Incivility among library staff in private universities in southwest Nigeria: a five-year evaluation

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Abstract

This study assessed incivility among library staff in private universities in Southwest Nigeria in the previous five years. The study was conducted via the survey method. Total enumeration method was employed to elicit data from all the library staff in six private universities across four states in southwest Nigeria. An online structured questionnaire adapted from Cortina (2001) was used for data collection, it was circulated via the Google Form Platform and some hard copies- 69 copies were found usable. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, tables of frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that all the 17 listed uncivil behaviors had been experienced by respondents at different times and frequencies. Such as, being shouted at, ignored, disrespected, addressed in unprofessional terms, taking credit for another's work. The total cumulative responses /frequency of occurrence across all the 17 listed uncivil behaviors, showed that a cumulative total of 401 (34.17%) respondents experienced uncivil behaviors once or twice a year, 203 (17.29%) every day, 108 (9.19%) once or twice a month, 58 (4.92%) about once a week and 50 (4.16%) several times a week while 354 (30.17%) did not experience uncivil behaviors. The most common strategy to combat incivility are, "supervisors are to effectively convey vision to subordinates for clarity of duties" 67(97.1%). Others rated equally with 65(94.2%) are: "staff should respect one another; do self-reflection/self-examination for positive change in behavior; maintain good interpersonal communication and bosses should be role models". Due punishment for uncivil behaviors ranked third, 64 (92.8%) while the least ranked was "it is better to retaliate and be uncivil to the uncivil staff, 19 (27.5%)". The study recommended policy formation, implementation, trainings and punishment for incivility, and libraries should focus more on this phenomenon.

Keyword_: Incivility, library staff, private universities, southwest Nigeria_

Introduction

Incivility has been given many meanings over the years. It is sometimes referred to as neglecting standard social norms, and acting in a manner that is disrespectful and does not regard others (Hülsheger, van Gils and Walkowiak, 2021). Incivility, also referred to as uncivil behavior, takes place in different circles of the society, including the workplace. Workplace incivility includes attitudes like ignoring someone, keeping back useful information for office work, yelling at, pressing phones instead of paying attention, refusing team work and sending nasty notes. According to Leiter, Peck, and Gumuchian (2015), incivility in the workplace has been experienced over the years. The library however, seems a sane place, quiet and often in order and one may be tempted to think that incivility is not present (Freedman and Vreven, 2016). Nonetheless, since human beings are social beings, interactions may sometimes stem out of pressure, personal bad behavior or simply disregard for social norms. Furthermore, social values seem to be decreasing and incivility seem to be on the increase (Türkkahraman, 2014).

The often quiet, serene and orderly environment of the library seems to indicate that absolute peace is enjoyed by both staff and students. However, it is inevitable, that communication between individuals and especially in the workplace, may sometimes be laced with uncivil behaviors. This may also be the experience of some university libraries in Nigeria. There are many studies on incivility but there seems to be a dearth of literature on the phenomenon in the private university library environment in Nigeria. In this vein, this study aimed to investigate incivility among library staff in private universities in southwest Nigeria in the previous five years.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the types of incivility experienced by staff in private university libraries in Southwest, Nigeria
2. Identify strategies to combat uncivil behavior in private university libraries in Southwest, Nigeria

Literature Review

Library environment has been considered to be very orderly with individuals exhibiting civil behavior to a very good measure (Gabriel, 2011). However, findings have shown that human behavior varies which may be due to some causes, it could be negative or positive (civil or uncivil), depending on the individual or circumstance. This negative behavior could be termed as incivility. Andersson and Pearson (1999), who projected the term "workplace incivility" described it as subtle aberrant behavior with unclear intent to harm anyone, but which violates workplace standards/customs for mutual respect. Pearson, Andersson, and Porath (2000) further described incivility as "rudeness and disregard toward others". Torres, van Niekerk, & Orlowski (2017) maintained that there are different types of incivility, namely, experienced, witnessed and instigated. Experienced means one is on the receiving end of the uncivil behavior, witnessed refers to when one sees/is aware of the uncivil behavior but it is not directed at him, while instigated means it is that individual that is displaying uncivil behavior to others.

