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Published Version

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Sarfraz, M., Degbey, W. Y., Sufya, M., Kundi, Y. M. and Laker, B. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0850-9744> (2026) Supervisors' role in mitigating coworker incivility: implications for workplace ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*. ISSN 1573-0697 doi: 10.1007/s10551-026-06346-0 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/129961/>

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-026-06346-0>

Publisher: Springer

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# Supervisors' Role in Mitigating Coworker Incivility: Implications for Workplace Ethics

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Received: 17 February 2025 / Accepted: 8 May 2026  
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## Abstract

Drawing on cognitive appraisal theory and an appraisal perspective of justice, this study investigates *how* and *when* coworker incivility impairs employee psychological well-being. We propose and test a moderated mediation model where perceived job stress mediates the negative effect of coworker incivility on psychological well-being, and this indirect effect is buffered by supervisor interpersonal justice. We tested our model across three studies: a three-wave survey establishing mediation (Study 1;  $N = 144$ ), a cross-sectional field study of the full moderated mediation model (Study 2;  $N = 172$ ), and a vignette experiment establishing causality (Study 3;  $N = 225$ ). Results consistently showed that coworker incivility diminishes psychological well-being by increasing employees' perceived job stress. Importantly, this indirect effect is attenuated when supervisors demonstrate high levels of interpersonal justice. This study expands the literature on workplace incivility and psychological well-being by empirically demonstrating that employees perceive their jobs as more stressful and experience poorer psychological well-being after interacting with uncivil coworkers; yet supervisors can play a critical role in mitigating these effects. Furthermore, we highlight the ethical implications by emphasizing the contingency effect of supervisors' interpersonal justice in mitigating incivility and fostering an ethical workplace for all employees.

**Keywords** Coworker incivility · Perceived job stress · Psychological well-being · Supervisor interpersonal justice · Cognitive appraisal · Justice appraisal

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## Introduction

Psychological well-being—an individual's optimal psychological functioning and fulfillment of potential (Zheng et al., 2015)—is a critical component of employee mental health in organizations (e.g., Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023). While supportive workplace relationships enhance psychological well-being (Hill et al., 2024), negative interpersonal exchanges, such as workplace incivility, can be particularly damaging. Workplace incivility is a prevalent form of harmful interpersonal interaction defined as a “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (Anderson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Such behavior is pervasive, with studies showing that most employees experience incivility at work (Henderson & Matthews, 2024). When these incidents occur between coworkers, they ripple through the workplace, creating complex dynamics that often involve supervisors as third parties, implicating them in managing and resolving the conflict.

Despite a growing body of research on coworker incivility (e.g., Reio, 2011; Rhee et al., 2017; Viotti et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019), pressing questions remain regarding its psychological impact. Employees are particularly vulnerable to incivility from coworkers, given their frequent interactions and social proximity (Chris et al., 2022; Hill et al., 2024). However, existing research has primarily focused on outcomes of ill-being, such as burnout and emotional exhaustion (Lim et al., 2008; Moon & Hur, 2018), which represent the end point of chronic workplace hassles (Chris et al., 2022). We contend that it is equally crucial to understand how these encounters erode psychological well-being, a positive and dynamic state distinct from the mere absence of ill-being (Khalid & Syed, 2024). However, the process through which incivility impairs psychological well-being is not well understood. Addressing this gap is important not only for advancing our understanding of how organizations can support employees' mental health (Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023), but also for reinforcing the value of positive psychology—"the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104)—as a foundation for healthier, more effective workplaces. Although coworker incivility is inherently stressful (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), we propose that it functions as a specific work stressor (Chan & McAllister, 2014) that employees cognitively appraise (Bliese et al., 2017). This appraisal of the uncivil event leads to perceived job stress, which in turn undermines psychological well-being. Furthermore, research has yet to fully explore the contextual factors that can mitigate these harmful effects. Supervisors, as authoritative third parties, can play a vital role in managing the occurrence and outcomes of coworker incivility (Costa et al., 2024; Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; Reio, 2011). While the notion that managers should prevent incivility is foundational (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), we argue for a more nuanced examination of how supervisors intervene between a perpetrator and a target to buffer the psychological impact of incivility.

To explain *how* and *when* coworker incivility impairs psychological well-being, we integrate two complementary theoretical lenses to examine how perceived job stress mediates the negative relationship between coworker incivility and psychological well-being, and supervisors' interpersonal justice acts as an important boundary condition. First, cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides the foundation for our core mediating mechanism. We address this by proposing a moderated mediation model in which perceived job stress mediates the effect of coworker incivility on psychological well-being. This perspective explains *how* target employees cognitively process uncivil interactions, appraising them as stressors that diminish well-being. Second, an appraisal perspective on organizational justice

(Spell & Arnold, 2007) complements this by suggesting that employees also appraise their supervisor's response to uncivil coworker interactions. This perspective helps explain how a supervisor's intervention can alter an employee's appraisal of stress and its consequences. Specifically, given that such interactions involve both the perpetrator's supervisor and the target of incivility, understanding these dynamics can help identify when and how the situation can be effectively resolved.

This study makes three contributions to the literature on workplace incivility and employee well-being. First, we offer a novel theoretical integration by applying two distinct appraisal-based theories: cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and interpersonal justice theory (Bies & Moag, 1986). The former explains how employees evaluate workplace events based on perceived threat and their coping abilities, while the latter focuses on how employees assess the fairness and dignity of managerial treatment. This dual-appraisal framework captures both the stressor (i.e., incivility) and the fairness of the managerial intervention (i.e., justice), offering a more holistic understanding of how employees simultaneously appraise incivility and justice. Specifically, this integrated dual-appraisal framework provides a novel perspective of how supervisor interpersonal justice can mitigate the effects of uncivil interactions on employee psychological outcomes—an aspect that existing single-theory approaches have not fully explored. Second, in response to calls to identify factors that can mitigate the negative effect of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Mackey et al., 2019; Rhee et al., 2017), we theorize and empirically test the buffering role of supervisors' interpersonal justice. This highlights the critical role of supervisors as third-party arbiters who can mitigate the harm caused by negative peer interactions (Colquitt, 2001; Meyer et al., 2018). Third, our study extends existing research on incivility and psychological outcomes, which has largely emphasized employee-to-employee dynamics and focused on a single continuum of mental health (i.e., ill-being; Khalid & Syed, 2024), such as emotional exhaustion and burnout (e.g., Moon & Hur, 2018; Rhee et al., 2017; Viotti et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019). We shift this perspective by highlighting the critical role of coworker incivility as a distinct job stressor that not only triggers perceptions of job stress but also undermines employees' psychological well-being, which is another continuum of mental health (Khalid & Syed, 2024).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We first develop our theoretical framework and present the hypotheses. We then describe the methodology used to test our hypotheses and report the results. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our findings, their limitations, and directions for future research.

## Theoretical Background

### Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Cognitive appraisal theory posits that an individual's response to an environmental encounter is determined by evaluating its relevance to their well-being (Folkman et al., 1986). According to this perspective, it is the individual's evaluation—not the situation itself—that drives emotional and stress responses (Lim et al., 2008; Matthews & Ritter, 2019). Accordingly, an event becomes a stressor only when an individual appraises it as threatening or harmful relative to their resources and coping capacity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This emphasis on appraisal as the trigger for stress is a foundational concept in the field. This principle is also reflected in frameworks such as the conservation of resources theory, which, while focusing on objective resource loss, still relies on cognitive evaluation (Hobfoll, 1989).

