Take the bull by the horns! The role of spiritual leadership and dark triad toward workplace incivility

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Abstract

Purpose – *Workplace incivility has become a global issue; therefore, this study aims to investigate how spiritual leadership can help employees to overcome uncivil behaviors in the workplace. Specifically, the authors explored the mediating mechanism between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility through workplace spirituality. The authors further examined how negative personalities (i.e. Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) moderate workplace spirituality and workplace incivility.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This study collected data from 369 employees working in the banking sector on a convenience basis. The authors applied structural equation modeling for hypotheses testing.*

Findings – *The authors noted that spiritual leaders help employees to reduce uncivil workplace behaviors and employees' perception of workplace spirituality intervenes the same. The authors further identified that the negative association between workplace spirituality and workplace incivility is moderated by the dark triad (Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) such that individuals high in Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism weaken this negative association.*

Research limitations/implications – *The cross-sectional design may restrict causality. However, our findings not only contribute to social cognitive theory but also suggest management includes civility intervention as an essential part of organizations' training and development.*

Originality/value – *This study not only highlighted the role of spiritual leadership and workplace spirituality toward workplace incivility but also shed light on how negative personalities can ignore workplace spirituality to exhibit uncivil behavior.*

Keywords *Social cognitive theory, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, Narcissism, Workplace incivility, Workplace spirituality, Spiritual leadership*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

Employees are considered a crucial factor for organizations (Abun *et al.*, 2021) because their positive and negative workplace behavior mirrors the workplace environment (Mukherjee and Chandra, 2022). Specifically, employees' positive behavior reflects a civil workplace, whereas negative behavior reflects an uncivil workplace (Anand *et al.*, 2022; Kiffin-Petersen and Soutar, 2020). Workplace incivility is a low-intensity deviant behavior that harms the target through violation of norms of mutual respect (Moon and Morais, 2022). Workplace incivility is an outcome of a series of interactions among employees that ends with uncivil behavior and humiliating each other (Akella and Eid, 2021). Such behaviors include making sarcastic comments, ignoring, personally attacking fellows, lack of mutual respect, demeaning and treating colleagues in impolite, rude, disrespectful and discourteous ways (Irum *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, workplace incivility may generate unpleasant sentiments and emotions among employees that may have negative consequences for organizations and individuals (Moon and Morais, 2022; Irum *et al.*, 2020;

Namin *et al.*, 2022). Statistics show that 98% of employees have experienced incivility at the workplace, of which 50% are the victims of uncivil behavior on a weekly basis (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016) which ultimately affects their service quality (Kiffin-Petersen and Soutar, 2020). As workplace incivility has become a global issue (Tricahyadinata *et al.*, 2020) that costs organizations $691.70bn to $1.97tn on annual basis (Dhanani *et al.*, 2021); therefore, there is a need to identify factors that may help to mitigate uncivil behaviors (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), especially in nonwestern cultures (Akella and Eid, 2021).

Recent studies have emphasized leadership to handle workplace incivility. Specifically, these studies have investigated the role of charismatic leadership (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), transformational leadership (Bureau *et al.*, 2021) and ethical leadership (Young *et al.*, 2021) in workplace incivility; nevertheless, the association between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility remained unexplored. Therefore, we argue that spiritual leaders (through their behaviors and attitudes) not only motivate themselves but also motivate their followers to create a sense of spiritual existence (Yang *et al.*, 2021) to reduce workplace incivility. Furthermore, in response to the future call of Haldorai *et al.* (2020, p.10) that there is still a need to investigate the mediating mechanism between spiritual leadership and negative workplace behaviors; we aim to study how workplace spirituality mediates the association between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility (negative behavior). According to Hunsaker and Ding (2022, p. 2), "Workplace spirituality is characterized as meaningful work, community, purpose, and transcendence. It helps employees achieve their spiritual needs, such as meaning and purpose in their work, and connection and comradery with others at the workplace." Literature has suggested that fulfilling such needs increases employees' job involvement, commitment, satisfaction and overall work performance (Astuti and Haryani, 2021; Sapta *et al.*, 2021; Singla *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, if such needs remain unfulfilled, it may lead to negative workplace behavior (i.e. workplace incivility here) (Ali *et al.*, 2022). These arguments can further be justified from the social cognitive theory (SCT) perspective (Bandura, 1989), that employees' perception of spiritual leadership would enable them to increase their workplace spirituality which negatively influences their uncivil behavior (workplace incivility). It is because individuals learn from others' behavior at the workplace to behave accordingly.

In a recent study, Tutar and Oruç (2020) suggested that "employees with different personality traits will have different perceptions of spirituality in the workplace" (p. 1006) because personality is an essential part of workplace spirituality (Mitroff *et al.*, 2009). This is because of the fact that individuals with positive personalities cannot perceive their workplace spirituality the same as individuals with negative personalities (Singh and Singh, 2022) to exhibit negative workplace behaviors (Vasconcelos, 2020; Lata and Chaudhary, 2020). Therefore, we argue that personality traits (dark triad i.e. Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) may serve as a boundary condition between workplace spirituality and incivility (see Figure 1).

