



Original Article

## Relationship between job stress and workplace incivility regarding to the moderating role of psychological capital

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of job stress and workplace incivility behaviors considering the moderating role of psychological capital (resiliency, optimism, hope, and efficacy).

**Materials and Methods:** Participants of this descriptive-analytical study were 297 employees of Khozestan Regional Electrical Company in Ahvaz at year of 2016 were selected by stratified randomized sampling method. These participants completed the job stress, workplace incivility behaviors and psychological capital questionnaires. Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were used to analysis.

**Results:** Findings indicated that job stress was negatively related to workplace incivility ( $P=0.008$ ) and resiliency moderated the relationship of job stress with workplace incivility ( $P=0.04$ ). Moreover optimism, hope, and self-efficacy not moderated relationship of job stress with workplace incivility.

**Conclusion:** The results showed that the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility in high resilient employees is weaker than the relationship between these two variables in employees with low resiliency.

**Keywords:** Job stress, Psychological capital, Resilience

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### Introduction

The occurrence of negative behaviors is an inseparable part of current organizations. When policies and strategies of organization are not fit with employees, they may be provoked to respond with negative behaviors. Negative behaviors in the work environment range from mild to severe. Mild negative behaviors in the workplace have led to the emergence of a new construct called workplace incivility. Incivility is a mild and prevalent form of interpersonal deviant behaviors that violates organizational

norms, thus creating a work environment characterized by disrespect and violence (1). Employees' exposure to uncivil behaviors frequently, they may be more depressed, anxious and have more stress, distress, sleep problems, shame, guilt feelings, embarrassment (2), work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion and more negative attitudes toward life (3), decline of motivation, morale and self-efficacy (4). In addition to the negative consequences of uncivil behaviors for individuals, these behaviors also have negative

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outcomes for organizations. Incivility in organizations has led to an increase in job burnout (1,5), waste resources (6), increase health and fitness costs (7), absenteeism (8), counterproductive workplace behaviors (9) and reduction of organizational citizenship behaviors (10). Incivility would occur both in vertical and horizontal communication (11) and not managing these behaviors have excessive costs for the organization and the employees. The mildness and vagueness of uncivil behaviors have made it difficult for organizations to create policies for prohibition these behaviors and to punish those perpetrate these behaviors. Thus, for reduction of workplace incivility, organizations have to identify the antecedents of these behaviors.

Considerable research have been conducted on antecedents of workplace incivility (4,12,13), and in most of these studies, despite the methodological differences, there is a consistent positive relationship between job stress and negative behaviors such as workplace incivility and have been shown that negative behaviors are a way for employees to avoid stressors and reduce their negative emotions (14).

To reduce workplace incivility, organizations have been encouraged to take actions such as modifying stressor work environments, but organizations can not reduce the stress for all of employees via environment change because employees' perceptions and evaluations of environments are different, thus an environment that is stressful for one person, it may not be stressful to another. Hence, an alternative solution to coping with stress is identification and reinforcement some personality characteristics of employees which prevents them from behaving negatively in stressful working conditions (15). One of these characteristics is psychological capital that decreases negative behaviors and increases positive psychological responses to stressful situations (16). The psychological capital is a potential ability for employees (17) that characterized by the following four traits: 1. Being enough self-confident and trying to achievement in challenging tasks (self-efficacy); 2. Having positive attributions about success in the present and future (optimism); 3. Persistence in achieving goals and, if necessary, changing paths to reach achievement (hope); 4. Increasing tolerance and rollback when encounter difficulties (resiliency) (16). Self-efficacy as one of the four components of

psychological capital affects the occupational stress. Bandura (18) argued that the effect of stress on human beings is controlled by self-efficacy and occupational stress is affected by perceived self-efficacy.

Another component of the psychological capital is optimism. Seligman (cited in 19) suggests that an optimist is a person who attributes positive events to general, stable and personal causes and negative events to specific, unstable and external. Totterdell, Wood, Wall (20) in an study on the workers, found that anoptimist person attributed the positive events to general, stable and personal causes and negative events to specific, unstable and external,thus the optimism is a key moderator that can explain the relationship between job characteristics and job strain.

Hope as a third component of psychological capital is a positive motivational state based on motivated sense of success. Considerable researches in clinical psychology suggest that hope could have a significant effect on the level of stress perceived by individuals (19).

