

What new research reveals about rude workplace emails

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With the advent of the coronavirus pandemic and remote work on the

rise, the sheer volume of email exchanges has skyrocketed. Electronic communication is efficient, but it's also distant and detached, and often can be rude.

Two studies led by a University of Illinois at Chicago researcher show that dealing with rude emails at work can create lingering stress and take a toll on your well-being and family life.

The research, published by the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, suggests impolite emails can have a [negative effect](#) on work responsibilities, productivity, and can even be linked to insomnia at night, which further relate to negative emotions the next morning.

"Given the prevalent use of emails in the workplace, it is reasonable to conclude this problem is becoming an increasing concern," said lead author Zhenyu Yuan, assistant professor of managerial studies in the College of Business Administration.

In the first study, Yuan and his co-authors surveyed 233 working employees in the U.S. about their impolite email experiences and collected their appraisals. In the second study, researchers conducted a diary study to examine the spillover effects of email rudeness on well-being, including employees' trouble falling and staying asleep.

There are two forms of email rudeness, Yuan notes. Active email rudeness—demeaning or derogatory remarks from the sender made about the recipient—suggests to the recipient that the sender has mistreated him or her. By comparison, passive email rudeness—such as ignoring a request or opinion from the sender—makes it difficult to know whether the receiver simply forgot to answer the email or actually intended to ignore it.

"Because emails are securely stored, people may have a tendency to

revisit a disturbing email or constantly check for a response that they requested, which may only aggravate the distress of email rudeness," Yuan explained.

To mitigate this stress, the researchers urge employees to "psychologically detach" from a stressful workday after receiving rude emails. The best option is to unplug from work after-hours. Whenever possible, managers also should set clear and reasonable expectations regarding email communications.

"It should be noted that efforts to address email [rudeness](#) should not be interpreted as the same as creating pressure for employees and managers to always check their [email](#) and respond to emails (i.e., telepressure)," Yuan concluded. "On the contrary, setting clear and reasonable communications norms can prove effective in addressing both."

More information: Zhenyu Yuan et al. Put you down versus tune you out: Further understanding active and passive e-mail incivility., *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1037/ocp0000215](https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000215)

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

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