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Short-term effects of experienced and observed incivility on mood and self-esteem

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ABSTRACT

Research on workplace incivility principally has focused on targets' reactions to uncivil behaviours. Moreover, incivility's consequences have been separately investigated for targets and observers. In the present diary study ($N = 164$), we examined the short-term effects of experienced incivility on targets' angry mood, depressive mood, and self-esteem. Also, we investigated the interplay between experienced and observed incivility in predicting targets' well-being. Specifically, we expected daily observed incivility to buffer the detrimental effects of experienced incivility on depressive mood and self-esteem. Findings revealed that daily experienced incivility positively predicted targets' angry and depressive mood. Moreover, observed incivility did moderate experienced incivility's effects at the between-person level. In line with our assumption, the effects of experienced incivility on depressive mood and self-esteem were weaker for targets who observed frequent incivility. In general, our findings confirmed the detrimental effects of experienced incivility on well-being and support the buffering role of observed incivility.

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Experienced incivility; observed incivility; negative mood; self-esteem; diary study

Workplace incivility is a common antisocial behaviour affecting employees' well-being, attitudes, and behaviours (Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016). Previous research has mostly focused on direct targets of incivility, and only a few studies have investigated observers' psychological reactions to events of incivility. In addition, although employees likely both experience and observe incivility in daily life, previous research has focused either on experienced or observed incivility but not both, ignoring the possibility that their interplay might affect targets' psychological reactions to incivility they experience directly (for an exception, see Schilpzand, Leavitt, et al., 2016).

The present study offers three contributions to the literature on workplace incivility. First, this study addresses the limits of the single perspective in examining employees' reaction to incivility by shedding light on the interplay between experienced and observed incivility. As we detail below, we argue that the effects of experienced incivility depend on, among other conditions, whether targets also observe other colleagues getting treated rudely. More specifically, based on Kelley's covariation model (Kelley & Michela, 1980), we suggest that the effects of experienced incivility on well-being should be particularly strong when the target is the only victim – in other words, when the target

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does not observe others getting treated rudely. By taking into account employees' social context, the current study aims to advance knowledge of the boundary conditions for the relationship between daily experienced incivility and psychological strain.

Second, this study broadens our understanding of employees' affective reactions to incivility by distinguishing between two specific negative emotions, namely angry and depressive moods. Although previous research mostly focused on general negative mood, scholars have repeatedly called on the field to consider the multidimensionality of mood and to examine specific affective reactions (Bunk & Magley, 2013; Yochi & Lazarus, 2001). Differentiating among specific negative emotions is crucial because different emotions lead to specific behaviours. For example, Porath and Pearson (2012) showed that anger was most strongly related to aggressive behaviours, whereas sadness led to withdrawal. In addition, and based on Smith and Lazarus (1990), experiencing and observing incivility are negative events that are likely to trigger different affective reactions. Extending previous research that examined specific affective reactions among targets of incivility (Bunk & Magley, 2013; Porath & Pearson, 2012), the current study aims to examine targets' specific and short-term affective reactions to incivility.

Third, it expands our knowledge of the effects of experienced incivility by assessing its impact on employees' self-esteem. Although self-esteem has largely been ignored as an outcome in stress research for a long time, it has more recently attracted scholars' interest (Semmer et al., 2019; Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018), because, among other reasons, self-esteem is an important predictor of individuals' psychological well-being (Sowislo & Orth, 2013) and work-related outcomes (Kuster et al., 2013). Thus, this study aims to explore the potential effects of incivility on self-esteem.

Workplace incivility and psychological well-being

Workplace incivility is a social stressor defined by Andersson and Pearson (1999) as "low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (p. 457). Examples of uncivil behaviours at work include ignoring someone's request for help, putting someone down, or making someone's idea its own. Such misbehaviours may thwart employees' basic psychological needs like the need to be respected and appreciated and to belong to a significant group, and thus may lead to poor psychological well-being such as negative mood. Whereas most studies have focused on general negative mood, some have considered its multidimensionality and shown that anger was the most common reaction to experienced incivility (Bunk & Magley, 2013; Porath & Pearson, 2012). Interestingly, targets only rarely reported feelings of sadness in a study where participants described their feelings regarding an uncivil event that bothered them the most in the last year (Bunk & Magley, 2013). Based on this, Bunk and Magley (2013) raised the question of "whether fear and sadness are useful emotions to use when investigating reactions to incivility" (p. 100). However, based on the theoretical work of Yochi and Lazarus (2001), we believe that both anger and sadness are critical emotional states employees are likely to experience when facing incivility.

