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Surviving supervisor incivility: Can age-related coping strategies attenuate its negative effect on commitment?

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ABSTRACT

Although previous research has shown that supervisor incivility reduces commitment, this study endeavors to address some research gaps regarding 1) the boundary condition of age in the relationship between supervisor incivility and affective commitment and 2) the mediation of two age-related coping strategies (i.e., distraction and reappraisal) by which age can moderate incivility-commitment relationship 3) the relationship between age and the coping strategies. Drawing on socio-emotional selectivity theory, it is argued that, the association between supervisor incivility and commitment is weaker when employees are older. Additionally, it was proposed that the moderating impact of age is mediated by two coping strategies of reappraisal and distraction in a way that older employees, relative to younger employees, would demonstrate an increased tendency for distraction over reappraisal after experiencing incivility. The final sample comprised 287 employees in diverse businesses. The results revealed that higher supervisor incivility was significantly associated with less commitment. Confirming the moderating role of age, this research also showed that the older the employees are, the more distraction (not reappraisal) is used. These results have implications for managers and future researchers.

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Introduction

Statistics show that workplace incivility is rising (Porath, 2015, 2016). Incivility is a term that refers to impolite and discourteous behaviors with ambiguous intents that violate the rule of reciprocity in mutual respect. Various individuals can instigate incivility; however, this study considers explicitly the incivility of supervisors towards their subordinates in organizations. From one perspective, incivility at work can impact subordinates' attitudes negatively. From another perspective, with the aging of human resources in organizations and emerging age diversity in organizations, more research is required to cast light on the role age plays in the relationships between deviant behaviors and job attitudes. Moreover, distraction and reappraisal as two age-related cognitive strategies to regulate negative emotions are investigated to determine when and how they are utilized as an individual ages.

Previous research has shown that incivility is likely to cause reduced self-esteem, work effort, absenteeism, and turnover (Adiyaman & Meier, 2022; Ghosh et al., 2013; Park & Haun, 2017; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2023), heightened emotionality (Bunk & Magley, 2013), negative emotions (Hughes et al., 2023; Kim & Shapiro, 2008), increased levels of stress (Adams & Webster, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Raza et al., 2023), emotional exhaustion and burnout (Kern & Grandey, 2009; Lu et al., 2023) and even depression (Glimmer et al., 2023; Lim & Lee, 2011), which are likely to influence organizational performance (Demsky et al., 2019; Gaan & Shin, 2023); however, through the lens of gerontology, diverse research has shown older individuals are different from younger ones in reactions to the stimuli in their environments. Research has accentuated that older adults are more adept at choosing the most efficient ways to alter their affective reactions (English & Carstensen, 2013; Mohindru et al., 2023). More specific to the epoch of the Covid-19 pandemic, research demonstrated that older age was associated with healthier minds (less anxiety and depression) (Wilson et al., 2020). Age can also influence inclusion experience (Li et al., 2020), workplace deviance perpetration (Pletzer et al., 2023), responses to job design (El Khawli et al., 2022), and emotion regulation (Scheibe et al., 2015; Sheppes et al., 2014). However, the role of age in the context of incivility is largely ignored.

Based on affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the occurrence of "affective events" due to internal or external organizational factors can be conducive to the feelings, emotions, and moods affecting workplace attitudes and behaviors. Admittedly, incivility has undeniably dire consequences; however, the relatively unaddressed question is, "Are there any moderators that mitigate the harmful effects of incivility?" This study, firstly, aims to investigate if age moderates the relationship between supervisor incivility and commitment. Secondly, it aims to explore whether older people apply one or both coping strategies of reappraisal and distraction (Scheibe et al., 2015) to cope with the incurred negativity and prevent commitment loss. There is evidence substantiating that as people age, they become more adept at emotional regulation, coping strategies (Acquati & Kayser, 2019; Mohindru et al., 2023; Revenson & Prantikoff, 2005), and managing social stress (Van Deursen et al., 2015), thereby maintaining their organizational commitment despite the uncivil behavior of their supervisors.

In this quantitative research, some questions extracted from standard questionnaires were used to collect data from various employees in different sectors to test the conceptual model. The data were analyzed and tested for scale reliability and validity, and finally, the structural model was analyzed using hierarchical regression.

The contributions of this study are three-fold. Initially, this research endeavors to demonstrate that the age of the affected employees can attenuate the negative relationship between supervisor incivility and commitment. Second, this research endeavors to demonstrate that the impact of supervisor incivility on employee commitment is contingent on individuals' coping strategies. This investigation contributes to the literature on incivility, which has paid relatively little attention to targets' volitional control and their utilization of coping strategies. Third, previous research has emphasized that there are apparent age differences in the contextual interpretation of hassles and corresponding coping strategy selection (Chen et al., 2017; Folkman et al., 1987); nevertheless, a detailed system approach toward emotional responses in a broader framework encompassing age, coping strategies and a job attitude is novel. This study casts light on these issues by examining whether coping strategies can function as mediators in determining *when* and *how* employee age curtails the detrimental effects of supervisor incivility on commitment.

