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Introducing a Swedish Translation of the Workplace Incivility Scale

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Abstract

This article reports the reliability and validity of the Swedish version of the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS), a 7-item self-report measure assessing subjectively appraised workplace incivility. The scale was offered to all 490 white-collar employees in a medium size Swedish company resulting in a response frequency of 54 % consisting of 266 participants. The results indicate a good internal consistency with an alpha value of .88 comparable to the original results reported by Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001). The construct validity of the translated scale was demonstrated by a one- factor solution and correlations with theoretically relevant concepts support the convergent validity. The results support the use of the Swedish translation of WIS as a reliable and valid instrument to measure workplace incivility.

Keywords: workplace incivility scale, Swedish translation, psychometric properties

Introduction

Workplace incivility (WI) has been recognized in the field of work and organizational psychology as an important as well as common aspect of work life. During the last decade WI has become a well-studied constructs as reported in the workplace aggression literature (e.g. Blau & Andersson, 2005; Cortina, 2008; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Milam, Spitzmueller, & Penney, 2009). Although research in areas closely related to WI, such as bullying, have been extensively studied in Scandinavia, WI has to this day gained very little attention as pointed out by Göransson, Näswall, and Sverke (2011).

As a construct, WI stands out in two ways: firstly as being a low intensity behavior and secondly as being ambiguous in its intentionality. Incivility in the workplace was originally defined by Andersson and Pearson in 1999 as a “low-intensity and deviant behavior with an ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (p. 457).

Examples of WI are behaviors like failing to take the view of one’s co-worker or not greeting someone entering a room. The perception, however, of someone’s behavior is highly influenced by the social norms of the individual as well as the workplace and is therefore intensely interwoven and difficult to tease out from contextual factors (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013). Cortina et al. further argues (2001) that WI can be equated with a kind of stressor, albeit not very strong, and prolonged exposure to stressors hard to cope with, has been shown to have negative effects on both the mental and physical health.

Blau and Andersson (2005) suggested that WI is connected to downsizing, modern employee demographic as well as increased pressure on productivity. Recently the interests in this milder type of interpersonal mistreatment have moved researchers to more closely examine both the perspective of the instigators and the targets (Blau & Andersson, 2005). Spector and Fox (2003) called for an integration of these two perspectives and Hershcovis and Reich (2013) investigated further the reciprocal nature of workplace aggression.

Hershcovis (2011) has also shown there to be an overlap between WI and other related constructs, such as bullying, social undermining and emotional abuse, with respect to causes and outcomes. Keeping in mind these complexities, we find the development of a valid Swedish measure an essential step on the way toward the implementation of methods to counteract this type of problem in workplaces around us.

The Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS) developed by Cortina et al. (2001) has been widely used for measuring WI (e.g. Ferguson 2012; Sakurai & Jex 2012; Reio & Sanders-Reio 2011). The WIS has shown good psychometric properties (Cortina et al., 2001). Cortina and others have reported on positive correlation between high scores on the WIS and low job satisfaction, psychological distress as well as other negative outcomes (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012)

In order to make it possible to explore the specific field of WI in Sweden, the aim of the present study was to evaluate a Swedish translation of the WIS concerning internal consistency reliability, construct validity.

Method

Participants

A total of 490 Internet questionnaires were administered to all white-collar employees in a medium size Swedish company. The resulting response frequency was 54 % resulting in a final sample of 266 participants, 29% were women and 71% were men. Twelve non-respondents were excluded. The participants had a mean age of 43 years ($SD=9.7$). They had been employed on average for 11 years ($SD=9.6$) in the company. They worked in sales, product development etc. Of the respondents 24% had leadership positions and 9% were born in another country.

