

Workplace incivility and its effect upon restaurant frontline service employee emotions and service performance

Meehee Cho and Mark A. Bonn

Dedman School of Hospitality, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Su Jin Han

Division of Business Administration, Hoseo University, Cheonan-si, South Korea, and

Kyung Hee Lee

Department of Food Service Management, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, South Korea

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to acquire a better understanding about consequences of workplace incivility upon restaurant frontline service employees caused by customers, supervisors and coworkers. The moderating roles of perceived organizational support (POS) and emotion regulation ability (ERA) were also tested to determine the possibility for reducing the negative effect of workplace incivility upon the emotional exhaustion of restaurant frontline service employees.

Design/methodology/approach – Using data obtained from 239 restaurant frontline service employees, a 35-item instrument was used to assess workplace incivility and its effects upon emotional exhaustion, perceived service performance, POS and ERA. A structural equation model was used to test hypotheses. The multi-group approach was used to investigate the moderating effects POS and ERA have upon the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance.

Findings – Results documented that workplace incivility significantly increases emotional exhaustion and further leads to low levels of job service performance. Customer incivility was especially found to have the strongest power for increasing emotional exhaustion, followed by supervisor incivility. Also, results confirmed that POS and ERA play significant roles in moderating the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance. Based upon this study's findings, theoretical and practical implications are offered for developing successful employee management strategies.

Practical implications – Results suggest specific practical management implications pertaining to restaurant frontline service employees. This study's research findings recommend the development of more efficient support programs designed to diffuse potential situations involving workplace incivility. Findings further highlight the important role employee ERA has upon the effects of incivility and frontline service performance. Implications are provided with respect to specific strategic direction management should consider to recruit and select the most appropriate employees for restaurant frontline service positions.



Originality/value – The current study’s conceptual research was developed in an attempt to simultaneously address all three dimensions of workplace incivility to examine how they affect employee emotions and their job performance.

Keywords Emotional exhaustion, Emotional intelligence, Perceived organizational support, Service performance, Workplace incivility, Restaurant management

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Arguably, no employee in any business has the potential for experiencing uncivil customer behavior as frequently as does the restaurant front line service employee. Service employees who are commonly referred to and regarded as “emotional labor” frequently experience negative and rude customers because they have to comply with emotion expression regulations established by service-oriented organizations even in unpleasant situations (Grandey *et al.*, 2007). Suppressing or masking emotions in an unpleasant work environment because of negative or rude customers can cause deleterious reactions involving stress, which may lead to mental and/or physical health problems (Humphrey *et al.*, 2015). Yet, the scholarly hospitality literature addressing service employees and incivility is surprisingly lacking. One can only speculate as to the reasons this situation has not been addressed. Is it because of the fact that service encounters perceived to be uncivil in nature are too embarrassing to share with others? Are restaurant service employees unwilling to re-live these negative experiences? Do these experiences represent such sensitive areas that foodservice employees would rather eliminate them from their cognitive and affective sets of service incidents? Whatever the reason may be, the fact remains that a dearth of knowledge pertaining to incivility or rudeness in the workplace exists with respect to the particularly important hospitality segment representing the restaurant industry and its frontline service providers.

Comparatively, research addressing negative deviant behavior in the workplace has entered its third decade of scholarly attention and continues to remain a topic of paramount interest to academics and practitioners in other service industries because of the devastating outcomes it has upon employees, management, customers, businesses and communities (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2014). Organizational behavior literature has historically focused on incidents involving workplace aggression, deviance, violence and bullying within industries such as retail, manufacturing, education and public or government service (Bennett and Robinson, 2000), hospitals (Ashraf and Khan, 2014) and health-care services (Bunk and Magley, 2013). More recent extensions to this body of research have resulted in the topic of negative workplace behavior to now represent the commonly accepted term “workplace incivility” (Walker *et al.*, 2014).

Originally, Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 457) defined workplace incivility as “low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms constituting mutual respect”. Workplace incivility has continued to receive increased attention because of its prevalent occurrence in the workplace (Wilson and Holmvall, 2013). In fact, research confirms that over 98 per cent of all employees report experiencing uncivil behavior at work (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2014).

Although workplace incivility is reported in some research findings as representing mildly rude, discourteous and innocuous behavior which may include speaking to others in a demeaning, insulting or disrespectful manner (Beattie and Griffin, 2014),

other scholarly evidence suggests workplace incivility has serious negative consequences upon health-care industry employee job dissatisfaction (Bunk and Magley, 2013), turnover intention (Cortina *et al.*, 2013) and job-specific strain (Wilson and Holmval, 2013). Uncivil behavior in the workplace is also of great concern from a managerial perspective because it has been shown to adversely affect a company's profitability (Pearson *et al.*, 2001). Several research studies focused on investigating the significance workplace incivility represents with respect to increasing the employee turnover rate. Studies document that each employee replacement cost averages US\$14,000 annually and often causes project delays and other job-related distractions leading to lost revenue (Sakurai and Jex, 2012).

Recognizing that previous research has devoted considerable effort in examining the general negative effect of workplace incivility using many different kinds of industries, including health care, banking, retail and financial services to name just a few, when applied to the field of hospitality management, two critical questions regarding more specific roles of workplace incivility still remain unanswered.

First, the existing literature has focused on identifying the nature and effects of workplace incivility that occurs specifically between employees and/or supervisors (Sliter *et al.*, 2010). However, workplace incivility represents a more comprehensive situation, and it also includes customers (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2014). Because of the expected service performances required by current knowledgeable consumers, employees working as restaurant frontline service providers must repeat these expected service performances more frequently in comparison to service providers in other service industry settings. Because of the sheer volume of repeated restaurant customer, coworker and supervisor interactions, increased opportunities exist for incivility experiences to be encountered by restaurant frontline service employees for a number of reasons that include service failure and if the service recovery was perceived to be proper and acceptable by the involved parties (Gustafsson, 2009). Regardless of the causes, incivility-related experiences have been documented to potentially lead to more serious negative impacts upon restaurant service employees, its guests and the restaurant business overall (Sliter *et al.*, 2012). Despite this situation, customer incivility has received cursory attention at best, and, more importantly, previous scholarly literature has ignored the customer incivility issue specific to restaurants and their frontline service employees (Wilson and Holmval, 2013). Although existing literature addressing customer incivility in the workplace has been restricted to situations involving supervisors and coworkers, a comprehensive examination of the effects of incivility upon restaurant frontline service employees involving supervisors, coworkers and customers has yet to be addressed. Neither of the existing research incorporates all three workplace incivility dimensions nor does research exist that has hypothesized different powers between sources of workplace incivility. With this mind, this study developed our hypotheses in consideration of specific restaurant workplace environments.

