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The impact of third-party aggression on Italian and Irish employees' well-being and job satisfaction

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Dedicated to my parents who taught me kindness and they encouraged me to take risks, boldly go. Dedicated to my parents who taught me that each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so.

None of us alone can save the nation or the world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so.

(C. West)

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INTRODUCTION

*“The silent killer of workplace happiness, productivity and health is
a lack of basic civility”
(Christine Porath, 2017)*

Third-party workplace aggression represents a serious threat to workplace safety and organizational well-being. Nevertheless, existing research on workplace aggression has been mainly restricted to situations involving intra-organizational members. To fill this gap, the current dissertation concentrates on third-party workplace aggression. Third-party workplace aggression may manifest itself through a tremendous range and variety of acts which may be perpetrated by unknown persons outside the organization who have no legitimate relationship to it (i.e., external), or by someone who is either the recipient of or the object of a service provided (i.e., client-initiated; CAL/OSHA, 1998). The current dissertation examines two client-initiated forms of workplace aggression, namely customer incivility and verbal aggression, and two external expressions of workplace aggression, namely robberies and thefts at work. In doing so, it focuses on the service sector because generally workers who have face-to-face communication with customers tend to report the highest levels of incidence of both client-initiated (e.g., customer incivility and verbal aggression) and external (thefts and robberies at work) workplace aggression (Mayhew & Chappell, 2001).

To introduce this subject, we will illustrate how these forms of aggression differ from and overlap with each other. To this end, we have created *Figure 1* which, through a schematic illustration of level set representation of different expressions of third-party workplace aggression, seeks to illustrate how customer incivility and verbal aggression

differ from and overlap with two external forms of aggression in organizations, namely thefts and robberies at work.

Third-party antisocial behavior (*a*), as behavior that harms organizations and/or its members (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997) exhibited by organizational outsiders, includes the other conceptualization of third-party workplace mistreatment. Third-party deviant behaviour (*b*), as behaviour that violates workplace norms for mutual respect (Robinson & Bennett, 1997) adopted by organizational outsiders, is broadly inclusive of third-party workplace aggression and incivility (*c*). The common feature of all acts of workplace aggression (*d*) is the clear intent to harm or hurt someone physically or psychologically (Neuman & Baron, 1997).

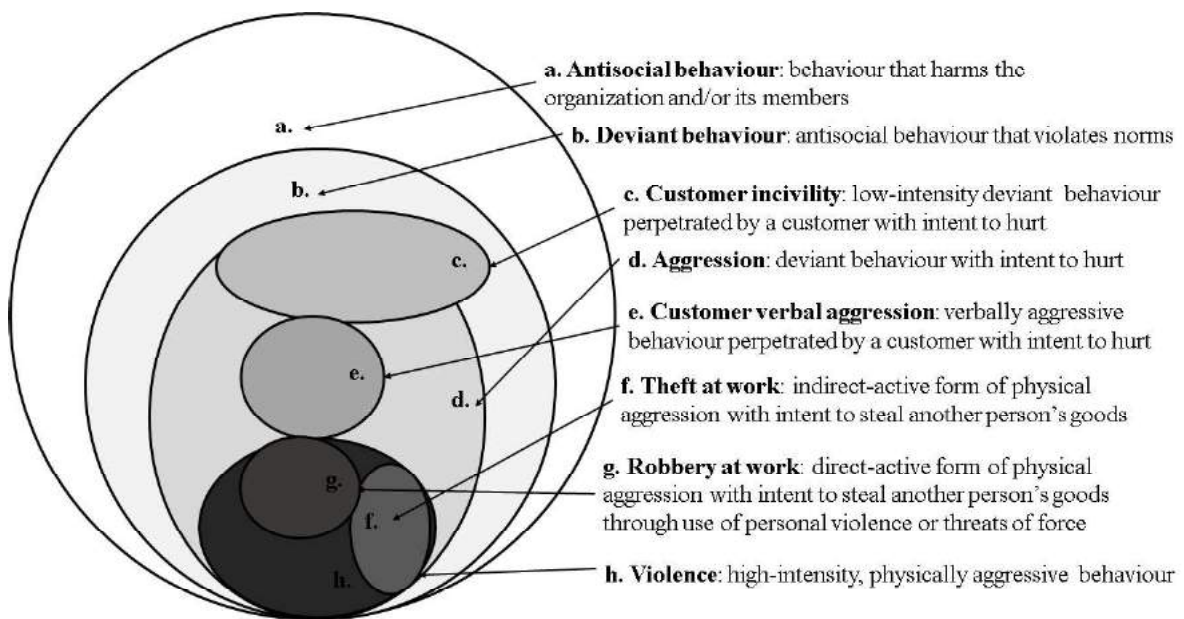


Figure 1. *Third-party workplace aggression expressions which are analyzed in the present dissertation. Picture adopted from Andersson & Pearson (1999, p. 456).*

Customer incivility (*c*) differs from other expressions of third-party workplace aggression because it is, like third-party aggression, a deviant behavior committed by an organizational outsider and an antisocial behavior which violates social norms of courtesy, but one that has a low intensity and an ambiguous intent to harm an employee (Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010). Unlike perpetrators of aggression, instigator of incivility

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can easily deny or conceal any intention, whether present, in ignorance of the impact, in misunderstanding by the target, or in excessive sensitivity of the target (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Moreover, the perpetrator may have the intent to harm the employee or he/she may not even be aware of such intention (ibidem). As a result, whereas some expressions of customer incivility (e.g., those without a clear intent to hurt, but in which the intent as perceived by the customer, the employee, and/or witnesses is not transparent) lie outside the realm of aggression, other forms of customer incivility, namely “those with intent to harm, but in which the intent perceived by the instigator, the target, and/or observers is ambiguous” (ibidem, p.1999), lie inside the realm of third-party workplace aggression. Additionally, in some cases, customer incivility may escalate to more serious behaviors, such as verbal aggression (ibidem). Customer verbal aggression (*e*) falls within third-party workplace aggression conceptualization because it is an antisocial and deviant behaviour perpetrated by a customer with clear intent to hurt a worker through verbal expressions, tone or manner (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Throughout the present dissertation we will use the general term *customer mistreatment* to refer to both customer incivility and customer verbal aggression. Moreover, verbal aggression in the form of threats of violence may occur in combination with physically aggressive behaviours, such as in the case of robberies. Both robberies and thefts at work are antisocial, deviant, aggressive behaviours which are perpetrated by persons outside the organization with the clear intent to steal another person’s movable goods and, then, hurt a worker. Differently from customer incivility and verbal aggression, these property crimes fall within the realm of third-party workplace violence (i.e., high-intense physically aggressive behaviour; *h*): a theft (*f*) represents an indirect-active form of physical aggression through assaults on objects valued by the employee, whereas a robbery (*g*) represents a direct-active expression of physical aggression in which there is a clear intent to harm a worker using personal violence or threats of force (Baron & Neuman,

1996). Thereby, even if both thefts and robberies are violent behaviours, the level of violence is more severe in a robbery than in a theft.

Despite being different by their nature, these types of third-party workplace aggression can be perceived as particularly stressful situations which may produce detrimental effects at the individual and the organizational level, impeding organizational performance and profitability. Indeed, previous studies have shown that robberies at work may be traumatizing experiences which may affect employees' psycho-physical well-being by stimulating the development of numerous mental health problems, such as long-term psychological distress (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998) and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Belleville, Marchand, St-Hilaire, Martin, & Silva, 2012). These symptoms may lead to poorer occupational functioning, absenteeism, difficulties to meet work-related demands and reduced overall job satisfaction (Belleville et al., 2012; Ciechanowski, Walker, Russo, Newman, & Katon, 2004; Giorgi, Perez, Montani, Courcy, & Arcangeli, 2015; Taylor, Wald, & Asmundson, 2007). Similarly, prior investigations have demonstrated that encounters with uncivil or verbally aggressive clients may undermine service providers' well-being, leading them to experience, for instance, negative mood (Wang et al., 2013), emotional dissonance and exhaustion (Goldber & Grandey, 2007). This may reduce the quality of the service provided (Rafaeli et al., 2012) and generate negative organizational outcomes, including withdrawal behaviors (Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012) and retaliatory intentions toward the source of misbehavior (Yeh, 2015). Despite of these findings, several research questions remain to be answered. For instance, which psychological characteristics may make some individuals more resilient than others to third-party workplace aggression? May words hurt individuals? Through which psychological mechanisms may a target of uncivility decide to treat the instigator uncivilly? Do different forms of aggression result in different individual- and organizational-level consequences? Which factors may influence

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victims' job satisfaction perceptions? More specifically, may an accumulation of uncivil acts have the power to affect an employee in the same way as verbally aggressive acts? Do the victims of robberies experience the same consequences of the victims of thefts? Do individuals from different countries react differently to aggressive acts occurring in the workplace?

The present dissertation seeks to answer these questions by investigating how experiencing different forms of customer mistreatment (i.e., incivility vs verbal aggression) and how being victims of diverse property crimes (i.e., robberies vs thefts) may differentially affect employees' mental health and work-related outcomes, with a focus on job satisfaction. Moreover, to detect cultural similarities and differences in terms of workplace aggression perceptions and victimisation, the current dissertation adopts a cross-cultural perspective, comparing results between two nations, namely Italy and Ireland. Additionally, the role of specific personal resources is investigated with the purpose of identifying possible protective factors against the development of negative outcomes following critical events. Investigating effects and dynamics underlying these phenomena is crucial to formulate preventive measures and tailored interventions for victims.

To address this subject, the present dissertation is divided into three parts.

Part A provides an overview of the existing literature on the topic and offers a rationale to conduct the following studies. It includes the first three chapters (see *Figure 1*).

Chapter 1 starts from providing a comprehensive detail of the workplace aggression phenomenon by offering a conceptualization of its different expressions. Then, by analyzing core business risk factors, professional groups at higher risk for third-party workplace aggression are identified. Drawing on the Job-Demands Resource Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) and the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), this chapter provides an overview of the

theoretical frameworks which represent the rationale for conducting the subsequent studies. In the light of such frameworks, this chapters contributes to understanding why and through which psychological mechanisms third-party workplace violence may lead to certain psychological states and outcomes. The theoretical background embraces previous evidence and Hofstede and colleagues' model (2010) to explain the presence of cultural differences in workplace aggression perceptions and victimization.

Chapter 2 provides a systematic review of research on customer incivility and verbal aggression within the service sector. Firstly, to establish a sense of structure to guide our findings, a theoretical framework is developed, drawing on the predominant theories used in previous studies. Then, antecedents of customer incivility and verbal aggression are investigated by identifying the characteristics of the employee, the customer, and the working environment. Employees' responses to uncivil or verbally aggressive acts are analyzed. Individual and organizational consequences following customer incivility and verbal aggression are identified, in addition to acknowledging the role of protective factors against these phenomena. Finally, current gaps, practical implications, and directions for future research are discussed.

Chapter 3 focuses on robberies and thefts at work. After reporting on statistics by sector concerning the occurrence of these property crimes, different drivers of robbers and thieves are identified as well as their preferential targets. Individual-level consequences following robberies at work are described, with special attention paid to post-traumatic stress symptoms. Pre- and peri-risk factors for the development of this symptomatology are identified, in addition to presenting work-related outcomes of and victims' reactions to robberies at work. Finally, potential protective factors are presented, with a specific focus on social support and trauma-related coping self-efficacy.

Table 1. *Overview of the theoretical chapters included in the current dissertation.*

| Chapter | Main aims | Type of mistreatment | Rationale for conducting |
|---------|--|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | To provide a brief introduction to workplace violence with a specific focus on job-related characteristics of professional groups at high risk of aggression by outsiders | Third-party workplace aggression | Studies 1, 2, 3, 4 |
| 2 | To provide a systematic review of research on customer incivility and verbal aggression within customer-service settings | Customer incivility Customer verbal aggression | Studies 1 and 2 |
| 3 | To provide a literature review of existing research on occupational risk factors related to theft- and robbery-related violence and its impact on employees' well-being and job-related outcomes | Robbery and theft-related aggression at work | Studies 3 and 4 |

The second part, namely **Section B**, includes four empirical studies: the first two studies are focused on customer incivility and verbal aggression, whereas the other two investigations are concentrated on robberies and/or thefts at work (see *Table 2*).

Chapter 4 consists of a cross-national study which aims to investigate Italian and Irish employees' emotional and cognitive reactions to customer incivility and verbal aggression by adopting a scenario-based experimental design. This two-country study analyses whether employees may react to stressful encounters with aggressive customers by developing customer-directed incivility intentions, and whether negative emotions and cognitive impairment may sequentially mediate this relationship. Moreover, this study analyses whether nationality may influence the relationship between negative emotions elicited by aggressive customers and employee-to-customer incivility. Findings are discussed for each nation and then a general discussion is provided. Theoretical contributions, practical implications and future research directions are discussed.

Chapter 5 involves a two-country study which aims to investigate whether customer incivility and verbal aggression may directly and indirectly (through burnout symptoms)

lead to job dissatisfaction and reduced service recovery performance. A further objective of this research is to identify which personal resources may help service providers maintain job satisfaction and service recovery performance, even in the presence of customer aggression. To this end, this study analyses whether customer orientation may directly influence service recovery performance and whether resilience may buffer the negative effects of customer mistreatment on such job-related outcome. Additionally, the role of affectivity traits in moderating the detrimental impact of customer mistreatment on job satisfaction is examined. Findings are discussed for each country and then an overall discussion is provided. This chapter concludes with practical implications for the management.

Chapter 6 includes a study which aims to investigate how experiencing robberies and thefts at work may affect Italian small business retailers' psychological well-being and job-related outcomes. This research analyzes whether victims of multiple violence (e.g., both thefts and robberies) may differ from their non-affected counterparts in terms of workload, job satisfaction, social support seeking, psycho-somatic symptoms, use of medical and mental health services. Furthermore, dissimilarities between victims of multiple violence and those of thefts only are examined with reference to post-traumatic stress symptomatology and trauma-related coping self-efficacy perceptions. A special focus is paid to job satisfaction perceptions by studying which factors may influence such perceptions among affected and non-affected workers. Findings, strengths and limitations as well as practical implications are discussed.

Chapter 7 comprises a study which explores similarities and differences between Italian and Irish small retailers' trauma-related coping self-efficacy perceptions and consequences in terms of post-traumatic stress symptomatology following robberies and/or thefts at work exposure. Moreover, this research analyzes whether victims of multiple violence (e.g., both thefts and robberies) may differ from their counterparts who are affected

by thefts only in post-traumatic stress symptoms and trauma-related coping self-efficacy. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the main findings of the study and dissimilarities between countries, in addition to acknowledging research strengths and limitations.

The third part, namely **Section C**, provides final considerations and practical suggestions within the last chapter.

Chapter 8 provides an overview of the key empirical findings and a general discussion which brings together the contributions of the whole dissertation by developing a theoretical model suitable for both customer mistreatment and robberies and/or thefts at work. Future research avenues, limitations and strengths are discussed. Specific practical implications for customer mistreatment and theft and/or robbery-related aggression are offered, in addition to outlining general guidelines for practice.

Table 2. Overview of the studies which are included in the present dissertation

| Chapter | Main aims | Theoretical framework and link to theoretical chapters | Type | Sample | Research design |
|---------|--|---|------------------|---|---|
| 4 | To analyse whether negative emotions and cognitive impairment may sequentially mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer-directed incivility. To identify differences between Italian and Irish workers' in customer-directed incivility intentions following negative emotions due to customer mistreatment | COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Hofstede's model (2001; <i>Chapter 1</i>), theoretical model developed in <i>Chapter 2</i> | CI CVA | 157 Italian and 259 Irish students working in customer-facing roles | Scenario-based experimental design Cross-national approach |
| 5 | To investigate whether CI and CVA may directly and indirectly (via burnout) reduce job satisfaction and SRP. To analyse whether CO may positively influence SRP and whether resilience may moderate the negative impact of CI and CVA on SRP. To examine whether PA and NA may buffer the impact of CI and CVA on satisfaction. | JD-R Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; <i>Chapter 1</i>), theoretical model from <i>Chapter 2</i> | CI CVA | 172 Irish and 157 Italian customer-contact working students | Cross-sectional design Cross-national approach |
| 6 | To study whether experiencing robberies and/or thefts at work may affect workers' mental health, social support seeking, workload, use of medical services and job satisfaction. To test whether workers who were exposed to both thefts and robberies are more vulnerable to PTSS and lower CSE than victims of thefts only. | COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; <i>Chapter 1</i>). Literature review (<i>Chapter 3</i>) | Robbery Theft | 492 Italian workers employed in jewellers and tobacco shops | Cross-sectional design |
| 7 | To identify similarities and differences between Italian and Irish workers' CSE perceptions and consequences in terms of self-reported PTSS following robbery and/or theft exposure | COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Hofstede's model (2001; <i>Chapter 1</i>), literature review (<i>Chapter 3</i>) | Robbery Theft | 492 Italian and 251 Irish small business retailers | Cross-sectional design Cross-national approach |

Note. CI= customer incivility; CVA=customer verbal aggression; SRP= service recovery performance; CO=customer orientation; PA=positive affectivity; NA=negative affectivity; PTSS= post-traumatic stress symptoms; CSE= trauma-related coping self-efficacy.

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PART A:

Theoretical and conceptual overview of customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robberies-related aggression

CHAPTER 1

Workplace aggression

1. Introduction

Workplace aggression is widely recognized as a major occupational health risk factor for many companies and employees around the world (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). According to the sixth European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2016), which represents the latest available statistics on aggression in European workplaces, employees reported to have been subjected to various forms of work-related aggression, including verbal abuse (twelve percent), threats (four percent), unwanted sexual attention (two percent), humiliating behaviour (six percent) in the month prior to completing the survey. Moreover, they reported to have been exposed to physical violence (two percent), harassment/bullying (five percent) and sexual harassment (fifteen percent), over the previous twelve months.

Generally, employees tend to experience more frequently psychological aggression than physical violence. Although the occurrence of aggressive behaviours remains relatively low, it is important to attain deeper knowledge of the professional groups that are at higher risk. Indeed, most national contributions provide evidence to support that workplace aggression may have detrimental consequences on employees' psycho-physical well-being (see *Tables 1* and *2*), including psychological distress, psycho-somatic symptoms, burnout, depression diseases, and post-traumatic stress symptomatology (Eurofound, 2015). These symptoms may result in negative job-related outcomes, including increased withdrawal intentions and behaviours, as well as reduced work engagement and performance (see *Table 3*; Eurofound, 2015). Such outcomes represent serious impediments to organizational

performance and profitability and may result in considerable costs for the whole organization. However, the actual costs related to workplace aggression cannot easily be measured since it is sometimes difficult to establish that aggression was one of the main reasons of employees' work inability, in addition to under-reporting of aggressive acts.

Table 1. *Impact of workplace aggression on workers' psychological well-being*

| Symptoms | Countries | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| | BE | BG | CY | DE | DK | EE | ES | FI | FR | IT | LT | MT | NL | NO | SE | SI | SK | UK | |
| Poor mental health | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Distress | X | X | X | | X | | | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | |
| Post-traumatic stress | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Depression | | | | X | X | | X | X | X | | X | X | | X | | | X | X | X |
| Anxiety | | X | | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | | | X | X | X | | | X |
| Suicidal thoughts | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | X |
| Low self-esteem | | | | X | | | X | | X | | X | | | | X | | | | |
| Sleeping problems | | X | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | X | X | | | X |
| Irritability | | X | | | | | | X | X | | X | | | | | | X | | |
| Burnout | X | | | | | | | | X | | X | | X | | | | | | X |

Note. X= presence; BE=Belgium; BG=Bulgaria; CY=Cyprus; DE=Germany; DK=Denmark; EE=Estonia; ES=Spain; FI=Finland; FR=France; IT=Italy; LT=Lithuania; MT=Malta; NL= Netherlands; NO=Norway; SE=Sweden; SI=Slovenia; SK=Slovakia; UK=United Kingdom. Data from Eurofound (2015, p.32).

According to a systematic review of cost-of-illness studies (Hassard, Teoh, Visockaite, Dewe, & Cox, 2018), the annual cost of psycho-social workplace aggression may range between 35.9 million and 114.64 million. For instance, a study on costs of workplace bullying estimated a loss of GBP 17.65 billion to the UK economy, considering only those costs related to absenteeism, turnover and productivity loss (ibidem).

Table 2. *Impact of workplace aggression on workers' psycho-physical health*

| Symptoms | Countries | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | AT | BE | BG | DK | EE | ES | FI | FR | IT | LT | SE | SI | UK |
| Headaches | | | X | | | X | | | | | X | X | |
| Chronic fatigue | | | | | | | | X | | | X | | |
| Digestion/stomach problems | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Cardiovascular diseases | | | | | | X | | X | | | | X | X |
| Musculoskeletal disorders, back pain | | | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Psychosomatic disorder in general | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | |
| Use of alcohol or drugs | X | X | | | | | | X | | | | | |

Note. X= presence; AT= Austria; BE=Belgium; BG=Bulgaria; DK=Denmark; EE=Estonia; ES=Spain; FI=Finland; FR=France; IT=Italy; LT=Lithuania; SE=Sweden; SI=Slovenia; UK=United Kingdom. Data from Eurofound (2015, p. 33).

Considerable differences in the reported magnitude emerged across countries (see *Figure 1*). This may stem from cultural dissimilarities in the tolerance towards undesired behaviours and in the under-reporting of aggressive acts. Moreover, it is difficult to compare results among countries since no single, uniform definition for workplace aggression exists (e.g., Hogh & Viitasara, 2005). Numerous reviewers have noticed that conceptual and operational definitions regarding workplace aggression have proliferated in the last decades (e.g., Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Kelloway, Mullen, & Francis, 2006; Neuman & Baron, 1998; Robinson & Greenberg, 1998; Schat & Kelloway, 2005). Since the focus of the current dissertation is on workplace aggression (i.e., customer incivility and verbal aggression, robberies and/or thefts exposure), it is needed to provide a theoretical definition of this phenomenon. Overall, different names have been used to define workplace aggression, such as workplace incivility (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999), bullying (e.g., Zapf & Einarsen, 2003), workplace harassment (e.g., Rospenda, Richman, Ehmke, & Zlatoper, 2005),

emotional abuse (e.g., Keashly & Harvey, 2005), antisocial work behaviour (e.g., O’Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000) and deviant behaviour (Robinson & Bennet, 1995).

Table 3. *Behaviours of workers who have been subjected to workplace aggression*

| Behaviours | Countries | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | BE | CY | DE | DK | EE | ES | FI | FR | IE | IT | MT | NL | NO | PL | SE | SK | UK |
| Absenteeism | X | | X | X | | | | X | X | | X | X | | | X | | X |
| Presenteeism | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Poor concentration | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Work accidents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fear of work | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Poor motivation | | X | X | | X | | | X | | | X | | | | | X | |
| Job dissatisfaction | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Turnover intentions | | | X | X | | | X | | X | | | X | X | X | X | | X |

Note. X= presence; BE=Belgium; CY=Cyprus; DE=Germany; DK=Denmark; EE=Estonia; ES=Spain; FI=Finland; FR=France; IE=Ireland; IT=Italy; MT=Malta; NL=Netherlands; NO= Norway; PL= Poland; SE=Sweden; SK=Slovakia; UK= United Kingdom. Data from Eurofound (2015, pp. 34-36).

Such definitions essentially allude to the same concept, namely, the presence of workers who are victims of mistreatment at the workplace or as a direct result of their job. Thus, aggression is a generic term that embraces different kinds of behaviours that “*humiliate, degrade or damage a person’s well-being, value or dignity*” (Milczarek, 2010; p. 9). One of the most widely cited and accepted definition of work-related aggression has been proposed by the European Commission and adapted from Wynne and colleagues (1997). According to such definition, workplace aggression refers to “*incidents where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health*” (p. 2).

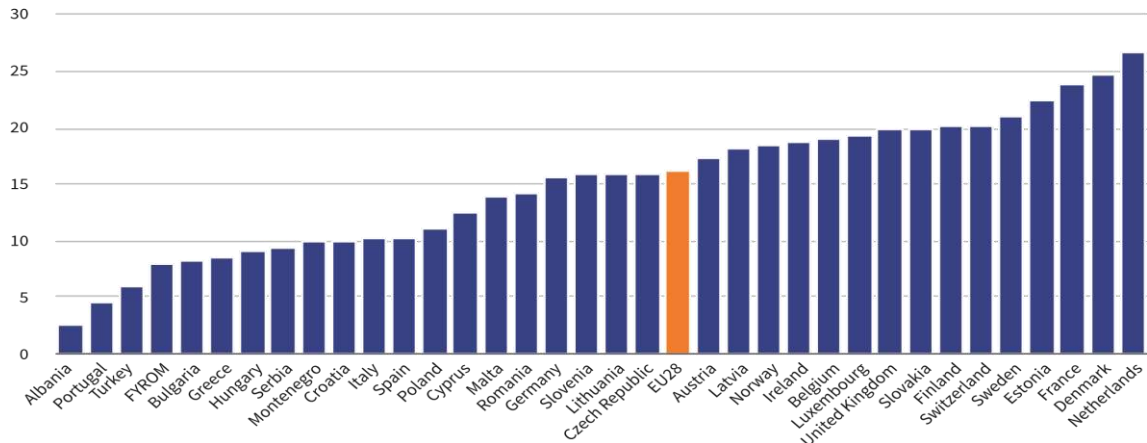


Figure 1. Proportion of workers reporting at least one adverse social behaviour, by country (%). Data from Eurofound (2016, p.69).

Moreover, the International Labour Organization (2003) has defined workplace aggression as “any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work” (p. 4). Workplace aggression “can be internal (within the enterprise, among managers, supervisors and workers); but there is also external aggression (between workers and intruders, as well as between staff, clients, patients, students, suppliers, and the general public)” (International Labour Organization, 2003, p. iii). Despite of the presence of several conceptual and operational definitions (Barling, Duprè, & Kelloway, 2009), workplace aggression refers to “behaviour by an individual or individuals within or outside an organization that is intended to physically or psychologically harm a worker or workers and occurs in a work-related context” (Schat & Kelloway, 2005, p. 191). This means that an aggressive action is both a deviant and an antisocial behaviour, but it is not necessarily a violent action. It is a deviant behaviour because this term refers to “voluntary behaviour that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Robinson & Bennet, 1995; p. 556). It is an antisocial behaviour because this definition includes “any behaviour that brings harm, or is intended to bring harm, to an organization, its employees, or stakeholders” (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997; p. vii). However, workplace aggression differs from workplace violence which is

related to “a distinct form of workplace aggression that comprises behaviours that are intended to cause physical harm” (e.g., physical assault and/or threat of assault; Barling et al., 2009; Schat & Kelloway, 2005, p. 191). Therefore, “all violent behaviours are aggressive whereas not all aggressive behaviours are violent” (Barling et al., 2009, p. 673). In fact, “the majority of incidents of violence are not lethal attacks but habitual incidents of fighting, verbal threats, and harassment” (Maes, Icenogle, Shearer, & Fowler, 2000; p. 14). Nevertheless, scholars have often acknowledged the potential for aggressive behaviour to escalate into a physical confrontation within workplace settings (Barling, 1996; Duprè & Barling, 2006; Glomb, 2002; Herschovis & Barling, 2006). Moreover, victims of workplace physical violence are likely to have previously experienced nonphysical aggressive acts (Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006).

Through this dissertation we use the term workplace aggression with reference to any deviant behaviour with intent to hurt which occurs in the course of, or as a direct result of, someone’s work. This is a comprehensive and sufficiently general definition to cover a wide range of physical and psychological expressions of workplace aggression, including incivility and theft and/or robbery-related aggression. In addition, such definition is inclusive since it encompasses aggressive behaviours perpetrated by persons inside (e.g., supervisors, colleagues) and outside (e.g., customers, clients, patients) the organization (e.g., Barling et al., 2009; Greenberg & Barling, 1999; LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002).

Despite the existence of different classifications concerning the types of aggression, it is challenging to make clear-cut distinctions between different kinds of workplace aggression as they frequently may occur in combination with one another. Thus, a degree of caution is required in drawing a distinguishing line between physical and psychological aggression. Historically, workplace aggression has been identified to embrace only physical assault or homicide which occurred in the course of, or as a direct result of, one’s own work

(Center for Mental Health Services, 1994; Hales, Seligman, Newman, & Timbrook, 1988). Some investigations have considered only physical attacks which turn in at least one day away from work to recover (e.g., Hales et al., 1988). Later, some scholars have extended the definition of workplace aggression to include expressions of aggression such as verbal abuse, threats, harassment, any assault or verbal attack which may generate psychological harm (Center for Mental Health Services, 1994, Pedersen & Thomas, 1992), theft (Bachman, 1994) and self-directed aggression (Center for Mental Health Services, 1994).

The definition of *workplace psychological aggression* is complex and elusive due to the difficulty of discriminating between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Psychological aggression manifests itself in many ways, ranging from incivility to sexual harassment.

Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity deviant, discourteous, and rude behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm an employee (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). According to definitions provided above, uncivility lies inside the realm of antisocial behaviour (i.e., mistreatment of people and of property in companies, with and without intention to harm; Robinson & Bennet, 1995) and can be defined as a deviant behaviour because it violates workplace norms of mutual respect and courtesy (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). In addition, psychological aggression is inclusive of some forms of incivility, namely “those with intent to harm, but in which the intent perceived by the instigator, the target, and/or observers is ambiguous” (ibidem, p.1999). In these cases, it can be considered as a milder form of verbal aggression because it violates social norms through gestures (e.g., snapping finger to get attention; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001) or verbal expressions (e.g., derogatory remarks; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013) which lack the anger that characterises verbal aggression (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). However, other expressions of incivility “lie outside the realm of aggression, including those with intent to harm, but in which the

intent is ambiguous, such as those that occur out of ignorance or oversight” (ibidem, p.1999; see *Figure 2*). Thereby, similarly to aggression, incivility represents a deviant behaviour, but it can be posited along psychological aggression blurring boundaries because of its low intensity and ambiguousness. Although a single uncivil act may have limited effects, the accumulation of repeated uncivil actions over time may have serious repercussions on victims (Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012). Moreover, incivility may escalate to more serious behaviours (i.e., spiral of incivility; Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

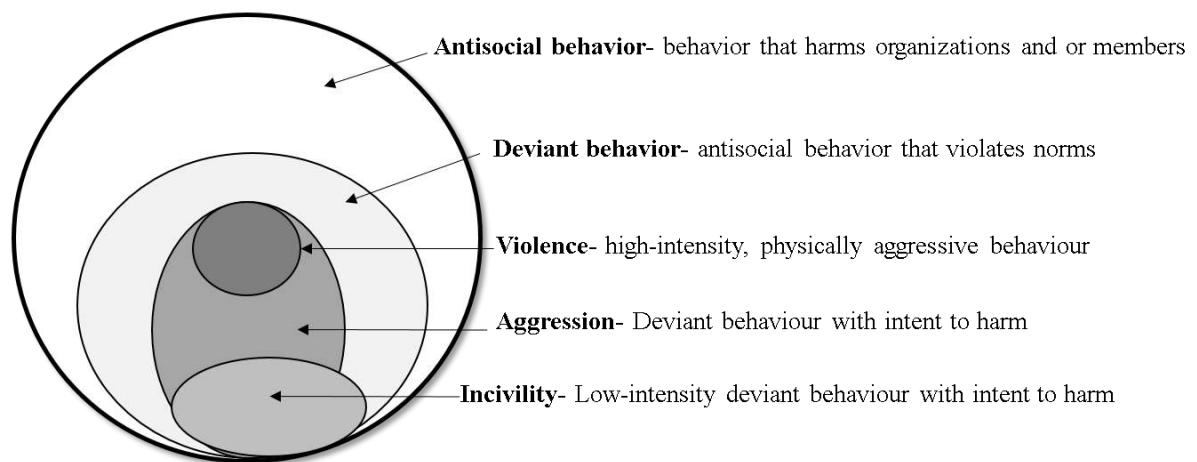


Figure 2. *Incivility and other forms of mistreatment in organizations.* Source: Andersson & Pearson (1999, p. 456).

Workplace verbal aggression refers to verbal communication of anger perpetrated by internal or external organizational members with clear intent to hurt a worker in violation of social norms of mutual respect (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Examples may include use of abusive or offensive language, tone or manner, such as swearing, making personal verbal attacks or insults, yelling, shouting and sarcasm (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey et al., 2004; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). More specifically, direct forms of verbal aggression may include both active (e.g., insults, yelling, shouting, acting in a condescending manner), and passive expressions (e.g., giving someone “the silent treatment”; Baron & Neuman, 1996). Similarly, indirect verbal abuse may take both active (such as spreading false rumours about the victim) and passive forms (including avoiding the transmission of information needed by the victim; ibidem). Verbal aggression may manifest itself through threats of

aggression. *Threats of workplace aggression* concerns the menace of death or the announcement of an intention to physically harm employees or to damage their property that give them the reasonable cause to believe they are at risk (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Mayhew & Chappell, 2002; Neuman & Baron, 1998). Instances include warning of intent to injure, physical intimidation, threat with a weapon.

Bullying/mobbing at work refers to an escalating process, in the course of which the victim feels constantly and repeatedly humiliated and emotionally attacked (e.g., weekly) through - direct or indirect - aggressive behaviours perpetrated by others at work over time (e.g., about six months). The instigator intends to remove the target from the organization, leading him/her to terminate his/her employment contract, extend his/her medical leave, or quit his/her job (Einarsen, Hoel, Cooper, & Zapf, 2003; European Commission, 2001; Sperry, 2009; Yavuz, 2007). Bullying/mobbing at work may take various forms, including person-related actions (e.g., humiliation, unjustified negative remarks or criticism, isolating a person from social contacts, spreading false information about the target), work-related acts (e.g., withholding important information, hampering access to work tools), or physically intimidating behaviours (e.g., threats of aggression; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). These actions tend to be frequent (i.e., daily or weekly) and persistent (i.e., for six months or more) resulting in the target's perception of inability to defend oneself and, therefore, generating serious repercussions for one's physical health (Einarsen, 2000). According to the source of actions, mobbing can be classified in: a) horizontal mobbing, which takes place between employees at the same level in the hierarchical organization of the company; b) vertical mobbing, where the tormentor is a superior who harasses a subordinate; c) bossing, where a superior harasses one in a single worker until it destroys the whole group; d) the subordinates harass their superior, attempting to demonstrate his/her incompetence. Although bullying and mobbing are often treated as synonyms, many researchers, such as

Leymann (1990), view them as two distinct phenomena. In contrast to mobbing, bullying originates from a colleague or a supervisor, but other members of the teamwork and the organization itself are not involved in the abusive behaviour. In brief, mobbing and bullying can be conceptualized among a continuum of abuse where bullying is a milder form of mobbing (Sperry, 2009).

Sexual harassment in the workplace has been defined as coercion of sexual cooperation by threat of job-related consequences (quid pro quo harassment) or as any unwanted, unreciprocated and unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour of sexual nature that is offensive to the person and violates his or her dignity, even in the absence of any job-related threats (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980; European Parliament, 2002). This may generate an intimidating, hostile, and offensive work environment, in addition to affecting victim's ability to perform one's own job (European Parliament, 2002). Sexual harassment may also be committed by customers. In this case, it may include behaviours such as sexist comments, unwanted sexual advances, coercive sexual activity or sexual assault (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Hoobler & Swanberg, 2006; Hughes & Tadic, 1998).

Workplace physical aggression concerns the use of physical force against another person to intentionally harm him or her physically in the course of, or as a result of, his/her job. Direct-active expressions of physical aggression are ones in which harm is delivered directly to the victim, such as physical attacks (e.g., beating, biting, pinching, pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, stabbing, shooting), robbery-related aggression or armed assaults; whilst indirect-active forms of physical aggression encompass the delivery of harm through assaults on individuals or objects valued by the victim, including thefts or destruction of property belonging to the victim (Baron & Neuman, 1996). Moreover, physical aggression may take the form of passive actions perpetrated with the intent to hurt a worker directly,

such as deliberately leaving a work area when target enters or decreasing targets' possibilities to express themselves (e.g., scheduling them at the end of a session so that they do not get their turn); or indirectly, such as failing to take the necessary measures to protect the target's welfare or safety (ibidem).

Furthermore, workplace aggression may be separated into three broad categories, according to the source of aggression and his/her relationship with the organization - or the worker - confronted (CAL/OSHA, 1998):

- **Type I:** *External/intrusive aggression:* incidents involving assault by unknown persons outside the organization who have no legitimate relationship to the organization and enter in the workplace with the clear intent to commit a criminal act, such as to steal cash or valuable property (e.g., robberies and thefts at work)
- **Type II:** *Client-initiated aggression:* events involving aggression inflicted by someone who is either the recipient of or the object of a service provided by the affected workplace or the victim (e.g., customer verbal aggression against staffs)
- **Type III:** *Internal aggression:* incidents where the perpetrator has an employment-related involvement in the work environment, namely the aggressor is an inter-organizational member - or an ex-employee - of the organization (e.g., staff-on-staff aggression, bullying).
- **Type IV:** events involving perpetrator(s) personally known to an employee (e.g., via friendship, familiar relationship, or intimate partnership; Howard, 1996).

Although recent research has demonstrated that experiencing aggression from different sources has different implications for victims (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007), existing studies addressing aggression in the workplace have been predominantly restricted to situations involving intra-organizational members. To fill this gap, the current dissertation concentrates on two external forms of third-party aggression, namely thefts and robberies at

work, and two client-initiated forms of third-party aggression, namely customer incivility and verbal aggression, in order to contribute to shedding light on the consequences stemmed from workplace aggression perpetrated by outsiders.

2. Professional groups at high risk of third-party aggression

Certain professional categories are at elevated risk for third-party aggressive attacks because of some peculiar characteristics of their work. Generally, occupations which are characterised by high levels of interaction with external clients tend to have the highest levels of incidence of workplace aggression. In some cases, aggression may be elicited by a perceived - or actual poor quality - of the service provided. Alternatively, it may be the product of dismissive and uncaring behaviours displayed by service providers: the insensitivity to customer's needs may be perceived as a personal offence, provoking employee-directed aggression (Carmi-Iluz, Peleg, Freud, & Shvartzman, 2005; Joa, & Morken, 2012; Yagil, 2008). In other cases, aggressive behaviour may be a more general attack on the organization itself: frontline workers represent the easiest target of blame for service errors and failures to meet customer expectations (e.g., long waiting periods; Albashtawy, 2013; Aydin, Kartal, Midik, & Buyukakkus, 2009; Bernaldo-De-Quirós, Piccini, Gómez, & Cerdeira, 2015; Carmi-Iluz et al., 2005; Hahn et al., 2010; Vezyridis, Samoutis, & Mavrikiou, 2015; Zampieron, Galeazzo, Turra, & Buja, 2010). Additionally, frontline workers employed in large-scale organizations have extensive face-to-face contact with anonymous members of the public. Within this context, it is difficult to predict the likelihood of meeting some individuals with a history of aggression or under drug effects, all factors which have been associated with the occurrence of serious incidents (Amore et al., 2008; El Ghaziri, Zhu, Lipscomb, & Smith, 2014; Renwick et al., 2016; Stewart & Bowers, 2013).

Workers within the health-care and medical sectors are likely to deal with people in distress and, consequently, they are at increased risk of victimization (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). Indeed, several factors may influence patients and/or visitors' behaviours, including: frustration and anger stemming from sickness and pain, older-age diseases (e.g., dementia), some mental health problems, intoxication with alcohol and substance abuse. The presence of these factors may increase individual tendency to commit verbally or physically aggressive acts (Baby, Swain, & Gale, 2016; Giesen, Mokkink, Hensing, van den Bosch, & Groel, 2008; Joa & Morken, 2012; Josefsson, Sonde, & Wahlin, 2007; Lin & Liu, 2005; Vezyridis et al., 2015). Although aggression in the health-care sector is so common to be frequently considered as part of the job, some health occupational groups seem to be at heightened risk of being exposed to verbal and physical violence from patients and visitors (i.e., patients' relatives or friends; Hahn et al., 2013; Park, Cho, & Hong, 2015). Among these, there are professionals employed in the following areas: emergency departments (e.g., Abou-ElWafa, El-Gilany, Abd-El-Raouf, Abd-Elmouty & El-Sayed Hassan El-Sayed 2015; Esmaeilpour, Salsali, & Ahmadi, 2011; Pich, Hazelton, Sundin, & Kable, 2010; Vezyridis et al., 2015), psychiatric facilities (e.g., Merez, Rymaszewska, Mościcka, Kiejna, & Jarosz-Nowak, 2006; Zeng et al., 2013), old-care age units (e.g., Danesh, Malvey, & Fottler, 2008; Boström, Squires, Mitchell, Sales, & Estabrooks, 2012; Rodwell, Demir, & Gulyas, 2015; Josefsson et al., 2007), outpatient units (e.g., Chen, Ku, & Yang, 2013). Other healthcare contexts associated with third-party aggression include: intensive care units (e.g., Ünsal Atan et al., 2013, Wykes & Whittington, 1998), services directed to people with disabilities (e.g., Brasić & Fogelman, 1999), social service agencies (e.g., Zelnick et al., 2013), detoxification facilities (e.g., Adamson, Vincent, & Cundiff, 2009) and remote health care areas (e.g., Opie, Lenthall, & Dollard, 2011). Moreover, contextual factors, such as inappropriate environmental conditions (e.g., noise, poor lighting, poor ventilation, inadequate facilities;

Lawoko, Soares, & Nolan, 2004; Yagil, 2008) and poor care activities organizations (e.g., long waiting time, enforcement of institutional bans, shortage of staff; Carmi-Iluz et al., 2005; Hahn et al., 2010) may increase the odds of third-party aggression. In addition, the reporting of aggressive incidents has been associated with perceptions of violence climate, poor quality of the teamwork and uncertainty concerning patients' therapies (ibidem). Additionally, other factors may substantially contribute to increasing the risk of third-party workplace aggression in the medical and healthcare sectors, including: inadequate training in the management of potentially violent individuals (e.g., setting boundaries/limits, de-escalation; Foley & Rauser, 2012; Kuehn, 2010), poor interpersonal skills (e.g., verbal interactions/communication with potentially violent people; AbuAlRub & Al Khawaldeh, 2014), individual attitudes towards violence (Chen et al., 2013) - combined with the tendency to under-report critical incidents (e.g., Crabbe, Alexander, Klein, Walker, & Sinclair 2002) - lack of understanding of the situation from visitors (e.g., hospitalization or discharge process due to cultural diversity, language problems), uncertainty regarding patients' treatments, patient's dissatisfaction with the treatment provided or disagreement with professional decisions (Estryn-Behar et al., 2008; Kisa, 2008; Lin & Liu, 2005).

According to Nowrouzi and Huynh' review of the top 50 cited articles on workplace aggression (2016), namely two-thirds of investigations have concentrated on the healthcare sector, whereas less attention has been given to other employment areas. However, working with mentally disturbed people is not limited to care professions, but encompasses also other professional categories, such as bar staff members who have often to work with drunk people, or prison officers who have to deal with potentially violent individuals (e.g., Beale, Cox, Clarke, Lawrence, & Leather, 1998).

Other occupational groups at heightened risk of victimization include workers who provide advice, education and training (e.g., teachers) or professionals who carry out

inspection, enforcement duties (e.g., ticket inspectors) or perform a social function, especially in military and paramilitary organizations (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Milczarek, 2010). In these contexts, the potential for aggression may result from the denial of an individual's request or from the need to reprimand someone for breaking the rules, or to order someone to do something against his/her will (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Menckel, Carter, & Viitasara, 2000). Organizational and psychological factors may represent important antecedents of third-party workplace aggression. Indeed, staff victimization has been predicted by the following factors: lack of job control and autonomy, high workload, role conflict, poor information flow, and poor cooperation among team members (Estryn-Behar et al., 2008; Vartia & Hyyti, 1999; Vitasara, Sverke, & Menckel, 2003).

Working in a small group or alone (e.g., small businesses, petrol stations, kiosks) may increase the vulnerability of workers, who are seen as "easy" targets by the aggressors, especially in the presence of other co-existing high-risk situations, such as working outside normal hours (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; NIOSH, 1996). Additionally, evidence suggests that the potential for aggression may be intensified at particular time of the day or the night, such as opening early in the morning and closing late at night (Geijer & Menckel, 2003) and on specific days of the week, particularly on bank holidays and on pay days. Lone workers cannot rely on the social support from colleagues or supervisors, an important factor which plays a protective role in the face of critical events (e.g., Han, Bonn, & Cho 2016; Leather, Lawrence, Beale, & Cox, 1998; Rodwell, Demir, & Flower, 2013; Rodwell et al., 2015). Furthermore, attention should be paid to the geographical location which may represent an important risk factor for robbery-related aggression (Geijer & Menckel, 2003; Mayhew, 2001), such as working in: isolated areas, crime black spots (e.g., petrol station staff; Leather et al., 1998), mobile workplaces (e.g., taxi drivers; Barish, 2001; LeBlanc,

Dupré, & Barling, 2006), big cities, places where groups of young males gather, or places where people under the influence of illicit drugs congregate. Workers who handle money and valuables (e.g., small business retailers, cashiers, bank officers, pharmacists, jewellers) or workers who guard valuable property and objects (e.g., private security guards) are preferential targets of robbers and thefts, especially when a business lacks adequate security measures and only a few workers are on the site (Chappell, & Di Martino, 2006; Milczarek, 2010).

Precariously employed workers (e.g., short-term contract, casual or subcontract arrangements) are especially vulnerable to third-party workplace aggression because of their marginal status which limit the influence they can exert over their job (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). Similarly, workers in export-processing enterprises - mainly composed of unskilled young people and women on precarious jobs - low-status call centre agents - speaking only from a prepared script – immigrant workers and apprentices are particularly vulnerable groups (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). In addition, working during periods of significant organizational changes (e.g., down-sizing) or in a workplace which is open to aggression (e.g., absence of zero-tolerance policy against workplace aggression) may constitute further secondary risk factors (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Fedá, Gerberich, Ryan, Nachreiner, & McGovern, 2010).

Since recent studies have shown that experiencing aggression from different sources may have different implication for victims (e.g., Chang & Lyons, 2012), more research on client-initiated and external workplace aggression is needed to shed more light on this phenomenon. To date, numerous studies have examined verbal aggression from outsiders within the healthcare context (e.g., Abou-ElWafa et al., 2015; Fujishiro, Gee, & De Castro, 2011; Itzhaki et al., 2015; Spector, Coulter, Stockwell, & Matz, 2007), while less attention has been given to other service areas (e.g., Goussinsky, 2011; Rafaeli et al., 2012).

Additionally, most studies on workplace incivility has focused on intra-organizational members (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008) rather than outsiders. Nevertheless, employees working in contact with the public are more likely to observe and receive mistreatment, especially incivility and verbal aggression, from outsiders than from intra-organizational members (Hoobler & Swanberg, 2006; Molino et al., 2016; Scarone & Cedillo, 2007; Sliter et al., 2012). In the service sector, issues of customer aggression are compounded by a philosophy held by many service organizations that “*The customer is always right*”, which essentially puts the emphasis on the customer satisfaction and creates an unequal power distribution between customers and employees (Rafaeli et al., 2012). As a result, customer facing occupations may be demanding because employees are required to cope with customer-related social stressors which may lead them to experience emotional dissonance (Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015) and psychological resource drain (Hobfoll, 1989). Thereby, our investigations on customer mistreatment will concentrate on customer-contact workers who are potentially in danger of experiencing third-party incivility and verbal aggression. Furthermore, to date, research on theft and/or robbery-related aggression has predominantly focused on bank contexts (e.g., Armour & Hansen, 2015; Christiansen & Hansen, 2015; Hansen & Elkit, 2013), whereas only a few studies have concentrated on workers employed in small businesses (Belleville, Marchand, St-Hilaire, Martin, & Silva 2012; Casteel, Peek-Asa, Greenland, Chu, & Kraus, 2008; Söndergaard, 2008) that represent an understudied and difficult-to-track population. To fill this gap, our investigations on thefts and/or robberies at work will concentrate on small businesses retailers because they represent a high-risk occupational group. Indeed, their job is characterized by a combination of risk factors, including dealing with customers, working alone or in a small team, handling valuables, selling items of values and - in some cases - working in night shifts.

3. The theoretical frameworks

In this section, widely accepted comprehensive stress and motivational theories, which form the bases of the subsequent studies, will be outlined. The Job-Demands Resource Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) and the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) represent useful frameworks for understanding the processes underlying the development of individual and organizational consequences in response to workplace aggression. Both frameworks assume a buffering role of resources in the association between threats/demands and negative consequences, considering the saliency of resources under stressful situations. Moreover, common ground between the two frameworks can be identified in the assumption that individual differences can be attributable to dissimilarities in the availability of resources.

3.1. Job Demands-Resource Model

In line with the Job Demands- Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), working conditions potentially can be distinguished into two broad categories, namely job demands and job resources. This model represents an all-encompassing theoretical framework that may be applied to several occupational environments, regardless of the specific job demands and resources involved.

3.1.1. Job demands and job resources

Job demands refer to working conditions that potentially elicit strain by exceeding the worker's adaptive capacity. More specifically, job demands concern "those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312).

Job demands are not negative in themselves, but they may turn into job stressors when meeting those demands requires considerable effort from which the worker cannot adequately recover (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Thereby, customer incivility and verbal aggression as well as thefts and/or robberies at work may represent specific job demands.

Conversely, job resources represent “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or: functional in achieving work goals; reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Job resources are not only necessary to manage job demands, but they are also important in their own right. Resources may be located at the following levels: the organization (e.g., job security, career opportunity), interpersonal and social relationships (e.g., supervisor and colleague support), the organization of work (e.g. role clarity, participation in decision making), and the task (e.g., job control, skill variety).

3.1.2. The health impairment and the motivational processes

An important assumption in the JD-R model is that job demands, and resources are responsible for two psychologically distinct, albeit related, processes which are crucial in the development of job strain and motivation, and eventually affect important organizational outcomes (see *Figure 3*; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The first process can be called “energetical” - or health impairment process - in which job demands are predictors of job strain. Having chronic job demands (e.g., experiencing multiple robberies or thefts) may drain employees’ mental, emotional and physical resources and may lead to the depletion of energy (i.e., a state of exhaustion) and therefore, in the long run, to the development of health problems (Demerouti et al., 2001; Doi, 2005; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Hakanen, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2005; Hakanen, Schaufeli, &

Ahola, 2008; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This, in turn, may lead to negative consequences for the organization, such as absenteeism (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003), impaired in-role performance (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004), withdrawal from work (Bakker et al., 2004), reduced work engagement and lower organizational commitment (Bakker et al., 2003). Indeed, the two processes may also intertwine, since job resources and job demands are unlikely to exist totally independently (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, see Figure 3).

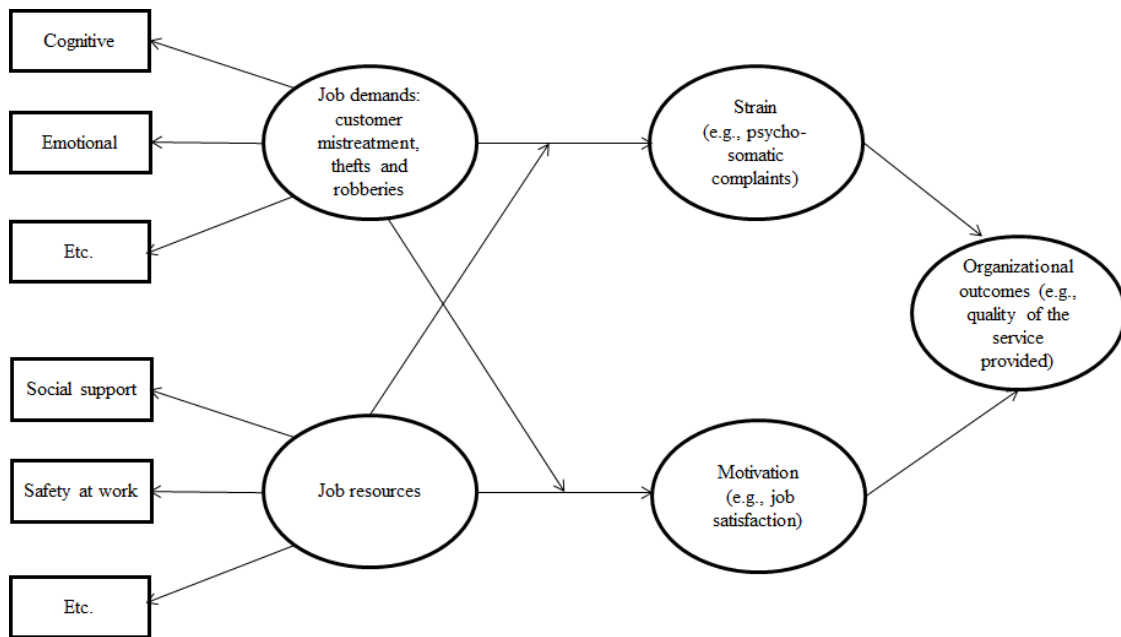


Figure 3. Figure adapted from Bakker & Demerouti (2007, p. 313).

The second process can be called “motivational”, where job resources foster work engagement and concomitant organizational commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The presence of job resources leads employees to experience positive job outcomes, such as dedication and extra-role performance (Bakker et al., 2004). Conversely, the absence of job resources may have a detrimental impact on motivation and lead employees to experience a cynical attitude towards work, resulting in diminished extra-role performance, reduced job satisfaction and decreased organizational commitment. Indeed, job resources may play either an intrinsic motivational role because they encourage workers’ growth, learning and

development, or they may play an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. In the former case, in line with the self-determination theory (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991), any workplace which meets the basic human needs of autonomy (e.g., job control), competence (e.g., positive feedback from supervisors) and relatedness (e.g., social support from colleagues) fosters well-being and promotes organizational commitment. This means that within a resource-high context, employees are likely to maintain a good functioning at work, even when they are confronted with aggressive acts, because they can rely on job resources, such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, which help them in the aftermath of the event.

3.1.3. The buffering role played by job and personal resources

The JD-R model also states that, depending on the peculiar job features which prevail within a certain organization, several different job resources can play an important role because they can buffer the effects of numerous different job demands on employees' well-being, including burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007, 2009), especially in the face of high job demands. The reasons why job resources can act as moderators is distinct for different resources. The buffering variable can diminish the inclination of organizational assets to produce specific stressors, can modify the perceptions and cognitions elicited by such stressors, or can moderate the responses that follow the appraisal process or decrease the health-damaging costs of such responses (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992, p. 622). Job resources become particularly salient and have more motivating potential under highly stressful conditions. A more recent formulation of the JD-R model suggests that personal resources, which are considered as psychological features concerning individual perceptions of being able to control and influence environments (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003; Schaufeli & Taris,

2014), may have similar motivational potential to that of job resources and may be positively associated with favourable job outcomes (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, 2009). Evidence has been provided to support the moderating role of personal resources (Van Yperen & Snijders, 2000; Mäkikangas, & Kinnunen, 2003) in the relationship between work characteristics and outcomes at the individual and the organizational levels. Indeed, the presence of personal resources may enable workers to maintain work engagement and organizational commitment, even in face of highly stressful situations (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). When employees have sufficient personal resources available, job demands become challenges, whereas job demands are perceived as stressors when such resources are lacking. This suggests that employees who hold high personal resources levels may be less vulnerable to develop psychological detrimental effects following workplace aggression since they are more likely to appraise such critical incidents (e.g., negative customer encounters, thefts and/or robberies) as less threatening or to perceive themselves to be able to effectively manage the negative consequences following such events. Additionally, it is worth noting that job strain and motivation can both be outcomes as well as antecedents of job demands and resources, so that increased stress levels and impaired motivation may convert to less positive working conditions over time. On the one hand, burned-out or disengaged employees may feel less capable to perform their tasks and, as a result, they may be more likely to engage in behaviours which may provoke negative others' reactions. For instance, an accumulation of rude acts may cause a gradual depletion of energies and, thus, lead employees to elicit further customer incivility because of one's own reduced quality of the service provided. On the other hand, employees' perceptions regarding their workplace may influence job demands and resources. For instance, stressed workers may perceive unmanageable job demands and complain more frequently about their workload, thereby feeding a negative work climate (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000).

In line with the JD-R model, workplace aggression from outsiders represents a job demand. When frequent encounters with verbally or physically aggressive clients occur within resource-poor workplaces, an adverse accumulative process may be triggered, which is likely to lead to constant overtaxing and, in the long term, to the depletion of energy (e.g., Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). This may result in detrimental health outcomes, such as burnout, impaired psycho-physical health, and negative job outcomes, such as reduced performance and lower job satisfaction. However, when workers perceive that they possess sufficient job (e.g., support from members within the organization) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy) to meet emotionally demanding interactions, they can find opportunities for recovery at work and, therefore, they can maintain a good functioning and satisfactory performance levels, even in the presence of high job demands. This suggests that the availability of job resources can lead workers to keep the effort investment required by high job demands within tolerable limits, enabling them to cope with demanding situations.

3.1.4. Applicability of the JD-R model to the current dissertation

The JD-R model represents one of the leading job stress models which has been largely applied to comprehend, interpret, and make predictions about the effects of job demands on employees' well-being and job outcomes. Drawing on the assumption that all job characteristics can be modeled using two diverse categories (i.e., job demands and job resources), this model can be suitable for all work settings and can be tailored to the peculiar occupations under analysis. Thus, by assuming that potentially any demand and any resource may influence employee well-being, this framework is much more flexible than previous models, such as Karasek's (1979) Job Demands Control model and Siegrist's (1996) Effort Reward Balance model. Indeed, although certain specific job demands and resources can be

common to almost every occupational group, other job demands and resources are unique. For instance, despite small business retailers have a great job autonomy (especially if they are owners), they work frequently alone, and they cannot rely on a supportive social network provided by colleagues and supervisors. Generally, working in direct contact with the public imply specific job demands, such as customer mistreatment and robbery-related aggression which are not common among other occupational groups, such as construction workers.

The application of the dual pathways to employee well-being proposed by the JD-R model to the research on workplace aggression may provide us with a way of thinking about how experiencing third-party aggression may influence individual well-being and motivation. Evidence has been provided to support that the presence of these two independent processes can predict important organizational outcomes (e.g., see Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). According to the energy-driven process, in *Chapter 4*, we expect that customer mistreatment will be an important predictor of negative emotions and cognitive impairment, which, in turn, will be associated with customer-directed incivility. Similarly, in *Chapters 6* and *7*, we assume that theft and or robbery-related aggression will be an important predictor of health problems in the form of psycho-somatic health complaints and post-traumatic stress symptoms, which, in turn, will be related to job dissatisfaction. In line with the motivation-driven process (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), in *Chapter 6*, we expect that trauma-related coping self-efficacy will predict job satisfaction, being an important job resource, which fulfils the individual need of competence.

Additionally, the assumption that job resources are particularly salient when an employee is confronted with challenging job demands can provide the justification for analysing the negative impact of job demands within the context of existing job resources which can help respond to job-related strain. Accordingly, in *Chapters 6* and *7*, we assume

the relevance of trauma-related coping self-efficacy perceptions in protecting victims of thefts and/or robberies from the development of post-traumatic stress symptomatology.

In addition, consistent with the motivation process, some individual differences can positively influence workers' motivation. Accordingly, in *Chapter 5*, we expect that individuals high in customer-orientation will report higher job satisfaction levels. Overall, the heuristic utilization of the JD-R model in combination with its comprehensive goal and flexibility offers a useful framework for the current dissertation.

3.2. The Conservation of Resources Model

The Conservation of Resources Model (COR, Hobfoll, 1989) is both an integrated model of stress based on resources and a motivational theory. It was initially formulated to analyse stress due to major stressful life events, traumatic events and chronic and/or acute illnesses (Benight et al., 1999; Hobfoll, Tracy, & Galea, 2006). Later it has been successfully applied to organizational contexts, becoming one of the most commonly cited theories in the organizational behaviour literature, especially in the research on burnout (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Neveu, 2007) and in the positive psychology field, particularly utilized in reference to high demand circumstances (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Sun & Pan, 2008).

3.2.1. The value of resources and the primacy of resource loss in the stress process

In line with the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals strive to gain, retain, foster and protect valued resources, which help them manage challenges they confront with, “to protect against resource loss, recover from losses and gain resources” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Resources are important to the individual either in themselves because of their inherent qualities or in an indirect sense because they are functional in relation to the acquisition of other resources. For example, positive customer encounters, such as compliments, successful sales transactions and interactions with polite clients, might be functional to foster personal

identity characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy), cognitive (e.g., general cognitive abilities, self-control) and social resources (e.g., social support; Hobfoll, 2002). Hobfoll (1989) has identified 74 resources which have been classified into four main categories:

1. *conditions*, states of being that have value because of their general desirability (e.g., job status, safety at work);
2. *energies*, resources that are valued in that they lead to acquiring other resources (e.g., efforts, knowledge);
3. *objects*, physical items of value due to their utility, rarity or symbolism (e.g., tools for work, material goods);
4. *personal characteristics*, key skills and personal traits that help with stress resistance (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience).

Although resources are a result of individual perceptions, such perceptions tend to be reality-based and socially common within a culture, so that appraisals regarding major stressors do not differ significantly for different people in similar circumstances. For instance, since workers may expect to be appreciated for the service provided, they may feel their resources threatened by rude or verbally aggressive customers and perceive that their resource investment in terms of time and energies does not generate the desired rewarding relations to compensate for the effort required.

Resources are interconnected through a protective influence Resources build upon each other, and aggregate in resource caravans. This means that the presence of one resource strongly predicts the existence of other resources, whereas the absence of one resource increases the odds that other resources are also absent. For example, previous studies found that resilience play an important role in helping people manage aggression and bullying at work, by promoting personal strengths (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007). Additionally, it seems to be a continuity of resources over the course of the lifespan:

“consistent with a caravan concept, the retinue of resources tends to travel together over time”, unless some internal or external forces are addressed to modify such set of resources (Hobfoll, 2001; p. 350).

Employees experience stress when (1) they feel threatened by a risk of resource loss (i.e., stress can be caused by anticipated or feared stress), (2) deal with actual resource loss (i.e., stress can be caused by actual external stressful events, such as material losses associated with thefts and robberies), or (3) receive insufficient return of supplementary resources following significant resource investment (i.e., stress can be self-caused through unsuccessful resources investments; Hobfoll, 2001). The initial threat to resources is perceived as a stressor; however, the prolonged loss or threat to resources, especially after a considerable resource investment (e.g., in terms of time, energy, lost opportunities), can produce burnout (Hobfoll, 2001). This state of exhaustion may result in the withdrawal of resources that, in turn, may cause negative organizational outcomes, such as poor job performance and turnover (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Job demands and resources can differentially lead to burnout and its dimensions (Leiter, 1993) due to the dissimilar perception of loss and gain. Thus, “resource loss is disproportionately more salient than resource gain” and “given equal amounts of loss and gain, loss will have significantly greater impact” (i.e., primacy of resource loss principle, see *Table 4*; Hobfoll, 2001; p. 343).

Evidence has shown that resource loss is a stronger predictor of psychological outcomes compared with resource gains (e.g., Wells, Hobfoll, & Lavin, 1999; Hobfoll et al., 2003; Zwiebach, Rhodes, & Roemer, 2010). Indeed, individuals are more concerned about avoiding loss than they are with accomplishing gains. Indeed, loss-related events are accompanied by negative emotions and long-term stress implications which can seriously affect psychological functioning (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Consequently, job demands - which may result in resource loss because of the need for ongoing resource investment - are more

likely to predict burnout than resources are to protect against it (Hobfoll & Freddy, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). This means that work-related losses have more harmful effects when compared with similarly valued gains (e.g., a reduction in pay will be more detrimental than the same gain in pay would have been beneficial). For instance, being targeted of a robbery at work represents a threat to one's working conditions which may result in a decrease in perceptions concerning one's own personal safety and security in the workplace.

Furthermore, in the context of resource loss, or threat of loss, the presence of resources becomes particularly salient and employment-related resource gains are taken on greater meaning. Additionally, within this context, the harnessing of other types of resources becomes important (Hobfoll, 1989) to meet the demands associated with the recovery, restore lost resources or reduce the negative impact.

Moreover, in under-resourced work settings, the availability of personal resources (e.g., optimism, control coping) plays a crucial role in protecting against the development of negative outcomes (e.g., emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment) which is far more relevant than that played in resource-endowed work environments (Riulli & Savicki, 2003). Thus, obtaining or possessing higher resource levels generally leads to a lower chance of negative consequences on well-being. This also implies that individuals with higher levels of actual resources are less vulnerable to factors that threatened resources. They are better positioned for resource gains because they have more resources available to invest and they are more likely to benefit in resource levels from behaviours that potentially increase the available levels of resources. Conversely, individuals with fewer resources are more likely to experience resource losses and they are less capable of achieving resource gains. Hence, those who lack resources are less likely to engage in resource investment because they either possess appropriate resources to invest or have to conserve resources in a reservoir which they could use for emergency contingencies.

Table 4. *Basic tenets of Conservation of Resource Theory.*

| Name | Description | Relevance for my investigations |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Principle 1 Primacy of loss principle</i> | Resource loss is more salient than resource gain. | Both customer incivility and theft and/or robbery exposure are perceived as stressful experiences which threaten employees' working condition. |
| <i>Principle 2 Resource investment principle</i> | People must invest resources to gain resources and protect themselves from losing resources or to recover from resource loss. | Victims engage in compensatory resource replacement (e.g., social support seeking). |
| <i>Principle 3 Gain paradox principle</i> | Resource gain becomes particularly salient in the context of resource loss. Under high resource loss circumstances, resource gains become more important and they gain in value. | The hardiness of personal (e.g., trauma-related coping self-efficacy) and job resources (e.g., organizational support) becomes particularly salient when employees are exposed to workplace aggression. |
| <i>Principle 4 Desperation principle</i> | When individual resources are exhausted, people enter a defensive mode to preserve the self which may become defensive, aggressive, and irrational. | Employees who are subjected to customer aggression may react by engaging in customer-directed incivility. |
| <i>Resource caravans</i> | Resources do not exist individually but travel in caravans. | Employees who are high in resilience are more likely to possess other personal resources and, then, to deal well with misbehaving customers. |
| <i>Resource caravan passageways</i> | Individual resources exist in ecological conditions that either enforce or block resource creation and sustenance | Workers who are employed in workplaces which offer them organizational support are more likely to face successfully critical events. |
| <i>Corollary 1</i> | Individuals with more resources are better positioned for resource gains and less vulnerable to resource loss. Individuals with fewer resources are more likely to experience resource losses and less capable of resource gain. | Victims with higher personal resources are less vulnerable to the development of negative consequences. |
| <i>Corollary 2 Resource loss cycles</i> | Since resource loss is more powerful than resource gain and stress occurs when resources are lost, at each iteration of the stress spirals people have fewer resources to compensate resource loss, so that initial resource losses lead to future resource losses. | Both customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robbery exposure lead to distress which, in turn, increase the risk of developing further negative outcomes. |
| <i>Corollary 3 Resource gain spirals</i> | Since resource gain is both of less magnitude and slower than resource loss, resource gain spirals tend to be weak and develop slowly. Initial resource gains lead to future resource gains. | Individuals who are able to adopt functional coping strategies in the aftermath of the event mobilize new resources. |

Note. Adapted from Halbesleben et al. (2014, p. 1337) and Hobfoll et al. (2018, p. 106).

3.2.2. Investment and conservation of resources strategies

In order to avoid the stressful experience of resource loss, individuals are motivated to cultivate, accumulate and acquire new resources, even when stress is not occurring, by adopting a proactive behaviour to ensure the strength of their resources in preparation of times of trial (i.e., motivational aspect of COR theory). Individuals actively invest their resources with the purpose of earning a “return of investment”, “develop resource surpluses” which generate positive feelings of eustress and “offset the possibility of future loss”, which would otherwise provoke the negative feelings of stress (i.e., resource investment principle; Hobfoll, 1989, p. 517). However, any resource investment has two possible outcomes: if successful, it may turn in a net gain of resources which leads to a state of positive well-being (e.g., eustress, a sense of control), whereas if unsuccessful, it may convert in a net loss of resources which leads to stress, since a lack of resource gain following a resource investment is perceived as a loss. When individuals cannot entirely prevent resource loss, they strive to reduce the loss by scaling back on resource investment or by investing in behaviours that are more strategic in their use of resources. More specifically, when threat of resource loss - or actual loss - occurs, individuals mobilize resources to offset, limit or reverse - impending or actualized - losses by applying resource conservation strategies, whereby they use resource available to them to adapt as successful as possible. Individuals can adopt one of the following conservation strategies:

- a. *resource replacement*, where the loss of one resource is met with attempts to re-establish such resource (Hobfoll, 2002; Huffman, Culbertson, Wayment, & Irving, 2015). For instance, a negative encounter with a verbally aggressive customer might threaten service provider’s self-esteem. As a result, the worker might engage in successive encounters with other customers in an attempt to re-establish one’s own self-esteem (e.g., Shao & Skarlicki, 2014).

- b.** *resource substitution* can be interpreted as a coping mechanism in which a lost resource can be replaced by a second resource of generally equivalent value from another resource domain, in order to offset such net loss. For instance, it is likely that the loss derived from robbery exposure (e.g., due to lost security, loss of valuable items, or diminished health due to stress or continued injuries) can be partially compensated, at least, by a greater investment in other work-related resources (e.g., relationships with co-worker), in order to secure additional resources (i.e., social support). However, any resource replacement is also stressful in itself as it implies the danger that resources expended in coping exceed the resultant benefits. Indeed, a lack of resource gain following a resource investment is perceived as a further loss (Grasso et al., 2012; Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, for example, whether workers exhaust energies trying to deal with the consequences of the robbery but are unsuccessful in doing so, they may further worsen their losses. In this case, victims are at higher risk of developing long-term post-traumatic stress and negative job-related outcomes.
- c.** *re-appraisal*, individuals can re-appraise their resources by shifting the focus of their attention and by concentrating on what they might gain (i.e., reinterpreting the threat as a challenge). Alternatively, they can re-appraise their resources by re-evaluating the value of resources that are threatened and by de-evaluating the lost resources - whether potentially or actually lost. Both mechanisms can be considered as types of prevention or coping strategies, since the re-appraisal enables the individual to prevent or diminish his/her perceptions of loss. Victims of workplace aggression can develop greater resilience in the aftermath of their difficult experiences when they feel able to exert control over their situation (van Heugten, 2013).

On the one hand, successful adaptation through the adoption of effective conservation strategies can lead individuals to mobilize and acquire new resources (i.e., resource gains)

which, in turn, restore their resource pools and offset the conditions that create acute and chronic resource loss. On the other hand, unsuccessful adaptation, which occurs when individuals cannot offset the net loss through resource replacement – for instance, by employing other resources to compensate for the loss - may produce secondary resource losses. This may generate a progressive resource pool deterioration, increasing the likelihood for negative psychological outcomes, such as post-traumatic complaints (Benotsch et al., 2000; Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, & Johnson, 2006; Ironson et al., 1997). Moreover, when workers become aware of losing resources, they might become unwilling to continue depleting those resources and need to “recover” from such experiences (Hobfoll & Freddy, 1993). Thus, employees would likely to act to reduce the quality of service provided (Hobfoll, 2001) or adopt other negative job-related behaviours, such as withdrawal behaviours and intentions, as well as dysfunctional behaviours (Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001). Moreover, exhausted employees will “enter in a defensive mode to preserve the self that is often aggressive and may become irrational” (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018; p. 106). For instance, customer incivility might motivate customer-directed incivility and lead workers to be rude as a mechanism to end a negative service encounter (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Such irrational behaviour may be a defensive (i.e., to preserve resources) or exploratory (i.e., to explore alternative adaptation strategies that on their own or from experience do not appear adaptive). “In this way, a defensive withdrawal allows time to regroup or to wait for help, or it allows the stressor to pass” (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018; p. 106).

