Experienced Workplace Incivility: Developing Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator and Its Consequences Among Millennial Employees

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Incivility is a silent disruption and a contemporary workplace crisis which commonly occurs in an organization. Experience of workplace incivility is defined as the frequency of experience of low intensity by employee in relation to deviant workplace behavior with ambiguous intention to the target of the violation of workplace norms with mutual consideration. Most studies on workplace incivility have shown that occurrence of workplace incivility has negative consequences for both individual employees and the whole organization. The mediator between workplace incivility and work consequences has to be explored and investigated to more understand their correlation. Using the affective event theory will predict significantly emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between experienced of workplace incivility to turnover intention and psychological well-being. Research about experience of workplace incivility and its consequences need to be explored and adapted with millennial employees who are the back bone of organization in the future.

Keywords: experience of workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, psychological well-being, turnover intention

The labor force of Indonesia consists of 39% Millennial employees (Y Generation) which makes it the biggest group of employees (Central Bureau of Statistics Indonesia, 2016). Millennial employees in Indonesia are significant for the future of their organization as they will be the primary resources and leaders of their respective companies (Ali & Purwandi, 2016) and Howe and Strauss (2000) describe millennial employees as employees born between 1980 and 2000. On the other hand, Luntungan, Hubeis, Sunarti, and Maulana(2014) describe millennial employees in Indonesia as employees who were born in 1984 until 1995, and who have access to information technology. The biggest millennial employees’ problem in Indonesia is their high tendency to resign from their organization. Raharjo (2015) found that millennial workers have higher intention to leave their jobs compared to the X generation. Lie and Andreani (2017) stated that 65.8% millennial employee in Indonesia choose to leave their company after working for 12 months. Ertas (2015) with his research on workers at federal government also found that millennial workers were more likely leave their jobs (31%) than older generation (24%). That finding show the level of millennial turnover intention in Indonesia is higher than in America. These show that the intention to leave an organization is a serious problem among millennial employees especially in Indonesia.
Turnover intention may happen due to the incivility in working place (Cortina, Farr, Leskimen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013; Rahim & Cosby, 2016; Sguera, Bagozzi, Huy, Boss & Boss, 2016 Wilson & Holmvall, 2013; Sintiong & Morshidi, 2015). Hagerty and Buelow (2017) found that the millennial employees report more internal gossiping and negative peer interaction than their older counterparts. Millennial employees have unique characteristics such as result oriented, influential in the social environment of working decision, directive, upfront and open for communication (Luntungan et al., 2014). Millennial employees experience turnover intention if they feel uncomfortable with their relationships within their organizations, especially if they experience workplace incivility. Saragih, Widodo, and Prasetyo (2016) found that there are eight variables that predict that turnover rate of employees; salary, benefit, opportunities for promotion, supervision, relationship with work-mates, job scope, work flexibility and work location. These factors have significant effects on the organizational bond among millennial employees in Indonesia. A research conducted in Indonesia by Hartijasti and Darpita (2017) shows that Gen Y have higher intrinsic motivators than Gen X and Baby Boomers, which mostly derive from a sense of community. Gen Y is motivated to work when they are connected with friendly colleagues and supportive working community (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). Based on their research, we can conclude that relationship in the workplace is really important for the millennial generation.

A qualitative review of literature on the incivility in workplace in the past 15 years highlights three distinct types of incivility, namely, “experienced incivility, witnessed incivility, and instigated incivility” (Schilpzand, Pater, & Erez, 2014). Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley, & Nelson (2017) describe workplace incivility as rude and disrupting acts that violate workplace respected norms which happen daily. Estes and Wang (2008) differentiate workplace incivility from other acts of organizational misconducts in three ways. Firstly, they describe incivility as behaviors coordinated toward another individual, not organizations. Although the incivility damages the organizational standard, the aberrance is restricted to minor acts such as dodging or protection a co-worker. In addition, the behaviors are not purposely done to hurt anyone.

Over the past from 1998 to 2011 Porath and Pearson (2013) survey thousands of workers and found that 98% of workers have experiencing uncivil behavior. It is a worldwide issue that leads to bad consequences across countries and happens daily in various working contexts including online and home-based jobs (Schilpzand et al., 2014; Lane, 2017). Workplace Incivility has become a silent killer of an organization and a new domain of negative workplace behaviour (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Leiter (2013) refers to incivility as a temporary crisis inside working place when the employees experience difficulties to meet and get along with one another. Vagharseyyedin (2015) concludes that work environment incivility can have negative results for the casualties, witnesses, and also the culprits. Besides turnover intention, incivility can have other negative effect to organizations and employees.