Applying cognitive appraisal theory to workplace interactions, we argue that coworker incivility functions as a potent stressor that impairs psychological well-being through a two-stage evaluation process. When an employee is subjected to uncivil behaviors—such as degrading remarks, rudeness, or discourtesy (Nixon et al., 2021)—they first engage in primary appraisal. In this stage, the employee evaluates the significance of the uncivil act and, given its violation of workplace respect, is likely to appraise it as a threat to their social standing and personal well-being. Following this, the employee engages in secondary appraisal, evaluating their own capacity and available resources to cope with the threat. They may assess whether they can effectively confront the coworker, secure support from others, or emotionally regulate their response. According to the theory, a powerful stress reaction emerges when an event is appraised as threatening (primary appraisal) and the individual's perceived ability to cope is low (secondary appraisal). We therefore posit that when employees appraise coworker incivility as a threat, it heightens perceived job stress and ultimately undermines psychological well-being.

### Appraisal Perspective of Interpersonal Justice

Scholars often integrate multiple theories to better capture complex phenomena. In this study, we adopt the third approach proposed by Mayer and Sparrowe (2013)—“applying one theory to the domain of another theory” (p. 919)—by integrating cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) with interpersonal justice theory (Bies & Moag, 1986) to explain the underlying

cognitive mechanism through which interpersonal justice is appraised to influence psychological outcomes (i.e., stress and well-being). To ensure theoretical coherence, we consider two key conditions (Mayer & Sparrowe, 2013): a clearly articulated link (i.e., the appraisal process treats justice perceptions as appraisable inputs that shape threat and coping evaluations) and compatibility of assumptions (i.e., the integration is coherent because both theories center on subjective interpretations).

A core tenet of justice appraisal is that the impact of managerial actions depends not on the actions themselves, but on how employees evaluate their fairness (Spell & Arnold, 2007). In the context of coworker incivility, this principle is paramount. While supervisor support can buffer employees from stress (Bliese et al., 2017), its effectiveness is filtered through an appraisal of its fairness. We argue that this evaluation is best captured through the lens of interpersonal justice—the degree to which an authority figure treats individuals with dignity and respect (Bies & Moag, 1986). Of the four facets of organizational justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal), we focus on interpersonal justice because it directly addresses the quality of relational dynamics (Janssen et al., 2010) that are central to interpersonal relations in the workplace.

To explain how interpersonal justice buffers the harm of incivility, we integrate the appraisal perspective on interpersonal justice with cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). We posit that supervisors, as influential authorities (Costa et al., 2024; Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019), can modify an employee's appraisal of an uncivil encounter. Regarding primary appraisal, an interpersonally just supervisor who treats the target with respect and dignity can reduce the perceived threat of the uncivil event. For secondary appraisal, a just supervisor can enhance an employee's perceived coping resources by validating their experience, offering support, and signaling institutional backing (Folkman et al., 1986). This theoretical integration provides a clear rationale for how a supervisor's just behavior in interpersonal interactions can mitigate the stress appraisal process initiated by coworker incivility.

**Hypotheses** Coworker incivility and psychological well-being.

While workplace incivility is broadly defined as low-intensity deviant behavior (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), the nature of incivility differs depending on whether it originates from a supervisor (e.g., exercising authoritative power), a customer, or a coworker who holds influence through informal social relationships within the organization (Han et al., 2022). We conceptualize coworker incivility as “uncivil behaviors instigated by individual coworkers, such as hurtful remarks, snippy emails, gossip, and shunning” (Reio,

2011, p. 55). Such behaviors are chronic relational stressors perceived as threats to an employee's standing and security (Al-Hawari et al., 2020).

To move beyond general assessments of quality of life or job satisfaction (Zheng et al., 2015), we define psychological well-being as a state reflecting not just "feeling good" (the hedonic view), but also "experiencing fulfillment and purpose" (Sonnentag, 2015, p. 262). We adopt a eudaimonic perspective, which is concerned with optimal human functioning, purpose, and self-realization (Sonnentag, 2015). This dimension of well-being is particularly relevant to our theoretical model, as the threat appraisal triggered by coworker incivility would directly undermine the sense of meaning, positive functioning, and personal fulfillment that are the cornerstones of psychological well-being (Hill et al., 2024).

Cognitive appraisal theory posits that psychological outcomes are determined not by an event itself, but by an individual's appraisal of that event as relevant to their psychological well-being. Based on this theoretical assertion, we argue that coworker incivility is the type of event likely to be appraised as a threat. Acts of incivility, such as being treated with disrespect or being denied assistance (De Clercq et al., 2020), thwart fundamental psychological needs for respect and belonging, thereby triggering distress (Han et al., 2022). Furthermore, employees are likely to psychologically appraise such encounters as a direct impediment to achieving meaningful goals and experiencing a sense of accomplishment at work (Brunetto et al., 2011). Appraising coworker incivility as a persistent threat erodes psychological well-being. When employees must continually evaluate and manage encounters that undermine their value and purpose, their capacity for optimal functioning is diminished. Being a target of incivility fundamentally undermines psychological health.

**Hypothesis 1.** *Coworker incivility is likely to negatively affect the psychological well-being of targeted employees.*

### The Mediating Role of Perceived Job Stress

Stress research distinguishes between stressors, which are the environmental conditions that cause reactions, and perceived stress, which is the psychological response that results from an employee's appraisal of those conditions (Bliese et al., 2017). We posit that coworker incivility acts as an interpersonal job stressor (Lim et al., 2008), distinct from task-based stressors such as role ambiguity (Chan & McAllister, 2014). While positive social interactions at work can be resource generating (Lee et al., 2023; Lilius, 2012), uncivil encounters are inherently resource depleting (Griffin, 2010). Frequent uncivil acts force employees to expend

cognitive and emotional resources to manage these interactions (Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lim et al., 2008). According to cognitive appraisal theory, this resource depletion is central to an employee's experience of stress, particularly during secondary appraisal. At this stage, employees evaluate whether their resources are sufficient to cope with the stressor's demands. When facing persistent coworker incivility, employees will likely appraise their coping resources as inadequate to manage the ongoing social threat. This sense of imbalance between the demands of dealing with a hostile interpersonal environment and their available resources can significantly increase job-related stress. The continuous mental effort needed to address this incivility amplifies job-related stress.

Furthermore, the chronic nature of coworker incivility requires a prolonged stress appraisal, forcing employees into sustained psychological arousal (Cortina et al., 2022). This perceived job stress serves as the immediate psychological response that translates interpersonal stressors into longer-term harm (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). The experience of stress consumes an individual's finite cognitive and emotional resources, diverting energy away from productive activities and toward managing emotional strain (Cheng et al., 2020). This resource drain undermines psychological well-being, which depends on investing resources in purpose and growth. In other words, when an employee's energy is continually redirected to cope with the stress of a threatening social environment, their capacity for well-being is directly undermined.