Studies showed that workplace incivility is not restricted to a particular geographical location but it is a phenomenon that occurs globally and has negative adverse effect across the globe as

asserted by Schilpzand, De Pater and Erez (2016), Kendrick and Damasco (2019) and Torkelson et. al., (2015). Schilpzand, De Pater and Erez (2016) further highlighted that incivility in the workplace is a global phenomenon which permeates different types of organisations and runs through various categories and levels of staff. In addition, staff who experience incivility are psychologically stressed, which may lead to instability, unproductivity and eventual staff turnover in the organization. Torkelson et. al., (2015) however, enumerated the causes of incivility as workplace exhaustion, pressure, social work environment, official norms, and workload.

It is interesting to note unfortunately, that incivility in the library environment still seems not to have received the attention it deserves. Vraimaki et al., (2019) in collaboration noted that the incivility phenomenon in the library environment is yet to be focused on, even though it is a regular occurrence. Henry, Eshleman and Moniz (2018a) in tandem, reiterated that the job of library staff usually involves team work, whereby they train, instruct and work together on different projects. This implies, that the regular communal interactions of staff make the library more volatile to rude behaviors among staff. This assertion should therefore, make incivility a topic of great concern to library and should be focused on by both library management and staff.

Freedman and Vreven (2016) highlighted the most common types of uncivil behavior in the workplace as, someone not releasing the information needed by a colleague for effective job performance, being ignored or excluded, paying little or no attention to a statement made by someone, and showing little interest in his opinion. The study further shed light on the word ignore to mean it implies incompetence on the part of the ignored and may lead to academic down-turn for those in higher institutions. In a submission, Porath and Pearson (2013) posited that 98% of employees in North America had experienced uncivil behavior and an average of 50% encountered it at least weekly, furthermore, that incivility is often reciprocated with a worse incivility. This indicates that incivility must not be allowed to develop/remain in any institution.

Henry et al., (2018) noted that 89.14% of university library staff surveyed experienced incivility at work. In collaboration, Zimmer (2022) in a study of workplace bullying in academic libraries, established that librarians (between 76.52-90.04%), experienced various uncivil behavior from their colleagues towards them, which ranges from offensive remarks, being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger, colleagues withholding information that affects one's performance and being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when one approaches. The study further showed that librarians who indicated that they bullied others in the workplace are more likely to have experienced bullying at the hands of someone else, at some point. Conversely, those who have less experience being bullied at work are less likely to report that they bully others.

Kendrick and Damasco (2019) established that low morale experienced by librarians working in public libraries is triggered by the co-workers as abusers. The librarians who experienced the uncivil behavior are exposed to various types of incivility and start to exhibit symptoms of adverse physiology, affective, and cognitive behavior. These lead victims to engage in coping strategies, mitigation methods, and recovery (or attempts to recover low-morale experiences begin with a trigger event, which reveals a co-worker as an abuser; additionally, trigger events remain constant even if different abusers appear during the experience. Similarly, Henry, Eshleman, Croxton, and Moniz (2018) extensively explored how incivility is associated with library dysfunction. The study, which predominantly mirrors about 61% responses of librarians working in public libraries emphasised that librarians often experience bullying and mobbing

at their work places. The study also established that librarians' general perceptions of their library workplaces as dysfunctional is as a result of interpersonal workplace conflict.

Studies have been conducted in Nigeria on incivility, but very few focused on the library environment. Odiri (2024) studied the effects of incivility on tertiary institutions in Nigeria and found that incivility affects staff productivity negatively. Asemota (2022) reiterated that there is prevalence of incivility in private financial organisations than in their public counterparts. Oboreh, Emmanuel and Opatayo, (2022) assessed the effect of uncivil behaviours on job performance of academic and non-academic staff in the Faculty of Management Sciences in thirteen (13) Federal Universities in South-South and South-East of Nigeria. The study found that workplace hostility enhances negative service delivery.

Porath (2016) writing on strategies to combat incivility stated that it is virtually difficult to advance through a career unaffected by incivility. The author conducted research on over a thousand workers who had over twenty years work experience and found out that 99% of them have experienced uncivil behavior in their work places. Some of the rude behavior reported by the workers in their places of work include: ill-mannered behavior which ranges from complete meanness and undermining to ignoring people's opinions or checking e-mail during meetings. Observing or experiencing rude behavior impairs short-term memory and thus cognitive ability, and this has been shown to damage the immune system, put a strain on families, and produce other harmful effects. The author also identified some tactics to minimize the negative effect of uncivil behavior on employee performance and health. The most efficient solution according to the author is for each employee to work holistically on their well-being, instead of them making effort to change people who perpetually exhibit uncivil behavior in the place of work or relationship. The author suggested two methods for employees to stay sane irrespective of incivility in their place of work which are; making a decision to succeed in their cognitive domain, which includes progress, momentum, and constant learning; and taking a decision to succeed in their affective domain which include being excited, passionate and experiencing vitality at work.

