

Common Incivilities Experienced by Hostel Students at Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan

Sidra Mushtaq¹, Uzma Munawar² and Muhammad Kamran³

Abstract

The study explored the relationship between incivility in the hostel environment, psychological well-being and academic achievement among students living in hostels. A correlational research design was used. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data with a population of 160 students living in university hostel and private hostels. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were used to analyze the data. Students often reported problems with food quality, hygiene, uncleanliness, breaches of personal boundaries, internal differences between residents and problems with personal security. The findings showed that there was a significant relationship between incivility in the home environment and academic performance. Psychological problems e.g., stress, anxiety, loneliness and social isolation were also linked to residential incivility. Students reporting greater levels of residential incivility had lower levels of academic success and well-being. The research indicates that the negative effects of an inappropriate residential environment and behavior of the student on the student's psyche and academic achievement can be detected. The results focus on improving the management of the hostel, improving residential facilities, effective student support services and promotion of good residential conduct. These measures can help to build a supportive learning environment and enhance student outcomes in Higher Education institution.

Keywords: Residential Environment, Student Conduct, Residential Incivility, Academic Performance, Psychological Well-being, Higher Education Institution

Introduction

Student incivilities is a growing issue in higher education that negatively affect the learning environment and students' academic performance. It also includes

^{1,2}Department of Education, The Women University Multan – Pakistan

³Department of Education, University of Loralai – Pakistan

disrespectful behavior such as stalking during lecture, bowling noise and ignoring classroom rules. This behavior creates anxiety and lack of concentration among students. Such behavior creates stress and insecurity among students. A peaceful and secure Hostel environment is important for student adjustment and successful learning. Students' feelings of insecurity are influenced by disorder and unsafe condition within the university environment. The study explains that students who experience fear and insecurity often face difficulties in concentration and academic adjustment.

Incivilities that violate mutual respect negatively influenced individual's emotional wellbeing and interpersonal relationship. The study explain that such behavior can create psychological stress and weakness in social relationship.

The consequences of uncivil behavior in hostel extend well beyond momentary discomfort and research consistently links prolonged exposure to incivility with heightened psychological distress, diminished academic engagement and compromised physical health (Porath & Erez, 2007). Students who experience bullying or social isolation in residential settings frequently report lower level of academic motivation, increased anxiety and reduced satisfaction with their overall University experience (Espelage et al., 2014).

Despite the elements of this issue, empirical research examining hostel specific incivility within the Pakistani higher education context remains sparse. The majority of existing studies have been conducted in western context and finding may not translate directly to South Asian residential environments which are shaped by distinct cultural norms, institutional framework and demography competitions (Malik & Hussain, 2018).

Review of the Literature

❖ Conceptualization of Incivility in Educational Setting

The theoretical foundation for the study comes from the work of Andersson and Pearson (1999), who defined workplace incivility as low-intensity deviant behavior with an ambiguous intent to harm the target that was contrary to workplace norms for mutual respect. Later (Twale and De Luca., 2008) expanded this definition to the educational setting, where they observed incivility between faculty, staff, and students in higher education settings. Throughout the literature, there has been a debate about whether incivility is a continuum of behavior, from subtle

dismissiveness and passive exclusion to more overt verbal aggression and deliberate disruptive behavior (Forni, 2002; Cortina et al., 2001).

Lim and Cortina (2005) also studied the gendered aspects of incivility, as women are far more likely to be the subject of uncivil behavior, and in particular, of uncivil behavior that takes advantage of social power differentials. Their work led them to focus on the incivilities as an entangled aspect of the social matrix of inequity and power.

❖ **Common hostel in civilities experience by students**

According to perceptions and practices of anti-social behavior among university hostel student in Punjab University Lahore, hostel students commonly experience different form of incivilities and anti-social behaviors including noise disturbance bowling, rude communication, aggressive attitude, conflict and violation of hostel rules. Such behavior negatively affecting students' emotional wellbeing, social adjustment and academic performance (Ullah et al,2024).