First, the theoretical background and hypotheses are thoroughly explained and theoretically justified in the following paragraphs. After elaborating on the method, comprising participants,

procedures, and measures, the strategy to analyze the data is explained, and finally, the results are discussed. In the discussion section, theoretical and practical implications are offered, the prevailing limitations and future research venues are mentioned, and finally the research conclusion is presented.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Incivility and commitment

As a global concept, employee commitment is defined as a “psychological state that binds the individual to the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 14). Workplace incivility is associated with increased psychological detachment (Azeem et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022), which impairs commitment. Moreover, incivility as an interpersonal conflict (Sydnor, 2015; Zahid & Nauman, 2023) may provoke shouting, disagreement, and rudeness (Thomas et al., 2005), all of which may raise the question of “What is my place and dignity in this organization?” (Pearson et al., 2000) and cause the victims to ruminate on the question and lose commitment (Demsky et al., 2019; Irwin et al., 2023; Leather et al., 1998).

The disempowerment theory (Montgomery et al., 2004) asserts that certain work events drain employee’s dignity and threaten their competency and self-efficacy. This theory postulates that workplace incivility induces negativity, regardless of its triviality. The targets interpret it as an enemy of their dignity and respect (Anjum et al., 2017). Incivility and rudeness as two sources of stress can impair trust and commitment to the organization, particularly when the instigator has a higher status (e.g., a supervisor) (Lim & Teo, 2009). Hence,

H1: Supervisor incivility is negatively related to employee commitment.

The moderating role of age

Researchers have long investigated the role of age in diverse facets of attitude including affect, cognition, and behaviors of employees with different ages (e.g., Salthouse, 2019; Truxillo et al., 2015). According to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992, 1998), as the most germane theory to demonstrate age differences in relationship quality, older individuals have more motivation to connect with others socioemotionally through life meaningfulness, emotional intimacy, and social embeddedness” (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). In contrast, younger workers prioritize knowledge acquisition (Carstensen, 1998). Socioemotional selectivity theory is applied in the studies about aging and lifespan development to explain age-based differences from diverse perspectives of social interactions, knowledge management, coworker cooperation, responses to inclusion, and reactions to feedback (e.g., Burmeister et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2015). Age plays a significant role in organizational phenomena. For example, Epitropaki and Martin (1999) showed that demographic characteristics, including age and tenure, impact the quality of LMX. In a different study, the relationship between anxiety and LMX was significantly moderated by age (James & Brooks, 2021). Recent research has demonstrated that older people have better mental health despite COVID-19 anxiety (Wilson et al., 2022). In their meta-analysis, Okun and Schultz (2003) delineated that older people are more motivated to maintain positive social relationships and friendships.

Although aging can cause physical and cognitive declines (Merchant et al., 2021; Revathi et al., 2022), it enhances emotional well-being (Charles & Piazza, 2009; Cheng, 2004; Kunzmann et al., 2000; Mather & Carstensen, 2005) due to more efficient use of emotion-regulation strategies (Mohindru et al., 2023; Opitz et al., 2012; Phillips et al., 2009). Similarly, strength and vulnerability integration theory states that older adults are more inclined to and adept at down-regulating negative emotions fast to prevent physiological arousal (Charles, 2010; Ginty et al., 2022). Based on socioemotional selectivity theory and the existing evidence showing older employees are better at coping with negativity, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Employee age moderates the relationship between supervisor incivility and commitment such that this relationship is more negative for younger adults than older ones.

The roles of coping strategies

From one point of view, based on the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), when there is resource loss, individuals try to obtain, retain, and protect resources. This resource loss is likely to happen when there is incivility. From another point of view, at old ages, based on socio-emotional selectivity theory, individuals change their goals because of their alteration in the concept of

time (Hellemans et al., 2023). Older people prioritize happiness, quality of life, social contacts, and emotion regulation as life gets shorter.

Researchers have shown that older individuals, in comparison with their younger counterparts, experience negative affect less intensely and frequently (Carstensen et al., 2000; Charles et al., 2001) due to more efficient emotion regulation (Roberts et al., 2006). Emotion regulation is “the ability to control the experience of positive and negative emotions” (Carstensen, 1992, p. 332). Some individuals disengage their attention through distraction strategy (i.e., refocusing attention from emotional information toward irrelevant thoughts). At the same time, some may think about the emotional information and reinterpret emotional information in a later phase through, for instance, appraisal (i.e., a technique to change the meaning of emotional information). While distraction is considered a strategy causing effective short-term relief (Paul et al., 2013; Thiruchselvam et al., 2011), reappraisal contributes to the sense-making of events, thereby helping long-term adaptation (Reffner et al., 2023; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). These two techniques are contingent on emotional goals (obtaining quick relief vs. longer-term adaptation) (Sheppes et al., 2014).

