

## Exploring the Impact of Workplace Incivility on Job Satisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion among Nurses: A Quantitative Study in Pakistan's Healthcare Sector

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to investigate the effects of workplace incivility on job satisfaction among nurses, with emotional exhaustion serving as a mediating factor. The research utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction among 300 nurses working in public hospitals in Pakistan. The data was analyzed using SPSS and PLS-SEM techniques to identify the relationships between the variables. The primary objective was to examine the relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction, and to explore the role of emotional exhaustion as a mediator. The study aims to provide insights into the impact of workplace incivility on nurses' well-being and job satisfaction, with the goal of contributing to the development of effective interventions in the healthcare sector. The study revealed a significant negative relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction, with emotional exhaustion partially mediating this relationship. The findings suggest that workplace incivility contributes to emotional exhaustion, which, in turn, reduces job satisfaction. The research underscores the importance of fostering respectful and supportive work environments in healthcare settings to enhance the mental health and job satisfaction of nurses. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address workplace incivility and prevent burnout, which can ultimately improve the quality of healthcare services.*

**Keywords:** Workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, nursing, healthcare, burnout, Pakistan, 5-point Likert scale, SPSS, PLS-SEM.

### INTRODUCTION

Nurses play a central role in the healthcare system, being the primary providers of patient care. Their job satisfaction is pivotal not only for their well-being but also for the overall quality of care delivered to patients. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), nurses represent more than 50% of the global health workforce, and their job satisfaction directly impacts healthcare delivery (Kramer et al., 2019). Despite their crucial role, nurses are increasingly exposed to negative workplace behaviors, including workplace incivility, which has been shown to significantly affect their job satisfaction, mental health, and emotional well-being. Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity, rude, or disrespectful behaviors that, while subtle, can have a profound impact on employees' mental health and organizational outcomes (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). In healthcare settings, workplace incivility is often exacerbated by the high-stress environment, where nurses deal with long working hours, high patient turnover, and emotional demands. Research has shown that incivility can lead to increased emotional exhaustion among employees, which in turn mediates the relationship between incivility and job satisfaction (Porath & Pearson, 2013; Lash & Popovich, 2019).

Job satisfaction among nurses has been linked to a variety of outcomes, including improved patient care, lower turnover rates, and reduced burnout (Kumar et al., 2018). However, factors such as workplace incivility and emotional exhaustion have been identified as major contributors to job dissatisfaction. A global study by

Aiken et al. (2012) demonstrated that high levels of emotional exhaustion among nurses lead to a significant decline in job satisfaction and quality of care. Specifically, nurses experiencing emotional exhaustion are more likely to report feelings of depersonalization, reduced engagement, and diminished job satisfaction, which eventually affects patient outcomes (Maslach et al., 2001). In the context of Pakistan, the healthcare sector faces several challenges, including inadequate resources, heavy workloads, and poor workplace conditions (Shah & Rahman, 2017). Nurses in Pakistan work under high-stress conditions with minimal emotional support, making them highly susceptible to workplace incivility. Khan et al. (2018) highlighted that workplace incivility among healthcare workers in Pakistan is a growing concern, leading to adverse effects on nurses' well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Despite the growing recognition of the negative impact of workplace incivility, there remains a gap in the literature on how emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between incivility and job satisfaction, especially in developing countries like Pakistan.

The healthcare sector in Pakistan faces numerous challenges, including limited resources, high patient volumes, and understaffing, which contribute to stress and emotional strain among healthcare workers. Among the most concerning issues is the prevalence of workplace incivility, which has been a subject of increasing concern in recent studies. Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity, rude, or disrespectful behaviors that, while subtle, can have a profound impact on employees' mental health and organizational outcomes (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Porath & Pearson, 2013). In healthcare settings, workplace incivility is exacerbated by the high-stress nature of the job. Nurses are especially vulnerable, given their continuous exposure to high emotional and physical demands (Maslach et al., 2001). Research shows that workplace incivility is a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion, which in turn leads to low job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions among employees (Shah & Rahman, 2017; Lash & Popovich, 2019). The emotional exhaustion component of burnout is especially pertinent in nursing, as it has been linked to a decrease in job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Aiken et al., 2012). Nurses experiencing emotional exhaustion report feelings of detachment from their work, decreased engagement, and a general decline in their well-being (Kumar et al., 2018).

Job satisfaction among nurses is critical, as it directly affects both their mental health and the quality of care provided to patients. Low job satisfaction can lead to high turnover rates, burnout, and poor patient outcomes (Kramer et al., 2019). Given the significant role nurses play in healthcare, addressing the factors that contribute to their job satisfaction is essential for improving healthcare delivery. However, the link between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction in the Pakistani context remains underexplored, especially with emotional exhaustion acting as a mediator between incivility and job satisfaction.