Pearson, Andersson and Porath (2000) and Andersson and Stritch (2016) in contributing to strategies to combat incivility maintained that organisations need to make clear to their employees, the behaviors considered as uncivil, the disciplinary measures to be enforced as well as ensure there's effective and unbiased address of uncivil actions. This in essence will stop people from being uncivil under the pretense of lack of awareness. In support, Henry, Eshleman and Moniz (2018b) concluded that the job task of individuals must be clearly stated to ensure commitment, goal achievement and exclusion of confusion, misunderstanding and incivility amongst employees This advice, if adhered to, will put to rest, the assertion of Matteson and Miller (2013) that problems in the workroom are no longer of much importance to library management and therefore, much incivility is being bred in the library.

It is unfortunate however, that the unpleasant phenomenon of incivility seems to be increasing. Porath (2016) reiterated that by 2016, staff who experienced rudeness in their workplaces in 1988 had increased by 13% in 2016. This situation needs to be addressed. The literature reviewed in this study however, indicates that although many studies have been carried out by researchers on incivility in libraries, very few focused on Nigeria and specifically on private universities in Nigeria. This study intends to fill this gap.

Methodology

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Survey research method was used for the study. The study population was all library staff in private universities in southwest, Nigeria. Six universities were purposively selected across four states for the study, namely; Adeleke University, Osogbo, Osun State, Anchor University, Lagos; Bells University, Ota, Ogun State; Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State; McPherson University, Ilishan, Ogun State, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State. The instrument for data collection was online questionnaire (adapted from Cortina et al., 2001) which was circulated via the Google form platform. The online questionnaire was used in order to make accessibility easy for the respondents. The researchers sent the online questionnaire to colleagues in the understudied universities who forwarded same to their colleagues via their various WhatsApp platforms. Some copies were also printed and distributed to respondents who did not have android phones to access WhatsApp and those who could not access the questionnaire due to network challenges. Total enumeration was used and 69 respondents was recorded. The data collected were analysed using descriptive analysis such as frequency count and percentages.

Result of the findings

Table 1: Distribution of respondents

S/N	University	No. of Respondents
1.	Adeleke	14
2.	Anchor	3
3.	Bells	2
4.	Covenant	20
5.	McPherson	5
6.	Redeemers	24
7.	Not indicated	1
Total		69

Table 1 indicates the number of respondents from each university. Redeemer's University had the highest number of respondents, 24, while Bells University recorded the lowest number, 3. One of the respondents however, did not indicate his university.

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1.	**Gender**		
	Male	41	59.4
	Female	28	40.6
2.	**Marital Status**		
	Married	47	68.1
	Single	22	31.9
3.	**Cadre**		
	Librarian	24	34.8
	Library Officer	16	23.1
	Library Assistant	26	37.7
	Supportive Staff	3	4.4
4.	**Academic Qualification**		
	School leaving Certificate	7	10.1

O.N.D	11	15.9				
H.N.D	8	11.6				
Ist Degree	17	24.6				
Master's Degree	20	29.0				
Ph.D	6	8.7				

There were 69 respondents dominated by males- 41(59.4%) while females were 28 (40.6%), 47(68.1%) were married and 22(31.9%) were single. Further analysis revealed that 24(34.8%) were librarians, 16(23.1%) were in the library officer cadre, 26(37.7%) belonged to the library assistant cadre while 3(4.4%) were other staff such as administrative staff, porters and so on. The highest number of staff (29%) had Master's degree while the least (8.7%) had Ph.D.