Incivility is an expensive and inescapable working environment behavior that has vital negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioral result for its targets, witnesses, and ingrain (Schilpzand et al., 2014). Experiencing working environment incivility can have coordinate impacts on an employee and organizational execution (Estes & Wang, 2008). Emotional results include sadness (Lim & Lee, 2011) and increase of stress level (Adams & Webster, 2013). Workplace incivility can affect the psychological well-being of the employee (Paulin & Griffin, 2015; Leiter, Peck, & Gumuchian, 2015;
Zhou, 2014; Kent & Muurlink, 2014). From previous research above about experienced workplace incivility and its consequences not give clear explanation how it can occur. Holm, Torkelson, and Bäckström (2015) in their study was found that low social support, low control and high job demands were mediated between experienced incivility and its consequences. They highlight the urgency in the future of study different components of workplace incivility and organizational factors (Holm et al., 2015). Jimenez, Dunkl, and Peibl (2015) stated that the mediator between workplace incivility and work consequences has to be studied further in order to understand their correlation. It is important to continue research efforts that attempt to further the understanding of workplace incivility to find solution to solve problems especially for millennial employees in Indonesia. Porath and Pearson (2012) suggest that organization have to manage incivility so that they can evade major direct and indirect financial implication of it.

**Theoretical Background**

**Experienced of Workplace Incivility**

Vagharseyyedin (2015) conducts a study on the incivility at work from a reference list of 50 articles that appeared from 2012 to March 2014 describing the confluence of the concept of the incivility located in working place. Workplace incivility is a behavior of low intensity and ambiguous intent, which lacks mutual respect and physical assault. Vagharseyyedin (2015) explained “these behaviors naturally differ from aggression, violence, and bullying, and certain organization and individual factors that contribute to their occurrence”. Leiter (2013) said that there are three differences between incivility and other forms of workplace mistreatment which include surface characteristics frequency, intensity and invisibility. Occurrence of such behavior has negative outcome for individuals involved in these behaviors, organizations, and society (Vagharseyyedin, 2015). Cortina et al.’s (2017) analysis of research conducted between 2001 to 2016 on working environment concentrating on incivility investigation as discourteous, condescending, and ostracizing acts that abuse working environment standards of regard. Based on past studies, we can conclude that experienced work environment incivility is the frequency of experiencing discourteous, condescending, and ostracizing behavior in infringement of work environment standards of common norms.

**Consequences of Experienced Workplace Incivility**

Past studies show that there is a difference in result of direct and indirect correlation between experienced workplace incivility and its effects. Some past research has shown direct correlation between workplace incivility and its consequences while some studies indicate the presence of a mediator. Experienced of workplace incivility can cause direct negative outcomes like turnover intention (Sguera, Bagozzi, Huy, Boss, & Boss, 2016; Rahim & Cosby, 2016; Cortina, Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013), low psychological well-being (Paulin & Griffin, 2016; Leiter, Peck, & Gumuchian, 2015; Zhou, 2014; Kent & Muurlink, 2014), burn out (Rahim & Cosby, 2016; Zhou, 2014), and psychological distress (Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001).

Other research that find workplace incivility has indirect outcomes is from Hur, Kim, and Park (2015). Using survey, they found that emotional exhaustion has a positive impact on turnover intention among organizational employees. They also summarize that emotional exhaustion plays a mediating role in the relationship between coworker incivility and three organizational outcomes. Another research by Jonker and Merwe (2013) show that emotional exhaustion
mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and turnover intention.

Drawing upon the Affective Event Theory (AET) and the Conservation Resources (COR) Theory, this study proposes a model that explains the relationship between experienced workplace incivility, psychological well-being, and turnover intention in the model of psychological well-being in workplace incivility, through the bridging of emotional fatigue and stress.

Affective Event Theory argue that emotions has a mediating role between work events and work attitudes, individual’s positive and negative affective responses to workplace events mediated the relationship between work events and his or her moment to moment cognition and behavior (Weiss & Cropanzano, cited in Glasø, Vie, Holmdal, & Einarsen, 2011). According to AET, “how employees initially respond to events at work dictates their subjective emotional responses, which, in turn, molds their affective states and their work-related outlooks and actions”. Glasø, Vie, Holmdal, & Einarsen (2011) with their study within framework of Affective Event Theory found that bullying and intention to leave at employee are partly mediates by target’s emotional experiences.

This regression of job-related performance among service employees which is due to emotional exhaustion and low job satisfaction have been highlighted and moreover, studies have begun to establish a link between experiencing incivility and psychological well-being (Leiter et al., 2015; Paulin & Griffin, 2015; Holm, Torkelson, & Bäckström, 2016; Zhou, 2014; Kent & Muurlink, 2014) and turnover intention (Sguera et al., 2016; Rahim & Cosby, 2016; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013). However, little is known about the process that mediates this relationship.