Another component of the psychological capital is resiliency. Resilience is a potential to roll back and cope with difficulties for success (21). Tugade and Frederickson (22) found that resiliency is one of the most important positive sources to overcome a stressful and turbulent work environment. According to the above mentioned, it can be concluded that occupational stress of individuals and their responses to stressors are influenced by the level of their psychological capital. Therefore, while stressful situations lead to increase in workplace incivility (23), but individuals with high psychological capital have psychological resources to prevent negative behaviors such uncivil behaviors. Thus, in order to have a developed organization, identifying weakening factors of incivility is important. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility considering the moderating role of psychological capital. Accordingly, the research hypotheses are presented as follows: 1) Job stress will be positively correlated with workplace incivility. 2) The relationship between job stress and workplace incivility will be lower for those employees who are high in psychological capital (resilience, optimism, hope, and self-efficacy) than employees who are high in psychological capital. Job stress: Steptoy (cited in 24) defined occupational stress

as follows: Responses to the demands of an activity that go beyond individual and social capabilities called stress. The first large-scale research program focused specifically on job stress was conducted by scientific Association for Social Studies at the University of Michigan in the early 1960s. The researchers focused on what they called role stressors.

**Job stressors:** Job stressors are anything in the workplace or the organization's environment which requires some adaptive responses from the worker (25).

**Role ambiguity:** This stressor is due to the unclear role information (performance standards, work procedures).

**Role overload:** This stressor will be perceived when an employee finds excessive demands for work.

**Role conflict:** This stressor is the result of contradictory information of the different parts of the employee job roles.

**Perceived control:** This stressor is a result of low job control along with high job demands.

**Work-Family Conflict:** This stressor is the result of conflict between the workplace demands and family responsibilities.

**Mergers and Acquisitions:** Mergers occur when two organizations joint with each other to form an organization. Acquisition is when a company is under control of another company.

**Workplace incivility:** Anderson and Pearson (1), defines incivility as deviant behaviors with low-intensity and ambiguous intentions in order to harm target person. **Workplace incivility theories:** Conservation of resources theory: Habofol (cited in 26) states that individuals are trying to preserve their valuable resources (eg. self esteem). Hence, counterproductive work behaviors such as incivility act as a mechanism for reacting to stressful events that affect personality and thus preserve their resources. **Deindividuation theory:** According to Zimbardo (cited in 26), de-individuation is a complicated and hypothetical process in which some social conditions lead to changes in the self and others perceptions. This leads to a lower threshold of normal behavior and, under appropriate conditions, results in a behavioral offense that is in violation of the proper and appropriate norms governing behavior.

**Psychological capital:** Lothans (21) entered positive psychology to workplace with invention term of "positive organizational behavior". He believed that positive organizational behavior is the study and

application of the positive psychological capabilities and the strengths of employees that can be developed and measured and the organization must effectively manage them to develop employees' performance. The psychological capital which includes self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency, is the best and most significant indicator of employees positive attitudes toward workplaces (positive organizational behavior). Theoretical and research evidences support that the four psychological capital (hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy) are state, so they could be developed by strategies such as training. Roberts, Scherer and Bowyer (15) found that psychological capital moderated relationship between job stress and workplace incivility, but Setar (27) found no moderated effect in his study. In addition, Tugade and Frederickson (22) and Amini (28) found that resilient employees have the ability to roll back from stress and avoid stressful experiences in an effective way. Taylor and Kluepfer (23) showed that more perceived job stress is associated with more workplace incivility and violence.

## Materials and Methods

The study population consisted of all employees (N=2000) of Khozestan Regional Electrical Company in Ahvaz at the year of 2016. Based on Kerjci and Morgan sampling table for this population 322 samples is needed. Participants were 350 randomly selected employees. They completed the questionnaires of job stress, workplace incivility and psychological capital and 297 correctly completed questionnaires were returned (response rate 85%). Samples with informed consent were selected according to inclusion criteria including employees who are at least diploma and 4 years and more job tenure. Of the participants 10% were diploma, 11% undergraduate, 56% graduate, and 23% master degree and above; 78% were male; and 85% were married. Mean of participants' age and tenure were 40.12 and 14.81, respectively.

### Research instruments

**A) Workplace Incivility Scale:** Workplace incivility was assessed with a 7 item scale developed by Blau and Anderson (cited in 26). Respondents should answer on items on a five-point Likert scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often and frequently). Kain (cited in 26)

reported Cronbach's alpha for this scale as 0.75. Arab (26) reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for this scale. In order to assess the validity of scale, he correlated it with an overall question ( $r=0.75$ ,  $P<0.0001$ ). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.70. Fit indices of confirmatory factor analysis on the scale items showed that the model was fitted with data ( $\chi^2=29.02$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.07$ ; CFI=.92; IFI=.92; RMSEA=.06) and all items had significant factor loadings (ranging from 0.3 to 0.6), indicated that this is a valid scale.