The effect of experienced incivility on negative mood

According to the transactional model of stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), individuals affectively react to events perceived as threatening to their well-being. Of particular

interest, workplace incivility may harm psychological needs like the need to be both respected and appreciated by others (Smith & Lazarus, 1990; see also Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and, consequently, trigger different affective reactions. Thus, we expect that experiencing incivility triggers both angry mood and depressive mood.

Angry mood

Uncivil behaviours signal a disregard for the target's person or behaviours, which may be particularly harmful to the target's ego (Baumeister et al., 1996). According to Smith and Lazarus (1990), anger is likely to arise when individuals feel offended by the instigator and think that they do not deserve to experience such mistreatment. Therefore, anger constitutes an affective response to an ego threat that is perceived as not self-caused.

Related to this, Caza and Cortina (2007) found that employees perceived uncivil behaviours as unfair because they violated the norm of reciprocity for mutual respect. According to justice research, anger is a common affective response to a situation perceived as unfair (Mikula et al., 1998). This is consistent with the incivility spiral proposed by Andersson and Pearson (1999), which posits that, among employees, an initial uncivil behaviour, perceived as derogatory and unfair by targets, may trigger angry feelings against the injuring party and paves the way for an exchange of multiple coercive behaviours. In line with these theoretical frameworks, Bunk and Magley (2013) found that experienced incivility was positively related to anger. Therefore, based on theory and empirical findings, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 1a: Experienced incivility is positively related to angry mood.

Depressive mood

Although experienced incivility may trigger negative emotions towards the instigator, such as anger, it may also induce negative emotions towards oneself. According to Smith and Lazarus (1990), individuals who feel at least partially responsible for a stressful situation and hence attribute the cause of such a situation to their personal characteristics or past behaviours are likely to feel sadness and depression. Baumeister et al. (1996) consistently stated that when individuals internalise the negative appraisal an instigator directs at them, they may blame themselves, resulting in helplessness and sadness. Feelings of sadness may also arise when individuals experience or anticipate the loss of an important resource to their personal well-being. As acts of incivility are derogatory and therefore signal threats to one's social standing – an important resource (Hobfoll, 2001) – targets may feel sadness.

In line with these theoretical frameworks, some cross-sectional studies have found a positive relationship between experienced incivility and depressive mood (Cortina et al., 2001; Porath & Pearson, 2012). But, as mentioned above, targets of incivility only rarely reported feelings of sadness in Bunk and Magley's (2013) study where participants were asked to report an uncivil event happening in the last year that most bothered them. In that study, they retrospectively reported their feelings about a specific event. However, research on memory and emotions shows that episodic memory fades over time and individuals increasingly rely on other information to reconstruct how they must have felt in the past (Schacter, 2001). It is therefore possible that the reconstructive process may result in biased reports of the intensity and quality of the experienced

emotion. To overcome this potential methodological issue and to capture the effect of incivility on fleeting feelings, we used an experience sampling approach. Based on theory and these previous empirical findings, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 1b: Experienced incivility is positively related to depressive mood.

The effect of experienced incivility on self-Esteem

Acts of incivility may not only impair targets' mood but also affect how targets think about themselves. Research on more intense forms of antisocial behaviour demonstrated that employees who experienced interpersonal conflict reported lower levels of self-esteem (Frone, 2000). One might wonder, however, whether milder forms of antisocial behaviours, such as incivility, may also impact targets' self-esteem in the short run. Although organisations still have the tendency to underestimate the detrimental effects of incivility (Huy, 2016), we argue that not only intense forms of mistreatment but also daily experiences of incivility might affect how targets evaluate their overall worth as a person.