❖ **Noise Disturbance as a Form of Incivility**

Noise disturbance has been the focus of much empirical research in the context of hostel incivility. Haines et al., (2003) have built strong connections between chronic noise exposure in residential environments and the increase in alterations of sleep and cognitive dysfunction. In a university-based hostel setting, late-night noise, loud music, and disregard for study hours have been cited as recurring complaints that negatively affect students' academic preparation.

❖ **Conflict among hostel residents**

One of the most extensively researched types of residential incivility is roommate conflict (Patterson et al.2004). Identifying incompatibility in personal hygiene, roommates' sleeping habits, study habits, and social preferences is the most significant contributor to roommate conflict, which then escalates to more serious interpersonal hostility if not addressed. On top of this, private bedrooms in shared hostels make it difficult to avoid the intensity of conflicts, as others cannot be far away from conflict points.

In social comparison theory, positive attitudes toward a person are likely to increase if that person is close, while negative attitudes toward that person are likely to increase if that person is distant, which could foster an upward spiral of negative

attitudes and feelings toward each other (Suls & Wheeler, 2000). The situation can be especially problematic in developing nations, where hostel overcrowding can lead to an increased likelihood of incompatible people living in the same vicinity without appropriate mediated tools.

❖ **Bullying and Social Exclusion**

Bullying in the residential academic environment has been described as a serious form of incivility, which has long-lasting psychological implications. Based on the study of (Espelage et al., 2014), "bullying in the hostel" is the mistreatment of one or more hostel peers by a single resident student that is systematic, deliberate and repetitive in nature with a power imbalance. Physical intimidation, property damage, relational aggression (intentional exclusion from social groups) and cyberbullying using shared digital space are all forms of bullying. The effects of bullying in a hostel setting have been well documented in the literature. Victims often feel anxious and depressed, have lower levels of academic motivation, are more likely to miss class and in extreme cases, withdraw from the University altogether (Twale & De Luca, 2008). Social isolation, the social aspect of bullying, has a significant impact, as it prevents students from being able to have the peer supports, they need to get through the academic and social challenges of university life.

Effects of Hostel Incivilities on Students' Academic and Emotional Well-being

Hostel incivilities create stress, anxiety, fear, lack of communication and negatively influenced pupils' academic performance and emotional health. The hostel plays a vital role in student emotional wellbeing and academic adjustment. Negative hostel experiences such as noise disturbance, conflicts, lack of privacy and disrespectful behavior can create stress, anxiety and emotional discomfort among learners. These problems reduce student concentration motivation and satisfaction with hostel life, which may ultimately affect their academic performance (Jameel & Agiel, 2023).

The social behavior and social dynamics in the hostels

Peers are a key element of the hostel experience. The hostel provides a first experience to many students with others from different regional, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The diversity can keep them tolerating and developing their personalities, but it can also cause intergroup tensions and misunderstandings that lead to uncivil behavior (Hershcovis, 2011).

Peer aggression and social dominance hierarchies are pervasive in the peer context of residency, especially for younger students. Their ecological model of peer victimization highlights the significance of contextual factors such as institutional culture, physical setting, and supervision on the peer behavior outcomes.

Academic Stress and Performance

There is a clear empirical literature showing that incivility in the hostel is a part of the research agenda related to academic performance. Experimental studies have shown that incivility, even just being an observer of the behavior, has a significant impact on cognitive functioning, creativity and task persistence (Porath & Erez, 2007). The effects of these disturbances in sleep and emotional stress from interpersonal conflict and from the cognitive preoccupations, these social stresses create measurable decrease in academic output in naturalistic hostel studies. In particular, Bickford (2005) studied the relationship between dormitory noise and academic performance, and concluded that there was a significant negative correlation between the noise level of the dormitory and the grade point average of the students studying in the university. This association was mediated by the quality of sleep, such that those students who reported high noise disturbance also reported low sleep quality and daytime fatigue, both of which are known to be predictors of poor academic functioning.

