Falling against incivility spirals or standing to maintain individuality: a social conformity perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The main purpose of this paper is to empirically investigate the spiraling effects of workplace incivility. In doing so, the authors examine how workplace incivility begets other forms of mistreatment such as ostracism and abusive supervision, which in turn hinders employees' job performance. In addition, the authors also test the buffering role of social skills in this process.

Design/methodology/approach – This study investigates a mediated moderation model with multitime and multisource data from 205 employees working in different Pakistani-based organizations (self-rated at T1 and supervisor rated at T2).

Findings – The results of this study provide support to the predictions that workplace incivility diminishes employees' ability to perform through parallel mediations of ostracism and abusive supervision. The empirical findings also show that social skills moderate the negative relationship between abusive supervision and job performance.

Originality/value – This work extends the contemporary slant in workplace incivility, ostracism and abusive supervision literature by providing empirical evidence of spiraling effects of workplace incivility. In addition, the authors also tested the critical buffering role of social skills in mitigating the negative effects of such mistreatments at work.

Keywords Workplace incivility, Social skills, Workplace ostracism, Abusive supervision, Job performance

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Workplace incivility, defined as "low intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; p. 457), has emerged as an important construct in the management literature in past two decades (Schilpzand and Huang, 2018; Yao *et al.*, 2022). This prior research indicates that employees' exposure to rude behaviors at work is deeply frustrating for them because that deteriorate their well-being and everyday functioning (Kamidi and Guo, 2022). Although previous researchers warn about these adverse effects of workplace incivility, it is still widely prevalent in organizations (Haq *et al.*, 2023). Due to this continued prominence and intrusive nature of incivility, management researchers and practitioners call for further investigations; especially in nonwestern context to expand current understanding of *how* and *when* workplace incivility spreads negativity in office environment and hinders employee's ability to complete their expected job tasks (Kumar *et al.*, 2023; Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). With this study, we respond to these calls and provide an empirical synthesis of the spiraling effects of workplace incivility by exploring the underlying mechanisms and boundary condition of incivility–performance relationship.

In particular, this study empirically examines the effects of workplace incivility on employees' job performance through parallel mediation of perceived workplace ostracism and abusive supervision. To substantiate our theoretical framework, we draw from social conformity theory (SCT) (Strickland and Crowne, 1962) and social interactionist perspective of incivility (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Social interactionist view refers to incivility as an interactive event that involves at-least three actors, i.e. the victim(s), the instigator(s) and the observer(s). Accordingly, we argue that incivility begets other forms of mistreatment in such a way that social actors within an organization start considering an uncivil treatment as an acceptable behavior (Rosen *et al.*, 2016). That is, incivility is an organizational event that triggers an array of negative spirals.

Following this notion of incivility spirals, we suggest perceived workplace ostracism as first critical mediating mechanism that underpins incivility-performance relationship. Perceived ostracism at work is a subtle and passive albeit "painful and aversive" experience (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2003). Prior literature suggests that among other negative consequences of incivility, employees who faced rude behavior tend to perceive being ostracized at workplace (Anjum *et al.*, 2022; Caza and Cortina, 2007). In line with these arguments, we draw from SCT to propose that employee's exposure to uncivil treatment cause social disapproval from other colleagues and makes it difficult for them to maintain their individuality. This social disapproval negatively affects their self-esteem and impairs their ability to maintain performance-enhancing efforts because they perceive that their social ties are largely affected due to uncivil treatment.

Similarly, we suggest abusive supervision as second mediating path that underlie incivility spirals at workplace and thwart employees' ability to adequately fulfill their job tasks. That is because the observers of incivility form an interactionist approach and become abusive with their subordinates considering it as an acceptable behavior (Andersson and

Pearson, 1999; Robinson and Kelly, 1998). The victims of incivility get stuck in vicious spiral of mistreatment and perceive that the supervisor is also behaving rudely, thus hold its efforts toward meeting performance targets. With these insights in mind, we examined the above-identified indirect paths (perceived workplace ostracism and abusive supervision) through which workplace incivility hinders employees' job performance.

In addition, this study also adds to the contingency perspective of workplace incivility (Ezerins and Ludwig, 2021) and examined that the negative spiral of incivility is less harmful if employees can draw from their social skills (Riggio *et al.*, 1993). Social skills imply social influence behavior that an individual use when seeks to increase his/her attractiveness in the eyes of others (Liden and Mitchell, 1988). In the context of this study, individuals with higher levels of social skills can effectively interact with others and counter the hardships that come with rude and ignoring behavior at work. Following SCT, we posit that employees who know how to maintain their individuality, do not fall for the "conformity effect" (Asch, 1956; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2022) and use their social skills to influence others' behavior and organizational processes (Baron and Tang, 2009), in turn reduce the chances of diminished performance.

By testing these predictions, our study offers two important contributions to extant incivility research. First, we provide empirical evidence of the "spiraling" effects of incivility proposed in the seminal work of Andersson and Pearson (1999) and shifts the focus from the dyadic level to the group level. Specifically, we substantiate the theoretical assumptions that underpinned the ambiguous and subtle nature of incivility and posit that incivility spreads as a toxic spiral that invoke other forms of mistreatment at work. That is, we test the mediating effects of perceived ostracism and abusive supervision in incivility-performance relationship based on negative feedback loops (Chan and McAllister, 2014). In doing so, we focus on the instigator-victim dyad and involves other observing organizational actors.