Based on the socioemotional selectivity theory, emotional goals shift with age (Carstensen, 2006). A shorter time horizon causes older adults to lend more importance to their immediate well-being; in contrast, younger adults have more motivation to optimize future results without considering immediate affective consequences. Research has also shown that when older adults face interpersonal emotion-laden problems, they prefer to prioritize disengagement and some passive strategies, such as denial and withdrawal, while other active and engaging strategies, such as reflection on emotions and direct confrontation, receive less attention (Birditt et al., 2005). Additionally, having been influenced by pessimistic mood induction, older adults try to distract their attention away from negative stimuli, whereas, younger adults cast attention on the same stimuli; thus, it implies that older adults utilize distraction and younger adults apply reappraisal in order to cope with negative emotions (Noh et al., 2011).

Additionally, the selection of emotional choice is contingent upon other contextual factors, such as cognitive resources and stimulus intensity (Blanke et al., 2022). It is found that when stimulus intensity increases, reappraisal becomes inefficient since it becomes more difficult to ignore the received information through alternative and more robust interpretations (Bellintier et al., 2022; Sheppes & Gross, 2011). Facing low-intensity negative situations, young adults prioritize reappraisal over distraction; however, in the case of high-intensity negative situations, distraction is preferred (Scheibe et al., 2015; Sheppes et al., 2011). One of the attributions of incivility is its low intensity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; p. 466); therefore, it implies that reappraisal may be the first choice for young adults; however, for older adults, distraction is bound to be the first choice since it is cognitively less effortful than reappraisal, thereby obstructing incoming emotional information early before getting reinforced. This leads to less conflict between the construal of affective stimuli and the thoughts to regulate emotions (Sheppes et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2022).

Based on the assertion that as individuals age, cognitive resources normatively decrease at different rates (Thompson et al., 2022; Verhaeghen, 2011), cognitively less effortful strategies are the most appropriate (Urry & Gross, 2010); hence, older individuals prefer distraction to reappraisal (Scheibe et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2022). On the contrary, for younger adults, due to more cognitive resources, the selection of an emotion-regulation strategy is not confined to distraction (Baltes et al., 2006). Regarding affective results of emotion regulation selection, for older adults, disengagement strategies (e.g., distraction) can lead to enhanced affective well-being; however, this may not be necessarily true for younger adults (Morgan & Scheibe, 2014). According to strength and vulnerability integration theory, as people age, physiological flexibility declines; therefore, it becomes more emotionally laborious to down-regulate negative arousal, causing recovery to last longer (Charles, 2010). As a result, disengagement can help older adults down-regulate emotions and increase their well-being (Isaacowitz, 2022; Noh et al., 2011). Therefore, as Figure 1 shows, we hypothesize that:

H3a: Employee age is positively related to distraction.

H3b: Employee age is negatively related to reappraisal.

H4a: Distraction mediates the moderating effect of age on the relationship between supervisor incivility and employee commitment.

H4b: Reappraisal mediates the moderating effect of age on the relationship between supervisor incivility and employee commitment.

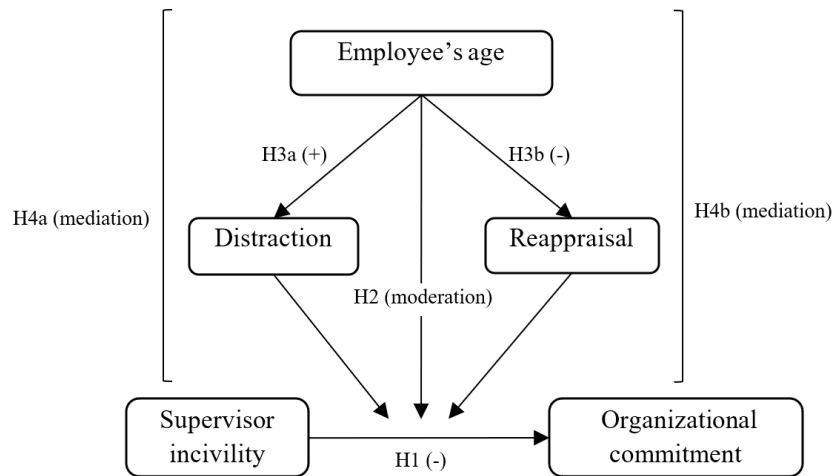


Fig. 1. The conceptual model of this study

Method

Participants and procedure

In this study, a stratified sampling technique based on probability-proportional-to-size sampling was utilized to ensure the sample's representativeness. The participants were employees in six sectors of Kerman: education, health, insurance, banking, tourism, and manufacturing.

Since the age distribution of the sample is a critical factor in the conceptual model and the insufficient number of participants in diverse age ranges could impact the results and serve the self-selection bias, age stratification was applied to include roughly equal numbers of participants across age groups. It was done for all sectors. The age ranges of the adults were 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, and 60 and above. After estimating the number of employees in these age ranges in the populations of the sectors and specifying the sample number of participants required for each age range, online questionnaires were sent to participants.

