

Women put up with more bad behaviour at work, respond by working harder, study finds

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ECU research has found women are treated with more workplace incivility and respond by working harder.

New research from Edith Cowan University (ECU) and the University of New England has found women experience more rude and disrespectful behaviour in the workplace, but they tolerated it by working harder.

In contrast, men who are treated rudely tended to react by taking longer

breaks away from work and taking spurious [sick days](#).

The findings are from a study of 317 Australian white collar workers that examines workplace 'incivility'.

According to ECU School of Psychology and [Social Science](#) Senior Lecturer Dr Jennifer Loh, examples of incivility include refusing to acknowledge co-workers, general gossip, rolling one's eyes at co-workers' suggestions, [texting](#) or emailing during meetings, making derogatory comments or insulting colleagues.

Workplace incivility is considered a step down from bullying. However, the study shows it still has a significant impact on the office environment and productivity.

Dr Loh, an Organisational Psychologist, said one possible reason for [women's](#) reaction to incivility in the workplace was the importance women tended to place on a good personal and social relationship with colleagues.

"Therefore, when they are faced with incivility in the workplace – and this would generally be over work issues – women are more likely to attempt to work harder with the aim to improve their work relationships," she said.

The study confirmed that women tended to be the targets of workplace incivility more often. Dr Loh said this was partly due to gender inequality in the workplace, with women being paid less and being less likely to be in a senior position.

She said previous studies had found perceived power imbalances were a prerequisite for incivil behaviour or bullying to occur.

Women also tended to use more 'passive' [coping strategies](#) to deal with workplace incivility. Rather than being interested in punishing their harasser, they were more interested in putting a stop to the undesirable behaviour itself.

In contrast, Dr Loh said men experiencing similar behaviour would tend to either ignore their aggressor or retaliate by withdrawing from work.

She said men tended to perceive themselves as the primary bread winner of a family and would tie their personal identity to their professional life.

This identity led men to react head-on to incivil behaviour in the workplace, in an effort to head off any problems early or to withdraw from work by showing up late or losing interest in work.

"Some may question what the problem is given our results indicated women did not withdraw from work when treated rudely or without respect at work," she said.

"But it is important to remember that all employees, including women, have a right to be treated with respect and fairness at work.

"In addition, when an organisation is perceived to be implicitly or explicitly tolerating behaviour reminiscent of mistreatment, it sets the tone for its culture and influences how employees behave towards one another.

"If workplace incivility is not handled properly, it can spiral and create a hostile work environment which can lead to violence.

"Therefore, it is important that managers and upper management acknowledge the existence of workplace incivility and stop it in its track as early as possible."

Dr Loh said the next step is to conduct an international study on workplace incivility. Studies have been conducted in Australia, Europe and the US, but there is a lack of data from Asia.

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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