Second, we respond to calls of previous researchers to extend the contingencies that provide understanding of *when* workplace incivility is less or more harmful (Liu *et al.*, 2021; Sguera *et al.*, 2016). We investigate the buffering role of an unexplored factor i.e. social skills and provide new insights on using the flattery and adaptability strategies to reduce the risk of compromised performance. In doing so, we extend the limited previous research that examined the beneficial moderating role of social skills for improving individual and group outcomes (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2006) and performance of employees working in various organizations (Payne, 2005). We expand on this line of inquiry and our findings inform organizational members about behavioral strategies that can be used to counter the adverse effects of workplace mistreatments. These theoretical predictions are summarized in Figure 1.

2. Literature review
2.1 Workplace incivility, perceived ostracism and low job performance
Workplace characterizes a range of passive and active mistreatments (Hitlan *et al.*, 2006) by supervisors, coworkers and customers. The most common forms of such unfair treatment are feeling ignored, overlooked and feelings of being micromanaged (Kmec *et al.*, 2014). Incivility is another such interpersonal mistreatment that has gained increasing attention of organizational scholars during the last two decades (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016) and plays an important role in prediction of ostracism at work (Bedi, 2021). Two salient features that differentiate this subtle form of mistreatment from others are ambiguity and less intensity. It is ambiguous because victims, witnesses and even instigators do not recognize that a particular action or comment harms the victim. Similarly, it is less intense because it does not involve physical or sexual violence and aggressive behaviors like workplace bullying
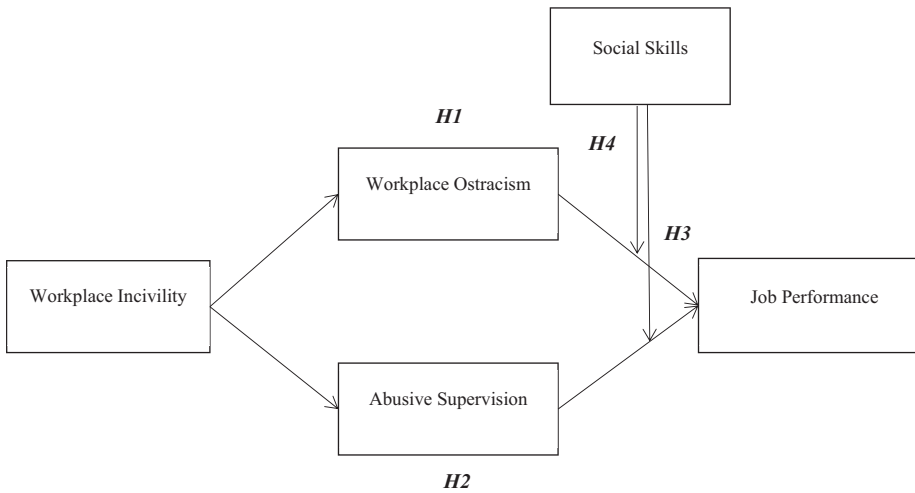
Source: Authors' conceptualization

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

(Baron, 2004). However, it is pervasive in virtually all types of organizations globally and yields a range of adverse outcomes that impede employees from playing a constructive role in organizations. When employees endure incivility in the form of rude, discourteous and insulting remarks or tone, they take it as a violation of ethical norms (Lim and Cortina, 2005; Robinson *et al.*, 2013) and consequently go through a stress response mechanism (Bunk and Magley, 2013). In turn, employees' job outcomes are compromised to the extent that they feel more depression (Lim and Lee, 2011), lack of creativity (Porath and Erez, 2007), decreased work engagement (Chen *et al.*, 2013) and lower task performance (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Giumetti *et al.*, 2013; Porath and Erez, 2007; Sliter *et al.*, 2012b). Schilpzand and Huang (2018) described the same phenomenon where incivility at workplace invokes the feelings of ostracism which results in diminishing employees' engagement at work which is another organizational outcome.

However in line with Caza and Cortina (2007) and Schilpzand and Huang (2018), in this study, we probe the mediating effect of ostracism on a slightly different organizational outcome such as job performance in light of some recent studies too which also captured the mediating impact of organizational isolation between incivility and job performance (Haq *et al.*, 2023) and mediation of loneliness between incivility and organizational outcomes (Gilmer *et al.*, 2023). Following these findings, we predict a negative relationship between employees' exposure to incivility at work and their job performance. Moreover, we predict that this relationship is mediated by employees' perception of workplace ostracism. That is, incivility occurs in a spiral where such rude behaviors do not remain confined to the victim, and the instigator rather proliferates across the organization. Consistent with the SCT assumptions, the observers of incivility might adopt this tendency and demonstrate some form of mistreatment to victims such as excluding, avoiding or ignoring them in official meetings to socially conform to the other group.

