

The Role of Positive and Negative Affect in the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Uncivil Workplace Behaviour among Managers

Natasha M. Loi Ph.D. & Carey Golledge
University of New England, Australia

nloi2@une.edu.au

Introduction

Workplace incivility is defined as “low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect...behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Research on uncivil workplace behaviour (UWB) has often relied on self-reports from victims and observers, ignoring self-reports from alleged perpetrators.

Negative affect (NA) is the dispositional tendency to experience a variety of negative mood states (Watson & Clark, 1984). When confronted with stressful conditions (e.g., UWB), those high in NA may be more inclined to attribute malicious motives to the perpetrators (Penney & Spector, 2005). Positive affect (PA), on the other hand, reflects the extent to which an individual feels enthusiastic, active, and alert (Watson et al., 1998). Those low in NA, therefore, may be more inclined to attribute UWB to less hostile causes, enabling them to not to feel the need to reciprocate the incivility (Penney & Spector, 2005).

Research has suggested that UWB is an outcome that may result from poor emotional processing (Kirk, Schutte, & Hine, 2011). Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to accurately perceive, understand, and regulate emotions. According to Ciarrochi, Chan, Caputi, and Roberts (2001), individuals low in EI will adapt poorly to stressful life events (e.g., UWB) whereas those higher in EI will adapt better.

Study Aims

This study predicted (a) managers high in EI would have higher levels of PA and lower levels of NA; (b) high levels of NA would be associated with a tendency to engage in UWB; and (c) PA and NA would mediate the relationship between EI and UWB.