3.2.3. Resource loss and gain spirals

Since resource loss is stressful and individuals rely on resources to compensate losses, initial resource losses are associated with fewer resources to rally in defence. This

may beget future resource losses in an increasing fashion. Such process is called “loss spiral” because at each lower level of resources people become even more vulnerable to ongoing loss and unable to protect the remaining resources and offset additional losses (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Conversely, gain spirals are stimulated by initial resource gains which increase the likelihood of future resource gains. Indeed, the availability of greater resources protects against the risk of loss and enables the taking of risk needed to invest resources to acquire further resources (e.g., De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno, & Witte, 2012). However, “the accumulation of resource losses is more rapid and powerful than the accumulation of equivalent resource gains over time” (Hobfoll, 2012). In fact, resource loss spreads quickly and intensively, unless there is a long history of gain and strong social support to counterweight the “hit” taken when major resource loss occurs. On the other hand, gain cycles are slower moving and they are more fragile in comparison with loss cycles, which are robust (Hobfoll, Stevens, & Zalta, 2015). Then, gain cycles are easily interrupted and require a lot of energy to create rich passageways. Caravan passageways represent “the environmental conditions that support, foster, enrich, and protect the resources of individuals, families and organizations, or that detract, undermine, obstruct, or impoverish people’s resource reservoirs” (Hobfoll, 2012; p. 229). Workers employed in resource poor environments are more subjected to accumulate resource losses. Conversely, workers employed in resource rich workplaces are likely to accumulate resource gains because these settings provide them with possibilities to access resources as well as safety and protection against resource loss, facilitating and accelerating the resource development process.

3.2.4. Applicability of the COR theory to the current dissertation

Over the past twenty-five years, COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has gradually taken a place as one of the most applied conceptualizations of the stress process (Hobfoll & Lilly,

1993; Neveu, 2007) in the organizational behavior (Halbesleben et al., 2014), along with the pioneering Lazarus and Folkman's theory (1984). COR theory acknowledges subject appraisals as the best proximal indicators in the stress process of greater importance especially when the nature of the stressor is ambiguous (e.g., customer incivility), but it differs markedly from Cognitive Appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) in underlying objective elements of threat and loss. In doing so, Hobfoll (1989) emphasizes the relevance of culture in shaping ranking of resources' importance as well as the presence of common and socially scripted appraisals among individuals who share the same culture. Since it recognizes the influence of environmental factors and it can be applied across different settings and cultures, COR theory is particularly suitable for the cross-national studies which are included in the current dissertation. Thus, this theoretical framework may also contribute to explaining cultural differences in reactions to aggressive acts, suggesting that individuals who belong to the same culture are more likely to share similar perceptions than those who come from different countries.

Moreover, COR theory received empirical support across a wide range of investigations (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). For instance, numerous empirical studies have shown that resource losses at work may lead employees to develop strain in the form of psychological consequences (De Vente, Olf, Van Amsterdam, Kamphuis, & Emmelkamp, 2003; Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2006). Additionally, the review presented in *Chapter 2* reveals that COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has been the most commonly theory cited among studies on customer mistreatment analyzing employees' psychological and job consequences. Indeed, this theory provides a comprehensive approach which allows a complex set of predictions regarding stress and strain processes as well as individuals' concomitant responses in organizational stressful situations. Thereby, this model can help inform research on workplace aggression in different ways. For instance,

according to *Principle 1*, individuals who are exposed to a threat to - or an actual loss of - resources experience stress and resource depletion because of the resource loss saliency. This principle is used in *Chapters 6* and *7*, where we will analyse thefts and robberies at work as potentially traumatic events which may represent a threat to employees' working conditions and lead to the loss of perceived security in the workplace.

In addition, COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is also a theory of motivation, suggesting that individuals are motivated to protect their current resources, and acquire new resources to avoid resource losses because loss can have such a profound detrimental impact on well-being. This motivational facet can provide a guidance to understand organizational behaviors among victims of workplace aggression. For example, in accordance with *Principle 2*, victims engage in compensatory resource replacement to recover from resource loss. Accordingly, in *Chapter 6*, we expect that employees who are affected from thefts and/or robberies will be more likely to seek social support in comparison with their non-affected counterparts. Additionally, in line with *Corollary 4*, when individuals lose resources, they act to preserve their remaining resources. Thereby, in *Chapter 4*, we assume that individuals who report more negative emotions and greater cognitive impairment following negative customer-encounters will be more likely to engage in customer-directed incivility to end the encounter and to conserve their own resources.

COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) represents also a useful framework to interpret individual differences in the light of dissimilarities in stress-aiding personal resource levels. According to *Corollaries 1, 2* and *3*, individuals who possess more resources are better-equipped to deal with stressors and more capable of gain in comparison with their counterparts who are, conversely, more vulnerable to resource loss spirals. Accordingly, in *Chapter 5*, we expect that service providers who have higher levels of resilience, customer orientation and positive affectivity will be less vulnerable to develop job dissatisfaction and

reduced service recovery performance following customer incivility and verbal aggression. Whereas, in *Chapter 7*, we expect that victims of thefts and robberies who possess lower trauma-related coping self-efficacy perceptions will report higher post-traumatic stress symptoms. Additionally, although the fourth principle of the COR theory represents the least researched principle, we believe that it could help us explain why service providers might respond to customer mistreatment by developing customer-directed incivility intentions (see *Chapter 4*). Indeed, such apparently irrational behaviour might be an adaptation strategy to protect employees' limited resources. Additionally, COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has been successfully applied to individual and collective traumatic contexts, receiving broad empirical support. For instance, numerous studies on disasters showed that resource loss was the best or among the best predictors of psychological distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms (e.g., Arata, Picou, Johnson, & McNally, 2000; Benight et al., 1999; Freedy, Saladin, Kilpatrick, Resnick & Saunders, 1994; Sattler et al., 2002), confirming the primacy of resource loss principle. Thus, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) contributes to the trauma psychology field by providing explanations about how resources assist in coping with traumatic experiences, and the reasons why some victims are more vulnerable to post-traumatic stress than others (i.e. resource loss and gain spirals). Thereby, this framework provides guidance for our studies on robbery and/or theft-related aggression by promoting the exploration of both protective and risk factors for the development of traumatic stress (see *Chapters 6 and 7*).

Whereas JD-R model indicates *what kind* of job and personal characteristics lead to *what kind* of psychological states and outcomes, COR theory helps us to in-depth understand *why* and through which *psychological mechanisms* this happens.

4. Cultural differences in workplace aggression perceptions and victimization

Culture is a learned system of interpretations and meanings of significant events, transmitted through generations and stemming from common experiences, which fosters a distinct shared identity among its group members who share motives, values and beliefs (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Culture has been defined as “*software of the mind*” because it provides its members with shared cognitive structures which serve as a filter for interpretation of attitudes and behaviours, distinguishing the members of one group from another (Hofstede, 1980a, b, 1991). This process of social construction of reality affects also how individuals perceive aggressive acts (Bowles & Gelfand, 2010), and results in perceptions which are socially constructed along cultural lines.

Cross-cultural variability has been revealed regarding aggression in both meaning and enactment (e.g., Forbes, Zhang, Doroszewicz, & Haas, 2009). Although some culturally shared dimensions of aggression have been identified, including damage to self-worth and direct versus indirect aggression, the meaning attributed to each dimension and the behaviours which define each dimension vary substantially across cultures (Severance et al., 2013). For instance, Americans associate direct aggression with physical harm, whilst Israelis consider highly direct behaviours as primarily verbal in nature (Severance et al., 2013). In cultures (e.g., Middle East and East Asia), where the public image is of the utmost importance, social exclusion and covert (e.g., ignoring and gossiping) assaults on one’s worth are extremely offensive, whereas these behaviours are considered as very minor in terms of damage to self-worth in the United States, according to an individualistic focus (Severance et al., 2013). Central American workers tend to emphasize the physical component of workplace bullying more than their Southern European counterparts who, conversely, tend to define it mainly as a psychological phenomenon (Escartín, Zapf, Arrieta,

& Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2011). This suggests that cultural variation in construing the meaning of specific behaviours makes it harder to reveal which behaviours are viewed as abusive. Indeed, the acceptability of workplace aggression may substantially vary across societies (e.g., Power et al., 2013). For instance, workplace bullying is perceived as an acceptable and effective way of completing tasks in some cultures which celebrate the appearance of toughness (Neuman & Baron, 1997), whereas other cultures consider it as unacceptable (Salin, 2003).

To date, only a few studies have investigated workplace aggression using a cross-cultural perspective, with previous research on this topic predominantly focusing on bullying at work. Although some similarities in etiology, coping and manifestations of workplace bullying have been revealed across countries, previous studies have found marked differences related to the source of bullying and to the use of formal interventions addressed at victims (D’Cruz, Paull, Omari, & Guneri-Cangarli, 2016). Prior investigations have found that protagonist-related factors and organizational characteristics were common triggers for workplace bullying, reflecting predatory or dispute-related misbehaviour (*ibidem*). Victims tended to face bullying through intrapsychic responses, informal coping or quitting (*ibidem*). Additionally, they reported common outcomes, such as a negative emotional impact (e.g., anger, depression, loneliness), harmful physical consequences (e.g., insomnia, weight gain/loss, digestive problems), decrements in morale and motivation (*ibidem*). Overall, supervisors were identified as the main source of bullying across all countries, although Australian identified also peers as common aggressors (*ibidem*). In addition, formal avenues of support (e.g., professional psychological and psychiatric help) were available and used differently from India and Turkey (*ibidem*). Furthermore, despite of the presence of some shared risk factors for workplace aggression (e.g., childhood physical abuse), ethnic minorities tended to under-utilize formal services (El-Khoury et al., 2004; Rodríguez,

Valentine, Son, & Muhammad, 2009; Sabri et al., 2013), being poorly aware of all resources available in their workplace (Sabri et al., 2015).

Previous research suggests that cultural beliefs and values may influence how employees perceive and make attributions regarding the sources of - or reasons for - aggressiveness (Leigh & Choi, 2007). Thus, since people with different cultural values perceive and interpret actions differently, they may have different reactions to various aspects of their work setting (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007), such as aggressive acts (Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001; Rippon, 2005; Salin, 2003; Tepper, 2007). To date, only a few studies have investigated how employees may react to customer mistreatment by adopting a cross-cultural perspective. For example, Shao & Skarlicki (2014) found that North American employees were more likely to engage in service employees' sabotage directed to the customer who mistreated them when compared to East Asian employees. These latter were more likely to indirectly and passively react to customer mistreatment by withdrawing organizational citizenship behaviours toward customers in general. The authors explained these differences in terms of individual-level individualism and collectivism, which represents one of the six cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede and colleagues (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In line with Hofstede's research (Hofstede, 1991, 2003; Hofstede et al., 2010), since within-countries dissimilarities in values are lower than the corresponding inter-country differences, nations can be considered as meaningful units of cultural analysis (Schwartz, 2006; Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010). More specifically, national cultures diverge and can be described according to the following cultural dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010):

- *Power distance* dimension is described as the degree to which the less powerful members of a culture accept and expect unequal power distribution. While individuals in high power distance nations are respectful of the subordinate-superior

relationship, those in low power distance countries demand justification for inequalities.

- *Individualism vs collectivism* dimension refers to the extent of interdependence a society uphold among its members. Individualism can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit framework in society in which people's self-image is defined in terms of "I". Conversely, collectivism represents a preference for a tightly-knit social framework where people's self-image is defined in terms of "We" and individuals belong to a cohesive "in group".
- *Masculinity vs femininity* dimension regards the motivational drivers which underlie individual behaviours. While masculine societies are success-oriented and competitive, feminine cultures are consensus-oriented quality of life driven.
- *Uncertainty Avoidance* dimension concerns the degree to which people feel uncomfortable with ambiguous situations. High uncertainty avoidance societies tend to be intolerant of unexpected behaviours which are viewed as a threat. Conversely, low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more accepting of unknown, not feeling threatened by changes.
- *Long vs short term orientation* dimension describes how every society maintains some links with its own past while facing the challenges of the present and the future. In long-term orientation cultures, individuals are more concerned with long-term fulfilment, whereas in short-term orientation societies, individuals are more concerned with immediate gratification.
- *Indulgence vs restraint* dimension is defined as the degree to which individuals try to control their impulses and desires. Cultures showing high indulgence allow relatively free gratification of basic human drives related to enjoying life.

Conversely, societies with high restraint tend to suppress gratification of needs and regulate it by means of strict social norms.

Dissimilarities in these cultural dimensions may explain different perceptions of aggressive acts and reactions to workplace aggression across countries. For example, individualism-collectivism dimension seems to influence the manifestation of aggressive behaviours, such that collectivistic cultures tend to show lower anger expressions toward supervisors (Noesjirwan, 1978) and indirect aggressiveness (Galín & Avraham, 2009) than high-individualistic societies. Moreover, power distance dimension can influence the extent to which employees are willing to accept bullying by supervisors (e.g., Loh et al., 2010).and response with interpersonal deviance in presence of poorly consultative organizational vertical systems (Menard, Brunet, Savoie, Van Daele, & Flament, 2011).

Hofstede's (1980a, b) work has been criticized for: a) reducing culture to an overly simplistic and static five or six bi-polar dimension conceptualization (Signorini, Wiesemes, & Murphy, 2009) which might be politically influenced (Jones, 2007); b) assuming domestic population is a homogenous whole (i.e., national uniformity) and that response difference analysis might identify national culture (McSweeney, 2002); c) generalizing cultural central tendencies from data which were limited to a single multinational corporation (i.e., IBM) and collected through a cross-sectional research that relied merely on self-reported questionnaires (McSweeney, 2002; Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006); d) inferring national cultural dimensions by averaging of situationally specific situations and by ignoring within-country cultural heterogeneity (McSweeney, 2002; Kirkman et al., 2006); e) failing to capture the malleability of cultural values over time and over specific situations (see McSweeney, 2002; Kirkman et al., 2006); f) relying on outdated data (McSweeney, 2002; Orr & Hauser, 2008). In response to such criticisms, Hofstede (2002) acknowledged that nations are not the most suitable way of assessing cultural features, but frequently the only

available for carrying out cross-national studies. In addition, he rejected the accusation of relying on outdated data by arguing that such data have centuries-old roots and by underling that contemporary replications supported their validity. In fact, spite of such limitations, Hofstede's framework has "become a dominant influence and set a fruitful agenda" (Chapman, 1996; p.1360), being one of the most widely and successfully utilized pieces of cross-cultural research among scholars and practitioners. Indeed, it is considered as a useful and relevant guide to understand the difference in culture between countries and to select culturally different nations in order to increment variance (Furrer, Liu, & Sudharshan, 2000; Søndergaard, 1994). Moreover, it has been preferred to other dimensional approaches to cultural theory since it is the "most robust and useful" (Gannon, 2004; p. 9) theory because of its clarity, parsimony, and resonance with the management, in addition to relying on rigorous design with systematic data collection (Jones, 2007). Furthermore, according to Smith and Bond's conclusion, large-scale investigations published since Hofstede's (1980a, b) work "have sustained and amplified [Hofstede's] conclusions rather than contradicted them" (see Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996). This is in line with the results from Kirkman and colleagues' review (2006) and from Søndergaard's bibliographical analysis (1994) showing that most country dissimilarities predicted by Hofstede's model were supported and confirming the accuracy of its four dimensions as well as the relevance of its values for cross-cultural research. Therefore, we decided to adopt Hofstede's framework to better understand possible differences between Italy and Ireland in relation to third-party workplace aggression.

According to Hofstede's findings (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010), both Italy and Ireland are very high on individualism and masculinity, whereas they are low on power distance. This indicates that individuals amongst both cultures are self-orientated and focused on their self-interest and autonomy; furthermore, they are competitive and highly

success-driven. Both countries are characterised by shared beliefs that inequalities among people should be minimized and a participative communication and decision-making should be promoted within organizations (Hofstede, 2003; Hofstede et al., 2010). Despite these similarities, Italy and Ireland diverge strongly on long-term orientation, indulgence and uncertainty avoidance dimensions. With reference to long term orientation dimension, Irish culture is classified as normative, whereas Italian culture is defined as pragmatic. This means that Irish people tend to be normative in their thinking and show great respect for their traditions, whilst Italian people can adapt traditions easily to changed circumstances. Moreover, Irish individuals show a relatively small tendency to save for the future and a focus on reaching quick results, while Italians exhibit a strong propensity to save for the future and perseverance in accomplishing results. Regarding indulgence dimension, Irish society is defined as indulgent, while Italian culture is classified as restrained. This results in a stronger propensity by Irish people to satisfy ones' own desires in terms of enjoying life and in a more optimistic attitude in comparison with Italians. Conversely, Italians tend to control the gratification of their desires and show a more cynic and pessimist attitude. However, the greatest differences between Irish and Italians are linked to the uncertainty avoidance dimension (see *Figure 4*). This might affect employees' perceptions of unexpected and potentially threatening events at work (i.e. robberies and thefts, customer mistreatment) and, thus, their vulnerability and reactions to negative consequences. Italians show a very low level of tolerance of ambiguity and they seem to be inclined to control everything to avoid or to eliminate the unexpected (Hofstede et al., 2010). Conversely, Irish tend to readily accept changes and have as few rules as possible, being low in this index (Hofstede et al., 2010).

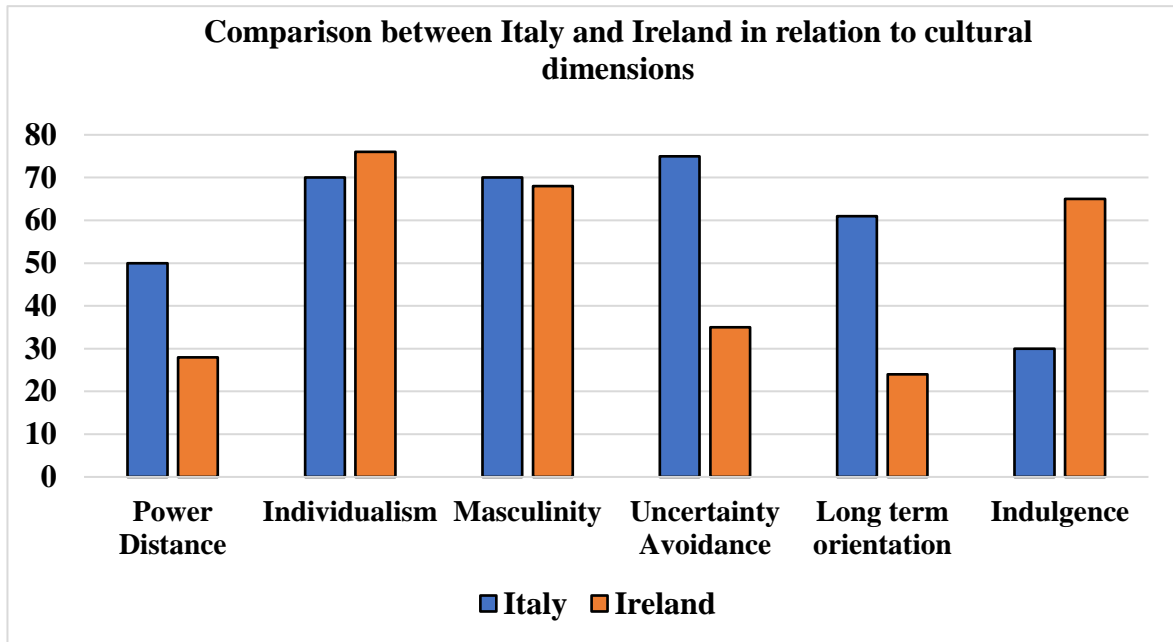


Figure 4. Comparison between Italy and Ireland in relation to Hofstede's cultural dimension. Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>

To date, to the best of our knowledge, no study on third-party workplace aggression - in the forms of customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robbery exposure - has analysed differences between countries having different uncertainty avoidance levels. To fill this gap, our investigations (see *Chapters 4, 5 and 7*) will aim to investigate differences and similarities between Italian and Irish employees in terms of perceptions of - and reactions to - customer mistreatment and theft and robbery-related aggression.

5. References

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CHAPTER 2

The impact of customer incivility and verbal aggression on service providers: A systematic review

In *Chapter 1*, we identified verbal aggression as one of the most commonly reported form of psychological workplace aggression. Moreover, we revealed that customer-contact employees are at high risk of experiencing third-party workplace aggression, especially in the forms of customer incivility and verbal aggression (see *Chapter 1*). Nevertheless, existing research addressing incivility and verbal aggression has been predominantly restricted to situations involving intra-organizational members, whereas, to the best of our knowledge, no literature review analysing this topic within the service sector was available. As a result, we decided to conduct a systematic review of studies investigating customer incivility and verbal aggression across different service sectors. Whereas some expressions of customer incivility (e.g., those without a clear intent to hurt, but in which the intent as perceived by the customer, the employee, and/or witnesses is not transparent) lie outside the realm of aggression, other forms of customer incivility (e.g., those intent to hurt, but in which the intent as perceived by the customer, the employee, and/or witnesses is ambiguous) lie inside the realm of third-party workplace aggression. This Chapter will be the theoretical framework of two of our studies (see *Chapters 4 and 5*) and has been published on *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*¹.

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Review

The impact of customer incivility and verbal aggression on service providers: A systematic review

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Abstract.

BACKGROUND: Working in direct contact with the public may involve psycho-social hazards for employees who are frequently exposed to rude or verbally aggressive customers. Negative encounters may undermine employees' well-being and job performance, impairing the quality of the service provided with tangible costs for organizations.

OBJECTIVE: The paper provides a systematic review of research on customer incivility and verbal aggression in service settings using the following framework 1) antecedents of customer misbehavior as reflected in worker perceptions, customer reasons and environmental factors; 2) maladaptive and adaptive coping strategies used by service providers in response to customer incivility and verbal aggression; 3) effects of customer incivility and verbal aggression on service providers' well-being and work-related outcomes; and 4) practical implications for the management. We present a model of the relationships between these four areas.

METHODS: A systematic review was conducted using PsychINFO and Scopus.

RESULTS: Fifty three papers (20 pertaining to customer incivility and 33 pertaining to customer verbal aggression) were included.

CONCLUSION: Both customer incivility and verbal aggression may impair employees' well-being and job outcomes. Current gaps, practical implications, and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Customer incivility, verbal aggression, occupational well-being, systematic review

1. Introduction

In most western countries, the service sector has become the main employment area characterized by direct contact with customers and accounts for more than 63% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP; a measure of the value of the total produc-

tion in a country in a given year) in 2017, ranging from around the 80% across developed nations (e.g. France, UK) to over 31% across developing countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia), and it is expanding at a quicker rate than the agriculture and the manufacturing sectors [1]. Employees working in jobs with higher labor requirements (e.g. with high levels of public contact or in call center) [2], observe and receive more mistreatment from outsiders than from intra-organizational members [3–6]. In this sector, customers represent an important source of incivility

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and aggression [3, 6–11]. Issues of incivility and aggression are compounded by a philosophy held by many service organizations that “The customer is always right”, which essentially creates an unequal power distribution between customers and employees [12]. As a result, a large proportion of workers have to cope with customer-related social stressors in the form of incivility and/or verbal aggression that cause severe strains, such as emotional dissonance [13], psychological resource drain [see 14] and emotional distress [9, 15–17]. These symptoms may lead to impaired overall and service recovery performance [18–21], diminished extra-role customer service [19], customer-directed service sabotage [22], employee-to-customer incivility [11], lower quality of the service provided [12], increased tardiness and absenteeism [6], and occupational disability [23], which represent serious impediments to organizational performance and profitability [24, 25] and entail organizational costs. Thus, it has been estimated that in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and the EU-15 the overall cost associated with work-related stress ranges from 221.13 million to 187 billion dollars [26], a finding which establishes a strong business case for the prevention of such risks. Whereas the 30% of these expenses are related to care and medical costs, the remaining 70% are attributable to productivity related losses [26]. Furthermore, aside from common organizational stressors, each category of service providers has to manage workplace-specific risk factors. For instance, it was found that call center agents were asked to express lower negative emotions aroused by uncivil or verbally aggressive customers, in comparison with employees working in similar service jobs, to comply with emotional display roles [27]. As a result, they were more likely to experience emotional dissonance and, in turn, affective discomfort [4], decreased sense of well-being, job-induced tension, emotional exhaustion [28], depressive symptoms and work-related musculoskeletal disorders [29]. Moreover, work-related musculoskeletal discomfort was found to prevent most of the affected call center agents from performing their daily work [30], whereas higher levels of perceived work stress, which were more likely to be experienced among inbound agents than their outbound counterparts, were related to more frequent common mental disorders, impaired work abilities [31] and greater absenteeism [32].

Customer incivility refers to low-intensity deviant, discourteous, and rude behavior, perpetrated by

someone in a client role, with ambiguous intent to harm an employee, in violation of workplace norms of mutual respect and courtesy [9, 33]. An accumulation of perceived uncivil acts may negatively affect employees' well-being and job performance over time [6]. Since incivility incidents are often experienced on a daily basis, it is possible to conceptualize them as an interpersonal daily hassle in the workplace [9]. What makes customer incivility somewhat unique compared to other types of mistreatment is the ambiguous intent to harm and the high occurrence of encounters with customers who are often anonymous and unlikely to interact again in the future with that employee [34]. Uncivil customer behaviors may include both verbal expressions, such as derogatory remarks [9, 35, 36], and disrespectful gestures to express impatience or get attention (e.g. snapping fingers) [37].

Customer verbal aggression refers to verbal abuse perpetrated by someone in a client role, with clear intent to hurt a worker deliberately through verbal expressions, violating the social norms of mutual respect. Examples may include offensive words, tone, or manner, such as swearing, making personal verbal attacks or insults, yelling, shouting, and sarcasm [38–40]. Both direct and vicarious exposure to customer-initiated aggression may affect organizational attachment (i.e. reduced affective commitment and increased turnover intentions) and individual well-being (i.e. diminished physical and mental health) [41]. Incivility can be considered as a milder form of verbal aggression because it violates social norms through gestures or verbal expressions which lack the anger that characterizes verbal aggression [3, 37, 42, 44].

Existing research addressing incivility and verbal aggression in the workplace has been predominantly restricted to situations involving intra-organizational members; we concentrated on customers' incivility and verbal aggression because the customer may be an important source of misbehavior. Although previous literature has focused on customer-related social stressors (CSSs) in terms of four broad dimensions (i.e. disproportionate expectations, ambiguous customer expectations, customer verbal aggression, and disliked customers) [13, 38], we decided to concentrate on customer verbal aggression because it may have more severe consequences in terms of individual and organizational well-being than other CSSs (e.g. disliked customers).

To the best of our knowledge, this review is the first to consider both customer incivility and verbal

aggression across different service settings. Our purpose is to identify the characteristics of the worker, the customer, and the environment which may contribute to incivility and/or verbal aggression. Secondly, we aim to examine coping strategies employees may use to deal with incivility and verbal aggression from customers, and the impact of customer mistreatment on employees' well-being and work-related outcomes. Investigating the consequences of customer incivility and verbal aggression is crucial in order to formulate preventive measures, tailored treatment and interventions for victims.

2. Method

This analysis included quantitative and qualitative research focused on customer-facing employees working in different service industries who experienced face-to-face or phone-mediated incivility or verbal aggression perpetrated by customers. We included papers that were focused on the impact of incivility and verbal aggression on workers' well-being and/or job outcomes, considered the reasons why customers chose to be rude or aggressive towards workers, or examined customer-directed sabotage following customer misbehavior. We excluded papers focusing on customer sexual harassment and physical aggression because they are considered as different forms of aggression potentially involving physical contact; online misbehaviors because they are not face-to-face or voice-to-voice behaviors (i.e. no direct contact with a customer); workplace violence in general and unethical behaviors because they do not analyze the specific facets related to customer incivility or verbal aggression. We also excluded research carried out within healthcare contexts, where the perpetrators were patients or patients' relatives, because of the distinguishing aspects related to the helping relationship between the healthcare professional and the client. We excluded studies that focused on intra-organizational actors or employees without examining customer incivility or aggression.

The databases of PsychINFO and Scopus were searched for peer-reviewed articles written in English. In the last decade job creation has mainly been in the service sector and it is expected that this area will employ more than a third of the global workforce by 2019 [45]. Thus, we focused on articles published from January 2006 to October 2017, to provide an up-to-date review of the current state of scientific knowledge on this topic. The search terms

used for customer verbal aggression were: verbal violence or verbal harassment or verbal aggression or mistreatment AND call center or client or consumer or customer. The search key-words used for customer incivility were: incivility or rudeness or bad manners or discourtesy or disrespect or intrusiveness or misbehavior or unkindness AND call center or client or consumer or customer. We used both UK and USA spelling in our search terms to be comprehensive. Therefore, service providers included employees who had contact with customers on a regular basis employed in call centers, banks, post offices or working within the retail, catering, tourism or transport sectors or offering professional advisory services.

In total 457 papers were identified and 345 articles were screened, after 112 duplications were removed. Of these, 260 were either not on topic, were theses or were not in English. 75 articles were assessed for eligibility: 20 were retained for customer incivility (see Table 1 and Fig. 1), and 33 met the defined inclusion criteria for customer verbal aggression (see Table 2 and Fig. 2). The term dysfunctional customer behavior was used in one paper to indicate customer misbehavior ascribable to incivility; while four studies analyzed customer misbehavior referring to both uncivil and verbally aggressive behaviors; other terms used to denote customer verbal aggression were customer interpersonal injustice and interpersonal conflict. We decided to include these articles. To minimize selection bias, a data extraction sheet was developed and pilot-tested on ten randomly selected included studies and then refined accordingly. Data extraction was completed independently by the first and second authors. Disagreements about keeping or dropping papers were resolved by discussion between the two review authors; if no agreement could be reached, it was planned a third author would decide.

3. Results

The final set of papers comprised 53 articles of which 20 pertained to customer incivility (see Table 1), and 33 pertained to customer verbal aggression (see Table 2). Various factors related to incivility or verbal aggression were identified: 25 papers analyzed service provider characteristics, 4 articles identified perpetrator characteristics, 2 studies were focused on aspects related to the physical service environment. 14 papers analyzed coping strategies adopted by service providers to deal with customer

Table 1
Customer incivility studies

| Authors | Country | Sample | Design | CI* scale | Analyzed variables | Main results |
|---|---------|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1. Temmel & Sonntag (2017) [see 122] | Germany | Service providers (n = 113) | Daily diary design | Customer incivility [140] | CI, co-worker incivility, affective and cognitive sharing modes, negative affect | CI was indirectly associated with next-morning negative affect via negative affect at the end of the working day and at bedtime. Conversations at home and at work in a cognitive sharing mode buffered the relationship between CI and employees negative affect |
| 2. Torres, van Niekerk & Orłowski (2017) [see 17] | USA | Hotel employees (n = 297) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility scale [141] | CI, sensitivity to incivility, customer aggression and harassment, negative emotions, EI | CI was positively associated with incivility from employees and customers and it lead employees to experience negative emotions, increased sensitivity to incivility and customer-directed incivility tendencies. |
| 3. Walker, van Jaarsveld & Skadicki (2017) [see 11] | Canada | Call center insurance customer service agents (n = 81) | Mixed-method multilevel field | Event customer incivility developed by authors | CI, entity incivility, NA, EI | Uncivil encounters were likely to trigger EI towards the specific uncivil customer especially when they were unexpected and among low-NA employees. High-NA workers reciprocated CI with EI for both high and low entity civility. |
| 4. Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee (2016) [see 18] | USA | Restaurant frontline employees (n = 239) | Cross-sectional | Workplace Incivility [35] | CI, supervisor and co-worker incivility, EE, perceived service performance, POS, ERA | CI had the strongest impact on employees' EE. The relationship between CI, EE and perceived service performance was buffered by POS and ERA. |
| 5. Han, Bonn & Cho (2016) [see 127] | USA | Restaurant frontline employees (n = 228) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility [140] | CI, burnout, turnover intentions, organizational and supervisor support | CI was positively related to burnout. This relation was moderated by organizational and supervisor support. CI led to turnover intentions through burnout symptoms. |
| 6. Gabriel, & Diefendorff, (2015) [see 112] | USA | Students (n = 84) | Experimental | Customer incivility manipulation [112] | Emotionality, surface and deep acting, vocal tone, service failure vs recovery manipulation | Changes in emotion regulation and vocal tone were shaped by felt emotions within a customer encounter and affected by customer behaviors. Surface acting and deep acting were used simultaneously. |
| 7. Sitter & Jones (2015) [see 86] | USA | Customers (a, n = 71) Frontline employees working in food, retail, administrative, medical, hotel services (b, n = 186) | Qualitative (a) Longitudinal (b) | Questions developed by authors (a); Incivility from Customer [37; b] | CI, environment, customer, employee characteristics (a) CI, environment, customer, employee characteristics (b) CI, response autonomy, service orientation, EI, agreeableness, neuroticism, training/knowledge (b) | CI related to characteristics of customer, aspects of environment and attributes of worker (a) Service environment, EI, service orientation, agreeableness and neuroticism were significantly related to CI. Representativeness high in agreeableness referred lower levels of CI, whereas those high in neuroticism reported higher levels of CI (b) |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------|---|-----------------|---|--|---|
| 8. Arnold & Walsh (2015) [see 34] | Canada | Frontline employees working in retail, food, bank, entertainment, government, healthcare and education services (n=215) | Longitudinal | Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale [48] | CI finding meaning in work, perspective taking, transformational leadership of supervisors, well-being | The relationship between CI and employee well-being was moderated by employees' perception of transformational leadership of their supervisors. Meaning and perspective taking were positively associated with employees' well-being. |
| 9. Sliker, Withrow & Jex (2015) [see 50] | USA | Students (n=708) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility vignette developed by authors | Agreeableness, extraversion, openness, stability, PA, NA, emotional conscientiousness, trait anger, CI | PA and trait anger were positively related to CI, whereas agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness were negatively related to CI. Supervisor-perpetrated incivility was perceived as more uncivil than co-worker and CI. Women tended to perceive incivility at a higher rate than men. Greater CI was associated with lower level of job satisfaction and higher level of turnover intentions, job-specific strain and general psychological strain in the form of depression and anxiety. Customer mistreatment predicted employee's retaliation against customers. This relationship was buffered by psychological strain. Mistreatment by customers was associated with surface acting and psychological distress. Surface acting mediated the link between customer mistreatment and distress (a). The relationship between customer mistreatment and distress was mediated by surface acting. |
| 10. Wilson & Holmwall (2013) [see 37] | Canada | Retail and restaurant student-employees (n=439) | Cross-sectional | Incivility from Customer [37] Workplace Incivility [35] | CI, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, general and job specific psychological strain | Customer mistreatment, psychological strain, retaliation |
| 11. Mullen & Kelloway (2013) [see 132] | Canada | Customer service representatives (n=109) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility [140] | Interpersonal mistreatment by customers, co-workers and supervisors, surface acting, psychological distress (a) Interpersonal customer mistreatment (b), co-workers and supervisors, surface acting, psychological distress, deep acting (b) | Customer mistreatment predicted employee's retaliation against customers. This relationship was buffered by psychological strain. Mistreatment by customers was associated with surface acting and psychological distress. Surface acting mediated the link between customer mistreatment and distress (a). The relationship between customer mistreatment and distress was mediated by surface acting. |
| 12. Adams & Webster (2012) [see 16] | USA | Alumni association frontline employees (a, n=256) Service engineering firm employees (b, n=138) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility [140] | CI, co-worker incivility, withdrawal behavior, sales performance | Incidents of misbehavior were met by tactics that were guided by underlying mechanisms in the form of practical judgements that, in turn, were informed by implicit knowledge. Routines, situational and contextual actions were identified as reactions. CI predicted absenteeism (a) and reduced performance. Experiencing both customer and co-worker incivility intensified the negative effects of incivility. |
| 13. Echeverri, Salomonson & Aberg (2012) [see 123] | Sweden | Frontline employees in insurance and mobility services (n=63) | Qualitative | Customer incivility [140] | Customer incivility [140] | Incidents of misbehavior were met by tactics that were guided by underlying mechanisms in the form of practical judgements that, in turn, were informed by implicit knowledge. Routines, situational and contextual actions were identified as reactions. CI predicted absenteeism (a) and reduced performance. Experiencing both customer and co-worker incivility intensified the negative effects of incivility. |
| 14. Sliker, Sliker & Jex (2012) [see 6] | USA | Bank tellers (n=120) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility [140] | Customer incivility [140] | Incidents of misbehavior were met by tactics that were guided by underlying mechanisms in the form of practical judgements that, in turn, were informed by implicit knowledge. Routines, situational and contextual actions were identified as reactions. CI predicted absenteeism (a) and reduced performance. Experiencing both customer and co-worker incivility intensified the negative effects of incivility. |

(Continued)

Table 1
(Continued)

| Authors | Country | Sample | Design | CI* scale | Analyzed variables | Main results |
|---|---------|---|--|--|---|--|
| 15. Adams & Buck (2010) [see 15] | USA | Police officers (n = 196) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility [140] | CI, co-worker incivility, surface acting, turnover intentions, distress, EE | CI was related to turnover intentions, psychological distress and EE. Surface acting mediated the relationships between CI and each of the three outcomes. |
| 16. Slier, Jex, Wolford & Melnerney (2010) [see 9] | USA | Bank tellers (n = 120) | Cross-sectional | Customer incivility [140] | CI, emotional labor, EE, customer service quality | Increased emotional labor stemmed from CI led employees to experience EE and reduce service quality. |
| 17. Van Jaarsveld, Walker & Sharficki (2010) [see 10] | Canada | Call center agents (n = 307) | Cross-sectional | Workplace Incivility [35] | CI, job demands, EE, EI | Employees who reported greater levels of CI engaged in higher levels of EI. This relation was mediated by perceived job demands and EE. |
| 18. Kern & Grandey (2009) [see 8] | USA | Retail employees (n = 102) | Cross-sectional | Workplace Incivility [35] | CI, racial identity, stress appraisal, EE | Neither CI nor job strain varied by race. Racial identity moderated the effect of perceived CI on job-related exhaustion. |
| 19. Reynolds & Harris (2009) [see 87] | | Outlet customers (n = 384) | Cross-sectional | Dysfunctional customer behaviors developed by authors | Severity of dysfunctional customer behavior, psychological obstructionism, dissatisfaction with the service, servicescape | The higher the level of psychological obstructionism, the greater was the negative interpretation of the environment which was positively connected to employee perceived dissatisfaction with the service that, in turn, was associated with a higher severity of dysfunctional customer behaviors. |
| 20. Diefendorff & Croyle (2008) [see 96] | USA | Students-employees working in retail, customer, restaurant, fast-food and teaching/child services (n = 231) | Cross-sectional with customer context manipulation | Customer interaction manipulation developed by authors | Extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, expectancy, valence, motivational force, commitment to display role, customer interaction | In typical customer interaction scenarios, commitment to display positive emotions to customers was predicted by expectancy and valence. Expectancy, valence, motivational force and display role commitment were lower in the incivility interaction condition. |

! Note 1. Customer Incivility (CI) = Customer Incivility; EE = Emotional Exhaustion; POS = Perceived Organizational Support; ERA: Emotion Regulation Ability; PA = Positive Affectivity; NA = Negative Affectivity; EI = Employee Incivility).

Table 2
Customer verbal aggression studies

| Authors | Country | Sample | Design | CVA* scale | Analyzed Variables | Main results |
|---|------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. Liu, Song, Koopman, Wang, Chang & Shi (2017) [see 130] | China | Call center agents (n= 737) | Longitudinal | Customer mistreatment [93] | Customer mistreatment, sleep quality, vigor, negative mood, overeating behaviors | Customer mistreatment was directly and indirectly (through negative mood experienced in the afternoon) related to employees' overeating behaviors after work. Previous night's sleep quality was positively linked to vigor in the next morning which, in turn, moderated the relationship between daily customer mistreatment and negative mood. EI was positively associated with CVA and interruptions. Targeted CVA had a stronger impact on EI than nontargeted CVA, especially at higher levels of customer interruptions. This link was attenuated by customer positive emotion words. |
| 2. Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki (2017) [see 11] | Canada | Recorded calls involving contact center employees (n= 417) | Qualitative mixed-method | | EI, CVA, targeted and untargeted CVA, customer positive emotion words, customer interruptions | Employees exposed to customer mistreatment tended to experience negative mood which, in turn, lead them to helping behaviors towards co-workers (a) and customers, but only for those who were high in CO and when cumulative customer mistreatment was low (b). |
| 3. Yue, Wang, & Groh (2016) [see 109] | China | Restaurant frontline employees (a; n = 70). Retailer employees (b; n = 54) | Repeated within-subject measures | Customer mistreatment [93, 120] | Customer mistreatment, negative mood, helping behaviors towards co-workers (a) Customer mistreatment, negative mood, customer-focused helping behaviors, CO (b) | CVA was associated with both emotional dissonance and affective discomfort. For the call center agents group, emotional dissonance was a partial mediator between CVA and affective discomfort, and between job autonomy and affective discomfort. |
| 4. Molino, Emanuel, Zito, Ghisleri, Colombo, & Cortese (2016) [see 4] | Italy | Call center and information service agents (n=531) | Cross-sectional | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | Customer-Related CVA, DCA, DC, ACE, affective discomfort, emotional dissonance, workload, supervisor and co-workers support | Among workers who reported lower levels of moral identity, low supervisor perceived justice exacerbated the relationship between low customer justice and customer-directed sabotage (a). Low customer justice was related to greater customer-directed sabotage tendencies only when employees reported both low moral identity and low supervisor justice (b). |
| 5. Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, Shao, Song & Wang (2016) [see 102] | America (a), South Korea (b) | Call center agents (a, n = 314; b, n = 265) | Cross-sectional | Customer justice [95] | Customer and supervisor justice, moral identity, customer-directed sabotage (a) Customer and supervisor justice, moral identity, customer-directed sabotage (b) | CVA represented an important predictor of depersonalization only and it was a weaker predictor of emotional dissonance than ACE and DC. |
| 6. Dendenhoffer & Dormann (2015) [see 13] | USA | Frontline employees working in travel agencies, stores, call centers, insurance, banks, security, healthcare and education services, flight attendants (n = 4199) | Meta-analysis | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, emotional dissonance, burnout, job satisfaction | |

(Continued)

Table 2
(Continued)

| Authors | Country | Sample | Design | CVA* scale | Variables | Main results |
|--|---------|---|-----------------|--|---|--|
| 7. Yeh (2015) [see 131] | Taiwan | Flight attendants (n = 504) | Cross-sectional | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CVA, emotional dissonance, service sabotage, revenge motive | Emotional dissonance mediated both the relationship between CVA and revenge motivation and that between CVA and service sabotage. CVA was positively associated with revenge motive. |
| 8. Yoo, Kim & Lee (2015) [see 21] | Korea | Restaurant frontline employees (n = 243) | Cross-sectional | Customer-related social stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, EE, SRP, CO | Workers' perception of CVA exacerbated EE that, in turn, had a detrimental impact on SRP. The relationship between CVA and SRP was fully mediated by EE and greater among employees with low CO those high in CO. Some employees dealt with repeated CVA through de-individualization of being a representative. CVA was used by callers in an instrumental way. |
| 9. Archer & Jagodziński (2015) [see 89] | Poland | Recorded calls involving call center agents (n = 20) | Qualitative | | | |
| 10. Baranik, Wang, Gong & Sui (2014) [see 117] | China | Call center agents (n = 737) | Longitudinal | Customer mistreatment [93] | Customer mistreatment, cognitive rumination, social sharing of negative events, deep and surface acting, well-being, EE, customer-directed sabotage, job performance | Customer mistreatment predicted cognitive rumination that, in turn, was negatively related to well-being and job performance, and positively associated with EE and customer-directed sabotage. Rumination mediated the link between customer mistreatment and well-being. EE, customer-directed sabotage, and job performance. Customer mistreatment predicted social sharing of negative emotions which, in turn, was positively associated with both EE and employees' well-being, despite mediating only the relationship with EE. Deep acting buffered the link between mistreatment and cognitive rumination as well as the association between customer mistreatment and social sharing of negative events. CVA was a better predictor of EE than ACE and DC. EE impacted negatively on CO and SRP. |
| 11. Choi, Kim, Lee & Lee (2014) [see 108] | Korea | Frontline employees working in travel agencies, tourist services, hotels (n = 1014) | Cross-sectional | Customer-related social stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, EE, CO, SRP | Direct and vicarious exposure to customer-initiated aggression increased perceived risk of future occurrences of aggression, which in turn rose turnover intentions and reduced affective commitment, physical and mental health. Employees who were directly exposed to customer aggression reported stronger effects compared with those who were vicariously exposed, despite higher exposure to vicarious aggression. |
| 12. Dupré, Dawe & Barling (2014) [see 41] | Canada | Service industry employees (n = 428) | Cross-sectional | Psychological workplace aggression [142] | Workplace aggression, vicarious exposure to customer-initiated aggression, perceived risk of future aggression, affective commitment, turnover intentions, mental and physical health | |

| Author(s) [Year] | Country | Participants | Design | Measures | Findings |
|--|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|--|
| 13. Greer, Russell-Bennel, Tembs, & Dienman (2014) [see 88] | USA | Postal service employees (n= 108) | Experimental | Rasch subscales [143] | CVA and refusal to participate was indirectly influenced by perceived service quality through the mediating effect of anger. Interpersonal service quality had an indirect effect on CVA, while technical quality influenced CVA through the mediating effect of anger. |
| 14. Karatepe & Nkondong (2014) [see 19] | Cameroun | Hotel frontline employees (n= 136) | Longitudinal | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CSSs were positively associated with EE that, in turn, led to lower job performance, weaker extra-role customer service and turnover intentions. EE was a full mediator of the relationship between CSSs and job outcomes. |
| 15. Shao & Skarlicki (2014) [see 111] | China (a), Canada (b) | Hotel frontline employees (a. n = 132; b. n = 8) | Comparative cross-sectional | Customer mistreatment [111] | Employees high in individualism were more likely to engage in customer-directed sabotage than those high in collectivism who were more prone to withdrawing OCB from customers in general. |
| 16. Shih, Lie, Klein & Jiang (2014) [see 113] | Taiwan | Information technology employees (n = 118) | Cross-sectional | Customer aggression [144] | Customer aggression predicted the levels of deep and surface acting. Surface acting influenced negatively job satisfaction, whereas deep acting impacted positively on job satisfaction. Employees who perceived high organizational climate of support were encouraged to adopt deep acting strategies. |
| 17. Li & Zhou (2013) [see 125] | China | Call center agents (n = 1112) | Cross-sectional | Customer verbal aggression [145] | CVA predicted employees' turnover intentions and EE. The relationship between CVA and turnover intentions was mediated by EE and moderated by emotional POS. |
| 18. Wang, Liu, Liao, Gong, Kammeyer-Mueller & Shi (2013) [see 120] | China | Call center agents (n = 149) | Repeated with-subject measures | Daily customer mistreatment [93] | Daily customer mistreatment predicted workers' nomination that, in turn, was positively associated with their morning negative mood. The effect of customer mistreatment on nominator was moderated by both service role commitment and POS, such that this impact was weaker among workers with higher POS and greater among those with higher levels of service role commitment. |
| 19. Chang & Lyons (2012) [see 7] | USA | Frontline employees working in retail, professional and educational services (n=466) | Cross-sectional | Workplace Aggression Research Questionnaire [144] | CVA was related to increased emotional strain, which, in turn, was associated with morale via POS and with morale and turnover intentions through employees' corresponding judgements of their social exchange relationships with these perpetrators. |
| 20. Karatepe, & Ehsani (2012) [see 128] | Iran | Hotel frontline employees (n = 231) | Longitudinal | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CVA intensified employees' burnout and disengagement. The impact of CVA on work-related depression was fully mediated by disengagement. |
| 21. Kim, Paek, Choi & Lee (2012) [see 20] | Korea | Frontline employees working in travel agencies, hotels and restaurants (n = 1107) | Cross-sectional | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CVA was related to EE. CO buffered both the effects of CSSs on EE and those of EE on SRP, by reducing the effects for workers high in CO. |

(Continued)

Table 2
(Continued)

| Authors | Country | Sample | Design | CVA* scale | Variables | Main results |
|--|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 22. Raifaei, Erez, Ravid, Derlier-Rozin, Treister, & Scheyer (2012) [see 12] | Israel (a, b, d) UK (c) | Students (a, n = 36; c, n = 86; d, n = 101). Cellular communication employees (b, n = 72) | Experimental | Manipulation of CVA developed by authors | CVA, free recall, recognition memory, WM, cognitive ability, perspective taking, task performance | CVA reduced employees' ability to remember consumers' requests (a); CVA influenced negatively workers' recognition memory and WM (b); Greater capacity for perspective taking reduced the negative effects of CVA on cognitive performance (c, d); CVA impacted negatively on the quality of task performance, worsening it when CVA was perpetrated by a high-status consumer (d). The frequency of CVA predicted job-induced tension (a) and job dissatisfaction (b), especially for high-PA employees (a, b). CVA was positively related to turnover intentions only among individuals high in PA; (b); CVA was negatively related to job satisfaction and positively associated with emotional dissonance only for workers high in extraversion (c). |
| 23. Goussinsky (2011) [see 97] | Israel | Call center agents (a, n = 417). Frontline employees working in call centers, supermarkets, healthcare and entertainment services (b, n = 422). Student-employee working in retail, food, administrative, clerical, education and healthcare services (c, n = 156) Bank employees (n = 146) | Cross-sectional | Frequency of customer aggression [146 a, c; 39, b] | CVA, NA, PA, job induced tension, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, extraversion and neuroticism, emotional dissonance | |
| 24. Karatepe, Hakiimur, & Yorganci (2010) [see 88] | Cyprus | Bank employees (n = 146) | Cross-sectional | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, EE, core-self evaluations | Employees with positive core-self evaluations perceived low levels of CVA. No relationship was found between CVA and EE. |
| 25. Sliker, Pui, Sliker & Jex (2011) [see 129] | USA | Call center agents (n = 75) | Multimethod, multi-time point | Interpersonal conflict at work [48] | Customer and co-worker interpersonal conflict, burnout and physical symptoms, task performance, trait anger, NA | Customer interpersonal conflict was a stronger predictor of burnout than co-workers interpersonal conflict and was the only predictor of reduced task performance. Trait anger moderated the relationship between customer interpersonal conflict and negative employee outcomes. CVA predicted EE. Surface acting was positively associated with EE. |
| 26. Song & Liu (2010) [see 122] | China | Call center agents (n = 310) | Cross-sectional | Customer-Related Social Stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, EE, surface acting and deep acting | |
| 27. Wegge, Van Dick & Von Bernstorff (2010) [see 100] | Germany | Call center agents (n = 161) | Cross-sectional | Customer-related social stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, PA, NA, emotional dissonance, job satisfaction, burnout, health disorders, negative emotions | NA and CVA were positively associated with emotional dissonance which, in turn, was associated negatively with employee work motivation and well-being. Emotional dissonance was based mainly on hiding anger, affection and boredom to customers. Not showing boredom was related to health disorders. |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--------|---|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 28. Karatepe, Yorganci & Hakianir (2009) [see 94] | Cyprus | Hotel frontline employees (n = 204) | Cross-sectional | Customer-related social stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, emotional dissonance, EE, SRP, job satisfaction, turnover intentions | Workers' perception of CVA led to emotional dissonance and EE. Emotional dissonance exacerbated EE that, in turn, reduced SRP and job satisfaction, intensifying turnover intentions. CVA increased turnover intentions. |
| 29. Karatepe, Yorganci & Hakianir (2009) [see 94] | Cyprus | Bank employees (n = 146) | Cross-sectional | Customer-related social stressors [38] | CVA, DCE, DC, ACE, supervisor support, co-worker support, EE | Supervisor support negatively influenced CVA and EE. CVA did not significantly impact on EE. |
| 30. Skarlicki, Van Jaarsveld & Walker (2008) [see 95] | Canada | Call center agents (n = 358) | Cross-sectional | Customer Interpersonal Injustice [95] | Customer interpersonal injustice, customer-directed sabotage, job performance, moral identity | Customer-directed sabotage impacted negatively on employee performance. The sabotage tendencies arising from injustice were moderated by moral identity; symbolization amplified the relationship between mistreatment and sabotage, whereas internalization suppressed sabotage tendencies. |
| 31. Grandey, Kern & Frone (2007) [see 39] | USA | Frontline employees working in office and administrative support, sales, education, transportation, healthcare services (n, n = 2446). Frontline employees working in financial, community, food, customer, health services, sales, management (b, n = 121) | Cross-sectional | Verbal abuse [2, a]. Workplace interpersonal conflict [48, b] | CVA, insider verbal abuse, EE, emotional labor demands (a); CVA, insider verbal abuse, EE, emotional labor demands (b) | CVA occurred more frequently than insider verbal abuse, particularly for those with higher emotional labor requests, and contributed to EE over and above insider verbal abuse (a, b). |
| 32. Scarone & Cedillo (2007) [see 5] | Mexico | Call center agents (n = 2007) | Cross-sectional | Questions developed by authors | CVA, emotional demands, health indicators | CVA was positively related to anxiety and anger. Following CVA, very few workers forced themselves to continue their job for the whole shift. |
| 33. Hobber & Swanberg (2006) [see 3] | USA | Municipal government employees (n = 868) | Cross-sectional and qualitative | Questions developed by authors | Verbal experienced or witnessed violence, perpetrator, customer contact | Employees involved in high public contact occupations were more likely to both witness and experience CVA. Direct experience of CVA had a stronger effect than vicarious experience, even if the latter was more frequent. |

²Note 2. Customer Aggression (EI = Employee Incivility; CVA = Customer Verbal Aggression; EE = Emotional Exhaustion; DC = Disproportionate Customer Expectations; DC = Distorted Customers; ACE = Ambiguous Customer Expectations; SRP = Service Recovery Performance; POS = Perceived Organizational Support; NA = Negative Affectivity; PA = Positive Affectivity; WM = Working Memory).

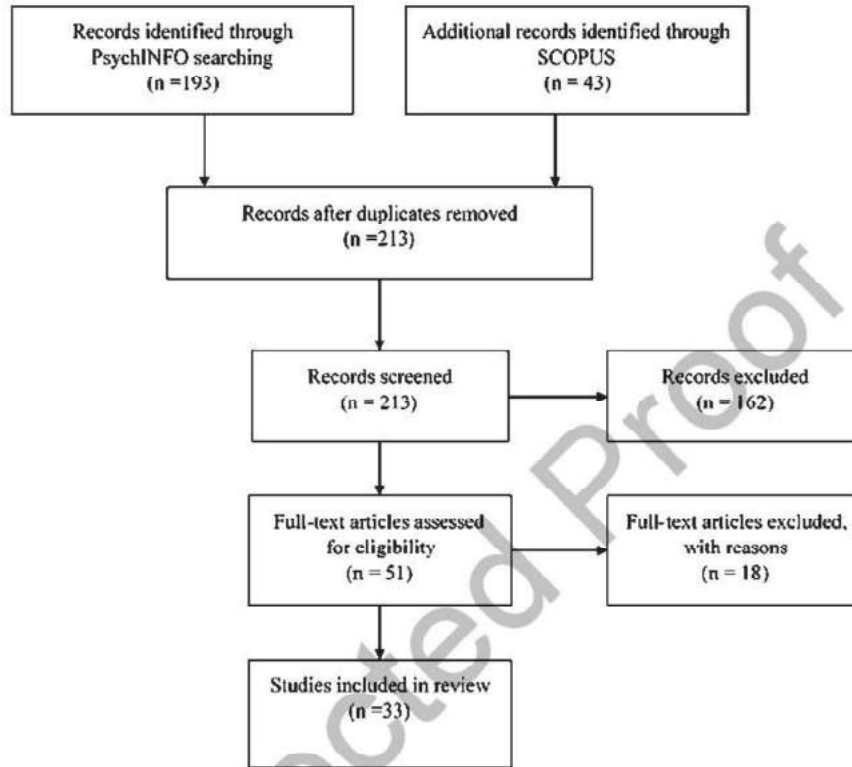


Fig. 1. Flow diagram pertaining to customer verbal aggression.

incivility or verbal aggression. Consequences for the individual were explored by 32 papers, while 13 papers investigated customer-directed incivility and sabotage as outcomes. Consequences at organizational levels were studied by 25 articles. We now discuss each of these themes in more detail.

4. Theoretical approaches to understanding customer incivility and verbal aggression

When defining customer incivility and verbal aggression as social job stressors associated with negative outcomes, past research has used different theoretical frameworks. The most commonly used theories were *Conservation of Resources* theory [14], used in 18 articles, and *Cognitive Appraisal Theory* [46], used in 6 papers. *Conservation of Resources* (COR) [14] states that individuals strive

to maintain, acquire, and preserve resources that they value. Resources are “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies” individuals access to help manage challenges they confront [14 p516] and invest them “to protect against resource loss, recover from losses and gain resources” [47 p349]. Employees experience stress when they feel threatened by a risk of resource loss, deal with actual resource loss, or receive insufficient return of supplementary resources following significant resource investment [47]. According to *Cognitive Appraisal Theory* [46], primary and secondary appraisals converge to help individuals determine whether a situation is challenging (holding the opportunity of mastery or benefit) or threatening (containing the possibility of harm or loss) [46]. Individuals engage automatically in primary appraisal to assess the significance attributed to an environmental condition by sensing whether the situation exceeds their resources [46]. Primary

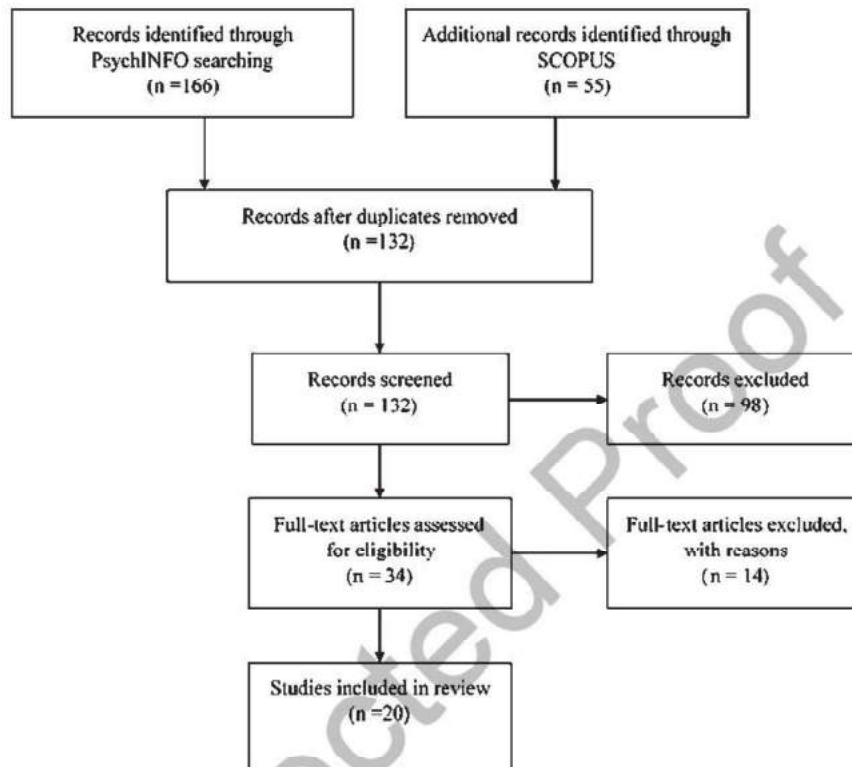


Fig. 2. Flow diagram pertaining to customer incivility.

appraisal involves the evaluation of the significance of a stressor or a potentially threatening event. When something in the environment is perceived as a condition significant to a person's well-being, the individual uses the secondary appraisal process to evaluate control of the event, available resources, and plan or develop reactions to the event. Examples of secondary appraisal are encounters with customers who are recognized as being hostile and verbally aggressive. Other stress theories used to conceptualize customer incivility and verbal aggression as job stressors include: the *Job-stress process model* [48–50], cited in 3 articles, which states individuals who must frequently manage job stressors experience more negative emotions, and this may undermine their social skills and lead to negative reactions involving negative job-related behaviors; the *JD-R theory* [51], quoted in 2 papers, which posits chronic job demands and a lack of job resources may

impact negatively on employees' well-being [52]; the *stressor-strain-outcome model* [53], mentioned in 2 papers, which proposes job stressors (e.g. customer verbal aggression) may cause job strain (e.g. emotional exhaustion) and job negative outcomes (e.g. diminished job performance); and the *Stressor-stress-strain model* [54], cited once.

A variety of theories were used to explain the reasons which can lead an employee to engage in service sabotage behaviors or incivility toward customers. The predominant theories used were Andersson and Pearson's [42] *spiral of incivility*, employed in 9 articles, and *Affective events theory* (AET) [55], utilized in 8 articles. The first suggests the presence of a spiraling process of reciprocation to uncivil acts which may escalate to more serious behaviors. The second posits negative work events, that employees regard as important, trigger unpleasant emotions which, in turn, predict affectively driven reactions toward the

perceived source of the emotions. Related to AET, the *frustration-aggression theory* [56], used in 2 studies, suggests aggressive behavior is the product of emotional reactions to frustrating events. Such events can be considered as situational constraints which impede employees to achieve desired goals or effective performance [57]. A further prominent theory was *Social exchange theory* [58], cited in 4 articles. This theory proposes social behavior is the result of an exchange process in which social actors aim to maximize benefits and minimize costs. An equal exchange stimulates positive feelings, whereas, an inequitable exchange violates the social expectations of the service encounter, motivating retaliation toward the source of such transgression [59]. Based on research on social exchange theory, the *multi-foci justice perspective* [60, 61], used in 6 articles, states individuals seek to hold some party accountable for the formation of justice perceptions [62]. The capacity to predict justice reactions is heightened by integrating the normative justice rules related to distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, with the accountable party responsible for the violation or by upholding of such normative justice rules (i.e. the source of justice).

Several studies, which are focused on employees' coping strategies to manage rude or verbally aggressive customers, refer to *emotion regulation theories*: since companies expect workers control their emotional expressions and their following behaviors, employees need to engage in emotional labor to regulate their emotions to comply with display rules. The most commonly used emotion regulation theories were Grandey's [63] *emotional labor model*, cited in 5 articles, and Diefendorff and Gosserand's [64] *control theory*, mentioned in 4 articles. The first states situational cues lead employees to engage in surface or deep acting emotional regulation strategies to comply with organizational display rules. More specifically, the *customer verbal aggression model* [39] claims customer aggressive behaviors are likely to cause emotional and psychological arousal which, if protracted, may lead employees to experience emotional exhaustion. Diefendorff and Gosserand's [64] *control theory* aids in comprehending the emotional labor process, suggesting employees constantly monitor the discrepancies between emotions and display rules (e.g. being friendly, smiling) during customer service interactions in order to satisfy the customer through the reduction of observed discrepancies by using the emotion regulation strategies of deep and surface acting to show more positive emotions (make

the customer happy) [65]. An exception happens when goals are not being met, particularly when the event is unexpected, the discrepancy is elevated, and the display is of relevance to the individual [64]. In addition to these frameworks, a number of related theories were included in order to better understand some specific facets. The *Goal Progress Theory* [66], mentioned in 2 articles, was used to explain the negative effects related to cognitive rumination on negative encounters. Other theories cited once comprised the *Negative State Relief Theory* [67] to explain the reasons why helping behaviors may be adopted by employees as a response to customer misbehavior; the *Social Learning Theory* [68] to illustrate the vicarious experiences of those who were exposed indirectly to verbally aggressive acts at work; the *Social Sharing Theory* [69] to explain how conversations on negative interactions can buffer the relationship between customer incivility and employees' negative affect; Hofstede and Hofstede's *Cross-cultural Theory* [70] to understand why cultural differences can influence how employees behave in response to social stressors; the *Emotional Cycle Model* [71] to explain how daily and periodic customer-related social stressors can develop to severe stressors and stress consequences. Further theories cited once throughout the review included Hockey's *Control Model of Demand Management* [72]; *Affect Control Theory* [73]; Hollenbeck and Klein's *model of Goal Commitment* [74]; Metcalfe and Mischel's [75] *Dual Process Model*; *Schema Corresponding Theory* [76]; *Theory of Planned Behavior* [77]; *The Broaden-and Build Theory* [78]; *The Group Identity Lens Model* [79]; *Implicit Knowledge Practical Judgment Theory* [80]; *Affective Spillover Theory* [81].

4.1. Antecedents and outcomes of customer incivility and verbal aggression: A framework

To provide structure to the findings of our review, we developed a framework of antecedents and outcomes of customer incivility and verbal aggression, drawing on the predominant theories used in past research. In this framework (see Fig. 3), an uncivil act or an act of verbal aggression can be considered an *affective trigger* stemming from customer interactions (e.g. anger, frustration, biases, and prejudices) and workplace factors (e.g. inadequateness of facilities, unsuitability of layout). Thus, in line with *frustration-aggression theory* [56], customer incivility or verbal aggression can be perceived as

frustrating events by target service providers because they block them from reaching their valued goals. This might evoke negative affect, which can trigger service misbehaviors (e.g. sabotage behaviors or employee incivility). The same event may be perceived in different ways by different employees according to their *personal characteristics* which may influence the extent to which the event is appraised as threatening and stressful. This is consistent with the *Cognitive Appraisal Theory* [46]: when an affective event is encountered (i.e. a customer is perceived as being rude or verbally aggressive), some individual characteristics (e.g. trait anger, conscientiousness) might predispose employees to assess that event as threatening, whereas certain factors might allow workers to be resilient and perceive the same event as challenging (e.g. emotional stability, agreeableness). As a result, employees may react by adopting two different categories of behaviors: they may *reciprocate with incivility* or misbehaviors (e.g. customer-directed sabotage) directed to the instigator or they may *continue to deliver the service* without reciprocating. The first behavior may foster an upward spiral which may lead to the escalation to more serious behaviors (e.g. from customer incivility to customer verbal aggression): this is in line with the *Affective events theory* [55], which claims negative emotions arising from experienced incivility or verbal aggression might motivate employee incivility directed at customers and lead workers to be rude as a mechanism to end an uncivil service encounter. This is consistent also with Andersson and Pearson's [42] *spiral of incivility* and in accordance with the *target similarity model* [82], according to which an uncivil act perpetrated by an employee can motivate the incivility target to revenge and reciprocate with an uncivil act directed toward the incivility instigator, fostering a spiral circle of incivility which may, in turn, generate unpleasant exchanges or even escalate to more serious misbehaviors. Regarding the downward spiral, the model proposes coping strategies adopted by service providers may moderate the relationship between behavior on one side and individual and organizational consequences on the other, so that the effects depend on the ways in which employees deal with stressors. According to Grandey's *emotional labor model* [63] and Diefendorff and Gosslerand's theory [42], when employees experience negative emotions due to customer incivility or verbal aggression they may adopt deep or surface acting emotional regulation strategies to show appropriate emotions as required by display rules. However, since customer

mistreatment may be unexpected, it is likely to result in a high discrepancy between employees' real emotions and organizationally-desired emotions to show on the outside. Consequently, the way an employee regulates such emotions is important in determining individual and organizational outcomes.

Exposure to customer incivility or verbal aggression may negatively affect employees' well-being and job outcomes. According to COR theory [47], when employees do not perceive themselves to have adequate emotional resources to meet interpersonal stressor demands and/or work demands and the resource investment does not generate the desired rewarding relations to compensate for the effort required, they may experience psychological distress [47], leading to job burnout [83]. On the one hand, since customer incivility and verbal aggression exhaust workers' emotional and cognitive resources required to successfully regulate employees' reactions to rude or verbally aggressive customers, it can amplify the potential for employee incivility. Therefore, a resource-depleted employee could be more likely to be rude toward customers. On the other hand, this means when workers become aware of losing resources, they might become unwilling to continue depleting such resources and need to "recover" from these experiences [84]. Employees would likely act to reduce the quality of the service provided across the next several customers in the short term [47] or adopt other negative job-related behaviors in the medium term (e.g. withdrawal behaviors and intentions). In the long term, this may impact negatively on the whole organization, resulting in reduced productivity and poor company image. If employees suffer, or continue to suffer, resource loss (e.g. due to multiple uncivil acts or frequent interactions with verbally aggressive customers) without being able to compensate through resource replacement by employing other resources to balance the loss (e.g. social support from co-workers and supervisors), they will be in danger of experiencing negative consequences in the short term (e.g. cognitive impairment), in the medium term (e.g. impaired well-being) and, if protracted, in the long term (e.g. continued emotional exhaustion). However, these negative outcomes may be buffered by personal (e.g. customer orientation) and organizational resources (e.g. social support from co-workers and supervisors), so that workers who are well-equipped in terms of resources may be less vulnerable to detrimental effects stemmed from negative encounters. This is in line with COR theory [14], the differences in levels of some stress-aiding

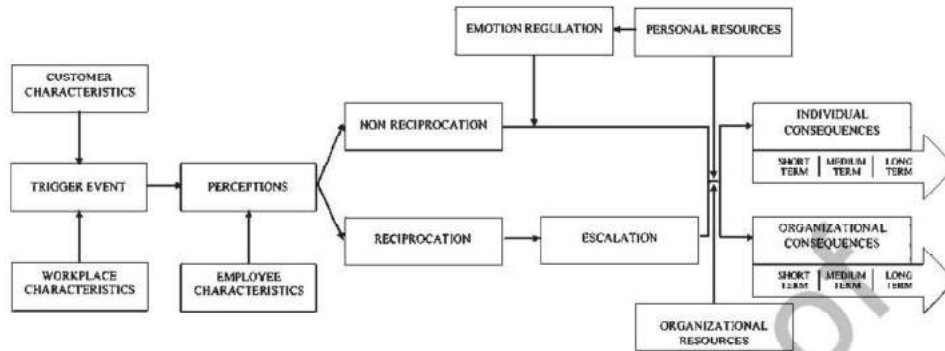


Fig. 3. Theoretical model to understand the impact of customer incivility and verbal aggression on employees' well-being and job outcomes.

personal characteristics (e.g. customer orientation), which can be treated as personal coping resources, may influence how individuals react to stress or loss of resources [14, 85], making some workers better at minimizing their losses and reducing stressors and strain.

5. Perpetrator characteristics

5.1. Individual characteristics

Four studies investigated the reasons why customers may behave uncivilly or aggressively, and those that have done so, have tended to ascribe them to individual predispositions or to consider them as a response to unmet service expectations. Some personality traits might predispose the customer to be uncivil, such as being high in anger, unthoughtful, malicious [86]. For example, customers high in *psychological obstructionism* – a trait which impedes individuals from behaving in a normative manner – seems to be associated with the tendency to interpret situations more negatively, behave in a dysfunctional fashion, and exhibit greater dissatisfaction with service received [87]. Incivility may also be perpetrated by customers as a result of personal *biases and prejudices* against service providers' characteristics (e.g. gender, race) [86].

5.2. Customer dissatisfaction with service

Customers high in trait anger who perceive poor service quality are more likely to be verbally abusive

towards employees [88]. Clients may vent their frustrations on the employee in the form of incivility, due to problems with a product or inconveniences with a service (e.g. returning a product) [86]. This frustration may be accumulated during previous interactions with employees working in the same company [86, 89]. In addition, in contexts where employees have to comply with scripts in responding to customer concerns (i.e. a call center agent who has to read off scripted responses in response to client worries), the impersonal nature of interaction due to workers' poor response autonomy may lead customers to be uncivil [86]. Some customers have disproportionate expectations and act in a superior manner. When these high standards are not met by service providers, customers might be uncivil because they do not get desired treatment [86]. In some cases, customer incivility may be a means to another primary end, such as obtaining some tangible recompense (e.g. a lower price) for the problem the client had experienced, assuming the form of emotional venting, impoliteness, or verbal aggression [86, 89]. In addition, customer uncivil behavior may be a manifestation of frustration triggered by *external causes* (e.g. personal life events) [86].