The symbolic interactionist view suggests that one's perception of self is rooted in interpersonal relationships (Mead, 1934) and how others view us (Cooley, 1964). Incivility could shatter the relational value of the victim, which could provoke a feeling of rejection experience in general within them (Smart Richman and Leary, 2009). This feeling of rejection resonates with the perception of being ostracized at the workplace. Hence, incivility breeds a vicious circle where uncivil acts instigate more mistreatment in the social context and thus makes it hard for the victims to concentrate on completion of their formal performance requirements. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Perceived workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and employees' job performance.

2.2 Workplace incivility, abusive supervision and low job performance

Consistent with our first hypothesis, we further build on the spiraling and social interactionist view of incivility and argue that such uncivil acts can escalate in the form of spiral. Specifically, we posit that workplace incivility also induce abusive supervision among the targets because if the environment is intoxicated with uncivil behaviors, the supervisors might also accede to it considering it as acceptable behavior. In line with the SCT, supervisors who perceive incivility in their surroundings conform to the social pressure (negatively charged environment) and reinforce this situation by using verbal abuse to their subordinates (Wei *et al.*, 2023). Such behaviors at workplace can lead to increased tardiness, increased absenteeism and decline in employee engagement, all of which ultimately effect employees' performance at workplace (Bunk and Magley, 2011).

In general, the victims who perceive incivility feel unable to maintain their social identity and conform to the surmounting pressure others exert on them in this vicious circle. In such instances, even a minor comment passed by supervisor would be taken much more seriously or with higher impact than if the same comment is passed in normal circumstances (Adams and Webster, 2013). That is, an individual may perceive the behavior of their supervisor as abusive in one context, might view it as nonabusive in another context, whereas those who experience or perceive uncivil behaviors from their immediate supervisors are more likely to exhibit abusive supervisory behaviors with their subordinates (Sümer *et al.*, 2024). In addition, the evaluations of two different subordinations about their supervisor's behavior could be different in the same given context (Tepper, 2000).

As perceived incivility is highly interpersonal in context, it correlates with the events occurring around the target from different parties. Therefore, rude behavior might add insult to injury and cause a reduction in the overall satisfaction, not only with coworkers but also with the supervisors (Lim and Lee, 2011). Similarly in some cases, experienced incivility in the presence of abusive supervision is found to negatively impact employees' behaviors and attitudes (Turek, 2023). Previous research also identified that a target of workplace incivility has significant adverse effects that can similarly be compared to the effects that result from abusive supervision or bullying at work (Hershcovis, 2011). Therefore, it is plausible that victims of incivility appraise the workplace as toxic and perceive that the supervisor is rude to him/her, in turn, unable to do his job properly.

Abusive supervision is defined as "employees' perceptions of consistent verbal and nonverbal hostile behavior, without any physical contact, displayed by their supervisors" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Extant research reported that employees experiencing abusive supervision tend to display undesirable behaviors at work (Brees *et al.*, 2014) which in turn reduces their performance at work (Haq *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the abusive acts from

supervisor harm the followers' mental and psychological well-being, work performance outcomes and creative ingenuity (Aryee *et al.*, 2007; Carlson *et al.*, 2012).

Though the existing research is deficient to explain the effects of incivility at the workplace with perceived abusive supervision on employees' work outcomes but many studies have discussed the serial impact of uncivil behaviors which trigger employees to display abusive supervision when they exercise power (Moin and Khan, 2023) which later results in negative work outcomes such as decrease in work performance (Saleem *et al.*, 2022). This oversight is surprising because approximately 14% of US employees are the victims of abusive supervision (Schat *et al.*, 2006), and corporations have lost approximately $23.8bn p.a. due to the outcome of lost productivity, grievance procedures and health-care costs. Therefore, investigating the nexus of incivility and abusive supervision in explaining employees' diminished job performance is timely and relevant. With this study, we unbox this link and predict that abusive supervision mediates the incivility-performance relationship:

> *H2.* Abusive supervision mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and employees' job performance.

2.3 Moderating role of social skills:

As discussed above, workplace ostracism and abusive supervision are harmful for employees' job performance. However, to counter its negative effects, employees use different coping strategies – social skills is one of them. Social skills are composed of verbal and nonverbal skills that individuals use when they interact with other (Riggio, 1986; Riggio and Throckmorton, 1988). In this study, social skills represent a set of ingratiation and social adaptability skills – two important and relevant verbal and nonverbal skills – that are useful in handling difficult situations and had an influence on organizational processes (Baron and Tang, 2009). Ingratiation is a form of social influence defined as "a political tactic employees use to further their interests" (Eastman, 1994) and are expressed in different forms such as flattery, conformity and performing favors for others (Ralston, 1985). Similarly, social adaptability is the ability of individuals to adapt the behavior in accordance with their social context. Collectively, both these skills represent employees' general tendency to change ones' behavior as needed and use flattery to influence the rude behavior of supervisors and turn it to their favor. This is consistent with the theoretical assertions of social balance theory (Cartwright and Harary, 1970) that when employees perceive an imbalance in their social context, they tend to regain the balance through using their social skills.

