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Customer sexual harassment of frontline service workers in Scottish hospitality: the role of line managers in addressing the problem.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Glasgow 2025

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

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Signed Paul Prescott

Date: 17/11/2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors, Dr Anastasios Hadjisolomou and Prof Dennis Nickson, for their insightful and constructive guidance throughout my PhD. Their support, encouragement and friendship have been invaluable, and I could not have wished for better mentors.

I am also deeply thankful to the academics within the Department of Work, Employment and Organisation for their genuine interest in my research and for the support and encouragement they provided. Special thanks go to my fellow members of the *Thesis Cooking Club*, whose advice, camaraderie and support were a constant source of motivation.

Heartfelt thanks extend to my wife, Ann, for her patience and unwavering support during the many hours devoted to my studies. Finally, I wish to acknowledge my children—Richard, Rachel, and James—who continue to inspire me and whose encouragement has been a constant source of strength and motivation.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the issue of customer sexual harassment (CSH) experienced by frontline service workers in Scotland's hospitality sector. Sexual harassment (SH) is understood as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature directed towards an individual; in this context, the individuals are customer-facing hospitality workers. The study explores the prevalence of CSH, analyses its impact on workers, and investigates how line managers respond to customer-perpetrated incidents. It also considers how human resource practitioners (HRPs) support both workers and managers in managing customer abuse.

Adopting a holistic, multi-stakeholder perspective, the research draws on qualitative data from 44 semi-structured interviews with frontline service workers, line managers, internal and external HRPs, hospitality trade union representatives, and an industry representative. Findings indicate that legally defined forms of SH by customers were prevalent across all nine participating establishments. The study further reveals that both workers and managers interpret incidents through a personal "interpretive prism", leading to hierarchical assessments of seriousness. Individual interpretation and perceived customer "sovereignty" contribute to underreporting by workers, heightening managerial caution in addressing customer misconduct. The research also identifies significant shortcomings in training for frontline workers regarding the nature of SH and strategies for managing abusive customers. Weak communication between line managers and HRPs left HR staff largely unaware of the extent of customer abuse. Additionally, the findings suggest that both managerial groups displayed only a perfunctory concern for workers' well-being in the context of customer mistreatment.

Four key contributions emerge from this study. First, it demonstrates the interpretive prism's centrality in shaping how individuals evaluate incidents of CSH on a hierarchical scale. Second, it highlights managerial caution in navigating perceived customer power as a barrier to proactive intervention. Third, it identifies "perfunctory concern" by line managers and HRPs concerning worker well-being when addressing customer misbehaviour and abuse. Fourthly, regarding CSH, it shows that the worker-line manager-HR triangle has inherent communication weaknesses, with HR being a distant partner in the triad.

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Chapter 1.0 Introduction and research questions

This thesis is about the sexual harassment (SH) of frontline service workers (hereafter referred to as front-of-house workers (FHWs, service staff, and workers) by customers (CSH) in Scotland's hospitality sector, and the challenges that line managers (LMs) face in addressing it. Within this context, it is important to note that on a global basis, research suggests that SH in the workplace is highly prevalent across the hospitality industry (Booyens *et al,* 2022; Dawson *et al,* 2021; Folgerø *et al.,* 1995; Karatepe, 2011; Poulston, 2008).

Research indicates that mistreatment and abuse by customers towards hospitality workers, including disrespect, offensiveness, and ridicule, are common (Boukis *et al,* 2020; Healey, 2018; Mitsakis *et al,* 2024), with verbal and physical assault also a common feature of the hospitality workplace (Karatepe *et al,* 2019). Whilst there is no categorical definition of mistreatment (Zhou *et al.,* 2021; Hershcovis *et al.,* 2020), workplace mistreatment is described as "an overarching term capturing myriad harmful social interactions in organisations, including various manifestations such as abusive supervision, incivility, interpersonal conflict, workplace ostracism, sexual harassment, and interpersonal injustice".

The darker side of customer mistreatment of customer-facing hospitality staff is CSH. In simple terms, SH is defined as "unwanted sexual or sexualised behaviour directed towards an individual" (ACAS, 2024). This will be examined in more detail in Section 2.1 of this thesis. Regarding CSH, forms of unwanted sexualised behaviour are directed towards customer-facing hospitality workers by customers, guests, and clientele (hereafter referred to as customers). Research indicates that CSH in the hospitality workplace is highly prevalent across the industry (see Beltramini *et al.,* 2020; Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Cheung *et al.,* 2018; Guerrier and Adib, 2000; Mkono, 2010; Mitsakis *et al.,* 2024; La Lopa and Gong, 2020). In essence, it is a common problem for customer service staff who work in hospitality establishments (Beltramini *et al.,* 2020; Good and Cooper, 2016; Ineson *et al.,* 2013; Karatepe, 2011; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Ram, 2018; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009; Williamson *et al.,* 2022).

SH endures within the hospitality sector because of the inherent features of service provision, particularly the need for sustained and close interpersonal engagement with customers, which raises chances for boundary-crossing behaviours by customers (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995; Gilbert *et al.,* 1998; Poulston, 2008; Ram, 2018). Surveys and research

suggest that female hospitality workers are more susceptible to CSH than male colleagues (Bragason, 2016; Coffey *et al.,* 2023; Gilbert *et al.,* 1998; La Lopa and Gong, 2020). In the United Kingdom (UK), hospitality worker surveys held in 2022 by the trade union Unite highlighted the problem of SH by customers (Unite, 2022). More specifically, in Scotland, survey reports by Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2021) and the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC, 2022) supported the notion that CSH in the Scottish hospitality industry is widespread. Although the extent of the phenomenon appears to be widespread, research suggests that CSH is often not reported by workers to their LMs (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Ram *et al.,* 2016; Turkoglu, 2020).

A review of the relevant literature reveals a clear gap in research on CSH within Scottish tourism and hospitality, specifically regarding how line managers respond to such incidents and the extent to which HR structures support both workers and managers. Existing studies suggest that LMs often overlook or dismiss CSH (Booyens *et al.,* 2022). Although quantitative research has examined workplace SH and customer misbehaviour in retail and hospitality (see Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021), there is limited qualitative work exploring CSH, managerial responses, and the role of organisational policies and human resources (HR) practices in addressing these issues. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining line managerial and HR approaches to CSH in the hospitality sector. Therefore, the objectives and research questions for this research are:

1) To explore and understand the dynamics of frontline service work in the Scottish hospitality sector and how the service worker - line manager - customer triad influences frontline work:
    - What are LMs' expectations of the interactions and service provision provided by FHWs to their customers?
    - How do power dynamics in the FHW-LM-customer triad affect the nature of frontline hospitality service work?
    - What influence do power relations in the FHW-LM-customer triad have on the tolerance of customer misbehaviour?

2) To explore the prevalence of CSH among FHWs and how LMs handle and address incidents of the phenomenon:
    - What is the prevalence of CSH, and how do FHWs handle the phenomenon?

- In what ways do LMs address allegations of CSH of frontline workers?
- What difficulties and challenges are there for LMs in addressing SH of FHWs?

3) To examine HR structures that help support FHWs and LMs in dealing with CSH and explore the impact of CSH on victims of the experience:
   - How do organisational human resource practitioners (HRPs) support frontline FHWs and LMs in dealing with CSH?
   - What is the impact of CSH on the well-being of FHWs subjected to the phenomenon?
   - What organisational policies and procedures are in place to support FHWs and LMs in dealing with CSH?

Within the tourism and hospitality sector, customer misbehaviour and abuse are well documented (Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Nimri *et al.,* 2021; Ram, 2018). Despite decades of legislation, the issue persists in the industry (Beltramini *et al.*, 2020). CSH is a problem in the hospitality sector due to the deeply ingrained aspects of service delivery that require building strong relationships with clients (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995; Gilbert *et al.,* 1998; Poulston, 2008). Fostering close rapport with customers is part of the front-line process in hospitality businesses and is seen as fundamental to building relationships between customers and hospitality service workers. However, this close association can increase the risk of CSH (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995; Gilbert *et al.,* 1998; Poulston, 2008).

A survey of hospitality workers in Scotland, by Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2021), found that over 75% of respondents were subjected to abuse by customers, with SH being a common feature, particularly towards females. A cross-sectional survey of Scottish hospitality workers by Booyens *et al.* (2022) found that managers generally expected abuse by customers to be tolerated by workers, suggesting that LMs paid little attention to reports of abuse. This situation means that often, workers remain silent about incidents of deviant customer behaviour (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Wang, 2016). Therefore, an objective of this research is to explore the relationship dynamics of frontline service work in hospitality, including interactions within the worker-manager- customer triad, and how these affect the management of SH by customers within organisations. LMs take the lead in managing and achieving organisational goals, targets, and standards and managing people and hold an official line that connects a worker with an LM (CIPD, 2025). As job activities are delegated to the

worker, progress on these activities is reported to or visible to the LM, with resources exchanged between them, and the job-task relationship continues to develop between the two (Kehoe and Han, 2020; Trullen *et al.,* 2020). One of the main obligations (among many others) is that LMs are responsible for employee well-being in the workplace (CIPD, 2023). The line manager should aim to ensure that the workplace and working conditions are fully appropriate for employees to work in. This includes all aspects of occupational health and safety in the workplace environment, which includes addressing SH at work, whether by coworkers or third parties (CIPD, 2023; Legislation.gov.uk, 2024).

1.1 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of nine chapters. To deepen the knowledge of the topics of this research, the literature review is made up of three distinct chapters, these being chapters two, three and four. As a guide to the literature analysis for this thesis, a framework has been created as a guide to conceptual factors to be discussed (see Table 1).

Thesis Literature Review Framework		
Ch 2: Sexual harassment in the workplace	Ch 3 Hospitality industry: charcteristics, and sexual harassment	Ch 4: Line Managers , their role, and their HRM responsibilities
Legal definitions of workplace sexual harassment	UK economic climate at the time of the study	Defining the line manager
Definition of workplace sexual harassment in the UK	Hospitality industry characteristics	Line managers - their role and responsibilities
Extent of workplace sexual harassment in the UK	Hospitality workforce characteristics	The basics of human resource management
Understanding theoretical developments of sexual harassment	CSH of frontline service workers	Line managers and their human resource management responsibilitie
Potential drivers and triggers of sexual harassment	Under reporting of CSH to line management	Line managers - barriers to effective HRM implementation
Power relations and power Imbalances	Sexual harassment organisational policies and procedures	Line managers - CSH in hospitality
Impact of sexual harassment on victims and organisations	Sexual harassment training	Line managers - human resource management capability

Table 1 – Thesis literature review framework

Chapter two introduces the first key topic from the literature review framework of the thesis. It considers workplace SH and provides the definition of SH that this research followed. Additionally, it looks at SH in the workplace from a global perspective before moving on to discussing this in the context of the UK. As background, and for the purpose of acknowledging the global nature of workplace SH, governmental legislation of several nations will be highlighted. Following this, UK legislation will be discussed, along with considering the extent of workplace SH in the UK. Next, the chapter integrates the major theoretical perspectives on SH, connecting them to workplace SH and subsequently to CSH within tourism and hospitality settings. In addition, the chapter looks at the potential drivers behind CSH whilst also bringing attention to the consequences of workplace SH, which include the impact on victims of the phenomenon and the impact it can have on organisations. Chapter three introduces the hospitality industry and the general characteristics associated with the sector, whilst also providing a contextual background of the current socioeconomic climate in the hospitality industry. Additionally, the chapter considers workplace SH in the sector, including CSH. Furthermore, it will discuss the phenomenon of underreporting of CSH whilst also providing a discussion around organisational policies and procedures concerning workplace SH and training of employees in handling workplace SH issues. Meanwhile, chapter four considers line managers, their roles, responsibilities and their HRM duties. It defines what a line manager is, the role of line managers and line manager and considers the role line managers play in executing organisational human resource (HR) policies, whilst also considering the concept of the worker-line manager-HR triangle. The chapter will be finalised by discussing the effectiveness of line managers' actions in HRM implementation and their capability in dealing with workplace SH.

