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The Outcomes of Illegitimate Tasks at Work: A Meta-Analysis

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This meta-analysis was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/y6wxd>). The data and findings of this study have not been previously presented in any form, including conferences or online. The data are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

The Outcomes of Illegitimate Tasks at Work: A Meta-Analysis

Abstract

Illegitimate tasks have garnered significant scholarly interest over the past decade, establishing such tasks as a key concept in stress research. Despite this, there has been no comprehensive quantitative systematic review to synthesize existing research findings. Addressing this gap, our meta-analysis ($k = 145$; $N = 66,387$) quantitatively examines the consequences of illegitimate tasks across three domains: attitudinal (affective commitment, job satisfaction, work engagement, and turnover intentions), wellbeing (negative affect, burnout, and work-family conflict), and behavioral (job performance, innovative behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, counterproductive work behavior, and work withdrawal behavior). We also compare the relationships between the two dimensions of illegitimate tasks—unreasonable tasks and unnecessary tasks—and related outcomes to assess their differential predictive validity. Furthermore, we investigate the potential moderating effects of sociodemographic factors (power distance and age) and methodological factors (rating source and measurement time lag). In light of the findings, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: meta-analysis; illegitimate tasks; unnecessary tasks; unreasonable tasks; behavioral outcomes; attitudinal outcomes; wellbeing outcomes

Introduction

In the popular film *The Devil Wears Prada*, aspiring journalist Andy Sachs becomes an editorial assistant to the formidable editor-in-chief of the prestigious *Runway* magazine. However, her day-to-day work proved a stark departure from reasonable expectations. For instance, her tasks extended far beyond professional duties into personal service for the supervisor's family. These requests, which clearly exceeded the scope of an assistant's role, included securing the unpublished manuscript for the children, purchasing personal items like surfboards for them, and even handling the family pet. Furthermore, driven solely by her boss's personal whims, she had to follow a rigid and pointlessly ritualized procedure for delivering magazine proofs and even contend with demands to book objectively impossible flights.

The nature of assignments like those Andy faced is captured by the academic concept of 'illegitimate tasks'. Semmer and colleagues (2010, p. 72) define these tasks as those violating "norms about what can reasonably be expected from a person in a given role or position." These tasks fall into two categories: unreasonable tasks, which extend beyond "the range of one's occupation" (illustrated by the first set of examples involving family service); and unnecessary tasks, which "should not have to be carried out by anyone" (exemplified by the unnecessarily demanding delivery process for the magazine mock-up) (Semmer et al., 2010, pp. 73-74). Understanding task illegitimacy requires considering its circumstances alongside the role of the individual assigned to carry it out. For example, while handling family pets or procuring children's items might be expected duties for a household manager, assigning these tasks to an editorial

assistant like Andy, whose professional role centers on supporting the magazine's operations, renders them illegitimate (Semmer et al., 2007). Thus, the assignment of such illegitimate tasks, whether unreasonable in scope or unnecessary in nature, can easily be perceived by the employee as disrespectful or unfair treatment (Semmer et al., 2015).

Research on illegitimate tasks has burgeoned since Semmer et al.'s (2010) seminal contribution, revealing numerous detrimental outcomes across various domains (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023; Fila et al., 2020). Despite this progress, several critical gaps persist. The first concerns the relative importance of these diverse outcomes, as the fragmented nature of the existing literature hinders direct comparisons across studies (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023). Clarifying which outcomes within the nomological network are most strongly associated with illegitimate tasks is essential for assessing their overall detrimental workplace impact. Yet, this remains unresolved. Additionally, primary studies are susceptible to "sampling error, measurement error, and other artifacts" (Schmidt & Hunter, 2014, p. 17). Consequently, a clear understanding of the direction and magnitude of the relationships between illegitimate tasks and their outcomes is required. Addressing these gaps is critical for enabling scholars and practitioners to leverage existing findings effectively and prioritize key relationships for research.

Second, although illegitimate tasks are conceptually differentiated into unreasonable and unnecessary tasks, their operationalization in empirical research has been inconsistent. Some researchers evaluate both dimensions, reporting their effects independently (e.g., Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018), while others merge them into a

single overall score (e.g., Semmer et al., 2015), and still others measure only one dimension (e.g., Koch & Adler, 2018). While preliminary evidence indicates that unreasonable and unnecessary tasks act as distinct predictors with differential effects (Schmitt et al., 2015; Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018; van Schie et al., 2014), the relative strength of their predictive effects remains a matter of scholarly debate (e.g., Muntz et al., 2019; Pindek et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2015). A critical next step, therefore, is to systematically evaluate the interrelationship between the two dimensions and the divergence in their effects across outcomes. Such an investigation is essential for determining whether future research should treat illegitimate tasks as a unitary construct or examine the two dimensions independently, a question underscored by recent calls for further inquiry (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023).

Third, the existing literature reveals several conflicting findings. For example, regarding the link between illegitimate tasks and employee performance, while Zhao et al. (2023) reported a negative association, Mugayar-Baldocchi (2021) found no significant link. This inconsistency may stem from unexamined moderating variables. Indeed, as demonstrated in other meta-analyses (e.g., Huth & Chung-Yan, 2023; Lyubykh et al., 2022), effect sizes often vary systematically due to methodological differences. Furthermore, sociocultural factors might influence this relationship. For instance, evidence suggests that the influence of illegitimate tasks may vary across cultures (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2018). However, the difficulty of implementing multi-country sampling has largely restricted research to single cultural contexts.

Consequently, it remains unclear whether cultural background moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and their consequences.

These research gaps prompt the following research questions:

1. What are the direction and relative strength of the associations between illegitimate tasks and key outcomes?
2. Do the relationships between illegitimate tasks and relevant outcomes differ significantly across the dimensions of unreasonable versus unnecessary tasks?
3. Are the effect sizes characterizing these relationships moderated by sociodemographic factors or variations in study methodology?

To comprehensively address these research questions—given that current studies cannot fully answer them and are susceptible to distortion from statistical artifacts (e.g., measurement and sampling error)—we employ meta-analysis to quantitatively synthesize existing research on illegitimate tasks.

This study makes several contributions. First, drawing on Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory, which posits that threats to personal and social self-esteem constitute a significant source of stress, we provide the first meta-analytic quantification of the overall impact of illegitimate tasks as a stressor on attitudinal, wellbeing, and behavioral outcomes. By integrating data across multiple samples, our analysis mitigates biases inherent in individual studies and advances beyond existing narrative reviews (e.g., Ding & Kuvas, 2023), yielding more precise and reliable effect size estimates. In doing so, this study provides a systematic empirical picture of the breadth of consequences associated with illegitimate tasks and the variation in their magnitude

across outcome domains. This empirical foundation enables the field to move from a general recognition that illegitimate tasks are harmful to a differentiated understanding of where their effects are most pronounced.

Second, to elucidate the dimensional structure of illegitimate tasks and assess the extent to which unreasonable and unnecessary tasks function as distinct yet related constructs, we synthesize their meta-analytic intercorrelation and examine their differential associations with relevant outcomes. This approach is consistent with the paradigm established in prior meta-analyses for evaluating the discriminant validity of intercorrelated variables (e.g., Badura et al., 2020). These analyses provide empirical evidence to inform the ongoing debate regarding the dimensionality of illegitimate tasks, offering researchers a clearer basis for operationalizing the construct in future studies.

Third, we investigate the potential moderating roles of sociodemographic and methodological factors. Drawing on the GLOBE cultural framework (House et al., 2004), we examine power distance — a particularly relevant cultural dimension given that illegitimate tasks are inherently rooted in hierarchical supervisor–subordinate relationships — as a boundary condition, probing whether the effects of illegitimate tasks are culturally universal. We also incorporate age, a key demographic variable that prior research has shown to shape employees' responses to work-related stressors (e.g., Dodanwala et al., 2021; Hertel et al., 2015), thereby introducing a career stage perspective to the understanding of illegitimate tasks' effects. In addition, we assess the moderating effects of methodological variables, including rating source and

measurement time lag, to evaluate the robustness of existing findings across research designs and the extent to which methodological artifacts may account for variation in reported effects. Collectively, these moderator analyses help reconcile inconsistent findings in the existing literature and, by delineating the boundary conditions that strengthen or weaken these effects, move the field toward a more nuanced understanding of when and for whom the effects of illegitimate tasks are most pronounced. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this research.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Theoretical background

The Stress as Offense to Self (SOS) theory is widely applied to explain the nature and consequences of illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al., 2015, 2019). This theory builds upon the widely accepted premise that people fundamentally strive to maintain a positive self-image and that threats to self-esteem constitute a significant source of stress (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). The SOS framework distinguishes threats to personal self-esteem (stress arising from self-evaluation) from those to social self-esteem (stress arising from others' evaluations) (Semmer et al., 2019). Threats to personal self-esteem occur when individuals perceive that their behavior fails to meet internalized standards of competence, integrity, or moral conduct.

The degree to which these standards are internalized influences vulnerability to such stress. When individuals attribute perceived failures, incompetence, or moral lapses to internal causes, they experience feelings of inadequacy, referred to as Stress through Insufficiency (SIN) (Semmer et al., 2015, 2019). In contrast, social self-esteem depends on the extent to which individuals feel respected, appreciated, accepted, and valued by others (Semmer et al., 2019). Stress increases when individuals perceive that they are treated unfairly, neglected, or excluded, which diminishes their sense of social worth (Fila et al., 2020, 2023). This form of stress, termed Stress as Disrespect (SAD), can result not only from interpersonal interactions but also from contextual factors such as job design (Semmer et al., 2015, 2019).

Illegitimate tasks exemplify how work conditions can convey symbolic messages that threaten self-esteem. Professional roles come with expectations about which tasks are appropriate, shaping both self-concept and social identity (Ashforth, 2001; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Warr, 2007). When assigned tasks are perceived as unnecessary (lacking justification) or unreasonable (outside their professional role), employees may interpret them as implicit signs of disrespect toward their occupational identity (Semmer et al., 2019). They may even attribute the assignment of such tasks to their own shortcomings in fulfilling their professional role, interpreting it as a sign of personal failure to meet occupational expectations. Consequently, illegitimate tasks can violate role expectations, undermine professional identity, threaten self-esteem, and elicit stress responses (Semmer et al., 2015, 2019). The SOS theory thus provides a

comprehensive framework for understanding how illegitimate tasks function as workplace stressors that affect various employee outcomes.

Building on this theoretical foundation, a systematic integration of empirical findings is warranted to clarify the relationship between illegitimate tasks and employee responses. Because meta-analyses synthesize effect sizes to produce cumulative insights, identifying clusters of outcome variables is a crucial step in developing a coherent and integrative framework. Scholars in occupational stress research (e.g., Beehr, 1995, 1998; Kahn & Byosiore, 1992) have long argued that stressors typically elicit psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses. Drawing on this theoretical tradition and grounded in SOS theory, we classify the consequences of illegitimate tasks—conceptualized as stressors—into three overarching clusters: attitudinal, well-being, and behavioral outcomes. Collectively, these clusters encompass the predominant findings in this research area. The proposed framework is theoretically coherent and parsimonious, aligning with prior meta-analytic frameworks on the consequences of stressors (e.g., Hu et al., 2022; Lyubykh et al., 2025; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). In selecting outcome variables, we adhered not only to this theoretical framework but also to established meta-analytic conventions requiring that each relationship examined be supported by at least three independent studies (e.g., Estevez Cores et al., 2021; Forner et al., 2024; von Allmen et al., 2024). Accordingly, we selected outcome variables previously identified in the illegitimate tasks literature (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023), focusing on those most theoretically relevant and empirically robust for rigorous meta-analytic synthesis.

Attitudinal Outcomes

Job attitudes, which reflect individuals' feelings and beliefs about their work, remain central and enduring constructs in organizational research (Harrison et al., 2006; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Riketta, 2008). They are especially significant, as work constitutes a core aspect of 'people's identities, to their health, and to their evaluations of their lives' (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 344). Illegitimate tasks, as a workplace stressor, can undermine employees' professional identity, leading them to perceive these tasks as signs of workplace failure (Semmer et al., 2007), which in turn triggers various attitudinal responses (e.g., Kottwitz et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2015). Among the attitudinal outcomes most frequently examined in research on illegitimate tasks are affective commitment, job satisfaction, work engagement, and turnover intentions. These variables are commonly explored in organizational psychology (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012) and have been found to be significantly related to task illegitimacy. Previous meta-analyses have also categorized these variables as attitudinal clusters (e.g., Gajendran et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2024).

Affective commitment. Workplace commitment is typically characterized by three distinct dimensions: affective, normative, and continuance (Meyer et al., 1993). Among these, affective commitment, which reflects an emotional attachment to the target of the commitment, has received the greatest scholarly attention and yields the most substantial benefits for both employees and organizations (Kabins et al., 2016; Meyer et al., 2002). According to Meyer and Allen (1997, p. 67), affective commitment is "the

most desirable form of commitment and the one that organizations are most likely to want to instill in their employees.” Affective commitment stands out from the other two dimensions by demonstrating the strongest empirical validation, exhibiting superior content and face validity (Meyer et al., 2002; Solinger et al., 2008). It is widely recognized as the core dimension of organizational commitment and is frequently used as its sole indicator in contemporary research (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Doerwald et al., 2021). Accordingly, it serves as the primary focus of our study.

Affective commitment emphasizes the emotional bond that develops through employees’ experiences within the organization (Bergman, 2006; Meyer et al., 1991, 1998) and the fulfillment of their pre-entry expectations regarding work and professional roles (Caldwell et al., 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; O’Reilly et al., 1991). Illegitimate tasks convey implicit messages of disrespect (Semmer et al., 2015, 2019), undermining employees’ professional identity and eliciting strong feelings of injustice and devaluation (Pindek et al., 2019). Such negative experiences violate employees’ role expectations, diminishing the extent to which they can derive recognition, support, and a sense of value from the organization. Consequently, these tasks are likely to diminish employees’ emotional attachment to and identification with the organization—that is, their affective commitment (Gahrman & Klumb, 2024).

