

YOU SAW THAT, RIGHT? THE EFFECTS OF WITNESSED WORKPLACE INCIVILITY ON FATIGUE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DETACHMENT ACROSS AGE

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ABSTRACT

Workplace incivility exists as a pervasive, low-intensity stressor that can affect workers across the age spectrum. The majority of past research has focused on targets of incivility with little attention given to the witnesses of these acts. Workers who witness incivility may experience negative effects on their work functioning and well-being, specifically by draining resources, leading to experiences of mental or emotional fatigue, which may hinder the ability to psychologically detach from work, a critical recovery process following stressful workplace experiences. Further, older and younger workers have different emotional regulation strategies; thus, how they interpret and respond to witnessing incivility may be dependent on this. This thesis aimed to understand how witnessing incivility at work influences workers' recovery processes through an aging lens. The present study utilized a between-subjects, vignette-based, experimental design. The sample consisted of 293 full-time working adults. Witnessing workplace incivility was shown to lead to higher perceived fatigue, which, in turn, was associated with greater psychological detachment. Age was revealed to be a significant moderator of the relationship between witnessing incivility, fatigue, and psychological detachment, indicating that older individuals experienced stronger effects from witnessing uncivil behaviors. The study findings suggest that the impact of witnessed incivility on well-being acts through a process of resource depletion that differs across ages.

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INCIVILITY ON FATIGUE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DETACHMENT ACROSS AGE**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Today's workforce is becoming increasingly age-diverse, underscoring a need to understand how employees across age groups experience mistreatment (Finklestein et al., 2013; Bae & Choi, 2022). Workers across varying ages are likely to have distinct experiences of workplace incivility (Baker et al., 2024; Cortina et al., 2013). Workplace incivility is characterized by subtle yet impactful violations of respect and professional norms (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Incivility within organizations is a common occurrence, as a survey of over 1,000 employees found that nearly two-thirds reported experiencing or witnessing incivility in their workplace within a single month, and over half indicated that they encounter it weekly (SHRM, 2024). It can pose as a threat to individuals' well-being both at work and spilling over into after-work hours into workers' personal lives (Cortina et al., 2001; Marchiondo et al., 2020).

Workplace incivility has been categorized into three levels: target, instigator, and witness (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Targets and instigators are directly involved in uncivil incidents (Cortina et al., 2001), while witnesses act as third-party bystanders (Cortina et al., 2017). The majority of research to date has focused on targets and instigators of incivility, leaving witnesses under-researched (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that observers of uncivil events do experience effects of mistreatment, such as disrupting work patterns, limiting workplace effectiveness, and contributing to negative effects on mental health and stress (Pearson et al., 2000; Nielson et al., 2024). Instances of incivility can reach the whole of the organization, not just those directly involved (Montgomery et al., 2004). Given the organizational reach of uncivil incidents, it is worth understanding how indirect exposure through witnessing contributes to workers' well-being and fatigue.

Incivility in organizational settings can be influenced by a variety of social identities, including age (Cortina et al., 2013; Baker et al., 2024). Older workers are more likely to experience mistreatment, including incivility, potentially due to negative, pervasive age-based assumptions surrounding this group (Marchiondo et al., 2020). Further, age differences may shape how individuals who are targets of negative workplace experiences interpret and respond to these events (Cortina et al., 2013) and how such experiences affect their psychological well-being (Baker et al., 2024). These dynamics highlight the importance of considering age-related influences when examining the influence of workplace incivility on fatigue and recovery-related outcomes across the work–nonwork boundary.

This thesis makes three contributions to the field. The first contribution is the consideration of incivility at the witnessed level, extending the existing body of literature surrounding this concept. While there is much research on incivility at both the levels of the target and the instigator (Schilpzand et al., 2016), there is limited examination of its impacts on witnesses. The existing literature suggests that bystanders who are exposed to incivility through either firsthand or secondhand accounts may experience negative effects such as low psychological safety, reduced satisfaction with work, and health detriments relating to mental health, stress, and sleep (Nielsen et al., 2024). However, research surrounding witnessed incivility has yielded inconsistent findings, with disagreement on whether observing uncivil behaviors negatively affects health and well-being, further highlighting the need for future studies to develop a more cohesive body of literature (Nielson et al., 2024; Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Moreover, this paper focuses on the impact of age on witnessed incivility. The aging at work literature suggests that differences in age can influence how individuals experience

mistreatment (Cortina et al., 2013). However, prior research has primarily focused on age differences among targets of incivility (Cortina et al., 2013; Marchiondo et al., 2020; Baker et al., 2024). This paper extends the existing body of work by exploring age differences among witnesses and their impact on well-being, with a particular focus on how workers across the spectrum are more vulnerable to fatigue and difficulty psychologically detaching from work. Understanding how workers of different ages interpret and respond to observed incivility can provide insight into the variations in coping strategies (Marchiondo et al., 2020).

The final contribution of this thesis examines how witnessing workplace incivility affects well-being, specifically fatigue and psychological detachment, through the lens of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Incivility can deplete personal resources, amplify negative well-being and emotional exhaustion, and impair psychosomatic health (Han et al., 2022; Cortina et al., 2001; Loh & Loi, 2018), including physiological and psychological fatigue (French & Allen, 2020). While incivility is known to drain resources (Viotti et al., 2018; Trent & Allen, 2019), its effect on fatigue in witnesses remains understudied. Further, little attention has been paid to how observers of uncivil behaviors experience psychological detachment. Given that observers may suffer negative outcomes (Anderson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2017; Porath & Erez, 2009), understanding their recovery responses is critical for addressing the broader organizational climate.

Literature Review

Incivility

Organizational research surrounding mistreatment in the workplace encompasses many forms, including aggression (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), discrimination (Chung, 2001), and incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Workplace mistreatment is known to have a variety of negative outcomes both on the individual and organizational level, including negative affect (Marchiondo et al., 2020), cognitive distraction (Loh & Loi, 2018), overall well-being decline (Marchiondo et al., 2020), reduced organizational commitment (Neilson et al., 2024), and lower performance (Cortina et al., 2017).

When discussing mistreatment, extremely mild and obscure types are often an afterthought; however, their effects are still harmful and lasting (Cortina et al., 2001; Andersson & Pearson, 1999). These subtle forms of mistreatment are known as incivility, defined by Andersson and Pearson (1999), and represent low-intensity, discourteous, and deviant behaviors that violate the natural norms of respect present in a workplace. Workplace norms encompass civility, which are the general behaviors of politeness and consideration of others within an organization (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Civility can vary between one organization's culture and another (Cortina et al., 2017); however, it typically surrounds dignity, mutual consideration, courtesy, and a shared understanding (Cortina et al., 2017; Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Incivility is ambiguous by nature due to the lack of a clear intent to harm targets, separating it from other, more extreme forms of mistreatment such as workplace aggression or abusive supervision (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Because of its ambiguity, associated behaviors are expansive; however, they include making condescending remarks, being passive-aggressive,

using demeaning or derogatory language and gestures, engaging in gossip, putting others down, or leaving inconveniences for others to deal with (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2011; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). Further, incivility's ambiguity hinders clear interpretation of these behaviors; thus, workers may have to rely on prior experiences for explanations, which may vary between workers based on their age group (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Baker et al., 2024). Incivility does not adhere to a strict timeline, meaning incidents can be single occurrences or can evolve into repeated experiences (Smith & Griffiths, 2022), often referred to as the incivility spiral (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). However, repeated experiences begin to cross over into everyday discrimination or microaggressions (Smith & Griffiths, 2022).

Sources/Levels of Incivility

The majority of research on workplace incivility has stemmed from supervisor and coworker-initiated incivility, often grouped, with customer-initiated incivility being separate and taking up a smaller portion of the literature as it is considered external to the organizational body (Schilpzand et al., 2016; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Cortina et al., 2017). Each of these sources may vary in the severity of its effects, with factors such as authoritative hierarchies or the length of interactions being influential (Schilpzand et al., 2016; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010).

Coworkers make up the most frequent social interactions among employees, usually involving repeated exchanges, unlike one-time customer interactions (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Relationships and interactions between coworkers contribute heavily to an organization's everyday climate (Montgomery et al., 2004; Cortina et al., 2017). When incivility is present in the workplace, these ongoing interchanges and proximity to fellow workers contribute to a deterioration effect over time (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Further, the social power dynamics that exist within workgroups can influence the quality of interpersonal relationships (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010) such that uncivil treatment can threaten a worker's sense of belonging and ultimately lead to disengagement (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). Age can also act as a proxy for hierarchical status within the workplace (Pearson et al., 2000), altering individuals' reactions to mistreatment (Abubakar et al., 2017). Younger workers may be seen as having less structural power and therefore be more vulnerable to uncivil treatment from their fellow workers, while older workers may be targeted due to age assumptions about competence and adaptability (Schmitz et al., 2025; Bae & Choi, 2022). Given these findings, the present study focuses specifically on coworker-initiated incivility and how these perceptions may vary by the perceiver's age. Further, understanding these peer-level interactions requires the consideration of those involved.

These sources of incivility, including supervisors, coworkers, and customers, represent the primary instigators in the incivility framework (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). Perpetrators engage in uncivil behaviors that violate workplace norms and negatively affect others without clear intent (Schilpzand et al., 2016; Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Much research has focused on determining the characteristics that are prominent among this group of people (Cortina et al., 2001; Schilpzand et al., 2016), although researchers have struggled to identify consistent profiles (Cortina et al., 2001). Despite this, researchers have examined power imbalances to explain why certain individuals engage in uncivil behaviors over others (Cortina et al., 2001; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). Authoritative power, held by supervisors or those higher in the organizational hierarchy, may be granted greater freedom to violate interpersonal norms without direct consequences (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2020; Cortina et al., 2001). Further, social power exerted by coworkers can have the same influence (Cortina et al.,

2001; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010) as they are key influencers of the quality of social relationships within the workplace (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). These power imbalances can influence the frequency and intensity of uncivil incidents (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010).

Examining the individual differences of those involved in uncivil incidents can give insight into how these factors can influence who is more likely to be exposed to these events. For instance, gender differences make up a large portion of research surrounding experienced incivility (Cortina et al., 2017). In male-dominated fields, women report higher cases of incivility than men (Cortina et al., 2017). Further, while findings are mixed regarding age differences in experiencing incivility (Baker et al., 2024; Cortina et al., 2001; Schilpzand et al., 2016), age influences perceived power, with younger workers viewed as having less organizational power than older workers due to age-related biases (Schmitz et al., 2025; Bae & Choi, 2022). When looked at through a generational lens, age differences can further impact responses to experiencing or witnessing incivility (Abubakar et al., 2017). For example, older adults typically have been shown to have greater emotional regulation skills than younger adults, which may act as a barrier against incivility (Marchiondo et al., 2019); however, these buffering effects may not endure through repeated exposure (Marchiondo et al., 2020). Importantly, incivility does not affect instigators and targets only, as many workers are exposed to its effects indirectly as observers (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Witnessed Incivility

Witnessed incivility is separate from experienced incivility as it does not include direct involvement in uncivil behaviors from either the target or instigator (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Instead, witnesses include individuals who have observed uncivil acts, either directly or through second-hand accounts (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Research surrounding this level of incivility is

limited (Schilpzand et al., 2016); however, it remains crucial to understand the effects of witnessing uncivil events in the workplace, as observers outnumber direct targets, given that these events typically occur within a shared work group (Nielson et al., 2024). Further, bystanders can experience adverse consequences that extend beyond the immediate interaction (Montgomery et al., 2004). These adverse consequences manifest themselves in sustained psychological and emotional strain, long-term attitudinal shifts, and a perpetuation of negative organizational behaviors (Nielson et al., 2024; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Porath & Erez, 2009).

