WORKPLACE INCIVILITY PREVALENCE AND GENDER DISPARITY AMONG TEACHING STAFF OF HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING IN DELTA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study aims to ascertain the WPI prevalence level and gender disparity among teaching staff of higher institutions of learning (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) in DeltaState, Nigeria. Thus, it employs the descriptive method, adopting the ex-post-facto design. The ex-post-facto, became expedient due to the fact that the events cannot be manipulated as the have already occurred. The population of the study comprises all the state owned universities, polytechnics and colleges of education teaching staff. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select one thousand three hundred (1,300) respondents: universities 780, polytechnics 260 and colleges of education 260. Of the 1,300 respondents, 630 were males while 670 were females. Data were collected using structured questionnaires titled "Workplace Incivility Prevalence among Higher Institutions Teaching Staff Questionnaire (WIPHITSQ)". The instrument was face and content validated and was subjected to reliability test deploying Cronbach's Alpha which yielded r = 0.84. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean score and standard deviation to answer research questions and independent t-test for hypothesis testing. Findings showed that the prevalence level of workplace incivility among teaching staff of the various institutions of learning in Delta State is high; and that significant difference exists in terms of the level prevalence between male and female teaching staffers of these institutions, with females recording a higher level of incivility. It was therefore recommended that the managements of these institutions craft policies and procedures that inhibit WPI; and as well encourage gender friendly climate and culture within the institutions.

Keywords: workplace, incivility, prevalence, teaching staff, higher institutions of learning

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher learning are some of the most complex workplace systems, resulting from its multicultural, social and organizational dynamics (Efayena, 2023). The varied nature of the individuals that comprised higher institutions of learning in Nigeria; such as the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, no doubt implicate that persons of multidimensional dispositions will be present in the system. Workplace incivility (WPI) is a growing concern in academic institutions worldwide, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural, societal, and organizational dynamics may influence interpersonal relationships among staff.

Incivility can manifest in various forms, including disrespectful behavior, lack of courtesy, and any act that undermines the dignity and respect of colleagues (Andersson& Pearson, 1999).

This off course will give room to clash of personalities resulting in minor distracting and disruptive conduct withinthese institutions of learning. Incivility which is also referred to as uncivil behaviour has been observed by Ahmed (2023) to be common in academia and higher education institutions. Efayena & Avwiri (2025), Devi & Eid (2020) and Clark (2017). See workplace incivility as a range of disrespectful, impolite, or aggressive behaviour that could result in emotional or physical discomfort to individuals involved in the situations. Workplace incivility thus is a rude, disrespectful, or insensitive behaviour that may violate norms of respect in a work environment. Given the unique dynamics of higher education institutions, which involve interactions among faculty, staff, and students, incivility can profoundly impact the academic atmosphere and the overall well-being of individuals within these settings.

Incivility in higher education institutions manifests in various forms and affects the academic environment, staff relations, student interactions, and overall institutional productivity. The phenomenon, characterized by rude, disruptive, and disrespectful behavior, has become increasingly recognized in both teaching and administrative contexts.Numerous studies indicate that workplace incivility is prevalent in higher learning institutions, affecting a significant number of faculty, staff, and students. In a study by Schilpzand et al. (2016), it was found that over 60% of faculty members reported experiencing some form of incivility in their interactions with colleagues and students. Similarly, a survey conducted by Yaranon et al. (2025) revealed that 49% of academic staff experienced incivility from students, while 28% reported incivility from their peers. Incivility is not just limited to direct interactions; the perception of a toxic environment also contributes to its prevalence.

A national survey by Gerten and McKinney (2020) found that over 50% of faculty reported that incivility had become a normalized aspect of their workplace culture. Also, Ehibor&Idubor (2023) observed that uncivil behaviour is rampant among higher institutions in Nigeria. Agbaje, Arua, and Obande-Ogbuinya (2021) reported high prevalence of WPI among staffers of universities, they reported as high as on the average 72%. These figures underscore the alarming rate of incivility in higher education, suggesting that it is an enduring issue that institutions must address.