A time-lagged approach with two measurement occasions was adapted to gather data via online questioners from 412 administrative employees at universities (14.1%), nurses (18.8%), insurance employees (20%), bank tellers (16.2%), hotel receptionists (10.8%), and operational managers in companies (20.2%). At time 1 (T1), 412 employees (43.9 % female) completed the survey. Their age ranged from 18 to 57 ($M= 32.1$, $SD= 7.52$) with an average tenure of 10.1 ($SD= 7.69$). The data was collected at two-time points to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). After reassuring the confidentiality of their answers, in the first questionnaire, the partakers were requested to give their demographic information and rate their emotion regulation choices (i.e., distraction and reappraisal). After a month, at time 2 (T2), the second questionnaires comprising supervisor incivility and affective commitment scales were emailed. Among the T1 partakers, 70% ($N= 287$; 51.2% female) completed the questionnaire at T2. Their age ranged from 19 to 55 ($M= 33.32$, $SD= 7.60$) with an average tenure of 9.48 ($SD= 7.39$). 16% had either a diploma or an associate diploma degree, 44.6 percent a bachelor's degree, and 39.4% had Master's or Ph.D. degrees. This attrition of participants was completely random and not associated statistically with demographics (e.g., gender, age, and tenure) or their emotional regulation tendencies.

Measures

The survey items were originally in English; therefore, they were translated into Persian through an iterate process by three bilingual scholars of Persian and English. A back translation was conducted, with the items translated back to English by another bilingual scholar of Persian and English, to ensure both the English and Persian versions of items were comparable with a high degree of accuracy (Brislin, 1986).

Supervisor incivility. The Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001) assessed the frequency of experiencing disrespectful, rude, or condescending behaviors from superiors. In this

study, the seven-item WIS was slightly changed to ask how often “supervisors” expressed incivility toward them. Responses ranged from “1” (*never=1*) to “5” (*daily=5*). A sample item is, “My supervisor makes demeaning or derogatory remarks about me.” Cronbach’s α was .87.

Emotion-regulation. We adopted Gross and John’s (2003) Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) to assess reappraisal. An example of a reappraisal item is, “I control my emotions by changing how I think about the situation I am in.” The alpha for the scale was .75. To evaluate distraction, we used mental disengagement questions in the COPE scale (Carver et al., 1989). An example of a distraction item is, “I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things.” Cronbach’s α was .72.

Organizational commitment. Allen and Meyer’s (1990) 8-item measure assessed affective commitment. The participants showed how much they agreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). A sample item is, “I feel as if this organization’s problems are my own.” The coefficient alpha for affective commitment was .86.

Control variables. In this study, participants’ gender, education level, and job tenure were controlled.

Analytical strategy

IBM SPSS and IBM SPSS AMOS software analyzed the data. In order to test Cronbach’s alpha, heterotrait-mono trait (HTMT) ratio, composite reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), measurement model techniques were used. The measurement model had acceptable goodness-to-fit data fitness indices ($\chi^2=316.92$, $df=108$, CFI=0.94, TLI= 0.90, IFI= 0.94 and RMSEA= 0.08). In the next step, discriminant validity was tested using correlations of latent variables and the square root of AVE. Additionally, collinearity and standard method bias were tested through VIF and Harman’s single-factor test, respectively. Additionally, data normality was checked. Ultimately, this study performed hierarchical regression to test the hypotheses. Based on Cronbach’s alpha (CA) test, the measurement scales were reliable, with the values ranging from 0.72 to 0.87, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. Internal consistency reliability was verified since all the figures for CR ranged from 0.76 to 0.88, exceeding the threshold of 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Hair et al., 2013).

To test validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The acquired factor loadings were all acceptable and more than 0.3 (Floyd & Widaman, 1995). Moreover, AVE scores exceeded the acceptability point of 0.4 (Diamatopoulos et al., 2000; Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement model

Construct	Item code	Factor loadings	p-values	CA	CR	AVE
Supervisor incivility				0.87	0.88	0.53
	Inc1	0.67	<0.000			
	Inc2	0.73	<0.000			
	Inc3	0.76	<0.000			
	Inc4	0.86	<0.000			
	Inc5	0.73	<0.000			
	Inc6	0.37	<0.000			
Distraction	Inc7	0.87	<0.000			
	Dis1	0.56	<0.000	0.75	0.86	0.69
	Dis2	0.98	<0.000			
Reappraisal	Dis3	0.83	<0.000			
	Reap1	0.75	<0.000	0.72	0.73	0.48
	Reap2	0.83	<0.000			
	Reap3	0.68	<0.000			
	Reap4	0.71	<0.000			
Commitment	Reap5	0.81	<0.000			
	Comm1	0.94	<0.000	0.86	0.85	0.52
	Comm2	0.86	<0.000			
	Comm3	0.76	<0.000			
	Comm4	0.41	<0.000			
	Comm5	0.32	<0.000			
	Comm6	0.81	<0.000			

CA, Cronbach’s alpha; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted.

HTMT evaluates multicollinearity within data, which should be less than 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015). The results were within the acceptable range of 0.1 and 0.6 (Table 2).

