009). The Cronbach's alpha value of the customer incivility construct is below 0.70 because seven items with factor loadings below 0.6 were dropped to improve the model fit and AVE. While the model fit improved and the AVE touched 0.5, Cronbach's alpha value dropped below 0.7 because the measure is sensitive to the number of items in a construct. Since the customer incivility construct has a composite reliability of 0.755, we considered the construct appropriate for further analysis. All the other latent variables have a Cronbach's alpha of above 0.7, indicating that the constructs are internally consistent.

**Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients and Bivariate Correlations**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Customer Incivility	0.2038	0.6575	(0.515)				
2. Co-worker Incivility	0.7271	0.7728	0.343**	(0.727)			
3. Supervisor Incivility	0.4626	0.6178	0.283**	0.607**	(0.721)		
4. Emotional Exhaustion	0.3457	0.9609	0.305**	0.304**	0.236**	(0.803)	
5. Work-Family Conflict	0.0823	0.2524	0.236**	0.216**	0.114	0.480**	(0.831)

Note: N = 235.

Cronbach's alpha values are reported along the diagonal in parentheses.

\*\* Correlation values are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, Hypothesis 1a, which proposes a positive relationship between customer incivility and WFC, is supported ( $\beta = 0.392$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Hypothesis 1b, which suggests a positive relationship between co-worker incivility and WFC, is also supported ( $\beta = 0.274$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Hypothesis 1c, which proposes a positive relationship between supervisor incivility and WFC, is also supported ( $\beta = 0.198$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

**Table 3: Mediation Model predicting WFC from Customer Incivility, Co-worker Incivility and Supervisor Incivility mediated by Emotional Exhaustion**

	Beta	t-stats	p-value	Mediation type
Customer Incivility is the independent variable				
CI $\rightarrow$ EE	0.356	5.500	0.000	
Mediator on outcome				
EE $\rightarrow$ WFC	0.466	7.831	0.000	
Direct effect				
CI $\rightarrow$ WFC	0.227	4.168	0.000	
Indirect effect				

	Beta	t-stats	p-value	Mediation type
CI → EE → WFC	0.166	4.401	0.000	Complementary mediation present
Co-worker Incivility is the independent variable				
CWI → EE	0.340	4.899	0.000	
Mediator on outcome				
EE → WFC	0.512	9.600	0.000	
Direct effect				
CWI → WFC	0.100	1.734	0.084	
Indirect effect				
CWI → EE → WFC	0.174	4.425	0.000	Indirect only mediation present
Supervisor Incivility is the independent variable				
SI → EE	0.265	3.486	0.001	
Mediator on outcome				
EE → WFC	0.531	9.874	0.000	
Direct effect				
SI → WFC	0.057	1.120	0.263	
Indirect effect				
SI → EE → WFC	0.141	3.291	0.001	Indirect only mediation present
Total effect				
CI → WFC	0.392	7.060	0.000	
CWI → WFC	0.274	5.032	0.000	
SI → WFC	0.198	3.397	0.001	
Moderated Mediation: SI is the independent variable				
SI → EE	0.267		0.000	
EE → WFC	0.336		0.001	
JE → WFC	-0.018		0.916	
EE*JE → WFC	0.045		0.020	

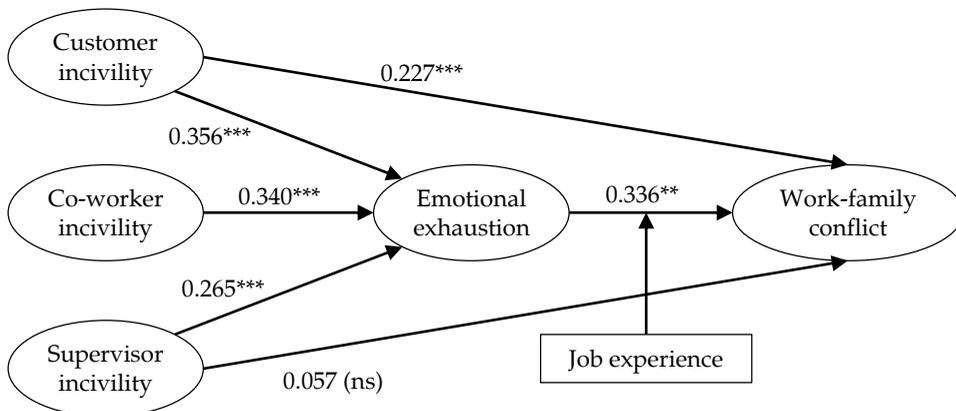
Note: N = 235. All coefficients are standardized coefficients.