Witnessing incivility can influence the broader organization as observers' perceptions of such behaviors may perpetuate a spiraling cycle of incivility, ultimately fostering an organizational climate characterized by disrespect and hostility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). The incivility spiral posits that uncivil exchanges between individuals can build and transform into aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Abubakar et al., 2017). Witnesses can trigger secondary spirals in which they subsequently engage in uncivil behaviors (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Loh & Loi, 2018). Further, the detrimental effects of incivility are not confined to direct targets but can also extend to observers, who may experience a shared sense of vicarious disempowerment (Montgomery et al., 2004). This refers to an individual's psychological impact of observing uncivil treatment towards others, which can result in demoralization or disempowerment (Montgomery et al., 2004). Additionally, violations of workplace norms disrupt the shared moral framework of the organization, which can adversely affect those who witness incivility within that context (Montgomery et al., 2004). Observing uncivil interactions may negatively affect behaviors associated with task performance and social behavior (Porath & Erez, 2009), disrupt work patterns, and also adversely impact mental health and stress (Pearson et al., 2000; Nielson et al., 2024).

A factor that may shape the interpretation and intensity of observing incivility is age, whether through the age of those directly involved or the age of the individual witnessing the behaviors (Abubakar et al., 2017; Torkelson et al., 2016). Older employees may interpret uncivil exchanges as signaling diminished value in the organization (Marchiondo et al., 2020). On the other hand, younger employees are more likely to be targets of incivility (Torkelson et al., 2016) and may interpret it as confirmation of negative age-based assumptions or as an indicator that their contributions are not valued as highly (Finklestein et al., 2013). These age-based interpretations shape the meaning and impact of witnessing incivility.

Fatigue

Incivility, representing a low-intensity form of mistreatment, can act as a stressor within the workplace (Cortina et al., 2001). Based on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, stressors can trigger stress responses within individuals when their valued resources, such as energy, time, and emotional stability, are perceived as threatened or depleted (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Stress occurs when environmental demands exceed an individual's available resources to adequately respond, resulting in an imbalance that impairs well-being (Hobfoll, 1989). Stress responses can be acute or chronic, varying in their intensity and duration (Hobfoll, 1989; McEwen, 1998; Ganster & Rosen, 2013).

As resources continue to be expended, individuals experience specific strain outcomes such as fatigue, a state of diminished physical and psychological energy (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006; Van Hooff & Geurts, 2015). Fatigue represents the immediate energetic costs of coping with daily stressors like incivility, whereas prolonged exposure may trigger excessive resource loss that can evolve into more chronic conditions such as burnout (French & Allen, 2020; Sonnentag, 2003; Taris & Schaufeli, 2014). Fatigue is made up of three different energy resources (Frone & Tidwell, 2015). Physical fatigue indicates actual tiredness and diminished

engagement in physical activities (Frone & Tidwell, 2015). Emotional fatigue represents the reduced engagement in emotional activity, while mental fatigue represents the cognitive component (Frone & Tidwell, 2015). Since incivility is not typically considered a physical stressor (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001), this paper will focus on the mental and emotional fatigue responses to witnessing it. Empirical research further supports the link between incivility and fatigue; incivility has been shown to hinder recovery processes, sustaining states of depletion (Han et al., 2022), while recurrent exposure contributes to loss spirals that exacerbate fatigue and other strain outcomes (Trent & Allen, 2019).

Because experiences of incivility convey social disrespect and interpersonal threat (Cortina et al., 2001), workers are required to expend cognitive and emotional resources to regulate their reactions and maintain composure (Holmgreen, 2017). In this way, incivility functions as a drain on personal resources, contributing to strain and fatigue (Trent & Allen, 2019; Loh & Loi, 2018). Incivility promotes resource loss in several ways (Viotti et al., 2018). Workers who observe uncivil interactions must regulate their emotional responses, especially when professional norms restrict natural emotional expressions of frustration (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2024). Further, the ambiguity of incivility requires cognitive appraisals of behaviors (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001), meaning they must interpret the intent, consequences, and responses as mentioned before, increasing mental load (Loh & Loi, 2018; Porath & Erez, 2009). According to COR theory, resource losses are more extreme and enduring than resource gain, making recovery especially difficult (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Fatigue is not only an immediate strain outcome but also a central mechanism through which incivility's broader effects reach throughout the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Taris

& Schaufeli, 2014). When employees' resources become insufficient to meet daily demands, fatigue manifests as both an indicator and outcome of sustained stress (Hobfoll et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant for witnesses of incivility, who must expend additional effort to regulate emotions in response to violations of workplace norms (Cortina et al., 2001; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Consequently, even employees who are not direct targets of incivility may experience crossover strain effects such as difficulty detaching from work (Han et al., 2022; French & Allen, 2020). Taken together, COR theory and the current literature indicate that witnessing incivility may be linked to resource depletion that may contribute to increased fatigue (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Han et al., 2022; French & Allen, 2020). The investment in resources to adequately respond to uncivil events can drain workers' reserves, increasing their susceptibility to strain. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Witnessing incivility leads to increased fatigue in comparison to not witnessing incivility.

Psychological Detachment

Psychological detachment during nonwork hours represents a distinct recovery process within the Effort-Recovery Model (von Thiele Schwarz, 2011) through which employees mentally and emotionally disengage from work-related demands, enabling the restoration of depleted cognitive and energetic resources (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Etzion et al., 1998; Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). When recovery is insufficient to meet demands, workers may experience ongoing depletion, leading to sustained strain (von Thiele Schwarz, 2011). Therefore, psychological detachment is not only a passive experience, but an active resource-protecting process that is critical for maintaining well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Nicholson & Griffin, 2015).

Job stressors are shown to hinder individuals' ability to detach from work, interfering with recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Stressors increase negative activation through negative affect or physiological responses, which then hinders detachment from work (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). When employees are exposed to daily stressors, detachment from work becomes harder as those stressors stay mentally active after the incident (i.e., witnessing incivility) has passed (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Interpersonal stressors such as workplace incivility are especially harmful as they encourage rumination and social disruptions that extend beyond the workday (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Incivility often causes those involved to replay the rudeness that has occurred, consuming limited resources (Porath & Erez, 2009), reactivating stress reactions (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). Further, witnessing incivility encourages employees to invest additional resources as they have to adjust to disrupted social dynamics within their workplace (Porath & Erez, 2009; Cortina et al., 2017). This requires additional cognitive effort to navigate these different exchanges (Han et al., 2022).

Over time, the inability to completely psychologically detach contributes to a pattern of insufficient recovery, reflecting loss spirals as described in COR theory, in which employees fail to restore depleted resources between work periods (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Han et al., 2022; Trent & Allen, 2019). Research supports this link, highlighting that prolonged exposure to incivility in the workplace reduces the ability to psychologically detach and leads to poorer next-day recovery (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). Further, even short episodes of stress can extend negative affect and rumination into leisure time, diminishing the restorative benefits of nonwork hours (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; von Thiele Schwarz, 2011). This reflects an ongoing depletion of emotional and cognitive resources, as workers remain engaged with work-related stressors rather than allowing themselves to recover (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Consequently, low detachment

reinforces strain reactions, like fatigue, further expanding resource loss over time (Hobfoll et al., 2018). From a COR perspective, repeated difficulty disengaging from work prevents resource restoration, accelerating loss spirals (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Witnesses to incivility may also experience reduced detachment from work due to the disruptions it causes to what should be a socially secure environment (Porath & Erez, 2009; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Rumination following the observation of an uncivil workplace interaction can foster uncertainty of organizational norms, sustaining work-related thoughts during nonwork hours (French & Allen, 2020; Cortina et al., 2017). Consistent with the Stressor Detachment Model, daily stressors reduce evening detachment and increase same-day and next-day fatigue (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). In the context of witnessed incivility, detachment functions as a key mechanism through which social stressors translate into prolonged strain. As strain reactions build, detachment becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Mentally or emotionally fatigued employees have greater struggles disengaging from work-related thoughts, as diminished cognitive and emotional resources hinder their ability to self-regulate (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005; von Thiele Schwarz, 2011). Fatigue impairs detachment, while insufficient detachment contributes to sustained fatigue, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of resource loss (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2018). This reciprocal pattern highlights how strain reflects both a failure of recovery and an ongoing limitation to resource replenishment, consistent with COR (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Witnessing incivility will be associated with differences in psychological detachment in comparison to not witnessing incivility.

H2b: Fatigue will be associated with differences in psychological detachment.

H3: Fatigue will indirectly affect the relationship between witnessing incivility and psychological detachment.

Age

Individual characteristics can influence the extent to which workers need to recover from exposure to workplace stressors (Gommans et al., 2015), such as witnessing incivility (Marchiondo et al., 2020; Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). Age can shape how workers interpret and respond to workplace incivility (Abubakar et al., 2017). For example, younger workers may interpret incivility from older coworkers as dismissive of their abilities, whereas older workers may perceive incivility from younger coworkers as disrespectful or lacking regard (Schmitz et al., 2025; Bae & Choi, 2022). This highlights the importance of considering how age affects the relationship between witnessing incivility and worker well-being, particularly regarding fatigue, withdrawal, and detachment. Within COR, the effects of workplace stressors can depend on the number of resources lost and personal and contextual factors that influence how those losses are perceived and managed (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Age is an important contextual factor that influences the types of resources workers have and how they prioritize them (Rabl & Triana, 2013). As organizations continue to become increasingly age-diverse, these individual differences can shape how workers interpret workplace incivility and how it can lead to heightened stress and well-being detriments (Abubakar et al., 2017; Baker et al., 2024). As a result, age may shape how witnessed incivility influences fatigue and detachment (Marchiondo et al., 2020; Cebola et al., 2021).

Evidence has shown that older workers' well-being may be adversely affected by stressful workplace experiences, such as being the target of incivility (Baker et al., 2024), which may extend into witness experiences. Although older adults typically have greater emotional

regulation, prolonged exposure to stressors can overwhelm those skills, contributing to excess strain (Marchiondo et al., 2019; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Interpersonal mistreatment can also disrupt psychological detachment and recovery during non-work hours, allowing fatigue to persist across longer periods of time (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015; French & Allen, 2020). This pattern aligns with COR theory's principle that resource loss accumulates and has a greater impact than resource gain (Hobfoll et al, 2018).

Prior research has indicated significant differences in the emotional regulation strategies employed by older and younger workers (Johnson et al., 2017; Marchiondo et al., 2019; Scheibe et al., 2016). When compared to younger workers, older adults tend to show greater regulation skills and coping strategies against stressors (Johnson et al., 2017; Marchiondo et al., 2019). Possible reasoning for this may be that older workers have more experience to draw on than their younger counterparts (Marchiondo et al., 2019). Older workers tend to take on a more adaptive approach, such as positive reappraisal of negative emotions, or anticipative deep acting, where a worker is able to prepare themselves emotionally before a stressful encounter (Johnson et al., 2017). On the contrary, younger workers are more prone to using maladaptive strategies (Scheibe et al., 2016). This includes rumination and expressive suppression (Scheibe et al., 2016). Further, younger workers report higher levels of surface acting (i.e., faking emotions), which has been linked to increased emotional exhaustion (Johnson et al., 2017; Scheibe & Moghimi, 2021). While older workers appear to be more effective at regulatory processes (Johnson et al., 2017; Marchiondo et al., 2019), they may be especially vulnerable to the consequences of prolonged exposure to stressors, including incivility (Cortina et al., 2001). These effects may be compounded by existing age-related resource losses such as chronic health problems or cognitive impairments (Baltes, 1997; Hobfoll, 1989). Further, when workplace

incivility is persistent, the effectiveness of older workers' regulatory processes on reducing emotional exhaustion is reduced (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Age will moderate the relationship between witnessing incivility (versus not witnessing) and fatigue.