Self-esteem has both a stable and a fluctuating aspect, the first corresponding to an individual's tendency to have general low or high self-esteem (trait self-esteem), whereas the second (state self-esteem) represents the intraindividual variation in self-esteem relative to his or her usual level. Although for a long time stress research mainly focused on the trait of self-esteem as resource to cope with stressful events (De Longis et al., 1988), more recent studies have shown that state self-esteem varies as a function of daily interpersonal negative events such as abusive supervision (Burton & Hooper, 2006).

According to the stress-as-offense-to-self approach (Semmer et al., 2007), derogatory behaviours represent a threat to one's social self-esteem. Sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) consistently argues that individuals interpret others' behaviours so as to evaluate their own social standing within the group and that self-esteem is particularly sensitive to this evaluation. Specifically, self-esteem tends to increase as individuals feel valued and accepted by others and conversely decreases when they feel devalued or rejected. Based on these theoretical frameworks and the findings of Caza and Cortina (2007), which showed that targets of incivility feel socially excluded, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 1c: Experienced incivility is negatively related to self-esteem.

Interplay between experienced and observed incivility

Existing research suggests that individuals react differently to experienced incivility depending on their personality traits (e.g. emotional stability and locus of control; Zhou et al., 2015) and work characteristics (e.g. social support; Miner et al., 2012). Extending this line of research, we expect that targets' social context also impacts their affective reaction to the experience of incivility. More specifically, we assume that the effects of experienced incivility depend on whether the target also observes other colleagues getting treated rudely or not.

Previous research on workplace incivility has largely focused on the direct experience of incivility; the number of studies examining observed incivility is rather small (for an

overview, see Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016). The few existing studies on observed incivility were mainly interested in testing whether observing incivility may have similar detrimental effects as directly experiencing it and found that observing incivility was also related to poor well-being (Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016). Extending this line of research, we examined whether observing incivility may alter (i.e. moderate) the effects of experienced incivility.

Some might expect that the effect of experienced incivility would be stronger when targets of incivility also observe others being treated rudely. An organisational culture that tolerates incivility may act as a stressor depleting employees' resources that are necessary to deal with experiencing incivility. However, preliminary research on the moderating role of work stressors is mixed. Zhou et al. (2015) showed that the effect of incivility on negative affect was stronger when the targets of incivility faced high organisational constraints, but it was weaker when they faced high workload. Noteworthy, Zhou et al. used a generic measure of negative affect and did not differentiate between specific emotions. However, as mentioned above, differential emotions might be experienced depending on who is perceived as responsible for the mistreatment.

Previous research on antisocial behaviour suggests that targets often tend to blame themselves when making sense of the instigator's misconduct (Garnefski et al., 2001), which then may lead, as outlined, to depressive symptoms and low self-esteem (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Of importance for the present study, the attribution of blame likely depends on the social context. According to Kelley's covariation model (Kelley & Michela, 1980), when a negative event is experienced by many people (i.e. distinctiveness is low), then targets tend to seek the causes of that negative event outside themselves. In line with this reasoning, in an experimental study, targets of incivility blamed themselves less when the instigator behaved rudely towards both the target and other team members than when the target was the only victim (Schilpzand, Leavitt, et al., 2016). Similarly, in a recent field study, the effect of experienced incivility on self-blame was weaker for employees who observed high levels of incivility towards their colleagues than for employees who observed little incivility (Tong et al., 2019). Thus, when targets of incivility observe others also being treated rudely (i.e. they are not the only victim), they blame themselves less for the event – and hence they should feel less sad and worthless than if they were the sole target.

Based on theory and these first empirical findings, we therefore assume that the effect of experienced incivility on depressive mood and self-esteem depends on the level of observed incivility towards others at work. More specifically, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 2: The effect of experienced incivility on (a) depressive mood and (b) self-esteem is weaker when observed incivility is high than when it is low.

In sum, the present research examined the short-term effects of experienced incivility on angry mood, depressive mood, and state self-esteem. Moreover, we investigated whether the effects of experienced incivility depend on the level of observed incivility. Given that mood and self-esteem are fleeting states that may fluctuate quickly, we conducted a diary study. Various scholars have noted that diary studies focusing on short-term fluctuations within individuals are particularly well suited to examining psychological processes (Hamaker, 2012).