Following SCT theory, we suggest that although most of the employees conform to the social or group pressure, but some use their knowledge, skills or abilities as a coping mechanism and successfully maintain their social identity or individuality (Nord, 1969; Witkin *et al.*, 1974). Similarly, individuals who are proficient in using their social skills counter the influence of social pressure and do not fall for the influence exerted by the organizational environment. That is, they create deterrence against obnoxious effect of abusive supervision and adapt their social behavior to contain harmful effects on performance. Moreover, employees need social support and social networking to neutralize a stressed environment laden with abusive supervision (Bolino *et al.*, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2013). Staying closer to organizational members eventually helps employees to use ingratiation skills as a coping strategy to reflect a cheerful affective disposition (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Such disposition enables employees to evade stressors like abusive supervision and foster a better environment to improve their job performance. Following these arguments, we hypothesize:

H3. Social skills moderate the negative relationship between abusive supervision and job performance such that the negative relationship is weaker at higher levels of social skills.

Consistent with the above arguments, we suggest the beneficial role of social skills in countering the feelings of isolation when employees endure pain of being ostracized at workplace. Similar to the experience of abusive supervision, employees feel frustrated when they are ignored at work because their social connectedness and networking is threatened (Mao *et al.*, 2018). However, they can fend off this frustration by drawing from their social skills such that they can use ingratiation and adapt behavior to others' legitimate expectations. Because ostracism induces "left alone" feelings, employees can use complements and impression management techniques to make others like them (Bolino and Turnley, 1999). In turn, they would feel less worried about their social well-being and can invest their energies to fulfill the duties that are assigned.

From SCT perspective, employees who are more effective in their social skills can easily cope with the perceptions of ostracism than those possessing introversion behavior (Munyon *et al.*, 2015; Quade *et al.*, 2017). That is, employees who can effectively ingratiate with others can successfully separate themselves from negative work outcomes because they use flattery and impression management to influence others' judgment about them and enhance their likeability (Bolino *et al.*, 2016). Because employees cannot work in silos, using their social skills is a useful strategy to fight against negative spirals of workplace mistreatment. Although, previous studies noted direct beneficial impact of social skills for improving organizational functioning (Baron and Tang, 2009; Sibunruang and Kawai, 2023), little attention has been paid to examine its moderating role in countering the adversities at workplace. We address this gap with this study and predict that social skills will serve as protective shield and buffer the negative effects of workplace ostracism on employees' performance. Hence, we propose:

H4. Social skills moderate the negative relationship between perceived workplace ostracism and job performance such that the negative relationship is weaker at higher levels of social skills.

3. Research methods

3.1 Data collection procedure

We collected a multisource and time-lag data ($N = 205$) in two rounds, with a time lag of three weeks between each round. Consistent with previous studies that were conducted to gauge the time-lagged effect (Gaan and Shin, 2023; Tam and Trang, 2024), a difference of three week is sufficiently long to diminish the concerns of reverse causality and short enough that any other organizational event should not affect the proposed nature of relationship between workplace incivility and job performance (Parray *et al.*, 2023). The data was collected from Pakistani-based organizations that are engaged in multiple sectors such as banking, pharmaceutical and textile with various departments of these organizations such as human resource, marketing, supply chain, accounts and sales executives were considered who have the ability to read, understand and participate in our survey. Because our study used Smart PLS (version 3) and the sample was taken from two different points with two different sources (supervisor and subordinate rated both), the sample of 205 was considered appropriate in line with some of the previous studies in past (Guenther *et al.*, 2023; Kock and Hadaya, 2018; Mylonopoulos and Theoharakis, 2020), which are consistent with our study as well. It is also endorsed by Hair *et al.* (2019) who state that five observations per items are

sufficient to collect data for using partial least square - structure equation modeling for a multivariate model. Because our questionnaire does not include more than 40 items, the total sample size is adequate as per the criteria discussed above.

Initially, 12 organizations were approached through the personal and professional contacts of the authors and requested for formal permission of data collection in their organizations. Eight of these organizations gave formal approval, hence, were included in the final data collection process. After getting approval, we sent an email invitation containing our survey to the contact persons who forwarded the surveys to their employees. In addition, the authors also visited some of the organizations where email invitations were not possible. A self-administered survey was used in such circumstances for collecting data personally.

Furthermore, a cover letter explaining the purpose and scope of the study was attached to assure respondents of strict anonymity. The respondents were communicated that the participation is entirely voluntary, and the participants were guaranteed that responses would remain confidential and only aggregate results will be presented. Earlier research conducted in Pakistan that deployed similar methods and variables to this study showed promising results (Khan *et al.,* 2015; Raja *et al.,* 2004). The completed surveys were returned to the authors or the contact persons who had distributed the surveys. Data was collected from all employees at different levels, i.e. upper, middle and lower management, to capture maximum variation and to ensure data collection from a wide variety of organizational settings.

Of the initial 300 surveys distributed in the first round, we received 230 completed responses from employees. In the second round, the direct supervisors of these employees were contacted

Table 1. Respondent profile

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	86	42.0
Female	119	58.0
Qualification		
Secondary school	5	2.4
College education	7	3.4
Undergraduate education	66	32.2
Masters'	112	54.6
MPhil and above	15	7.3
Experience		
less than 1 year	19	9.3
1–5 years	94	45.9
6–10 years	56	27.3
11–15 years	18	8.8
15–20 years	13	6.3
More than 20 years	5	2.4
Tenure		
Less than 1 year	50	24.4
1–5 years	110	53.7
5–10 years	30	14.6
10–15 years	13	6.3
15 and above	2	1.0
Total	205	100.0

Source: Authors' own computation

and requested to rate the job performance of these employees. We received 212 filled responses in this round. After eliminating the missing responses, we finally included 205 usable pairs in the analyses, with an overall response rate of 68%. The employee sample consisted of 58% women (N = 119), with an average age of around 34 years (SD = 7.11), depicting an encouraging percentage of young and female workforce in Pakistani organizations. In addition, the average tenure of the respondents was around nine years with their current organization. All respondents received formal education, with majority of them (93%) holding a university degree. Table 1 provides the information about respondent's profile.