Job satisfaction. Illegitimate tasks threaten employees’ professional identity and self-esteem, as individuals may interpret such assignments as indicators of workplace failure (Semmer et al., 2007). This impediment to developing a positive self-concept tied to their professional identity results in psychological harm and distress, which may

ultimately diminish their perceived job satisfaction (Omansky et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2007, 2010). Furthermore, the unreasonable or unnecessary nature of illegitimate tasks limits their significance and variety, thereby reducing employees' sense of meaning at work and, consequently, their job satisfaction (Omansky et al., 2016). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates a negative association between illegitimate tasks and job satisfaction (Eatough et al., 2016; Kottwitz et al., 2019; Omansky et al., 2016; Stocker et al., 2010).

Work engagement. Both job and personal resources predict engagement (Bakker, 2011). Illegitimate tasks deplete these resources by reducing perceptions of support and reasonable arrangements (job resources) while simultaneously threatening positive self-evaluation and sense of workplace environmental control (personal resources) (Dong & Zhang, 2022; Zhou et al., 2020). Furthermore, illegitimate tasks function as hindrance stressors that are difficult to overcome through effort alone, resulting in negative affect that is incompatible with positive work attitudes (Schmitt et al., 2015). Consequently, employees facing illegitimate tasks probably struggle to direct their full energy and attention toward their core responsibilities, leading to diminished work engagement.

Turnover intentions. Turnover intention is a frequently investigated outcome of illegitimate tasks (e.g., Apostel et al., 2018; Fältén et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2021). A key reason for this link is that these tasks often extend beyond employees' formal job responsibilities, thereby violating role expectations and creating a mismatch between anticipated and actual work environments. Furthermore, as noted before, such tasks

convey devaluing messages that undermine individuals' professional identity and self-esteem (Semmer et al., 2019). Consequently, employees may pursue alternative employment opportunities to secure positions that better align with their expectations and offer greater professional respect (Apostel et al., 2018; Fältén et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 1: Illegitimate tasks are negatively associated with (a) affective commitment, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) work engagement, while positively associated with (d) turnover intentions.

Wellbeing Outcomes

Existing research on illegitimate tasks has examined employees' well-being responses and has frequently focused on three primary variables (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023): negative affect, burnout, and work–family conflict (e.g., Eatough et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2015; Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018; Zhou et al., 2020). Accordingly, and guided by prior meta-analyses (e.g., Gajendran et al., 2024; Park & Martinez, 2022), our study includes these variables as the focal well-being outcomes.

Negative affect. Illegitimate tasks violate employees' expectations regarding appropriate role boundaries, triggering identity threat (Wang & Zong, 2023). The immediate and direct reaction of individuals when facing stressors is to display negative affect (Spector & Fox, 2005). This professional identity threat manifests as various emotional reactions, including anger (Eatough et al., 2016; Pindek et al., 2019), resentment (Stocker et al., 2010), anxiety (Fila & Eatough, 2020), and depression (Eatough et al., 2016). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates a positive

relationship between illegitimate tasks and negative affect (Cheng et al., 2022; Eatough et al., 2016; Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018).

Burnout. Illegitimate tasks impose additional demands beyond employees' formal responsibilities, necessitating extra resource investment for coping (Wang & Jiang, 2023). These tasks intensify exhaustion as individuals struggle to maintain their professional self-concept while performing role-contradictory activities. The substantial cognitive and emotional resources required for regulation and adaptation accelerate resource depletion, ultimately culminating in burnout. The positive association between illegitimate tasks and burnout has been documented across multiple studies (Koch & Adler, 2018; Meier & Semmer, 2018; Semmer et al., 2015).

Work-family conflict (WFC). The negative affect and rumination triggered by illegitimate tasks persist beyond working hours, making it difficult for employees to fully disengage psychologically from work (Zhou et al., 2020). This impaired detachment leads employees to continue ruminating about work during family time, allows negative emotions to permeate the family domain, and creates difficulty in transitioning between work and family roles (Zhou et al., 2020). The psychological preoccupation with identity-threatening work experiences reduces employees' mental and emotional availability for family interactions, ultimately leading to WFC.

Hypothesis 2: Illegitimate tasks are positively associated with (a) negative affect, (b) burnout, and (c) WFC.

Behavioral Outcomes

Employee behaviors play a critical role in determining overall organizational effectiveness and success (Daniels et al., 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2009). Such behavioral responses have long been a central focus of stressor research (Beehr, 1995, 1998; Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). When faced with illegitimate tasks that convey demeaning signals and threaten social dignity, employees often exhibit reduced motivation to perform both in-role and extra-role duties (Ma & Peng, 2019), accompanied by an increased tendency to retaliate through negative behaviors (Zhou et al., 2018). This study focuses on the behavioral outcomes most frequently investigated in the illegitimate tasks literature, including job performance, innovative behavior, counterproductive work behavior, work withdrawal, and organizational citizenship behavior. These have also been predominantly recognized as behavioral clusters in prior meta-analyses (e.g., Greco et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022).

Job performance. Illegitimate tasks compromise employees' professional identity, undermining their sense of job identity and making it challenging for them to align their actions with role expectations (Ma & Peng, 2019). In such cases, employees' motivation and willingness to fulfill core responsibilities diminish, ultimately harming job performance (Ma & Peng, 2019). Furthermore, illegitimate tasks typically require employees to invest additional cognitive and emotional resources to cope with identity threats and perform tasks outside their defined responsibilities (Zhao et al., 2023). Notably, since illegitimate tasks fall outside employees' normal work scope, their allocation may be unpredictable and sudden, complicating employees' coping mechanisms and disrupting their daily work rhythms. This additional resource

expenditure depletes the energy available for core tasks, directly impairing individuals' ability to fulfill formal job duties (Mugayar-Baldocchi, 2021). Consistent with our theoretical predictions, most empirical studies on the relationship between illegitimate tasks and employee performance have found a significant negative correlation (e.g., Ma & Peng, 2019; Zhao et al., 2023). However, Mugayar-Baldocchi (2021) reported no significant association between these two variables. This inconsistency may be attributed to unexamined moderating factors.

Innovative behavior. Illegitimate tasks threaten employees' professional identity and self-perception, potentially diminishing their motivation to generate new ideas (He et al., 2024). When employees are required to perform tasks they perceive as unreasonable or unnecessary, they may conclude that their work holds little value for themselves or the organization (Bani-Melhem et al., 2023). This perception depletes the psychological resources necessary for innovative behavior. Additionally, illegitimate tasks consume time and energy, leaving employees with insufficient capacity to explore novel approaches or develop creative solutions (He et al., 2024). Notably, although most empirical studies have found a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and innovative behavior (e.g., Bani-Melhem et al., 2023; Song et al., 2025), a few studies have reported non-significant results (Adler & Koch, 2017; Koch & Adler, 2018).

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Illegitimate tasks convey messages of devaluation and disrespect to employees, threatening their professional identity and self-esteem (Semmer et al., 2007). Employees who perceive such identity threats are

likely to shift their self-identity from a collective to an individual focus, thereby reducing their motivation to engage in voluntary behaviors that extend beyond formal job duties to benefit the organization (Mugayar-Baldocchi, 2021). From a resource perspective, when illegitimate tasks deplete employees' time, energy, and emotional resources, they tend to preserve remaining resources and become reluctant to invest them in extra-role contributions such as OCB (Mauno et al., 2022; Shaya et al., 2024). Empirical evidence generally supports this reasoning, with several studies confirming the negative association between illegitimate tasks and OCB (e.g., Shaya et al., 2024; Lian & Ding, 2025). However, one study has reported a non-significant relationship between the two constructs (Mugayar-Baldocchi, 2021).

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) has been extensively studied as a significant consequence of illegitimate tasks (Ahmed et al., 2018; Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019; Semmer et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018). Conceptually, illegitimate tasks that violate norms of reasonable employee expectations are frequently associated with employees' perceptions of injustice (Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019; Semmer et al., 2015). Perceived organizational injustice is recognized as a work stressor that predicts CWB (Berry et al., 2007; Fox et al., 2001). Previous research indicates that illegitimate tasks, functioning as stressors or unfair events, lead employees to experience negative affect, which subsequently motivates them to engage in various forms of CWB—such as verbal aggression—as a means of retaliation to restore justice and reaffirm their professional identity (Zhou et al., 2018).

Work withdrawal behavior. When employees encounter stressors they perceive as high-risk and unescapable, they tend to adopt avoidance rather than approach strategies (de Hooge et al., 2011). Illegitimate tasks constitute one such stressor, inherently conveying messages of social devaluation that threaten employees' social esteem and professional identity (Semmer et al., 2007). To mitigate or avoid these threats, individuals may employ defensive or avoidance strategies to preserve their self-image (Wang & Jiang, 2023). In particular, since an illegitimate task represents an indirect signal of disrespect, employees are more likely to respond with corresponding covert behaviors. Work withdrawal behavior represents a manifestation of these avoidance strategies. For example, employees may engage in subtle and easily implementable avoidance tactics, such as leaving work early or disengaging during work hours.

Hypothesis 3: Illegitimate tasks are negatively associated with (a) job performance, (b) innovative behavior, and (c) OCB, while positively associated with (d) CWB and (e) work withdrawal behavior.

Dimensions of Illegitimate Tasks

Research has revealed divergent findings regarding the intensity of the impacts of the two dimensions of illegitimate tasks—unreasonable and unnecessary tasks—on employees. Schmitt et al. (2015) suggest that unreasonable tasks may pose a greater threat to professional identity, referring to this phenomenon as "the stronger facet" (p. 30). This discrepancy may arise because unreasonable tasks often challenge employees' occupational identity (Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019), which is a central element of illegitimate tasks. Such tasks are perceived as unjust, encroaching on established role

boundaries and posing significant threats to an individual's self-esteem (Schmitt et al., 2015). In contrast, unnecessary tasks exhibit weaker connections to individuals' professional identity, resulting in a lower degree of self-threat (Schmitt et al., 2015) and a higher level of tolerance (Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019). Furthermore, while unnecessary tasks typically stem from mismanagement, unreasonable tasks can be attributed to various causes, including malicious intent by supervisors, which may lead to more negative personal attributions (Pindek et al., 2019). Supporting this assertion, studies by Pindek et al. (2019) and Semmer et al. (2015) indicate that unreasonable tasks have a stronger correlation with negative affect compared to unnecessary tasks. Conversely, Muntz et al. (2019) found that unnecessary tasks have a more significant impact on job dissatisfaction than unreasonable tasks. They argue that unreasonable tasks may be more readily accepted because they possess a certain purpose and convey a sense of meaning, even when they fall outside the specific responsibilities designated to particular employees, whereas unnecessary tasks often lack significance for any employee (Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018). Taken together, and considering that the threat to one's professional identity is the central feature of illegitimate tasks, we posit that unreasonable tasks have a more potent impact on employees than unnecessary tasks. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: Unreasonable tasks are more strongly related to the proposed outcomes than are unnecessary tasks.

Potential Moderators

Cross-national studies (e.g., Germany, Switzerland, the United States, and China) have adopted diverse research designs (e.g., variations in rating sources and measurement time lags) to examine illegitimate tasks among employees of different age groups. Culture and age represent distinct sociodemographic dimensions, which reflect where illegitimate tasks occur (the contextual setting) and who experiences them (the workforce characteristic). As one of the most widely examined cultural values in organizational research, power distance shapes individuals' acceptance of inequality and influences numerous organizational outcomes (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). Because the assignment of illegitimate tasks reflects the exercise of authority by superiors over subordinates, their effects may differ across cultures with varying levels of power distance.

Age, an important demographic attribute of the workforce, has also been extensively examined in relation to work stress (e.g., Dodanwala et al., 2021; Hertel et al., 2015). Research suggests that older employees, drawing on accumulated experience and resources, manage workplace stress more effectively (Peterson & Spiker, 2005; Shirom et al., 2008), implying that the effects of illegitimate tasks may vary across age groups. Furthermore, methodological factors, such as single-source data and cross-sectional designs, may inflate observed relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The growing body of research on illegitimate tasks provides a foundation for empirically examining these moderating effects. Thus, we consider both sociodemographic variables (power distance and age) and methodological variables (rating source and measurement time lag) as potential moderators, with their theoretical rationales

elaborated in the following sections. These factors have also been identified in prior management meta-analyses as key sources of heterogeneity in bivariate relationships (e.g., Carter et al., 2024; Feitosa et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022; von Allmen et al., 2024).

Sociodemographic Boundary Conditions

Cultural background. Culture is defined as “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” (House et al., 2004, p. 57). Despite repeated calls from scholars to investigate the impact of culture on illegitimate tasks (e.g., Eatough et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2023), research on illegitimate tasks has largely focused on single cultural contexts, primarily due to the challenges associated with obtaining data from multinational samples. However, some studies have suggested that the impact of these tasks can vary across cultures (Ahmed et al., 2018; Eatough et al., 2016). For example, Ahmed et al. (2018) identified a negative correlation between illegitimate tasks and interactional justice in the United States, a relationship not observed in the Indian context. In response to the urging of scholars to delve into the cultural characteristics of illegitimate tasks, our study investigates how power distance moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and their outcomes.

Among the various cultural dimensions, power distance is uniquely suited for this investigation. It has demonstrated stability, replicability, and predictive validity in numerous meta-analyses (e.g., Carter et al., 2024; Harari et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2025), and since illegitimate tasks are rooted in the superior-subordinate dynamic, it

provides the most direct measure of the norms governing this power relationship. To operationalize this dimension, we utilize the GLOBE framework because it distinguishes between cultural practices (perceptions of "as is") and values (beliefs about "what should be"). This distinction is critical, as practices are more effective at differentiating organizational contexts (Hofstede et al., 1990), and they can even be negatively correlated with values, a phenomenon particularly pronounced for power distance (House et al., 2004). Given that illegitimate tasks are organizational phenomena, an employee's reaction is more likely to be guided by their perception of actual interaction patterns (a practice) rather than by abstract hierarchical beliefs (a value). Therefore, our study focuses on the cultural practice dimension of power distance.

In societies characterized by high power distance, strict adherence to hierarchical structures is expected from employees, who are required to follow the leader's instructions and exert maximum effort to complete assigned tasks, even if they seem unnecessary or unreasonable (Cheng et al., 2022; Ueno & Sekaran, 1992). Within such cultures, employees accustomed to deferring to their superiors may become less sensitive in the identification of illegitimate tasks, perceiving them as a necessary compromise to comply with the management system. Thus, the association of illegitimate tasks with different outcomes could be more pronounced in countries featuring low power distance as opposed to those with high power distance.