Hypothesis 2a suggests that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between customer incivility and WFC. The indirect effect is examined at 95 percent confidence interval and is found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.166$ ,  $t = 4.401$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), which confirms that mediation exists. In the presence of emotional exhaustion as a mediator, the coefficient between customer incivility and WFC remains significant ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $t = 4.168$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), suggesting that the relationship between customer incivility and WFC is complementarily mediated by emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2b suggests that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between co-worker incivility and WFC. The indirect effect is significant ( $\beta = 0.174$ ,  $t = 4.425$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), which confirms that mediation is present. When emotional exhaustion is used as a mediator, the coefficient between co-worker incivility and WFC becomes insignificant ( $\beta = 0.100$ ,  $t$ -stat = 1.734,  $p$ -value = 0.084), indicating that the relationship between co-worker incivility and WFC is 'indirect only' or fully mediated by emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2c suggests that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between supervisor incivility and WFC. The indirect effect is significant ( $\beta = 0.141$ ,  $t = 3.291$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), which confirms that mediation exists. When emotional exhaustion is applied as a mediator, the coefficient between supervisor incivility and WFC becomes insignificant ( $\beta = 0.057$ ,  $t = 1.120$ ,  $p = 0.263$ ), suggesting that the relationship between supervisor incivility and WFC is 'indirect only' or fully mediated by emotional exhaustion.

**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**



Hypothesis 4 suggests that the indirect effect from supervisor incivility to WFC via emotional exhaustion will be stronger for employees with longer job experience. Following Edwards and Lambert's (2007) approach, we compute the indirect effect of supervisor incivility (through emotional exhaustion) on WFC at low, average and high levels of job experience. Our data supports the hypothesis as the interaction term (emotional exhaustion  $\times$  job experience) is significantly associated with WFC ( $\beta = 0.045$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ). The theoretical framework is shown in Figure 1.

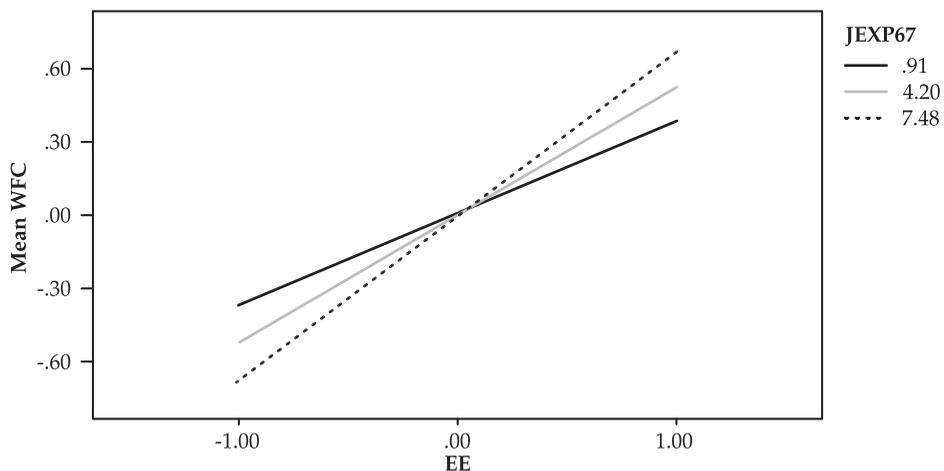
As shown in Table 4, the results indicate that the greater the degree of supervisor incivility experienced by a restaurant server is, the greater the emotional exhaustion they will experience ( $b = 0.267, p = 0.000$ ). The effect of supervisor incivility on WFC is statistically significant for all categories of work experience because the confidence interval does not straddle 0 for shorter, average and longer job experience. Although the indirect effect of supervisor incivility on WFC is significant for all three categories of employees, the effect is strongest for the third category of employees with longer work experience (mean + 1SD). The slope linking emotional exhaustion and WFC is steepest for employees with a higher number of years of job experience relative to employees with only a few years of job experience, as shown in Figure 2.

**Table 4: Indirect effect of Supervisor Incivility (through Emotional Exhaustion) on WFC by level of Job Experience**

Level of job experience	Job experience	First stage		Second stage		Indirect effect	
		b MX	SE	b YM	SE	b MX b YM	95% CI
Lesser job experience	0.914	0.267***	0.063	0.377***	0.086	0.101	[0.0322, 0.1838]
Mean job experience	4.197	0.267***	0.063	0.524***	0.056	0.139	[0.0633, 0.2175]
Longer job experience	7.480	0.267***	0.063	0.672***	0.082	0.179	[0.0804, 0.2741]

Note: \*\*\* Significant values at  $p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 2: Job Experience exacerbates the positive relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and WFC**



## 5. Discussion of Findings

Our results indicate that all three forms of workplace incivility (customer, co-worker and supervisor) are significantly related to WFC, suggesting that even less intense forms of disrespectful behavior by customers, co-workers and supervisors serve as sources of stress, robbing the employee of their emotional resources and contributing to their WFC. Multiple sources of incivility (customer, co-worker and supervisor) were included to fully represent the social environment of restaurants.