Accordingly, in line with cognitive appraisal theory, we propose that perceived job stress is the crucial intervening mechanism linking coworker incivility to a decline in psychological well-being. The causal sequence begins with primary appraisal, in which an employee evaluates the significance of an encounter. Coworker incivility undermines respect (Han et al., 2022) and triggers negative emotions like anger and frustration (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Baker & Kim, 2020), often viewed as a threatening hindrance stressor. This initial threat appraisal triggers psychological arousal (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), which manifests as perceived job stress (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). This state of stress is then magnified during secondary appraisal as the employee evaluates their ability to cope with the persistent threat of coworker incivility (Cortina et al., 2022). Their perceptions of inadequate resources to manage these encounters effectively intensify their job stress. Ultimately, this state of stress diminishes psychological well-being by depleting the cognitive and emotional resources necessary for functioning (Llorens et al., 2006). In conclusion, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Perceived job stress among employees will mediate the relationship between coworker incivility and*

*psychological well-being such that higher levels of coworker incivility will lead to increased job stress, resulting in lower psychological well-being.*

### **Supervisor Interpersonal Justice as a Boundary Condition**

We propose that supervisors' interpersonal justice is a critical boundary condition that buffers employees from the harmful effects of coworker incivility. Interpersonal justice refers to the degree to which employees perceive they are treated with dignity and respect by authority figures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Meyer et al., 2018). As third-party authorities, supervisors, who have the power to manage subordinates (Costa et al., 2024; Reio, 2011), can play a vital role in handling coworkers' incivility by exerting control over the occurrence, recurrence, and consequences of coworker incivility (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; Sakurai & Jex, 2012). While often examined in dyadic contexts (e.g., Colquitt, 2001), we apply this concept to the relationship where a supervisor, as a powerful third party (Costa et al., 2024; Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019), can mitigate the negative effects of uncivil interactions on targeted employees relative to a subordinate who is the perpetrator. Therefore, in the context of coworker incivility, supervisor interpersonal justice can be defined as the extent to which employees feel that their supervisor fairly addresses problems caused by dysfunctional coworkers. This includes appropriate handling procedures, behavioral responses, and efforts—such as ensuring adequate compensation—to ensure that affected employees are treated fairly throughout the resolution process.

Employees observe supervisor behavior as a significant and viable source of an improved psychosocial work environment and employee well-being (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). Scholars argue that if target employees appraise supervisor interpersonal justice as unfair, they will likely experience adverse psychological reactions, such as self-silencing, emotional suppression, and cognitive dysfunction, leading to decreased psychological well-being (Bani-Melhem et al., 2022). In contrast, when employees confront coworker incivility, their supervisors can resolve uncivil conflicts between the involved employees (Lin et al., 2023). For instance, when supervisors assess that incivility has occurred, target employees are treated with dignity and courtesy, ensuring the provision of justice (Bani-Melhem et al., 2022). This treatment may help repair the psychological harm caused by coworker incivility, given that supervisors stimulate coping mechanisms that help employees reframe these encounters (Folkman et al., 1986). Supervisors play a pivotal role in fostering a fair and respectful work environment, shaping employees' perceptions of organizational justice and support (Wallace et al., 2006). When supervisors are perceived

as considerate and supportive, employees feel valued and are more likely to trust their leaders, voice concerns, and engage constructively with workplace challenges (Qin et al., 2014). This perceived support not only enhances emotional resilience but also enables employees to reappraise stressful or uncivil interactions with coworkers as less threatening, thereby reducing emotional labor and dissonance (Lee et al., 2023). By serving as a general resource, supervisor support preserves employee dignity and strengthens ethical engagement in the face of everyday workplace stressors (Lloyd et al., 2015).

We argue that this supervisory resource fundamentally alters the cognitive appraisal process through which incivility inflicts harm, providing distinct pathways to protect against both perceived stress and the erosion of psychological well-being. First, supporting Hypothesis 3, interpersonally just treatment can directly influence an employee's primary appraisal of an uncivil act. When a supervisor treats a target with dignity and validates their experience, it reaffirms the employee's value and standing, making the coworker's uncivil behavior seem less personally threatening and damaging (Bani-Melhem et al., 2022). By mitigating the initial threat appraisal, the supervisor's actions directly shield the employee's psychological well-being from the incident's immediate erosive impact. Second, supporting Hypothesis 4, interpersonal justice strengthens employees' secondary appraisal of their coping resources. A just supervisor who listens and shows concern signals that the employee has institutional backing and is not alone in managing the stressor (Folkman et al., 1986). This bolstered sense of coping capacity directly combats perceived job stress, as the employee feels more equipped to handle stressful coworker interactions (Baker & Kim, 2020; Lee et al., 2023). In essence, a just supervisor helps employees reframe incivility as less threatening and more controllable, thereby weakening its link to both perceived job stress and diminished psychological well-being. We therefore hypothesize as follows:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Supervisor interpersonal justice will moderate the negative relationship between coworker incivility and targeted employees' psychological well-being, with higher levels of justice weakening the negative impact of incivility.*

**Hypothesis 4.** *Supervisor interpersonal justice will moderate the positive relationship between coworker incivility and targeted employees' perceived job stress, with higher levels of justice weakening the positive impact of incivility.*

### **Moderated Mediation**

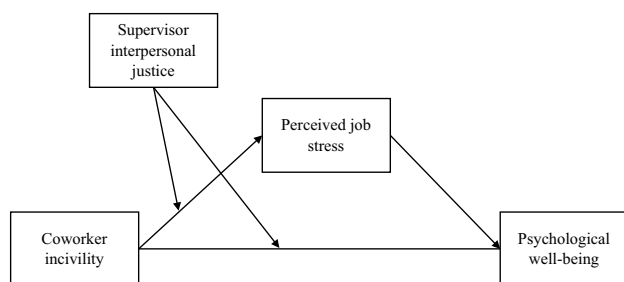
The combination of Hypotheses 4 and 6 indicates a moderated mediation effect, in which supervisor interpersonal

justice functions as a buffering factor, attenuating the indirect influence of coworker incivility on employees' psychological well-being through perceived job stress. From an appraisal perspective, supervisor interpersonal justice can reduce the perceived threat posed by coworker incivility during the primary appraisal. Additionally, during secondary appraisal, supervisor support is perceived as a coping resource, as employees believe they deserve justice in the face of uncivil interactions with coworkers. If employees perceive neither the supervisor's response nor the support as fair, their psychological well-being may be negatively affected (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019).

Adverse psychological reactions to coworker incivility are common and well documented (Sakurai & Jex, 2012). Notably, employees with lower perceptions of supervisor interpersonal justice appraise coworker incivility as more threatening and feel they have fewer supportive resources to cope, making it harder to preserve psychological well-being under stress. Conversely, the moderated mediation indicates that when employees perceive high levels of fair supervisor interpersonal justice, the negative impact of coworker incivility on psychological well-being, mediated by perceived job stress, is alleviated. Therefore, the indirect effect of coworker incivility on psychological well-being, operating through perceived job stress, depends on the supervisor's behavior. Consistent with these arguments, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 5.** *Supervisor interpersonal justice will moderate the indirect relationship between coworker incivility and employees' psychological well-being through perceived job stress, with higher levels of supervisor interpersonal justice weakening this indirect effect.*

These relationships among coworker incivility, perceived job stress, supervisor interpersonal justice, and psychological well-being are illustrated in the mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation models (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1** Research model

## Overview of Studies

We conducted three studies across different organizational contexts to empirically test our hypotheses: two field surveys (Study 1 and Study 2) and one experimental study (Study 3). Following Sakurai and Jex (2012), we asked the respondents to report coworker incivility they experienced in the past month. In Study 1, we examined the direct and indirect effects of coworker incivility on employee job stress and psychological well-being. In Study 2, we explored the moderating role of supervisor interpersonal justice and its impact on the direct and indirect relationships identified in Study 1. In this way, we validated the findings of Study 1 and our theoretical model of supervisor interpersonal justice, extending the scope of generalizations based on the inferences derived from its findings (Wright & Sweeney, 2016). However, because Study 2 was cross-sectional, it could not establish causality. To address this limitation, we conducted an experimental study (Study 3) designed to test causal relationships among the proposed direct and indirect effects. This approach aligns with methods used in prior studies that explored moderated mediation models (e.g., Hamid & Kundi, 2025; Kundi et al., 2025).