*B) Job Stress Scale:* Parker and DeCotiis Job Stress scale (cited in 29) was used to measure occupational stress. The 13-item scale is one of the most commonly used scales to measure occupational stress and assesses two dimensions of job stress including time stress (8 items) and anxiety stress (5 items). Each item is answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low job stress) to 5 (very high job stress). Parker and DeCotiis (cited in 24) reported Cronbach's alpha for time stress and anxiety stress 0.86 and 0.74, respectively. Bazrafkan (24) obtained Cronbach's alpha and

split-half reliabilities for the scale 0.92 and 0.91, respectively. To verify the construct validity of the scale, he correlated total scores of the scale with an overall question ( $r=0.69$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and showed that this is a construct-valid scale.

*C) Psychological Capital Scale:* Psychological capital 24-item questionnaire developed by Lothans and his colleagues (30) was used to measure psychological capital. This scale assesses four psychological traits including self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency, each of them is measured by 6 items. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.85. In addition, the confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS on the scale items showed that all items had a significant factor loadings (ranging from 0.3-0.8) indicating the validity of this scale. Fit indices were  $\chi^2=562.371$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.31$ ; CFI=0.90; IFI=0.90; RMSEA=0.06 indicating the model fitness.

## Results

Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients among variables are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients between variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Job stress	35.34	9.65					
Workplace incivility	10	2.69	0.20**				
Self efficacy	25.78	3.08	0.06	0.05			
Hope	23.46	3.74	0.09	0.13*	0.51**		
Resiliency	22.20	3.10	0.22**	0.15**	0.53**	0.49**	
Optimism	20.65	3.77	0.24**	0.16**	0.22**	0.52**	0.34**

\*\* $P<0.01$ ; \* $P<0.05$

As Table 1 shows, most of the correlations are significant. In particular there is a positive correlation coefficient between job stress and workplace incivility ( $r=0.20$ ;  $P<0.01$ ).

In order to assess the moderating role of psychological capital in the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility, moderated regression analysis was used. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. It should be noted that in order to assess the interaction of two independent variables, we followed the Baron and Kenny (1986)

procedure. According to their procedure, independent variable must be entered into the regression equation first and the second independent variable (the moderator variable) must be entered in the next stage, and at the final stage the interaction variable (which are multiplication of previous variables); if the interaction variable has a significant beta beyond the effect of the two Independent variables, it can be concluded that there is a moderated correlation (31).

**Table 2.** Hierarchical regression analyses of moderation role of psychological capital

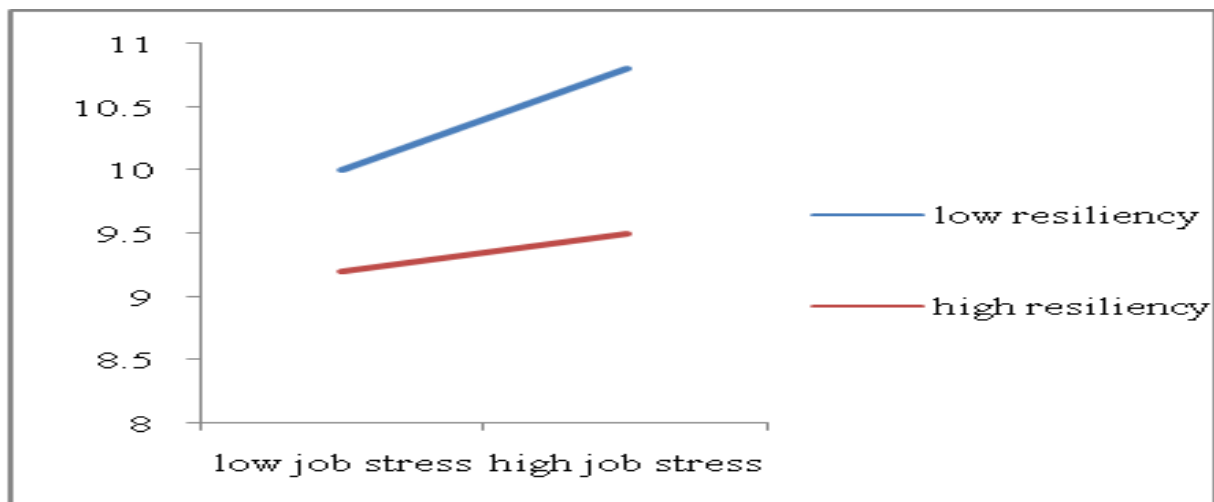
Workplace incivility			
Predictors	Step1	Step2	Step3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Job stress	0.21**	0.18**	-0.6**
Resiliency		-0.12**	-0.72**
Stress*resiliency			0.80*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04**	0.05**	0.6**
$\Delta R^2$		0.01	0.01*
Job stress	0.21**	0.18**	-0.37
Optimism		0.12	-0.49*
Stress*optimism			0.59*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04**	0.05**	0.06**
$\Delta R^2$		0.01	0.01
Job stress	0.21**	0.19**	0.06
Hope		0.12	-0.20
Stress*hope			0.16
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04**	0.05**	0.05**
$\Delta R^2$		.01	0.0
Job stress	0.21**	0.20**	0.08
Self-efficacy		-0.04	-0.10
Stress*optimism			0.13
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04**	0.04**	0.04**
$\Delta R^2$		0.0	0.0