Hypothesis 5: The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in low power distance cultures than in high power distance cultures.

Age. Age has emerged as a significant variable in stress-related research. Several studies indicate that older employees are more adept at managing and coping with workplace stress (e.g., Dodanwala et al., 2021; Hertel et al., 2015). This can be attributed to the accumulation of life skills, experiences, and resources that they acquire over time, enabling them to develop more effective strategies for handling stress (Peterson & Spiker, 2005; Shirom et al., 2008). In contrast, younger employees often lack the necessary skills and experiences for managing workplace stress, which can hinder them to cope with high-pressure job demands. Supporting this view, an empirical study by Shirom et al. (2008) found that age mitigates the negative correlation between stressors, such as role ambiguity, and job performance.

This enhanced coping ability among older employees is further explained by socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 2003). The theory posits that as individuals mature psychologically with age, their motivational goals shift, leading them to place greater importance on positive socioemotional experiences while downplaying or ignoring negative information (Henry et al., 2015; Zhan et al., 2015). Consequently, age is thought to buffer individuals from reacting strongly to threats against their self-esteem or identity (e.g., Amarnani et al., 2019; Aquino & Douglas, 2003).

Consistent with this reasoning, we hypothesize that age moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks, which are perceived as threats to professional identity and self-esteem (Semmer et al., 2015), and their associated outcomes. Specifically, the skills, experience, and resources accumulated by older employees (Peterson & Spiker, 2005; Shirom et al., 2008) enable them to deploy more effective coping strategies when faced with unreasonable or unnecessary task demands. For instance, when encountering illegitimate tasks, older employees are more adept at utilizing professional diplomacy to strategically decline requests or redefine task boundaries; they may also leverage their social capital to orchestrate resources and alleviate their workload. Moreover, older employees tend to downplay the derogatory signals conveyed by illegitimate tasks. By prioritizing positive affect, they tend to subjectively decouple such tasks from their intrinsic self-worth (Henry et al., 2015; Zhan et al., 2015). Conversely, younger employees usually lack the necessary resources and experience to effectively cope with such tasks; they are also more susceptible to the negative social signals implied by these tasks, exacerbating the threat to their self-esteem (Henry et al., 2015; Shirom et al., 2008). Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 6: The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in younger samples than in older samples.

Methodological Boundary Conditions

Rating source and measurement time lag. Methodological factors are frequently considered moderators in the analysis of bivariate relationships (e.g., Han et al., 2022; Feitosa et al., 2020). Therefore, to assess the robustness of the focal associations, we

explored the influence of two such factors: rating source and measurement time lag. Specifically, we examined whether the relationships were affected by the use of a single data source (e.g., self-report only) versus multiple data sources (e.g., self- and supervisor-reports). We also analyzed the effect of the measurement time lag, comparing cross-sectional designs (where illegitimate tasks and their consequences are measured simultaneously) with time-lagged or time-separated designs (where they are measured at different time points). Scholars argue that associations derived from a single source are often stronger than those from different sources due to common method bias (e.g., Hu et al., 2002; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Similarly, relationships measured concurrently (cross-sectionally) can be inflated by this bias compared to those measured with a time lag (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, a greater time lag between measurements may weaken observed relationships, as it allows for the influence of intervening variables (Feitosa et al., 2020). Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 7: The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in studies using same-source data than in those using different-source data.

Hypothesis 8: The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in cross-sectional designs than in time-lagged designs.

Method

Article Research Strategy

To locate pertinent research, multiple electronic databases were searched extensively, including Web of Science, PsycINFO, ProQuest, and CNKI, from January 2010 to May 2025, using keywords like "illegitimate tasks," "unnecessary tasks," and "unreasonable tasks". The year 2010 was chosen as the starting point due to the seminal work on illegitimate tasks published by Semmer et al. (2010). Additionally, we manually scrutinized the reference lists of review articles addressing illegitimate tasks (e.g., Ding & Kuvaas, 2023; Fila et al., 2020) to locate missing studies. The initial literature search yielded 390 articles.

The reviewed studies were subject to a set of inclusion criteria. First, the study must measure at least one of the proposed consequences of illegitimate tasks at the between-person level. Second, only quantitative studies that provided sufficient statistical data to calculate effect sizes were considered. Third, the focus was specifically on the responses of employed individuals with incomes to illegitimate tasks; hence, only studies involving employees were selected, excluding those targeting students (e.g., Fila & Eatough, 2018) and volunteers¹ (e.g., van Schie et al., 2014). Fourth, in order to mitigate potential biases, each study had to display independent effect sizes from distinct samples. In cases where an article reported results from several separate samples, each sample was considered as an individual study (e.g., Semmer et al., 2015). Duplicate correlations from multiple studies using the same sample were disregarded in favor of the one containing more comprehensive data (e.g., more

correlations relevant to this meta-analysis) or appearing in a peer-reviewed journal. However, in instances where the information provided in an unpublished dissertation was more extensive than its published counterpart (e.g., Cheng et al., 2022), the additional information in the dissertation was also used. Last, to ensure accurate interpretation and avoid translation complexities, inclusion was restricted to studies written in either English or Chinese (the first author's native language). Overall, this meta-analytical study conducted a comprehensive examination of 145 independent studies, comprising a total of 66,387 samples (see Supplementary Materials). The process of study selection is depicted in Figure 2 by the PRISMA flowchart.

Coding and Measures

In our study, we adhered to four primary objectives in coding the research: consistency, accuracy, conservatism, and thoroughness (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). To achieve this, we developed a comprehensive coding protocol and independently applied it to all identified English-language studies. Initial coding agreement was achieved for 96% of the data, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion. Subsequently, the first author coded all Chinese-language studies and conducted a thorough double-check to ensure accuracy; any coding issues were discussed with the second author until a consensus was reached.

We extracted the following information during coding: authors, publication year, title, research source, dimensions of illegitimate tasks, outcome variables, correlation coefficients, sample size, reliability, and potential moderators. These moderators included sociodemographic (power distance and age) and methodological variables

(rating source and measurement time lag). In line with established precedents (e.g., Allen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Rockstuhl et al., 2023; Tomova Shakur et al., 2024), we coded power distance by assigning the GLOBE study's "as is" societal practice score (House et al., 2004) to each sample based on its country of origin. Furthermore, we standardized the correlation coefficients' direction across studies to ensure consistent interpretation of effect sizes. For example, we reversed the coding for the correlation between illegitimate tasks and inverse measures of job satisfaction (i.e. job dissatisfaction). We categorized related constructs and established synthesized construct groupings, including example operationalizations for each construct (refer to Supplementary Materials).

Meta-analytical Procedures

The Hunter and Schmidt Meta-Analysis Software was utilized for the implementation of random-effects meta-analytic procedures (Schmidt & Le, 2014). Due to sampling errors and unreliable measurements, we corrected the observed correlations reported in individual studies and synthesized the effect size estimates. When multiple estimates of the identical association were presented in a single study (e.g., the relationship between innovative behavior and the two dimensions of illegitimate tasks), data independence was ensured through the calculation of the composite correlation with formula 10.6 by Schmidt and Hunter (2014) and the composite reliability with Mosier's formula (Mosier, 1943). When reliability information was unavailable from included studies, sample-weighted average

reliability of research measuring the same construct was imputed (e.g., Hora et al., 2022; Young et al., 2021).

The number of independent studies (k), the sample size (N), the weighted mean correlation (r), the corrected correlation (ρ), standard deviation (SD), and 95% confidence intervals (CI) around ρ were reported. The absence of zero within the 95% CI of the effect size indicated its statistical significance (Schmidt & Hunter, 2014). The calculation of the percentage of variance resulting from statistical artifacts (%Var) and 80% credibility intervals (CR) surrounding ρ was also conducted to examine the possible presence of moderators. The existence of moderators is indicated by $\text{Var}\% < 75$ or if zero is within the 80% CR.

In this study, we employed subgroup and meta-regression techniques to assess moderation effects. Following Borenstein et al.'s (2011) recommendations, we utilized meta-regression for continuous moderators and subgroup analysis for categorical moderators. The moderating impact of sociodemographic boundary conditions was evaluated using weighted least squares (WLS) regression analysis. Specifically, power distance scores and mean age in each sample served as independent variables, with uncorrected correlation coefficients between illegitimate tasks and their proposed outcomes as dependent variables (e.g., Bernerth et al., 2023). Studies were weighted based on the inverse of their sampling error variance for each correlation (Steel & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2002), enabling the assessment of each potential moderator's influence on focal effect sizes. Additionally, we conducted subgroup analyses and t -test comparisons (e.g., Park & Martinez, 2022; Watts et al., 2020) to examine the

moderating effects of illegitimate tasks' dimensions and methodological (rating source and measurement time lag) boundary conditions. Subgroup analyses were performed only when the categorical moderator had been evaluated by a minimum of three studies at each level (e.g., Estevez Cores et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2024).

Publication Bias and Outliers

Publication bias occurs when "the research that appears in the published literature is systematically unrepresentative of the population of completed studies" (Rothstein et al., 2005, p.1). In this meta-analysis, we employed multiple methods to assess publication bias (see Table 1). First, we conducted a fail-safe N analysis to determine how many additional studies would be needed to invalidate our results. Using the formula $K*5+10$ to establish the critical value, where K represents the number of included studies (Carson et al., 1990), we found that for each focal relationship, the fail-safe N exceeded its corresponding critical value, indicating that publication bias could be disregarded.

Second, the Egger intercept test (Egger et al., 1997) revealed non-significant probability values ($p > 0.05$) for all relationships except the illegitimate tasks-work withdrawal behavior association, suggesting an absence of publication bias in most investigated relationships. Even though we have taken measures to incorporate unpublished manuscripts, all studies we found on the illegitimate tasks-work withdrawal behavior relationship were conducted within the Chinese context. Against this cultural setting (e.g., high power distance), the reported effect size may deviate

from the broader global population effect, potentially limiting the generalizability of this finding.

Furthermore, we utilized trim and fill methods (Duval & Tweedie, 2000) to evaluate the extent of bias. This analysis generally demonstrated minimal differences between trimmed and filled effect sizes versus original effect sizes (differences less than ± 0.07). As the 95% confidence interval for the adjusted effect size excluded zero, the overall interpretation remained consistent after adjustment (Banks et al., 2012).

Outliers were detected using Huffcutt and Arthur's (1995) sample adjusted meta-analytic deviancy (SAMD), with Fisher's Z serving as the recommended effect size metric, as suggested by Beal et al. (2002). Potential outlier research was identified if its SAMD statistic was greater than 3 (Bilgili et al., 2017). We performed meta-analytic procedures both with and without the outlier studies to certify the accuracy of our analyses. The absence of significant alterations in the results justified our decision to proceed with the full sample analyses.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results

Table 2 presents the meta-analysis results examining the relationships between illegitimate tasks and attitudinal, wellbeing, and behavioral outcomes. We applied

Cohen's (2013) benchmarks to evaluate effect size magnitudes, where $|\rho|$ values of 0.1, 0.3, and 0.5 represent small, moderate, and large effects, respectively.

Attitudinal Outcomes

As hypothesized, the results revealed that illegitimate tasks are negatively related to attitudinal outcomes including work engagement ($\rho = -0.329$, 95% CI [-0.394, -0.264]), affective commitment ($\rho = -0.398$, 95% CI [-0.464, -0.331]), and job satisfaction ($\rho = -0.529$, 95% CI [-0.585, -0.473]), coupled with a positive association with turnover intentions ($\rho = 0.441$, 95% CI [0.382, 0.501]).

Wellbeing Outcomes

The relationships between illegitimate tasks and wellbeing outcomes were all significantly positive. The strongest relationship was observed with burnout ($\rho = 0.565$, 95% CI [0.519, 0.612]), followed by negative affect ($\rho = 0.535$, 95% CI [0.503, 0.568]), and work-family conflict ($\rho = 0.453$, 95% CI [0.395, 0.510]).

Behavioral Outcomes

Regarding behavioral outcomes, illegitimate tasks exhibited positive relationships with work withdrawal behavior ($\rho = 0.484$, 95% CI [0.422, 0.547]) and CWB ($\rho = 0.386$, 95% CI [0.312, 0.460]), but had negative relationships with job performance ($\rho = -0.271$, 95% CI [-0.355, -0.187]), innovative behavior ($\rho = -0.203$, 95% CI [-0.290, -0.116]), and OCB ($\rho = -0.245$, 95% CI [-0.409, -0.081]).

Insert Table 2 about here

Dimensions of Illegitimate Tasks

We tested whether the effect sizes associated with the dimensions of illegitimate tasks (unnecessary vs. unreasonable) and relevant outcomes differed significantly (see Table 3). The two dimensions were highly correlated ($\rho = 0.700$, 95% CI [0.661, 0.740]). Results revealed that unnecessary tasks demonstrated a marginally weaker relationship with negative affect compared to unreasonable tasks (unnecessary tasks: $\rho = 0.483$, 95% CI [0.420, 0.546] vs. unreasonable tasks: $\rho = 0.542$, 95% CI [0.517, 0.567], $t(20) = -1.979$, $p < 0.1$). However, no statistically significant differences were found between unnecessary and unreasonable tasks for other tested outcomes.

Insert Table 3 about here

Moderating Effects

As shown in Table 2, there is high heterogeneity in the effect sizes between illegitimate tasks and attitudinal (except for affective commitment), behavioral, and wellbeing outcomes. Therefore, we conducted further moderator analysis (see Table 4 and Table 5).