3.2 Measures

Using self-report items, respondents indicated the extent of their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale for the scales of workplace incivility, ostracism and abusive supervision and job performance. However, social skills dimensions i.e. social adaptability and ingratiation skills were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, as previously used in literature.

Workplace incivility: We measured workplace incivility with a six-item scale (e.g., (Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Lim *et al.*, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2012). A sample item included "people in my workplace make demeaning or derogatory remarks about me" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85). One item was deleted during the analysis due to low factor loading value.

Social skills: The measure of social skills includes two dimensions, i.e. social adaptability and ingratiation skills. We measured social adaptability with a five-item scale developed by Baron and Markman (2003) and used in previous research (Baron and Tang, 2009). A sample item is "I can easily adjust to being in just about any social situation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81). To measure ingratiation skills, we relied on a four-item scale of Baron and Markman (2003). A sample item is "I compliment my colleagues so they will see me as likeable" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79).

Workplace ostracism: We measured workplace ostracism with a nine-item scale developed by Ferris *et al.* (2008). A sample item is "My greetings have gone unanswered at work" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88). Similar to the workplace incivility scale, one item was deleted due to low factor loading value.

Abusive supervision: We measured abusive supervision with a 15-item scale developed by Tepper (2000). However, we relied on eight items for final analysis due to low factor loadings of remaining items. These eight items are consistent with the shorter version of abusive supervision scale (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). A sample item is "My supervisor ridicules me" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84).

Job performance: We measured supervisory-rated job performance with a five-item scale developed by (Williams and Anderson, 1991) and used in earlier studies (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019). A sample item is, "This employee fulfills responsibilities specified in his/her job description" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.86).

Control variables: In line with the prior studies on job performance (Downes *et al.*, 2021; Ng and Feldman, 2009), we controlled for employee education, gender, experience and tenure. These variables were controlled considering the possibility that the job performance of the employees may be influenced by these variables (e.g. longer tenure in the firm) rather than the hypothesized variables.

3.3 Common method bias

We undertook various preventive measures to ensure that common method of data collection would not create problems in the study. The data was collected in two rounds by using a multisource rating design, whereby the surveys were rated by employees and their respective

supervisors. Our strategy to rely on two sources (employees and their supervisors) helped us to avoid the issues of common method bias associated with ratings from same source (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In first round (T1), the survey asked employees about their perceived workplace incivility, two relevant dimensions of social skills, perceived ostracism and abusive supervision. In second round (T2), three weeks later, we approached the supervisors of these employees and requested them to rate the performance of their employees who provide responses in first wave. As mentioned, both surveys were preceded by cover letters that assured participants' anonymity and encouraged them to answer the questions honestly. Thus, resulting in minimal social desirability or acquiescence bias (Spector, 2006). Finally, we also performed a post hoc test to assess the possibility of common method bias. We loaded all the indicators in the model on a single factor in an exploratory factor analysis. The single factor solution explained less than 50% variation in data indicating that common method bias was not a problem in this study (Harman, 1976).

4. Results

Analysis procedures in the study followed two steps. In the first step, the measurement model was evaluated. Next, we tested the research hypotheses using structural equation modeling. We used the partial least squares (PLS) technique for both steps. We used PLS as we had a formative construct (social skills) in the measurement model, which could not be accommodated in the covariance-based structural equation modeling.

We evaluated the formative measurement model by assessing multicollinearity and significance of weights (Hair *et al.*, 2016). Variance inflation factors of both formative indicators of social skills were below two. It suggested that multicollinearity was not a problem. Furthermore, the weights of both the formative indicators were large (>0.4) and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), validating the formative model. We used Fornell and Larcker criteria to validate reflective constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). According to this criterion, convergent validity is established based on high factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.5. Discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the square root of AVE of a construct with bivariate correlations with all the other constructs along with the more recent criterion of testing validity, i.e. heterotrait-monotrait ratio (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) for which the values were below the threshold value of 0.85. The results of our study showed that average loadings on a construct were above 0.7 with AVEs of all constructs above 0.5 (Table 2). Furthermore, the square roots of AVEs for all the constructs were more than the bivariate correlations for the respective constructs (Table 3). Hence, convergent and discriminant validity was established.

We estimated internal consistency reliability using composite reliability (CR). The reliability of all the constructs was above the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Nunally and Bernstein, 1994). Table 1 provides the details about the reliability coefficients of the constructs. Table 2 provides the descriptive measures for the constructs used in the study.