Literature review and hypotheses development

Social cognitive theory

Literature has suggested social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to understand leaders' influence on employees' attitudes and behavior (for example; Ahmad *et al.*, 2023; Chaudhary and Islam, 2023). However, this study argues that SCT is a better way to explain the association between leader and employee behavior. According to Bandura (1986), human functions are the reciprocation of personal cognitions, environment and behavior that dynamically interact with each other to further shape human attitudes and behavior. The basic principle of SCT is observation and reinforcement as it emphasizes the individual's interaction with others and his/her mental (cognitive) processes (Shetty *et al.*, 2022). SCT postulates that imitation and observations are conveyed through fictional heroes, friends, educators and parents (Malik *et al.*, 2023a);

Figure 1 Conceptual model

Source: Authors' work
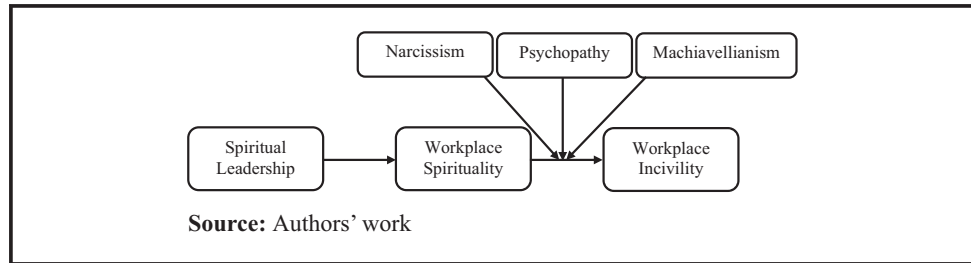
therefore, this theory has been widely used to identify how behavior is learned through the interaction between social, organizational and personal factors. However, such cognitive processes do not function independently because these can be influenced by perceived environmental elements (Bao and Han, 2019). Specifically, SCT posits that employee shapes their behavior by observing (cognitive processes) the behaviors of their role models (leaders here) at the workplace (Cialdini, 2007). Therefore, this study argues that spiritual leadership through workplace spirituality affects workplace incivility.

Spiritual leadership and workplace incivility

In his seminal work, Fairholm (1997) suggested that spiritual leaders through mutual respect, enable employees to enhance their self developmental activities and provide opportunities to build meaningful work. Meng (2016) noted hope/faith, altruistic love and vision as the core components of spiritual leadership because Fry (2003, p. 711) refers to it as leadership "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership." Ali et al. (2020, p. 3) noted that "spiritual leadership's simultaneous application of social/spiritual values and rational determinants in decision making through its transcendent vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love" distinguishes it from other leadership styles. Literature is well documented on how spiritual leadership enhances employees' positive job-related outcomes (Hunsaker and Ding, 2022; Hutahayan, 2020); nonetheless, its association with employees' negative workplace behavior (workplace incivility in this study) remained less investigated (Ali et al., 2022), and are essential to understand because it ultimately affects the overall quality.

A low-intensity deviant behavior (including ignoring, disrespect, rudeness, discourteous and personal attacking) that harms the target through violation of norms of mutual respect is known as workplace incivility (Moon and Morais, 2022; Ishaque et al., 2020; Irum et al., 2020), and such negative behaviors may be shaped through positive leadership because positive leaders through their behaviors can change followers' mindsets (Islam and Asad, 2024; Islam et al., 2022) and vice versa. Therefore, we argue that spiritual leadership (by creating hope/faith, altruistic love and vision) creates a healthy work environment that can control the chaos of negative/uncivil workplace behaviors. According to Bayighomog and Araslı (2019), a healthy workplace environment restricts employees from mistreatment, behaving improperly and conducting negative acts. Spiritual leaders by creating a sense of meaningful work, through appreciation and recognition, intrinsically motivate their followers; hence, they feel that they can have an impact on society (Hutahayan, 2020). Such acts of leaders accelerate employees' inner morale; hence, they not only start building healthy relations with their colleagues but also start respecting them (Samul, 2020). This argument can further be justified through SCT that employees' perceptions are based on observing

their colleagues (leaders) at the workplace (Cialdini, 2007). Therefore, when employees perceive their leaders as motivating, encouraging and recognizing (spiritual leadership), then they would also treat their subordinates well (reduced uncivil behavior). Thus, we hypothesized:

H1. Spiritual leadership negatively affects workplace incivility.

Mediating role of workplace spirituality

An organizational culture characterized by personal desires, beliefs and values of one's individual spirituality, which reflect innovation, fairness, support and trust, is referred to as workplace spirituality (Hunsaker and Ding, 2022). According to Houghton *et al.* (2016), the concept of workplace spirituality has been viewed from intrinsic-origin and existential views of individual meaning perspective. According to the intrinsic-origin perspective (Mitroff and Denton, 1999), workplace spirituality is an individual's internal sense of being connected with one's work and colleagues. However, from the existential perspective (Neck and Milliman, 1994) workplace spirituality is about the meaning of one's work and how it fits one's existence. It can be inferred that workplace spirituality helps individuals to express themselves in their work after finding the purpose of their life and work; achieve congruence between personal and organizational values, and develop connections with their colleagues (Singh and Singh, 2022). Thus, there is a need to enhance workplace spirituality at the workplace.

Literature has suggested that leadership is the most crucial factor in implementing workplace spirituality (Hutahayan, 2020); nevertheless, literature is scarce about which style of leadership can better foster workplace spirituality (Houghton *et al.*, 2016). However, it has been noted that workplace spirituality is only possible when leaders become role models for their followers (Hutahayan, 2020). In a recent study, Sapta *et al.* (2021) argued that workplace spirituality cannot be isolated from spiritual leadership. Such leaders are recognized as role models that not only fulfill employees' needs but also encourage them to build interpersonal relations (Neal, 2018); hence, this entails and absorbs "spirituality at work". We argue that spiritual leaders through recognition and appreciation, make employees' work meaningful (Hudson, 2014); motivate them intrinsically (Astuti and Haryani, 2021); build faith and trust to enhance their interpersonal relations (Fry *et al.*, 2017); and align their personal and organizational values (Hutahayan, 2020). These factors are in line with the intrinsic-origin and existential perspective of workplace spirituality.