Sociodemographic Boundary Conditions

First, we examined the moderating role of age. Our results indicated that age significantly strengthened the positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and work-family conflict ($b = 0.009$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.017], $p < 0.05$). Conversely, age weakened the negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and job performance ($b = 0.015$, 95% CI [0.003, 0.028], $p < 0.05$), innovative behavior ($b = 0.030$, 95% CI [0.024, 0.036], $p < 0.001$), and OCB ($b = 0.016$, 95% CI [0.008, 0.024], $p < 0.001$). Next, we investigated the moderating role of power distance. The results revealed that power distance significantly amplified the negative associations between illegitimate tasks and job satisfaction ($b = -0.397$, 95% CI [-0.778, -0.017], $p < 0.05$), affective commitment ($b = -0.939$, 95% CI [-1.749, -0.129], $p < 0.05$), and OCB ($b = -2.144$, 95% CI [-3.174, -1.115], $p < 0.001$). Similarly, power distance strengthened the positive association between illegitimate tasks and burnout ($b = 0.257$, 95% CI [0.052, 0.463], $p < 0.05$). However, power distance was found to attenuate the negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and innovative behavior ($b = 0.846$, 95% CI [0.466, 1.226], $p < 0.001$).

Insert Table 4 about here

Methodological Boundary Conditions

First, we tested the moderating effect of rating source. The relationship between illegitimate tasks and innovative behavior was significantly stronger in different source samples than in same source rating samples (different source: $\rho = -0.364$, 95% CI [-0.386, -0.341] vs. same source: $\rho = -0.148$, 95% CI [-0.251, -0.046], $t(13) = 4.351$, $p < 0.001$). No significant moderation effects of rating source were observed for the relationships between illegitimate tasks and CWB or job performance. Additionally, the moderating effect of measurement time lag was significant for the relationships between illegitimate tasks and both job performance (cross-sectional: $\rho = -0.193$, 95% CI [-0.223, -0.164] vs. time-lagged: $\rho = -0.400$, 95% CI [-0.502, -0.298], $t(6) = 5.241$, $p < 0.01$) and CWB (cross-sectional: $\rho = 0.446$, 95% CI [0.383, 0.510] vs. time-lagged: $\rho = 0.332$, 95% CI [0.220, 0.443], $t(12) = 2.014$, $p < 0.1$). For all other outcomes, the moderating influence of measurement time lag on their associations with illegitimate tasks was not significant. A summary of the study hypotheses and corresponding results is presented in Supplementary Materials.

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion

Our primary objective was to provide a comprehensive quantitative overview of the consequences associated with illegitimate tasks. Based on an analysis of 145

independent studies, the findings yield precise estimates of the relationships between illegitimate tasks and their attitudinal, well-being, and behavioral consequences, effectively minimizing the influence of context-specific biases often present in individual studies. Our research also demonstrates the moderating role of sociodemographic and methodological factors on the association between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

First, grounded in SOS theory, our meta-analysis synthesized over a decade of fragmented empirical findings by quantifying the consequences of illegitimate tasks across three distinct domains (attitudinal, well-being, and behavioral), thereby advancing the field beyond existing narrative reviews (e.g., Ding & Kuvas, 2023). The results supported our hypotheses and revealed a consistent yet graduated pattern of effects across the three domains. Specifically, illegitimate tasks exhibited moderate to large associations with attitudinal and well-being outcomes, whereas associations with behavioral outcomes were comparatively weaker, ranging from small to moderate. This pattern is consistent with established knowledge that stressors tend to be more strongly associated with attitudinal and well-being outcomes than with behavioral outcomes (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2007). Furthermore, the variables most strongly correlated with illegitimate tasks—job satisfaction ($\rho = -.529$), negative affect ($\rho = .535$), and burnout ($\rho = .565$)—can be regarded as key proximal indicators of the impact of illegitimate tasks. These variables may serve as important empirical entry points for developing process models of illegitimate tasks, for instance, as potential mediating mechanisms

linking such tasks to more distal behavioral outcomes, and thus warrant priority in future research. Collectively, our meta-analysis provides the first clear and systematic empirical overview of the consequences of illegitimate tasks within the SOS framework, offering a reliable empirical foundation for future theoretical refinement in this area.

Second, in response to the call by Ding and Kuvas (2022), we investigated the similarities between the two dimensions of illegitimate tasks—unnecessary and unreasonable—with regard to employee outcomes. The two dimensions were highly correlated and showed no significant differences across most of the outcomes examined, including job satisfaction, work engagement, turnover intentions, and burnout. This finding aligns with the suggestions of Semmer et al. (2010), supporting the integration of these dimensions into a comprehensive measure of illegitimate tasks. However, our findings revealed that unreasonable tasks were more strongly correlated with negative affect than unnecessary tasks, which aligns with prior research by Pindek et al. (2019) and Schulte-Braucks et al. (2019). Unreasonable tasks are closely linked to employees' professional identity, exhibiting more severe characteristics of role violation and posing a greater threat to self-worth (Pindek et al., 2019; Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019), and thus may lead to increased negative affect among employees. In contrast, while unnecessary tasks are perceived as unpleasant, their association with demeaning social signals is often weaker and more incidental (Pindek et al., 2019), resulting in relatively higher tolerance among employees. Our findings offer empirically grounded guidance for future operationalization of illegitimate tasks: researchers may generally adopt a unitary measure, while remaining attentive to potential dimensional differences when

affective outcomes are of primary interest. We cautiously recommend that future research report detailed statistical analyses of the relationships between the two dimensions and relevant variables to further investigate their similarities.

Finally, our moderator analyses help extend the understanding of illegitimate tasks effects by revealing when and for whom their consequences are most pronounced, thereby reconciling prior inconsistent findings and providing a more nuanced picture within the SOS framework. Regarding power distance, our study introduces a cultural lens to the illegitimate tasks literature by drawing on the cultural values framework (House et al., 2004) to examine how power distance shapes individual responses to these tasks. Specifically, while the relationship between illegitimate tasks and innovative behavior was, as hypothesized, stronger in low power distance cultures, the effects on job satisfaction, affective commitment, burnout, and OCB were, unexpectedly, more pronounced in high power distance cultures. This result may be explained by a "pressure cooker" effect, stemming from the interplay of illegitimate tasks (the heat), strong expectations of obedience (the sealed lid), and employees' inability to voice concerns or refuse tasks (the disabled pressure relief valve).

In high power distance cultures, supervisors often employ an autocratic style characterized by limited, unidirectional communication and little justification for their directives (House et al., 2004). This cultural context fosters a perception among employees that their opinions and perspectives have minimal impact on leadership decisions (Farh et al., 2007; Hofstede, 2010). Even when their views differ from their superiors', employees tend to "restrict their verbal and behavioral expressions as a

means to minimize interpersonal conflict” (Morrison & Rothman, 2009, p. 126) rather than voice dissent or propose alternatives that might challenge the status quo (Khatri, 2009). Consequently, they are less likely to express dissatisfaction, question authority, or refuse assignments, even those they deem illegitimate (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). Furthermore, seeking support from colleagues or upper management is often untenable, as responsibility for managing role stress is typically deferred to one's direct superior (Peterson et al., 1995). Trapped by these circumstances, employees often experience a sense of oppression and powerlessness. Consequently, when facing illegitimate tasks, these employees exhibit significantly higher levels of burnout, lower job satisfaction, and more diminished affective commitment than their counterparts in low power distance societies. OCB, as an extra-role behavior not mandated by superiors, also declines significantly in such high-pressure contexts.

Conversely, employees in low power distance cultures experience less emotional distance from their superiors, making them more inclined to question assignments and express their views openly (Dorfman & Howell, 1988; Hofstede, 2010). Prioritizing their internal convictions over external authority (Galinsky et al., 2006), these individuals are more likely to engage in direct communication with superiors or utilize formal channels to report violations when confronted with illegitimate tasks (MacNab et al., 2007). This provides employees in low power distance cultures with more effective coping mechanisms, thereby buffering the impacts of illegitimate tasks on burnout, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and OCB. These findings are consistent with research showing that individuals in high power distance cultures

exhibit greater burnout (Auh et al., 2016) and higher turnover intentions (Richard et al., 2020) when subjected to stressors like close supervision or abusive leadership. Innovative behavior, however, presents a notable exception. In high power distance cultures, employee innovation is often discouraged, undervalued, or perceived as a threat to the existing power structure (Daniels et al., 2014). Given the low baseline for innovation in such contexts, the detrimental effect of illegitimate tasks is less pronounced than in low power distance societies, where such contributions may be more expected and valued (Daniels et al., 2014). Overall, this suggests that the moderating role of power distance in the stressor–outcome relationship is complex and that its direction may also depend on the nature of the outcome under consideration, underscoring the need for future research to exercise greater caution when theorizing the boundary effects of cultural values on workplace stressors.

Our study also addresses the prompting from Kottwitz et al. (2019) to investigate how age moderates the stressor-strain link, uncovering a complex role for age in the response to illegitimate tasks. Consistent with our hypothesis, illegitimate tasks had a less detrimental impact on the job performance, innovative behavior, and OCB of older samples compared to their younger counterparts. This finding helps explain the mixed results reported in prior studies on how illegitimate tasks relate to job performance (e.g., Huth & Chung-Yan, 2023; Lyubykh et al., 2022; Mugayar-Baldocchi, 2021), innovative behavior (e.g., Adler & Koch, 2017; Bani-Melhem et al., 2025; Song et al., 2025), and OCB (e.g., Lian & Ding, 2025; Mugayar-Baldocchi, 2021; Shaya et al., 2024). Paradoxically, however, these tasks prompted greater WFC among older

samples. This, to some extent, aligns with Madsen et al.'s (2014) exploratory analysis, which indicated that unnecessary tasks exert a stronger negative impact on the mental health of older employees. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989, 2001) offers a framework to interpret this seemingly complex pattern of results. According to COR theory, individuals with limited resources are more vulnerable to further resource loss. Older employees, who already face resource depletion due to constraints in time, ability, and energy, may be particularly susceptible to resource losses associated with illegitimate tasks. Consequently, when confronted with these tasks, they appear to make a strategic trade-off. They leverage their accumulated experience in stress management and emotional regulation to buffer the impact on productive work behaviors (e.g., job performance, innovation, and OCB). Simultaneously, to conserve valued personal resources and prevent further depletion, they reduce resource investment in both the family domain and health maintenance. Taken together, these findings establish age as a previously underexplored yet important boundary condition in the illegitimate tasks literature, demonstrating that these tasks can produce divergent patterns of effects across outcome domains depending on employees' age, and underscoring the importance of incorporating a career stage perspective into future theorizing in this area.

In examining the methodological boundary conditions, this study investigated two potential moderating variables: rating source and measurement time lag. Overall, the comparison of cross-sectional and time-lagged studies revealed no significant variations in the associations of illegitimate tasks with most outcomes, indicating that

these relationships are stable and persistent. However, cross-sectional studies highlighted stronger links of illegitimate tasks with CWB, pointing to a more immediate impact on individual responses. Conversely, time-lagged studies revealed a more substantial link of illegitimate tasks with job performance, suggesting that performance declines may develop over time in response to these stressors. Additionally, studies using multi-source data revealed stronger associations of illegitimate tasks with innovation behavior. This could be attributed to the reduced objectivity in self-assessments, which might downplay the detrimental link of illegitimate tasks with favorable outcomes. Future research should prioritize multi-source data to improve accuracy.

Practical Implications

Illegitimate tasks, which occur on average two to three times per week (Ahmed et al., 2018), lead to various negative consequences for employees affecting their attitudes, behaviors, and well-being. These outcomes subsequently impose significant costs on organizations. To mitigate these effects, organizations should implement interventions aimed at preventing the emergence of illegitimate tasks. Managers should acknowledge the harmful impacts of illegitimate tasks and exercise caution in task assignment. Effective communication with employees before delegating tasks can clarify job responsibilities and reduce perceptions of task illegitimacy. Furthermore, managers should note that, compared with unnecessary tasks, unreasonable tasks tend to elicit stronger negative affect among employees. Therefore, when it becomes unavoidable to assign tasks outside an employee's primary duties, supervisors should clearly

communicate the importance of the task and the reasons for its assignment to mitigate employees' negative reactions (Semmer et al., 2010, 2015). For example, a supervisor might explain, "I understand this isn't typically your responsibility, but we need to assign it to you as an exception due to the usual responsible employee's illness, and the task is critical and urgent."

In addition, in high power-distance cultures, employees tend to experience higher burnout and lower job satisfaction, affective commitment, and OCB when confronted with illegitimate tasks. To mitigate these challenges, managers should exercise heightened caution in assigning such tasks. They could redesign jobs to establish clear work boundaries and revise job descriptions to expand employees' responsibilities. Moreover, implementing anonymous reporting systems would allow employees to raise concerns about task legitimacy without fear of reprisal (Mackey et al., 2018). This is particularly critical in high power-distance societies, where strict hierarchical structures lead employees to suppress dissatisfaction and refrain from questioning authority.

Finally, in situations where illegitimate tasks must be assigned, managers should take employees' age into account when formulating targeted management and intervention strategies. For older employees, close attention to workload and working hours is necessary; providing additional resources (e.g., extra time or technical support) can help mitigate the depletion of personal resources. For younger employees, who may have limited experience in stress management, managers should prioritize reassurance by affirming their professional value and clarifying that the assignment of illegitimate tasks is not intended as a sign of disrespect. Whenever possible, supervisors should

participate in these tasks alongside employees to help mitigate their negative effects on both in-role and extra-role behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research

This research presents several limitations. First, our meta-analysis was conducted in the early stages of research on illegitimate tasks, which was constrained by a limited number of studies. For instance, some analyses included only a few studies (e.g., affective commitment, $k = 4$), which may lead to second-order sampling errors (Schmidt & Hunter, 2014). While a minimum of two studies can suffice for a meta-analysis, larger datasets typically yield more accurate cumulative effect sizes (Schmidt & Hunter, 2014). Hence, caution is advised in the interpretation and generalization of findings from a small number of studies (especially when $k \leq 10$). The limited number of studies also restricted our ability to examine key antecedents of illegitimate tasks, such as leader-member exchange (Sias & Duncan, 2019) and abusive supervision (Stein et al., 2020), as well as other related outcomes like sleep quality (Pereira et al., 2014) and moral disengagement (Zhao et al., 2022), which have not been sufficiently explored. Future research could address these gaps to provide more robust meta-analytic evidence and refine the nomological network surrounding illegitimate tasks.