The square roots of AVE were 0.73, 0.83, 0.83, and 0.72, respectively. These scores were higher than the correlations of each variable with others. Therefore, discriminant validity was confirmed. Harman's single-factor test demonstrated that one factor accounted for less than 50% of the covariance between the items and the constructs, which is the acceptability threshold (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first factor only accounts for 32.88% of the total variance (Table 3). Therefore, Common Method Variance (CMV) is not an issue in this study.

Table 2. HTMT (heterotrait–monotrait ratio)

	SI	D	R	OC
Supervisor incivility (SI)	-			
Distraction (D)	0.397	-		
Reappraisal (R)	0.097	0.484	-	
Organizational commitment (OC)	0.545	0.418	0.245	-

Table 3. Harman's single-factor test results

Factor	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sum of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	6.905	32.882	32.882	6.905	32.882	32.882
2	2.678	12.754	45.636			
3	2.132	10.154	55.791			
4	1.479	7.043	62.834			
5	1.242	5.915	68.748			
6	0.970	4.621	73.369			

In order to test data normal distribution, the kurtosis and skewness of the variables were within 1.25 and -0.62; thus, all the observed variables were normally distributed.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics, normality indices and correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9
1. Gender	1.75	.433	1							
2. Age	33.25	7.57	-.27*	1						
3. Tenure	9.41	7.33	-.30**	.81**	1					
4. Education level	4.11	.96	-.04	.19**	.16**	1				
5. Supervisor incivility	1.98	.89	.03	-.26**	-.14*	.14*	1			
7. Distraction	3.69	.90	.20**	.07	-.05	-.05	.37**	1		
8. Reappraisal	3.77	.62	.00	.20**	.19**	-.11	-.25**	.48**	1	
9. OC	3.49	.72	-.02	.23**	.26**	-.21**	-.53**	.32**	.38**	1

N=287 * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$; male=1 female=2; OC (Organizational Commitment); M (Mean) SD (Standard Deviation)

As shown in Table 5, the relationship between supervisor incivility and organizational commitment is negative and significant ($\beta = -.52$, $p < .00$). This supports Hypothesis 1.

According to Table 5, the interaction term for supervisor incivility and age was positive and significant ($\beta = .46$, $p < .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$). The interaction was plotted to interpret the interaction term.

The depiction of the results bolsters Hypothesis 2 and is shown in Figure 2. A simple slope analysis delineates that the impact of supervisor incivility on organizational commitment is negative and significant when age is one standard deviation above the mean ($\beta = -.29$, 95% CI [-.44, -.15]) and was also negative and significant when age was one standard deviation below the mean ($\beta = -.49$, 95% CI [-.59, -.39]). For further moderation analysis, the significant region for supervisor incivility and age

interaction was plotted (Figure 3). The results indicated that the effects of supervisor incivility on organizational commitment were negative and significant ($p < .05$) when age was below 47.12 years. Overall, the results lend support to Hypothesis 2.

Table 5. Regression Analyses Predicting organizational commitment

Predictor	Dependent Variables				
	Coping Strategies		Organizational commitment		
	Distraction	Reappraisal	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Gender	-.05	.01	.00	.00	-.01
Education	-.05	-.13*	-.16**	-.18**	-.17**
Tenure	-.32**	.07	.36**	.35**	.37**
Age	.35**	.17	-.18*	-.43**	-.26
Supervisor incivility			-.52**	-.95**	-1.45**
Supervisor incivility × Age				.46*	.04
Distraction					-.17
Reappraisal					.05
Supervisor incivility × Distraction					.63**
Supervisor incivility × Reappraisal					.34
R^2			.35	.36	.45
ΔR^2				.01	.09

Note. N = 287. Values in bold are relevant to tests of hypotheses.

** $p < .001$ * $p < .05$ * $p < .01$

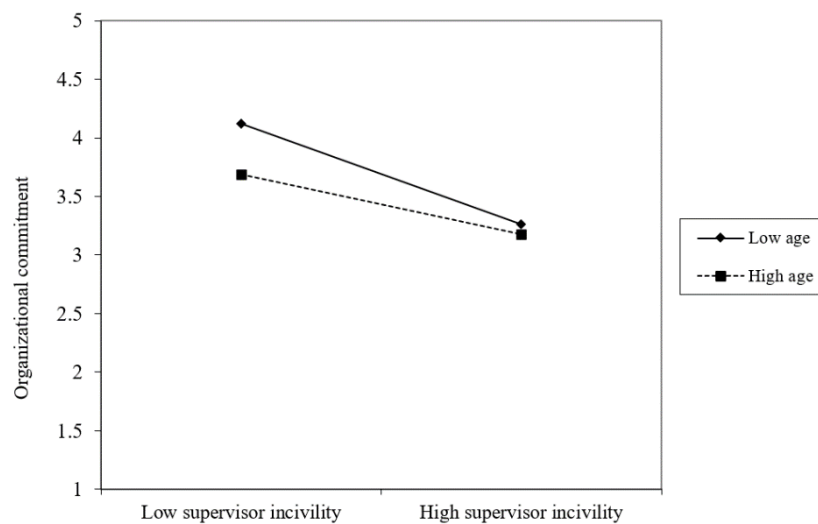


Fig. 2. Interaction of supervisor incivility and age on organizational commitment