5.3. Workplace characteristics

The physical impediments to achieving desired ends (e.g. finding wanted items) may provoke or exacerbate negative feelings within consumers. For instance, the presence of long queues or waiting time, the exposition to other frustrated clients and noises, the uncleanness and inadequateness of

facilities, the unsuitability of layout and design are all factors which might amplify customer frustration [86]. Thus, the quality of the *physical service environment* is related to the occurrence of incivility [86]: customers who evaluate the environment more negatively are more likely to be disaffected with the service received and, consequently, engage in more dysfunctional misbehaviors [87].

6. Service provider characteristics

Twenty five papers identified service provider characteristics which may predispose employees to perceive interpersonal stressors as threatening, making them particularly vulnerable to adverse effects stemmed from negative encounters or leading them to act in a way that provokes customer incivility or verbal aggression. These include personality traits (i.e. Big Five personality traits, trait anger) and personal skills and attitudes (i.e. perspective taking, customer orientation) as illustrated in the following sections.

In line with Cognitive Appraisal Theory [46], some personal characteristics (e.g. socio-demographic variables, neuroticism, conscientiousness, trait anger) may predispose individuals to appraise a negative encounter as stressful, while certain factors (e.g. openness to experience) might allow them to be resilient to stressors. Conflicting results were found regarding *socio-demographic variables*. Findings are mixed with regard to the relationships between *gender*, customer incivility [8, 90], and verbal aggression [12, 91] but in general women seem to be more prone to experiencing incivility than men [9, 89]. *Job tenure* seems to provide workers with cognitive resources derived from job experience which decrease the detrimental effects of customer misbehavior, reducing their perceptions of incivility [89, 92, 93]. However, studies on the relationship between job tenure and customer verbal aggression resulted in mixed findings [2, 94]. In addition, *age* relates positively to moral identity and negatively to customer-directed sabotage: older people are less likely to engage in customer sabotaging behaviors, having greater moral identity levels compared to younger employees [95]. Opposing results were identified about whether customer mistreatment exposure varies by *racial group* [2, 8].

Focusing on the Big Five personality traits, individuals high in *agreeableness* are inclined to report lower levels of customer incivility [86, 90]. They

seem to be more committed to and place greater value on displaying positive emotions, even when they interact with an uncivil client [96]. By contrast, employees high in *neuroticism* tend to perceive higher levels of customer incivility [90] and job dissatisfaction following customer verbal aggression [97]. Workers who report high *extraversion* tend to display more positive emotions and be satisfied with displaying positive emotions [96], although in contrary, Sliter et al. [90] did not find a significant association between extraversion and incivility perceptions. Additionally, customer verbal aggression seems to be positively associated with emotional dissonance only among employees high in extraversion [96]. Conflicting results were found regarding *conscientiousness* [90]. Finally, *openness to experience* seems to protect employees against the negative effects of incivility: a person high in openness tend to be more accepting of others, perceiving customers as less uncivil [90].

Moving beyond the Big Five, *trait anger* - that is the tendency to perceive a wide range of stimuli as anger-inducing [98] - is positively related to perceptions of customer incivility [90] and verbal aggression [5]. Relatedly, people high in *negative affectivity* - a general predisposition to experience negative emotions [99] - also appear to be more prone to perceiving customer incivility [90], reciprocating with customer-directed incivility [11] and being more vulnerable to its harmful effects, such as emotional dissonance [11, 100].

Moral identity consists of two dimensions: *internalization*, the degree to which a set of moral characteristics are central to one's self-definition and *symbolization*, the extent to which responses to moral issues are manifested publicly through individual's acts [101]. Whereas symbolization can exacerbate the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee sabotage, internalization seems to suppress customer-directed sabotage tendencies [95]. Employees low in moral identity are more likely to react to rude or aggressive customers by engaging in sabotage [102].

As stated by COR theory [103, 104], personal resources are beneficial because they help individuals to deal with stressors and can be treated as personal coping resources which influence how individuals react to stressful situations. The individual differences may be explained by differences in levels of some stress-aiding personal characteristics (e.g. core-self evaluations, perspective taking, customer orientation): some employees may be more

vulnerable to stressors and strain due to the lack of personal resources. Thus, a number of employees' skills were identified as protective factors against sensitivity to incivility and verbal aggression. Employees with positive *core-self evaluations* (i.e. personal assessment of one's own worthiness, competence, abilities) tend to experience low levels of customer verbal aggression, having the confidence of their capabilities to cope with difficulties arising from dysfunctional customers [91]. *Perspective taking* is the ability to "understand how a situation appears to another person and how that person is reacting cognitively and emotionally to the situation" [105]: people high in perspective taking tend to understand better other's needs, be empathetic, and prosocial. It seems to protect an individual from the negative effects of customer verbal aggression exposure (i.e. cognitive interference experienced by workers who must simultaneously handle aggression and job task), by attenuating subsequent cognitive impairment [12]. This is because workers high in perspective taking tend to be more sensitive to others and engage in less surface acting (e.g. faking emotions), adopting more adaptive strategies to effectively cope with stressors [106]. Similarly, individuals with good *emotion regulation abilities*, who are able to control their own emotions in the face of difficult situations, are less likely to impair their job performance following customer incivility [18].

Customer orientation refers to the tendency or disposition to understand and meet customer needs [107]. People high in this dimension enjoy nurturing customers and have the confidence to provide a good service. It can be considered as an important personal resource against customer verbal aggression and emotional exhaustion, helping employees to experience weaker emotional exhaustion and, therefore, allowing them to provide a better service recovery performance [20, 21, 108]. Only highly customer orientated workers engage in customer-directed helping behaviors following customer mistreatment [109].

Customers may be rude in response to employee incivility [86]. This may foster an "incivility spiral" [42 p458] that may escalate to more severe kinds of misbehavior (e.g. verbal aggression). Service orientation, that is the degree to which organizational culture is orientated towards customer satisfaction [110], impacts negatively on customer incivility [90]. Instead, consumers may behave rudely in response to poor service encounter with a worker who seems to be not interested in providing service [86].

7. Employees' responses to uncivil or verbally aggressive acts

7.1. Reciprocation: Employee incivility and sabotage toward customers

Customer-directed incivility and sabotage may be an employee's response to an act of incivility by a customer, in line with Andersson and Pearson's spiral of incivility (1999) [42] and Affective Events Theory [55]. Employees who experience customer incivility may reciprocate by treating customers in a rude and disrespectful way, targeting customers with incivility [10, 17, 93, 95, 111]; they can use rude language or gestures, and their vocal tone may become more negative [112]. Customer incivility has been mainly studied in two forms: entity incivility and event incivility. Entity incivility refers to employees' overarching perception of incivility across interactions with customers and may trigger *customer-directed incivility* [11]. Event employee incivility, that is employee reactions due to single service events, is triggered when the customer directs aggressive words towards employees, interrupting frequently [11]. However, the more the customer uses positive emotion words, the less likely employees are to engage in uncivil behaviors in response to verbal personal attacks [11].

7.2. Non-reciprocation: Employees' coping strategies

According to Grandey's emotional labor model [63] and the self-regulation theory [64], when employees deal with rude or verbally aggressive customers, they have to regulate their emotions in order to conform to organizational expectations which encourage them to serve customers with a smile. This process is called emotional labor [63] and may lead employees to experience emotional dissonance (i.e. a discrepancy between felt emotions and displayed emotions). Workers may use either deep or surface acting as coping strategies to deal with uncivil or aggressive acts.

Surface acting refers to the alteration of emotional expressions aimed at assuring affective delivery ordered by the service display rules. Employees who use this strategy pretend or fake positive emotions to handle negative emotional events following customer incivility or aggression. This leads them to experience job dissatisfaction [113, 114], distress

[15, 16], emotional exhaustion [15, 114], and turnover intentions [15].

Deep acting is an emotion regulation strategy aimed at modifying inner emotions to fully match experienced and expressed expressions with the demands of the service rules [63, 115]. When organizational climate of support is higher, employees dealing with customer aggression are more likely to adopt deep acting to manage their emotions and, thus, be more satisfied of their own job [113]. During an encounter with an uncivil customer, momentary felt emotions are negatively associated with temporary surface acting and deep acting; as felt emotions become more negative, the adoption of surface acting and deep acting grows [112]. Thus, these strategies may be used simultaneously: surface acting seems to be an immediate reaction to demanding encounters, provoking subsequent deep acting [112, 116]. Employees who engage in deep acting seem to experience less rumination and social sharing in response to customer mistreatment [117].

Studies included in the review identified other strategies which may be adopted by service providers to cope with the emotional demands arising from negative interactions with clients. According to Martin and Tesser's *Goal Progress Theory* [66], *cognitive rumination* (i.e. conscious recurrent thoughts directed toward failing to complete a task effectively) [118] occurs because the goal failure (e.g. receiving customer mistreatment) strengthens the accessibility of event-related information which can be easily cued and reproducible, as well as difficult to get rid of. Rumination inhibits adaptive problem-solving and instrumental behaviors. It is related to feelings of anger [66] and thoughts about revenge and aggression following perceptions of mistreatment [119]. On days that workers perceive more customer mistreatment, they are more likely to ruminate on those negative encounters at night and have a negative mood in the next morning [120]. Employees who ruminate are more likely to experience feelings of anger [66] and thoughts about revenge, engage in customer-directed sabotage, experience emotional exhaustion, and decrements in job performance and well-being [117]. However, employees who perceive organizational support are less likely to engage in *rumination* due to customer mistreatment [120]. The effects of customer mistreatment on cognitive rumination and social sharing are buffered by deep acting [117].

Unlike cognitive rumination - considered as a person's cognitive process - *social sharing of negative events* can be conceptualized as an interpersonal

process of discussing problems with others [121]. It is positively related to both well-being and emotional exhaustion. Employees who share their problems with their co-workers and family report higher levels of well-being, but also greater level of emotional exhaustion [117]. One possible explanation for these conflicting findings may be that talking about negative encounters to others has beneficial effects on employees' well-being because it helps in giving meaning to the situation. However, this may also drain workers' emotional resources through the activation of negative emotions associated with the encounter, making employees feel emotionally exhausted [117]. According to the social sharing theory [69], conversations in a cognitive sharing mode (i.e. discussing of a negative experience which can help to reappraise it, modify expectations and schemas, or overcome frustrated goals) at home are effective for diminishing the relationship between customer incivility and negative affect (experienced at the end of the workday or at bedtime), and buffers the indirect impact of customer incivility on next-morning negative mood [122]. This buffering effect was not found for conversations in an affective sharing mode (i.e. talking about negative interactions with customers in order to receive empathy, reassurance and recognition by the interlocutor) at work or at home, although they seem to not exacerbate the relationship between customer incivility and negative affect [122].

Moreover, in line with the negative state relief model [66], negative emotional states can motivate individuals to engage in *helping behaviors* which can be used as coping strategies to alleviate negative feelings. Workers tend to be more motivated to help others (i.e. co-workers and customers) when they experience elevated negative mood in the hope of minimizing negative state and/or increasing positive affect by helping co-workers and customers, although this last behavior is acted by only highly customer-orientated workers [109]. Customer and co-worker helping behaviors are positively associated to employees' experience of positive mood. However, cumulative customer mistreatment over time diminishes the general tendency to help others [109].

In addition, research has found that practical judgment rules (i.e. intuitive and low-reflective thinking) are formed by norms, which are implicit knowledge founded on subjective values, work experience, and norms [80, 123]. They shape *routines* which lead employees to manage the customer in an impulsive and immediate way, by engaging in behaviors such as ending the conversation without trying to

find a solution for the customers' problem, referring to organizational rules to deny the customers' requests, ignoring the client, or using dishonest explanations [123]. Some employees may deal with uncivil customers by engaging in unhealthy activities (e.g. smoking, drinking) or withdrawal behaviors (e.g. walking out) [17].

When workers cope with rude or aggressive clients, they may react using *situational actions*, considering different aspects to find solutions for customer's concerns, such as: explaining the situation, educating customer about organizational rules, offering alternative solutions, joking or using humor to reduce incidents of misbehavior and to try to turn them into positive experiences for the customer [123, 124].

Other coping strategies may include: *concessions and additional effort* to meet customer demands, *seeking assistance* from a supervisor and letting the customer talk to him/her, seeking *peer or management support* to efficiently deal with the situation [123, 124]. Customer misbehavior may be met by managing the client in a customized way, by establishing a personal relationship with him/her, and by giving enhanced service to assist the customer who may be frustrated by external causes [123]. Furthermore, in dealing with upset customers, employees may *take a break*, instead of forcing themselves to continue their job for the whole shift [5]. Workers may perceive verbal aggression with detachment through the *de-individuation* of being a representative, losing own individual identity and identifying themselves with the organization, so that they do not take attacks personally [89].

8. Protective factors: Organizational resources

The results of the review identified a number of key protective factors against the negative outcomes of customer mistreatment. These mainly included: perceived organizational and supervisor support as well as transformational leadership.

Employees who perceive themselves to be supported by their organization are less likely to engage in cognitive rumination in response to daily customer mistreatment [120]. The presence of an organizational climate of support helps employees to effectively manage their emotions, facilitating the adoption of deep acting strategies when facing customer aggression [113]. Both organizational and supervisor support buffer the negative impact

of customer incivility on burnout [125]. Furthermore, supervisor support is negatively associated with customer verbal aggression perceptions [126] and resulting affective discomfort [4]. In addition, employees working in teams with higher levels of organizational support experience lower emotional exhaustion following customer verbal aggression, when compared to those who do not perceive to be emotionally supported by their organization [125]. These findings suggest organizational and supervisor support are protective factors against emotional exhaustion due to customer mistreatment [18]. In addition, it should be noted that leadership plays an important role in shaping employees' perceptions towards customer mistreatment. In particular, transformational leadership seems to moderate the detrimental effects of customer incivility on psychological well-being - particularly at high levels of incivility [34] because it encourages innovative thinking and ability to perceive problems as challenges. It is worth pointing out that customer verbal expression of positive emotions (e.g. happy, good) can act as a form of social support, helping refill worker regulatory resources and reducing uncivil employee responses to customer verbal aggression [11].

9. Consequences of customer incivility and verbal aggression

9.1. Individual outcomes

9.1.1. Emotional and cognitive consequences

Customer verbal aggression increases employees' *emotional dissonance* [4, 21, 94, 97, 100]. Among call center agents, emotional dissonance is associated with the frequency of longing and intensity of anger and not showing the three emotions anger, affection to customers, and boredom [100]. Dealing with rude customers can lead employees to experience greater pressure to show positive feelings while simultaneously experiencing lower motivation to display positive emotions [96]. Furthermore, employees have less motivation to conform to positive display rules when managing a rude customer [96]. According to the COR theory, "*resource loss is disproportionately more salient than resource gain*" [47 p343]. When frontline employees have to serve customers with a smile even when they are uncivil or verbally aggressive, they experience a loss of resources because of emotion rule dissonance (i.e. the discrepancy between required emotions and felt emotions)

and fewer resources are left for dealing with emotional dissonance (i.e. the discrepancy between felt emotions and displayed emotions). Therefore, they are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion due to customer incivility or verbal aggression and emotional dissonance. Indeed, customer incivility heightens frontline employees' [8, 9, 15, 17, 125, 127] emotional exhaustion more seriously than supervisor and co-worker incivility [18]. Similarly, customer verbal aggression intensifies employees' emotional exhaustion [19–21, 94, 108, 114, 117, 128], predicting exhaustion over and above verbal abuse perpetrated by intra-organizational members [2, 129].

Customer elicit *stress appraisal* [8], increases psychological distress perceptions [9, 15–17], as well as general psychological and job specific strain, in the form of depression and anxiety [37]. Similarly, customer verbal aggression intensifies job-induced tension, leading workers to experience greater stress [97, 117]. The violation of expected procedural justice norms, due to verbal aggression, lead employees to experience emotional strain that, in turn, decreases their morale [7]. Encountering an uncivil customer leads the individual to feel increased negative emotions [17, 112]. Indeed, according to Affective Events Theory [55], interactions with uncivil or verbally aggressive customers represent negative work events that elicit affective reactions. Customer verbal aggression amplifies *affective discomfort* [4] and customer incivility is positively related to negative affect at the end of the workday and at bedtime. These feelings, in turn, lead employees to experience next-morning negative affect [122]. On days that employees received more daily customer mistreatment, they ruminate more at night about such negative interactions and, therefore, experience *negative mood* the next morning [109, 120]. Following customer mistreatment, the experienced negative mood may result in employee overeating behaviors after work, although this is less likely to happen when workers feel vigorous (i.e. energetic, resilient and persistent even in the face of difficulties) after a good night's sleep [92]. Taken together, these results suggest the detrimental effect of customer incivility in terms of negative feelings last until the next morning.

Experiencing customer verbal aggression interferes with several forms of *cognitive functioning*, reducing employees' ability to *recall* and *recognize* the content of a service call. In addition, it impairs *working memory*, important in order to focus

attention on relevant information (e.g. content of customers' requests) [12]. It should also be noted that employees who are unfairly treated by customers tend to become more *sensitive towards uncivil acts* [17], perceive *less interactional justice*, and have greater difficulty in conforming with job emotional demands [130].

Seeking retaliation or revenge may be a reaction [117, 124]. Following customer mistreatment, employees who are low in moral identity are likely to engage in *customer-directed sabotage*, particularly when they perceive to be treated unfairly by supervisors [102]. Customer verbal aggression may lead employees to experience emotional dissonance which, in turn, stimulates revenge motivation to punish customers for their misbehaviors and customer-directed service sabotage behaviors [22]. Customer incivility may provoke retaliation against customers, especially among employees who experience high psychological strain levels [131]. Employees with individualistic cultural values are more prone to be actively responding to customer mistreatment, by engaging in sabotage directed toward the specific customer, whereas those who are members of a collectivistic culture are more inclined to react in an indirect way, by withdrawing organizational citizenship behaviors from customers in general [111].

9.2. Organizational outcomes

One of the main negative effects of customer incivility is the increase of *turnover intentions* [16, 37, 127], and *withdrawal behavior*, which in turn predicts both tardiness and absenteeism [6]. Customer verbal aggression is positively associated with workers' turnover intentions [7, 94, 97, 125]: when employees encounter more verbal aggression from customers, they are more likely to become emotionally exhausted and, in turn, to experience intentions to leave the organization [19, 125] and impair service recovery performance [20, 21], customer orientation, job performance [18, 19], and extra-role customer service [19]. Furthermore, customer verbal aggression leads employees to perceive lower organizational support and morale and, in turn, increase turnover intentions [7]. Employees who are exposed to greater frequency of customer incivility or verbal aggression experience *job dissatisfaction* [37, 94, 97]. Customer verbal aggression predicts *disengagement* among frontline employees, who may develop negative job attitudes

and distance themselves from the job following customer mistreatment [128]. Therefore, customer incivility may interfere with customer service quality, *reducing the overall quality of service* provided [9] and job performance [117, 129].

Even short-term encounters with customer verbal aggression may undermine cognitive aspects relevant for customer service work and, in turn, directly result in lower quality performance [12]. Moreover, engaging in customer-directed sabotage detracts employees' attention from task performance, reducing their courtesy, competence, decision quality, and sales skills [95].

Customer mistreatment exerts particularly detrimental effects on service recovery performance, which is defined as the actions implemented by customer-contact workers, who directly handle customer complaints, to resolve a service failure, recovering customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Alternatively, it can be considered as "frontline service employees' perceptions of their own abilities and actions to resolve a service failure to the satisfaction of the customer" [132 p274]. Customer verbal aggression weakens service recovery performance among employees through emotional exhaustion [20, 21, 94, 108].

Further consequences relate to the impact of incivility on interpersonal relationships. Workers who are frequently exposed to customer incivility may be emotionally exhausted and, therefore, *mistreat their co-workers* [10, 11], engaging in *employee-to-employee incivility* [17]. In addition, employees who were target of customer mistreatment over time may exhibit weaker levels of helping behaviors towards co-workers and customers [109]. Despite engaging in customer-directed sabotage, employees high in collectivism seem more prone to reducing their *citizenship behavior* towards customers, in general, compared to those high in individualism [111]. Following customer verbal aggression, emotionally exhausted employees are less likely to engage in *extra-role customer service*, that is not prescribed or explicitly required behaviors directed to meet customers' expectations and requests, contributing to their satisfaction with the service (e.g. providing extra attention) [19]. Customer verbal aggression relates negatively to *perceived organizational support*: workers who experience customer aggression perceive a violation of procedural justice expectations and, as a result, they are more likely to assess the relationships with their organization to be of poor quality because it allows misbehavior [117].

10. Practical implications

There are several practical implications resulting from our review. It would benefit service organizations to consider taking steps to prevent conflicts between employees and customers because of tangible costs for organizations as well as employees' well-being and job performance. Training programs should be developed to manage the *expression of emotions* and improve *emotion regulation skills* [4, 22, 112], promoting the adoption of better *problem-solving strategies* in dealing with uncivil or aggressive acts (e.g. deep acting, social sharing of negative events) [9, 15, 17, 19, 114, 123]. *Empathy-type training* may be useful to help workers be more understanding of how clients feel and help them to comprehend that the exhibited frustration is not personally directed at the employee [108, 113]. Training to improve *listening* and *interpersonal skills* and *conflict negotiation/avoidance tactics* may provide workers with abilities needed to de-escalate potentially violent situations [16, 21, 95]. Use scenarios, role plays or case studies [18, 87, 95, 128] may be useful because customer incivility may be triggered by worker's inability to understand a problem or complete the transaction correctly due to lack of knowledge or training [86]; a prepared, knowledgeable employee will be more likely to meet customers' needs and requests, reducing the occurrence of misbehavior.

Organizations could monitor program results. Furthermore, monitoring the experiences of emotional dissonance is crucial to sustain workers and promote their well-being [4]. It is important to identify workers who chronically encounter aggressive customers and offer appropriate interventions, such as psychological support assistance and stress management [7, 9, 131, 133].

Moreover, workers feel more severe injustice when managers do not intervene to address frequent and serious problems caused by dysfunctional customers [133]: organizations should tackle the customer mistreatment issue. Customers can be educated through awareness campaigns (via confirmation e-mails, videos, promotional materials) to improve communication with frontline staff by providing customers a realistic preview of what to expect from service providers, and what actions violate social norms towards workers and other customers [17]. Management might take steps to assure a pleasing layout, as well as maintenance and safety of the service environment. Adequate staffing can reduce

customer waiting times [3]. Providing and monitoring high-quality service and products will likely help to reduce customer dissatisfaction that triggers uncivil reactions [87].

Management can support workers by encouraging them to share experiences with their co-workers in a cognitive sharing mode (e.g. by suggesting positive reappraisals for ambiguous situations or knowledge about dealing effectively with customers), by conducting debriefing or daily mentoring sessions [19, 95, 108, 112, 113, 120, 122, 128], or by introducing online tools (e.g. social network groups and online forums) [93, 111], a solution particularly well suited to large organizations. Mentoring sessions to assist employees in handling difficult situations could be a further practical solution to transfer skills [21, 92, 108, 109, 131]: mentors provide vocational support and serve as role models to help employees to regulate their emotions [4, 94, 113, 128].

Organizations may allow employees to take short breaks at their own discretion after negative encounters. This would give some power back to employees, enabling them to feel more control, alleviate some of the experienced stress before resuming work, and provide time to recover resources lost through the regulation of emotions [4, 9, 21, 112, 117, 129]. Establishment of flexible service to recover performance can help to empower employees by providing them with autonomy to manage interactions with customers and, in turn, minimize employee emotional exhaustion. Employee autonomy and flexibility can be seen as a sign of an organization's trust in, respect for, and support toward its employees [20, 108, 114, 117].

Managers should define a *zero-tolerance policy* for customer mistreatment to signal that the company cares for its employees. Include specific information to determine cut-off points for when dealing with verbally aggressive customers [12, 95, 111, 120]. Managers might consider declining to serve reoffending misbehaving customers and establishing a progressive system of "discipline" for clients [3, 12, 87, 95, 129]. Organizational policies should encourage employees to report aggressive incidents and the employee response, adopting practices to address these incidents promptly and effectively [3, 7, 22, 126].

Recruiting and selecting the most appropriate individuals for frontline service jobs should be based on the notion that there is a fit between the demands of the job and the employee. There is a management obligation to provide a realistic job description

making emotional requirements explicit [4, 22, 94]. Recruitment and selection procedures might include assessments for affective traits and personal skills (e.g. customer orientation, multi-perspective taking) [18, 21, 102, 108, 123]. Moreover, to identify candidates' behavioral tendencies, HR representatives could consider using work sample tests, situational interviews, or mini-case studies [19].

Aside from practical implications suggested by the included papers, occupational health care management programs (e.g. aimed at increasing work-related self-efficacy and self-management) [134], wellness programs (e.g. multifaceted programs focused on increasing physical activity while at work) [135], mindfulness-based practices [136, 137] and stress reduction programs [138] can be effective solutions within work settings, especially in high customer stress positions.

11. Limitations and strengths

This review is subjected to some limitations. First, workplace settings we included and excluded and the selection criteria for study inclusion in the review restrict the generalizability of our findings. However, they were necessary to obtain a cohesive sample of studies. Second, the restriction of the time period of this review - which is an unavoidable limitation common to all systematic reviews- to the last 12 years represents a further limitation, as relevant earlier studies may have been excluded. Third, the majority of the included studies adopted a cross-sectional design: therefore, caution should be used in drawing conclusions based on causal inferences. Fourth, most studies reviewed relied solely on one source of information -predominantly on self-report measures- for data gathering which might contribute to common method bias. Additionally, the inconsistency in the type of measures utilized may explain dissimilarities in some results revealed. However, the current systematic review has a number of strengths. To date, this is the first review to analyze both customer incivility and verbal aggression across different service settings in a comprehensive way by means of the inclusion of a wide range of studies. Furthermore, it provides a theoretical framework of antecedents and outcomes for scholars as well as practical suggestions for practitioners. Finally, a further strength lies in the use of a solid systematic review methodology, in line with PRISMA guidelines [139].

12. Conclusions

Future research should examine whether co-worker and supervisor support may buffer the effects of customer incivility and verbal aggression. Additional investigation of employee characteristics, customer features, and workplace aspects might reveal how they interact and lead to these phenomena. More objective measures for assessing customer mistreatment (e.g. recorded calls) or multiple sources for data collection (e.g. supervisor or customer assessment of employees' performance) might provide valuable new information. Research of records of absence from personnel files could provide significant data. Experimental studies or longitudinal designs might be valuable for generating important observations. It would be worthwhile to study the combination of different sources of incivility or aggression and third parties influence on these behaviors. More empirical evidence must be gathered to examine the inconsistent results of various researchers and if such inconsistencies are due to the cultural background of each study setting. Comparative reviews to shed light on the underlying dynamics of each research study may be useful to provide additional guidelines for improving the effectiveness of interventions.

Further knowledge is needed to describe the factors associated with customer incivility and verbal aggression, as well as the relationships between these factors. In order to better discern these phenomena and promote useful strategies to reduce the negative consequences due to customer incivility and verbal aggression, future research projects should aim to develop a complex model which includes environmental and personnel-related factors. Both customer incivility and verbal aggression represent customer-related social stressors [38] which may impact negatively on employee well-being and job outcomes. Promoting a culture of respect in the workplace and training workers about effective coping strategies may be beneficial for the whole organization.

Conflict of interest

None to report.

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Corrected Proof

14. Additional information

Whereas recent reviews were conducted to identify factors associated with aggression perpetrated against health care professionals by clients (i.e., patients and their relatives; see Edward et al., 2016; Esmailpour, Salsali, & Ahmadi, 2011; Pich, Hazelton, Sundin, & Kable, 2010), no one, as far as we know, has specifically reviewed studies on customer-to-employee incivility and verbal aggression within service organization settings. However, the paper by Yagil (2008) reviewed research on customer aggression and sexual harassment in service environments, including also a few papers which focused on verbal abuse and rudeness published from 1980 to 2007. The author provided an overview of antecedents of customer aggression, its effects on service providers' well-being and work-related outcomes as well as coping strategies used by service providers in response to customer aggression and sexual harassment. Therefore, we focused on articles published from January 2006 to October 2017, to provide an up-to-date review of the current state of scientific knowledge on this topic. The choice of a time frame including the prior 10 years limits our review question to contemporary studies, but it continues and connects to the work initiated by Yagil (2008).

Papers were deemed not to be on topic because in some cases the keyword "client" referred to patient and, thus, led to the inclusion of researches conducted within healthcare contexts (e.g., Ko et al., 2012; Stewart & Bowers, 2013), whereas the keyword "harassment" were sometimes interpreted as sexual harassment (e.g., Good & Cooper, 2016; Liu, Kwan, & Chiu, 2014). Moreover, in some instances, the keywords "misbehaviour" or "mistreatment" extended the results to articles regarding general expressions of customer misbehaviours or unethical behaviours (e.g., Daunt & Greer, 2015; Harris & Dumas, 2009). Additionally, in many cases, our bibliographic research produced results on incivility or aggression perpetrated by intra-organizational members, reflecting a mainstream research trend (e.g., Porath, MacInnis, & Folkes, 2010, 2011).

15. Final considerations

Both customer incivility and verbal aggression represent customer-related social stressors (Dormann & Zapf, 2004) which may impact negatively on employee well-being and job outcomes. More cross-cultural evidence must be gathered to examine the inconsistent results of various researchers and if the inconsistencies are due to the cultural background of each study setting. Future studies should clarify the process which lead employees to reciprocate or not reciprocate in response to customer mistreatment. Additional investigation should be addressed at identifying protective factors against the development of detrimental effects following interactions with uncivil or verbally aggressive clients. For instance, which service providers' personal resources may moderate the negative impact of customer mistreatment on job outcomes? Additionally, further research is needed to investigate whether customer incivility and verbal aggression may differentially affect workers' well-being. In order to better discern these phenomena in the effort of responding to these questions, we conducted two cross-national studies (see *Chapters 4* and *5*) which built on the theoretical model proposed in this *Chapter*. With the purpose of better understanding employees' reactions to customer mistreatment, the first research adopted an experimental design aimed at shedding light on the underlying mechanisms which may lead employees to reciprocate to customer incivility by treating the incivility instigator in a rude way. Additionally, in order to empirically test our predictions regarding the role of workers' characteristics, the second study aimed to analyse whether some personal resources may buffer the detrimental effects of customer incivility and verbal aggression on job satisfaction and service recovery performance. Examining these aspects is crucial to promote a culture of respect in the workplace and trainee workers about effective coping strategies with benefits for the whole organization.

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CHAPTER 3

Robbery and theft exposure: impact on employees' well-being

This chapter will focus on psycho-physical and work-related outcomes associated with thefts and/or robberies at work exposure, in addition to identifying occupational risk factors. As in the case of customer mistreatment, such property crimes represent specific forms of third-party workplace aggression perpetrated by organizational outsiders. The current chapter will provide an overview of the existing literature to facilitate the understanding of this topic which will be the subject of two of our studies (see *Chapters 6 and 7*). Given that one of these studies will explore similarities and differences between Italian and Irish workers' well-being in relation to robberies and theft exposure, statistics regarding these crimes will be reported for both countries. Both robberies and thefts are considered property crimes, perpetrated by "anyone who gains possession of another person's movable goods, stealing them from the owner with a view to drawing profit for themselves or others" (Article 624, 628 C.P.; Lattanzi, 2010). The key distinguishing factor between a theft and a robbery is that the latter involves the use of "personal violence or threats" of force (Article 628 C.P.; Lattanzi, 2010).

1. Overview of critical factors related to thefts and robberies exposure

The level of violence used in robberies does not represent simply a function of perpetrator inclinations, but it depends also on victims' and bystanders' responses. Generally, offenders are unconcerned about the effects of their crimes on victims (Wright & Decker, 1997) and use violence as a means to exert control over uncertain circumstances. In some cases, perpetrators may resort to violence to diminish victims' and bystanders' resistance or any attempts to obstruct them (Indermaur, 1995; Mouzos & Borzycki, 2003). Previous studies revealed that during a robbery physical injury risk might be increased for both workers and customers when one or more of the following elements

were present: (a) workers and/or customers actively resisted the offender(s), (b) there were more than one criminal, (c) alcohol was involved, (d) the perpetrator(s) did not use a weapon or used a weapon other than a firearm (Amandus et al., 1997; Borzycki, Mouzos, & Sakurai, 2006; Peek-Asa, Casteel, Kraus, & Whitten, 2006; Kapardis, 1989; Willis, 2006; Morrison & O'Donnell, 1994). Furthermore, injury risk was strongly related with the following characteristics: robberies without the taking of money; the absence of customers present when the robbery took place; stores with limited escape routes or no physical barriers (e.g., screen), cash policy or drop safes; the lack of employees trained for violent situations; robberies occurring in shops which were robbed multiple times - in comparison with stores robbed only once (Amandus, et al., 1997; Faulkner, Lansittel, & Hendricks, 2001; Morrison & O'Donnell, 1994). Conversely, a careful store design (e.g., good lighting), the use of security and surveillance devices (e.g., access control mechanisms and security cameras), the utilization of cash control and storage systems (e.g., drop safes) and the presence of employees training for violent situations are all protective factors against injury risk (Faulkner, et al., 2001; Loomis, Marshall, Wolf, Runyan, & Butts, 2002). This suggests that some businesses may be particularly vulnerable to robberies and thefts exposure because of some specific features associated with the nature of their job.

Although there has been a downward trend in robbery rates over the period from 2012 to 2016, robbery-related aggression represents an alarming phenomenon: commercial establishments were the preferential target (see *Figure 1*).

A serious concern in Italy is represented by bank robberies which were around 790 in 2015, the 60% of total attacks across Europe (European Banking Federation, 2016). Although there has been a slight decline, Italy has accounted for 58% of the total amount of valuables stolen (European Banking Federation, 2016), with a total number of 563 bank robberies reported in 2016 (Istat, 2016). However, in Italy most of robberies were committed against commercial establishments which reported 89,833 thefts to law enforcement in 2017 (Istat, 2019). Moreover, two thirds of Irish small businesses reported to be affected by more than one instance of crime over the last year, with an

estimated total cost of €1.83 billion: the highest crime incidence was among retailers who were mainly impacted by thefts and robberies (Isme, 2016). These statistics suggest the more research on thefts and/or robberies at work should be addressed at employees working in commercial establishments.

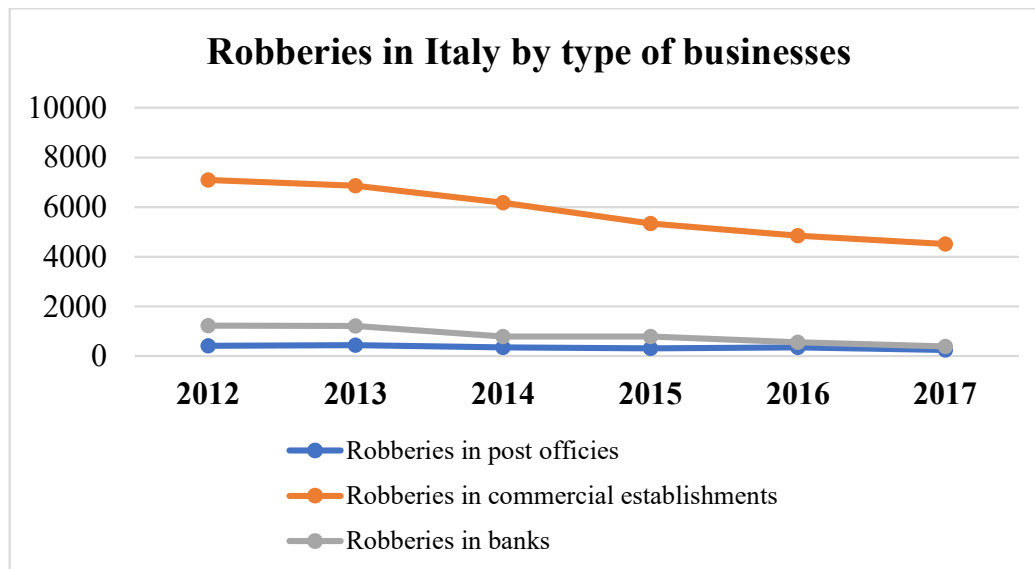


Figure 1. Robbery rates in Italy by type of businesses. Source: Istat (2019).

According to the Global Retail Theft Barometer 2015 report - the last available statistics on external thefts within the retail sector – shoplifting has been identified as the primary reason for shrinkage in Europe, accounting for 42% of the total shrinkage (i.e., stock loss from internal and external crime or waste expressed as percentage of retail sales) with a total cost of €17.17 billion across Europe during 2014-2015. In Italy, the 45% of shrinkage were attributable to external thefts with an overall annual expense of around €1,76 billion (ibidem), whereas in Ireland customer thefts was responsible for 41.9% of losses with a cost of above €183 million (Global Retail Theft Barometer, 2007). In 2016, Italian retail establishments reported approximately 83 prevented thefts per shop on average (Crime&tech, 2017), whereas organised thefts committed by micro-gangs or organised criminal groups witnessed an increase (specially for night-time intrusions), as compared with the previous years (ibidem).

Globally, retailers reported that losses due to external thefts were almost 20% greater than losses from internal crime (i.e., employee thefts, supplier frauds; Global Retail Theft Barometer,

2007). Generally, shoplifting differs among different kinds of retail business. In 2015, it was responsible for more than 50% of retail shrinkage among European countries in discounters (73.7%), superstores (68.5%), convenience stores (65%), pharmacies (60%), department stores (58.7%), home improvement and gardening stores (58.7%), other non-grocery retailers (53.1%), and apparel specialist retailers (51.3%; Global Retail Theft Barometer, 2015). More specifically, pharmacies and jewellery specialist retailers witnessed the highest shrinkage both at the Global (see *Table 1*) and the European level (see *Table 2*) because in these businesses retailers deal with items which can be easily concealed and readily resold to others at good prices, without any significant legal implications (*ibidem*). In fact, the most-stolen merchandise from Europe's retailers include small products which have high value per volume and greater popularity among customers (Crime&tech, 2017).

Table 1. *Global retail shrinkage by kind of business*

| Retail business type | 2014-2015 | 2013-2014 | Increased or decreased |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Pharmacies/drugstores | 2.22% | 0.59% | Increased |
| Apparel specialist retailers | 2.04% | 0.73% | Decreased |
| Other non-grocery retailers | 1.81% | 1.11% | Increased |
| Home improvement and gardening stores | 1.39% | 1.05% | Increased |
| Department stores | 1.30% | 2.18% | Decreased |
| Jewellery and watch specialist retailers | 1.25% | 1.20% | Increased |
| Hypermarkets/mass merchandisers | 1.15% | 0.67% | Increased |
| Supermarkets/grocery retailers | 1.13% | 1.16% | Increased |
| Traditional toy and games stores | 1.00% | 1.00% | No change |
| Sport goods stores | 0.84% | 0.88% | Decreased |
| Electronic/media products specialist retailers | 0.64% | 0.50% | Increased |
| Global | 1.42% | 0.94% | 7 increased, 4 decreased |

Note. Percentages of losses related to employee thefts, customer thefts, supplier fraud by types of business. Source: Global Retail Theft Barometer (2015).

Many products are comparatively small such as small electronic items, batteries or watches, and can be hidden relatively easily by the thief. As a result, the same basic range of merchandise items appears in the most-stolen list of the great majority of countries. It should be noted that every

type of specialist store has its own list of most stolen items, such as medicines and vitamin tablets for pharmacies, watches for jewellery shops, alcohol and cigarettes for off-licences.

Table 2. *European retail shrinkage by kind of business*

| Retail business type | 2014-2015 |
|--|------------------|
| Pharmacies/drugstores | 2.25% |
| Jewellery and watch specialists' retailers | 1.66% |
| Department stores | 1.47% |
| Gas stations | 1.37% |
| Home improvement and gardening stores | 1.14% |
| Hypermarkets/mass merchandisers | 1.09% |
| Supermarkets/grocery retailers | 1.15% |
| Superstores | 1.02% |
| Sport goods stores | 1.02% |
| Warehouse clubs | 0.84% |
| Discounters | 0.84% |
| Beauty specialist retailers | 0.80% |
| Electronic specialist retailers | 0.79% |
| Other non-grocery retailers | 0.62% |
| Convenience stores | 0.20% |

Note. Percentages of losses related to employee thefts, customer thefts, supplier fraud by types of business. Source: *Global Retail Theft Barometer (2015)*.

In Italy, shrinkage tends to be higher in stores within shopping malls because of different factors, such as lower visitors' conversion rate, greater crowding and more complex surveillance actions (Crime&tech, 2017). The most recurrent modus operandi regards shoplifting committed with booster bags (i.e. crafted with materials to circumvent anti-shoplifting measures; *ibidem*). Additionally, Italian small establishments located in less densely populated areas or in smaller municipalities with lower GDP per capita and higher employment rates are more frequently exposed to shrinkage, especially in areas with a greater incidence of young people aged between 11 and 20 years (*ibidem*).

Taken together, these statistics confirm that more research addressed at workers employed in commercial establishments is needed because they are particularly at risk of experiencing thefts and/or robberies at work, especially when retailers handle cash and valuables.

1.1. Robbers driven by different motivations and their preferential targets

Unlike the most violent crimes against the person, in the great majority of robberies the offender is a stranger to the victim (Indermaur, 1995). Previous research has revealed that a useful differentiation can be made between two groups of robbers which have different preferential targets:

a) **professional robbers**. Since these offenders are often driven by the desire to maintain a “desirable lifestyle”, they have greater financial expectations. Consequently, they tend to be involved with substantial pre-offence planning and direct their efforts at a range of high-risk commercial businesses with the potential for considerable takings. Thus, they tend to prefer *organizations which handle a large amount of money or valuables* (e.g., banks, post offices, construction companies, jewellery shops) or *professions which involve the guarding or transport of valuable properties or objects* (e.g., cash-in-transit vans). Professional robbers are more likely to utilize firearms, be organized in groups and act to defeat security systems.

b) **amateur/opportunistic robbers**. Since these perpetrators are often driven by a state of desperation due to the immediate need of obtaining sufficient amounts of money quickly to feed an addiction, pay financial burdens or meet basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, support a family), they have less expensive requirements. Therefore, they tend to not engage in time-consuming planning and choose less lucrative targets. As a result, they are more likely to attack low risk businesses (e.g., liquor sales, supermarkets, service stations, retail shops, small businesses) which are characterised by common risk factors, including *exchanges of money with customers, the presence of a few workers on site, evening or night opening times, customer face-to-face interactions* (Heskett, 1996). Additionally, employees *working alone in a mobile workplace* (e.g., taxi drivers) are at a very high risk, representing “easy” targets due to the absence of security measures (Mayhew, 2000). Opportunistic

robbers are inclined to use predominantly improper weapons (e.g., knives, syringes) and work largely alone. They may potentially attack any types of shops because of their irrational and erratic decision making about the target (e.g., due to drug influence). This unpredictability makes the implementation of effective crime prevention measures challenging. It should be noted that robbery-related homicides occurred overwhelmingly in the retail (67%) and transportation (20%) areas, mainly with the use of handguns, making these sectors particularly vulnerable (Gurka et al., 2009).

Moreover, Hendricks and colleagues' study (1999) on 460 robbed convenience stores identified as common risk factors for robbery-related aggression across retailers the following: *poor cash handling policy, lack of security systems* (e.g., the absence of bullet-resistant shielding), *poor visibility of clerk/cash register from outside of the shop, lack of employees trained in robbery prevention, surrounding environmental features* (e.g., stores not located in shopping centres, distance to graffiti, and proximity to multifamily housing). Additionally, being a cashier was found to be an important risk factor for victimisation following robberies due to the high frequency with which these employees are likely to be directly involved in interactions with robbers, in comparison with those employed in other job positions (Fichera et al., 2014).

Drawing attention to the issue of thefts, it should be noted that, to date, only a few studies are available on thefts, mainly focused on employee thefts and motivational factors leading to engage in this property crime. Businesses which sell alcohol or other drugs (e.g., off-licences, pharmacies) may be particularly vulnerable to outsider thieves who may use shoplifting as a means of acquiring substances or items they are addicted to (Lamontagne, Carpentier, Hetu, & Lacerte-Lamontagne, 1994). Additionally, high-school or college-age students may occasionally engage in shoplifting within supermarkets, shopping centres or stores with the purpose of obtaining acceptance by their peers. Furthermore, research has revealed that a theft may be an inappropriate coping strategy adopted to deal with some psycho-social stressors (e.g., economic difficulties, changing role expectations) or a client's way to venting frustration in response to a perceived unfair treatment received by the business, in addition to being related to the lack of impulse control (Moore, 1984; Schwartz & Wood,

1991). Generally, the primary motivation of thieves is to obtain financial benefits (Moore, 1984) and, therefore, it is likely that offenders choose targets which reflect the rewards they hope to achieve. Thus, businesses at high risk for thefts are likely to have characteristics like those which are at increased risk for robberies, such as face-to-face contact with the public, the handling of valuables, the presence of a few employees on site, the absence of security measures.

It should be noted that repeated and multiple property crimes occur more commonly in some areas ("hot spots"), whereas others are free-crime zones. This phenomenon has been explained in terms of "attractive" or "unattractive" targets (Bellamy, 1996). "Attractive" targets are located in high-crime areas and provide minimal protection for employees as well as restricted visibility from passer-by, in addition to allowing rapid access to highways for escape and having different possible exits from the site (Heskett, 1996; OSHA, 1998). Moreover, research suggests that the potential for robberies may be intensified on certain periods. For instance, almost a quarter of all attacks against jewellery stores occurred in the month of December corresponding to the stockpiling of jewels in anticipation of heightened Christmas sales (*ibidem*). In a similar vein, post offices are at higher risk for robberies on "pension days" before the arrival of pensioners, whereas financial institutions are particularly vulnerable on the days before the "weekend rush" in which the amount of money held at each counter is higher. Additionally, robbers seem to prefer acting during a time when rush-hour traffic is likely to interfere with the speedy arrival of police and when the target property is empty, in order to decrease the number of potential witnesses (Morrison & O'Donnell, 1994).

Although the threatened use of violence pervades all robberies, evidence shows that the actual use of violence by perpetrators and serious (physical) injuries sustained by victims are relatively uncommon (Borzycki, 2003). Nevertheless, the detrimental psychological impact of experiencing a robbery is well recognized. Afterwards, specific factors and psychological outcomes related to robberies will be discussed.

2. Robberies and thefts as stressful events: a theoretical framework

In line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), both robberies and thefts at work can be considered as stressful events since they constitute either a threat to - or an actual loss of - one's working conditions (e.g., movable goods, personal safety at work, perception of a secure working environment), which are one of the four resources identified (i.e., objects, personal characteristics, conditions and energies; Hobfoll, 2001). Although robberies may result in both verbal and physical violence against employees (e.g., swearing, rough gestures and pistol whipping), the most common form of aggression regards death threats (Wright & Decker, 1997; Katz, 1988; Conklin, 1972). Robberies at work may, therefore, be considered as particularly stressful events because of its unpredictability, suddenness, and occurrence within a setting where employees ordinarily feel safe.

When workers experience resource loss, they apply resource conservation strategies (i.e., resource substitution, replacement and reappraisal), whereby they try to recover from losses. In this context, the availability of resources becomes particularly important and the harnessing of other types of resources becomes relevant to satisfy the demands related to the recovery, re-establish lost resources or diminish the resulting negative consequences (Hobfoll, 1989). However, any resource replacement is also stressful in itself because it implies the danger that resources expended in coping may exceed the resulting benefits. Thereby, a lack of resource gain following a significant resource investment may be perceived as an additional loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, whether employees suffer, or continue to suffer, resource loss (e.g., due to stress, sustained injuries or multiple thefts and robberies) and they do not succeed to restore their resources by employing other resources to compensate the loss (e.g., seeking and receiving social support), they may further worsen their losses. In this case, victims are at higher risk of experiencing diminished well-being, long-term post-traumatic stress (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, & Johnson, 2006), and negative work-related consequences.

A peculiar feature of a theft or a robbery at work is that it occurs unexpectedly at the workplace, where workers usually feel safe: consequently, most people may feel threatened,

unprotected, fearful, helpless and hopeless. Additionally, by returning to the same environment where the trauma took place, stress responses might be exacerbated and protracted over time. Thus, the work environment may become a trigger and a cuing source for memories and emotions associated with the critical event (Smith & Vela, 2001). As a result, feelings of life threat, lack of safety, helplessness, hopelessness, and horror are common among robbery victims. Thus, criterion A for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as described by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) is likely to be met, since thefts and robberies may be perceived as unexpected life-threatening events and hence considered fully-fledged potentially traumatic events (PTEs).

2.1. Psycho-somatic symptoms and psychological malaise

Previous studies have shown that robberies may be PTEs (Armour & Hansen, 2015; Hansen, Armour, Shelvin, & Elklit, 2014) which may impair employees' psycho-physical well-being (Miller-Burke, Attridge, & Fass, 1999; Schnurr & Jankowski, 1999) and stimulate the development of numerous mental health problems, such as long-term psychological distress (Giorgi, Perez, Montani, Courcy, & Arcangeli, 2015a; Harrison & Kinner, 1998; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998), major depressive disorder (Belleville, Marchand, St-Hilaire, Martin, & Silva, 2012; Zatzick et al., 2008), acute stress disorder (Belleville et al., 2012; Hansen & Elklit, 2011; 2013; Hansen et al., 2014), and post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS; Belleville et al., 2012; Bobic, Pavicevi, & Gomzi, 2007; Fichera et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2014; Hansen & Elklit, 2014; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; van der Velden, van der Burg, Steinmetz, & van den Bout, 1992). For instance, in a mail survey study of 57 victims of armed robberies, respondents referred elevated distress levels which persisted for several years (Harrison & Kinner, 1998). This finding is consistent with those from other studies showing high psychological distress levels following robberies exposure (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Giorgi et al., 2015b). The most common symptomatology reported by one-hundred and forty-one bank employees who were victims of hold-ups embraced the following: augmented awareness of

victims' surroundings, sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, headaches, overstated startle responses, anger, worse physical health (Miller-Burke et al., 1999). Additionally, victims of robberies were more likely to report somatization (Hansen et al., 2014), agitated stress states (St-Hilaire & Marchand, 2001), anxiety and depression symptoms (Söndergaard, 2008) than their non-affected counterparts. Moreover, individuals who experienced a robbery were more likely to seek medical attention (Belleville et al., 2012, Schnurr & Jankowski, 1999) due to their reduced physical health, especially in the presence of PTSS. However, Giorgi and colleagues (2015a) revealed that bank robbery victims did not typically require medical attention, and that, in the few cases that needed it, any injuries found resolution after a few days.

Regarding medical health service (MHS) utilisation, van der Velden and colleagues (1992) noticed a general tendency from robbery victims to seek more MHS than non-victimised co-workers, even if there were not significant differences in the number of therapeutic sessions between victims and non-victims who sought treatment. Thus, prior studies showed that mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety (Rutter, Weatherill, Krill, Orazem, & Taft, 2013; Söndergaard, 2008), were associated with PTSS which may be developed following robberies exposure.

3. Post-traumatic stress symptoms

According to the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), to diagnose the presence of PTSD - which is included in Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders category - certain criteria must be met. The direct or indirect exposure (e.g., as a witness) to a traumatic event - which has resulted in actual or threatened death, serious injury, sexual violence or threat of physical integrity to self or others - is a necessary PTSD diagnostic criterion (Criterion A), as well as the presence of specific symptoms which are ascribable to three main symptom clusters: re-experiencing, avoidance, alterations in arousal. First, the individual must have at least one of the following intrusion symptoms: unwanted upsetting memories, flashbacks, nightmares, emotional distress or physical reactivity in response to internal or external cues which function as reminders of the trauma (Criterion B). Second, the person must have

at least one of the following avoidance symptoms: avoidance of trauma-related thoughts or feelings, avoidance of people, places and objects that are reminders of the event (Criterion C). Third, individuals must have at least two of the following arousal symptoms: irritability, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance (e.g., insomnia), difficulty in concentrating, exaggerated startle reaction, or outbursts of anger (Criterion E). Moreover, an additional symptom cluster was added to the latest DSM edition (DSM 5; APA, 2013) regarding negative alterations in cognition and mood. To meet this further criterion, the person must experience at least two of the following negative thoughts or feelings - which began or worsened following the trauma - : incapacity to recall key trauma-related facets, negative thoughts about oneself or the world, exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma, negative affect, difficulty experiencing positive affect, reduced interest in daily activities, feeling isolated (Criterion D). If these symptoms persist for more than one month, creating considerable distress or impairment in victim's daily living (e.g. social, occupational areas, Criterion F and G), and if they are not caused by medication, substance use, or other illnesses (Criterion H), a diagnosis of PTSD is appropriate. Like PTSD, the acute stress disorder (ASD) is defined as a disorder which follows experiencing, witnessing or being confronted with a trauma. ASD is characterized by the presence of intrusion, avoidance, arousal symptomatology and negative mood. The main difference between ASD and PTSD diagnostic criteria is that ASD-related symptoms last from a minimum of three days to a maximum of one month after trauma exposure, whereas PTSS persist for more than one month after the traumatic event occurrence. Furthermore, ASD may involve dissociative symptoms, such as alterations in sense of reality about one's environment or oneself and incapacity to remember important trauma-related features.

The estimated ASD prevalence is of fourteen- twenty-five% among robbed victims (Elklit, 2002; Hansen & Elklit, 2013). ASD severity seems to be a better predictor of PTSD severity than ASD diagnosis (Hansen & Elklit, 2013). This means that individuals who experience higher acute stress reactions in the first week after the robbery are more likely to develop severe PTSD symptomatology over time (Hansen, Hyland, & Armour, 2016). Most victims report PTSS

immediately following the robbery (Richards, 2000), and then PTSS generally decrease significantly with the passage of time, disappearing within a few months after the trauma. However, in some cases the symptomatology may persist in the form of chronic PTSD (Shalev, 2009). Leyman (1985) found that even after six months, fifty-eight percent of bank robbery victims reported distress symptoms. Similarly, Harrison and Kinner (1998) revealed that armed robbery victims were still experiencing high post-traumatic stress levels six months following the episode, whereas Tunnecliffe and Green (1986) showed that clinical conditions were enduring in eleven out sixteen hold-ups victims up to two years after the event. Moreover, vicarious traumatization may affect colleagues who were absent from work during robbery, especially in small work settings with a few employees, where reciprocal social relationships are likely to be close (Dyregrov, Kristoffersen, & Müller, 1991; Miller-Burke et al., 1999; Richards, 2001).

3.1. Pre- and peri- risk factors for the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms

The severity of trauma is determined also by individuals' perceptions of the cognitive and emotional valance of the event, as well as stimulus-response fear conditioning (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Graham et al., 2016; Kelley, Weathers, McDevitt-Murphy, Eakin, & Flood, 2009). For instance, previous studies have found that socio-demographic variables might make victims at increased risk for violent victimisation, such as gender (i.e., male for non-sexual violent events), marital status (i.e., never married), race/ethnicity (i.e., non-white; McGruder-Johnson, Davidson, Gleaves, Stock, & Finch, 2000). Thus, in line with two meta-analyses (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003), numerous socio-demographic variables might be predictive of PTSS, although their predictive value seemed to be small (Hansen & Elklit, 2011, 2013; Mucci, Giorgi, Fiz Perez, Iavicoli, & Arcangeli, 2015) and variable across trauma types. Furthermore, contrasting findings have been found regarding age (Bobic et al., 2007; Hansen & Elklit, 2011, 2013; Mucci et al., 2015; Fichera et al., 2014), level of education (Bobic et al., 2007; Davis, Taylor, & Lurigio, 1996; Elklit, 2002) and gender (Bobic et al., 2007; Christiansen & Hansen, 2015;

Leyman, 1985). For instance, some studies did not find gender differences (Bobic et al., 2007; Harrison & Kinner, 1998; Resick, Jordan, Girelli, Hutter, & Marhoefer-Dvorak, 1988), whereas numerous investigations demonstrated that female robbery victims were more vulnerable to PTSS than their male counterparts (Beckmann, 1995; Cohn, 1974; Christiansen & Hansen, 2015; Fichera et al., 2014; Hansen & Elklit, 2013; Hansen et al., 2014; Leyman, 1985). For instance, Christiansen and Hansen (2015) conducted a research on 450 Danish bank tellers who were victims of robberies to shed light on possible gender differences in the likelihood of developing PTSS. The authors found that such differences were attributable to sex dissimilarities in the subjective experience and evaluation of the traumatic event, both during and following the trauma. Thus, females were more likely to report greater peritraumatic fear, horror, helplessness, negative post-traumatic cognitions about self and world following a robbery. Thereby, females were at higher risk of developing PTSS than males. Moreover, co-existing psychological and psychiatric disorders (Giorgi et al., 2015b; Hansen & Elklit, 2013; Hansen et al., 2014; Marmar et al., 2006), prior trauma exposure (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Hansen & Elklit, 2011), previous experiences of robberies (Fichera et al., 2014; Miller-Burke et al., 1999; McFarlane & Bryant, 2007; Jenkinson, 1993), and major life changes (Elklit, 2002; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998) have been identified as important risk factors for post-robbery PTSS. Additionally, higher neuroticism levels and more negative self-cognitions significantly increased the probability of developing PTSD (Hansen et al., 2016).

Research has identified peri-traumatic risk factors for post-traumatic PTSD which may stem from modalities related to the implementation of a robbery (e.g., duration, intensity, level of violence used) as well as from victims' perceptions of the seriousness of the threat. Among such factors, studies have acknowledged the importance of the following aspects: trauma severity (Brewin et al., 2000; Elklit, 2002), presence during the robbery (Hansen & Elklit, 2013; Hansen et al., 2014), direct exposure to robbery - rather than being a bystander - (Giorgi et al., 2015a, 2015b; Mucci et al., 2015), being alone during the event (Fichera et al., 2014), physical proximity to the robber - such as being in the same room with the robber, seeing the robber, and being able to identify the criminal(s) (Elklit,

2002; Hansen & Elklit, 2011; Miller-Burke et al., 1999; Frans, Åhs, Bihre, & Åhs, 2018; Rutter et al., 2013; Jenkinson, 1993) - fights and physical contact without injuries (Fichera et al., 2014; Giorgi et al., 2015b), physical injuries during the event (Bobic et al., 2007; Fichera et al., 2014), the presence of customers witnessing the robbery (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998), the use of a weapon (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Miller-Burke et al., 1999; Jenkinson, 1993).

Since robbery is generally characterized by death threats and uncertainty associated with the outcome of the event (Marquez, 1996; Paes-Machado & Nascimento, 2006; Richardson, 1985), the majority of victims experience negative peri-traumatic feelings, such as vulnerability attributions (Harrison & Kinner, 1998), the thought of being harmed (Giorgi et al., 2015b; Hansen, Armour, & Elklit, 2012; Kleim, Ehlers, & Glucksman, 2007; Mucci et al., 2015), perceived life threat (Davis et al., 1996; Elklit, 2002; Giorgi et al., 2015b; Hansen & Elklit, 2011, 2013; Kamphuis, & Emmelkamp, 1998; Mucci et al., 2015), anxiety, intense fear of imminent death, terror, which are frequently accompanied by a strong sense of powerlessness, hopelessness (Fichera et al., 2014; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Mucci et al., 2015; Paes-Machado & Levenstein, 2004) and helplessness (Elklit, 2002; Hansen & Elklit, 2011, 2013; Miller-Burke et al., 1999). Prior studies have found that these victims' peri-traumatic emotional reactions, in combination with possible dissociative responses and negative emotions experienced during the critical event, were more strongly predictive of PTSD than the objective circumstances of the event itself (Kleber & van der Velden, 2009; Ladwig et al., 2002). Moreover, previous investigations have shown that PTSD severity was strongly related also to negative post-traumatic appraisal of the trauma, negative cognitions concerning self and the world as well as maladaptive thinking related to the panic (i.e., an increased awareness of bodily sensations and the tendency to interpret these sensations catastrophically; Blain, Galovski, Elwood, & Meriac, 2013; Foa, Ehlers, Clark, Tolin, & Orsillo, 1999; Hansen & Elklit, 2011, 2013; Moser, Hajcak, Simons, & Foa, 2007; Nixon & Bryant, 2005).

3.2. Work-related outcomes associated with post-traumatic symptoms following robbery exposure

Post-traumatic re-experiencing and arousal symptoms – which are developed as a consequence of robberies exposure - may interfere with a broader range of occupational tasks, especially when they involve higher levels of cognitive processes (e.g., concentration, memory; Taylor, Wald, & Asmundson, 2007). This may result in a poorer occupational functioning (Breslau, Lucia, & Davis, 2004; Ciechanowski, Walker, Russo, Newman, & Katon, 2004; Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004; Stein, Walker, Hazen, & Forde, 1997; Zatzick et al., 1997; Zatzick et al., 2008), impaired work performance (Belleville et al., 2012; Miller-Burke et al., 1999), long-lasting occupational disability and difficulties to meet work-related demands (Adler et al., 2011; Belleville et al., 2012; Breslau et al., 2004; Hoge, Terhakopian, Castro, Messer, & Engel, 2007; Taylor et al., 2007).

Post-traumatic avoidance symptomatology may make the victim reluctant to return to their job after the work-related trauma (Taylor et al., 2007) because the workplace itself may be a reminder of the experienced trauma. This may turn in decreased intentions to continue working for the current employer (Miller-Burke et al., 1999), absenteeism (Belleville et al., 2012; Miller-Burke et al., 1999) and worse perceived social support from intra-organizational members (Söndergaard, 2008).

Additionally, employees who were exposed to robbers who used weapons, violence or abduction were more likely to take more frequent and larger amount of sickness absence (Jenkinson, 1993). More specifically, workers who were attacked for a second time tended to take five times longer sickness leaves when compared to those who were exposed only once (Jenkinson, 1993). Moreover, a long duration of sickness absence following a robbery - which was in average less than 20 days - was related to poor social support provided from managers and co-workers (Söndergaard, 2008). The relationships of trust with both colleagues and the organization - for which the employee works - may be seriously compromised by experiencing a robbery at work (Matthews, 2002, 2013;

Bauman, 2000; Kennedy, & Sacco, 1998; Jenkins, Purnell, & Wainstein, 1985). Previous studies have found that victims of workplace aggression might blame their organization, since it allowed the aggression to be committed against them and, as a result, they might experience negative feelings and emotions towards the organization (Lapierre, Spector, Lack, 2005). The thought of further violence may generate negative attitudes and behaviours towards their work environment (Rogers & Kelloway, 1997; Van Den Bossche, Tarris, Houtman, Smulders, & Kompier, 2013). For instance, evidence has been provided to support that post-robbery distress might lead to job dissatisfaction both in the aftermath of a robbery and a few months later (Giorgi et al., 2015a). Furthermore, the occurrence of a robbery at the workplace may undermine workers' sense of security. As a result, victims are likely to feel threatened or unsafe at work (Söndergaard, 2008) as well as anxious about interacting with customers, becoming more aware and suspicious towards them (Miller-Burke et al., 1999; Jones, 2002). More specifically, the higher was the fear for one's own safety following the robbery, the greater were the reported ASD symptoms (Elklit, 1999; Elklit & Kurdahl, 2007; Hansen & Elklit, 2013), whereas perceived safety was an important protective factor against PTSS (Hansen & Elklit, 2013).

4. Protective factors

In the context of traumatic events, victim's reactions play an important role in the recovery process and a range of factors can modify the recovery or de-escalate distress symptoms, such as the provision of appropriate social support.

4.1. Social support seeking and social support

Previous studies have identified some maladaptive coping strategies adopted by robbery victims. For instance, active or passive attempts to avoid the resurfacing of trauma-associated memories were positively associated with the risk of developing ASD and PTSS (Elklit, 2002; Harrison & Kinner, 1998; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Mucci et al., 2015). Thus, the defence

system when dealing with the inability of responding properly to a PTE, develops different mechanisms, such as “avoidance”, whereby victims, who have difficulty in acknowledging their traumatic experience, suppress painful emotions and memories. In this case, the trauma is likely to express itself in other ways, such as through psycho-somatic complaints (McCall & Resick, 2003; Foa, Steketee, & Rothbaum, 1989). Additionally, research has found that both depressive (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998) and emotional coping strategies (Hansen et al., 2014) were strongly related to traumatization. Conversely, previous investigations have shown that traumatized victims tend to seek social support to cope with negative symptoms (Smith, Donlon, Anderson, Hughes, & Jones, 2015). This latter strategy may be helpful especially when support is provided by others who have shared the same experience and can intimately understand the seeker's needs (Thoits, 2011).

Social support seeking is an active emotion-focused coping strategy (Norberg, Lindblad, & Boman, 2006; Schaefer & Moos, 1998; Taylor & Stanton, 2007) which generates positive outcomes by reducing the emotional consequences stemmed from stressful events and by improving one's ability to meet recovery-related demands (Thoits, 2011). Such strategy may foster resilience and facilitate recovery in the aftermath of a trauma (Ozer et al., 2003). Thus, this may positively influence seeker's perceptions regarding social support and self-efficacy appraisals (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007), whereby contributing to a decrease in victims' feelings of isolation and loneliness. In addition, seeking social support may also enable victims to successfully adapt in the aftermath of the trauma. Indeed, talking about the event and expressing one's own emotions with significant others may contribute to facilitating the victim in adopting further functional coping strategies, in re-appraising the event and in enhancing personal sense of meaning (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009; Schaefer & Moos, 1998).

It should be noted that social support seeking is different from perceived or effectively received social support. Therefore, when this way of coping with stress is associated with a positive perceived social support, it may foster self-efficacy appraisals and contribute to reducing psychological distress (Smith, Benight, & Cieslak, 2013). On the contrary, social support seeking

may have negative effects, such as increased depression, anxiety and stress levels (Dickstein et al., 2015), when individuals do not perceive themselves to have received the social support they sought. What is decisive of whether social support protects against PTSS is the quality of the social support provided (Andrews, Brewin, & Rose, 2003; Elklit, 2002; Miller-Burke et al., 1999; Richards, 2000). Thus, ambiguous support, criticism, feeling let down by others or guilty feelings can turn social support into a burden for the victims and, therefore, constitute a barrier to their recovery process (Christiansen & Elklit, 2008; Yap & Devilly, 2004).

Robbery research investigating social support has shown that a lack of perceived social support was significantly associated with PTSS (Elklit, 1999, 2002; Hansen & Elklit, 2013; Harrison & Kinner, 1998; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Miller-Burke et al., 1999; Richards, 2000). However, whereas Elklit (2002) revealed that low perceived social support levels were negatively related to ASD, Richards (2000) showed that social support was not significantly associated with PTSS until six months following the robbery. Likewise, Ozer and colleagues' (2003) meta-analysis found that the strength of the relationship between perceived social support and PTSD grew with the passage of time. Although in the aftermath of a critical event victims received a lot of social support, after six months or more, people around victims showed less understanding, since they expected that victimized individuals had recovered (Theorell et al., 1988). Despite of the relevance of support from families and friends in the recovery process is well-known, sources of support within the work environment, such as supervisors and colleagues, can also be effective in decreasing victims' stress associated to a trauma which occurred within the workplace (House, 1981). Thus, previous studies have confirmed that social support from managers and co-workers led victims to experience fewer symptoms, good psychological functioning and shorter sick absence (Söndergaard, 2008). Additionally, group cohesion, supportive leadership, good quality of the leadership, good communication may play a protective role by buffering the detrimental impact of robberies exposure on employees' well-being, reducing the risk of developing PTSD (Fichera et al., 2014; Jones, 2002; van der Ploeg & Kleber, 2003).

4.2. Trauma-related coping self-efficacy

Trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE) refers to the perceived ability to effectively manage both personal functioning and external recovery demands handled in the aftermath of a traumatic event (Benight & Bandura, 2004). This internal sense of control has been revealed to affect immediate as well as long-term distress and PTSS levels (Luszczynska, Benight, & Cieslak, 2009) following exposure to different shocking events such as childhood sexual abuse (Cieslak, Benight, & Lehman, 2008), natural disasters (van der Velden, van Loon, Benight, & Eckhardt, 2012), terrorist attacks (Benight et al., 2000), motor vehicle accidents (Benight, Cieslak, Molton, & Johnson, 2008), military combat (Solomon, Benbenishty, & Mikulincer, 1991), domestic violence (Benight, Harding-Taylor, Midboe, & Durham, 2004), and burn injuries (Bosmans, Hofland, De Jong, & Van Loey, 2015). Thus, CSE plays a protective role in overcoming trauma because victims, who feel able to exert control on trauma-related consequences, are more likely to perceive reduced distress which, in turn, decreases the likelihood of developing PTSS (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Benight, Ruzek, & Waldrep, 2008; Bosmans et al., 2015; Bosmans & van der Velden, 2015; Flatten, Walte, & Perlitz, 2008).

CSE impacts on the stressfulness of traumatic events through various mechanisms. Firstly, CSE influences the extent to which an event is perceived as threatening by facilitating individual ability to find a good balance among personal coping abilities, environmental demands and potentially harmful characteristics of the event (Bandura, 1997). Secondly, by determining their perceived feasibility, CSE perceptions affect the individual motivation to choose, utilize and sustain effective coping strategies, thereby influencing his/her perception of the event as stressful over time (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Benight et al., 1999; Kraaij, Garnefski, & Maes, 2002). Thirdly, CSE impacts on the perceived stressfulness of any existing initial stress reactions which are perceived as less distressing by victims who believe in their own ability to relieve them (Kent, 1987; Kent & Gibbons, 1987).

Longitudinal studies have shown the predictive role played by CSE perceptions in accounting for a significant proportion (eight–twenty-seven percent) of the variation in PTSS, over and above the effect of a variety of control variables (e.g., Bosmans, Benight, van der Knaap, Winkel & van der Velden, 2013; Luszczynska et al., 2009). Research has found that higher CSE levels predicted fewer initial and long-term PTSS, facilitating a quicker recovery after experiencing a potentially traumatic event (Bosmans et al., 2015). The perceived stress level during or immediately after the traumatic event seems to influence both short-term symptoms and perceptions to be able to overcome trauma-related consequences (Bosmans & van der Velden, 2015). However, it is not clear whether initial stress reactions determine CSE or, on the contrary, CSE influences the recollection of how stressful the event was at the time. Indeed, this relationship was studied through a cross-sectional design and the total explained variance of CSE was only of fourteen percent (which included the effect of personality traits; Bosmans & van der Velden, 2015). Furthermore, a four-wave follow-up study (Bosmans & van Der Velden, 2017) on the cross-lagged relationship between CSE and PTSS found that when PTSS persisted for years, they began to affect subsequent victims' CSE perceptions. Thus, CSE levels are continuously adapted over time based on individual perceptions of one's own effectiveness in dealing with emotional and psychological consequences of the trauma. If people have been unable to recover from post-traumatic distress for a long period, this represents a persistent negative mastery experience associated with negative psychological and affective states and, therefore, reduced CSE levels.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, robberies represent a serious concern in terms of third-party workplace aggression: they are severely traumatizing experiences for employees which may stimulate the development of psychological distress, PTSS and, therefore, negative work-related outcomes. To date, only a few studies have focused on the psychological impact of robberies on employees working in small businesses (Belleville et al., 2012), with previous research on this topic mainly focused on

the banking sector (see for example Armour & Hansen, 2015; Christiansen & Hansen, 2015). To date, as far as we know, no previous studies have examined whether thefts at work may be considered as traumatic experiences and whether there are differences in terms of psychological outcomes between victims of thefts only and victims of both thefts and robberies. It is possible that individuals who were exposed to multiple traumatic events might experience residual effects of such exposure, being subject to re-experiencing many stressful events and arousal stimuli over time. This might culminate in impaired mental health (Wahlström et al., 2008) and in higher levels of post-traumatic stress (Yuan et al., 2012). In order to contribute to fill these gaps, two of our studies will investigate the psychological sequelae of robberies and thefts at work among workers employed in small businesses.

