

**Investigating the Effect of Customer Incivility on Employee Incivility
via Employee Burnout in the Hospitality Industry**

**by
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ABSTRACT

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF CUSTOMER INCIVILITY ON EMPLOYEE INCIVILITY VIA EMPLOYEE BURNOUT IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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This study investigates the relationships among customer incivility, employee incivility, and employee burnout in the hospitality industry. It further explores whether or not supervisory support, as a coping strategy, moderates the relationship between customer incivility and burnout. A survey questionnaire was distributed to 446 restaurant employees in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. A structural equation model (SEM) was then applied for data analysis. The results demonstrate that (a) customer incivility is positively related to employee incivility in the hospitality industry, (b) burnout mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility, and (c) supervisory support plays an important moderating role between customer incivility and employee burnout. Based on these findings, theoretical and practical implications are provided, as well as the study's limitations and recommendations for future studies.

Key words: Customer incivility; Employee incivility; Burnout; Supervisory support

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The customer is always right” or “The customer is the king” are popular slogans businesses use to emphasize customer satisfaction as one of their priorities, inevitably placing employees in unequitable positions in relation to their customers (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016). There is evidence that some customers may take advantage of this privileged situation and behave uncivilly towards customer service employees (Hur, Moon, & Han, 2015). For instance, a CBC news brief on the matter highlighted that enduring uncivil behaviours, insults, and threats from customers has become “part of job” for retail workers in Canada (Margaux, 2017, March). In addition, call center employees reported that they experienced verbal aggression from customers an average of 10 times per day (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Mathisen, Einarsen and Mykletun (2008) insist that bullying and unfair treatments are prevalent parts of working environments in the restaurant industry. It is especially concerning for frontline employees who interact extensively with restaurant customers and are therefore more likely to be exposed to customer mistreatments.

Apparently, customer incivility has become an ubiquitous phenomenon in various service settings, including call centers (Grandey et al., 2004; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Zedeck, 2008; Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011; Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014; Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2016), banks (Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010), retail stores (Hur et al., 2015), and hotels and restaurants (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016). Examples of customer incivility include insulting comments, verbal attacks, expressing anger towards employees, and using condescending behaviours (Burnfield, Clark, Devendorf, & Jex, 2004). The serious and pervasive impact of uncivil

behaviour from customers has inspired many researchers to investigate underlying reasons in an effort to decode this motivation and responsibility between customers and service employees.

Customer incivility can lead to various negative effects on employees, including passive attitudes or expressing hostility in their service. According to Andersson and Pearson's incivility spiral effect (1999), employees frequently subjected to customer mistreatment are more likely to engaging in retaliating behaviours towards customers (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010; Torres, van Niekerk, & Orłowski, 2017; Walker et al., 2016). More seriously, customer service representatives who perceived to be mistreated by customers are more likely to adopt sabotage towards uncivil customers (Skarlicki et al., 2008). The likely consequence is that customers can become less willing to purchase products or services from the company that employs staff perceived to be impolite (Porath, & Pearson, 2013). As a result, employee incivility is regarded as a form of service failure that undermines the service quality and the organization's reputation (Walker et al., 2016), further leading to customer turnover and revenue losses (Porath & Pearson, 2013). Only a few empirical studies were conducted to examine the mutual relationship of incivility between customers and employees in call center settings (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2016). However, despite the understanding that incivility between customers and frontline employees is prevalent in the restaurant industry, little research has examined this link. This study therefore aims to assess the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility in restaurant settings.

When it comes to how customer incivility affects employee incivility, the emotional exhaustion from burnout has been frequently discussed as the mediating factor (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Hur et al., 2015). This idea could be reasonably supported by the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the job stressor model. The COR theory is used to explain how customer incivility as a job stressor generates burnout (Hobfoll, 1989). Meanwhile, the job stressor model (Spector, 1998; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Zhang, Redfern, Newman, & Ferreira-Meyers, 2016) advocates that customer-related stressors contribute to emotionally exhausted employees engaging in counterproductive work behaviours towards customers. Though it is clear that, emotional exhaustion is just one component of burnout (Maslach, 1982; Maslach, Shaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment may also mediate the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), but remain to be fully explored. In this study, it is anticipated that burnout (defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment) could serve as a multi-factored mediator between customer incivility and employee incivility.

Since burnout is associated with various deleterious outcomes, such as turnover intentions, counterproductive behaviours from employees, and employee incivility towards customers, efficient supervisory support could potentially buffer the level of burnout stemming from customer incivility (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Zhang et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016). Supervisory support refers to the degree to which the supervisor values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber,

Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). In the hospitality industry, where front-line employees suffer greatly from job burnout, strong support from hotel supervisors could not only enhance job embeddedness but also alleviate the adverse effect of customer incivility on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the sense of diminished personal accomplishment (Karatepe, 2014; Han et al., 2016). Consistent with this logic, this study examines whether supervisor support from restaurant supervisors moderates the relationship between customer incivility and burnout as well as between burnout and employee incivility.

The purpose of this study is three-fold: (a) to reveal the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility in a restaurant setting, (b) to test mediating effects on the relationship between customer incivility and restaurant employee incivility by utilizing three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment), and (c) to examine the moderating effect of supervisory support on the relationship between customer incivility and restaurant employee burnout and on the relationship between employee burnout and employee incivility.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

DEVELOPMENT

Incivility

Incivility is a ubiquitous worldwide phenomenon in the workplace that has attracted considerable attention from organizations and researchers (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). In a survey conducted by a U.S. federal court in the Eighth Circuit, Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) found that 71 percent of respondents said they had encountered workplace incivility in the last five years.

Incivility is defined by Andersson and Pearson (1999) as “low-intensity deviant behaviour, with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of social norms of mutual respect. Uncivil behaviours are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (p. 457). Manifestations of workplace incivility include making demeaning comments, ignoring others’ requests, excluding somebody from activities, slamming doors, conducting conversations with condescending acts or other behaviours that demonstrate a disregard for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2000; Cortina et al., 2001).

Incivility is a costly problem that has a detrimental effect on both organizations and other individuals in the workplace. From the employee’s standpoint, frequent workplace incivility appears to reduce their sense of belonging to the organization (Pearson et al., 2000), contributes to psychological distress (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008), increases the level of emotional-exhaustion (Rahim & Cosby, 2016), undermines

their efforts and increases the time required on the job (Pearson et al., 2000; Porath & Pearson, 2013), reduces job satisfaction (Penney & Spector, 2005; Lim et al., 2008), and fosters an intent to leave the occupation (Pearson et al., 2000; Rahim & Cosby, 2016). Moreover, workplace incivility increases the cost of recruitment, training, and the retention of mistreated employees. Furthermore, incivility potentially undermines the reputation and profitability of a corporation because customers can become less willing to purchase products from a company whose employees are perceived as discourteous (Porath & Pearson, 2013).

Research has looked into the causes and effects of incivility from coworkers and supervisors, but has remained limited on studying customer incivility (Grandey et al., 2004; Sliter et al., 2010; Wilson & Holmyall, 2013; Torres et al., 2017). To date, customers are increasingly becoming an additional important source of aggressive behaviours, especially in customer service industries (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005). A large national random sample of American employees found that verbal abuse from customers towards employees occurred more frequently than verbal mistreatment from supervisors and coworkers towards employees (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007). In addition, customer service representatives usually spend much more time interacting with customers than with supervisors or coworkers (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005). Hence, the relationship between customers and employees is of great importance in service-related industries.