Incivility in higher education institutions manifests in various forms and affects the academic environment, staff relations, student interactions, and overall institutional productivity. The phenomenon, characterized by rude, disruptive, and disrespectful behavior, has become increasingly recognized in both teaching and administrative contexts. This literature review analyzes recent studies on the different manifestations of incivility among staff in higher education, highlighting its implications and potential strategies for mitigation. Some of the broad sub-categories of the manifestation of WPI are: verbal incivility, nonverbal incivility, disrespecting professional boundaries, passive aggressive behavior, and bullying. All these include derogatory comments, interruptions, and hostile exchanges. Several studies have documented instances of verbal abuse during faculty meetings, office hours, and in correspondence (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019). Such behavior not only discourages open communication but also diminishes morale among staff (McGee 2021).Nonverbal

behaviors, such as eye rolling, sneering, and dismissive gestures, contribute to a toxic work environment (Akinmayowa & Kadiri 2014). Research indicates that nonverbal cues can be as damaging as verbal confrontations, often leading to misunderstandings and a breakdown in professional relationships (Rosenberg et al., 2020).Disregarding professional boundaries manifests through intrusive behavior, gossiping, and undermining colleagues' authority (Gulliford, 2022). This type of incivility can create a hostile work environment, ultimately affecting staff retention and student outcomes (Rosenberg & Gauvin, 2021).Subtle manifestations of incivility, such as sarcasm and backhanded compliments, are categorized as passive-aggressive behavior. These interactions often go unnoticed but contribute significantly to workplace hostility and decrease staff morale (Thomas, 2023). The cumulative effect of such behaviors can lead to a pervasive sense of discord and anxiety among staff (Matthews et al., 2021).Bullying is a severe form of incivility that includes targeted harassment, intimidation, and constant criticism. It is often perpetrated by individuals in positions of power, creating a dissension that drastically impacts employee performance and well-being (Chappell & Di Martino, 2020). The literature highlights that bullying not only diminishes productivity but also leads to higher levels of stress and burnout (Hodgins et al, 2024). Workplace incivility is a growing concern in higher education institutions, negatively impacting job satisfaction among academia. Studies have shown that incivility can lead to increased stress levels, erosion of self-esteem, damaged relationships, and a toxic work environment.

Gender dynamics play a pivotal role in the experience of incivility among academic staff. Across sectors female workers have been found to be more aware and intolerant to uncivil conduct yet the are more at the receiving end of workplace incivility (Carmona-Cobo, Garrosa, and Lopez-Zafra, 2021). Studies suggest that female faculty members are more frequently subjected to gendered incivility—behaviors that are explicitly or implicitly tied to their gender identity (Cortina et al., 2017). For instance, research by Berdahl (2007) suggested that male faculty may perceive female colleagues as less competent, leading to derogatory remarks or undermining behaviors that reinforce gendered stereotypes. This incivility not only affects the targeted individuals but can also create a hostile work environment, contributing to higher turnover rates among female faculty (Baker et al, 2023). Agbaje et al. (2021) found that female staff of universities faces more of uncivil behaviour.Efayena and Avwiri (2025) reveals that female teachers faced a greater level of WPI and also engaged more in verbal uncivil conduct.

Research finding indicates that WPI is pervasive within academic settings globally. In the Nigerian context, a study by Annuar et al. (2021) explored the prevalence of incivility among academic staff at various Nigerian universities. Their findings revealed that both male and female staff experienced incivility, with women reporting slightly higher instances of disrespectful behavior from male colleagues, suggesting a gendered dimension to the phenomenon. Also, Adebayo and Olawole (2019) conducted a study focusing on incivility as experienced by female academic staff. Their research reveals that female staffers encountered more incidents of undermining comments and dismissive attitudes, particularly in collaborative environments where male colleagues were dominant. This gender disparity highlights the nuanced dynamics of incivility where power relations intersect with gender.