Measures

Workplace incivility was measured with a translated version of the WIS (Cortina et al., 2001). The WIS contains seven questions related to WI. Respondents rate the frequency of such experiences as “During the past year while employed at ___ have you been in a situation where any of your supervisors or coworkers made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you?” The respondents rated each item on a five-point scale from never (0) to most of the time (4). In the present study the time frame for reporting was changed from five years, used in the original WIS, to one year as discussed by Cortina et al. (2013). Cortina et al. has reported an alpha value of .89 for WIS. Due to memory distortions when reporting workplace aggression a shorter time-span is also recommended by Budd, Arvey, and Lawless (1996).

Job satisfaction was measured using one of the scales in Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) (Kristensen, 2001). The four job satisfaction questions were rated on five-point frequency scale indexing agreement. An example is “Regarding your work in general - how pleased are you with the way your abilities are used?” The respondents rated each item on a

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five-point scale from vary dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). Internal consistency reliability in the present study was $\alpha = .80$.

Mental health was also measured using one of the scales in COPSOQ (Kristensen, 2001). The scale contains five questions, such as “How much of the time during the past 4 weeks have you been a very nervous person”. The respondents rated each item on a five-point scale from never (1) to most of the time (5). Internal consistency reliability in the present study was $\alpha = .80$.

A measure of the *intention to leave* was assessed by asking the question “Have you looked for another employment during the past year” (Strolin-Goltzman, 2010).

Procedure

The study included the translation into Swedish and back-translation (Hulin, 1987) into English of the original 7-item version of the WIS. Two bilingual translators independently conducted the translation. The back-translation was done by a bilingual language expert. The back-translation revealed some ambiguity concerning the wording in one of the questions as the word “camaraderie” as well as the translation was considered too formal. (“Ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie”). A decision was made to keep the wording.

Computerized questionnaire administration. The self-report survey measures were distributed through Survey Monkey, an online survey distribution tool (Surveymonkey.com). Participants were first presented with an electronic informed consent document, which indicated that individual responses on the measures would be kept confidential. A reminder was distributed after one week. A total period of nine days was allotted for completing the survey.

Results

Means and Standard Deviations of the WIS

The means and standard deviations for the individual items as well as the totals are displayed in table 1, for all participants and for men and women respectively. A t-test revealed no significant difference between men ($M=3.40$, $SD=4.12$) and women ($M=4.03$, $SD=5.06$), concerning the total score of perceived WI; $t(256)= 1.04$, $p= .119$.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of WIS for total and individual items, for the total group as well as for men and women separately.

WIS	Total		Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
WIS-total	3.58	4.40	3.40	4.11	4.03	5.06
WIS-1	0.52	0.87	0.44	0.79	0.71	1.03
WIS-2	0.88	0.94	0.89	0.92	0.87	1.01
WIS-3	0.37	0.75	0.33	0.67	0.49	0.92
WIS-4	0.46	0.86	0.43	0.78	0.53	1.04
WIS-5	0.37	0.74	0.33	0.68	0.49	0.86
WIS-6	0.64	0.84	0.64	0.84	0.62	0.85
WIS-7	0.32	0.70	0.32	0.67	0.33	0.76

Reliability Estimates

The results show that the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the WIS was .88. Cortina has reported an alpha value of .89 for WIS. The inter-item correlations ranged from .38 to .80 with an average correlation of .52. All WIS items were highly correlated with the WIS total (corrected item-total correlations ranging from .52 to .81).

Construct Validity

The WIS is generally suggested to have only one factor and to evaluate the suggested one-factor model a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using MPLUS (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). Since the variables were clearly ordinal and not normally distributed (they were heavily right skewed) we based our estimation on Weighted Least Square (WLSMV), since this has been suggested as the best for ordered categorical data.

A structural equation model yielded satisfactory fit indices $\chi^2(14) = 53.880, p < .05$; $CFI = .988$; $RMSEA = .105$). The RMSEA value was high, but the very high CFI, almost indicating perfect fit. The standardized loadings for the 7 items were very high; between .705 and .932 showing that the items measures the same underlying construct (fig. 1).