Our findings are partially consistent with those of Zhou et al. (2019), where both customer incivility and co-worker incivility were found to be positively related to WFC. In Zhou et al. (2019), supervisor incivility was found to be unrelated to WFC, whereas Lim and Lee (2011) found superior incivility to be positively related to WFC. Zhou et al. (2019) argue that the study used a five-week diary design during which nurses likely did not have enough occurrences of uncivil interaction with supervisors that could account for the variance in family conflict. Our findings pertaining to supervisor incivility are consistent with those of Lim and Lee (2011).

Compared to customer incivility and co-worker incivility, supervisor incivility has the weakest relationship with WFC. These findings are similar to those of Adams and Webster (2013), where the relationship between supervisor interpersonal mistreatment and psychological distress is weakest compared to the relationship between co-worker and customer interpersonal mistreatment and psychological distress.

Latané's (1981) social impact theory provides a relevant explanation by positing that the impact of mistreatment is not only determined by the position of power but also by the immediacy and frequency of interaction. Customers appear in large numbers at restaurants and restaurant servers spend more time interacting with customers than with supervisors. As customers appear in large numbers, the frequency of interaction increases and subsequently the likelihood of exposure to uncivil treatment from customers increases. Drawing on Latané (1981), we infer that due to the immediacy and access of customers, the customer incivility and WFC relationship is stronger than the supervisor incivility and WFC relationship.

Our mediation results are similar to those of Greenbaum et al. (2014), where emotional exhaustion mediates the impact of customers' unethical behavior on WFC. This finding also matches that of Zhou et al. (2019), where burnout explained the effect of co-worker incivility on WFC. The mediation

result for supervisor incivility is similar to Giumetti et al. (2013), who indicate that after experiencing supervisor incivility via email, employees experience emotional exhaustion and, as a result, withdraw effort from their work, thereby lowering their task performance and work engagement.

The moderated mediation analysis reveals that job experience strengthens the positive link between emotional exhaustion and WFC, such that longer job tenure results in greater WFC. Bradley (2007) found that the stressor-strain relationship is stronger among inexperienced workers than among experienced workers. Experienced workers have adapted better to the job environment and are thus better equipped to cope with challenging job demands than inexperienced employees.

Our results are contrary to those of Bradley (2007). In our study, experienced restaurant servers experienced greater emotional exhaustion than novice servers. A plausible explanation could be that late-career restaurant servers are caught up in a negative burnout cycle whereby individuals' personal resources are continuously depleted and not replenished to cope with workplace demands (Bakker & Costa, 2014). It is possible that the subtle nature of uncivil interactions is not immediately recognizable to younger, more inexperienced workers since they are not fully aware of job demands in their early careers. However, with increasing job experience, respondents are better able to recognize subtle forms of social stressors.

Our findings suggest that restaurant servers with longer customer service roles experience greater emotional exhaustion and greater WFC. WFC was higher for those who had experienced greater emotional exhaustion, but those who had longer job experience faced higher emotional exhaustion. Thus, WFC was found to be greater among employees who had longer job experience.

### ***5.1. Theoretical Implications***

COR theory posits that individuals have limited cognitive, emotional and psychological resources that they seek to protect and conserve (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees experience stress when they perceive the threat of loss or actual loss of valuable cognitive, emotional and psychological resources. Cognitive resources include job skills, experience, and knowledge; emotional resources include positive feelings and a sense of optimism; and psychological resources include the focus and attention required to perform a given task efficiently. This study provides support

for the COR theory in that workplace incivility imposes psychological and emotional demands that deplete employees' valuable cognitive and emotional resources, which results in emotional exhaustion.

Employees devote extra time and mental energy to ruminating about their work experiences during nonwork hours and experience emotional exhaustion as a result. Employees engage in defensive attempts to conserve their leftover resources by reducing their participation in the family domain and thus experience WFC (Zhou et al., 2019). In the context of the present study, an increased level of intellectual resources stemming from longer job experience did not help restaurant servers experience lower emotional exhaustion and lower WFC. We thus infer that intellectual cognitive resources cannot compensate for the depletion of emotional resources. Cognitive resources can be used to effectively cope with cognitive demands. Likewise, emotional resources can be used to effectively cope with emotional demands.