Second, our meta-analysis does not allow us to empirically establish causality between illegitimate tasks and their correlates. These correlates have been classified as consequences based on existing literature. We recommend that future research employs experimental designs to garner stronger evidence of causal relationships. Since causal links may also exist among these consequences, future research could use advanced

meta-analytic techniques, such as meta-structural equation modeling, to examine how illegitimate tasks influence distal outcomes (e.g., innovative behavior) through proximal outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, negative affect, and burnout). Investigating these mediating mechanisms will deepen our understanding of the pathways through which illegitimate tasks shape distant employee outcomes.

Another limitation concerns the cultural diversity of our sample, which included data from only 11 countries. Many countries were not represented, and over half of the studies originated from China. This raises concerns about the validity and generalizability of our findings, particularly regarding the cultural dimensions of illegitimate tasks. Our findings should be considered preliminary until further research is conducted across a broader spectrum of countries. We encourage future studies to be conducted in more countries, and to provide detailed data to facilitate more thorough and nuanced meta-analytic investigations. In terms of cultural dimensions, this study focused on the moderating role of power distance due to its direct connection to the supervisor–subordinate power dynamics that underlie illegitimate tasks, but other cultural dimensions may also be relevant and warrant investigation in future research. For example, in individualistic societies, employees tend to prioritize personal goals and self-interest over collective interests (Hofstede et al., 2010). Compared to employees from collectivist cultures, those from individualistic cultures may exhibit stronger reactions to unfair treatment that negatively impacts personal interests, such as illegitimate tasks.

Furthermore, social roles, such as volunteers and employees, may serve as potential moderating variables influencing individuals' responses to illegitimate tasks. Extensive research has demonstrated that volunteers and employees differ in several fundamental aspects, such as motivation (Pearce, 1983), personality traits (Elshaug & Metzger, 2001), and work attitudes (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2009). Employees typically enter into formal contracts with their employers, securing paid positions subject to organizational management and supervision. When confronted with illegitimate tasks, employees may be more likely to tolerate them due to career development opportunities and economic incentives, even if these tasks fall outside their professional scope or are unnecessary. In contrast, volunteers, driven by social responsibility and values rather than financial incentives, typically have more flexible and informal roles (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; Pearce, 1993). Consequently, volunteers may be more inclined to resist illegitimate tasks, guided by personal values, as they face fewer constraints related to economic rewards, career development, or job responsibilities. Empirical evidence further suggests that, compared with employees, volunteers are more sensitive to the social meaning of their roles (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2009) and to the degree of recognition and support they receive (Fallon & Rice, 2015). This suggests that illegitimate tasks, which inherently violate role expectations and convey devaluation or disrespect, are likely to trigger stronger psychological threats and value conflicts, leading to more pronounced negative reactions. However, due to the limited research on volunteers in the context of illegitimate tasks, this meta-analysis was unable to conduct a subgroup analysis. Future research should further explore these potential

moderators to provide deeper insights into the variations in effect sizes between illegitimate tasks and related variables.

Conclusion

After nearly two decades of research on illegitimate tasks, this study offers the first quantitative synthesis of empirical evidence, demonstrating the associations of illegitimate tasks with attitudinal, behavioral, and well-being employee consequences. Our findings also highlight specific sociodemographic, and methodological boundary conditions that affect the strength of these associations. This meta-analysis aims to elucidate the adverse impacts of illegitimate tasks and inform future research and management strategies to mitigate their prevalence in the workplace.

Footnotes

1. Considering the impact of social role differences, volunteers may respond to illegitimate tasks differently from employees (for a detailed discussion, see the Limitations and Future Research section). Therefore, we excluded volunteers to minimize heterogeneity in the study and enhance the generalizability of our findings to a homogeneous employee group.

References

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Table 1 Publication bias analyses

Variable	Fail-safe N	Egger's test		Trim and fill results			
		t	Adjusted ρ	95% CI		Implied missing studies	
				s.e.	LL	UL	Left
Attitudinal							
Affective commitment	221	0.692	-0.439	0.042	-0.521	-0.357	2
Job satisfaction	19523	0.699	-0.530	0.052	-0.632	-0.427	0
Work engagement	6232	-0.355	-0.301	0.088	-0.473	-0.128	3
Turnover intention	8600	0.359	0.443	0.038	0.368	0.517	0
Wellbeing							
Negative affect	78484	-1.709	0.553	0.022	0.511	0.596	7
Burnout	106722	-1.174	0.566	0.037	0.493	0.640	0
Work-family conflict	2086	-1.811	0.477	0.033	0.412	0.542	3
Behavioral							
Job performance	428	-0.962	-0.272	0.054	-0.378	-0.165	0
Innovative behavior	1249	-1.421	-0.151	0.047	-0.244	-0.058	4
Organizational citizenship behavior	255	-0.019	-0.246	0.088	-0.419	-0.072	0
Counterproductive work behavior	2625	-0.628	0.448	0.048	0.355	0.542	4
Work withdrawal behavior	8375	-3.791**	0.526	0.038	0.453	0.600	4

Note: 95% CI: LL = 95% lower confidence interval for adjusted ρ ; 95% CI: UL = 95% upper confidence interval for adjusted ρ ; s.e. = standard

*error; *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$*

Table 2 Meta-Analysis of relationship between illegitimate tasks and its consequences

Variable	N	k	r	SDr	ρ	SD_{ρ}	95% CI		80% CR		%Var
							LL	UL	LL	UL	
Attitudinal											
Affective commitment	973	4	-0.363	0.071	-0.398	0.029	-0.464	-0.331	-0.435	-0.360	81.27%
Job satisfaction	11194	19	-0.477	0.118	-0.529	0.120	-0.585	-0.473	-0.682	-0.375	8.00%
Work engagement	18161	17	-0.270	0.117	-0.329	0.131	-0.394	-0.264	-0.497	-0.161	6.41%
Turnover intention	6970	17	0.393	0.111	0.441	0.117	0.382	0.501	0.292	0.591	14.05%
Wellbeing											
Negative affect	14437	44	0.479	0.094	0.535	0.098	0.503	0.568	0.409	0.661	19.08%
Burnout	20545	38	0.509	0.142	0.565	0.141	0.519	0.612	0.384	0.746	5.89%
Work-family conflict	2666	11	0.403	0.089	0.453	0.075	0.395	0.510	0.356	0.549	39.49%
Behavioral											
Job performance	2226	8	-0.247	0.106	-0.271	0.104	-0.355	-0.187	-0.403	-0.138	26.75%
Innovative behavior	5994	15	-0.185	0.147	-0.203	0.163	-0.290	-0.116	-0.411	0.005	10.11%
Organizational citizenship behavior	2206	6	-0.217	0.194	-0.245	0.198	-0.409	-0.081	-0.499	0.008	7.08%
Counterproductive work behavior	3378	14	0.354	0.127	0.386	0.127	0.312	0.460	0.223	0.548	19.12%
Work withdrawal behavior	6256	14	0.433	0.105	0.484	0.111	0.422	0.547	0.342	0.627	13.08%

Note: k = number of independent effect sizes; N = total sample size; r = mean observed correlation; SDr = standard deviation of r ; ρ = mean correlation corrected for unreliability; $SD\rho$ = standard deviation of ρ ; 95% CI: LL = 95% lower confidence interval for ρ ; 95% CI: UL = 95% upper confidence interval for ρ ; 80% CR: LL = 80% lower credibility interval for ρ ; 80% CR: UL = 80% upper credibility interval for ρ ; Var% = percentage of variance attributable to statistical artifacts.

Table 3 Moderating effects of sub-dimensions of illegitimate tasks using subgroup analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Subgroup</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SD_r</i>	<i>ρ</i>	<i>SD_ρ</i>	95% CI		80% CR	
								<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Job satisfaction	unnecessary	4222	6	-0.299	0.097	-0.333	0.096	-0.416	-0.250	-0.456	-0.210
	unreasonable	4222	6	-0.349	0.051	-0.387	0.030	-0.425	-0.349	-0.426	-0.348
								<i>t</i> (10) = 1.315		<i>p</i> = 0.218	
Work engagement	unnecessary	2530	4	-0.340	0.103	-0.407	0.101	-0.514	-0.300	-0.536	-0.278
	unreasonable	2207	3	-0.284	0.109	-0.351	0.111	-0.485	-0.217	-0.493	-0.209
								<i>t</i> (5) = -0.686		<i>p</i> = 0.523	
Turnover intention	unnecessary	2457	3	0.374	0.081	0.422	0.091	0.312	0.532	0.305	0.538
	unreasonable	2457	3	0.375	0.058	0.434	0.057	0.359	0.509	0.362	0.506
								<i>t</i> (4) = -0.194		<i>p</i> = 0.856	
Negative affect	unnecessary	5443	11	0.420	0.096	0.483	0.098	0.420	0.546	0.358	0.609
	unreasonable	5443	11	0.473	0.030	0.542	0.013	0.517	0.567	0.526	0.558
								<i>t</i> (20) = -1.979		<i>p</i> = 0.062	
Burnout	unnecessary	10561	13	0.471	0.099	0.530	0.087	0.480	0.580	0.418	0.642
	unreasonable	11038	14	0.496	0.131	0.559	0.133	0.487	0.630	0.388	0.729
								<i>t</i> (25) = -0.675		<i>p</i> = 0.506	

Note: k = number of independent effect sizes; N = total sample size; r = mean observed correlation; SDr = standard deviation of r ; ρ = mean correlation corrected for unreliability; $SD\rho$ = standard deviation of ρ ; 95% CI: LL = 95% lower confidence interval for ρ ; 95% CI: UL = 95% upper confidence interval for ρ ; 80% CR: LL = 80% lower credibility interval for ρ ; 80% CR: UL = 80% upper credibility interval for ρ .

Table 4 Moderating effects of power distance and age using WLSR

Variable	Power Distance					Age				
	k	coef.	s.e.	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	k	coef.	s.e.	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Attitudinal										
Affective commitment	4	-0.939*	0.413	-1.749	-0.129	1	-	-	-	-
Job satisfaction	18	-0.397*	0.194	-0.778	-0.017	15	-0.003	0.004	-0.010	0.005
Work engagement	15	-0.029	0.362	-0.737	0.680	8	0.003	0.015	-0.027	0.032
Turnover intention	14	0.105	0.353	-0.587	0.796	5	-0.006	0.004	-0.014	0.002
Wellbeing										
Negative affect	43	-0.148	0.154	-0.450	0.155	28	0.001	0.003	-0.006	0.007
Burnout	34	0.257*	0.105	0.052	0.463	24	-0.001	0.005	-0.011	0.009
Work-family conflict	11	0.031	0.151	-0.265	0.326	8	0.009*	0.004	0.001	0.017
Behavioral										
Job performance	8	-0.157	0.710	-1.548	1.234	6	0.015*	0.006	0.003	0.028
Innovative behavior	13	0.846***	0.194	0.466	1.226	8	0.030***	0.003	0.024	0.036
Organizational citizenship behavior	5	-2.144***	0.525	-3.174	-1.115	4	0.016***	0.004	0.008	0.024
Counterproductive work behavior	14	0.094	0.268	-0.430	0.619	9	0.012	0.007	-0.003	0.026
Work withdrawal behavior	14	-	-	-	-	5	0.011	0.007	-0.003	0.026

Note: *k* = number of independent effect sizes; *coef.* = meta-regression coefficient of the moderator; *s.e.* = standard error; ****p* < 0.001; ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05

Table 5 Moderating effects of rating source and measurement time lag using subgroup analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Subgroup</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SD_r</i>	<i>ρ</i>	<i>SD_ρ</i>	95% CI		80% CR	
								<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
<i>Rating source</i>											
Counterproductive work behavior	same source	2251	10	0.388	0.117	0.421	0.112	0.342	0.501	0.278	0.565
	different source	1127	4	0.288	0.120	0.313	0.125	0.177	0.450	0.153	0.474
								<i>t</i> (12) = 1.503		<i>p</i> = 0.159	
Job performance	same source	1405	4	-0.234	0.097	-0.247	0.103	-0.361	-0.132	-0.379	-0.114
	different source	821	4	-0.268	0.116	-0.319	0.086	-0.432	-0.207	-0.429	-0.209
								<i>t</i> (6) = 1.073		<i>p</i> = 0.324	
Innovative behavior	same source	4488	10	-0.137	0.141	-0.148	0.157	-0.251	-0.046	-0.349	0.053
	different source	1506	5	-0.326	0.021	-0.364	0.000	-0.386	-0.341	-0.364	-0.364
								<i>t</i> (13) = 4.351		<i>p</i> < 0.001	
<i>Measurement time lag</i>											
Attitudinal											
Job satisfaction	cross-sectional	10520	13	-0.475	0.121	-0.529	0.125	-0.599	-0.459	-0.689	-0.369
	time-lagged	674	6	-0.505	0.053	-0.528	0.000	-0.567	-0.488	-0.528	-0.528
								<i>t</i> (17) = -0.029		<i>p</i> = 0.977	
Work engagement	cross-sectional	15968	11	-0.276	0.068	-0.339	0.064	-0.381	-0.298	-0.420	-0.258
	time-lagged	2193	6	-0.232	0.279	-0.265	0.309	-0.516	-0.014	-0.661	0.131
								<i>t</i> (15) = -0.580		<i>p</i> = 0.571	
Turnover intention	cross-sectional	5471	12	0.403	0.092	0.453	0.092	0.396	0.511	0.336	0.571
	time-lagged	1499	5	0.358	0.156	0.398	0.172	0.239	0.557	0.178	0.619

									<i>t</i> (15) = -0.676	<i>p</i> = 0.509		
Wellbeing												
Negative affect	cross-sectional	10680	27	0.476	0.091	0.532	0.097	0.492	0.572	0.408	0.656	
	time-lagged	3757	17	0.490	0.102	0.544	0.102	0.489	0.600	0.414	0.674	
												<i>t</i> (42) = -0.387
												<i>p</i> = 0.701
Burnout	cross-sectional	16639	27	0.514	0.127	0.572	0.129	0.522	0.622	0.407	0.737	
	time-lagged	3906	11	0.486	0.190	0.538	0.181	0.428	0.649	0.306	0.770	
												<i>t</i> (36) = -0.567
												<i>p</i> = 0.574
Work-family conflict	cross-sectional	1817	6	0.416	0.089	0.471	0.084	0.391	0.551	0.364	0.578	
	time-lagged	849	5	0.374	0.080	0.415	0.027	0.346	0.484	0.381	0.449	
												<i>t</i> (9) = 1.540
												<i>p</i> = 0.158
Behavioral												
Job performance	cross-sectional	1341	4	-0.177	0.035	-0.193	0.000	-0.223	-0.164	-0.193	-0.193	
	time-lagged	885	4	-0.353	0.089	-0.400	0.079	-0.502	-0.298	-0.502	-0.299	
												<i>t</i> (6) = 5.241
												<i>p</i> = 0.002
Innovative behavior	cross-sectional	3097	7	-0.156	0.142	-0.170	0.154	-0.290	-0.050	-0.367	0.027	
	time-lagged	2897	8	-0.216	0.146	-0.239	0.164	-0.360	-0.119	-0.450	-0.029	
												<i>t</i> (13) = 0.840
												<i>p</i> = 0.416
Counterproductive work behavior	cross-sectional	1677	6	0.397	0.080	0.446	0.055	0.383	0.510	0.375	0.517	
	time-lagged	1701	8	0.313	0.150	0.332	0.147	0.220	0.443	0.144	0.520	
												<i>t</i> (12) = 2.014
												<i>p</i> = 0.067
Work withdrawal behavior	cross-sectional	3775	7	0.463	0.080	0.524	0.076	0.461	0.586	0.427	0.621	
	time-lagged	2481	7	0.386	0.122	0.426	0.128	0.324	0.528	0.262	0.591	
												<i>t</i> (12) = 1.742
												<i>p</i> = 0.107

Note: k = number of independent effect sizes; N = total sample size; r = mean observed correlation; SDr = standard deviation of r ; ρ = mean correlation corrected for unreliability; $SD\rho$ = standard deviation of ρ ; 95% CI: LL = 95% lower confidence interval for ρ ; 95% CI: UL = 95% upper confidence interval for ρ ; 80% CR: LL = 80% lower credibility interval for ρ ; 80% CR: UL = 80% upper credibility interval for ρ .