The gender lens through which workplace incivility is viewed is critical. According to Ojo and Oluremi (2020), female academic staff encounters unique challenges in higher institutions, stemming from underlying patriarchal norms prevalent in Nigerian society. Their research indicated that male staff often trivializes the contributions of female staff, leading to feelings of isolation and diminished professional efficacy among women. Moreover, a meta-analysis by Ojo et al. (2021) examined various studies on workplace incivility across different sectors, emphasizing that women in academia such as professionals, often face greater emotional and psychological impacts due to incivility than their male counterparts. This assertion aligns with findings by Kiewitz et al. (2016), who noted that women tend to internalize experiences of incivility more intensely than men, which could potentially contribute to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions among female academics. The impact of workplace incivility extends beyond immediate interpersonal relationships, influencing overall workplace culture and individual performance. A study by Nwankwo et al. (2022) in a Nigerian university indicated that workplace incivility significantly negatively affected job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational commitment among both male and female staff, albeit to differing degrees; women reported feeling more demotivated and stressed, which adversely affected their job performance and professional relationships.

Whereas the literatures indicate that studies have been carried out in the area of WPI prevalence globally and in Nigeria, none seems to have been conducted in Delta State across universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. This is the gap in knowledge which this study seeks to fill beyond just contributing to the body of literature in this regard.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, workplace incivility has emerged as a critical concern within educational environments, significantly affecting the dynamics of professional interactions and overall organizational well-being. In Nigeria's higher institutions of learning such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, etc., the prevalence of workplace incivility among academic staff presents a multifaceted problem with implications for staff well-being, institutional productivity, and student outcomes. The educational sector in Nigeria is currently grappling with numerous challenges, including insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, and political instability, all of which create a highly stressful working environment for academic staff. These external pressures can exacerbate feelings of frustration and result in increased instances of incivility among colleagues. Moreover, the hierarchical nature of academic institutions often fosters environments where bullying and incivility can flourish unchecked, with junior staff feeling vulnerable to the disrespectful behaviours of senior academic colleagues. In the context of Nigerian higher education, where academic staff plays pivotal roles in shaping the future of the nation through teaching, research, and community engagement, the negative implications of incivility can have far-reaching consequences. Students may find themselves adversely affected by a toxic educational atmosphere, ultimately compromising their learning experience and academic success.Despite the growing acknowledgment of workplace incivility as a significant issue globally, there is a notable gap in research focusing specifically on this phenomenon within the Nigerian educational context. Existing studies predominantly examine other forms of workplace aggression without exploring the nuanced experiences and perceptions of academic staff regarding prevalence of incivility. This lack of localized research restricts the ability of educational leaders and policymakers to develop effective interventions aimed at promoting civility, fostering a supportive work environment, and enhancing overall institutional health.Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the prevalence of workplace incivility among academic staff in Delta State, Nigerian higher institutions of learning, exploring its prevalence and determine its gender dynamics. Insights gained from this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interactions among academic staff, inform institutional policies, and facilitate the development of strategies to cultivate a respectful and collaborative academic culture, as well as cultivate gender friendly atmosphere.

Research Questions
1. What is the prevalence level of WPI as experienced by teaching staffof higher institutions of learning in Delta State?
2. What is the difference in the level of WPI prevalence between male and female staff of Delta State higher institutions of learning?

Hypothesis
1. Significant difference does not exist in the level of WPI prevalence between male and female teaching staff of higher institutions of learning in Delta State?

Purpose of the Study
The major aim of this study is to investigate the prevalence level of WPI among teaching staff of higher institutions of learning in Delta State. Specifically, it aims to:

I, ascertain the prevalence level of WPI as experienced by teaching staff of higher institutions of learning in Delta State;

II, determine the difference in the level of WPI prevalence between male and female staff of Delta State higher institutions of learning; and

III, find out whether significant difference does not exist in the level of WPI prevalence between male and female teaching staff.

Methodology

This study aims to ascertain the WPI level and gender disparity among teaching staff of higher institutions of learning (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) in Delta State, Nigeria. Thus, it employs the descriptive method, adopting the ex-post-facto design. The ex-post-facto, became expedient due to the fact that the events cannot be manipulated as the have already occurred. The population of the study comprises all the state owned universities, polytechnics and colleges of educationteaching staff. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select one thousand three hundred (1,300) respondents: universities 780, polytechnics 260 and colleges of education 260. Of the 1,300 respondents, 630 were males while 670 were females. Data were collected using structured questionnaires titled"Workplace Incivility Prevalence among Higher Institutions Teaching Staff Questionnaire (WIPPHITSQ)". The instrument was face and content validated and was subjected to reliability test deploying Cronbach's Alpha which yielded r = 0.84. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean score and standard deviation to answer research questions and independent t-test for hypothesis testing.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: what is the prevalence level of workplace incivility as experienced by teaching staff?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Prevalence Level of Workplace Incivility as Experienced by Teaching Staff of Higher Institutions in Delta State, Nigeria.