Second, the majority of previous workplace incivility research has focused its investigation on the extent to which workplace incivility influences employee job-related outcomes while providing little attention to examining how its negative impacts may be successfully overcome. In consideration of this situation, one research study asserted that it is necessary to identify important factors that can mitigate the

negative power of workplace incivility because of its potentially harmful effects upon the well-being of its employees, which often leads to counterproductive work attitudes and behaviors (Sakurai and Jex, 2012).

To fill this void, our study develops a comprehensive conceptual research model that, for the first time, encompasses all three workplace incivility dimensions, representing customers, supervisors and coworkers, and applies this to the context of restaurant frontline service providers. This study seeks to investigate those similarities and differences the three workplace incivility dimensions have upon restaurant frontline service employee emotions and job performance.

Additionally, this study attempts to identify important factors that could possibly be used to attenuate the negative impacts workplace incivility has upon restaurant frontline service employees. Based upon recommendations from prior research (Sakurai and Jex, 2012), two potential moderators are tested:

- (1) perceived organizational support (POS); and
- (2) emotion regulation ability (ERA).

This study has interpreted incivility as a cause of resource depletion based upon the feelings of those emotionally and psychologically exhausted employees having experienced workplace incivility. One way of decreasing resource depletion is to enhance other resources such as emotional intelligence (individual emotional resource aspect) and organizational support (organizational social resource aspect). Therefore, this study expects that employee perceptions about support provided by their restaurant organization and their individual emotional intelligence can play an important role in mitigating the impact of workplace incivility upon emotional exhaustion.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Workplace incivility and its consequences

Incivility is a general term associated with low deviant behavior levels that are characteristically considered to be rude and discourteous such as putting people down in a condescending way, paying little attention to their statements, showing little interest in their opinions and ignoring or excluding them from social camaraderie (Hershcovis, 2011). To further distinguish incivility from aggression which represents more severe forms of interpersonal mistreatment, questions of “why” and “how far” can be important criteria (Pearson *et al.*, 2001). Aggression is considered as behavior apparently intended to harm or injure other people physically or psychologically and is not frequently experienced in the workplace (Pearson *et al.*, 2001). Incivility, which is frequently experienced, represents a more ambiguous term regarding whether or not intent to harm the target existed (Kern and Grandey, 2009). Unlike aggression, which is purposeful, the intent of incivility is not transparent and is subject to question.

Research regards incivility in the workplace as representing chronic job stress caused by daily hassles (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). Because workplace incivility occurs frequently, chronic uncivil events have been found to adversely affect employee emotions and mental health, further causing psychological harm, confirming that workplace incivility represents a critical job stressor (Lim *et al.*, 2008).

The theory of work-related stress, originally introduced by Spector (1998), proposes that individuals frequently facing job stressors feel more negative emotions (anger,

anxiety or exhaustion), which may lead to reactions involving negative behavioral patterns such as work avoidance, decreased work quality and job resignation. Subsequent studies have adopted this job stress theory into conceptual research frameworks to examine how employees cope with uncivil treatment in the workplace and those outcomes involving stressful workplace incivility experiences (Cortina *et al.*, 2001).

Multiple empirical workplace incivility studies demonstrate that when employees continuously experience workplace incivility, they are more likely to suffer from similar stress symptoms including decreasing mental health, depression and anxiety, emotional exhaustion, reduced organizational commitment and increased turnover intention (Grandey *et al.*, 2007; Leiter *et al.*, 2011).

Workplace incivility and emotional exhaustion

Andersson and Person (1999) acknowledge the social nature of workplace incivility and argued that acts of incivility have the potential to foster unpleasant exchanges or even lead to more serious behaviors. Numerous research studies document workplace incivility as insidious frustrations that become fixed and ongoing in everyday settings, potentially leading to mental and physical problems (Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Kern and Grandey, 2009).

Pearson *et al.* (2001) document that workplace incivility experiences are accompanied by negative psychological reactions such as being “depressed” and “emotionally hurt”. According to Bowling and Beehr’s (2006) meta-analysis, interpersonal mistreatment such as workplace incivility leads to undesirable affective reactions because experiencing workplace incivility is damaging to the targeted individual’s emotions. Empirical studies addressing workplace incivility consequences report typical effects to represent psychological situations involving heightened emotionality (Bunk and Magley, 2013), depression and negative emotions (Miner *et al.*, 2012). Other research studies by Kern and Grandey (2009) and Sliter *et al.* (2010) found customer incivility to be positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Employees that are emotionally and/or psychologically damaged because of workplace incivility often experience emotional exhaustion, as they invest extra effort to avoid having to endure incivility. Emotional exhaustion, a product of psychological strain, is defined as feeling tired and fatigued at work and represents emotional depletion derived from excessive job and/or personal demands and continuous stress (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998). Work environment related stressors resulting from experiences involving non-cooperation or non-support of colleagues/supervisors and interpersonal pressures related to negative employee affectivity further lead to emotional exhaustion (Zapf *et al.*, 2001). Incivility by coworkers is more likely to be perceived by employees as representing deficient affective support and insufficient instrumental help from coworkers (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). Also, Gilin Oore *et al.* (2010) documented that incivility caused by co-workers could negatively influence employees’ mental health in the workplace. Therefore, employees experiencing workplace incivility often experience high levels of emotional exhaustion. In particular, Jung and Yoon (2014) document that restaurant employees face stressful workplace situations on a daily basis because they are more likely to be exposed to unexpected situations involving serving unhappy customers and also because of being mistreated by restaurant managers or coworkers. Because different dimensions or types of

workplace incivility are commonly classified based upon specific sources of workplace incivility representing customers, supervisors and coworkers (Leiter *et al.*, 2011), three sub-hypotheses are developed:

H1. Restaurant workplace incivility increases restaurant frontline service employees' emotional exhaustion.