Figure 1 Integrated framework of illegitimate tasks and their attitudinal, wellbeing, and behavioral outcomes

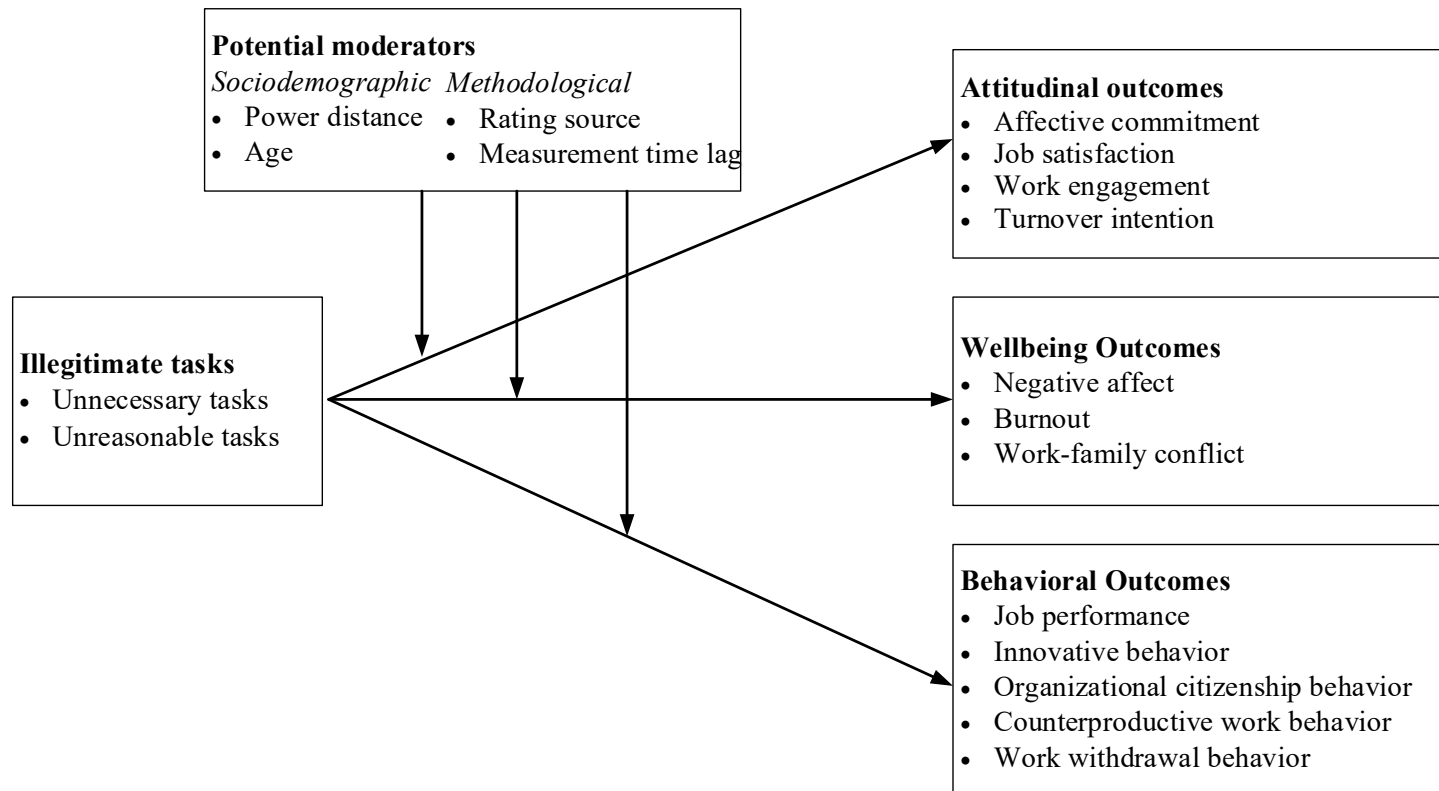
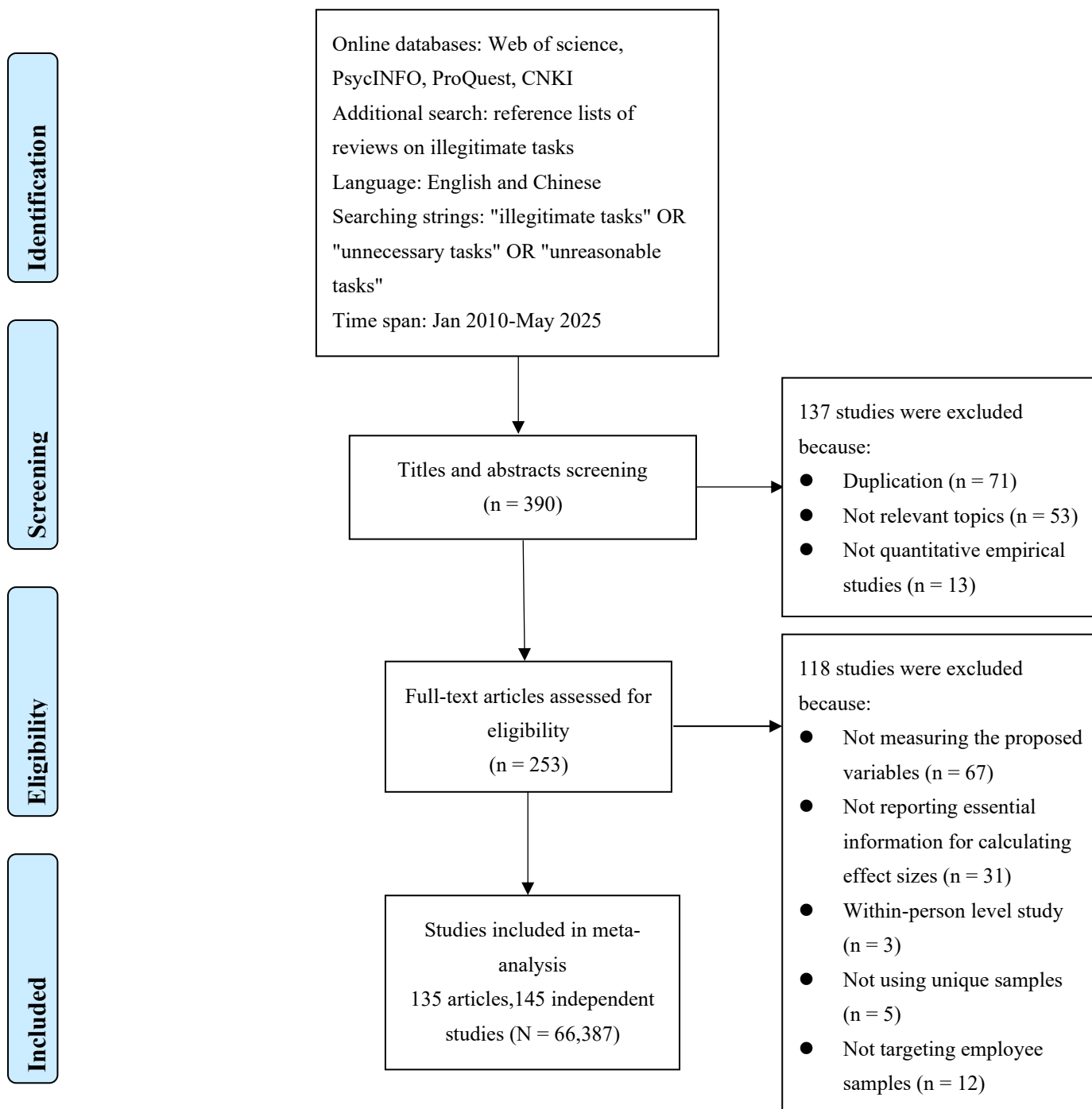


Figure 2 PRISMA flowchart



Supplementary Material A. Studies included in the meta-analysis

No.	Authors	Title	Journal	Language
1	Adler, M., & Koch, A. K. (2017)	Expanding the job demands-resources model to classify innovation-predicting working conditions	Management Revue	English
2	Ahmed, S. F., Eatough, E. M., & Ford, M. T. (2018)A	Relationships between illegitimate tasks and change in work-family outcomes via interactional justice and negative emotions	Journal of Vocational Behavior	English
3	Ahmed, S. F., Eatough, E. M., & Ford, M. T. (2018)B	Relationships between illegitimate tasks and change in work-family outcomes via interactional justice and negative emotions	Journal of Vocational Behavior	English
4	Andrade, C., & Neves, P. C. (2024)	Illegitimate Tasks and Work–Family Conflict as Sequential Mediators in the Relationship between Work Intensification and Work Engagement	Administrative Sciences	English
5	Apostel, E., Syrek, C. J., & Antoni, C. H. (2018)	Turnover intention as a response to illegitimate tasks: The moderating role of appreciative leadership	International Journal of Stress Management	English
6	Bani-Melhem, S., Abukhait, R. M., & Mohd Shamsudin, F. (2023)	This doesn't make sense! Does illegitimate tasks affect innovative behaviour?	The Service Industries Journal	English
7	Basinska, B. A., & Dąderman, A. M. (2023)	Psychometric properties of the Bern illegitimate tasks scale using classical test and item response theories	Scientific Reports	English
8	Che, X. (2015)	Effects of Occupational Stressors on Nurses' Safety Performance and Well-being: A Within-Individual Study	Doctoral Dissertation	English
9	Cheng, H., Li, Z., Zhao, J., Wang, W., & Zou, R. (2022)	The role of cognition, affect, and resources in the influence of unreasonable tasks on work engagement: A moderated chain mediation model	Frontiers in Psychology	English

10	Davis, T. A. (2018)	Illegitimate Tasks and Employee Silence: A Moderated Mediation Model	Master Thesis	English
11	Dettmers, J., & Biemelt, J. (2018)	Always available—the role of perceived advantages and legitimacy	Journal of Managerial Psychology	English
12	Dong, C., & Zhang, L. (2022)	Illegitimate tasks and nurses' work engagement: The role of ego depletion	Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal	English
13	Eatough, E. M., Meier, L. L., Igit, I., Elfering, A., Spector, P. E., & Semmer, N. K. (2016)	You want me to do what? Two daily diary studies of illegitimate tasks and employee well-being	Journal of Organizational Behavior	English
14	Fältén, R., Berntson, E., & Bernhard-Oettel, C. (2024).	Illegitimate tasks in the public sector—associations with work engagement, stress, and turnover intention: the moderating role of leadership	Nordic Psychology	English
15	Fan, P., Zhang, H., Yang, S., Yu, Z., & Guo, M. (2023)	Do Illegitimate Tasks Lead to Work Withdrawal Behavior among Generation Z Employees in China? The Role of Perceived Insider Status and Overqualification	Behavioral Sciences	English
16	Fila, M. J., & Eatough, E. (2020)	Extending the Boundaries of Illegitimate Tasks: The Role of Resources	Psychological Reports	English
17	Fila, M. J., Semmer, N. K., & Kern, M. (2023)	When being intrinsically motivated makes you vulnerable: Illegitimate tasks and their associations with strain, work satisfaction, and turnover intention	Occupational Health Science	English
18	Gahrman, C., & Klumb, P. L. (2024).	Investigating the impact of temporary nurses on permanent nurses' commitment via perceptions of illegitimate tasks: A cross-sectional study	Journal of Advanced Nursing	English
19	Gao, R. (2022)	The Influence Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on New Employee Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Organizational Identity	2022 2nd International Conference on Management Science and	English