According to Cortina *et al.* (2011), uncivil/unethical behaviors have become a new normal, which negatively affects employees' behavior (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, it can convert a healthy workplace into a toxic work environment (Bunk and Magley, 2013) that can affect individuals' knowledge sharing and overall organizational productivity. Considering these detrimental effects, recent studies have emphasized finding ways to reduce/overcome uncivil behavior (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021). Therefore, we argue that workplace spirituality (as it provides meaningful work, enhances interpersonal relations and aligns individuals' personal goals with organizational goals) can reduce workplace incivility. Garg *et al.* (2022) also noted that workplace spirituality helps employees overcome negative workplace behaviors (uncivil behaviors here). Thus, drawing upon Bandura's (1986) SCT, we assume that spiritual leaders enhance employees' workplace spirituality, which in turn, reduces workplace incivility. According to SCT, individuals observe others' behavior (leaders and colleagues) to develop their own behavior (Ahmad *et al.*, 2021ab). Therefore, employees' observation of their leader's (spiritual) motivational acts (by providing vision, meaningfulness at work, appreciation and recognition), enable them to feel that they are being valued, which helps them to align their personal and organizational goals (workplace spirituality); thereby, they are less likely to engage in uncivil behavior. Thus, we hypothesized:

H2. Workplace spirituality mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility.

The moderating role of dark triad

Personality helps individuals to positively or negatively perceive things around them. For example, individuals with an optimistic approach carry a positive personality; whereas, individuals with a pessimistic approach carry a negative personality (Lata and Chaudhary, 2020). According to Wang *et al.* (2022), an individual's personality predicts how he/she would behave and react in a particular situation; therefore, can serve as a conditional variable between organizational and individual variables. Specifically, as negative personality traits are associated with negative workplace behavior (Furnham *et al.*, 2013), therefore, we focused on the dark triad. The concept of the dark triad was first introduced by Paulhus and Williams (2002), consisting of three negative and "socially aversive" personality traits (i.e. narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy). According to Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007, p. 353), "narcissism refers to the degree to which an individual has an inflated sense of self and is preoccupied with having that self-view continually reinforced." Narcissists are characterized as self-centered, have an excessive need for admiration, arrogant thinking and behavior, and lack empathy and consideration for other people (O'Boyle *et al.*, 2012). Narcissists believe that it is their right they should be preferred or favored by their organizations; therefore, they not only overtake workplace-related benefits but also restrict to align with a supportive environment to stop uncivil acts (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021). Vazire and Funder's (2006) meta-analysis noted that narcissists are less likely to control their behaviors; therefore, mostly involve in uncivil acts (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, we argue that narcissists in the presence of a spiritual/ethical workplace would less likely to overcome uncivil acts as they lack self-control and are high impulsive. Suffice it to say, that the negative association of workplace spirituality on incivility would be weakened by narcissists. Hence, we hypothesized:

H3a. Narcissism would moderate the association between workplace spirituality and workplace incivility such that individuals high in narcissism would weaken this negative association.

Psychopathy is the second dark triad that we have considered in this study. Individuals with psychopathy are antisocial, lack empathy, have deficient emotional remorse, have poor behavioral control and are emotionally insensitive (Skeem *et al.*, 2011). Because of lacking emotional response, psychopaths do not feel apologetic upon wrongdoing (Babiak and Hare, 2006); therefore, are more likely to be involved in deviant or uncivil behavior in the workplace. According to Shagufta and Nazir (2021), psychopaths continue to exhibit antisocial behavior because they are cold-blooded and less likely to feel others' pain. Lata and Chaudhary (2021) suggested that individuals with negative personalities (psychopathy) are less likely to get benefits from their organizations, therefore, they may be involved in uncivil behavior. Based on these arguments, we believe that psychopaths would also weaken the negative association between workplace spirituality and workplace incivility. Thus, we hypothesized:

H3b. Psychopathy would moderate the association between workplace spirituality and workplace incivility such that individuals high in psychopathy would weaken this negative association.

Machiavellianism, a third dark triad in our study, is a kind of personality syndrome of being sly, deceptive, distrusting and manipulative in achieving personal goals (Pilch and Turska, 2015). Individuals with such personality traits are malevolent, self-centered and cold-hearted in their interpersonal dealings as they "distrust others, engage in amoral manipulation, seek control over others, and seek status for oneself" (Dahling *et al.*, 2009, p. 219). Specifically, individuals with high Machiavellianism are more likely to engage in

unethical behavior, are self-interested, prioritize their personal goals, discard others after their accomplishments and are impersonal in their interpersonal relationships (Khan *et al.*, 2022). Lata and Chaudhary (2021) further noted that individuals with this personality trait pursue their personal goals at the cost of their organization as well as colleagues. Therefore, literature has identified a positive association of Machiavellianism with deviant behavior, deviation from organizational norms, theft and hunger for status, power and economic opportunities (Varshney, 2022; Srivastava *et al.*, 2022). Literature has noted that Machiavellianism personality behave aggressively, break organizational norms and involve in uncivil behavior (Oguegbe, 2016) It can be inferred that, due to their negative nature about everything around them, Machiavellianism are less likely to recognize their organizational positive outcomes, thus continuing their aggressive and manipulative nature, and harming the sentiments and feelings of coworkers (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021). As high Machs are unethical and self-centered, less likely to regard workplace spirituality; therefore, highly involve in uncivil acts. Thus, we hypothesized:

> *H3c.* Machiavellianism would moderate the association between workplace spirituality and workplace incivility such that individuals high in Machiavellianism would weaken this negative association.

Methods

Participants and procedure

We focused on employees working in public and private banks in Pakistan. The Pakistani banking sector highly contributes to the country's GDP (Bhutta and Zafar, 2019) but pays less attention to its HR activities (Islam *et al.*, 2018) which cost billions of rupees (Jehanzeb, 2021). Workplace incivility has become a major challenge for banking sector (Butt and Yazdani, 2021; Lata and Chaudhary, 2022) as its employees have to face high stress, long working hours (Islam and Ahmed, 2019), high job demand (Ellahi *et al.*, 2022) and high work pressure (Butt and Yazdani, 2021). Specifically, Young *et al.* (2021) and Ellahi *et al.* (2022) suggested examining the causes and determinants of workplace incivility in the Pakistani banking sector.

