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The role of incivility aggression on decent work: A local government sector case

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Background: The issue of workplace incivility is noted as being one of the factors that affect the work of public service employees. However, empirically, the problem needs to be sufficiently addressed in the South African local context. There are growing calls to ascertain how workplace incivility affects the experience and the outcome of work.

Aim: This study investigates the effects of incivility aggression on decent work among local government employees in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Methods: The study followed a quantitative research design. Primary data were collected with the help of 425 self-administered questionnaires among employees in the Eastern Cape local government.

Results: The study found that experienced workplace incivility significantly influences decent work. Further, instigated workplace incivility was found to influence decent work among employees significantly.

Conclusion: Through the findings of the study, an appeal is made to policy makers and practitioners to implement policies that promote necessary good working conditions, social support, interdependence and fairness to counteract incivility aggression.

Contribution: The study advances the understanding of incivility aggression within an organisational setting.

Keywords: experienced workplace incivility; instigated workplace incivility; aggression; decent work; local government.

Introduction

Governments throughout the world seek to provide services to communities within their jurisdiction through public service agencies. In most world's economies, the local government is the backbone of effective governance (Jackson & Jabbie 2019). It is mandated to provide standardised service delivery and decent jobs to its citizens (Masuku & Jili 2019). When public employees experience decent working conditions in the workplace, it enhances quality service delivery, which raises the socio-economic status of all citizens (Mhlanga et al. 2019). However, a lack of quality service delivery by the public service agencies could result from incivility and aggression, among other organisational factors such as gross misconduct and unethical and dishonest behaviour faced by employees within the local government. There are reports of an over 80% prevalence rate of rude, yelling, demeaning and arguing behaviour, which are some of the fastest-growing incivility behaviours among employees in this recent times (Akanni, Omisile & Oduaran 2018).

Within the local government, incivility is one of the factors that hinder decent work and other positive work outcomes, and this notion is gaining more attention in popular academic publications worldwide, including in South Africa (Zivnuska et al. 2020). According to Eka and Chambers (2019), incivility is rude speech or behaviour, impoliteness, bad manners and inappropriateness among employees that violate workplace norms. Indeed, incivility is stressed as a severe social problem affecting over 89% of employees, and it continues to spread like wildfire with deleterious consequences in the working environment (Zivnuska et al. 2020). Hence, incivility aggression constitutes severe deviant behaviour that threatens service delivery in both the private and public sectors through its massive negative effect on employee morale and the working environment, which hinders performance and productivity.

Incivility in the workplace occurs in several forms, such as experienced workplace incivility and instigated workplace incivility (Raza et al. 2022). Experienced workplace incivility focusses on employees who experience the incivility acts of others in the workplace or are targets of uncivil behaviour (Schilpzand, De Pater & Erez 2016). Instigated workplace incivility, on the other hand, focusses on individual employees who perpetrate acts of uncivil behaviours towards others in the workplace (Sharma & Mishra 2021). Studies have proven that incivility is an actual stressor with real consequences for employees, and although the conduct is subtle, the consequences are not, giving room for further inquiry in this regard (Chung et al. 2021; Cortina et al. 2017). Consequently, incivility creates a high amount of conflict and high-intense aggressive working conditions, which affects decent working conditions and the job performance of employees (Ko, Kim & Choi 2021).

Decent work is the amount of aspiration individuals have in their working lives (Pereira, Dos Santos & Pais 2019). In addition, decent work is conceptualised on five main pillars, namely, safe working conditions, adequate compensation, good healthcare, free resting time and an increase in complementary work values for all employees (Duffy et al. 2016). Decent work promotes the fulfilment of work and well-being through its satisfaction of employees' basic needs (Atitsogbe et al. 2021).

In the context of South Africa, the decent work concept brings about more hope, especially as it offers solutions to improving working conditions, job creation, engagement and trust (Chinyamurindi, Mathibe & Marange 2023; Ndung'u 2012). Even though decent work is the primary key to employees' development and well-being (Atitsogbe et al. 2021), the impact of incivility aggression on decent work remains an aspect that needs further inquiry (Zivnuska et al. 2020). Notably, a stream of work within the public service and local government sector emerges, also advancing the decent work agenda in South Africa (Chigbu, Chinyamurindi & Marange 2024).

An interesting angle concerns exploring how these behaviours are deemed to manifest as aggressive behaviours that do not affect only the experience of work but also the decent working conditions of employees and various work outcomes (Smittick et al. 2019). The reasoning here is that workplace incivility aggravates psychological loss, which affects work outcomes and decent working conditions in organisations (Pu, Ji & Sang 2021). Incivility aggression interrupts decent work in the workplace, bringing about high negative consequences to both employees' behaviours and organisational outcomes (Zivnuska et al. 2020). These include high stress, high withdrawal behaviours, high absenteeism, less willingness to work and low organisational productivity (Smidt et al. 2016). Ultimately such negative behaviours potentially affect the health of employees (Chinyamurindi et al. 2023).

Context of the study
There are surmounting crises in the South African local government spheres with employees being the most affected

(Kgalema & Mankolo 2018; Nyabvudzi & Chinyamurindi 2019). Specifically, the atmosphere in the local government is characterised by high-level misconduct, unethical behaviours, wilful disobedience, absenteeism, sabotage, rudeness, arguing behaviours, incapacity, ineffective, corruption and poor working conditions (Akanni et al. 2018; Mashamaite & Lethoko 2018). The challenges faced by these employees have a significant impact on the process of service delivery to the public and decent work (Mafini & Dlodlo 2014). These challenges are often accompanied by violent service delivery protests (Masuku & Jili 2019) that affect the poorest of the poor in society.