6. References

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PART B:
Four empirical studies

CHAPTER 4

Investigating Italian and Irish employees' emotional and cognitive reactions to customer mistreatment: An experimental study

The present study focuses on reciprocation that is one of the two behavioral categories related to employees' reactions following customer mistreatment which has been identified by the theoretical model proposed in *Chapter 2* (see *Figure 1*). We aim to shed light on the mechanisms which may lead an employee to be uncivil toward a customer as a result of customer mistreatment. More in detail, drawing on the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) - which has been discussed in *Chapter 1* – the main purpose of this research is to investigate Italian and Irish employees' emotional and cognitive reactions to customer mistreatment by analysing the potential mediating role of negative emotions and cognitive impairment in the customer-incivility employee-incivility relationship.

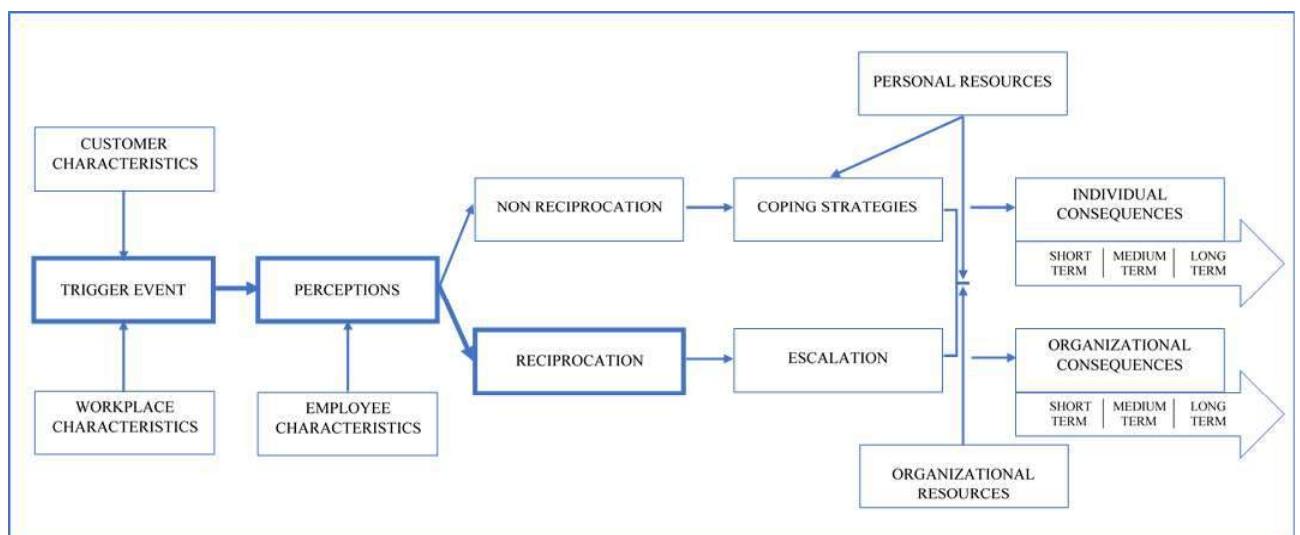


Figure 1. Theoretical model proposed in Chapter 2 with aspects analysed by this study in boldfaced.

Abstract

Background. Given the increasing market competitiveness, companies strive to deliver high-quality customer services. Employees' negative reactions in response to customer mistreatment may erode the quality of the service provided with considerable organizational costs.

Objective. This two-country study investigated whether negative emotions and cognitive impairment sequentially mediate the customer-incivility employee-incivility relationship.

Method. One hundred fifty-seven Italian and two hundred fifty-nine Irish students working in customer-facing roles completed a questionnaire which included an experimental task that manipulated customer misbehaviour through scenarios to create three conditions (i.e. control, incivility, verbal aggression). Emotional reactions, cognitive impairment and customer-directed incivility were investigated. ANOVA and SEM analyses were conducted.

Results. In both nations, customer mistreatment was associated with negative emotions and cognitive impairment. Italian workers reacted directly to negative emotions aroused from stressful interactions with aggressive customers by developing customer-directed incivility intentions. Conversely, Irish employees who perceived customer-encounters as highly stressful were likely to experience negative emotions which led to cognitive impairment and, thus, customer-directed incivility.

Conclusion. This two-country study extends incivility research by showing how the customer incivility-employee incivility dynamic plays out through negative emotions and cognitive impairment. Organizations should provide their employees with short breaks after negative customer-encounters and training programs aimed at improving emotion regulation skills and capabilities to help them deal with customer mistreatment.

Key words: customer incivility, customer verbal aggression, employee-to-customer incivility, negative emotions, cognitive impairment.

1. Introduction

In most western countries, the service sector has become the main employment area (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Thereby, a large proportion of workers spend most of their working time in direct contact with the public and, therefore, they are frequently exposed to customer-related social stressors (CSSs; Dormann & Zapf, 2004). More specifically, evidence has been provided to suggest that customer mistreatment is increasing (e.g., Harris & Ogbonna, 2006). As a result, from the worker's perspective, dealing with uncivil or verbally aggressive customers can undermine one's well-being by stimulating the development of anxiety and depression symptomatology, psychological resource drain (see Hobfoll, 1989) and emotional distress (Adams & Buck, 2010; Adams & Webster, 2013; Grebner et al., 2003; Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010; Torres, van Niekerk, & Orłowski, 2017; Witt, Andrews, & Carlson, 2004). These symptoms may lead to impaired overall and service recovery performance (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016; Karatepe, Beirami, Bouzari, & Safavi, 2014; Kim, Paek, Choi, & Lee, 2012; Yoo, Kim, & Lee, 2015), diminished extra-role customer service (Karatepe et al., 2014), customer-directed service sabotage (Yeh, 2015), lower quality of the service provided (Rafaeli et al., 2012), increased tardiness, absenteeism (Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012), and occupational disability (White et al., 2015). Such outcomes represent serious impediments to organizational performance and profitability (Bonache & Noethen, 2014; Godøy, 2016) with considerable costs for the whole organization. Furthermore, customer incivility may provoke employee-to-customer incivility (Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014): the worker who is the victim of customer incivility can engage in negative reactions directed toward customers in general (i.e., target-general reactions), including withdraw organizational behaviours (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014) and uncivil responses (Walker et al., 2014), or toward the source of such mistreatment (i.e., target-specific reactions), including incivility

directed toward the uncivil customer (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). This latter reaction is consistent with Andersson and Person's (1999) spiral of incivility model. According to this framework, a rude act perpetrated by a customer can motivate the employee who was the target of such act to reciprocate by treating the incivility instigator in a disrespectful way. This may foster a spiral circle of incivility. To date, only a few studies have focused on this reciprocal process in the relationship between employees and customers, with previous research on this topic predominantly concentrated on individual responses (e.g., emotional dissonance, burnout) following negative encounters with the public. Nevertheless, customer-directed incivility represents an important issue because such event can erode the quality of the service provided, increase customer turnover and reduce organizational performance - a crucial source of competitive advantage for many organizations worldwide (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005).

This study aimed to shed light on the mechanisms underlying employee-to-customer incivility following encounters with rude or verbally aggressive customers, by adopting a scenario-based experimental design and a cross-national approach. In doing so, the role of negative emotions and cognitive impairment as mediators of the relationship between customer mistreatment (in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression) and employee-to-customer incivility was investigated. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) model (Hobfoll, 2001) and the Affective Events Theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), we expected that service providers who would perceive customer encounters as more aggressive would be more likely to appraise such encounters as highly stressful and, as a result, they would feel negative emotions which, in turn, would undermine cognitive functioning, thereby decreasing their ability to interact with customers in a civil way. By testing this prediction, this study significantly contributes to the workplace incivility literature in two ways. First, prior research in this area has mostly focused on within organizational sources of mistreatment (e.g.,

supervisors, co-workers; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). This is one of the few studies (except for van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010) to identify which factors mediate the relationship between customer and employee incivility, thus providing guidance to managers to improve service quality and promote service providers' well-being. Second, this study adopts a cross-national approach to understand whether Italians and Irish may react differently to negative emotions stemming from stressful customer encounters, reporting different customer-directed incivility tendencies. Investigating the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer-directed incivility is crucial to formulate preventive measures and tailored interventions that help victims maintain an optimal functioning at work, even in the face of negative customer-encounters.

1.1. Customer mistreatment as a stressful event

Throughout this paper we use the term customer mistreatment to refer to customer incivility and verbal aggression, whereas we utilize the term misbehaving customers to refer to uncivil and verbally aggressive customers. Customer incivility is described as a low-intensity deviant behaviour, perpetrated by someone in a client role, with ambiguous intent to harm an employee, in violation of social norms of interpersonal treatment (Leiter, Peck, & Gumuchian, 2015; Sliter et al., 2010). It can be considered as an interpersonal daily hassle which occurs within a given work setting (Sliter et al., 2010) because of its high occurrence, according to what reported by several studies (Molino et al., 2016; Hoobler & Swanberg, 2006; Scarone & Cedillo, 2007; Sliter et al., 2012). Uncivil customer behaviours may comprise both verbal expressions, such as the utilization of inappropriate manners of addressing the employee (e.g., "Hey you"; Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001; Sliter et al., 2010), and discourteous gestures (e.g. eye rolling to express impatience; Wilson & Holmval, 2013).

Customer verbal aggression is defined as verbal abuse perpetrated by someone in a client role, with clear intent to hurt an employee deliberately through offensive words (e.g., personal verbal insults), tone (e.g., shouting) or manner (e.g., swearing), in violation of the social norms of mutual respect (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). On the one hand, both customer incivility and verbal aggression represent CSSs (Dormann & Zapf, 2004) which may increase employee risk of experiencing negative emotions, emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion and psychological distress (Adams & Buck, 2010; Adams & Webster, 2013; Sliter et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2017). On the other hand, incivility can be conceptualized as a milder form of verbal aggression since it violates social norms through gestures or verbal expressions which lack the anger that characterises verbal aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, 2008; Lim et al., 2008; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013).

In line with the COR theory, employees experience stress when: a) they feel threatened by a risk of resource loss, b) deal with actual resource loss, or c) receive insufficient return of supplementary resources following significant resource investment (Hobfoll, 2001). The initial threat of resource loss is perceived as a stressor. It is typically accompanied by a negative emotion (e.g., fear, anger) as well as emotional and physiological arousal which fatigues the body and, in the case of prolonged loss or threat to resources, leads to self-depletion or exhaustion (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Being a target of customer mistreatment can be a stressful experience because employees may perceive a threat to their working conditions and personal resources (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy), which are two of four resources identified by COR theory (i.e., objects, conditions, personal characteristics, energies; Hobfoll, 1989). Alternatively, negative customer encounters may be stressful experiences because employees perceive to receive insufficient return of supplementary resources (i.e., a successful encounter allows employees to gain further resources, such as optimism) following significant resource investment (i.e., energies, knowledge). If employees (continue to) suffer from resource loss

(e.g., following frequent encounters with rude or verbally aggressive customers) without being able to compensate through resource replacement - by employing other resources to offset the loss - they are at increased risk for emotional exhaustion. In a situation of continued resource depletion, dealing with other difficult customers may be perceived as more effortful due to an individual's reduced coping capacity. In this context, customer mistreatment can deplete employees' resources and self-regulation capacity, and foster employee-to-customer incivility. Additionally, findings from previous studies showed that even brief incidents of customer mistreatment can negatively influence employees' performance and productivity (Porath & Erez, 2007, 2009; Rafaeli et al., 2012; Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2017).

The current study aimed at providing empirical evidence to support COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) within customer service contexts by examining the stress appraisal level elicited by aggressiveness severity attributed to imagined customer encounters as antecedent of employees' negative emotions and cognitive impairment. Since encounters with verbally aggressive customers may be perceived – by definition – as higher aggressive in comparison with those with rude clients, we expected that interacting with verbally aggressive customers would be perceived as more threatening and, therefore, appraised as more stressful than interacting with uncivil clients, even if both forms of customer mistreatment may be appraised as stressful events. Moreover, we expected that more a customer will be perceived as aggressive, more the customer encounter will be appraised as stressful. Thus, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 1: The severity of aggressiveness attributed to customer encounters would be positively associated with stress appraisal level

1.2. The relationship between customer mistreatment and customer-directed incivility

Customer-directed incivility refers to a low-intensity rude and discourteous behavior directed to customers with ambiguous intention to harm them in violation of workplace norms of mutual respect and courtesy (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Employees who are treated in an uncivil manner are likely to react negatively by seeking revenge (e.g., Bedi & Schat, 2017), by sabotaging the uncivil client (e.g., in voice-to-voice encounters; Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011; and face-to-face encounters; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014), or by reciprocating with an uncivil act directed toward the incivility source (Anderson & Pearson, 1999) or towards the customer in general. This may occur even if employees acknowledge that their act could be judged by the organization itself as an expression of counterproductive work behavior (Penney & Spector, 2005). This is in line with the fourth principle of the COR theory (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018) which states that resource-depleted employees may adopt defensive strategies and become irrational to conserve their resources. In the light of such principle, we could consider customer-directed incivility as a coping strategy which employees might adopt to preserve their resources. Moreover, evidence has been provided about the notion that incivility tends to be reciprocated toward its instigator by empirical studies on organizational justice (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), workplace aggression (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010) and workplace incivility (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2017). For instance, van Jaarsveld and colleagues (2010) showed that customer incivility generated employee incivility, and employee incivility triggered customer incivility. On the one hand, the most common reason reported by customers to be uncivil was identified in an initial act of incivility perpetrated by the service representative (Sliter & Jones, 2016; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2014). This means that when a service provider treats a customer in an uncivil way, it is likely that the customer

will become frustrated and he/she will vent that incivility back to the worker (Sliter & Jones, 2016). On the other hand, previous research has found that customer incivility was positively associated with customer-directed incivility tendencies (Torres et al., 2017). Thus, drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), if customer mistreatment (in the forms of incivility or verbal aggression) is appraised as a threatening stressor, it will exhaust workers' emotional and cognitive resources – which are required to successfully regulate employees' reactions to misbehaving customers - leading them to reduce their job performance in an effort to conserve their remaining resources (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). As a result, resource-depleted employees could be more likely to behave rudely toward customers and colleagues since they perceive to not have enough emotional and cognitive resources to perform in a civil way. More specifically, when faced with negative encounters and the subsequent loss of self-esteem and self-worth (Dormann & Zapf, 2004), employees can engage in uncivil behaviors toward the source of mistreatment as a way to restore and replace the lost personal resources (e.g., self-worth, social status), which are more highly valued by them (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Thus, in line with the COR theory, “excessive demands and/or insufficient resources within a particular role domain can result in negative affective and dysfunctional behaviors” (Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001; p.100).

Consistent with this logic, previous investigations revealed that employees who encountered uncivil customers were at increased risk of developing emotional exhaustion and perceiving emotional job demands as high which, in turn, led them to engage in higher levels of incivility towards customers and colleagues (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Kim & Qu, 2018). Additionally, Walker and colleagues (2014) found that specific instances of customer verbal aggression - especially in case of attacks targeted at the employee - led to uncivil employee reactions toward the instigating customer, such as getting blunt with the customer and escalating one's own tone of voice. By analysing the direct influence of aggressiveness severity (i.e., being

exposed to customer verbal aggression was considered as more severe than being victim of customer incivility) on employee-to-customer incivility, we aimed to provide empirical evidence to the fourth principle of the COR theory. Thus, based on these arguments, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The severity of aggressiveness attributed to customer encounters would be positively associated with employee-to-customer incivility

1.3. The mediating role of negative emotions

According to AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), experiences of customer mistreatment is appraised as a significant event which triggers negative emotions that, therefore, can motivate affectively driven behaviours directed to the perceived source of the emotions (Weiss & Beal, 2005). Consistent with previous research, employees may feel negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, depression and fear (Kessler, Spector, Chang, & Parr, 2008), in response to interpersonal conflict (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Frone, 2000), customer mistreatment (Dallimore, Sparks, & Butcher, 2007; Wang et al., 2013), customer interaction injustice (Rupp & Spencer, 2006), customer incivility (Gabriel & Diefendorff, 2015; Torres et al., 2017; Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2017) and customer verbal aggression (Molino et al., 2016). For instance, Tremmel and Sonnentag (2017) revealed that employees who were more frequently confronted with rude customers during their working time were more likely to report negative affect at the end of the workday and at bedtime. As a result, they tended to experience unpleasant emotions the next morning. Similarly, Wang and co-workers' research (2013) showed that on days that workers were subjected to more daily customer mistreatment, they tended to ruminate more at night about experienced negative encounters and, in turn, report negative mood the morning after. Additionally, being exposed to customers who displayed

anger while complaining may be emotionally contagious, increasing the incidence of negative affective states (Dallimore et al., 2007).

Customer mistreatment triggers strong emotional reactions (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; McCance, Nye, Wang, Jones, & Chiu, 2013), which signals to workers that they are failing to reach their purposes - as suggested by the discrepancy between their felt emotional states and the organization-desired emotions (Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Wang et al., 2013) - and they need to engage in emotional labour to regulate the felt emotions in order to comply with organizational display rules. This may be particularly effortful for employees who have to hide negative emotions in the face of unexpected customer mistreatment (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). In addition, this may be conducive to affective discomfort, emotional dissonance and exhaustion (Goldber & Grandey, 2007; Molino et al., 2016).

Evidence has shown that employees can utilize different coping strategies depending on whether an act is rude or verbally aggressive, in addition to being influenced by individual dispositions (Grandey et al., 2004; Goussinsky, 2012). Moreover, as stated by AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the negative emotions aroused by the perceived violation of one's own sense of dignity and respect - related to be a target of customer mistreatment - are likely to increase employee motivation to reciprocate with uncivility directed toward the source of mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) as a mechanism to end an uncivil service encounter (Sliter et al., 2010) and as compensation for the dissatisfaction (Richards & Schat, 2011). Thus, threat appraisals following negative interactions lead employees to more negative affective states (e.g., Schneider, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) which, in turn, may stimulate customer-directed incivility intentions. Consistent with this line of reasoning, the level of stress appraisal elicited by the aggressiveness severity attributed to customer encounters may stimulate negative emotions, raising the likelihood of customer-directed incivility occurrence.

1.4. The mediating role of cognitive impairment

Negative customer encounters may also undermine employees' cognitive functioning and, therefore, fulfil employee-to-customer uncivil tendencies. Indeed, in the light of COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), employees who encounter misbehaving customers have to deal with additional tasks stemmed from the resulting cognitive interference (i.e., the effort of maintaining self-control distract them by impeding their ability to effectively perform their jobs) and emotional regulation (i.e., in the attempt of complying with organizational display rules) which may drain their energies and cognitive resources. This is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that even single incidents of customer mistreatment might produce cognitive impairment which, in turn, might result in performance decrements. For instance, Goldberg and Grandey's research (2007) found that being the target of customer hostility led to more errors in processing customer requests. Similarly, evidence has been provided to support the negative impact of observing anger on employees' ability to perform complex tasks and solve problems (Miron-Spektor, Efrat-Treister, Rafaeli, & Schwarz-Cohen, 2011). Furthermore, research revealed that even one-time incidents of direct or indirect exposure to rudeness might seriously affect employees' objective cognitive functioning, resulting in impaired victims' and witnesses' performance on routine tasks as well as creative tasks in the immediate aftermath of the event (Porath & Erez, 2007, 2009). Likewise, findings from Rafaeli and colleagues' four experimental studies (2012) confirmed that even episodic and short-term encounters with verbally aggressive clients hampered the immediate cognitive performance of workers. Such cognitive impairment negatively affected cognitive aspects relevant for the customer service work (i.e., ability to recall of customers' requests, recognition memory, and active engagement of working memory), decreasing the overall quality of employees' performance in customer service tasks. Moreover, according to the COR theory (Hobfoll,

1989), this can amplify the potential for customer-directed incivility since a resource-depleted employee is more likely to be rude toward customers and be less willing to provide a good quality service (i.e., continue depleting those resources), preserve their remaining resources and recover from these negative experiences. Taken together, these assumptions suggest that workers who perceive encounters with misbehaving customers as more aggressive and, thus, stressful would be more likely to report impaired cognitive functioning and, in turn, customer-directed incivility intentions.

1.5. The sequential mediation of negative emotions and cognitive impairment

Negative emotions and cognitive impairment are both implicated in the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee-to-customer incivility. Indeed, being exposed to customer mistreatment may induce strong negative affective states (e.g., Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002; Rupp & Spencer, 2006) which, in turn, may drain employees' cognitive resources. In fact, negative emotions elicited by customer mistreatment may diminish employees' capacity to concentrate on their work tasks and lead them to revenge, through customer-directed incivility - or sabotage behaviours - to reaffirm their damaged identity, to restore justice or to discourage future identity threats (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2002). Thus, according to Beal and colleagues (2005), emotional events may consume employees' cognitive resources by stimulating: a) secondary appraisal of interpersonal interactions (i.e., a conscious process to evaluate one's own control of the event, available resources and plan or develop reactions to the aggression); b) rumination about social encounters (e.g., conscious recurrent thoughts about why the aggression occurred and what the encounter means for future work within the company); c) arousal stemmed from high-arousal negative feelings related to social encounters. When resources are focused on emotion regulation, cognitive processes related to performance are likely to be hindered (e.g., Kanfer &

Ackerman, 1989). Moreover, evidence has been provided to support that negative emotions can affect some relevant features of cognitive processing which may be crucial to complete complex tasks (e.g., Easterbrook, 1959; Eysenck, 1982; Mandler, 1975), such as customer service tasks. For instance, Porath and Erez (2009) found that employees who witnessed rudeness were more likely to feel negative affect and, therefore, exhibit an impaired task performance in addition to showing greater dysfunctional ideation (i.e., expressing more aggressiveness and hostile ideas). Moreover, as demonstrated by prior experimental studies (Ellis, Moore, Varner, Ottaway, & Becker, 1997; Ellis, Thomas, & Rodriguez, 1984; Ellis, Varner, Becker, & Ottaway, 1995), respondents who were induced with negative mood were less willing to engage in cognitive efforts when compared with those in the neutral affect condition. In addition, participants' abilities to learn, recall, comprehend and use previous knowledge were undermined. This reduction in cognitive functioning may be particularly pronounced for high-arousal negative feelings that may decrease the performance of complex tasks which requires considerable cognitive efforts. For example, Zillmann's researches (1979, 1983, 1988, 1993) demonstrated that "hot emotions", such as anger resulted from provocations, impaired participants' cognitive abilities and inhibited their cognition which, in turn, increased the likelihood of engaging in retaliatory behaviours.

Given the theory and empirical evidence above, we hypothesized that the stress appraisal level aroused by the severity of aggressiveness attributed to customer encounters would be associated with employee-to-customer incivility through negative emotions first, and then cognitive impairment. Therefore, we tested whether negative emotions and cognitive impairment would sequentially mediate the relationship between stress appraisal aroused by aggressive customers and employee-to-customer incivility. As such, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between stress appraisal level aroused by aggressiveness severity attributed to customer-encounters and employee-to-customer

incivility would be sequentially mediated by negative emotions first, and then cognitive impairment.

1.6. Cultural differences in reactions to negative emotions following customer mistreatment

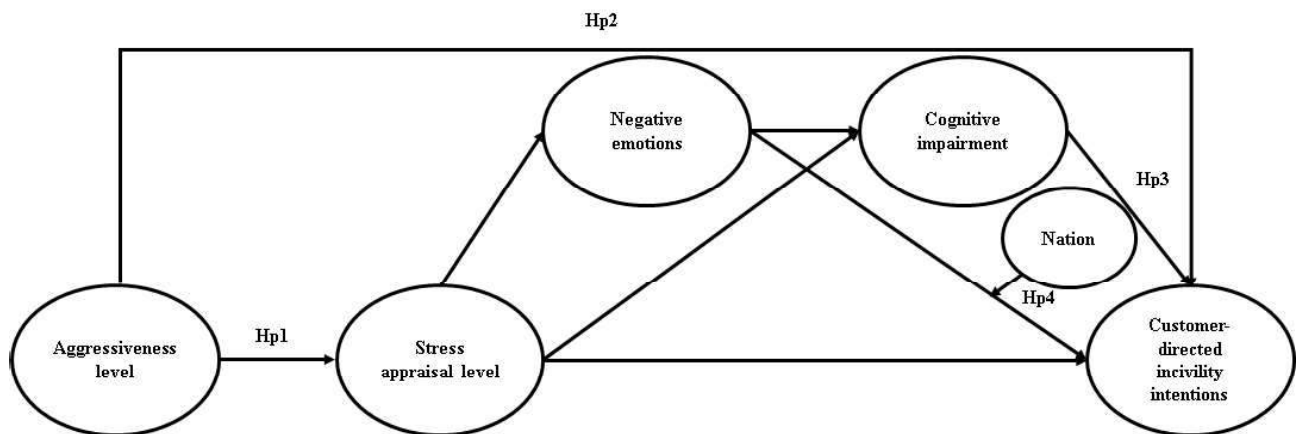
Since cultural beliefs and values may influence individual responses to aggressive acts (e.g., Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006), employees from different countries may react differently to various aspects of their work setting (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). To date, only a few studies have investigated how employees may respond to customer mistreatment using a cross-cultural perspective. For instance, Shao & Skarlicki (2014) found that North American employees were more likely to engage in service employees' sabotage directed to the customer who mistreated them in comparison with their East Asian counterparts. Indeed, these latter tended to adopt indirect and passive reactions to customer mistreatment by withdrawing organizational citizenship behaviours toward customers in general. The authors explained these differences in terms of individual-level individualism and collectivism, which represents one of six cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede and colleagues (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). According to Hofstede's research (Hofstede, 2003; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), Irish and Italian national cultures diverge strongly on uncertainty avoidance. This dimension refers to the degree to which citizens of a society feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and, therefore, have a strong emotional need to minimise the possibility of uncertainty by creating beliefs and institutions to specifically protect themselves against it. Furthermore, according to Zola's research (1966), Italians and Irish tend to handle problems in a different way according to what prescribed by their respective cultures: Italians are inclined to deal with their problems by dramatization - which is a culturally

supported defence mechanism based on overexpressing anxiety associated with troubles in order to dissipate it - whereas Irish are more prone to face with problems by denial.

Additionally, previous cross-cultural research found that culture might shape beliefs concerning emotions (Bastian et al., 2012; Chentsova-Dutton et al., 2007; Eid & Diener, 2001; Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009) and influence the degree to which people engage in emotion regulation following a negative event (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011). More specifically, differences in cultural dialectical beliefs regarding the motivational and cognitive utility of negative emotions seem to explain emotion regulation tendencies, so that those who believe in the utility of negative emotions are less likely to readily engage in emotion regulation after experiencing a negative event (Miyamoto, Ma & Petermann, 2014). Moreover, Wang and colleagues (2011) revealed that employees who experienced more negative emotions were more likely to engage in customer-directed sabotage following customer mistreatment. Thus, according to their culturally supported way of facing with problems (Zola, 1966), Italians may perceive negative emotions to be functional to invite sympathy and social support from surrounding people (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurosawa, 2000) and be less motivated to regulate negative emotions after unpleasant customer encounters than their Irish counterpart. Taken together, these findings suggest that, since Italians may be more inclined to eliminate the unexpected and be less motivated to readily regulate their negative emotions than Irish, they would be more likely to respond directly to negative emotions stemmed from unexpected customer mistreatment by engaging in customer-directed incivility. Thus, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 4: Nation would moderate the relationship between negative emotions following stressful customer-encounters and customer-directed incivility, such that Italians would be more likely to report customer-directed incivility in response to negative emotions than Irish.

As a conceptual framework, *Figure 1* illustrates our proposed model, incorporating our hypothesized relationships. We expected that aggressiveness severity attributed to imagined customer encounters would directly influence stress appraisal level (Hp1) and customer-directed incivility intentions (Hp2). Additionally, we hypothesized that the relationship between stress appraisal level and employee-to-customer incivility would be sequentially mediated by negative emotions first, and then cognitive impairment (Hp3). Moreover, we predicted that nation would moderate the relationship between negative emotions aroused from stressful customer-encounters and customer-directed incivility intentions, such that Italians - but not Irish – employees would directly react to unpleasant emotions by engaging in uncivil behaviors directed to the source of mistreatment (Hp4).



H₁= Aggressiveness level → Stress appraisal level

H₂= Aggressiveness level → Customer-directed incivility

H₃= Aggressiveness level → Stress appraisal level → Negative emotions → Cognitive impairment → Customer-directed incivility

H₄= Stress appraisal level → Negative emotions*Nation → Customer-directed incivility

Figure 1. Proposed Sequential Mediation Model with nation as moderator

Study a: Irish sample

2a. Method

2.1a. Sample and procedure

Participants were psychology students at University of Limerick who were recruited using academic newsletter and e-mail system. To participate, students were required to be working in a retail sale (e.g., shop assistant, cashier) or restaurant service (e.g., waiter, bartender) job for at least 6 months, be 18 years of age or older, and have at least a moderate amount of contact with the public, so that certain stressful events were likely to occur. After obtaining ethical approval from the KBS Research Ethics Committee of University of Limerick, the survey was administrated online through Qualtrics survey software. In total, two hundred fifty-nine Irish working students volunteered to participate in the research after giving their informed consent and being ensured about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The majority of respondents were female (78.70%) who spent on average the 86.57% of their working time in direct contact with customers. The average age was 22.93 years (SD=6.43) with an average job tenure of 5.13 years (SD=6.18) and an average job tenure in the current position of 2.76 years (SD=3.28).

Each participant was invited to read carefully three scenarios (see *Appendix 1*) involving specific service encounters and choose the one which they could mainly relate to - or that they had experienced in the past during - their work experience. Customer misbehaviour level was manipulated using scenarios which were created by authors based on words used by customer incivility and verbal aggression scales. Although the situations were similar, customer behaviours were differently worded in order to create three conditions, as follows:

1. Neutrality condition: customer problems due to service failures or employees' obligation to comply with certain organizational rules were described in a neutral way.

2. Customer incivility condition: employees met customers who blamed them or made inappropriate gestures (e.g., rolling his/her eyes and sighing) to express their impatience.
3. Customer verbal aggression condition: workers encountered customers who attacked them verbally, used an offensive language and accused them of incompetence.

After being randomly assigned to one of the three conditions - ranging in size between seventy-two and ninety-nine people - participants were invited to read three scenarios which were designed for each condition. The choice of including three scenarios per condition was justified by the need to increase the odds which all the participants could identify themselves with one of the scenarios, considering different work environments. The use of scenarios to control and manipulate variables is a well-established method which offers considerable internal and external validity (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). Moreover, previous studies have revealed that having participants imagine themselves in a situation can help to stimulate the same reactions as they would have had they actually confronted with the situation in the reality (Montes & Zweig, 2009). Consequently, it was reasonable to expect that participants responses to the present scenarios would reflect closely reactions they could have experienced in a real job circumstance (Gong, Yi, & Choi, 2014). Moreover, to ensure the realism and the reliability of comparative experimental conditions, in-depth interviews were conducted with thirty pre-test respondents – who were students employed in customer-contact occupations and, therefore, representative of our research participants – to improve the experimental design of the research.

The scenarios were followed by questions aimed at analysing how working students would react if they were in a situation similar to that described in the scenario selected. To prevent any possible order effect, the order in which the items were presented to each respondent was randomized.

2.2a. Measurements

Check realism questions. Two items from Gong and colleagues (2014) and one from Maxham and Netemeyer's (2002) were utilized to check the realism of the experimental design (e.g., "*I could imagine an actual workplace situation like the one described in the scenario*") with response choices reported on seven-point Likert-type scales (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*).

Aggressiveness severity was evaluated through a single item adapted from Grandey and co-workers (2004). Participants were invited to evaluate to what extent they considered the behaviour exhibited by the customer in the scenario as aggressive (i.e., "*To what extent do you think that the behaviour exhibited by customers in the scenario is aggressive?*") using a seven-point Likert scale (1= *not at all aggressive*, 7= *extremely aggressive*).

Stress appraisal level was assessed using a single item adapted from Grandey and co-workers (2004). Respondents were invited to indicate to what extent they considered the customer encounter described as stressful (i.e., "*How stressful do you find this type of event when it occurs to you?*") on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1=*not at all stressful situation*, 7=*extremely stressful situation*).

Employees' reactions to the customer-employee encounter presented by the scenario chosen were investigated in terms of customer-directed incivility intentions, negative emotions and cognitive impairment.

Employee-to-customer incivility intentions were assessed using seven items adapted from Sliter and Jones (2016). Responses were based on a seven-point Likert scale (1= *never*, 7= *3 or more times a day*) which assessed how frequently the individual would engage in uncivil behaviours toward the customer (e.g., *I would escalate my tone of voice with the customer*)

whether they were in a situation like that described in the scenario selected. In this study, the reliability of this scale was .75.

Negative emotions were measured through six items adopted from the Negative Affective (NA) dimension of PANAS questionnaire (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants were asked to rate to what extent they would feel each of the listed negative mood states (e.g., *distressed, upset, irritable*) as a result of a customer-encounter similar to that described in the scenario chosen. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1= *not at all*, 5=*extremely*) Cronbach's alpha for this scale was good ($\alpha=.87$).

Cognitive impairment was assessed adapting five items from the cognitive demands dimension of the *Healthcare Productivity Survey* (Gillespie, Gates, & Succop, 2010). Responses were based on a five-point Likert scale that evaluates if and how the individual's cognitive abilities (e.g., *Think clearly when working*) would differ from his/her usual state following the exposure to a customer-encounter similar to that selected (from 1= *much better than usual* to 5=*much less than usual*). Although this instrument was tested with healthcare professionals who had experienced workplace violence, it was one of the few validated measures available to investigate changes in work productivity following stressful events at work. Thus, we considered this scale as particularly useful to analyse reactions following emotionally demanding encounters with customers, considering the applicability of items regarding cognitive performance to different sectors because of their generic nature. The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha =.88$).

3a. Results

3.1a. Manipulation and realism checks

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA, see *Table 1*) showed that the manipulation was effective. In particular, Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons indicated that employees who

were assigned to the customer verbal aggression condition reported significantly higher aggressiveness

Table 1. ANOVA between groups for different kind of condition regarding aggressiveness and stress appraisal levels for working students (N=259).

| Variables | Condition | Mean | SD | F |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------|-----|----------|
| Aggressiveness severity | Neutrality | 3.27 | .17 | 70.44*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 4.84 | .12 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 5.46 | .11 | |
| Stress appraisal level | Neutrality | 4.08 | .21 | 8.39*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 4.72 | .17 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 5.10 | .14 | |

Note. SD= standard deviation; ***p<.001.

Table 2. ANOVA between groups for different kind of condition regarding realism check questions (N=259).

| Variables | Condition | Mean | SD |
|---|----------------------------|------|------|
| The customer problem described in the scenario is a major problem | Neutrality | 4.46 | 1.56 |
| | Customer Incivility | 4.39 | 1.71 |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 4.77 | 1.52 |
| I could imagine an actual workplace situation like the one described in the scenario | Neutrality | 6.35 | 1.20 |
| | Customer Incivility | 6.53 | 1.15 |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 6.44 | 0.77 |
| I believe that the described situation could happen in a real workplace | Neutrality | 6.68 | 0.80 |
| | Customer Incivility | 6.58 | 1.15 |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 6.66 | 0.59 |

Note. SD= standard deviation.

levels, followed by those who were in the customer incivility condition, when compared with the neutrality group ($F_{(2,255)}=70.44; p<.001$).

Furthermore, the stress appraisal level was perceived as significantly higher by the experimental groups ($F_{(2,255)}=8.39; p<.001$) than the neutral group. The customer verbal aggression condition was perceived by respondents as more stressful ($M=5.10$) than the customer incivility condition ($M=4.84$), although no statistically significant differences were revealed between the two experimental groups. Additionally, the realism check items confirmed that all the situations described in the scenarios were considered as major problems which were likely to occur in a real workplace (see *Table 2*).

3.2a. Confirmatory factor analysis and assessment of common method bias

Using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 1998-2012), a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted in order to assess the dimensionality of the substantive variables (i.e., customer-directed incivility, negative emotions and cognitive impairment). As showed by *Table 3*, the fit indices indicated that the hypothesized three-factor model had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2[132]=254.15$, CFI=.93, TLI=.92, RMSEA=.06, SRMR=.06).

Table 3. Fit indices for the three-factor model and the alternative models.

| Model | χ^2 | df | p | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI | TLI |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|-----|-------|------|-----|-----|
| <i>Three-factor model</i> | 254.15 | 132 | .00 | .06 | .06 | .93 | .92 |
| <i>Two-factor model 1</i> | 1009.90 | 134 | .00 | .14 | .17 | .53 | .46 |
| <i>Two-factor model 2</i> | 553.48 | 134 | .00 | .11 | .12 | .77 | .74 |
| <i>Two-factor model 3</i> | 852.40 | 134 | .00 | .14 | .14 | .61 | .56 |
| <i>One-factor model</i> | 1221.02 | 135 | .00 | .18 | .17 | .42 | .34 |

Note. df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index. Two-factor model 1: customer-directed incivility with cognitive impairment, negative emotions; Two-factor model 2: customer-directed incivility with negative emotions, cognitive impairment; Two-factor model 3: cognitive impairment with negative emotions, customer-directed incivility

In addition, this model outperformed all the alternative two-factor models as well as the one-factor model. These results provide evidence for the distinctiveness of the study variables. Furthermore, since all the substantive variables were measured at the same time by the same source, the hypothesized relationships could be inflated by common method bias. Accordingly, in order to control for common method bias, an unmeasured latent method factor was added to the hypothesized CFA model and allow manifest indicators to load on their respective latent constructs as well as on the method factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Methodologists recommend using the unmeasured method factor technique when the specific source of method bias is not known or cannot be measured (Williams, Cote, & Buckler, 1989). Results indicated that the hypothesized three-factor model yielded a better fit to the data after inclusion of the method factor ($\Delta\chi^2 [155] = 171.89$, RMSEA=.04, SRMR=.04, CFI=.97, TLI=.96). Furthermore, the method factor explained only 12% of the variance in the items, which is largely below the average amount of method variance (25%) reported in self-reported research (Podsakoff et al., 2012; Williams et al., 1989). Accordingly, common method bias did not appear to have a substantial impact on the present study.

3.3a. Descriptive statistics, correlations and ANOVA analyses

After conducting descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables (see *Table 4*), ANOVA analyses were carried out to detect differences among conditions (i.e., neutrality vs customer incivility vs customer verbal aggression) regarding the constructs of interest. Results from ANOVA analyses (see *Table 5*) showed that working students assigned to the experimental conditions differed significantly from those who were in the neutrality group with reference to negative emotions ($F_{(2, 256)}=7.27$, $p<.01$), cognitive impairment ($F_{(2, 256)}=11.14$, $p<.001$) and customer-directed incivility ($F_{(2, 256)}=9.12$, $p<.001$). The results of the

Bonferroni post-hoc tests indicated that participants assigned to the customer verbal aggression and incivility conditions perceived significantly higher

Table 4. *Descriptive, internal consistency and intercorrelations for study variables among Irish service providers (N=259).*

| Measure | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|------|------|------------|------------|------------|-------|
| 1. Customer-directed incivility | 1.86 | .70 | .75 | | | |
| 2. Negative emotions | 2.49 | .91 | .02 | .87 | | |
| 3. Cognitive impairment | 3.39 | .70 | .16** | .27** | .88 | |
| 4. Aggressiveness level | 4.65 | 1.50 | .20** | .30** | .27** | |
| 5. Stress appraisal level | 4.69 | 1.65 | -.08 | .59** | .23** | .32** |

Note. Boldfaced numbers on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha; SD= standard deviation; **p<.01.

Table 5. *ANOVA between groups for different kind of condition regarding negative emotions, cognitive impairment and employee-to-customer incivility among Irish service providers (N=259).*

| Variables | Condition | Mean | SD | F |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|------|------|----------|
| Negative emotions | Neutrality | 2.08 | 0.82 | 11.14*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 2.61 | 0.93 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 2.68 | 0.87 | |
| Cognitive impairment | Neutrality | 3.12 | 0.58 | 9.12*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 3.41 | 0.73 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 3.57 | 0.69 | |
| Customer-directed incivility | Neutrality | 1.63 | 0.47 | 7.27** |
| | Customer Incivility | 1.85 | 0.68 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 2.03 | 0.81 | |

Note. SD= standard deviation; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

levels of negative emotions and cognitive impairment in comparison with those in the neutrality group, whilst statistically significant differences concerning employee-to-customer incivility were found between the customer verbal aggression and the neutrality group only.

3.4a. Hypotheses testing

To test *Hypotheses 1*, we utilized regression analyses using enter variable selection (see *Table 6*). As expected ($F_{(4,156)}=4.82$, $p<.01$, $R^2=.11$), aggressiveness severity was positively and significantly associated with stress appraisal level ($\beta=.31$, $p<.001$; see *Figure 2*), while controlling for age, overall job tenure and tenure in the current position. This suggests that more a customer encounter was perceived as aggressive, more such encounter was appraised as stressful. Then, path analyses were carried out using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 1998-2012). According to *Hypothesis 2*, we expected that aggressiveness severity would directly predict customer-directed incivility. This hypothesis was confirmed. In fact, aggressiveness severity was positively associated with employee-to-customer incivility intentions ($\beta=.19$, $p<.001$; see *Figure 2*), such that more the customer-encounter was perceived as aggressive, more the service provider was likely to behave in an uncivil way.

Table 6. *Effects of aggressiveness severity on stress appraisal level, controlling for age and job tenure (N=160)*

| Variable | Stress appraisal level | | | |
|---|------------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| | B | SE | β | t |
| Aggressiveness severity | .31 | .09 | .32*** | 4.22 |
| Age | -.01 | .06 | -.05 | -0.24 |
| Overall job tenure | -.01 | .07 | -.04 | -0.16 |
| Job tenure in the current position | -.01 | .05 | -.02 | -0.22 |

Note. *** $p<.001$.

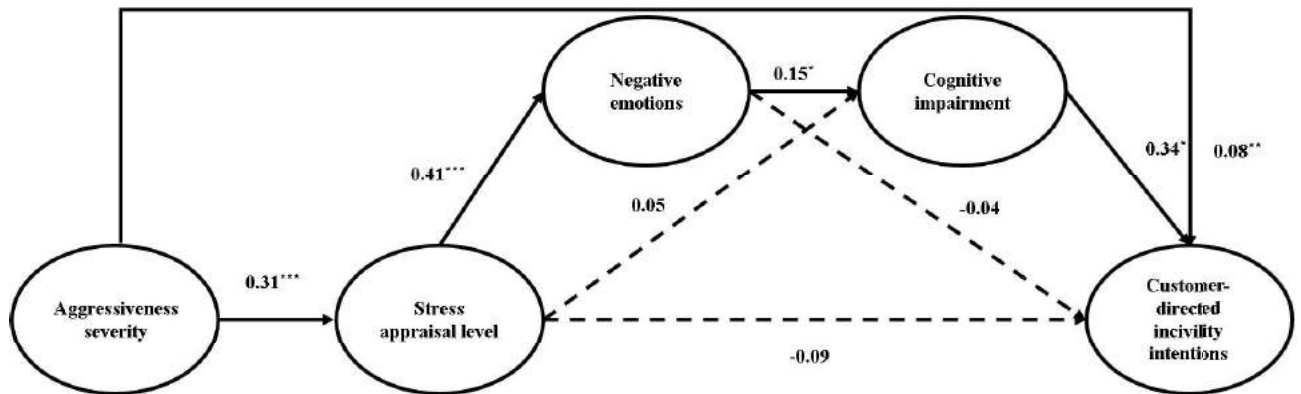


Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients for Model 1a with negative emotions and cognitive impairment as mediators of the relationship between stress appraisal level – predicted by aggressiveness severity attributed to the customer-encounter - and customer-directed incivility.

In line with *Hypothesis 3*, we predicted that when service providers perceived customer-encounters as more stressful because of its associated aggressiveness severity, they would be more likely to experience negative emotions and, in turn, cognitive impairment which would lead them to customer-directed incivility. This hypothesis was supported ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < .05$, see *Table 7*).

Table 7. Fit indices for sequential mediation model, Model 1

| Model | χ^2 | df | p | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI | TLI |
|------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-------------|------|------------|-----|
| <i>Model 1a</i> | 273.06 | 163 | .00 | .05 | .07 | .94 | .93 |
| Model | Standardized direct and indirect effects | | | | | | |
| <i>Effects</i> | <i>Estimate</i> | | | <i>S.E.</i> | | <i>p</i> | |
| Aggr→Stress→NE→EI | -.03 | | | .07 | | .68 | |
| Aggr→Stress→COG→EI | .03 | | | .02 | | .21 | |
| Aggr→Stress→NE→COG→EI | .30 | | | .20 | | .04 | |
| Aggr→Stress→EI | -.15 | | | .10 | | .12 | |
| Aggr→EI | .19 | | | .05 | | .00 | |

Note. In boldfaced the significant effects, df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index; Aggr= Aggressiveness level; Ne= Negative Emotions; EI= Customer-directed incivility.

4a. Discussion

Study a suggests that Irish service providers were more likely to appraise customer-encounters as stressful when such encounters were perceived as more aggressive. This finding is consistent with the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) which states that the higher the threat of loss, the more severe is the resulting stress appraisal. Additionally, Irish employees who perceived their customer-encounters as more aggressive were more likely to report customer-directed incivility intentions. This result supports the presence of a process of reciprocation to uncivil acts directed toward the incivility instigator. Moreover, the more customer encounters were perceived as stressful, the more employees were likely to feel negative emotions and, as a result, experience decrements in cognitive functioning which, in turn, led them to engage in customer-directed incivility. In line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), resource-depleted employees have fewer emotional and cognitive resources and, therefore, reduced self-regulation capability and motivation to provide good service and be civil toward customers. Under such conditions, employees may become irrational and enter a defensive mode to preserve their resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Study b: Italian sample

2b. Method

In *Study b* we replicated the approach of *Study a*: the same survey was administered to working students employed in customer-contact jobs, randomizing the order of item presentation and analysing data by conducting the same analyses.

2.1b. Sample and procedure

Participants were psychology students who were recruited using academic newsletter and e-mail system or were enrolled in psychology courses at University of Pavia. To participate,

students were required to be working in a retail sale (e.g., shop assistant, cashier) or restaurant service (e.g., waiter, bartender) job for at least 6 months, be 18 years of age or older, and have at least a moderate amount of contact with the public (i.e., we applied the same recruitment criteria we utilized to select Irish participants). Working students received extra course credit for taking part in the research. Once they voluntarily agreed to participate, we obtained informed consent from them and ensured them the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Then, they were invited to complete questionnaires which were administered by professional trainees in Psychology within a laboratory setting. In total, one hundred fifty-seven Italian students employed in customer-contact jobs took part to the present study. We excluded three participants who did not meet the study criteria (e.g., not employed in customer services) and two participants because they did not complete at least the sixty percent of the survey. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (neutrality vs customer incivility vs customer verbal aggression), ranging in size between forty-four and fifty-eight people per condition. The majority of respondents were female (78.30%) who spent on average the 85.91% of their working time in direct contact with the public. The average age was 25.27 years (SD=5.59) with an average job tenure of 4.53 years (SD=4.99) and an average job tenure in the current position of 2.95 years (SD=4.99).

2.2b. Measurements

As in *Study a*, participants were invited to answer check realism questions regarding scenarios and evaluate to what extent they considered the behaviour exhibited by the customer in the scenario as aggressive (*aggressiveness severity*) and stressful (*stress appraisal level*). The same scales as those used in *Study a* were adopted to assess employees' reactions in terms of *customer-directed incivility* (seven items; $\alpha=.78$), *negative emotions*

(six items; $\alpha=.81$) and *cognitive impairment* (five items; $\alpha=.68$) following the exposure to a customer-encounter similar to that described in the scenario chosen.

In order to produce the Italian version of the questionnaire, firstly, we translated original English items in Italian by emphasizing conceptual rather than literal translations as well as the need to utilize natural language to assure cultural equivalence. Then, to address concerns about inadequate expressions and concepts of the translation, the forward translation was reviewed by a bilingual (in English and Italian) expert panel which identified acceptable alternatives. Items that were suspected to be particularly sensitive to translation issues across cultures were translated back to English by an independent translator. The resulting version of the questionnaire was administered to thirty pre-test respondents who were students employed in customer-contact occupations and, therefore, representative of research participants. They were systematically debriefed by asking them – for each item - what they thought was the meaning of a certain item, whether they could re-word that item using their own words, what sprang to their mind when they heard a specific expression, how they selected their answer. Such answers were compared to pre-test participants' actual responses to test the measurement for consistency. Additionally, pre-test respondents were asked whether there were words they did not understand as well as which of the alternative expressions conformed better to their natural language. Moreover, in-depth interviews were conducted with pre-test respondents to test the realism of scenarios and the effectiveness of experimental conditions. Finally, the modified version of the survey – which included scenarios - was discussed through two focus groups conducted by an experienced psychologist.

3b. Results

3.1b. Manipulation and realism check

ANOVA analyses revealed the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation (see *Table 8*).

Table 8. ANOVA between groups for different kind of condition regarding aggressiveness and stress appraisal levels among Italian service providers ($N=157$).

| Variables | Condition | Mean | SD | F |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------|------|----------|
| Aggressiveness severity | Neutrality | 3.67 | 1.41 | 60.04*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 5.20 | .99 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 6.02 | .80 | |
| Stress appraisal level | Neutrality | 4.63 | 1.29 | 16.21*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 5.71 | .85 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 5.81 | 1.21 | |

Note. SD= standard deviation; *** $p<.001$.

More specifically, Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that participants who were assigned to the customer verbal aggression condition perceived the customer behaviour as more aggressive, followed by those who were in the customer incivility condition, in comparison to the neutrality group ($F_{(2,154)}=60.40$; $p<.001$). Moreover, the stress appraisal level was perceived as significantly higher by the two experimental groups ($F_{(2,154)}=16.21$; $p<.001$) than by the neutral group. Participants in the customer verbal aggression condition ($M=5.81$) reported higher stress appraisal levels than those in the customer incivility group ($M=5.71$), although no statistically significant differences were revealed between the two experimental conditions. Additionally, as shown by *Table 9*, the realism check items

confirmed that all the situations described in the scenarios were perceived as considerable and realistic problems which could happen within a real work setting.

Table 9. ANOVA between groups for different kind of condition regarding realism check questions (N=157).

| Variables | Condition | Mean | SD |
|---|----------------------------|------|------|
| The customer problem described in the scenario is a major problem | Neutrality | 5.14 | 1.60 |
| | Customer Incivility | 4.96 | 1.68 |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 5.31 | 1.52 |
| I could imagine an actual workplace situation like the one described in the scenario | Neutrality | 6.53 | .59 |
| | Customer Incivility | 6.55 | .95 |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 6.34 | .87 |
| I believe that the described situation could happen in a real workplace | Neutrality | 6.65 | .57 |
| | Customer Incivility | 6.71 | .56 |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 6.52 | 1.05 |

Note. SD= standard deviation.

3.2b. Confirmatory factor analysis and assessment of common method bias

As in *Study a*, a CFA with the maximum likelihood method was carried out to examine the factor structure of the study variables (see *Table 10*). Results from CFA revealed that the factor structure expected three-factor model (i.e., customer-directed incivility, negative emotions, cognitive impairment) outperformed all the alternative two-factor models as well as the one-factor model. However, in order to obtain a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2[128]=221.59$, CFI=.92, TLI=.90, RMSEA=.07, SRMR=.07), it was necessary to take into account the high correlation existing among three items concerning negative emotions (“*afraid*” with “*distressed*”; “*upset*” with “*distressed*”; “*nervous*” with “*irritable*”) and one item regarding customer-directed incivility (“*I would escalate my tone of voice*” with “*I would be blunt with a customer*”). The

resulting structural equation model was built considering the modification indices which were used in the satisfactory three factor model. Furthermore, to control for common method bias, an unmeasured latent method factor was added to the hypothesized CFA model and allowed manifest indicators to load on their respective latent constructs as well as on the method factor (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Results indicated that the hypothesized three-factor model yielded a better fit to the data after inclusion of the method factor ($\Delta\chi^2 [112] = 127.77$, RMSEA=.05, SRMR=.06, CFI=.95, TLI=.93). However, the method factor explained only 20% of the variance in the items, which is largely below the average amount of method variance (25%) reported in self-reported research (Podsakoff et al., 2012; Williams et al., 1989). Accordingly, common method bias does not appear to have a substantial impact on the present study.

Table 10. Fit indices for the three-factor model and the alternative models.

| Model | χ^2 | df | p | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI | TLI |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----|-----|-------|------|-----|-----|
| <i>Three-factor model mod</i> | 221.59 | 128 | .00 | .07 | .07 | .92 | .90 |
| <i>Three-factor model</i> | 303.47 | 132 | .00 | .09 | .08 | .85 | .83 |
| <i>Two-factor model 1</i> | 1009.90 | 134 | .00 | .14 | .17 | .53 | .46 |
| <i>Two-factor model 2</i> | 553.48 | 134 | .00 | .11 | .12 | .77 | .74 |
| <i>Two-factor model 3</i> | 852.40 | 134 | .00 | .14 | .14 | .61 | .56 |
| <i>One-factor model</i> | 1221.02 | 135 | .00 | .18 | .17 | .42 | .34 |

Note. *df*= degree of freedom; *RMSEA*= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; *SRMR*= Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; *CFI*= Comparative Fit Index; *TLI*= Tucker-Lewis Index; *Two-factor model 1*: customer-directed incivility with cognitive impairment, negative emotions; *Two-factor model 2*: customer-directed incivility with negative emotions, cognitive impairment; *Two-factor model 3*: cognitive impairment with negative emotions, customer-directed incivility; *Three-factor model*= customer-directed incivility, negative emotions and cognitive impairment scales; *Three-factor model mod*= three-factor model modified taking into account correlations among one item regarding customer-directed incivility (item 1 with item 2) and three items concerning negative emotions (item 6 with item 1; item 2 with item 1; item 4 with item 3).

3.3b. Descriptive statistics, correlations and ANOVA analyses

After carrying out descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables (see *Table 11*), ANOVA analyses were conducted with the purpose of identifying differences among

conditions (i.e., neutrality vs customer incivility vs customer verbal aggression) regarding the constructs of interest. Results from ANOVA analyses (see *Table 12*) revealed that respondents in the experimental conditions perceived more negative emotions ($F_{(2, 154)}=30.98, p<.001$),

Table 11. *Descriptive, internal consistency and correlations for study variables (N=157).*

| Measure | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|------|------|------------|------------|------------|-------|
| 1. Customer-directed incivility | 2.17 | .81 | .78 | | | |
| 2. Negative emotions | 2.76 | .76 | .30** | .81 | | |
| 3. Cognitive impairment | 3.01 | .90 | -.32** | -.43** | .68 | |
| 4. Aggressiveness level | 5.08 | 1.41 | .24** | .51** | .39** | |
| 5. Stress appraisal | 5.45 | 1.22 | .18* | .57** | .27** | .56** |

Note. Boldfaced numbers on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha; * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$.

Table 12. *ANOVA between groups for different kind of condition regarding negative emotions, cognitive impairment and employee-to-customer incivility among service providers (N=157).*

| Variables | Condition | Mean | SD | F |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|------|-----|----------|
| Negative emotions | Neutrality | 2.10 | .58 | 30.98*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 2.97 | .66 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 3.05 | .68 | |
| Cognitive impairment | Neutrality | 3.61 | .90 | 15.98*** |
| | Customer Incivility | 2.83 | .78 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 2.73 | .80 | |
| Customer-directed incivility | Neutrality | 1.82 | .66 | 7.53** |
| | Customer Incivility | 2.17 | .77 | |
| | Customer Verbal Aggression | 2.43 | .85 | |

Note. SD= standard deviation; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

greater cognitive impairment ($F_{(2, 154)}=7.27, p<.01$) and had higher customer-directed incivility intentions ($F_{(2, 154)}=7.27, p<.01$) when compared with the neutrality group. More specifically, as indicated by Bonferroni post-hoc test, working students assigned to the customer verbal

aggression or incivility conditions differed significantly from those who were in the neutrality group with reference to negative emotions and cognitive impairment, whereas statistically significant differences related to employee-to-customer incivility were showed between the customer verbal aggression and the neutrality group only.

3.4b. Hypotheses testing

To test *Hypotheses 1*, we utilized regression analyses using enter variable selection (see *Table 13*). As expected ($F_{(4,128)}=16.95$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.35$), aggressiveness severity was positively and directly associated with stress appraisal level ($\beta=0.47$, $p<.001$; see *Figure 3*), while controlling for age, overall job tenure, job tenure in the current position. Thereby, *Hypothesis 1* was confirmed. This suggests that more a customer-encounter was perceived as aggressive, more such condition was appraised as stressful. Then, to test the other hypotheses, path analyses were carried out using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 1998-2012).

Table 13. *Effects of aggressiveness severity on stress appraisal level, while controlling for age and job tenure (N=132)*

| Variable | Stress appraisal level | | | |
|---|------------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| | B | SE | β | t |
| Aggressiveness severity | .47 | .06 | .57*** | 7.77 |
| Age | -.03 | .02 | -.16 | -1.30 |
| Overall job tenure | -.01 | .03 | -.03 | -0.26 |
| Job tenure in the current position | .07 | .04 | .21 | 1.86 |

Note. *** $p<.001$.

Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed since aggressiveness severity did not positively predict customer-directed incivility intentions. Additionally, contrary to what expected based on *Hypothesis 3*, the association between stress appraisal level - elicited by aggressiveness level attributed to customer encounters - and customer-directed incivility intentions was not

sequentially mediated by negative emotions and cognitive impairment. Indeed, negative emotions - but not cognitive impairment - fully mediated the analysed relationship, such that workers who experienced more negative emotions in response to stressful encounters with aggressive customers were more likely to report customer-directed incivility ($\beta=0.30$, $p<.01$; see *Table 14*).

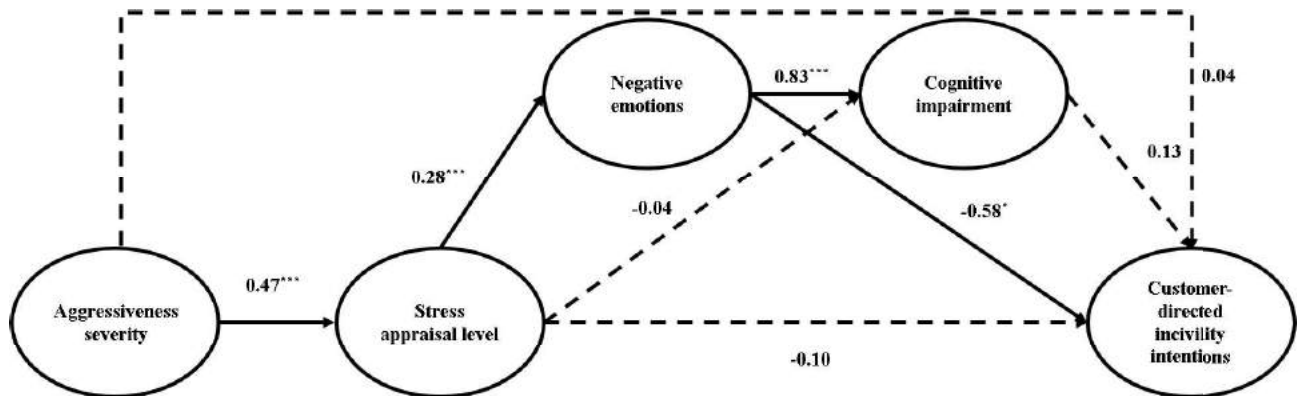


Figure 3. Standardized path coefficients for Model 1b with negative emotions and cognitive impairment as mediators of the relationship between stress appraisal level and customer-directed incivility.

Table 14. Fit indices for sequential mediation model, Model 1b

| Model | χ^2 | df | p | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI | TLI |
|----------|----------|-----|------|-------|------|-----|-----|
| Model 1b | 257.96 | 160 | .000 | .06 | .07 | .92 | .91 |

| Model | Standardized direct and indirect effects | | |
|-----------------------|--|------|------|
| Effects | Estimate | S.E. | p |
| Aggr→Stress→NE→EI | .30 | .11 | .004 |
| Aggr→Stress→COG→EI | -.01 | .02 | .583 |
| Aggr→Stress→NE→COG→EI | .06 | .04 | .147 |
| Aggr→Stress→EI | -.17 | .12 | .172 |
| Aggr→EI | .04 | .05 | .427 |

Note. df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index; Stress= Stress appraisal level; Ne= Negative Emotions; EI= Customer-directed incivility.

4b. Discussion

Study b suggests that, in line with the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001), more customer-encounters were considered as threatening, more such encounters were appraised as stressful. However, aggressiveness severity attributed to interactions with clients did not directly lead Italian workers to engage in customer-directed incivility. This nonsignificant finding indicates the presence of other mediating factors, as supported by previous studies (e.g., Kim & Qu, 2018; Torres et al., 2017). Moreover, negative emotions and cognitive impairment did not sequentially mediate the relationship between stress appraisal and employee-to-customer incivility. A possible explanation is that the effects of cognitive impairment due to customer mistreatment on employee-to-customer incivility are nonlinear, such that victims of customer mistreatment might be motivated to respond uncivilly only at certain levels of cognitive impairment, which were not reached through our manipulation. However, negative emotions fully mediated the analysed association, as expected based on research (e.g., Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2017; Wang et al., 2017) and AET theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Additionally, consistent with previous empirical evidence (e.g., Porath & Ereth, 2007, 2009; Zillmann, 1993; Zillmann & Weaver, 1999), employees who felt more negative emotions were more likely to report a greater impaired cognitive functioning.

5. Hypothesis of cross-national differences testing

As indicated by *Table 15*, Irish and Italian working students presented similar socio-demographic characteristics which made them potentially comparable. In order to assess measurement invariance, multi-group confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA) were performed using Mplus7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 1998-2012). This study utilised maximum likelihood estimation of the covariance matrix to ascertain statistical fit. To determine statistical cross-national differences between models, the χ^2 of the baseline model was subtracted from the χ^2

value of the nested comparison model, computing the Satorra-Bentler scaled χ^2 (Satorra & Bentler, 2010). Moreover, as χ^2 values are influenced by sample size, to evaluate the goodness of the nested models, we used the difference in comparative fit indices (Δ CFI, Bentler, 1990) between the freely estimated model and the constrained model. In fact, Δ CFI is considered a robust statistic for testing the between-group invariance of CFA models, indicating invariance when this value is .01 or less (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Furthermore, fit was examined using also the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA, Steiger, 1990; values of .05 are taken as good fit, .05-.08 as moderate fit, Hu & Bentler, 1999) and the comparative fit index (CFI, Bentler, 1990; values between .90 and .95 indicate acceptable fit, Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 15. *Socio-demographic data compared for nation*

| Socio-demographic variables | Irish | Italian |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | (N=259) | (N=157) |
| | M (SD) | M(SD) |
| Age | 22.93 (6.43) | 25.27 (5.59) |
| Job tenure | 5.13 (6.18) | 4.53 (4.99) |
| Job tenure in the current position | 2.76 (3.28) | 2.95 (3.53) |
| Percentage of working time in contact with the public | 86.57% (15.95) | 85.91% (19.35) |

Note. M=mean; SD=standard deviation.

Since partial scalar invariance of the model measuring the constructs of interest (i.e., aggressiveness severity, stress appraisal level, negative emotions, cognitive impairment and customer-directed incivility intentions) was confirmed (see *Table 16*), scores were comparable across nations (Milfont & Fischer, 2010). To test *Hypothesis 5*, a baseline model with negative emotions as mediators in the relationship between stress appraisal level and customer-directed incivility was simultaneously performed across the two nations. The partial structural model (M7) with equality constraints on all regression coefficients except from the mediating regression coefficient showed a good fit. This suggests the presence of differences in the

mediating role of negative emotions on the relationship between stress appraisal and customer-directed incivility (see *Table 17*). To confirm the buffering role played by nation in the relationship between negative emotions and customer-directed incivility, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012). As shown by *Table 18*, negative emotions significantly mediated the relationship between stress appraisal and customer-directed incivility in Italy only ($\beta=.20$, $p<.01$). This suggests that Italians were more inclined to experience customer-directed incivility than Irish when they perceived high stress levels as a product of interactions with aggressive customers (see *Figure 4*). Thus, *Hypothesis 5* was confirmed. The validity of the hypothesized model was assessed by comparing it (i.e., in terms of BIC and AIC) with three competing models, as described in *Table 18*. As shown, the model with nation as moderator in the relationship between stress appraisal and customer-directed incivility was the better-fitting model compared to those which included nation as a moderator of other paths of our model.

Table 16. *Testing for measurement invariance across countries*

| <i>Model</i> | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AIC</i> | <i>M comp.</i> | ΔCFI | $\Delta \chi^2$ |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| M1. Configural invariance | 487.82 | 312 | .05 | .94 | 22113.81 | --- | --- | |
| M2. Full metric invariance | 704.58 | 327 | .07 | .88 | 22312.09 | M2-M1 | .06 | 174.37*** |
| M3. Partial metric invariance | 499.69 | 324 | .05 | .94 | 22111.35 | M3-M1 | .00 | 14.12 |
| M4. Partial scalar invariance1 | 860.13 | 336 | .09 | .83 | 22450.31 | M4-M1 | .11 | 332.10*** |
| M5. Partial scalar invariance2 | 505.07 | 330 | .05 | .94 | 22112.95 | M5-M1 | .00 | 19.93 |

Note. *df*= degree of freedom; *RMSEA*= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; *AIC*= Akaike Information Criterion; *CFI*= Comparative Fit Index; *Model comp.*= Model comparison; ΔCFI = difference in CFI between models; $\Delta \chi^2$ = difference in chi-square between models; M3= factor loadings of items 3 and 6 assessing negative emotions and item 4 measuring cognitive impairment are unconstrained across nations; M4= the intercepts of items are constrained to be equal across groups, except for items 3 and 6 evaluating negative emotions and item 4 measuring cognitive impairment; M5= the intercepts of items 3, 4, 5, 6 evaluating negative emotions, item 4 and 5 measuring cognitive impairment and items 3, 4, 5, 7 assessing customer-directed incivility are unconstrained across countries.

Table 17. Testing for structural invariance of the mediating model with stress appraisal level as antecedent

| Model | χ^2 | df | RMSEA | CFI | AIC | M comp. | ΔCFI | $\Delta \chi^2$ |
|--|----------|-----|-------|-----|----------|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| M1. Configural invariance | 471.70 | 284 | .06 | .94 | 20756.07 | --- | --- | --- |
| M2. Full metric invariance | 688.20 | 299 | .08 | .87 | 20956.20 | M2-M1 | .07 | 172.90*** |
| M3. Partial metric invariance | 484.09 | 296 | .05 | .94 | 20754.99 | M3-M1 | .00 | 14.88 |
| M4. Partial scalar invariance | 492.75 | 297 | .06 | .93 | 20758.81 | M4-M1 | .00 | 21.18 |
| M5. Baseline model | 534.48 | 303 | .06 | .92 | 20793.39 | --- | --- | --- |
| M6. Full structural invariance | 552.89 | 306 | .06 | .92 | 20804.51 | M5-M6 | .00 | 25.26*** |
| M7. Partial structural invariance | 535.28 | 305 | .06 | .92 | 20789.47 | M5-M7 | .00 | 0.04 |

Note. df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; Model comp.= Model comparison; ΔCFI = difference in CFI between models; $\Delta \chi^2$ = difference in chi-square between models; M7= the regression coefficient linking negative emotions to customer-directed incivility is unconstrained across nations.

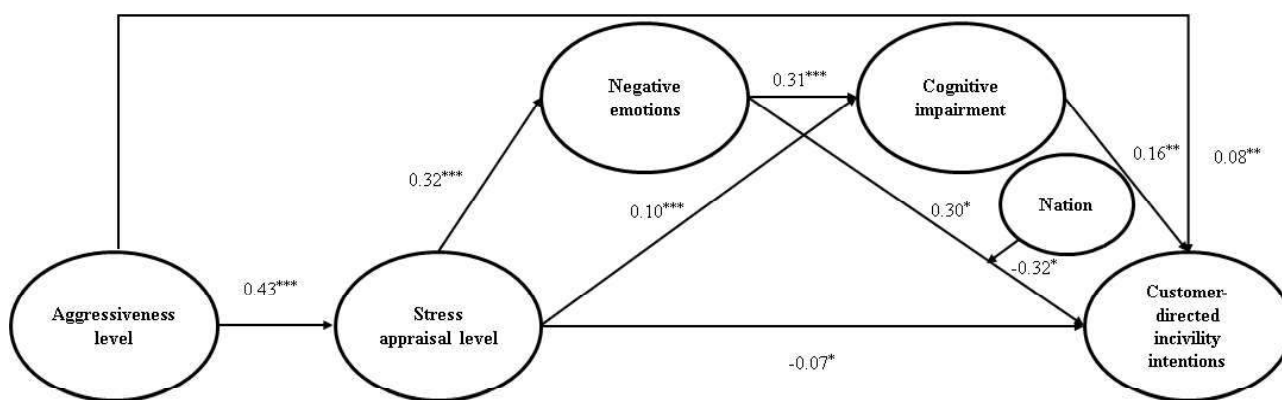


Figure 4. Standardized path coefficients for Model 3 with nation as a moderator in the relationship between negative emotions and customer-directed incivility.

Table 18. Standardized indirect and total effects for Model 2.

| Model | AIC | BIC |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Aggr→Stress→NE*Nation→EI | 22506.38 | 22776.27 |
| Aggr→Stress→NE*Nation→COG→EI | 22526.59 | 22788.43 |
| Aggr→Stress→NE→COG*Nation→EI | 22512.43 | 22782.33 |
| Aggr→Stress*Nation→NE→COG→EI | 22547.07 | 22808.91 |

| Model | Standardized indirect effects | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | <i>Effects</i> | <i>Estimate</i> | <i>S.E.</i> |
| Indirect effects for Italy | .20 | .07 | .007 |
| Indirect effects for Ireland | -.00 | .02 | .849 |
| Total effects for Italy | .25 | .07 | .001 |
| Total effects for Ireland | -.03 | .02 | .163 |

Note. In boldfaced are indicated the better-fitting model and the significant direct and indirect effects. AIC= Akaike Information Criterion; BIC= Bayesian Information Criterion

6. Discussion regarding cross-cultural differences

By adopting a cross-cultural approach, we gain greater precision in understanding how workers' reactions to customer mistreatment can differ among individuals from different cultures. In both countries, the more the negative encounters were perceived as stressful, the more were the negative emotions felt by workers. This is in line with the findings of previous empirical studies investigating workplace interpersonal conflict (Fox et al., 2001; Frone, 2000), mistreatment (Dallimore et al., 2007) and other customer abuse constructs, such as interaction injustice (Rupp & Spencer, 2006), demonstrating that employees tend to feel negative emotions in response to different forms of mistreatment. However, differently from what found in Ireland, negative emotions elicited by aggressive customers were the intervening variables which led Italian workers to directly engage in uncivil behaviours directed to customers.