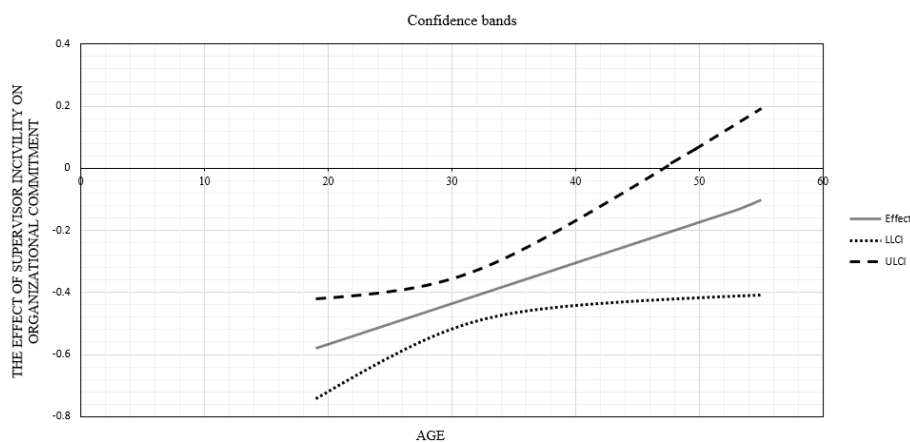


Fig. 3. Johnson-Neyman regions representing the threshold for the significance of the effect of abusive supervision on self-blame for different levels of CSE (Core Self-Evaluation)

Hypotheses 3a and 3b predicted that age would be positively associated with distraction and negatively associated with reappraisal, respectively. As shown in Table 5, the association between age and distraction was positive and significant ($\beta = .35, p < .001$); the relationship between age and reappraisal was not significant ($\beta = 0.17, p > 0.05$). These results suggest support only for Hypothesis 3a; however, Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

Hypothesis 4a predicted that distraction would mediate the moderating effects of age on the relationship between supervisor incivility and organizational commitment. Since the interaction between distraction and supervisor incivility was significant in Step 3, Hypothesis 4a was supported. Hypothesis 4b predicted that reappraisal would mediate the moderating effects of age on the relationship between supervisor incivility and organizational commitment. Since the interaction between appraisal and was not significant in Step 3, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

The results in Table 5 show that the regression coefficient for the interaction between supervisor incivility and distraction was significant in our full model ($\beta = .63, p < .001$), whereas the regression coefficient for the interaction between supervisor incivility and distraction was not significant ($\beta = -.17, p > .05$). This suggests that the moderating effects of age on the relationship between supervisor incivility and job performance were fully mediated by distraction.

To further test the indirect effect of distraction as the mediator, the procedures strongly suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008) since it is the most robust and reasonable method to estimate the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval around our estimate of the indirect impact of age on organizational commitment via distraction. The 1000 bootstrap samples estimated the indirect to be 0.23 (95% CI [0.125, 0.319]), demonstrating that the indirect effects exceeded zero.

Discussion

Based on the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 2006), this study first endeavored to investigate if, when and how supervisors showing incivility can impair employee organizational commitment. Second, it is proposed that age can moderate the impact of supervisor incivility on organizational commitment. More importantly, this study investigated the mediating roles of two coping strategies, distraction and reappraisal, through which the moderation functions.

Theoretical implications

First, the results showed that supervisor incivility can harm organizational commitment. The results of this study are aligned with Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), showing that incivility is negatively related to affective commitment. From the lens of reciprocity, based on the social exchange theory, perceived support from the supervisor and organization is associated with higher affective commitment from the employee side (Indra et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019), which can reinforce organizational identification due to the swap of social support and the expectations built up accordingly. Workplace incivility discharges dignity and respect, which decreases professional relationship quality (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), thereby initiating employee-organization emotional detachment (e.g., Garrosa et al., 2022; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005). The results of this study are aligned with research done by Taylor and colleagues (2012), which showed that workplace incivility reduces affective commitment, thereby reducing organizational citizenship behavior. Smith and colleagues (2010) also demonstrated that for newly-graduated nurses, workplace incivility can impair organizational commitment. The results of this study also accentuate the results of the recent meta-analysis (Chris et al., 2022), indicating that affective commitment is not only impacted adversely by experienced incivility but also induces a negative effect on organizational performance.

Second, the findings showed that the way age functions in the incivility-commitment relationship differs for the dichotomy of old and young employees. Up to an age that differs for diverse individuals, employee commitment is not significantly influenced by supervisor incivility. This is aligned with the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 2006), positing that as individuals become older, they consider their limited time horizon leading to prioritizing immediate well-being. Moreover, older adults are more encouraged to down-regulate negative emotions to prevent psychological arousal (Charles, 2010; Scheibe et al., 2015). Aligned with this finding, in a recent meta-analysis, Jimenez and colleagues (2022) showed that older adults are more likely to ruminate

less on negative experiences in general, reducing their negative work-related thinking. Prior research has also shown that older adults, compared with younger adults, can cope more efficiently with and react to stressors (i.e., supervisor incivility in this research) (Diehl & Hay, 2010) via better and more effective emotional regulation (Charles, 2010). It appears that older adults, in comparison with younger adults, have higher life satisfaction and affective well-being (e.g., Ji et al., 2022; Mroczek & Spiro, 2005).