It is not surprising that customer service providers are required to comply with mottos such as “the customer is always right” or “the customer is the king” prescribed by service-oriented organizations (Han et al., 2016). These generally accepted principles have

inevitably placed customers and employees in unequal positions. However, the customer is not always right and it is possible for a customer to mistreat service personnel as a way of displaying their superiority. According to Andersson and Pearson (1999), customer incivility can be defined as “low-intensity customer deviant behaviour, with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of social norms of mutual respect” (p.457). Examples of customer incivility include condescension, the expression of anger towards employees, and question the competence of employees (Burnfield et al., 2004).

Incivility, as one form of mistreatment, has overlaps and differences from other forms of mistreatment as shown in Figure 1 (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Antisocial behaviours involve all forms of mistreatment behaviours which hurt both the organization and its stakeholders. Deviant behaviors, belonging to antisocial behavior, is “a voluntary behavior, which violates significant organizational norms and in doing so, threatens the wellbeing of organizations, its members, or both” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p.556). As an intentional and intense type of deviant behavior, aggression is intended to bring harms to the target (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005). Violence, sabotage (Skarlicki, et al., 2008), and counterproductive work behaviors (Zhang et al., 2016) constitute aggressive behaviors. Incivility differs from these forms of mistreatment in two aspects. First, unlike aggressive behaviours that have the overt attempt to harm the target, customer or employee incivility conveys a less obvious intention to hurt the target (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Therefore, perpetrators of incivility can readily deny or hide their malicious purpose, and attribute their mistreatment of others to their own oversight or the victims’ sensitivity. Second, as a low-intensity deviant behaviour, incivility is a daily harassment that takes place more

frequently than other aggressive behaviours (Pearson et al., 2000). As subtle as it is (Porath & Pearson, 2013), the accumulation of incivility can escalate into a more intense and obvious form of mistreatment, such as coercive actions (aggression), that can be characterized as the incivility spiral (Andersson & Pearsson, 1999).

Frequent exposure to customer incivility, as a job stressor, deeply influences customer service providers' emotions, attitudes, and behaviours in different service-oriented industries, such as call centers. Grandy et al. (2004), confirm that, negative customer-employee exchanges constitute considerable parts of the work life for call center employees. For instance, employees reported that they experienced verbal aggression 10 times per day on average in call centers (Grandey et al., 2004).

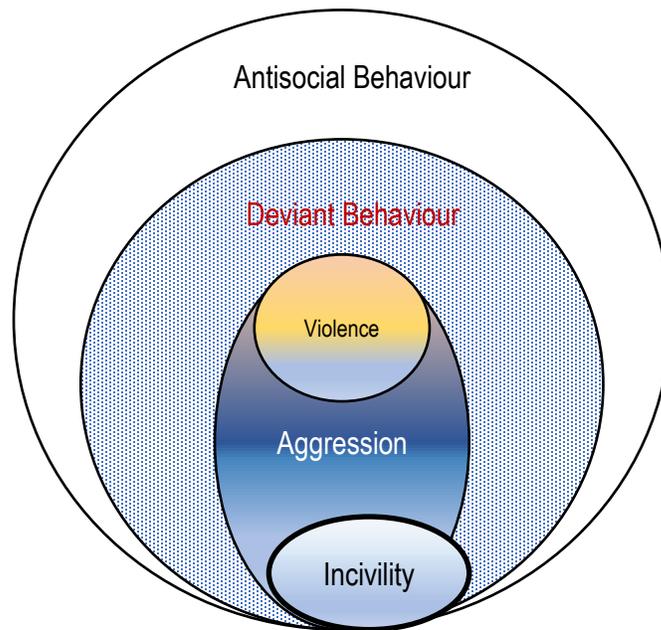


Figure 1 Incivility and other forms of mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p.456)

In a study on bank tellers, customer incivility was found to be a predictive factor of emotional exhaustion and inferior quality of customer service, as measured by low

customer service ratings (Sliter et al., 2010). The researchers also found that customer incivility is a positive predictor for withdrawal behaviours and is associated with decreased sales performance among bank tellers. Furthermore, when simultaneously exposed to co-worker and customer incivility, job absenteeism increased. Investigating both university alumni and engineering firm employees, Adams and Webster (2013) found that mistreatment by customers, coworkers, and supervisors positively influenced psychological distress. Contrary to their hypotheses, co-worker and customer mistreatment had stronger impacts on distress than mistreatment from supervisors. Wilson and Holmvall (2013) found that customer incivility was negatively related to job satisfaction and positively associated with turnover intentions and both general and job-specific psychological strain. In a study on firefighters, 99 percent of firefighters were found to have experienced some level of victim incivility in a single month (Sliter & Boyd, 2014). In turn, victim incivility toward firefighters led to burnout, physical symptoms, and absenteeism. In a restaurant study (Cho et al., 2016), frontline service providers who were exposed to mistreatment in the workplace (customer, supervisor, and coworker incivility) became more likely to be emotionally exhausted, thereby hindering their inner motivation to provide high-quality service. Among the three dimensions of workplace incivility, customer incivility has been shown to have the greatest influence on escalating employee emotional exhaustion. Both perceived organizational support and the ability of employees to regulate emotions play significant roles in mitigating the adverse effects of customer incivility that cause emotional exhaustion. Han et al. (2016) was the first to examine the effects of customer incivility upon turnover intentions among restaurant employees and to

underline the mediating role of burnout between customer incivility and turnover intentions in the hospitality industry. This study is of great value because incivility by restaurant customers was found to increase the three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment), and, in turn facilitate greater turnover intentions. Efficient and prompt support from the organization and team leaders seemingly alleviates burnout experienced by restaurant frontline employees derived from frequent customer incivility.

Employees who are the targets of incivility are not only likely to deliberately lower their commitment to the organization, diminish the time and efforts required on the job, and encourage the intent to quit (Pearson et al., 2000), but also likely to retaliate against the source of mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Employee incivility can be defined as “low-intensity deviant employee behaviour, with ambiguous intention to harm customers, in violation of social norms of mutual respect” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p.457). Consistent with incivility spiraling effect, incivility is a social interaction that is expected to spiral through the negative exchange between two or more parties. For example, if one person treats another to uncivil acts (such as rude comments), the recipient perceives the act as uncivil and the subsequent negative feeling stimulates the recipient to reciprocate with mistreatment as well. This process is a “tit-for-tat” behaviour. In customer-employee encounters, it is not organizational and personal factors but customer-related ones (such as abusive behaviours and attitudes), that motivate hospitality frontline employees to engage in deviant behaviours to retaliate against customers (Browning, 2008). Another theory that can properly explain customer-directed employee retaliation is the job stressor model

(Spector, 1998). Spector (1998) advocated that people experience and evaluate incidents in the environment and those acts that erode their well-being are regarded as job stressors. Environmental stressors perceived by individuals then evoke negative emotions, including irritation and frustration, followed by job strains, that can be psychological, physical, and behavioural (Penney & Spector, 2005). Fox, Spector, and Miles (2001) expanded the job-stressor model (Spector, 1998) by considering counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) as behavioural strain. Employee counterproductive work behaviour refers to the behaviours intended to hurt the organization or other members of the organization, including acts with the potential for harm, such as avoiding work, doing tasks incorrectly, physical aggression, verbal hostility (insults), sabotage, and theft (Spector & Fox, 2002). Findings revealed that job stressors and perceived injustice were related to both negative emotions and CWB, whereas negative emotions generally mediated relations between job stressors and CWB. Adding incivility to the domain of job stressors, Penney and Spector (2005) found that job stressors and incivility significantly correlated with job satisfaction, and that incivility was a precursor to CWB.

Previous literature that examined the customer-employee link showed that, it was not unusual for service employees to engage in retaliatory behaviours (in various intensities) toward their customers. Numerous studies shed light on employee mistreatment of customers in call center settings where only voice-to-voice exchanges occurred (Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2011). Call center service representatives showed a greater tendency to engage in customer-directed sabotage in response to interpersonal injustice by customers (Skarlicki et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2011).