Chapter five outlines the research methodology undertaken for this research; the critical realist-based philosophical presuppositions of the researcher, as well as the epistemological considerations and methodological strategy used for this study, are also expressed. Within the chapter, the research strategy's theoretical and practical aspects of the research are laid out and examined. A qualitative approach was adopted in this research, which reports on forty-four semi-structured interviews with participants who work in the hospitality sector. Interviews were conducted with FHWs, LMs, external HRPs, internal HRPs, trade union representatives and a hospitality industry representative. Analysis of the data was conducted using thematic analysis, with the potential research limitations being discussed before finalisation of the chapter. Chapters six and seven report the findings from the research, which was conducted

with participants who, apart from the external HRPs, worked across nine assorted hospitality sites located in the cities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, and towns in Ayrshire in the West of Scotland (WoS). Chapter six highlights the consideration of CSH as an interpretive and hierarchical problem. It provides the findings from interviews with participants who provide information about the nature of the FHW and LM role, customer misbehaviour and CSH. Furthermore, the chapter highlights how CSH, as a phenomenon, is interpreted by an individual's unique interpretive prism, from which hierarchical levels of concern are formed by the person themselves. It transpires that CSH is not a clear-cut issue with FHWs and LMs who grade incidents from an irrelevant level through to low, medium and high levels. These personal judgement calls help form the frontline workers' decision-making as to whether to report an incident. The prism also impacts the line manager's decision whether to act or not act on an incident. However, it is commonplace that incidents are not reported by frontline workers, even those considered serious. Meanwhile, chapter seven discusses research findings that highlight organisational matters which include unfounded assumptions, from LMs and HRPs, about FHW knowledge of corporate definitions of CSH and application of policy and procedure in dealing with the problem. The findings suggest that workers and line managers have a lack of knowledge and a skills gap in how to handle CSH. As a result, both exhibit a high level of navigational caution when deciding on how to deal with an incident involving a customer. Overall, the research data in chapters six and seven reveal that CSH, according to the UK legal definition of SH, is rife in Scottish hospitality. It is also apparent that both LMs and HRPs show perfunctory concern towards victims of the phenomenon, focusing more on corporate risk and reputation rather than empathetic concern for the victim. This results in a high level of non-reporting of incidents and causes a perpetuation of CSH of FHWs. Moreover, the research found fundamental communication deficiencies in the HR triad, with HRPs, in relation to CSH, considered as a distant entity divorced from the dynamics of frontline hospitality work.

Chapter eight presents the discussion of this thesis, including its connection to existing literature. The chapter aims to demonstrate how the study contributes to the current understanding of CSH in the hospitality workplace and highlights the challenges that line managers encounter in addressing this issue. Chapter nine concludes the research by revisiting the research objectives and evaluating how the findings address them. It highlights the key contributions of the study, discusses its implications, and identifies potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2.0 Sexual harassment in the workplace

This chapter introduces SH as a key workplace issue. It begins by assessing legal definitions within a variety of national contexts. It will then examine the extent of SH in the workplace. Having established the broad context around the nature and extent of SH, the chapter outlines theoretical developments, for example, noting the importance of power inequalities, organisational culture, and sociocultural factors that can influence SH. Following this, the chapter will examine the effects of SH on victims and on organisations.

2.1 Legal definitions of sexual harassment in the workplace

"Sexual harassment" as a phrase can be considered a relatively new term in the workplace lexicon. It first appeared in the United States of America (USA) in the middle of the 1970's, and by the early 1980's, the UK embraced the phrase accordingly (Turkoglu, 2020). SH in the workplace is recognised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as a societal issue and a key concern that is frequently tolerated. As a result, for any significant reduction of this phenomenon, it is lawmakers and legislation which can help to minimise the problem (ILO, 2019). Gilhooley (2020) recognises that workplace SH is a significant issue globally, acknowledging that it is prohibited in over 122 countries, with 116 of these expanding such protection to both women and men. Gilhooley claims that employers have become increasingly aware of the risks posed by workplace SH. These risks include aspects such as litigation by an employee, possible criminal actions, reputational damage, as well as the potential of low employee productivity along with an impact on recruitment, retention and attrition rates (Gilhooley, 2020).

As early as 1999, Timmerman and Bajema (1999) indicated that workplace SH was a problem in many countries, with the extent of this varying considerably. The same authors note that differences in incident rates are partly due to a country's definition of SH rather than reflecting variations in national cultures. However, the authors emphasise that organisational cultures can influence the frequency of workplace SH incidents. Turkoglu (2020) reports that national governments, organisations, and businesses have implemented numerous measures such as laws, regulations, and policies to prevent and reduce workplace SH. Simultaneously, movements like #MeToo and Time's Up, through mainstream media and social platforms, have raised public awareness of gender inequality, violence, and workplace SH (Turkoglu, 2020). Dugan (2020) describes harassment as an act of hostility towards someone, leading the author to suggest that discrimination and SH are interconnected. This view is reflected in some

legislation enacted by various countries, as noted below. To illustrate this point, the following discussion highlights a selection of countries and their legal approaches to addressing SH. This is solely to recognise the global nature of workplace SH and how authorities perceive it as a concern by establishing measures to combat the issue.

- **Australia:** New SH at work laws were introduced in March 2023, banning SH at work. These laws are linked to the Fair Work Act (2009) and provide greater protection for both male and female workers (Omari, 2023).
- **Brazil:** Law introduced in 2022 "Emprega and Mulheres" (Employment and Women) covering prevention and violence against women in the workplace. Employers had until March 2023 to implement this in the workplace (L&E Global, 2023).
- **China*:*** Women's Protection Law was introduced in October 2022 and implemented in the workplace from the start of January 2023. This legislation will provide women with increased protection against gender discrimination and SH (China Briefing, 2022).
- **India:** In India, laws were updated in 2013 when the "Sexual Harassment of Women in the Workplace Act" was passed, which aimed particularly at women. However, since its implementation, it has been acknowledged that SH does not automatically mean that it must be men v women (Soman and Shroff, 2021).
- **Japan:** Legislation was introduced in 2019 (effective June 2020) to counter harassment in the workplace, this including "power harassment" and SH. Companies with more than 50 employees must implement measures to prevent harassment. Interestingly, the law does not sanction non-compliant companies (Pitchford, 2020).
- **Mexico:** In 2019, a new labour law was introduced, which obliged employers to have worker participation protocols in place to remedy workplace SH at the first step, through "non-judicial grievance mechanisms". If this is not remedied, the next step would be pre-judicial conciliation, which occurs before a victim puts forward a judicial claim (Suarez, 2020).
- **Russia:** There is no official definition of harassment in Russian law. Coercion into acts of a sexual nature, which is a crime, is one of the legal concepts in Russian law. It is not just severe types of workplace harassment that are classed as illegal, but also unwelcome touching, sexual innuendo, inappropriate images, and films. Ambiguity in understanding workplace SH leads to rare court cases (Anyukhina *et al.*, 2022).

- **United States of America:** the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (USEEOC, 2022) classifies SH as a form of sex discrimination and is underpinned by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under this act, discrimination based on sex, pregnancy, gender identity and sexual orientation falls under the category of sexual assault or SH, which contravenes Title VII.

In Europe, although each member country has its own specific regulations concerning SH, EU members are guided by Directive 2006/54/EC (Directive 2006/54, p.L204/23-L204/24), which addresses the equal treatment of women and men at work (Siuta and Bergman, 2019). According to the directive, "Harassment and sexual harassment are contrary to the principle of equal treatment between men and women and constitute discrimination on grounds of sex." (EC Directive 2006/54, p.L204/23-L204/24). The directive states that harassment and SH are intended to intimidate, degrade, offend, or humiliate individuals, but they differ in content: harassment is generally based on sex, whereas SH involves sexualised content. Similarly, the directive places responsibility on employers to take measures to address all forms of discrimination in the workplace and to implement preventive measures against harassment and SH in accordance with national legislation and practices. The ways these broad principles have been put into practice in individual countries can be seen from the examples below of EU member states, France and Spain.

- **France:** Adopted improved legislation for SH at work in 2012 following a significant issue of a sexual assault case involving ex-International Monetary Fund Chief, Dominique Straus Khan and a hotel service worker. The law also covers transphobia and moral harassment in the workplace (France24, 2012).
- **Spain:** Under the constitutional Act 3/2007 covering Effective Equality between Men and Women (the "Equality Law"): *"*any form of verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, degrading or offensive environment*"*. This includes all forms of discrimination, including workplace SH, in which employers are expected to take measures and action to reduce workplace SH (CMS Law, 2023).

Despite the United Kingdom (UK) leaving the EU, it continues to adopt the principles of the EU Directive legislation concerning SH (Legislation.gov.uk, 2023). Additionally, the UK

Equality Act 2010 is the legislation that covers discrimination. This act addresses equality relating to sexual orientation and gender, and includes SH, both within and outside the workplace. In the workplace, the Act applies to employees, workers, job applicants, contractors, and self-employed individuals engaged in their own work (ACAS, 2024). The UK Equality Act 2010 defines SH as "Unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, be this physical, verbal, films, images, and any conduct that is degrading plus, unwanted behaviour that disregards a person's dignity, predetermined or not, or creating an unpleasant, intimidating, demeaning, or embarrassing environmental situation, be it intended or not, will all fall foul of the legislation." (ACAS, 2024). This applies whether the harassment is by a coworker or third parties, such as customers. The legislation provides examples of SH, including making sexual remarks to a person or flirting; sexual innuendo; sexually offensive jokes, including jokes about gender or orientation; asking someone about their sex life; touching someone without their consent; showing or sharing pornographic material/photos/images; physical assault and/or rape. SH can be a one-off behaviour or part of a repeated pattern, and it is important to note that an employee can be subjected to workplace SH by third parties, such as members of the public, clients, and customers.

Moreover, the legislation states that it is the employer's responsibility to do everything possible to prevent such harassment, and they could be held accountable for their employees' actions, known as "vicarious liability" (Legislation.gov.uk, 2025). Additionally, the Worker Protection (Amendment of UK Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 came into force in October 2024 (Legislation.gov.uk, 2024). This amendment strengthens employers' duty of care regarding workplace SH. It requires them to take "reasonable steps" to prevent SH by third parties, including customers and clients. However, there remains no legal obligation (italics added by author); it is simply about taking reasonable steps to protect against SH by third parties. The current UK government aims to amend clause 20 of the Employment Rights Bill, which will make it a legal obligation to "take all reasonable steps" to prevent third-party harassment of employees (Soliman, 2025). This harassment encompasses not only SH but also any harassment related to protected characteristics. As of the writing of this thesis, the amendment is still under review. The clause would cover speech and humour, which may be perceived as harassment by the recipient but not by the person delivering it. Critics refer to the amendment as the "banter ban" and warn that "employers may be expected to police casual conversations." Consequently, "a fine balancing act unfolds" for employers if this clause is enacted (Soliman, 2025, pp.52-53).

In applying government employment legislation at the workplace level, it is the responsibility of employers to enact these laws. For instance, legislation such as equal pay law, working hours and wages law, and health and safety laws would come under the employer's responsibility for workplace implementation (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Moreover, this would include the enactment of the UK Equality Act (2010, amendment 2023), which covers equality in the workplace, along with SH in the workplace (Legislation.gov.uk, 2024). Employment legislation is enshrined in organisational working polices, including HR and other people policies. Additionally, the HR policies will generally put forward the organisation's philosophy of people management and provide a framework for employees to understand expected behaviours and attitudes towards all organisational employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, it is the role of line managers at all levels in the organisation to apply corporate polices, within the workplace, this being important part of their HR duties (Purcell *et al.* 2003). As a note, LMs' HR duties will be discussed further in chapter four of this thesis.

