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Spillover Effects in Customer Incivility: Impacts on Frontline **Employees' Negative Behaviors**

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KEYWORDS

Customer incivility, Burnout, Deviant workplace behavior, Frontline employees.

ABSTRACT

This study intended to examine transitive relation among customer incivility perceived by deluxe hotel frontline employees, burnout, and deviant workplace behaviors and clarify the moderating effect of employees' stress. A total of 230 employees working in deluxe hotels in Seoul, the capital of Korea, in 2017 comprised the sample in this study. The hypothesized relationships in the model were tested simultaneously by using structural equation modelling (SEM). As results, customer incivility perceived by deluxe hotel frontline employees had significant (p<.001) positive influence on their burnout(β =.38, t-value=4.93). Employees' burnout positively influenced their deviant workplace behaviors (β =.56, t-value=7.22). In addition, customer incivility was found to positively affect employees' deviant workplace behaviors(β =.26, t-value=3.90), and therefore, the moderating role of stress level was not verified. The findings of this study suggested that deluxe hotels are supposed to enhance their frontline service by providing orientation for customers through promotion materials. Limitations and future research directions of this study were also well established and discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry has more depressed employees than any other industry. The cause is the working environment and culture of the industry where harrassment and incivility frequently occur (Pizam, 2008). Rowley and Purcell (2001) noted that there were many reasons for high turnover rate in the hospitality industry, and major reasons among them were excessive exposure of employees to stress and its failure to appropriately deal with incivility from superiors or customers (Adam & Webster, 2013). Kern and Grandy (2009) observed incivility service employees in retail stores underwent from their customers increased their stress, ultimately

leading to emotional burnout or negative emotions. As mentioned in research by Grandy, Dicketer, and Sin (2004) 20% of phone calls that call center employees receive involve their customers' oral aggressive behaviors; customers are probably the most representative cause of incivility to which those employees are frequently and severely exposed.

In particular, because employees of deluxe hotels as a representative service industry work at the forefront of service and interactions while contacting their customers in such service encounters are a very crucial task of them (Sliter, Jex., Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010), they are relatively much exposed to harassment by their customers (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016). Further, frontline employees should abide by pre-

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determined rigid rules and regulations on how to express their emotions toward rude customers and therefore they are under severe psychological pressure and stress (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016). Uncertainty and variability related to the process of providing services to customers requires employees' initiative and positivity (Griffin, Bell, & Marusarz, 2007) but employees at the front line relatively exert less power because resources (discretionary power) are more fixed in each position of the front line than in other departments (Li, Chen, Lyu, & Qiu, 2016). Kern and Grandy (2009) first used the concept customers' incivility and recently a lot of attention was paid to incivility occurring when customers mistreat employees (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016).

Nonetheless, research on customers' incivility largely concerned retail stores (Kern & Grandy, 2009; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013), banks (Sliter, Jex., Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010), department stores (Hur, Moom, & Han, 2015), and insurance companies (Walker, Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014) research on employees in the hospitality industry was very limited in its scope. Jung, Bae, and Jeon (2015) noted that in a hotel's service situation employees who experienced customers' incivility underwent excessive burnout of emotional energy and faced burnout of dry emotional conditions, which in turn decreased their job satisfaction and increased their turnover intent. In addition, Torres, Van Niekerk, and Orlowski (2017) asserted that hotel customers' aggressive behaviors or incivility increased employees' negative emotions and their possibility of informal behaviors such as insulting words, anger, frustration, or oral aggression.

Nonetheless, research thus far paid attention to internal aspects of an organization such as superiors or colleagues and research on customers as external aspects was lacking. At this time point, this research attempted to verify the spillover effect of customers' incivility perceived by hotel frontline employees on their burnout and deviant workplace behaviors and clarify the moderating role of employees' stress level in such causative relationship.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Customer Incivility and Burnout

As research related to customer incivility and employees' burnout, Kern and Grandy (2009) noted that incivility service employees experienced from their customers often induced increase in emotional exhaustion like burnout. Han et al. (2016)

observed that incivility of customers experienced by restaurant employees had significant positive influence on employees' burnout and employees underwent exhaustion of psychological resources, which led to their burnout. Jung et al. (2015) and Cho et al. (2016) also noted that employees severely underwent emotional exhaustion and burnout in service situations resulting from customers' incivility. Based on the above previous studies, this study established the following study hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Customer incivility positively influences the employees' burnout.

2.2. Burnout and Deviant Workplace Behavior

As research related to employees' burnout and deviant work-place behaviors, Krischer, Penney, and Hunter (2010) noted that emotional exhaustion increased employees' counterproductive behaviors and Balducci, Schaufeli, and Fraccaroli (2011) verified a positive mechanism between employees' burnout and their negative behaviors through the JDB model. In addition, Smoktunowicz et al. (2015) asserted that police officers experienced a high level of burnout when they perceived they were not supported by their organization, resulting in their counterproductive behaviors. Liang and Hsieh (2007) as well suggested that in a working situation, burnout as a negative response experienced by flight attendants had positive association with their deviant workplace behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Employees' burnout positively influences the employees' deviant workplace behavior.