Drawing upon item-to-response theory with the criteria of ten responses against each question (42×10), we selected a sample of 420. We used "Google Forms" to collect responses and the respondents were approached on a convenient basis. This data collection method is escalating (Newman *et al.*, 2020) because it is a good source to collect data from multiple respondents in less time (Malik *et al.*, 2023b,c). We used convenience sampling (from nonprobability) to collect responses because a sampling frame of the Pakistani banking sector was not available. Specifically, we visited various banks to communicate with the employees, briefed them about the purpose of this study and asked for their email addresses to share "Google Form" links.

We received 377 responses between November 2021 to February 2022 (response rate = 89.76%) from which 369 were used in the final analysis. We noted that 61% ($N = 226$) of respondents were male and 39% ($N = 143$) were female, which confirms that workplaces in Pakistan are male-dominated. We further noted that 64% ($N = 235$) of respondents were in the age bracket of 20–25 years, and 31% ($N = 114$) of respondents were in the age bracket of 26–30 years, which attests that Pakistan has a young workforce. Finally, we noted that 53% ($N = 196$) of respondents were holding a graduation degree, and 69% ($N = 253$) were with the same organization for two to five years.

Measures

The scales used in this study were adapted from past studies. The respondents were asked on a five-point Likert scale. Specifically, spiritual leadership, workplace spirituality and dark

triad scales range from *1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree*; whereas, the workplace incivility scale ranges from *1 – never to 5 – many times*.

Spiritual leadership. We used Fry *et al.'s* (2005) 17 items scale (validated by Ali *et al.*, 2020) for spiritual leadership, and its Cronbach's alpha was 0.94. A sample item includes, "I have faith in my leader and am willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish his/her mission."

Workplace spirituality. We operationalize workplace spirituality with organizational values, sense of community and meaningful work; therefore, we adapted six items from Ashmos and Dennis (2000), and three items from Milliman *et al.* (2003). This nine-item scale has been validated by Srivastava and Gupta (2022). The reliability of the scale was 0.93. A sample item includes, "I see a connection between work and social good."

Workplace incivility. We used Cortina *et al.*'s (2011) shorter version (which consists of four items). This scale has been validated by Özkan (2021). The reliability of the scale was 0.86. A sample item includes, "During the past year, have you been put in a situation where a coworker or supervisor interrupted or spoke over you."

Dark triad. We used Jonason and Webster's (2010) scale (also validated by Lata and Chaudhary, 2021) to measure the dark triad. Specifically, narcissism was measured with four items (with a reliability value of 0.84). A sample item includes, "I tend to want others to pay attention to me." Psychopathy was measured by four items (with a reliability value of 0.93), with a sample item as, "I tend to be callous or insensitive." Similarly, Machiavellianism was measured by four items (with a reliability value of 0.93), and a sample item was, "I tend to manipulate others to get my way."

Results

Preliminary analysis

We examined data for missing values, outliers, normality and multicollinearity as these could harm the results (Islam and Chaudhary, 2024). The data was free from missing values. We identified eight outliers applying the Mahalanobis distance test, which were removed (Kline, 2016), and only 369 responses were used for further analysis. We assessed the values of skewness (ranges between ± 1) and kurtosis (ranges between ± 3) for data normality (Byrne, 2010; Khatoon *et al.*, 2022). Finally, the correlational values among variables were less than 0.85 (see Table 1), indicating the absence of multicollinearity (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

Common method variance

The data for this study was collected from a single source; therefore, it was examined for common method variance (CMV). Following Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), we applied Harman's single factor test and noted a single factor contributing 41.51% (which is less than the standard criteria of 50%); hence, CMV was not the issue in this data.

Table 1 Descriptive and correlational analysis								
Variables	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*Mean*	*SD*
1. Spiritual leadership	(0.94)						3.47	0.57
2. Workplace spirituality	0.65**	(0.93)					3.37	0.71
3. Workplace incivility	−0.67**	−0.80**	(0.86)				2.53	0.77
4. Narcissism	−0.58**	−0.63**	0.65**	(0.84)			2.52	0.71
5. Psychopathy	−0.33**	−0.36**	0.40**	0.47**	(0.93)		2.57	0.73
6. Machiavellianism	−0.43**	−0.39**	0.44**	0.44**	0.66**	(0.93)	2.54	0.73

Notes: **$p < 0.01$; () $=$ Cronbach's alpha; SD $=$ standard deviation
Source: Authors' work

Descriptive and correlational analysis

The mean values (see Table 1) show that the respondents were neutral or disagree regarding variables such as spiritual leadership ($M = 3.47$), workplace spirituality ($M = 3.37$), workplace incivility ($M = 2.53$), psychopathy ($M = 2.57$), narcissism ($M = 2.52$) and Machiavellianism ($M = 2.54$).

We further noted that spiritual leadership positively correlates with workplace spirituality ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$), and negatively correlates with workplace incivility ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.01$), machiavellianism ($r = -0.43$, $p < 0.01$), psychopathy ($r = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$) and narcissism ($r = -0.58$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, we noted that workplace spirituality negatively correlates with workplace incivility ($r = -0.80$, $p < 0.01$), Machiavellianism ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$), psychopathy ($r = -0.36$, $p < 0.01$) and narcissism ($r = -0.63$, $p < 0.01$).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