\*\* $P < 0.01$ ; \* $P < 0.05$

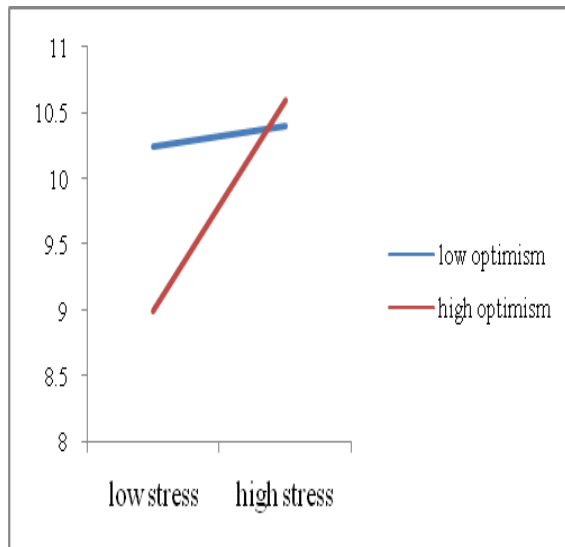
Based on the table 2 contents, the job stress variable that entered in the first step had a positive significant relationship with workplace incivility ( $\beta = 0.20, P < 0.01$ ). Resiliency ( $\beta = -0.11, \beta = 0.05$ ), optimism ( $\beta = -0.11, P < 0.05$ ) and hopefulness ( $\beta = -0.12, P < 0.05$ ) that entered in the second step shows a significant negative relationship with workplace incivility, but self-efficacy ( $\beta = -0.04, P > 0.05$ ) does not show a significant negative relationship with workplace incivility. In the third step, the interaction of the

independent variable (job stress) with moderator (resiliency) significantly predicted workplace incivility ( $\beta = 0.80, P < 0.05$ ).

The significant interaction confirms the hypothesis and shows that the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility is different at low and high levels of resilience. Figure 1 shows the moderating role of resiliency on the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility.



**Figure 1.** The interaction of job stress and resiliency in prediction of workplace incivility



**Figure 3.** The interaction of job stress and optimism in prediction of workplace incivility

Figure 3 shows that relationship of job stress and workplace incivility for high optimist employees is stronger than low optimist employees. This pattern of interaction is at reverse direction of our expectation, so this hypothesis was rejected.

Based on table 2, interaction of job stress with self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) and hopefulness ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) are not significant. These results indicate that, contrary to expectations, self-efficacy and hopeful do not moderate the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility.

$R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  columns in table 2 indicate that job stress explains 4% variance of workplace incivility.

In the second step, when the moderating variable of resiliency was added to regression equation, job stress and resiliency together explained 5 percent of workplace incivility variance, indicating resiliency explained only 1% of incivility variance, beyond and above job stress. Adding the interaction of job stress and resiliency to equation in the third step increased the explained variance from 5% to 6%, indicating the exclusive explained variance of interaction variable is 1%. This significant interaction effect indicates that the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility is different in the low and high levels of resiliency.