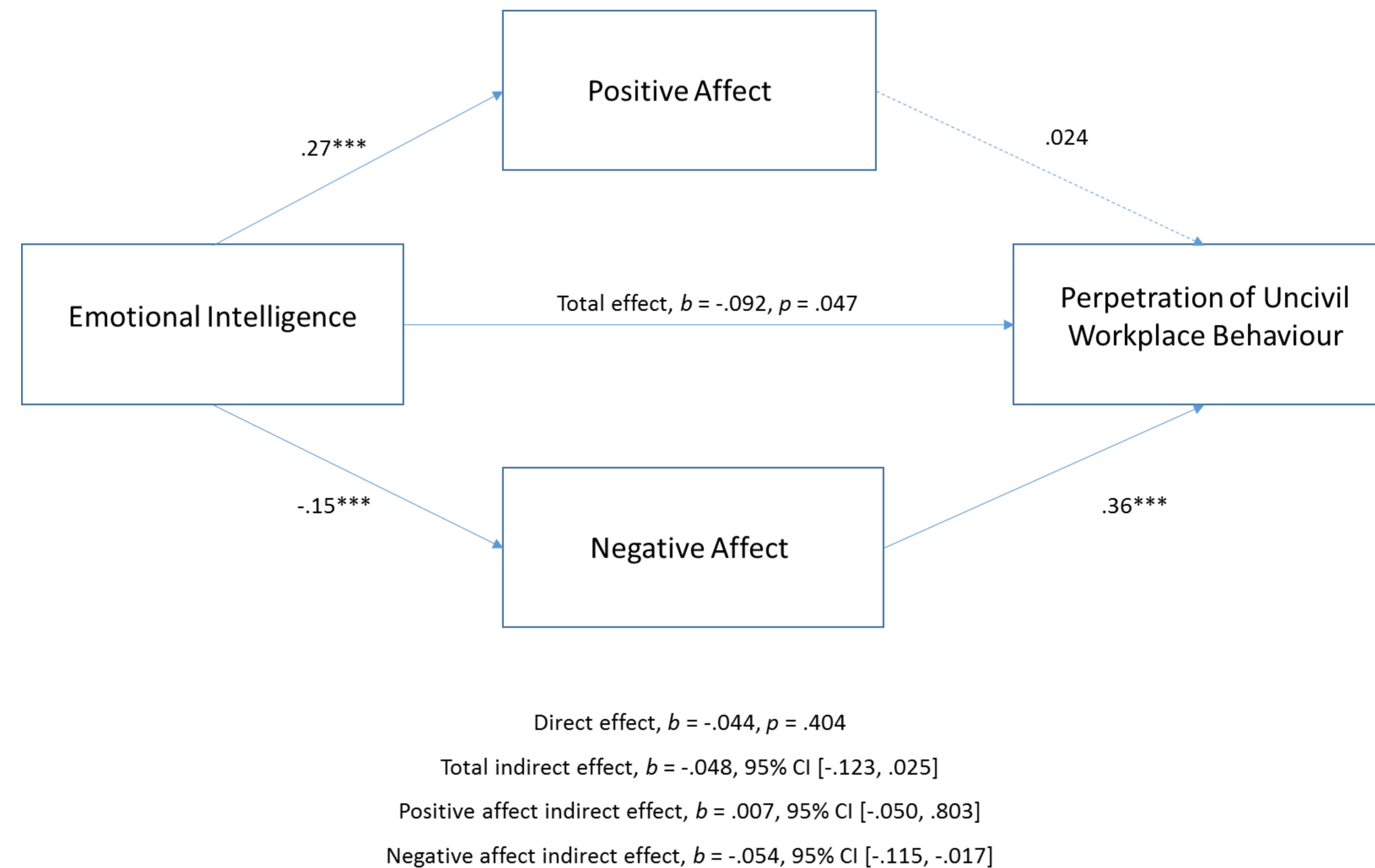


Figure 1. Path model showing negative affect mediating the relationship between emotional intelligence and engaging in uncivil behaviour.
*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for All Study Variables (N = 113)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. PA	-			
2. NA	-.16	-		
3. UWB	-.07	.37**	-	
4. EI	.50**	-.32**	-.19*	-
M	37.24	18.49	24.99	124.72
SD	6.94	5.94	6.22	12.68
Range (Min-Max)	12-50	10-42	17-46	93-165

Method

113 managers (73 females; 40 males) were recruited via email and social media ($M_{age} = 45.23$, $SD = 11.07$). Experience managing or supervising employees ranged from 2 months to 45 years ($M = 12.16$, $SD = 9.61$).

Participants completed:

- Uncivil Workplace Behaviour Questionnaire (Martin & Hine, 2005)
- Assessing Emotions Scale (Schutte et al., 1998)
- PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

Correlation analyses were performed using SPSS v.23. Mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro.

Results

Correlation analyses assessed the relationships between the main study variables (see Table 1). EI was strongly positively correlated with PA and negatively correlated with NA and UWB. NA was positively associated with engaging in UWB.

The relationship between EI and uncivil behaviour perpetration was mediated by NA only (see Figure 1).

Conclusion

Results confirm that managers are not exempt to engaging in uncivil behaviour. These results also suggest that those managers low in EI may be more prone to experiencing NA, resulting in the perpetration of UWB. With UWB having the potential to spiral into more intense behaviours such as bullying and psychological aggression, resulting in a high cost to both organisations and individuals directly and indirectly involved, contributing to the knowledge of UWB is vital to uncovering the antecedents of this behaviour and ensuring the promotion of healthy and safe workplaces.

References

- Andersson, L.M., & Pearson, C.M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 452-471.
- Ciarrochi, J., Chan, A., Caputi, P., & Roberts, R. (2001). Measuring emotional intelligence. In J. Ciarrochi, J.P. Forgas, & J.D. Mayer (Eds.), *Emotional intelligence in everyday life: A scientific inquiry* (pp. 25-45). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Martin, R. & Hine, D.W. (2005). Development and validation of the Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10, 477-490. doi:10.1037/1076-8998
- Schutte, N.S., Malouff, J.M., Hall, L.E., Haggerty, D.J., Cooper, J.T., Golden, C.J., & Dornheim, L. (1998). Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25, 167-177. doi:10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00001-4
- Penney, L.M., & Spector, P.E. (2005). Job stress, incivility, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB): The moderating role of negative affectivity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26, 777-796. doi:10.1002/job.336
- Watson, D., & Clark, L.A. (1984). Negative affectivity: The disposition to experience aversive emotional states. *Psychological Bulletin*, 96, 465-490. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.96.3.465
- Watson, D., Clark, L.A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 1063-1070.