According to human capital theory (Becker, 1962), experienced employees perform better in job roles than less experienced employees. Earley et al. (1990) suggest that job experience allows employees to accumulate skills, knowledge, competencies and psychomotor abilities that improve performance. Job experience offers employees a period of learning during which they accumulate job-related capital, including human capital, social capital and psychological capital, which allows them to manage job demands. Long work experience leads to cognitive simplification of job tasks by converting complex cognitive schemas into simplistic habitual routines (Earley et al., 1990). According to the attentional view of stress, under stressful work conditions, experienced employees are better able to redirect their attention and concentrate better on key work tasks than inexperienced employees (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007).

However, our findings are contrary to human capital theory and the attentional view of stress. We find that the cognitive resources accumulated through extended job experience are not sufficient to overcome the depletion of emotional resources resulting from uncivil workplace interactions. The results suggest that the greater the work experience acquired by employees is, the less capable they become of effectively handling WFC, reinforcing the belief that only emotional resources can make up for emotional workplace demands and that cognitive resources can make up for cognitive workplace demands. Workplace incivility lowers restaurant servers' self-esteem, self-efficacy and sense of optimism. This study contends that emotional exhaustion resulting from a loss of emotional resources cannot be

compensated for by cognitive resources accumulated through long job tenure. These findings have implications for organizational leaders and practitioners to which we now turn.

## **5.2. Practical Implications**

Organizational executives can take steps to lower the incidence of workplace incivility and break the negative burnout cycle, which will likely lower WFC. Organizational leaders must strive to establish a psychologically safe, respectful and ethical workplace climate that encourages ethical workplace behavior. This can be accomplished by introducing relaxation techniques and mindfulness programs (Dicke et al., 2022) as well as organizing professional development workshops (Yao et al., 2023) and implementing a civility, respect and engagement in the workforce (CREW) training program (Demsky et al., 2019).

The purpose of implementing CREW programs is to promote civil and respectful workplace interactions (Osatuke et al., 2009). Such programs cultivate an organizational climate of respect, fairness and mutual trust. Employees build their capacity to accept individual differences in the work group and treat their co-workers with respect. The ensuing respect and mutual trust increase feelings of empowerment and job satisfaction and lower employee burnout and turnover intention (Osatuke et al., 2009). Civil workplace interaction increases employee cooperation, teamwork, collective problem-solving, and fair conflict resolution (Osatuke et al., 2009), which likely results in improved customer experience and elicits repeat customer purchases. This study argues that CREW programs not only improve the quality of social workplace interactions but also improve an organization's bottom-line performance.

Restaurant managers should seek feedback from subordinates regarding their behavior and style of supervision. They should also build supportive relationships with and provide mentoring and socio-emotional support to employees (Tsagkanou et al., 2023). Restaurant managers must identify employees who frequently face customer incivility issues because a greater frequency of exposure to such incidents may indicate the need for development. Doing so would help restaurant managers develop a 'buddy system' by pairing an employee who encounters more customer incivility with an employee who encounters less customer incivility (Han et al., 2016).

Management could also encourage employees to initiate blogs and Facebook groups to discuss experiences of customer incivility and effective

strategies to handle such events. Moreover, workplace engagement programs, including sports events, competitions and employees' birthday celebrations, could be designed and implemented to give employees an opportunity to recover their emotional and psychological resources and improve workplace morale. Employee recognition and reward programs such as cash incentives, bonuses and employee-of-the-month certificates should be implemented to acknowledge employees' efforts to meet and exceed customer expectations. Such programs will likely improve employees' motivation to improve the quality of their social interactions.

Organizations should encourage employees to adopt perspective-taking behavior. Employees who do so consider customer problems personally relevant and attach greater importance to resolving such problems (Song et al., 2018). In order to foster perspective-taking behavior, organizations could consider offering 'lens-of-the-customer' training (Sliter et al., 2010) to train employees to take the time to understand the perspective of their interaction partners before enacting a response.

A more appropriate response to customer incivility may be emotional neutrality because being too positive or too negative can make things worse (Sliter et al., 2010). Service providers who fake positive expressions in response to incivility may be perceived as not being serious about customer concerns, whereas those expressing negative emotions in response to incivility could be perceived as rude and unprofessional. We suggest adopting an emotionally neutral tone to make customers feel that their concerns will be heard and addressed.

### ***5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions***

The study is not without its limitations. First, the data was collected from a single country, which can affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study is subject to common method bias due to the cross-sectional research design, which we adopted owing to time and resource constraints. Third, the study sample comprised primarily of male respondents (87 percent), making it difficult to examine whether gender differences affected the proposed relationships. We suggest that future studies adopt time-lagged, longitudinal and experimental designs and collect data from different sources (i.e., supervisors, focal employees and co-workers) to reduce common method bias and determine causal relationships. Last, future researchers could choose to adopt a qualitative approach (i.e., interviews, observations and focus groups) to enrich and validate the present study's findings.

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