Therefore, in the current research, the role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between experiencing incivility and consequences will be examined. In addition, this study aims to find the correlation between experience of workplace incivility and its effect. First, it will study experience of workplace incivility and turnover intention mediated with emotional exhaustion. Second it will study about experienced workplace incivility and psychological well-being which are mediated with emotional exhaustion. Third, it will study about the relationship between psychological well-being and turnover intention.

**Experienced Workplace Incivility and Psychological Well-being**

Psychological well-being of millennial employees may be caused by the relationship in the workplace. There is a significant correlation between experience of workplace incivility and psychological well-being (Leiter et al., 2015; Paulin & Griffin, 2015; Holm, Torkelson, & Bäckström, 2016; Zhou, 2014; Kent & Muurlink, 2014). An organizational culture which supports the psycho-social needs of the employees emerged as a significant factor in employee’s overall well-being (Swift, Fox, Marshall, Welch, & Willis, 2014). With semi structured interviews with 42 manage and employees, Swift et al. (2014) found that respectful personal relationship, flexible work, supportive management, and good communication are some key factors that contributes to a healthy working environment. Employees like to feel valued and appreciated, in such a way that their employers value them as a person, where they can have meaningful and respectable communication with. They are also able to express their ideas with confidence, and well supported in their day to day role. Attributes like respect, trust, care, approach, and the ability to develop personal relationship with different levels of
management are considered important by many employees. According to past research, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between experienced workplace incivility and psychological well-being.

**An Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator between Experienced Workplace Incivility and Psychological Well-being**

There is a lack of explanation on the relationship between low psychological well-being and workplace incivility. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) explained that the affective event theory regards events or experiences in work place as a mean to produce affective responses among service employees which influences their job-related attitudes and behaviors.

Jonker and Merwe (2013) provide “insight into emotion as events in the workplace which can cause positive and negative workplace experiences”. This information should be taken into deliberation with assume to wellness and emotion measurement efforts. According to conservation resources theory, which is explained when an employee faces demand in their social relationship at work and the threat of loss in resource, people will mostly suffer from adverse psychological effects which result in emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). Li, Wong, and Kim (2017) define emotional exhaustion as a special type of physical and psychological state of depletion. Emotional exhaustion is a type of strain that result from workplace stressors (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003).

Cho, Bonn, Han, and Lee (2016) state that customer incivility have the strongest power for increasing the level of emotional exhaustion, followed by supervisor incivility and co-worker incivility. Besides that, it is found that there is a negative relationship between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, and service performance. Zhou (2014) examines the effects of incivility which is experienced from multiple sources (coworkers, supervisors, physicians, and patients and visitors) on targets’ emotions, psychological, and physical well-being, as well as their own problematic behaviors in a weekly sampling taken with the employees consent. This study provides explanation on how experience of workplace incivility can have negative outcomes using Affective Emotion Theory and Conservation Resources Theory. Hence, it can be hypothesized that there is no role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between experience of workplace incivility and psychological well-being.

**Experienced Workplace Incivility and Turnover Intention**

Hartijasti and Darpita (2017) reveal that millennial generation in Indonesia is more intrinsically motivated than Gen X and Baby Boomers, especially in affiliation and community feeling. Their research concludes that millennial generation regard affiliation to friendly colleagues and good community will enhance their productivity. Millennial employees have higher tendency to stay in an organization if they feel comfortable with the interaction and community. Recent research argue that workplace incivility may have direct effects on turnover intention (Sguera et al., 2016; Smidt et al., 2016). Sintiong and Morshidi (2015) in their research show that incivilities in workplace are positively related to employees’ turnover intention especially among the trade union members, coming from the support group. Holm et al., (2015) found that experience of supervisor incivility contributed to explain negative outcomes via organizational factors. Leiter (2013) explain when people have no concrete problem solving to solve incivility they will seek to escape from that setting, hoping to find a safer work environment. Therefore, it can deduce that there is no significant relationship
between experience of workplace incivility and turnover intention.

An Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator between Experienced Workplace Incivility and Turnover Intention

There is a lack of explanation on how workplace incivility leads to increased intention to resign. This gap can be explained using AET and COR in that the events in workplace is in line with experiences to produce affective responses among service employees which influence their job-related attitudes and behaviors. This theory is already tested by Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, West, & Dawson (2006) with their study which has proven the empiric correlation between several work features and job satisfaction which were, in part, mediated, by work emotion. Study by Bunk and Magley (2013) concludes that optimism and emotion may play important roles in showing why the experience of incivility is related to job-related outcomes. It is then explained that appraisal and emotions mediate the relationship between incivility and reciprocation.