Role of hostel in managing student incivilities

The hostel plays an important role in shaping students' behavior. The study explains that overcrowded and poorly managed hostels increase conflicts, noise aggression and other negative behavior among students as supporting hostels help improve student behavior and social interaction (Balogun et al., 2024)

The study highlights that clear rules, effective communication and a respectful environment play a key role in reducing uncivil behavior and improving interaction among students with a well-managed environment with proper supervision and mutual respect (Afshari et al., 2025)

Methodology

A quantitative correlational research design was adopted in this study which includes the systematic collection of numerical data. The application of statistical methods to describe, explain and predict relationships among variables (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). Quantitative methods are desired when the goal of the research is to test theory and generalize findings from a sample to a broader population.

❖ Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample consisted of 160 students residing in university-owned and private hostels affiliated with higher education institutions in Pakistan. Simple random sampling was employed to ensure every eligible student had an equal probability of selection, thereby minimizing selection bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). All participants were full-time undergraduate or postgraduate students currently residing in hostels.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 160)

Type of Residence	1.43	0.497	Most respondents in one dominant category
Duration of Stay	2.81	1.168	Significant diversity in length of residency
Number of Roommates	3.45	0.708	Most students share with 3-4 others

Note. Items based on Likert-coded response categories. Valid responses = 160 for all variables.

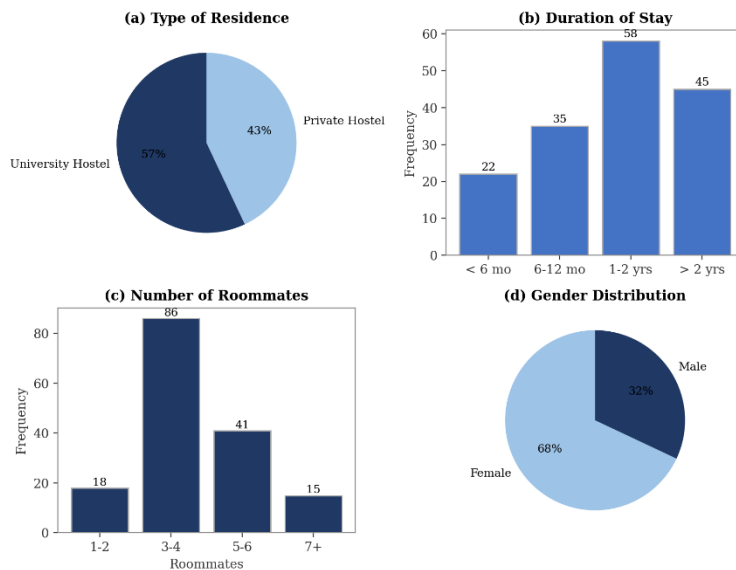


Figure 1. Demographic distribution of study sample (N = 160): (a) type of residence, (b) duration of stay, (c) number of roommates, (d) gender distribution.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS (Version 26) was used for all analyses. Descriptive statistics characterized the prevalence of residential incivilities was used. Pearson correlation coefficients examined associations between incivility dimensions and academic and psychological outcomes. Significance was assessed at $p < .05$ (*) and $p < .01$ (**), two-tailed. All statistical assumptions including normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were verified before inferential analysis (Field, 2024; Hair et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

The table presents the Pearson correlation analysis between different components of the residential environment. In this context, the main variables analyzed include "rude and disrespectful behavior" and "conflicts demanding pursuits," based on data collected from 160 participants (N = 160).

All variables were measured, such as levels of rude behavior and frequency of conflicts, show significant correlations. This means that as these specific residential environment problems increase, their negative impact on pupils' academic performance and behavior also increases

Prevalence of Residential Incivilities (Objective 1)

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the ten residential incivility scale items. Mean scores ranged from 3.30 to 3.79, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that these incivilities characterize their hostel experience. All items exceeded the neutral midpoint (M > 3.0), signaling pervasive institutional concern.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Residential Incivility Scale Items (N = 160)