## Study 1

### Participants and Procedure

Data were collected across three time points from full-time employees enrolled in Master's programs at various business schools in Pakistan. Participants were approached through their course instructors. Before distributing the survey, participants were informed of the study's purpose and the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. They were instructed to include their registration numbers to facilitate the matching of responses across the three waves of data collection. At Time 1, questionnaires were distributed to 180 participants, and 158 complete responses were received. At Time 2, one week later, 151 of the initial 158 participants completed the survey. One week later, all 151 participants completed the Time 3 survey. Seven responses were excluded for incomplete or unusual response patterns, leaving a final sample of 144 individuals. An attrition analysis was conducted, and we found no significant differences in the demographic variables among participants who completed all three surveys ( $n = 144$ ) and participants who dropped out at Time 2 (age:  $t = -1.30$ ,  $p = .19$ ; gender:  $t = .11$ ,  $p = .90$ ; organizational tenure:  $t = -.64$ ,  $p = .52$ ) and Time 3 (age:  $t = -.47$ ,  $p = .63$ ; gender:  $t = -1.36$ ,  $p = .17$ ; organizational tenure:  $t = -.24$ ,  $p = .80$ ). Thus, attrition did not introduce systematic bias. Of the 144 participants, 54.9% were

female, with an average age of 30.89 years ( $SD = 3.64$ ) and an organizational tenure of 3.56 years ( $SD = 2.90$ ).

## Measures

All constructs were measured using well-established scales. Modifications for contextual fitness were made through discussions and approval by expert researchers. All items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree/never) to 7 (strongly agree/most of the time). All study items are presented in Table 5 (see Appendix A). We measured the frequency of participating employees' experiences of *coworker incivility* by adopting a seven-item scale from Cortina et al., (2001;  $\alpha = .91$ ). Initially, this scale was developed to measure workplace incivility induced by coworkers and supervisors. In our research context, the items explicitly referred to coworker incivility. *Perceived job stress* was measured using five items adapted from Poddar and Madupalli (2012;  $\alpha = .90$ ) and modified for this study, as the original items were designed for customer mistreatment contexts. To adapt the items to coworker mistreatment, we replaced the term "customer" with "coworker." *Psychological well-being* was measured by adopting four items from Brunetto et al., (2011;  $\alpha = .90$ ). Finally, we measured employee age and organizational tenure as continuous variables (in years) and gender as a binary variable (0 = female; 1 = male) which were included as control variables in the analysis.

## Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations of the study variables.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted a CFA in Mplus 8.3 to assess model fit and establish the constructs'

convergent and discriminant validity. Our hypothesized three-factor model, including coworker incivility, perceived job stress, and psychological well-being, demonstrated a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 239.75$ ,  $df = 101$ ,  $CFI = .91$ , and  $SRMR = .06$ . Moreover, the three-factor model was found to have a better model fit when compared to the two-factor ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 429.19$ ,  $\Delta df = 2$ ) and one-factor ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 649.56$ ,  $\Delta df = 3$ ) models. As shown in Table 1, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) scores exceeded their cutoff scores of .70 and .50, respectively. Therefore, convergent validity was established. Moreover, the square root of AVE for each construct was compared with the correlation coefficients, which were lower than the square root of the AVE scores, thereby establishing discriminant validity (Hamid & Kundi, 2025). In addition, we checked for common method bias using the common latent factor technique (Podsakoff et al., 2003), in which an additional latent variable was added to the CFA, and all paths were constrained to be equal and the variance was set to 1. Results of the common latent factor test identified .06% of common variance across all variables in our model, suggesting that common method bias is not a serious concern.

### Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses were tested through multiple linear regression using the PROCESS macro, Model 4, with 5,000 bootstrap samples. As shown in Table 2, coworker incivility negatively affected employee psychological well-being ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Hypothesis 1 was supported), while it positively affected perceived job stress ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Moreover, perceived job stress negatively affected psychological well-being ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The indirect effect of coworker incivility on employee psychological well-being through perceived job stress was negative and significant (indirect effect =  $-.05$ , 95% CI  $-.105, -.004$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics and correlation, study 1

Variable	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Coworker incivility	2.44	1.41	.58	.90	(.76)					
2. Perceived job stress	4.33	1.47	.66	.91	.35**	(.81)				
3. Psychological well-being	4.97	1.51	.69	.89	-.48**	-.35**	(.83)			
4. Age	30.89	3.64	–	–	-.33**	-.40**	.34**	–		
5. Gender	.45	.49	–	–	.28**	.05	-.04	-.12	–	
6. Tenure	3.56	2.90	–	–	-.43**	-.40**	.49**	.92**	-.06	–

$N = 144$ .  $SD$  standard deviation,  $AVE$  average variance extracted,  $CR$  composite reliability. Square roots of AVE are placed in parentheses

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 2** Regression results for mediation effect, study 1

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	PJS	PWB	PJS	PWB	PJS	PWB	PJS	PWB
Age	-.14	-.29**	-.12**	.06	–	–	–	–
Gender	-.20	.01	–	–	–	–	–	–
Tenure	.02	.51**	–	–	-.15**	.16**	–	–
Coworker incivility (CWI)	.29**	-.25**	.26**	-.40**	.23**	-.32**	.37**	-.43**
Perceived job stress (PJS)	–	-.16*	–	-.15	–	-.11	–	-.21**
Indirect path	Effect [LLCI, ULCI]		Effect [LLCI, ULCI]		Effect [LLCI, ULCI]		Effect [LLCI, ULCI]	
CWI → PJS → PWB	-.05 [-.105, -.004]		-.04 [-.097, -.001]		-.03 [-.074, .005]		-.08 [-.152, -.021]	

$N = 144$ . PWB psychological well-being, LLCI lower limit confidence interval, ULCI upper limit confidence interval

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

## Study 2

### Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from full-time employees working in the healthcare sector. The healthcare sector was selected because employees regularly work on-site, increasing the likelihood of frequent interactions with coworkers. We gathered data via surveys from employees working in hospitals in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. Islamabad was selected due to its diverse workforce, which reflects various regions of the country and enhances the generalizability and external validity of the findings (De Clercq et al., 2020). Moreover, we argue that incivility is more likely to occur when employees work in proximity and interact directly. Therefore, we collected data from employees working in the same medical wards where high levels of social proximity and interactions were expected.