Method

Participants and procedure

Two hundred and forty Swiss employees in diverse professional fields, including marketing, education, healthcare, and administration, working at least 25 h per week (60% of full-time employment), were recruited with the help of master's-level students and invited to participate in a diary study. Participants were first sent a link to their email addresses to fill in a baseline survey. The next Monday, they started the diary study by filling in two daily surveys over a period of 10 workdays (weekend days excluded). Specifically, the morning survey (sent at 6:00 am each workday) measured morning angry mood, depressive mood, and self-esteem, and participants filled it out before starting to work. The end-of-work survey (sent at 4:00 pm) measured end-of-work angry mood, depressive mood, and self-esteem as well as experienced and observed incivility, and participants filled out this survey before leaving the workplace. Participants could fill in the daily surveys within a window of four hours. Finally, at the end of the data collection, participants were offered individual feedback and took part in a drawing to win a gift card worth 100 Swiss francs.

In the initial sample, 27 out of the 240 participants did not fill in the baseline survey (response rate: 89%). Moreover, 8 participants were omitted from the analyses due to incompatibility with the eligibility criteria (i.e. working less than 25 h per week) and 41 due to providing insufficient daily data (i.e. completing fewer than three end-of-work surveys), resulting in a final sample size of 164 participants, who filled in 1380 morning and 1283 end-of-work surveys (response rates of 84% and 78%, respectively).

Fifty-seven percent of the participants were women, with a mean age of 32.74 years ($SD = 11.68$) and mean tenure in the current job of 5.91 years ($SD = 8.81$). Educational degrees varied from secondary school diplomas to doctorate degrees (with 62% having any university degree). Twenty-six percent were supervisors, and the average working hours per week was 41.05 h ($SD = 4.92$).

Measures

The original English scales were translated into French by a research assistant fluent in French and were back-translated into English by a native English speaker. Divergences between translations were discussed to define the more relevant French translation.

Daily experienced incivility. We assessed experienced incivility using three items from Hershcovis et al. (2017). At the end of the workday, participants indicated how often they personally experienced incivility during the day. A sample item was "Today, have you been in a situation where your supervisor or a colleague ignored you?" Responses ranged from *never* (1) to *many times* (5). Within-person reliability, calculated according to Shrout and Lane (2012), was .60.

Daily observed incivility. We assessed observed incivility using the same three items we used for experienced incivility but adapted them to the bystander's perspective. At the end of the workday, participants indicated how often they observed incivility during the day. A sample item was "Today, have you observed or been told of a situation in which your supervisor or a colleague ignored someone?" Responses ranged from *never* (1) to *many times* (5). Within-person reliability was .70.

State angry mood. We assessed angry mood using three items from the Profile of Mood States scale (POMS) from McNair et al. (1981) (item selection by Cranford et al. 2006). In the morning and before leaving work, participants indicated the extent to which they felt “angry,” “resentful,” and “annoyed.” Responses ranged from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). Within-person reliability estimates of morning and end-of-work measures were .63 and .76, respectively.

State depressive mood. We assessed depressive mood using three items from the Profile of Mood States (POMS), with item selection by Cranford et al. (2006) and McNair et al. (1981). In the morning and before leaving work, participants indicated the extent to which they felt “sad,” “hopeless,” and “discouraged.” Responses ranged from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). Within-person reliability estimates of morning and end-of-work measures were .68 and .71, respectively.

State self-esteem. We assessed state self-esteem using five items from the self-esteem scale from Rosenberg et al. (1989). In the morning and before leaving work, participants indicated how they felt about themselves. A sample item was “At the moment, I am satisfied with myself.” Responses ranged from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). Within-person reliability estimates of morning and end-of-work measures were .50 and .54, respectively.