This study is located within the context of local government in the Eastern Cape province. This is because there is a need to understand and address those factors that affect public employees and thus influence the delivery of services to the public (Thornhill & Van Dijik 2018). According to the Public Service Commission (2007, 2008), the South African local government faces challenges in maintaining healthy and productive working conditions among its employees. Workplace incivility is one of the factors that affect the work of public employees (Slattery 2019). However, this concept needs to be sufficiently addressed in the African context, particularly in South Africa (Smidt et al. 2016; Ugwu et al. 2022). Hence, this study further focussed on this construct in the public service of the Eastern Cape province as argued by previous studies (Chinyamurindi et al. 2023).

Unethical behaviour in the local government is negatively interrupting effective and efficient public service delivery, resulting in high wasteful expenditure from the government, which is money that could have been channelled for service delivery (Glasser & Wright 2020). This negative behaviour is not just unethical but also adds to tangible and intangible expenses for the local government (Alias, Ojo & Ameruddin 2022). For instance, a high number of public employees are experiencing a lack of accountability, inefficiency, incompetency, unproductive work behaviour, high rate of misconduct, corruption, poor management of finances, poor human resource practices, high turnover and not adhering to the norms of ethical behaviour in the workplace (Matloga et al. 2024). This has led to the suspension of over 500 public servants and over 484 employees dismissed in the public service in the past 3 years because of uncivil work behaviours in the Western Cape local government (Mazibuko-Madalani 2016). Mashamaite and Lethoko (2018) added that the local government is characterised by challenges such as a shortage of skills to propel local economic development, incapacity to plan for growth, ineffective implementation of policies and corruption. Also, there is growing concern over the need for more professionalism and knowledge sharing, which creates a toxic working atmosphere that hinders collaboration and cooperation in the delivery of public goods (Smidt et al. 2016).

There is equal frustration over incivility, aggression and a deficit of decent work expressed by employees within the public sector on a daily basis while performing their duties (Slattery 2019). This demotivates employees' efforts towards

work (Slattery 2019). Therefore, if workplace incivility is tolerated among employees in the local government, the consequences can be devastating to communities because the decent working conditions of employees are affected. Also, there is growing concern over the need for more professionalism, which is leading to a decent work deficit, less engagement and less job trust in the form of less collaboration and cooperation in the delivery of public goods (Smidt et al. 2016).

Most studies on incivility have primarily focussed on organisations within the private sector organisations (Schilpzand et al. 2016) with negligible research on employees in the local government (Cortina et al. 2013; Slattery 2019). Therefore, more empirical work on the impact of incivility on employees' decent working conditions in the workplace within the local government in South Africa is needed (Smidt et al. 2016). Hence, this study seeks to close the knowledge gap on the effects of incivility aggression on decent work among local government employees in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This study investigates the impact of incivility aggression on decent work among local government employees in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Literature review

This section will put forth the relationship between decent work and incivility aggression. The research hypotheses are reviewed to establish the relationship that exists between these variables. The following section will discuss the effects of experienced and instigated incivility on decent work.

The concept of experienced and instigated workplace incivility

Incidents of incivility aggression in the workplace are mounting worldwide including its adverse effects on both individuals and the organisation of work at large (Alias et al. 2022; Zivnuska et al. 2020). The rise in this discourteous behaviour in the workplace takes a negative toll on the organisation and its employees both financially and physically (Vraimaki et al. 2019). Incivility is described as rude, unsociable speech, offensive comments or behaviour and belittling others or their opinions. Incivility could be experienced or instigated (Chaudhary, Lata & Firoz 2022). With confirmation that workplace incivility is a global organisational issue with most organisations having difficulties in tackling or preventing it, given that it is subtle and cannot be easily identified (Agarwal et al. 2023), because of its low-intensity nature (Namin, Øgaard & Røislien 2022).

However, both experienced and instigated workplace incivility have positive and negative impacts on decent work (Raza et al. 2022). Incivility decreases performance, job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour, creativity, ability to decide, memory recall and employee well-being (Namin et al. 2022). Liu et al. (2020) found that workplace incivility permeates work groups and teams and increases detrimental effects such as withdrawal work behaviours and mental issues in targets. Emotional problems employees suffer as a result of

incivility include anger, isolation, fear, depression, anxiety, nervousness, burnout and impaired psychological well-being (Agarwal et al. 2023). When employees experience decent work, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their jobs and have a greater sense of well-being.

The importance of decent work

Within this 21st century, about 63% of the world's population belongs to the global workforce (Rantanen, Muchiri & Lehtinen 2020). Work refers to general efforts and activities put together to accomplish a goal and represent a primary source of identity, meaning and longing among employees (Nazir & Islam 2020). Work forms a fundamental aspect of human existence, influencing various facets of individuals' lives, including basic survival needs, personal identity, family, social integration, health, well-being and overall quality of life (Duffy et al. 2020). As such, the psychological and economic well-being of individuals is deeply dependent on work.

Duffy et al. (2021) argued that decent work is conceptualisation around the following pillars: a good working atmosphere that is mentally and psychical safe, free allowance and allocation of adequate resting time, suitable compensation, increased complementary work values for all employees and the provision of proper health care to employees. Decent work can promote positive work relationships, fair treatment and opportunities for skill development and career advancement.

Decent work can also provide employees with a sense of purpose and meaning, which can contribute to their overall sense of fulfilment and life satisfaction (Ribeiro, Silva & Figueiredo 2016). Studies that have investigated the relationship between experienced incivility and decent work found that experienced incivility was positively associated with turnover intentions but negatively associated with perceived job control (Riadi & Tricahyadinata 2019). Rantanen et al. (2020) added that even though decent work is all about safe work in our society, the conditions of employment and job opportunities still vary in different work contexts among employees in organisations.

Effects of experienced workplace incivility on decent work

The ability of workers to feel safe and secure in their work environment is an essential aspect of decent work (Rasool et al. 2019). However, incivility can lead to a hostile work environment, thus undermining decent work. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO 2022), workers should have security in the workplace and social protection for families. Koon and Pon (2018) posit that an unsatisfactory social environment, unclear job roles and high work pressure in the workplace have negative impacts on decent work. Indeed, incivility erodes employees' sense of security and also undermines the ability of workers to experience decent work. The significant causes of workplace incivility are high job demand, high job insecurity, anger, lack of cooperation and changes that organisations experience such as downsizing (Pu 2021).

