



The Effects of Workplace Incivility on Psychological Distress and Health

IWH Plenary Presentation

April 29, 2008

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Studies

- **Phase I - Qualitative Study**
 - Yields ideas and themes.
 - To determine the important issues related to work and health among Canadian postal workers.
- **Phase II - Quantitative Study**
 - Yields numbers.
 - To determine how common incivility is, and how incivility is related to psychological distress and health.



Phase I



Research Questions

- What are the important issues related to work and health?
- What, if anything needs to be done and why?
- How should changes be made? What are the barriers to such changes?



Methods

- **Qualitative Study**

- **Focus Groups**

- 60 discussion groups with 271 postal workers at 9 sites across Canada
 - Inside workers, Outside workers, Maintenance workers, Supervisors

- **Comment Sheets**

- Employees not selected for the focus groups were asked to fill out comment sheets (678 returned)



Results

■ Themes

- Environment (e.g., lighting, weather)
- Equipment (e.g., damaged)
- Physical Health and Injury (e.g., back problems, pain)
- Mental Health (e.g., stress)
- Personal Relations (e.g., feeling devalued)
- Health and Safety



Summary

- General lack of respect for workers
- Workers feel stressed and burdened



Phase II



Research Questions

- What is the magnitude of incivility, with and without associated sexual harassment, among Canadian postal workers?
- To what extent, if any, does incivility contribute to psychological distress?



Methods

- **Questionnaire**

- Pilot tested with 10 postal workers to test length and understandability
- Translated to French and back-translated to English
- Divided into 7 sections



Methods

- **Questionnaire**

- **Sections**

- the job
 - the union
 - feelings about work
 - organizational commitment, turnover intent, job satisfaction
 - physical and mental health
 - self-rated health, pain, anxiety, depression, hostility, burnout
 - treatment in the workplace
 - incivility, bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment
 - injuries and safety
 - demographics



Exposures

- **Incivility**

- **Definition:**

- Discourteous behaviour or treatment
 - Different from bullying in that it is generally less obvious, and potentially more common
 - Can come from multiple sources (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, customers)

- **Past research:**

- Becoming more common
 - May lead to more severe violence if left unresolved
 - Related to psychological distress and well-being
 - Can impact the organization (e.g., costs in dealing with employee disputes)



Exposures

■ Incivility

- Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2001)
 - During the last year have you been in a situation where any of these people did the following:
 - Put you down or was condescending to you?
 - Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinion?
 - Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you?
 - Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately?
 - Ignored or excluded you?
 - Doubted your judgement on a matter over which you have responsibility?
 - Made unwanted attempts to draw you into discussion of personal matters?



Exposures

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Exposures

- **Job Strain**

- **Definition:**

- High job demands, low control (skill discretion, decision latitude)

- **Past Research:**

- Related to psychological distress and well-being
 - Effects of job strain on health outcomes can be mitigated by social support

- **Scale:**

- Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek, 1985)



Exposures

- **Bullying**

- **Definition:**

- “use of superior strength or influence to intimidate, typically to force someone to do what one wants”

- **Past Research:**

- risk factor for depressive symptoms in working men and women (Neidhammer et al., 2006), as well as sickness and anxiety (Voss et al., 2001)



Exposures

■ Bullying

- Scale: Work Harassment Scale (Bjorkqvist, 1994)
 - 24 questions, 5-pt scale (Never-Very Often)
 - Have you experienced:
 - Inappropriate attempts to keep you from saying your opinion?
 - Lies about you told to others?
 - Being shouted at loudly?
 - Insulting comments about your private life?
 - Having sensitive details about your private life revealed?
 - Etc.



Exposures

- **Sexual Harassment**

- **Definition:**

- One of multiple behaviours including unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, and gender harassment

- **Past Research:**

- Related to employee well-being (Lim & Cortina, 2005)



Exposures

- **Sexual Harassment**

- **Scale: Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (Fitzgerald, 1998)**

- 15 questions, 5-pt scale (Never-Many Times)
- Have you been in a situation where any of your superiors, coworkers, and/or customers:
 - made stereotypic remarks to you about appropriate roles of men and women?
 - made sexually suggestive comments to or about you?
 - made you afraid that you would be treated poorly if you didn't cooperate sexually?
 - Etc.



Outcomes

- Self-Rated Health
- Job Satisfaction
- Organizational Commitment
- Burnout
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Hostility
- Pain
- Stress



Hypotheses

- Incivility and bullying will be only moderately related.
- Incivility will predict outcomes even after allowing for other factors such as job strain.
- Social support and coping skills will help reduce any effects of incivility on health.



Methods

- **Design:**
 - Cross-Sectional
 - information on exposures and outcomes collected at the same time
 - Mailed questionnaires
 - Dillman method to increase response rate
 - multiple mailings
 - Completely anonymous