Table 3: Types of incivility from supervisor/co-workers experienced by staff in the library in the previous five years

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Put you down or was arrogant to you in some way	28 (40.6%)	12 (17.4%) 1st	5 (7.2%)	1 (1.4%)	9 (13%)	14 (20.3%)
2	Paid little attention to a statement you made or showed little interest in your opinion	20 (29%)	15 (21.7%)	5 (7.2%)	4 (5.8%)	11 (15.9%)	14 (20.3%)
3	Made disrespectful remarks to/about you	25 (36.2%)	7 (10.1%)	3 (4.3%)	5 (7.3%)	11 (15.9%)	18 (26.1%)
4	Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately	25 (36.2%)	12 (17.4%) 2nd	2 (2.9%)	2 (2.9%)	8 (11.6%)	20 (29%)
5	Ignored or excluded you from professional friendship	22 (31.9%)	8 (11.6%)	4 (5.8%)	1 (1.4%)	12 (17.4%)	22 (31.9%)
6	Doubted your judgment in a matter over which you have responsibility	21 (30.4%)	6 (8.7%)	4 (5.8%)	3 (4.3%)	14 (20.3%)	21 (30.4%)
7	Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of personal matters	23 (33.3%)	3 (4.3%)	5 (7.2%)	5 (7.2%)	12 (17.4%)	21 (30.4%)
8	Ignored you or failed to speak to you	21 (30.4%)	7 (10.1%)	2 (2.9%)	3 (4.3%)	17 (24.6%)	19 (27.5%)
9	Made jokes at your expense	21 (30.4%)	4 (5.8%)	4 (5.8%)	6 (8.7%)	13 (18.8%)	21 (30.4%)
10	Yelled, shouted, or swore at you	24 (34.8%)	8(11.6%)	3 (4.3%)	2 (2.9%)	12 (17.4%)	20 (29%)

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11	Sent nasty and demeaning notes	21 (30.4%)	3 (4.3%)	2 (2.9%)	1 (1.4%)	14 (20.3%)	28 (40.6%)
12	Took credit for another's work	27 (39.1%)	0	7(10.1%)	0	12 (17.4%)	23 (33.3%)
13	Refused to work collaboratively	25 (36.2%)	2 (2.9%)	4 (5.8%)	4 (5.8%)	9 (13%)	25 (36.2%)
14	Frequently recalled your errors or faults	26 (37.7%)	10 (14.5%) 3rd	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.9%)	12 (17.4%)	18 (26.1%)
15	Being impatient with your questions	24 (34.8%)	5(7.2%)	3 (4.3%)	4 (5.8%)	12 (17.4%)	21
16	Giving you scolding /bad looks	27 (39.1%)	3 (4.3%)	2 (2.9%)	3 (4.3%)	13 (18.8%)	21 (30.4%)
17	Plotting against you	21 (30.4%)	3 (4.3%)	2 (2.9%)	3 (4.3%)	12 (17.4%)	28 (40.6%)
Total		401 (34.17%	108 (9.19%)	58 (4.92%)	50 (4.16%	203 (17.29 %	354 (30.17 %)

Key: 1= Once or twice a year, 2= Once or twice a month, 3=About once a week, 4= Several times a week, 5= Everyday, 6= Not applicable

Table 3 reveals the responses received as regards the types and frequency of uncivil behaviors received from supervisor/co-workers in the past five years in the library. The total number of responses were analyzed, it was revealed that all the 17 listed uncivil behaviors had been experienced by respondents at different times and frequencies. The uncivil behaviors included being shouted at, ignored, disrespected, addressed in unprofessional terms, taking credit for another's work, trying to draw staff into a discussion of personal matters and frequently recalling one's errors or faults. A total of the types of uncivil behaviors experienced in relation to the frequency of occurrence across the 17 listed uncivil behaviors, showed that a cumulative total of 401 (34.17%) library staff experienced uncivil behaviors once or twice a year, 354 (30.17%) did not experience uncivil behaviors, 203 (17.29%) experienced uncivil behaviors every day, 108 (9.19%) once or twice a month, 58 (4.92%) about once a week and 50 (4.16%) several times a week. This result shows that various uncivil behaviors were commonly experienced at different frequencies by majority of the library staff in the private universities in southwest Nigeria.

Table 4: Strategies to combat incivility in library

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4
1	Staff should respect one another	60 (87%)	5(7.2%)	0	4 (5.8%)
2	Staff must do self-reflection/self-examination for positive change in behavior	49 (71%)	16 (23.2%)	0	4 (5.8%)