Moreover, experienced workplace incivility by workers has a significant impact on decent work. It can also negatively impact the ability of workers to experience fairness in the workplace. Although decent work implies equal treatment for both women and men (Lout et al. 2022), incivility can lead to discrimination and unequal treatment. For instance, Cortina et al. (2013) showed that women and minorities are more likely to experience incivility in the workplace. When incivility is being looked at through a gender lens, women are subjected to experiencing workplace incivility and disrespectful behaviour in most male-dominated working environments (Cortina 2008). As such, experienced incivility often makes women feel devalued and disrespected, thus affecting their sense of self-worth and making them question whether they are being treated fairly (Porath & Pearson 2013). Generally, workers who experience incivility from co-workers or superiors are more likely to perceive their workplace as toxic, thus leading to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions, which negatively affects decent work (Cortina et al. 2001; Fida, Laschinger & Leiter 2018).

A significant aspect of decent work is the ability of workers to experience personal development and social integration. Indeed, Duffy et al. (2016) expound that the conceptualisation of decent work specifies that it provides better prospects for personal growth and social integration. In addition, the ILO (2018) expects that decent work should offer opportunities to work that have better prospects for personal development and social integration. Nevertheless, experienced incivility interrupts this by leading to social isolation, which undermines this aspect of decent work.

Workers who experience incivility are less likely to participate in work-related social activities and often have lower levels of job satisfaction (Pearson, Andersson & Porath 2005). Vickers (2006) put forth that incivility can further reinforce feelings of isolation and alienation while decreasing cooperation and mutual understanding. Workplace incivility is, therefore, linked to poor health (Cortina 2001). As such, targets who have experienced incivility do report feelings of hurt, anxiety, depression, nervousness, sadness, moodiness and worry (Chaudhary et al. 2022). All these decrease decent work and personal well-being, which impacts the performance of all employees in the organisation. This further undermines the ability of workers to experience personal development and social integration.

Shim (2015) found that aggressive cultures or norms may be harmful to decent work, employee well-being and organisational performance. Vickers (2006) equally concurs that hostile organisational culture exerts a lot of consequences in the workplace as it fosters an unfriendly, rude, paranoid, cliquish and stressful work climate. Consequently, the relationship between experienced workplace incivility and decent work has been described as a vicious circle (Budnick & Barber 2015) where the outcome of incivility at work is projected into employees' personal lives and vice versa. For example, an employee who has disturbed sleep patterns as a result of the experiences of workplace incivility will mostly have difficulties the next day on the job in processing and performing their tasks or even interpreting given information and thus be prone to make poorer work decisions (Lee et al. 2022). Nonetheless, Akella and Lewis (2019) pointed out that when relationships among employees are uncertain or unstable, it increases the chances of incivility being instigated or experienced by employees, as employees tend to withdraw from work more frequently. Using the decent work scale (DWS), Buyukgoze-Kavas and Autin (2019) found that the different dimensions of decent work are capable of predicting withdrawal intentions among employees because of incivility.

Effects of instigated workplace incivility on decent work

Instigated workplace incivility has a significant impact on the ability of workers to experience decent work. Umičević, Arzenšek and Franca (2021) posited that instigated workplace incivility is causing a spike in mental illness among young employees doing insecure types of work. This has caused precarious work to present itself in different work forms, such as low job security, low pay, low social security, poor working conditions and high threats of outsourced jobs (Umičević et al. 2021). All these violate physical and psychological safety at work (Duffy 2017), and thus, workers are unable to perform decent work. Instigated incivility can undermine these conditions by creating a culture of disrespect and fear, making workers feel undervalued and mistreated. This can lead to increased stress, anxiety and depression, which can further exacerbate the negative impact of incivility on decent work.

Instigated incivility influences pressure from the organisation such as budget cuts, high workforce diversity, high changes to part-time work, changes in management and high implementation of technology to monitor employee productivity (Kowalski, Toth & Morgan 2018). Potential factors that increase indecent work in the workplace are high job demands, conflicts, high workload, poor leadership, climate, compressed time and deadlines (Torkelson et al. 2016; Vraimaki et al. 2019).

Koon and Pun (2018) show that power shifts in the workplace and high work demands may lead to high workplace incivility. Other studies have suggested that job insecurity and job autonomy increase incivility among employees through more significant stress, overwork and high diversity, leading to interpersonal misunderstandings (Blau & Andersson 2005). Pearson and Porath (2005) confirmed that low job security creates a negative emotional state and increases the experience of negative emotions like anger, fear, sadness, jealousy and guilt, which correlate positively with workplace incivility. Hence, instigated incivility causes aggressive working conditions, which negatively impact the safety and security of employees in the workplace and inhibit decent work.

Changes in working hours in the workplace positively predict changes in co-worker incivility, which impacts decent

work (Sakurai 2021). According to Chaudhary et al. (2022), incivility aggression brings about low job satisfaction, decreases organisational commitment and increases turnover intentions and poor work-life balance. Hence, the working conditions of employees are reduced. Aquino, Tripp and Bies (2006) added that instigated incivility is associated with decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions, which affects some aspects of decent work.

Based on the presented literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H0: Experienced workplace incivility does not significantly influence decent work.

H1a: Experienced workplace incivility significantly influences decent work.

H0: Instigated workplace incivility does not significantly influence decent work.

H1b: Instigated workplace incivility significantly influences decent work.