Given that our investigation did not directly assess cultural dimensions which could be useful to explain the reasons why we found cultural dissimilarities, the interpretations of such differences should consequently be treated with considerable caution. One possible explanation for these country differences might be associated with cultural beliefs and values which might influence how employees respond to aggressive acts, as demonstrated by previous researches (Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001; Kernan., Watson, Fang Chen, & Gyu Kim, 2011; Kim, Shapiro, Aquino, Lim, & Bennett, 2008; Rippon, 2005; Salin, 2003; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014;

Tepper, 2007). According to Hofstede and colleagues' findings (2010), Irish and Italian national cultures diverge strongly on uncertainty avoidance dimension, that is the degree to which society members feel threatened by ambiguous circumstances and, therefore, strive to decrease the possibility of uncertainty by relying on established social norms, laws and rules. Although we did not assess this dimension, as indicated by Hofstede and co-workers' research (2010), Italians are more poorly tolerant to ambiguity and more inclined to avoid or eliminate the unexpected than Irish. Since aggressive behaviours - by their nature - are often unpredictable, it could be likely that Italians might perceive unexpected customer aggressive acts as more threatening and unacceptable events at work in comparison with Irish people and, thus, they might react directly to resulting negative emotions by reciprocating with customer-directed incivility. Alternatively, another plausible explanation might be related to cultural dissimilarities in dialectic beliefs regarding the utility of negative emotional states which, as demonstrated by Miyamoto and colleagues' research (2014), may shape emotion regulation and emotional experiences. The authors found that individuals who believe in negative emotions utility are less likely to engage in emotion regulation (Miyamoto et al., 2014). According to Zola (1966), Italians tend to handle their problems by dramatization which results in a tendency to overexpress anxiety associated with troubles to dissipate it, whereas Irish are more prone to deal with problems by denial. Therefore, in accordance with their culturally supported way of dealing with problems (Zola, 1966), Italians could perceive the expression of negative emotions as having motivational and cognitive utility. As a result, they might be less motivated to readily regulate their unpleasant emotional states - elicited by negative customer-encounter - and they might be more inclined to vent their negative emotions on the instigator of those emotions than Irish workers. Conversely, Irish employees might be more motivated to reduce negative emotions after interactions with aggressive customers by engaging in emotional regulation to comply also with organizational display rules. These interpretations should be treated with

caution. An important question to resolve for future studies is why Italian and Irish employees react differently to negative emotions elicited by misbehaving customers.

7. General discussion and theoretical contributions

To date, research on workplace incivility has predominantly focused on intra-organizational members and individual consequences (e.g., burnout) following negative customer-encounters, with less attention given to the potential reciprocating process of incivility initiated by customers. As more companies compete based on customer service, successful exchanges between workers and customers become critical for organizational success. Customer-directed incivility represents an important issue because it can erode the quality of the service provided and reduce organizational performance (Schneider et al., 2005). This two-country study aimed to analyse the relationship between employee-directed uncivility and employee-to-customer incivility and better understand why this might occur. The theoretical significance of this study is fiftyfold.

First, the results of our study support the COR framework (Hobfoll, 1989), by showing that service providers who are confronted with more aggressive customers tend to appraise such customer encounters as more stressful. When employees do not receive the returns which they expected after investing their limited resources (i.e., time, energy) in satisfying customers, they are likely to experience stress. Moreover, the higher the threat of loss or actual loss of resources (i.e., the more aggressive is the customer), the more detrimental are the negative outcomes (Hobfoll, 2001). Employees who were victims of verbally aggressive customers might experience more serious emotional resource depletion, which might result in more severe psychological states of stress. Thereby, our study shows the value of the COR theory as a basis for predicting and understanding psychological dynamics among service providers.

Second, we provided empirical evidence for the presence of a reciprocating process in which workers react to customer mistreatment by reciprocating with uncivility. The aggressiveness severity attributed to customer-encounters was positively correlated with employee-to-customer incivility intentions in both countries. This is in line with the findings from prior studies (e.g., Kim & Qu, 2018; Torres et al., 2017; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) and consistent with the “spiral of incivility” theory (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and the target similarity model (Lavelle et al., 2007). Moreover, this is in accordance with justice reciprocity processes which argue that when employees are treated with unprovoked rudeness from customers, they perceive to be treated unfairly and, as a result, they are likely to engage in negative reactions directed toward the sources of undeserved injustice (Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Skarlicki et al., 2008). Furthermore, aggressiveness severity directly predicted customer-directed incivility intentions in Ireland only. On the one hand, this nonsignificant result for the Italian sample indicates the presence of potential mediating factors which could explain the positive correlations between aggressiveness severity and customer-directed incivility found in Italy. On the other hand, this finding suggests that employees who were confronted with verbally aggressive customers were more likely to reciprocate with uncivil acts in comparison with those who were victims of customer incivility. Indeed, our experimental manipulation showed that episodes of verbal aggression were perceived as more aggressive than those of customer incivility. We extend existing incivility literature by showing that uncivil reciprocating processes can occur also in response to customer verbal aggression.

Third, by evaluating the role played by negative emotions in mediating the association between stress appraisal aroused by aggressive customer-encounters and employee-to-customer incivility, relevant cultural differences were revealed. In Italy employees who perceived customer-encounters as more stressful were more likely to experience negative emotions and, in turn, directly react by engaging in employee-to-customer incivility when compared with their

Irish counterparts. This is in accordance with the findings from previous studies (e.g., Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Rupp & Spencer, 2006) and in line with AET theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) which states that significant events that trigger negative emotions (e.g., negative customer-encounters) can motivate affectively driven negative reactions (e.g., customer-directed incivility; Weiss & Beal, 2005) directed to the perceived source of emotions. This may occur during the same service interaction (Martinko, Douglas, & Harvey, 2006) as a mechanism to end an uncivil service interaction (e.g., Sliter et al., 2010). According to the fourth principle of the COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), employees may enter a defensive mode and become irrational to conserve their limited resources. In this case, this means that customer-directed incivility might be a coping strategy to reduce the loss of emotional resources due to negative emotions aroused by misbehaving clients. Possible explanations for cross-national differences might be drawn on Hofstede and colleagues' model (2010) and previous cross-cultural investigations (Miyamoto et al., 2014; Zola, 1966). This study contributes to existing workplace incivility research by showing cultural differences in underlying mechanisms which lead Italian and Irish employees to be uncivil in response to misbehaving clients. Future work needs to be performed to establish why these differences occur.

Fourth, these data suggest that, according to the results from previous investigations (e.g., Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Porath & Erez, 2007, 2009; Rafaeli et al., 2012), in both nations handling stressful customer-encounters may undermine employees' cognitive functioning. However, in neither of the two nations cognitive impairment on its own fully mediated the investigated relationship. It is plausible to hypothesize the presence of nonlinear effects, so that cognitive impairment following encounters with misbehaving customers may lead employees to engage in uncivil behaviors, but only when cognitive impairment reaches certain levels. Conversely, this effect might not exist at lower cognitive impairment levels. Alternatively, resource-drained employees might act to restore their resources at work by

withdrawing from the workplace (e.g., staying at home or being late to work; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Taris, Schreurs, Van Lersel-Van Silfhout, 2001; Sliter et al., 2012) rather than behaving uncivilly toward customers.

Fifth, in both nations we found a positive association between negative emotions and cognitive impairment. This is in line with what expected based on previous arousal-based studies which have shown that high arousal, especially in the case of negative emotions, may interfere with task-focused thinking (e.g., Sarason, 1984), performance in complex tasks (Easterbrook, 1959) and problem-solving ability (Beier, 1951; Maltzman, Fox, & Morrisett, 1953; Pally, 1954). However, unpleasant emotions resulting from perceived highly stressful interactions with misbehaving clients interfered with cognitive abilities and, thus, made employees less able to properly manage job demands and more inclined to behave in an uncivil way toward customers in Ireland only. This finding supports the applicability of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to in-depth understand psychological mechanisms which may lead service providers to react to stressful customer-encounters. Indeed, according to what expected based on this framework, in the face of unexpected customer mistreatment, employees may perceive that their resources are threatened or that their resource investment does not generate the desired rewarding relations to compensate for the effort required. Additionally, the effort to regulate the resulting negative emotions - to comply with organizational display rules - may distract affected workers by impeding their ability to effectively perform, leading to a further depletion of resources. As a result, service providers are more likely to be rude toward customers to preserve their remaining resources. In sum, our results shed light on how the customer incivility-employee incivility dynamic plays out through negative emotions and cognitive impairment.

8. Practical implications

Given the increasing market competitiveness, companies strive to deliver high-quality customer service, and the results of the present two-country study offer some interesting implications for possible organizational interventions aimed at reducing customer-directed incivility which can erode the quality of the service provided and reduce organizational performance (Schneider et al., 2005).

Firstly, management should take steps to prevent customer mistreatment from occurring in the first place. Organizations could, for instance, track customers who manifest employee-directed misbehaviours and institute a zero-tolerance policy for mistreatment by clients. Since a customer satisfied with the service provided will be less likely to be uncivil, managers should ensure they are providing quality customer services and they are soliciting frequent feedbacks from clients as a way to detect service failures. The implementation of reward and recognition programs for employees who maintain excellent service standards is recommended for companies to deter workers from engaging in negative workplace deviance (Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007). Additionally, companies should provide their employees with ongoing training programs aimed at fostering the adoption of better problem-solving strategies in handling disrespectful customers and improving conflict negotiation/avoidance tactics to defuse upset clients (Adams & Webster, 2013; Skarlicki et al., 2008; Yoo et al., 2015). Moreover, training should be addressed at enhancing service providers' recovery skills to face with customer mistreatment that is due to service failures, such that the service purposes could be achieved (Liao & Chuang, 2007).

Secondly, the finding that Italian employees were more likely to react directly to negative emotions aroused from stressful interactions with aggressive customers by engaging in employee-to-customer incivility in comparison with their Irish counterparts suggests

important practical implications for managers who are managing internationally diverse workforces. If Italians use negative emotions as a way to elicit social support, then any such training programmes need to be cognisant of the need to substitute alternative mechanisms for social support. Accordingly, organizations should provide their employees with training programs aimed at improving their emotion regulation skills. Moreover, companies should allow frontline employees to take short breaks at their own discretion after negative encounters to alleviate negative emotional states. Additionally, managers could conduct sharing and debriefing sessions (also with the support of a professional psychologist, where appropriate) with service providers where workers are stimulated to openly share their emotional experiences with difficult clients. Moreover, supervisors should support their subordinates through regular communication and mentoring sessions aimed at going over the negative exchanges that occurred during the day, in addition to implementing job-rotation for at-risk staff. Additionally, by transferring or knowing that transferring unreasonable customers to one's own supervisors is allowed, service providers can decrease their likelihood of depleting their own resources and view their supervisors as more supportive.

Thirdly, managers could consider training employees on managing multiple service tasks simultaneously to reduce the potential negative effects of customer incivility on employees' cognitive functioning (Gopher, Weil, & Siegel, 1989). For example, training might simulate customer mistreatment while trainees at the same time have to deal with technical service tasks, as performing the two together may be an intellectually demanding task (Rafaeli et al., 2012). This could be useful to strengthen employees' ability to remain concentrated on service provision even in presence of distracting elements derived from customer mistreatment.

9. Limitations

Aside from the theoretical contributions reported above, there are a number of strengths to the study. To date, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first two-country study to investigate how negative emotions and cognitive impairment function together in the reciprocal process of incivility. Moreover, this is one of the few studies analysing workplace incivility to adopt an experimental design. This allows us to draw causal conclusions and exert greater control on extraneous variables. By repeating the same manipulation design within the same contexts future studies could confirm our findings, whereas by replicating the same experiment within different national settings further research could reveal the presence of cultural differences in employees' reactions to customer mistreatment. Adopting a cross-national approach, this is one of the first studies to detect cross-cultural differences in terms of employees' emotional and cognitive reactions to customer mistreatment.

The results of this investigation are not without limitations. Firstly, our findings are limited in their generalizability to actual customer service settings, given that these researches were laboratory studies and respondents were working students. However, evidence has been provided to support that findings obtained in contrived settings across numerous psychological fields are generalizable (Anderson, Lindsay, & Bushman, 1999; Colquitt, 2008; Locke, 1986). Furthermore, participants evaluated all the situations described in the scenarios as major problems which were likely to occur in a real workplace. Additionally, metanalytic evidence (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001) on justice topic has revealed a powerful correlation (i.e., $r=.97$) between the effect sizes of laboratory and field researches.

Secondly, the present study relied on scenarios, meaning that participants were asked to imagine what they would do but they were not exposed to actual customer mistreatment. We assessed employees' reactions by considering customer incivility intentions, but not actual

behaviours, although intentions represent the critical psychological predictor of voluntary behaviours (Frieze, Hofmann, & Schmitt, 2008). However, several factors lend ecological validity to our findings. Individuals are likely to experience stronger emotional reactions and harmful consequences to real than imagined scenarios. Therefore, our results can be considered as conservative test of the real employees' reactions likely to be triggered by misbehaving customers. Moreover, research has shown that imagining ourselves in a situation can help to stimulate the same reactions as we would have had whether we would handle the situation in the reality (Montes & Zweig, 2009). In addition, our findings are in accordance with those of previous research, some of it carried out in workplace environments (e.g., Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Porath & Erez, 2007, 2009; Skarlicki et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2011). Further studies could be directed to full-time workers within real workplaces. Additionally, we need more research to compare results among different service sectors or reveal peculiarities associated with specific customer-contact jobs.

Thirdly, a limitation of our studies was the adoption of a between-person design, in which participants in the experimental groups encountered rude or verbally aggressive customers and participants assigned to the control group (i.e., neutrality condition) did not. A within-person design would have had more external validity since service providers deal with numerous clients on a daily basis, some of them rude or verbally aggressive and some not. Data were collected at one point in time and we could not consider the difference between conditions at different time-points. Future research should analyse our predictions with different manipulations of customer mistreatment (e.g., simulations), considering also the possibility of adopting a within-person design (e.g., diary studies). Moreover, the validity of our results should be check by utilising a full experimental design, namely, by measuring customer-directed incivility, negative emotions and cognitive impairment before and after reading scenarios.

Fourthly, possible selection bias due to the voluntary participation into the research cannot be ruled out. It is possible that those who experienced demanding customer encounters were more motivated to respond and, as such, were overrepresented.

Fifthly, another limitation involved the unequal sizes between Italian and Irish groups. However, this different distribution is representative of cultural differences existing in the number of students working within the two national contexts: in general, Italians are less likely to work during their studies than their Irish counterparts. Moreover, the small size of the Italian sample might influence the significance of our results. Additionally, in our SEMs we could not control employee-to-customer incivility intentions for age and job tenure because of the small size of our samples and missing responses of our participants. Nevertheless, our results are promising and should be validated by a larger sample size in both countries.

Sixthly, since the majority of subjects were women, and gender has been found to affect emotional expressivity, particularly for negative emotions (Deng, Chang, Yang, Huo, & Zhou, 2016), this might have partially influenced our findings. However, the gender distribution in our sample is highly representative of the Italian and Irish customer service workforces.

Finally, other mediating variables that we did not measure could influence the relationship between customer incivility and employee-to-customer incivility (e.g., interpersonal justice, perceptions of (dis-)similarity with the perpetrator, presence of other customers). Furthermore, we did assess neither cultural beliefs and values (e.g., uncertainty avoidance, emotion expression) which could help explain the dissimilarities found between the two nations nor other possible employee reactions to customer incivility (e.g., searching for colleagues' support) nor employees' personal characteristics which could influence such reactions. Research must always achieve a balance between parsimony and comprehensiveness, and the purpose of this study was to shed light on the emotional and cognitive mechanisms through which customer mistreatment generated employee incivility. Therefore, we must leave

it to future work the task to address the questions of whether other mediating variables may influence and the reasons why we revealed cultural differences in employees' reactions to customer mistreatment.

10. Conclusion and implications for future research

This two-country experimental study highlights the presence of a reciprocating process which links customer mistreatment (in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression) to employee-to-customer incivility through employees' emotional and cognitive reactions. Since an increasing number of workers are employed within the service sector, researchers and practitioners should recognize and further analyse the influence of the client on employees' behaviours and attitudes as well as the presence of possible cultural dissimilarities in employees' reactions. Further studies should investigate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between cognitive impairment stemming from customer mistreatment and customer-directed incivility as well as the extent to which diverse customer-service tasks may be differently impaired by negative customer-encounters. Another area of future research is to identify individual characteristics which could lead employees to resist engaging in uncivil behaviours toward the source of mistreatment. Moreover, investigating cultural values and culturally supported coping strategies may help explain differences across countries in terms of employees' reactions to customer mistreatment.

The customer mistreatment construct is complex and affords several opportunities for investigation. For instance, it is possible that certain forms of incivility may have more powerful effects than others as well as the presence of witnesses may influence the likelihood of an employee to behave uncivilly toward the customer-instigator of uncivility. Furthermore, the presence of a reciprocating process of incivility should be analyse also across intra-

organizational members. Additional research should explore further mediators beyond those examined here.

In conclusion, the current research provides some interesting insights on the customer service interaction by investigating the role of negative emotions and cognitive impairment in this dynamic. Notwithstanding, we call for future research to test our predictions within genuine organizational contexts and different cultural settings. This research has raised many questions in need of further investigation.

11. References

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12. Appendix 1.

Please read carefully the scenarios below which outline various interaction with customers. Choose the scenario that you can relate to most or that you have experienced in the past (please choose only one). Subsequently, you will be asked some questions. Please think about the scenario you chose as you progress to answer these questions.

A) Neutrality condition

(1) 1. You work in a clothing store. A customer asks you to return an item without a receipt. You explain to the customer that no refund or return can be obtained without a sale receipt or packing slip. In addition, products must be unused and free from any type of customer damage or sign of abuse.

(2) 2. You work in a shop and you have to cope with a period of intense work over the Christmas period approaching. The winter season brings with it more customers and more complaints due to long waiting time and shortage of staff.

(3) 3. You work as a waiter at a restaurant. After an issue with the service, a customer isn't satisfied with ordered meat cooking. You offer to return his/her food to the kitchen and after a while give him/her the meat cooked as desired. It is important to satisfy the customer.

B) Customer incivility condition

(1) 1. You work in a clothing store. A customer blames you for not being able to return an item without a receipt. The customer uses inappropriate verbal expressions to address you and complaints to you about the value of goods and services.

(2) 2. You work in a shop and you have to cope with a period of intense work over the Christmas period approaching. A customer grumbles to you claiming that the service is slow

and they had to wait a long time to be served. In addition, the customer blames you because there are few employees working and they are failing to meet needs of a large number of customers. The client makes inappropriate gestures, rolling his/her eyes and sighing, to express his/her impatience and get your attention.

(3) □ 3. You work as a waiter at a restaurant. After an issue with the service, a customer isn't satisfied with ordered meat cooking. You offer to return his/her food to the kitchen, going out of your way to help him/her and meet his/her needs. Despite the efforts made to assist him/her, the customer continues to complain loudly and question the ability of some waiters working in the restaurant to properly do their job.

C) Verbal Aggression condition

(1) □ 1. You work in a clothing store. A customer gets angry at you due to not being able to return an item without a receipt. The customer attacks you verbally, shouting and swearing at you in front of your co-workers and customers in the store.

(2) □ 2. You work in a shop and you have to cope with a period of intense work over the Christmas period approaching. A customer, using a condescending tone, threatens to make a complaint to your boss about you claiming that the service is slow and they had to wait a long time to be served. In addition, the customer vents his/her anger on you, grumbling to you that there are few employees working and they are failing to meet needs of a large number of customers. The client raises irrelevant points, interrupting you while you are interacting with another customer, to express his/her impatience and get your attention.

(3) □ 3. You work as a waiter at a restaurant. After an issue with the service, a customer isn't satisfied with ordered meat cooking. You offer to return his/her food to the kitchen, going out of your way to help him/her and to meet his/her needs. Despite the efforts made to assist

him/her, the customer, using an offensive language, accuses you of incompetence, humiliates and insults you, and threatens to leave the restaurant.

CHAPTER 5

The role of personal resources in protecting Italian and Irish employees' job satisfaction and service recovery performance against customer mistreatment

Focusing on employees' psychological resources identified by the theoretical model presented in *Chapter 2* (see *Figure 1*) and drawing on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and the JD-R model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; see *Chapter 1*, this two-country study concentrates on the impact of customer mistreatment on job-related outcomes as the study in *Chapter 4*. However, it differs from the previous investigation in terms of objectives. Thus, this study investigates whether customer mistreatment may directly and indirectly – via burnout – lead to job dissatisfaction and reduced service recovery performance and whether personal characteristics could help service providers maintain such job-related outcomes. Part of the Italian data have been published on *Sustainability*¹.

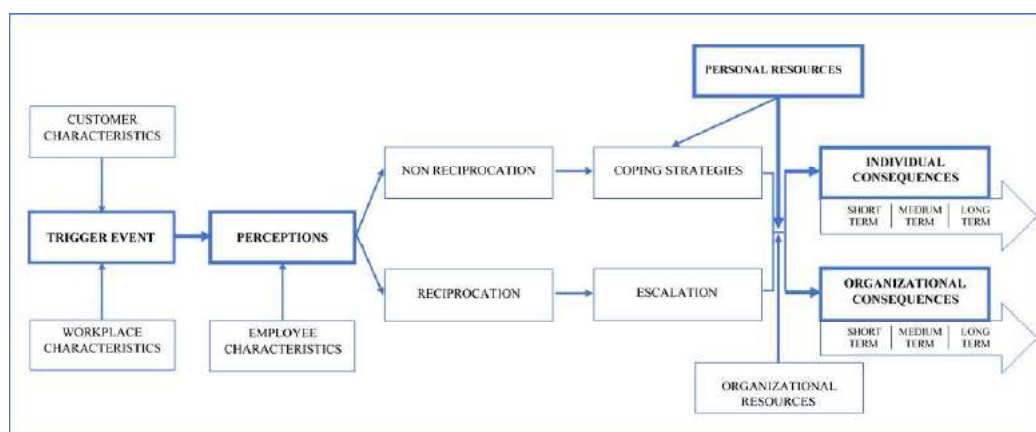


Figure 1. Theoretical model proposed in Chapter 2 with aspects analysed by this study in boldfaced.

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Abstract

Background. Customer mistreatment may undermine employees' well-being which, therefore, lead to negative job-related outcomes. Fostering personal resources become critical to support service providers who can effectively manage such job demands.

Objective. The current two-country study investigated whether customer mistreatment may directly and indirectly – through burnout symptoms – affect employees' job satisfaction and service recovery performance and whether personal resources (i.e., customer orientation, positive affectivity, resilience) may protect service providers against customer mistreatment.

Method. One hundred seventy-two Irish and one hundred fifty-seven Italian customer-contact working students completed a questionnaire investigating: customer orientation (CO), positive affectivity (PA), negative affectivity (NA), resilience, customer incivility (CI), customer verbal aggression (CVA), burnout, job satisfaction and service recovery performance (SRP). Regression analyses and SEMs were conducted.

Results. Both CI and CVA increased burnout, leading to job dissatisfaction and reduced SRP. CI only exerted a direct and detrimental impact on such job-related outcomes. CO was positively associated with SRP, whereas affectivity disposition was the best predictor of job satisfaction. PA in Ireland and NA in Italy buffered the detrimental effects of CI on job satisfaction. In both countries, highly resilient employees were less affected by variations in SRP across customer incivility levels.

Conclusion. Service companies can greatly benefit from providing their employees with psychological resilience training programs, cultivating high customer-oriented attitudes through mentoring sessions, and hiring highly customer-oriented and resilient employees for customer-contact occupations.

Key words: customer mistreatment, customer orientation, affective disposition, resilience, job satisfaction, service recovery performance.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, service organizations strive to deliver exceptional quality to their customers to succeed within increasingly global competitive and ever-changing market environment conditions (Oldham, 2003). Because of the high “people factor” (Susskind, 2002), mistakes and failures are often an inevitable part of the service delivery process. In this scenario, service recovery performance (SRP) plays a crucial role in recovering customers' loyalty and satisfaction (de Jong & DeRuyter, 2004), especially among Western countries where the service sector represents the main employment area, accounting for more than 60% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP, a measure of the value of the total production in a country in a given year; CIA, 2018). For instance, in 2017 in Italy such sector contributed around 70% to the employment rates and approximately 66% to the GDP, whereas in Ireland the 75% of the employees were active in such area which contributed just over 60% to the GDP (CIA, 2018; Statista, 2018). Therefore, a large proportion of employees are frequently exposed to customer-related social stressors (CSSs; Dormann & Zapf, 2004), which may produce detrimental effects on their well-being and job-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction and SRP, depending on individual characteristics. Indeed, some psychological characteristics may predispose individuals to perceive their workplace more or less favorably, influencing their reactions and vulnerability to CSSs (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Zeidner & Matthews, 2000). In this context, resilience and customer orientation (CO) represent interesting variables, since they may be learned through specific training programs. To date, the majority of research on SRP has concentrated on customer perceptions (Van der Heijden, Schepers, Nijssen, & Ordanini, 2013), whereas only a few studies have analyzed this topic from the service provider perspective (Liu, Yan, Phau, Perez, & Thea, 2016). Additionally, to the best of our knowledge, the only study investigating the direct influence of individual-level CO on SRP

was conducted by Choi and colleagues (2014), with previous investigations on this topic predominantly concentrating on organizational-level CO (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Hammami & Triki, 2011; Kwon & Park, 2005). Furthermore, to our knowledge, no prior studies have examined the role of resilience in buffering the negative effects of customer mistreatment on SRP, with previous investigations on the protective role of resilience against third-party workplace aggression predominantly focusing on the healthcare setting (Itzhaki et al., 2015; Hsieh, Chen, Wang, Chang, & Ma, 2016). Moreover, most of research on customer mistreatment has analyzed individual differences related to the perpetrator (e.g., Ones & Viswesvaran, 2003; Parkins, Fishbein, & Ritchey, 2006), whereas we know of only two studies which have considered at the same time the influence of different individual characteristics in relation to customer incivility (CI), comparing their effects (e.g., Milam, Spitzmueller, & Penney, 2009; Sliter, Withrow, & Jex, 2015). The first study, which was conducted by Milam and co-workers (2009), showed that certain personality traits might predispose individuals toward appraising interpersonal breaches as incivility (i.e., neuroticism) and provoking incivility from others because of their provocative behavior. The second study, which was carried out by Sliter and colleagues (2015), examined how different personality traits could influence individual perceptions of incivility, suggesting that positive affectivity (PA) was one of the best predictors of incivility perceptions. Although numerous researches have confirmed that affective disposition might influence the process of emotional labor and the adoption of emotional regulation strategies (Abraham, 1998; Bono & Vey, 2007; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000), only a few investigations have analyzed the buffering role of PA in the context of employee-customer interaction (Bell & Luddington, 2006; Goussinsky, 2011). To fill these gaps, drawing on the Conservation of Resource theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and the Job-Demand Resources model (JD-R;

Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the current two-country study investigated whether customer mistreatment – in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression – may directly and indirectly – through burnout symptoms – affect job satisfaction and SRP and whether personal characteristics could help service providers to maintain such job-related outcomes. More specifically, one of the main purposes of the present study was to analyze whether CO could directly and positively influence SRP and whether resilience could buffer the association between customer mistreatment and SRP. A further objective was to examine whether affective traits could be predictive of job satisfaction and buffer the negative effects of customer mistreatment on satisfaction perceptions

1.1. The importance of service recovery performance

SRP refers to “frontline service employees’ perceptions of their own abilities and actions to resolve a service failure to the satisfaction of the customer” (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, & Avci, 2003, p. 274). Correctly addressing customer discontent can lead to a host of positive outcomes, including reinforced positive word-of-mouth advertising, increased repurchase intentions and eventually customer patronage (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009; Mattila, 2001; Tang, Chang, Huang & Zhang, 2018; Yavas, Karatepe, & Babakus, 2010; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). This may generate benefits for the whole organization in terms of profitability afterwards by fostering long-term seller-customer relationships (Valenzuela, Vasquez-Parraga, Llanos, & Vilches, 2006) and by decreasing customer acquisition expenses (Wang, Hsu, & Chih, 2014). Additionally, service providers can learn from recovery services and improve their performance - in terms of recovery speed and recovery quality, accordingly (Van der Heijden et al., 2013). Moreover, evidence has shown that a good service recovery may not only compensate previous negative service experiences, but also increase post-failure customer satisfaction and loyalty, perceptions of relationship

quality, and favourable company image beyond levels held before the service error (i.e., a phenomenon known as “service recovery paradox”; Cheng, Chen, & Chang, 2008; Liao, 2007; Lorenzoni & Lewis, 2004). This calls for acknowledging the importance of recovery encounters as “critical moments of truth” (Nadiri & Tanova, 2016, p. 163) because customers tend to view frontline service employees, who occupy “boundary spanning” roles (Nair, 2015, p. 161), as organizational representatives and base their recovery evaluations mainly on the performance of these workers (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003).

1.2. The importance of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is described as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (Locke, 1969, p. 316), reflecting employees’ attitudes toward their job. The energy that stems from this positive emotional state is fundamental in influencing the effort put into the job (Williams & Anderson, 1991). This attitude represents a key indicator of psychological functioning at work (Alexopoulos, Palatsidi, Tigani, & Darviri, 2014), since it plays a protective role against several negative outcomes, such as malaise, withdrawal behaviours, turnover intentions, counterproductive behaviours and reduced job performance (Aguiar do Monte, 2012; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Kawada, 2014; Sulea, Maricutoiu, Dumitru, & Pitariu, 2015; Swider, Boswell, & Zimmerman, 2011). Moreover, satisfied employees uphold more positive relations with their co-workers (Swider et al., 2011), in addition to being more committed to their organization (Yoon & Thye, 2002) and less frequently absent from work (Steel, Rentsch, & Hendrix, 2002), when compared with their less satisfied counterparts (Swider et al., 2011).

1.3. The detrimental impact of customer mistreatment on job-related outcomes

Whereas customer incivility (CI) refers to low-intensity deviant, discourteous, and rude behaviors, perpetrated by a customer, with the ambiguous intent to harm an employee (Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010), customer verbal aggression (CVA) is described as a verbal communication of anger perpetrated by a customer with clear intent to hurt a worker (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Although both forms of customer mistreatment represent CSSs (Dormann & Zapf, 2004) which violate social norms of mutual respect and courtesy, CI can be considered as a milder form of CVA because it manifests itself through gestures or verbal expressions which lack the anger that characterizes CVA (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, 2008; Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013). In the light of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), both CI and CVA can be considered as job demands because they require employees to invest considerable cognitive and emotional energies and are, therefore, associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Alternatively, in line with the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), CI and CVA can be viewed as stressors which can lead employees to experience negative organizational and personal strains, such as job dissatisfaction and reduced job performance. Indeed, according to this framework, service providers who experience high level of CI or CVA may perceive a threat to their working conditions and personal resources (two of the four resources identified by the theory) or receive insufficient return of supplementary resources following significant resource investment (i.e., energy, time); thereby, they are likely to perceive such events as stressful. In addition to theory, empirical research has suggested that employees who were directly or vicariously subjected to high levels of coworker and supervisor incivility were more likely to be dissatisfied with their job (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007; Lim et al., 2008; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007; Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009). Additionally,

correlational and meta-analytic evidence supported the associations between organizational outsider injustice and job dissatisfaction (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007). In addition, a few studies found that employees who experience greater CSSs, including CI and CVA, reported lower job satisfaction (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016; Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013). However, studies regarding the CVA-job satisfaction relationship produced inconsistent findings. Whereas Boyd (2002) confirmed that CVA directly generated job dissatisfaction, several studies showed that the influence of CVA on job satisfaction was not direct, but rather it was mediated by emotion variables, such as emotion regulation (Shih, Lie, Kleing, & Jiang, 2014) or emotional dissonance (Wegge, Van Dick, & Von Bernstorff, 2010). Similarly, conflicting results have been obtained concerning the direct harmful impact of customer mistreatment on SRP. To the best of our knowledge, the only study to hypothesize that CVA might directly affect SRP was conducted by Yoo and colleagues (2015), suggesting that such direct relationship was not significant. Nevertheless, experimental evidence has confirmed that even short-term negative customer encounters might undermine cognitive aspects relevant for customer service work and, therefore, result in lower quality performance (Rafaeli et al., 2012). Taking together these results, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 1: Customer mistreatment (H1a: CI, H1b: CVA) will be negatively associated with job satisfaction

Hypothesis 2: Customer mistreatment (H1a: CI, H1b: CVA) will be negatively associated with SRP

1.4. The mediating role of burnout

Previous investigations showed that CSSs (Dormann & Zapf, 2004), including CI and CVA, were positively related to, result in, and/or heighten emotional exhaustion (i.e.,

lack of energy and emotional fatigue) and cynicism (i.e., detachment from work and uncaring attitude towards customers customers; Choi, Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2014; Karatepe, Yorganci, & Haktanir, 2009a, b; Karatepe, Haktanir, & Yorganci 2010; Song & Liu, 2010; Van Dierendonck & Mevissen, 2002; Walsh, 2011) which, therefore, might produce undesirable job outcomes, including impaired job performance (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). A possible explanation could be drawn on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Indeed, when employees are exposed to customer mistreatment, they are likely to invest extra resources to regulate possible negative emotions and spend their resources in thinking about their condition (e.g., by worrying about how they could avoid the situation). Whether service providers continue to be affected with resource loss without effectively compensating through resource replacement (i.e., by employing other resources to offset the loss), they may feel their resources are no longer sufficient to meet job demands and, therefore, be at increased risk for emotional exhaustion. Additionally, emotionally drained employees might try to reduce the loss of emotional resources by detaching themselves from customers (e.g., treating them as impersonal objects) to conserve their scarce resources (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Therefore, resource-depleted workers might be unwilling to continue depleting their resources by investing their limited energies in service recovery efforts and they might lack the motivation to engage in their job. Thereby, they might be less satisfied with their job and they might reduce the quality of the SRP provided in the attempt of preserving their remaining resources.

In addition to theory, empirical studies found that workplace mistreatment was related to organizational strain which, in turn, might lead to decreased job satisfaction (Cortina et al., 2001; Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007; Lim et al., 2008). Similarly, research demonstrated that interactions with misbehaving customers might produce stress in

employees (Grandey et al., 2004; Spector & Jex, 1998; Walsh, 2011) and, therefore, lead to negative attitudinal consequences, such as job dissatisfaction (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Kim, Murrmann, & Lee, 2009; Walsh, 2011; Yagil, 2008). Additionally, several studies revealed that customer mistreatment might reduce job satisfaction through emotional exhaustion (e.g., Adams & Buck, 2010; Cho et al., 2016; Kim, Jung-Eun Yoo, Lee, & Kim, 2012). Moreover, evidence has been provided to support the role played by emotional exhaustion in mediating the detrimental effects of CVA on SRP (Choi et al., 2014; Kim, Paek, Choi, & Lee, 2012; Yoo, Kim, & Lee, 2015). Given these findings, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 3: Burnout symptoms will mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment (H2a: CI, H2b: CVA) and job satisfaction

Hypothesis 4: Burnout symptoms will mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment (H4a: CI, H4b: CVA) and SRP

1.5. The importance of personal resources

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), personal characteristics represent “resources to the extent that they generally aid stress resistance” (Hobfoll, 1989, p.517), suggesting that certain characteristics can be treated as personal coping resources. The differences in levels of stress-aiding personal characteristics may influence how individuals react to stress, making some individuals better at minimizing their losses and handling stressors. Moreover, personal resources produce other resources through resource gain spirals and engender resource caravans (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007), such that the availability of greater resources protects against the risk of loss and enables to invest resources for the acquisition of further resources (De Cuyper, Makikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno, & Witte, 2012). Conversely, poorly resourced individuals are more vulnerable to further resource “loss spirals” because they tend to be unable to offset

additional losses and to protect their remaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). This is also consistent with the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) which considers personal resources as psychological characteristics regarding one's sense of ability to control and influence environments in a successful way (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). According to this framework, personal resources may have similar motivational potential to that of job resources and may be positively related to favourable job outcomes (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, 2009). Conversely, the perception of not possessing sufficient resources to deal with high job demands may have detrimental effects on motivation. This may lead workers to experience a cynic attitude toward work, reducing their job satisfaction. In other words, employees who hold high personal resources levels will be more likely to appraise negative customer encounters as challenges - rather than threatening - which may stimulate their personal growth, learning and development. Thereby, they will be better able to reduce the physiological and psychological costs associated with customer mistreatment.

Evidence has been provided to support the moderating role of personal resources (Van Yperen & Snijders, 2000; Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003) in the relationship between job demands and both individual and organizational outcomes. Indeed, the presence of personal resources may help individuals maintain work engagement and organizational commitment, even in face of highly stressful conditions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Furthermore, previous research has revealed that individual resources have a direct impact on psychological well-being by decreasing the detrimental effect of job demands (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). Moreover, evidence has been provided to support the role of personal resources in predicting subsequent work engagement and job satisfaction (Lorente, Salanova, Martinez, & Vera, 2014; Surikova, Vodinchar, Neyaskina, Frizenm, & Shiryaeva, 2018; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, 2009; Vera, Le Blanc,

Taris, & Salanova, 2014) by shaping the way people perceive job features and response to them (Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997). This means that psychological resources may help explain dissimilarities in individual appraisals of - and abilities to handle - stressors (e.g., negative customer encounters), which may significantly affect job performance and satisfaction (Fisher, Kerr, & Cunningham, 2017). Thus, employees with higher personal resources levels may be more likely to perceive their work setting as less demanding and, hence, be satisfied with their job and highly performing (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Among analysed service providers' personal characteristics, we decided to focus on CO, PA and resilience because CO and PA have been identified as protective factors against detrimental effects due to customer mistreatment (e.g., Bell & Luddington, 2006; Kim et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2015), whereas the role of resilience in helping with critical events resistance has been widely acknowledged in the workplace violence literature (e.g., Itzhaki et al., 2015).

1.6. The positive influence of customer orientation on service recovery performance

Customer orientation (CO) is defined as an "employee's tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context" (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002; p.111). Such predisposition refers to worker beliefs about their capacity to satisfy customers' needs, expectations and desires by providing a courteous and helpful service. CO captures the extent to which interacting with and investing time and efforts to satisfy consumers is intrinsically pleasurable (Donovan, Brown, & Mowen, 2004). Previous studies revealed that CO contributes to determine a service organization's business success (Henning-Thurau, 2004; Saura, Contrí, Taulet, & Velázquez, 2005; Knight, Kim, & Crutsinger, 2007) by decreasing negative individual and organizational-level consequences, such as role conflict, burnout and turnover intentions (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009;

Brown et al., 2002; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Taylor, 2002; Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012) and by enhancing numerous job-related outcomes, including organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviours (Donavan et al., 2004), work engagement, job performance (Babakus et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2002), in particular SRP (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Lee, Park, Park, Lee, & Kwon, 2005; Yue, Wang, & Groth, 2017).

Assuming the COR theory perspective (Hobfoll, 2001), CO can be considered as a personal coping resource (Yoo et al., 2015) which makes customer-contact employees better at minimizing their losses because it predisposes them to seek additional resources to solve customers' problems (Harris & Reynolds, 2004) and cope better with CSSs (Yoo et al., 2015). Indeed, CO provides workers with an enduring reservoir of emotional and cognitive resources to pursue SRP (Babakus & Yavas, 2012). Thereby, customer-oriented employees are predisposed to have a cooperative attitude, interpret their work environment through a customer service lens and display customer-satisfying behaviors (Pan & Zinkhan, 2006). Additionally, given their tendency to naturally read customers' needs and be emotionally stable when engaging in customer encounters (Donavan et al., 2004), highly customer-oriented employees tend to promptly respond to customer's problems with solutions and be highly motivated to be helpful towards clients (Brown et al., 2002). Previous studies revealed that CO at the organizational level exerted a significant positive impact on service providers' SRP (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Kwon & Park, 2005). However, to date, to the best of our knowledge, the only study investigating the direct influence of individual-level CO on SRP was conducted by Choi and colleagues (2014), obtaining the same result. This suggests that further empirical investigation on the direct relationship between individual-level CO and SRP is required. Taken together these findings, we expected that service providers' CO

would be directly and positively associated with their SRP. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 5: CO will be directly and negatively related to SRP

1.7. The differential impact of positive and negative affectivity on job satisfaction

Positive affectivity (PA) and negative affectivity (NA) refer to pervasive predispositions that are expressed by the individual tendency to respectively experience positive or negative emotional states over time and across situations (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Watson & Clark, 1984; Watson & Slack, 1993). Judge and Larsen (2001) claimed that “PA and NA dimensions may be the most proximal dispositional influences on job satisfaction” (p. 82). Indeed, dispositional affectivity might directly influence job satisfaction in different ways. First, given their tendency to dwell on failures and shortcomings of themselves and others, high-NA service providers may evoke more aggression from customers because of their provocative behavior, resulting in negative exchange spirals (Groth & Grandey, 2012), which, in turn, may decrease their job satisfaction (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Conversely, given their predisposition to act in a friendly way during service transactions (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), exhibit supportive customer-oriented attitudes (George, 1991, 1998) and behaviors (Kelly & Hoffman, 1997), high-PA employees might exert an “undoing” effect on misbehaving customers, restoring positive interactions which, in turn, boosts their job satisfaction. Second, given their heightened sensitivity to negative stimuli (George, 1992; Watson & Clark 1984; Watson & Pennebaker, 1989; Watson, Pennebaker, & Folger, 1987), high-NA employees might feel more extreme emotions on the job when they experience negative customer encounters (Eysenck, 1987; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Tellegen, 1985), turning in greater job dissatisfaction. Additionally, high-NA people might perceive, rather than

experience, stressors (Burke, Brief, & George, 1993), being inclined to appraise external events as more threatening (Spector, Chen, & O'Connell, 2000) and interpret the behaviour of others in a manner consistent with their negative beliefs in the world (Marshall, Wortman, Kusulas, Hervig, & Vickers, 1992). For instance, Grandey and colleagues (2004) found that the variability in the extent to which employees perceived CVA as stressful was a function of dispositional affectivity, so that the less NA have employees, the less stressful they perceived hostile clients. Conversely, given their predisposition to interpret the behavior of others in a positive light and their positive view of the world and themselves (Marshall et al., 1992), high-PA individuals might be less likely to appraise ambiguous interpersonal behaviors in etiquette as incivility, in addition to being more committed to satisfying customer needs (Bell & Luddington, 2006). Third, given their lowered sensitivity to positive stimuli or their lowered magnitude positive mood reaction to positive events (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991), high-NA employees might respond to positive interactions with polite customers with less positive mood, which might negatively influence judgments on job satisfaction. Meta-analytic evidence has been provided to support the positive and negative associations of PA and NA with job satisfaction, respectively (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). Therefore, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 6: Dispositional affectivity will be related to perceived job satisfaction, so that high-PA employees will be more likely to be satisfied with their job (a), whereas high-NA workers will be more likely to be dissatisfied with their job (b)

Drawing on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), PA may be considered as a personal coping resource because experiencing positive emotions helps employees build a range of personal (e.g., optimism) and social resources (e.g., social support networks), which make individuals better in effectively coping with stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984;

Moskowitz, 2003; Srivastava & Sager, 1999; Yamasaki, Sakai, & Uchida, 2006). Accordingly, numerous investigations have shown that PA can protect employees against the development of negative effects due to work stressors (Adams, Treadway, & Stepina, 2008; Isen & Baron, 1991; James, Treadway, Conner, & Hochwarter, 2005; Callan, 1993). However, to date, only a few studies have examined the potential buffering role of PA in the context of employee-customer interaction. For instance, Bell and Luddington (2006) revealed that high-PA service providers were less affected from variations in commitment to customer service following customer complaints. The authors claimed that high-PA employees are more likely to perceive criticism as a possible source of enhancement, rather than as a product of their inability or poor performance. In addition, high-PA employees tend to adopt more proactive strategies for dealing with the stress elicited by customer complaints, including intensifying efforts to de-escalate any conflict and negotiating with clients (Bell & Luddington, 2006). Thereby, despite of the negative nature of customer complaints, high-PA workers are not discouraged by them. Moreover, scholars have argued that when extrovert people (i.e., extraversion and neuroticism have been suggested to correspond to trait PA and trait NA, respectively; Watson & Clark, 1997; Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999) interact with customers, they are less likely to be distressed by emotion regulation because of their ability to effectively regulate their emotional expressions (Bono & Vey, 2007). Moreover, evidence has been provided to support that under conditions which require emotional labor, such as when customer encounters arouse negative emotions, high-PA employees might have a lower risk of emotional exhaustion since displaying unfelt positive emotions towards customers is less personally costly for them (Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009), in comparison with their high-NA colleagues who have more negative emotions to suppress. Furthermore, previous studies have revealed that high-NA employees are more likely to deal with misbehaving customers by responding defensively

(Buss, 1987), by venting their negative emotions on customers and by adopting behavioural disengagement and customer-directed sabotage (Goussinsky, 2012; Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011). Thus, based on these arguments, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between customer mistreatment and job satisfaction will be moderated by affectivity, so that high-PA employees will report job satisfaction, even if confronted with rude (Hp7a) or verbally aggressive (Hp7b) customers. Conversely, high-NA workers will be affected by customer mistreatment, reporting lower job satisfaction in presence of high CI (Hp7c) or CVA (Hp7d) levels

1.8. Resilience as a protective factor for service recovery performance

When applied to the workplace, resilience is defined as the “positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002, p. 702). Resilience is the ability to succeed in maintaining equilibrium and in positively adapting in the aftermath of traumatic - or stressful - experiences (Luthans, 2002; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Feldman Barrett, 2004; DiCorcia & Tronick, 2011; Schetter & Dolbier, 2011; Frankenberg, Sikoki, Sumantri, Suriastini, & Thomas, 2013). Such capacity, which can be learned, plays an important role in facilitating posttraumatic growth among victims of violence (Mace, 2012) and in helping people manage violence and bullying at work, by promoting personal strengths (Jackson, Firtko & Edenborough, 2007).

Scholars consistently found that resilient individuals were likely to experience greater well-being (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009), decreased distress levels (Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008), better quality of life and lower severity of depression and anxiety (Melnyk, Hrabe, & Szalacha, 2013; Achour & Nor 2014), even when these symptoms were developed following workplace aggression (Hsieh et al., 2016). In addition,

several investigations have found a weak to moderate relationship between resilience and job performance (Krush, Agnihotri, Trainor, & Krishnakumar, 2013; Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Youssef & Luthans, 2007), whereas a systematic review by Robertson and colleagues (2015) have revealed that resilience training can improve personal resources and is a useful means of improving job performance. Moreover, prior investigations demonstrated that resilience (conceptualized as a dimension of psychological capital) positively influenced service providers' SRP (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Yoo et al., 2015). Thus, according to Bakker and Demerouti (2008), resilience may support individuals in maintaining or even in developing personal resources even in presence of adversities, in addition to enhancing a positive self-image. Individuals who possess a positive self-image tend to select activities which are in line with their personal objectives, and this concordance fosters their motivation to achieve these objectives (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). As a result, resilient employees tend to be intrinsically motivated to pursue their goals and, then, they trigger greater performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009; Gorgievski, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010; Kašpárková, Vaculík, Procházka, & Schaufeli, 2018), even in the face of stressful situations, such as customer mistreatment.

Accordingly, drawing on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), resilience can be considered as a crucial psychological coping resource that can support individuals in managing professional challenges effectively, in addition to fulfilling positive resource gain spirals (Campbell-Sills, Coahn, Stein, 2006). In fact, resilient workers, who possess a wide reservoir of personal resources, are better able to be flexible and adaptable to stressful encounters and proactively prepare themselves for challenging job demands. Thereby, this personal resource may facilitate employees in overcoming obstacles and in striving to attain

their goals. In addition, resilience may protect employees from negative outcomes following difficult situations by utilizing their resources and by replenishing them in an effective way (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Therefore, resilient service providers, who tend to have a sense of control over external events, are likely to effectively respond to numerous complaints and engage in extra-role behaviours to satisfy customer requests. In other words, resilient workers could appraise negative customer encounters as challenging – rather than threatening – conditions and, hence, they would be more likely to maintain high SRP level, even when they are confronted with misbehaving customers. Therefore, resilience could buffer the negative impact of customer mistreatment on SRP. By the same token, low resilience could intensify this detrimental impact. As such, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 8: Resilience will buffer the negative effects of customer mistreatment (H8a: CI; H8b: CVA) on SRP, such that resilient employees will maintain high SRP, even in the presence of high customer mistreatment levels

As a conceptual framework, *Figure 1* illustrates our proposed model, incorporating our hypothesized relationships. We expected that CI and CVA would directly (Hp1a and Hp1b, respectively) and indirectly (through burnout symptoms; Hp3a and Hp3b, respectively) negatively influence job satisfaction. Similarly, we assumed that CI and CVA would directly (Hp2a and Hp2b, respectively) and indirectly (through burnout symptoms; Hp4a and Hp4b, respectively) negatively affect SRP. Moreover, we expected that CO would be directly and positively associated with SRP (Hp5). Additionally, we hypothesized that PA would be directly and positively associated with job satisfaction (Hp6a), whereas NA would be directly and negatively related to job satisfaction (Hp6a). In addition, we hypothesized that PA would buffer the negative effects of CI (Hp7a) and CVA (Hp7b). Conversely, we expected that NA would exacerbate the detrimental impact of CI (Hp7c) and

CVA (Hp7d) on job performance. Finally, we hypothesized that resilience would moderate the relationship between customer mistreatment (Hp8a:CI, Hp8b: CVA) and SRP.

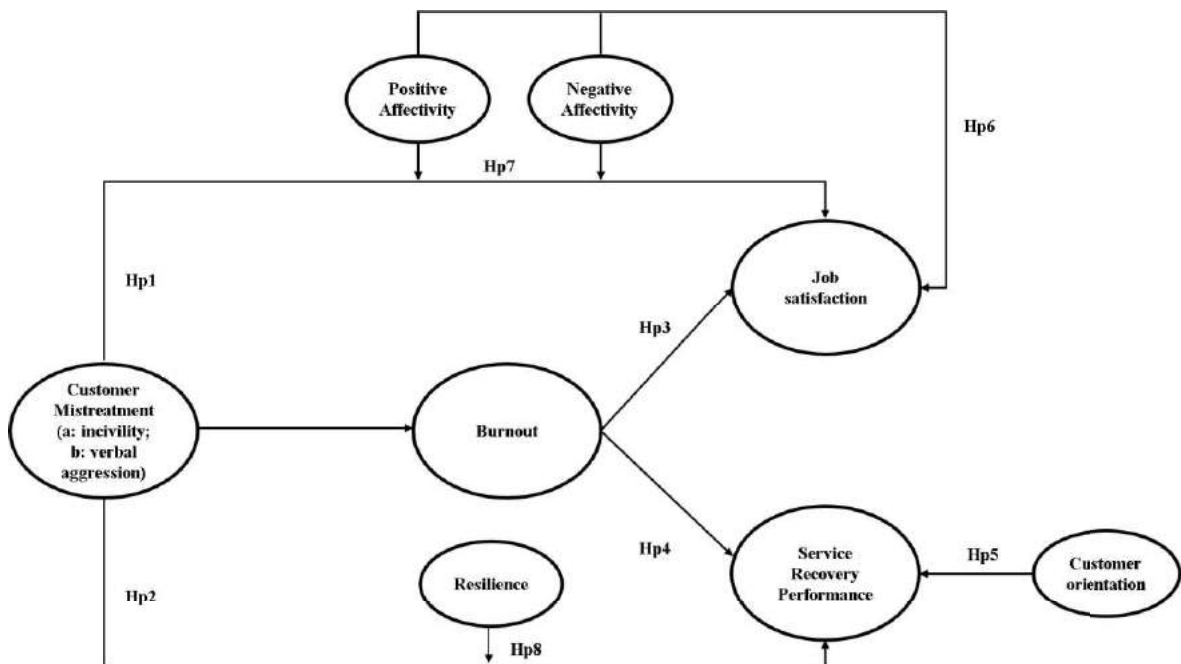


Figure 1. Proposed model regarding the relationships between customer mistreatment (in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression) and job outcomes (job satisfaction and service recovery performance) as well as the protective role of resilience, positive affectivity and customer orientation.

Study a: Irish sample

2a. Method

2.1a. Sample and procedure

Participants were psychology students at University of Limerick who were recruited using academic newsletter and e-mail system. To participate, they were required to be working in a retail sale (e.g., shop assistant, cashier) or restaurant service (e.g., waiter, bartender) job for at least six months, be eighteen years of age or older, and have at least a moderate amount of contact with the public, so that certain stressful events were likely to occur. The research obtained ethical approval from the KBS Research Ethics Committee of University of Limerick. In total, one hundred seventy-two working students employed in customer-contact jobs volunteered to participate in the study and completed anonymous self-

report questionnaires which were administrated online after obtaining informed consent. Most of participants were female (78.80%) with an average age of twenty-three years (SD=6.48) who spent on average the 86.38% of their working time in direct contact with the public. They had an average job tenure of 5.17 years (SD=6.25) and an average job tenure in the current position of 2.81 (SD=3.30). To limit the possibility of primacy bias, the order in which the items were presented to each respondent was randomized.

2.2a. Measurement

Different individual characteristics were measured including CO, dispositional affectivity and resilience. Furthermore, participants were invited to answer questions concerning CI, CVA, burnout symptoms, SRP and job satisfaction.

Customer orientation was operationalized via thirteen items from the *Customer Orientation Scale* (Donavan et al., 2004), using a seven-point Likert scale (1=*strongly agree*, 7=*strongly disagree*). Respondents indicated to what degree they agreed with some statements concerning behavioural tendencies directed to meet customers' needs and expectations (e.g., *I take pleasure in making every customer feel like he/she is the only customer*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was good ($\alpha=.89$). This scale has been broadly utilized by previous psychological studies, showing a satisfactory internal consistency (e.g., Choi et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2015).

Trait Affectivity. Positive Affectivity (PA) and Negative Affectivity (NA) were evaluated using the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) which includes ten positive and ten negative mood states (e.g., *concentrating* for PA, *upset* for NA; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they felt each of the listed emotional states in their workplace over the last two weeks. The responses were

obtained on a five-point scale (from 0= *very slightly or not at all* to 5= *extremely*). The internal consistency of these measures was good ($\alpha = .89$; $\alpha = .77$, respectively).

Resilience was assessed through 10 items from the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). Respondents reported how much they agreed with each statement concerning ways of dealing with problems and reacting to stressful situations (e.g., *I can achieve goals despite obstacles*) on a five-point Likert scale (0=*almost always false*, 4=*almost always true*). The reliability of this scale was .79.

Customer incivility was evaluated using ten items from the *Incivility from Customer Scale* (Wilson & Holmval, 2013). Participants indicated how frequently, in the last two weeks, they have encountered rude customers in their actual workplace (e.g., *Customers blamed you for a problem you did not cause*) on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1=*never* to 7=*more than three times per day*. This measure was developed based on a sample of working students who met criteria for research recruitment very similar to those applied to select our participants (i.e., working in retail sale or restaurant service occupations for at least six months). In addition, it has been found to have a good reliability (Sliter, & Jones, 2016) and had a very good reliability in the present study ($\alpha = .92$).

Customer verbal aggression was assessed through five items from the *Customer-related social stressors scale* (CSSs scale; Dormann & Zapf, 2004) which analysed to what extent participants believed some statements concerning encounters with verbally aggressive clients (e.g., *Customer personally attack me verbally*) were true in relation to their work experience, with response choices ranging from 1=*absolutely untrue* to 7=*absolutely true*. This measure was developed based on a sample of three service sectors' employees (i.e., travel agency employees, shoe store sales clerks, and flight attendants) and, therefore, it was applicable for our sample. This scale has been widely used by previous studies on customer mistreatment, showing a high degree of internal consistency among the construct items (Choi

et al., 2014; Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015; Yoo et al., 2015). In the present study, the reliability of this scale was .83

Burnout was measured using ten items from the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), including two sub-scales: emotional exhaustion (five items, e.g., “*I feel emotionally drained from my work*”) and depersonalization symptoms (five items; “*I have become less enthusiastic about my work*”). Consistent with Cordes and colleagues' contention (1997) that decreased personal accomplishment represents a consequence of burnout rather than a distinct symptom of the condition, and according to Bakker and co-workers (2004), we did not include it. Accordingly, we concentrated on the impact on customer-contact employees' satisfaction as a result of burnout considered in its dimensions of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. All items were scored on a seven-point frequency Likert scale (ranging from 0=*never* to 6=*daily*). The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha = .93$).

Service recovery performance was evaluated using five items (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; e.g., *Considering all the things I do, I handle dissatisfied customers quite well*) that investigated to what degree respondents agreed with some statements regarding the perceptions of being able to manage customer complaints and recover from service failures. The responses were obtained on a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). This scale, which has the advantage of its short length (5 items), has been widely applied by previous studies assessing SRP within service organizations (e.g., Choi et al., 2014; Karatepe et al., 2009a, b; Kim et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2015). The reliability of the scale was 0.62.

Job satisfaction was evaluated using a single item (Giorgi, Leon Perez, Montani, Courcy, & Arcangeli, 2015.; e.g., *How satisfied have you been with your work?*). The responses were obtained on a ten-point scale (from 0= *no satisfaction* to 10= *satisfaction*).

This single item showed sufficient validity and was positively related to more general scales of theoretically associated constructs in past research (Faragher, Cass, & Cooper, 2005; Lapierre, Spector, & Leck, 2005).

2.3a. Statistical analyses

The data were first explored for descriptive statistics and correlations using SPSS Version 20 statistical program for Windows (SPSS, 2011). Then, to test whether customer mistreatment (i.e., CI and CVA) could directly and indirectly - through emotional exhaustion and cynicism symptoms - influence job outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and SRP), we conducted mediation models using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012). Fit models were examined using the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA, Steiger, 1990; values of .05 are taken as good fit, .05-.08 as moderate fit; Hu & Bentler, 1999), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; a value less than .08 is considered a good fit; Hu & Bentler, 1999), the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990; values between .90 and .95 indicate acceptable fit; Hu & Bentler, 1999) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI, values between .90 and .95 indicate acceptable fit; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004). To test the direct effect of CO on SRP, we conducted a regression model having SRP as dependent variable, while controlling for PA, NA and resilience. Similarly, to investigate whether affectivity predisposition could explain a great variance of job satisfaction, we carried out a regression model having SRP as dependent variable, while controlling for CO and resilience. Such regression analyses were conducted using enter variable selection in which variables were randomly selected and entered since we did not have research evidence to hypothesize a certain order. Subsequently, to analyze the buffering effect of affectivity traits on the association between CI and job satisfaction, a moderation model was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012), while controlling for CO and resilience. Finally, to

examine the moderating effect of resilience on the relationship between CI and SRP, a moderation model was carried out using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012), while controlling for CO, PA and NA. The goodness of the moderation models was evaluated by comparing it in terms of BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) and AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) comparative indices with three competing models. Lower values of AIC and BIC indicate a better fit and the model with the lowest AIC and BIC is the best fitting model. To test measurement invariance across nations, multi-group confirmatory factor analyses for all scales were conducted using Mplus7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012). Since at least partial scalar invariance was reached for all the scales which were utilized to evaluate the constructs of interest (see *Appendix 1*), we could compare scores across countries.

3a. Results

Firstly, data were explored by conducting descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables (see *Table 1*), using SPSS version20 (SPSS, 2011). Then, to test whether burnout could mediate the associations between customer mistreatment and job satisfaction, mediation models were conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012). As shown by *Table 2*, *Hypotheses 1a, 2a, 3a, 3b, 4a* and *4b* were supported, whereas *Hypotheses 1b* and *2b* were rejected. Indeed, both CI ($\beta = -.50$, $p < .001$) and CVA ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$) were negatively associated with burnout symptoms which, in turn, led employees to experience reduced job satisfaction. Similarly, SRP was negatively associated with CI ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .01$) and CVA ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$) through burnout symptoms. However, only CI had a direct and negative impact on job satisfaction ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .05$) and SRP ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$). Overall, CI exerted a stronger total negative effect than CVA on the analysed job-related outcomes. Then, regression analyses were conducted to test whether CO was predictive of SRP (see *Table 3*). The results ($F_{(4,168)} = 21.86$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .28$) indicated that CO ($\beta = .45$,

Table 1. Descriptive, internal consistency and intercorrelations for study variables among Irish service providers (N=259)

| Measure | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|----------------|------|------|------------|------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. CI | 3.44 | 1.28 | .79 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. CVA | 3.27 | 1.34 | .67** | .89 | | | | | | | |
| 3. Sat. | 6.16 | 2.17 | -.28** | -.19* | - | | | | | | |
| 4. SRP | 4.24 | 1.02 | -.12 | -.21** | .09 | .62 | | | | | |
| 5. Bur. | 3.23 | 2.62 | .50** | .40** | -.54** | -.26** | .93 | | | | |
| 6. CO | 5.42 | .93 | -.16* | -.19* | .19* | -.48** | .30** | .88 | | | |
| 7. PA | 3.37 | .80 | -.22** | -.20** | .54** | -.28** | -.45** | .41** | .92 | | |
| 8. NA | 1.95 | .56 | .12 | .20** | -.17* | -.09 | .42** | -.10 | -.02 | .83 | |
| 9. Res. | 2.97 | .60 | .02 | -.02 | .18* | .27** | -.22 | -.34** | .29** | -.31** | .79 |

Note. Boldfaced numbers on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha; M= means; SD= standard deviation; * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; CI=customer incivility; CVA= customer verbal aggression; Sat.= job satisfaction; SRP= service recovery performance; Bur.=burnout; CO= customer orientation; PA= positive affectivity; NA= negative affectivity; Res.= resilience

$p<.001$) was positively related to SRP, over and above PA, NA and resilience. Thereby, *Hypothesis 5* was confirmed. Unexpectedly, resilience was positively associated with SRP ($\beta=.14$, $p<.05$).

To test *Hypotheses 6a* and *6b*, we utilized regression analyses using enter variable selection (see *Table 3*). As expected ($F_{(4,168)}=18.78$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.31$), PA positively influenced job satisfaction perceptions ($\beta=.55$, $p<.001$), whereas NA was negatively associated with such perceptions ($\beta=-.15$, $p<.05$), over and above the other personal characteristics. Indeed, PA and NA were the only significant predictors of job satisfaction. Consequently, *Hypotheses 6a* and *6b* were supported.

To test whether dispositional affectivity could moderate the relationship between CI and job satisfaction, a moderation model was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012), while controlling for the other analysed personal characteristics. *Hypothesis*

Table 2. Fit indices and standardized direct and indirect effects for mediation models analyzing the direct and indirect (through burnout symptoms) impact of customer mistreatment (i.e., incivility and verbal aggression) on job satisfaction and service recovery performance (N=172)

| Model | χ^2 | df | p | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI | TLI |
|---------|----------|-----|-----|-------|------|-----|-----|
| Model 1 | 256.99 | 182 | .00 | .05 | .05 | .97 | .96 |
| Model 2 | 171.94 | 100 | .00 | .06 | .06 | .96 | .95 |
| Model 3 | 470.99 | 270 | .00 | .05 | .07 | .92 | .91 |
| Model 4 | 279.08 | 165 | .00 | .05 | .07 | .93 | .92 |

| Standardized direct and indirect effects | | |
|--|-----------------|-------------|
| Effects- Model 1 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI→ Burnout →Satisfaction | -0.50*** | 0.11 |
| CI →Satisfaction | -0.27* | 0.15 |
| Effects- Model 2 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CVA→ Burnout →Satisfaction | -0.24*** | 0.05 |
| CVA → Satisfaction | .04 | 0.08 |
| Effects- Model 3 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI→ Burnout →SRP | -.22** | .06 |
| CI →SRP | -.11* | .11 |
| Effects- Model 4 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CVA→ Burnout →SRP | -.14** | .05 |
| CVA →SRP | -.04 | .11 |

Note. Boldfaced numbers indicate significant effects; * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index; CVA= customer verbal aggression; CI= customer incivility; SRP= service recovery performance.

7a was confirmed, whereas Hypotheses 7b, 7c and 7e were not supported. PA moderated the relationship between CI and job satisfaction (see Figure 2), so that working students who reported low ($\beta = -0.59, p < .01$; see Table 5) or moderate ($\beta = -0.29, p < .05$) PA levels were at higher risk of experiencing job dissatisfaction because of CI than their high-PA colleagues.

Table 3. *Effects of personal characteristics on service recovery performance (N=172)*

| Variable | Service recovery performance | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----|---------|------|
| | B | SE | β | t |
| Customer Orientation | .45 | .07 | .43*** | 6.66 |
| Positive Affectivity | .10 | .08 | .08 | 1.25 |
| Negative Affectivity | .00 | .11 | .00 | 0.33 |
| Resilience | .26 | .12 | .14* | 2.23 |

Note. *p<05; **p<01.

Table 4. *Effects of personal characteristics on job satisfaction (N=172)*

| Variable | Job satisfaction | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| | B | SE | β | t |
| Positive Affectivity | 1.37 | .18 | .55*** | 7.70 |
| Negative Affectivity | -.53 | .25 | -.15* | -2.13 |
| Customer Orientation | .09 | .16 | .04 | .53 |
| Resilience | -.09 | .28 | -.02 | -.34 |

Note. *p<05; ***p<001

High-PA working students tended to report approximately the same level of satisfaction with their job regardless of the extent to which they were targeted of CI. Additionally, PA had a positive and significant direct effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 1.09$, $p < .001$). Examination of the interaction plot (see *Figure 3*) showed that at high PA, job satisfaction level was similar for employees exposed to low or high CI levels. Individuals with lower PA scores who were targeted of high CI reported the lowest job satisfaction perceptions. The validity of the hypothesized models was assessed by comparing each of them (i.e., in terms of BIC and AIC comparative indices) with three competing models, as described in detail in *Table 6*. As shown, the model with PA was the better-fitting model compared to those which included other personal characteristics as moderators.

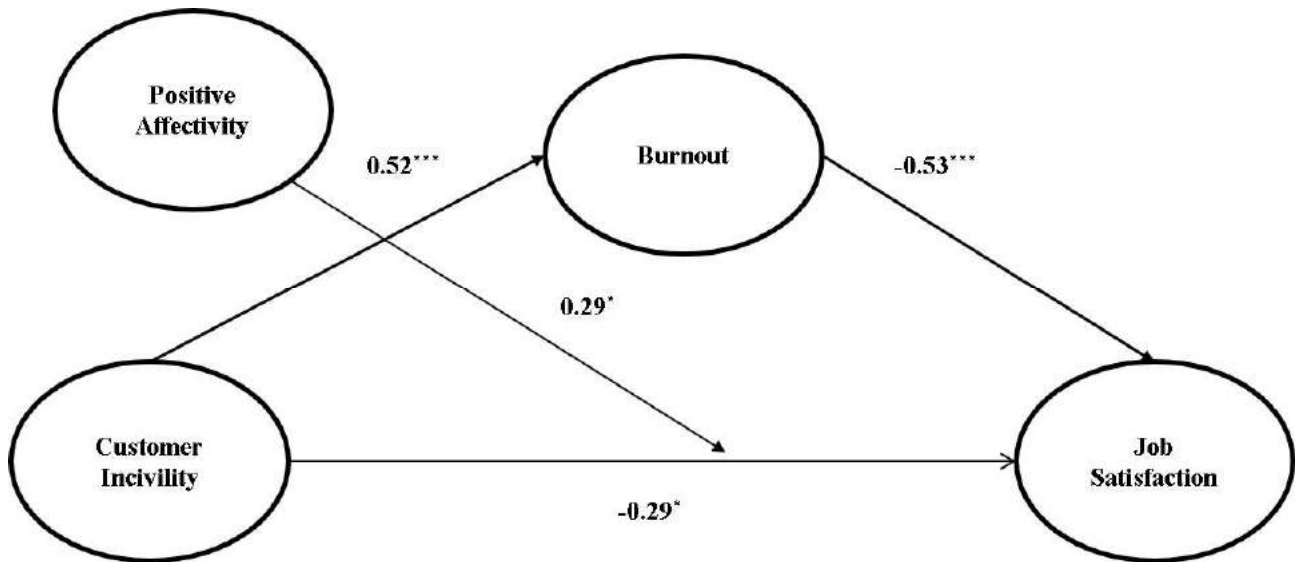


Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients for Model 5 with positive affectivity as moderator of the relationship between customer incivility and job satisfaction

Table 5. Standardized conditional effects for the Model 5

| Model: X*W→ Y | Standardized conditional effects | |
|--|----------------------------------|------|
| | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI*Low levels of PA→ Job Satisfaction | -.59** | .20 |
| CI*Moderate levels of PA→ Job Satisfaction | -.29* | .13 |
| CI*High levels of PA→ Job Satisfaction | .00 | .18 |

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; X = I.V.; W = moderator; Y = D.V.; CI = Customer Incivility, PA = Positive Affectivity

To test whether resilience could moderate the relationship between CI and SRP, a moderation model was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012). *Hypothesis 8a* was supported: resilience buffered the relationship between CI and SRP (see *Figure 4* and *Table 7*), as indicated by the significant interaction term ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.05$). To test whether resilience could moderate the relationship between CI and SRP, a moderation model was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012). *Hypothesis 8a* – but not *Hypothesis 8b* – was supported: resilience buffered the relationship between CI and SRP (see *Figure 4* and *Table 7*), as indicated by the significant interaction term ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.05$).

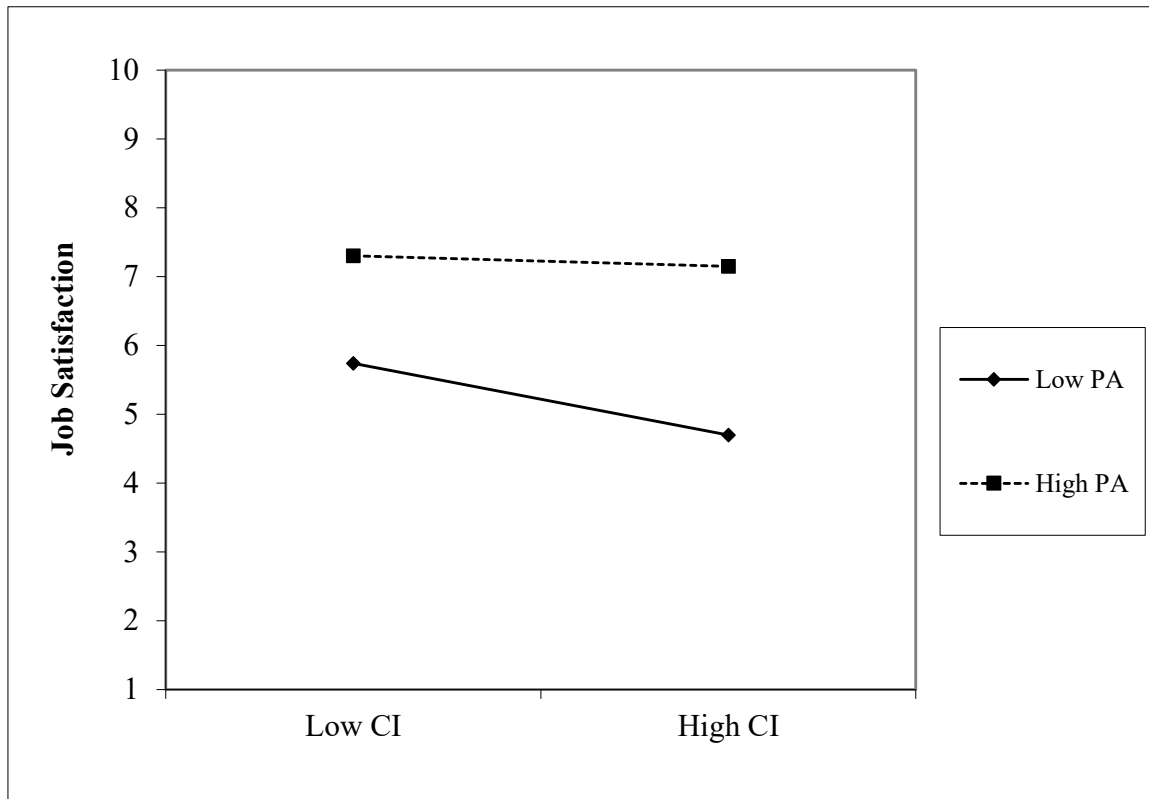


Figure 3. The moderating role of positive affectivity in the relationship between customer incivility and job satisfaction.