Methods

- **Definitions:**

- **Clustering**

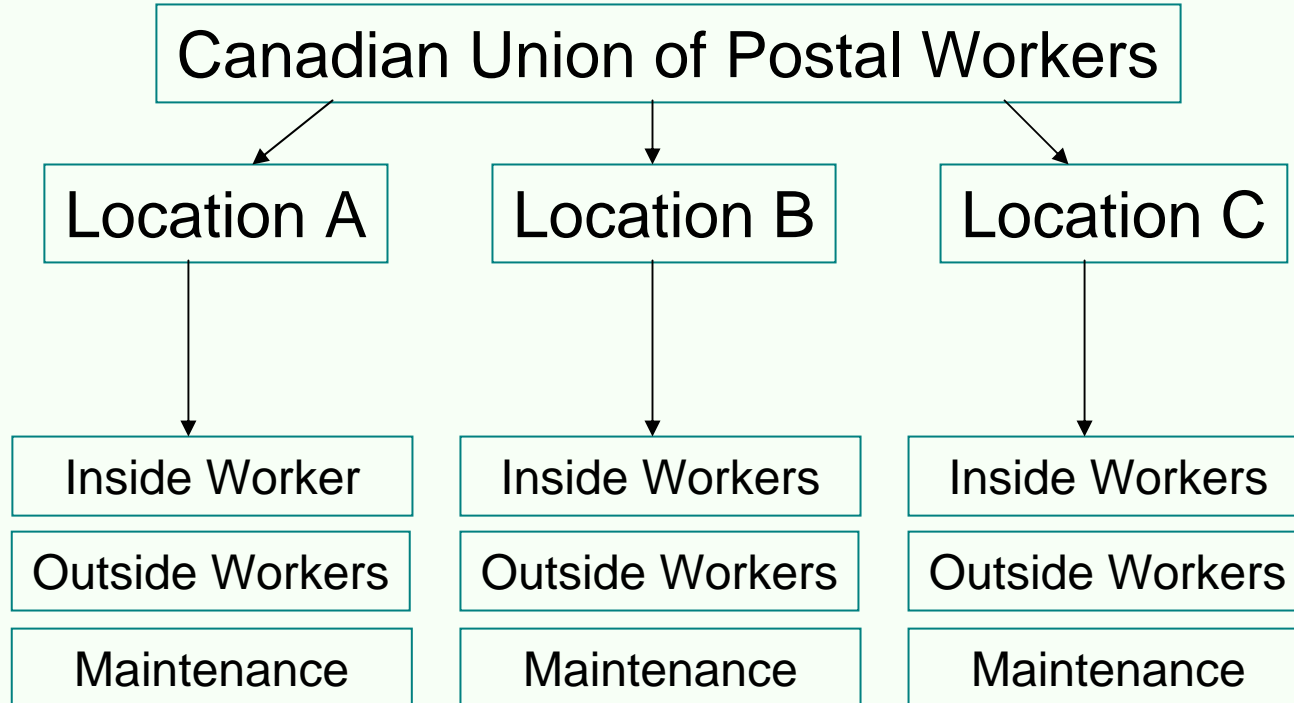
- each location is a cluster
 - would expect individuals at each location to be more similar to each other than to individuals in other clusters

- **Stratification**

- divide people into 'strata' or smaller groups and sample from within each
 - to ensure an adequate number from within each group

Methods

Sampling (Stratified Cluster)





Methods

- **Analysis**
 - Descriptive Analysis
 - response rate
 - frequencies, means
 - prevalence of incivility



Results

■ Response Rate

- 1,968 workers were sampled
- 42 ineligible (moved, retired, died, on medical leave)
- 1,926 valid sample size
- 965 questionnaires returned
- 50% response rate (965/1926)

■ Demographics

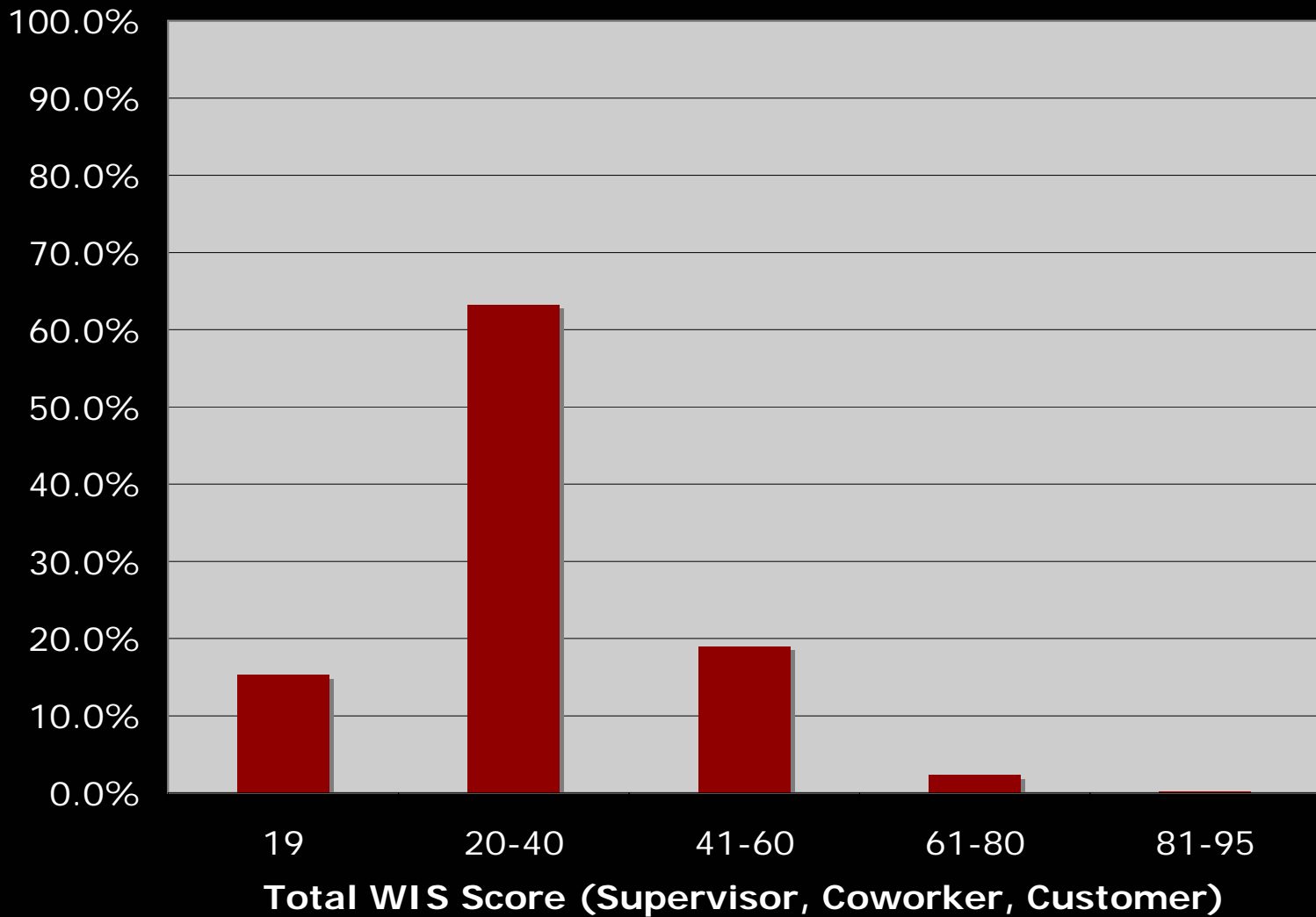
- primarily male (60%)
- mean age of 47 years (SD=8)
- majority married (70%)
- mean employment duration 18 years (SD=10)