2.2 The extent of sexual harassment in the workplace

Research into workplace SH has revealed it to be a widespread issue across various business sectors (Buckner *et al.,* 2014; Chamberlain *et al.,* 2008; Cortina and Areguin, 2021; Dougherty *et al.,* 1996; Ford *et al.,* 2021; Hunt *et al.,* 2010; McDonald, 2012; McLaughlin *et al.,* 2012; Ohse and Stockdale, 2008; Willness *et al.,* 2007). Industry bodies and trade unions, through survey research, further emphasise the incidence and severity of the problem. For instance, the UK Sexual Harassment Survey of 2020, conducted by Adams *et al.* (2020) for the UK government Equalities Office, found that 72% of respondents experienced at least one form of SH during their lifetime. Moreover, it acknowledged that incidents in hospitality settings were more frequent, often occurring weekly or monthly. Academic research also indicates that in the hospitality sector, such incidents are often a regular occurrence (see Beltramini *et al.,* 2020; Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Curran, 2021; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Williamson *et al.,* 2022). Meanwhile, trade union surveys also underscore the issue of workplace SH. The Trades Union Congress (TUC, 2016), in its "Still just a bit of banter?" report covering the UK, found that over half of women surveyed had experienced some form of SH; over a third of respondents had heard sexually charged comments about other women at work; nearly a quarter of women experienced unwanted touching; and one in ten women were victims of unwelcome attempted kissing or sexual touching. This behaviour was predominantly perpetrated by men in more senior positions than the victims. Additionally, seven per cent of those surveyed reported that third parties (customers/clients) were responsible, while four out of five women stated they did

not report the harassment (TUC, 2016). In Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC, 2022) report "Silence is Compliance", which involved 653 respondents, found that 45% of women experienced workplace SH. This harassment occurred across all demographic groups and was more common in male-dominated industries and in roles that are low-paid and considered precarious. Moreover, during the twelve months before the research, a third of women had experienced workplace SH, with over 50% knowing a colleague who had or was experiencing it. Furthermore, while 20% were uncertain, 40% believed SH was a problem at their place of work. This was especially prevalent in the hospitality, education, manufacturing, energy, and utility sectors (STUC, 2022). Although 90% of women recognised SH at work, younger women were less aware of it. The report suggests that 50% of participants under 30 would not be able to identify workplace SH, though the survey does not explain this, which indicates a knowledge gap. Regarding third-party incidents (customers/clients), 26% of respondents had been victims of third-party SH, which appears more common in customer-facing roles within sectors such as hospitality, retail, health, and social care (STUC, 2022). Overall, the STUC report concludes that workplace SH is widespread and persists due to cultural complacency and workers' reluctance to report it. Despite legislative efforts to address the issue, academic research and survey findings demonstrate that it remains a persistent problem in workplaces. The next section aims to explore the reasons behind workplace SH by examining theoretical developments related to it.

2.3 Understanding theoretical developments in sexual harassment

In an analysis of SH literature, Pina *et al.* (2009) noted four theoretical viewpoints and models of workplace SH: organisational theory; sociocultural theory; natural/biological theory; sex-role spill-over. The sections will consider these theories before moving on to discussing potential drivers of SH.

2.3.1 Organisational theory

Organisational theory suggests that a wide range of organisational problems, such as inequalities of power and status within the organisation, may increase the likelihood of SH occurring (Gruber, 1992; Tangri *et al.,* 1982). Organisational theory recognises that hierarchical structures within organisations create power differences, which lead to status inequalities that, in turn, heighten the risk of workplace SH (Gutek and Morasch, 1982; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Rhee, 1997). Cleveland and Kerst (1993) argue that proponents of organisational theory support the idea that power disparity amplifies the chances of workplace SH. Western cultural

norms imply that individuals have varying structural vulnerabilities and that their relationships are often organised by hierarchy, of which this hierarchy can also have vulnerabilities; therefore, the use and acceptance of power within such hierarchies are to be expected (Lips, 1991). Interestingly, Pina *et al.* (2009) note that gender power differentials are not a primary focus in organisational theory and acknowledge that while males mainly perpetrate SH, females in positions of power may also be or become aggressors. Moreover, in the pursuit of power or merely to maintain it, peers and subordinates might also engage in SH (Cleveland and Kerst, 1993). A core element of organisational theory is that it considers not only power differentials but also other contributing factors such as organisational norms and ethics, tolerance within the organisation's culture or climate, and gendered occupational roles. For example, if an organisation exhibits a permissive culture, has line management that is ineffective at enforcing SH policies, or lacks such policies altogether, organisational theory will predict that SH is more likely to occur (Pina *et al.*, 2009). One of the strengths of organisational theory lies in the fact that many of its propositions have been supported by research as significant factors influencing the incidence of SH at work. For instance, Willness *et al.* (2007) suggest that organisations with an imbalance of gendered occupations—reflecting the gendered nature of the organisation—and those with a climate that tolerates SH serve as strong predictors of its occurrence. However, organisational theory is limited in that it tends to neglect individual differences, including daily behaviour, expectations, and stereotypical considerations, which can also impact the manifestation of workplace SH (Pina *et al.*, 2009). Nonetheless, Willness *et al.* (2007) affirm that organisational theory has played a leading role in advancing practical strategies for organisations to address and manage workplace SH.

As will be considered in more detail in chapter three, hospitality is a sector where a significant number of women work (Zientara *et al.,* 2024); consequently, this theory could well be considered as one that suits the reasoning of why SH occurs due to the imbalance of gendered occupations. However, it is unclear as to how this could give a solid rationale for SH by third parties. Nevertheless, it offers insights into power differentials, which will be discussed in Section 2.5 of this thesis.

2.3.2 Sociocultural theory – men v women sociocultural factors

The broader social and political context in which SH at work occurs is the primary focus of sociocultural theory. Generally feminist in perspective, sociocultural theory proposes that SH serves as a means of maintaining male dominance over women, which is an unavoidable

consequence of sexism and gender inequality (Gutek, 1985; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015). It is believed that because SH highlights gender roles, it reinforces the idea that women are inferior to men. Consequently, it supports existing gender stratification by emphasising sex role expectations and endorsing norms related to sex status, such as male dominance and female subservience (Malovich and Stake, 1990; Schacht and Stake, 1993). This leads to stereotypical interactions between men and women, where men are seen as domineering and aggressive, and women as submissive and compliant, due to low sociocultural power (Gruber and Bjorn, 1985). According to feminist theory, this situation allows men to justify their actions, including SH, while women often blame themselves for being targeted (Vaux, 1993).

A key strength of feminist sociocultural theory is its incorporation of gender issues, male dominance, and patriarchy in explaining SH (Pina *et al.,* 2009). Similarly, highlighting workplace gender inequality is often linked to raising awareness about SH at work (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997). Therefore, male dominance and power imbalances are central themes of the theory. Pina *et al.* (2009) argue that feminist sociocultural explanations for SH have some validity, with studies indicating that harassment is more common in workforces dominated by males (Brown, 1998; Tangri *et al.*, 1982). However, concerns exist that the feminist sociocultural focus on men and class may overshadow other factors contributing to SH (Dillabough, 2004). Taking intersectionality theory as an example, it examines not just men and class, but also how other overlapping systems of power shape social relations (Hills-Collins and Bilge, 2020). Additionally, it looks across different contexts and influences individuals' everyday experiences. As an analytic framework, it treats categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, and age as interconnected and mutually constitutive, rather than as separate or additive dimensions of identity (see Cole, 2009; Hills-Collins and Bilge, 2020, p.2; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010). According to Dillabough (2004), such social categories are not included in sociocultural theory. Moreover, despite SH being widespread in society, most men do not engage in such behaviour, and feminist sociocultural theory does not adequately explain why this is the case (Pina *et al.,* 2009). In the context of CSH in hospitality, male dominance and power imbalances may partly explain the occurrence of CSH. However, sociocultural theory falls short when accounting for female-on-male SH and same-sex harassment.

2.3.3 Sex role spill-over theory

Although often regarded as an independent theory, Tangri and Hayes (1987) view it as an extension of organisational theories of SH (Pina *et al.,* 2009). Gutek and Morasch (1982) proposed that the primary reason women experience SH at work is generally related to the concept of sex-role spill-over. In theory, individuals involved in the same work roles, with similar role expectations and behaviours, should behave consistently. However, it is believed that, to some extent, a worker can, through their own thoughts about themselves (the self) and their personality, craft a work role that suits them. Since sexuality is part of the self, it may influence the work role, regardless of how inappropriate this may be (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). The core assumption of this theory is that men and women enter the workplace with personal beliefs and expectations about gender-based conduct, even if these expectations are unsuitable in the work context. Hence, the theory argues that gender-based notions held by sexual harassers often override those promoting worker equality (Sbraga and O'Donohue, 2000). Consequently, conflicts are more likely to arise when the sex-role stereotypes of the aggressor differ from the expected roles of males and females at work (Sbraga and O'Donohue, 2000). As a result, women may experience SH in roles that are traditionally considered non-traditional for females, such as engineering, oil rig work, or senior CEO positions (Brown, 1998; Niebuhr and Boyles, 1991). In addition, sex roles extend into gender-based behavioural norms within the workplace environment (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). For instance, women are often expected to be warmer-hearted, more sympathetic, and more loyal than men in similar roles. Moreover, women are expected to embody sexual objectification and impact as a sex object, which are considered elements of the female sex role (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). Consequently, sex-role spill-over occurs when women are required to portray the sex object or display their sexuality through their behaviour, appearance, or clothing more frequently than men do in similar professional situations (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). Similarly, spill-over becomes evident if a woman behaves seductively towards a male colleague or a man exhibits sexually aggressive behaviour towards a female colleague at work (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). Essentially, sex-role spill-over theory argues that a harasser's attitudes towards gender stereotypes override their views on worker equality.

It is accepted that, by itself, sex-role spill-over theory does not fully explain why SH occurs (Gutek and Morasch, 1982) and, due to inherent disparities between the sex-roles of men and women, the theory fails to provide the same argument for men (Gutek and Done, 2001), perhaps because there are fewer males in non-traditional work settings (Gutek, 1985). There remains

the consideration that hospitality work is seen as a servile sector to work in (see Ariza-Montes *et al.,* 2019; Baum *et al.,* 2016; Williamson, 2017), with the industry suffering from the perception of hospitality jobs being of low status (Karatepe, 2011; Tseng, 2014; Lainpelto and Wellton, 2025). Nickson (2013) observed that groups such as young workers, women, and migrants constitute a large portion of the tourism and hospitality workforce. Additionally, women are disproportionately represented in roles commonly stereotyped as female, including cleaning, bar service, restaurant, and kitchen work (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Ladkin, 2011; Silva and Couto, 2023; Vargas-Jiménez *et al.,* 2020). Under this theory, it could be considered here that the perceived servility of hospitality service work, along with the higher ratio of women workers, increases the chances of SH of service workers. This could potentially be a reason for CSH being a significant problem in the hospitality sector. Meanwhile, Pina *et al.* (2009) note that sex-role theory has some empirical support, particularly regarding the presence of females in male-dominated workplaces. From a CSH perspective, the theory suggests that personal sociocultural beliefs can influence SH by men against women. However, it provides limited insight into the causes of same gender SH or SH by women on men.