2.3. Customer Incivility and Deviant Workplace Behavior

As research on customer incivility and deviant workplace behaviors, Jaarsveld, Walker, and Skarlicki (2010) noted that incivility experienced by employees from their customers led to behaviors against their organizations through emotional burnout and Walker et al. (2014) observed that incivility employees underwent in the process of interaction with customers triggered employees' indiscriminate negative behaviors. Han et al. (2016) as well asserted that incivility perceived by restaurant service employees through customers positively affected their deviant workplace behaviors such as job transfer through their burnout. Torres, Jaarsveld, and Skarlicki (2017) also noted that customers' aggressive behaviors increased employees' negative emotions and raised the possibility for

the employees to make informal behaviors such as offensive words or oral attacks.

Hypothesis 3: Customer incivility positively influences the employees' deviant workplace behavior.

2.4. Moderating Effects of Employees' Stress

There is no research that closely examined the moderating role of stress in organic causal relationship between customers' incivility and employees' burnout and deviant workplace behaviors. However, Kim (2012) observed that when guestcontact employees who contacted customers at the forefront of services were exposed to aggressive and rude customers, they became extremely stressful and Adam and Webster (2013) noted that an environment where employees felt a lot of stress from experiencing customers' incivility had very positive influence on employees' stress. Arnold and Walsh (2015) as well asserted that when employees experienced customers' incivility in a service situation, their cognitive stress increased and their psychological well-being was negatively influenced by such incivility. Inferring from the above research, employees' stress level was considered to perform a significant moderating role between customer incivility and employees' negative responses. Fig. 1 shows the study model reflecting all the hypotheses of this study.

Hypothesis 4: The employees' stress level moderates the relationship between customer incivility, burnout, and deviant workplace behavior.

3. METHODS

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

In order to perform this study, 10 deluxe hotels (five-star hotel) in Seoul were selected. The reason for selecting deluxe hotels as the study subjects was because disadvantageous working conditions resulting from the working environment with much pressure and job characteristics of employees' directly contacting customers at the forefront of services led to the employees' much exposure to harassment from their superiors or incivility from their customers (Han et al., 2016; Lyu, Zhu, Zhong, & Hu, 2016). This study measured customer incivility, burnout, stress, and deviant workplace behaviors experienced by employees working at the frontline through the first round of preliminary survey and some questions that were ambiguous or hard to understand were revised and complemented. Based on the preliminary survey results, a main survey was conducted from October 1, 2016 to October 20, 2016 for 20 days and under the approval from each department head a total of 300 questionnaires (30 questionnaires per hotel) were distributed and 278 copies among them were collected. A total of 230 questionnaires (76.6%) except for ones with incomplete responses were used for analysis. Of those, 49.6% were men and 50.4% were women. Most had a community college degree (32.7%) or a university degree (59.4%) and were either younger than 29 (35.6%) or between 30 and 39 years old (47.0%). Of the participants, 37.2% had been with a hospitality company for 3 to 5 years.

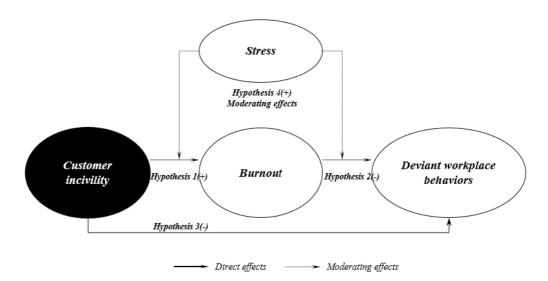


Fig. 1. A proposed model of customer incivility and employees' response.

3.2. Measurement Development

For this study, four factors including customer incivility as an independent variable, burnout as a parameter, deviant workplace behaviors as a dependent variable, and stress as a moderating variable were measured and a total of 22 variables were used. The Likert 5-score scale was applied to all the measured variables. Customer incivility was defined as customers' dissatisfaction-related behaviors such as disregarding employees or being rude to and making insulting expressions to them (Sliter et al., 2010) and 10 questions were used for measurement of customer incivility based on research by Burnfield, Clark, Devendorf, and Jex (2004) and Han et al. (2016). The items included "my customers take out anger on me", and "my customers makre insulting comments to me". Burnout is a condition of mental exhaustion (Pine & Aronson, 1988) resulting from long-term exposure to the organizational environment triggering emotional burden. It was measured with four questions on the basis of research by Cordes and Dougherty (1993) and Singh, Goolsby, and Rhoads (1994). The items included "I feel burned out from my work", and "I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes anything." Deviant workplace behaviors are defined as employees' intentional behaviors to do harm to the organization or insiders (Bennet & Robinson, 2000) and were measured with four questions by referring to the relevant literature. The items included "put in to be paid for more hours than you worked", and "Started an argument with a coworker." Stress is a condition where psychological dysfunctions occurred as to be difficult for employees to perform normal functions due to factors related with their jobs (Beehr & Newman, 1978) and was examined with four questions. The items included "I receive incompatible requests from two or more people", and "I feel certain about how much authority I have".