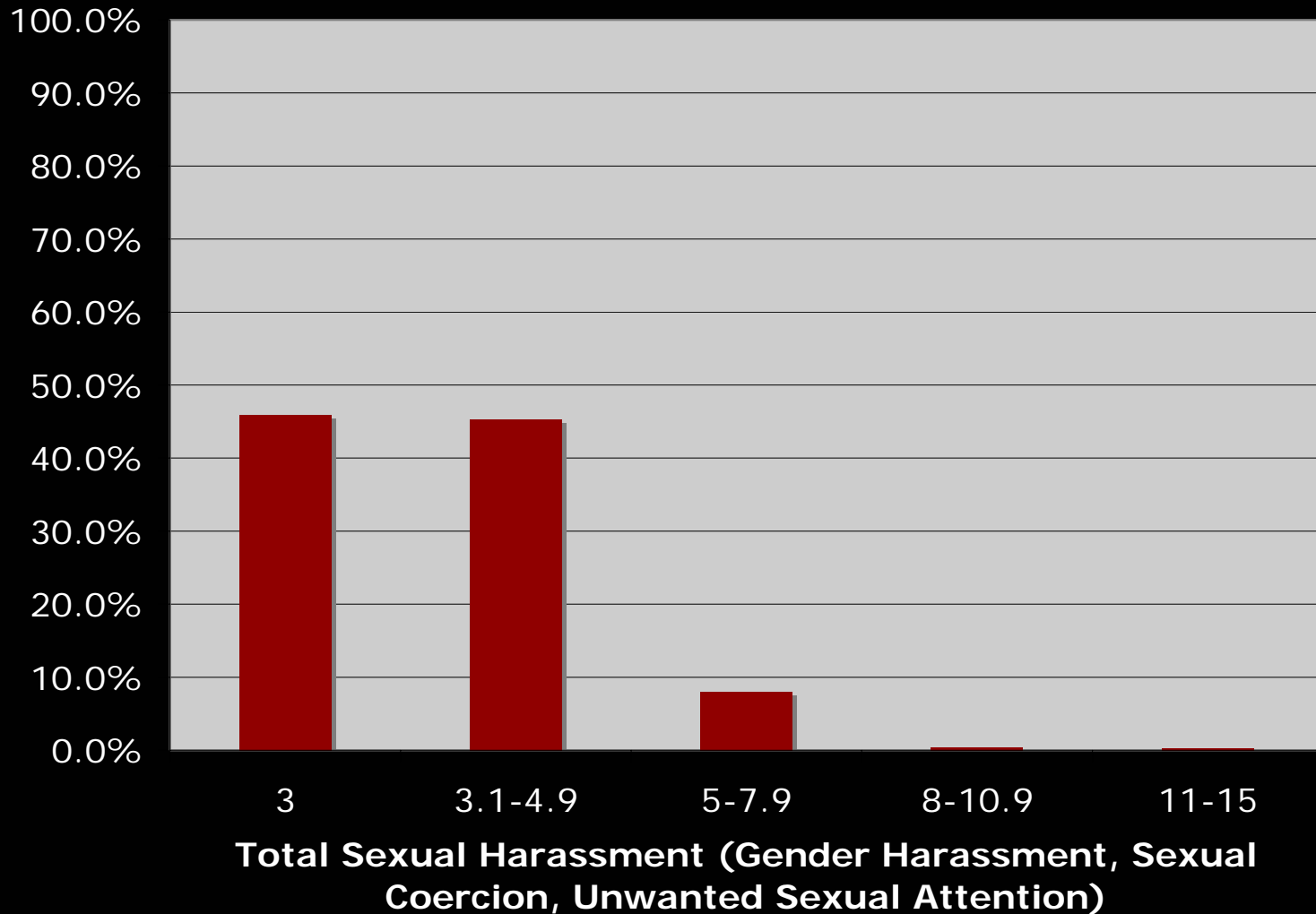
Results

- **Incivility and Sexual Harassment**
 - 85% of people experienced at least some incivility
 - 33% of people experienced incivility with no sexual harassment
 - 13% experienced neither

Results - Incivility



Results - Sexual Harassment





Results

- **Incivility Instigators**
 - most often male (58%)
 - *but* we don't know the distribution of male and female supervisors
 - therefore, could just be that there are more male than female supervisors
 - most often supervisors (44%)



Results

■ Union

- almost one-third (30%) had filed a grievance against the union in the previous 12 months
- union satisfaction rated from *very dissatisfied (1)* to *very satisfied (5)* was given a mean score of 2.8



Results

■ Work Environment

■ worst parts of job

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| ■ physical complaints and safety | 38% |
| ■ supervisors/management | 30% |
| ■ time pressure/burden* | 26% |
| ■ job in general* | 17% |
| ■ weather/walking conditions** | 11% |
| ■ coworkers* | 10% |
| ■ customers/public | 6% |
| ■ employee morale* | 4% |
| ■ union | 2% |
| ■ other | 7% |



Results

- **Injuries and Safety**
 - Almost half (43%) had been injured at work in the previous 12 months
 - 13% did *not* report their injury
 - 70% required medical attention



Results

■ Injuries and Safety

- What causes the most fear for safety at work?
 - Equipment accidents (15%)
 - Dogs (15%)
 - Supervisors or managers (7%)
 - Other employees (6%)
- Only 18% reported that there was nothing about their job that made them fear for their safety at work



Results

Type of Discrimination	Overall Frequency (%) (n=950)
Age	5
Gender	4
Race	2
Ethnicity	2
Disability	7
Sexual Orientation	1
Religion	1
Language	1
Political Belief	1
Union Involvement	8
Other	8
None of the Above	69



Results

■ Health and Pain

■ self-rated health

- majority rated very good (32%) or excellent (14%)
- 20% rated as fair or poor (compared to 11% of the general Canadian population aged 12+ years)

■ pain

- low back/buttock pain (59%)
- neck/shoulder pain (61%)
- pain was more often reported by outside workers



Hypothesis #1

- **Incivility and bullying will be only moderately related.**
 - correlations were fairly high (0.72 for supervisor incivility, 0.71 for coworker incivility)