Third, consistent with socio-emotional selectivity theory, the results accentuated that due to age, coping strategies are prioritized after experiencing adverse events (i.e., supervisor incivility in this study). To elaborate, older employees preferred to distract (a prototypical disengagement choice that causes abrupt relief) rather than reappraise (a prototypical engagement selection that entails processing that leads to long-term adaptation) to down-regulate their negative emotions (Scheibe et al., 2015). In terms of cognitive resources, older employees select a less resource-depleting strategy of distraction than a more resource-demanding coping strategy of reappraisal (Matthews et al., 2021). Having less executive control as an indicator of cognitive resources (Cohen et al., 2012), older employees use distraction, which is less effortful. These results dovetail with the findings of Noh and colleagues (2011), demonstrating that older adults looked away from negativity-inducing visual cues during an image-viewing task, and this helps them have better affective outcomes. Looking through the lens of strength and vulnerability integration theory (SAVI; Charles, 2010), disengagement lets older individuals reduce their physiological arousal sharply, which, once increased, makes down-regulating difficult due to physiological deficits. It bolsters the results of prior research showing that distraction as a low-resource demanding emotional regulation is prioritized (Itzhaky & Stanley, 2022; Scheibe et al., 2015). The results of this research also accentuate the relatively high cost of reappraisal as an emotional regulation strategy (Sheppes & Grass, 2011). The findings of this study are also aligned with the research conducted by Rieger et al. (2009), showing that an age-related increase in prehedonic motivation minimizes negative affect via decreasing contra-hedonic motivation. As more evidence shows, young adults, in contrast with older adults, are more inclined to engage in interpersonal confrontation (Luong et al., 2011).

Fourth, the results showed no significant association between age and reappraisal. Previous research has shown that the intensity of the emotional stimuli determines whether reappraisal is utilized (Ortner et al., 2016). Therefore, apart from age, some other factors, such as the intensity of the engendered feeling after experiencing incivility, play an important role in applying reappraisal. In a recent study, Röbbing et al. (2021) demonstrated that the emotion regulation choices of older adults are contingent upon the intensity of the autobiographical memory and habitual reappraisal. To elaborate, considering anger as one of the outcomes of incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2012), older adults with higher reappraisal propensity are more inclined to reappraise their anger in low anger intensity, indicating emotion-regulation flexibility. Hence, the age-reappraisal relationship is contingent upon the intensity of the victim's internal feelings after experiencing incivility. Furthermore, using reappraisal is highly related with culture. Matsumoto and colleagues (2016) postulated that, in Japan, for older adults, reappraisal is a more applied coping strategy, while the relationship between distraction and age was non-significant. They reasoned, "Such different findings for the effects of emotion regulation on mood and mental health are presumably due to cultural differences in emotional regulation (p.7)." Last but not least, research has shown that reappraisal is a more effective strategy than distraction at regulating fear or anxiety, and the effectiveness of reappraisal is enhanced as they grow up (Theurel & Gentaz, 2018). Therefore, regardless of age, if incivility inflicts anxiety and fear, then reappraisal is likely to be used.

Practical implications

First, in terms of practical implications, the current study is multifaceted. Incivility, unfortunately, is ubiquitous in various organizations and has dire consequences, including personal and professional well-being (Karam & Mohammed, 2022; Miller et al., 2022). Hence, decreasing or uprooting incivility is of top importance. Notably, incivility, regardless of stress infliction, can impair the quality of employee relationships with the organization (via reducing commitment in this research) in various work contexts. Moreover, job attitudes are marred with rudeness, leading to a lack of job satisfaction, withdrawal behavior, and even job quit. The policymakers, practitioners and organizational leaders

need to reduce rudeness at work place via training polite and effective interactions through workshops, case studies, coaching, lectures, and presentations, thereby not only organizing but also delivering strategies to prevent it.

Second, incivility can decrease organizational commitment (Taylor et al., 2012), akin to “cement” sticking employees to their organizations through the sense of identification with the organization. It is an asset that cannot be quickly replenished once lost. This study demonstrated that supervisor incivility can impede commitment. Shrewd leaders can think of group, individual incivility, and discriminatory incivility as various possible symptoms of lacking commitment, especially affective commitment. Therefore, initiating some recovery plans to change employees’ mental and emotional reactions via confining the relation bonds of employees with rude employees and leaders can settle the disaster. This is a proper strategy to reduce the number of sources causing social impact. In the next step, some uncivil leaders and employees can be trained to recognize their behaviors. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that incivility is determined with low intensity and ambiguous in terms of harm intention; therefore, the targets of the training plan might feel insulted if they are directly asked to be trained.