We assessed the measurement model for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) because scales were adapted from past studies (Byrne, 2010). We followed Williams *et al.*'s (2009) indices of model fit i.e. "normed chi-square ($\chi^2/df \leq 3.0$), goodness of fit index (GFI ≥ 0.90), comparative fit index (CFI ≥ 0.90), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA ≤ 0.08) and root mean residual (RMR ≤ 0.08)". Initially, the model was not fit e.g. $\chi^2/df = 1.41$, GFI $= 0.87$, CFI $= 0.93$, RMSEA $= 0.09$ and RMR $= 0.07$. Few items were noted to have low factor loading ($\lambda \geq 0.50$); therefore, they were deleted (Byrne, 2010) and found model fit e.g. χ^2/df [1019.586/725] $= 1.406$, GFI $= 0.876$, CFI $= 0.972$, RMSEA $= 0.033$, RMR $= 0.025$. The deleted items were, "my organization is trustworthy and loyal to its employees" (from spiritual leadership); and "I see a connection between work and social good" (from workplace spirituality). We further noted that the values of "composite reliability (CR ≥ 0.60) and average variance extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50) were above the used criteria" (see Appendix); which confirmed convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Hypotheses testing

We examined "structural model at 5,000 bootstraps with 95% confidence level" (see Table 2). The results revealed that spiritual leadership positively affect workplace spirituality ($\beta = 0.65$, SE $= 0.049$, $p = 0.00$), and negatively affect workplace incivility ($\beta = -0.26$, SE $= 0.052$, $p = 0.00$). Similarly, workplace spirituality was noted to negatively affect workplace incivility ($\beta = -0.63$, SE $= 0.042$, $p = 0.00$). These findings support *H1* of the study.

Mediation analysis

We conducted direct and indirect paths to examine the mediating role of workplace spirituality (see Table 3). The direct path between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility ($\beta = -0.26$, SE $= 0.052$, $p = 0.00$) was significant. For the indirect path, we multiplied the beta coefficient value of spiritual leadership – workplace spirituality ($\beta = 0.65$) with the beta coefficient value of workplace spirituality – workplace incivility ($\beta = -0.63$), and noted a

Table 2	Results of structural model					
					Bootstraps at 95%	
Hypotheses	β	p	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Spiritual leadership → workplace spirituality	0.65	0.00	0.049	0.568	0.727
Spiritual leadership → workplace incivility	−0.26	0.00	0.052	−0.346	−0.179
Workplace spirituality → workplace incivility	−0.63	0.00	0.042	−0.707	−0.540
Source: Authors' work					

Table 3 Mediation of workplace spirituality

Hypotheses	β	p	SE	Bootstraps at 95% LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect Spiritual leadership → workplace incivility	−0.26	0.00	0.052	−0.346	−0.179
Indirect effect Spiritual leadership → workplace spirituality → workplace incivility	−0.41	0.00	0.031	−0.475	−0.354
Source: Authors' work					

significant effect ($\beta = -0.41$, SE = 0.031, $p = 0.00$) without zero value between lower and upper limits (LLCI = −0.475, ULCI = −0.354). This result supports *H2* of the study.

Moderation analysis

We applied two-step hierarchical regression method to test the moderation of the dark triad (see Table 4). In the first step, we regressed independent (workplace spirituality) and moderating variables (narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism) with the dependent variable (workplace incivility). In the second step, we computed interactional terms between independent and moderating variables (i.e. Workplace spirituality × Narcissism, Workplace spirituality × Psychopathy and Workplace spirituality × Machiavellianism) and regressed with the dependent variable (workplace incivility) to note its significant effect that indicates moderation.

We noted that workplace spirituality negatively ($\beta = -0.43$, $p = 0.02$) and narcissism positively ($\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.00$) influence workplace incivility. Furthermore, the influence of their interactional term (Workplace spirituality × Narcissism) was also significant ($\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.03$, LLCI = −0.499, ULCI = −0.061) without a zero between lower and upper limit. This indicates the presence of moderation. We further examined the effect of high and low narcissism through slopes (see Figure 2), and noted that individuals with high narcissism are more likely to involve in workplace incivility. This result supports *H3a* of our study.

For the moderation of psychopathy (see Table 4), we noted that workplace spirituality negatively ($\beta = -0.38$, $p = 0.01$) and psychopathy positively ($\beta = 0.58$, $p = 0.00$) influence workplace incivility. In addition, the effect of their interactional term (Workplace spirituality × Psychopathy) was also significant ($\beta = -0.48$, $p = 0.00$, LLCI = −0.826, ULCI = −0.158)

Table 4 Results for moderation

Hypotheses	For narcissism β (p)	Bootstraps at 95% LLCI	ULCI	For psychopathy β (p)	Bootstraps at 95% LLCI	ULCI	For Machiavellianism β (p)	Bootstraps at 95% LLCI	ULCI
Step-1									
Workplace spirituality	−0.43 (0.02)	−0.734	−0.086	−0.38 (0.01)	−0.642	−0.094	−0.44 (0.00)	−0.695	−0.137
Narcissism	0.49 (0.00)	0.163	0.851	–	–	–	–	–	–
Psychopathy	–	–	–	0.58 (0.00)	0.275	0.927	–	–	–
Machiavellianism							0.52 (0.00)	0.215	0.881
Step-2									
Workplace spirituality × narcissism	−0.21 (0.03)	−0.499	−0.061				–	–	–
Workplace spirituality × psychopathy	–	–	–	−0.48 (0.00)	−0.826	−0.158	–	–	–
Workplace spirituality × Machiavellianism	–	–	–	–	–	–	−0.38 (0.01)	−0.725	−0.076
Note: Dependent variable = workplace incivility **Source:** Authors' work									