Negative affectivity was found to exacerbate the effect of customer mistreatment on employee sabotage, whereas the self-efficacy of emotional regulation would mitigate the effect (Wang et al., 2011). In turn, it was noteworthy that sabotage undermined employees' preoccupation with their efforts and energy on the job, further jeopardizing individual performance (Skarlicki et al., 2008). Van Jaarsveld et al. (2010) revealed the relationship between customer and employee incivility in a Canadian call center. Specifically, uncivil behaviours by customers, as captured in this study, led employees to behave uncivilly back towards customers due to excessive job demands and the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout, respectively. However, the mediating role of depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment of burnout, between customer incivility and employee incivility, was not considered. Walker et al. (2014) divided incivility into event incivility, which happened in a specific episode, and entity incivility, which was integral and accumulated impressions of customer incivility. Consistent with the finding of van Jaarsveld et al. (2010), both event and entity customer incivility engendered customer-originated employee incivility. Moreover, this link was more profound when employees recognized their entity encounter as highly civil. Another call center study, which was innovative, found employee incivility came into being as a function of words of customer aggression, use of the second-person pronoun, interruptions, and words of positive emotions (Walker et al., 2016). This study emphasized what uncivil customers said during the interaction that led employees to retaliate against them. A Chinese call center study by Zhang et al. (2016) demonstrated the positive relationship between customer-related stressors and counterproductive work behaviours via emotional exhaustion. Emotional intelligence had

a great benefit in buffering the effect of customer-related stressors on CWB caused by emotional exhaustion.

Beyond research conducted in the call-center context, several studies shed light on employee mistreatment towards customers in a hospitality setting (Browning, 2008; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014; Torres et al., 2017). In the study by Shao and Skarlicki (2014), how hospitality employees responded to customer mistreatment was assumed to be different in different countries and in places with different cultural values. The effect of customer mistreatment on employee sabotage was more profound among individuals in Canada, which represented North America, than among individuals in China, which represented East Asia. In terms of cultural values, individualists (Canadians) were more likely to respond directly, proactively, and target specifically, whereas collectivists (Chinese) were more likely to react indirectly, passively, and target generally. Torres et al. (2017) conducted the unique study that examined the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility in the hospitality industry. Consistent with the study of van Jaarsveld et al. (2010), Torres et al. (2017) confirmed that uncivil customer behaviours, such as insulting comments, personal verbal attacks, and offensive body language, would lead to hotel employee retaliation against customers by directly engaging in incivility.

Burnout

Burnout is a work-related syndrome that reflects employees' negative affective reaction to excessive and prolonged stressors on the job (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). It has attracted much attention in organizational behaviour studies because it is associated with detrimental consequences, such as employee turnover, negative employee-client

relationships, and CWB, all of which lead to considerable costs for both organizations and individuals (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). The widely accepted definition of burnout is “a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding” (Pines & Aronson, 1988, p. 9). Compared to people in other professions, customer service representatives in human service professions are more susceptible to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Such professions include personnel in health care centers, banks (Sliter et al., 2010), call centers (Grandey et al., 2004), restaurants (Cho et al., 2016), and retail departments (Kern & Grandey, 2009), due to both the high frequency and intensity of interpersonal contact (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994).

Burnout is a construct composed of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982; Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional exhaustion is the main component of burnout, and is defined as “feeling tired and fatigue at work and represents emotional depletion derived from excessive job and/or personal demands and continuous stress” (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998, p.486). Depersonalization focuses on the interpersonal context and has been conceptualized as cynical, callous, and indifferent attitudes toward jobs, organizations, customers, and colleagues (Maslach et al., 2001). Depersonalization manifests itself as an emotional detachment from service recipients or treatment of others as an object instead of as a person (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Reduced personal accomplishment (professional inefficacy) denotes a self-evaluation of incompetence and inefficacy, lack of productivity, and failure to achieve the goal (Singh

et al., 1994; Maslach et al., 2001). As for the inner relationships among the three dimensions of burnout, both Leiter and Maslach (1988) and Cordes and Dougherty (1993) revealed a sequential relationship among them, proposing that an excessive workload and job stressors contributed to emotional exhaustion, which is the main determinant of depersonalization. Using depersonalization as a coping mechanism for emotional exhaustion might change an individual's attitudes and behaviours, thereby decreasing that person's internal capability and effectiveness. This would lead to feeling a low level of personal accomplishment.

As for the antecedents to burnout, previous literature offered different insights within and beyond organizations. The most frequently mentioned theory associated with burnout is the conservation of resources (COR) theory initially proposed by Hobfoll (1989). This theory is based on the assumption that "people strive to retain, protect, and build the resources, and what threatens them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources" (Hobfoll, 1989, p.516). According to this theory, people are exposed to psychological distress or burnout when they perceive or actually suffer from a loss of resources or are unable to regain resources. Moreover, these resources can be categorized as objects, personal characteristics, conditions (marriage, tenure, and seniority) and energy (time, money, and energy). Demerouti et al. (2001) initially proposed a job demands-resources (JD-R) model of burnout that divided work conditions into job demands and job resources. In their JD-R model, various job demands (physical workload, time pressure, recipient contact, physical environment, and shift work) were the main causes of the emotional exhaustion of burnout, whereas limited job resources (feedback, rewards, job control,

participation, job security, and supervisor support) were the predictors of depersonalization. Job resources, however, mitigated the effect of job demand on burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, Euwema, & Barling, 2005). A literature review paper by Cordes and Dougherty (1993) disclosed several antecedents that generated burnout, including role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, employee-client relationship, system of rewards and punishment in the organization, personal characteristics, and promotion opportunities. Consistent with these findings, Maslach et al. (2001) further presented the scarcity of social support and autonomy, as well as higher expectations with respect to their job, contributed to the onset of burnout. Dormann and Zapf (2004) found that extra-organizational members, such as customers, are important causes of burnout among customer service employees. Their studies identified four components of customer-related social stressors: disproportionate customer expectations, customer verbal aggression, disliked customers, and ambiguous customer expectations. Therefore, negative service encounters between customers and employees were linked to emotional exhaustion, a main component of burnout (Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2002). A call center study postulated that excessive workload imposed on customer service representatives and a routinized working process contributed to the feeling of emotional exhaustion (Deery et al., 2002). Another call center study revealed that both frequency of customer aggression and stress appraisal are predictors of employee emotional exhaustion. The increase in job autonomy is likely to somewhat decrease emotional exhaustion and absences (Grandey et al., 2004). Indeed, customer aggression is positively related to the arousal of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, whereas it is negatively associated with personal accomplishment (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005).

Empowerment provided by an organization enabled employees to control their job and heighten confidence, thus both buffering the effects of customer aggression on burnout. Customer incivility toward employees, as a social stressor, was also extensively confirmed as a precursor of emotional exhaustion of burnout and the three dimensions of burnout in the call center and hospitality industries (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Sliter et al., 2010; Hur et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016).