H5: Age will moderate the relationship between witnessing incivility (versus not witnessing) and psychological detachment.

H6: The indirect effect of witnessing incivility on psychological detachment through fatigue will vary as a function of age

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Participants

Participants were recruited through the CloudResearch Connect platform. This platform has been shown to produce higher-quality data than other similar crowdsourcing platforms (Douglas et al., 2023). Because age is a key variable and moderator in this study, stratified sampling was used to recruit participants to ensure various ages were represented. Recruitment targets were based on national labor-force benchmarks from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) conventions and thresholds (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). According to the BLS, the 2024 labor force was estimated to include approximately 33.9% aged 18-34, 21.7% aged 35-44, and 44.4% aged 45 and older. In the current sample, younger workers (aged 18-34) were slightly underrepresented ($n = 92$; 31.40%), while mid-career workers (aged 35-44) were intentionally oversampled ($n = 135$; 46.08%) and older workers (aged 45+) were underrepresented ($n = 66$; 22.53%). This pattern is consistent with online sampling dynamics, where younger adults are often easier to recruit (Hoffmann et al., 2022). Oversampling mid-career participants helped ensure adequate group sizes consistent with age-related trends in the U.S. workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025) and sufficient variability for examining age-related effects (Bornstein et al., 2013; Beier et al., 2022).

Participants in this study were required to be at least 18 years of age and currently employed as a full-time worker (e.g., working 30 or more hours per week). As this study examines exposure to job demands, full-time employment increases the likelihood of participants having sufficient and relevant work experiences from which to draw. Participants must have been from the United States; however, there were no restrictions on which industry they worked in. Further, to ensure high-quality data, attention check questions were included. Their inclusion

ensured that participants answered questions using their full focus, as larger surveys are at increased risk of careless responses and data quality issues (Meade & Craig, 2012). These attention checks included instructed response items. Further, compensation of \$1.50 was given to each of the participants after completion of the survey.

To determine the number of participants needed for this study, an a priori power analysis using *G*Power* (version 3.1.9.7) was conducted. A small to moderate effect size of $f^2 = 0.04$ was chosen based on the substantial variability in effect sizes reported across the incivility and well-being literature. Prior studies vary widely in design characteristics, including whether incivility is experienced versus witnessed ($f^2 = 0.02$, Cortina et al., 2001; $f^2 = 0.18$, Chris et al., 2022; $f^2 = 0.63$, Lim et al., 2008), longitudinal design ($f^2 = 0.06$, Totterdell et al., 2012), the specific well-being outcomes examined ($f^2 = 0.04$, Notebaert et al., 2025; $f^2 = 0.63$, Lim et al., 2008; $f^2 = 0.02$, Cortina et al., 2001) or the lack of age as a moderating effect. Methodological guidance recommends against using overly optimistic effect sizes for an a priori power analysis, particularly when examining moderation effects, and suggests using a conservative estimate to avoid being underpowered (Aguinis et al., 2005; McClelland & Judd, 1993). Thus, an f^2 of 0.04 was used. The additional parameters were set using an alpha of 0.05, a minimum power threshold of 0.80, and 5 predictors, accounting for the focal predictors and relevant covariates (including witnessing incivility, fatigue, psychological detachment, age, and the interaction between age and witnessing incivility). A sample size of 327 was determined to be the minimum number of participants needed for this study. However, the final sample size would include a 20% overcollection to account for potential data quality issues, resulting in a minimum of 393 participants needed for this study.

After data collection had concluded, a total of 397 participants were included in the original sample and were compensated \$1.50 for their survey completion. While Cloud Research's Connect platform produces high-quality data (Douglas et al., 2023), additional steps were taken to further screen the data for any concerning responses due to the nature of crowdsourcing platforms. IP addresses and Connect IDs were assessed, and 10 participants were removed for having duplicate IP addresses and/or Connect IDs. Eleven participants were removed for not meeting the inclusion criterion of being a full-time worker (defined as working 30 or more hours per week), and one participant was removed for failing a data quality check. Three attention-check items were spread throughout the survey (including additional measures that were incorporated for future research opportunities and not used in the current study) to ensure participants were reading and responding intentionally. Five participants who failed the majority (i.e., 2 of 3) had their responses removed.

Manipulation checks were used to assess whether participants paid attention to and understood the scenarios they read in the vignettes. Failing these checks did not automatically indicate the need for removal; however, it flagged responses that required further investigation. The first, "*What was your job title?*" had 92 failures and 206 passes, and the second, "*How many coworkers were in the scenario?*" had 18 failures and 280 passes. As a result, two chi-square tests of independence were run to determine if there were differences in responses based on vignette condition. The first check, concerning job title, was not significantly associated with vignette condition, $\chi^2(1) = 3.72$, $p = .054$, $\phi = .11$, and the second check, asking about the number of coworkers present, was also not significantly associated with vignette condition, $\chi^2(1) = 1.52$, $p = .218$, $\phi = .07$. Thus, their attention and comprehension of the vignette content were

high and did not differ based on which condition they received, and all who failed were retained in the sample.

Survey responses that were either too long or too short, that is, ± 1 standard deviations (SD) away from the average completion time ($M = 12.98$ minutes, $SD = 7.55$ minutes), were removed ($n = 72$). Prior to this, an independent samples t -test was run between age and the time it took participants to complete the survey to ensure this exclusion criterion did not disproportionately affect older participants. A Levene's test was non-significant ($p = .367$), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of equal variances was met; however, due to the unequal group sizes between those who had acceptable completion times ($n = 293$) and those who did not ($n = 64$), the use of a Welch's t -test was warranted. This test indicated that participants flagged for excessive completion times ($M = 40.20$, $SD = 11.00$) did not differ significantly in age from participants who were not flagged ($M = 40.00$, $SD = 9.85$; $t(86.52) = -0.14$, $p = .887$, 95% $CI [-3.17, 2.75]$). The test showed a moderate effect size ($d = -0.02$, 95% $CI [-0.29, 0.25]$). Thus, the exclusion criterion of taking too long or too short was upheld. After the initial cleaning process, a total of 298 participants remained.

To further ensure data quality, the *careless* package (Yentes & Wilhelm, 2003) in R (R Core Team, 2024) was used, specifically for Mahalanobis distance and longstring analyses. Extreme outliers were also assessed and removed if they fell more than 2 SD s from the average score of any variable. For these analyses, the measure assessing mental and emotional fatigue was used as it is central to the study and contained enough items (12 items) to accurately evaluate both longstring and Mahalanobis distance. Having a longstring of 8 or more was the cutoff point for the longstring analysis. From this, 70 participants failed only the longstring analysis, while 52 failed just the Mahalanobis distance. However, only 5 participants failed both

analyses and were thus removed from the final data set, resulting in 293 participants included in the final sample. No missing data was present in the final sample.

Participants' average age was reported to be 40.04 ($SD = 9.85$) and ranged from 22 to 74. Age was moderately positively skewed ($skew = 0.98$, $kurtosis = 1.06$) but remained within commonly accepted thresholds and was consistent with the recruitment targets used based on data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025). Overall, 154 participants identified as female (52.56%) and 137 identified as male (46.77%), with 2 participants declining to answer (0.68%). The racial composition included 205 (69.97%) participants being Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American, 30 (10.24%) being Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American, 20 (6.83%) being Latinx or Hispanic American, 16 (5.46%) being East Asian or Asian American, 3 (1.02%) being Middle Eastern or Arab American, 1 (0.34%) being Native American or Alaskan Native, 16 (5.46%) identifying as mixed race, and 2 (0.68%) declining to answer.

Further, as identifying as a full-time worker (working 30 hours or more per week) was necessary to be included in the study, 100% ($n = 293$) of participants identified as full-time employees, with their reported working hours ranging from 30 to 80 per week ($M = 40.90$; $SD = 4.44$). Participants had an average tenure of 78.51 months ($SD = 78.51$), or 6.54 years ($SD = 6.73$), with the range spanning 1 – 680 months (0.08 – 56.67 years). The most represented occupations in the sample were business and financial operations ($n = 42$; 14.33%), computer and mechanical ($n = 36$; 12.27%), and education, training, and library ($n = 31$; 10.24%). Full occupational demographics are reported in Table 1.

Design & Procedure

Manipulation

The present study employs a between-subjects, experimental vignette-based design, which is well-suited for organizational research examining causal relationships that are not ideal to test in natural work settings (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). This design allows researchers to experimentally manipulate workplace conditions while maintaining realism through carefully constructed scenarios, helping maintain balance between internal and external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). This approach was deemed appropriate for examining workplace incivility, as experimentally manipulating real mistreatment in organizational settings raises ethical and practical concerns. By using vignettes, researchers can ethically simulate exposure to witnessing incivility and examine participants' reactions in a controlled manner.

The vignettes used in this study are adapted from Sliter et al. (2014). These vignettes detail scenarios in which coworker-on-coworker incivility takes place. The participant reading the vignette will act as a witness. Participants were assigned to read and respond to one of two vignettes. The first vignette details a scenario in which incivility takes place, while the second vignette is neutral in that there is no incivility present (see Appendix C for the vignette manipulations).

Procedure

IRB approval was obtained before the study began. Participants navigated the CloudResearch Connect platform and viewed the recruitment statement (see Appendix A). Next, participants read and acknowledged the electronic informed consent form (see Appendix B), after which they indicated their agreement. If they declined to provide informed consent, they were directed out of the survey, and their responses were not recorded. Participant data remained secure and anonymous, with no identifier linking them to their data. One of two vignettes (Sliter et al., 2014) was then presented to the participants (see Appendix C). The measures used in this

study (see Appendix D) include the vignette evaluations, participants' chronological age, subjective feelings of mental and emotional fatigue (Frone & Tidwell, 2015), and psychological detachment (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). To support future research efforts, the survey included additional measures beyond those required to test the current hypotheses. This data was not analyzed as part of the present study. After, participants' demographic variables and characteristics were collected, including gender, race, employment status, and tenure. Once participants finished, they were presented with the debriefing materials (see Appendix E).

Measures

Manipulation checks. To assess the extent to which participants determined the vignettes to be uncivil or civil, as well as ensure the quality of the data, 9 items were presented. Sample items include “Would you describe the behaviors as rude?” with answers ranging from *not rude at all* to *very rude*, “Why do you perceive the behaviors as civil or uncivil?” with the requested response being open-ended, and “What were your coworkers doing in the breakroom?” with sample responses being *eating lunch* or *discussing a project*.

Fatigue. To measure fatigue, the mental and emotional fatigue subfactors of the Three-Dimensional Work Fatigue Inventory (3D-WFI) (Frone & Tidwell, 2015) were used. Although this measure includes mental, emotional, and physical dimensions of fatigue, this study is focused on only mental and emotional fatigue, as witnessing incivility is considered a nonphysical stressor (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). These two dimensions were treated as a single factor. This measure has 12 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Some example items include “I have difficulty thinking and concentrating” and “I would feel emotionally exhausted.” Reliability was assessed

using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, which indicated high reliability ($\alpha = .98$; $\omega = .98$). This scale has been commonly used to assess fatigue in organizational literature.