Research methods and design

This study adopted the quantitative descriptive research methodological choice where the positivist research paradigm, together with a deductive methodological approach, was adopted (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007). A mono method that supports the use of the quantitative descriptive survey design was utilised to collect a large amount of numeric data from employees within the Eastern Cape local government (Struwig & Stead 2013). The study relied on public employees from multiple departments in the six local municipalities of the Eastern Cape province, namely Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Amathole District Municipality, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, Chris Hani District Municipality, Joe Gqabi District Municipality and Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. We used convenience sampling to collect data using a closed-ended questionnaire. A total of 600 self-administered questionnaires were administered to public employees in the six local government municipalities. Out of these questionnaires handed out, 425 were attained with questionnaires deemed usable for data analysis, achieving a response rate of about 70%.

Research instrument

The study used three main measures. Firstly, decent work was measured using the 15-item DWS produced by Duffy et al. (2017), which is divided into five sub-scales. The study used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = (strongly disagree) to 7 = (strongly agree). The whole scale scores have an internal consistency reliability of 0.84 and the various sub-scales include: (1) *safe working conditions*, (2) *access to health care,* (3) *adequate compensation*, (4) *free time and rest* and (5) *complementary values.* Prior studies by Di Fabio and Kenny (2019) confirmed the scale's reliability in terms of internal consistency. Duffy et al. (2020) indicate that, while the DWS scale proved accurate and valid in models in the developed world, applying it to the work experiences of employees from other continents, including the developing world,

remains crucial. This necessitates the study's application of this scale to public servants in the local government in South Africa's Eastern Cape province.

Secondly, the seven-item Experienced Workplace Incivility Scale (EWIS) of Cortina et al. (2001) was used to measure experienced workplace incivility. Most studies have used the EWIS, which contains seven items in the developed world, and it produced an acceptable Cronbach's alpha for experienced incivility from colleagues 0.87 and from supervisors 0.90 (Cortina & Magley 2009). This study adopted this scale, and it was answered on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (= never) to 4 (= most of the time).

Thirdly, instigated workplace incivility was measured using the 7-item measure of Instigated Workplace Incivility Scale (IWIS) developed by Blau and Andersson (2005). The scale's seven items ranged from 0 (never) to 4 (most of the time). The scale items focussed on the respondent instigating uncivil behaviour in others in the workplace. The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.94, indicating highly acceptable internal consistency (Zivnuska et al. 2020). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient greater than 0.70 was indeed achieved on all the study scales, indicating satisfactory reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein 1994).

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) statistical software were used for the analysis. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS was used to determine the items that load to specific factors for the measurement scales. Items with an inadequate, completely standardised factor loading (< 0.30) were deleted and those above were accepted (Hair et al. 2006). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the Joreskog rho were used to assess the reliability and composite or construct reliability (CR) of the established factors. A Likert-type scale was utilised to measure all the variables in the study. Data editing was done so that the data would have some quality minimum requirement (Bougie & Sekaran 2019). The data were scanned before being taken for analysis using SPSS and AMOS statistical software to ensure that the data file was captured accurately. Questions that were not answered or were answered incorrectly were identified for possible termed data cleaning elimination.

Once all these quality minimum requirements were confirmed, a descriptive analysis was conducted to outline the demographic characteristics of the sample and the theoretical variables of interest. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the nature, strength and direction of the correlations between the study's significant theoretical variables. Path analysis utilising structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to quantify the direct effects of the hypothesised frameworks.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

(No. CHI011SNGW01). Permissions were also obtained from the Local Government authorities in the different municipalities within Eastern Cape province. Equally, respondents were issued informed consent forms that accompanied the questionnaires, and the respondents indicated their willingness to participate in the survey. As such, data collected from respondents were treated in line with the *Protection of Personal Information Act* (POPIA).

Results

Descriptive and reliability analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of significant theoretical variables and constructs used in the study.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the main study variables and constructs. To begin with, experienced and instigated workplace incivility were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 – Never; 2 – Rarely; 3 – Sometimes; 4 – Quite often and 5 – Most of the time). The sample reported a somewhat low level of experienced incivility (Mean = 2.5480; standard deviation [SD] = 1.07436). In terms of instigated incivility, the participants revealed that there were low levels of instigated incivility within the sampled organisation (Mean = 1.8750; SD = 0.84180).

Decent work and its respective constructs were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Somewhat disagree; 4 – Neither agree nor disagree; 5 – Agree; 6 – Somewhat Agree and 7 – Strongly agree). Overall, the mean level of decent work (Mean = 4.0880; SD = 0.88639) was moderate among the sampled participants. Among the constructs, safe working conditions (Mean = 4.4638; SD = 1.33461) and access to health care (Mean = 4.4198; SD = 1.59585) were the most highly rated, while adequate compensation (Mean = 3.7087; SD = 1.66083) and free time and rest (Mean = 3.8184; SD = 1.42712) had the lowest ratings.

Confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis

The validity and reliability of the study's measuring scales were evaluated using a CFA and a reliability analysis. Literature was consulted for guidance on the empirical factors for these tools. A couple of model fit indices and their criteria were applied to the CFA in order to assess the measurement models' goodness of fit index (GFI). These model fit indices include the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), adjusted GFI (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI) and relative fit index (RFI). The criteria for a good fit were SRMR values 0.05 < SRMR ≤ 0.09 (Hu & Bentler 1998); GFI and AGFI values >0.95 and > 0.90, respectively (Byrne 1994); NFI values >0.90 (Byrne 1994) or > 0.95 (Schumacker & Lomax 2016) and RFI values of ≤ 1 indicates a good fit. In the event that the model did not satisfy the requirements for a good fit, the criteria for an acceptable model fit were utilised. Hence, the requirements for acceptable model fit include SRMR values ≤ 0.05 (Hu & Bentler 1998); GFI and AGFI values ≥ 0.95 (Byrne 1994); NFI values ≥ 0.95 (Schumacker & Lomax 2016) and RFI values ≤ 1.