Table 6. Goodness of fit indices for the selected moderation model and its competing models.

| Model | $X*W \rightarrow Y$ | AIC | BIC |
|-----------|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| M1 | CI*Positive Affectivity \rightarrow Job Satisfaction | 31360.73 | 31910.01 |
| M2 | CI*Customer Orientation \rightarrow Job Satisfaction | 31361.19 | 31910.47 |
| M3 | CI*Negative Affectivity \rightarrow Job Satisfaction | 31408.11 | 31957.39 |
| M4 | CI*Resilience \rightarrow Job Satisfaction | 34808.837 | 35436.333 |

Note. In bold the selected model; $X = I.V.$; $W =$ moderator; $Y = D.V.$; CI= customer incivility; BIC= Bayesian Information Criterion; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion

Examination of the interaction plot (see *Figure 5*) showed that high-resilient service providers tended to report approximately the same level of SRP regardless of the extent to which they were targeted of CI. Conversely, working students with low resilience levels were more likely to experience decrements in their SRP levels when they were frequently confronted with rude customers.

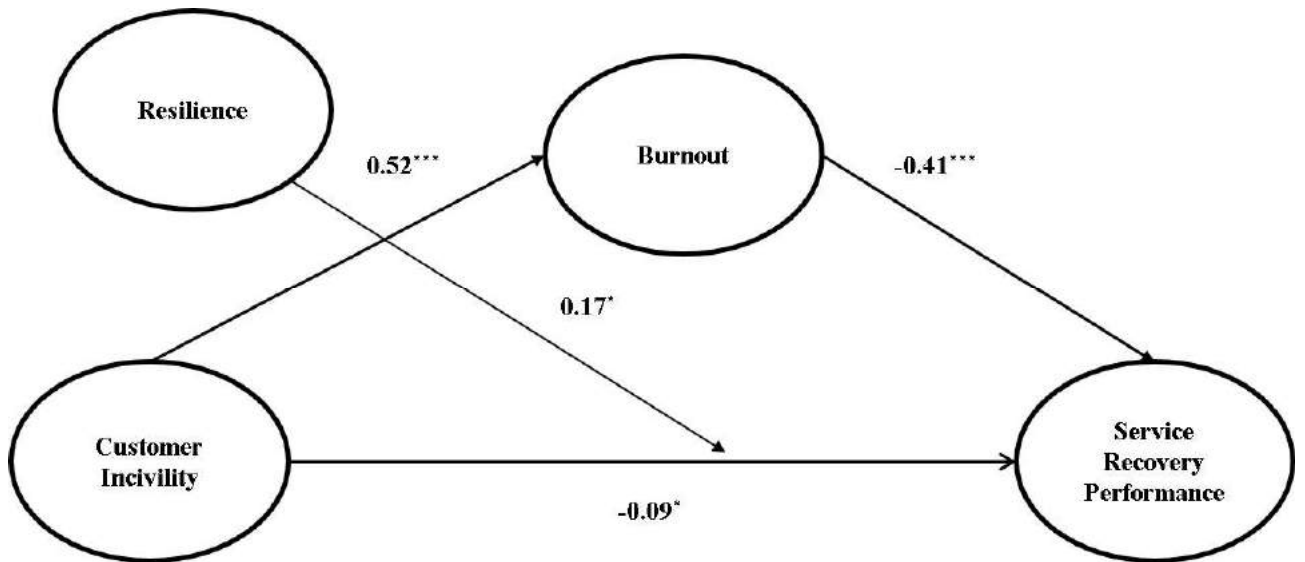


Figure 4. Standardized path coefficients for Model 6 with resilience as moderator of the relationship between customer incivility and service recovery performance.

Table 7. Standardized conditional effects for Model 6

| Model: X*W → Y | Standardized conditional effects | |
|--|----------------------------------|------|
| | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI*Low Resilience levels → Job Satisfaction | -.26** | .09 |
| CI*Moderate Resilience levels → Job Satisfaction | -.09 | .05 |
| CI*High Resilience levels → Job Satisfaction | .08 | .08 |

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; X = I.V.; W = moderator; Y = D.V.; CI = Customer Incivility, PA = Positive Affectivity

The validity of the hypothesized model was assessed by comparing it (i.e., in terms of BIC and AIC comparative indices) with three competing models (see Table 8). As shown, the model with resilience was the better-fitting model compared to those which included other personal characteristics as moderators.

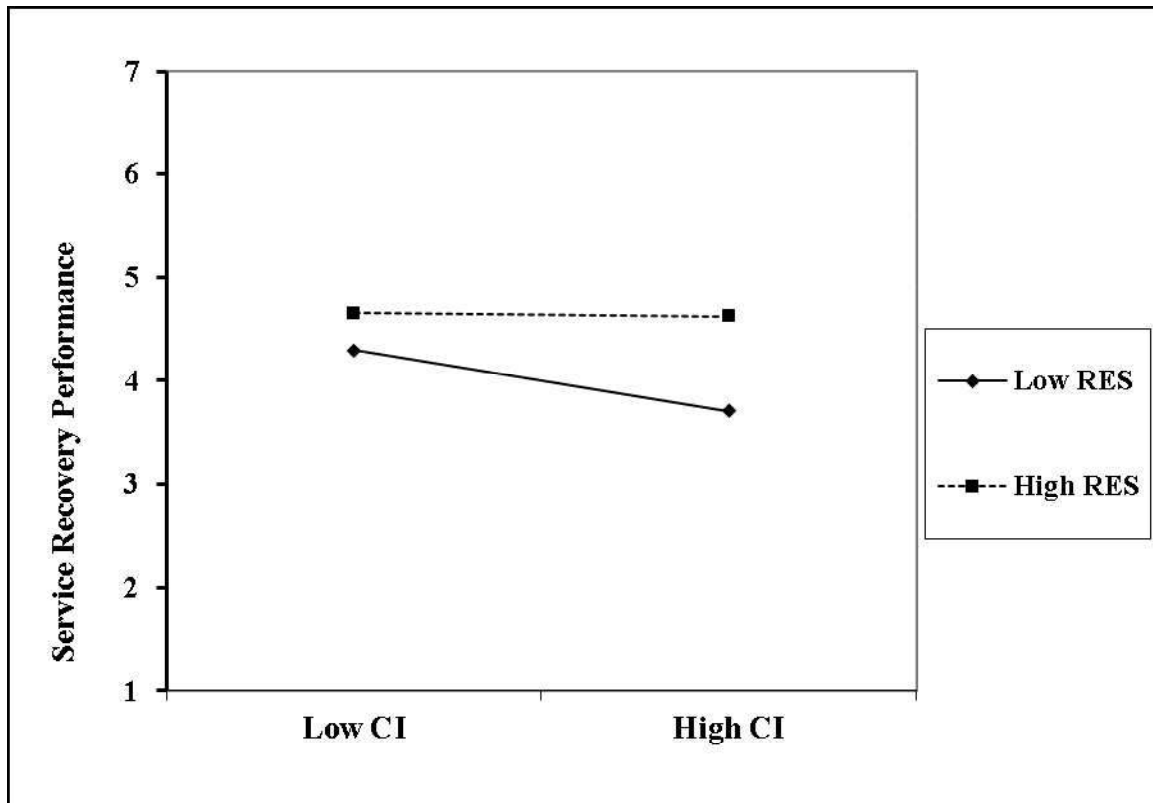


Figure 5. The moderating role of resilience in the relationship between customer incivility and service recovery performance.

Table 8. Goodness of fit indices for the selected moderation model and its competing models.

| Model | X*W→ Y | AIC | BIC |
|-----------|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| M1 | CI*Resilience→ Service Recovery Performance | 16527.43 | 16804.26 |
| M2 | CI*Customer Orientation→ Service Recovery Performance | 20423.92 | 20732.69 |
| M3 | CI*Negative Affectivity→ Service Recovery Performance | 17614.51 | 17891.34 |
| M4 | CI*Positive Affectivity→ Service Recovery Performance | 16865.15 | 16804.26 |

Note. In bold the selected model; X = I.V.; W = moderator; Y = D.V.; CI= customer incivility; BIC= Bayesian Information Criterion; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion

4a. Discussion

Several findings emerge from *Study a*. First, it provides empirical support for the detrimental effects of customer mistreatment on job satisfaction and SRP. Both CI and CVA increased employees' burnout which, in turn, affected job satisfaction and SRP. This is in

accordance with what expected based on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001) and the health impairment process proposed by the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Additionally, this is in line with the results from previous studies investigating incivility from intra-organizational members (Cortina et al., 2001; Cho et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2008; Spence Laschinger et al., 2009; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013), unfair treatment (Donovan, Drasgow, & Munson, 1998), CVA (e.g., Boyd, 2002), and other customer mistreatment constructs, such as aggression (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010) and injustice (Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007). Moreover, our findings are consistent with the results from prior investigations analysing the associations between CSSs, burnout and SRP (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Karatepe et al., 2010). However, contrary to what expected, only CI directly impacted on job satisfaction and SRP. This might be explained based on the different occurrence of these phenomena: uncivil acts tend to occur more frequently than verbally aggressive actions.

Second, this research confirms Choi and colleagues' (2014) results by showing the positive and direct impact of individual-level CO on SPP. Thus, in accordance with the motivational process proposed by the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), CO represents an important personal resource which is instrumental for employees to fulfil their work tasks, which therefore keeps them interested and committed to satisfy customers' needs (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Third, PA and NA were predictive of job satisfaction in the direction expected based on previous meta-analytic evidence (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Thoresen et al., 2003). Given their positive outlook on life, high-PA individuals may be better suited for customer-contact occupations than their high-NA counterparts because they are more predisposed to act in a friendly way (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987) and display more supportive customer-oriented attitudes (George, 1991, 1998) and behaviours (Kelly &

Hoffman, 1997) during service transactions; thereby, they tend to be highly satisfied with their customer-contact job.

Fourth, PA - but not NA - moderated the relationship between CI and job satisfaction. In line with the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), PA may represent a personal resource which may predispose employees to appraise uncivil customer encounters as constructive challenges and help them to find effective solutions to customers' problems by providing better access to functional coping strategies (Bell & Luddington, 2006). Additionally, high-PA employees might perceive emotional labour related to uncivil clients as less demanding (Bono & Vey, 2007; Judge et al., 2009) because they are predisposed to be in a good mood and adopt effective strategies (i.e., deep acting) to regulate possible negative emotions (e.g., Shih et al., 2014).

Fifth, resilience buffered the detrimental effects of CI on SRP, in addition to influencing directly and positively SRP. In the light of the COR theory (2001), resilience represents a coping personal resource that may enable workers to proactively prepare themselves for challenging customer encounters by utilising available resources to make timely decisions to effectively handle difficult clients.

Study b. Italian sample

2b. Method

Study b adopted the same method as *Study a*: the same survey was administrated - in its Italian version - to working students employed in customer-contact jobs, randomizing the order of item presentation and analysing data by conducting the same analyses (see *Statistical Analyses* section).

2.1b. Sample and procedure

Participants were psychology students who were recruited using academic newsletter and e-mail system or were enrolled in psychology courses at University of Pavia. To participate, students were required to be working in a retail sale (e.g., shop assistant, cashier) or restaurant service (e.g., waiter, bartender) job for at least six months, be eighteen years of age or older, and have at least a moderate amount of contact with the public, so that certain stressful events were likely to occur. Working students received extra course credit for taking part in the research. Once they voluntarily agreed to participate, we obtained informed consent from them and ensured them the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Then, they were invited to complete questionnaires which were administered by professional trainees in Psychology within a laboratory setting. In total, one hundred fifty-seven Italian students employed in customer-contact jobs took part to the present study. Most of respondents were female (78.30%) who spent on average the 85.91% of their working time in direct contact with the public and were mainly employed as waiters or shop assistants, within the retail and catering sectors. The average age was 25.27 years (SD=5.59) with an average job tenure of 4.53 years (SD=4.99) and an average job tenure in the current position of 2.95 years (SD=4.99).

2.2b. Measurement

The same scales as those used in *Study a* were utilized. All the variables were measured using scales taken or adapted from previously validated and published instruments. *Resilience* was measured through the Italian version of the *Connor-Davidson Scale* (10 items; Di Fabio & Pallazzeschi, 2012; $\alpha=.77$); *trait affectivity* was evaluated using the Italian version of *PANAS* (ten items for PA and ten items for NA; adaptation from Di Fabio & Bucci, 2015; $\alpha=.89$ and $\alpha=.87$, respectively); *burnout* was assessed using ten items

from the Italian version of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Borgogni, Galati, & Petitta, 2005; $\alpha=.88$); *customer verbal aggression* was measured through five items from the Italian version of the *Customer-related social stressors scale* (Setti & Sommovigo, 2016; $\alpha=.0.76$), and *job satisfaction* was evaluated using a single item (Giorgi et al., 2015). Because the other scales were originally written in English, they were subjected to a back and forward translation process. Firstly, the original English items were translated in Italian. Then, the forward translation was reviewed by a bilingual (in English and Italian) expert panel. Items that were suspected to be particularly sensitive to translation issues across cultures were translated back to English by an independent translator. The resulting version of the questionnaire was administered to thirty pre-test respondents who were students employed in customer-contact occupations and, therefore, representative of our research participants. They were systematically debriefed by asking them – for each item - what they thought was the meaning of a certain item, whether they could re-word that item using their own words, what sprang to their mind when they heard a specific expression, how they selected their answer. Finally, the modified version of the survey was discussed through two focus groups conducted by an experienced psychologist. *Customer Orientation Scale* (thirteen items; Donovan et al., 2004), *Customer Incivility* (ten items; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013) and *Service Recovery Performance Scale* (five items; Boshoff & Allen, 2000) showed a satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha=.80$, $\alpha=.89$, $\alpha=.75$, respectively).

3b. Results

3.1b. Hypotheses testing

After exploring data by carrying out descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables (see *Table 9*), mediation models were carried out using Mplus7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012) to test whether burnout symptoms could mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and job outcomes, namely job satisfaction and SRP. As shown by *Table 10*, both CI ($\beta=-.35$, $p<.001$) and CVA ($\beta=-.25$, $p<.01$) were negatively related to burnout which, in turn, led employees to experience reduced job satisfaction. Similarly, both

Table 9. Descriptive, internal consistency and intercorrelations for study variables among Italian service providers (N=157)

| Measure | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---------|------|------|------------|------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. CI | 2.27 | .98 | .89 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. CVA | 1.69 | .94 | .68** | .76 | | | | | | | |
| 3. Sat. | 6.87 | 1.68 | -.29** | -.11 | - | | | | | | |
| 4. SRP | 4.79 | 1.02 | -.31** | -.12 | .35** | .75 | | | | | |
| 5. Bur. | 2.02 | 1.18 | .38** | .20** | -.66** | -.32** | .88 | | | | |
| 6. CO | 5.51 | .68 | -.24** | -.17* | .41** | .55** | -.26** | .80 | | | |
| 7. PA | 3.49 | .74 | -.20** | -.16* | .57** | .30** | -.50** | .43** | .89 | | |
| 8. NA | 1.71 | .63 | .21** | .10 | -.28** | -.19* | .34** | -.04 | -.12 | .87 | |
| 9. Res. | 2.83 | .51 | .06 | .09 | .15 | .31** | -.14 | .26** | .33** | -.35** | .77 |

Note. Boldfaced numbers on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha; M= means; SD= standard deviation; * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; CI=customer incivility; CVA= customer verbal aggression; Sat.= job satisfaction; SRP= service recovery performance; Bur.=burnout; CO= customer orientation; PA= positive affectivity; NA= negative affectivity; Res.= resilience.

CI ($\beta=-.11$, $p<.05$) and CVA ($\beta=-.13$, $p<.01$) negatively influenced SRP through burnout symptoms. However, only CI had a direct and negative impact on job satisfaction ($\beta=-.29$, $p<.05$) and SRP ($\beta=-.31$, $p<.01$). Thereby, *Hypotheses 1a*, *2a*, *3a*, *3b*, *4a* and *4b* were supported, whereas *Hypotheses 1b* and *2b* were rejected.

Table 10. Fit indices and standardized direct and indirect effects for mediation models analyzing the direct and indirect (through burnout symptoms) impact of customer mistreatment (i.e., incivility and verbal aggression) on job satisfaction and service recovery performance (N=157)

| Model | χ^2 | df | p | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI | TLI |
|---------|----------|-----|-----|-------|------|-----|-----|
| Model 1 | 269.79 | 176 | .00 | .06 | .06 | .95 | .94 |
| Model 2 | 135.61 | 97 | .00 | .05 | .04 | .98 | .97 |
| Model 3 | 446,34 | 264 | .00 | .06 | .07 | .90 | .90 |
| Model 4 | 229,07 | 140 | .00 | .06 | .07 | .93 | .92 |

| Standardized direct and indirect effects | | |
|--|-----------------|-------------|
| Effects- Model 1 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI→ Burnout → Satisfaction | -0.35*** | 0.07 |
| CI→ Burnout | -0.29* | 0.07 |
| Effects- Model 2 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CVA→ Burnout → Satisfaction | -0.25** | 0.08 |
| CVA→ Burnout | 0.14 | 0.08 |
| Effects- Model 3 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI→ Burnout →SRP | -.11* | .05 |
| CI →SRP | -.31** | .10 |
| Effects- Model 4 | Estimate | S.E. |
| CVA→ Burnout →SRP | -.13** | .05 |
| CVA →SRP | -.04 | .10 |

Note. Boldfaced numbers indicate significant effects; *p<05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index; CI= customer incivility; CVA= customer verbal aggression; SRP= service recovery performance.

Overall, considering the total effects, CI had a stronger influence on both job satisfaction and SRP than CVA. Then, a regression analysis was conducted to test whether CO could influence SRP, over and above the other personal characteristics (see Table 11). According

to *Hypothesis 5*, CO directly and positively influenced employees' SRP perceptions ($F_{(4,152)}=20.42$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.35$). Moreover, CO was the only significant predictor of SPR ($\beta=.75$, $p<.001$), in a direction in line with what expected. Therefore, *Hypotheses 5* was confirmed.

To test *Hypotheses 6a* and *6b*, we utilized regression analyses using enter variable selection (see *Table 12*). As expected ($F_{(4,152)}=4.17$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.42$), PA positively influenced job satisfaction

Table 11. *Effects of personal characteristics on service recovery performance (N=157)*

| Variable | Service recovery performance | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| | B | SE | β | t |
| Customer Orientation | .75 | .11 | .50*** | 6.82 |
| Positive Affectivity | .04 | .10 | .03 | .36 |
| Negative Affectivity | -.20 | .11 | -.12 | -1.74 |
| Resilience | .26 | .15 | .13 | 1.77 |

Note. *** $p<.001$.

Table 12. *Effects of personal characteristics on job satisfaction (N=157)*

| Variable | Job satisfaction | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----|---------|-------|
| | B | SE | β | t |
| Positive Affectivity | 1.12 | .16 | .49*** | 6.93 |
| Negative Affectivity | -.71 | .18 | -.26*** | -3.99 |
| Customer Orientation | .56 | .17 | .23** | 3.29 |
| Resilience | -.53 | .23 | -.16 | -2.32 |

Note. * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

perceptions ($\beta=.49$, $p<.001$), whereas NA was negatively associated with such perceptions ($\beta=-.26$, $p<.001$), over and above the other personal characteristics. Moreover, CO was positively related to job satisfaction ($\beta=.23$, $p<.01$). Consequently, *Hypotheses 6a* and *6b* were supported.

To test whether affective predisposition could buffer the association between customer mistreatment - in the forms of CI and CVA - and job satisfaction, a moderation model was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012), while controlling for the other investigated personal characteristics. *Hypothesis 7a*, *7b* and *7e* were not supported, whereas *Hypothesis 7c* was confirmed, but in a direction opposed to what expected. Indeed, NA buffered the relationship between CI and job satisfaction, so that the negative impact of CI on job satisfaction perceptions was stronger for workers with low ($\beta = -0.60, p < .01$; see *Figure 6*) and moderate ($\beta = -0.37, p < .05$) levels of NA, rather than for high-NA individuals ($\beta = -0.15, ns$).

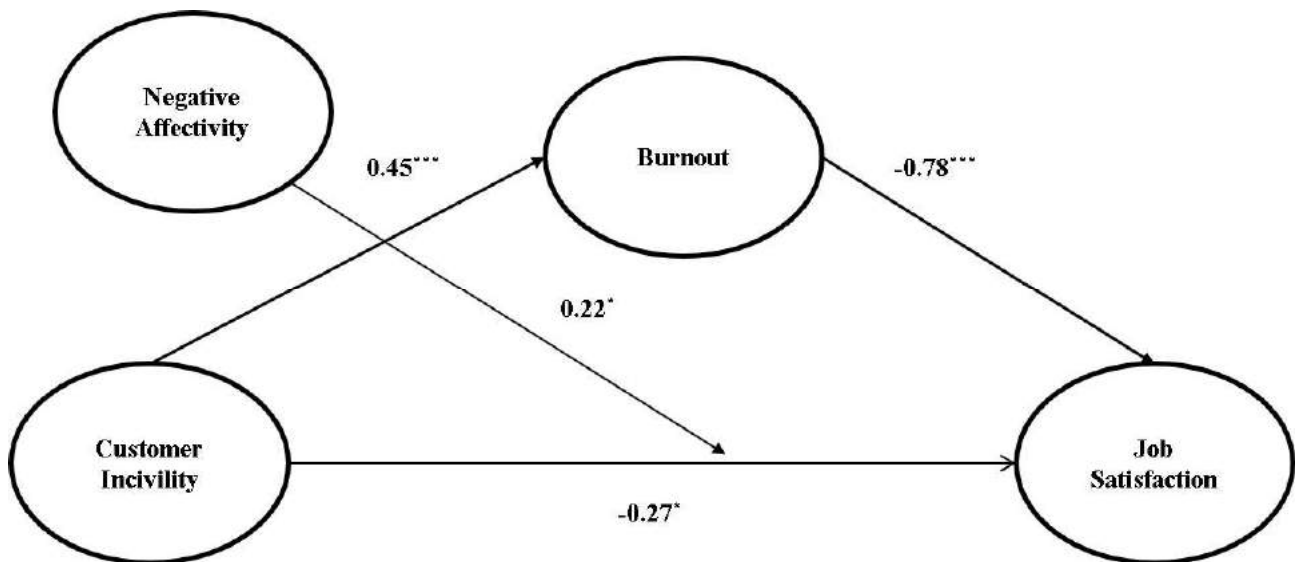


Figure 6. Standardized path coefficients for Model 5 with negative affectivity as moderator of the relationship between customer incivility and job satisfaction

Although NA did not nullify the effect of CI and had a direct and negative impact on job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.36, p < .05$), the risk of experiencing job dissatisfaction increased with decreasing NA level (see *Table 13*). Examination of the interaction plot (see *Figure 7*) showed that overall low-NA employees tended to report greater satisfaction with their job. However, low-NA individuals were considerably affected by encounters with uncivil customers, reporting a greater decrease in job satisfaction at high CI levels than their high-NA counterparts. Indeed, although high-NA employees were more likely to report lower

overall job satisfaction levels in comparison with their low-NA colleagues, a slight change in their job satisfaction levels was revealed in the passage from the low-frequency CI condition to the high-frequency CI condition.

Table 13. Standardized conditional effects for Model 5

| Model: X*W→ Y | Standardized conditional effects | |
|--|----------------------------------|------|
| | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI*Low levels of NA→ Job Satisfaction | -.60** | .23 |
| CI*Moderate levels of NA→ Job Satisfaction | -.37* | .17 |
| CI*High levels of NA→ Job Satisfaction | -.15 | .17 |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; X = I.V.; W = moderator; Y = D.V.; CI= Customer Incivility, NA= Negative Affectivity

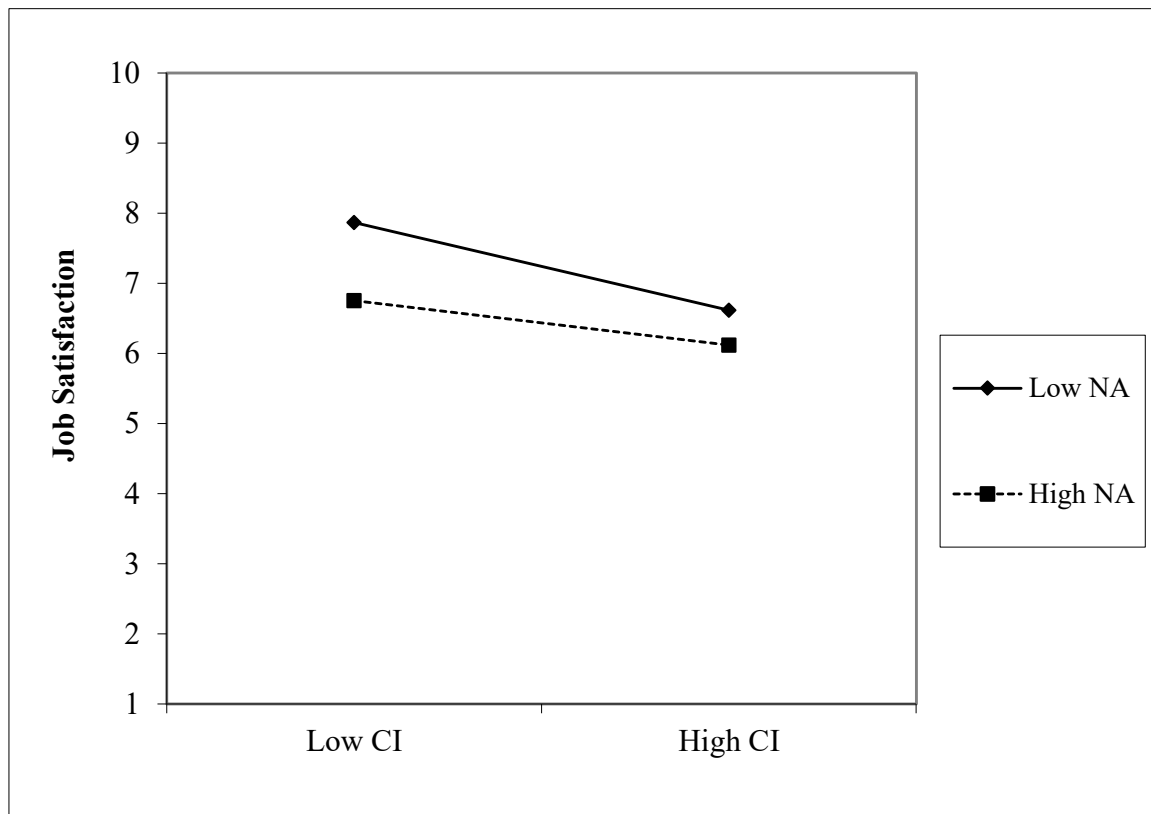


Figure 7. The moderating role of negative affectivity in the relationship between job satisfaction and customer incivility.

The model with NA as buffer outperformed those which considered other personal characteristics as moderators (i.e., in terms of BIC and AIC indices; see Table 14).

Table 14. *Goodness of fit indices for the selected job control moderation model and its competing models*

| Model | X*W→Y | BIC | AIC |
|--------------|--|------------------|------------------|
| M1 | CI*Negative Affectivity→ Job Satisfaction | 22582.722 | 23123.678 |
| M2 | CI*Resilience→ Job Satisfaction | 22586.057 | 23126.069 |
| M3 | CI*Customer Orientation→ Job Satisfaction | 22583.193 | 23124.148 |
| M4 | CI*Positive Affectivity→ Job Satisfaction | 22583.347 | 23124.303 |

Note. In bold the selected model; X= I.V.; W= moderator; Y= D.V.; CI= customer incivility; BIC= Bayesian Information Criterion; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion.

To test whether resilience could moderate the relationship between CI and SRP, a moderation model was conducted using Mplus Version 7 (Muthèn & Muthèn, 2012), while controlling for CO, NA and PA. *Hypothesis 8a* – but not *Hypothesis 8b* - was supported: resilience buffered the relationship between CI and SRP (see *Figure 8* and *Table 15*), so that working students who reported low ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .01$) or moderate ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < .01$) resilience levels were at higher risk of experiencing impaired SRP as a result of CI when compared with those who were higher in this dimension.

Table 15. *Standardized conditional effects for the Model 6 with resilience as moderator of the association between customer incivility and service recovery performance*

| Model: X*W→ Y | Standardized conditional effects | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------|
| | Estimate | S.E. |
| CI*Low levels of RES→ SRP | -.21** | .07 |
| CI*Moderate levels of RES→ SRP | -.13* | .05 |
| CI*High levels of RES→ SRP | -.04 | .06 |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; X = I.V.; W = moderator; Y = D.V.; CI = Customer Incivility, RES = Resilience; SRP = Service Recovery Performance.

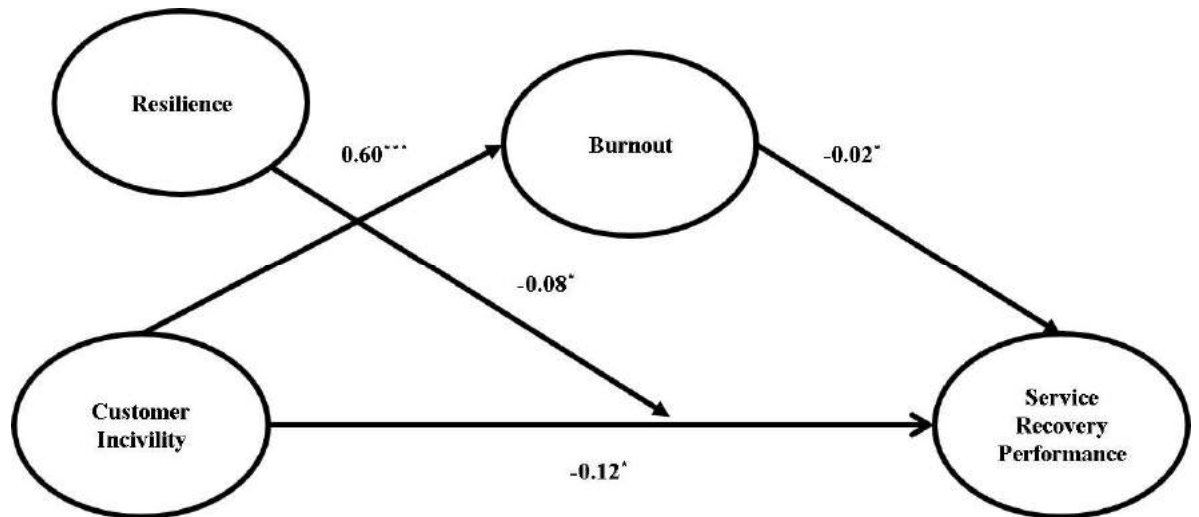


Figure 8. Standardized path coefficients for model with resilience as moderator of the relationship between customer incivility and service recovery performance.

Examination of the interaction plot (see Figure 9) showed that high-resilient service providers tended to report approximately the same level of SRP across CI levels.

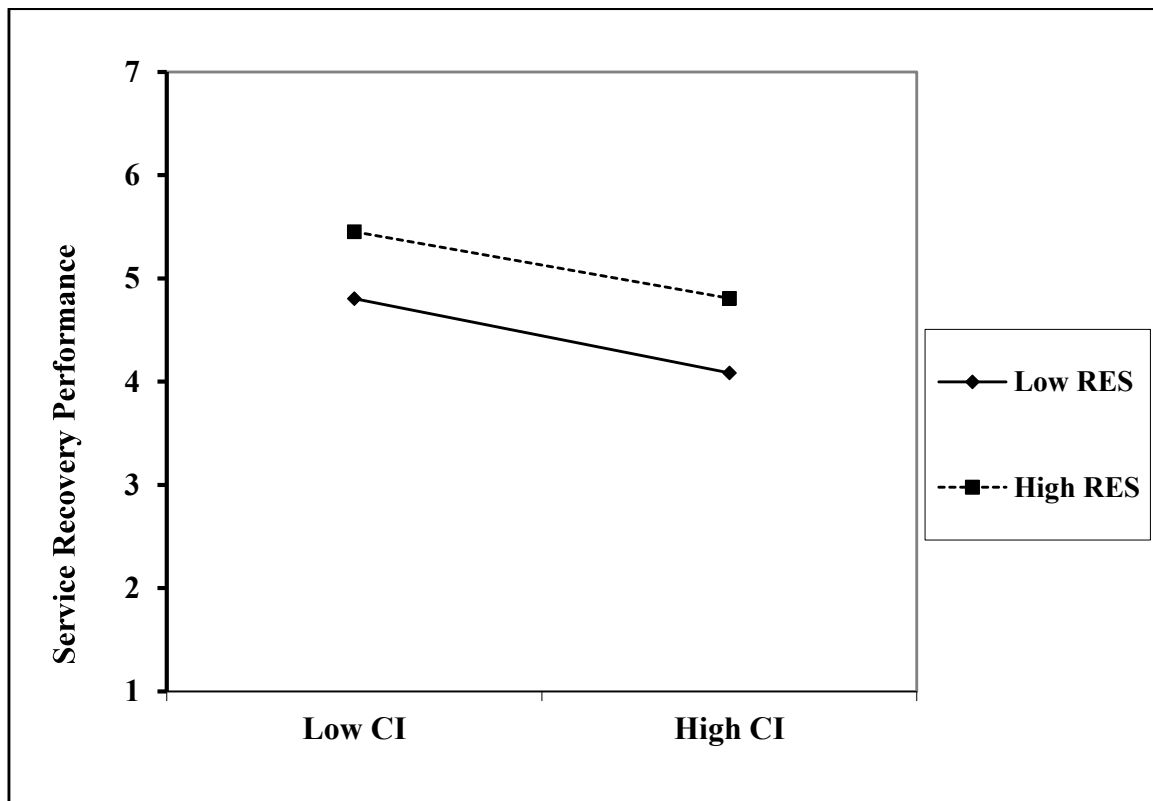


Figure 9. The moderating role of resilience in the relationship between customer incivility and service recovery performance.

The validity of the hypothesized model was assessed by comparing it (i.e., in terms of BIC and AIC comparative indices) with three competing models, as described in detail in

Table 16. As shown, the model with resilience was the better-fitting model compared to those which included other personal characteristics as moderators.

Table 16. Goodness of fit indices for the selected job control moderation model and its competing models

| Model | X*W→Y | AIC | BIC |
|-----------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| M1 | CI*RES→ SRP | 29853.43 | 30558.37 |
| M2 | CI*NA→ SRP | 29855.95 | 30558.93 |
| M3 | CI*CO→ SRP | 29860.19 | 30563.12 |
| M4 | CI*PA→ SRP | 29861.50 | 30564.39 |

Note. In bold the selected model; X= I.V.; W= moderator; Y= D.V.; CI= customer incivility; BIC= Bayesian Information Criterion; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion.

4b. Discussion

Study b provides several findings. First, it suggests that both CI and CVA may negatively influence job satisfaction and SRP through emotional exhaustion and cynicism symptoms. This is in line with what expected based on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001) and in accordance with the results of prior studies analysing customer injustice (Holmval & Sidhu, 2007), incivility (Cho et al., 2016; Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008; Spence Laschinger et al., 2009; Wilson & Holmval, 2013) and CSSs (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey et al., 2007; Karatepe et al., 2010). In line with previous studies (Goussinsky, 2011; Karatepe et al., 2010; Shih, et al., 2014; Wegge et al., 2010), although CI directly impacted on both job satisfaction and SRP, we did not find the same results for CVA which was not directly associated with such job outcomes. A plausible explanation may be drawn on the different occurrence of these phenomena: while CI may represent a daily hassle, CVA may occur with a lower frequency, thereby being perceived as an isolated episode.

Second, by showing the direct and positive influence of CO on SRP, this research contributes to existing literature by providing further support to a limited but increasing body of empirical evidence (Choi et al., 2014; Donovan et al., 2004) which suggests the relevance of CO as a critical tool in pursuing SRP. Additionally, CO was positively associated with job satisfaction. Thus, in contexts in which the primary task is satisfying customer expectations, workers who are highly customer-oriented show a better fit than workers with lower CO levels since they are predisposed to enjoy the work of serving customers (Donovan et al., 2004).

Third, this study confirms the differential value of affectivity traits in predicting job satisfaction, according to previous investigations (e.g., Brief, 1998; Chen, Dai, Spector, & Jex, 1997; Watson, 2000).

Fourth, NA was the only significant moderator on the relationship between CI and job satisfaction, such that the negative effects of CI on job satisfaction were lowered with increasing NA level. High-NA individuals might display less dissimilarities across CI levels in terms of job satisfaction perceptions since they are better able to understand the negative responses of uncivil customers (e.g., Tamir & Robinson, 2004). Alternatively, high-NA individuals may be more prone to show their real emotions in the face of uncivil clients and, in turn, perceive lower emotional dissonance levels in comparison with their low-NA counterparts (Wegge et al., 2010).

Fifth, by showing the moderating effect of resilience on the relationship between CI and SRP, this study provides empirical support to the protective role played by resilience in protecting service providers against CI. Drawing on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), resilience represents a coping personal resource which enables employees to respond to customers' discontent with promptly solutions.

5. General discussion and theoretical contributions

The present two-country study analysed whether customer mistreatment, in the forms of CI and CVA, could directly and indirectly - through burnout symptoms - affect job satisfaction and SRP and whether three personal resources, namely CO, PA and resilience, could help frontline employees provide a good SRP and maintain job satisfaction. Several findings emerged from this research which makes a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge on workplace incivility and aggression from outsiders (see *Table 17* for a summary of results).

Firstly, both CI and CVA increased the risk for employees of experiencing burnout symptoms and, in turn, reduced job satisfaction and SRP. The finding that customer mistreatment impacted on job satisfaction through burnout symptoms is in line with what expected based on previous meta-analytic evidence (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007) and prior investigations showing the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the analyzed relationship (e.g., Adams & Buck, 2010; Cho et al., 2016; Karatepe et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2012). Moreover, the finding that customer mistreatment indirectly affected SRP is in accordance with the results from prior studies analyzing the associations between CSSs, burnout and SRP (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey et al., 2007; Karatepe et al., 2010). For instance, Karatepe and colleagues (2010) showed that CVA intensified emotional exhaustion which, in turn, produced reduced SRP among frontline hotel employees. Similarly, Kim and co-workers (2012) revealed that CVA negatively influenced frontline employees' service recovery efforts through emotional exhaustion. Our results are consistent with the health impairment process proposed by the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to such process, customer mistreatment represents a challenging job demand which may exhaust employees' mental and physical resources and result in burnout and eventually in negative organizational outcomes.

Table 17. *Summary of results for each Hypothesis*

| Hp | Description | Result | |
|------|---|----------|----------|
| | | Ireland | Italy |
| H1a. | <i>CI will be directly and negatively associated with job satisfaction</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H1b. | <i>CVA will be directly and negatively associated with job satisfaction</i> | Rejected | Rejected |
| H2a. | <i>CI will be directly and negatively associated with SRP</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H2b. | <i>CVA will be directly and negatively associated SRP</i> | Rejected | Rejected |
| H3a. | <i>CI will negatively influence job satisfaction through burnout</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H3b. | <i>CVA will negatively influence job satisfaction through burnout</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H4a. | <i>CI will negatively influence SRP through burnout</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H4b. | <i>CVA will negatively influence SRP through burnout</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H5. | <i>CO will be directly and positively associated with SRP</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H6a. | <i>PA will be directly and positively associated with job satisfaction</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H6b. | <i>NA will be directly and negatively associated with job satisfaction</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H7a. | <i>PA will buffer the negative impact of CI on job satisfaction</i> | Rejected | Rejected |
| H7b. | <i>PA will buffer the negative impact of CVA on job satisfaction</i> | Accepted | Rejected |
| H7c. | <i>NA will buffer the negative impact of CI on job satisfaction</i> | Rejected | Accepted |
| H7d. | <i>NA will buffer the negative impact of CVA on job satisfaction</i> | Rejected | Rejected |
| H8a. | <i>Resilience will buffer the negative impact of CI on SRP</i> | Accepted | Accepted |
| H8b. | <i>Resilience will buffer the negative impact of CVA on SRP</i> | Rejected | Rejected |

Note. CI= customer incivility; CVA= customer verbal aggression; SRP= service recovery performance; PA= positive affectivity; NA= negative affectivity. In red the hypotheses that were rejected; in green the hypotheses which were accepted; in orange the hypothesis with a direction opposite to what expected.

In addition, our findings can be explained in the light of the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Since customer mistreatment progressively exhausted employees' emotional and cognitive resources, individuals who became burned-out might need to recover from such stressful experiences. As a result, resource-depleted workers might be unwilling to continue depleting their resources investing their limited energies in service recovery efforts and, thus, they might reduce the quality of the SRP provided in the attempt of preserving their remaining resources. Additionally, emotionally drained employees may try to conserve their limited emotional resources by detaching themselves from customers, resulting in cynicism symptoms. Prior investigations concentrated on incivility from intra-organizational members or on task-related workplace stressors (Babakus et al., 2009), with less attention given to stressors from customers. Furthermore, previous analyses on customer mistreatment were limited to emotional exhaustion, without considering the burnout dimension of cynicism. By shedding light on the impact of customer mistreatment on job satisfaction and SRP, the current research contributes to addressing these gaps and providing empirical evidence for the COR theory regarding threatening customer encounters and their impact on individual and organizational outcomes.

Secondly, differently from CVA, CI exerted a direct and negative influence on both job satisfaction and SRP. The fact that we did not find a direct association between CVA and the analyzed job outcomes explains our null findings regarding the role played by personal resources in protecting employees from its detrimental direct effects on the analyzed job-related outcomes. A possible explanation can be drawn on the different frequency of occurrence of these phenomena. Indeed, since CI is likely to occur with a higher occurrence than CVA, the accumulation of uncivil acts over time may have a stronger negative impact, despite of its lower magnitude, on job outcomes than isolated actions of CVA. Additionally, this finding is in line with the results from previous studies which found

that CI was directly related to negative job outcomes among service providers, such as reduced sales job performance (Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012). These null findings could be also related to the characteristics of our sample which was made by working students, who are generally employed in part-time or seasonal occupations. The theoretical contribution of this finding is to identify the differential impact of CI and CVA on job satisfaction and SRP.

Thirdly, in both countries CO was directly and positively associated with SRP. This result is in line with what expected based on a few Korean hotel studies (Kwon & Park, 2005; Park & Hong, 2008) which found the presence of a positive relationship between organizational-level CO and SRP. By replicating Choi and colleagues' (2014) findings, the present research is among the first to reveal that individual-level CO directly fosters SRP. Thus, CO helps workers maintain high-quality SRP (Yoo et al., 2015) by predisposing them to display customer-satisfying behaviors (Pan & Zinkhan, 2006) and seek additional resources to provide customers' problems with solutions (Harris & Reynolds, 2004). This means that highly customer-oriented employees are intrinsically self-motivated to invest energies to satisfy customers' needs and expectations (Donavan et al., 2004). Thus, it is not surprising that in Italy CO positively influenced job satisfaction perceptions, a result which further confirms the natural fit existing between customer-oriented individuals and service occupations. Indeed, high-CO employees are likely to derive meaningfulness and satisfaction from their customer-contact work (Donavan et al., 2004; Lee & Hwang, 2016) which allows them to fulfil their own professional needs (Farrel & Oczkowski, 2009) and make customers happy by utilizing their natural abilities (e.g., Franke & Park, 2006; Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005; Pettijohn et al., 2002). In line with the motivational process proposed by the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), CO represents an important personal resource which is instrumental for employees to fulfil their work tasks. This study contributes to existing research by providing further support to a limited but increasing body

of empirical evidence (Donavan et al., 2004) which suggests the relevance of CO as a critical tool in pursuing SRP.

Fourthly, in both countries trait affectivity was the best predictor of job satisfaction, so that high-PA individuals were more likely to be satisfied with their job, whereas NA-individuals were more likely to report job dissatisfaction. These findings are in line with those from prior studies which have consistently revealed the presence of moderate relationships between affectivity traits and job satisfaction (e.g., Brief, 1998; Chen et al., 1997; Watson, 2000). In addition, meta-analytic evidence has been provided to support that individual differences in trait affectivity could explain a great amount of variance in job satisfaction (i.e., 10-25%; Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Thoresen et al., 2003). This research contributes to enrich existing literature on personal differences by providing further evidence for the differential influence of PA and NA on job satisfaction perceptions.

Fifthly, we investigated the moderating role of dispositional affectivity on the relationship between CI and job satisfaction. Our findings revealed that in Ireland, high-PA individuals' job satisfaction was less likely to be affected by the negative effects of CI. Brief and colleagues (1995) suggest that affective disposition may affect job satisfaction via both actions and perceptions. Accordingly, high-PA individuals may be less likely to appraise customers' ambiguous behaviours as incivility and, therefore, they might feel less threatened by negative customer encounters. In addition, high-PA employees, who generally have a great sense of control over external events, tend to use more effective coping strategies in dealing with uncivil customers (e.g., Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Bowman & Stern, 1995), such as problem-solving strategies (Elliot, Sherwin, Harkins, & Marmarosh, 1995). Thereby, they could be better able at restoring positive situations at work which, in turn, enforces their job satisfaction. Conversely, high-NA employees, who are more responsive to negative stimuli, might be prone to "ascribe malicious motive" (Penney &

Spector, 2005, p. 781) - rather than ambiguous reasons - to uncivil acts, perceiving them as threatening and unjust (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007). Additionally, they might evoke more hostility from customers, responding more defensively (Buss, 1987) and adopting less effective coping strategies, such as behavioural disengagement and customer-directed sabotage (Goussinsky, 2012; Wang et al., 2011). As a result, they may be likely to fulfil negative customer-exchange spiral escalating which, therefore, may reduce their job satisfaction. On the other hand, Italian high-NA employees were less affected by variations in job satisfaction across CI levels than their low-NA counterparts. This apparently counterintuitive finding has some logic to it. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest the possibility that high-PA employees might be more detrimentally influenced by job stressors and dissatisfaction (Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewe, & Johnson, 2003; Judge, 1993; Shaw, Duffy, Abdulla, & Singh, 2000). For instance, previous investigations have found that dissatisfied high-PA workers reported more physical health complaints and greater counterproductive work behaviors than their low-PA counterparts (Duffy, Ganster, & Shaw, 1998). Indeed, according to Hochwarter and colleagues (2003), high-PA people might be more responsive to negative environmental cues because “negative environmental cues may serve to bring about heightened levels of sensitivity for those who ordinarily are predisposed to perceive positive stimuli” (p. 1021). Moreover, Goussinsky (2011) has demonstrated that workers' positive disposition did not decrease the negative outcomes - including job dissatisfaction - of interactions with verbally aggressive customers, but rather exacerbated them. The researcher argued that given their disposition to be friendly and helpful (Bell & Luddington, 2006; George, 1991; Kelly & Hoffman, 1997), high-PA employees might be more likely to perceive customer mistreatment as unjust and undeserved and, as a result, they might be more offended by misbehaving customers than their low-PA colleagues. Additionally, high-NA employees might be better able to understand the negative responses

displayed by uncivil customers because of their tendency to experience negative emotions (e.g., Tamir & Robinson, 2004). Additionally, they could engage in lower emotional labour because of their inclination to exhibit more negative emotions (Wegge et al., 2010). Alternatively, it might be that employees with high NA experienced more problems also when confronted with friendly customers, fulfilling a vicious circle of negative emotions within customer-employee interactions (e.g., high-NA people elicit negative responses in customers that, as result, provoke stronger negative emotions in themselves; Wegge et al., 2010). Thereby, high-NA individuals might be more likely to maintain relatively constant job satisfaction across CI levels.

Given that our investigation did not directly assess cultural dimensions which could be useful to explain the reasons why we found cultural dissimilarities, the interpretations of such differences should consequently be treated with considerable caution. One possible explanation for the country differences might be related to cultural values which might influence how employees react to aggressive acts, as demonstrated by previous researches (Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001; Kernan, Watson, Fang Chen, & Gyu Kim, 2011; Kim, Shapiro, Aquino, Lim, & Bennett, 2008; Rippon, 2005; Salin, 2003; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014; Tepper, 2007). In addition, such dissimilarities might be related to cultural dialectical beliefs concerning the utility of negative emotions (Bastian et al., 2012; Chentsova-Dutton et al., 2007; Eid & Diener, 2001; Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009) which might shape emotion regulation tendencies after negative events (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011). Indeed, Miyamoto and colleagues (2014) showed that individuals who believed in the motivational and cognitive utility of negative emotions were less likely to readily engage in emotion regulation following negative experiences. According to Zola (1966), Italians tend to deal with difficult situations by dramatization which turns in a tendency to overexpress anxiety related to troubles to dissipate it, whilst

Irish are more prone to handle their problems by denial. Therefore, according to their culturally supported way of dealing with problems (Zola, 1966), Italians might perceive the expression of negative emotions as being functional to obtain social support from others. Thereby, they might be less motivated to readily regulate their negative emotional states elicited by misbehaving customers than their Irish counterparts. As a result, Italians might be less likely to engage in emotional labour in the face of uncivil customers since they might be more inclined to vent their negative emotions on the source of those emotions. Since this tendency might be particularly pronounced among high-NA individuals, they might be less likely to experience resource depletion associated with emotional labour. Therefore, they could be able to maintain their job satisfaction level - that is generally lower than that reported by low-NA individuals - even when confronted with uncivil clients. Conversely, Irish employees might be more motivated to reduce their negative emotions experienced following uncivil customer encounters by engaging in more emotional regulation. This tendency could be less effortful for high-PA individuals, who tend to naturally experience more positive emotions, since they are better at modifying their internal emotions (i.e., deep acting) to fully match experienced and expressed feelings to comply with organizational display rules. Therefore, high-PA Irish workers could experience lower emotional dissonance and greater professional satisfaction when compared with their low-PA colleagues. In fact, these latter might be more likely to regulate their emotions by pretending or by faking positive emotions (i.e., surface acting), a strategy that has been related to job dissatisfaction. Indeed, previous studies (e.g., Shih et al., 2014) found that employees who engaged in deep acting to regulate their emotions following negative customer encounters reported greater job satisfaction than those who utilised surface acting. Future work needs to be performed to establish whether these assumptions might be confirmed. Nevertheless, this is one of the few studies to investigate the role of affectivity in moderating the relationship

between CI and job satisfaction. Nevertheless, it is important to do so because results may offer some interesting implications for recruitment and organizational interventions aimed at preserving highly performing employees. Additionally, the present study contributes to existing workplace incivility research by showing how affective disposition may differently function in buffering the negative impact of customer incivility on job satisfaction depending on nationality. Further investigations are necessary to validate the kinds of conclusions regarding the reasons for cross-national dissimilarities.

Sixthly, in both countries resilience buffered the detrimental effects of CI on SRP. According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), resilience represents a coping personal resource which may help service providers to proactively prepare themselves for - and effectively manage - challenging customer encounters by utilizing, by developing and by maintaining their resource caravans. In Italy, resilience had also a direct and positive influence on SRP. A possible explanation for this is its role in employees' attribution processes. In accordance with the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), individuals engage automatically in primary appraisal to evaluate the significance attributed to an environmental situation by sensing whether the condition exceeds their resources. When something in the environment is perceived as a condition significant to a person's well-being, the individual utilizes a second appraisal process to evaluate the availability of coping resources and develop reactions to the event. Using this framework, highly resilient employees may appraise CI as less threatening due to their natural disposition to have optimistic thinking and be able to regulate their emotional exhaustion (Kumpfer, 1999; Luthans et al., 2005; Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012; Utsey et al., 2008). Moreover, in the light of the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), resilience may represent a personal coping resource in the secondary appraisal process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) as resilient employees tend to thrive in challenging circumstances (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer,

2010; Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010) and easily utilize available resources to restore customers' satisfaction with the service. In other words, resilient employees are likely to respond to customers' discontent with effective solutions. Additionally, employees with high resilience levels can develop effective relaxation skills to stay calm and positive, thereby making right and timely decisions to effectively deal with uncertain and problematic service failures (Fredrickson et al., 2008). To the best of our knowledge, to date, this is the first study to investigate the role of resilience in moderating the relationship between CI and SRP. Thereby, we extended existing incivility literature by showing that resilience can mitigate the detrimental effects of CI on employees' SRP perceptions.

6. Practical implications

There are several important implications of this empirical investigation for service managers.

Firstly, since encounters with rude or verbally aggressive customers may affect employees' job satisfaction, organizations should take steps to tackle this problem in the first place. The management should institute a zero-tolerance policy for customer mistreatment, distinguishing reasonable from unreasonable customers' demands (Cortina et al., 2001; Rafaeli et al., 2012; Torres, van Niekerk, & Orłowski, 2017). Furthermore, managers might encourage feedback from their employees about negative customer encounters through weekly communication meetings. Such feedback can also help the management identify reoffending misbehaving customers and can be utilized as case studies to teach effective coping strategies to handle misbehaving customers (Cho et al., 2016; Karatepe et al., 2010). These interventions would help managers retain highly satisfied and, then, highly performing employees.

Secondly, since CO can directly influence SRP and resilience can protect employees against the detrimental effects of CI on SRP, customer-contact employees should be

provided with interventions aimed at fostering these personal resources to build strengths and promote well-being (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016). On the one hand, organizations can greatly benefit from selecting and hiring highly customer-oriented and resilient employees for customer-contact positions. By establishing more thorough instruments to assess candidates' CO and resilience levels and by highlighting these individual resources as critical credential that applicants should possess, HR representatives can select the most suitable candidates and facilitate a better job-person fit. On the other hand, companies could cultivate high CO attitudes through supervisory support and mentoring to facilitate learning and knowledge transfer (Babakus et al., 2009; Kwan, Yim, & Zhou, 2015). Additionally, psychological resilience training programs (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Lioysis, Shochet, Millea, & Biggs, 2009) and structured training sessions aimed at improving employees' recovery skills could make service providers more resilient and productive when they are confronted with uncivil customers.

Thirdly, HR recruiters who screen candidates based on affective disposition need to be aware of the possibility that this variable may work differently as a function of nationality. More specifically, while high-PA Irish employees' job satisfaction might be less influenced by interactions with rude customers, high-NA Italian workers might be less affected by decrements in job satisfaction across CI levels. These findings underline the need to consider the complex effects of personality; while high-NA individuals are generally more likely to be dissatisfied from their job, the results also suggest that in Italy they may react less strongly to misbehaving customers.

Fourthly, the finding that PA was the best positive predictor of job satisfaction suggests that it is possible to increase professional satisfaction by minimising events which provoke negative emotions (e.g., stress and anxiety) within the workplace. Indeed, although PA and NA are dispositional variables that tend toward stability, they also are somewhat

malleable (Li, Stanek, Zhang, Ones, & McGue, 2016). Vaidya and colleagues' (2008) findings support this point; they found test-retest correlations over a two-and-a-half-year period were considerably lower for affectivity traits than for the Big Five personality traits. This suggests that the repeated exposure to positive work-related events may potentially foster individual tendencies to experience positive emotional states. Thereby, managers should encourage an organizational culture that promotes positive events by treating errors as learning opportunities (Van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005), by offering a compensation system which successfully links merit pay with performance (Heneman, 1992), and by supporting employees when critical events, such as CI and CVA, occur (Abramis, 1987). Moreover, HR representatives could consider providing employees with brief present-moment awareness trainings (Nasser & Przeworski, 2017), in addition to promoting opportunities for physical activities (Fuegen & Breitenbecher, 2018), in order to help them cultivate and develop positive affect.

Fifthly, managers should facilitate "environmental conditions that support, foster, enrich and protect" (i.e., caravan passageways; Hobfoll, Stevens, & Zalta, 2015, p. 176) service providers' resources, thereby preventing burnout symptoms due to CI and CVA, which undermine job satisfaction and SRP. In doing so, organizations should support employees by providing organizational resources to deal with misbehaving customers; thereby, avoiding the depletion of their own emotional reserves. Accordingly, employees could be provided with training programs focused on the crucial roles of colleagues and supervisor support in coping with CSSs as well as negotiation skills to de-escalate critical events (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; Adams & Webster, 2013). In addition, managers could conduct sharing and debriefing sessions (also with the support of a professional psychologist, where appropriate) with service providers where workers are stimulated to openly share their emotional experiences with difficult clients. Additionally,

by transferring or knowing that transferring unreasonable customers to one's own supervisors is allowed, service providers can decrease their likelihood of developing burnout and view their supervisors as more supportive. Furthermore, service firms should establish a real-time and flexible service, enabling employees to take short breaks at their discretion after handling a difficult complainant as well as exert greater discretionary power to promptly find tailored solutions to customers' problems and to defend themselves from misbehaving clients. In other words, companies could use organizational flexibility and resources rather than overwhelming service providers' resource reservoirs when customer mistreatment occurs to sustain healthy and, thus, more satisfied and productive workers.

7. Strengths, limitations and future directions

The current two-country study has a number of strengths. It gives an original contribution to the existing literature on workplace incivility and aggression: this is one of the few studies demonstrating that CI and CVA may increase employees' burnout symptoms and, as a result, decrease their SRP and job satisfaction. In doing so, our study is not limited to emotional exhaustion symptoms as the majority of previous researches, but it includes also the burnout dimension of cynicism. Moreover, this research provides empirical evidence to support the differential impact of CI and CVA on job-related outcomes, by showing that CI – but not CVA – is directly and negatively associated with reduced SRP and job dissatisfaction. Additionally, this study contributes to knowledge beyond the existing literature on job satisfaction because it is one of the few investigations analyzing the buffering role of affectivity traits on the CI-job satisfaction relationship, within the context of employee-customer interaction. In addition, the current study provides further empirical evidence to support the differential value of PA and NA in predicting job satisfaction. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to examine the

direct influence of individual-level CO on SRP and the first study to investigate the buffering role of resilience on the CI-SRP relationship. Moreover, this is one of the first investigations to analyze the influence of CI and CVA on job-related outcomes within a cross-national approach. Overall, this research contributes to our understanding of the role of different personal resources in helping service providers maintain crucial job-related outcomes, even in the presence of CI and CVA.

However, our findings are also subjected to some limitations. First, this study relied on one source of information for data gathering which might contribute to common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Although common method bias is seldom severe enough to compromise the validity of the results (Spector, 2006), we followed Podsakoff and colleagues' (2003) recommendations regarding questionnaire design to decrease this bias. Future research would benefit from integrating different information sources. Second, the cross-sectional design of this investigation did not allow us to infer causal relationships. Therefore, future studies should adopt a longitudinal design and measure job satisfaction and SRP prior and after the occurrence of CI and CVA. Third, results cannot be generalized to specific working populations since the current research was conducted on a sample of working students employed in different customer-contact areas. Thereby, replications should be carried out in specific professional contexts through comparative studies addressed at full-time employees from different organizations and national contexts. Fourth, possible selection bias due to the voluntary participation into the research cannot be ruled out. Thus, it is possible that those who experienced demanding customer encounters were more motivated to respond and, as such, were overrepresented. Fifth, since most of research participants were women, and gender has been found to affect the levels of burnout among service workers (Grandey et al., 2007; Goussinsky, 2011), this might have partially influenced our findings. However, the gender distribution in our sample

is highly representative of the Italian customer service workforce. Sixth, in Ireland the reliability of the *Service Recovery Performance* scale was poor. Future investigations should further test the reliability of this scale by collecting data on a larger Irish sample and by evaluating more deeply the content validity of its items. Indeed, it should be considered the possibility of modifying the content of some items to adopt them to the specific socio-cultural context. Seventh, since we did not assess for cultural dimensions, it was not possible to empirically support our speculations concerning the nature of cultural dissimilarities. Thereby, replications should be conducted on Irish and Italian samples including also the assessment of emotion regulation tendencies following negative customer encounters (Miyamoto et al., 2014), dialectic utility of negative emotions (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011), and coping styles (Zola, 1966). Eighth, other personal characteristics (e.g., emotional intelligence; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016) and job resources (e.g., workplace relational civility; Di Fabio et al., 2016) which we did not measure could influence the associations between customer mistreatment, burnout and SRP as well as job satisfaction. We must leave to future work the task of addressing the questions of which other personal and job resources may influence these relationships.

8. Final considerations

From an applicative perspective, managers should be aware of the growing evidence suggesting that CI and CVA negatively impact on service providers' well-being and may lead employees to be dissatisfied with their job and less performing. Moreover, management should recognize the importance of supporting service providers during negative customer encounters by fostering a resource-high work setting which enables them to rely on organizational resources (e.g., supervisor support and greater latitude in the SRP delivery process) to facilitate the handling of customer mistreatment, thereby protecting them from

burnout. This may be advantageous from an organizational perspective because such employees in this workplace are likely to replenish their emotional resources more easily and, therefore, be more productive and better able to turn dissatisfied customers into satisfied ones. Additionally, this study contributes to the existing literature by identifying two crucial personal coping resources, namely CO and resilience, which may help individuals in maintaining high SRP levels, even when confronted with CI and CVA. In this respect, managers should establish and capitalize on a human resource management system, which includes structured procedures (e.g., the assessment of candidates' CO and resilience during the recruiting process) as well as training programs - in combination with experience sharing sessions and mentoring sessions - to promote the enhancement of employees' personal resources to support employees in overcoming encounters with misbehaving customers. Indeed, identifying and fostering protective personal resources is crucial to promote service providers' well-being and healthy workplaces.

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PART B: CHAPTER 5- The role of personal resources in protecting Italian and Irish employees' job satisfaction and service recovery performance against customer mistreatment

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10. Appendix

To test measurement invariance across nations, multi-group confirmatory factor analyses for all scales were conducted using Mplus7 (Muthèn, & Muthèn, 2011). Since at least partial scalar invariance was reached for all the scales which were utilized to evaluate the constructs of interest (see *Tables 13, 14, 15 and 16*), scores could be compared across countries. In fact, this means that respondents who obtain the same scores on the latent constructs would have the same scores on the observed variables regardless of their cultural belonging (Milfont & Fischer, 2010). Furthermore, the same pattern of factor loading was revealed across countries in relation to Incivility from Customer Scale (Wilson & Holmvall, 2013), Customer Verbal Aggression subscale (Dormann & Zapf, 2004) and PANAS (Watson et al., 1988), confirming that customer incivility and customer verbal aggression could be treated as independent constructs as well as the distinctiveness of the opposite affective dispositions.

Table 13. *Testing for measurement invariance of Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Campbell-Skills et al., 2007) across countries.*

| <i>Model</i> | <i>X²</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AIC</i> | <i>M com.</i> | <i>ΔCFI</i> | <i>Δ X²</i> |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------|
| M1. | 131.98 | 88 | .05 | .93 | 11018.89 | --- | --- | --- |
| M2. | 142.87 | 97 | .05 | .93 | 11014.11 | M2-M1 | .003 | 11.08 |
| M3. | 199.77 | 106 | .07 | .85 | 11057.30 | M3-M1 | .079 | 67.82*** |
| M4. | 149.06 | 99 | .05 | .92 | 11016.57 | M4-M1 | .009 | 17.06 |

Note. M1=Configural invariance, M2=Full metric invariance, M3=Full scalar invariance, M4=Partial scalar invariance. *df*= degree of freedom; *RMSEA*= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; *AIC*= Akaike Information Criterion; *CFI*= Comparative Fit Index; *Model com.*= Model comparison; *ΔCFI*= difference in CFI between models; *Δ X²*= difference in chi-square between models. M4= items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 are unconstrained across countries.

Table 14. Testing for measurement invariance of Incivility from Customer Scale (Wilson & Holmvall, 2013) and Customer Verbal Aggression (Dormann, & Zapf, 2004) across countries

| <i>Model</i> | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AIC</i> | <i>M com.</i> | ΔCFI | $\Delta \chi^2$ |
|--------------|----------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| M1. | 294.15 | 166 | .07 | .93 | 15256.47 | --- | --- | --- |
| M2. | 322.20 | 178 | .07 | .92 | 15272.53 | M2-M1 | .010 | 26.64** |
| M3. | 302.35 | 177 | .07 | .93 | 15250.36 | M3-M1 | .001 | 10.50 |
| M4. | 353.59 | 188 | .07 | .91 | 15286.84 | M4-M1 | .022 | 57.77*** |
| M5. | 320.99 | 186 | .07 | .92 | 15253.60 | M5-M1 | .004 | 27.80 |
| M6. | 393.37 | 197 | .08 | .89 | 15330.46 | M6-M1 | .039 | 91.13*** |
| M7. | 324.62 | 192 | .07 | .93 | 15249.07 | M7-M1 | .003 | 32.20 |

Note. M1= Configural invariance, M2= Full metric invariance, M3= Partial metric invariance, M4= Partial scalar invariance1, M5= Partial scalar invariance2, M6= Partial strict invariance1, M7= Partial strict invariance. 2df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; Model com.= Model comparison; ΔCFI = difference in CFI between models; $\Delta \chi^2$ = difference in chi-square between models. M3= item 4 measuring customer verbal aggression (CVA) is unconstrained; M4= item 4 measuring CVA is unconstrained across nations; M5= items 1 and 4 measuring CVA and item 5 assessing customer incivility (CI) are unconstrained; M6= items 1 and 4 measuring CVA and item 5 assessing CI are unconstrained; M7= items 2, 3, 4 assessing CVA and items 4, 5, 6 and 9 measuring CI.

Table 15. Testing for measurement invariance of Customer Orientation Scale (Donavan et al., 2004) across countries

| <i>Model</i> | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AIC</i> | <i>M com.</i> | ΔCFI | $\Delta \chi^2$ |
|--------------|----------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| M1. | 246.09 | 142 | .06 | .94 | 15263.41 | --- | --- | --- |
| M2. | 290.50 | 154 | .07 | .92 | 15292.94 | M2-M1 | .020 | 42.78*** |
| M3. | 258.59 | 151 | .06 | .93 | 15262.89 | M3-M1 | .003 | 12.92 |
| M4. | 486.57 | 160 | .11 | .80 | 15527.96 | M4-M1 | .138 | 192.31*** |
| M5. | 258.91 | 153 | .06 | .93 | 15259.98 | M4-M1 | .002 | 13.68 |

Note. M1= Configural invariance, M2= Full metric invariance, M3= Partial metric invariance, M4= Partial scalar invariance1, M5= Partial scalar invariance2. df= degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; AIC= Akaike Information Criterion; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; Model comp.= Model comparison; ΔCFI = difference in CFI between models; $\Delta \chi^2$ = difference in chi-square between models. M3= items 3, 4 and 9 are unconstrained across nations; M4= items 3, 4 and 9 are unconstrained across countries; M5= items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 are unconstrained across nations.

Table 16. *Testing for measurement invariance of PANAS questionnaire (Watson et al., 1988) across countries*

| <i>Model</i> | <i>X²</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AIC</i> | <i>M com.</i> | <i>ΔCFI</i> | <i>Δ X²</i> |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------|
| M1. | 596.82 | 336 | .07 | .90 | 18501.83 | --- | --- | --- |
| M2. | 658.72 | 354 | .07 | .89 | 18539.89 | M2-M1 | .016 | 57.36*** |
| M3. | 615.88 | 353 | .07 | .90 | 18496.43 | M3-M1 | .001 | 21.14 |
| M4. | 771.00 | 370 | .08 | .85 | 18628.77 | M4-M1 | .052 | 166.87*** |
| M5. | 625.55 | 357 | .07 | .90 | 18497.79 | M4-M1 | .003 | 29.90 |

Note. M1=Configural invariance, M2=Full metric invariance, M3=Partial metric invariance, M4=Partial scalar invariance1, M5=Partial scalar invariance2. *df*= degree of freedom; *RMSEA*= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; *AIC*= Akaike Information Criterion; *CFI*= Comparative Fit Index; *Model com.*= Model comparison; *ΔCFI*= difference in CFI between models; *Δ X²*= difference in chi-square between models. M3= item 6 measuring NA is unconstrained across nations; M4= item 6 assessing NA is unconstrained across countries; M5= items 5 and 8 measuring PA and items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 assessing NA are unconstrained across nations.

CHAPTER 6

Well-being and functioning at work following thefts and robberies: A comparative study

After analyzing customer incivility and verbal aggression through the two previous studies (see *Chapters 4 and 5*), we will investigate how experiencing thefts and/or robberies at work may affect small businesses retailers' well-being and job satisfaction. As in the case of customer mistreatment, thefts and robberies at work are generally perpetrated by organizational outsiders. Moreover, as in the case of customer mistreatment, victims are likely to be employed in occupations in direct contact with the public. Additionally, in accordance with our literature review (see *Chapter 3*), we assumed that, despite being different by their nature, similarly to what found for customer mistreatment, thefts and/or robberies at work will be perceived as stressful events and have a detrimental impact on employees' well-being and work functioning. Additionally, similarly to the comparison made between customer incivility and verbal aggression, we expected that thefts and robberies would have differential effects on workers' well-being - because by definition the level of violence is more severe in robbery. The current study has been published in *Frontiers of Psychology* and, according to the authorization given by this Journal and co-authors, we included its post-printed PDF version in the current dissertation¹.

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Well-Being and Functioning at Work Following Thefts and Robberies: A Comparative Study

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Thefts and robberies may be traumatizing experiences for employees. The aim of this study is to explore to what extent experiencing robberies and/or thefts at work affect workers' mental health, coping-self-efficacy, social support seeking, workload and job satisfaction. Drawing on Conservation of Resources theory, this research contributes to our understanding of the psychological sequelae of robbery and theft for employees working in small businesses. The few studies on the effects of robberies and thefts in the past have predominantly focused on bank employees. A sample of Italian tobacconists and jewelers completed an anonymous self-report questionnaire examining the experience of robbery and/or theft, social support seeking (Coping Orientation to Problem Experienced scale, COPE-IV), psycho-somatic well-being (General Health Questionnaire, GHQ-12), job satisfaction (a single item). Victims of thefts and/or robberies reported their PTSD symptoms (Impact of Event- Revised 6, IES-R-6) and trauma-related coping self-efficacy (Coping Self-Efficacy scale, CSE-7), based on the last event ($N = 319$). Descriptive analyses, ANOVA, ANCOVA and multiple regressions analyses have been carried out. The results indicated that victims of thefts and robberies experienced greater workload, higher psycho-physical complaints and greater tendency to seek social support in comparison with their non-affected counterparts. They additionally experienced more post-traumatic symptomatology and perceived lower coping self-efficacy, when compared to those who experienced thefts "only." Multiple regression analyses revealed that CSE was positively related to job satisfaction, although the presence of psycho-physical symptoms was the main predictor of job satisfaction among both non-affected and affected employees. PTSD was not an independent predictor of job satisfaction. In sum, robberies and/or thefts exposure undermines differently workers' well-being.

Keywords: violence at work, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psycho-somatic well-being, trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE), job satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Robberies and thefts represent a serious threat to workplace safety. For instance, in Italy the numbers of robberies and thefts in 2015 among retailers were 5,337 and 102,041 respectively (Istat, 2015). In fact, Italy had the twelfth highest robbery rates out of 71 countries in 2006 (Aebi et al., 2010; European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control International Statistics on Crime Justice, 2011). To date, only a few studies have focused on the psychological impact of

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these types of events on employees working in small, independently owned businesses (Casteel et al., 2008; Söndergaard, 2008; Belleville et al., 2012), with previous research on this topic predominantly focusing on the banking context (Van der Velden et al., 1992; Kamphuis and Emmelkamp, 1998; Hansen and Elklit, 2011, 2013; Hansen et al., 2012, 2014; Armour and Hansen, 2015; Christiansen and Hansen, 2015; Giorgi et al., 2015a,b; Mucci et al., 2015). The present research focused on jewelers and tobacconists because their job characteristics (e.g., customer-facing, working alone or in a small team, handling valuables and selling items of value) may potentially increase workers' risk for theft and robbery-related violence. The main purpose of this study was to investigate how experiencing robberies and/or thefts at work may affect workers' psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Indeed, previous research has widely demonstrated that being exposed to traumatizing experiences—such as robberies—may negatively affect individuals' mental health (Van der Velden et al., 1992; Hansen et al., 2014) with resulting effects on work-related aspects, such as job satisfaction (Giorgi et al., 2015b).