S/N	INCIVILITY PREVALENCE LEVEL ITEMS: the degree at which someone	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	Ignored or dismissed my ideas is	3.35	0.71	High
2	Treated you condescendingly or talked down is	3.08	0.76	High
3	Made derogatory comments about you is	3.23	0.72	High
4	Interrupted you is	3.15	0.72	High
5	Displayed blatant disrespect for you is	3.19	0.84	High
6	You were excluded from important meetings is	3.03	0.83	High
7	Failed to respond to your request is	3.13	0.73	High
8	Left out of social gatherings is	3.36	0.68	High
9	Yelled at you	2.98	0.65	High
10	Used profanity when speaking to you is	3.31	0.79	High
11	Subjected you to sarcastic comments is	3.01	0.81	High
12	Made threatening state to	3.00	0.89	High
13	Subject you to unwanted physical contact is	2.44	1.04	Low
14	Invaded your personal space is	2.47	1.01	Low
15	You were exposed to unhealthy working conditions is	2.58	0.89	High
16	Gave you silent treatment is	2.49	1.03	Low
17	Subject you to subtle insults is	3.13	0.85	High
18	Treated you unfairly is	2.69	1.07	High
19	Sabotage your work is	3.10	0.94	High
20	Used their position to intimidate you is	2.82	0.92	High
	GRAND MEAND/SD	**2.98**	**0.85**	

The result of table one 1 above indicates that items 1 – 12, 15 and 17- 20 with mean range of 2.58 to 3.36 which are above the cot off mark of 2.50 and above as high prevalence level of work place incivility as experienced by higher institutions teaching staff. However, items 13, 14 and 16 recorded low level.

Research Question 2: What is the difference in the level of workplace incivility prevalence between male and female staff of Delta State higher institutions of learning?

Table2: Mean Difference in the Level of Workplace Incivility Prevalence between Male and Female Staff of Delta State Higher Institutions of Learning Teaching.

Variable	N	Mean	STD	Mean Diff.
Male	630	58.79	3.93	
				1.51
Female	670	60.29	4.23	

The result in table 2, indicates that 1.51 is the mean difference in the level of workplace incivility prevalence between male and female teaching staff of higher institutions of learning in Delta State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the prevalence level of workplace incivility and general health level of teaching staff of higher institutions of Delta State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: Significant difference does not exist in the level of incivility prevalence between male and female staff.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis on the level of incivility prevalence between male and female teaching staff of higher institutions of learning.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Sig(2-tail)
Male	630	58.79	3.93	1298	-6.637	0.000
Female	670	60.29	4.23			

Table 3, shows the t-value of -6.637 and a P-value of 0.000. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the P-value of 0.000 was less than alpha level of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This revealed that significant difference exist in the level of incivility prevalence between male and female staff.

Discussion of Results

The study's findings reveal high incivility prevalence level among academic staff of higher institutions across Delta State. This means that the rate at which these teaching staff in these institutions experience incivility in terms of ignored or dismissed ideas, treated condescendingly or talked down, made derogatory comments about, interrupted, displayed blatant disrespect for among themselves, excluded from important meetings, left out of social gatherings, yelled at, used profanity when spoken to, failed to respond to request, subjected to sarcastic comments, threatened, subject to unwanted physical contact, invaded personal space, exposed to unhealthy working conditions, given silent treatment, treated unfairly, work sabotaged, intimidated with positions, etc were not just manifest (prevalent) but also high. These findings synced with Schilpzand et al, (2016), who found that over 60% of faculty members, reported experiencing some form of incivility in their interactions with colleagues and students. Similarly, a survey conducted by Yaranon et al. (2025) revealed that 49% of academic staff experienced incivility from students, while 28% reported incivility from their peers. Incivility is not just limited to direct interactions; the perception of a toxic environment also contributes to its prevalence.