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3	Maintaining good interpersonal communication	51 73.9%	14 (20.3%)	0	4 (5.8%)
4	Supervisors to effectively convey vision to subordinates for clarity of duties	48 (69.6%)	19 (27.5%)	0	2 (2.9%)
5	Bosses should be role models	54(78.3%)	11(15.9%)	0	4 (5.8%)
6	Library management should encourage team work among only those who understand one another	23 (33.3%)	19 (27.5%)	16 (23.2%)	11 (15.9%)
7	Library management should enforce team work among only those who do not understand one another	16 (23.2%)	18 (26.1%)	19 (27.5%)	16 (23.2%)
8	Trainings/Policies should be given on civil behavior	40 (58%)	21 (30.4%)	5(7.2%)	8(4.3%)
9	Due punishment must be given for uncivil behaviors	34 (49.3%)	30 (43.5%)	3 (4.3%)	2 (2.9%)
10	It is better to retaliate and be uncivil to the uncivil staff	12 (17.4%)	7 (10.1%)	29 (42%)	21 (30.4%)
11	Uncivil behavior should be reported to appropriate Bosses	41 (59.4%)	20(29%)	4 (5.8%)	4 (5.8%)

Key: 1= Strongly Agree, **2**= Agree, **3**= Disagree. **4**= Strongly Disagree

Table 4 above reveals the strategies to combat uncivil behavior in the university library as suggested by respondents. The most common strategy as agreed by 67(97.1%) of the respondents is that "supervisors are to effectively convey vision to subordinates for clarity of duties". This is followed by four different strategies that were equally rated by 65(94.2%) of respondents, namely, "staff should respect one another; staff must do self-reflection/self-examination for positive change in behavior; maintaining good interpersonal communication and bosses should be role models". The third highly ranked strategy was due punishment must be given for uncivil behaviors, 64 (92.8%) while the least ranked was "it is better to retaliate and be uncivil to the uncivil staff, 19 (27.5%)". This result implies that staff are aware that if uncivil behavior is not overlooked but given due recompense, it can be effectively addressed in the library.

Discussion of the findings

The findings of this research indicate that incivility is a common phenomenon in the libraries understudied. Furthermore, most of the respondents had at one time or the other experienced uncivil behaviors from bosses/ colleagues. This finding is in tandem with Henry et al., (2018) that 89.14% of university library staff surveyed experienced incivility at work. This also indicates that incivility runs through all categories of staff in the library. The most common types of incivility displayed were taking credit for another's work, being yelled at, being ignored and so on. This finding is in agreement with Freedman and Vreven (2016) that bosses took pleasure in taking credit of tasks done by subordinates, furthermore, ignoring someone and being disrespectful were also common. Henry, Eshleman and Moniz (2018b) in collaboration also stated that yelling is a common uncivil behavior displayed by co-workers in the workplace.

The most common strategy to combat incivility according to the finding of this research is that supervisors should give clear directives to their subordinates. This is in tandem with Andersson

and Stritch (2016) that organisations should give work schedule to their employees for clarity of task assigned. Henry, Eshleman and Moniz (2018b) also in agreement maintained that clearly stated schedules must be made available to employees to avoid confusion and incivility and promote commitment and goal achievement. It is interesting that the second-best strategy to combat incivility had four tallying responses. This means that respondents recognized the fact that each staff needs to comport himself well in the office, no matter the pressure or challenge from inside or outside the office. This is in agreement with Porath (2016) that every staff should work on himself to make the workplace a better place and that no one should be expecting people to change, or that they can change others.

Conclusion

This study was carried out to examine the prevalence of incivility in the previous five years among library staff in private universities in southwest Nigeria. The study concluded that incivility is experienced by the library staff in the understudied universities. There were different types of incivility experienced by the library staff at various frequencies and at different times over the previous five years. The respondents were however, hopeful that incivility would be eradicated or at least considerably reduced through the different strategies suggested by them. The study concluded that civility should start from and be sustained by every library staff.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby proffered:

- Library management should focus more on incivility phenomenon.
- Staff should be trained and retrained on workplace civility.
- Policies on civility should be formed, made accessible to staff and implemented accordingly.
- Library staff should learn to respect one another and avoid being uncivil.

Limitations

This study is limited to library staff in six private university libraries in southwest Nigeria. Only those who responded to the online questionnaire and those who could access the printed copies of the online questionnaire took part in the study. The study is limited to the types and frequency of incivility experienced in the past five years by the understudied staff and the strategies to combat uncivil behavior as perceived by the staff. Furthermore, the study did not examine the repercussions of workplace incivility as perceived by the respondents, such as psychological stress on staff, unfriendly work environment, instability, unproductivity and eventual staff turnover in the university libraries. On this matter, further research would benefit from an analysis of the effects of incivility on library staff, service provision and the achievement of university goals.

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