Results

Data analysis

Results from null models indicate that the within-person variances of the Level 1 variables ranged from 32% to 70%, showing that there is considerable fluctuation in employees’ well-being over the course of two weeks. The main objective of the current study was to examine short-term effects of incivility on well-being at the within-person level. Therefore, all (daily) predictors were person-mean-centered, implying that the coefficients for these variables reflect the effect of a person being above or below (e.g. experiencing more or less incivility) his or her own mean for that variable across days. Thus, between-person variance in these variables was removed, and an interpretation of the results in terms of stable differences between persons could be ruled out. Average levels of experienced and observed incivility, however, are neglected by person-mean-centering.

Although it was not the main focus of the present study, we also examined the effect of interindividual differences with respect to the level of experienced and observed incivility. According to various authors (e.g. Hamaker, 2012), it is critical to consider within-person and between-person relationships simultaneously because the relationship between two constructs at the within-person level may differ from the relationship between the analogous constructs at the between-person level in size or sign. To test the effect on the between-person effects, we used the aggregated daily measures of experienced and observed incivility as between-person variables, which were grand-mean-centered.

To model change and to account for the auto-regressive effects of the outcomes (i.e. mood and self-esteem), we controlled for mood and self-esteem in the morning. We used the restricted maximum-likelihood procedure to estimate the fixed and random parameters. In particular, we modelled experienced and observed incivility as random

slopes and the interaction effects as well as the control variables (i.e. well-being in the morning) as fixed slopes. We used two-tailed tests for testing our hypotheses.

Testing of hypotheses

Descriptive statistics and correlations for the main study variables appear in [Table 1](#). Of particular interest, within-person experienced incivility was positively related to end-of-work angry mood and depressive mood and negatively related to end-of-work self-esteem.

Results from multilevel regression analyses appear in [Table 2](#). Within-person, and in line with hypotheses 1a and 1b, daily experienced incivility positively predicted end-of-work angry mood ($B = 0.63, p < .001$) and depressive mood ($B = 0.27, p = .014$), controlling for morning states. However, it did not predict end-of-work self-esteem ($B = -0.13, p = .116$), thus hypothesis 1c was not supported. Moreover, daily observed incivility did not moderate the effects of experienced incivility on end-of-work depressive mood and self-esteem. For this reason, hypothesis 2 was not supported.¹

With regard to between-person effects, aggregated experienced incivility was positively related to angry mood ($B = 0.84, p < .001$) and depressive mood ($B = 0.98, p < .001$) and negatively related to self-esteem ($B = -0.85, p = .003$). Moreover, and in line with our assumption, there were significant interactions between observed and experienced incivility for depressive mood and self-esteem. Simple slope tests, using the tool for probing interactions in multilevel modelling from Preacher et al. (2006), indicated that the effect of experienced incivility on depressive mood was weaker among targets who reported high observed incivility ($B = 0.81, p < .001$) than among those targets who reported low observed incivility ($B = 1.15, p < .001$; see [Figure 1](#), left side). Similarly, the effect of experienced incivility on self-esteem was weaker among targets who reported high observed incivility ($B = -0.67, p < .001$) than among those who reported low observed incivility ($B = -1.03, p < .001$; see [Figure 1](#), right side).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effects of experiencing workplace incivility on targets' psychological well-being and whether observing co-workers being treated rudely may alter the targets' reactions. Our findings indicate that targets of incivility likely experience both angry and depressive mood. Addressing Bunk and Magley's (2013) question of the usefulness of studying sadness when investigating reactions to incivility, we therefore believe it is worth studying depressive mood (sadness being a part of it) in the context of incivility. That said, it is worth mentioning that, consistent with past research (Bunk & Magley, 2013), it seems that the effect of experienced incivility on anger was stronger than on depressive mood (for anger: $B = 0.63, \beta = .27$; for depressive mood: $B = 0.27, \beta = .12$). Moreover, observed incivility was related only to angry mood, thus, arguably, anger is a key emotion in the context of workplace incivility.