Through our professional contacts, we reached out to the human resources (HR) managers at participating hospitals to obtain their consent to conduct the survey. We shared the survey link, which included the study's purpose and the questions to be asked of participants. HR managers provided us with the email addresses of medical officers in 33 medical wards. We emailed the medical officers a survey link to be shared randomly with their medical staff. Thus, the data collection from employees remained random, ensuring the likelihood that the sample involved an adequate representation of participating employees (De Clercq et al., 2020). To minimize retrospective bias and facilitate accurate recall, we asked respondents to report coworker incivility experienced in the past month, following Sakurai and Jex (2012). As a result, we retrieved 205 responses from our online database. After excluding incomplete responses, we found 172 responses suitable for analysis. Of these 172 respondents, 60.5% were male, with an average age of 34.25

years ( $SD = 4.06$ ) and an organizational tenure of 3.38 years ( $SD = 1.59$ ).

### Measures

Coworker incivility ( $\alpha = .89$ ), perceived job stress ( $\alpha = .95$ ), and psychological well-being ( $\alpha = .88$ ) were measured using the same measures used in Study 1. All responses were assessed on a 5-point scale. *Supervisor Interpersonal Justice* was measured using a three-item scale (Bani-Melhem et al., 2022;  $\alpha = .91$ ). The scale was designed for measuring customer mistreatment; therefore, we modified the items to focus on coworker mistreatment. The three items in Table 5 (see Appendix A) focus on how supervisors address and respond to issues related to uncivil coworker behavior. These items assess employees' feelings about the fairness of supervisors' problem-handling procedures, their behavioral responses, and their efforts to ensure that affected employees are treated fairly when remedial actions—such as compensation—are implemented. Employee age, gender, and organizational tenure were controlled.

## Result

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations of the study variables.

### CFA

Our hypothesized four-factor model including coworker incivility, perceived job stress, supervisor interpersonal justice, and psychological well-being demonstrated a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 210.80$ ,  $df = 113$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $SRMR = 0.03$ ) and was better than the three-factor model in which we combined perceived job stress and psychological well-being

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics and correlation, study 2

Variable	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Coworker incivility	2.11	.82	.63	.89	(.79)						
2. Perceived job stress	1.95	.88	.81	.95	.61**	(.90)					
3. Supervisor interpersonal justice	3.76	.75	.77	.91	-.36**	-.38**	(.87)				
4. Psychological well-being	3.94	.74	.65	.88	-.55**	-.52**	.56**	(.80)			
5. Age	34.25	4.06	–	–	-.07	-.01	.18**	.06	–		
6. Gender	.60	.49	–	–	-.14	-.29**	.28**	.16*	-.24**	–	
7. Tenure	3.38	1.59	–	–	-.14	-.03	.11	.04	.18*	.09	–

$N=172$ . *SD* standard deviation; *AVE* average variance extracted, *CR* composite reliability. Square roots of AVE are placed in parentheses  
\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$

( $\Delta\chi^2=287.16$ ,  $\Delta df=3$ ) and a single-factor model where all items were loaded on a single factor ( $\Delta\chi^2=867.06$ ,  $\Delta df=6$ ), suggesting construct distinctiveness. Additionally, as shown in Table 3, both the CR and AVE scores exceeded the cutoff thresholds of .70 and .50, respectively, establishing convergent validity. Furthermore, the square root of AVE was greater than the correlation coefficients, which further confirmed the constructs' discriminant validity. Next, we checked for common method bias using the common latent factor technique. The results revealed .01% of common variance across all variables in our model, suggesting that common method bias is not a serious concern.

### Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses were tested through multiple linear regression using the PROCESS macro, Models 4 and 8, with 5,000 bootstrap samples. As shown in Table 4, coworker incivility negatively affected employee psychological well-being ( $\beta=-.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ; Hypothesis 1 supported), while it positively affected perceived job stress ( $\beta=.51$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Moreover, perceived job stress negatively affected psychological well-being ( $\beta=-.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The indirect effect of coworker incivility on employee psychological well-being through perceived job stress was negative and significant (indirect effect =  $-.15$ , 95% CI  $-.262$ ,  $-.055$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2. Moreover, supervisor interpersonal justice positively moderated the relationship between coworker incivility and employee psychological well-being ( $\beta=.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ; Hypothesis 3 supported), but negatively moderated the relationship between coworker incivility and perceived job stress ( $\beta=-.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ; Hypothesis 4 supported).

The moderated mediation index was significant, indicating that supervisor interpersonal justice moderates the indirect effect of coworker incivility on employee psychological well-being. When supervisor interpersonal justice was high, the negative indirect effect of coworker incivility on employee psychological well-being was less severe ( $-.05$ )

compared to when supervisor interpersonal justice was low ( $-.09$ ). These findings support Hypothesis 5.

## Study 3

### Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from full-time employees working in various organizations located in Karachi, Pakistan. Prior to data collection, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and the anonymity of their responses. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of two hypothetical vignettes to manipulate perceptions of coworker incivility. Participants were asked to read the situation (see Vignettes 1 and 2 in Appendix B) and to imagine the situation as if it were real. The scenarios were based on the measure of coworker incivility used in Studies 1 and 2. Then, participants completed the dependent measures, namely, perceived job stress and psychological well-being, along with manipulation and realism checks (sample item was "The situation described was realistic"). To check whether the manipulation was successful, participants rated the coworker incivility items used in Studies 1 and 2 Table 5.

In total, we received 225 valid responses, with 109 assigned to the coworker incivility condition and 116 to the no coworker incivility condition. Among the respondents, 60.4% were male, with an average age of 30.09 (SD = 7.00) years and an average organizational tenure of 4.84 (SD = 3.73) years.

## Results

We examined the responses to the manipulation check question and found that in the coworkers' incivility condition, participants scored higher on the coworkers' incivility ( $M=3.82$ ;  $SD=1.00$ ) than in the condition where coworker incivility was absent ( $M=1.94$ ;  $SD=1.03$ ) [ $F(1,$

**Table 4** Regression results for moderation and moderated mediation effects, study 2

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	PJS	PWB	PJS	PWB	PJS	PWB
Age	.01	-.01	–	–	–	–
Gender	-.33**	-.07	-.32**	-.06	–	–
Tenure	.05	-.02	–	–	–	–
Coworker incivility (CWI)	.51**	-.24**	.51**	-.23**	.51**	-.23**
Perceived job stress (PJS)	–	-.14*	–	-.15*	–	-.14*
Supervisor interpersonal justice (SIJ)	-.07	.34**	-.06	.32**	-.12	.31**
CWI x SIJ	-.17**	.11*	-.17**	.10*	-.16**	.11*
Indirect path	Effect		Effect		Effect	
	[LLCI, ULCI]		[LLCI, ULCI]		[LLCI, ULCI]	
CWI → PJS → PWB	-.15 [-.262, -.055]		-.15 [-.260, -.056]		-.17 [-.278, -.071]	
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of coworker incivility on perceived job stress						
- 1 SD	.64 [.511, .784]		.63 [.499, .770]		.64 [.503, .781]	
+ 1 SD	.38 [.198, .567]		.37 [.193, .562]		.39 [.206, .583]	
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of coworker incivility on psychological well-being						
- 1 SD	-.32 [-.468, -.188]		-.31 [-.448, -.175]		-.31 [-.451, -.181]	
+ 1 SD	-.15 [-.314, .002]		-.15 [-.311, .004]		-.15 [-.312, .003]	
Conditional <i>indirect</i> effect of coworker incivility on psychological well-being via job stress						
- 1 SD	-.09 [-.193, -.006]		-.09 [-.192, -.005]		-.09 [-.186, -.007]	
+ 1 SD	-.05 [-.128, -.002]		-.05 [-.129, -.002]		-.05 [-.130, -.003]	
Index of moderated mediation	.025 [.002, .057]		.025 [.001, .058]		.023 [.002, .052]	

$N = 172$ . *PWB* psychological well-being, *LLCI* lower limit confidence interval, *ULCI* upper limit confidence interval

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

223) = 188.85,  $p < .001$ ]. This result suggests that the coworker's incivility manipulation was successful.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using the coworker incivility manipulation as the independent variable. Perceived job stress and psychological well-being were the dependent variables (see Table 6 in Appendix C). Perceived job stress [ $F(1, 223) = 161.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ] and psychological well-being [ $F(1, 223) = 111.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ] differed significantly in the coworker incivility condition, as expected. Psychological well-being was rated higher in the no coworker incivility condition ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ) than in the coworker incivility condition ( $M = 1.98$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. In addition, perceived job stress was rated higher in the coworker incivility condition ( $M = 4.34$ ;  $SD = .84$ ) than in the no coworker incivility condition ( $M = 2.46$ ;  $SD = 1.30$ ).