Contrary to the expectations, the interaction of job stress and self-efficacy and the interaction of job stress and hope, explained no variance of workplace incivility. The interaction of job stress and optimism predicted workplace incivility in reverse direction of the hypothesis.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between job stress and workplace incivility with moderating role of psychological capital (resiliency, optimism, hope and self-efficacy). Findings confirmed the negative relationship between job stress and workplace incivility, and this finding is consistent with Taylor and Kluepfer (24), Oyeleye, Hanson, O'Connor, and Dunn (32). The results consistent with the Stress-Emotion-Counterproductive behaviors Model proposed by Spector and Fax (14). According to this model, job stressors made employees feeling exhaustion and exhausted employees will experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, so that they feel strongly need to improve their health. Then employees are doing deviant and impulsive behaviors as a kind of compensatory response to energy and emotional depletion.

In addition, the findings showed that the resiliency moderated the relationship between occupational stress and workplace incivility. This Finding is consistent with the result of the research by Roberts, Scherer, and Bowyer (15). Resiliency is one of the most important positive resources for coping with a stressful work environment. Research has shown that resilient individuals are open to new experiences, act flexibly when encounter with work demands are emotionally stable when encounter with negative events (19). So, resilient people always are preparing to deal with the workplace stresses. Other hypotheses in this study were the weaker relationship between job stress and workplace incivility in high hopeful, optimist and self-efficient employees than with low hopeful, optimist and self-efficient employees. Contrary to expectations, all of these three hypotheses were rejected. These results are inconsistent with the results of the research conducted by Roberts, Scherer, and Bowyer (16) and are consistent with the results of the research conducted by Setar (27).

To explain these contradictory findings, it should be consider the following points: 1. the culture of each society is unique and so it is integrated with the spirit and thought of the people of that society, which affect on every speech and behavior. Therefore, the culture of society through its influence on various variables can play a significant role in the dignity of society (33). Research has shown that one of the variables influenced by national

culture is psychological capital, which is considered as a moderating variable in this study.

Research conducted on Chinese samples has shown that many issues of organizational behavior have different meanings in eastern versus western cultures (34). Therefore, it is necessary to study the construct of employees' psychological capital in Chinese culture. The construct of the psychological capital in context of Chinese culture is different from in Western cultures, and includes calm, hope, optimism and confidence. In addition, Brandt, Gomes and Boyanova (35) found that there was a significant difference in the level of psychological capital in different countries. For example, among the three countries of Bulgaria (Eastern Europe), Finland (Northern Europe) and Portugal (Southern Europe), Portuguese had the highest and the Finnish had the lowest scores in all aspects of psychological capital. This study also showed that the relationship between psychological capital and other variables could be influenced by culture. More precisely, Portuguese with personality trait of being perceptive had highest scores on psychological capital, but the Finnish with personality trait of introversion had the lowest. Psychological capital, in addition to being influenced by national culture, has a positive and significant relationship with different dimensions of organizational culture (engagement in work, integration, compatibility, and mission). It can be predict employees' psychological capital through organizational culture (36).

Thus, it can be concluded that effect of psychological capital on other variables can be influenced by national and organizational cultures and various research regarding to psychological capital in different cultures may have conflicting results. In support of this reasoning, Shabir, Abrar, Baig and Javed (37) conducted a study on the relationship of job stress and workplace incivility with moderating role of psychological capital and emphasized that future research should explore the effect of culture on the relationships and suggested that

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researchers should replicate this research in both western and non-western cultures.

2. The second point is that the achievement of moderating effects in field studies is difficult because of the high error of measurement and the poor estimation of parameters (38). Therefore, the weakness of the moderator regression statistical power may lead to non-meaningful results.

This study had some limitations. First, self-report questionnaires were used to collect data and these tools have its own limitations. Second, the data from this research have been collected from a single organization that can reduce the generalizability of findings. Therefore, it is suggested that this research be replicated in other organizations with different cultures. Based on the results of this study it is suggested that in order to reduce the workplace incivility the managers should select and employs the resilient people. There is also evidence that the resiliency can be increased through training. Hence, organizations can help their employees through seminars and workshops to enhance their resiliency. In addition, it is suggested that mangers should identify the uncivil employees and modify their uncivil behaviors.

## Conclusion

Finally, based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that to reduce the workplace incivility behaviors, work stressors need to be managed and minimized as much as possible. In addition, psychological capital moderated to some extent the positive relationship between job stress and incivility in the workplace. Further research should be conducted on the culture differences on psychological capital and it's relationships with organizational outcomes.

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