Quality and hygiene of food management	160	3.79	1.200	1st
Personal boundaries not respected in hostel	160	3.76	1.205	2nd
Lack of cleanliness causes discomfort	160	3.61	1.208	3rd
Conflicts among residents disrupt living	160	3.52	1.279	4th
Students feel intimidated by other residents	160	3.50	1.254	5th
Loss of personal belongings (security concerns)	160	3.51	1.218	6th
Bullying or harassment in residency	160	3.40	1.328	7th
Discriminatory treatment from hostel workers	160	3.40	1.214	8th

Hostel staff treat students unfairly	160	3.31	1.255	9th
Rude or disrespectful behavior from students	160	3.30	1.212	10th
Overall Construct Mean	160	3.53	0.621	—

Note. Items ranked in descending order by mean. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. SD = Standard Deviation.

Food quality and hygiene received the highest mean rating ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.200$), with 62.9% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was closely followed by violations of personal boundaries ($M = 3.76$), lack of cleanliness ($M = 3.61$), and interpersonal conflicts ($M = 3.52$). Staff-related incivilities—including unfair treatment ($M = 3.31$) and rude peer behavior ($M = 3.30$)—while somewhat lower, remained consistently above the neutral threshold. Moderate standard deviations (approximately 1.20–1.33) reflect variation in individual experiences while confirming broad agreement on prevalence across the sample.

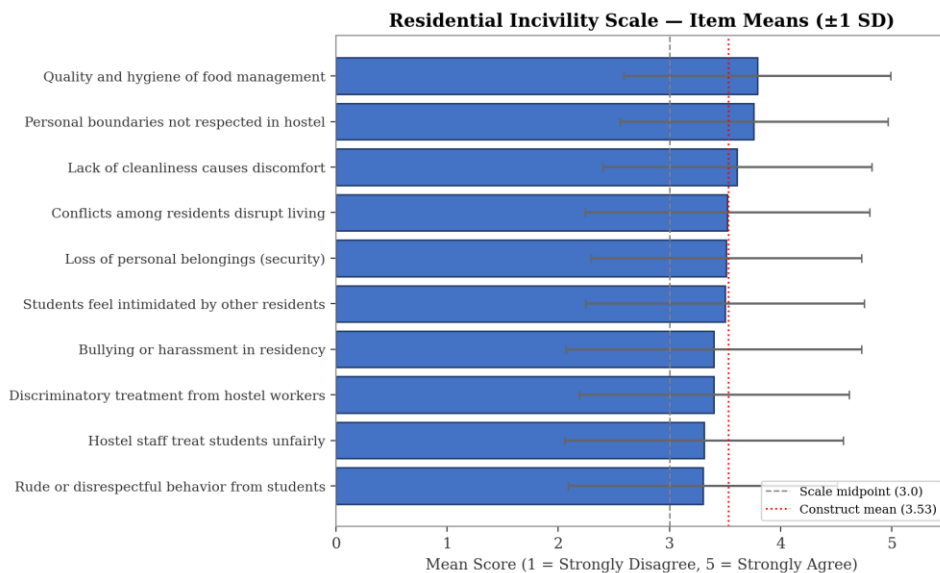


Figure 2. Residential Incivility Scale — Item means ranked in descending order with ± 1 SD error bars. Dashed line = scale midpoint (3.0); dotted line = construct mean (3.53).

Incivility Dimensions and Academic Performance (Objective 4)

Table 3 examines correlations between specific behavioral dimensions of residential incivility and academic performance, ranked in descending order by correlation coefficient.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix Incivility Dimensions and Academic Performance (N = 160)

Staff favoritism	.400**	.000	160
Problems reducing ability to concentrate	.336**	.000	160
Conflicts among residents	.318**	.000	160
Rude and disrespectful behavior	.307**	.000	160
Stress due to residential problems	.281**	.000	160
Emotional well-being crucial for academic success	.224**	.004	160
Noise affecting study time	.246**	.002	160
Anxiety affecting daily activities	.210**	.008	160

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Items ranked in descending order by correlation coefficient. All correlations significant at $p < .05$.