Both robberies and thefts are considered property crimes, perpetrated by "anyone who gains possession of another person's movable goods, stealing them from the owner with a view to drawing profit for themselves or others" (Article 624, 628 C.P.; Lattanzi, 2010). The key distinguishing factor between a theft from a robbery is that the latter involves the use of "personal violence or threats" of force (Article 628 C.P.; Lattanzi, 2010). Since such experiences are consistent with the conditions described by criterion A for PTSD as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-V), thefts and robberies may be considered fully-fledged potentially traumatic events (PTEs).

Previous studies have shown that a robbery may be a traumatizing experience for workers, which may initiate the development of or increase existing mental health problems, such as psychological distress, major depression, acute stress disorder, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Van der Velden et al., 1992; Kamphuis and Emmelkamp, 1998; Hansen and Elklit, 2014a,b; Hansen et al., 2014). This, in turn, may lead victims to experience reduced overall job satisfaction (Giorgi et al., 2015b), decreased work productivity (Zatzick et al., 2008), and increased demand for medical and mental healthcare services (Van der Velden et al., 1992; Mucci et al., 2015).

Experiencing a robbery or theft constitutes a threat to one's working conditions, which are one of four resources identified by Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (i.e., objects, conditions, personal characteristics, energies; Hobfoll, 1989). Following the exposure to a theft or robbery, workers experience a loss in their resources with regard to their working conditions such as their personal safety at work and the perception of a secure working environment. If workers (continue to) suffer from resource loss without being able to compensate through resource replenishment by employing other resources to offset the loss, they are at increased risk for mental health problems and PTSD symptoms. Furthermore, employing resources for coping can be stressful too (Hobfoll, 1989). If the resources expended in coping are greater than the resulting benefits, then the outcome of coping is likely to be negative (Hobfoll,

1989). Thus, if workers expend energy trying to cope with the aftermath of the theft or robbery, but are unsuccessful in doing so, they may further exacerbate their losses. In this situation, the likelihood for post-traumatic complaints and continued health impairment are more likely. In a situation of continued resource depletion, work demands may be perceived as more effortful due to an individual's reduced coping capacity. COR theory suggests that stress is not the result of an imbalance between objective demands and resource capacity, but rather the perception of these factors (Hobfoll, 1989). Little research to date has considered the effect of robberies and thefts on the regular everyday demands of one's job, such as perceived workload. However, it is likely that if one's resources are already depleted due to a traumatic event than a worker's capacity to deal with everyday work demands is reduced and thus, workload may be perceived to be higher. We investigate this aspect in the present study.

In the context of resource loss, or threat of loss, the harnessing of other types of resources becomes important (e.g., resource replacement; Hobfoll, 1989) to meet the demands related to the recovery, restore lost resources or reduce the negative impact. Social support seeking is an active coping strategy (Schaefer and Moos, 1998; Norberg et al., 2006; Taylor and Stanton, 2007) that may facilitate this process following robberies and thefts. Social resources may foster victim's resilience and recovery in the aftermath of a trauma because it may have a positive impact on the victims' perceptions of social support competence (Lepore, 2001) and the belief about their ability to cope with the stressor (Schwarzer and Knoll, 2007) by decreasing feelings of isolation (Ozer et al., 2003). Furthermore, when constructively provided, social support may encourage successful adaptation by helping victims to re-appraise the traumatic event and thus, engage in more effective coping strategies (Schaefer and Moos, 1998; Prati and Pietrantoni, 2009). In sum, receiving social support may reduce the emotional burden of robberies and thefts (Thoits, 2011).

Since robberies are different from thefts (because by definition the level of violence is more severe in a robbery), we expected that thefts and robberies would have differential impacts on workers' well-being. To examine these expectations, normally we would distinguish the following three groups of victimized workers: (1) workers who experienced thefts only; (2) workers who were victims of robberies only; (3) workers who were targeted of both thefts and robberies. However, at the beginning of our study we became aware that the majority of (if not all) robbed workers were also confronted with thefts (or vice versa). For this reason, the subgroup including those who experienced robberies only was eliminated and we focused on the comparison between the other two affected groups.

Hypothesis (1) Workers employed in jewelers and tobacco shops who were affected by both robberies and thefts will experience higher levels of psycho-somatic complaints and higher perceived workload, and they will seek more social support compared to non-affected workers.

PTEs like robberies and thefts may be accompanied by more specific post-traumatic symptoms such as re-experiencing the

event, avoiding event-related feelings and places, event-related anger and fear in the short, medium or long term. Some victims may develop a mental disorder, such as PTSD (DSM-5; American psychiatric association, 2013). The development of psycho-physical problems and post-traumatic stress symptoms may depend on the severity of trauma exposure and how it is subjectively experienced (Tsai et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals exposed to multiple traumatic events may experience higher levels of post-traumatic symptoms and more severe impairment of mental health compared to those exposed to single events (Schwartz et al., 2005; Wahlström et al., 2008; Wisnivesky et al., 2011; Yuan et al., 2013; Karam et al., 2014). Taken together, these findings suggest that being exposed to both robberies and thefts may exacerbate the detrimental outcomes over and above being exposed to thefts only.

Hypothesis (2) Workers who were exposed to both robberies and thefts will be more likely to experience PTSD symptomatology than colleagues who were victims of thefts only.

As stated by COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), personal resources are beneficial because they help individuals to deal with stressors. In the context of trauma exposure, trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE) is an important personal resource, which has been found to protect individuals from psychological distress (Benka et al., 2014) and is positively associated with psychological well-being (Benight et al., 2001; Lambert et al., 2012). CSE refers to the perceived ability to effectively manage both personal functioning and external recovery demands handled in the aftermath of a traumatic event (Benight and Bandura, 2004). CSE impacts the perceived stressfulness of traumatic events through various mechanisms. First, CSE influences the extent to which an event is perceived as threatening through an appraisal of the balance between personal coping abilities, environmental demands and potentially harmful characteristics of the event (Bandura, 1997). Secondly, CSE perceptions affect both the motivation to utilize and sustain effective coping strategies and the choice of adopted strategies, thereby influencing the perception of the event as stressful over time (Benight et al., 1999; Kraaij et al., 2002; Benight and Bandura, 2004). Thirdly, since CSE regards the belief in one's own ability to relieve stress reactions, it plays an important role because it helps victims to perceive stressors as less distressing (Kent, 1987; Kent and Gibbons, 1987). CSE perceptions are continuously adapting over time on the basis of individuals' perceptions of their own effectiveness in dealing with emotional and psychological consequences of the trauma. The level of stress perceived during or immediately after the traumatic event seems to have an impact on both short-term symptoms and the ability to overcome the event (Bosmans and van der Velden, 2015; Bosmans et al., 2015a). This suggests that the perceived seriousness of the event could affect CSE levels, so that traumatic events perceived as more serious may lead individuals to experience lower CSE perceptions.

Hypothesis (3) Workers who were exposed to both robberies and thefts will report lower CSE levels than those who were victims of thefts only.

The negative association between psychological well-being and job satisfaction has been widely demonstrated across several types of professional populations (Faragher et al., 2005; Alexopoulos et al., 2014). A longitudinal study by Giorgi et al. (2015b) showed that robberies had long-term effects on victims' psychological distress, which in turn may lead to reduced overall job satisfaction. In addition, a meta-analysis by Bowling et al. (2015) revealed that workload was significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction, although this association was relatively weak. Consequently, we expected that workers who reported greater psycho-physical complaints and higher perceived workload would be less satisfied with their job.

Furthermore, coping self-efficacy perceptions have been shown to be particularly important for job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001; Schyns and von Collani, 2002). A strong relationship was found between feeling generally competent and being satisfied with one's job (Judge et al., 2001; Law and Guo, 2016). More specifically, previous studies found that occupational self-efficacy predicts job satisfaction (Schyns and von Collani, 2002; Paggi and Jopp, 2015). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies investigating the relationship between the more specific construct of trauma-related CSE and job satisfaction have been carried out to date. Feeling more confident in one's ability to cope with trauma should protect employees against detrimental psychological consequences and, in turn, contribute to the maintenance of job satisfaction levels following a theft or robbery. Some studies have found relationships between PTSD and job dissatisfaction (North et al., 2002; Paunović and Öst, 2004), whereas others failed to identify such relationship (Nandi et al., 2004; Vinokur et al., 2011). These mixed findings suggest the need to examine this association more in depth.

Hypothesis (4) High psycho-physical symptoms and workload levels are negatively associated with job satisfaction among affected and non-affected workers over and above demographic variables. Perceived job satisfaction is negatively associated with PTSD symptoms and positively associated with coping self-efficacy among victimized workers, over and above psycho-physical symptoms and workload, and time since event.

Since victims with low CSE levels and high PTSD symptoms are less likely to recover spontaneously and more likely to experience a weaker decline in symptoms (Morina et al., 2014), they are more likely to require treatment. However, only one study to date has specifically investigated the relationship between CSE and help-seeking behavior (Bosmans and van der Velden, 2015). Past studies suggest that the severity of post-event mental health problems, particularly PTSD symptomatology, is the factor most consistently related to the utilization of mental health services (MHS) following trauma exposure (Boscarino et al., 2004; Gavrilovic et al., 2005; Elhai et al., 2006; van der Velden et al., 2007). Indeed, PTSD severity is related to increased use of MHS among residents of disaster affected areas (Frahm et al., 2013), survivors of terrorist attacks (Boscarino et al., 2004) and, more generally, victims of disasters (Van der Velden et al., 2006). Although trauma-exposed individuals are more likely to use MHS compared to non-affected people (Van der Velden

et al., 1992, 2006), many victims do not utilize MHS or wait to seek treatment, even when they experience severe mental health problems (Kessler et al., 1998; Koenen et al., 2017). This may be due to different perceived barriers, such as stigma associated with mental health care (Gorman et al., 2011), low mental health literacy and helplessness related to ongoing symptoms (Davis et al., 2008; Ghafouri et al., 2014). With respect to robberies, a study among Dutch victims of bank robberies found that significantly more victims (32%) compared to non-victimized colleagues (9%) had used MHS, while the number of therapeutic sessions did not significantly differ between victims and non-victims who sought treatment (Van der Velden et al., 1992). To our knowledge, there are no studies available that have evaluated post-robbery and post-theft MHS utilization among victimized employees working in small, independently owned businesses.

Furthermore, because workload is positively associated with emotional exhaustion (Aronsson et al., 2017) which, in turn, may impair workers' mental health, those who perceive higher workload could be more likely to seek treatment than those who experience low workload. Indeed, previous research has found that poor mental health is an important factor predicting primary care consultation (Bellón et al., 2007). Edmond et al. (2013) found that the family doctor was the most frequently utilized service by the survivors of intimate partner violence. In Italy, the popularity of general practitioners (GP) can be explained by the fact that all citizens have access to this service free of charge. Furthermore, GPs play a gatekeeping role because they are the first point of contact for referrals to consultants, and are responsible for prescribing medication.

Since victims with low CSE and high PTSD symptoms are more likely to experience mental health complaints, we expected that they will be more likely to use MHS and consult their family doctor.

Hypothesis (5) The use of medical health services (MHS) by workers affected by thefts and/or robberies will be positively associated with post-traumatic symptoms and negatively associated with coping self-efficacy, over and above psycho-somatic symptoms and workload.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Procedure

This cross-sectional study was carried out with 492 workers employed in jewelers (*N* = 250) and tobacco shops (*N* = 242) throughout Italy in collaboration with their national trade unions. Respondents completed an anonymous self-report questionnaire. Tobacconists completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire—since they are less likely to use the internet—whereas jewelers completed an online questionnaire.

As revealed by **Table 1**, the sample was equally distributed between jewelers and tobacconists who were the 50.81% and the 49.19% of the total sample respectively. The two professional categories were broadly similar as regards the main socio-demographic variables: with regard to the exposure to violent events, 31.90% of jewelers and 36.60% of tobacconists were victims of thefts, whereas 68.10% of jewelers and 63.40%

TABLE 1 | Socio-demographic data compared for professional categories.

| Socio-demographic variables | Jewelers (<i>N</i> = 250) | Tobacconists (<i>N</i> = 242) |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) |
| GENDER | | |
| Male | 202 (80.80%) | 202 (84.20%) |
| Female | 48 (19.20%) | 38 (15.80%) |
| MARITAL STATUS | | |
| Single | 32 (12.80%) | 39 (16.50%) |
| Married | 195 (78.00%) | 177 (74.70%) |
| Divorced | 18 (7.20%) | 16 (6.60%) |
| Widower | 5 (2.00%) | 5 (2.10%) |
| WORK WITH | | |
| Always alone | 25 (10.00%) | 12 (5.00%) |
| Mainly alone | 55 (22.00%) | 47 (19.50%) |
| With one or more colleagues | 170 (68.00%) | 162 (75.50%) |
| SHOP LOCATION | | |
| Isolated | 5 (2.00%) | 23 (9.60%) |
| Proximity of houses and shops | 240 (98.00%) | 217 (90.40%) |
| SHOP LOCATION | | |
| Northern of Italy | 90 (38.30%) | 92 (38.50%) |
| Centre of Italy | 40 (17.00%) | 52 (21.80%) |
| Southern of Italy and Islands | 105 (44.70%) | 95 (39.70%) |
| IWORK AS | | |
| Owner | 222 (94.50%) | 196 (82.00%) |
| Employee | 13 (5.50%) | 43 (18.00%) |
| | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) |
| Age | 51.60 (9.94) | 48.96 (10.15) |
| Job tenure | 31.00 (11.49) | 27.05 (10.75) |
| Job tenure in the current position | 26.00 (12.03) | 17.53 (11.03) |

of tobacconists were exposed to both thefts and robberies. Considering the similarities between the two professional categories, we considered them comparable, and we carried out all analyses on the combined sample. Considering the total sample, the majority of respondents were male (82.40%), married (76.40%), working with other co-workers (71.70%) and were owners of the shop (88.20%). The average age was 50.28 years (*SD* = 10.12) with an average job tenure of 29.04 years (*SD* = 11.29) and average tenure in their current position of 21.79 years (*SD* = 12.29). In the majority of cases, the shop was located in the immediate proximity of houses and other shops (94.20%) and open only during the day (67.20%). 182 shops were located in the North, 92 small business in the Centre and 200 in the South of Italy.

In total, 319 workers had been exposed to robberies and/or thefts. More specifically, 108 workers were victims of thefts only, 211 were exposed to both thefts and robberies, and 173 workers didn't experience any events. Most respondents had been exposed to thefts in the past 13–24 months (80.30%), while more than half (56.70%) were victims of robberies in the past 7–12 months.

Measurement

Participants who were exposed to thefts and/or robberies were invited to complete the whole questionnaire, whereas those who had not been exposed completed some sections only. Victims completed additional measures related to post-traumatic stress symptomatology, trauma related copy self-efficacy and use of mental health services.

Participants were asked whether they experienced thefts or robberies in their workplace. The two items were combined to a dichotomous measure of **exposure severity** to distinguish between respondents who were exposed to thefts only and those who reported multiple exposures (both thefts and robberies). Being exposed to both types of events was considered as more severe than being victims of a single type of event. In addition, participants were invited to indicate when the event took place (e.g., *How long ago was the last theft in your workplace?*) on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = 0–6 months ago to 5 = more than 24 months ago.

General Psychological Health

General psychological health was assessed using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978, 1992; Goldberg and Williams, 1988; GHQ-12). This well-established screening instrument has been widely used in trauma research in different settings (e.g., Connor et al., 2006). It exists in several versions, but we decided to use the twelve-item version because of its good statistical properties (Goldberg and Williams, 1988). The questionnaire comprises three subscales: social dysfunction is assessed with six items related to difficulties in social performing and dealing with problems (e.g., *“Have you recently felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?”*); general dysphoria evaluates the presence of psycho-somatic symptoms (four items, e.g., *“Have you recently been confident in yourself?”*), and finally, loss of confidence assesses self-esteem levels (two items, e.g., *“Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself?”*). Responses are based on a four-point Likert scale that assesses if and how the individual's mental state differs from his or her usual state (from 0 = better than usual/more so than usual to 3 = much less than usual for positively worded items and for negatively 0 = not at all to 3 = much more than usual for negative worded items). For the purpose of this study, the total GHQ score was chosen over the three-dimensional model (with items loading exclusively on each GHQ factor), as the GHQ-12 was initially designed as a one-factor measure (Goldberg and Williams, 1988), and many researchers support the unidimensional use of the questionnaire (e.g., Shevlin and Adamson, 2005). This scale gives a total score ranging from 0 to 36 points, in which a greater score means a high level of malaise. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was good ($\alpha = 0.80$).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction was assessed using a single item measuring overall satisfaction (Giorgi et al., 2015b; e.g., *How satisfied have you been with your work?*). The responses were obtained on a ten-point scale (from 0 = no satisfaction to 10 = satisfaction) where a higher score indicates greater job satisfaction. This single item was used in previous studies focused on robberies (Giorgi et al., 2015b),

showed sufficient validity and was positively related to more general scales of theoretically associated constructs (Faragher et al., 2005; Lapiere et al., 2005).

Social Support Seeking

Social support seeking as a coping strategy was assessed using Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced scale (COPE-IV; Sica et al., 2008). This instrument was used to assess participants' tendency to seek social support in the process of coping with problems (10 items; e.g., *I've been getting emotional support from others*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was good ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Workload

Workload perceptions were evaluated using a subscale taken from the Areas of Work life Survey (Leiter and Maslach, 2006) to capture the extent to which work demands spill into personal life as well as the physical and intellectual burden of job demands (e.g., *I do not have time to do the work that must be done*). The six items were assessed on a five-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). As indicated by Maslach and Leiter (2008), scores greater than 3 denote a satisfactory alignment between the individual and the workplace's demands, whereas low scores reveal the presence of risk factors for the development of work-related stress. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was good ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms

The six-item Impact of Event-Revised scale (IES-R; Thoresen et al., 2010) was used to assess symptoms of post-traumatic stress in response to a traumatic event. Participants were invited to indicate how frequently symptoms of intrusion (two items; e.g., *Other things kept making me think about it*), avoidance (two items; e.g., *I tried not to think about it*) and hyperarousal (two items; e.g., *I felt watchful or on-guard*; Weiss and Marmar, 1997) were experienced in the period following the last robbery or theft on a four-point scale (from 1 = never to 4 = often). Instead of using the three-dimensional solution, a global score (from 0 to 24) was calculated by adding the scores for each of the three subscales. This unidimensional solution gives an overall post-traumatic stress measure and it was found to be positively correlated with general health (Giorgi et al., 2015a). Cronbach's alpha for the IES scale was good ($\alpha = 0.88$). Respondents were asked to take the (most recent) theft/robbery in mind when answering the questions on PTSD symptoms. In case respondents experienced both thefts and robberies, they were asked to focus on one of these events of their own choosing.

Trauma-Related Coping Self-efficacy

Trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE) was assessed with a seven-item Coping self-efficacy scale (CSE-7; Bosmans et al., 2015b). Respondents rated their perceived efficacy in coping with diverse consequences derived from the theft or robbery (e.g., *dealing with frightening images or events about the event*, *being emotionally strong*) on a seven-point Likert scales (from 1 = I am completely incapable of to 7 = I am perfectly capable of). Cronbach's alpha for the CSE scale was good ($\alpha = 0.89$). Respondents were asked to take the same event in mind as the event when they answered the questions about PTSD symptoms.

Use of (Medical) Health Services

Use of (medical) health services was assessed using a single item (“Have you contacted your general practitioner at any time during the past 12 months in connection with the last armed robbery/theft?”). Participants were invited to indicate on a ten-point Likert scale (from 1 = never to 10 = 9 or more times) how frequently, during the past 12 months, they have contacted their general practitioner to deal with consequences due to the last robbery or theft. Using the same scale, respondents answered whether, during the past 12 months, they have contacted a mental health professional (through public or private mental health services) to manage the consequences derived from theft and/or robbery exposure (e.g., *Have you been in contact with an independent psychiatrist, psychologist and/or psychotherapist for yourself during the past 12 months?*).

Statistical Analyses

The data were analyzed using SPSS, version 20. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to verify the presence of differences in levels of psycho-somatic complaints, workload and social support, comparing victims of thefts and robberies with non-affected workers. Significant differences were subjected to multiple comparisons using Bonferroni’s highly significant difference to understand the nature of the differences.

One-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used in order to analyze differences in levels of PTSD symptoms and CSE, comparing workers affected by thefts and robberies with victims of thefts only. ANCOVA was also used to explore differences in the number of GP visits in the past 12 months, comparing non-affected individuals with those who were affected by thefts only and those who were exposed to both thefts and robberies.

Multivariate regression analyses were carried out to verify the influence exerted by psycho-physical symptoms and workload on job satisfaction among affected and non-affected workers. Furthermore, regressions were used to assess the influence of psycho-physical and post-traumatic symptoms, coping self-efficacy and workload on job satisfaction among affected workers.

A *p* value < 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, skewness and kurtosis statistics, and internal consistencies (Cronbach’s alpha) for the measures used in this study are provided in **Tables 2, 3** (for non-affected and affected subjects, respectively).

With regard to Hypothesis 1, as expected *post-hoc* comparisons showed that victims of both thefts and robberies experienced higher levels of psycho-somatic symptoms [$F_{(2, 486)} = 6.65; p < 0.01$], workload [$F_{(2, 485)} = 13.49; p < 0.001$] and seeking social support [$F_{(2, 486)} = 4.47; p < 0.05$], compared to non-affected colleagues (all Cohen’s *D* between 0.18 and 0.51) (see **Table 4**).

With regard to hypotheses 2 and 3, one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) showed that workers affected by thefts and robberies had significantly higher PTSD-symptom levels [$F_{(1, 303)} = 22.43; p < 0.001$; Cohen’s *D* = -0.58] and significant

TABLE 2 | Descriptive, internal consistency, and intercorrelations for study variables among non-affected workers (*N* = 173).

| Measure | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Skewness | Kurtosis | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Psycho-physical health | 2.92 | 1.48 | 0.65 | -0.30 | 0.80 | | |
| 2. Social support seeking | 2.06 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 0.34 | 0.32** | 0.67 | |
| 3. Workload | 3.19 | 0.80 | -0.05 | -0.58 | 0.12 | -0.17* | 0.79 |

*Boldfaced numbers on the diagonal represent Cronbach’s alpha; **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01.*

lower coping self-efficacy levels, compared to workers affected by thefts only [$F_{(1, 296)} = 8.37; p < 0.01$; Cohen’s *D* = 0.36; see **Table 5**].

According to hypothesis 4, we expected that the presence of psycho-physical symptoms and the perception of high workload would be negatively associated with job satisfaction (while controlling for gender, age and marital status). The results of the multivariate regression analyses with workload and psycho-somatic symptoms as predictors of job satisfaction were statistically significant for non-affected workers only (see **Table 6**). The full model explained 39% of total variance, but when controlling for gender, age and marital status, only psycho-physical symptoms level was significantly and strongly related to job satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 0.29; \beta = -0.56; p < 0.001$; Cohen’s $f^2 = 0.64$). The perception of high workload was not associated with the job satisfaction levels of workers who had not been affected by assessed traumatic events.

In addition, according to hypothesis 4, we expected that job satisfaction would be negatively related to post-traumatic symptoms and positively related to coping self-efficacy in workers affected by thefts and/or robberies, over and above the effects of psycho-somatic symptoms and workload (controlling for gender, age, marital status and time since event). The results show that the factor highly related to job satisfaction in workers affected by thefts and/or robberies was psycho-somatic symptoms level ($\beta = -0.31; p < 0.001$); the level of coping self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.20; p < 0.01$) was significantly related to job satisfaction, explaining a limited amount of variance while controlling for psycho-somatic symptoms (see **Table 7**). Post-traumatic symptoms were not independently associated with job satisfaction.

Finally, regarding hypothesis 5, the results of ANCOVA showed no significant differences in the number of GP visits in the past 12 between non-affected individuals (*M* = 1.88), those affected by thefts only (*M* = 2.24) and those exposed to both thefts and robberies (*M* = 2.23). Differences in the number of event-related GP-visits between thefts (*M* = 1.02) and thefts and robberies (*M* = 1.30) did not reach the *p* < 0.05 significance level between (*p* = 0.06) while controlling for gender, age and marital status.

With respect to the use of mental health services in the past 12 months, multivariate logistic regression analyses showed no significant differences between non-affected (9.8%), those affected by thefts (7.4%) and those affected by thefts and robberies (9%).

TABLE 3 | Descriptive, internal consistency, and intercorrelations for study variables among affected workers (*N* = 319).

| Measure | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Skewness | Kurtosis | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Psycho-physical health | 3.37 | 1.55 | 0.66 | 0.42 | 0.80 | | | | |
| 2. Social support seeking | 2.20 | 0.65 | 0.61 | 0.07 | 0.40** | 0.88 | | | |
| 3. Workload | 3.58 | 0.80 | -0.35 | 0.03 | 0.28** | 0.10 | 0.80 | | |
| 4. CSE | 4.85 | 1.36 | -0.39 | -0.14 | -0.08 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.89 | |
| 5. PTSD symptoms | 2.18 | 1.01 | -0.26 | -0.73 | 0.26** | 0.29** | 0.20** | -0.27** | 0.88 |

Boldfaced numbers on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha; ***p* < 0.01.

TABLE 4 | ANOVA results for workload and social support seeking among the three study groups.

| Variables | Groups | Mean | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> ^a |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Psycho-somatic symptoms | No event | 2.02 | 1.48 | 6.85** |
| | Thefts | 3.15 | 1.42 | |
| | Thefts and robberies | 3.49 | 1.61 | |
| Workload | No event | 3.19 | 0.80 | 13.49*** |
| | Thefts | 3.53 | 0.72 | |
| | Thefts and robberies | 3.61 | 0.84 | |
| Social support seeking | No event | 2.08 | 0.61 | 4.47** |
| | Thefts | 2.08 | 0.66 | |
| | Thefts and robberies | 2.25 | 0.64 | |
| Job satisfaction | No event | 6.88 | 1.99 | 12.14*** |
| | Thefts | 6.46 | 2.12 | |
| | Thefts and robberies | 5.74 | 2.23 | |

p* < 0.01, *p* < 0.001.
^a*DF* = 2.

TABLE 5 | ANCOVA results for PTSD symptoms and coping self-efficacy among affected groups.

| Variables | Groups | Mean | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> ^{Time^a} | <i>F</i> ^{Groups^a} |
|----------------------|----------------------|------|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|
| PTSD symptoms | Thefts | 5.36 | 2.94 | 1.75 | 22.43*** |
| | Thefts and robberies | 5.10 | 1.34 | | |
| Coping self-efficacy | Thefts | 5.14 | 2.93 | 5.50* | 8.37*** |
| | Thefts and robberies | 4.71 | 1.34 | | |

^a*DF* = 1.
p* < 0.05, **p* < 0.001.
Covariate: time since event.

DISCUSSION

This cross-sectional study focuses on psychological consequences of robberies and thefts, an increasing health and safety issue in Italy, among the under-investigated population of jewelers and tobacconists. Although some studies have investigated the consequences of being exposed to robberies and thefts on workers' well-being, post-traumatic stress, psycho-physical symptoms and job satisfaction (e.g., Giorgi et al., 2015b; Mucci

TABLE 6 | Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting job satisfaction in non-affected group.

| Variable | ΔR^2 | <i>F</i> ² | Non-affected (<i>N</i> ^{max} = 163) | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|---|----------|----------|
| | | | β | <i>t</i> | <i>P</i> |
| Step 1 | | | | | |
| | 0.10 | | | | |
| Gender | | | -0.32 | -4.10 | 0.00 |
| Age | | | -0.01 | -0.10 | 0.92 |
| Marital status | | | -0.01 | -0.09 | 0.93 |
| Step 2 | | | | | |
| | 0.29 | 0.64 | | | |
| Gender | | | -0.20 | -3.06 | 0.00 |
| Age | | | 0.05 | 0.69 | 0.49 |
| Marital status | | | -0.02 | -0.31 | 0.76 |
| Workload | | | 0.09 | 1.37 | 0.17 |
| GHQ total score | | | -0.56 | -8.39 | 0.00 |

et al., 2015), the ways in which experiencing these PTEs at work may affect workers' perceptions remains unclear. This study assessed the associations between exposure to robberies and thefts with psychological well-being in light of the solid scientific framework of the Conservation of Resource Theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Firstly, this study confirmed the hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Victims of multiple violence (both thefts and robberies) reported higher levels of psycho-somatic complaints, greater workload perceptions and higher levels of social support seeking compared to non-affected counterparts. Additionally, they experienced higher levels of PTSD symptoms and weaker CSE perceptions compared to those who were exposed to thefts only. According to the COR model, the higher the threat of loss or actual loss of resources, the more harmful are the negative psychosocial consequences. Workers who are victims of both thefts and robberies seem to be more likely to perceive a threat to their working conditions, feeling less safe within their workplace and needing more resources to face the trauma and its aftermath, than their counterparts. Consequently, they tend to experience more serious resource depletion, which may result in a reduced capacity to manage everyday work demands, the need for compensatory resource replacement and the risk of being stressed by the negative balance between energies invested in dealing with recovery demands and poor benefits achieved. As a result, they are more likely to perceive higher

TABLE 7 | Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting job satisfaction in affected group.

| Variable | ΔR^2 | f^2 | Affected ($N^{\text{max}} = 303$) | | |
|----------------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|------|
| | | | β | t | p |
| Step 1 | | | | | |
| | 0.01 | | | | |
| Gender | | | 0.02 | 0.31 | 0.76 |
| Age | | | -0.08 | -1.28 | 0.20 |
| Marital status | | | 0.10 | 1.64 | 0.10 |
| Step 2 | | | | | |
| | 0.11 | 0.14 | | | |
| Gender | | | 0.05 | 0.86 | 0.39 |
| Age | | | -0.06 | -1.08 | 0.28 |
| Marital status | | | 0.10 | 1.73 | 0.08 |
| Workload | | | -0.04 | -0.68 | 0.50 |
| GHQ total score | | | -0.32 | -5.57 | 0.00 |
| Step 3 | | | | | |
| | 0.03 | 0.18 | | | |
| Gender | | | 0.04 | 0.67 | 0.49 |
| Age | | | -0.01 | -0.22 | 0.82 |
| Marital status | | | 0.09 | 1.54 | 0.12 |
| Workload | | | -0.05 | -0.95 | 0.34 |
| GHQ total score | | | -0.31 | -5.28 | 0.00 |
| PTSD symptoms | | | 0.02 | 0.28 | 0.78 |
| Coping self-efficacy | | | 0.20 | 3.27 | 0.00 |
| Time since event | | | -0.01 | -0.15 | 0.88 |

workload, search for greater social support and experience a more serious psycho-physical impairment than their non-exposed counterpart. Furthermore, workers may experience trauma re-actualization when they are victims of both thefts and robberies, increasing post-traumatic symptoms (Van der Kolk, 1989; Schwartz et al., 2005; Wisnivesky et al., 2011; Yuan et al., 2013). Indeed, the reoccurrences of violence may stimulate hopelessness, which may influence workers' health (Herschenovis and Barling, 2010). Moreover, literature found associations between perceived helplessness and post-traumatic complaints, since victims of violence seem to commonly feel helpless or fearful even after a robbery (Mucci et al., 2015). Consequently, it is possible that employees who were exposed to robberies are more likely to experience feelings of helpless or fearful and, in turn, they may be at higher risk of developing PTSD symptoms.

In addition, the development of fears (for instance of being a victim of future robberies) might decrease CSE levels. For example, Di Giacinto et al. (2014) pointed out that fear is an important factor that influences the extent to which robbery victims experience post-traumatic symptoms. Van der Velden et al. (1992) showed that victims of bank robberies are more afraid of future robberies than non-victims.

Accordingly, workers affected by violence reported impediments in self-management, a factor related to self-efficacy (Giorgi et al., 2016). Furthermore, CSE might be impaired by the level of stress perceived during or immediately after the trauma (Bosmans and van der Velden, 2015; Bosmans

et al., 2015c). In line with COR theory, workers who are exposed to both thefts and robberies, which are perceived as fearful and stressful events, continue to be affected by resource loss and, thus, they are more likely to feel like they don't have the necessary energies and capacities to successfully manage the negative consequences following traumas, experiencing higher PTSD symptoms and lower CSE levels.

Hypothesis 4 was not confirmed. In non-affected workers, job satisfaction was associated to workload and psycho-somatic symptoms. However, when controlling for socio-demographic variables, only psycho-somatic symptoms were related to job satisfaction in this cohort. Among those who were exposed to both thefts and robberies, PTSD symptomatology and high workload were not independently related to job satisfaction, whereas CSE levels explained a small amount of variance in satisfaction, over and above all other predictors. The differences regarding workload found between the two groups could be explained by the fact that those affected by violence might have learned, to a certain extent, to cope with the trauma by becoming more resilient. In line with this reasoning, post-traumatic growth - which may stem from the struggle with the trauma - has been found to be associated with the development of coping skills and the redefinition of life in a more meaningful way (Williams et al., 2003; Baillie et al., 2014).

Similar to findings regarding non-exposed workers, psycho-somatic symptoms represent the variables more strongly related to job satisfaction in workers exposed to thefts or robberies (or both). Indeed, job satisfaction is affected by psycho-somatic complaints, as shown by previous research (Faragher et al., 2005; Alexopoulos et al., 2014). The fact that the presence of post-traumatic symptoms did not influence job satisfaction is in line with some previous findings (Nandi et al., 2004; Vinokur et al., 2011). This might be due to the fact that in our sample, some time had elapsed since the trauma for the majority of the sample (as confirmed by reported time since the last theft or robbery) and, as a result, its effect might be attenuated by natural course of coping. Robbery puts demands on workers - often company owners - to remain resilient and cope in a positive way.

In conclusion, hypothesis 5 was not confirmed: no differences were found in (mental) health services utilization. There might be several explanations for this finding. Possibly cultural aspects might emerge: discrimination and stigma potentially associated with a mental health diagnosis or receiving mental health treatment may be responsible for delays in seeking treatment (Gorman et al., 2011). Thus, in Italy—like in other countries—some workers might be still reluctant to use mental health services (Kessler et al., 1998; Koenen et al., 2017). This may explain the fact that affected and non-affected workers did differ in mental health problems, while no differences were found in MHS utilization. Since treatment seeking victims tend to have lower CSE perceptions than nontreatment seeking individuals (Bosmans et al., 2016), an alternative explanation could be that victims didn't seek treatment because they had high overall CSE levels. It would be interesting to test this hypothesis in future. From an applied perspective, even if no significant differences were found in mental health problems and services utilization between affected and non-affected workers, it is

noteworthy that therapists may help victims to reduce negative effects deriving from the exposure to PTEs at work. Indeed, several psychological interventions aimed at individuals who experienced a trauma have been designed to mitigate acute distress reactions with the goal of preventing the development of chronic PTSD symptoms (Foa et al., 2005). Such interventions include both traditional individual crisis interventions (e.g., prompt intervention aimed at comforting victims, mobilizing their resources to react to the traumatic experience; Setti and Argentero, 2016) and group psychological debriefing, especially Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (i.e., small-group discussion implemented to assist individuals in reaching a sense of closure post crisis and encourage them to discuss and ventilate intense emotions facilitating their processing of their responses to the trauma; Mitchell and Everly, 2000). Furthermore, brief (i.e., 4–5 sessions) cognitive-behavioral therapy (Bryant et al., 1998) and medication (e.g., benzodiazepines, propranolol, and hydrocortisone; Pitman et al., 2002) may be useful to support victims who exhibit malaise symptoms.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The current study has a number of strengths. It gives an original contribution to the existing literature of psychological sequelae following robbery and theft exposure: to date, this is one of the first studies with a large sample of workers employed in small businesses assessing how experiencing these PTEs may impact on their well-being and job satisfaction. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to compare the differences in terms of PTSD symptoms, by coping self-efficacy perceptions, social support and treatment seeking, between workers who were exposed to both thefts and robberies and those who were victims of thefts only.

A further strength is the focus on an understudied and difficult-to-track population, since only a few studies have concentrated on workers employed in small businesses while previous research has predominantly focused on other professional categories, such as bank tellers (e.g., Armour and Hansen, 2015; Mucci et al., 2015).

However, the findings are also subjected to several limitations. First, since the majority of our subjects were men, and gender has been found to affect the levels of mental health and PTSD symptoms (see Christiansen and Hansen, 2015), this might have partially influenced our findings. However, the gender distribution in our sample is representative of these worker cohorts in the Italian context. Secondly, causal relationships cannot be inferred since the study design was cross-sectional. Consequently, further research should adopt longitudinal design and assess workers' well-being and job satisfaction before violent episodes take place, in order to more thoroughly interpret how experiencing robberies and thefts may impact on these psychological states. Using a longitudinal design, it will be beneficial to examine the potential moderation role exerted by resources (for example, in terms of CSE) in the relationship between the exposure to PTEs (i.e., thefts and robberies), and individual and occupational outcomes (respectively in terms,

for example, of health symptoms and job satisfaction), among exposed subjects.

Furthermore, this study used only self-report measures for data gathering which might contribute to common method bias. Therefore, a further limitation was that the assessment of post-traumatic stress symptomatology was based on self-reporting without a clinical examination. Although IES score has a good accuracy showing a high correlation with PTSD diagnosis, this scale does not include all criteria for PTSD as stated by DSM-5. Further research should collect information from other sources rather than rely solely on self-reports: clinical interviews should be integrated to assess PTSD symptomatology.

Furthermore, data on pre- and peri-trauma variables were not gathered, although it has been found that they may affect individuals' susceptibility to PTSD. Thus, it has been shown that both pre-traumatic risk factors—such as the presence of pre-event mental health problems (Van der Velden et al., 2016); co-existing psychopathological disorders (Skogstad et al., 2013); or having experienced prior non-occupational traumatic life events (Hansen and Elklit, 2011)—and peri-traumatic factors—such as perceived threat to one's life, helplessness and the presence of a weapon (Giorgi et al., 2015a)—might increase the likelihood of developing PTSD. Therefore, controlling for these confounding variables is suggested going forward.

The fact that results were based on a sample of jewelers and tobacconists means that they may not be generalizable to other working populations. Replications should be conducted in other professional categories. Moreover, an important endeavor would be to examine whether these findings replicate in other cultural contexts through comparative studies.

Another limitation is due to the fact that we received a response from a representative sample from each category of theft and robbery related violence, although possible selection bias due to the voluntary participation into the research cannot be ruled out. It is possible that those who experienced robbery and theft-related violence were more motivated to respond and, as such, are overrepresented. Alternatively, non-response to a survey of this type may be due to avoidance symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress.

Finally, although job satisfaction was measured by a well-validated single item, the use of facet measures would make it possible to identify specific areas that might be differently influenced by trauma exposure. Future studies should attempt to study different aspects of job satisfaction and examine other behavioral work-related outcomes of robbery and theft exposure (e.g., work performance). In addition, future research should also focus on the influence of possible compensations from insurance companies, or problems with receiving compensations, on post-event mental health problems, workload and job satisfaction (O'Donnell et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, thefts and/or robberies exposure undermines differently workers' well-being and job satisfaction. Workers who were exposed to both types of events were more likely

to develop PTSD symptomatology and impaired perceived ability to cope with the trauma, when compared to those who were exposed to thefts only. Victims of multiple violence reported greater workload, higher psycho-somatic complaints and greater tendency to seek social support in comparison with their unexposed colleagues. PTSD symptomatology was not significantly associated with job satisfaction. By contrast, CSE perceptions explained a limited amount of variance of satisfaction, although psycho-somatic impairment was the main predictor of job satisfaction both in affected and non-affected workers. Investigating these effects is crucial to formulate preventive measures and tailored interventions for victims.

ETHICS STATEMENT

We have investigated topics related to occupational well-being and work environment/conditions without any reference to private/personal issues. All participants were employees of private businesses, and they can be classified as "normal subjects" (i.e., without specific mental health problems): they were all adult mentally fit. Italian law does not impose these requirements (i.e., ethics approval and written informed consent) in case of these type of self-report and anonymous research carried out on healthy subjects.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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CHAPTER 7

Victimization on the job: The influence of thefts and robberies on Irish and Italian employees and its relationship with psychological well-being

The present study provides further empirical evidence to support findings from *Chapter 6*. Thus, this is the second research to investigate how being victim of thefts and/or robberies at work may be a traumatizing experience - which may stimulate the developing of post-traumatic stress symptomatology- and whether coping self-efficacy perceptions could play a protective role against negative effects following such events. More specifically, the aim of this study was to explore similarities and differences between Italian and Irish employees in terms of coping self-efficacy perceptions and post-traumatic stress symptoms following robbery and/or theft exposure. By adopting a cross-national prospective (similarly to *Chapter 4* and *5*), this investigation contributes to extend the existing research on theft and robbery-related aggression at work (see *Chapters 3*) as well as the results from the previous study (see *Chapter 6*). The current study was published in *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health*. With permission granted by this Journal and co-authors, we included the post-printed PDF version of this paper in the current dissertation¹.

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Victimization on the job: the influence of thefts and robberies on Irish and Italian employees and its relationship with psychological well-being

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ABSTRACT

Although some similarities are evident in manifestations, etiology and coping, research suggests that cultural variations may explain different reactions to workplace violence. This study explores similarities and differences between Italian and Irish workers' well-being in relation to robberies and theft exposure. A sample of Italian ($N = 319$) and Irish ($N = 251$) employees working in small businesses completed a self-report questionnaire examining post-traumatic symptoms and trauma-related coping self-efficacy. Results indicated that Italian victims reported higher post-traumatic symptoms than their Irish counterparts. When compared to those who experienced thefts only, Italian victims who had experienced both thefts and robberies experienced more post-traumatic symptoms and lower coping self-efficacy, whereas Irish employees differed significantly only in hyper-arousal symptomatology. Regression analyses revealed that coping self-efficacy had a protective role against the risk of developing post-traumatic symptomatology. In both countries, interventions fostering employees' coping self-efficacy perceptions might stimulate psychological recovery, especially among victims of both thefts and robberies.

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Cross-cultural study; post-traumatic stress symptoms; robberies; thefts; trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE)

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the incidence of outsider workplace violence in Europe have increased, especially among service providers who have frequent contact with customers (Van den Bossche, Taxis, Houtman, Smulders, & Kompier, 2013). Within the Italian retail sector, the numbers of robberies and thefts in 2015 were 5337 and 102,041, respectively (Istat, 2015). Two thirds of Irish small businesses reported to be affected by more than one instance of crime over the last year, with an estimated total cost of €1.83 billion: the highest crime incidence was among retailers who were mainly impacted by thefts and robberies (Isme, 2016). Although it is possible to identify potentially universal dimensions upon which aggression is perceived, there may be important culture-specific aspects of aggression responsible for differences in perception of identical aggressive acts across nationalities. To date, there have been some research findings regarding cross-cultural comparisons of workplace violence (WPV; e.g. Arenas et al., 2015; Clear, Vincent, & Harris, 2006; D'Cruz, Paull, Omari, & Guneri-Cangarli, 2016), whereas no cross-national studies have been aimed at specifically investigating the psychological impact of robberies and/or thefts on employees' well-being, as specific cases of workplace violence. In addition, there is currently little research focused on the psychological

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sequelae following robbery exposure on employees working in small, independently owned businesses (Belleville, Marchand, St-Hilaire, Martin, & Silva, 2012; Casteel, Peek-Asa, Greenland, Chu, & Kraus, 2008; Söndergaard, 2008). This means that there is a critical need for cross-cultural research into these under-investigated working populations.

This study aimed to investigate similarities and differences between Italian and Irish workers' trauma-related coping self-efficacy perceptions and consequences in terms of post-traumatic stress symptomatology following robbery and/or theft exposure.

1.1. Robberies and thefts as traumatic events

Both robberies and thefts are defined as property crimes, perpetrated by 'anyone who gains possession of another person's movable goods, stealing them from the owner with a view to drawing profit for themselves or others' (Article 624, 628 C.P.). The key distinguishing factor between a theft from a robbery is that the latter involves the use of 'personal violence or threats' of force (Article 628 C.P.).

In line with the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), both robberies and thefts can be viewed as stressful events due to the threat of loss or actual loss of resources (e.g. movable goods, personal safety). Take for example a robbery which takes place at gunpoint. Imagine an employee working alone in a small business who is threatened by a robber using a weapon. Several features (such as seeing the weapon, the proximity to the robber, the presence of more than one criminal) may all affect the employee's perception of being injured. As a result, the majority of people could experience feelings of life threat, unsafety, helplessness, hopelessness, and horror. Thus, criterion A for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM V; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) is likely to be met, since thefts and robberies may be perceived as unexpected life-threatening incidents and, thus, as traumatic events. Furthermore, there is evidence that robberies may be accompanied by specific post-traumatic stress symptoms and, in some cases, by the development of PTSD (Belleville et al., 2012), and even undermine organizational performance and productivity (Zatzick et al., 2008).

PTSD, as defined by the DSM-V (APA, 2013), is characterized by *intrusion* (i.e. re-experiencing the traumatic event through distressing dreams, flashbacks, feelings), *avoidance* (i.e. avoiding feelings, thoughts and other reminders of the event) and *hyper-arousal* symptoms (i.e. hyper-vigilance, sleep disturbance, irritability, poor concentration), as a result of exposure to a particularly stressful event which is likely to cause anyone distress. The development of post-traumatic reactions may depend on the seriousness of trauma exposure and how the cognitive and emotional valence of the event is subjectively perceived, as well as stimulus-response fear conditioning (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Graham et al., 2016; Kelley, Weathers, McDevitt-Murphy, Eakin, & Flood, 2009; Tsai, Harpaz-Rotem, Pietrzak, & Southwick, 2012).

According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), experiencing a robbery or theft at work represents a threat to one's working conditions and the greater the threat of loss, or the actual loss of resources, the more serious are the detrimental psychological effects. Following theft or robbery exposure, employees experience a loss in their resources regarding their working conditions (e.g. reduced personal safety at work). When workers experience resource loss without being able to counterbalance through resource replacement by using other resources to compensate for the loss, they will be in danger of suffering diminished well-being and sustained post-traumatic stress. It is likely that victims of multiple violent incidents (in this case, both thefts and robberies) may continue to suffer resource loss and experience a more serious resource depletion, which may result in the risk of being stressed by the negative balance between energies invested in dealing with recovery demands and poor benefits achieved. As a result, they may be more likely to perceive serious psycho-physical impairment, compared to those who were exposed to thefts only.

Furthermore, individuals affected by multiple traumatic events may experience trauma re-actualization and, thus, have an increased risk of developing PTSD (Karam et al., 2014; Schwartz, Bradley, Sexton, Sherry, & Ressler, 2005; Van der Kolk, 1989; Wahlström, Michélsen, Schulman, &

Backheden, 2008; Wisnivesky et al., 2011; Yuan et al., 2013). Taken together these findings suggest that being exposed to both robberies and thefts may amplify the detrimental outcomes over and above being exposed to thefts only.

Hypothesis 1: *In both countries, the severity of the experienced trauma will be associated with greater post-traumatic symptoms: employees who were exposed to both robberies and thefts will be more likely to experience PTSD symptomatology than those who were victims of thefts only.*

1.2. Nations as units of cultural analysis: cultural similarities and differences between Italy and Ireland

Culture is a learned system of interpretations and meanings, transmitted through generations and stemmed from common experiences, which fosters a distinct shared identity among its group members (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Culture has been defined as 'software of the mind' because it provides its members with shared cognitive structures which serve as a filter for interpretation of attitudes and behaviours, distinguishing the members of one group from another (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). This process of social construction of reality affects also how individuals perceive aggressive acts (Bowles & Gelfand, 2010), so that it results in perceptions which are socially constructed along cultural lines.

Cross-cultural variability has been revealed regarding aggression in both meaning and enactment (e.g. Forbes, Zhang, Doroszewicz, & Haas, 2009). On the one hand the prevalence of workplace violence in different countries varies according to national cultures, on the other hand cultural beliefs and values may reciprocally influence individual perceptions and reactions to aggressive acts (Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006). Although some similarities are evident in manifestations, etiology and coping, research suggests that cultural variations may explain different factors related to WPV, such as: acceptability of workplace mistreatment (Power et al., 2013; Salin, 2003), meaning attributed to abusive events (Clear et al., 2006; Severance et al., 2013), source of aggression (D'Cruz et al., 2016), use of formal WPV resources and vulnerabilities to WPV victimization among different ethnic/racial groups (Sabri et al., 2015).

Since within-country dissimilarities in values are lower than the corresponding inter-country differences, nations can be considered as meaningful units of cultural analysis: this study use nationality as the index of culture (Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010; Schwartz, 2006). Thus, as stated by Hofstede (2003), national cultures diverged and can be described according to four dimensions: individualism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. According to Hofstede's findings (Hofstede, 2003; Hofstede et al., 2010), both Italy and Ireland are very high on individualism and masculinity, whereas they are low on power distance. This indicates that individuals amongst both cultures are self-orientated and focused on their self-interest and autonomy; furthermore, they are competitive and highly success-driven. Both countries are characterised by shared beliefs that inequalities among people should be minimized and a participative communication and decision-making should be promoted within organizations (Hofstede, 2003; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Despite these similarities, Italy and Ireland diverge strongly on uncertain avoidance. This dimension refers to the extent to which members of a society feel threatened by ambiguous or unfamiliar situations and, thus, they strive to minimize the possibility of uncertainty by relying on established social norms, laws and rules. Italians show a very low level of tolerance of ambiguity and they seem to be inclined to control everything to avoid or eliminate the unexpected (Hofstede et al., 2010). By contrast, it seems that Irish readily accept changes and tries to have as few rules as possible, being low in this index (Hofstede et al., 2010). Taken together, the significant cultural difference of uncertainty avoidance between Italy and Ireland might affect employees' perceptions of unexpected and potentially threatening events at work (i.e. robberies and thefts) and, thus, their vulnerability to negative consequences. Therefore, evidence has shown that victims with higher uncertainty intolerance levels are more at risk of developing PTSD symptoms following traumatic experiences than those who are

lower on this dimension (Fetzner, Horswill, Boelen, & Carleton, 2013). They may be more vulnerable to the uncertainty itself which may cause inaction, such as concerns about inability to react to current threats, and worry about the future, such as fear of future trauma (Fetzner et al., 2013). In other words, it is likely that Italians tend to consider the possibility of a negative event occurring as more unacceptable and threatening than Irish people and, thus, they may experience higher levels of PTSD symptoms following robbery and theft exposure.

To the best of our knowledge, the only study to analyse differences among Italians and Irish in reporting psycho-physical symptoms was conducted by Zola (1966). It found that although different people react differently to the same disease process, response patterns may vary according to the ethnic background of the patient. It seems that Italians and Irish tend to use different ways of communicating illness and strategies of handling with problems prescribed by their respective cultures. Italians are inclined to deal with their problems by dramatization which is a culturally supported defence mechanism based on overexpressing anxiety associated with troubles in order to dissipate it (Zola, 1966). This results in a tendency to overestimate symptoms, express psycho-physical complaints and identify several kinds of dysfunctions. By contrast, Irish are more prone to face with problems by denial: they seem reluctant to admit they have any symptoms at all, underestimating their impact on other life domains (Zola, 1966). Consequently, it is more likely that Italians will report more post-traumatic complaints than Irish according to their culturally supported way of dealing with problems.

Hypothesis 2: Italian employees who were exposed to thefts or robberies will be more likely to report PTSD symptomatology than their Irish counterparts.

1.3. Trauma-related coping self-efficacy

In line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), personal resources are helpful when individuals have to face with stressors. In the context of trauma exposure, trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE) represents a relevant personal resource in overcoming traumatic situations, since it gives victims a sense of control which helps them to adopt effective coping strategies and manage successfully distress (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Flatten, Wälte, & Perltz, 2008; Bosmans, 2015).

CSE has been defined as the perceived confidence of one's ability to effectively face with both personal functioning and negative consequences handled in the aftermath of a traumatic event (Benight & Bandura, 2004). It has been found to be positively associated with psychological well-being (Lambert, Benight, Harrison, & Cieslak, 2012) and predict post-trauma recovery for survivors of several shocking events (Bosmans, Hoffland, De Jong, & Van Loey, 2015; van der Velden, van Loon, Benight, & Eckhardt, 2012). Thus, CSE impacts on the stressfulness of traumatic events by influencing the extent to which an event is perceived as threatening, the choice of adopted strategies, and the perception of any existing initial stress reactions (Bandura, 1997). Verification of the role played by CSE perceptions in different cultural contexts, may confirm its importance as a protective factor against the development of PTSD symptoms.

Hypothesis 3: Trauma-related coping self-efficacy will be negatively associated with PTSD symptoms in both countries.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Sample and procedure

This cross-sectional study was carried out with 492 Italian and 251 Irish employees working in small retailers. Data were collected in the period between 2016 and 2017. Considering the dissimilarities existing between the two nations in terms of professional categories at higher risk of thefts and/or robberies exposure, in Italy, the research was carried out on jewellers and tobacconists throughout

the national territory in collaboration with their trade unions. Tobacconists completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire -since they were less likely to use the Internet- whereas jewellers filled in an online survey. In Ireland, the research was addressed at employees working in pubs, off-licences, petrol stations, pharmacies or small shops who were randomly selected. All the participants were invited to complete an anonymous self-report questionnaire which was administered online or through paper-and-pencil surveys, depending on participants' confidence with using the Internet. In both countries the common inclusion criteria for selecting participants were the following: employees should work within small businesses in direct contact with customers, alone or in a small team, handling valuables and selling items of value (e.g. alcohol, jewels, medication). This research is focused on exposed employees who were identified asking respondents -through two dichotomous filter items- whether they had ever experienced thefts and/or robberies in their working environments. In Italy, 108 employees (33.86%) were affected by thefts only and 211 (66.14%) were victims of both crimes; in Ireland, 66 employees (57.39%) experienced thefts only and 49 (42.61%) were exposed to both types of event. The majority of Italian respondents were male (82.40%), married (74.50%), working with other co-workers (72.00%), and were owners of the shop (85.40%). The average age was 51.15 years ($SD = 10.14$) with an average job tenure of 30.27 years ($SD = 11.22$). The majority of Irish respondents were female (56.60%), single (55.70%), working with other co-workers (65.20%), and were employees of the shop (67.00%). The average age was 26.74 years ($SD = 10.52$) with an average job tenure of 8.89 years ($SD = 9.90$).

2.2. Measurement

The questionnaire assessed robbery and/or theft exposure, PTSD severity and CSE perceptions.

Participants were asked (through dichotomous questions) whether they experienced thefts or robberies in their workplace. The two items were combined into a dichotomous measure of exposure severity to distinguish between respondents who were exposed to thefts only and those who reported multiple exposures (both thefts and robberies). This former condition was considered as more severe than being victims of a single type of event. Furthermore, employees who responded positively were invited to indicate the time occurred from the last theft and/or robbery experienced in their workplace through two items on a four-point scale (from 1 = 0–6 months ago to 4 = more than 24 months ago). The two items were combined to create a single measure of time from the last event. Additionally, two questions were utilized to measure the number of thefts and/or robberies had at work over the last two years.

Participants were asked through dichotomous items to what extent they were involved (e.g. proximity to the criminal), whether they felt threatened or fearful, whether they saw a weapon and more than one criminal, using the check-list proposed by Giorgi et al. (2015). This instrument was previously utilized to investigate peri-trauma variables among victims of robberies at work (see Giorgi et al., 2015; Mucci, Giorgi, Fiz Pérez, Iavicoli, & Arcangeli, 2015).

The six-item Impact of Event-Revised scale (IES-R; Thoresen et al., 2010) was used to investigate symptoms of post-traumatic stress in response to a traumatic event. Participants were invited to indicate, on a four-point scale (from 1 = *never* to 4 = *often*), how frequently each symptom of intrusion (e.g. *Other things kept making me think about it*), avoidance (e.g. *I tried not to think about it*) and hyper-arousal (e.g. *I felt watchful or on-guard*) was experienced in the afterward of the last robbery or theft. Cronbach's alpha for the IES scale was good ($\alpha = .90$).

The seven-item trauma-related coping self-efficacy scale (CSE-7; Bosmans, Komproue, et al., 2015) was administrated to evaluate respondents' perceived efficacy in coping with diverse consequences derived from the theft or robbery (e.g. *dealing with frightening images or events about the event*, *being emotionally strong*). Answers are scored on a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = *I am completely incapable of* to 7 = *I am perfectly capable of*). The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha = .91$).

3. Results

To confirm the hypothesis of measurement invariance between the two nations, a baseline model with no equality constraint was simultaneously tested across the two countries using Mplus7 (Muthén, & Muthén, 2015). The fit of this model (M1) to the data was acceptable (see Table 1) and configural invariance was supported, suggesting that respondents from different nations conceptualized the constructs in the same way. Equality constraints were then imposed on all factor loadings across the countries and full metric invariance was confirmed (DCFI = 0.005), suggesting that observed item differences referred to group dissimilarities in the underlying latent constructs. Next, equality constraints were imposed on all item intercepts to test scalar invariance (M3). Partial scalar invariance was supported (DCFI = 0.004), enabling us to compare scores across nations (Milfont & Fischer, 2010).

As shown by Table 2, Italian victims reported more frequently than their Irish counterpart to be in the same room as the robber (80.00% vs 52.00%), have physical contact with the criminal (39.70% vs 14.00%), feel threatened by the robber (70.30% vs 31.30%), fearful and helpless (76.00% vs 22.00%), see a weapon (73.80% vs 16.70%) and imagine they would be potentially harmed during the robbery (61.00% vs 22.90%). The majority of Irish victims reported to be targeted of the last event during the last six months (69%), while almost half of Italian employees (45%) referred to experience the last crime between 7 and 12 months ago (see Table 3).

With regard to *hypothesis 1*, as expected, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that Italian victims of thefts and robberies experienced more intrusion [$F_{(1, 319)} = 26.11, p < .001$], avoidance [$F_{(1, 316)} = 13.74, p < .001$] and hyper-arousal [$F_{(1, 319)} = 9.98, p < .01$] symptoms and lower

Table 1. Testing for measurement invariance across countries.

| Model | χ^2 | df | RMSEA | CFI | M comparison | Δ CFI | $\Delta \chi^2$ |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----|-------|------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| M1. Configural invariance | 225.880 | 108 | .072 | .947 | – | – | – |
| M2. Full metric invariance | 236.162 | 117 | .070 | .946 | M2-M1 | .005 | 9.438 |
| M3. Full scalar invariance | 281.238 | 125 | .077 | .945 | M3-M1 | .001 | 48.414*** |
| M4. Partial scalar invariance | 244.850 | 119 | .071 | .943 | M4-M1 | .004 | 18.664 |

Note. df: degree of freedom; RMSEA: root mean square error approximation; CFI: comparative fit index.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Percentages of yes responses reported by victims to checklist questions compared for countries.

| | Theft | | Robbery | |
|---|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Italy | Ireland | Italy | Ireland |
| 1. Did you see the thief/robber? | 58.70 | 56.30 | 79.70 | 65.30 |
| 2. Were you in the same room as the thief/robber? | 53.40 | 75.00 | 80.00 | 52.10 |
| 3. Were you able to identify the thief/robber? | 41.90 | 53.60 | 61.30 | 64.60 |
| 4. Did you feel threatened by the thief/robber? | 20.00 | 23.20 | 70.30 | 31.30 |
| 5. Did you imagine you or others would be potentially harmed? | 17.50 | 18.90 | 61.00 | 22.90 |
| 6. Did you feel fearful and helpless? | 29.80 | 20.50 | 76.00 | 22.00 |
| 7. Did you have physical contact with the thief/robber? | 16.70 | 8.90 | 39.70 | 14.00 |
| 8. Were you wounded? | 5.80 | 3.60 | 15.50 | 6.00 |
| 9. Was the theft pulled off by more than one thief/robbery? | 67.50 | 36.00 | 76.60 | 24.00 |
| 10. Did you see a weapon? | | | 73.80 | 16.70 |
| Firearm | | | 79.60 | 18.80 |

Table 3. Percentages of time occurred from the last event occurred at work by country.

| Time from the last event | Italy | Ireland |
|--------------------------|--------|---------|
| 0–6 months | 16.30% | 69.00% |
| 1–6 months | 17.30% | 12.40% |
| 7–12 months | 45.00% | 6.20% |
| 13–24 months | 21.50% | 12.40% |

Table 4. ANOVA between groups for different kinds of events regarding PTSD symptoms and CSE perceptions, comparing between nations.

| Variables | Event exposition | Italy | | | Ireland | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------|------|----------|---------|------|--------|
| | | Mean | SD | F | Mean | SD | F |
| Intrusion symptoms | Thefts | 1.92 | 1.14 | 26.11*** | .51 | .74 | 3.54 |
| | Thefts & robberies | 2.64 | 1.24 | | .84 | .99 | |
| Hyper-arousal symptoms | Thefts | 1.82 | 1.18 | 9.98** | .75 | .84 | 4.84** |
| | Thefts & robberies | 2.27 | 1.22 | | 1.15 | .94 | |
| Avoidance symptoms | Thefts | 1.72 | 0.93 | 13.74*** | .91 | 1.09 | 1.21 |
| | Thefts & robberies | 2.15 | 1.00 | | 1.15 | 1.07 | |
| Coping self-efficacy | Thefts | 5.14 | 1.32 | 7.57** | 6.14 | 1.26 | .30 |
| | Thefts & robberies | 4.69 | 1.38 | | 6.00 | 1.22 | |

** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$

Table 5. ANOVA between groups for nation regarding intrusion, hyper-arousal, avoidance symptoms and trauma-related coping self-efficacy perceptions.

| Variables | Nation | Mean | SD | F |
|------------------------|---------|------|------|-----------|
| Intrusion symptoms | Italy | 2.40 | 1.25 | 158.47*** |
| | Ireland | 0.67 | 0.88 | |
| Hyper-arousal symptoms | Italy | 2.12 | 1.23 | 75.77*** |
| | Ireland | 0.94 | 0.91 | |
| Avoidance symptoms | Italy | 2.01 | 1.00 | 67.86*** |
| | Ireland | 1.03 | 1.09 | |
| Coping self-efficacy | Italy | 4.84 | 1.37 | 58.20*** |
| | Ireland | 6.07 | 1.23 | |

** $p < .001$.

coping self-efficacy [$F_{(1, 312)} = 7.57, p < .01$], when compared to those who experienced thefts only (see Table 4).

Although a similar trend, Irish employees who were exposed to both types of events differed significantly from those who were targets of thefts in hyper-arousal symptomatology only [$F_{(1, 94)} = 4.84, p < .05$]. Taken together, these results suggest that victims who were exposed to both types of events were at increased risk of developing PTSD symptomatology. Thus, *hypothesis 1* was confirmed. With regard to *hypothesis 2*, the results of the ANOVA (see Table 5) revealed significant differences between Italy and Ireland on all PTSD dimensions: intrusion [$F_{(1, 415)} = 159.67, p = .000$], avoidance [$F_{(1, 412)} = 70.85, p = .000$], and hyper-arousal symptoms [$F_{(1, 415)} = 75.77, p = .000$], as well as on coping self-efficacy perceptions [$F_{(1, 401)} = 58.20, p = .000$]. Italian victims of thefts and/or robberies reported statistically significantly higher PTSD symptomatology and lower CSE perceptions, when compared to their Irish counterparts. Thus, *hypothesis 2* was supported.

To investigate *hypothesis 3*, regression analyses were conducted to examine the effects of exposure severity and CSE on each of the PTSD symptom clusters, controlling for time from the last event. In Italy, the model explained a significant amount of the variance in employees' intrusion [$F_{(3, 296)} = 15.18, p < .000, R^2 = .36, R^2_{Adjusted} = .13$], avoidance [$F_{(3, 293)} = 9.12, p < .000, R^2 = .29, R^2_{Adjusted} = .08$] and hyper-arousal complaints [$F_{(3, 296)} = 13.53, p < .000, R^2 = .35, R^2_{Adjusted} = .12$]. It was found that exposure severity positively predicted intrusion ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) and hyper-arousal symptoms ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), whereas CSE negatively predicted intrusion ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$) and hyper-arousal ($\beta = -.29, p < .001$) symptomatology. Similarly, in Ireland, a significant amount of variance in workers' intrusion [$F_{(3, 85)} = 3.62, p < .05, R^2 = .36, R^2_{Adjusted} = .13$], avoidance [$F_{(3, 85)} = 3.44, p < .05, R^2 = .33, R^2_{Adjusted} = .11$] and hyper-arousal symptoms [$F_{(3, 85)} = 3.89, p < .05, R^2 = .35, R^2_{Adjusted} = .12$] was explained by the predictors. The analyses revealed that CSE negatively predicted intrusion ($\beta = -.24, p < .05$) and arousal ($\beta = -.24, p < .05$) symptoms, while exposure severity was positively associated with intrusion ($\beta = .22, p < .05$) and hyper-arousal ($\beta = .24, p < .05$) complaints

Table 6. Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting PTSD intrusion.

| Variable | PTSD intrusion | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | Italy | | | Ireland | | |
| | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Time from last event | .07 | 1.22 | .223 | .03 | .29 | .685 |
| Exposure severity | .23 | 4.14 | .000 | .23 | 2.23 | .031 |
| Coping self-efficacy | -.25 | -4.47 | .000 | -.23 | -2.28 | .024 |
| R^2 | | .13 | | | .11 | |
| <i>F</i> | | 15.18*** | | | 3.62* | |

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 7. Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting PTSD hyper-arousal.

| Variable | PTSD hyper-arousal | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | Italy | | | Ireland | | |
| | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Time from last event | .13 | 2.29 | .023 | .01 | .08 | .759 |
| Exposure severity | .12 | 2.19 | .029 | .24 | 2.31 | .023 |
| Coping self-efficacy | -.29 | -5.25 | .000 | -.24 | -2.32 | .021 |
| R^2 | | .12 | | | .12 | |
| <i>F</i> | | 13.53*** | | | 3.86* | |

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 8. Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting PTSD avoidance.

| Variable | PTSD avoidance | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | Italy | | | Ireland | | |
| | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | β | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Time from last event | .18 | 3.19 | .002 | .04 | .40 | .471 |
| Exposure severity | .18 | 3.23 | .002 | .15 | 1.52 | .144 |
| Coping self-efficacy | -.07 | -1.19 | .028 | -.27 | -2.65 | .008 |
| R^2 | | .08 | | | .10 | |
| <i>F</i> | | 9.12*** | | | 3.30* | |

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.

in both countries (see Tables 6 and 7). Whereas in Ireland time from the last event did not predict significantly intrusion and arousal symptoms, in Italy it was a significant predictor for arousal complaints ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), but not for intrusion. Moreover, differences were revealed regarding avoidance symptomatology between the two nationalities (see Table 8). Thus, although in the both countries employees with higher CSE perceptions were less likely to experience PTSD symptoms (in Italy: $\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$; in Ireland: $\beta = -.28$, $p < .01$), in Italy exposure severity ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) and time from the last event ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) were significantly associated with avoidance complaints, while in Ireland neither exposure severity nor time from the last event were significant predictors for these symptoms.

4. Discussion

Firstly, this study confirmed *hypotheses 1* and *2*. Victims of both thefts and robberies reported higher levels of PTSD symptomatology when compared to those who were exposed to thefts only, in both countries. However, Italian employees who were exposed to both types of events differed significantly from those who experienced thefts only in all PTSD symptom clusters, whereas in Ireland

the difference between the two exposure groups was statistically significant only for hyper-arousal symptomatology. Furthermore, Italian workers reported higher PTSD symptoms in comparison with their Irish counterparts. The finding that robberies at work may be traumatizing experiences which may lead victims to develop feelings of lack of safety (e.g. Mannocci et al., 2018) and PTSD symptoms is in accordance with the results from previous studies (e.g. Fichera, Sartori, & Costa, 2009; Setti et al., 2018). This is relevant since PTSD symptomatology- developed as a result of the exposure to robberies – was found to interfere with a broader range of job-related tasks (Taylor, Wald, & Asmundson, 2006), resulting in poorer occupational functioning (Zatzick et al., 2008), long-lasting impairment of work abilities (Fichera et al., 2009), greater workload (Setti et al., 2018) and absenteeism (Belleville et al., 2012).

The finding that victims of both thefts and robberies were at higher risk of developing PTSD symptoms is in line with Setti et al.'s research (2018) which has revealed that employees who were exposed to both types of crime reported higher PTSD symptomatology and lower CSE levels in comparison with those who were targeted of thefts only. However, this finding is in contrast with Converso and Viotti's study (2014) which has shown that bank-employee victims of robberies were less likely to report PTSD symptoms when they had experienced a greater number of previous robberies. Indeed, the authors argued that repeated and continued experiences of robberies and/or thefts – which are characterized by absence of violence escalation and a positive conclusion – may lead victims to a kind of 'habituation' and to a gradually increase in their perceptions of exercising control over such events as well as to the development of defence and adaptive mechanisms functional to deal with the aftermath and the negative consequences of the trauma. Conversely and accordingly to what found based on this research, other scholars have identified previous experiences of robberies (Fichera et al., 2015; McFarlane & Bryant, 2007; Miller Burke, Attridge, & Fass, 1999) as an important pre-trauma risk factor for the development of PTSD. Thus, it seems that individuals who are exposed to multiple incidences of violence may be subject to trauma re-actualization and, in turn, be at a higher risk of developing PTSD (Schwartz et al., 2005; Van der Kolk, 1989; Wisnivesky et al., 2011; Yuan et al., 2013). Moreover, it is possible to draw a possible explanation on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which states that the higher the threat of loss or actual loss of resources, the more detrimental are the negative psychological effects. Employees who are victims of both thefts and robberies are more likely to feel less safe within their workplace and, in turn, experience more harmful resource depletion, which may result in a more serious psychological impairment than those who are exposed to thefts only.

The development of post-traumatic reactions may depend on the severity of trauma exposure and how it is subjectively experienced (Tsai et al., 2012). It is possible that thefts and robberies are perceived as more frightening events in Italy than in Ireland because of the level of violence used in these property crimes in the two countries: both types of crimes are more frequently committed by more than one criminal in Italy compared to Ireland. This is confirmed by the fact that Italian victims are more likely to report armed robberies involving the use of firearms and closer proximity to the robber. These factors have been revealed to be related to the onset of PTSD symptomatology in the aftermath of a robbery (Hansen & Elklit, 2011; Rutter, Weatherill, Krill, Orazem, & Taft, 2013). As a consequence, Italian victims were more likely to feel threatened by the robber, fearful and helpless and imagine they would be potentially harmed during the robbery. These peri-traumatic emotional responses have been shown to represent important risk factors for PTSD (Hansen & Elklit, 2011; Mucci et al., 2015).

Alternatively, these dissimilarities might be explained by different culturally prescribed coping strategies: Italians tend to face with problems by dramatization, overestimating complaints; whereas Irish tend to manage problems by denial, minimizing symptoms (Zola, 1966). Additionally, since Italians have higher uncertainty avoidance levels than Irish, their less tolerance toward unexpected events may make them more vulnerable to develop PTSD symptoms (Fetzner et al., 2013).