Emotions play an important role in our organization experiences (Brief & Weiss, 2002). That statement has been proven with Porath and Pearson (2012) who investigated emotional response to workplace incivility, and has a clear explanation ground theory of how the emotion can affect behavioral responses to workplace incivility. Porath and Pearson (2012) found that the target who gets workplace incivility get angry (86%), the majority report sadness (56%), and fear (46%). Lower status targets who experienced greater fear and sadness were more likely to be absent and to exit. Their finding indicates that the social context including the uncivilized experiences of the target may have important impact on people’s sadness and, ultimately their exit. With this study we can know how the emotional process from people that get workplace incivility is. Targets of incivility assess the uncivilized action, recognize the unfairness, and experiencing hurt feelings (Estes & Wang, 2008). According of their literature review, experience of workplace incivility can affect to cognition and affective impairment to a person (Estes & Wang, 2008).

Another empirical research that shows indirect consequences is Hur et al. (2015) who found that “while employee incivility positively affects emotional exhaustion, emotional exhaustion has a negative effect on job satisfaction and job performance”. They found that emotional exhaustion has a positive impact on turnover intention among organizational employees. Individuals constantly endure unfavorable mental impacts (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) which result in emotional exhaustion. That statement has evidence based on (Huang & Lin, 2017).

Her and Chieh (2017) use conservation resources theory which explain emotional exhaustion which is fully mediated between experienced of workplace incivility and turnover intention. According to COR theory, when employees encounter high level of workplace incivility, there will be emotionally overwhelmed (emotional exhaustion) and expended consequently which will enhance the turnover intention (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013; Huang & Lin, 2017). Targets of uncivil assess the uncivilized action, recognize the unfairness, and experience hurt feelings (Estes & Wang, 2008). It is then hypothesized that there is no role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between experience of workplace incivility and turnover intention.

Psychological Well-being and Turnover Intention

The earlier conceptions of healthy workplace primarily concentrated on physical safety of employees’ focusing on the physical environment and on health and safety of
employee which are unarguably the integral aspects of the concept of healthy workplace (Day, Kelloway, & Hurrel, 2014). The concept of healthy workplaces has expanded even more to include broad psycho-social aspect of well-being at work. According to Robertson and Cooper (2011), the three components of well-being are physical, social, and psychological well-being. Social well-being is “a positive and supportive social network; physical well-being is the amount of exercise, sleep, habit, alcohol; psychological well-being is our ability to handle the stresses of daily life and maintain a positive attitude and sense of purpose”. Aside from industrial accidents and dangerous working conditions, psychological well-being is the most important and work has more direct impact on psychological well-being rather than the physical or social aspect of well-being. Work that is rewarding, involving good relationships with colleagues and opportunities to feel a sense of achievement on a regular basis is a key factor in psychological well-being (PWB).

Swift et al. (2014) studies level of employee well-being among 42 employees using a face-to-face interview method. They find an organizational culture which supports the psycho-social needs of the employees which emerges as a significant factor in employee’s overall well-being. “Respectful personal relationships, flexible work, supportive management, and good communication were some of the key factors identified as creating a health promoting working environment” (Swift et al., 2014). Scanlan, Meredith, & Poulsen (2013) found that wellbeing at work is significantly associated with turnover intention. Employee who has high level of well-being have low turnover intention. Therefore it can be said that there is no significant relationship between psychological well-being and turnover intention.

**Method**

The approach in this study is going to use quantitative online survey at millennial employees in Indonesia. Population and respondent in this study were millennial employee at IT organization in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The sampling technique was a purposive sampling with judgment; employees who has born from 1985-1999 and have worked from 3 months. The instrument for this study are going use The seven-item Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2013), instrument of emotional exhaustion adapted from Maslach and Jackson (cited in Karatepe, 2013), Index of Psychological well-being at work context was assessed using a measure by Desmarais and Savoie (2012), instrument of Turnover Intention subscale from Netemeyer & Brashear et al. (cited in Hur et al., 2015). To test our hypotheses regarding the interactive consequences experienced workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion, psychological well-being and turnover intention we will use SEM-PLS (Structural Equation Model-Partial Least Square). SEM-PLS will be used because objective of this study is for exploratory study, have highly complex research models, and data does not follow a multivariate normal distributions (Peng & Lai, 2012).

**Conclusion**

A relationship has been proposed to review emotional exhaustion as mediator between experienced of workplace incivility to psychological well-being and turnover intention among millennial employees. The relationship between psychological well-being and turnover intention will be explored among millennial employees. It is hoped that the findings of this study can provide information for organization to develop a better system and policy to increase psychological well-being and reduce turnover intention among millennial employees in Indonesia. The weakness of this concept is less
reference about workplace incivility in Indonesia. To investigation of this conceptual research in Indonesia needs process of translation and cultural adaptation at instrument of each variable to ensure validation and reliability of instruments on different culture.

References