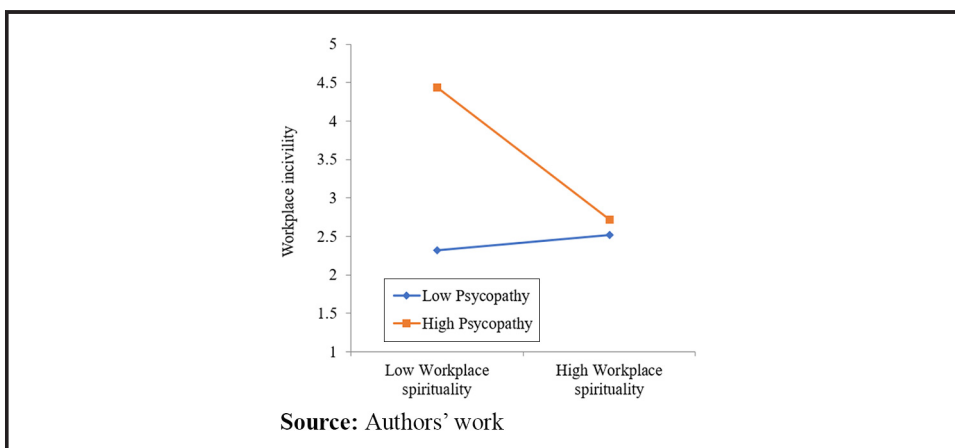**Figure 2** Slope of moderation for narcissism

Source: Authors' work
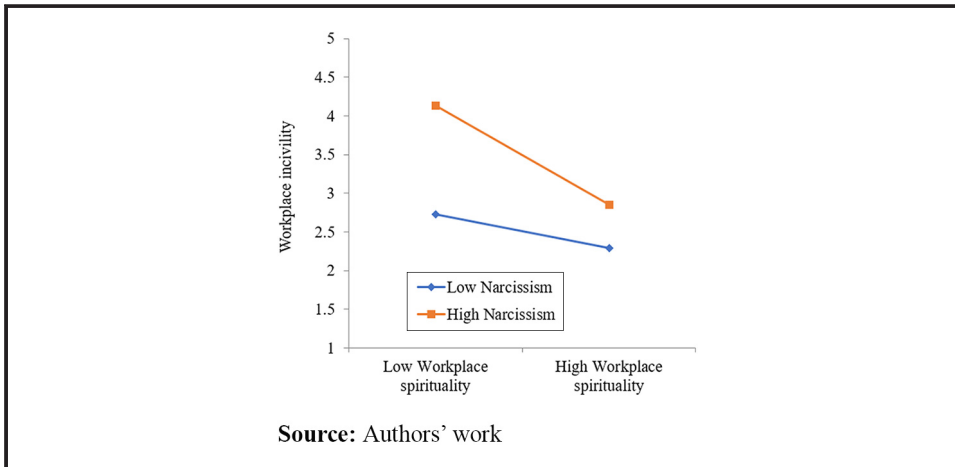
without a zero between lower and upper limit. We further examined the effect of high and low psychopathy through slopes (see Figure 3), and noted that individuals high in psychopathy are more likely to involve in workplace incivility even in the presence of workplace spirituality. This result supports *H3b* of our study.

Similarly, for the moderation of Machiavellianism, we noted that workplace spirituality negatively ($\beta = -0.44$, $p = 0.00$) and Machiavellianism positively ($\beta = 0.52$, $p = 0.00$) associated with workplace incivility (see Table 4). In addition, the effect of their interactional term (Workplace spirituality $\times$ Machiavellianism) was also significant ($\beta = -0.38$, $p = 0.01$) without a zero between lower and upper limit (LLCI = -0.725, ULCI = -0.076). We further examined the effect of high and low Machiavellianism through slopes (see Figure 4), and noted that individuals high in Machiavellianism are more likely to involve in uncivil behavior, which confirms *H3c* of our study.
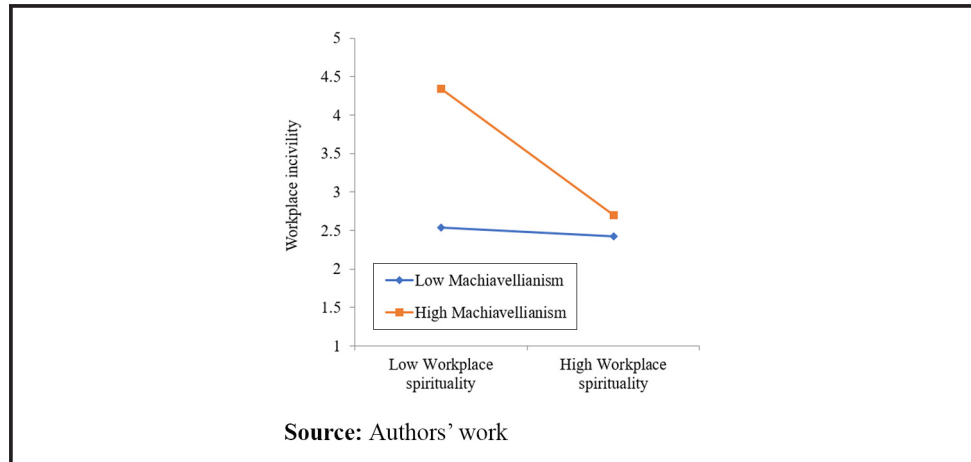
Discussion

Despite its low-intensive nature, workplace incivility is an unavoidable phenomenon as it negatively affects employees and organizations (Shim, 2010). Therefore, we proposed a

Figure 3 Slope of moderation for psychopathy

Source: Authors' work

Figure 4 Slope of moderation for Machiavellianism

Source: Authors' work

framework, for how this issue can be addressed through leadership (spiritual leadership). We further highlighted the role of negative personalities (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) toward employees' uncivil behaviors at the workplace. Following Malik *et al.* (2017) that leadership can shape employees' workplace behavior, we proposed and noted a negative association of spiritual leadership with workplace incivility (*H1*). Our finding is in line with the findings of Adawiyah and Pramuka (2017) that spiritual leaders can curb negative employee behavior. This is because spiritual leaders, through their vision, love and sense of everlasting hope, shape a supportive environment full of mutual respect, appreciation, recognition, meaningfulness and growth (Bayighomog and Araslı, 2019). Spiritual leaders make employees believe that their work is meaningful and has an impact on society (Hutahayan, 2020), which boosts their morale and reduces uncivil behavior (Samul, 2020). Extending past studies, we further noted that workplace spirituality mediates the association between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility (*H2*). Neal (2018) suggested that spiritual leaders are likely to manage strong interpersonal relationships with their followers because they provide meaningful work and help them align their personal goals with organizational goals (Yang *et al.*, 2021). According to Hunsaker and Ding (2022), a sense of meaningful work and comradery with others sparks the concept of workplace spirituality. Hence, employees high in workplace spirituality are less likely to be involved in negative (i.e. uncivil) workplace behavior (Ali *et al.*, 2022).