Staff favoritism demonstrated the strongest correlation with academic performance ($r = .400$, $p < .001$), suggesting that perceived institutional inequity is the most potent individual predictor of academic harm. Concentration difficulties ($r = .336$), interpersonal conflicts ($r = .318$), and rude behavior ($r = .307$) followed closely with moderate, significant associations. Noise disruption ($r = .246$), residential stress ($r = .281$), anxiety ($r = .210$), and emotional well-being ($r = .224$) each demonstrated significant associations. Crucially, all eight incivility dimensions yielded statistically significant correlations, confirming the multidimensional nature of residential incivility's academic impact.

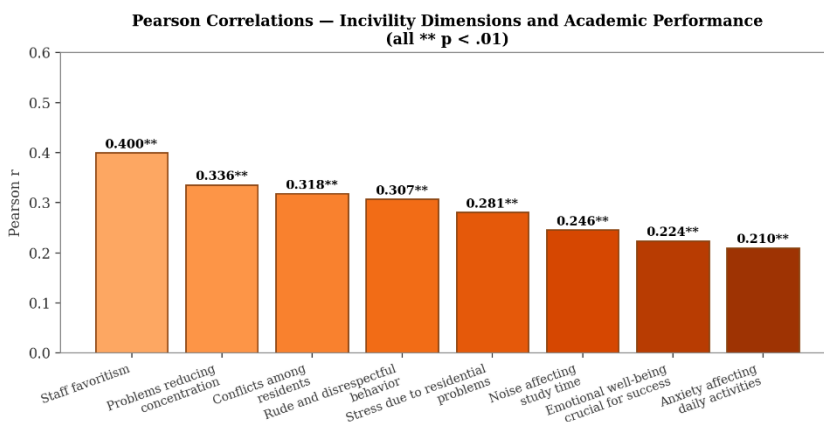


Figure 3. Pearson correlations — incivility dimensions and academic performance, ranked in descending order. All ** $p < .01$.

Table 4: Summary of Construct Means Across All Four Research Objectives (N = 160)

Residential Incivility	3.53	0.621	Moderate-High
Academic Performance Impact	3.41	0.589	Moderate-High
Psychological Distress	3.67	0.644	High
Social Isolation	3.48	0.632	Moderate-High

Note. Interpretation scale: values above 3.5 = High; 2.5-3.5 = Moderate-High; below 2.5 = Low (5-point Likert scale).

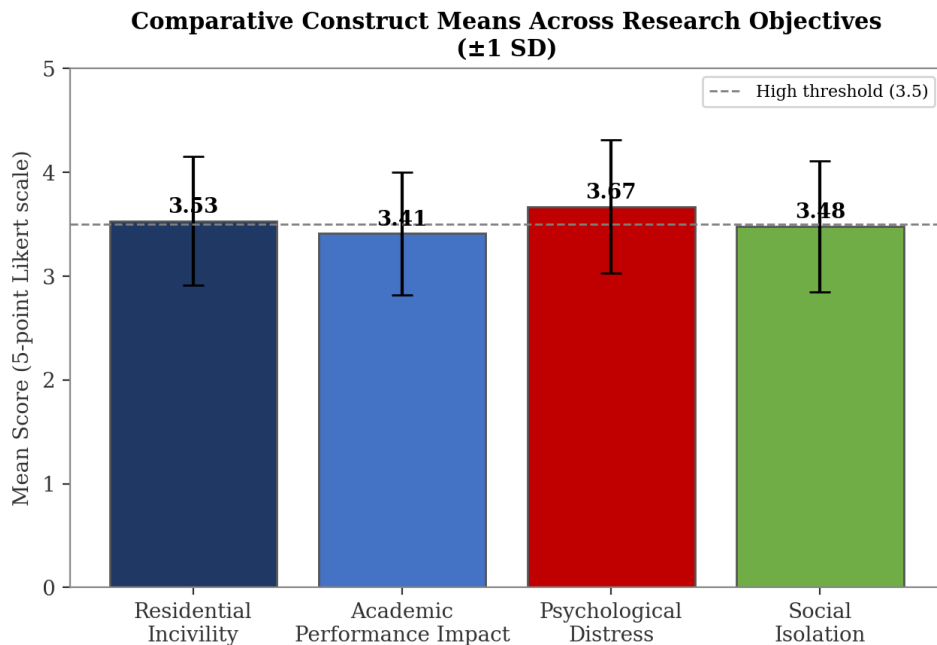


Figure 4. Comparative bar chart of construct means across all four research objectives with ± 1 SD error bars.