Being subjected to burnout is, not surprisingly, related to deleterious psychological and behavioural consequences (Singh et al., 1994). Leiter and Maslach (1988) postulated that burnout, stemming from contacts with supervisors and coworkers, caused personnel in the hospital to be less committed to their organization, increasing the possibility of their withdrawing from the job. Emotionally exhausted call center personnel showed a greater tendency to escape from their daily work or showed an intent to quit their jobs, which are reactions that can be characterized as withdrawal behaviours (Deery et al., 2002). More seriously, burnout played an important role in employees' job satisfaction and turnover intentions in service occupations, especially the hospitality industries. For example, burnout was a leading precursor of turnover intentions for certificated chefs (Kang, Twigg, & Hertzman, 2010) and for casino employees in gaming industries (Chan, Wan, & Kuok, 2014). For each dimension of burnout, emotional exhaustion and cynicism (depersonalization) have a negative relationship with job satisfaction and a positive association with turnover intention, whereas professional efficacy has a positive correlation with job satisfaction and a negative relation with turnover intention (Chan et al., 2014; Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Numerous related studies explored the relationship between customer

mistreatment and employee responses via emotional exhaustion (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Hur et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Cho et al., 2016). Specifically, emotional exhaustion triggered by uncivil customer behaviours facilitated employee incivility toward customers (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), counterproductive work behaviours (Zhang et al., 2016), incompetent customer-oriented behaviours (Hur et al., 2015), and unsatisfactory customer service performance (Cho et al., 2016).

Supervisor support

As for the coping strategies that buffer burnout, social support (in the forms of organizational support, coworker support, and supervisor support) was recommended to reduce the feeling of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and to improve personal accomplishment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Supervisors' support was the main component of social support (Choi, Cheong, & Feinberg, 2012), referring to the degree to which the supervisor values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Compared to the support from the organization and coworkers, employees usually preferred and reported more support from supervisors because supervisors were closest to them (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). Supervisors' support is known as an important element of job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001), since the lack of the necessary support from supervisors in the work environment was a precursor to the disengagement dimension of burnout. As such, support from supervisors buffered the adverse effect of job demands on emotional exhaustion (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004), further enhancing greater hotel employee engagement (Choo & Aizzat, 2016). In a

call center study, however, supervisors' support intensified the deleterious effect of the depersonalization dimension of burnout on employee turnover intentions (Choi et al., 2012).

Hospitality employees suffer heavily from job burnout typically resulting from work overload, uncivil customers, and a fast-paced work environment (Kim, Shin, & Umbreit, 2007). The stress imposed on them hinders their ability to provide optimal service. Therefore, a reduction of burnout would stem from the provision of necessary guidance and support from those who supervise employees daily (Han et al., 2016). Direct support from hotel supervisors facilitated job embeddedness and, in turn, increased employee job performance and diminished turnover intention (Karatepe, 2014). In addition, the work-leisure conflict generated job burnout, which subsequently eroded employees' well-being in the hospitality and tourism industries. Appropriate supervisor support weakened the relationship between the work-leisure conflict and job burnout (Lin, Huang, Yang, & Chiang, 2014). Another study conducted in a restaurant setting by Han et al. (2016) investigated the moderating role of supervisors' support in the relation of customer incivility (a job stressor) and burnout. The results showed that perceived supervisors' support alleviated the adverse influence of customer incivility on the three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment).

Hypotheses development and conceptual model

Just like the incivility spiral effect presented by Andersson and Pearson (1999), incivility is an interpersonal event in which two or multiple parties are involved. The target of incivility will reciprocate with uncivil behaviours against the source of incivility. As such, the COR theory explains that customer incivility drains resources, such as self-esteem

or energy valued by employees. To conserve the existing resources and prevent the depletion of future resources, employees might directly engage in sabotage towards customers (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). However, the purpose of the study is to focus only on the influence of customer incivility on employee incivility; whether employee incivility generates customer incivility will not be taken into consideration and deserves future exploration. Consistent with the incivility spiral, many previous studies revealed that customer service representatives' perception of being mistreated by customers motivated them to engage in sabotage, counterproductive work behaviours, and incivility toward the customers in the service-related industries, such as call centers, hotels, and restaurants. As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Customer incivility towards employees is positively related to restaurant employee incivility towards customers.

Consistent with the COR theory, customer incivility, as a job stressor, has the potential to threaten the resources valued by employees, such as resourcefulness, self-esteem, or energy (Hobfoll, 1989; Han et al., 2016). Psychological stress or burnout occurs when employees perceive or suffer from the loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Extensive studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between customer incivility and the emotional-exhaustion dimension of burnout, because uncivil customer behaviours usually deplete employees' emotional resources and their energy (Grandey et al., 2007; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Sliter et al., 2010; Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Sliter & Boyd, 2014; Cho et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016). Han et al. (2016) first revealed that customer incivility was associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment of

burnout in hospitality industries. Based on these studies, the second hypothesis is proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Customer incivility towards employees is positively related to restaurant employee burnout.

H2a: Customer incivility towards employees is positively related to restaurant employee emotional exhaustion.

H2b: Customer incivility towards employees is positively related to restaurant employee depersonalization.

H2c: Customer incivility towards employees is positively related to restaurant employee diminished personal accomplishment.

Based on the COR theory, customer incivility as a job stressor threatens the resources valued by employees, further leading to a feeling of job burnout. As such, when integrating the job-stressor model into the study, it was found that incivility in the environment generated negative emotion as an immediate reaction to the stressor, such as customer mistreatment. This negative emotion ultimately motivated employees to engage in counterproductive work behaviours as a manifestation of strain (Fox et al., 2001; Penney & Spector, 2005). Supporting this logic, Zhang et al. (2016) further found that customer-related stressors enabled emotionally exhausted employees to confront customers with counterproductive work behaviours. Furthermore, Walker (2009) and van Jaarsveld et al. (2010) both demonstrated the mediating role of emotional exhaustion between customer incivility and employee incivility in call centers. Based on these findings, the third hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Restaurant employee burnout mediates the relationship between customer incivility towards employees and employee incivility towards customers.

Supervisors' support, as a type of social support, is usually applied as a coping strategy to not only buffer the negative effect of customer-related job stressors on employee burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), but also mitigate the detrimental impact of burnout on work outcomes (Choi et al., 2012). It is common for customer service employees to suffer from job burnout triggered by emotional labor and customer mistreatment. On the one hand, supervisory support is demonstrated as a buffering intervention between job stressors and job burnout (Chen, Sun, Lam, Hu, Huo, & Zhong, 2012; Han et al., 2016). On other hand, in an Arabic cultural setting, Muhammad and Hamdy (2005) found supervisory support moderated the relationship between experienced burnout and work outcomes which consists of organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to leave. Consistent with this study, Choi et al. (2012) advocated that supervisory support intensifies the relationship between depersonalization dimension of burnout and turnover intention. As such, the fourth and fifth hypotheses could be proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between customer incivility towards employees and restaurant employee burnout.

Hypothesis 5: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between restaurant employee burnout and employee incivility towards customers.

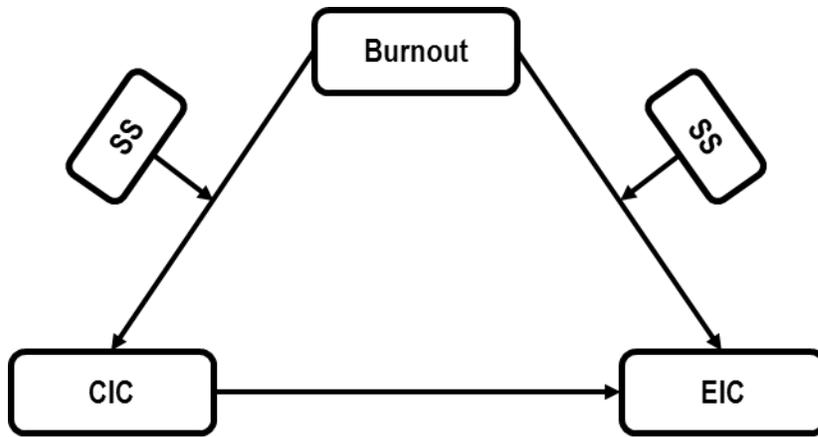


Figure 2 Conceptual Model

Note: CIC=Customer incivility, EIC=Employee incivility, SS=Supervisory support.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Study design

A quantitative research method was applied to achieve the study objectives. A survey was developed based on measurement items adopted from previous research (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Burnfield et al., 2004; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) and consisted of six sections: customer incivility (9 questions), employee incivility (11 questions), a burnout scale (22 questions), and a supervisory support scale (5 questions), as well as the participant's socio-demographic and restaurant information.