Reliability was suggested by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient more significant than 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein 1994), and an alpha Cronbach's value above 0.6 is regarded as an acceptable indicator by Pallant (2001). The Joreskog rho coefficient (Jöreskog 1971) was used to quantify CR. Hair et al. (2006) recommended a minimum CR value of 0.70. The average variance extracted (AVE) was used to evaluate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker 1981). An excellent convergent validity was defined as AVE > 0.50 (Schumacker & Lomax 2016). Although a minimum cut-off point of 0.50 is advised, values less than 0.50 may be allowed as long as the CR is more significant than 0.60.

Firstly, a CFA was conducted on the 15 items. Items with poor loadings were removed in order to establish a measurement model that has good and acceptable model fit indices. With the achievement of the most parsimonious, 13 items were retained. All factor loadings were above 0.70 (Table 2). The established factor structure shows three items loading for safe working conditions (Factor 1), 3 items also loading for access to health care (Factor 2), 2 items loading on adequate compensation (Factor 3), 2 items loading on free time and rest (Factor 4) and 3 items loading organisational values (Factor 5). The average extracted variance value for each of the specified factors exceeds the minimum needed of 0.50 i.e. safe working conditions (AVE = 0.700), access to health care (AVE = 0.848), adequate compensation (AVE = 0.788), free time and rest (AVE = 0.831) and organisational values (AVE = 0.827). The minimum cut-off point for AVE is 0.50. Hence, it is determined that the convergent validity for all the factors is satisfactory. Furthermore, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was employed to gauge these factors' internal consistency. Assessing these coefficients, the values are at least 0.70 for all the constructs, i.e. safe working conditions (alpha = 0.873), access to health care (alpha = 0.943), adequate compensation (alpha = 0.877), free time and rest (alpha = 0.797) and organisational values (alpha = 0.935). The reliability of the established factors indicates good and acceptable reliability. The CR values, as measured by Jöreskog's rho, exceed 0.70 for all constructs, that is safe working conditions (CR = 0.875), access to health care (CR = 0.944), adequate compensation (CR = 0.881), free time and rest (CR = 0.797) and organisational values (CR = 0.935). Therefore, the CR of the established measurement model is adequate. Thus, the CR is at a very high degree of satisfaction level.

Examining the overall assessment criteria for model fitness, the measurement model showed a good fit.

In Table 3, SRMR is 0.025, which is regarded as a good model fit. A good model fit is also shown by the fact that both the GFI and the related AGFI were above 0.95. Similarly, the normed fit index (NFI = 0.994) and the relative fit index (RFI = 0.992) were also above 0.95, further supporting a good fit for the established measurement model.

Secondly, experienced workplace incivility CFA and reliability output are displayed in Table 4. The results show that all factor loadings were over 0.70, suggesting a

good fit for these loadings. The value of the AVE is 0.607. Thus, the convergent validity of the EWIS is considered satisfactory. Cronbach alpha was employed to measure internal consistency, and the result is 0.902, which reveals an acceptable reliability level. After assessing the Joreskog rho for measuring CR, the calculated CR value of 0.902 indicates that the established measurement model achieves satisfactory CR, demonstrating an acceptable level of CR.

Table 5 reveals the model fitness indices values for the experienced incivility measurement model. The findings indicate that the model is a good fit. The measurement model met all the criteria, making it appropriate for establishing connections between items and assessing their contribution to measuring experienced workplace incivility. Therefore, the established measurement model is satisfactory, according to the results of the fitness index assessment for the structural model of the CFA.

Lastly, a CFA analysis was performed to determine the factor structure for the workplace incivility scale that was initiated. Table 6 shows that all factor loadings were over 0.70, suggesting a satisfactory fit for these loadings. The value of the AVE is 0.636. Thus, the convergent validity of the instigated workplace incivility scale is considered acceptable. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency, and the value was 0.872, which reveals a satisfactory reliability level.

TABLE 3: The fitness measures assessment for decent work measurement model.

Name of index	Index value	Cut-off points	Comments
SRMR	0.025	≤ 0.05	Good fit
GFI	0.997	≥ 0.95	Good fit
AGFI	0.994	≥ 0.95	Good fit
NFI	0.994	≥ 0.95	Good fit
RFI	0.992	≥ 0.95	Good fit

SRMR, Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; GFI, Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; NFI, Normed Fit Index; RFI, Relative Fit Index.

TABLE 4: Experienced workplace incivility confirmatory factor analysis and internal consistency output.

Factors and respective items	CODE	CFA loadings	Alpha if item deleted
Factor 1. Experienced incivility			
Have put you down or was condescending to you in some way.	EWI1	0.823	0.878
Have paid little attention to a statement you made or showed …	EWI2	0.725	0.891
Have made demeaning, rude, or derogatory remarks about you.	EWI3	0.801	0.881
Have addressed you in unprofessional, terms, either publicly or …	EWI4	0.774	0.885
Have doubted your judgment over a matter in which you have …	EWI6	0.714	0.892
Have made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of …	EWI7	0.830	0.877

Note: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.902; Joreskog rho = 0.902; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = 0.607.
CFA, Confirmatory factor analysis; EWI, experienced workplace incivility.

TABLE 1: Summary of descriptive statistics of primary variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	W. Sig
Experienced incivility	2.5480	1.07436	0.234	-0.831	< 0.0001
Instigated incivility	1.8750	0.84180	0.754	-0.328	< 0.0001
Decent work	4.0880	0.88639	0.249	-0.085	0.001
1. Safe working conditions	4.4638	1.33461	-0.202	-0.535	< 0.0001
2. Access to health care	4.4198	1.59585	-0.326	-0.659	< 0.0001
3. Adequate compensation	3.7087	1.66083	0.207	-0.654	< 0.0001
4. Free time and rest	3.8184	1.42712	0.040	-0.270	< 0.0001
5. Organisational values	4.0291	1.50734	-0.007	-0.728	< 0.0001

SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 2: Decent work confirmatory factor analysis and internal consistency output.