Psychological Detachment. To measure psychological detachment, the psychological detachment subfactors in the Recovery Experience Questionnaire (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) were used. This measure has 4 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Some example items include "I want to forget about work" and "I want to distance myself from work." Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, which indicated good reliability ($\alpha = .95$; $\omega = .96$). This scale has been commonly used to assess psychological detachment in organizational literature.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

The data analyses for this study were conducted using *R* version 4.4.1 (R Core Team, 2025). No missing data were present in the sample; therefore, all analyses used the full sample size ($n = 293$). Assumptions were evaluated to confirm that outliers did not affect the sample's normality, and no issues were identified that would compromise data quality. Witnessed incivility was coded as a binary variable (0 = no incivility present, $n = 146$; 1 = incivility present, $n = 147$), and the order of vignette received was coded as (0 = printer, $n = 146$; 1 = coffee, $n = 147$).

Any potential effects related to the order in which information was presented in the vignettes were assessed using a series of 2 (Witnessed Incivility: no, yes) x 2 (Vignette Order: printer, coffee) factorial ANOVA. Results showed no significant differences as a function of vignette order across variables. Specifically, for fatigue, there was a significant main effect of witnessing incivility ($F(1, 289) = 31.08, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10, 95\% CI [0.06, 1.00]$), however there were no significant main effects of vignette order ($F(1, 289) = 1.61, p = .206, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00, 1.00]$), or interaction between witnessing incivility and vignette ($F(1, 289) = 0.45, p = .504, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00, 1.00]$). For psychological detachment, there was a significant main effect of witnessing incivility ($F(1, 289) = 32.95, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10, 95\% CI [0.06, 1.00]$), but no significant main effects of vignette order ($F(1, 289) = 0.05, p = .828, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00, 1.00]$), or significant interaction between witnessing incivility and vignette order ($F(1, 289) = 0.54, p = .463, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00, 1.00]$). For age, there was no significant main effect of witnessing incivility ($F(1, 289) = 0.36, p = .550, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00, 1.00]$) or order ($F(1, 289) = 0.00, p = .956, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00, 1.00]$), and no significant interaction between witnessing incivility and vignette order ($F(1, 289) = 2.36, p = .125, \eta^2_p = .00, 95\% CI [0.00,$

1.00]). These results suggest that vignette presentation order was not considerably associated with fatigue, psychological detachment, or age, and thus, was not treated as a predictor in the primary analyses. Full statistics are presented in Table 2.

To assess whether the vignette manipulation was successful, a one-way ANOVA was run to determine whether participants in the witnessed incivility condition differed from those in the non-incivility condition on perceived civility of the vignette behavior. The participants rated the behaviors on a 5-point scale from *not rude at all* to *very rude*, with higher scores indicating greater perceived incivility. The results showed that there was a significant effect of the witnessed incivility condition on participants' perceived incivility, $F(1, 291) = 195.20, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .40$, 95% *CI* [0.33, 1.00]. The participants in the witnessed incivility condition reported higher perceived incivility ($M = 3.65, SD = 1.15$) than those in the non-incivility condition ($M = 2.12, SD = 0.65$). As a result, the vignette manipulation showed to be successful.

Descriptive Statistics

Relationships among the primary study variables were examined using a correlation matrix. These patterns revealed that fatigue and psychological detachment were moderately related, suggesting that higher levels of fatigue are linked to greater levels of psychological detachment. Witnessing incivility was also positively related to both fatigue and psychological detachment. In contrast, age did not appear to be meaningfully associated with psychological detachment or witnessing incivility. However, age was negatively associated with fatigue, suggesting that older participants tended to report lower levels of fatigue. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the tested variables are presented in Table 3.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses 1 – 2b were tested using multiple linear regression. Hypothesis 1 expected that witnessing incivility would lead to increased fatigue as compared to not witnessing incivility. Witnessed incivility and age acted as predictors of fatigue. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 290) = 20.55, p < .001$, and explained 12.41% of the variance in fatigue ($R^2 = .12$). Controlling for age, witnessed incivility condition ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.04$) led to more perceived fatigue in comparison to not witnessing incivility condition ($M = 2.05, SD = 1.11$), $b = 0.72, SE = 0.12, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.47, 0.96]$. See Figure 2 for mean differences. Cohen's d indicated a moderate-to-large effect ($d = -0.65, 95\% CI [-0.89, -0.42]$), which additionally indicates that the group who witnessed incivility reported higher levels of perceived fatigue. Further, age was a significant predictor of fatigue, $b = -0.02, SE = 0.01, p = .002, 95\% CI [-0.03, -0.01]$, showing that older participants reported lower fatigue. These results indicate support for Hypothesis 1. Full statistics are presented in Table 4.

For Hypothesis 2a, witnessing incivility was expected to be associated with differences in psychological detachment in comparison to not witnessing incivility. Witnessed incivility and age acted as predictors of psychological detachment. The overall model was significant, $F(2, 290) = 16.56, p < .001$, and explained 10.25% of the variance in fatigue ($R^2 = .10$). Controlling for age, witnessing incivility ($M = 3.60, SD = 1.04$) was associated with significantly higher levels of psychological detachment than not witnessing incivility ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.19$), $b = 0.75, SE = 0.13, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.50, 1.01]$. See Figure 3 for mean differences. Cohen's d indicated a moderate to large effect ($d = -0.67, 95\% CI [-0.91, -0.44]$), which further supports the claim that the group who witnessed incivility reported higher levels of perceived psychological detachment than those who did not. Age was not a significant predictor of psychological detachment, $b = -0.00, SE = 0.01, p = .735, 95\% CI [-0.02, 0.01]$. Since witnessing incivility was

associated with increased psychological detachment versus those who did not, Hypothesis 2a was supported. Full statistics are presented in Table 5.

Hypothesis 2b suggested that fatigue would lead to different levels of psychological detachment. Fatigue acted as a predictor for psychological detachment, and age was used as a covariate in this model. The overall model was significant, $F(2, 290) = 40.25, p < .001, R^2 = .22$, explaining 21.73% of the variance in psychological detachment. Fatigue was determined to be a significant, positive predictor of psychological detachment, $b = 0.49, SE = 0.05, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.38, 0.60]$. Further, a Pearson correlation was consistent with the regression results, indicating a significant positive association between fatigue and psychological detachment, $r(291) = .46, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.37, 0.55]$. These results indicate that those who reported higher levels of perceived fatigue, in turn, reported higher psychological detachment. Age was not a significant predictor of psychological detachment, $b = 0.01, SE = 0.01, p = .213, 95\% CI [-0.00, 0.02]$, suggesting that this relationship does not differ across age. As fatigue showed a positive relationship with psychological detachment, Hypothesis 2b was supported. Full statistics are presented in Table 6.

Hypothesis 3 was tested through a mediation analysis using the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012) in *R* (R Core Team, 2025). This hypothesis expected that fatigue would indirectly affect the relationship between witnessing incivility and psychological detachment. Fatigue was noted as the mediator between witnessed incivility and psychological detachment. When controlling for fatigue, participants who witnessed incivility reported significantly higher levels of psychological detachment compared to those who did not, $b = 0.45, SE = 0.13, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.19, 0.69]$, suggesting that witnessing incivility has a direct effect on psychological detachment beyond its indirect effect through fatigue. The indirect effect of witnessing incivility on

psychological detachment through fatigue was significant, $b = 0.31$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.44], $\beta = .13$, based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples. This implies that participants who witnessed incivility showed higher levels of perceived fatigue, which in turn was associated with greater psychological detachment compared to those who did not witness incivility. Overall, participants who witnessed incivility reported significantly higher levels of psychological detachment compared to those who did not, $b = 0.75$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.49, 1.00]. The model explained 12% of the variance in fatigue ($R^2 = 0.12$) and 25% of the variance in psychological detachment ($R^2 = 0.25$). These findings suggest that fatigue shows partial statistical mediation for the relationship between witnessing incivility and psychological detachment. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported. Full statistics are presented in Table 7.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 were both tested using a moderation analysis using *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012) and simple slopes using *interactions* (Long, 2024) in *R* (R Core Team, 2024). Hypothesis 4 expected that age would moderate the relationship between witnessing incivility and fatigue, compared to not witnessing incivility. The interaction accounted for an additional 1.61% of variance in fatigue ($\Delta R^2 = .01$), while the full model explained 14.02% ($R^2 = .14$). Full statistics are presented in Table 8. The interaction between age and witnessing incivility was significant, $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .021$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.05], indicating that this relationship varied as a function of age. Simple slopes analyses indicated that the effect of witnessed incivility on fatigue was significant at low (-1 SD) levels of age ($b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .020$), mean levels of age ($b = 0.72$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$), and high (+1 SD) levels of age ($b = 1.01$, $SE = 0.18$, $p < .001$). Simple slopes are presented in Table 9. These results suggest that the relationship between witnessing incivility and fatigue became stronger as age increased. Specifically, older participants who witnessed incivility reported greater fatigue compared to younger participants

(see Figure 4 for the interaction plot). Overall, the effect of witnessed incivility on fatigue becomes stronger with increasing age, thus supporting Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 suggested that age would moderate the relationship between witnessing incivility and psychological detachment, compared to not witnessing incivility. The interaction between incivility and age was not significant, $b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .945$, 95% $CI [-0.03, 0.03]$. These findings suggest that age is not a moderating factor in the relationship between witnessing incivility and psychological detachment. Thus, Hypothesis 5 is not statistically supported. See Table 10 for full statistics.

Hypothesis 6 was tested through a moderated mediation model using *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012). This hypothesis expected that the indirect effect of witnessing incivility on psychological detachment through fatigue would vary as a function of age. The model accounted for 14.00% of the variance in fatigue ($R^2 = .14$) and 25.30% of the variance in psychological detachment ($R^2 = .25$). The index of moderated mediation was significant, $b = 0.01$, 95% $CI [0.00, 0.02]$, which indicates that the indirect effect of witnessing incivility on psychological detachment through fatigue varied across levels of age. Further, conditional indirect effects were examined at low (-1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of age. The indirect effect was significant and low age, $b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .027$, 95% $CI [0.02, 0.36]$, mean age, $b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.19, 0.45]$, and high age, $b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.28, 0.62]$ (see Table 11). Conditional total effects were also significant at low age, $b = 0.76$, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.42, 1.09]$, mean age, $b = 0.75$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.50, 1.00]$, and high age, $b = 0.74$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.34, 1.12]$. These results indicate that the indirect effect of witnessing incivility on psychological detachment through fatigue is stronger at higher levels of age, showing support for Hypothesis 6.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Considering that workplace incivility remains a prevalent and impactful stressor in organizations, research has largely focused on those directly involved, leaving the experiences of witnesses comparatively underexplored (Schilpzand et al., 2016). The present study addressed this gap by examining how witnessing incivility can influence employee well-being through fatigue and psychological detachment, considering age as an important contextual factor in shaping these relationships. Overall, the findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of witnessing incivility by demonstrating that its effects on well-being and recovery are driven by underlying processes and age-related differences, highlighting the complexity with which workers interpret and respond to workplace stressors.