Next, the PROCESS macro was used to assess the influence of the experimental conditions on employee

psychological well-being, mediated by perceived job stress. Age, gender, and organizational tenure were controlled. The full model explained 44% of the variance of psychological well-being ( $F = 35.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The coworker incivility manipulation had a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ) on employee psychological well-being, whereas it had a significant positive effect ( $\beta = .79$ ,  $p < .01$ ) on employee perceived job stress. The effect of perceived job stress on employee psychological well-being was negative and significant ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Moreover, the indirect effect of coworker's incivility manipulation on employee psychological well-being through perceived job stress was negative and significant (effect size =  $-.23$ , 95% CI  $-.364, -.097$ ), supporting the mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 2).

## Overall Discussion

This study answers recent calls to explore the mechanisms and boundary conditions that link coworker incivility to employee psychological outcomes (Baker & Kim, 2020). Our multi-study investigation first confirmed that coworker incivility is detrimental to employees' psychological well-being, a finding consistent with prior work demonstrating the negative health consequences of workplace stressors (e.g., Lim et al., 2008; Matthews & Ritter, 2019). More importantly, we identified the primary pathway for this harm. Our results consistently showed that the negative relationship between coworker incivility and psychological well-being is mediated by perceived job stress, substantiating the view that coworker incivility functions as a job stressor that diminishes psychological well-being (Griffin, 2010).

Furthermore, our findings underscore the pivotal role supervisors play in mitigating the negative effects of incivility. We found strong empirical support for our buffering hypotheses, demonstrating that high levels of supervisor interpersonal justice weaken the positive relationship between coworker incivility and perceived job stress. This result aligns with scholarship emphasizing that managerial and organizational interventions are crucial for alleviating stress and curbing the impact of negative workplace behaviors (Baker & Kim, 2020; Sakurai & Jex, 2012). In sum, our findings support a moderated mediation model in which the harmful indirect effect of incivility is contingent on a supervisor's just and dignified treatment of employees, demonstrating that the consequences of negative peer interactions can be mitigated through supervisory support.

## Theoretical Implications

Our research has expanded the literature on workplace incivility and psychological outcomes in three main ways. First, prior research on incivility and its related outcomes is primarily dominated by social exchange theory (e.g., Moon & Hur, 2018) and conservation of resources theory (e.g., Rhee et al., 2017; Viotti et al., 2018). We argue that employees' appraisals of interpersonal interactions are a major determinant of their psychological outcomes. We have integrated two appraisal-focused theories—cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and interpersonal justice theory (Bies & Moag, 1986)—to examine the role of the supervisor in mitigating the negative effects of coworker-induced incivility on the psychological outcomes of target employees. This integrated dual-appraisal framework (see Mayer & Sparrowe, 2013) provides a novel perspective on how supervisor interpersonal justice can

neutralize uncivil interactions—an area that existing single-theory approaches have not fully addressed. For example, cognitive appraisal theory (grounded in the stress and coping literature) explains how incivility is appraised as a stressor and becomes detrimental to psychological well-being, but it does not explain under what conditions or for which employees the psychological impact of incivility varies. In contrast, interpersonal justice (rooted in the organizational justice literature) explains how supervisor interpersonal justice serves as a reinforcing mechanism, but it does not address when and for whom it is effective. Thus, integrating the cognitive appraisal lens and interpersonal justice offers a parsimonious and robust explanation of how supervisor interpersonal justice can neutralize the detrimental effect of perpetrator coworkers' incivility on target employees' psychological well-being Table 6.

Second, responding to calls for research on factors that can contain the negative spiral of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Mackey et al., 2019; Rhee et al., 2017), we theorize and empirically test the buffering role of supervisors' interpersonal justice. Specifically, we examine how supervisors' interpersonal justice mitigates the direct and indirect effects of coworker incivility on psychological outcomes (i.e., stress and well-being). While organizational justice encompasses multiple facets, prior research has typically conceptualized and measured interpersonal justice in a dyadic fashion (e.g., “My supervisor treats me with dignity”; Colquitt, 2001; Meyer et al., 2018; Spell & Arnold, 2007), reflecting how supervisors are perceived to treat their subordinate employees at an interpersonal level. We extend this view by framing interpersonal justice as a contextual resource that reinforces the target employee's cognitive appraisal process when coping with coworker incivility. This perspective highlights how interpersonal justice, when applied to managing the aftermath of uncivil peer interactions, can reduce perceived stress and preserve psychological well-being.

Third, we provide an understanding of how uncivil interactions with coworkers and supervisors are appraised as a specific job stressor and as a source of supportive justice, respectively. Additionally, we have identified the underlying mechanism by which the negative impact of uncivil interactions triggers perceived job stress, thereby undermining employee psychological well-being. For example, coworkers' support and social relations are considered critical in impacting various employee outcomes, such as reduced job stress and enhanced well-being (e.g., Costa et al., 2024; De Clercq et al., 2020), given that “coworkers possess social power to influence the quality of everyday social relationships” (Han et al., 2022, p. 503). Based on this stance, we argue that when a supportive coworker becomes uncivil, fostering toxic social relations, target employees perceive their jobs as more stressful and experience poorer psychological

well-being. Our study advances extant scholarship that primarily focuses on employee-to-employee perspectives on incivility and psychological outcomes (e.g., Chris et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2008; Rhee et al., 2017). Specifically, by shifting existing research that predominantly focuses on one continuum of mental health (i.e., ill-being; Khalid & Syed, 2024), such as emotional exhaustion and burnout (e.g., Moon & Hur, 2018; Rhee et al., 2017; Viotti et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019), we provide an understanding of the critical role of coworker incivility as a particular job stressor in triggering perceptions of job stress and diminishing employee psychological well-being (i.e., the other continuum of mental health; Khalid & Syed, 2024).

Finally, we theorize that supervisors' justice, an important boundary condition, is an appraised interpersonal treatment in which the supervisor reinforces the target employee with dignity and respect and serves as a source of coping with negative psychological reactions. Further, we argue that the effects of supervisor interpersonal justice operate through psychological and behavioral processes. In this manner, we empirically contribute to understanding the neutralizing effect of supervisor interpersonal justice on the relationship between incivility and employee psychological outcomes (i.e., stress and well-being) by employing different study designs and three samples within similar organizational contexts.