Multiple Regression



Methods

■ Analysis

■ Effect of Clustering

- Individuals are not independent since in clusters
- Want to ensure that this is accounted for in the analysis
- Can calculate an intraclass correlation coefficient to determine the amount of variability each outcome that is explained by the clustering within each location
 - Values were very low in this case (highest = 2.8%)
- R^2 analog calculated using proportions of variance explained by fixed effects variables and random effect of location



Methods

■ Analysis

■ Multiple Linear Regression

- technique that allows you to determine what factors contribute to variation in the outcome
- create **models** with different combinations of factors/exposures
- can look at **explained variance** to compare the models
 - outcome values differ for everyone (e.g., everyone has a different percent body fat)
 - knowing certain characteristics can help you predict an outcome (e.g., knowing gender when predicting percent body fat)



Methods

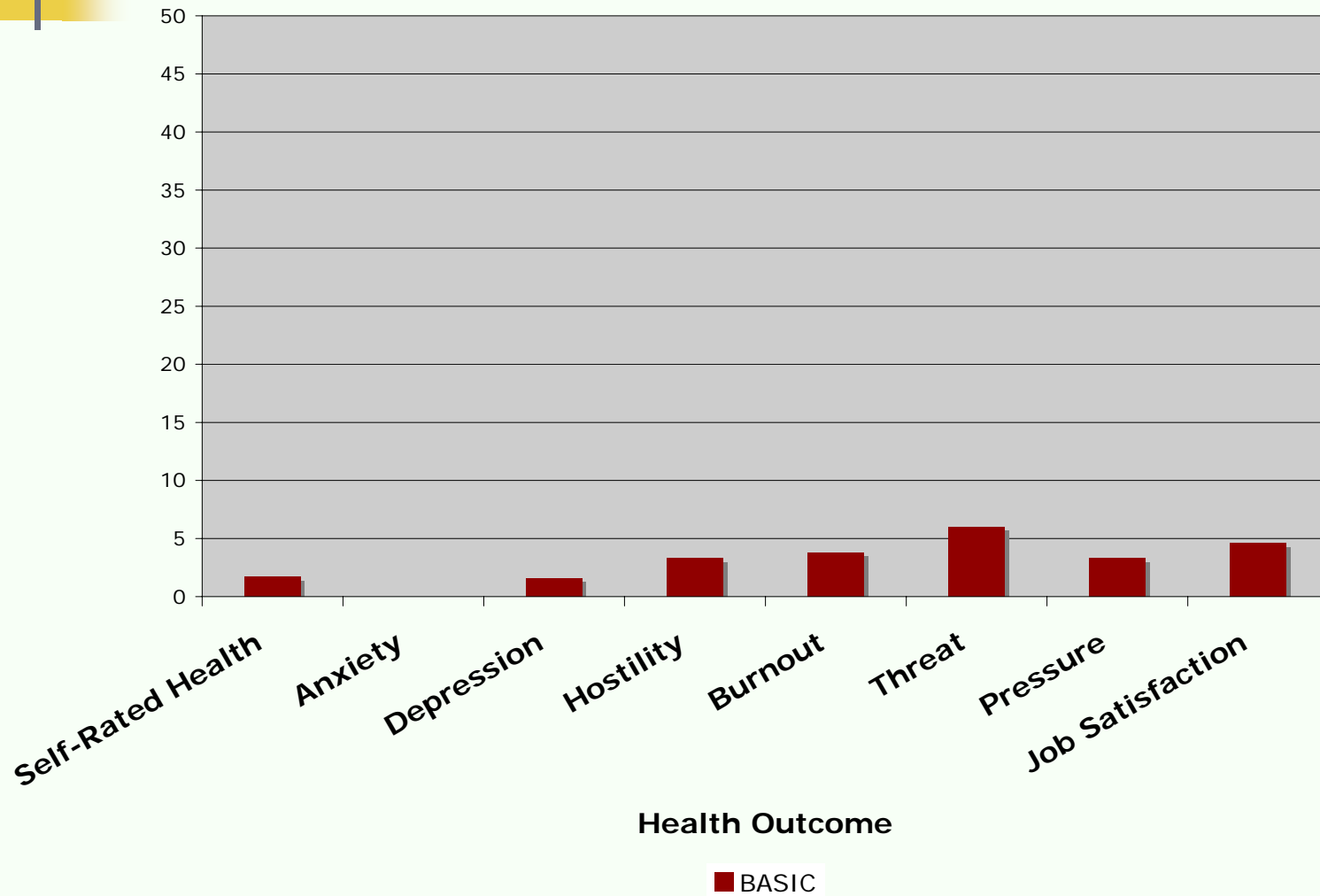
■ **Models**

- **Model 1: BASIC**
 - age, gender, employment type, shift type, job classification
- **Model 2: BASIC + INCIVILITY**
 - age, gender, employment type, shift type, job classification, supervisor incivility, coworker incivility
- **Model 3: BASIC + JOB STRAIN + SUPPORT + INCIVILITY**
 - age, gender, employment type, shift type, job classification, skill discretion, job demands, decision authority, supervisor support, coworkers support, supervisor incivility, coworker incivility
- **Model 4: BASIC + BULLYING + INCIVILITY**
 - age, gender, employment type, shift type, job classification, bullying, supervisor incivility, coworker incivility