Fatigue

Fatigue was first examined as a key outcome of witnessing workplace incivility. Consistent with expectations, participants who witnessed incivility reported higher perceived fatigue than those who did not. This strengthens the claim that even indirect exposure to workplace incivility can act as a stressor (Totterdell et al., 2012). From a COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) perspective, observing behaviors that violate workplace norms, even when not directly targeted, can signal an unstable work environment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), which can eventually contribute to feelings of fatigue (Totterdell et al., 2012). People who witness these behaviors tend to use up cognitive and emotional resources to respond accordingly (Porath & Erez, 2009; Totterdell et al., 2012). This aligns with this study's findings that participants who witnessed incivility demonstrated higher perceived fatigue, indicating that resource depletion can occur in the absence of direct involvement in stressful situations.

In addition, age played an important role in shaping the severity of perceived fatigue through moderation. The relationship between witnessing incivility and fatigue became stronger as age increased, demonstrating that older workers may experience stronger effects of witnessing uncivil behavior. One explanation is that older workers may experience witnessing incivility as more resource-demanding, as age-related stressors and resource levels can make additional stressors more draining (Rabl & Triana, 2013). Although older workers reported lower overall fatigue than younger workers, this gap became smaller when incivility was present, suggesting that age differences in fatigue may be less pronounced after witnessing incivility. Witnessing incivility did not appear to be neutral in its impact on workers. However, its influence on fatigue is largely dependent on individual perceptions of the experiences across age.

Psychological Detachment

Regarding the psychological detachment hypotheses, differences in psychological detachment were observed as a function of participants' fatigue levels. It was expected that different levels of perceived fatigue would be associated with either higher or lower levels of psychological detachment, and that witnessing incivility would also affect workers' inability to disengage from work. Based on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), witnessing incivility could reduce workers' available resources, limiting their ability to mentally disengage from the uncivil events they witnessed. However, the results of this study indicated that witnessing incivility actually increased levels of psychological detachment. One such reason for this is that detachment may be acting as a coping mechanism for dealing with stressors in the workplace, such as witnessing incivility (Loh & Loi, 2021). Psychologically disengaging may be done as a conscious choice in order to preserve what resources are left after stressful work encounters (Loh & Loi, 2021;

Abubakar et al., 2017). In this way, workers may intentionally distance themselves from their work or organization in order to protect their own well-being.

Further, the inclusion of age as a moderator did not change this relationship. Once such reason may be that psychological detachment acts as a general recovery process rather than being age-specific. Detachment may be a broad way in which workers attempt to mentally disengage from work stressors (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005), driven more so by negative activation (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2014), rather than by age. Age-related differences may be more likely to emerge in emotion-regulation strategies rather than in recovery strategies (Scheibe et al., 2016). This suggests that the engagement in psychological detachment is less dependent on age differences and can be considered a universal coping response.

Fatigue and Psychological Detachment

The results relating to fatigue and psychological detachment were consistent with the hypotheses. The expectation that increased levels of perceived fatigue would lead to differences in levels of psychological detachment was supported. Greater perceived fatigue was associated with greater detachment. Workers who are experiencing greater levels of fatigue may be more likely to intentionally engage in psychological detachment as a way of coping with workplace stressors and resource loss (Loh et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022). These findings imply that fatigue may actually encourage disengagement, rather than impairing recovery processes. Fatigue may signal to employees that their resources have been depleted, increasing the need to step away mentally from work in order to recover (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). In this way, psychological detachment functions as an active recovery response (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2014).

Additionally, fatigue helped explain why witnessing incivility might relate to psychological detachment. Someone who witnesses an uncivil interaction may feel drained

mentally or emotionally, developing the need to detach themselves from work (Totterdell et al., 2012). While incivility may influence detachment in other ways, this study shows that fatigue is one explanation. Further, the role of fatigue becomes stronger when age is accounted for. Specifically, for older workers, witnessing incivility appears to contribute more strongly to increased levels of fatigue, which, in turn, is more strongly associated with increased psychological detachment. Older workers may be more likely to engage in psychological detachment as age is often associated with greater resource losses (Hobfoll et al., 2018). This can make witnessing incivility feel more draining (Marchiondo et al., 2020), thus increasing the likelihood of disengaging from work (Loh & Loi, 2019). Therefore, age not only shapes how strongly incivility affects fatigue levels but also how it translates into recovery. From this study, it can be seen that witnessing incivility likely acts as a workplace stressor, leading to fatigue, but may also trigger a recovery process, such as psychological detachment. These processes are also shaped by age, indicating that age plays a key role in shaping the relationship between witnessing incivility and worker well-being.

Theoretical Implications

The previous literature surrounding workplace witnessed incivility has been limited in examining its impact on affected workers, as witnesses are often treated as an afterthought, leaving its full influence on their well-being largely understudied (Schilpzand et al., 2016). The current study aimed to address this gap by determining the influence of witnessed incivility on employees' perceived levels of mental and emotional fatigue, and their subsequent engagement in psychological detachment. In doing so, this study adds to the literature by showing that witnesses are not passive observers of uncivil behavior but are meaningfully affected by what they observe. This is important as the consequences of incivility can also influence the well-

being of employees who are indirectly exposed to it (Cortina et al., 2017). These findings support the idea that incivility is a shared social stressor, rather than solely an individual experience, and may contribute to the broader interpersonal climate of a workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Thus, these findings support that witnessed incivility may play an important role in the spread of negative workplace dynamics, ultimately affecting how observers interpret, respond to, and recover from their work environment.

A second theoretical contribution of this study is the inclusion of age as a moderating factor in the relationship between witnessed incivility and employee well-being. Although prior research has examined the consequences of witnessing incivility at work, little is known about whether these effects differ across age. The present study suggested that age shaped how employees responded to witnessed incivility, specifically through increased levels of fatigue and psychological detachment. This suggests that employees do not experience witnessing incivility uniformly, but rather the strengths in its effects may be explained by age-related differences. By identifying age as a meaningful influence, this study offers a basis for integrating a lifespan lens into research on witnessed incivility and employee recovery.

Further, the findings of this study are consistent with a COR-based interpretation of witnessed incivility. Witnessing incivility was shown to lead to increased perceived fatigue, suggesting that indirect exposure to incivility may contribute to feelings of resource depletion. As observing incivility may require cognitive processing and emotional regulation, resource loss may stem from interpreting social interactions (Porath & Erez, 2007). Further, fatigue was not only relevant as an outcome of witnessed incivility but also helped explain psychological detachment. Thus, it is important to consider fatigue as more than just a passive consequence, as it may signal the need for recovery.

This study's findings demonstrated that psychological detachment was elevated when stressors were present. Rather than hindering detachment, stressors facilitated it, likely as a short-term recovery behavior. This introduces a more complex understanding of recovery processes. Witnessing incivility can signal a negative and uncomfortable environment (Montgomery et al., 2004), creating a desire to withdraw mentally. This ties into the Effort Recovery Model (von Thiele Schwarz, 2011), suggesting that individuals may recognize the need to restore resources and actively initiate recovery. Overall, this contribution expands recovery theory by showing that workers actively shape their recovery experiences.

Currently, there are no studies considering the effects of age in the context of witnessing incivility. Research surrounding how outcomes of witnessed incivility differ across age is still a largely developing field (Schilpzand et al., 2016). While prior research has shown that older adults differ from younger adults in the amount of vigor (Baker et al., 2024) or stability they have (Scheibe & Moghimi, 2021) following stressful events such as incivility, these findings have primarily focused on workers directly targeted by such behaviors. Less attention has been given to whether age-related differences emerge among witnesses of incivility, particularly when considering specific recovery-based outcomes such as fatigue and psychological detachment. This study addresses that directly and reveals that age shapes both how strongly witnessing incivility relates to fatigue and how fatigue relates to recovery. The findings suggest that responses to workplace stressors are not uniform across the lifespan. This expands the current literature surrounding age and incivility, offering a needed shift toward viewing age as an active factor in shaping workplace experiences.

Practical Implications

While there is a notable theoretical impact, this study additionally provides several practical implications. As this study reinforced the notion that incivility negatively impacts the well-being of witnesses, there needs to be a conscious effort from organizations to address it as a multilevel issue. Oftentimes, the focus is given to those directly harmed, but as discovered, the negative effects that witnesses experience imply that incivility should be addressed at the team or organizational climate level. This would encourage broader organizational accountability for maintaining respectful behavior. In the same way, there is a strong importance in preventing incivility before it happens. As subtle behaviors can have meaningful downstream effects, initiating interventions early on, even for low-intensity behaviors that make up incivility, can help prevent broader negative impacts for workers. Given that the present study suggests witnesses of incivility are meaningfully affected by witnessing incivility, organizations may benefit from using established incivility interventions such as Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW). By improving norms around respectful communication and interpersonal treatment, CREW may reduce employees' exposure to incivility (Osatuke et al., 2009), which may also extend to witnesses. Although CREW has primarily been used to improve workplace civility more broadly (Osatuke et al., 2009), future research should consider whether these interventions can also benefit witnesses.

As witnessing incivility was seen to increase fatigue and psychological detachment, organizations should support and encourage workers to participate in healthy recovery practices such as autonomy, low-effort leisure activities (e.g., walks, listening to calm music, etc.), or relaxation (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). While disengagement from work can be beneficial, recovery should not rest solely on workers. Organizations can also support recovery by implementing additional practices (Sonnetttag & Fritz, 2007). One example is encouraging work-

life balance. Setting clear boundaries between work and non-work time allows workers to be able to healthily disengage once working hours are over (Cho et al., 2025). If employees are expected to constantly stay connected, there is never a chance to fully detach and recover from workplace stressors (Sonnentag et al., 2022). Thus, promoting recovery practices shows that organizations care about the well-being of their workers.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study has several strengths, including the use of an experimental design, multiple witnessed incivility scenarios, and evidence of statistical mediation and moderation, it is not without limitations. This study utilized an experimental vignette-based design to strengthen the accuracy of findings and allow for a controlled manipulation of incivility. This design supported stronger causal interpretations regarding the effects of witnessed incivility on both fatigue and psychological detachment. However, the relationship between fatigue and psychological detachment was assessed cross-sectionally, which limits the ability to assess change over time that may be necessary to determine mediation effects fully (Cain et al., 2018). Thus, although participants in the incivility condition report significantly greater perceived fatigue, the cross-sectional nature of the fatigue-to-detachment pathway must be considered in that interpretation. Participants likely experienced acute mental or emotional fatigue rather than lasting fatigue, which may limit the realism of responses; however, future research is needed to determine the duration of these effects.

Another limitation concerns the self-report nature of the survey. Because the study relied on one-time self-report data, the findings may be influenced by common method bias, as participants' responses may introduce bias or inaccuracy, however this effect was mitigated through the use of an experimental design. Further, many steps were taken to ensure the quality

of data gathered and used; there is still a risk of this occurring. Implementing a mixed-method design in the future would help mitigate these effects by implementing both quantitative and qualitative elements and understanding the meaningful impact witnessing incivility has on workers. Additionally, the sample demographics limit the generalizability of the findings. Findings cannot be generalized to participants outside of the US, as the sample was restricted. As workplace norms and culture can differ drastically among countries, what was determined in this study may not be applicable elsewhere.

A final limitation was the high reliability of the two survey measures for fatigue and psychological detachment. While having good reliability is desired, having it be too high may suggest that survey items might be too similar to one another, or the scale itself may capture a narrow construct. This has the potential to limit the breadth of the constructs being measured. As a result, the measures may not have fully captured more nuanced experiences of fatigue. Thus, in future studies, it may be beneficial to use comprehensive measures to assess whether these findings remain consistent.