Unexpectedly, experienced incivility was unrelated to self-esteem at the end of the workday, in contrast with other studies showing that interpersonal conflicts may negatively affect employees' self-esteem (Frone, 2000). Our findings therefore suggest that rather mild forms of interpersonal mistreatment like uncivil behaviours mainly trigger

Table 1. Means (*M*), Standard Deviations (*SD*), and correlations for main study variables within each level.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i> ₁	<i>SD</i> ₂	ICC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Experienced incivility	1.09	0.24	0.26	0.46		.33*	.05	.03	.01	.32*	.18*	-.13*
2. Observed incivility	1.15	0.34	0.29	0.36	.64*		.02	.01	-.04	.13*	.06	-.03
3. Morning angry mood	1.16	0.34	0.26	0.30	.59*	.32*		.29*	-.25*	.14*	.12*	-.03
4. Morning depressive mood	1.25	0.38	0.39	0.46	.29*	.14	.60*		-.36*	.13*	.23*	-.10*
5. Morning self-esteem	4.11	0.34	0.51	0.68	-.20*	-.07	-.22*	-.54*		-.06	-.09*	.17*
6. End-of-work angry mood	1.21	0.42	0.41	0.39	.69*	.46*	.80*	.44*	-.22*		.45*	-.24*
7. End-of-work depressive mood	1.27	0.43	0.41	0.41	.42*	.24*	.62	.84*	-.53*	.59*		-.40*
8. End-of-work self-esteem	4.14	0.38	0.50	0.62	-.19*	-.07	-.21*	-.49*	.91*	-.22*	-.57*	

Notes: *SD*₁ = standard deviations within-person, *SD*₂ = standard deviations between-person. Between-person correlations are below the diagonal, within-person correlations are above the diagonal.

Level 1 *N* = 1165–1380; Level 2 *N* = 164.

**p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Table 2. Multilevel analyses predicting angry mood, depressive mood, and self-esteem.

	Angry mood		Depressive mood		Self-esteem	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
<i>Intercept</i>	1.22*	0.02	1.31*	0.03	4.10*	0.04
<i>Within-person effects</i>						
DV in the morning	0.12*	0.04	0.27*	0.03	0.16*	0.04
Experienced incivility	0.63*	0.11	0.27*	0.11	-0.13	0.08
Observed incivility	0.14*	0.04	0.04	0.04	-0.02	0.04
Experienced × observed incivility	-0.15	0.09	-0.09	0.09	0.03	0.08
<i>Between-person effects</i>						
Experienced incivility	0.84*	0.17	0.98*	0.21	-0.85*	0.28
Observed incivility	0.05	0.10	0.02	0.13	0.09	0.18
Experienced × observed incivility	0.16	0.14	-0.61*	0.19	0.65*	0.26

Notes: DV = Dependent variable. Main effects of experienced incivility and observed incivility were set as random and the interaction term as fixed.

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

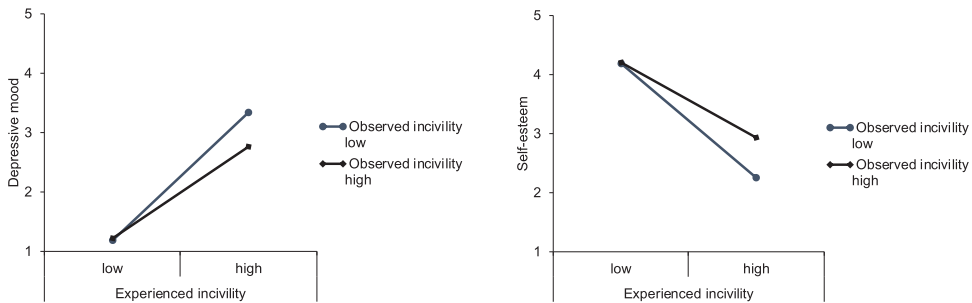


Figure 1. Interaction between experienced and observed incivility in predicting depressive mood and self-esteem at the between-person level.

negative emotions but do not affect how targets evaluate themselves, at least not in the short run. It is plausible to assume that the process that leads targets to feel socially rejected requires time, and single episodes of incivility are unlikely to threaten one's self-esteem. However, more chronic exposure to incivility may cause feelings of social rejection and a drop in self-esteem. In line with this reasoning, experienced incivility was associated with depressive mood and self-esteem at the between-person level. Thus, individuals who generally experienced high levels of incivility not only reported higher levels of depressive mood but also lower levels of self-esteem than individuals who experienced low levels of incivility.