4.1 Hypotheses tests

Assessment of structural models in PLS involves assessing collinearity, the significance of relationships, R^2, effect sizes and predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2016). To assess the collinearity issues, the PLS algorithm was run. Results show that variance inflation factors for the predicted variables by more than one variable in the model (i.e. job performance) were below 4.9, which is well under the maximum threshold of 10 (Hult *et al.*, 2018).

In the second step, structural paths were tested for significance. Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was used to generate the estimates for hypothesized model. Table 4 provides the results of the hypotheses tests. Our first set of hypotheses evaluated the indirect relationship

Table 2. Measurement model validation-reliability and convergent validity

Construct (*CR, AVE*)	Loadings
* Incivility (*CR = 0.94, AVE = 0.72*)	
INC1	0.88
INC2	0.79
INC3	0.84
INC4	0.90
INC5	0.85
INC6	0.85
Abusive Supervision (*CR = 0.95, AVE = 0.70*)	
AS1	0.84
AS2	0.82
AS3	0.81
AS4	0.89
AS5	0.82
AS6	0.80
AS7	0.88
AS8	0.85
Ostracism (*CR = 0.98, AVE = 0.78*)	
O1	0.88
O2	0.84
O3	0.84
O4	0.90
O5	0.90
O6	0.86
O7	0.91
O8	0.89
O9	0.91
Social Adaptability (*CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.66*)	
SA1	0.80
SA2	0.87
SA3	0.83
SA4	0.82
SA5	0.74
Ingratiation Skills (*CR = 0.87, AVE = 0.62*)	
IS1	0.78
IS2	0.80
IS3	0.73
IS4	0.85
Job Performance (*CR = 0.93, AVE = 0.73*)	
JP1	0.83
JP2	0.89
JP3	0.78
JP4	0.90
JP5	0.87

Notes: *Incivility and job performance were measured on a five-point Likert scale with 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; and 5 = frequently. The remaining variables were measured on a six-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = agree; and 6 = strongly agree
Source: Authors' own computation

Table 3. Correlations, means and standard deviations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Incivility	2.04	1.04	*0.85*					
Abusive supervision	2.02	1.10	0.81**	*0.84*				
Ostracism	2.31	1.39	0.77**	0.83**	*0.88*			
Social adaptability	4.01	1.61	−0.45**	−0.6**	−0.49**	*0.81*		
Ingratiation skills	2.84	1.34	−0.06	−0.16*	−0.09	0.51**	*0.79*	
Job performance	3.67	0.90	−0.56**	−0.57**	−0.52**	0.43**	0.26**	*0.86*

Notes: The italic diagonal values are the square root of AVE representing discriminant validity. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)
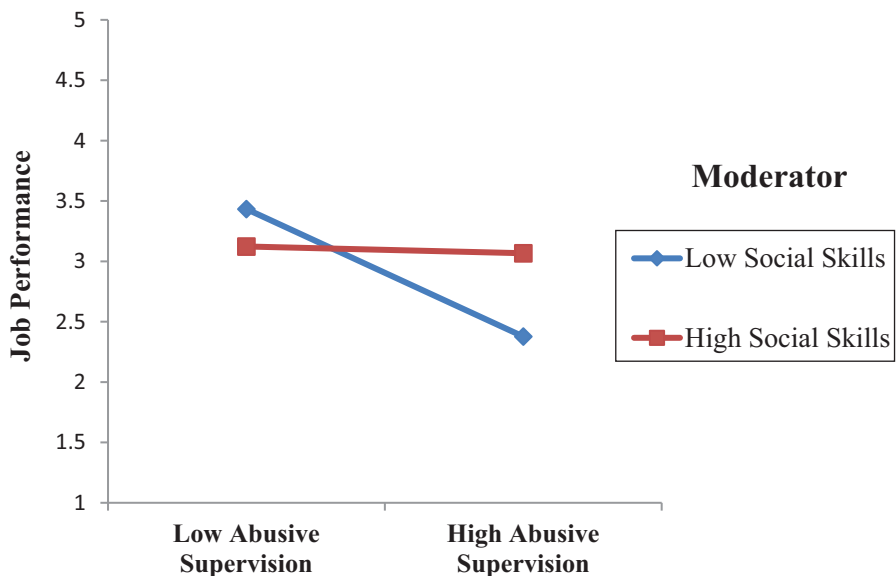**Source:** Authors' own computation

Table 4. Structural model results

Effects	β	*p*-value	LCL	UCL
Direct effects				
Incivility → Abusive supervision	0.853	0.000	0.811	0.884
Incivility → Ostracism	0.794	0.000	0.723	0.845
Abusive supervision → Job performance	−0.307	0.005	−0.528	−0.096
Ostracism → Job performance	−0.271	0.009	−0.468	−0.063
Indirect effects				
Incivility → Abusive supervision → Job performance	−0.262	0.005	−0.451	−0.082
Incivility → ostracism → Job performance	−0.216	0.013	−0.387	−0.050
Moderating effects				
Social skills × Abusive supervision → Job performance	0.240	0.006	0.071	0.424
Social skills × Ostracism → Job performance	0.067	0.466	−0.123	0.246
Controls				
Experience → Job performance	−0.105	0.091	−0.225	0.020
Qualification → Job performance	−0.034	0.648	−0.187	0.106
Tenure → Job performance	0.120	0.064	−0.010	0.242
Gender → Job performance	0.033	0.625	−0.093	0.169

Notes: LCL = lower confidence limit (of 95% bias-corrected confidence interval); UCL = upper confidence limit
Source: Authors' own computation

between incivility and job performance through the mediation effects of abusive supervision and ostracism. The results of indirect effects tests showed that incivility negatively affects job performance through both abusive supervisions ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and ostracism ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, *H1* and *H2* were supported. Next, we tested the moderating role of social skills between abusive supervision–job performance and ostracism–job performance relationships. Our results show that social skills moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and job performance ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, *H3* is supported. However, social skills do not significantly moderate the relationship between ostracism and job performance ($\beta = 0.07$, $p > 0.05$). Hence *H4* is not supported.