## Practical Implications

Positioned within the business ethics literature, workplace incivility involves significant ethical implications. Scholars in business ethics have extensively explored the relationship between incivility and ethical behaviors in the workplace (e.g., Abdellatif & Prasad, 2024; Huang et al., 2022; Mackey et al., 2019; Miranda & Welbourne, 2023; Valentine et al., 2019). Consequently, this study offers several practical implications for organizations, supervisors, and employees in addressing uncivil behaviors and fostering workplace ethics to enhance employee outcomes.

Employees should be trained to appraise potential interpersonal challenges, including uncivil or unethical behaviors, and respond appropriately. This recommendation stems from our dual-appraisal framework, which emphasizes the ways in which employees interpret both the stressor (i.e., incivility) and the fairness of managerial responses (i.e., justice). Training employees to appraise interpersonal challenges aligns with this theoretical insight by strengthening adaptive appraisal processes. For example, recognizing compatibility with coworkers can shape perceptions of what constitutes incivility and how such behaviors are appraised as stressful for psychological well-being. Enhanced emotional self-regulation, such as that fostered by emotional self-efficacy, strengthens coping mechanisms and helps create a civil

environment that supports well-being and reduces conflict or retaliation (Locklear et al., 2021). Promoting civility and respect fosters a sense of safety when discussing uncivil events and maintaining healthy working relationships, thereby helping employees conserve emotional resources and avoid retaliatory or unethical behaviors.

Our findings indicate that supervisors' interpersonal justice acts as a crucial boundary condition that neutralizes the harmful effects of coworker incivility. This practical implication reflects our finding that supervisors' interpersonal justice serves as a critical buffer, mitigating the negative effects of coworker incivility and reinforcing fairness perceptions. Employees evaluate supervisors' justice and form overarching perceptions of fairness (David et al., 2024), which implies that interpersonal justice inherently entails moral and ethical concerns because employee justice perceptions are not merely justice laden but also ethics laden (Koopman et al., 2019). Organizations should encourage supervisors to take responsibility for consistently demonstrating interpersonal justice, as this is a key aspect of responsible human resource management that promotes ethical behavior in the workplace (e.g., Pham et al., 2026). This implication aligns with research highlighting workplace incivility as a significant business ethics issue, emphasizing that supervisors who establish and reinforce an ethical organizational climate provide a foundation for mitigating incivility (Abdellatif & Prasad, 2024).

Employees experiencing incivility or injustice may share a social identity and engage in collective action to resist or overcome stressors like incivility (Lopez-Alvarez et al., 2024). Such collective responses can involve bystanders and, if unmanaged, may erode ethical norms and disrupt workplace harmony. Therefore, supervisors must demonstrate high levels of interpersonal justice to reduce the negative effects of incivility and maintain workplace ethics. Among different facets of organizational justice, interpersonal justice is considered the most effective channel for shaping employees' behaviors and fostering a civil, ethical work environment.

Supervisors who demonstrate interpersonal justice—through respectful communication, empathy, and fair treatment—can reshape employees' appraisals, reducing perceived threat and promoting adaptive coping responses (Greenberg, 2004). Practically, organizations should equip supervisors with ethical and emotional intelligence training to help them recognize and respond to employees' interpretations of incivility, thereby fostering reappraisals that mitigate stress and restore psychological balance (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). For example, failure to acknowledge or address disrespectful behaviors perpetuates unethical conduct and corrodes workplace ethics (Miranda & Welbourne, 2023; Valentine et al., 2019). In contrast, supervisors who identify and correct incivility foster climates of respect and

accountability. Thus, practical measures, such as civility training, ethical leadership development, and justice-oriented feedback systems, can equip supervisors to respond constructively to incivility while promoting ethical workplaces (e.g., Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2026; Stone & Degbey, 2025).

Overall, the study emphasizes that fair supervision anchored in interpersonal justice is essential for mitigating the psychological and moral costs of coworker incivility. By addressing incivility as a distinct job stressor and promoting fairness-based supervisory practices, organizations can protect employees' psychological well-being, that is, the positive continuum of mental health highlighted in our study. Supervisors who demonstrate fairness and sensitivity act as moral stewards, limiting the stress pathway linking incivility to reduced well-being and modeling ethical behavior in the workplace. By embedding justice-based leadership and moral obligation into everyday practice, organizations can transform potential sources of interpersonal harm into opportunities for ethical growth, thereby enhancing both employee flourishing and organizational integrity (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 2004; Zoogah et al., 2025).

### Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

As with other studies, our research has certain limitations that may affect scholars who need to validate our findings and conclusions. First, we collected data only from target employees. Including perpetrating employees in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of perceptions of justice and incivility dynamics. For example, a target employee experiencing uncivil behavior may choose to ignore it or refrain from responding, while the perpetrating employee might deny any harmful intent behind their actions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Following this line of reasoning, we encourage scholars to collect data from both target and perpetrating employees to refine our theorization of how incivility and justice operate in a triadic fashion. For instance, Koopman et al. (2020) demonstrated that employees actively compare their own justice treatment to that of coworkers and adjust their behavior accordingly. Second, Mitchell et al. (2019) argued that individuals appraise stressors over time, and thus found that the effect of stress on psychological well-being fluctuates dynamically. In contrast, researchers have demonstrated that employees experience justice treatment dynamically, influencing employee stress (Matta et al., 2017). Our data collection procedures prevented us from measuring dynamic changes in the focal variables. Thus, a longitudinal research design would allow for more robust evidence regarding the appraisal of incivility as a stressor and the moderating role of supervisor

interpersonal justice in the relationship between experienced incivility and the employee outcomes under investigation. Third, our results indicate that when supervisors make justice between both the target employee (i.e., to boost dignity and respect) and the perpetrating employees (i.e., to discourage incivility and stimulate apology), the effect of incivility lessens. This mechanism is evident in the seminal work of Andersson and Pearson (1999): when the perpetrating party offers an excuse for the uncivil behavior and the target employee accepts it, the spiral effect ends. However, once the incivility spiral is ended, we cannot be certain whether the perpetrating employee will repeat the behavior with the same or a different colleague. This notion of future research will assess the extent to which supervisors are effective at maintaining civil interactions among subordinates and the overall moral order of the workplace.

We focused on target employees who personally experienced incivility, but other employees may also witness negative or unethical behaviors directed at their colleagues (David et al., 2024). Miranda and Welbourne (2023) found that other-condemning emotions stem from moral appraisals and can trigger distinct spiral effects in response to incivility. Building on these investigations, we call for research into how employees who experience, witness, or condemn incivility may perceive a personal threat (e.g., David et al., 2024), experience moral disgust and outrage (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and form judgments about the broader ethical climate. We encourage scholars to examine these emotional and cognitive responses as mechanisms linking workplace incivility to ethical perceptions and employee psychological outcomes.

Supervisors, as influential authority figures (Costa et al., 2024), often intervene when employees face uncivil behavior in the workplace (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019), responding to uncivil employees with corrective actions intended to restore norms rather than inflict harm (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). Supervisors may experience other-condemning emotions such as contempt, disgust, or anger (Miranda & Welbourne, 2023), and assess the moral character of uncivil employees, potentially responding with assertive corrective strategies aimed at restoring civility, ensuring psychological safety, and upholding moral standards (Eissa et al., 2020). We suggest that, in some cases, supervisors may engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior—actions intended to benefit the organization at the expense of ethical norms (Umphress et al., 2010). Future research could examine whether supervisors' unethical pro-organizational behavior inadvertently influences the regulation of incivility and how such actions affect the broader ethical climate of the workplace.