Factors and respective items	CODE	CFA loadings	Alpha if item deleted
Factor 1. Safe working conditions			
I feel dedicatedly safe interacting with people at work.	DWP1	0.818	0.831
At work, I feel safe from verbal abuse of any kind.	DWP2	0.781	0.849
I feel vigorously safe interacting with people at work.	DWP3	0.906	0.780
*Cronbach's Alpha = **0.873**; Joreskog rho = **0.875**; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = **0.700***			
Factor 2. Access to health care			
I get good healthcare benefits from my job.	DWH1	0.914	0.922
I have a good healthcare plan at work.	DWH2	0.949	0.898
My employer provides acceptable options for healthcare.	DWH3	0.899	0.932
*Cronbach's Alpha = **0.943**; Joreskog rho = **0.944**; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = **0.848***			
Factor 3. Adequate compensation			
I am not properly paid for my work.	DWC1	0.948	n/a
I do not feel I am paid enough based on my qualifications and …	DWC2	0.823	n/a
*Cronbach's Alpha = **0.877**; Joreskog rho = **0.881**; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = **0.788***			
Factor 4. Free time and rest			
I do not have enough time for non-work activities.	DWF1	0.831	n/a
I have no time to rest during the work week.	DWF2	0.797	n/a
*Cronbach's Alpha = **0.797**; Joreskog rho = **0.797**; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = **0.831***			
Factor 5. Organisational values			
The values of my organisation match my family values.	DWO1	0.907	0.898
My organisation's values align with my family values.	DWO2	0.922	0.886
The values of my organisation match the values within my …	DWO3	0.899	0.931
*Cronbach's Alpha = **0.935**; Joreskog rho = **0.935**; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = **0.827***			

Overall Cronbach's alpha = **0.819**.
CFA, Confirmatory factor analysis; DWP, decent work – safe working conditions; DWH, decent work – access to health care; DWC, decent work – adequate compensation; DWF, decent work – free time and rest; DWO, decent work – organisational values.

Evaluating the Joreskog rho to measure CR, the CR value is 0.875, indicating that the established measurement model achieves satisfactory CR. Therefore, the CR is deemed acceptable.

Table 7 reveals the model fitness indices values for the instigated workplace incivility measurement model. The findings indicate that the model is a good fit. Therefore, the established measuring model of instigated incivility is sufficient according to the results of the fitness index assessment for the structural model of the CFA.

In summary, the resultant full measurement model is suggestive of a good and satisfactory fit for the respective items and constructs. Thus, they are therefore appropriate for establishing relationships between variables and figuring out how constructions contribute to measuring decent work, experienced workplace incivility and instigated workplace incivility within the local government of the Eastern Cape.

Hypotheses testing using structural equation modelling in analysis of moment structures

In order to test for the hypothesis testing for the predictive influence of experienced and instigated incivility on decent work workplace incivility among employees in the local government of Eastern Cape province, structural equation

TABLE 5: The fitness measures assessment for the experienced incivility measurement model.

Name of index	Index value	Cut-off points	Comments
SRMR	0.055	0.05 < SRMR ≤ 0.09	Acceptable fit
GFI	0.993	≥ 0.95	Good fit
AGFI	0.983	≥ 0.95	Good fit
NFI	0.988	≥ 0.95	Good fit
RFI	0.981	≥ 0.95	Good fit

SRMR, Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; GFI, Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; NFI, Normed Fit Index; RFI, Relative Fit Index.

TABLE 6: Instigated workplace incivility confirmatory factor analysis and internal consistency output.

Factors and respective items	CODE	CFA loadings	Alpha if item deleted
Factor 1. Instigated incivility			
Have made demeaning, rude, or derogatory remarks about …	IWI3	0.792	0.839
Have addressed someone in unprofessional terms, either publicly…	IWI4	0.856	0.817
Have ignored or excluded someone from professional camaraderie.	IWI5	0.761	0.849
Have made unwanted attempts to draw someone into a …	IWI7	0.778	0.841

Note: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.872; Joreskog rho = 0.875; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = 0.636.
CFA, Confirmatory factor analysis.

TABLE 7: The fitness measures assessment for the instigated incivility measurement model.

Name of index	Index value	Cut-off points	Comments
SRMR	0.023	< 0.05	Good fit
GFI	0.999	≥ 0.95	Good fit
AGFI	0.994	≥ 0.95	Good fit
NFI	0.998	≥ 0.95	Good fit
RFI	0.993	≥ 0.95	Good fit

SRMR, Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; GFI, Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; NFI, Normed Fit Index; RFI, Relative Fit Index.

models were examined. The significance of the direct influence between experienced and instigated incivility on decent work was established through the importance of the respective path coefficients. Equally, a correlational analysis was conducted in order to assess the existing relationships between the study's main theoretical variables, such as experienced and instigated incivility and decent work. Table 8, Table 9 and Table 10 report on this.

Hypothesis 1a: The influence of experienced incivility on decent work

The standardised estimates and corresponding bootstrapped 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) for the structural model's regression weights are shown in Table 8. Focussing on the experienced workplace incivility-to-decent work path, the results reveal a negative and significant predictive effect of experienced workplace incivility on decent work (β = -0.519; standard error [SE] = 0.043; 90% CI = [-0.586 to -0.446]; p = <0.0001). Based on the significance of the beta parameter for the predictive path of experienced workplace incivility on decent work, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Therefore, based on the evidence at a significance level of 5%, we can reject the null hypothesis in support of the alternative hypothesis, leading us to conclude that experienced workplace incivility significantly influences decent work among employees in the local government of Eastern Cape province.

Furthermore, effect size was equally used to decide on the practical significance of the findings. Table 10 shows sufficient evidence that experienced workplace incivility had a moderate, negative and significant correlation with decent work (r = -0.478). The practical significance of these established correlation coefficients is that they represent a medium effect size. In essence, as employees experience more incivility at work, their perception of decent work noticeably decreases.