H1a. Customer incivility increases employees' emotional exhaustion.

H1b. Supervisor incivility increases employees' emotional exhaustion.

H1c. Coworker incivility increases employees' emotional exhaustion.

To date, literature addressing workplace incivility has not attempted to explore whether or not significantly different effects of workplace incivility on employees' emotions exist. However, because workplace incivility is derived from interpersonal relationships (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), and also recognizing that differences in power degrees or status of perpetrators and their intended targets exist, it is important to predict how influential workplace incivility affects employees (Bunk and Magley, 2013). This implies that when employees have experienced incivility produced by a source having unequal or higher power, employees may feel more embarrassed and frustrated (Lim *et al.*, 2008).

This current study assumes that the negative effects of restaurant workplace incivility upon frontline service employees' emotions would be different to some degree based upon the amount of power those sources of incivility represent. Therefore, this study investigates differences among the three dimensions (types) of workplace incivility and how they each affect employees' emotional exhaustion when applied to the context of the restaurant business.

In particular, restaurant frontline service employees may frequently encounter uncivil customers, which make them more prone to being emotionally exhausted (Karatepe, 2015), and also more likely to be in a situation involving customer incivility compared with other situations involving supervisors and/or coworkers. Restaurant frontline service employees also experience frequent encounters with one-time customers, where repetitive interactions are highly unlikely in the future. Because of this, restaurant customer anonymity in these service encounter situations may instigate incivility toward service employees without fear of any repercussion to customers (Wilson and Holmval, 2013).

Coworker incivility represents uncivil behavior toward individuals instigated by their coworkers, whereas supervisor incivility refers to uncivil behaviors toward individuals provided by supervisors (Brehm and Brehm, 1981). When comparing the power supervisors have over coworkers, incivility toward employees from supervisors may cause more stress compared to incivility from coworkers. Also, because supervisor authority involves employee performance evaluations and rewards, uncivil treatment by supervisors could be perceived by employees as being more problematic compared to situations involving coworker incivility (Reio, 2011). Based upon this evidence, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2. Customer incivility has the strongest influence on restaurant frontline service employee emotional exhaustion, followed by supervisor incivility and coworker incivility.

Emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance

Employees' emotional, psychological and physical conditions have been found to be important determinants of service quality provided to customers (Mayer, 2002). Therefore, employees who are often exposed to work-related stressors leading to a high level of emotional exhaustion may not be able to offer acceptable levels of job performance specifically in the customer service-oriented business context. A recent restaurant study by Choi *et al.* (2014) documented that emotional exhaustion leads service employees to becoming impatient, causing them to maintain psychological distance from their customers. Therefore, this study expects that restaurant frontline service employees' emotional exhaustion is negatively related to perceived service performance:

- H3. Emotional exhaustion has a negative relationship upon perceived service performance when placed in the context of the restaurant frontline service employee.

Moderating roles of perceived organizational support

Early research pertaining to job stress conducted by Cohen and Wills (1985) assert that organizational support can play an important buffering role in a stressful workplace environment. Their research highlights that employees who feel organizationally supported may be less affected by stressful workplace events. A more recent research study (Perrot *et al.*, 2014) found that when individuals feel supported by their organization, they also feel more likely to have been cared for and thus feel as though they have access to useful help from others with whom they interact socially. Therefore, employee feelings involving support may enable them to redefine unpleasant and/or unacceptable events in different ways, which means that employees may be less affected and less damaged by those stressful situations.

As defined by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), POS is "assurance that aid will be available from an organization to deal with stressful situations and when it is needed to carry out one's job effectively". The subsequent study has emphasized the importance of employees' perceptions about their organizational support for business operations to be successful and particularly how POS influences employees who are frequently placed in stressful situations (Hur *et al.*, 2013).

One empirical research study involving health care (Schat and Kelloway, 2003) reported that employee perceptions about organizational support significantly decreased the negative effects of workplace violence and aggression. In a study involving property management, Miner *et al.* (2012) provide additional empirical evidence regarding the importance of POS by demonstrating that employees frequently experiencing supervisor and coworker incivility, and having higher levels of POS, generate better job-related outcomes than their counterparts having lower levels of POS.

Based upon these findings, this study expects that when restaurant frontline service employees have a positive perception about support provided by their restaurant organizations, these positive perceptions play a significant role to mitigate the effects of workplace incivility upon emotional exhaustion which, in turn, leads to better employee perceptions about their service performance.

- H4. When restaurant frontline service employees perceive organizational support more positively, the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance weaken.

The moderating roles of emotion regulation ability

2895

The way individuals react to interpersonal conflict varies based upon their social competencies, which includes their emotional intelligence, defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997, p. 10) as “the ability to perceive, accurately appraise, and express emotion”. It can be a critical factor for individuals to experience success when communicating their ideas, goals and intentions with other people. Because of this, emotional intelligence has been found to be an important individual trait for being able to effectively avoid and/or overcome interpersonal conflict (Jordan and Troth, 2004). When emotionally intelligent individuals communicate interpersonally, they are more likely to be sensitive to the emotions and feelings of others. Although they may experience unpleasant and stressful situations, their responses to these are less likely to be impulsive and hasty, but, instead, they are more likely to be cautious and prudent (Ashraf and Khan, 2014). Consistently, individuals with high emotional intelligence may regard environmental stressors as challenges they can overcome rather than as external stimuli causing stress, further leading to less aversive outcomes (Lindebaum, 2013).

Employees with high emotional intelligence endeavor to regulate their emotions positively to provide high-quality job performance and reduce the negative influence of unpleasant and uncivil situations involving feelings of insecurity, anxiety and anger (Namie and Namie, 2009). One restaurant study also provides evidence for the importance of service employees to regulate their emotions, which can then significantly reduce emotional exhaustion (Shani *et al.*, 2014).