Hypothesis 3 was confirmed: CSE perceptions were negatively associated with all PTSD symptoms in both countries. This finding is consistent with previous research which has shown that higher CSE perceptions can be considered a protective factor for distress and PTSD symptoms (Benka et al.,

2013): individuals with higher CSE levels are more likely to control trauma-related negative thoughts and emotions, appraise the event as less aversive, use effective coping strategies, reducing distress and strengthening perceptions of capability to cope (Bosmans & van der Velden, 2015; Luszczynska, Benight, & Cieslak, 2009). Thus, CSE has been found to be the strongest predictor of initial PTSD symptoms, with higher levels of CSE related to lower initial symptoms and a reduction of symptoms over time (Bosmans, Hofland, et al., 2015; Luszczynska et al., 2009).

It is worth noting that the severity of exposure positively predicted avoidance symptoms among Italian victims only. It has been claimed that intrusion and arousal symptoms have a biological basis, while avoidance symptomatology is more culturally founded (Marsella, Friedman, Gerrity, & Scurfield, 1996). Since in Ireland, avoidance behaviours may be considered desirable and adaptive strategies to deal with trauma (Zola, 1966), individuals may tend to suppress intrusive thoughts regardless of the severity of the traumatic experience. By contrast, within the Italian culture, individuals who use avoidant behaviours may be not socially rewarded, since these strategies come up against the community's response to the nature of the traumatic event itself (i.e. emotional expression of symptoms, Slobodin, Caspi, Klein, Berger, & Hobfoll, 2011). As a result, Italians may be more likely to deal with less severe traumatic incidents in a different way, such as expressing their feelings (Slobodin et al., 2011) and searching for social support (Setti et al., 2018). Furthermore, the finding that temporal proximity to the last event is positively associated with PTSD symptoms among Italian employees is in accordance with what expected based on previous studies which shown that most of the victims reported post-traumatic symptoms immediately following the robbery (Richards, 2000), and then these symptoms generally decreased significantly with the passage of time, disappearing within a few months after the trauma. For instance, Fichera et al.'s research (2009) revealed that bank employees' PTSD symptomatology assessed after 45 days from the last robbery were significantly lower (and within the cut-off) when compared with the rates revealed the day after the crime (which were on average over the cut-off). The nonsignificant predictive role played by time from the last event in Ireland could be explained considering the different occurrence of robberies and/or thefts in the two nations. Thus, the reported average number of thefts and robberies occurred in the last two years was considerably greater in Ireland ($M = 6.98$, $M = 2.00$, respectively) than in Italy ($M = 0.78$, $M = 0.42$, respectively), so that the majority of Irish employees reported to be victim of the last event over the previous six months (69.00%). According to LeBlanc and Kelloway (2002), individuals who experienced public-initiated aggression were more likely to view experiencing violence as a function of their occupation and as a result, to perceive themselves at high likelihood of being victim of future violence. Thus, it is possible that the effect of temporal proximity was nullified among Irish victims who were exposed to repeated experiences of thefts and/or robberies since they could be inclined to anticipate the occurrence of new episodes of violence because of their fear of future violence based on their actual work experience.

5. Strengths and limitations

This work takes an important step forward in revealing the influence of culture on how perceptions of theft and/or robbery-related aggression can vary across countries, taking into account the role played by CSE perceptions. Furthermore, this is one of the first studies to investigate the psychological sequelae following property crime among the under-investigated population of employees working in small businesses.

However, the findings are also subjected to several limitations. First, since the present study was cross-sectional, we cannot infer any causal relationships. Second, this study relied on one source of information for data gathering, which might contribute to common method bias. PTSD symptomatology was assessed using the IES scale which does not embrace all criteria for PTSD as defined by DSM-V, although it is a well-known validated scale which has shown good reliability. Therefore,

future studies should overcome these limitations by adopting a longitudinal design and integrating different information sources (e.g. clinical examination).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, victims of both thefts and robberies were more likely to develop PTSD symptoms, when compared to those who were exposed to thefts only. Italian workers reported higher PTSD symptomatology in comparison with the Irish counterparts. The role of CSE perceptions in preserving employees' well-being was confirmed. In both countries, interventions fostering employees' CSE perceptions might stimulate psychological recovery, especially among victims of both robberies and thefts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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PART C: Final considerations

CHAPTER 8

Discussion and practical suggestions

1. Key findings from each empirical study

Third-party workplace aggression has been identified as an important issue to be addressed because of its individual and organizational costs. The current dissertation concentrated on this subject analysing customer incivility and verbal aggression on the one side, robberies and thefts at work on the other side. To date, research on workplace incivility has predominantly focused on intra-organizational members and individual consequences following negative customer encounters, whereas verbal aggression from outsiders has been studied mainly within healthcare settings. One of the main issues in our knowledge of customer mistreatment is a lack of empirical evidence which explains through which psychological mechanisms service providers may react to misbehaving customers with incivility. Indeed, despite customer-directed incivility represents a serious issue for organizational profitability, this specific area has been neglected. Additionally, until now a scenario-based experimental approach has been applied to a limited number of investigations within high-contact service contexts. Moreover, to date, previous work on service recovery performance (SRP) has been mainly limited to customer perceptions, whereas only a few researchers have addressed the question of SRP from the service provider perspective. In addition, despite the relevance of identifying protective personal characteristics against customer mistreatment, no one as far as we know has studied whether resilience can moderate the negative effects of customer mistreatment on SRP, with previous investigations on the protective role of resilience against third-party aggression predominantly focusing on the healthcare setting. Furthermore, the direct influence of individual-level customer

orientation (CO) on such job-related outcome is still not widely understood, with previous research on this topic predominantly concentrating on organizational-level CO. Moreover, most studies tended to focus on the role of affective disposition in influencing the process of emotional labour and the adoption of emotional regulation strategies, whereas it has not yet been well established the moderating role of positive affectivity (PA) in the context of employee-customer interaction. In addition, there is currently little research concentrating on the psychological sequelae following robbery exposure on employees working in small businesses, whereas previous work has failed to address the question whether thefts at work might be traumatic events. Moreover, research on this field is needed to identify possible protective factors which may facilitate victims' psychological recovery from thefts and/or robberies at work. Additionally, no cross-national studies have been aimed at specifically investigating the psychological impact of robberies and/or thefts at work on employees' well-being, while there has been very little research analysing employees' reactions to customer mistreatment by adopting a cross-national perspective. To fill these gaps, the overarching goal of the present dissertation was to investigate whether experiencing customer mistreatment - in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression - and thefts and/or robberies at work might negatively influence customer-contact workers' well-being and job-related outcomes, within a cross-national approach. In doing so, firstly we systematically reviewed studies on customer incivility and verbal aggression within high-contact service contexts (see *Chapter 2*) and we conducted a literature review on thefts and robberies-related aggression (see *Chapter 3*). Drawing on the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and on the Job-Demands Resource model (Demerouti et al., 2001), we conducted two studies which were focused on the impact of customer incivility and verbal aggression on employees' well-being and job-related outcomes. Although both researches drew on a common theoretical framework and adopted a cross-national approach, the first study

investigated the underlying mechanisms which are involved in the reciprocating process of incivility (see *Chapter 4*), whereas the second study analysed the role of personal resources in helping employees maintain a good SRP and job satisfaction, even in presence of high customer mistreatment levels (see *Chapter 5*).

By adopting an experimental design, the first two-country study (see *Chapter 4*) provided evidence to support the presence of a reciprocating process in which employees respond to customer mistreatment - in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression - by treating the source of mistreatment with incivility. In both Italy and Ireland, more the behaviour of a customer was perceived as aggressive, more the interaction with such customer was appraised as stressful. Irish and Italian service providers who were confronted with stressful interactions with aggressive customers were more likely to experience negative emotions and cognitive impairment. Nationality buffered the relationship between negative emotions and employee-to-customer incivility, such that Italians were more likely to react to negative emotions due to aggressive clients by directly engaging in customer-directed incivility, in comparison with their Irish counterparts. Moreover, Irish employees who perceived unpleasant emotions following highly stressful interactions with aggressive clients reported a decrease in their cognitive abilities and, therefore, greater tendencies to behave in an uncivil way toward customers. Overall, this study contributes to extending the existing incivility literature by investigating how the customer incivility-employee incivility dynamic plays out through negative emotions and cognitive impairment.

The second two-country study (see *Chapter 5*) revealed that both customer incivility and verbal aggression led Italian and Irish employees to experience emotional exhaustion and cynicism symptoms which, in turn, decreased SRP and job satisfaction. Moreover, customer incivility - but not customer verbal aggression - exerted a direct and detrimental impact on SRP and job satisfaction. In both countries, CO was directly and positively

associated with SRP. Additionally, high-resilient employees were less affected by variations in SRP across customer incivility levels. In both nations, PA was directly and positively associated with job satisfaction perceptions, whereas negative affectivity (NA) was directly and negatively related to such perceptions. PA in Ireland and NA in Italy buffered the detrimental effects of customer incivility on job satisfaction. This study contributes to knowledge beyond the existing literature on personal resources because it is one of the few investigations showing the positive influence of CO and resilience on SRP and analysing the buffering role of affectivity traits on customer incivility-job satisfaction relationship, within the context of employee-customer interaction.

The second section of the current dissertation aimed to empirically test whether being exposed to thefts and/or robberies at work may be perceived as a traumatic experience (in accordance with the theoretical findings included in *Chapter 3*) by small business retailers. To this end, we conducted two studies investigating the differential impact of thefts and/or robberies at work on small business retailers' well-being in terms of post-traumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS), in addition to analysing the protective role of trauma-related coping self-efficacy (CSE) perceptions against such experiences. Whereas the first investigation concentrated on the effects of thefts and/or robberies at work on job satisfaction perceptions, the second study adopted a cross-national approach.

Study 3 (see *Chapter 6*) revealed that Italian small business workers who were victims of both thefts and robberies were more likely to seek social support in the aftermath of the event and experience higher levels of psycho-somatic symptoms and greater perceived workload, when compared with their non-affected colleagues. Additionally, workers who were exposed to multiple violence (i.e., both thefts and robberies) tended to report higher PTSS levels and impaired perceived ability to cope with the trauma compared to workers who were affected by thefts only. It might be that workers who were victims of both events

were more likely to perceive a threat to their working conditions and, then, to experience more serious resource depletion, which may result in more serious negative consequences. When controlling for socio-demographic variables, only psycho-somatic symptomatology was associated with job satisfaction among non-affected workers. Similarly, among victims of both thefts and robberies, psycho-somatic complaints represented the variables more strongly related to job satisfaction, whereas neither workload perceptions nor post-traumatic stress symptoms were independently associated with job satisfaction perceptions. Trauma-related CSE level played a protective role against the development of job dissatisfaction following thefts and/or robberies at work. We did not reveal significant differences in the use of mental health services among workers affected by thefts and/or robberies who presented different levels of PTSS or trauma-related CSE. This study provided an original contribution to the existing research by comparing the differences in terms of PTSS, trauma-related CSE, social support and treatment seeking between workers who were exposed to both thefts and robberies and those who were victims of thefts only.

Study 4 (see *Chapter 7*) investigated similarities and differences between Italian and Irish workers' well-being in relation to robberies and theft exposure. When compared to those who experienced thefts only, small businesses workers who were victims of both thefts and robberies at work reported higher levels of all PTSS in both countries. However, in Italy workers who were affected by multiple violence (both thefts and robberies) tended to differ significantly from those who were exposed to thefts only in all PTSS clusters and in trauma-related CSE levels. Conversely, in Ireland the dissimilarity between the two exposure groups was statistically significant only for hyper-arousal symptoms. Overall, Italian workers tended to report higher PTSS and lower trauma-related CSE perceptions when compared with their Irish counterparts. These dissimilarities might be explained by different culturally prescribed coping strategies: Italians tend to face with problems by dramatization,

overestimating complaints; whereas Irish tend to manage problems by denial, minimizing symptoms. Moreover, trauma-related CSE perceptions played a protective role against the risk of developing PTSS in both countries. Furthermore, among Italian victims only, the severity of exposure was positively associated with avoidance symptoms, whereas the temporal proximity to the last event was positively related to PTSS. This study contributed to the existing workplace aggression literature by revealing the influence of culture on how perceptions of and victimization to thefts and/or robberies at work may vary across countries.

After providing a brief overview of the main findings of each individual study, we will try to address the questions raised at the beginning of the present dissertation. Indeed, in the *Introduction* we posed several questions which will be repeated in this section in order to address them based on the empirical evidence provided by our studies.

“Which psychological characteristics may make some individuals more resilient than others to third-party workplace aggression?”. In the case of customer mistreatment, CO and resilience may help service providers maintain a good SRP, even when they are frequently confronted with uncivil customers. Although PA is directly associated with job satisfaction, the role of affectivity traits in moderating the detrimental effects of customer incivility on job satisfaction remains unclear. In the case of thefts and/or robberies at work, trauma-related CSE represents a psychological characteristic which may protect victims of thefts and robberies from developing PTSS and job dissatisfaction.

“May words hurt individuals?”. Both customer incivility and verbal aggression may generate employees’ emotional exhaustion and cynicism symptoms, which, in turn, may undermine SRP and job satisfaction. Moreover, customer mistreatment is associated with negative emotions and cognitive impairment, which may trigger customer-directed incivility.

“May an accumulation of uncivil acts have the power to affect an employee in the same way as verbally aggressive acts?”. Differently from customer verbal aggression,

customer incivility exerts a direct and detrimental impact on both SRP and job satisfaction. Since customer incivility is likely to occur with a higher occurrence than verbal aggression, an accumulation of uncivil acts over time may have a stronger negative impact, despite of its lower magnitude, on job outcomes than isolated actions of customer verbal aggression.

“Through which psychological mechanisms may a target of uncivility decide to treat the instigator uncivilly?”. Customer mistreatment may deplete emotional and cognitive service providers’ resources by increasing their negative emotions and by decreasing their cognitive functioning at work. This, in turn, may lead employees to engage in customer-directed incivility.

“Do different forms of aggression result in different individual- and organizational-level consequences?”. On the one hand, customer incivility and verbal aggression may produce negative consequences on service providers’ well-being, including negative emotions, greater cognitive impairment, emotional exhaustion and cynicism symptoms. These symptoms may lead employees to experience increased customer-directed incivility intentions, decreased SRP and reduced job satisfaction perceptions. On the other hand, thefts and/or robberies at work may negatively impact on small business retailers’ well-being by stimulating the development of psycho-somatic symptoms, PTSS, lower trauma-related CSE perceptions. As a result, victimized victims may seek social support from others and perceive greater workload and lower job satisfaction levels. Taken together, these findings suggest that both customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robberies at work can be perceived as particularly stressful situations which may produce detrimental effects at the individual and the organizational level. Although some of these effects may be common among such different expressions of third-party workplace aggression (e.g., job dissatisfaction), other psychological consequences seem to be peculiar for the specific type of aggression (such as PTSS in the case of thefts and robberies and SRP in the case of customer mistreatment).

“Which factors may influence victims’ job satisfaction perceptions?”. Regarding customer mistreatment, both customer incivility and verbal aggression may lead to job dissatisfaction through burnout symptoms, whereas customer incivility only may directly and detrimentally influence job satisfaction perceptions. Moreover, PA and NA represent the best predictors of service providers’ job satisfaction perceptions, over and above other personal characteristics (i.e., CO, resilience). PA in Ireland and NA in Italy may moderate the negative impact of customer incivility on job satisfaction. Regarding thefts and/or robberies at work, victims tend to be more dissatisfied with their job than their non-affected colleagues. Among those who are exposed to both thefts and robberies, psycho-somatic complaints represent the variables more strongly related to job satisfaction, whereas neither workload perceptions nor PTSS are independently associated with job satisfaction. Moreover trauma-related CSE level is a protective factor which help victims maintain job satisfaction following thefts and/or robberies at work. Overall, these results suggest that both customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robberies at work may negatively impact on workers’ job satisfaction perceptions.

” Do the victims of robberies experience the same consequences of the victims of thefts?”. At the beginning of our studies we became aware that most of (if not all) robbed workers were also confronted with thefts (or vice versa). As a result, we focused on the comparison between workers who experienced thefts only and workers who were victims of both thefts and robberies. This latter group tend to report higher PTSS and impaired perceived ability to cope with the trauma compared to workers who were affected by thefts only. Thereby, although being victims of both thefts and robberies at work is associated with more severe psychological outcomes, a theft can be considered as a traumatic event since victims of thefts only may report PTSS.

“Do individuals from different countries react differently to aggressive acts occurring in the workplace?” Regarding customer mistreatment, we found that Italian employees who are confronted with stressful interactions with aggressive customers are more likely to directly react to the resulting negative emotions by behaving uncivilly towards customers. Conversely, Irish employees who perceive negative emotions following highly stressful interactions with aggressive clients report a decrease in their cognitive abilities and, therefore, greater tendencies to behave in an uncivil way toward customers. In both countries, both customer incivility and verbal aggression may generate burnout symptoms and, therefore, reduced SRP and lower job satisfaction perceptions. Additionally, in both nations CO and resilience represent protective factors which may help employees maintain a good SRP even in presence of high customer incivility. However, whereas in Ireland, high-PA individuals’ job satisfaction is less affected by the detrimental impact of customer incivility, high-NA Italian employees are less affected by variations in job satisfaction than their low-NA counterparts. Regarding robberies and/or thefts at work, it seems that Italian victims tend to report higher PTSS and lower trauma-related CSE perceptions than their Irish counterparts. Moreover, Italian small business retailers who were targeted of both thefts and robberies tend to differ significantly from their counterparts who were victims of thefts only in all PTSD clusters and in trauma-related CSE, whereas in Ireland the two exposure groups differ only in hyper-arousal symptoms. Furthermore, among Italian victims only, the severity of exposure is associated with avoidance symptoms, whereas the temporal proximity to the last event is related to PTSS. In both nations, victims of both thefts and/or robberies tend to report more PTSS and lower trauma-related CSE perceptions. Additionally, CSE plays a protective role against the development of PTSS in both countries. Taken together, these results suggest the presence of cross-national dissimilarities in third-party workplace aggression reactions and victimization.

Taken together, our findings are in line with what expected based on the COR theory, showing the value of this framework as a basis for predicting and understanding psychological dynamics in the third-party workplace aggression field.

2. Global overview of contributions provided and future research directions

In this section, we will clarify the theoretical contribution provided by our empirical studies, beginning by referring to the theoretical model which we developed in *Chapter 2*. Then, we will hypothesize a further theoretical framework which may be suitable for both types of third-party workplace aggression, namely customer mistreatment - in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression - and theft and/or robbery-related aggression.

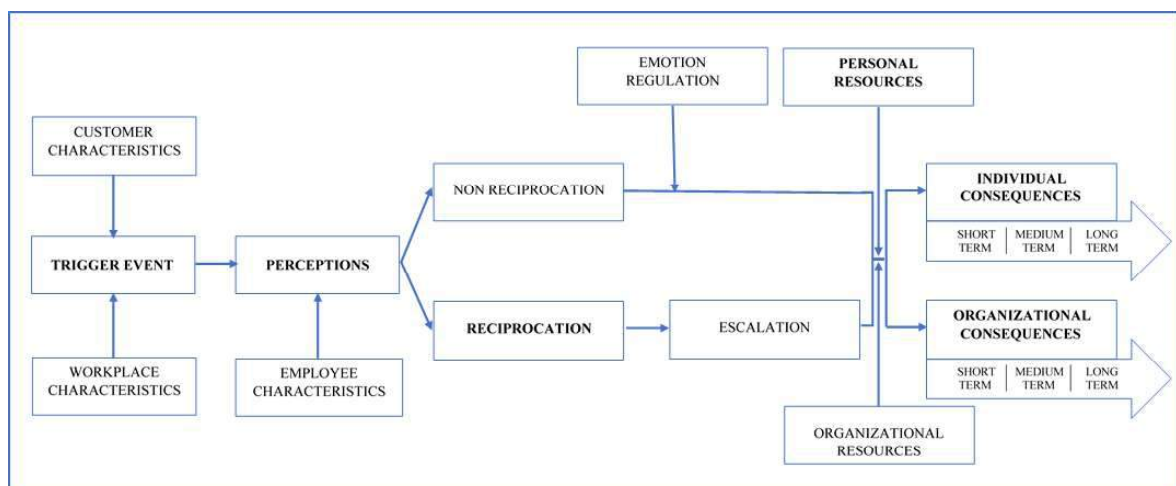


Figure 1. Theoretical model developed in Chapter 2 with aspects analysed by customer mistreatment investigations in boldfaced.

We investigated customer incivility and verbal aggression as *trigger events*, showing that although interactions with verbally aggressive clients may be perceived as more aggressive than those with rude customers, both forms of mistreatment are appraised as stressful situations (see *Chapter 4*). More the behaviour of the customer is perceived as aggressive, more the situation is appraised as stressful.

With reference to one of the two behavioural categories included in this model, we empirically confirmed the presence of a *reciprocating* process in which workers tend to react

to a stressful customer-interaction due to an aggressive customer by rising employee-to-customer incivility intentions (see *Chapter 4*). However, we revealed that the customer-incivility employee-incivility dynamic plays out not so much in a direct way, but rather through the mediating role of negative emotions and cognitive impairment. Future studies in the current topic are therefore recommended in order to validate the presence of other mediating or moderating factors in the customer-incivility employee-incivility relationship. Interesting research questions for future research could be whether would exist a curvilinear relationship between cognitive impairment due to customer mistreatment and customer-directed incivility. *Non-reciprocating coping strategies* to deal with rude or verbally aggressive clients might be an important area for future research. Moreover, analysing whether training on *emotion regulation* strategies could make employees less vulnerable to negative outcomes due to customer mistreatment represents a vital issue for future research. Additionally, the possibility of better understanding the *escalation* from incivility to more serious behaviours warrants further investigation.

Drawing attention to another aspect of the model, we investigated which *personal resources* could buffer the detrimental effects of customer incivility on two job-related outcomes, namely SRP and job satisfaction (see *Chapter 5*). We found that high-resilient service providers tend to report approximately the same level of SRP across customer incivility levels. Conversely, employees low in resilience are more likely to experience decrements in their SRP levels, when they are frequently confronted with rude customers. Moreover, CO has a direct and positive influence on SRP. Additionally, high-PA Irish employees and high-NA Italian employees are less affected by variations in job satisfaction across customer incivility levels. We must leave to future work the task of addressing the questions of which other personal resources might influence these relationships.

Regarding *individual* and *organizational-level outcomes*, we found that stressful encounters with uncivil or verbally aggressive clients generate negative emotions and impaired cognitive functioning which, in turn, increase the likelihood of employee-to-customer incivility (see *Chapter 4*). Moreover, we demonstrated that both customer incivility and verbal aggression lead employees to experience emotional exhaustion and cynicism symptoms which, as a result, decrease SRP and job satisfaction perceptions (see *Chapter 5*). However, customer incivility - but not customer verbal aggression - directly affects such job-outcomes, suggesting that an accumulation of uncivil acts over time may have a stronger negative impact, despite of its lower magnitude, on SRP and job satisfaction than isolated episodes of customer verbal aggression. It is recommended that further research should be undertaken in order to detect which other consequences could be caused by misbehaving customers.

Furthermore, more broadly, research is also needed to determine which *customer characteristics* and *workplace features* may trigger customer incivility and verbal aggression. Further work needs to be performed to establish which *employee characteristics* may predispose some employees to ascribe intent to hurt, rather than ambiguous reasons, to uncivil customers, labelling behaviours - which could be potentially viewed as rude - as uncivility. In addition, future work should concentrate on enhancing the quality of workplace by identifying *job resources* which could be provided to support employees in dealing with misbehaving customers.

For understandable reasons, neither customer characteristics nor the two different categories of behaviours (i.e., reciprocation vs non-reciprocation) - which were identified in the theoretical model described above - are applicable to theft- and/or robbery-related aggression. Thus, we developed a further theoretical model (see *Figure 2*) in which we deleted such sections and included new dimensions which are suitable for both forms of

third-party workplace aggression, namely *reactions*, *event characteristics*, *nation* and *coping strategies*. It should be noted that whereas in the previous model emotion regulation represented a stand-alone construct, which referred to emotional labour to comply with organizational display rules, in this expanded model we consider coping strategies as a broader category, which might include also emotion regulation strategies. Now, we will describe this model by explaining how it is applicable to thefts and/or robberies at work.

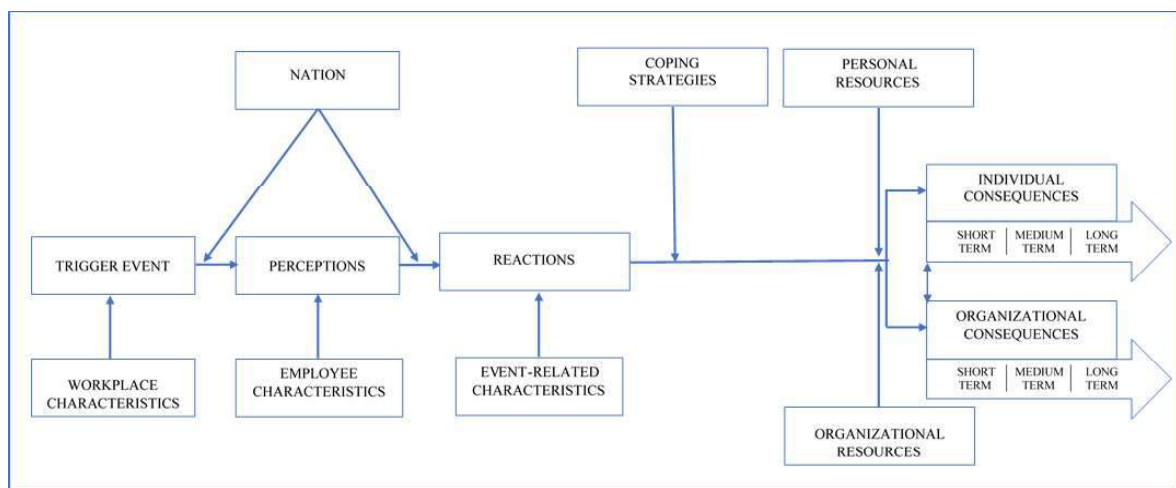


Figure 2. Theoretical model suitable for both customer mistreatment and theft and/or robbery exposure.

In the model described in *Figure 2*, both customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robberies at work are considered as trigger events. Although aggressive events, by their nature, are often unpredictable, the likelihood of their occurrence may be associated with *workplace characteristics*. For instance, in the case of customer mistreatment, the uncleanness and inadequateness of facilities as well as the unsuitability of layout and design might amplify customer frustration and, therefore, increase the risk of customer mistreatment (see *Chapter 2*). Similarly, in the case of theft- and/or robbery-related aggression, shops located in high-risk areas and characterized by an absence of security measures might represent “easy” targets for robbers and thieves (see *Chapter 3*). Additionally, such trigger events may be perceived as more or less threatening stressors, depending on *employees’ characteristics*, including their nationality. For instance, in the case of customer

mistreatment, employees high in neuroticism and in trait anger might be more likely to perceive customer incivility (see *Chapter 2*). Similarly, in the case of thefts and robberies, individuals who have co-existing psychological disorders or who were previously exposed to traumatic experiences might be at higher risk of perceiving such events as threatening and, therefore, developing PTSS (see *Chapter 3*).

Perceiving a trigger event lead to immediate *reactions* during the event itself. Reactions represent a new element of the model. For instance, we showed that victims of robberies are more likely to feel threatened, fearful and helpless as well as imagine they or others would be potentially harmed during the event, in comparison with those who were exposed to thefts only (see *Chapter 7*). Similarly, employees may emotionally (i.e., negative emotions) and cognitively (i.e., cognitive impairment) react to customer mistreatment during the encounter (see *Chapter 4*). Additionally, reactions may depend on *event characteristics*. For instance, in the case of robberies, reactions may be influenced by the presence of a weapon or more than one robber (see *Chapter 3*), whereas in the case of customer mistreatment, reactions may be influenced by the presence of witnesses or other angry customers (see *Chapter 2*). Depending on such reactions, employees may develop negative consequences which may be mitigated by the adoption of effective *coping strategies*, which refer to ways of dealing with the consequences of the aggressive act and represent a further innovative element of the model. For example, we revealed that victims of thefts and/or robberies are likely to face the negative consequences following these property crimes by seeking social support from others, while they do not differ from their non-affected colleagues in the use of mental health services (see *Chapter 6*).

This new model includes also *nation* as a unit of cultural analysis (Schwartz, 2006) which may influence both the initial appraisal of the aggressive act and the reactions to the event itself. In fact, we revealed dissimilarities concerning these aspects among Italian and

Irish victims which might be explained in terms of cultural differences (see *Chapters 4, 5 and 7*). For instance, it could be likely that Italians, who have lower uncertainty avoidance levels (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010), tend to perceive these unexpected events as more threatening and unacceptable than Irish. Different perceptions of the trigger event could explain why Italians are more likely to report more PTSS following robberies and/or thefts or why they tend to directly react to negative emotions elicited by aggressive customers with employee-to-customer incivility. Alternatively, such dissimilarities might also be explained in the light of different culturally prescribed coping strategies. Future research should further develop and confirm these initial findings by directly measuring uncertainty avoidance and by testing whether this cultural dimension would explain differences in Italian and Irish reactions to third-party workplace aggression. Moreover, further research should test whether these differences would be associated to diverse cross-national tendencies to engage in emotion regulation after negative customer encounters, according to cultural dialectical beliefs about the utility of negative emotions. Additionally, future studies should consider the potential effects of culturally prescribed coping strategies to deal with psychological consequences in the aftermath of critical events more carefully.

Aside from the adoption of functional coping strategies, the presence of *organizational* and *personal resources* may buffer the negative consequences following aggressive acts. Although we did not include in our investigations any organizational resources, we provided further evidence to support that certain *personal resources* may protect victims from such consequences. More specifically, trauma-related CSE perceptions plays a protective role against the risk of developing PTSS and job dissatisfaction (see *Chapters 6 and 7*), whereas PA in Ireland and NA in Italy buffer the detrimental impact of customer incivility on job satisfaction (see *Chapter 5*). This latter finding confirms the importance of considering the influence of national differences within our model. This

provides also a good starting point for further cross-national research on the role played by psychological resources in protecting workers against third-party workplace aggression.

Depending on coping strategies, personal and organizational resources, individuals may develop different negative outcomes in the *short*, *medium* and *long-term* at the *individual* (e.g., impaired cognitive impairment, reduced well-being, continued emotional exhaustion, respectively) and the *organizational* (e.g., reduced performance; withdrawal behaviours and intentions; decreased organizational profitability, respectively) levels. As in the case of customer mistreatment, our investigations constantly showed that thefts and/or robberies at work produce *negative individual and organizational-level consequences*. Indeed, we found that such events undermine differently workers' well-being, so that victims of both events are more likely to report higher levels of PTSS and lower trauma-related CSE perceptions, when compared to those who were targeted of thefts only. Results indicated that robberies and thefts may be traumatizing events which may stimulate the developing of PTSS and psycho-somatic symptoms, leading affected workers to perceive higher workload perceptions and lower job satisfaction levels. These findings suggest that certain psychological consequences associated with robbery and/or theft exposure, such as PTSS, are peculiar for this type of aggression and not - or at least only in a few cases- in common with customer mistreatment. Thereby, this is a dynamic and flexible model which needs to be re-modulated, depending on the type of aggression (i.e., customer mistreatment vs theft/robbery exposure) in order to consider specific event-related features.

Research must always achieve a balance between parsimony and comprehensiveness, and the purpose of the present dissertation was to shed light on some aspects of this model. Therefore, we must leave to future work the task to address the questions concerning the not analysed sections of the models described above. For instance, future studies could fruitfully explore the third-party workplace aggression issue by

identifying job resources which might support workers in dealing with aggressive acts or by analysing which workplace characteristics might trigger aggression from outsiders. Moreover, we believe that apart from looking for the influence of employees' characteristics on perceptions of aggressive acts, future research should look for event-related characteristics which might impact on employees' reactions to critical events. In addition, future research could consider the potential moderating effects of different coping strategies more carefully to detect effective ways of dealing with aggressive acts. Furthermore, interesting research questions for future research that can be derived from our studies regard why people from different countries might react differently to aggressive acts. Additionally, future research should certainly further test whether the analysed expressions of third-party workplace aggression would affect other individual and organizational outcomes.

In sum, further work is certainly required to disentangle the complexities which have emerged from the present dissertation. Moreover, future research should be devoted to the validation and the development of this model.

3. Overall strengths and limitations

The current dissertation has a number of strengths. Firstly, it gives an original contribution to the existing literature on third-party workplace aggression by investigating how experiencing incivility and verbal aggression as well as thefts and/or robberies at work may differently affect employees' well-being and job satisfaction. In doing so, we extend existing incivility literature by showing that uncivil reciprocating processes can occur also in response to customer verbal aggression. Moreover, this is one of the few dissertations demonstrating that both customer incivility and verbal aggression may increase employees' burnout symptoms and, as a result, decrease their SRP and job satisfaction. In doing so, this work provides empirical evidence to support the differential impact of these forms of

customer mistreatment on job-related outcomes, by showing that customer incivility - but not customer verbal aggression - is directly and negatively associated with reduced SRP and job dissatisfaction. Similarly, considerable progress has been made with regard to theft-and/or robbery-related aggression literature by showing that being exposed to both kinds of event results in higher PTSS, lower trauma-related CSE and greater social support seeking tendencies than being victims of thefts only. Additionally, to date, as far as we know, this is the first dissertation to analyse the psychological sequelae following thefts at work, suggesting that thefts represent traumatic events.

Secondly, this work takes an important step forward in revealing how perceptions of and reactions to client-initiated and external expressions of aggression can vary across countries. More specifically, this dissertation contributes to the existing workplace incivility research by showing cultural differences in underlying mechanisms which lead Italian and Irish employees to be uncivil in response to misbehaving clients. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first dissertation examining similarities and differences between Italian and Irish workers' well-being in terms of PTSS and trauma-related CSE in relation to thefts and/or robberies at work exposure.

Thirdly, the significance of our contribution lies in analysing the psychological consequences following thefts and/or robberies at work in an under-investigated working population, namely workers employed in small businesses. Whereas in the case of customer mistreatment, we showed that scenario-based experiments provide a potential powerful tool for analysing employees' reactions to aggressive acts.

Fourthly, the current dissertation contributes to our understanding of the role of different personal resources in helping service providers maintain crucial job-related outcomes, even in the presence of third-party workplace aggression. In doing so, as far as we know, this is one of the first dissertations to investigate the direct influence of individual-

level CO on SRP. Additionally, as far as we know, this is the first dissertation to examine the buffering role of resilience on the customer incivility-SRP relationship. Furthermore, this is one of the first works to identify the protective role of trauma-related CSE perceptions against the development of PTSS and job dissatisfaction in the aftermath of thefts and/or robberies at work.

Fifthly, this work contributes to our knowledge beyond the existing literature on job satisfaction by analysing some factors associated with decrements in such psychological state following aggressive acts from outsiders. In doing so, it is one of the few dissertations analysing the buffering role of affectivity traits on the customer incivility-job satisfaction relationship, within the context of employee-customer interaction. Moreover, we have provided further evidence that job dissatisfaction may be an outcome of thefts and/or robberies at work, showing the relevance of psycho-somatic complaints in predicting job satisfaction perceptions.

Sixthly, the present dissertation develops a theoretical framework suitable for both customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robberies at work which, we hope, will serve as a base for future studies on third-party workplace aggression

The contributions of the current dissertation need to be interpreted considering its limitations. Firstly, the self-report nature of our investigations raises issues of common method bias. For instance, PTSS was based on a self-report measure (i.e., IES scale) without including a clinical examination. Although common method bias is seldom severe enough to compromise the validity of the results (Spector, 2006), we followed Podsakoff and colleagues' (2003) recommendations regarding questionnaire design to decrease such bias. Additionally, according to numerous methodologists' recommendations (Williams, Cote, & Buckler, 1989), in *Chapter 4* we used the unmeasured method factor technique, showing that common method variance was not a major issue. Moreover, in *Chapters 4, 5 and 6* we

conducted confirmatory factor analyses and measurement invariance analyses across countries, supporting the discriminant validity of our measures. Future research would benefit from integrating different information sources.

Secondly, the non-longitudinal nature of our investigations included in *Chapters 5, 6 and 7* did not afford causality inferences. Nevertheless, in *Chapter 4* we adopted an experimental design which allowed us to draw causal conclusions and exert greater control on extraneous variables. Furthermore, in *Chapters 4 and 5*, in order to test our hypotheses we used SEM analyses whose potential are largely recognized in psychological discipline (Hancock & Mueller, 2013). Future studies should use longitudinal designs and measure outcomes prior and after the occurrence of aggressive acts.

Thirdly, although the main potential confounders were selected in accordance with the literature and specific workplace settings, unmeasured factors may have affected the investigated relationships. For instance, in *Chapters 6 and 7*, we controlled for time from the last event, gender, age and marital status. However, some pre- and peri-trauma variables might have affected workers' reactions to thefts and/or robberies at work. Moreover, since in *Chapters 4 and 5* most of research participants were women, we could not control for gender. This might have partially influenced our findings. However, the gender distribution in our samples was highly representative of the Italian customer service workforce. Controlling for these confounding variables is suggested going forward.

Fourthly, possible selection bias due to the voluntary participation into our researches cannot be ruled out. Thus, it is possible that those who experienced more frequently aggressive acts were more motivated to respond and, as such, were overrepresented.

Fifthly, results of *Chapters 4 and 5* cannot be generalized to specific working populations since our investigations were conducted on samples of working students employed in different customer-contact areas. In addition, results of *Chapters 6 and 7* were

conducted on workers employed in small businesses. Thereby, our results cannot be generalized to other working populations. Replications should be carried out in other specific professional contexts through comparative studies addressed at full-time employees from different organizational and national contexts.

Sixthly, since we did not directly assess for cultural dimensions, it was not possible to empirically support our speculations concerning the nature of cultural dissimilarities between Italy and Ireland. Thereby, replications should be conducted on Irish and Italian samples including also the assessment of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010), emotion regulation tendencies following negative events (Miyamoto, Ma, & Petermann, 2014), dialectic utility of negative emotions (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011), and coping styles (Zola, 1966).

Seventhly, although job satisfaction was evaluated through a well-validated single item, the use of facet measures would make it possible to identify specific areas which might be differently affected by customer mistreatment and theft and/or robbery exposure. Further investigations should attempt to examine different aspects of job satisfaction and analyse other work-related outcomes of third-party workplace aggression.

4. Recommendations for practice

The findings of the present dissertation have considerable managerial implications. On the one hand, *Chapters 2, 4 and 5* might suggest several courses of action in order to address the problem of customer mistreatment - in the forms of incivility and verbal aggression - in high-contact service industries. On the other hand, *Chapters 3, 6 and 7* could be a useful aid for workers employed in small businesses who were – or who are at considerable risk of being – victims of theft- and/or robbery-related violence.

4.1. Practical implications to reduce customer mistreatment within the service sector

According to findings of *Chapters 4 and 5*, being victims of customer mistreatment - in the forms of incivility or verbal aggression - may deplete employees' emotional and cognitive resources, leading to customer-directed incivility, emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction and reduced SRP, which affect organizational profitability. Thereby, HR management should be proactive in efforts to reduce the occurrence of customer mistreatment and build a respectful workplace (Porath & Pearson, 2010) in which employees are satisfied with their job and highly performing.

4.1.1. Promoting civil relationships among intra-organizational members

Although the focus of the present dissertation was not on intra-organizational incivility, promoting workplace civility among intra-organizational members is the first step to deal with customer mistreatment because if tolerance towards incivility or verbal abuse among insiders occurs in a work setting, such tolerance may contribute to a culture of disrespect. Such culture may negatively affect not only intra-organizational relationships, but also customer-employee encounters.

To date, most of civility interventions have been implemented within the healthcare sector and evidence has been provided concerning the potential of some interventions in cultivating civility and in decreasing incivility among intra-organizational members (e.g., Leiter, Day, Oore, & Laschinger, 2012). For instance, according to Armstrong's review (2018), the most effective strategies to enhance employees' abilities to cope with workplace incivility were the following: a) incivility training interventions focusing on both education about workplace incivility and its impact; b) assertiveness strategies for de-escalating conflicts; c) activities on effective responses to incivility scenarios, either using cognitive rehearsal (i.e. a mental practice which lead participants to experience assertive responses to

incivility scenarios; e.g., Griffin, 2004) or role-play techniques. Moreover, education and active learning were identified as the two key components for the acquisition of effective responses to workplace incivility (Armstrong, 2018). Furthermore, Hodgins and colleagues' review (2018) of studies addressing workplace bullying and/or incivility showed that, in addition to expressive writing techniques about incivility-related topics (Kirk, Schutte, & Hine, 2011), effective measures (Leiter et al., 2011; Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, & Belton, 2009) referred to a multi-component, six-month organizational intervention named Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW). Such intervention specifically targets workplace civility and it was firstly implemented in Veterans Hospital Administration contexts (Osatuke et al., 2009). This theory-driven program aims to create a social environment dedicated to enhancing civility (Leiter et al., 2011). Firstly, each work group identifies specific agendas and needs to be addressed, then group-based exercises are tailored to the unique conditions of each team. Accordingly, a structured plan of action is developed by providing civility sessions and weekly workshops. Team-building activities are focused on building civil communication, respect, cooperation and conflict resolution by changing individual behaviours - within a group setting - and by receiving explicit support for the process from managers (Osatuke et al., 2009; Leiter et al., 2011). The program involves training on recognizing and reacting to uncivil acts as well as activities on effective responses to incivility scenarios. Furthermore, regular meetings to enhance working relationship, respectful interactions and behaviours among group members are planned as well as evaluations of intervention effectiveness at different time points during the process. Although CREW has been developed within healthcare settings, implications for the implementation of civility interventions within the service sector can be drawn. Training should be inspired to its founding principles, namely responsiveness, participation, contextual embeddedness and empowerment. Furthermore, programs should adopt an

integrated approach including individual, job and organizational levels. Thus, since previous studies have shown that both organizational tolerance towards workplace incivility and organizational disinterest of addressing it or implementing preventive practices are conducive to this issue (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011; Fevre, Lewis, Robinson, & Jones, 2012; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Rayner & McIvor, 2008; Salin, 2003), interventions should facilitate a change in the organizational culture in order to shape a culture of respect.

4.1.2. Defining a zero-tolerance policy towards uncivil or verbally aggressive customers

Since most disrespectful behaviour of customer appears to be caused by either service failures or disrespectful (or ignorant) behaviour by employees (as revealed in *Chapter 2*), management should in the first place pay more attention to avoiding service failures and disrespectful behaviour of employees. Additionally, since a customer satisfied with the service will be less likely to be uncivil, managers should ensure to provide their customer with pleasing layout, high-quality service and products (vaan Jarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). Moreover, the management should clearly establish a *code of conduct* characterized by mutual respect and introduce a *zero-tolerance policy* towards misbehaving customers, including information about cut-off points allowed while facing difficult clients (see Bailey, 1994). Furthermore, a reporting system to document and address customer misbehavior should be developed to audit complaints and to record critical incidents and employees' reactions to such events (Chang & Lions, 2012; Echeverri, Salomson, & Alberg, 2009; Hoobler & Swanger, 2006; Yeh, 2015). This might allow to gather information about the frequency and the context of critical incidents occurrence, which can guide prevention interventions and contribute to create long-term control (Karatepe, Yoganaci, & Haktanir, 2009; Reynolds & Harris, 2006). Additionally, the description of specific customer encounters can be utilized as case studies in training programs. Written procedures should

include the adoption of practices to address these incidents promptly and effectively, providing victims with appropriate feedbacks and support (Chang & Lions, 2012; Echeverri et al., 2009; Hoobler & Swanger, 2006; Yeh, 2015). Managers might consider declining to serve reoffending misbehaving customers (Sliter, Sliter & Jex, 2012) and establishing a progressive system of “discipline” for clients (Hoobler & Swanberg, 2006; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Rafaeli et al., 2012; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; Sliter, Pui, Sliter, & Jex, 2011). Some call-centers, for example, have introduced emotion sensors to control the customer’s emotional state which can indicate the need for a supervisor intervention. Alternatively, these sensors can empower employees to terminate - or automatically terminate - calls from abusive customers (Esfahani, 2004; Skarlicki et al., 2008; Twiddy, 2007; Shin, Lie, Klein, & Jiang, 2006; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010).

4.1.3. Promoting civil customer encounters through training programs

In *Chapter 2*, we found that customer dissatisfaction with the service provided was the main reason which led customers to behave uncivilly. Therefore, to tackle customer mistreatment issue in the first place, organizations should train their staff to adequately address the problems caused by service mistakes and failures. To this end, fostering CO and resilience might be a useful tool because in *Chapter 5* we found that these psychological resources might help employees maintain their service recovery efforts even in presence of disrespectful complainants. Accordingly, companies should provide their employees with psychological resilience training programs and structured training sessions aimed at improving their recovery skills to successfully face customer interactions, perceive difficult complainants, respond to customers’ requests and, in the meantime, foster customer-oriented behaviors. Organizations could cultivate such behaviours through mentoring to instil higher levels of CO among poorly customer-oriented workers (Babakus, Yavas & Ashill, 2009;

Karatepe, 2013; Kim, Paek, Choi, & Lee, 2012; Yoo, Kim, & Lee, 2015). Furthermore, managers could consider training employees through simulations on managing multiple service tasks simultaneously to reduce the potential negative effects of customer incivility on employees' cognitive functioning – effects that we revealed in *Chapter 4* (Gopher, Weil, & Siegel, 1989). For example, training might simulate customer mistreatment while trainees at the same time have to deal with technical service tasks, as performing the two together may be an intellectually demanding task (Rafaeli et al., 2012). This could be useful to strengthen employees' ability to remain concentrated on the service provision, even in presence of distracting elements associated with customer mistreatment. The use of simulations, case studies, practice scenarios and role-play (e.g., mock customer calls, Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016; Porath, MacInnis, & Folkes, 2011; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) might be also useful to intervene on employees' reactions. Indeed, since in *Chapter 4* we showed that employees might react to customer mistreatment by reciprocating with uncivil behaviours towards customers, organizations should take steps to avoid disrespectful behaviours of employees. For instance, companies could consider implementing *empathy-type training* or *lens-of-the-customer training* as well awareness programs on uncivil behaviours which employees might exhibit (Choi, Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2014; Bavik & Bavik, 2015; Shih, Lie, Klein, & Jiang, 2014). In addition, since service providers might engage in customer-directed incivility as a result of the negative emotions elicited by customer mistreatment (see *Chapter 4*), it could be useful to train them in how emotionally detach themselves from negative experiences (Gabriel & Diefendorff, 2015) and in how elicit positive emotional states by focusing on successful interactions (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). These measures might also be helpful to prevent employees from burnout symptoms which may be developed following encounters with misbehaving customers, as demonstrated in *Chapter 5*. Additionally, service firms should prepare employees to

effectively deal with angry customers by training their *emotional competences* (Giardini & Frese, 2006), such as *emotional intelligence* (Boyatzis Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002; Gabriel, Cheshin, Moran, & van Kleef, 2016) and *emotional self-efficacy* (Pugh, Growth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011), and by fostering their skills to effectively manage and regulate emotional expressions (Karatepe et al., 2009; Yeh, 2015). Moreover, training could also focus on *conflict negotiation/resolution tactics* to defuse upset clients (Adams & Webster, 2013; Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014; Yoo, Kim, & Lee, 2015) and on *effective coping strategies* to face stressful encounters (e.g. expression of genuine positive emotions, social sharing of negative events; Shulei & Minter, 2006; Yoo, Kim, & Lee, 2015). Moreover, to prevent burnout symptoms due to customer mistreatment, service firms should enable workers to rely on organizational resources to face unpleasant encounters without depleting their own emotional reserves. Thereby, employees could be provided with training programs concentrating on the crucial role of colleagues and supervisors support in dealing with customer mistreatment (Adams & Webster, 2013; Skarlicki et al., 2008). At the same time, supervisors and colleagues should be educated in coaching and in recognizing the signals that help is needed to sustain service providers who are confronted with misbehaving customers (Molino et al., 2016; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010).

4.1.4. Implications for recruiting and selecting customer-contact employees

Our research (see *Chapter 5*) suggests that recruiters service firms can greatly benefit from selecting and hiring highly customer-oriented and resilient employees for customer-contact positions. By establishing more thorough instruments to evaluate applicants' CO and resilience levels and by emphasizing these personal resources as critical credential that candidates should have (Yoo et al., 2015), HR representatives can select the most suitable candidates and facilitate a better job-person fit. This should also inform decisions concerning

the relocation of the most appropriate workers to jobs with more (versus less) contact with the public (Cho et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2014; Echeverri et al., 2009; Sliter et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2015). Moreover, HR recruiters who screen candidates based on affective disposition need to be aware of the possibility that this variable may operate differently as a function of nationality. Indeed, according to our results of *Chapter 5*, while high-NA individuals are generally more likely to be dissatisfied from their job, in Italy they may react less strongly to misbehaving customers, whereas in Ireland high-PA employees are less affected by variations in job satisfaction across customer incivility levels.

To reduce the occurrence of employee-to-customer disrespectful behaviours, during the recruitment process, HR representatives might use work sample tests, situational interviews, or mini-case studies to detect candidates' possible customer-directed incivility tendencies (Karatepe & Anumbose Nkendon, 2014; Sliter & Jones, 2016). Additionally, service companies could consider assessing civility in performance reviews and eventually including civility among evaluative criteria for career advancement (Porath et al., 2011). To this end, direct monitoring (e.g., supervisor observations), mystery shopping and customer surveys might be useful tools to identify misbehaving employees (as suggested by findings in *Chapter 2*). In addition, reward and recognition programs for employees who maintain excellent service standards could be implemented to deter workers from engaging in customer-directed incivility (Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007). Furthermore, since PA is positively associated with job satisfaction (see *Chapter 5*), compensation systems which successfully links merit pay with performance (Heneman, 1992) could contribute to build an organizational culture that promotes employees' job satisfaction through positive emotions elicited by positive events.

4.1.5. Promoting a supportive climate through organizational interventions

To avoid reciprocating processes of uncivility which were revealed in *Chapter 4*, supervisors should set an example for their subordinates by engaging in civil behaviours and by directing uncover polite reprimands to members of the organization - or of the public - who behave uncivilly (Henkel, Boegershausen, Rafaeli, & Lemmink, 2017). In addition, managers should facilitate “environmental conditions that support, foster, enrich and protect” (i.e., caravan passageways; Hobfoll, Stevens, & Zalta, 2015) service providers’ resources, thereby preventing burnout symptoms due to customer mistreatment which may undermine SRP and job satisfaction, as shown in *Chapter 5*. In doing so, service firms should support workers by offering them organizational resources to avoid their resources depletion. Thereby, interventions should be implemented at the group level to help workers build the social support needed to manage demanding customer interactions. For instance, introducing online tools (e.g. social network groups and online forums; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) or establishing spaces to promote social interactions (e.g., chill out areas) might help workers build strong bonds. Furthermore, supervisors could conduct sharing and debriefing sessions (also with the support of a professional psychologist, where appropriate) with service providers where workers are stimulated to openly share their emotional experiences with difficult clients to relieve negative emotions, which, otherwise, could be conducive to customer-directed incivility (see *Chapter 4*). According to findings of articles included in our review (see *Chapter 2*), sharing such experiences in a cognitive mode may be helpful. This means that debriefing sessions should suggest positive reappraisals for ambiguous situations and encouraging the exchange of alternative explanations for uncivil acts (Choi et al., 2014; Karatepe & Nkendon, 2014; Karatepe & Ehsani, 2012; Shih et al., 2014; Tremmenl & Sonnentag, 2017; Skarlicki et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2013). Moreover, supervisors should support their subordinates through regular communication and mentoring

sessions aimed at analyzing negative customer-encounters (Karatepe et al., 2009). Additionally, by transferring or knowing that transferring unreasonable customers to one's own supervisors is allowed, service providers can view their supervisors as more supportive and decrease the likelihood of becoming uncivil towards customers and developing burnout following customer mistreatment (Cho et al., 2016; Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016).

At the organizational level, attention should be paid to promote a strong service climate (Jergen & Wirtz, 2017) which supports positive relationships and gives some power back to employees. Considering the direct impact of customer incivility on both SRP and job satisfaction (see *Chapter 5*), organizations might enable employees to take short breaks at their discretion after handling a difficult complainant and give systematic feedback to inform the management about stressful conditions (Troughakos, Beal, Green, & Weiss, 2008; van Jarsveld et al., 2010). Additionally, companies might consider using job rotations to limit employees' contact with the public (Yoo et al., 2015) to facilitate workers' recovery from emotional and cognitive resources loss. More specifically, giving the possibility to take a break to a more than one worker at time might facilitate mutual support and exchange information and solutions among colleagues (Gabriel & Diefendorff, 2015; McCance, Nye, Wang, Jones, & Chiu, 2013). Moreover, by establishing a real-time and flexible service, empowered employees can exercise their discretionary power to promptly respond to customer's problems with solutions, make necessary remedies to satisfy customers' requests and defend themselves against uncivil customers (Chow, Lo, Sha, & Hong, 2006; Yavas, Karatepe, Avci, & Tekinkus, 2003). Empowerment may also be perceived as a sign of organization's trust in and support toward its employees (Baranik, Wang, Gong, & Shi, 2017; Choi et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Song & Liu, 2010), thus increasing perceived organizational support and, in turn, helping employees maintain a good SRP (Karatepe, & Ehsani, 2012), even in the face of high customer incivility levels. On the other hand, since

employees who are frequently confronted with uncivil or verbally aggressive customers are at increased risk of developing burnout, as proven in *Chapter 5*, HR representatives should provide them with supportive programs, such as stress reduction (Wang & Delp, 2014), occupational health care management (Linden, Muschalla, Hansmeier, & Sandner, 2014), wellness (Das et al., 2016) or mindfulness-based programs (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). Additionally, meetings and interviews with employees should be frequently scheduled to gather information regarding the occurrence of negative customer-encounters. This information, in combination with data derived from the reporting of critical incidents, could be used to develop support programs to help workers process negative experiences (e.g., human resource hot lines; Cho et al., 2016). Moreover, considering the beneficial influence of PA on job satisfaction (as shown by *Chapter 5*), HR representatives could consider providing employees with brief problem-solving (Ayres & Malouff, 2007) or brief present-moment awareness trainings (Nasser & Przeworski, 2017), in addition to promoting opportunities for physical activities (e.g. corporate fitness centres; Fuegen & Breitenbecher, 2018), in order to help them cultivate and develop positive affect. In other words, companies could use organizational resources rather than overwhelming service providers' resource reservoirs when customer mistreatment occurs to sustain healthy and, thus, more satisfied and productive workers.

4.2. Practical implications addressed at employees working in small businesses who are at high risk of experiencing thefts and/or robberies

The findings of *Chapters 6* and *7* suggest that small businesses retailers who are victims of thefts and/or robberies at work may develop PTSS and reduce their work functioning. Since these workforces frequently work alone or within a small group, they cannot rely on organizational social networks which could support them in the aftermath of

the traumatic event (e.g., through support from colleagues and supervisors or through interventions provided by the organization). Thereby, local business groups, Chambers of Commerce, law enforcement and professional trade unions should take steps to prevent the occurrence of thefts and/or robberies and to support their members when such events occur.

4.2.1. Environmental design interventions in retail settings

Research has revealed that environmental design interventions represent the most effective strategy in preventing robbery-related violence and shoplifting, and in decreasing the occurrence of injuries when such crimes are perpetrated within retail settings (e.g., Casteel and Peek-Asa, 2000; Casteel, Peek-Asa, Howard, & Kraus, 2004; Erickson, 1998; Wassell, 2009; Peek-Asa, Casteel, Mineschian, Erickson, & Kraus, 2004). According to the crime prevention through environmental design model (CPTED; Crow & Bull, 1975; Jeffery, 1971), to increase business security, potential modifications should concern five key factors, as follows:

a) *natural surveillance* refers to the utilization of design features (e.g., design of windows, placement of the cash register) in combination with proper lighting control (i.e., indoor and outdoor) to increase the visibility into the store. This may deter crime by making the offender's behaviour more easily external noticeable.

b) *access control* includes the design of the internal environment to provide a physical guidance of people on the designated path, for example, by clearly defining entrances and exits (e.g., height markers at the store entrance), by installing security and surveillance systems (e.g., closed-circuit cameras; silent alarm systems), and by denying access to portions of the worksite at a particular time of day (e.g., control-locks on doors). All these measures may contribute to controlling customer movements, denying access to a crime target and generating a perception of risk in selecting the target among offenders.

c) *territorial reinforcement* includes the shop location within the community, traffic flow surrounding the store, signs and advertisement for the business and design components (e.g., sidewalks, landscaping, bulletproof barriers). All these measures empower the worker over the customer and create a clear delineation of space. This may help owners display signs of “ownership” and separation from non-legitimate users, which result in sending “hands off” messages to would-be offenders.

d) *activity support* encompasses any activity which encourages the presence of legitimate customers. For instance, making the store appealing through design elements or active-scheduled events (e.g., store opening, charity events) may attract customers to the shop and discourage criminals.

e) *maintenance* allows for the prolonged use of a space for its intended objective. It represents the tangible sign that someone cares and is watching over the store (e.g., remove graffiti, maintain landscaping). Conversely, deterioration of the store indicates a greater tolerance of disorder and may result in greater mistreatment by outsiders.

Previous studies have identified multiple-component programs - especially those with low-cost implementation and measures - as the most effective and easily accepted measures among retailers to assure business safety (Casteel & Peek-Asa, 2000; Peek-Asa et al., 2004; Wassell, 2009). Additionally, evidence has been provided to support that some single-component interventions might be effective in reducing robbery-related violence, including drop safes for cash management, unobscured visibility, internal and external lighting (Casteel & Peek-Asa, 2000; Peek-Asa et al., 2004; Wassell, 2009). Aside from CPTED-based interventions, research has revealed that some administrative measures might be effective in reducing crime among business establishments, including precautions during opening and closing times, especially at night (Loomis, Wolf, Runyan, Marshall, & Butts, 2001; Loomis, Marshall, Wolf, Runyan, & Butts, 2002), and limited cash-handling policies

(Amandus, Hunter, James, & Hendricks, 1995; Hendricks, Landsittel, Amandus, Malcan, & Bell, 1999). Furthermore, establishing a relationship with local police could reduce response time in the event of emergency by making store location known (Maggio, 1996).

Since small business retailers have often limited resources, local business groups, Chambers of Commerce, law enforcement and professional trade unions should take steps to educate them about crime prevention, inform them about the possibilities of taking part to programmes and ensure their access to resources available to implement such programmes (Peek-Asa, Casteel, Mineschian, Erickson, & Kraus, 2004). For instance, they could develop a multi-component CPTED-based program addressed at small retail owners, including the following phases:

- a) recruiting and training business owners on the programme components.
- b) conducting an on-site security assessment of the store to identify whether there are gaps in security measures or whether there are preventive measures already in place.
- c) providing one-on-one, on-site consultation sessions held by Certified Protection Professionals (CPPs), who can provide business owners with detailed information about each tailored recommendation regarding the implementation of further security measures (based on previous assessment).
- d) providing participating business owners with training materials (e.g., educational manuals, brochures, videos) concerning the management of critical situations as well as safety signs to place on store entrances, cash registers, and safes.
- e) performing an on-site follow-up visit within three months to assess compliance to recommendations (Cabell et al., 2013).

Since we found that employees who were exposed to both thefts and robberies are at higher risk of developing PTSS when compared with their counterparts who were targeted of thefts only (see *Chapter 6* and *7*), these interventions should be directed especially to

business stores which have a history of prior property crimes in order to reduce the likelihood of multiple violence occurrence.

4.2.2. Training addressed at small business employees

Our investigations identified trauma-related CSE as an important personal resource which may prevent workers from the development of PTSS and job dissatisfaction (see *Chapter 6* and *7*). Moreover, our research (see *Chapter 7*) suggests that in both Italy and Ireland, victims' psychological recovery might be facilitated through interventions aimed at fostering CSE perceptions. So how could we foster such perceptions?

Firstly, in order to enhance CSE perceptions, it could be useful to provide small business employees with information that gives them a better understanding of the robbery event. More specifically, such information should concern the possible negative consequences following the traumatic experience and the way in which robbery-associated consequences can be controlled - using master and modelling experiences (Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). For instance, employees who were previously victims of thefts and robberies could be encouraged to discuss their experiences with other members of their trade union, describing their reactions in the aftermath of the event and providing evidence to support that life can return to normal. Moreover, robbery prevention and awareness programs should also inform on common trauma responses. During such programs, workers should be provided with written materials including useful telephone numbers (e.g., counsellors), doing things for self-care to maintain personal well-being and a list of potential beneficial resources existing within the community (e.g., psychologically based support services). Change, crisis and stress management trainings should be a must for all workers. Moreover, trade unions should send periodic reminders to their members to enforce the adoption of safety behaviours, in addition to organizing meetings regarding multi-component CPTED-

based programs (WorkSafeBC, 2012). Indeed, workers should be made aware of the relevance of basic safety measures, including keeping the cash register clearly visible from outside the store, maintaining appropriate external lighting, keeping cash levels in registers as low as possible, adopting further precautions after dark and using safety equipment.

Secondly, individual perceptions of exerting control over critical events can be increased by providing a training which directly enhances - primarily through the utilisation of mastery, modelling, and persuasion experiences (Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992) - the individual's capabilities - or understanding of how to successfully use his/her skills - to deal with aggressive, drunk, or otherwise difficult people. Such perceptions can be enhanced also through training on ways to prevent and respond to both conflict and escalation to violence. Retailers should be trained to recognize the warning signs of aggression and how intervene when a customer would become violent. Training may be accompanied by programs aimed at enhancing interpersonal communication skills and first aid knowledge. Retailers should be properly educated on what to expect before, during and after a robbery and what responses are appropriate during a robbery. Training techniques should embrace the utilisation of videotapes as well as the use of case studies, role playing and simulations.

Thirdly, training should provide workers with information useful to enhance their understanding of behavioural and psychological coping strategies needed to effectively deal with consequences in the aftermath of a robbery - mainly through modelling, feedback and persuasion experiences (Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; McNatt & Judge, 2008). For example, considering victims' tendency to seek social support (a tendency which was revealed in *Chapter 7*), trade unions should promote initiatives, such as social events, to create and improve a social network of mutual support among members. Such network may represent an emotional support system in the case of crisis. Additionally, trade unions should consider introducing an online forum to encourage the sharing of experiences among

retailers. This could also facilitate the exchange of positive feedbacks among colleagues under stressful situations, increasing their CSE perceptions (e.g., McAuley, Talbot, & Martinez, 1999; Ouweneel, Schaufeli, & Le Blanc, 2013). Moreover, small business retailers should be informed about tools helpful to maintain their well-being in the aftermath of a robbery, such as possibilities of post-robbery psychological support, training groups, online/phone counselling services (Mucci, Giorgi, Perez, Iavicoli, & Arcangeli, 2015).

Finally, victims' CSE perceptions may be increased through coping effectiveness trainings (Chesney, Chambers, Taylor, Johnson, & Folkman, 2003), which represent group-based interventions in which session contents are founded on components of cognitive and behavioural stress management techniques (e.g., cognitive therapy, relaxation, and problem-solving). Such contents may be integrated with a range of activities, such as scenarios and role plays, through which participants can employ their new coping knowledge (Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2011).

4.2.3. Psychological support for traumatized victims

Findings from our studies provided evidence to support that thefts and robberies at work may be potential traumatic events which may stimulate the development of PTSS (see *Chapters 6 and 7*). Providing psychological support to victims who develop such symptoms, especially when they experience a traumatic event individually, may assist them in resolving any underlying mental health problem to prevent the developing of chronic conditions. Several psychological interventions have been designed to mitigate victims' acute distress reactions with the goal of preventing the development of chronic PTSS (Foa et al., 2005). Traditional *individual/group crisis interventions* refer to prompt interventions aimed at comforting victims which mobilize their resources to react to the traumatic experience by facilitating the reflection on their feelings and, in the case of group-based interventions,

social support among victims (Setti & Argentero, 2016). Examples of crisis interventions are described below.

Defusing (Mitchell & Everly, 2001) represents a short and less structured version of the debriefing process which is typically conducted immediately after the critical incident (i.e., within a few hours after the event), usually lasting from twenty to forty-five minutes. Firstly, group members are introduced to rules, guidelines and confidentiality which guide the group discussion. Then, victims are asked to speak about what happened, maintaining their focus on the facts and not on the emotional reactions to what happened. Lastly, participants are provided with information for the self-management of distress symptoms and contact details of mental health professionals.

Post-traumatic debriefing is a psychological treatment intended to reduce psychological distress and negative long-term effects due to event exposure as well as to prevent the development of PTSD after traumatic experiences. It is recommended within twelve/forty-eight hours following the trauma. According to Dunning (1988), distinct debriefing protocols can be identified. On the one hand, the “didactic” or “teaching” debriefing represents an informational approach which provides participations with education about typical traumatic stress responses, ways to recognize stress and individual technics of self-management which can be used to help regulate post-traumatic stress. On the other hand, “psychological” debriefing is concentrated on emotional ventilation suggesting that a catharsis may facilitate the recovery process.

One of the most effective “psychological first aid” interventions is the *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing* (CISD; Mitchell, 1983; Mitchell & Everly, 2001). It refers to a seven-phase psycho-educational, supportive crisis-founded intervention based on the discussion of a critical incident (i.e., traumatic experience), in addition to providing practical information useful to normalize members’ reactions. Such discussion, which occurs within

a small (and homogenous) group, is implemented with the purpose to assist individuals in reaching a sense of closure post-crisis and to encourage them to discuss and ventilate intense emotions (Mitchell & Everly, 2000). This facilitates victims' processing of their responses to the trauma. The session is generally held by a mental health professional for every five to seven group participants, accompanied by trained "peer support personnel" (i.e., someone who is employed in the same occupation or who shares a similar background as the group members). It occurs twenty-four to seventy-two hours after the critical incident, lasting for one-three hours. The phases of the intervention are the following: 1) introduction: team members describe the process and encourage active participation from the group members; 2) facts: participants are encouraged to speak of what happened in the situation from their perspective; 3) thoughts: group members are invited to share what was their most prominent thought once they realized they were thinking; 4) reactions: the affective impact of the event on participants is analysed; 5) symptoms: victims share their experiences of cognitive, physical, emotional or behavioural symptoms following the traumatic experience; 6) teaching: the professional gives explanations of the group members' responses and provides stress management information; 7) re-entry: summary of the discussion, final explanations, additional information, action directions and guidance are presented to the group - eventually together with written materials, such as handouts. This intervention enables victims to share and process heightened emotional responses, receiving support from other group members. Additionally, this intervention helps victims process, elaborate and give symbolic meaning to the traumatic event. When appropriate, the CISD is followed by one-to-one sessions, follow-up counselling, or psychologically based support services (e.g., telephone calls, visits to workplaces, contacts with families). Thus, in a few cases brief (i.e. four-five sessions) cognitive-behavioural therapy (Bryant, Harvey, Dang, Sackville, & Basten, 1998) and/or

pharmacological treatment (e.g. benzodiazepines, propranolol, and hydrocortisone; Pitman et al., 2002) could be needed.

What is crucial to the effectiveness of the interventions is its timeliness (Davis 1996; Devita-Vessa, 1998; Mitchell, 1988; Jones, 2002), since as the length of time increases between exposure to the traumatic experience and the employment of these interventions, the less effective these become. In a few cases, it can be needed to provide referrals for professional care. Indeed, previous studies have found that some interventions may be effective in treating chronic PTSD (Foa et al., 2005; García-Vera et al., 2011), including:

- *exposure therapies* which refer to the repeated confrontation with trauma-related memories or reminders in order to reduce anxiety associated with trauma-related stimuli, for example, through virtual reality (e.g., Josman et al., 2006);
- *trauma-focused cognitive-behavioural therapies* which include the combination of cognitive techniques - such as cognitive restructuring - with in vivo or imaginal exposure and stress control techniques (e.g., Duffy, Gillespie, & Clark, 2007);
- *stress inoculation trainings* which embrace psycho-education techniques about PTSS as well as techniques for facing anxiety, such as breathing and relaxation training or cognitive restructuring (e.g., Foa et al., 2009);
- *cognitive therapies* which address dysfunctional beliefs about the long term physical and functional problems following the trauma (see Foa & Jaycox, 1999);
- *pharmacological treatments* (e.g. sertraline, paroxetine; e.g., Jonas et al., 2013).

Finally, it should be noted that group treatment for PTSS (e.g. group psychological debriefing, group trauma-focused cognitive-behavioural therapy) can be implemented to create protected settings in which victims can engage in group sharing and collaborative processes (Ellis, Peterson, Buffor, & Benson, 2014). Local business groups, Chambers of Commerce, law enforcement and professional trade unions could consider training a group

of peer volunteers (or regional corporate responders) in conducting defusing sessions to promptly address small business employees' post-robbery or post-theft needs and, when necessary, to promptly facilitate victims' access to appropriate professionals for consultation as well as debriefing interventions.

5. General practical implications

Overall, the present dissertation provides implications which may inform general intervention guidelines for both customer mistreatment and thefts and/or robberies at work.

Firstly, it is important to take steps to tackle third-party workplace aggression in the first place by *promoting a healthy and safe work setting*. In the case of customer mistreatment, this means to promote an organizational culture of civility by defining a zero-tolerance policy towards misbehaving customers and by promoting a supportive climate. In the case of theft and robbery-related violence, this results in environmental design interventions to prevent crime.

Secondly, *training programs* represent a useful tool to support workers in handling emotional and cognitive reactions following aggressive acts and in adopting appropriate behaviours to deal with critical incidents. Workers should be provided with information that gives them a better understanding of such events and of the possible negative consequences which they might develop following such experiences. Moreover, workers should be trained on effective coping strategies to deal with such critical incidents, de-escalate potentially aggressive situations and effectively handle negative consequences in the aftermath of the event. Training should also be addressed at enhancing personal resources which may protect workers from the development of detrimental effects. Additionally, crisis, stress management and emotion regulation training are suitable for workers at high risk of experiencing both kinds of third-party aggression.

Thirdly, initiatives aimed at creating and at fostering a social network of *mutual support* among workers may offer an emotional support system in the case of crisis. This may enable victims to receive sought social support and, thus, help them process negative emotional states, facilitating psychological recovery. Online forums which allow workers to share their experiences may represent useful tools by facilitating the exchange of positive feedbacks among colleagues under stressful situations.

Fourthly, affected employees should be informed about tools helpful to maintain their well-being following aggressive events, such as possibilities of individual and/or group *psychological support*. Debriefing sessions (also with the support of a professional psychologist, where appropriate) or mentoring sessions where workers are stimulated to openly share their experiences may be interventions suitable for both forms of third-party workplace aggression. However, to prevent the developing of PTSS following thefts and/or robberies exposure, it is crucial to provide traumatized victims with appropriate interventions, such as critical incident stress debriefing.

6. Conclusion

Third-party aggression may manifest itself in different forms which vary in aggressiveness level. The current dissertation has demonstrated that both customer mistreatment - in the forms of customer incivility and verbal aggression - and robbery and/or theft-related violence may be stressful experiences which may deplete workers' resources, leading them to experience negative consequences in terms of one's own well-being and functioning at work. In both cases, people from different cultures may react differently to aggressive acts and personal resources may play a protective role against the risk of developing job dissatisfaction. Decision makers should be aware of the need to set policies and reinforce norms that reduce the occurrence of such forms of third-party workplace

aggression, such as zero-tolerance policies toward aggressive behaviours and measures to assure workplace security. Moreover, decision makers should provide victims with stress release options, such as human resource hot lines and psychological support services, to support them in the aftermath of critical incidents. Organizations have much to lose when aggression from organizational outsiders occurs; likewise, organizations have much to gain by understanding the factors which prompt aggression and by identifying protective factors to formulate preventive measures, tailored intervention for victims and foster healthier work environments.

7. References

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