Hypothesis 1b: The influence of instigated incivility on decent work

Examining the standardised estimates and bootstrapped 90% bias-corrected CIs for the regression weights for the influence of instigated workplace incivility on decent work, the results show that the path coefficient is statistically significant (Table 9). Thus, the predictive effect of instigated workplace incivility on decent work is negative and statistically significant (β = -0.148; SE = 0.046; 90% CI = [-0.225 to -0.075]; p = 0.002). In conclusion, because the beta parameter for the instigated workplace incivility-to-decent work path is negative and statistically significant, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Thus, instigated workplace incivility significantly influences decent work among employees in the local government of Eastern Cape province.

Moreover, effect size was used to determine the practical significance of the findings in Table 10. However,

TABLE 8: Structural equation estimates and bootstrapped 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the regression weights for the influence of experienced incivility on decent work.

Path effects for model 1	Standardised beta estimates		Bias-corrected 90% CI	p
	Estimate	SE	[LL; UL]	
Decent work ← Experienced incivility	-0.519	0.043	[-0.586; -0.446]	0.000
DWO1 ← Decent work	0.909	0.018	[0.877; 0.937]	0.000
DWO2 ← Decent work	0.907	0.023	[0.866; 0.941]	0.000
DWO3 ← Decent work	0.912	0.022	[0.874; 0.946]	0.001
EWI1 ← Experienced incivility	0.810	0.028	[0.760; 0.853]	0.000
EWI2 ← Experienced incivility	0.705	0.039	[0.641; 0.765]	0.000
EWI3 ← Experienced incivility	0.773	0.032	[0.714; 0.820]	0.001
EWI4 ← Experienced incivility	0.759	0.038	[0.689; 0.814]	0.001
EWI6 ← Experienced incivility	0.763	0.038	[0.702; 0.828]	0.000
EWI7 ← Experienced incivility	0.855	0.030	[0.799; 0.898]	0.000

Note: Statistically significant effects. Represents the standardised estimates for the structural model. Standard error is the standard error for the structural regression estimates. Bias-corrected confidence intervals using 2000 replications are presented.

SE, standard error for the structural regression estimates; CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit; DWO, decent work; EWI, experienced workplace incivility.

TABLE 9: Structural equation estimates and bootstrapped 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the regression weights for the influence of instigated incivility on decent work.

Path effects for model 2	Standardised beta estimates		Bias-corrected 90% CI	p
	Estimate	SE	[LL; UL]	
Decent work ← Instigated incivility	-0.148	0.046	[-0.225; -0.075]	0.002
DWO1 ← Decent work	0.921	0.019	[0.890; 0.950]	0.000
DWO2 ← Decent work	0.899	0.026	[0.852; 0.937]	0.001
DWO3 ← Decent work	0.908	0.023	[0.868; 0.944]	0.000
IWI3 ← Instigated incivility	0.755	0.034	[0.691; 0.804]	0.001
IWI4 ← Instigated incivility	0.832	0.029	[0.783; 0.877]	0.000
IWI5 ← Instigated incivility	0.858	0.031	[0.807; 0.911]	0.000
IWI7 ← Instigated incivility	0.735	0.037	[0.665; 0.788]	0.001

Note: Statistically significant effects. Represents the standardised estimates for the structural model. Standard error is the standard error for the structural regression estimates. Bias-corrected confidence intervals using 2000 replications are presented.

SE, standard error for the structural regression estimates; CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit; DWO, decent work; IWI, instigated workplace incivility.

TABLE 10: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) for relations between the various main theoretical variables.

Variables	Work engagement	Experienced incivility	Instigated incivility	Decent work	Job trust
	r	r	r	r	r
Work engagement	1	-0.394**	-0.328**	0.400**	0.405**
Experienced incivility	-	1	0.428**	-0.478**	-0.458**
Instigated incivility	-	-	1	-0.133**	-0.023
Decent work	-	-	-	1	0.567**
Job trust	-	-	-	-	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

instigated workplace incivility had a negative significant but weak correlation with decent work (r = -0.133). This suggests that the practical significance of the established correlation between these variables represents a low effect size. As instances of incivility in the workplace increase, the perception of decent work slightly decreases.

Discussion

The research sought to investigate the predictive influence of experienced and instigated incivility on decent work workplace incivility among employees in the local government of Eastern Cape province; structural equation models were examined. Firstly, in line with the results in H1a, when employees are subjected to experienced workplace incivility, it undermines their experience of decent work and has a detrimental effect on various dimensions of their work environment. Rasool et al. (2019) buttressed this finding by adding that the ability of

workers to feel safe and secure in their work environment is an essential aspect of decent work, which is often affected by incivility, leading to a hostile work environment, thus undermining decent work. Hence, an unsatisfactory social climate, unclear job roles and high work pressure in the workplace have negative impacts on decent work (Koon & Pon 2018). Lout et al. (2022) add that incivility can lead to discrimination and unequal treatment among men and women, which hinders decent work. For instance, Cortina et al. (2013) showed that women and minorities are more likely to experience incivility in the workplace.

Vickers (2006) put forth that incivility can further reinforce feelings of isolation and alienation while decreasing cooperation and mutual understanding, which is linked to poor health (Cortina 2001). As such, targets who experience incivility report feelings of hurt, anxiety, depression, nervousness, sadness, moodiness and worry

(Chaudhary et al. 2022). All these decrease decent work and personal well-being, which impacts the performance of all employees in the organisation.

In line with the findings, Shim (2015) found that aggressive cultures or norms may be harmful to decent work, employee well-being and organisational performance. Vickers (2006) equally concurs that hostile organisational culture exerts a lot of consequences in the workplace as it fosters an unfriendly, rude, paranoid, cliquish and stressful work climate. Informal organisational climate stimulates uncivil behaviours among employees and nervousness (Saleem et al. 2022).