Although workplace incivility has been widely studied in Western contexts, there is a notable gap in research exploring its effects within developing countries like Pakistan. This gap is especially important given the unique cultural, organizational, and healthcare challenges faced by nurses in Pakistan. Despite the growing recognition of workplace incivility's negative impacts, limited research has focused on nurses in Pakistan, where workplace incivility might be influenced by organizational hierarchy, cultural norms, and resource constraints (Khan et al., 2018). In particular, little empirical evidence exists on how emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction in the Pakistani healthcare context.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Workplace Incivility and Job Satisfaction:**

Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity behaviors that convey a lack of respect for others, including rude or discourteous actions. These behaviors are often subtle and may include things like ignoring colleagues, making demeaning remarks, or engaging in belittling conversations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). While workplace incivility may seem minor in comparison to more severe forms of mistreatment, research shows that it can have a substantial negative impact on employees' well-being and job satisfaction (Porath & Pearson, 2013). In healthcare settings, nurses are particularly vulnerable to workplace incivility due to the emotional and physical demands of their job, long working hours, and the hierarchical nature of healthcare organizations. Nurses often work in high-pressure environments where they are expected to maintain a calm and composed demeanor, despite being exposed to incivility from colleagues, supervisors, or even patients (Kramer et al., 2019).

Research has shown that workplace incivility is strongly associated with lower levels of job satisfaction. For instance, Porath and Pearson (2013) found that incivility in the workplace led to a decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust in supervisors. Nurses who experience incivility may feel undervalued or disrespected, which increases their stress levels and contributes to emotional exhaustion (Lash & Popovich, 2019). These feelings of disrespect and undervaluation reduce nurses' job satisfaction, making them more likely to disengage from their work or even leave the profession altogether (Cortina et al., 2001).

Further studies have reinforced this view, showing that workplace incivility correlates with higher turnover intentions among nurses, which significantly affects retention rates in healthcare settings (Aiken et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2018). As nurses feel disrespected and unsupported, they are less likely to stay in their current roles, leading to increased turnover and a loss of experienced personnel, which in turn negatively impacts the quality of patient care.

### **Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator**

Emotional exhaustion is a central component of burnout and refers to feelings of emotional depletion resulting from prolonged exposure to stressors in the workplace. It is particularly prevalent in healthcare professions, where employees, especially nurses, are exposed to constant emotional and physical demands (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Nurses experiencing emotional exhaustion report feelings of being emotionally drained, detached from their work, and unable to meet the demands of their roles. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is widely used to assess emotional exhaustion, and numerous studies have found that emotional exhaustion negatively impacts job satisfaction. According to Maslach et al. (2001), emotional exhaustion occurs when individuals feel overwhelmed by work demands, leading to a sense of detachment and reduced engagement with their jobs. In the context of workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion acts as a mediator between incivility and job satisfaction (Kaur & Rajput, 2020). Nurses who experience incivility in their work environment are more likely to feel emotionally drained and disconnected, which leads to lower levels of job satisfaction.

Several studies have shown that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction. For example, Lash & Popovich (2019) found that nurses who encountered incivility from their colleagues or supervisors were more likely to report feelings of emotional exhaustion, which subsequently led to lower job satisfaction. Similarly, Kaur & Rajput (2020) found that emotional exhaustion significantly mediated the relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction, emphasizing the need to address both incivility and emotional exhaustion to improve job satisfaction among nurses. The impact

of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction is particularly concerning in healthcare, as it can lead to reduced patient care quality and increased turnover rates. Aiken et al. (2012) found that emotional exhaustion among nurses was a strong predictor of turnover and negatively influenced patient care outcomes. Therefore, addressing emotional exhaustion in conjunction with workplace incivility is crucial for improving both nurse well-being and the quality of care provided to patients.