The target population of the study includes adult restaurant employees in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, who have frequent direct contact with customers and who have experienced customer incivility in the last 12 months. To distribute the survey in China, a four-part process was used. First, the English-version of the questionnaire approved by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board was translated into Chinese by the researcher. Secondly, the Chinese translation was then back-translated into English by an impartial translator and compared to the original questionnaire to ensure the quality and accuracy of the translation (Asmuri, Brown, & Broom, 2016). The third step involved conducting a pretest on 10 bilingual (Chinese & English) undergraduate students with working experience in hotels or restaurants who then provided feedback on the wording and clarity of the survey. The final step was to fine-tune the questionnaire according to the feedback received (Zikmund, 2003).

Procedure

Using an online survey platform, “SoJump” (<https://www.sojump.com>), the researcher contracted assistance from a local consulting firm in Hubei province, China (Wuhan Zeweier Hospitality Ltd (WZH), known for its extensive consulting experience in the Hubei restaurant industry), to distribute the online survey and compensate WZH 5 yuan (\$1 CAD) for each survey collected. WZH contacted approximately 100 restaurants in Wuhan who were members of the Wuhan Restaurant Association and have more than 20 employees. WZH distributed the recruitment letter and the SoJump survey link to each restaurant’s employee group chat via the WeChat app. A simple click on the provided link lead interested participants to provide consent (which was presented at the beginning of the survey) and their survey responses using their personal phone or laptop. Consent forms and survey responses were automatically stored in SoJump database. A total of 717 questionnaires were distributed, with 509 questionnaires returned, 446 of which were deemed valid complete for the research.

Measures

Customer incivility

Previous studies on customer incivility tend to use items from the Customer Incivility Scale, designed by Burnfield et al. (2004). The scale uses a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) on customer incivility issues, such as “customers take anger on employees”, “customers make insulting comments on employees”, and “customers treat employees as if they are inferior or stupid”.

Employee incivility

Though employee incivility is a burgeoning concept, few studies have developed comprehensive scales to assess the issue. Though one study (Torres et al., 2017) reversed the Customer Incivility Scale designed by Burnfield et al. (2004) to reflect employee incivility towards customers, only van Jaarsveld et al. (2010) included three unique items in light of employee incivility: “You got blunt with a customer,” “You were derogatory to a customer,” and “you escalated your voice.” Eight more questions were added based on industry-related experience for a more comprehensive assessment of this issue.

Burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is to date the most extensively and widely utilized scale for measuring burnout in human service professions (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Maslach et al., 2001; Demerouti et al., 2001). It encompasses all three factors that define a burnout in just 22 questions: Nine are used to assess emotional exhaustion, five for depersonalization, and eight for diminished personal accomplishment. Each question uses a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (‘a few times a year or less’) to 6 (‘everyday’), to assess the frequency with which each item is experienced. Examples of emotional exhaustion include “I feel emotionally drained from my work”, “I feel burned out from my work”, and “I feel frustrated by my job”. As for depersonalization, examples include “I feel I treat some residents as if they were impersonal objects”, “I’ve become more callous toward people since I took this job”, and “I don’t really care what happens to some customers”. Finally, examples of diminished personal accomplishment include “I deal very effectively with the problems of my customers”, “I have accomplished many

worthwhile things in my job”, and “In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly”.

Supervisor support

Supervisor support is the main component of social support in the workplace (Choi et al., 2012), referring to the degree to which a supervisor values employees’ contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Five items were selected from the Perceived Supervisor Support Measure (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), each of which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example of supervisor support includes “Help is available from my supervisor when I have a problem”.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 outlines the socio-demographic profile of the study' participants. Participation in the study was limited to adults whose age 18 or older, the majority (83.2%) of whom fell between 18 and 35 years of age. Nearly 65% participants were female and about 35% were male. As for marital status, more than half were married (57.9%), nearly half (40.8%) were single, and only 6 participants chose "other". More than half of the participants had at least a college certificate (54.5%). Nearly all participants (95.5%) were full-time employees, except for 20 (4.5%) part-time employees. In terms of position, 60.3% participants were front-line servers, 14.7% were supervisors, and 21.1% were managers. As for the tenure, the majority of participants reported a minimum 2 years of experience both in the current restaurant (74.8%) and in the hospitality industry (89%).

Table 2 provides a glimpse into the types of restaurants that were assessed in this study. The number of independent restaurants (57.85%) were nearly equal to franchised ones (42.2%). Though most restaurants were small (36.5%) and medium (34.85%) scale, large and very large restaurants were also well represented (28.7%). In terms of restaurant seats, most of restaurants (86.5%) provided less than 500 seats, and only 13.5% offered over 500 seats. The average expenses per person in most restaurants (75.1%) were less than 200 RMB. The majority of the participants (83.9%) had a close friend in the workplace, to some degree, indicating good relationship with co-workers.

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (N=446)

	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age group	18-25	88	23.2
	26-35	228	60.0
	36-45	48	12.6
	46-55	15	4.0
	56+	1	0.2
Gender	Female	292	65.5
	Male	154	34.5
Marital status	Married	257	57.9
	Single	181	40.8
	Others	6	1.3
Education background	Less than high school	63	14.3
	High school diploma	138	31.2
	Some College/ College certificate	175	39.6
	Bachelor's degree	66	14.9
Employment status	Full-time	424	95.5
	Part-time	20	4.5
Position	Server	229	60.3
	Supervisor	56	14.7
	Manager	80	21.1
	Others	15	3.9
Tenure in current restaurant	0-1	112	25.2
	2-3	210	47.3
	>3	122	27.5
Tenure in hospitality industry	0-1	49	11.0
	2-3	140	31.5
	4-5	110	24.7
	>5	156	32.8

Table 2 Restaurant information (N=446)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Close friend	Yes	374	83.9
	No	72	16.1
Restaurant type	Franchised	188	42.2
	Independent	258	57.8
Restaurant scale	Small	163	36.5
	Medium	155	34.8
	Large	62	13.9
	Very large	66	14.8
Restaurant seats	0-100	183	41
	101-500	203	45.5
	501-1000	45	10.1
	>1000	15	3.4
Average bill per person	0-100	158	35.4
	101-200	177	39.7
	201-300	82	18.4
	301-500	29	6.5

The one-way ANOVA shows that participants' positions make a difference about the responses of customer incivility and employee incivility. Front-line servers reported that they experienced customer incivility ($p < 0.001$) and retaliated towards customers ($p < 0.05$) more frequently than their supervisors and managers.

Measurement model

Before the study model and the hypotheses could be tested, the reliability and validity of the measurement model needed to be tested via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS. CFA is a statistical tool to evaluate how well the observed variables relate to the latent variables or construct (Wang & Wang, 2012). In other words, CFA was conducted to decide whether the number of factors or factor loadings of measured variables were consistent with what was expected based on the pre-defined theory (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998). In this study, CFA was used to validate five multi-item constructs (customer incivility, employee incivility, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished personal accomplishment).