2.3.4 Natural/biological theory

The natural/biological theory puts forward the notion that SH is a normal and natural allurement between males and females and, overall, is part of evolutionary theory in the selection of mates. As such, it is considered a natural component in choosing a partner; thus, SH is an indication of sexual interest (Barak *et al.,* 1995; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Studd and Gattiker, 1991). Furthermore, Studd and Gattiker (1991) suggest that males have an innate inner sense of sexual aggression to find a partner. Barak *et al.* (1995) consider that such actions are not designed to be seen as harassment. The greater sex drive causes an imbalance between the sexual desires of men and women (Pina *et al.,* 2009). For some researchers, the divergent reproductive methods of men and women, and their differing evolutionary pathways, cause potential for conflict, with this overflowing into the workplace (Studd and Gattiker, 1991). This is argued from an evolutionary standpoint; men exploit their power to their advantage to attain sex (Browne, 1997). A leading strength of the natural/biological stance is that it brings together evolutionary viewpoints to explain SH as, in essence, it suggests sexually aggressive behaviour is innate, and it is this that compels an aggressor accordingly (Pina *et al.,* 2009). However, there are several criticisms of this school of thought. Firstly, it reduces SH to a basic, primal and simplistic approach, trivialising it as simply a matter of a reproductive practice (Pina *et al.*, 2009). For instance, humans have higher-order faculties, these are considered as namely,

perception, imagination, ego/reason and superego/conscience (Frimpong, 2025). This theory neglects consideration of these personal and individual aspects of human behaviour in resisting primal urges and instincts (Pina *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, it treats SH in an elementary manner, which has the effect of making light of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the theory gives the impression of women as being the only victims of SH (Pina *et al.,* 2009), yet men can also be sexually harassed. Surveys such as the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (USMSPB) in 1981, 1988, 1995, and 2022, plus academic research (see Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Holland *et al.,* 2016; Jones, 2006; Stockdale *et al.,* 2004), found that males are also subjected to SH. As a result, the theory fails to account for female SH against males and same gender SH. Moreover, the natural/biological theory of SH has little empirical support as a predictor of SH. For example, Tangri *et al.* (1982) in a study testing the USMSPB (1981) survey data, found no evidence of the theory as a predictor of SH. This is an example of what Pina *et al.* (2009) note as a failing of empirical adequacy. So, in considering natural/biological theory as a reason for SH, its key flaws are the failure to consider higher-order faculties of humans and the lack of adequate empirical support surrounding it. Meanwhile, the next section will consider potential drivers of CSH in the hospitality workplace and the consequential impact on an employee and the organisation.

2.4 Potential drivers of customer sexual harassment

This section considers the relationships between frontline service workers and customers in the hospitality industry. It will provide a discussion around what could be considered as potential drivers of SH of frontline workers by customers. Consequently, the section will consider areas covering emotional labour, aesthetic labour, sexualised aesthetic labour, the role of alcohol and power imbalances between frontline service workers, line managers and customers.

2.4.1 Emotional labour, aesthetic labour and sexualised aesthetic labour

In her seminal work, *The Managed Heart* (updated in 2012), Arlie Russell Hochschild, defined emotional labour as,

"Individuals required to manage [sic] their feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold as a wage and therefore has exchange value" (Hochschild, 2012, p.7).

Hochschild's book relates to interviews and observations conducted with airline flight attendants, these being predominantly female. According to Hochschild, flight attendants' duties include coordinating their own well-being with their passengers' feelings (emotions). In a similar vein, airlines demand that employees always smile when interacting with customers, with the overarching goal of making work appear effortless (p.8). Additionally, Hochschild asserts that to protect product-passenger-contentment, any irritation and fatigue that the flight attendant may have should be concealed while working with customers (p.8) through conscious use of positive body language, being part of surface acting (p.35). Hochschild's perspective is that such deeds are in fact emotional labour, as a result, it is display that is what is sold (p.90), with this behaving as a commodity when employed in the open market of work (p.14). Additionally, Hochschild brought up the notion of appearance codes in airline organisations in which the company controls flight-attendant appearance. For example, dress code, amount/type of make-up, standard of grooming and weight checks. Such codes provide the basis for the aesthetic looks of workers as part of their work contract, this considered as part of being a professional employee (pp.101-103). Aesthetic looks of workers were built on by Warhurst *et al.* (2000), who sought to develop a more systemic examination of corporeal aspects of interservice work.

It was a study of interactive service workers by Warhurst *et al.* (2000) that introduced the notion of aesthetic labour, which they defined as "Embodied capacities and attributes possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment" (p.4). It is suggested that these capacities and attributes are "mobilised, developed and commodified" by employers, and they are aesthetically geared to construct a desired style of customer service experience, this corresponding with Hochschild's comments around product-passenger-contentment and customer care requirements. Warhurst and Nickson (2020) consider that employee fit, including aesthetic fit, is a prerequisite for organisational marketing and branding needs, meaning that interactive service workers are part of the brand experience. In addition to aesthetics (looking good), elements such as body language, eye contact, and verbal impression management (speech) also form part of and are key aspects of aesthetic labour (Warhurst and Nickson, 2020). Whilst aesthetic labour is believed to be mobilised, developed, and commodified, it could be argued that sexualisation is also used in such a manner. Indeed, Hochschild (2012) hinted at sexualisation of emotional labour when commenting that the smile can be sexualised (p.93). At the time of Hochschild's original work in the early 1980's, airline advertisements used straplines clearly drawing on sexual innuendo, such as "Fly me, you'll

like it" (National Airlines) and "We really move our tails for you to make your dreams come true" (Continental Airlines). Hochschild considered such advertising as exacerbating the feeling of a sexual environment, with this inflating customer expectation of that environment (sexual) of which flight attendants are in the front-line (Hochschild, 2012, p.93). Thus, sexualisation becomes part of organisational brand marketing and a commodity used for organisational gain.

The Collins English Dictionary defines sexualisation as "To make something or someone sexualised – meaning to make them sexual or sexually consider them" (Collins, 2022). However, what an individual may consider as being sexualised is perhaps in the eyes of the beholder, and this ought to be borne in mind when considering aesthetic labour and sexualised aesthetic labour as a concept. Walter (2010) suggests a "hypersexual culture" pervades contemporary society in which accomplishments by women are reformulated through a limited frame of reference, which tends to highlight "sexual allure" (Warhurst and Nickson, 2020, p.125). Walter's view is rather critical of the creation of such a sexualised culture. However, Hakim (2010) is less so, seeing this as what she terms "erotic capital." Such capital is an asset that can be advantageous to women in industries such as entertainment and leisure, with Hakim claiming that erotic capital can be as important, if not more important than economic or social capital. This leads Warhurst and Nickson (2020, pp.126-127) to consider that sexualised aesthetic labour is a phenomenon that is evident in the interactive service workplace.

In examining the mechanism of sexualisation in interactive service work, Warhurst and Nickson (2009) argue for different forms of sexualised labour. These are 1) sexualised labour that is sanctioned by management, 2) sexualised labour which is subscribed by management, and 3) sexualisation as a part of management strategy. The authors view sexualised labour that is sanctioned and subscribed to by management as largely driven by the employee. For example, potential recruits and current employees apply their aesthetic skills and abilities towards employers and work colleagues as a means of "getting in" and progressing in an organisation. These aesthetic skills and abilities are presented through facial characteristics and expression, eye contact, demeanour, speech, and tone of voice. This is conducted via discussions, meetings and during interviews, for the aim of self-benefit and gain. The important thing to remember here is that aesthetic labouring is rendered for the worker's own gain, for example, to improve their employability, gain a pay increase or enhance their skills or career; therefore, this is not done for the financial gain of the company (Warhurst *et al.*, 2000).

The third factor highlighted by Warhurst and Nickson (2009) is that of sexualisation as a part of management strategy. Obviously, this is driven by the organisation as a clear attempt to develop a sexualised appearance as a manner of a service style, for commercial benefit. As a result, prescriptive standards and rules of employee dress codes and appearance, for both men and women, feature explicitly in some organisations, as do requirements in comportment, looks, body language and speech. As an illustration, Rhee (1997) highlights the example of Hooters Restaurants in the USA, in which all waiting staff are young, attractive women. The employee uniform comprises tight-fitting shorts and T-shirts, this providing a strong indication that employees had to look "aesthetically good" to be employed by the company. Similarly, Walters (2016) highlights the retail clothing chain Abercrombie and Fitch, whose corporate policy emphasises looks and sexuality to embody the brand, with this also applying to male workers who sometimes were expected to work as shirtless greeters in the store.

The discussion around the concepts of emotional, aesthetic labour and sexualised labour has noted how these concepts can play an important part in an organisation's brand and marketing of that brand. Additionally, aesthetic appearance is also seen as a key element in the service experience and is considered part of and accepted as an aspect of contemporary service work. Furthermore, in terms of sexually objectifying service work roles through these concepts, they can be seen as a provocation for customers who engage in unacceptable behaviour towards frontline workers, including that of SH.

2.4.2 Alcohol consumption

Customers will frequently consume alcoholic beverages when on holidays and business trips, dining in pubs, bars, and restaurants, and whilst attending a variety of events (Yagil, 2008). Authors have argued that alcohol is a frequent enabler of customer misbehaviour (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Fellesson *et al.,* 2013; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021). In the area of human behaviour, alcohol is thought to be a cause for generating increased aggression as it can reduce the inhibitory control of an individual; as a result, it has the potential to escalate interpersonal conflict into violence and hostility (Boyd 2002; Gmel and Rehm 2003; Parrot and Eckhardt 2018; Pedersen *et al.,* 2002). By implication, this would mean that in the context of customers consuming alcohol in tourism and hospitality contexts, alcohol could perhaps become a potential spark to ignite customer aggression towards service workers, including the act of SH. Aggressive behaviour in social settings may be explained by a condition called "alcohol myopia" (Steele and Josephs, 1990). This entails a person becoming more aware of, or

receptive to, environmental cues that are prominent, particularly when opposing indications are faint or subtle. Alcohol myopia may cause the person to mistakenly see sexual activity or attractiveness as a proposition to make sexual approaches (Giancola *et al.,* 2010; Josephs and Steele, 1990; Steele and Josephs, 1990). Meanwhile, when conducting their research in bars, Graham *et al.* (2014) found that SH is a significant issue that frequently stems from intentional sexual interference and unwelcome persistence rather than from people misinterpreting attention. Likewise, their research found that 90% SH involved men sexually harassing women. Interestingly, Turchik (2012), in researching experiences of sexual victimisation of male students by females, alcohol consumption was considered a key driver. Meanwhile, in survey research of nightclubs in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Sanchez *et al.* (2019) considered that in those venues that charged an admission price for alcohol as a means of entry to the club, episodes of SH were more common. Forced kissing and groping were the most common elements of SH, and there was little difference in SH rates, gender wise. The researchers theorised that purchasing alcohol as a means of entering the clubs would be the spark for further consumption inside the venue (Sanchez *et al.,* 2019). Findings consistent with those of Sanchez *et al.* (2019) were reported by Peterson *et al.* (2023) in their study of SH in public spaces, in which nightclubs were involved. It was noted that SH was prevalent in such venues. In addition, events of unwanted attention which are sexual by nature are common, so too is touching of non-genital body parts without consent, which also has a significantly high frequency rate (Peterson *et al.,* 2023). The effect of alcohol in reducing an individual's inhibitory control leads to an increase in alcohol-seeking behaviour, that is, drinking more alcohol (Field *et al.,* 2010). What's more, alcohol intoxication holds other adverse effects; for instance, it can encourage aggression (Hull and Bond, 1986; Ito *et al.,* 1996) and increase sexual risk-taking (George and Stoner, 2000; Halpern-Felsher *et al.,* 1996). Such effects could lead to the creation of a hostile working environment (HWE) created by customers, meaning that HWE's are not exclusive to organisational or business culture. Rather, such environments can be created by events which are constructed by customers, causing a stressful workplace environment for workers.