We also attempted the dark triad (Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) as conditional variables for a deeper understanding of workplace incivility. We noted that individuals high in Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism are more likely to weaken the negative association between workplace spirituality and incivility (*H3a*, *H3b* and *H3c*). According to Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007), narcissists are the most self-centered, who believe that they are superior to their colleagues, and are right all the time. Such negative traits overpower job-related advantages (such as workplace spirituality), and are less likely to relate to the supporting atmosphere (Anninos, 2018; O'Boyle *et al.*, 2012; Ahmed and Islam, 2023); hence, they engage in uncivil behavior (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Narcissists are less likely to recognize their organizational facilities for them as they think that they deserve more than what is been provided to them.

Psychopaths, on the other side, have a negative mindset because they see everything with negativity (Skeem *et al.*, 2011; Ahmed and Islam, 2023). Shagufta and Nazir (2021) noted that psychopaths become mean to their coworkers, behave rudely and exhibit unethical

behavior at the workplace (uncivil). According to Lata and Chaudhary (2020), psychopaths because of their negative mindset cannot see the positivity around themselves. Specifically, such personalities ignore the benefits of workplace spirituality and involve in unethical behavior. Finally, Khan *et al.* (2022) suggested that Machiavellianism personalities detach themselves from society as they are the most self-centered and only focus on accomplishing their personal goals at any cost. While doing so, they never make long-lasting relations with other individuals (Pilch and Turska, 2015; Ahmed and Islam, 2023). As such personalities are habitual in using others for their benefit, therefore, they do not feel bad to show this side of their personality (Dahling *et al.*, 2009), which engages them in unethical behaviors (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021). Similar to psychopaths and narcissists, individuals high in Machiavellianism are less likely to recognize organizational favors (spirituality or leadership).

Theoretical implications

Our study has several theoretical implications. First, the literature on low-intensity workplace bad conduct (workplace incivility) is scant (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2022), which has mostly been studied in western countries; hence, we extend the phenomenon to a nonwestern culture like Pakistan (Butt and Yazdani, 2021). Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature on workplace incivility in collectivist culture (Pakistan). Pakistan is a high-power distance culture with the rule of might is right, therefore, people here are more involved in unethical/uncivil behavior (Islam *et al.*, 2022).

Second, literature is well documented about how workplace incivility is influenced by ethical leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership and charismatic leadership; we extend the same from a spiritual leadership perspective. Our study noted that spiritual leaders (through appreciation and recognition make employees feel that their work is meaningful and has an impact on society) help employees to reduce uncivil behavior at the workplace. Therefore, it can be inferred that spiritual leadership is a crucial organizational factor that can reduce uncivil behavior among employees. Third, drawing upon SCT, our study is the first of its kind that has examined workplace spirituality explaining the association between spiritual leadership and workplace incivility. According to SCT (Bandura, 1986), individuals' behavior can directly be related to observing others in the workplace. Contributing to SCT, our study explains how adopting a spiritual leadership style increases spirituality, which in turn helps employees to reduce their impolite or discourteous behavior. Specifically, employees develop a positive mindset when inspired by leaders (spiritual leaders here) as it helps them understand the purpose of their work, therefore, they not only align their goals with organizational goals (workplace spirituality) but also try to be empathetic toward their co-workers (reduced uncivil behavior).

We further argue individuals' positive or negative perceptions are linked to personality. As Pakistan is a high-power distance culture where negative personality traits are dominant, therefore, we focused on the negative personality traits (i.e. dark triad including Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) to understand the concept of workplace incivility. Our study noted that negative personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) restrict employees to recognize and value the favors by their organization (in terms of leadership or spirituality). Individuals with such personalities consider every favor (from the organization) as their right, and are less likely to be empathetic toward others; therefore, exhibit unethical behavior (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021).

Practical implications

Our study has several implications for the management and policymakers. First, our study raises awareness of the prevalence of workplace incivility because this phenomenon has become a global issue. We suggest that "civility intervention programs" can build up

employees' narratives to control negative workplace behaviors. Specifically, civility intervention should be an essential part of organizations' training and development where employees can be trained regularly that how they should behave with each other. Furthermore, organizations should be strict in imposing penalties in case of inappropriate behaviors (i.e. breaching organizational rules/norms). In this aspect, simulations, role-plays and movies can be a good source to make employees sensitive to the harmful repercussions of incivility.

Second, we noted that implementing spiritual leadership in service-based organizations (banking sector) would be advantageous for the employees as well as employers. Therefore, our findings suggest that management should implement spiritual leadership to overcome employees' harmful/negative workplace behavior. Specifically, our findings suggest management to train their leaders/supervisors for spirituality. Spiritual leaders are often trained by adding different elements like spiritual practices, ceremonies and rituals into the workplace culture (Patil *et al.*, 2023). These kinds of practices may include praying, mindfulness activities, meditation and performing rituals that are distinct in each culture. Observing such kind of practices contributes to a sense of shared purpose, mindfulness and connection among organization members, which promotes a spiritual and reflective culture (Sapta *et al.*, 2021). A leader's effectiveness can be measured by profitability, the application of values and vision and collective organizational responsibility to society and stakeholders (Jose and Chully, 2023).