Results - Linear Regression

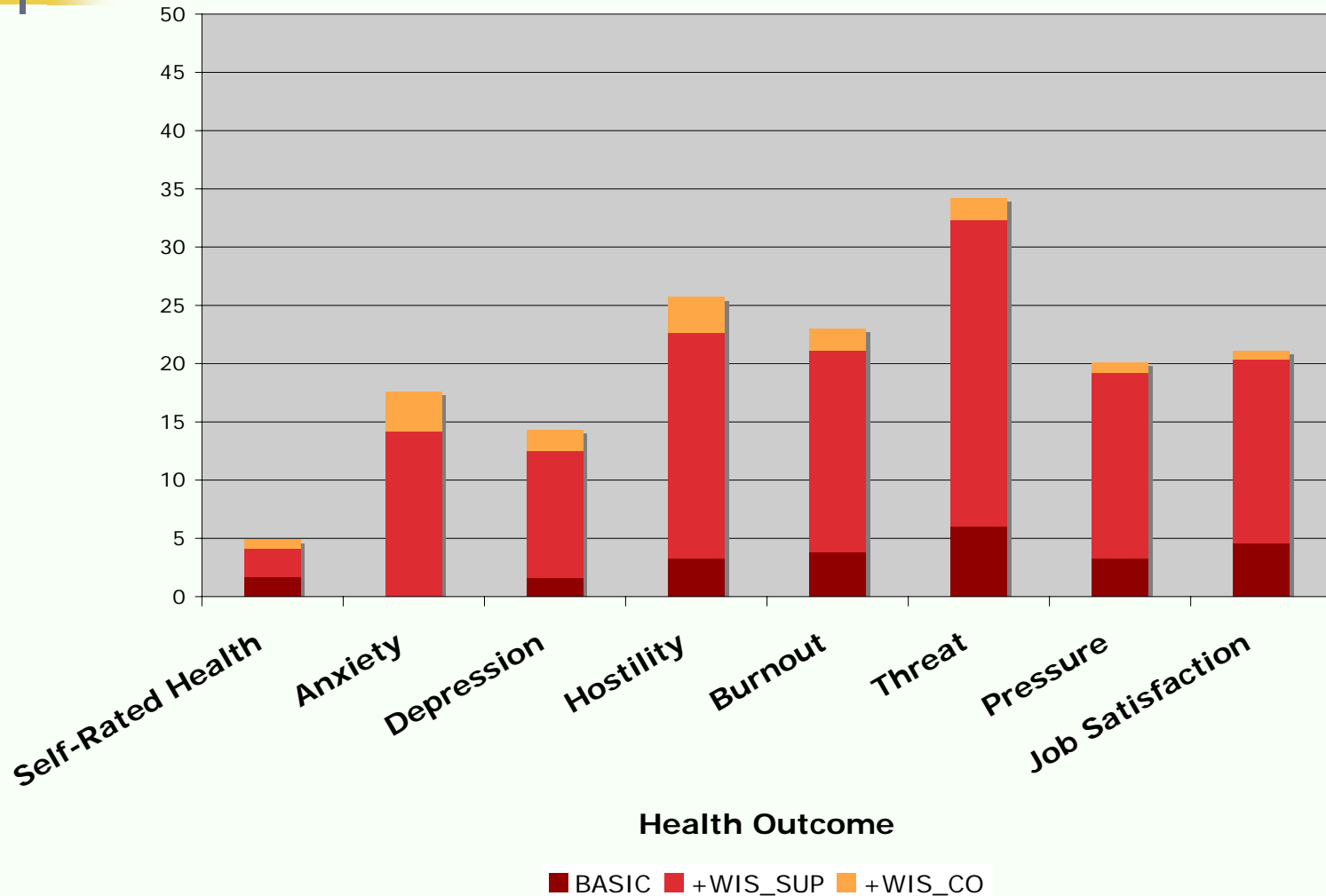
Model 1 - Basic Model

Adjusted Explained Variance



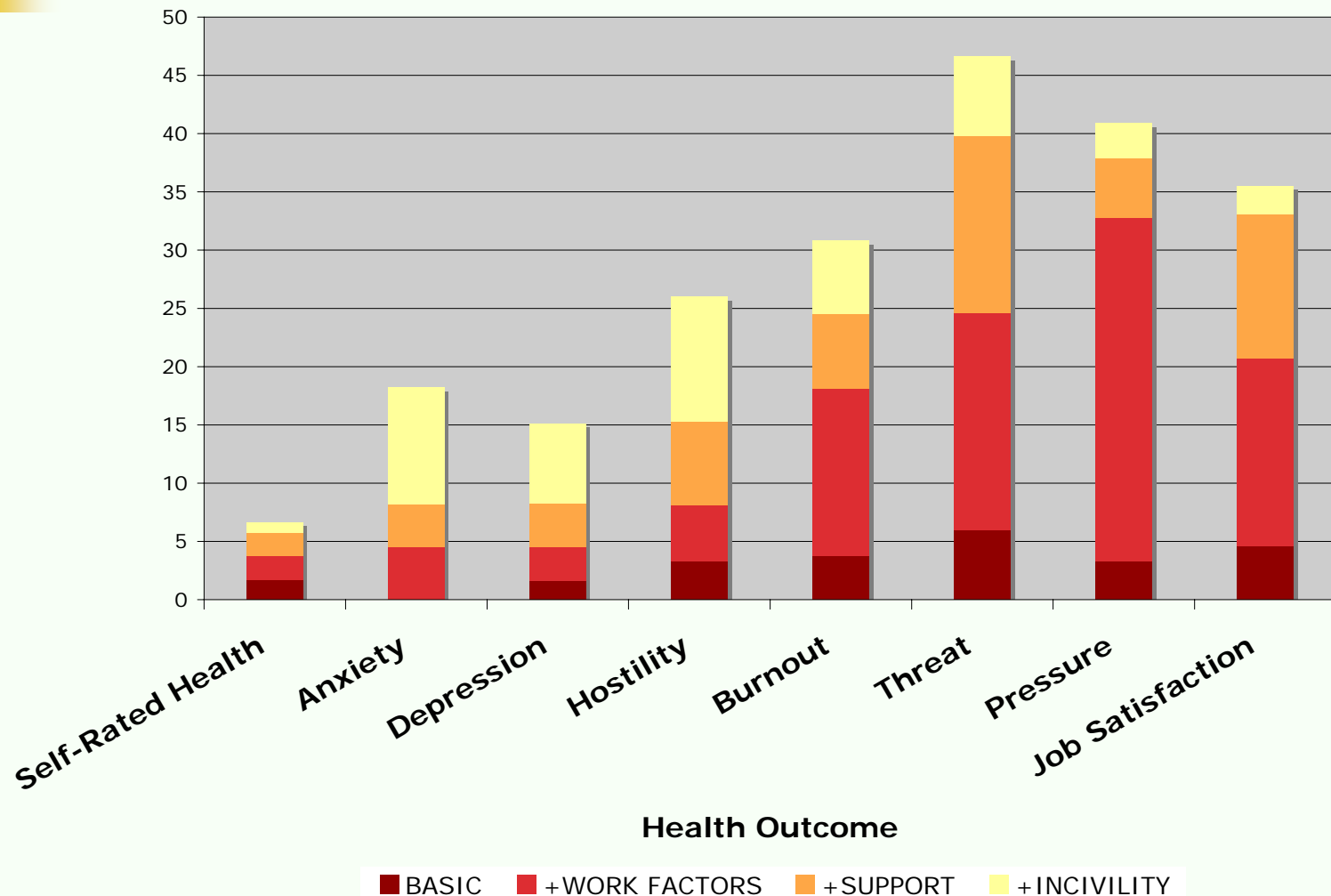
Results - Linear Regression

Model 2 - Basic + Incivility
Adjusted Explained Variance



Results - Linear Regression

Model 3 - Basic +Job Strain + Support + Incivility
Adjusted Explained Variance



Results - Linear Regression

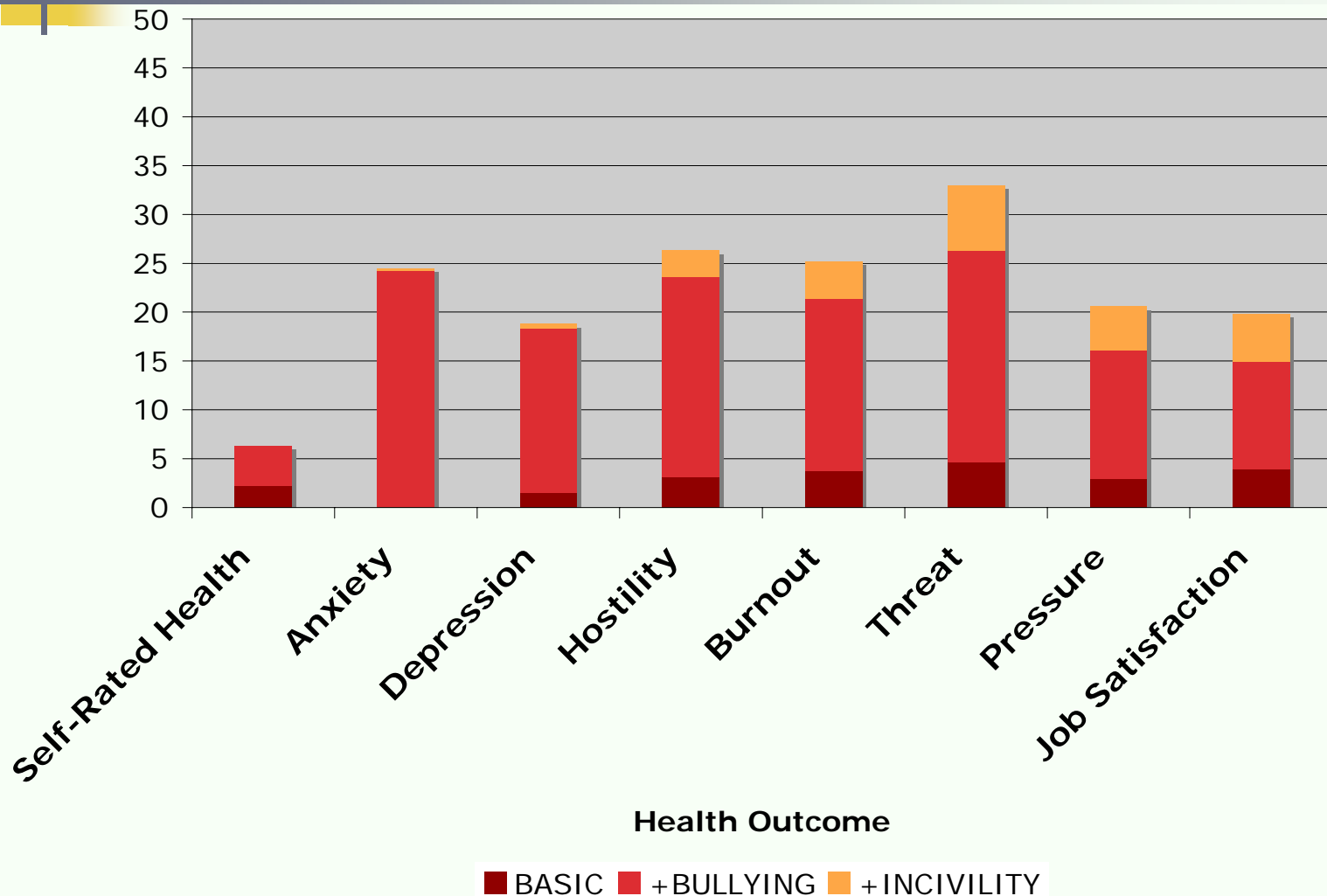
Model 3 - Basic + Job Strain + Support + Incivility

Adjusted Explained Variance

Outcome	ΔR^2 with Incivility (%)	Standardized Beta Coefficients	
		Supervisor Incivility	Coworker Incivility
Self-Rated Health	1	0.092*	0.044
Anxiety	10	0.237*	0.209*
Depression	6	0.229*	0.141*
Hostility	10	0.256*	0.192*
Burnout	7	0.233*	0.142*
Threat	6	0.250*	0.098*
Pressure	3	0.165*	0.079*
Job Satisfaction	2	-0.151*	-0.054 ₄₅

Results - Linear Regression

Model 4 - Basic + Bullying + Incivility
Adjusted Explained Variance





Hypothesis #2

- **Incivility will predict outcomes even after allowing for other factors such as job strain.**
 - incivility contributed additionally to explaining anxiety, depression, hostility, and burnout