Originally, emotional intelligence developed by Wong and Law (2002) consisted of four components: self-emotion appraisal, others’ emotion appraisal, use of emotion and emotion regulation. Lopes *et al.* (2005) insisted that among these four components, emotion regulation is the most critical for sustaining positive social interactions with others because it can directly influence how emotions can be expressed. Subsequent studies supporting this position document that emotion regulation is the only component consistently found to enable employees to control and manage their emotions (Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008). Therefore, ERA can be a very desirable trait for restaurant frontline service employees who are required to adhere to strict organizational policies and regulations pertaining to how they have to manage and express their emotions (Beal *et al.*, 2013).

Based upon this body of information, our study predicts that ERA may be able to assist employees experiencing workplace incivility to control their emotions and overcome stressful thoughts. It is predicted that the impact of workplace incivility upon the emotions of those employees having high levels of ERA decreases, which in turn, positively influences their job performance. Based upon this discussion, ERA is expected to significantly reduce the effect of workplace incivility upon the emotional exhaustion of restaurant frontline service employees. Because it is also expected that reducing emotional exhaustion levels increases employees’ perception about their service performance, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H5. As restaurant frontline service employees exhibit a higher level of emotion regulation ability, the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance weaken.

Methodology

Measurement

This study's measures were developed based upon a comprehensive literature review process that generated 50 items (Figure 1). Customer incivility was measured using 14 items (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). Seven items were used to measure supervisor incivility (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). Seven items were used to measure co-worker incivility (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). Six items were used to measure employee emotional exhaustion (Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Four items were used to measure perceived service performance (Winsted, 1997). Eight items were used to measure POS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997), and four items were used to measure ERA (Wong and Law, 2002) (Appendix A1). All items were measured on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

To refine and verify 50 items generated from the literature review process, a pilot test was conducted using 124 college students who were working at restaurants as frontline service employees. Respondents were asked to complete the survey related to their most recent restaurant employment experiences and specifically within the context of issues representing workplace incivility and emotional exhaustion. They were also asked to self-evaluate their perceived service performance, restaurant organizational support and emotional regulation ability. These data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation to address relatively high correlations among the dimensions (factor loading ≥ 0.5 and eigenvalues ≥ 1.0 , Hair *et al.*, 1998).

A total of 12 workplace incivility items were removed because of having factor loadings lower than 0.5. Three POS items were eliminated because of having high cross-loadings on other factors. The remaining 35 items successfully identified 7 factors representing customer incivility, supervisor incivility, coworker incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance, organizational support and ERA. This solution accounted for 75.84 per cent of the total variance. The final survey instrument consisted of seven parts. The first five parts included items pertaining to the three workplace incivility constructs, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance. The sixth part was developed to evaluate POS and ERA. The seventh part contained items pertaining to demographic characteristics and general job-related information.

Data collection and sampling

To test the study hypotheses, 50 independent (unaffiliated with any corporate restaurant chains), locally owned, casual dining restaurants providing tableside service and located in a highly popular visitor destination in Florida, USA, were used. From a list of 700 foodservice businesses appearing in a destination magazine, every *n*th business was selected using the systematic random sampling procedure (Hair *et al.*, 2000). All restaurant managers were personally visited to explain the study objectives. Managers required that their restaurant names, location and employee responses remain confidential. Based upon these conditions, managers agreed to allow a one-time-only access to those restaurant frontline service employees randomly selected for this study.

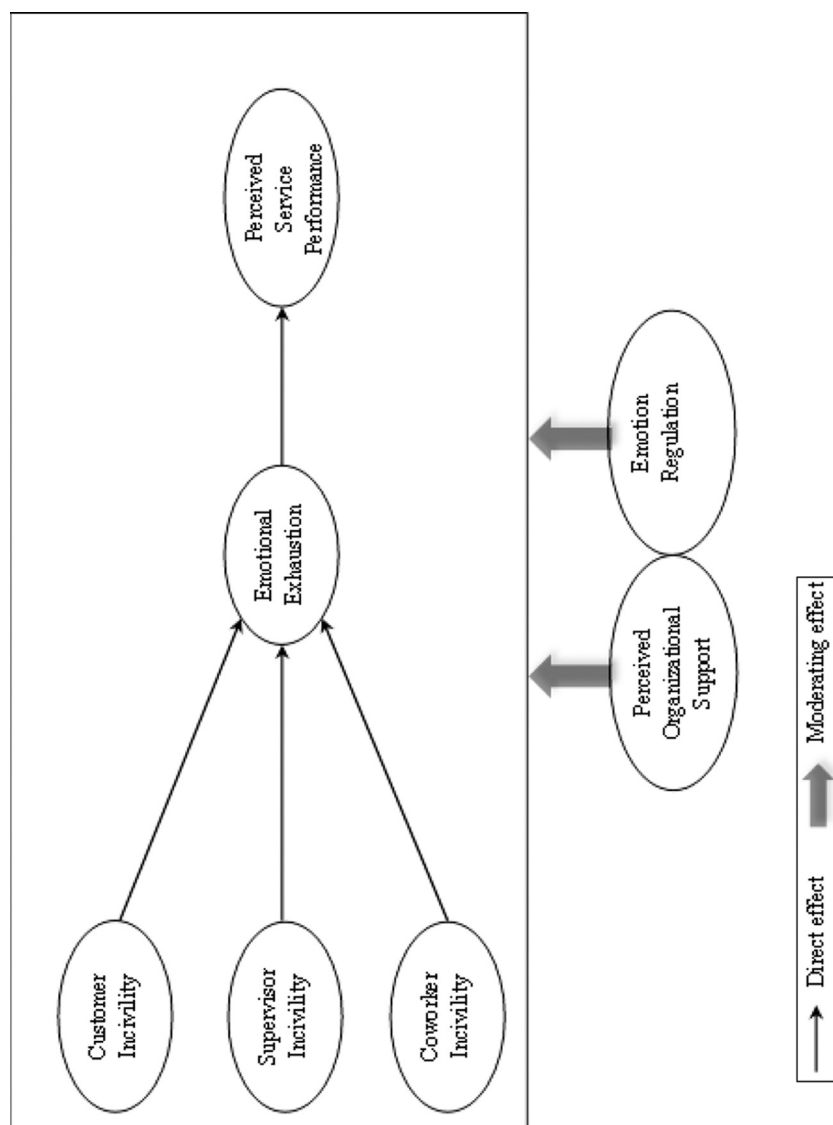


Figure 1.
Conceptual research
model

Survey respondents were screened to validate they were restaurant frontline service employees having direct contact with customers. Respondents were assured that the survey would be performed under strict confidentiality and that there would be no way to identify any one response with a particular employee. Each respondent was informed that the survey would take approximately 15 min to complete and that they were not required to respond to questions in any certain way.