3.3. Data analysis

This research adopted the data using SPSS and AMOS programs. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis of the measurement constructs were analyzed by testing convergent validity, discriminant validity, and Cronbach's alpha. The test hypotheses $1\sim3$, structural equation model (SEM) was conducted to analyze the effects of customer civility, and burnout on deviant workplace behavior. Also, we tested the multi-group comparison analysis for moderation effects.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model of the constructs was analyzed using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis (Table 1). According to the result of CFA, the model fit was χ^2 =473.48, NFI=.84, CFI=.90, with relatively fit level. In

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis results

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Items	Standardized estimate	t value	Cronbach's α	CCR	AVE ASV			
Customer incivility								
CI1	.59	Fixed		.91	.45 .17			
CI2	.61	7.49***						
CI3	.70	8.23***						
CI4	.65	7.78***						
CI5	.73	8.49***	.88					
Cl6	.60	7.34***						
CI7	.65	7.81***						
CI8	.73	8.46***						
CI9	.65	7.81***						
CI10	.74	8.49***						
	Burnout							
BO1	.76	Fixed						
BO2	.86	13.25***	.87	.93	.65 .28			
BO3	.87	13.37***						
BO4	.74	11.34***						
Deviant workplace behavior								
DB1	.79	fixed		.89	50			
DB2	.81	12.57***	.84		.59 .37			
DB3	.72	11.04***						
DB4	.77	11.84***						
Stress								
ST1	.71	Fixed						
ST2	.78	10.61***	.84	.90	.57 .24			
ST3	.82	10.98***						
ST4	.75	10.18***						

Note: CCR=composite construct reliability; AVE=average variance extracted; ASV=average shared variance; χ^2 =473.482 (*df*=203); χ^2 / *df*=2.332; GFI=.84; NFI=.84; IFI=.90; CFI=.90; RMR=.037; **** p<.001.

addition, internal consistency among the measured items was verified using reliability analysis and the result was all the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the four factors were higher than 0.80. with excellent outcomes, average variances extracted were all higher than 0.50 except for customer incivility (0.45), and composite reliability was higher than 0.8, with excellent convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In addition, discriminant validity was obtained, with an average standard error value smaller than an average variance extracted value. Moreover, coefficients among the derived factors ranged from 0.334 to 0.569, with all the four factors having significantly positive correlation at the significance level of 0.01. The squared value of the greatest coefficient was 0.323, which was smaller than AVE, showing excellent discriminant validity.

4.2. Structural Equation Model

This study employed a structural equation model analysis in order to verify the three hypotheses and the results are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2. The fit index of the final model was χ^2 =314.59, GFI=.86, IFI=.91, CFI=.91, and RMR=.03 corresponding with the fit standard (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). According to the verification results, customer incivility perceived by deluxe hotel frontline employees had significant (p<.001) positive influence on their burnout (β =

Table 2. Structural equation model

Hypothesis	Standardized estimate	<i>t</i> -value
H1 Customer civility → Burnout	.38	4.93***
H2 Burnout → Deviant workplace behavior	.56	7.22***
H3 Customer civility → Deviant workplace behavior	.26	3.90***

Note: χ^2 =314.59 (*df*=132); *p*<0.001; GFI=.86; IFI=.91; CFI=.91; RMR= .03; *** *p*<.001.

.38, t-value=4.93). Therefore, the hypothesis 1 was adopted. The result was consistent with those by Kern and Grandy (2009), Han et al. (2016), and Cho et al. (2016) that when employees perceived customers' incivility in a working situation their burnout increased as well.

Employees' burnout positively influenced their deviant work-place behaviors (β =.56, t-value=7.22) (therefore, the hypothesis 2 was adopted) and such result was similar to those by Liang and Hsieh (2007), Krischer et al. (2010), and Balducci et al. (2011) that burnout employees experienced while doing their tasks resulted in their behaviors against their organization.

Customer incivility was found to positively affect employees' deviant workplace behaviors (β =.26, t-value=3.90) and accordingly, the hypothesis 3 was also adopted. Such result was consistent with those by Jaarsveld et al. (2010), Walker et al. (2014), and Han et al. (2016) that customers' incivility employees experienced in the process of providing services to them may increase the employees' deviant workplace behaviors.