Interactions



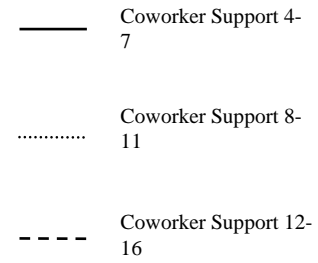
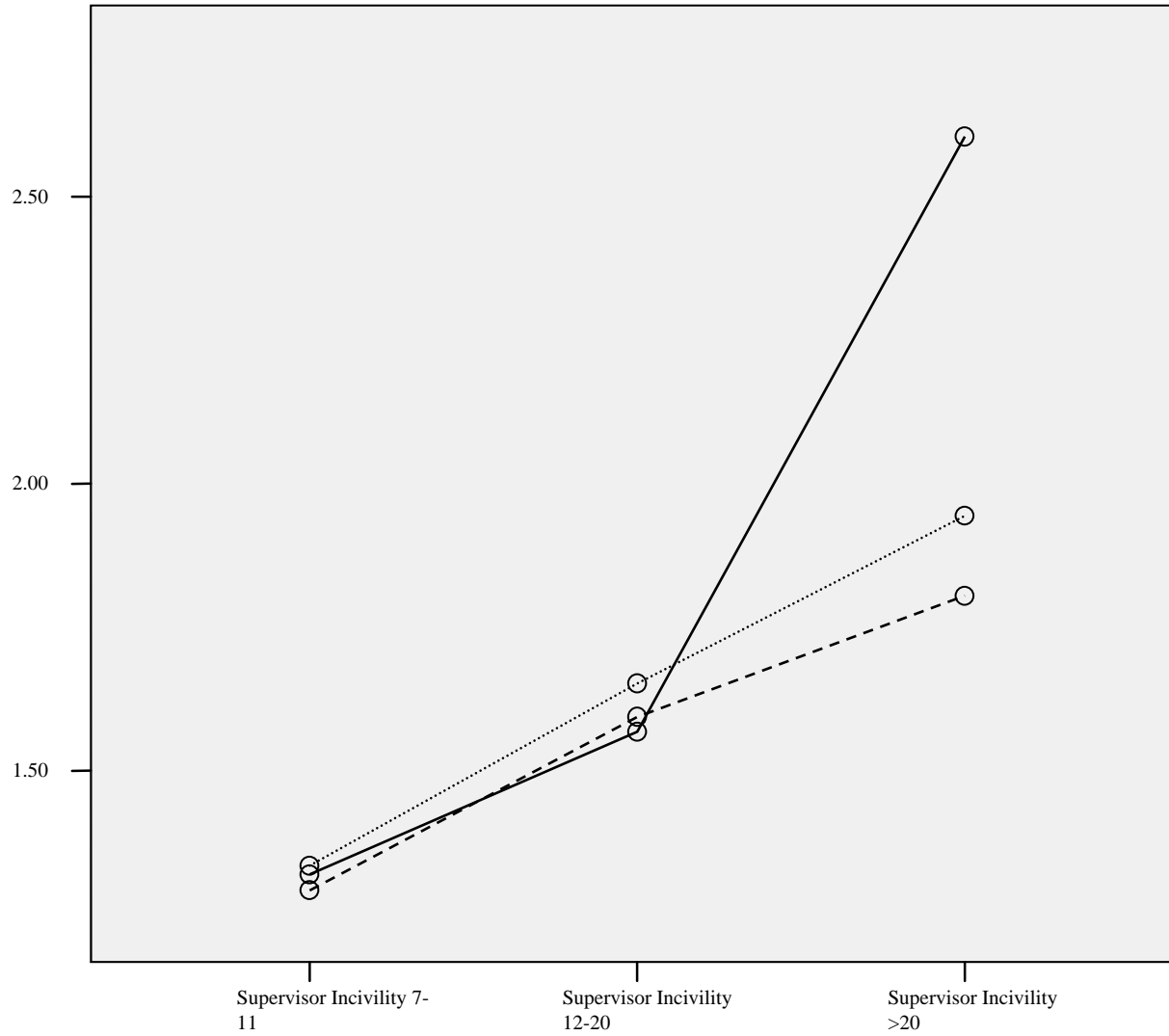
Methods