This research extends to show how the relationship between experienced workplace incivility and decent work has been viewed as a vicious circle (Budnick & Barber 2015) where the outcome of incivility at work is projected into employees' lifestyle and vice versa. For example, an employee who has disturbed sleep patterns as a result of the experiences of workplace incivility will mostly have difficulties the next day on the job in processing and performing their tasks or even interpreting given information and thus be prone to make poorer work decisions.

Nonetheless, Akella and Lewis (2019) pointed out that when relationships among employees are uncertain or unstable, it increases the chances of incivility being instigated or experienced by employees, as employees tend to withdraw from work more frequently. The findings of this study highlight using dimensions of decent work capable of predicting withdrawal intentions among employees because of incivility (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin 2019).

Secondly, in line with H1b, the findings show that instigated workplace incivility is characterised by intentional acts of disrespect, rudeness or mistreatment, which have highly detrimental consequences for the work environment and employees' experience of decent work. Support from Raza et al. (2022) shows that instigated workplace incivility stimulates some form of a lose-lose situation for every employee involved in these acts. For example, employees who are targets or instigators of workplace incivility suffer from poor attitudes and behavioural outcomes such as withdrawing from work, poor performance and creativity, high-stress level and emotional exhaustion, poor health and well-being (Miner et al. 2019). As such, instigated incivility is associated with decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions, which affect some aspects of decent work (Aquino et al. 2006).

The result is bolstered by evidence from Umičević et al. (2021) who posited that instigated workplace incivility causes a spike in mental illness among young employees conducting insecure types of work and causes costly changes to the entire organisations environment. Emirza and Öztürk (2022) added that instigators who are caught carrying out incivility acts in the workplace suffer from adverse outcomes from other employees, such as distrust and exclusion. All these violate physical and psychological safety at work (Duffy 2017), and thus, workers are unable to perform decent work. In agreement with this finding, a study conducted by Sakurai (2021) found that changes in working hours in the workplace positively predicted changes in co-worker incivility, which impacts decent work. Poor work-life balance and low job satisfaction decrease organisational commitment and are marked by an increase in turnover intentions that decreases the decent working conditions of employees (Chaudhary et al. 2022).

However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in testing the joined constructs of experienced and instigated workplace incivility and decent work. Hence, the study further suggests that important work characteristics such as social support, interdependence, good working conditions and individual affectivity could be used to counteract the adverse effects of experienced workplace and instigated workplace incivility. Thus, the finding provides new insight into the field of organisational psychology by indicating a significant impact of experienced and instigated workplace incivility on decent work.

Contributions

To begin with, this research contributed substantial theoretical work to the body of current literature on decent work and incivility aggression within the Eastern Cape local government, which is yet to be studied. Literature indicates that researchers have noted neglect in paying enough attention to decent work, especially in the African context (Atitsogbe et al. 2021).

The results have enhanced our comprehension of the relationships between experienced and instigated workplace incivility on decent work. The findings conclude that incivility aggression significantly affects decent work within the Eastern Cape and local government. These findings have shed light on fresh perspectives on relationships, which has allowed this study to expand on previous research in the discipline of organisational behaviour, psychology and management and laid a new research basis.

Similarly, this study extends the psychology of working theory (PWT), as established by Duffy et al. (2016), which underpins the concept of decent work by highlighting the positive effects of decent work, such as fair compensation, job security, opportunities for advancement and a supportive work environment in counteracting incivility aggression. Decent work is linked to healthy workplace behaviours. Hence, when employees perceive their work environment as decent, there is a high probability that these employees will be more engaging and trusting in the workplace.

Limitations and future research

The research instrument used in this research study only contained closed-ended questions and no open-ended questions, limiting insight into the in-depth findings of

the study while improving the likelihood of survey participation. Hence, future combined studies on decent work and incivility aggression among employees should embrace a qualitative approach to observe the possible changes in the variables under consideration. In addition, this research was done only in Eastern Cape province. The study did not extend to other provinces in South Africa or the whole country as such, hindering the generalisability of the study's findings to the entire country of South Africa.

Noticeably, the present research exclusively targeted public employees in the Eastern Cape Local Government. The researchers are recommending that the same study be undertaken or replicated throughout the country, both at the provincial and national levels, as well as in private enterprises. The researchers also suggest that studies on the combined variables of incivility aggression and decent work be employed using a mixed research approach and with a larger sample size in other organisations.

Conclusion

A practical contribution of this study entails the general aim of the research being achieved and a conceptual model being developed. The findings of this study conclude that incivility aggression significantly affects decent work among employees within the Eastern Cape local government. The study recommends that the local government and other provincial and national governments should adopt decent work factors, such as supportive supervisors, fair compensation and opportunities for growth, which can buffer the negative consequences of workplace incivility aggression on employees (Day & Leiter 2014). The study suggests that acknowledging and rewarding positive behaviour, teamwork and respectful communication reinforces employees to maintain respectful interactions.

In addition, the local government should implement policies that promote a healthy balance between work and personal life, such as conducive hours working or hybrid working options where applicable. The local government should provide a suitable work environment that is both physically and psychologically safe to empower employees to offer quality services to the entire public. Also, the local government should promote a positive organisational culture of leadership behaviour. This leadership should set a culture and grounds for clear organisational values, mission and code of conduct that emphasise respect, collaboration and open communication among employees in the local government.

Moreover, the local government should provide resources for employees to seek support, such as counselling or mentorship programmes, especially for those who are suffering from acts of incivility and aggression. Hence, this cultivates a more conducive environment where workers are more comfortable seeking help without any fear of retribution from others.

Employees should be offered wellness initiatives such as health programmes, mindfulness activities and stress management resources to help cope with the psychological and emotional effects of incivility. They should prioritise employees' mental and physical well-being.

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V.Y.N. contributed towards the writing of the article and M.D. reviewed the article. W.C. assisted in the conceptualisation.

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