Third, our findings suggest managers instill transcendental values and a sense of control among employees, which can be possible through a clear vision by integrating spiritual values into the organizational and employee development process. Therefore, managers should conduct workshops and training programs characterized by spiritual values to foster positive energy with faith in the leadership's vision (Somani *et al.*, 2021). Management should incorporate various spiritual values in their practices so that employees could understand their organizational vision as spiritual. This would enhance employees' sense of meaningfulness that can inspire them not to engage in negative workplace behaviors.

Fourth, although Hofstede (2001) commented that individuals in high-power distance cultures (like Pakistan) are socialized to respect rather than challenging status quo; still, our finding suggests management not ignore the personality of their employees as personality shapes an individual's thinking pattern. Organizations are suggested to conduct personality tests at the time of hiring because individuals with negative personalities (i.e. Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) are self-centered; therefore, are less likely to prefer organizational interests over their personal interests. However, before conducting such tests, there must be an informed consent so that legal and ethical issues can be tackled (Cherry, 2023). Moreover, such tests can be used as one of the conjunctions with other assessment methods to help management to take best possible decision for the existing employees. Finally, our findings give insight for practitioners that organizational culture plays an important role in determining employees' behavior. A culture of help, love, respect and compassion depicts civilization.

Limitations and future avenues

Despite implications, our study has certain limitations. First, although workplace incivility is an issue in all sectors, we collected data from employees working in the banking sector of Pakistan (high-power distance culture). There are a lot of differences in socio-culture characteristics of Western and Asian characteristics (Lata and Chaudhary, 2021); therefore, so we are also expecting differences over the idea of incivility that how it is perceived in Western and non-western cultures. Specifically, Pakistani culture is more toward the collective societal structure unlike western individualistic societal structure (Kokab *et al.*, 2020); therefore, future researchers are suggested to examine incivility in western individualistic societal sectors and cultures for generalizability, as culture plays an essential

role in individuals' behavior and attitudes. Second, we used a cross-section design which may restrict causality; therefore, a longitudinal study could help in understanding how spiritual leadership-workplace incivility varies with time (Taris and Kompier, 2014) because time is going to be an important factor in facilitating an in-depth study on subject, i.e. the change in behavior of individuals over a time when spiritual leadership is implanted in workplace. Third, we consider a positive leadership style to understand how it helps employees to reduce workplace incivility in Pakistan. According to Chaudhary and Islam (2023), the negative side of leadership is more prevalent in high-power distance countries; therefore, we suggest future researchers to explore how the dark side of leadership can affect employees' uncivil/unethical behavior at the workplace. Fourth, because our study is limited to the dark triad (negative personality traits), the role of positive personality traits would further help in understanding the issue of workplace incivility. Finally, we suggest future researchers explore how psychological factors (e.g. psychological contract fulfillment and psychological empowerment) intervene in the association between leadership and uncivil behavior.

Conclusion

Considering the existing voids on workplace incivility and drawing upon SCT, we noted that spiritual leaders help employees to reduce uncivil behaviors at the workplace as such leaders enhance their workplace spirituality. Our findings also noted that the dark triad (i.e. Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) personalities are more likely to weaken the negative association between workplace spirituality and uncivil behaviors.

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Table A1	Confirmatory factor analysis			
Variables		λ	CR	AVE
Spiritual leadership			0.937	0.490
1. I understand and am committed to my leader's vision		0.779		
2. My workgroup has a vision statement that brings out the best in me		0.783		
3. My leader's vision inspires my best performance		0.851		
4. I have faith in my leader's vision for its employees		0.804		
5. My leader's vision is clear and compelling to me		0.811		
6. I have faith in my leader and am willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish his/her mission		0.770		
7. I persevere and exert extra effort to help my leader succeed because I have faith in what he/she stands for		0.761		
8. I always do my best in my work because I have faith in my organization and its leaders		0.772		
9. I set challenging goals for my work because I have faith in my organization and what us to succeed		0.770		
10. I demonstrate my faith in my organization and its mission by doing everything I can to help us succeed		0.882		
11. My organization really cares about its people		0.611		
12. My organization is kind and considerate toward its workers, and when they are suffering, and want to do something about it		0.570		
13. My leader in the organization "walks the walk" as well as "talk the talk"		0.562		
14. My organization is trustworthy and loyal to its employees*		*0.451*		
15. My organization does not punish honest mistakes		0.563		
16. My leader in the organization is honest and without false pride		0.514		
17. My leader in the organization have the courage to stand up		0.545		
Workplace spirituality			0.938	0.657
1. My spirit is energized by work		0.863		
2. I see a connection between work and social good*		*0.360*		
3. I understand what gives my work personal meaning		0.897		
4. I feel part of a community		0.894		
5. I think employees are linked with a common purpose		0.551		
6. I believe employees genuinely care about each other		0.813		
7. I feel positive about the values of the organization		0.826		
8. My organization cares about all its employee		0.826		
9. I feel connected with the organization's goals		0.759		
Workplace incivility			0.862	0.611
"During the past year, have you been put in a situation where a co-worker/supervisor . . .."				
1. Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinion		0.797		
2. Interrupted or "spoke over" you		0.840		
3. Ignored you or failed to speak to you (e.g., gave you "the silent treatment")		0.789		
4. Made jokes at your expense		0.694		
Narcissism			0.842	0.571
1. I tend to want others to admire me		0.780		
2. I tend to want others to pay attention to me		0.791		
3. I tend to expect special favors from others		0.747		
4. I tend to seek prestige or status		0.701		

Table A1			
Variables	λ	CR	AVE
Psychopathy		0.931	0.771
1. I tend to lack remorse	0.896		
2. I tend to be callous or insensitive	0.874		
3. tend to not be too concerned with morality or the morality of my actions	0.908		
4. I tend to be cynical	0.832		
Machiavellianism		0.925	0.755
1. I have used deceit or lied to get my way	0.795		
2. I tend to manipulate others to get my way	0.871		
3. I have used flattery to get my way	0.939		
4. I tend to exploit others toward my own end	0.864		
Note: *Deleted items			
Source: Authors' work			

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