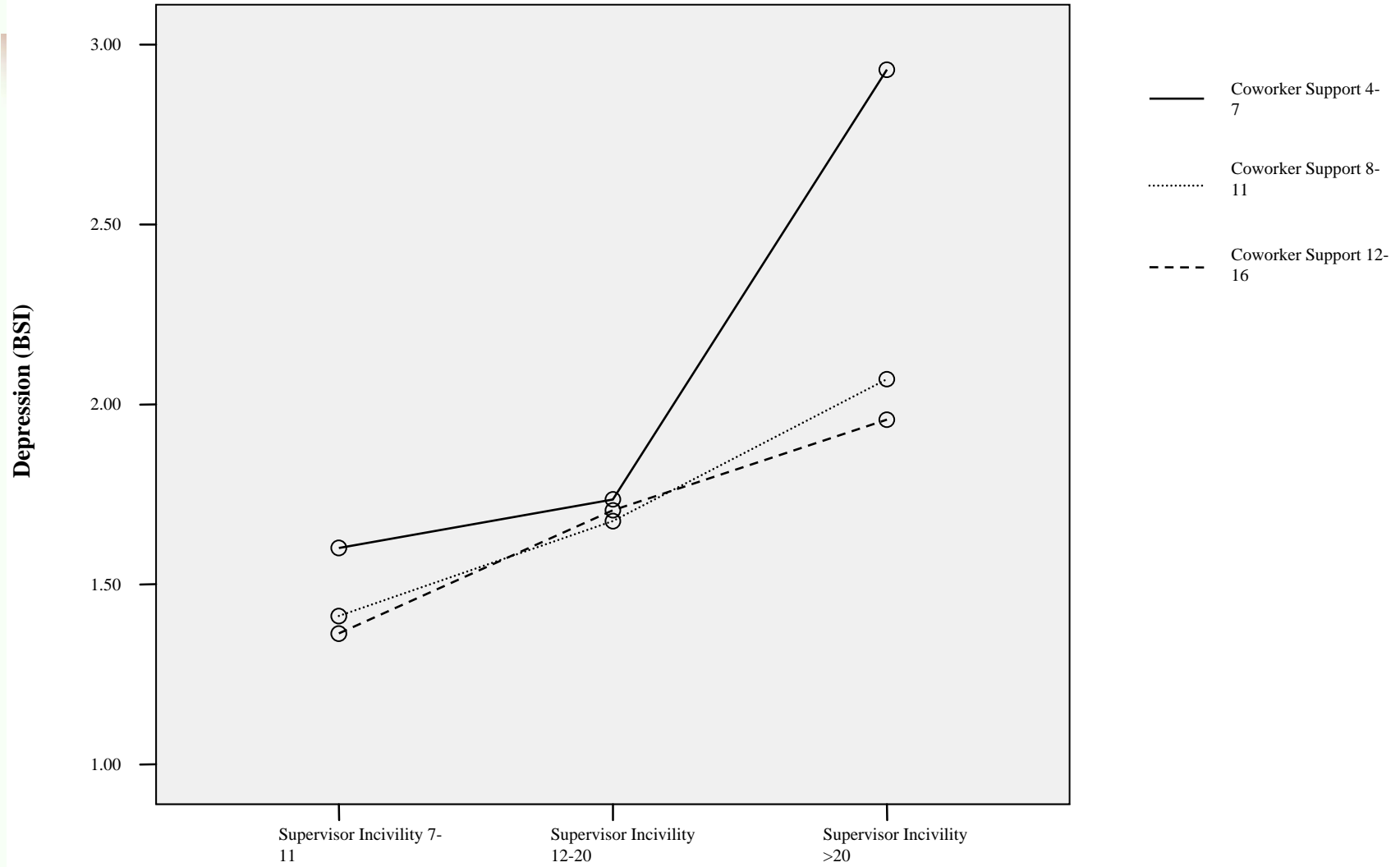
- **Analysis**

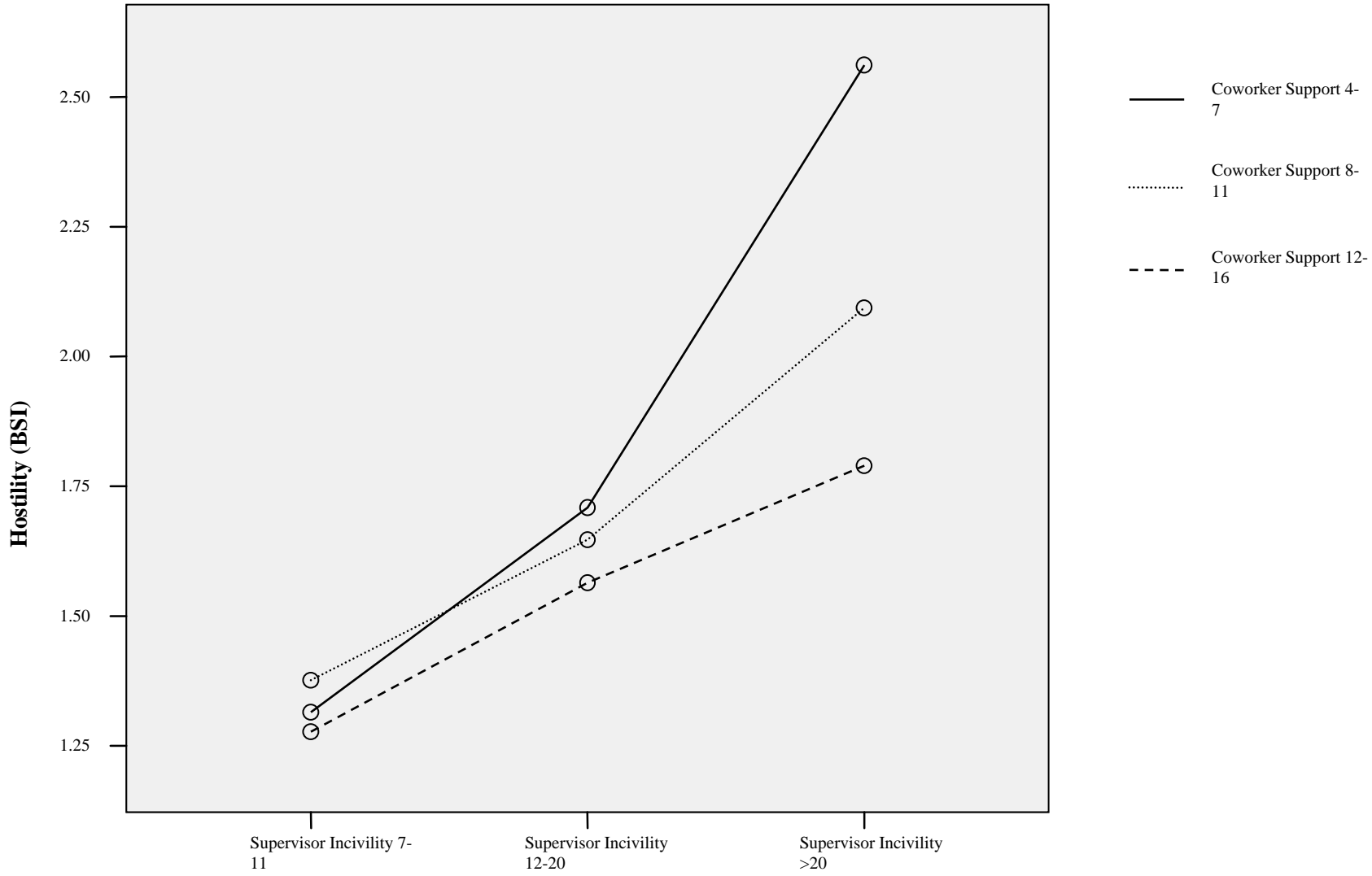
- Interactions

- the effect of one variable depends on the value of another
 - e.g., asbestos exposure modifies the relationship between smoking and lung cancer as having both asbestos exposure and a history of smoking increases the risk of lung cancer more than just smoking alone
 - in this study we were looking at the interaction between incivility and social support on the various health outcomes

Anxiety (BSI)









Hypothesis #3

- **Social support and coping skills will help reduce any effects of incivility on health.**
 - even with high levels of incivility, high levels of social support helped to buffer the effects on several health outcomes



Discussion

■ Strengths

- large sample size
- good representation of workers from multiple job classes, and location sizes
- union support for the project
- anonymous questionnaires
- separated out incivility from supervisors, coworkers, and customers

■ Limitations

- cross-sectional study
- response rate
- common-method bias



Conclusions

- **Conclusions**

- recognition that incivility is a problem in the workplace
- incivility helped explain various health outcomes after controlling for demographic and job characteristics
- further longitudinal research would be helpful



Acknowledgements

- This project was funded by a research grant (WSIB#04016) provided by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (Ontario).
- Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) for their cooperation with the project
- Vasudha Gupta and Kazi Othir Moitri for their time in data entry