When the nature of a research topic, such as workplace incivility, includes potentially embarrassing and sensitive personal situations, survey methods historically document that monetary incentives can be appropriately used to encourage individuals to respond to all survey questions accurately and completely and also to encourage respondents to accurately recall sensitive situations (Tzamourani and Lynn, 2000). The use of incentives has been documented as being a successful method for acquiring data and has proven that people who are rewarded for their participation give good information and without response bias (Simmons and Wilmot, 2004). Based upon this evidence, respondents were provided \$25 gift cards as an incentive for them to recall their workplace incivility situations accurately and completely.

A total of 246 surveys out of the 300 distributed were received. Among these, seven surveys were excluded because of incomplete responses. Ultimately, a total of 239 completed surveys, representing a 79.6 per cent response rate, were obtained over a four-week period at randomly selected restaurants. This information was used to subsequently test the study hypotheses.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the overall respondents can be described as females (64.3 per cent), having earned an undergraduate college or university degree (58.8 per cent) and being between 30 and 39 years old (33.0 per cent). The majority of respondents were Caucasian (84.5 per cent), working an average of 38.3 hours per week, with nearly 8 years (7.9 years) of restaurant frontline service experience.

Validity and reliability of measurements

A confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess validity of the measured variables. Internal consistency of each construct was estimated with coefficients of Cronbach's α . All Cronbach's α coefficients ranged from 0.887 to 0.939 which were acceptable by surpassing the recommended 0.70 cutoff (Nunnally, 1978). Reliability for each construct was assessed using composite construct reliability (CCR). All values of CCR ranged from 0.740 to 0.909 which satisfied the acceptable 0.70 threshold value (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Also, the convergent validity was satisfactory because all confirmatory factor loadings exceeded 0.70. All values of the average variance extracted (AVE) were above the recommended level of 0.50. This result supported that seven constructs in our research model were distinct and unidimensional (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The χ^2 fit statistics showed 1,141.713 with 539 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.001$). The root square error of approximation was 0.061 which is considered acceptable due to being less than the recommended 0.08 threshold. Furthermore, the goodness of fit index (GFI = 0.942), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI = 0.919), the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.927) and the incremental fit index (IFI = 0.928) values exceeded the recommended 0.90 (Hair *et al.*, 1998) (Table I).

Construct	Standardized loadings	<i>t</i> -value	CCR ^a	AVE ^b	Cronbach's α
<i>Customer incivility</i>			0.864	0.515	0.910
CUI1	0.807	Fixed			
CUI2	0.866	14.729***			
CUI3	0.853	14.412***			
CUI4	0.790	12.991***			
CUI5	0.709	11.275***			
CUI6	0.759	12.321***			
<i>Supervisor incivility</i>			0.872	0.579	0.898
SUI1	0.878	Fixed			
SUI2	0.881	17.042***			
SUI3	0.746	13.003***			
SUI4	0.750	13.103***			
SUI5	0.749	13.066***			
<i>Coworker incivility</i>			0.909	0.667	0.920
CWI1	0.853	Fixed			
CWI2	0.877	16.696***			
CWI3	0.820	14.922***			
CWI4	0.802	14.391***			
CWI5	0.844	15.661***			
<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>			0.901	0.602	0.939
EE1	0.830	Fixed			
EE2	0.889	16.602***			
EE3	0.897	16.861***			
EE4	0.860	15.716***			
EE5	0.781	13.557***			
EE6	0.807	14.226***			
<i>Service performance</i>			0.893	0.678	0.899
SP1	0.797	Fixed			
SP2	0.890	14.526***			
SP3	0.830	13.406***			
SP4	0.791	12.604***			
<i>Perceived organizational support</i>			0.740	0.512	0.919
POS1	0.946	Fixed			
POS2	0.951	28.642***			
POS3	0.749	11.720***			
POS4	0.846	19.729***			
POS5	0.759	15.441***			
<i>Emotion regulation ability</i>			0.845	0.547	0.887
ERA1	0.763	Fixed			
ERA2	0.883	13.482***			
ERA3	0.784	11.832***			
ERA4	0.843	12.843***			

Notes: $\chi^2 = 1141.713$ (df = 539), $p < 0.001$; goodness of fit (GFI) = 0.942; Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.919; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.927; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.928; root square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.061; ^aCCR = composite construct reliability; ^bAVE = average variance extracted; *** $p < 0.001$

Table I.
Reliabilities and
confirmatory factor
analysis

Discriminant validity was evaluated using three tests based upon [Bagozzi et al. \(1991\)](#) ([Table II](#)). First, the difference between the χ^2 values with one degree of freedom for the fixed and unconstrained models was computed. All changes in the χ^2 values were significant, which support the discriminant validity. Second, all values of the square root of the AVE from all seven constructs were greater than those correlations among constructs, providing evidence of the discriminant validity ([Fornell and Larcker, 1981](#)). Third, the 95 per cent confidence intervals of the paired correlations among the study's constructs were examined. None of the confidence intervals included 1 (or -1) which implies support for the discriminant validity among the constructs ([Anderson and Gerbing, 1988](#)).

Hypotheses testing

To verify the proposed research model and the study's hypotheses, structural equation modeling was used to simultaneously investigate the relationships between constructs. The research structural model fit was considered appropriate because overall fit indices were deemed satisfactory ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.531, p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.921; TLI = 0.919; CFI = 0.928; IFI = 0.904; RMSEA = 0.070).