On the between-person level, we also found the postulated interaction effect of experienced and observed incivility. For targets who often observed others being treated rudely, the effect of experienced incivility on depressive mood and self-esteem was weaker than for targets who rarely observed others being mistreated. This finding is in line with the findings of Schilpzand, Leavitt, et al. (2016) and Tong et al. (2019) and provides support for Kelley and Michela's (1980) model of attribution. Targets of incivility who know they are not the only victims likely attribute the mistreatment to an external cause (e.g. the perpetrator) and hence are less likely to question their own social standing and worth. Interestingly, we did not find these buffering effects on a daily level. One explanation

for this unexpected finding might be that on a daily basis, targets mainly focus on their personal experience with incivility and do not pay much attention to others' experiences. However, across days, they may become more attentive and include information concerning their close social context in their attributions. Overall, these findings highlight the existence of an interplay between experienced and observed incivility in predicting targets' well-being and the importance of taking into account the close social context in which employees experience incivility.

The present findings also have practical implications, and recommendations based on them can guide occupational health professionals' practice. First, the findings corroborate past research showing that workplace incivility has detrimental effects on targets' psychological well-being, which implies that managers should rapidly intervene to keep strain from developing among workers. Second, given the predominance of anger, regularly measuring the level of counterproductive work behaviours among co-workers would allow the supervisors to detect the beginning of a potential incivility spiral. Finally, because uncivil behaviours trigger anger among observers as well as among targets, actions aimed at reducing incivility should be made visible to all employees in order to prevent a secondary spiral that spreads incivility throughout the organisation.

Limitations and directions for future research

A limitation of this research concerns the temporal dynamic of the stressor-strain relationship. We measured negative mood and self-esteem in workers before they left the workplace, which includes a time lag between the moment when workers experienced workplace incivility and the moment when they reported on their well-being. However, we cannot be sure whether the change in well-being was caused by the experience of incivility or whether well-being actually changed before the event happened. To pinpoint the temporal order, future research may either use an experimental study design or a daily diary study design with a combination of a time-based design (with repeated measures of well-being) and an event-based design where participants are invited to record their emotional states just after having experienced incivility (see Bolger et al., 2003).

Second, the within-person reliability of the self-esteem measure was low, which may explain why we found no effect of incivility on self-esteem at the within-person level. It is noteworthy that we used an established measure of self-esteem (Rosenberg et al., 1989) that has been used in diary studies in social psychology (e.g. Nezlek & Gable, 2001) and work psychology (e.g. Eatough et al., 2016). That said, Rosenberg's measure was developed to capture stable interindividual differences in global self-esteem. Although we adapted the instruction to measure a state ("At the moment, ..."), the items may not be optimal for capturing short-term variation in self-esteem across occasions (for a related discussion of the measurement of within-person variation in affect, see Brose et al., 2020). Therefore, future studies may use a measure that has been developed to capture specific aspects (e.g. social) of one's state self-esteem, such as the instrument by Heatherton and Polivy (1991).

Finally, although our findings on the between-person level suggest that the level of observed incivility may affect the association between experienced incivility and targets' depressive mood and self-esteem, we did not examine the underlying

mechanisms. Although we built our assumptions on previous theoretical (Kelley & Michela, 1980) and empirical work (Schilpzand, Leavitt, et al., 2016; Tong et al., 2019) on the attribution of blame, we did not measure it. Future research may therefore assess targets' attribution (e.g. blaming the self-versus the perpetrator) and capture more details about the episode of incivility (e.g. the identity of the perpetrator, whether targets experienced incivility from multiple perpetrators or multiple times from the same perpetrator).

Conclusion

The current study confirmed the harmful effects of daily experienced incivility on targets' emotional well-being by showing that such incivility is linked to distinct negative emotions. Moreover, the study revealed the existence of an interplay between experienced and observed incivility, pointing out the importance of considering the close social context in understanding targets' reactions to incivility.

Note

1. We did not hypothesise an interaction effect between experienced and observed incivility for angry mood; nevertheless, we tested this effect in an exploratory manner. The interaction effect for angry mood as outcome was not significant, neither at the within nor at the between-person level.

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