In further support of *H3*, the plots of simple slopes (using the $\pm$ I SD above and below the mean) for the significant interaction are shown in Figure 2, illustrating that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and job performance is more forceful for

Source: Authors' own work

Figure 2. Moderating role of social skills in the relationship between abusive supervision and job performance

employees who possess low social skills. That is, employees with higher social skills are likely to cope with stressful situation and buffer the negative effects of workplace mistreatment like abusive supervision.

In the next step overall model was evaluated for the ability to explain variation in endogenous variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is a standard measure used to evaluate the model's predictive accuracy. It is the square of the correlation between predicted and actual values of an endogenous construct. It represents the amount of variation in the endogenous construct explained by the associate exogenous construct. In our model, R^2 for the endogenous constructs were 0.73 (abusive supervision), 0.43 (ostracism) and 0.64 (job performance).

The next step in the model validation process was to estimate the change in R^2 when exogenous constructs are removed from the model one by one. It can be used to assess whether the omitted construct impacts the endogenous constructs substantially (Hair *et al.*, 2016). This measure is called effect size and is symbolized as f^2. Specific guidelines are that f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 signify small, medium and large effects. Our results showed that f^2 values for the relationship of incivility on abusive supervision and ostracism were large, whereas abusive supervision and ostracism on job performance were negligible. Another valuable measure for model validation is Stone–Geisser's Q^2, which is used to assess the predictive relevance of reflective constructs. The blindfolding procedure is used to estimate Q^2 for constructs with reflective indicators only. The value of Q^2 greater than zero indicates that the explanatory variable has predictive relevance (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). This study blindfolding procedure with $D = 7$ was used to estimate Q^2 values for endogenous variables with reflective indicators. Q^2 values for abusive supervision, ostracism and job

performance were 0.43, 0.47 and 0.25, respectively, indicating the predictive relevance of explanatory variables.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how perceived incivility affects employee performance through parallel mediation of perceived ostracism and abusive supervision at the workplace. We also attempted to confirm a moderating effect of social skills on the relationship between abusive supervision, ostracism and job performance. While a plethora of studies have empirically tested relationships between incivility and negative work behaviors, our study added a new perspective with some valuable contributions both in theory and practice.

First, employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors are influenced by how they are being treated at work by their leaders and colleagues (Buch *et al.*, 2016). Employees, laden with a strong perception of mistreatment, also tend to be perceptive of abusive supervision and workplace ostracism while psychologically responding to perceived incivility, which eventually impacts their work performance. The findings of study confirmed the mediating role of workplace ostracism (*H1*) and abusive supervision (*H2*) between perceived incivility and job performance. Furthermore, our study contributes to examining the moderating role of social skills on the aforementioned mediating paths. Based on a SCT and social balanced perspective, we hypothesized that employees with perceptions of abusive supervision are prone to decreased work performance. To counter such feelings and improve their job performance, employees use social skills as a coping mechanism (*H3*). Similarly, employees use social skills to cope with the magnitude of perceived ostracism at work (*H4*). The findings of moderation analysis revealed an affirmative moderating impact of social skills on the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and job performance. However, no significant moderation was found between perceived ostracism and job performance.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Our findings contribute to workplace incivility research in many ways. First, our empirical confirmation of the mediating role of ostracism in the relation between incivility and low task performance aligns ostracism's well documented passive, subtle and pervasive form of organizational aggression (Zhao *et al.*, 2013) with very similar traits of the subtle and ambiguous nature of workplace incivility. Both incivility and ostracism are "silent treatments" resulting in the perception of being less valuable, less wanted and hence stirring up the negative state of mind and emotions, such as frustration, emotional exhaustion and counterproductive work behavior (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Wu *et al.*, 2012), thus resulting in low task performance.

Second, by focusing on the role of perceived abusive supervision as the second explanatory mechanism that mediates the relation between incivility and low job performance, we empirically confirm the "spiraling" effect of workplace incivility as envisaged in the seminal work of Andersson and Pearson (1999). Like ostracism, perceived abusive supervision excludes any physical contact but invokes the feelings of being mistreated (Tepper *et al.*, 1998). To offset their feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, victims engage in behaviors to restore their autonomy by displaying deviant behaviors resulting in low justice perceptions, decreased job satisfaction and psychological stress (Zellars *et al.*, 2002). These interactions are not purely dyadic but also involve observing organizational actors embedded in the organization's social context. Through these actors, the ill effects of both ostracism and abusive supervision spread subtly but contagiously within an organization, promoting a generalized sour relational context. Chen and Ferris

(2019) demonstrated that observers feel sympathetic about victims of incivility, but in the case of ostracism, they tend to react negatively toward target and positively toward instigators. That means, the experience of incivility would increase the likelihood of perceived ostracism by the victim, which will set up a vicious cycle of leading the victim toward further negative behavioral outcomes, which again confirms the "spiraling effect" created by incivility at the workplace through mediators of its relationship with job performance. Therefore, the two mediators of our research clarify *how* incivility works through them to affect job performance adversely.