The outcome of the instant study also collaborate those of Gerten and McKinney (2020) and Agbaje et al. (2021). Gerten and McKinney (2020) found that over 50% of faculty reported that incivility had become a normalized aspect of their workplace culture; Agbaje et al. (2021) reported high prevalence of WPI among staffers of universities, they reported as high as on the average 72%; and Ehibor & Idubor (2023) observed that uncivil behaviour is rampant among higher institutions in Nigeria. The implications of these findings are significant for institutional management, as they suggest the need for interventions to address incivility, particularly aimed at reducing gender disparities in experiences of disrespectful behaviour. Adebimpe and Bamidele (2022) proposed comprehensive training and development programs that would foster a respectful academic environment and promote awareness of the impacts of incivility. Nigeria presents a complex challenge, particularly when analyzed through a gendered lens.

Evidence suggests that female academic staff experience higher levels of incivility compared to their male counterparts, which can adversely affect their professional experiences and mental well-being. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategic interventions aimed at creating more inclusive and respectful academic environments. The current study is also in congruence with that of Ojo and Oluremi (2020) which found that female academic staff encounters unique challenges in higher institutions, stemming from underlying patriarchal norms prevalent in Nigerian society; indicating that male staff often trivializes the contributions of female staff, leading to feelings of isolation and diminished professional efficacy among women. In addition, there is agreement between the findings of this study with that of Ojo et al. (2021) that examined various studies on workplace incivility across different sectors, emphasizing that woman in academia such as professionals, often face greater emotional and psychological impacts due to incivility than their male counterparts. This aligns with findings by Kiewitz et al. (2016), which affirmed that women tend to internalize experiences of incivility more intensely than men, which could potentially contribute to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions among female academics.

Finding also shows that significant difference does exist in the level of the prevalence of WPI between male and female teaching staff of higher institutions of learning in Delta State, Nigeria; indicating a higher prevalence level among female staff and as well as more affected by the incidence of WPI in these higher institutions of learning. This finding aligns with the findings of previous study by Nwankwo et al. (2022) in a Nigerian university which indicated that workplace WPI significantly negatively affected job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational commitment among both male and female staff, albeit to differing degrees; women reported feeling more demotivated and stressed, which adversely affected their job performance and professional relationships.Similarly, this study's outcome reaffirms those of Ojo et al. (2021) and by Kiewitz et al. (2016). Ojo et al. (2021)examined various studies on workplace incivility across different sectors, emphasizing that women in academia such as professionals, often face greater emotional and psychological impacts due to incivility than their male counterparts; and Kiewitz et al. (2016), who noted that women tend to internalize experiences of incivility more intensely than men, which could potentially contribute to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions among female academics, this also in congruence with the findings of Carmona-Cobo et al. (2021).

The findings that there is high rate of WPI among teaching staff of higher institutions of learning and significant difference does exist between the rate it occurred and felt between male and female; with the female folk experiencing a share is consistent with previous studies as shown above. It is pertinent to observe that this gender difference may be due to gender-based stereotypes, biases or discriminatory behaviour; power dynamics and the fact that female are more likely to report incidence of incivility. These findings hold critical implications for management of higher institutions of learning with regards to institutional policies, training and development; and support systems.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the degree of incivility among teaching staff of higher institutions of learning in Delta State, Nigeria. It also examine the gender dynamics with regards to who experience WPI more between male and female teaching staff of these institutions. The findings show that the prevalence and manifestations of WPI is high; and that female staff experience and suffer the impact of WPI more as revealed in the statistically significant disparity between both genders. These findings imply that these institutions either lack institutional policies, training and development programmes aimed at curbing the menace of WPI in these institutions. Hence it was suggested that management of craft policies that impede as well as punish WPI among staffers.

Recommendations

With regards to the findings and discussion of the foregoing the following recommendations are made.

1. The managements of these higher institutions of learning should formulate and implement realistic and functional policies that ensure conducive, gender-friendly and respectful work atmosphere.
2. The managements of these higher institutions of learning should afford staff with training WPI diversity, and inclusion which can help staff recognize and address incivility.

3. Higher institutions of learning authorities should establish support systems for staff who experience WPI, including counseling service and reporting mechanism

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