			Software Engineering (ICMSSE 2022)	
20	García Johnson, C. P., & Otto, K. (2020)	“Please, bring me some coffee”: Illegitimate tasks as the explanation for the relationship between organisational sexism and occupational well-being	GENDER–Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft	English
21	García Johnson, C. P., & Otto, K. (2022)	Illegitimate tasks: obstacles to trans equality at work	Gender in Management: An International Journal	English
22	He, X., Zheng, Y., & Wei, Y. (2024)	The double-edged sword effect of illegitimate tasks on employee creativity: Positive and negative coping perspectives	Psychology Research and Behavior Management Journal of Construction Engineering and Management	English
23	Huo, X., Xu, X., Zhang, Y., & Jiao, L. (2024).	Insight into the Mechanism of Noncompliance Tasks in Construction Workers’ Unsafe Behaviors	Journal of Construction Engineering and Management	English
24	Jiang, F., & Wang, Z. (2024)	Craft it if you cannot avoid it: job crafting alleviates the detrimental effects of illegitimate tasks on employee health	Current Psychology	English
25	Koch, A. K., & Adler, M. (2018)	Emotional exhaustion and innovation in the workplace—a longitudinal study	Industrial Health	English
26	Konuk, H., & Aydın Küçük, B. (2024)	The moderation role of supervisor support in the interaction of illegitimate task, emotional exhaustion, and self-undermining: A job-demand resources approach	Journal of General Management	English
27	Kottwitz, M. U., Kälin, W., & Otto, K. (2025)	Illegitimate Tasks Predict Sleep Disturbances and Musculoskeletal Pain: Single and Serial Indirect Effects of Qualitative Job Insecurity and Emotional Exhaustion	Occupational Health Science	English
28	Kottwitz, M. U., Pfister, I. B., Elfering, A., Schummer, S. E., Igc, I., & Otto, K. (2019)A	SOS - Appreciation overboard! Illegitimacy and psychologists’ job satisfaction	Industrial Health	English

29	Kottwitz, M. U., Pfister, I. B., Elfering, A., Schummer, S. E., Igic, I., & Otto, K. (2019)B Kottwitz, M. U., Pfister, I. B.,	SOS - Appreciation overboard! Illegitimacy and psychologists' job satisfaction	Industrial Health	English
30	Elfering, A., Schummer, S. E., Igic, I., & Otto, K. (2019)C	SOS - Appreciation overboard! Illegitimacy and psychologists' job satisfaction	Industrial Health	English
31	Kronenwett, M., & Rigotti, T. (2019)	When do you face a challenge? How unnecessary tasks block the challenging potential of time pressure and emotional demands	Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	English
32	Langseth-Eide, B. (2019)	It's been a hard day's night and I've been working like a dog: Workaholism and work engagement in the JD-R model	Frontiers in Psychology	English
33	Lian, R., & Ding, T. (2025)	Illegitimate tasks diminish my engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors: A reciprocity perspective model	Acta Psychologica	English
34	Lovett, M. (2022).	The Relationship Between Experienced Workplace Incivility and Pre-Quitting Behaviors: A Model of Mediated Moderation	Doctoral Dissertation	English
35	Ma, J., & Peng, Y. (2019)	The performance costs of illegitimate tasks: The role of job identity and flexible role orientation	Journal of Vocational Behavior	English
36	Mauno, S., Minkkinen, J., & Shimazu, A. (2022)	Do Unnecessary Tasks Impair Performance Because They Harm Living a Calling? Testing a Mediation in a Three-Wave Study	Journal of Career Assessment	English
37	Meier, L. L., & Semmer, N. K. (2018)	Illegitimate tasks as assessed by incumbents and supervisors: Converging only modestly but predicting strain as assessed by incumbents, supervisors, and partners	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	English
38	Meng, Y., Liu, S., Li, J. Y., Zhao, X. K., & Tan, J. (2025)	An Empirical Study on the Illegitimate Tasks and Its Causal Mechanism at Chinese Social Work Agencies	Human Service Organizations:	English

			Management, Leadership & Governance	
39	Mihelič, K. K., Zupan, N., & Merkuž, A. (2024)	I feel the need – the need for speed! Unreasonable tasks, work pace, psychological detachment and emotional exhaustion	Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance	English
40	Minei, E. M., Eatough, E. M., & Cohen-Charash, Y. (2018)	Managing illegitimate task requests through explanation and acknowledgment: A discursive leadership approach	Management Communication Quarterly	English
41	Moncayo-Rizzo, J., Alvarado-Villa, G., & Cossio-Urbe, C. (2024).	The impact of illegitimate tasks on burnout syndrome in a healthcare system: A cross-sectional study.	International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances	English
42	Mugayar-Baldocchi, M. A. (2021)	Illegitimate tasks and performance outcomes: The moderating role of the perception of coworker sharing illegitimate tasks experiences	Doctoral Dissertation	English
43	Muntz, J., Dormann, C., & Kronenwett, M. (2019)	Supervisors' relational transparency moderates effects among employees' illegitimate tasks and job dissatisfaction: A four-wave panel study	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	English
44	Omansky, R., Eatough, E. M., & Fila, M. J. (2016)	Illegitimate tasks as an impediment to job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation: Moderated mediation effects of gender and effort-reward imbalance	Frontiers in Psychology	English
45	Ouyang, C., Zhu, Y., Ma, Z., & Qian, X. (2022)	Why Employees Experience Burnout: An Explanation of Illegitimate Tasks	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	English
46	Park, H. I., & Park, J. (2024).	Different responses to facets of illegitimate tasks depending on job level: A multigroup path analysis	International Journal of Stress Management	English

47	Parker, S. L., Pahor, K., Van den Broeck, A., & Zacher, H. (2024)A	Effects of perceived illegitimacy of interrupting tasks on employees' cognitive and affective experiences: the mediating role of stress appraisals	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	English
48	Parker, S. L., Pahor, K., Van den Broeck, A., & Zacher, H. (2024)B	Effects of perceived illegitimacy of interrupting tasks on employees' cognitive and affective experiences: the mediating role of stress appraisals	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	English
49	Pereira, D., Semmer, N. K., & Elfering, A. (2014)	Illegitimate tasks and sleep quality: An ambulatory study	Stress and Health	English
50	Pfister, I. B., Jacobshagen, N., Kälin, W., Stocker, D., Meier, L. L., & Semmer, N. K. (2020)	Appreciation and Illegitimate Tasks as Predictors of Affective Well-being: Disentangling Within- and Between-Person Effects	Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	English
51	Pindek, S., Demircioğlu, E., Howard, D. J., Eatough, E. M., & Spector, P. E. (2019)	Illegitimate tasks are not created equal: Examining the effects of attributions on unreasonable and unnecessary tasks	Work & Stress	English
52	Pindek, S., Hayman, M. R., Howard, D. J., Arvan, M. L., & Spector, P. E. (2025).	Understaffing as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Cross-Sectional Study of Hospital Nurses' Manpower and Expertise Understaffing	Journal of Advanced Nursing	English
53	Schmitt, A., Ohly, S., & Kleespies, N. (2015)	Time Pressure Promotes Work Engagement	Journal of Personnel Psychology	English
54	Schulte-Braucks, J., Baethge, A., Dormann, C., & Vahle-Hinz, T. (2019)	Get Even and Feel Good? Moderating Effects of Justice Sensitivity and Counterproductive Work Behavior on the Relationship Between Illegitimate Tasks and Self-Esteem	Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	English
55	Semmer, N. K., Jacobshagen, N., Meier, L. L., Elfering, A., Beehr,	Illegitimate tasks as a source of work stress	Work & Stress	English

	T. A., Kälin, W., & Tschan, F. (2015)A			
56	Semmer, N. K., Jacobshagen, N., Meier, L. L., Elfering, A., Beehr, T. A., Kälin, W., & Tschan, F. (2015)B	Illegitimate tasks as a source of work stress	Work & Stress	English
57	Semmer, N. K., Jacobshagen, N., Meier, L. L., Elfering, A., Beehr, T. A., Kälin, W., & Tschan, F. (2015)C	Illegitimate tasks as a source of work stress	Work & Stress	English
58	Semmer, N. K., Tschan, F., Meier, L. L., Facchin, S., & Jacobshagen, N. (2010)A	Illegitimate Tasks and Counterproductive Work Behavior	Applied Psychology	English
59	Semmer, N. K., Tschan, F., Meier, L. L., Facchin, S., & Jacobshagen, N. (2010)B	Illegitimate Tasks and Counterproductive Work Behavior	Applied Psychology	English
60	Shakeel, N. (2024)	Impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Knowledge Hiding Behavior and Creative Work Performance: A Moderated Mediation Analysis	Master Thesis	English
61	Shaya, N., Mohebi, L., Pillai, R., & Abukhait, R. (2024).	Illegitimate Tasks, Negative Affectivity, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior among Private School Teachers: A Mediated–Moderated Model	Sustainability	English
62	Song, H., Yin, Q., Yin, K., Duan, L., Zhou, X., & Li, Y. (2025)	How illegitimate tasks impact creative behavior of knowledge workers: a moderated mediation model	Current Psychology	English
63	Sonnentag, S., & Lischetzke, T. (2018)	Illegitimate Tasks Reach Into Afterwork Hours: A Multilevel Study	Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	English

64	Stengård, J., Leineweber, C., & Berthelsen, H. (2024).	Illegitimate work tasks: an investigation of psychometric properties of the Swedish version of the BITS instrument and its suitability in human versus ‘non-human’ service occupations	BMC Public Health	English
65	Stocker, D., Jacobshagen, N., Semmer, N. K., & Annen, H. (2010)	Appreciation at work in the Swiss armed forces	Swiss Journal of Psychology	English
66	Thun, S., Halsteinli, V., & Løvseth, L. (2018)	A study of unreasonable illegitimate tasks, administrative tasks, and sickness presenteeism amongst Norwegian physicians: an everyday struggle?	BMC Health Services Research	English
67	Verkuilen, J., Bianchi, R., Schonfeld, I. S., & Laurent, E. (2021)	Burnout–Depression Overlap: Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling Bifactor Analysis and Network Analysis	Assessment	English
68	Wald, D. R. (2022)	In the Eye of the Beholder: A Daily Diary Investigation of Appraisals of Illegitimate Tasks	Doctoral Dissertation	English
69	Wan, W., Wang, A., & Li, L. (2021)	Temporal leadership and employee workplace deviance: The role of perceived illegitimate tasks	Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal	English
70	Wang, H., & Zong, G. (2023)	Relationship between employees’ perceived illegitimate tasks and their work procrastination behavior: Role of negative emotions and paternalistic dimensions	Heliyon	English
71	Wang, Z., & Jiang, F. (2023)A	It is not only what you do, but why you do it: The role of attribution in employees’ emotional and behavioral responses to illegitimate tasks	Journal of Vocational Behavior	English
72	Wang, Z., & Jiang, F. (2023)B	It is not only what you do, but why you do it: The role of attribution in employees’ emotional and behavioral responses to illegitimate tasks	Journal of Vocational Behavior	English
73	Werdecker, L., & Esch, T. (2021)	Burnout, satisfaction and happiness among German general practitioners (GPs): A crosssectional survey on health resources and stressors	PLoS One	English

74	Wessels, J. (2021)	Too illegit to quit: The impact of illegitimate tasks on turnover intentions and well-being	Master Thesis	English
75	Wray, S. (2018)	Explaining work-related stress in UK academic staff: Alternative approaches	Doctoral Dissertation	English
76	Yang, F., Zhou, Z., & Huang, X. (2025)	With Unexpected Tasks Come More Dilatory Behaviors: The Dynamic Spillover Effects of Illegitimate Tasks on Procrastination at Work	Human Resource Management Journal	English
77	Yang, J., Han, J., Huang, S., & Huang, H. (2025).	To Leave or to Stay? Research on the Double-Edged Sword Effect of Illegitimate Tasks on Employee Turnover Intention	Psychological Reports	English
78	Zeng, X., & Chen, Y. (2022)	A research on illegitimate tasks, job autonomy, organizational justice and job anxiety—Inspired by standardization management	2022 13th International Conference on E-business, Management and Economics	English
79	Zeng, X., Huang, Y., Zhao, S., & Zeng, L. (2021)	Illegitimate Tasks and Employees' Turnover Intention: A Serial Mediation Model	Frontiers in Psychology	English
80	Zhao, L., Jolly, P. M., & Zhao, S. (2023)	The effect of illegitimate tasks on hospitality employees' service performance: a conservation of resources perspective	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	English
81	Zhou, Z. E., Eatough, E. M., & Che, X. X. (2020)	Effect of Illegitimate Tasks on Work-to-Family Conflict through Psychological Detachment: Passive Leadership as a Moderator	Journal of Vocational Behavior	English
82	Zhou, Z. E., Eatough, E. M., & Wald, D. R. (2018)	Feeling insulted? Examining end-of-work anger as a mediator in the relationship between daily illegitimate tasks and next-day CWB	Journal of Organizational Behavior	English
83	Zhou, B., Hu, X., Tang, Q., Xie, Y., & Zhu, Y. (2023)	The influence mechanisms of illegitimate tasks on employees' silence behaviors against the backdrop of artificial intelligence and fuzzy algorithms.	International Journal of Industrial Engineering:	English

			Theory, Applications and Practice	
84	Zong, S., Han, Y., & Li, M. (2022)	Not My Job, I Do Not Want to Do It: The Effect of Illegitimate Tasks on Work Disengagement	Frontiers in Psychology	English
85	Chang, L.(2023)	Research on the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work withdrawal behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
86	Chang, J.(2023)	The effect of illegitimate tasks on employee anxiety and job performance : the moderating role of resilience	Master Thesis	Chinese
87	Chang, Y., & Wang, Z. (2021)	Effect of illegitimate tasks on counterproductive work behavior among new generation employees : The mediating role of organization – based self-esteem and the moderating role of age	Psychological Research	Chinese
88	Chen, F. (2023)	Illegitimate Tasks and Employee Behaviour: Growth Needs Strength as a Moderator	Master Thesis	Chinese
89	Chen, Y.(2023)	Research on the Underlying Mechanisms of Illegitimate Tasks for Bystanders from the Perspective of Deontic Justice Theory	Master Thesis	Chinese
90	Cui, W.(2022)	A study on the impact of illegitimate tasks on employees' innovative behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
91	Ding, H. (2021)	The impact of illegitimate tasks on workplace well-being and innovative behavior among public hospital physicians ——evidence from public hospitals in the P District of Shanghai	Master Thesis	Chinese
92	Dong, J. (2021)	Research on the impact of illegitimate tasks on workplace deviance	Master Thesis	Chinese
93	Fang, M., Gan, Y., Hu, J., & Yang, X.(2024)	Mediating role of psychological capital between non-compliance tasks and occupational burnout among obstetric nurses	Occupation and Health	Chinese