Third, our study contributes to examining the moderating role of social skills. Workplace stress research places social or coping skills as a defense mechanism to alleviate the adverse effects of a stressful work environment (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Heaney *et al.*, 1995). Consistent with this, our research shows that employees' social skills would moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and job performance. The hypothesis that ostracism plays a similar role is, however, not supported. Literature seems to support our finding. According to Wu *et al.* (2012), high political skills neutralize workplace ostracism and psychological distress through ingratiation. However, when political skills are low, ingratiation only worsens it further. This finding puts political rather than coping and social skills and ingratiation as the primary defense mechanism to counter distressful environment in ostracism. Social skills consist of a tirade of motivation, knowledge and skills (communication competence) (Payne, 2005; Ferris *et al.*, 2007) also differentiate political skills from coping and social skills. They argue that employees having political skills have the ability to integrate personal disposition with organizational contingencies. They do this to promote their organizational career goals and objectives. This line of thought is also consistent with Chen and Ferris' (2019) finding that incivility victims gather sympathies from observers, but ostracism targets the actors who tend to react negatively for them but positively toward instigators. It could be because ostracism perhaps labels the victims somehow under the influence of which other organizational members also start believing the label and further ostracize the target rather than being sympathetic with him/her.

5.2 Managerial implications

The current study also has several managerial implications. This study suggests that managers and organizations should be concerned about their employees' psychological states and develop a culture discouraging incivility, ostracism and abusive supervision through values. We recommend that organizations should help employees develop a concrete and comprehensive understanding of consequences which may be caused by uncivil behavior at any level, i.e. supervisory or coworker levels. Furthermore, the managers should be aware of the fact that performance in organization cannot be enhanced if employees are kept isolated intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, the managers should develop an environment to promote more inclusive and interpersonal treatment. Such an environment can increase their productivity and create positive outcomes (PB, 2020; Zdaniuk and Bobocel, 2015).

Moreover, to protect employees from such detrimental outcomes, we suggest the managers to set strict rules and a zero-tolerance policy for incivility. From a social interactionist view, an organization where people do not work in silos and interact more has less tendency to get ostracized. To effectively eliminate uncivil behaviors from the organizations, there is a need to develop a friendly and encouraging work environment. Incivility can lead to many negative results. It is worthwhile for organizations and supervisors to be aware that impoliteness occurrences aiming at a single worker may cause related effects on the rest. This can be eradicated through behavioral trainings and to let

employees and supervisors learn how to use social skills. Supervisors should take steps to reduce the possible accumulation of damage to workforces. Organizations should label uncivil behaviors as inappropriate and take strict actions to prevent them.

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

Although this study offers pertinent insights about spirals of incivility, however, there are some limitations that should be noted because it opens new room for future research. First, we relied on survey data that was collected from two different sources at two-time intervals, which helps to reduce the biases; however, its causal inference is uncertain because of absence of nonexperimental design (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Future researchers can replicate these results in laboratory settings of vignette-based experiments to ensure causal inference. In addition, qualitative research design to explore incivility as a phenomenon can also be helpful to capture the lived experience of victims. In addition, qualitative data helps to examine how employees describe their social relationships and their ability to perform a specific task. By doing so, a valid and rich conclusion can be complemented with the proposed relationships.

Second pertinent limitation of the study is that we examine social skills as a single boundary condition that can help employees to counter the detrimental effects of incivility spirals. However, individuals might draw from multiple psychological strengths to deal with workplace adversities that we cannot capture because of the limited scope of our theoretical model. Future researchers can benefit from this study and extend the contingencies that can strengthen or weaken the effects of different types of workplace mistreatment. For example, individual can draw from personal and psychological factors such as their psychological capital (Luthans *et al.*, 2007), emotional stability (Sears and Han, 2021) and religious faith (De Clercq *et al.*, 2023). Another fruitful research area is to test whether zero-tolerance to incivility works empirically? Do managers have the abilities to manage uncivil behavior? Similarly, our model is not recursive in nature and future researchers can test the recursive impact of abusive supervision and ostracism on employees' incivility at the same time – both supervisors' and subordinates' incivility can be tested.

Another limitation of the study is its limited empirical context. The findings of this study are based on the data collected from one country (Pakistan) that reduces the generalizability of the results. The cross-cultural comparisons and data from multiple cultures might provide further insights about the true nature of our predictions about incivility spirals. In addition, further research is needed to increase our understanding of the within-person effects of incivility and interventions such as stress coping interventions, leadership trainings to see whether within-person effects are less or more pronounced. Despite these limitations, this study offer pertinent insights and enhance our understanding of *how* and *when* spiraling effects of workplace incivility hinders employee's ability to meet performance expectations.

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