Discussion

The results confirm the multi-dimensional and widespread nature of incivility in hostels of university campuses and its impact on student health and performance.

The overwhelming prevalence of noise disturbance as the most common type of incivility is in line with a large amount of literature from a residential psychology tradition (Haines et al., 2003). This indicates that interpersonal and communicative aspects of hostel life are important sources of social friction as they are among the top five reported incivilities.

Perhaps the most significant finding from an institutional perspective is the high non-reporting rate found in this study. If most of the students are in need of institutional redress for their uncivil behavior and do not seek that redress, the institution should not be able to use that feedback to fine-tune its response mechanisms. Systemic failures, fear of retaliation and low confidence in institutional responsiveness must be dealt with by hostel administrators urgently.

Gender and year-of-study differences observed are in line with theoretical predictions from the social power and developmental psychology perspectives. Females are more likely to score high on incivility, which corroborates an overall trend of gendered targeting that has been found by Lim and Cortina (2005). Being more vulnerable than their older peers provides first-year students with a reason to emphasize the need for targeted transition support programs.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the incivility experienced in hostels is a common and significant issue in Pakistan's higher education institutions. The five most prevalent reported instances of incivility e.g., noise disturbance, verbal disrespect, noncooperation, roommate conflict, and social bullying combine to make a residence that is often hostile to academic work and psychological well-being. The predominance of noise disturbance is indicative of structural and policy shortcomings in hostel management, whereas the high levels of interpersonal disturbance incivilities point to the need for intentional measures to promote community building and conflict resolution. The under-reported incivility incidents documented show that there is a significant disconnection between student experiences and institutional awareness, and existing oversight mechanisms are not working well. The differences in exposure to incivility between genders and years of study suggest that interventions are necessary for specific sub-groups of the hostel residents.

The lessons learned from these findings have implications not only for institutions in Pakistan but also for higher education systems across South Asia and contexts in

which the capacity for residential students has been rapidly expanding, and the capacity and frameworks of accommodating students' needs, welfare, and regulation have not yet matched. Longitudinal research designs should be used to investigate whether hostel incivility has a cumulative effect on students' academic life, and qualitative research methods should be incorporated to gain insight into an in-depth study into the students' lived experiences with respect to the issue.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research that has been done in this study the following recommendations are made: Institutions should have clear and written codes of conduct for hostel residents, and definitions of what constitutes an uncivil behavior, consequences for breaking the code of conduct should be clear, unambiguous and easily accessed, and there should be a mechanism for complaints from which complainants are protected from retaliation. Hostel administration must establish a structured peer mediation program, so that the senior student in the hostel can act as a mediator to solve the interpersonal conflict early so as not to cause trouble. All the university hostels should have silent study hour and should be designated as quiet area and should be monitored by the hostel wardens regularly with efficient management of disturbances created by the use of loud audio-visual materials. Universities should have orientation programs for new hosts in their hostels, which include information about their community norms, expectations on how they are expected to live together, how to handle conflict and what avenues are open to them if they encounter conflict. Institutions should also provide special peer support and mentoring programs for first year and female students, especially in the first semester of living in the hostel. Accessibility of counselling and psychosocial support services in hostel; regular awareness campaigns to reduce stigma of seeking mental health support. Further research is recommended in order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes that students go through when they experience and manage hostel incivility, as well as to assess the effectiveness of proposed interventions, through mixed methods approaches.

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Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	20-Mar-2026
<i>Revised</i>	16-May-2026
<i>Accepted</i>	12-Jun-2026
<i>Published</i>	30-Jun-2026

Declarations:

Author's Contribution:

- **All Authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

Muhammad Kamran

muhammad.kamran@uoli.edu.pk