2.4.3 Hostile working environments

As part of the definition of workplace SH, the ILO notes that in an HWE workplace, the chances of SH are significantly heightened (Lippel, 2016). A HWE is created when a working environment in which coworkers, line supervisor/managers, organisational hierarchy and customer/clients intimidate, insult, ridicule, and assault workers in their place of work on account of their sex or sexuality (Aalberts and Seidman, 1994; Ram *et al.,* 2016; Rhee, 1997;

Thomas, 2021). McGinley *et al.* (2007) note that a HWE occurs when an employee (man or woman) shows agency and subjectively deems the working environment as being hostile enough to change the circumstances of their job, thinking it severe enough, that it transforms the terms and conditions of their employment. Unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, verbal or physical acts of a sexual nature, are considered as SH when they directly or indirectly affect a person's employment, impair their ability to perform their job duties, or foster an uncomfortable, intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment (Buchanan *et al.,* 2014; O'Leary-Kelly *et al.,* 2009; USEEOC, 2022). According to Stockdale *et al.* (2004), there are three types of hostile work environments which generate SH: approach-based SH, rejection-based SH, and generalised SH. The foundation of approach-based SH is sexual interest towards the subject of the harasser's interest; this can be conducted through nonverbal or verbal harassment. In such cases, the harasser seeks to pursue an amorous relationship with the person of interest to them (Stockdale *et al.,* 2004). The goal of rejection-based SH is to belittle the victim because of their gender. Once more, harassment may be either vocal or nonverbal. Instead of displaying a sexual attraction, this behaviour is intended to denigrate the victim. Meanwhile, generalised SH is when sexual abuse is made towards women or men rather than any specific victim (Stockdale *et al.,* 2004).

In relation to the tourism and hospitality industries, over the years, SH by coworkers, managers and customers is ubiquitous (see Bitner *et al.,* 1994; Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995; Gettman and Gelfand, 2007; Harris and Reynolds, 2003, 2004; Johnson and Madera, 2018; Reynolds and Harris, 2006; Yagil, 2008). It could perhaps be considered that the industry has a problem with HWE's, with Said and Tanova (2021) believing that the hospitality industry continues to face significant challenges in improving working conditions for employees. Anasori *et al.* (2020) consider that the poor working conditions in the industry may well exacerbate a workplace that is hostile, which can promote unsavoury incidents against employees. Meanwhile, Ariza-Montes *et al.* (2017) note that the conditions that employees in hospitality work in can also result in bullying from fellow workers, management, or customers. In addition, Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2023) view job precarity in the hospitality sector as a key element of poor employee working conditions. This insecurity may make workers feel unable to address unfavourable conditions of work, including those of repeated SH by coworkers and customers. Therefore, coworkers and customers can create and incite an HWE by making the employee vulnerable to aggressive acts by such individuals.

2.5 Power relations and power imbalances – intersectionality and customer supremacy

As noted, earlier workplace SH is an increasing global problem with both female and male workers being subjected to the phenomenon (Cesario, 2020; ILO, 2019; ILO, 2022b; McDonald and Charlesworth, 2015). In a missive in 2019, the ILO noted that in highly feminised industries, like hospitality, where women make up the bulk of the production staff, but men make up line supervisors and managers, there may be a higher prevalence of SH (ILO, 2019). This is an indication that hierarchical power may well play a part in promoting SH. The ILO (2019) further note that discrimination plays a part in violence and harassment at work, including SH, which is seen as a severe expression of sex discrimination and a violation of human rights. Additionally, it is recognised that women with low socio-economic status may face SH more frequently, along with women of other social groups, such as ethnic minorities, migrant workers, disabled women, lesbians, transgender women, and women with disabilities (ILO, 2019). Therefore, this section starts with considering the concept of intersectionality as a potential power play influencer of SH in the workplace.

2.5.1 Intersectionality

The significance and implications of simultaneously belonging to different social groups are studied through the concept of intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010). Sojourner Truth was the pioneer of intersectional theory. One of the earliest discussions of intersectionality was an 1851 speech to the Akron Women's Convention in Ohio, where she contrasted her experiences as a Black woman with the kindness shown to White women and the demands placed on the physical prowess of Black males (Brah and Phoenix, 2004). Truth considered that discrimination based on gender or race failed to appropriately describe the challenges she faced throughout her life due to being female and her ethnicity. Truth's authoritative narrative provided the basic foundations for the intersectional viewpoint, which evolved in feminist studies and critical race theory during the 1970's and 1980's (Rosette *et al.,* 2018).

Intersectional theory considers that to understand an individual's experience, personal identity characteristics, for example, gender, race, sexual orientation and class ought to be considered as a whole and not subject to isolation (Rosette *et al.,* 2018). In reviewing what is meant when two social categories, for example, gender and race, "intersect." Rosette *et al.* (2018) believe that, in its most condensed form, intersection denotes the simultaneous passage of two dimensions through a common point or the shared element of two categories. For example,

being a person who is female, Black and who identifies as a lesbian is more than belonging to one group alone; these characteristics are unique to everyone. The term intersectionality is attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw following her essay written in 1989 (Rosette *et al.,* 2018). Historically, intersectionality has typically concentrated on race and sex and how overlapping oppressive systems affect people's social identity categories differently (Daily JSTOR, 2020), such that power dynamics affect social interactions as well as day-to-day interactions (Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2020, p.2). Since Crenshaw first raised awareness of intersectionality, the term has broadened in use to include other social categories, including race/ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, ability, and disability, in which it is considered that all are interconnected and influence each other. For example, power relations of gender, class and race are not separate and mutually exclusive identities but are interconnected and interact simultaneously. As a result, these intersected power connections impact on many facets of social life (Hills-Collins and Bilge, 2020, p.2). Thus, intersectionality theory highlights that the significance of power in a social hierarchy can be created through structural power relations, which can determine which people's experiences are seen or unseen (Brassel *et al.,* 2020). For Hills-Collins and Bilge, this means that power dynamics affect both the way people interact with one another in their everyday lives as well as in a variety of social contexts (Hills-Collins and Bilge, 2020, p.2). Contemporary definitions of intersectionality are more expansive and explicitly include the experience of dominant and privileged social meaning, with Rosette *et al.* (2018) arguing that intersectionality now goes beyond that of subordination. As a result, people can more easily access the complexity of the world and their experiences, which may all be understood and explained via the lens of intersectionality (Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2020, p.2-3).

This blending of social categories alters perceptions, and social identities are connected to many stereotypes and situations for people who are part of organisations (Rosette *et al.,* 2018). Regarding this, Petsko *et al.* (2022) put forward the notion of a "lens-based" account of intersectional stereotyping. They propose that individuals, "perceivers", have a spectrum of autonomous lenses which are used as a framework of reasoning, in this case, about other people. Similarly, the authors suggest that in any given social situation, only one lens at a time is used. These lenses become active in social situations and are considered identity-specific mental schemas for placing others in categories (Petsko *et al.,* 2022). This means that perceivers will have a separate lens for all social categories, for example, gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. Additionally, it is thought that other lenses, and the social

categories that are implied by them, will lose focus as one lens sharpens. For instance, if a race lens is used, categories connected to ethnicity, such as Black, Asian, White, and Eastern, will focus perceptions on this area. The outcome of this means that other social categories, for example, male, gay elderly, would be considered to the perceiver as lens-irrelevant and these would be removed from their thinking (Petsko *et al.,* 2022). The authors consider lenses to be clearly intersectional, which can lead perceivers to view an individual target through those lenses. For instance, a perceiver may consider a person as an elderly man or an Asian woman, whilst at the same time, broader group memberships such as men or Asian women in general are likely to recede from perceptual view (Petsko *et al.,* 2022). Thus, perceivers can stereotype individuals in a variety of categorically specific ways, which may result in some categories being targeted more by perceivers (Petsko *et al.,* 2022). Kensbock *et al.* (2015) in their research with room attendants in 5-star hotels found that several participants considered that ethnicity, age, race, and status produced a greater level of harassment. Furthermore, interviewees noted that such harassment is just part of hotel work culture, such that harassment is the norm. As a result, it could be argued that there is potential for power imbalances to occur. This is discussed in the next section, with the focus being on power inequalities in tourism and hospitality, particularly in the context of the SH of women workers.

2.5.2 Power Imbalances – gender power relations and inequalities

At this point, to understand the pervasiveness of SH in the tourism and hospitality workplace, it is worth examining gender power relations and inequalities that derive from gender socialisation, that is, traditional gender roles, behaviours, and responsibilities, as a potential reason for SH. It is also worth noting that it is generally considered that women experience more incidents of SH than men (Baltag *et al.,* 2021; Friborg *et al.,* 2017; Ineson *et al.,* 2013; Lim *et al.,* 2019; McLaughlin *et al.,* 2012; Vettori and Nicolaides, 2016; Yagil, 2008). Gendered spaces and habitats define socially prescribed roles running across society (Duffy *et al.,* 2015). As a corollary, the construction, promulgation, and consumption of social processes are, in a variety of ways, also gendered. Whilst shaping society, these gendered environments will inevitably shape genders in the workplace, with, of course, this being the case for tourism and hospitality. Thus, gendered tourism and hospitality practices are shaped by broader societal gendered cultures (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). Research has shown that women are far more likely to be subjected to workplace SH than men (Adams *et al.,* 2020; Charlesworth *et al.,* 2011; Gutek and Morasch, 1982; Hoel and Vartia, 2018; ILO, 2019; McDonald, 2012; Robinson *et al.,* 2022). The gendered nature of SH, as featured in a USEEOC report, shows

that 7,609 SH charges in the workplace were filed in 2018. Out of this total, 84.1% were filed by women and 15.9% by men (Chawla *et al.,* 2021). As noted earlier in the thesis, the tourism and hospitality industries produce a large assortment of jobs and roles. The industry is labour-intensive by nature, with jobs ranging from unskilled and semi-skilled positions through to professional skilled roles. It is an industry where it is not unusual for men and women to have differing employment contracts, alongside contrasting working conditions and working arrangements, dependent on the role occupied (Ladkin, 2011). Despite the industry's historically high proportion of women employees, there is a far higher ratio of women workers in job roles and occupations that are typically stereotyped as female tasks, for example, cleaning, bar, restaurant, and kitchen work than that of males (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Ladkin, 2011; Silva and Couto, 2023; Vargas-Jiménez *et al.,* 2020).

Overall, the comments relating to gendered spaces, stereotypical jobs, and roles occupied by women appear to reinforce differences and distinctions between men and women. In this sense, Butler and Schmidtke (2014) argue that conventional power differentials between men and women account for SH and consider that endurance of harassment continues to cultivate the power differential, linking to the sociocultural theory of SH posited by Gutek (1985). As such, power relations behind stereotypical gendered roles and intersectional sociocultural inequalities could be seen as potential drivers of SH at work. In addition, hierarchical organisational power relations also seem to come into play as a potential driver. For example, Dawson *et al.* (2021), Folgerø *et al.* (1995), Poulston (2008), and Waudby and Poulston (2017) recognise that men are more likely to hold managerial roles in the hospitality industry than women, with many women being involved in lower-level roles. Hierarchical structures are a key element of the organisational theory of SH. This theory considers that organisational hierarchical structures create power differentials which result in status inequality, therefore fuelling and escalating the prospects of SH in the workplace (Gutek and Morasch, 1982; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Rhee, 1997). Similarly, Waudby and Poulston (2017) argue that structural differential and managerial imbalances in power in the hospitality sector are crucial factors as to why SH continues its prevalence in the industry. But it is not just organisational power differentials that can be a factor in workplace SH in hospitality. Power imbalances between customers, hospitality front-line workers and line managers may also come into play.