Items with low standardized factor loadings (<0.60) were removed to improve the model fit and increase the reliability and validity of the construct. Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was used to assess the reliability (internal consistency) of the measures. It is suggested that the reliability is acceptable if α is equal to or greater than 0.7. The reliability of five constructs ranged from 0.75 to 0.91, indicating an acceptable to excellent reliability of the constructs. As for the convergent validity of the constructs, Averaged Variance Extracted (AVE) together with composite reliability of the constructs were computed. All the AVE values exceeded the threshold value of 0.50 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998), while the composite reliability ranged from 0.75 to 0.91 which was above the recommended value 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998). Finally, the convergent validity of the study variables was confirmed. As suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the discriminant validity can be achieved if the square root of AVE value derived from

each factor is greater than its corresponding correlations with other factors. Table 4 shows that the results support the discriminant validity of the five variables.

Table 3 The reliability and convergent validity of measurement model

Factor	Item	Standardized factor loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's α
CIC	A4	0.71	0.53	0.82	0.81
	A5	0.65			
	A7	0.83			
	A8	0.70			
EIC	B1	0.70	0.50	0.75	0.75
	B3	0.80			
	B7	0.61			
EE	C3	0.71	0.58	0.85	0.84
	C4	0.78			
	C5	0.80			
	C6	0.75			
DEP	C10	0.78	0.52	0.81	0.81
	C11	0.75			
	C12	0.70			
	C13	0.66			
DPA	C16	0.68	0.59	0.91	0.91
	C17	0.74			
	C18	0.83			
	C19	0.85			
	C20	0.81			
	C21	0.68			
SS	C22	0.76	0.57	0.84	0.84
	D2	0.75			
	D3	0.74			
	D4	0.80			
	D5	0.72			

Note: CIC=Customer incivility, EIC=Employee incivility, EE=Emotional exhaustion, DEP=Depersonalization, DPA=Diminished personal accomplishment, SS=Supervisory support.

A series of indices were provided after the CFA was applied to evaluate the measurement model. According to Hair et al. (1998), the χ^2 :df ratio was 2.13 ($\chi^2=415.512$, df=195), less than the suggested value 5, indicating a better-fitting model when the sample size is less than 750. The values of Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), and Goodness-of-Fit (GFI) were 0.95, 0.92, 0.95, and 0.92 respectively, higher than the cutoff value 0.90. The values of root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.05, smaller than acceptable value 0.07. All of the indices demonstrated a satisfactory model fit.

Table 4 Discriminant validity of measurement model

Factor	CI	EI	EE	DEP	DPA	SS
CI	0.73					
EI	0.40	0.71				
EE	0.33	0.49	0.76			
D	0.33	0.60	0.75	0.72		
DPA	0.03	0.35	0.2	0.26	0.77	
SS	-0.08	-0.44	-0.19	-0.27	-0.45	0.75

Note: CIC=Customer incivility, EIC=Employee incivility, EE=Emotional exhaustion, DEP=Depersonalization, DPA=Diminished personal accomplishment, SS=Supervisory support.

Structural model

With confirmation that the measurement model is valid and reliable, the structural model could be tested using a structural equation model (SEM) via AMOS. SEM tends to define the causal relationships among different latent variables or constructs which cannot be directly observed and assessed by observed indicators (Wang & Wang, 2012). The model fit indices show that χ^2 : df=3.155, GFI=0.90, NFI=0.90, IFI=0.91, CFI=0.91, and

RMSEA=0.07, demonstrating an acceptable model fit of the structural model (Hair et al., 1998).

It was therefore possible to proceed with hypothesis testing with confidence. Figure 2 shows the structural model with standardized path coefficients and R^2 values. The R^2 value (squared multiple correlation) denotes how much variance explained by the predictor variable (Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009). As shown in Figure 2, customer incivility explained 41% of employee incivility, indicating the model has an acceptable predictive power. The results for path analysis in the Table 5 indicate that customer incivility is significantly and positively related to employee incivility ($\beta=0.24$, $t=4.0$, $p<0.001$), supporting H1 and consistent with previous studies (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2017). H2 predicts that customer incivility is positively associated with employee burnout comprised of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. The results show that customer incivility will lead to employee emotional exhaustion ($\beta=0.38$, $t=6.39$, $p<0.001$) and depersonalization ($\beta=0.39$, $t=6.40$, $p<0.001$), supporting H2a and H2b. However, customer incivility is not a predictor of employee diminished personal accomplishment ($\beta= 0.07$, $t= 1.211$, $p>0.05$). In sum, Hypothesis 2 can be partially supported.

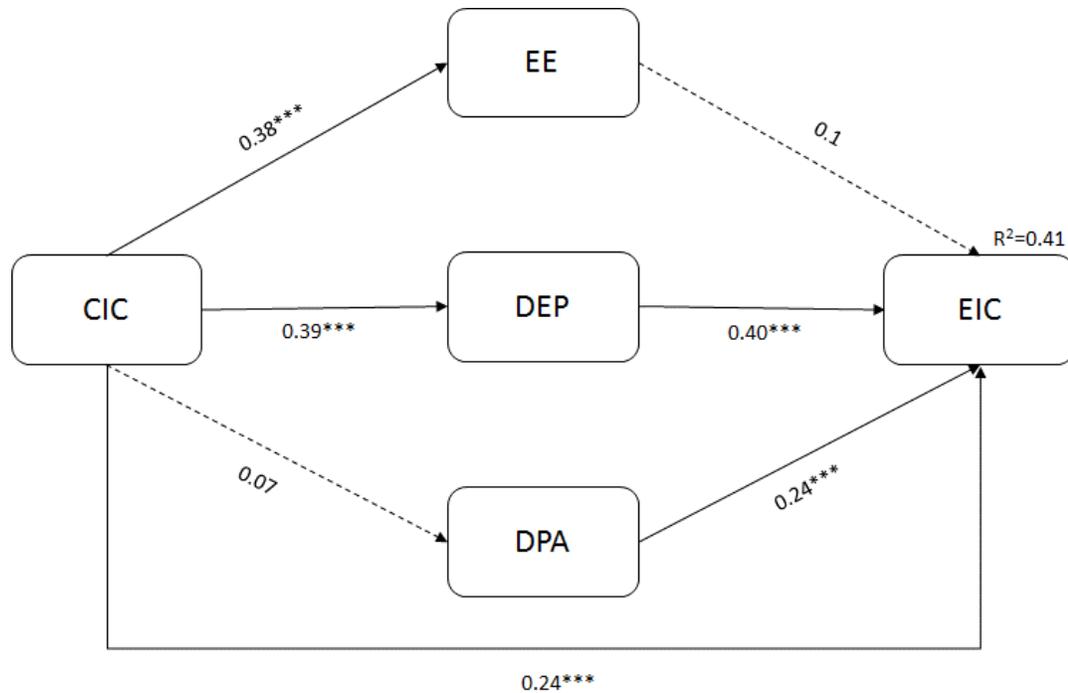


Figure 3 Structural model

Note: CIC=Customer Incivility, EIC=Employee Incivility, EE=Emotional Exhaustion, DEP=Depersonalization, DPA=Diminished Personal Accomplishment, *** $p < 0.001$.

As for the testing of Hypothesis 3, it is anticipated that employee burnout mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. According to Frazier, Tix, & Barron (2004), variable burnout can play a mediating role between customer incivility and employee incivility if (1) customer incivility significantly predicts employee incivility, (2) customer incivility significantly leads to burnout, and (3) burnout significantly relates to employee incivility. To test the mediation effect of three dimensions of burnout between customer incivility and employee incivility separately, a bootstrapping procedure with 2000 samples and 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals was adopted via AMOS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

As shown in the Table 5, customer incivility does not predict diminished personal accomplishment ($\beta=0.07$, $t=1.211$, $p>0.05$) and emotional exhaustion is not significantly related to employee incivility ($\beta=0.10$, $t=1.456$, $p>0.05$). As such, the mediating preconditions cannot be met for both emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment. For further indirect effects between customer incivility and employee incivility (as shown in Table 6), customer incivility does not seem to have a significant indirect effect on employee incivility via emotional exhaustion nor personal accomplishment. In other words, both emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment do not mediate the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. Customer incivility only has a significant indirect effect on employee incivility via depersonalization ($p<0.01$), indicating depersonalization mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. Based on these results, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported.