This study opens up the possibility of many future research options. First, to address the limitations of the cross-sectional design of the current study, future research should examine the long-term effects of witnessing incivility on fatigue and recovery processes over time using longitudinal methods. Specifically, a naturalistic daily diary design may be well-suited for capturing the day-to-day fluctuations in witnessed incivility and recovery processes as they exist in employees' real work environments. Daily diary methods have been widely used in research surrounding workplace incivility, yet not many exist in witnessed incivility literature specifically. As incivility inherently has a building effect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), this approach would allow researchers to see its dynamic nature better. Further, while this study was

centered around COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), different theoretical perspectives could offer more insight into these processes or point towards alternative underlying mechanisms through which these relationships occur. For instance, integrating the role of leadership in these reactions and viewing how leader-member exchange (LMX) may shape well-being and recovery experiences would allow for a fuller organizational perspective (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Bennett et al., 2016).

As this study focused on the age of the participants, future research could expand on this and manipulate the age of the characters in the vignettes. This would shed light on whether participants' attitudes towards incivility vary by age and whether those effects are also shaped by age group identification or in-group perceptions, as has been shown by work on gender and incivility (Cortina et al., 2001; Gabriel et al., 2018). Other individual differences could be included as moderating factors, such as resilience or emotional regulation ability, as these may play a role in an individual's resource loss and recovery cycle, as well as help explain variability in responses. Lastly, as age did not significantly influence the relationship between witnessed incivility and psychological detachment, it would be interesting for future research to explore other recovery-related outcomes, such as sleep quality, rumination, or non-work leisure activities, to determine if there are any age differences in engagement.

Conclusion

Workplace incivility remains a pervasive organizational stressor (Cortina et al., 2001; Schilpzand et al., 2016) and has been shown to extend beyond direct experiences (Cortina et al., 2013), shaping broader patterns of employee well-being and recovery (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015). The present study contributes to this by demonstrating that simply witnessing incivility may have meaningful implications for workers. Further, these findings highlighted that employee

experiences are not uniform across the workforce, as age shaped workers' responses to witnessing incivility. By experimentally examining witnessed incivility through a recovery and age-focused lens, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how workplace stressors extend beyond direct interactions and influence organizations more widely.

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Table 1*Occupation Representation of Sample*

Industry	<i>n</i>	%
Architecture and Engineering	8	2.73
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, or Media	11	3.75
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	1	0.34
Business and Financial Operations	42	14.33
Community and Social Services	4	1.37
Computer and Mechanical	36	12.27
Construction and Extraction	7	2.39
Education, Training, and Library	30	10.24
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	1	0.34
Food Preparation and Serving Related	6	2.05
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	18	6.14
Healthcare Support	16	5.46
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	2	0.68
Legal	3	1.02
Life, Physical, and Social Science	5	1.71
Management	9	3.07
Military	1	0.34
Office and Administrative Support	19	6.48
Personal Care and Services	1	0.34
Production	6	2.05
Protective Services	2	0.68
Sales and Related	27	9.22
Transportation and Material Moving	16	5.46
Other	22	7.51

Note. *n* indicates the number of participants who reported each occupation, % indicates the percent of participants who reported each occupation; total *n* = 293.

Table 2*Factorial ANOVA Results Examining the Effects of Vignette Order on Study Variables*

Variable	Effect	$F(1, 289)$	p	η^2	90% CI for η^2 [LL, UL]
Fatigue	Order	1.61	.206	0.01	[0.00, 1.00]
	Witnessed Incivility x Order	0.45	.504	0.00	[0.00, 1.00]
Psychological Detachment	Order	0.05	.828	0.00	[0.00, 1.00]
	Witnessed Incivility x Order	0.54	.463	0.00	[0.00, 1.00]
Age	Order	0.00	.956	0.00	[0.00, 1.00]
	Witnessed Incivility x Order	2.36	.125	0.01	[0.00, 1.00]

Note: Witnessed Incivility is coded as (0 = no incivility present; 1 = incivility present), order is coded as (0 = printer first; 1 = coffee first), η^2 is eta squared, confidence intervals are one-sided with upper bounds fixed at 1.00, $n = 293$.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with 95 % Confidence Intervals of Study Variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Fatigue	293	2.40	1.13			
2. Psychological Detachment	293	3.22	1.18	.46** [0.37, 0.55]		
3. Age	293	40.04	9.85	-.16** [-0.27, -0.04]	-.01 [-0.12, 0.11]	
4. Witnessed Incivility	293	0.50	0.50	.31** [0.20, 0.41]	.32** [0.21, 0.42]	.04 [-0.08, 0.15]

Note. Values for Witnessed Incivility include point-biserial correlations. Witnessed Incivility is coded as (0 = no incivility present, 1 = incivility present). Values in brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals. * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

Table 4

Main Effects Model Predicting Perceived Fatigue from Witnessed Incivility Holding Age as a Covariate (H1)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>b</i> [LL, UL]	<i>R</i> ²
(Intercept)	2.81	0.27	< .001		[2.28, 3.33]	
Witnessed Incivility	0.72	0.12	< .001	0.10	[0.47, 0.96]	
Age	-0.02	0.01	.002	0.03	[-0.03, -0.01]	
						<i>R</i> ² = .12
						95% <i>CI</i>
						[0.06, 0.19]

Note. H1 references Hypothesis 1, witnessed incivility is coded as (0 = no incivility present, 1 = incivility present), *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error; *sr*² = squared semi-partial correlation, *R*² = proportion of variance explained, 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized coefficients are reported in brackets, *n* = 293.

Table 5

Main Effects Model Predicting Perceived Psychological Detachment from Witnessing Incivility Holding Age as a Covariate (H2a)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	<i>b</i> 95% <i>CI</i> [LL, UL]	<i>R</i> ²
Intercept	2.94	0.28	< .001		[2.38, 3.49]	
Witnessed Incivility	0.75	0.13	< .001	0.10	[0.50, 1.01]	
Age	-0.00	0.01	.735	0.00	[-0.02, 0.01]	
						<i>R</i> ² = .10
						95% <i>CI</i>
						[0.04, 0.17]

Note. H2a references Hypothesis 2a, witnessed incivility is coded as (0 = no incivility present, 1 = incivility present), *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, *sr*² = squared semi-partial correlation, *R*² = proportion of variance explained, 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized coefficients are reported in brackets, *n* = 293.

Table 6

Main Effects Model Predicting Psychological Detachment from Perceived Fatigue Controlling for Age as a Covariate (H2b)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>b</i> [LL, UL]	<i>R</i> ²
Intercept	1.73	0.31	< .001		[1.13, 2.34]	
Fatigue	0.49	0.05	< .001	0.22	[0.38, 0.60]	
Age	0.01	0.01	.213	0.00	[-0.00, 0.02]	
						<i>R</i> ² = .22
						95% <i>CI</i>
						[0.14, 0.29]

Note. H2b references Hypothesis 2b, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, *sr*² = squared semi-partial correlation, *R*² = proportion of variance explained, 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized coefficients are reported in brackets, *n* = 293.

Table 7

Mediation Results for Witnessing Incivility Predicting Psychological Detachment Through Perceived Fatigue Controlling for Age (H3)

Path	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>b</i> [LL, UL]
Witnessed Incivility → Fatigue (a)	0.72	0.12	0.32	< .001	[0.46, 0.96]
Fatigue → Psychological Detachment (b)	0.43	0.06	0.41	< .001	[0.32, 0.53]
Witnessed Incivility → Psychological Detachment (c')	0.45	0.13	0.19	< .001	[0.19, 0.69]
Indirect effect (ab)	0.31		0.13		[0.18, 0.44]
Total effect	0.75	0.13	0.32	< .001	[0.49, 1.00]

Note. H3 references Hypothesis 3, witnessed incivility is coded as (0 = no incivility present, 1 = incivility present), *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient, indirect effect CIs are based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples, *n* = 293.

Table 8

Two-Way Interaction Model of Witnessed Incivility Age Predicting Perceived Fatigue (H4)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	<i>b</i> 95% <i>CI</i> [LL, UL]	<i>R</i> ²
Intercept	3.46	0.38	< .001		[2.70, 4.21]	
Witnessed Incivility	-0.46	0.52	.377	0.00	[-1.48, 0.56]	
Age	-0.04	0.01	.000	0.04	[-0.05, -0.02]	
Incivility × Age	0.03	0.01	.021	0.02	[0.00, 0.05]	
						<i>R</i> ² = .15
						95% <i>CI</i>
						[0.07, 0.22]

Note. H4 references Hypothesis 4. *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *sr*² = squared semi-partial correlation. *R*² = proportion of variance explained. 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized coefficients are reported in brackets. *n* = 297

Table 9

Simple Slopes of Witnessed Incivility Predicting Perceived Fatigue at Different Levels of Age (H4)

Age Level	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
-1 SD (30.22 years)	0.43	0.17	.020
Mean (40.03 years)	0.72	0.12	.000
+1 SD (49.84 years)	1.01	0.18	.000

Note. H4 represents Hypothesis 4, age values represent one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, *n* = 297.

Table 10

Moderated Regression Results for Witnessed Incivility and Its Interaction With Age Predicting Psychological Detachment (H5)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>b</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Intercept	2.92	0.41	< .001		[2.11, 3.72]	
Witnessed Incivility	0.79	0.55	.154	0.00	[-0.30, 1.88]	
Age	-0.00	0.01	.862	0.00	[-0.02, 0.02]	
Incivility × Age	-0.00	0.01	.945	0.00	[-0.03, 0.03]	
						<i>R</i> ² = .10
						95% <i>CI</i> [0.04, 0.17]

Note. H5 references Hypothesis 5, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, *sr*² = squared semi-partial correlation, *R*² = proportion of variance explained, 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized coefficients are reported in brackets, *n* = 293.

Table 11

Conditional Indirect Effects of Witnessed Incivility on Psychological Detachment Through Fatigue (H6)

Age Level	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% Bootstrapped CI for <i>b</i> [LL, UL]
-1 SD (30.22 years)	0.19	0.08	[0.02, 0.36]
Mean (40.03 years)	0.31	0.07	[0.19, 0.45]
+1 SD (49.84 years)	0.44	0.09	[0.28, 0.62]

Note. H6 references Hypothesis 6, indirect effects are presented at values of age representing one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, 95% confidence intervals based on 5,000 samples are reported in brackets, *n* = 293.