2.5.3 Power Imbalances – customers, service workers and the customer service triangle

Research by Guerrier and Adib (2000) with participants from a cross-section of work roles in hotels from two to five stars, in the UK, USA, Europe and South-East Asia. Noted that female chambermaids encountered high levels of harassment from guests. In addition, their research suggested that customer-facing hotel employees are more exposed to customer SH due to their relative status to guests (Guerrier and Adib, 2000). Similar findings to this have been found in wide-ranging academic research (see Fine *et al.,* 1999; Good and Cooper, 2014, 2016; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Karatepe, 2011; Kundro *et al.,* 2022; Lin and Tseng, 2022; Tseng, 2014; Ueno *et al.,* 2022; Worke *et al.,* 2021; Yagil, 2008). One of the consequences of these perceptions is that it transmits the notion of unequal power between the provider of service (the employee) and the customer (Bishop *et al.,* 2005; Grandey *et al.,* 2004). An example of customer power differentials was seen by Marriage (2018), who reported SH from customers at The President's Club men's only dinner event held at a five-star luxury hotel in London. Marriage, a newspaper reporter working for the UK's Financial Times, went undercover and was employed by a host/hostess agency to work at the event. The agency was charged by the organisers to employ tall, thin, and pretty females who were instructed to wear skimpy black outfits, matching underwear, and sexy black high heels. This is clearly an applied example of sexualised aesthetic labour (see Section 2.4.1). During and after dinner, hostesses reported widespread customer SH, including groping, lewd comments, and unseemly propositions. Guests (all male) in attendance were "high profile" businessmen, politicians, property tycoons and financiers, who were considered powerful people. This example links to the power imbalances within the customer service triangle. The hierarchical power of the line managers seen by the worker, the perceived power of the customer held by the worker and the line manager, and the powerful sense of "sovereignty" held by the customer create significant power imbalances between the triad of actors (Korczynski, 2002).

The customer, worker and employer service triangle will not be covered in detail in this thesis; that said, it is imperative to be aware of the fierce competition within the hospitality industry and the considerable influence that customers have when visiting hospitality establishments. The notion of a dyadic employment connection between an employer and a frontline service worker was altered by research on frontline service work, which recognised the customer as the third party in the interaction (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013; Du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Fuller and Smith, 1991; Havard *et al.,* 2009; Korczynski, 2002; Lopez, 2010). Indeed, Korczynski (2002) declared that the most "important unique aspect of service work" (p.2) is

the client or customer. Meanwhile, the increased competition brought about by the globalisation of services has had the effect of placing the customer/client at the centre of attention (Korczynski, 2002, p.12). Various authors have covered the distinction between service labour and manufacturing labour in some detail and have emphasised the vital role that customers play in the employment process (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010; Korczynski, 2002; Korczynski, 2013; Lopez, 2010). Indeed, Bélanger and Edwards (2013) take it as a given that the customer is in the triangle of power in the employment relationship and believe that only through considering the worker-customer interaction as a component of the employment relationship - the social structure that affects service work - that a greater knowledge of this field can be reached. For Korczynski (2002), the unique characteristics of the worker-customer interaction (direct contact with the customer) and the approach in which service and sales work is managed, make the matter of such work worthy of separate consideration, as it involves service satisfaction for both the service provider and the customer. The idea of the customer satisfaction–workforce mirror contributes to the discussion over the significance of service quality (Barbee and Bott, 1991; Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Heskett *et al.,* 1997; Schneider and Bowen, 1993; Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996; Zemke and Schaff, 1989). The basic concept of the customer satisfaction workforce mirror is straightforward. When service workers are happy in their jobs, customers will receive better service and will be happier. The interdependence of the two parties' satisfaction is a crucial component of the mirror. Because employees' contentment with their employment is evident in the way they handle customers, this will shine through in the service that they provide to the customer. Additionally, it is considered that front-line service workers gain increased satisfaction when they can satisfy customer requirements (Korczynski, 2002, p.20). Meanwhile, Heskett *et al.* (1997, p.113) propose that the service worker's job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction is primarily determined by their ability or inability to satisfy customers.

There are many power synergies in the customer service triangle relationship. Even in the dual interaction between the two actors, there may be an exercise of power as the interests of the three actors coincide (Lopez, 2010). Employees may encounter complexity to the degree that they must satisfy the potential conflicting demands of achieving corporate goals, hierarchical power, and meeting customer needs; workers perceive this as a sense of power of the customer. Likewise, the triangular relationship can, in some situations, be a convoluted one when two out of the triangle align against the other, which may result in power conflicts (Lopez, 2010). Employees must balance the conflicting demands of achieving corporate goals and living up to

the needs and expectations of the customer. Consequently, employees may encounter complexities (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013; Eddleston *et al.,* 2002), one of which may be a sense of alienation with the customer. Korczynski (2009), in considering the topic of whether workers have a sense of alienation with customers, posited three elements that may be influential on the sense of alienation a worker may have regarding a customer. These are noted as the significant emotional tie between the worker and the customer, the disparity of power between the worker and the customer, and the frequency of recurring interactions between the employee and the consumer. Korczynski (2009) considers that when the customer is primarily the instrumental emotional element, when the customer is the commanding party versus the worker, and when interaction between the worker and customer is a string of one-off encounters, then elevated levels of customer alienation are likely to be experienced by the worker. Contrastingly, low levels of alienation are more likely to occur when the worker and the customer's power relations are more equal, and when the customer is treated with care and empathy (Korczynski, 2009). So, it is possible then that tensions between service workers and customers may ebb and flow with the potential of complaints by customers of service delivery. When this occurs, as an actor in the service triad, the manager may be required to involve themselves in the service interaction in mediating the customer complaint.

However, such an intervention can be fraught with tensions. For example, Bolton and Houlihan (2010) express the view that when it comes to managing service delivery issues, managers can at times feel powerless in terms of dealing with and managing customer expectations of service delivery, and the expectations of the employee who expects support from management. At the same time, the manager must also balance this expectation with organisational (senior manager/management) requirements and expectations. Similarly, when problems arise with customer service, the front-line manager may feel the need to defer to organisational centralised policy, which can have the effect of making them feel disempowered or undermined in managing service delivery issues. Therefore, if a service worker feels discontented with a decision by their line manager due to the mantra of “the customer is always right”, this could be a potential reason for not informing management of any customer aggression towards a service worker. Additionally, customers are less likely to act inappropriately when they think that their actions will be known and could result in punishment. Customer animosity may also influence how a service provider responds to consumer behaviour (Yagil, 2008). For example, research by Handy (2006) found that service workers who knew local customers socially were more likely to counter any perceived customer harassment in a more robust and self-assured

manner than if the harasser was unknown to them. Meanwhile, Yagil (2008) notes that service industries like hospitality service worker jobs (and therefore the incumbents of those jobs), in general, are perceived to hold low status and be unskilled. This situation has the effect of creating a large power gap between the service worker and the customer, with this gap favouring the customer. Consequently, Guerrier and Adib (2000) claim that a hospitality service worker's perceived low status compared to that of the customer opens opportunities for customer SH and customer aggression. Roles like bar workers, waiting staff, receptionists, cleaning attendants, and room attendants are often occupied by workers who are often in a precarious position. Generally, it is young people (male and female), women and vulnerable groups of a perceived lower social standing, in a general sense, who work in these roles and become targets (Yagil, 2008). On the issue of customer dependence, according to Emerson (1962) and power dependence theory, the more someone, for example, a service worker, appreciates resources that are controlled by someone else, for instance, the customer, the more dependent they become on the controller of that resource. Consequently, in the example of the relationship between the service worker and the customer, the service worker has much greater dependence on the controller of the resource, that is, the customer. In their research on SH among professional women across a range of professions, Gettman and Gelfand (2007) found that customer power was a form of provider dependence. Additionally, the research indicated that customer power held a positive correlation to the SH of service providers. Therefore, if these findings concerning the strength of customer dependence are looked at through the lens of a service worker, they may perceive that the customer's capacity to reward is high. As a result, this could, potentially, lead to an acceptance of harassment from the customer (Fine *et al.,* 1994). However, if customers are seen as not being essential to the business, and customer dependence is seen as low, service providers may respond far differently to customer SH in that they may be less restrained to act passively and react assertively towards the aggressor (Handy, 2006).

2.6. Consequences of Sexual Harassment on Workers and Organisations

The ILO (2022) first global survey of violence and harassment at work showed that people found it difficult to report instances of SH to employers and line management, for a variety of reasons. However, the two most commonplace reasons were a concern for their own reputation and that doing so was a waste of time. Rather, victims tended to speak with family members or friends rather than using formal or informal processes or procedures. Furthermore, academic

research corresponds with the ILO (Dahl and Knepper, 2021; Hadi, 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021; Williamson *et al.,* 2022; Zeidan *et al.,* 2022). The consequences for those who suffer SH at work can be considerable, potentially having negative repercussions in career advancement, hours reduction, and pay. Additionally, economic costs can be incurred through career damage and the possibility that an individual may need to move away from a hostile working environment. More personally, it can have an impact on physical health and well-being alongside psychological health and mental well-being (ILO, 2019).

2.6.1 Consequences of sexual harassment on employee well-being

According to research, workplace SH is linked to a range of physical and mental health consequences, lack of confidence, anxiety, despair, depression, confusion, humiliation, anger, and increased substance abuse (Beltramini *et al.,* 2020; Hershcovis and Barling, 2010; Ho *et al*, 2012; Ineson *et al.,* 2013; Rospenda *et al.,* 2008; Sojo *et al.,* 2016; Worsfold and McCann, 2000). Turkoglu (2020) believes that the after-effects of SH are multifaceted. On a personal level, for victims, it can have adverse and disturbing effects on them, from both personal and occupational well-being. In this regard, empirical evidence shows that episodes of SH can have an undesirable psychological impact on victims (Gilbert *et al.,* 1998; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009). Indeed, McDonald (2012, p.4) notes the psychological definition of SH is considered as "unwanted sex-related behaviour at work at work, that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding their resources or threatening their well-being" In addition, the same author goes onto suggest three primary aspects of SH, these being sexual coerciveness, unwelcome attention of a sexual nature, and gender harassment. Meanwhile, SH can have serious negative effects on an employee's personal well-being, such as a decline in their physical and mental health (Collinsworth *et al.,* 2009). This can lead employees to exhibit "withdrawal behaviours", these being voluntary actions that go against organisational rules, and which harm the productivity of an organisation and its employees, also known as counterproductive behaviours (Marcus *et al.,* 2016; Sackett, 2002). The elements that can make up the concept of counterproductive behaviour can range from damaging an organisation's property to theft and sabotage (Varna-Horna *et al.*, 2023). However, withdrawal from the job is a common element of the concept. Aspects such as leaving early, arriving late, absenteeism and tardiness of work come under the area of withdrawal behaviour (Vara-Horna *et al.,* 2023). Furthermore, Hershcovis and Barling (2010) consider that incivility at work can also be a symptom of withdrawal behaviour, with a decline in a person's mental health often being a reason for withdrawal behaviours (Collinsworth, 2022).

In addition to behavioural withdrawal, there is also the matter of emotional stress and burnout. Reactions to stressful situations like SH in the workplace can increase stress-related responses, with, at worst, victims being discomforted by disturbed sleeping patterns, emotional numbing and incident flashbacks (Collinsworth *et al.*, 2009; Willness *et al.,* 2007). What's more, Theocharous and Philitaretou (2009) report symptoms such as fear, anger and depression as psychological symptoms that can affect those subjected to SH, alongside feelings of guilt, humiliation, embarrassment, and confusion. Meanwhile, researchers consider that workplace SH increases the chances of employee burnout, which can also lead to withdrawal behaviours and a decrease in job satisfaction (Batool *et al.,* 2023; Gettman and Gelfand, 2007; Jung and Hoon, 2020; Liu *et al.,* 2014). Moreover, within the hospitality sector, high-quality customer service standards are an inherent factor in the industry; as a result, worker job satisfaction is an important element in achieving service quality (Díaz-Carrión *et al.,* 2020). However, research has found that workplace SH harms employees who have been subjected to such behaviour, along with raising employee intentions to leave an organisation (Alrawadieh *et al.,* 2022; Gettman and Gelfand, 2007; Ineson *et al.,* 2013; Szymanski and Feltman, 2015; Tsai *et al.,* 2022). Additionally, psychological feelings of low self-esteem, loathing, disgust and degradation are all elements that can impact victims of SH (Hunt *et al.,* 2010; Liu *et al.,* 2014; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009). According to Maslow (1943, 1954), there are five needs that humans are driven to fulfil, as part of human motivation, with some of these needs being more important than others. He identifies one of these needs as an "esteem need", a person's view of their self-worth. Self-esteem is strongly linked to an individual's well-being and can have both good and negative consequences on daily interpersonal relationships. Moreover, a lack of self-esteem may have negative effects on employee morale and productivity at work, which can then have an impact on an individual's motivation at work (Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009).