Moderating effect

To test the moderating role of supervisor support between customer incivility and burnout (“CIC→Burnout”) and between burnout and employee incivility (“Burnout→EIC”), a multi-group approach (Hair et al., 1998) was adopted. Firstly, the sample was divided into high supervisory support ($n=267$) and relatively low supervisory support ($n=179$) based upon the median of supervisory support scores (16/20). Then a comparison of chi-square tests between the constrained model (the parameter estimates for both high supervisory support and relatively low supervisory support will be constrained

Table 5 Results for the path analysis

Parameter path	Standardized Path coefficients	C.R.	<i>p</i> -value	Supported
CIC→EIC	0.24	4.0	***	YES
CIC→EE	0.38	6.39	***	YES
CIC→DEP	0.39	6.40	***	YES
CIC→DPA	0.07	1.211	0.226	NO
EE→EIC	0.10	1.456	0.145	NO
DEP→EIC	0.40	5.11	***	YES
DPA→EIC	0.24	4.6	***	YES

Note: CIC=Customer incivility, EIC=Employee incivility, EE=Emotional exhaustion, DEP=Depersonalization, DPA=Diminished personal accomplishment, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 6 Direct and indirect effect of three dimensions of burnout

Hypotheses	Mediation		
	Standardized direct effect	Standardized indirect effect	Result
H3a CIC→EE→EIC	0.24***	0.04	No mediation
H3b CIC→DEP→EIC	0.24***	0.16**	Partially mediated
H3c CIC→DPA→EIC	0.24***	0.02	No mediation

Note: CIC=Customer incivility, EIC=Employee incivility, EE=Emotional exhaustion, DEP=Depersonalization, DPA=Diminished personal accomplishment, ***= $p < 0.001$, **= $p < 0.01$.

to be equal) and the unconstrained model was conducted to test the moderating effect, as shown in Table 7. The significant chi-square change between the unconstrained model and Model “CIC→Burnout” ($\chi^2=745.472$, $\Delta\chi^2=5.99$, $p < 0.05$) indicates the relationship between customer incivility and burnout is different in high ($\beta=0.25$, $p=0.003 < 0.01$) versus relatively low supervisory support groups ($\beta=0.65$, $p < 0.001$). This result supports Hypothesis 4. However, there is no significant $\Delta\chi^2$ between the unconstrained model and

Model “Burnout→EIC” ($\chi^2=739.764$, $\Delta\chi^2=0.20$, $p>0.1$). As such, the moderation effect on the relationship between burnout and employee incivility is not significant. Therefore, H5 is not supported.

Table 7 Moderating effect of supervisory support (SS)

Models		<i>t</i> -value	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δ df	Results
Unconstrained model			739.484	398			
CIC→Burnout	High SS	2.88**	745.472	399	5.99*	1	Supported
	Low SS	4.32***					
Burnout→EIC	High SS	3.93***	739.687	399	0.20	1	No supported
	Low SS	4.42***					

Note: the critical value for $\Delta\chi^2$ is 3.84 at 95% confidence level ($p<0.05$) and 6.63 at 99% confidence level ($p<0.01$), CIC=Customer Incivility, EIC=Employee Incivility, SS= Supervisory Support, ***= $p<0.001$, *= $p<0.05$.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship among customer incivility, employee incivility, and employee burnout (Objective 1&2) as well as the moderating effects of supervisory support between customer incivility and employee burnout as well as between employee burnout and employee incivility (Objective 3) in restaurants in Wuhan, China.

The study findings indicate customer incivility towards employees directly leads to employee incivility towards customers. More specifically, restaurant employees may reciprocate towards customers with uncivil behaviours when exposed to uncivil treatment perpetrated by customers. Notably, frontline servers experienced customer incivility and adopted employee incivility more frequently than their supervisors and managers. Considering servers have more frequent face-to-face interactions with customers, the likelihood of encountering customer incivility is greater (Cho et al., 2016). Consequently, those frontline employees who are unfairly treated by customers are more likely to retaliate towards these perpetrators. This “tit-for-tat” interaction between customers and employees explains the incivility spiral effect in practical terms (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), which emphasizes the target of incivility will reciprocate with uncivil behaviours against the source of incivility in a restaurant setting. Furthermore, this finding is congruent with previous studies which found a positive relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility in call centers (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2016) and in hotels (Torres et al., 2017).

Secondly, the study findings reveal that customer incivility is positively related to employee burnout. In light of the COR theory, uncivil customer behaviours such as condescending behaviours may threaten restaurant employees' valued resources (e.g., self-esteem) (Hobfoll, 1989). Consequently, those employees who feel poorly treated by customers may suffer from psychological stress and burnout when they lose these resources or are unable to regain them. Not only is the severity of customer mistreatment towards employees a contributor to their potential onset of burnout, but so is the intensity, whether it be, high-intensity, such as customer verbal aggression in call centers (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005), or low-intensity, such as customer incivility in hospitality (Han et al., 2016). However, it is worth noting that customer incivility is not a predictor of a diminished personal accomplishment. The first plausible explanation of this phenomenon is that restaurant employees are accustomed to having a lack of accomplishment and regard their job as merely a way to make a living (Shen & Huang, 2012). Or perhaps a reduced personal accomplishment is considered as the weakest component of burnout, compared to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). To some degree, this could imply an outcome of burnout excluded from the burnout model (Bakker, Demerouti, de Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003).

The third finding of this study confirms the partial mediating role of burnout between customer incivility and employee incivility in the hospitality industry. Following the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the job-stressor model (Spector, 1998), restaurant

employees experience negative emotions or burnout in response to job stressors, such as customer incivility. Suffering from burnout further generates adverse outcomes, such as intention to leave and employee retaliation towards customers. Although generally consistent with previous studies that burnout mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), this study found that customer incivility has an indirect effect on employee incivility through depersonalization and not through emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment.

Possible explanations are twofold. Firstly, emotional exhaustion is not positively related to employee incivility. Emotional exhaustion concentrates on an employee's emotional status, such as feeling fatigued and having a lack of energy (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). However, it is prevalent that hospitality employees will suppress their negative feelings (emotional labour) in order to provide considerate service to their customers (Chen et al., 2016). From the perspective of interpersonal dimensions of burnout, depersonalization represents callous and impersonal attitudes towards the target, especially in social service occupations (Maslach et al., 2001). Based on the uncivil interactions between customers and employees, depersonalization explains well how employees regard customers as objects with impersonal attitudes. It is plausible that they will retaliate towards customers after being subjected to depersonalization. Secondly, though employee incivility does exist, it is much less frequent (the mean score for

employee incivility is 1.6, between “Never” and “Rarely”). Considering low score of employee incivility among participants, the mediating role of the three dimensions of burnout on the relationship between customer and employee incivility still needs further investigation.

This study’s fourth finding reveals that supervisory support moderates the relationship between customer incivility and employee burnout. The impact of customer incivility on employee burnout varies according to the level of supervisory support (high vs relatively low). When restaurant employees experience customer incivility, they are less likely to burn out if restaurant supervisors provide strong support following customer incivility events, in line with previous findings (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Bakker et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2012; Han et al., 2016). However, the empirical results did not find a significant moderating role of supervisory support between employee burnout and employee incivility. One reasonable explanation is supervisory support is only effective prior to the occurrence of employee burnout. Should an employee already be suffering from burnout, support from supervisors can hardly change the employee’s attitude towards uncivil customers. As was expected, few prior studies demonstrated that supervisory support mitigated the adverse impact of burnout on employee mistreatment towards customers. A few studies only have explored that supervisory support moderated the effect of job burnout on turnover intentions (Muhammad & Hamdy, 2005; Choi et al., 2012).