94	Gao, R. (2023)	Research on the influence mechanism of illegitimate tasks on employees' voice behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
95	Ge, W., Wu, P., Zeng, L., Huang, Y., & Shi, Y.(2022)	Revision of the Chinese Version of Illegitimate Tasks Scale in Chinese Employees	Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology	Chinese
96	Hao, X., & Chen, Y. (2023)	Research on the Impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Knowledge Hiding:From the Perspective of Dual-process Mode	Journal of Technical Economics & Management	Chinese
97	He, J.(2024)	Research on The Impact Path of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Job Satisfaction	Master Thesis	Chinese
98	Hong, Y. (2022)	Research on the impact mechanism of illegitimate tasks and workplace deviance	Master Thesis	Chinese
99	Jin, Y.(2024)	Research on the Impact of Illegitimate Tasks at Company A on Employee Cyberloafing Behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
100	Le, X., Wang, L., Ye, J., Sun, L., & Dong, S. (2023)	Relationship between workplace procrastination and illegitimate tasks in kindergarten teachers	Chinese Mental Health Journal	Chinese
101	Li, M. (2022)	The impact of illegitimate tasks on employee knowledge hiding behavior: A moderated mediation model	Master Thesis	Chinese
102	Li, N. (2021)	A research on the influence mechanism of illegitimate tasks on employee creativity	Master Thesis	Chinese
103	Li, P., Chen, T., Huang, Z., Ao, X., Gao, J., & Zhao, X. (2024)	The Influence Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on Work Withdrawal Behavior among Hotel Employees: A Moderated Chain Mediation Model	Tourism Science	Chinese
104	Li, P., Gao, J., Huang, Z., & Wang, R. (2023)	Research on the influence mechanism of illegitimate tasks on turnover intention of employees from the perspective of psychological contract	Chinese Journal of Management	Chinese

105	Li, S. (2022)A	Don't Challenge Me Anymore: The Impact Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Counterproductive Work Behaviors	Master Thesis	Chinese
106	Li, S. (2022)B	Don't Challenge Me Anymore: The Impact Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Counterproductive Work Behaviors	Master Thesis	Chinese
107	Li, Z., & Liu, L. (2024)	The effects of illegitimate tasks on employee withdrawal behavior	Journal of Chongqing University of Technology	Chinese
108	Liang, X. (2023)A	A cross-generational research of the influencing mechanism of Illegitimate tasks on work engagement	Master Thesis	Chinese
109	Liang, X. (2023)B	A cross-generational research of the influencing mechanism of Illegitimate tasks on work engagement	Master Thesis	Chinese
110	Liu, J. (2023)	The Impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Turnover Intention- Based on the Dual Perspectives of “Self” and “Interaction”	Master Thesis	Chinese
111	Li, L.(2025)	A Study on the Consequences of Illegitimate Tasks on Employee Family Satisfaction	New Economy	Chinese
112	Liu, S. (2024)	The relationship between leadership involvement and social worker burnout: a study on the causal mechanism of organizational illegitimate tasks	Master Thesis	Chinese
113	Liu, Y.(2024)	Research on the Influence of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
114	Ma, L., Chen, T., Xie, P., & Zhao, X. (2021)	Influence of illegitimate tasks on employee innovative behavior: the role of psychological detachment and temporal leadership	Science & Technology Progress and Policy	Chinese
115	Mai, S., Li, T., & Ge, Y. (2025)	A Study on the Impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Employee Turnover Intention	Xinjiang State Farms Economy	Chinese

116	Peng, G. (2023)	The Influence of Practice of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees Work Withdrawal Behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
117	Shi, S., Wen, T., & Xie, X. (2025)	Resistance or Motivation? The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Illegitimate Tasks on Employee Turnover in Tourism Organizations	Tourism Tribune	Chinese
118	Song, B.(2024)	The influence of non-compliant tasks on employee turnover intention: the mediating role of role conflict and the moderating effect of job feedback	Master Thesis	Chinese
119	Sun, S. (2023)	Research on the Influence of Illegitimate Tasks on Work Withdrawal Behavior of New Generation Employees	Master Thesis	Chinese
120	Wang, J., Xie, J., & Cao, Z. (2025)	Research on the Psychological Mechanism of Employees Maintain Proactive Behavior Under Illegitimate Tasks: The Moderating Effect of Growth Mindset	Human Resources Development of China	Chinese
121	Wang, K. (2022)	Research on the influence of illegitimate tasks on turnover intention	Master Thesis	Chinese
122	Wang, S., Hu, Q., & Zhang, L. (2023)	The Double-edged Sword Effect of Illegitimate Tasks on Job Engagement	Journal of Technology Economics	Chinese
123	Wu, F. (2022)	A study on the relationship between illegitimate tasks, intrinsic motivation and employee turnover intention under paternalistic leadership's effect	Master Thesis	Chinese
124	Wu, M. (2022)	Research on the influence of illegitimate tasks on employee work withdrawal behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
125	Xu, J. (2023)	Research on the impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Creative Performance	Master Thesis	Chinese
126	Yang, H. (2023)	The Effects and Job Crafting Intervention Research of Illegitimate Tasks on Mental Health Teachers	Master Thesis	Chinese

127	Yang, J., Xie, P., Yang, W., & Qiao, X. (2022)	Influencing Mechanism Study of Illegitimate Tasks on Employee Innovative Behavior	Soft Science	Chinese
128	Yang, Y.(2023)	Impact of illegitimate tasks on employees withdrawal behavior:The mediating role of negative emotions and the moderating role of the Doctrine of mean	Master Thesis	Chinese
129	Ye, L., & Shi, J. (2023)	The Influence of Irregular Task to the Organizational Citizenship Behavior of New Employee	Shandong Social Sciences	Chinese
130	Ye, S.(2022)	Illegitimate Tasks and Work-Family Conflict: The Mediating Role of Psychological Detachment and the Moderating Role of Boundary Flexibility Ability	Master Thesis	Chinese
131	Ye, Y. (2022)	Research on Management Strategies of Employees' Illegitimate Tasks in Q Preschool Education Company	Master Thesis	Chinese
132	Yu, G.(2021)	Research on workplace procrastination of new generation employees ——From the perspective of illegitimate tasks	Master Thesis	Chinese
133	Zhang, G., Zheng, W., & Li, M.(2020)	The Impact of Electronic Communication during Non-working Time on Leader Effectiveness:A Diary Study of Experience Sampling	Journal of Business Economics	Chinese
134	Zhang, H., Wang, Z., Zou, Y., Su, Z., & Peng, J. (2019)	Illegitimate Tasks Lead to Deviant Employees: The Impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Workplace Deviant Behavior	Human Resources Development of China	Chinese
135	Zhang, M.(2021)	Effect of illegitimate task on in-role performance: Moderated by supervisor support and growth need strength	Master Thesis	Chinese
136	Zhang, S., Chen, Y., Zhou, M., & Gu, R. (2025)	The mechanism of illegitimate tasks on employees' innovative behaviors : a dual pathway perspective of work engagement and job burnout	Science & Technology Progress and Policy	Chinese
137	Zhang, S., Li, Y.,& Gao, S. (2025)	Mediating role of psychological resilience between non-compliant task pressure and occupational burnout among internal medicine nurses	Occupation and Health	Chinese

138	Zhang, S., Zhang, B., Bu, L., & Wei, J. (2021)	Research on the Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Innovative Behaviors——Based on the Perspective of Emotional Exhaustion and Ethical Leadership	Soft Science	Chinese
139	Zhang, S., Zhang, B., Xie, P., & Wei, J. (2022)	The Influence of Illegitimate Tasks on Family Undermining from the Perspective of the Boundary Theory	Soft Science	Chinese
140	Zhao, L., & Zhao, S. (2023)	Effect of illegitimate tasks on employees' job performance: a moderated double-mediation model	Journal of Business Economics	Chinese
141	Zheng, L.(2023)	Formation of work withdrawal behavior: the role of social face and organization-based self-esteem	PR Magazine	Chinese
142	Zheng, L.(2024)	The Impact of Illegitimate tasks on Work withdrawal behaviors: The Role of Emotional Exhaustion and Organization-based self-esteem	Master Thesis	Chinese
143	Zhou, T.(2022)	This is not my task: the impact of illegitimate tasks on employees'time banditry behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese
144	Zhu, J.(2020)	Research on the Relationship between Illegitimate Tasks and Employee Creativity	Master Thesis	Chinese
145	Zong, G.(2024)	A Study on the Influence Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on Employee Work Procrastination Behavior	Master Thesis	Chinese

Supplementary Materials B. Definitions and measures of outcome variables

Variable	Definition	Sample item
Attitudinal		
Affective commitment	It refers to “employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p.1).	(e.g., “I feel that I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.”; Che,2015)
Job satisfaction	It refers to “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the perception of one’s job as fulfilling or allowing the fulfillment of one’s important job values” (Locke, 1976, p. 1342).	(e.g., “I feel a sense of pride in doing my job”; Fila et al.,2023)
Work engagement	It signifies a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).	(e.g., “I feel strong and vigorous in my work”; Schmitt et al.,2015)
Turnover intention	It refers to “the (subjective) probability that an individual will change his or her job within a certain time period” (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2004, p.113).	(e.g., “I frequently think of quitting my job”; García Johnson & Otto, 2022)
Wellbeing		
Negative affect	The general propensity to experience negative affect, characterized by feelings such as anger, anxiety, resentment, depression, and irritability.	<p><i>Anger</i> (e.g., “To what extent do you feel angry right now?”; Zhou et al.,2018)</p> <p><i>Anxiety</i> (e.g., “I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job.”; Fila, & Eatough, 2020)</p> <p><i>Resentment</i> (e.g., “What extent one has feelings such as anger, indignation or disappointment towards one’s organization.”; Semmer et al.,2015)</p> <p><i>Depression</i> (e.g., “Feeling bad about yourself—or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your</p>

		family down.”; Verkuilen et al.2021)
		<i>Overall negative affect/ negative emotions</i> (e.g., “Today, after leaving work, I felt upset” ; Pereira et al.,2014)
Burnout	It refers to a syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy developing in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach et al., 1996).	<i>Overall burnout</i> (e.g., “How often have you felt worn out?”; García Johnson, & Otto, 2022) <i>Emotional exhaustion</i> (e.g., “I feel emotionally drained from my work”; Fila et al.,2023)
Work-family conflict	It denotes “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77)	(e.g., “My work keeps me from activities at home more than I would like”; Zhou et al., 2020)
Behavioral		
Job performance	It refers to employee activities that either directly involve or support the accomplishments of core job tasks (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).	<i>Task performance</i> (e.g., “This employee adequately completes assigned duties”; Ma & Peng, 2019) <i>In-role performance</i> (e.g., “How often did this employee perform all those tasks for customers that were required of him/her?”; Zhao et al.,2023) <i>Performance</i> (e.g., “How would you rate your current job performance?”; Basinska et al.,2023)
Innovative behavior	It refers to “intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization” (Janssen,2000, p. 287).	<i>Innovative behavior</i> (e.g., “At work, this employee comes up with innovative and creative notions”; Bani-Melhem et al.,2023) <i>Creativity</i> (e.g., “Often comes up with creative solutions to problems at work”; Zhu,2020) <i>Creative performance</i> (e.g., “I propose new ideas to enhance the current situation”; Xu,2023)
Organizational citizenship behavior	It refers to “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in aggregate	(e.g., “Offers ideas to improve the functioning of the organization,” Mauno et al.,2022)

	promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization” (Organ et al., 2005, p. 3)	
Counterproductive work behavior	It refers to “behavior intended to hurt the organization or other members of the organization” (Spector & Fox, 2002, p. 271).	<i>Counterproductive behavior</i> (e.g., “I delayed actions on matters that were important to a supervisor or colleagues”; Schulte-Braucks et al.,2019) <i>Workplace Deviance</i> (e.g., “I intentionally arrive late for work”; Wan et al., 2021)
Work withdrawal behavior	It refers to employees’ avoidance and disengagement from work and task situations, even when they are physically present in the workplace (Lehman & Simpson, 1992).	(e.g., “left work station for unnecessary reasons”; Wang & Jiang, 2023)

Supplementary Materials C. A summary of the study hypotheses and corresponding results

Variable	Hypothesis number	Stated relationship	Hypothesis supported?
Attitudinal outcomes			
Affective commitment	H1a	There is a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and affective commitment.	Supported
Job satisfaction	H1b	There is a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and job satisfaction.	Supported
Work engagement	H1c	There is a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement.	Supported
Turnover intention	H1d	There is a positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention.	Supported
Wellbeing outcomes			
Negative affect	H2a	There is a positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and negative affect.	Supported
Burnout	H2b	There is a positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and burnout.	Supported
Work-family conflict	H2c	There is a positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and work-family conflict.	Supported

Behavioral outcomes

Job performance	H3a	There is a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and job performance.	Supported
Innovative behavior	H3b	There is a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and innovative behavior.	Supported
Organizational citizenship behavior	H3c	There is a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and organizational citizenship behavior.	Supported
Counterproductive work behavior	H3d	There is a positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and counterproductive work behavior.	Supported
Work withdrawal behavior	H3e	There is a positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and work withdrawal behavior.	Supported

Moderators

Dimensions of Illegitimate Tasks	H4	Unreasonable tasks are more strongly related to the proposed outcomes than are unnecessary tasks.	Partially supported. Unreasonable tasks showed a stronger relationship with negative affect than did unnecessary tasks.
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Power distance	H5	The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in low power distance cultures than in high power distance cultures.	Partially supported. The relationship between illegitimate tasks and innovative behavior was stronger in low power distance cultures, while the relationships with job satisfaction, affective commitment, burnout, and OCB were stronger in high power distance cultures.
Age	H6	The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in younger samples than in older samples.	Partially supported. The relationships between illegitimate tasks and job performance, innovative behavior, and OCB were stronger in younger samples, while the relationship with work-family conflict was stronger in older samples.
Rating source	H7	The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in studies using same-source data than in those using different-source data.	Not supported
Measurement time lag	H8	The relationships between illegitimate tasks and the proposed outcomes are stronger in cross-sectional designs than in time-lagged designs.	Partially supported. The relationship between illegitimate tasks and CWB was stronger in cross-sectional designs, while the relationship with job performance was stronger in time-lagged designs.