Low self-esteem is related to depression (Orth and Robins, 2013). Colman (2009, p.202) defines depression as "A mood state of sadness, gloom and pessimistic ideation, with loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities." Another symptom of depression is anxiety, described as "A state of uneasiness, accompanied by dysphoria and somatic signs and symptoms of tension" (Colman, 2009, p.46). Employees subjected to workplace SH may suffer from depression and anxiety problems, which can have a significant effect on the psychological well-being of those concerned (Collinsworth *et al.,* 2014; Gettman and Gelfand, 2007; Willness *et al.,* 2007; Worsfold and McCann, 2000). Furthermore, psychological stress may well become

a factor of concern. In Latin, *Stringere* means to draw tight, and in the English language, the word stress is derived from this (Arnold and Randall, 2010, p.35). Colman (2009, p.735) explains the definition of stress as "Psychological and physical strain or tension generated by physical, emotional, social, economic or occupational circumstances". Researchers have acknowledged that the negative elements of stress are common factors for employees who have been subject to workplace SH to experience (Bi *et al.,* 2021; Ram, 2018; Rospenda *et al.,* 2008; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009; Tsai *et al.*, 2023). Meanwhile, while psychological issues have an impact on an individual, research suggests that associated physical health concerns may also arise. Some common physical symptoms arising from depression, anxiety and stress are noted as lack of appetite, headaches, tiredness and fatigue, periodic crying, breathlessness without exertion, bouts of nausea and weight loss/gain (Arnold *et al.,* 2010, p.443). Additionally, behavioural symptoms can include a feeling of being unable to cope with people, lack of interest in work, loss of interest in others, loss of sense of humour, feeling of being bad, a feeling of no one to confide in, concentration difficulties and an inability to show true feelings (Arnold *et al.,* 2010, p.443).

As can be seen, the potential impact on employees who have experienced SH in the workplace can be considerable. For victims, occupational and career development, quality of work, poor performance and quality of work-life in general, can all spill over into a victim's daily life and home/family life, including personal relationships (Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Madera, 2018; Poulston, 2008; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009; Zhou *et al.,* 2019). Whilst this clearly affects individuals, the impact this can have on organisations should not be dismissed, and it is this that is discussed in the next section of the chapter.

2.6.2 Impact of sexual harassment at organisational level

Whilst several elements can impact the individual, at an organisational level, workplace SH can lead to high attrition rates, disengaged employees, and absenteeism (ILO, 2019; Willness *et al.,* 2007). An employer could also be burdened with additional costs, such as the cost of lost/lower productivity, case settlement, judicial financial awards, medical and/or counselling charges (ILO, 2019; Turkoglu, 2020). In a similar vein, Willness *et al.* (2007) note that employers will have to deal with professional effects in their organisation. For example, significant withdrawal behaviours, higher turnover intentions and high attrition rates among those who have been subject to harassment. Organisations may suffer from employee withdrawal or even loss of employees, but if workers feel appreciated, they are more inclined

to remain with the business. Ensuring workers feel appreciated by a business is an important element of worker retention and employee engagement; consequently, this would reduce rates of attrition (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). The word "engagement" in employee terms was first coined in the work of William Kahn in 1990 (Radley, 2024). Kahn used the term employee engagement in his study of engagement and disengagement at work. In defining engagement, Kahn's theory was that "…people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances…". Alternatively, Kahn notes personal disengagement as being "…an uncoupling of themselves from work roles…people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively or emotionally during work performances." (Kahn, 1990, p.694). Meanwhile, Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) put forward a three-element framework to engagement: a) vigour – mental resilience and work-related energy, b) dedication – pride, high involvement, high significance, c) absorption – the degree to which the employee is engrossed in their work. Kahn (1990) considered that an employee will disengage as a means of protecting their psychological safety in situations they may find distressing. Therefore, an employee who disengages is someone who retreats from work, as, at the time, they are unable to subscribe to the work at hand. Disengagement can be seen as a strategy for handling demands that are more than the employee's current psychological capacity to cope (Afrahi *et al.,* 2020). George (2011) considered that employee disengagement, including low levels of engagement, correlated with weak productivity and poor employee well-being.

Moreover, the additional business costs of poor employee well-being can be considerable. For example, increased attrition rates may be expensive and disruptive. Disruption to productivity can occur due to the loss of output/productivity from those who depart before replacements are in place. Similarly, a decrease in output/productivity may occur as new hires become familiar with the tasks and acquire the required know-how; this is also a cost to the business (Armstrong and Taylor). Then there are upfront costs associated with finding recruits, including hiring, interviewing, and the costs associated with needing to provide appropriate job training and organisational standards. Additional expenses may possibly be incurred that relate to employees leaving, for example, payroll and administrative costs, the time involved by line management and/or HRPs who may be involved in the recruitment process, onboarding, and training requirements (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, there is the cost of organisational reputation. Carpenter and Krause (2012, p.26) define organisational reputation as "a set of beliefs about an organisation's capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences." Therefore, it could be considered that society

will hold a perception of an organisation, of which this perception is one that an organisation would seek to manage positively to reduce or limit reputational risk (Eccles *et al.,* 2007). A company's reputation depends on how well regarded it is in areas such as, but not restricted to, customer service, quality of products, employee relations, and corporate social responsibility. Different stakeholders, for example, customers, employees, suppliers, and investors, will all hold views about an organisation's reputation, as will local communities where a business conducts its business (Eccles *et al.,* 2007). A solid positive reputation will give stakeholders confidence, which is likely to translate into a favourable reputation for the business accordingly (Eccles *et al.,* 2007). Therefore, the importance of developing robust organisational policies and procedures around workplace SH could be considered a critical item for the organisational agenda.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter two has discussed SH in the workplace. It has provided the legal definitions of SH in the workplace and provided legislative information on these definitions from several countries across the globe. This also included the UK legislative definition, which was confirmed as being the anchor definition of workplace SH for this thesis. The chapter considered four classic theoretical developments of why SH occurs, these being organisational theory, sociocultural theory, sex-role spill-over theory, natural/biological theory and the concept of HWE's and the propensity for such environments fuelling SH. Additionally, it discussed how alcohol can be a driving force in creating HWE's driven by customers, which also exacerbates the chances of customer SH occurring. Following this, it looked at potential drivers and triggers of SH. It discussed emotional labour, aesthetic labour, and sexualised elements of service work as concepts that support the creation of the unique working environment of hospitality service work. The closeness and rapport building with customers and clients that is expected from frontline service workers as part of the customer service experience can also be considered as holding potential of being a stepping stone towards SH of service workers by customers. In addition, the chapter also considered power relations and power imbalances as potential drivers of SH.

Included in this discussion were views concerning intersectionality and power imbalances, brought about by this concept. The chapter considered the concept of the customer service triangle and highlighted imbalances of power between the three actors involved, with a sense of powerlessness often being felt by service workers and managers. FHWs have in the back of

their mind the hierarchical power of their LM and the power of the customer, whilst both worker and manager are impacted by the perceived sense of customer "sovereignty", which both worker and manager must manage expectations. Such power factors were looked at as elements that impact considerations on how customer SH may or may not be addressed by the LM, and potential reasons for workers feeling the need to "know their place." Finally, the chapter has considered the consequences of SH on an individual and organisational basis. There is clear evidence that an individual who has been subjected to SH can experience significant consequences on their health and well-being, physically, psychologically and mentally. This can reduce their work productivity and cause them to disengage from the work and, all in all, negatively affect their personal health and well-being. In addition, the potential consequences to organisations of workplace SH include high financial costs, along with organisational reputational damage.

The next chapter will discuss the industry characteristics of tourism and hospitality and the background of the socioeconomic climate in the UK, in which the thesis research was conducted. It will also discuss SH in the industry and will provide further details concerning working conditions, alongside the nature of workplace SH by coworkers and customers alike.

Chapter 3.0 Hospitality – industry characteristics and customer sexual harassment

It is important to provide a basic understanding of the hospitality industry and the unique characteristics of the sector as a foundation for the discussion of SH in the industry. The chapter will initially introduce the nature of the hospitality sector and the focus the industry has on providing excellence in standards of service for customers. Next, it will proceed to discuss SH in the tourism and hospitality industry, including CSH and the extent of under-reporting of CSH to line management. Following this, it will briefly discuss organisational policies and procedures and employee training in addressing SH. The chapter will end with a summary of its content.

3.1 The Tourism and hospitality sector – a basic introduction

Whilst it appears that there is no one single definition for the tourism and hospitality industries (Nickson, 2013), a briefing paper into skills assessment in hospitality, tourism and sports sectors conducted by Galbraith and Bankhead in 2012 for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, noted tourism and hospitality sectors were made up of subsectors which include hotels, hostels, hospitality services, restaurants, bars and nightclubs, membership clubs, holiday parks, gambling/casinos, food services and event services providers, self-catering accommodation and tourist travel services (Galbraith and Bankhead, 2012, p.3). As such, it can be said that tourism and hospitality are very much interwoven.

Hospitality organisations can vary in size, from small independent businesses through to large multi-national organisations (UK Hospitality, 2023). Like any other business sector, there are advantages and disadvantages for employees working in the sector. Advantages of working in the hospitality sector include the types and diversity of jobs in the industry and provision of numerous opportunities for often entry-level work for people in the labour market (SOEG Jobs, 2023). In her report about working conditions in the hospitality sector in Ireland, Curran (2021, p.21) informs that hospitality staff enjoyed working with people from across the globe, liked the positive interactions with customers, along with the collegial rapport with their coworkers. Similar research by Robinson *et al.* (2022) and Williamson *et al.* (2022) conducted in Australia and New Zealand, respectively, noted that survey respondents reported additional advantages including commissions, tips, discounts on rooms, discounts on food/beverages and free meals. However, such things can be neutralised by traditional characteristics of the hospitality industry of low wages and salaries alongside other disagreeable features such as unruly customers, limited career progression, unsocial hours, work-stress and negative work-life balance (Bi *et*

al., 2021; Cowen *et al.,* 2023; Farrugia *et al.,* 2023; Lugosi, 2019). In addition, the industry suffers from high attrition rates, retention of skilled workers and an overreliance on transient employees such as foreign tourist-workers, working holiday types, migrant workers and students and the impact of seasonality; thus, there tends to be a dearth in workforce stability (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020). A key feature of the hospitality industry is the focus and strong priority that is placed on providing a high standard of customer service (Hopf, 2018), as does the customer perception of the quality of service provided by a hospitality business (Briggs *et al.,* 2007). Yagil (2008) considers that the "customer is always right" ideology is a mentality that hospitality work is built on and is established in the case of delivery and experience. As a result, the goal of service providers in the tourism and hospitality sectors is to improve the quality of service and customer perceived value. The expectation is that this will heighten customer experience, promote customer loyalty and enhance the provider's reputation and image, all of which are thought to contribute to a strong business performance (Ingram and Grieve, 2013). Organisations expect employees to ensure that the service experience that is provided to customers meets the organisational service goals. Therefore, positive interaction between the employee and the customer is of high importance (Fletcher *et al.,* 2018). Thus, the quality of service adopted by FHWs is highly significant for hospitality organisations. When providing services, there is a predominance of intense personal engagement between employees and customers. The result of this encounter has a direct impact on consumer pleasure and loyalty, which influences corporate performance (Delcourt *et al.,* 2013; Guerrier, 2013). Moreover, Susskind *et al.* (2007) and Mmhutle and Shone (2017) consider the employee-customer rapport as being significant to the perception of the service experience and achieving corporate aims. These customer-specific working conditions could lead to more intimate and personal interactions between employees and clients, which have the potential to facilitate CSH (Ram, 2018). Furthermore, hospitality is part of the night-time economy, in which the unique working conditions of this area of the economy can increase the chances of CSH. The prevalence of alcohol and/or drug use, plus atmospherics and environments that could be considered as sexualised, are among notable aspects of this line of work, creating a setting that can encourage inappropriate behaviour and events of SH (Aslan and Kozak, 2012; Hoel and Einarsen, 2003; Ram *et al.,* 2016).