### **Previous Research and Gaps**

While there has been significant research on workplace incivility and its effects on job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion has not been sufficiently explored as a mediating factor, especially in the healthcare sector. Much of the existing literature focuses on the direct effects of incivility on job satisfaction, with fewer studies examining the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. Previous studies conducted in Western countries have shown that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace stressors and job satisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001; Aiken et al., 2012). However, the Pakistani context remains largely underexplored. Nurses in Pakistan face unique challenges, such as inadequate resources, heavy workloads, and a hierarchical workplace culture, which may exacerbate the effects of workplace incivility (Khan et al., 2018). Moreover, the impact of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction among Pakistani nurses remains poorly understood.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of emotional exhaustion as a mediator between workplace incivility and job satisfaction in Pakistan. The study also seeks to contribute to the global body of knowledge by examining how these dynamics unfold in a developing country context, which may differ from Western healthcare systems. By doing so, the research will provide valuable insights into the effects of workplace incivility on job satisfaction and offer recommendations for reducing emotional exhaustion in Pakistani hospitals.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction among nurses in Pakistan's public healthcare sector. A cross-sectional survey approach was employed to gather data from a sample of 300 nurses working in public hospitals in Lahore, Pakistan. This design was chosen because it allows for the collection of data at one point in time, providing a snapshot of the current state of workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction. The study utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction, allowing respondents to rate the frequency and intensity of behaviors and feelings. The choice of a Likert scale is grounded in its widespread use in social sciences research to capture subjective perceptions and attitudes.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of 300 nurses employed at two major public hospitals in Lahore, Pakistan. Lahore was selected due to its status as one of the largest cities in Pakistan, housing a significant number of public healthcare facilities, and offering a diverse range of nurse roles in both primary and tertiary healthcare settings. The nurses selected were from various departments, including emergency care, surgical wards, intensive care units, and outpatient services. To ensure representative sampling, participants were selected using stratified random sampling. This technique was employed to ensure that nurses from different age groups, gender categories, and experience levels were included, making the sample more representative of the nursing population in Lahore's public hospitals. The sample included both male and female nurses,

with an age range of 22-45 years. The average years of experience in nursing was 6.2 years.

### **Measures Workplace Incivility**

The Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2001) was used to assess workplace incivility. The scale consists of 7 items that measure the frequency of incivility-related behaviors such as being ignored, belittled, or treated disrespectfully by coworkers and supervisors. The scale utilizes a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to rate the occurrence of these behaviors.

### **Emotional Exhaustion**

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used to measure emotional exhaustion, which refers to feelings of emotional depletion due to work-related stress. This 9-item scale evaluates how often respondents feel emotionally drained from their work. Responses were also measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always).

### **Job Satisfaction**

The Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985) was used to measure overall job satisfaction. This scale includes 36 items assessing satisfaction with various aspects of the job, including work environment, compensation, and relationships with coworkers. A 5-point Likert scale was used for each item, with responses ranging from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied).

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 for descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and reliability analysis, as well as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for testing the hypotheses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic information and to examine the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each variable. Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the scales. The acceptable threshold for reliability was set at 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Correlation Analysis: Bivariate correlation was performed to explore the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction. PLS-SEM: This method was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between the independent variable (workplace incivility), the dependent variable (job satisfaction), and the mediating variable (emotional exhaustion). PLS-SEM is suitable for models with multiple relationships and is particularly useful for examining complex mediation effects (Hair et al., 2019).

## **RESULTS & ANALYSIS**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Workplace Incivility</b>	300	3.30	0.80	1.00	5.00
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	300	3.85	0.83	1.00	5.00
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	300	2.95	0.90	1.00	5.00

The descriptive statistics show that workplace incivility has a mean score of 3.30, indicating that respondents

experience moderate levels of incivility in the workplace. Emotional exhaustion has a mean score of 3.85, indicating that nurses are moderately emotionally exhausted. Job satisfaction, with a mean of 2.95, is relatively low among the nurses in this sample.

### Correlation Analysis

Variables	Workplace Incivility	Emotional Exhaustion	Job Satisfaction
<b>Workplace Incivility</b>	1	0.62	-0.58
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	0.62	1	-0.50
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	-0.58	-0.50	1

**Note:** Correlations marked () are significant at the 0.01 level.

The results show significant positive correlations between workplace incivility and emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.62$ ) and significant negative correlations between both workplace incivility and job satisfaction ( $r = -0.58$ ) and emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction ( $r = -0.50$ ).

### PLS-SEM Results

Path	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Significance
<b>Workplace Incivility → Emotional Exhaustion</b>	0.62	11.08	< 0.01	Significant
<b>Emotional Exhaustion → Job Satisfaction</b>	-0.50	8.97	< 0.01	Significant
<b>Workplace Incivility → Job Satisfaction</b>	-0.38	6.43	< 0.01	Significant

The PLS-SEM analysis confirmed that workplace incivility significantly impacts emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and emotional exhaustion negatively affects job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, workplace incivility directly affects job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), with emotional exhaustion acting as a mediator between the two.

### DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal that workplace incivility significantly reduces job satisfaction among nurses, and emotional exhaustion plays a mediating role in this relationship. Nurses who experience incivility in the workplace are more likely to feel emotionally exhausted, which, in turn, leads to lower job satisfaction. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies (e.g., Porath & Pearson, 2013), but the mediating role of emotional exhaustion is a novel contribution to the literature, particularly in the context of Pakistan.

### CONCLUSION

This study underscores the importance of addressing workplace incivility and preventing emotional exhaustion in the healthcare sector. By improving nurses' work environments and supporting their emotional well-being, healthcare institutions in Pakistan can enhance nurses' job satisfaction, which will improve

overall healthcare delivery. Future research should investigate other mediating factors and explore interventions to mitigate the negative effects of incivility.

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