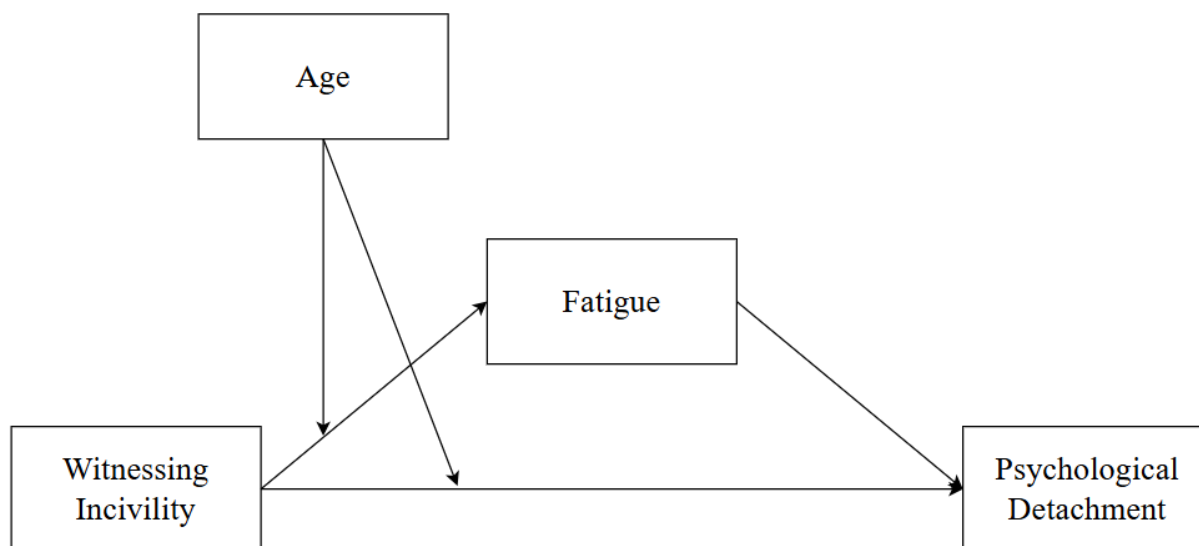
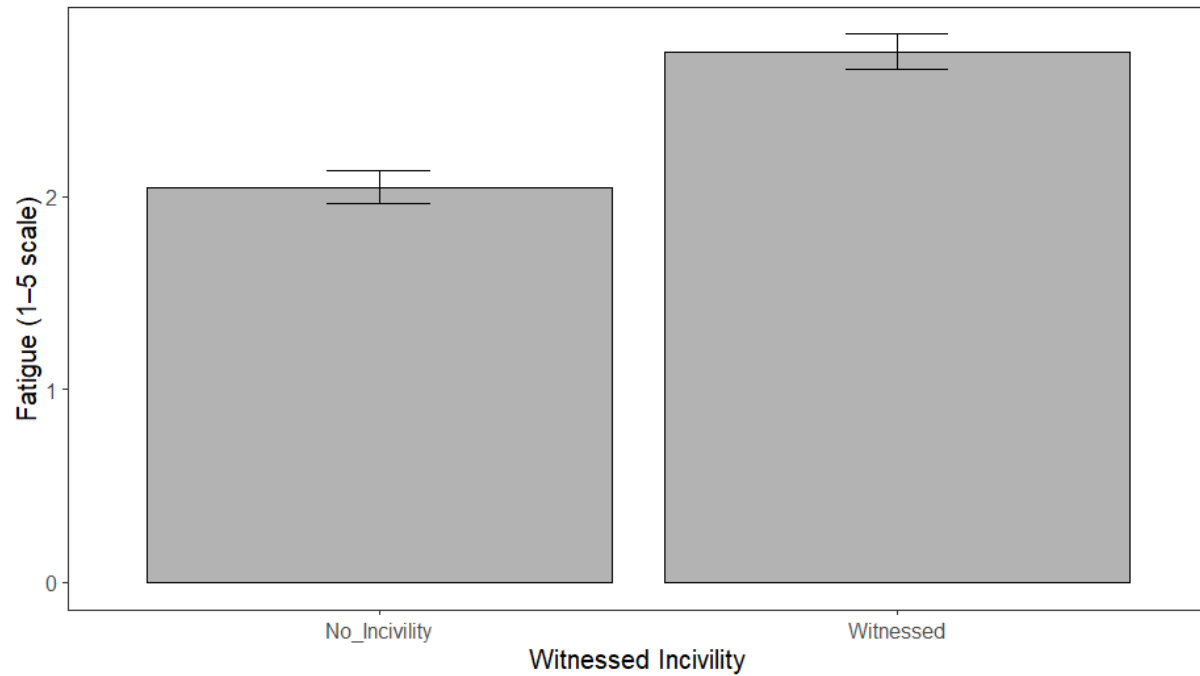
Figure 1*Conceptual Model*

Figure 2

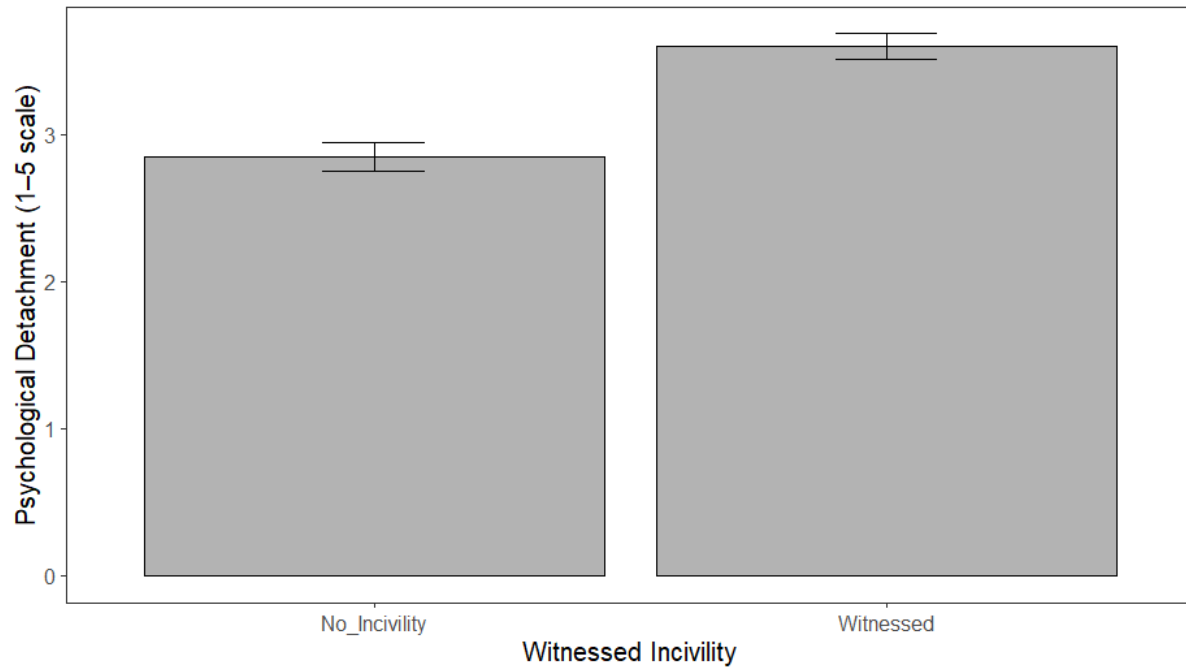
Differences in Perceived Fatigue by Vignette Group (H1)



Note. H1 references Hypothesis 1, bars represent mean levels of perceived fatigue for participants who did and did not witness incivility. Error bars represent standard errors.

Figure 3

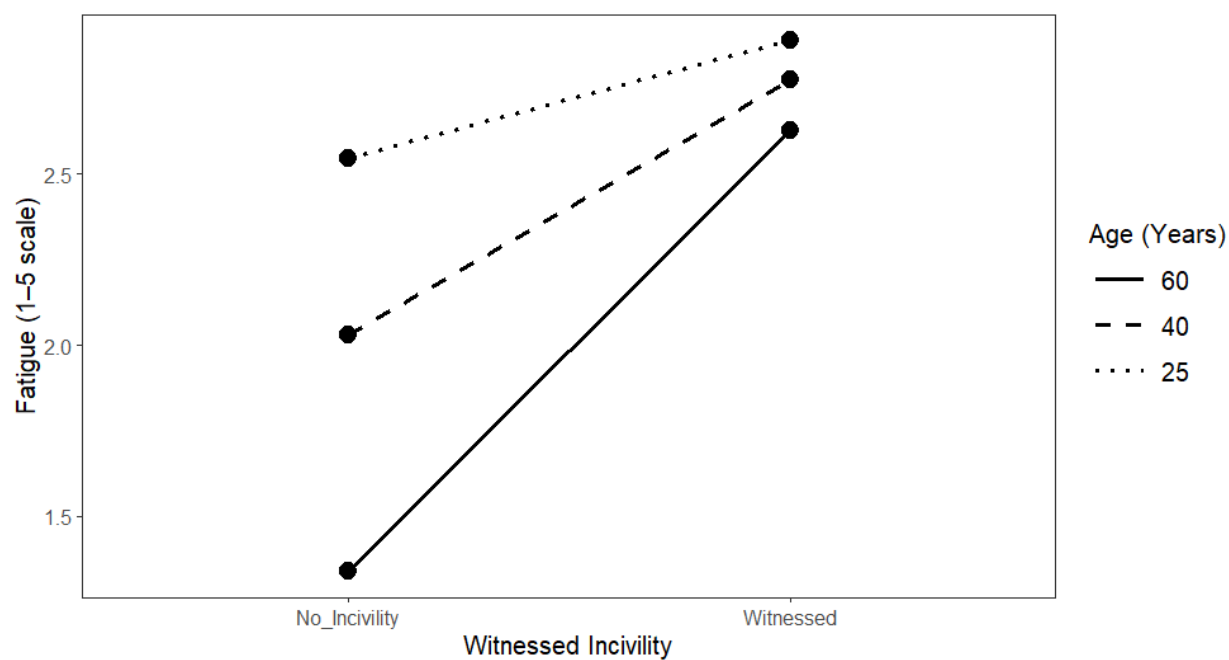
Differences in Psychological Detachment by Vignette Group (H1)



Note. H2a references Hypothesis 2a, bars represent mean levels of psychological detachment for participants who did and did not witness incivility. Error bars represent standard errors

Figure 4

Interaction Between Witnessed Incivility and Age Predicting Perceived Fatigue



Appendices

Appendix A

A Study of Workplace Witnessed Incivility

Recruitment Statement: This 10-12-minute online research study will ask you to read a workplace scenario and answer specific questions regarding your feelings related to the scenario. Afterward, you will be asked to answer demographic questions. This voluntary study aims to evaluate how you perceive and respond to workplace scenarios.

Qualified Participants: Individuals who are 18 years of age or older, comfortable reading and writing in English, and who are currently who are employed full-time (at least 30-hours or more per week).

Time Commitment: If you decide to provide us with your consent to participate, you can access the survey link below. This survey should take no more than 10-12 minutes.

Confidentiality: This study is strictly confidential, meaning that no identifying information is being collected in connection with the research data. Once you receive your credit for participation in this study, Cloud Research Connect IDs will be removed from the electronic file. All information that is collected will be kept in a password-protected file, and all electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Cloud Research Connect IDs are not considered identifying information since IDs are a randomly generated number and letter sequence that is assigned to a worker through Connect. The Connect ID does not possess any personally identifiable information, and as per Cloud Research's requester use policy, requesters aren't permitted to collect other potentially identifying information (e.g., email addresses, phone numbers, etc.) to protect the workers we're gathering information from. Through the use of an external site to administer the survey (i.e., Qualtrics), this acts as a protective mechanism to further conceal the participant's identity since no one has access to the responses beyond the research team.

Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point in time without any penalty.

Compensation: Compensation will be provided for your time completing this survey of \$1.50. Compensation will only be granted if you have met the following conditions: 1) you qualify as a participant for this study, 2) you pass attention check questions throughout the survey, 3) you provide your Cloud Research Connect ID when prompted, and 4) you provide the accurate HIT completion code provided to you at the end of the survey

Contact us: Interested participants are invited to contact us with any questions. If you have no questions, please proceed to the study link provided via this site.

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Appendix B
Informed Consent Form
A Study of Workplace Witnessed Incivility

You are invited to participate in a study that assesses how your perception of workplace incivility influences your responses to workplace scenarios.

Key Information

- This **voluntary** study evaluates how perceptions of workplace incivility influence individuals' emotional and behavioral responses at work.
- This study should **take approximately 10-12 minutes** and will ask you to read a short workplace scenario and respond to questions regarding your feelings about the scenario, as well as provide demographic information.
- The benefits of this study for you will be to see the research process. For the field of I/O psychology, the benefit of this study will help researchers better understand how observing incivility in the workplace affects workers' well-being.
- There are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

Eligibility

Only individuals who are 18 years of age or older, comfortable reading and writing in English, and who are currently who are employed full-time (at least 30-hours or more per week) will be eligible to participate in this survey.