Third, incivility is not distributed evenly all through all social spaces and time (Whitehead, 1997) and, for example, in the perpetual contact of employees with enraged and unsatisfied customers or the exposure of employees to specific coworkers and supervisors, in some situations, incivility may be felt. This research showed that the age of the individuals exposed to supervisor incivility can play a significant moderating role in coping with the instigated incivility. This implies older employees are better at taking charge of those positions where handling incivility is inevitable because of applying distraction and refraining from using reappraisal.

The results further demonstrated that distraction is a more applied strategy than reappraisal to decrease the harmful impact of supervisor incivility on commitment. Reappraisal, in comparison with distraction, consumes more cognitive resources and can cause further resource depletion; however, distraction maintains resources by deviating attention from the depleting source. Based on our findings, when a supervisor is uncivil, three strategies may be used to mitigate the harmful effects of incivility. First, as it was mentioned before, uncivil supervisors can be trained, displaced or even isolated to reduce the perception of incivility in the organization. Second, the employees with whom they interact can be selected from older employees to reduce the negative impact of their rudeness on employee commitment. Basically, the mechanism is via the efficient utilization of a coping strategy. It is especially true if the supervisor is a rare resource with a specific expertise or power, and there is little possibility of displacing or requesting to change behavior. Third, there are various types of coping strategies that require negligible or much cognitive and emotional effort. Comparatively, distraction needs a small amount of physical arousal; therefore, less stress and physical strain are felt once it is used after encountering supervisor incivility. Some distraction techniques can be taught to younger employees to help them distract when the distraction has no dire consequences. For example, after perceiving rudeness, employees may count some numbers sequentially to become distracted or make themselves busy doing some unrelated tasks for the event.

Conclusion

This study reveals an emotional mechanism linking supervisor incivility to organizational commitment. In this regard, the findings showed that supervisor incivility impedes organizational commitment. More importantly, more committed individuals feel more negative emotions. Additionally, the conceptual model analyzed the emotional regulation mechanism adapted by individuals at diverse ages to cope with the negativity caused by supervisor incivility. The results showed that the older the employees are, the more distraction strategy is used to attenuate the effect of supervisor incivility on affective commitment; however, no significant mediating role of reappraisal for the moderating role of age was accentuated.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, economic, relational, and social problems along with dire consequences of international sanctions, Iranian people, especially employees, are more prone to psychological resource depletion, which can impair emotional regulation and increase incivility at workplaces (Fasbender et al., 2023); hence, the increasing level of incivility entails casting more light on this unfavorable phenomenon. This study helps the statistical community by introducing distraction

as a more applied strategy than reappraisal by older employees to decrease the harmful impact of supervisor incivility on commitment. The results can help the decision makers select more suitable employees for those parts of the organizations with more exposure to incivility to maintain and increase commitment.

Limitations and future research

There are some inherent limitations to this research. First, data were collected from a single source, and this strategy's cross-sectional nature can result in common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the interaction effects are impeded by single-source bias (Aiken, West & Reno, 1991), and the acquisition of data related to the predictor (supervisor incivility) and the outcome variable (affective commitment) reduces the possibility of CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, future research can reduce this concern through multi-source data collection (e.g., affective commitment from supervisors). Second, due to cross-sectional data collection, any perception of causality would be premature. In order to explore causality, future research may consider longitudinal and experimental research. Third, using a between-person design to test our hypotheses undermines the volatility of incivility from day to day, and this fluctuation is subject to change the results. Lastly, most participants were female, and gender may cause variations in emotional regulation (Goubet & Chrysikou, 2019). Therefore, future research may analyze the conceptual model separately for the genders to highlight the gender differences in emotional regulation use.

Specifically, in this study, the conceptual framework considered two coping strategies: reappraisal and distraction. Despite the categorization scheme used, other categorization schemes may also be used. In recent research, for example, Fukase et al. (2022) showed that after encountering the stressful situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional support, venting, and humor adaptive strategies were used by middle-aged, aged, and younger adults; however, the employment of these strategies was only beneficial for the former group. This implies that, in the workplace, supervisor incivility as a source of stress is likely to be coped with differently when various coping strategies are investigated for various age groups. Future research can investigate diverse emotional, cognitive, and behavioral coping strategies (Nieto et al., 2019) to illuminate the age-coping relationship in adverse leader-follower relationships. Second, in this study, affective commitment was the main component of commitment (Dunham et al., 1994); however, recent research has demonstrated that incivility in the workplace by co-workers and principals or supervisors negatively affects the emotional, continuous, and normative commitment of the targets (Mahmood et al., 2023). Finally, emotion regulation choices may vary because of the intensity of engendered negativity (Martins et al., 2018). Incivility is a low-intensity interpersonal deviant behavior; plausibly, some more intense behaviors, such as abuse and harassment, may make younger and older employees apply coping strategies differently. Therefore, future research can consider abusive supervision to figure out what coping strategies may alleviate the harmful impact of abuse on commitment.

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