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to a better understanding of customer and employee incivility in the restaurant industry. Most previous studies on customer-employee incivility were mostly conducted in call centers, where negative customer-employee encounters were more frequent (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2016). The study by Torres et al. (2017) was the only one that went beyond call centers to reveal a positive relation between customer incivility and employee incivility in a hotel setting. Consistent with the findings of previous studies, this study further confirmed this phenomenon in a restaurant setting as well, thereby enriching the customer and employee incivility literature.

Secondly, this study integrated both the COR theory and the job-stressor model, followed by an examination of an integrated model that portrayed the relationship among customer incivility, burnout, and employee incivility. In contrast to prior studies that only focused only on the emotional exhaustion of burnout (Walker, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), this study tested the mediating role of the three dimensions of burnout (i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment) between customer incivility and employee incivility. This study shows that depersonalization is only a variable which has the mediating effects between customer incivility and employee incivility. The results of an additional second order factor SEM

demonstrated that burnout mediates this relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility.

Thirdly, this study confirmed the important role of supervisory support. According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the job demand-resource model (Demerouti et al., 2001), lack of supervisory support which pertains to job resources will finally lead to job burnout. Based on these theories, this study demonstrated that strong supervisory support provided to frontline employees can buffer the adverse effect of customer incivility on facilitating job burnout. This finding is congruent with the study by Han and his colleagues (2016) that found that supervisory support moderates the relationship between customer incivility and employee burnout.

Practical implications

This study provides insightful practical implications for both restaurant managers, owners and firms. Employee incivility directed at customers increasingly becomes an issue in service-oriented industries because of its underlying deleterious impact on customer service and the organization's reputation (Walker et al., 2016). This study reveals that customer incivility towards employees is a precursor of employee retaliating behaviours targeting customers in restaurants. Therefore, it is imperative to reduce customer incivility at an institutional level.

On the one hand, efficient and thoughtful service will likely cater to customers' needs, thus reducing their dissatisfaction towards employees and restaurants, which

ultimately decreases the possibility of leading to uncivil behaviour (Sliter et al., 2012). Therefore, it is worthwhile for restaurants to improve the performance of service employees. Unfortunately, except a few mega-franchising firms, most restaurants' existing training systems aren't systematic. Current training programs should be reviewed to address incivility issues, including: how employees provide quality service, best practices for managing uncivil treatments, what formal and informal forms of open communication are available with co-workers and supervisors, and how to report incivility issues and breaches of related policy (Tracey & Hinkin, 1994). Ideal approaches would include, scenario practices and role play training programs to enable employees to cultivate practical techniques and strategies to attenuate uncivil encounters with customers, ultimately avoiding feelings of helpless when faced with such situations (Han et al., 2016). In addition, training should be provided on a weekly basis over the certain period of time until employees fully manifest policies and procedures into their regular service provision.

On the other hand, restaurants should implement a zero-tolerance policy or a full-respect policy for uncivil customer behaviours, (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). It is important that restaurant owners be committed to creating an organizational culture of respect and civility for their employees and install related policies (i.e., respect and zero tolerance policies) that lead to healthy and safe working environments. For instance, Snow Fox, a chain of Korean franchise restaurants, implemented a respect policy in all

their restaurants, with a banner displaying “If our staff has behaved rudely to a customer, we will fire the employee. However, if the customer is rude to our staff, we will not provide service or ask you to leave our restaurant” (Snowfox, 2015). Such a policy will not only hinder customers from behaving uncivilly towards employees, but also improve employees’ sense of belonging to the restaurants.

Since restaurant employees who experience mistreatments from customers are likely to engage in retaliating behaviours, it is of great importance to prevent restaurant employees from feeling depersonalized towards their customers. To mitigate employee’s depersonalization, this study found that supervisory support plays a significant role in attenuating the negative influence of customer incivility on restaurant employee burnout, including depersonalization. Restaurants, and their owners, are obliged to provide training for supervisors to acquire useful knowledge and capabilities (Karatepe, 2014). When equipped with adequate skills, supervisors should be able to mentor frontline employees, share working experiences, listen to their dissatisfaction and complaints, and provide psychological comfort whenever frontline employees experience customer incivility or other pertinent job stressors (Karatepe, 2014). Furthermore, competent and responsible frontline employees should be promoted to managerial positions and be provided with input into skills training, skills evaluation, and further promotions. Establishing a strong connection between job performance and job promotion allows

successfully promoted supervisors or managers to play important roles as models of excellent service that ultimately gets rewarded with promotional opportunities.

CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite revealing some important findings, there remain some limitations in the study. Firstly, considering the time and capital constraints for data collection, the study sample was collected from restaurant employees in only one location in China. The study findings may therefore not represent restaurant employees in general throughout China. Even the study's applicability to the hospitality industry in other parts of the world remains unknown. Consequently, various locations and larger sample sizes in different countries are recommended for future studies.

Secondly, the model fit indices for the study's measurement model were relatively better than those for the structural model. Though the model fit indices for the structural model were acceptable, it was deemed more appropriate to first investigate the effect of customer incivility on employee incivility through emotional exhaustion, followed by depersonalization, and then diminished personal accomplishment. However, this further exploration was not conducted because it was beyond the objectives of this research.

Thirdly, after removing items with low standardized factor loadings (<0.60) that influenced the convergent validity of the constructs assessed by AVE and the composite reliability values during the model modification procedure, only four out of nine items were left for the customer incivility scale and only three out of eleven items were left for the employee incivility scale. Once these items were removed, the model fit for the structural model improved and laid the foundation for a further path analysis. There are a

few practical explanations for eliminating these items. Firstly, the customer incivility scale may not fully represent a negative interaction between customers and employees in restaurant settings. The customer incivility scale developed by Burnfield et al. (2004) may be too general and not fully applicable to restaurant-specific situations employees frequently experience. Additionally, the incivility scale was developed in Western countries, while the participants were all from China representing an Asian culture. People from different countries with different ideologies may respond differently towards incivility, as demonstrated by Shao and Skarlicki (2014). This study therefore misses elements of a complete interpretation understanding of both customer and employee incivility behaviours that are common in restaurant settings, but suggests qualitative research approaches for this more comprehensive insight.

It is noteworthy that the majority of the survey participants have a close friend in their restaurant, indicating a good relationship with colleagues. Close-friend relationships in the workplace can be regarded as a type of social support, which is possible to attenuate job burnout derived from job stressors (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Therefore, future studies should consider social support, especially from co-workers (Akgunduz & Eryilmaz, 2018), as a moderator that could potentially buffer the impact of job-stressors on job burnout.

As a last limitation, the relatively low average ratings for customer incivility and employee incivility imply that frontline employees in restaurants do not experience

uncivil encounters with customers very frequently. One reason may be that feedback was asked long after their unpleasant interaction with customers, resulting in faded recollections. Their responses towards this survey may not truly represent what they exactly felt towards customer incivility. Another underlying reason could be that customers are in a better mood when they go to restaurants than when they call customer service because of a problem, or go shopping on busy days. The customer's initial mood may also bias the infrequency of customer incivility. Additionally, the pressure from restaurants and supervisors may hinder them from honestly reflecting on their own uncivil behaviours towards customers in the survey. Hence, it is highly recommended to design an experimental study that would intensify uncivil interactions between customers and employees to observe employee reactions.

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