Variable constrained	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta\text{df} = 1$)	Correlations	The square root of AVE	95% confidence interval
None	1141.713				
CUI-SUI	1145.789	4.076*	0.318	CUI: 0.718	From 0.024 to 0.612
CUI-CWI	1171.506	29.793***	0.161		From -0.047 to 0.369
CUI-EE	1145.767	4.054*	0.388		From 0.068 to 0.708
CUI-SP	1222.380	80.667***	-0.099		From -0.273 to 0.075
CUI-POS	1203.333	61.62***	-0.202		From -0.576 to 0.172
CUI-ERA	1198.495	56.782***	-0.236	SUI: 0.761	From -0.488 to 0.016
SUI-CWI	1147.085	5.372*	0.558		From 0.342 to 0.774
SUI-EE	1145.714	4.001*	0.450		From 0.166 to 0.734
SUI-SP	1261.604	119.891***	-0.245		From -0.403 to -0.087
SUI-POS	1299.895	158.182***	-0.558		From -0.928 to -0.188
SUI-ERA	1243.518	101.805***	-0.226	CWI: 817	From -0.460 to 0.008
CWI-EE	1159.907	18.194***	0.341		From 0.139 to 0.543
CWI-SP	1281.188	139.475***	-0.207		From -0.325 to -0.089
CWI-POS	1258.821	117.108***	-0.373		From -0.631 to -0.115
CWI-ERA	1263.797	122.084***	-0.225		From -0.403 to -0.047
EE-SP	1269.600	127.887***	-0.292	EX: 775	From -0.460 to -0.124
EE-POS	1289.478	147.765***	-0.555		From -0.943 to -0.167
EE-ERA	1342.014	200.30***	-0.463		From -0.761 to -0.165
SP-POS	1151.563	9.85**	0.388	SP: 0.823	From 0.164 to 0.612
SP-ERA	1161.706	19.993***	0.395	POS: 0.718	From 0.225 to 0.565
POS-ERA	1146.096	4.383*	0.360	ERA: 0.759	From 0.026 to 0.694

Notes: CUI – customer incivility; SUI – supervisor incivility; CWI – coworker incivility; EE – emotional exhaustion; SP – service performance; POS – perceived organizational support; ERA – emotion regulation ability; Mean $\pm$ SD; CUI; 3.59 ± 1.39 , SUI; 2.76 ± 1.04 , CWI; 1.57 ± 0.93 , EE; 3.01 ± 1.52 , SP; 5.08 ± 0.89 , POS; 5.12 ± 1.91 , ERA; 4.40 ± 1.12 ; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Discriminant validity tests

Results showed that all three workplace incivility dimensions including customer incivility ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.001$), supervisor incivility ($\beta = 0.250, p < 0.01$) and coworker incivility ($\beta = 0.204, p < 0.05$) have significant negative effects on emotional exhaustion. Therefore, research *H1* was supported. In addition, based upon the path coefficients, customer incivility was found to have the strongest power for increasing the level of emotional exhaustion, followed by supervisor incivility and coworker incivility. Therefore, *H2* was also supported.

H3 predicted a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance. The result showed that emotional exhaustion has a significant and negative relationship with service performance ($\beta = -0.263, p < 0.001$). Therefore, *H3* was supported.

Moderating effect

H4 and *H5* predicted the significant moderating roles POS and ERA have upon the relationships between the three workplace incivility dimensions, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance. To do so, the multi-group approach was used. Our sample was divided into two groups comprised of high-POS ($n = 130$) and low-POS groups ($n = 109$) based upon the mean score of perceived organization support they reported. Using the same method, high-EI ($n = 131$) and low-EI groups ($n = 108$) were generated.

Table III indicates that only one significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.193, p < 0.05$) pertaining to the relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion exists in the high-POS group. But, results for the low-POS group showed that all four path coefficients were significant regarding the relationships of “customer incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\beta = 0.481, p < 0.001$), “supervisor incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\beta = 0.436, p < 0.001$), “coworker incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\beta = 0.213, p < 0.05$) and “emotional exhaustion – perceived service performance” ($\beta = -0.360, p < 0.01$).

	Standardized coefficient		$\Delta\chi^2$ (df = 1)
	Low-POS	High-POS	
<i>H4</i>			
Customer incivility – emotional exhaustion	0.481***	0.193*	3.948*
Supervisor incivility – emotional exhaustion	0.436***	0.092	7.902**
Coworker incivility – emotional exhaustion	0.213*	0.071	2.993
Emotional exhaustion – service performance	−0.363**	−0.063	4.219*
$\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.858, p < 0.001$; TLI = 0.878; CFI = 0.886; IFI = 0.892; RMSEA = 0.052			
	Low-ERA	High-ERA	$\Delta\chi^2$ (df = 1)
<i>H5</i>			
Customer incivility – emotional exhaustion	0.487***	0.143	6.706**
Supervisor incivility – emotional exhaustion	0.467***	0.108	7.417**
Coworker incivility – emotional exhaustion	0.341**	0.021	4.851*
Emotional exhaustion – service performance	−0.304**	−0.028	4.284*
$\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.994, p < 0.001$; TLI = 0.863; CFI = 0.870; IFI = 0.895; RMSEA = 0.067			

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Moderating effects of
perceived
organizational
support (POS) and
emotion regulation
ability (ERA)

To confirm whether or not any significant differences between the high-POS group and the low-POS group exist, each of the four path coefficients in a constrained model was compared with one another in an unconstrained model, respectively (Frazier *et al.*, 2004). The χ^2 tests indicate that the relationships regarding “customer incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.948, p < 0.05$), “supervisor incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7.902, p < 0.01$) and “emotional exhaustion – perceived service performance” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.219, p < 0.05$) were significantly moderated by high and low levels of POS. However, the difference in the relationship of “coworker incivility – emotional exhaustion” with respect to the high and low POS group levels was not significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.993, p > 0.05$). Therefore, *H4* was partially supported.

In terms of the moderating roles of ERA, no significant path coefficient exists in the high-ERA group. But, all four path coefficients involving “customer incivility and emotional exhaustion” ($\beta = 0.487, p < 0.001$), “supervisor incivility and emotional exhaustion” ($\beta = 0.467, p < 0.001$), “coworker incivility and emotional exhaustion” ($\beta = 0.341, p < 0.01$), and “emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance” ($\beta = -0.304, p < 0.01$) were found to be significantly associated with the low-ERA group.