Description of Study

This study will take approximately 10-12 minutes to complete. You will be presented with a brief workplace scenario describing your observation of your coworkers. After reading the scenario, you will answer questions about your perceptions of and anticipated responses to the situation described.

Risks and Benefits

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with this study. Participation is completely voluntary, and thus, you may choose not to continue at any point. The results of this study may be published in scientific research journals and presented at professional conferences. However, your records will remain confidential. Your data will be used as part of a larger data set with no identifying information. The data set, once de-identified, could potentially be posted to a scholarly, public online medium.

Confidentiality

This study is confidential, meaning that no identifying information is being collected in connection with the research data. Once you receive your credit for participation in this study, Cloud Research Connect IDs will be removed from the electronic file. All information that is collected will be kept in a password-protected file, and all electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Cloud Research Connect IDs are not considered identifying

information since IDs are a randomly generated number and letter sequence that is assigned to a worker through Connect. The Connect ID does not possess any personally identifiable information, and as per Cloud Research's requester use policy, requesters aren't permitted to collect other potentially identifying information (e.g., email addresses, phone numbers, etc.) to protect the workers we're gathering information from. Through the use of an external site to administer the survey (i.e., Qualtrics), this acts as a protective mechanism to further conceal the participant's identity since no one has access to the responses beyond the research team.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point in time without any penalty.

Compensation: Compensation will be provided for your time in completing this survey of \$1.50. Compensation will only be granted if you have met the following conditions: 1) you qualify as a participant for this study, 2) you pass attention check questions throughout the survey, 3) you provide your Cloud Research Connect ID when prompted, and 4) you provide the accurate HIT completion code provided to you at the end of the survey

Future Use of the Research Data

The results of this study may be published in scientific research journals and presented at professional conferences. However, your records will remain confidential. Your data will be used as part of a larger data set with no identifying information. The data set, once de-identified, could potentially be posted to a scholarly, public online medium (e.g., Open Science Framework).

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You may refuse to participate by choosing "No, Exit Survey" below. Participation is also completely voluntary, and thus, you may choose not to continue at any point. You may change your mind about being in the study and quit after the survey has started. You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

Questions

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914. This research has been approved by the institutional review board of East Carolina University. If you have questions about this research study, you can contact the investigators below:

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By selecting “Yes, Continue with the Study”, you are acknowledging that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and that you have read and understand the information provided above. **It is advised that you save or print a copy of this form for your own records.**

I understand the above and grant my consent to participate:

- Yes, Continue with the Study
- No, Exit the Study

If you have questions about your rights when taking part in this research, call the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, call the Director of Human Research Protections at 252-744-2914.

Appendix C
Manipulations
Coworker Incivility Vignettes

All participants will receive the same directions.

Participant Instructions: For the purpose of this study, you work for the Thomas Group, a consulting company that focuses on organizational assessment. You've noticed that the work environment is rather collegial and team-focused. In the following sections, you will be presented with multiple interactions that could occur across workplace settings. Please read these situations carefully and answer the questions that correspond to each situation.

Participants will then receive one of the following vignettes randomly.

Vignette 1

Incivility Present (First)

You see Andrew and Peter waiting at the printer for some documents. Andrew finishes printing and has used all the paper in the paper tray. Peter notices this while Andrew takes his documents and does not refill the paper tray.

Incivility Present (Second)

You are in the breakroom, and there is a coffee maker on the counter. Andrew and Peter are standing at the counter discussing a project they are working on. There appears to be enough coffee left for them both to have some. Andrew takes the last of the coffee, filling up his oversized mug, then leaves the breakroom.

Vignette 2

Incivility Not Present (First)

You see Andrew and Peter waiting at the printer for some documents. Andrew finishes printing and has used all the paper in the paper tray. Peter notices this while Andrew takes his documents and then refills the paper tray.

Incivility Not Present (Second)

You are in the breakroom, and there is a coffee maker on the counter. Andrew and Peter are standing at the counter discussing a project they are working on. There appears to be enough coffee left for them both to have some. Andrew takes the last of the coffee, filling up his oversized mug, then makes a new pot of coffee before leaving the breakroom.

Appendix D
Survey Materials

Screeners Items

1. The first item will be a captcha verification.
2. Are you at least 18 years of age?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If the answer is “no,” they will be directed out of the survey.
3. Please select your employment status:
 - a. Full-time (30 hours or more a week)
 - b. Part-time (29 hours or less a week)
 - c. Not employed
 - d. Retired
 - e. Full-time self-employed (30 hours or more a week)
 - f. Part-time self-employed (29 hours or less a week)

If the answer is “retired” or “not employed,” they will be directed out of the survey.
4. It is important to the research team that you are paying attention when responding to this survey. Otherwise, we will not be certain that we can rely on the results we obtain. Please disregard this question and select “Green” as your response. Thank you for taking the time to read this question.

What color is the sky?

 - a. Orange
 - b. Blue
 - c. Green
 - d. Red
 - e. Other (*fill in the blank*)

If the participants fail the attention check, they will be directed out of the survey.

Three-Dimensional Work Fatigue Inventory (3D-WFI) – Mental and Emotional Fatigue
(Frone & Tidwell, 2015) (wording edited to apply to the vignette)

Directions: Below are several questions that ask how you felt about the scenario you just read. Using the response scale below, indicate the level of agreement with which you resonate the most regarding the scenario.

Scale Anchors:

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Mental Fatigue Item Directions:

How would you feel after experiencing the scenario you read:

Emotional Fatigue Item Directions:

How would you feel after experiencing the scenario you read:

The Recovery Experience Questionnaire – Adopted (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007)

Directions: Below are several questions that ask how you felt about the scenario you just read. Using the response scale below, indicate the level of agreement with which you resonate the most regarding the scenario.

Scale Anchors:

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Item Directions:

How would you feel after experiencing the scenario you read:

Manipulation Check Items:

1. Thinking about the behaviors that were engaged in, would you describe them as uncivil?
Uncivil can be defined as a disrespectful act towards you or someone else.
 - a. Very uncivil
 - b. Uncivil
 - c. Not uncivil or civil
 - d. Civil
 - e. Very civil
2. Why do you perceive the behaviors as civil or uncivil?
 - a. *(Open-ended)*
3. Would you describe the behaviors as rude?
 - a. Not rude at all
 - b. Not rude
 - c. Neither rude nor not rude

- d. Rude
- e. Very rude
- 4. Overall, how would you describe the behavior of the instigator?
 - a. Inconsiderate/Considerate
 - b. Rude/Polite
 - c. Unacceptable/Acceptable
 - d. Competitive/Generous
 - e. Selfish/Generous
 - f. Untrustworthy/Trustworthy
 - g. Inefficient/Efficient
 - h. Lazy/Hardworking
 - i. Unproductive/Productive
 - j. Uncivil/Civil
- 5. What was your job title?
 - a. General manager
 - b. Office Assistant
 - c. Salesman
 - d. IT admin
- 6. How many coworkers were in the scenario?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4

Attention Check Items (Mead & Craig, 2012)

Throughout the survey, there will be items like the following

- 1. Select strongly agree.
- 2. Select disagree.
- 3. Select neither agree nor disagree.

Demographics

- 1. What is your age? (In years)
- 2. What is your gender identity?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Trans woman/trans female
 - d. Trans man/trans male
 - e. Custom (Please tell us more!) (*fill in the blank*)
 - f. Prefer not to answer
- 3. Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage? (Choose all that apply)
 - a. Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American
 - b. Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American
 - c. Latinx or Hispanic American

- d. East Asian or Asian American
 - e. South Asian or Indian American
 - f. Middle Eastern or Arab American
 - g. Native American or Alaskan Native
 - h. Custom (Please tell us more!) (*fill in the blank*)
 - i. Prefer not to answer
4. Please indicate your employment status.
- a. Full-time
 - b. Part-time
 - c. Not employed
 - d. Retired
 - e. Self-employed
5. On average, how many hours per week do you work at your job?
- a. (*numerical fill in the blank*)
6. How many days have you been absent in the past 30 days from work?
- a. (*numerical fill in the blank*)
7. How much of your job is remote?
- a. Less than 10%
 - b. 10% - 19%
 - c. 20 % - 29%
 - d. 30 – 39%
 - e. 40 – 49%
 - f. 50 – 59%
 - g. 60% - 69%
 - h. 70% - 79%
 - i. 80% – 89%
 - j. 90% or greater
8. Which of the following best describes your occupation?
- a. Architecture and Engineering
 - b. Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, or Media
 - c. Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance
 - d. Business and Financial Operations
 - e. Community and Social Services
 - f. Computer and Mechanical
 - g. Construction and Extraction
 - h. Education, Training, and Library
 - i. Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
 - j. Food Preparation and Serving Related
 - k. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical
 - l. Healthcare Support
 - m. Installation, Maintenance, and Repair
 - n. Legal
 - o. Life, Physical, and Social Science

- p. Management
 - q. Military
 - r. Office and Administrative Support
 - s. Personal Care and Services
 - t. Production
 - u. Protective Services
 - v. Sales and Related
 - w. Transportation and Material Moving
 - x. Other (please specify)
9. What is your job title?
- a. *(fill in the blank)*
10. How long have you been at your current job?
- a. *(numerical fill in the blank)*

Appendix E

Debriefing

Thank you for completing this study! The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of witnessing incivility in the workplace and how it can affect individuals' well-being, including emotional/mental fatigue, as well as psychological detachment from work. Furthermore, we aim to investigate whether age affects these relationships, in that the perceptions of older workers' observations of incivility may differ in comparison to those of younger workers.

If you're interested in more information regarding this topic, you may reference these articles:

- Cortina, L. M., Kabat-Farr, D., Magley, V. J., & Nelson, K. (2017). Researching rudeness: The past, present, and future of the science of incivility. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 299-313. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000089>
- Nielsen, M. B., Einarsen, S. V., Parveen, S., & Rosander, M. (2024). Witnessing workplace bullying — A systematic review and meta-analysis of individual health and well-being outcomes. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 75, 101908. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2023.101908>

We would appreciate it if you would refrain from discussing any parts of this study with other individuals who may have the chance to participate in this study.

You are welcome to contact Dr. Courtney Baker (bakerco22@ecu.edu) or Savannah Kirchner (kirchners24@students.ecu.edu) with any questions regarding this study.

Also, if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914.

If answering any of the questions in this study raises any issues for you, please use the resources below as a source of support:

Resource	Accessing the Resource
American Psychological Association “Psychologist Locator”	http://locator.apa.org/ or (800) 374-2723
Crisis centers in the United States	1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Crisis centers worldwide	www.allaboutcounseling.com

Now that you've completed the study. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us? (open-ended)

Appendix F

IRB Approval

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
 Willis Building · Mail Stop 682
 Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · redc@ecu.edu · redc.ecu.edu/umcirm/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
 To: [Courtney Baker](#)
 CC:
 Date: 3/9/2026
 Re: [UMCIRB 25-002306](#)
 Witnessed incivility effects on fatigue and psychological detachment across age

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 3/7/2026. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2A.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Debriefing Form(0.01)	Additional Items
Informed Consent Form(0.01)	Consent Forms
Kirchner Thesis Proposal Document(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Recruitment Statement(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Survey Questions(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Vignettes(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.