Research indicates that employees may instigate incivility in response to being targeted themselves (Gallus et al., 2014) or due to perceived interpersonal injustice from supervisors (Lopez-Alvarez et al., 2024), contributing to a cycle of

**Table 5** Results of confirmatory factor analysis in studies 1 and 2

Construct items	Loading	Loading
Coworker incivility		
1. My coworkers make demanding, rude, or derogatory remarks about me	.69	R
2. My coworkers address me in unprofessional terms either publicly or privately	.71	R
3. My coworkers put me down or are condescending to me	.80	.61
4. My coworkers pay little attention to my statements or show little interest in my opinions	.79	.67
5. My coworkers ignore or exclude me from professional companionship	.84	.89
6. My coworkers doubt my judgment on a matter over which I have responsibility	.76	.91
7. My coworkers make unwanted attempts to draw me into a discussion of personal matters	.75	.86
Perceived job stress		
1. Working with uncivil coworkers directly puts too much stress on me	.91	.90
2. I feel under pressure from the incivility my coworkers put on me	.79	.87
3. I feel upset because of working directly with uncivil coworkers	.96	.92
4. I feel mentally strained trying to work with uncivil coworkers	.70	.92
5. I feel tense from trying to meet coworker expectations	.66	.89
Supervisor interpersonal justice		
1. Overall, I feel the supervisor's handling procedure for the problems caused by dysfunctional coworkers is fair	–	.87
2. Overall, I feel the supervisor's handling behavior for the problems caused by dysfunctional coworkers is fair	–	.88
3. Overall, I feel the supervisor ensures that the compensation I received from the company due to the problems caused by dysfunctional coworkers is fair	–	.88
Psychological well-being		
1. Overall, I think being an employee in this company fulfills an important purpose in my work life	.81	.80
2. Overall, I get enough time in this company to reflect on what I do at work	.80	.83
3. Overall, I think I am reasonably satisfied with my work life	.85	.79
4. Overall, most days I feel a sense of accomplishment in what I do in this company	.86	.81

R = Items removed due to factor loadings < .6

escalating uncivil and unethical behaviors in the workplace. We encourage scholars to apply and test our conceptualization of supervisors' interpersonal justice to examine how both target and perpetrator employees perceive fairness and whether these perceptions influence intentions to engage in incivility. This highlights the need for deeper insights into the motivations and behaviors of those who initiate incivility in the workplace—an area that remains underexplored (Miranda & Welbourne, 2023). Future research may help identify employees who are at greater risk of engaging in moral and ethical violations, including rule breaking, retaliation, and theft.

Spell and Arnold (2007) conceptualized interpersonal justice as a reinforcing mechanism that shapes employee behavior through perceived fairness. This suggests that supervisors should reinforce target employees by offering emotional support and validating the psychological impact of workplace incivility. Conversely, Miranda and Welbourne (2023) found that coworkers perceived as morally deficient may be subject to punitive responses aimed at restoring a sense of justice. Thus, our study opens a promising direction

**Table 6** Mean and standard deviations of experimental conditions, study 3

Variable	Conditions	Mean	SD
Perceived job stress	Coworker incivility	4.34	.84
	No coworker incivility	2.46	1.30
	Total	3.37	1.44
Psychological well-being	Coworker incivility	1.98	1.15
	No coworker incivility	3.53	1.04
	Total	2.78	1.34

N = 225

for future research to examine interpersonal justice through the lens of reinforcement theory (Adams, 2000), which explains how behavior is influenced by its consequences through positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment, and extinction. Consistent with this line of reasoning, employees experience justice and develop relative

perceptions of their own and others' justice (Colquitt, 2004). In a triadic context of justice treatment (e.g., Colquitt, 2004; Koopman et al., 2019, 2020), this suggests that supervisors can shape employee behavior by reinforcing civility and addressing uncivil conduct among both target and perpetrating employees, thereby fostering a respectful and ethical work environment that improves employees' psychological well-being.

Finally, several questions remain regarding supervisor and employee dynamics: Were uncivil employees held accountable or merely labeled as such? How do subordinates perceive and evaluate supervisors' ethical conduct when addressing incidents of incivility? Do employees who engage in incivility experience guilt or shame following supervisory intervention, and does this lead to improvements in their civility, moral reasoning, and ethical behavior? These questions warrant further scholarly investigation to deepen our understanding of workplace incivility and justice within triadic treatment (e.g., Colquitt, 2004; Koopman et al., 2019, 2020), rather than traditional dyadic, frameworks.

## Conclusion

This study has investigated how coworker incivility directly and indirectly influences employees' perceived job stress and psychological well-being. Drawing on cognitive appraisal theory, we identified a key mechanism through which coworker incivility impacts psychological well-being. Additionally, we have employed an appraisal perspective of justice to show how supervisor interpersonal justice can buffer the negative impacts of coworker incivility on perceived job stress and psychological well-being. This buffering effect highlights the importance of fair and supportive supervision in mitigating the detrimental effects of incivility. This study contributes to the literature on workplace incivility and well-being by identifying coworkers as a key source of incivility and a major influence on employees' psychological health. We recommend that supervisors address uncivil behavior, foster healthy relationships among subordinates, and promote an ethical work environment to support employees' psychological well-being.

## Appendix A

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis in Studies 1 and 2

## Appendix B

### Vignettes

The following vignettes/scenarios were used for the experiment.

### Vignette 1: Incivility condition ( $N = 109$ )

Imagine you are working in an organization in which your coworkers make demanding, rude, or derogatory remarks about you. They address you in unprofessional terms, both publicly and privately, often speaking arrogantly or attempting to belittle you. You have noticed that when decisions are made, you are frequently excluded from key conversations, and your coworkers rarely seek your input on matters directly related to your responsibilities. They express doubts about your judgment regarding issues for which you are responsible. During lunch and in informal settings, your coworkers make unwelcome attempts to discuss personal matters with you.

### Vignette 2: No incivility condition ( $N = 116$ )

Imagine you are working in an organization in which your coworkers treat you with respect and professionalism. You never encounter demanding, rude, or derogatory remarks from them. They address you courteously in both public and private settings, consistently acknowledging your contributions. You are included in the decision-making process and participate in key conversations, with your opinions actively sought—especially on matters related to your responsibilities. Your judgment is trusted and valued by your coworkers. During lunch and in informal settings, your coworkers maintain appropriate boundaries while remaining friendly and respectful.

## Appendix C

### Experimental Conditions in Study 3

**Acknowledgements** Muhammad Sarfraz, William Degbey and Muhammad Sufyan acknowledge the Marcus Wallenberg Foundation in Finland for supporting this research. In addition, Muhammad Sarfraz and Muhammad Sufyan also acknowledge the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Jenny & Antti Wihuri Foundation respectively for their support of this research.

**Funding** Open Access funding provided by University of Vaasa.

**Data availability** Not applicable.

### Declarations

**Conflict of interest** All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Research Involving Human Participants and/or Animals** All data collection procedures undertaken in this research involving human participants were in accordance with the Ethical Standards of the School of

Business Studies, Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Informed Consent** Participants were informed about the study's objectives and data usage, and then asked to participate in the survey with their free consent.

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