The χ^2 tests revealed that all relationships pertaining to “customer incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.706, p < 0.01$), “supervisor incivility – emotional exhaustion” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7.417, p < 0.01$), “coworker incivility and emotional exhaustion” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.851, p < 0.05$) and “emotional exhaustion – perceived service performance” ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.284, p < 0.05$) were significantly different between the high-ERA and the low-ERA group. Therefore, *H5* was supported.

Conclusions and implications

In consideration of those very strict regulations and policies pertaining to how restaurants manage frontline service employees expressing their emotions to customers, it would be expected that workplace incivility and its effects upon various constituents would be an important research topic. However, a comprehensive review of the scholarly hospitality literature pertaining to workplace incivility has confirmed that the three dimensions representing supervisor incivility, coworker incivility and customer incivility, along with possible solutions to mitigating incivility’s negative effects on employee attitudes and behaviors toward customers, has been overlooked.

To fill this literature gap, our study examines restaurant workplace incivility in conjunction with internal organizational sources which includes supervisors and coworkers, along with customers. Additionally, our study examines workplace incivility and its effects upon employee emotional exhaustion. To better understand workplace incivility and its consequences, these effects were then used in conjunction with consideration given to the roles that POS and ERA play upon the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance. Overall, results provided important empirical support for the study’s hypotheses.

Theoretical implications

This study’s findings suggest several theoretical implications from the hospitality frontline service employee perspective involving workplace incivility and its effects. First, this study reveals that among the three dimensions of workplace incivility, customer incivility has the strongest power to increase employees’ emotional

exhaustion. [Leiter and Maslach \(2009\)](#) examined employee stressors and found that a high level of frequent contact with customers is one of the main determinants increasing levels of employee emotional exhaustion. In line with previous research findings ([Adams and Webster, 2013](#)), this study confirms and further supports that customer incivility is the most powerful factor that significantly influences emotional exhaustion when applied to the specific context of restaurant frontline service providers. Prior literature ([Sliter *et al.*, 2010](#)) offers compelling evidence that customer service employees must follow their organization's rules for displaying emotions, even in situations related to customer incivility. As a result, frontline service providers feel more exhausted. Therefore, this study's finding pertaining to the strong negative impact that customer incivility has upon the restaurant frontline service employee's emotional exhaustion is plausible. Further magnifying this situation is the expectation for employees to provide excellent service with a smile ([Rafaeli *et al.*, 2012](#)). Due to this, they might feel much more exhausted and frustrated, given the volume of daily service encounters with customers. It would be entirely feasible for one customer incivility incident to negatively affect how the service employee reacts to the rules of service engagement mandated by the restaurant business ([Rafaeli *et al.*, 2012](#)).

Our study's findings further document that both restaurant supervisor and coworker incivilities significantly contribute to an increase in restaurant employees' emotional exhaustion. It was established that the effect of restaurant supervisor incivility on frontline service employees' emotional exhaustion is stronger than that of restaurant coworker incivility. This supports prior research findings presented in other service industries by [Hershcovis and Barling \(2010\)](#) documenting that uncivil behavior by supervisors towards employees may be more harmful than incivility received by employees from coworkers. [Spence Laschinger *et al.* \(2009\)](#) demonstrate that the effects of supervisor and coworker incivility upon nursing employees can vary according to job positions and/or certain workplace environments. In the typical restaurant setting, frontline service providers are predominantly involved with their own independent tasks and tend to have more contact with their customers rather than with their coworkers. Because of this, restaurant coworker incivility may represent a relatively less powerful effect that contributes to increasing frontline employees' emotional exhaustion. Therefore, our study's findings can be rationalized in consideration of those work environment characteristics which are specific to the restaurant business.

Study findings further suggest that restaurant employees' emotional exhaustion plays a significant role in leading to a low level of perceived service performance. Prior research conducted by [Kern and Grandey \(2009\)](#) documents when employees experience situations involving incivility from customers and/or supervisors multiple times, their emotional exhaustion levels are increased which, in turn, leads to their negative attitudes and behaviors toward customers. Therefore, this study provides evidence that those restaurant frontline service employees who are continuously exposed to unpleasant situations related to workplace incivility, consequently feel exhausted and are more likely to exhibit negative service performances.

This study reveals some significant moderating effects of POS on the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional exhaustion and perceived service performance. The effect of restaurant customer incivility on frontline service employees' emotional exhaustion, as well as the influence of employee emotional exhaustion on perceived employee service performance were moderated according to various levels of employee

perceptions about restaurant organizational support. This implies when restaurant frontline service employees perceive a high level of organizational support, the effect of customer incivility on their emotional exhaustion is significantly reduced. Furthermore, results confirm that restaurant frontline service employees having high levels of POS indicate that emotional exhaustion has no significant effect upon their perceived service performance. In contrast, restaurant employees having low levels of POS report that customer incivility still significantly increases emotional exhaustion, which reduces the employee's perceived service performance. In consideration of the nature of POS that connotes emotional resources such as caring, approval and respect, it is reasoned that a significant moderating effect exists pertaining to POS and its relationship between job stressors and negative workplace consequences.

The power of supervisor incivility upon emotional exhaustion was shown to vary significantly according to levels of POS. Restaurant frontline service employees exhibiting low levels of POS feel more exhausted by incidents of incivility caused by supervisors. However, employees exhibiting high levels of POS were not significantly affected emotionally by coworker incivility. There is the distinct possibility that frontline service employees working in the independent restaurant industry may identify supervisors as being their "perceived organizational support", compared with chain restaurants having human resources departments and outreach programs. Thus, it is regarded as one and the same. The frontline service employee perceives there is no other level of organizational support for them to pursue, so this issue becomes irrelevant (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Finally, this study revealed that ERA has significant moderating effects upon all restaurant frontline service relationships between customer incivility, supervisor incivility, coworker incivility, emotional exhaustion and service performance. Emotionally intelligent restaurant frontline service employees faced with workplace incivility incidents feel less exhausted, which does not impact their ability to provide high quality service to customers. This is in line with findings in job stress studies in other service industries that document ERA has the power to mitigate the effect job stress can have upon negative consequences (Lindebaum, 2013). In summary, ERA represents the ability for restaurant frontline service employees to regulate emotions which plays a critical role in controlling and managing restaurant frontline service employees' emotions in stressful situations involving workplace incivility, allowing those restaurant frontline service employees to continue to provide high levels of service quality to their customers.