In addition, Table 3 shows the result of analysis on the moderating role of employees' level of stress in transitive relation among customer incivility perceived by deluxe hotel frontline employees, burnout, and deviant workplace behaviors. Prior to the analysis, the respondents were divided into a group with a high level of stress and one with a low level of stress based on the average level of stress, and then a multi-group comparison analysis was carried out. The fit level of the final model aimed at analyzing the moderating effect was χ^2 = 534.11 (df=266), IFI=.84, and CFI=.84. According to the analysis result, the group whose stress level was higher than the average level of stress had a relatively high coefficient route from customer incivility to employees' burnout, which was not statistically significant, and therefore the hypothesis 4 was rejected.

Table 3. Moderating effect of the employees' stress level

	Stress level				Baseline	Nested	
	LOW (n=96)		High (n=134)		model χ^2	model χ^2	$\Delta \chi^2$ ($\Delta df=1$)
	Standardized estimate	t-value	Standardized estimate	t-value	(<i>df</i> =266)	(df=267)	(Δui=1)
H4 ^a	.176	1.770	.357	2.860**	534.11	535.90	1.79
H4 ^b	.574	5.432***	.510	3.585***		536.58	2.47

Note: χ^2/df =2.008; IFI=.84, CFI=.84; ** p<.01, *** p<.001

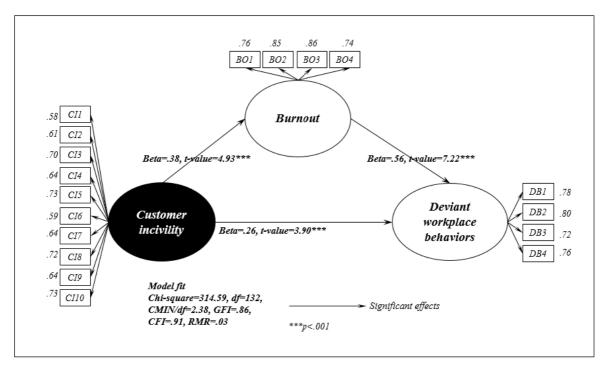


Fig. 2. Structural equation model with estimate.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study intended to examine transitive relation among customer incivility perceived by deluxe hotel frontline employees, burnout, and deviant workplace behaviors and clarify the moderating effect of employees' stress level in such causal relationship. The main result of this study was that customer incivility perceived by frontline employees in a service situation increased their burnout and deviant workplace behaviors. In addition, regarding the influence of customer incivility on employees' burnout, the route coefficient was higher when the stress level of employees was high compared to when it was low, which was not significant, however, and therefore the moderating role of stress was not verified.

The academic implications inferred from the above results are as follows. First, this study concerned frontline employees providing services at the forefront of deluxe hotels on whom there has been almost no discussion. Frontline employees are much exposed to customer incivility because they should immediately provide services desired by customers in response to their instant demands and therefore the results of this study will provide an opportunity to promote additional research in which discussion on incivility prevalent in deluxe hotels may be made. Second, research thus far has focused on incivility or harassment of colleagues or superiors while

this study dealt with incivility employees experienced from their customers as an external factor, thereby having a theoretical meaning of expanding the scope of research thus far.

In addition, this study has the following practical implications seeking for policy responses to the agenda of the present times. First, this study verified that customer incivility experienced by employees in a service situation affected their burnout, thereby increasing their deviant workplace behaviors as voluntary negative behaviors in their organization. Such result means that customer civility perceived by employees not only affected their negative emotions but also had very meaningful influence on employees' behaviors harmful to the organization and provides an opportunity to seriously perceive problems of diverse aspects that may occur from rude customers in the organization's dimension. If employees are relatively more exposed to stress through rude customers and there is a high possibility for them to do negative behaviors, campaigns or fun programs for customers to properly interact with service employees will be able to be planned by referring to previous research emphasizing the importance of customer education (Bowers & Martin, 2007; Eisingerich & Bell, 2008). In particular, deluxe hotels will be able to provide brief orientation for customers through promotion materials, e-mails, videos, and other media so that they can recognize in advance check-in procedures, important information, and behaviors

violating general etiquettes.

The followings are the limitations of this study and future tasks. First, this study restricted the study subjects to frontline employees working in deluxe hotels in Seoul and it is difficult to interpret the results of this study as those of the entire hospitality industry. Therefore, future research needs to examine more diverse samples. Second, this study verified the effect of customer incivility experienced by employees in a service situation on their burnout and deviant workplace behaviors as their negative responses, and future research needs to utilize more diverse performance variables like positive responses such as involvement or satisfaction. Third, this study utilized stress level as a moderating variable but due to lack of previous research, no sufficient discussion was made. Thus, future research needs to complement the above limitations and thereby should be able to derive more objective results.

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