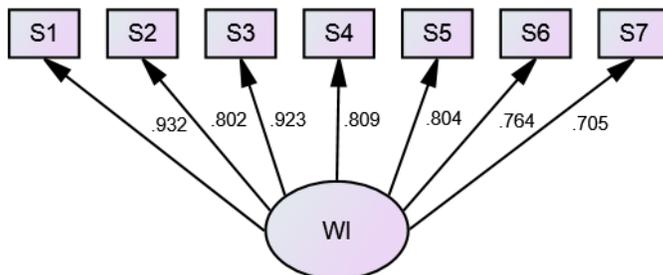


Figure 1. CFA of the Swedish WI scale based on ordinal indicator variables, standardized loadings.

Convergent Validity

To measure the convergent validity, the Pearson correlation coefficients between WI and scales measuring mental health, job satisfaction as well the question measuring intention to leave were calculated (table 2). The results showed that workplace incivility correlated positively with both mental health problems and intentions to leave the current employment. It correlated negatively with job satisfaction.

Table 2

Correlation coefficients between WI, job satisfaction, mental health problems, and intention to leave

Measure	1	2	3
1. WI			
2. Job satisfaction	-.36*		
3. Mental health problems.	.40*	-.42*	
4. Intention to leave	.23*	-.36*	.21*

Note. N=252-258 * $p < .01$

Discussion

This study concerns the translation and psychometric evaluation of the Swedish version of the Workplace Incivility Scale. The development of the Swedish version was successful in that the translation process yielded good forward and backward translation. Our results indicate that the Swedish version of the WIS is a highly reliable instrument for measuring incivility as appraised by the individual.

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The Swedish version showed high reliability in terms of internal consistency on par with the value obtained by Cortina et al. (2001). The results also indicate that the translated scale has satisfactory construct validity, the suggested one-factor solution was clearly supported by the CFA, one of the fit indices revealed an excellent fit. In addition convergent validity was found as WIS correlated with the theoretically relevant concepts job satisfaction, mental health problems and intention to leave. WIS was positively related to mental health problems and intention to leave and negatively related to job satisfaction.

There are studies showing that more women than men report being victims of WI (Cortina et al., 2001). In our study we found no significant differences between men and women. Further studies are needed in Sweden to explore if this result is generalizable.

A shortcoming of the present study is that it was conducted in one organization only, which limits the possibility to generalize the results to all organizational settings. This is probably not a problem for the results concerned with the homogeneity and construct validity presented in this report, but the relation to criteria like intention to leave, job satisfaction and mental health problems could possibly interact with the organizational context. Also, the repeatedly shown difference between men and women in other countries, not shown in the present organization, suggest that gender is a factor that interacts with the organizational context. It therefore would be of value to replicate the results in other organizations, e.g. public organizations and/or organizations dominated by women. In addition, other types of validity such as discriminative validity could be tested in further attempts to assess the psychometric properties of a Swedish translation of the WIS. Future directions might also entail repeated measurements to estimate the test-retest reliability of the scale.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to assess the psychometric properties of a Swedish translation of the WIS (Cortina et al., 2001). The results of the study support that the Swedish version of the WIS is a reliable and valid instrument for measuring perceived incivility in the workplace. As only few studies concerning milder forms of mistreatment in the workplace such as incivility has been conducted in Scandinavia, the translation and evaluation of the Workplace Incivility Scale can hopefully stimulate further research.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Har du under det senaste **året** som du varit anställd i nuvarande organisation varit med om att någon av dina chefer eller arbetskamrater:

-
1. Varit förödmjukande eller nedlåtande mot dig?
 2. Inte lyssnat till vad du sagt eller inte visat intresse för din åsikt?
 3. Gett dig nedlåtande eller förolämpande kommentarer?
 4. Tilltalat dig på ett oprofessionellt sätt, antingen inför andra eller privat?
 5. Ignorerat dig eller uteslutit dig från kollegialitet?
 6. Ifrågasatt din bedömning angående något som du ansvarar för på jobbet?
 7. Försök att dra in dig i en oönskad diskussion kring personliga frågor?

Svarsalternativen var: *aldrig* (=0), *allt som oftast* (=4).