Practical implications

Customer incivility applied to the specific context of restaurant frontline service employees is found to have the strongest influence for increasing emotional exhaustion. Supervisor incivility and coworker incivility are also identified as contributing to restaurant frontline service employees' emotional exhaustion. These findings suggest specific practical implications that can be applied to the restaurant industry. First, restaurant managers should frequently interview frontline service employees to obtain information pertaining to their experiences involving customer incivility. Based upon this information, support programs can be developed to suggest specific techniques for restaurant service employees to adopt that are designed to avoid or quickly diffuse potential situations related to customer incivility.

Second, managers need to anticipate these reported customer incivility patterns will likely re-occur. Situations regarding customer incivility need to have proactive management intervention, which supports frontline service providers. This implies that managers must establish a visible and continuous restaurant dining environment presence. Management's appearance magnifies awareness to employees and customers that the restaurant's visible authority figure is present. Ease of management access to customers and employees can mitigate many potentially difficult situations before they are able to elevate into confrontational or potential incidents representing incivility.

With respect to this study's finding pertaining to the significant negative impact supervisor incivility has upon the emotional exhaustion of restaurant employees, restaurant owners and management should attempt to recruit, select and retain supervisors having people skills that are especially related to being open-minded, and having an ability to listen and communicate with employees pertaining to their expectations, and specifically to concerns they express about interpersonal relationships existing within the workplace. Frequent meetings with supervisors should be scheduled with owners and management to clarify supervisor expectations related to these issues. Additionally, programs should contain information that clearly establishes the code of conduct for restaurant supervisors, managers and employees. Further, restaurant businesses should develop a system to document and address issues of inappropriate behavior regarding supervisor incivility to provide proper feedback to them and also to employees, management and customers.

Specific practical implications pertaining to this study's findings about restaurant incivility, frontline service employees and the moderating effect ERA has upon perceived employee service performance are now possible. This study found that ERA enables restaurant frontline employees to feel less exhausted, despite situations involving incivility from customers which leads to continued high-quality service delivery. Regarding this finding, an effective management strategy needs to first begin with restaurant businesses and their attempt to recruit and select new frontline service employees having high ERA. To achieve this goal, restaurant organizations should use well accepted standardized personality inventory tests (i.e. Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test; MSCEIT), designed to measure ERA levels of potential employees, among other personality traits. Employee development programs need to incorporate sensitivity training using case studies, or scenarios, of actual incivility situations to demonstrate and reinforce desired outcomes. Research documents that ERA can be improved through training programs related to self-management, counseling, coaching and anger management (Nelis *et al.*, 2009). Considering the many specific job characteristics that restaurant frontline service employees must regularly address, restaurant organizations should customize frontline service employee training programs that are designed specifically to meet their geographical and business challenges.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

All research studies have limitations, and this study is no exception. First, the data used in this study was from one particularly large vacation destination area located in Florida. Therefore, results generated from this study's respondents cannot be generalized to the total population of all restaurant businesses and to other

geographical areas. Additionally, the independent restaurants used in this study represented full service, casual family dining restaurant concepts. Thus, fine dining establishments and quick service restaurant businesses were purposely excluded from this study's sampling design. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to any other restaurant types than those used in this study and in this geographic destination area.

Second, monetary incentives were used to obtain survey responses. This decision was based upon compelling evidence provided in historical survey research methods for study topics involving highly sensitive and potentially embarrassing situations (Simmons and Wilmot, 2004). These research studies support the fact that individuals who are rewarded for their participation provide accurate and complete information with no evidence suggesting that incentives increase response bias. However, it is suggested that future research should address the appropriate level of monetary support, as well as the type of incentive used.

It is also recommended that future research develop scales specific to restaurant workplace incivility issues to address nuances unique to that environment. Some comments that emerged from our respondents suggested workplace incivility issues arise for many reasons. Thus, future research should consider addressing root causes of situations involving restaurant workplace incivility. Antecedents of workplace incivility could be identified in consideration of an individual's personal characteristics or misbehavior of those victims (employees) and predators (customers, supervisors and co-workers).

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Corresponding author

Su Jin Han can be contacted at: humanhan06@gmail.com

Factors	Scale items	Sources
Customer incivility	<i>My restaurant customers</i>	Cortina <i>et al.</i> (2001)
	Take out anger on me	
	Make insulting comments to me	
	Treat employees as if they were inferior or stupid	
	Show that they are irritated or impatient	
Supervisor incivility	Do not trust the information that I give them and ask to speak with someone of higher authority	Cortina <i>et al.</i> (2001)
	Make comments that question the competency of me	
	<i>My restaurant supervisor(s)</i>	
	Was condescending to me	
	Showed little interest in my opinions	
Coworker incivility	Made demeaning remarks about me	Cortina <i>et al.</i> (2001)
	Addressed me in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately	
	Ignored or excluded me from professional camaraderie	
	<i>My coworker(s)</i>	
	Was condescending to me	
Emotional exhaustion	Showed little interest in my opinions	Maslach and Jackson (1986)
	Made demeaning remarks about me	
	Addressed me in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately	
	Ignored or excluded me from professional camaraderie	
	<i>I feel</i>	
	Emotionally drained from my work	(continued)
	Fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	
	Burned out from my work	
	Used up at the end of the workday	
	I am working too hard on my job	
	Frustrated by my job	

Table AI.
Measurements

Table AI.

Factors	Scale items	Sources
Perceived service performance	I am always available when my customers need service I have my customers' best interests at heart I understand my customers' specific needs I give my customers' individual attention	Winsted (1997)
Perceived organizational support	<i>My company</i> Values my contributions to its well-being Considers my goals and values Shows little concern for me Cares about my opinion	Eisenberger <i>et al.</i> (1997)
Emotion regulation ability	Is helpful when I have a problem I am able to control my temper when handle difficult situations I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry I have good control of my own emotions I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions	Wong and Law (2002)

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