3.2 Industry characteristics of hospitality in the United Kingdom

The tourism and hospitality industry creates a large variety of jobs and employment opportunities covering unskilled, semi-skilled positions and skilled professional roles

(Turkoglu, 2020). Nickson (2013) noted that employees such as young workers, females and migrant workers who make up a significant part of the industry may be seen as marginal workers. Moreover, there is a higher ratio of women workers in job roles and occupations that are typically stereotyped as female tasks, for example, cleaning, bar, restaurant, and kitchen work (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Ladkin, 2011; Silva and Couto, 2023; Vargas-Jiménez *et al.,* 2020).

In the second quarter of 2024, 2.8 million people were working in the UK hospitality industry (Hutton *et al.,* 2024). Whilst both male and female workers hold frontline customer-facing roles, females tend to be more dominant in this area, with 59% of front-of-house positions being held by women. However, this dominance is reversed with back-of-house roles, with males making up 58% (Fourth Analytics, 2017). Historically, in the global tourism and hospitality industry, a significant number of migrant workers are employed in the hospitality sector (Baum *et al.,* 2007; Ladkin, 2011; Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020, p.100). Partly, this is due to the industry being thought of as one in which a minimal amount of knowledge or ability is required (Williams and Hall, 2000). Additionally, hospitality employment can often hold a casual and/or informal environment, which can be an engaging climate for many people to work in (Janta *et al.,* 2011). Migrant workers can provide support to hospitality organisations by filling roles, skills gaps and knowledge roles. Boella and Goss-Turner (2020, p.10) recognise that the transience of workers in the industry, with people often moving on to different jobs after short periods of time, is especially true for occupations that involve interacting with customers, such as in fast service restaurants, pubs, and bars. This can be due to personal factors such as poor language proficiency, cost of travel, low-paid work (seeking higher pay) and job precarity (Alberti and Danaj, 2017; Jovanović *et al.,* 2022). For Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2023), the phenomenon of job precarity in the industry means that workers frequently feel vulnerable, often causing them to lack agency in protesting about unfavourable working conditions. It is commonly acknowledged that working in the hospitality industry may be unstable and difficult. The unpredictability of hours and seasonality combine to heighten the precarious nature of work in the sector, where job security is far from certain. This adds a burden on workers as it can be difficult in terms of an employee's work-life balance and general lifestyle (see Dreier and Flaming, 2020; Ioannu, 2023; Kearsey, 2020; Robertson *et al.,* 2023; Wallace and Coughlan, 2022). Nevertheless, research indicates that, in the UK hospitality sector, the shortage of skilled workers is a key issue (Baum *et al.,* 2023; Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020; Cowen *et al.,* 2023; Hutton, 2022; UK Hospitality, 2022).

Labour force and skills shortages in UK hospitality have been fully acknowledged by researchers and industry reports (Baum, 2002; Scriven, 2023; UK Hospitality, 2018), and this continues to blight the industry. According to data from the UK Office of National Statistics, at the end of 2023, there were 112,000 open positions in the hospitality industry. This shows a decrease of 147,000 on a like-for-like comparison to 2022. Currently, there are more vacancies open than pre-COVID-19 levels, when 89,000 were available (UK Hospitality, 2024). Soft skills deficiencies of hospitality workers are frequently identified by hospitality employers as being an issue, particularly in front-of-house customer-facing roles. Oral communication, customer service/handling skills, problem-solving, and collaborative teamwork are examples of soft skills gaps noted by employers (Nickson, 2013). Similarly, technical roles, for example, skilled/qualified chefs, are also said to be difficult to recruit (Lashley, 2009; Pratten and O'Leary, 2007; UK Hospitality, 2018).

Before the global COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of the UK leaving the European Union had been impacting the supply of workers from abroad who wished to work in the hospitality industry (Baum *et al.,* 2023). Traditionally, the sector has low-compensation employment and is perceived to be a sector that is low-skilled (Riley, 2002). The issue around low pay is a highly common factor in UK hospitality (Baum *et al.*, 2023; Cowen *et al.,* 2023; Nickson, 2013; Robertson *et al.*, 2023). Compared to other business sectors, hospitality holds inequality of pay and low wages (Cowen *et al.,* 2023), with Robertson *et al.* (2023) noting that job precarity and financial uncertainty are frequently linked to low pay, which can lead to workers having general concerns around their ongoing cost of living. For some hospitality workers, low wages could add fuel to the reason why workers seek other, higher-paid opportunities in the labour market. This is potentially an issue for hospitality employers in terms of worker retention (Alberti and Danaj, 2017; Jovanović *et al.,* 2022).

Moreover, due to the need for continuous heightened customer service, the industry has a reputation for intense working conditions. For instance, unsocial work hours, a variety of shift patterns, including night shifts, weekend shifts, and a propensity to be compelled to work during statutory holiday times (Nickson, 2013). Unpredictable hours, unsociable working conditions, evening work, split-shift work, and low pay are long-established in the industry and are considered problem areas of working conditions (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020; Farrugia *et al.,* 2023). Consequently, retention of hospitality workers in the sector is a challenge for employers and a longstanding issue of the industry (Boella-Goss-Turner, 2020). For example,

Deputy Data Statistics (2023) show that the UK hospitality industry's workforce turnover rate is 30%, which is twice the rate of the UK industry average, with the average length of time spent in a job being 7.5 months. Key reasons for leaving jobs revolved around low pay/benefits, unsocial hours, and limited career opportunities (Deputy Data, 2023). Overall, these working characteristics of the hospitality industry can be driven by socioeconomic factors, which the next section will provide a discussion in brief.

3.3 Socioeconomic crisis: the context background at the time of research

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) July 2022 World Economic Outlook reported a slowing global recovery, hindered by China's economic downturn, the Russia–Ukraine conflict, and rising global inflation (IMF, 2022). Global growth was projected to fall from 6.1% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022, a 0.4 percentage point downgrade from April 2022 forecasts. Disinflation measures were also expected to suppress growth further to 2.9% in 2022 due to multiple economic shocks. A year later, the July 2023 report confirmed actual 2022 global growth at 3.5%, slightly higher than forecast but still weak by historical standards (IMF, 2023). The IMF projected global growth to ease to 3.0% in both 2023 and 2024, driven by continued economic uncertainty linked to China's slowdown, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and broad inflationary pressures (IMF, 2023). Despite these challenges, global headline inflation was expected to decline from 8.7% in 2022 to 6.2% in 2023 and 5.2% in 2024, driven by tighter monetary policy. However, rising operating costs, pricing pressures, and climate-related challenges were anticipated to constrain economic momentum. These conditions have been particularly acute in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Scriven's (2023) Deloitte UK hospitality outlook report, based on feedback from over 100 industry leaders, including owners, operators, developers, investors, and lenders, found that the sector initially benefited from pent-up post-pandemic consumer demand. However, inflation-driven pressures were expected to slow activity in late 2023 as consumers became more cautious with discretionary spending. A 2022 Deloitte Global study cited in the report indicated that consumers are increasingly delaying major purchases. European markets such as Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, and the UK experienced notable declines (Scriven, 2023), making the UK a particularly relevant focus for this thesis.

Scriven (2023) also identified key challenges facing hospitality businesses, foremost among them rising operating costs and inflation, followed by an ongoing shortage of skilled labour.

Brexit-related concerns increased compared with the previous year. Studies by Burton and Gallacher (2023) and Dowell *et al.* (2023) highlight persistent disruptions to supply chains, recruitment, and retention, compounded by rising costs. Economists further note that the impacts of the Brexit agreement have worsened, with declining exports and greater regulatory burdens increasing administrative costs for businesses (Islam and Labiak, 2024). The UK's rising energy costs exemplify these pressures. Timmins and Race (2022) documented a pub in Essex whose annual energy bill increased from £13,000 to £35,000. BBC News (2022) reported a Newport brewery facing energy cost rises of 200 to 300%. Lough and Capurro (2022) similarly reported that a pub owner in Marlow expected costs to rise from £60,000 to £420,000. Rising energy costs have continued into 2025, affecting operators across the sector (Business Energy Claims, 2025). Labour shortages remain a persistent challenge. Scriven (2023) projected that shortages could worsen and extend beyond 2025. A UK Hospitality briefing in May 2023 reported 132,000 vacancies, 48% above pre-COVID levels, despite some improvement compared to the previous year. This was attributed in part to industry efforts to support workers' return to employment through training, development, and more flexible working practices (UK Hospitality, 2023).

In Scotland, labour shortages have led to significant operational difficulties. Stephen Montgomery, restaurateur and chair of the Scottish Hospitality Group, expressed concern about staffing levels for summer 2023, noting the departure of frontline staff and the potential need to reduce opening hours (Dempsey, 2023). Hotel owner Stephen Leckie also reported acute staffing challenges (Jackson, 2023), largely caused by the departure of EU workers during the pandemic and the end of the Brexit transition period. Meanwhile, issues related to recruitment and retention continued to impact Scottish hospitality in 2025 (Gallacher, 2025; Munro, 2025; Walker, 2025). Overall, the UK's socioeconomic crisis is an ongoing issue and continues to have a heavy impact on UK hospitality businesses.

3.4 Pervasiveness of mistreatment and sexual harassment in hospitality by customers

Mistreatment by customers towards hospitality workers, such as disrespect, coarseness, and disdain, is a regular occurrence (Boukis *et al.,* 2020; Healey, 2018), with verbal and physical assault a common feature (Karatepe *et al.,* 2019). Whilst there is no categorical definition of mistreatment (Zhou, *et al.,* 2021), the underlying nature of it is highlighted by Hershcovis *et al.* (2020, p.699) describing workplace mistreatment as "an overarching term capturing myriad harmful social interactions in organizations, including various manifestations such as abusive

supervision, incivility, interpersonal conflict, workplace ostracism, SH, and interpersonal injustice". In considering consumer behaviour, Fullerton and Punj (2004, p.1239) defined it as "behavioural acts by consumers, which violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations, and thus disrupt the consumption order." Meanwhile, Jung and Yoon (2018) consider that mistreatment of workers by customers is due to the demanding nature of interpersonal interactions with guests and customers, which is coupled with the high level of emotional labour that is required in the service environment. Mitsakis *et al.* (2024) believe that the most common misconduct in the hospitality and tourism industry is abuse and harassment, whilst Booyens *et al.* (2022) claim that such social concerns are pervasive and widespread within the hospitality sector and have become normalised in the sector.

Research in the tourism and hospitality sector, globally, reveals that SH is highly prevalent in the industry (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Dawson *et al.,* 2021; Dyer and Hurd, 2021; Madera, 2018; Madera *et al.,* 2018; Poulston, 2008; Reguera and García-Izquierdo, 2021; Waudby and Poulston, 2017). In studies that have focused on Fair Work Principles, which include, but are not restricted to, fair wages, fair treatment, rest breaks, freedom from discrimination, and general working conditions, researchers from Ireland, Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand all noted issues and concerns brought up by respondents working in hospitality in relation to SH in their place of work. In Ireland, Curran (2021) found that the most likely form of harassment was that of SH, with main elements specified as "sexual references/comments and innuendo". What's more, inappropriate sexual comments were noted as a bullying indicator (Curran, 2021, p.15). Similar survey findings are also apparent in Scotland in research by Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2021), in Australia (Robinson *et al.* 2022) and New Zealand (Williamson *et al.* 2022). Notably, Robinson *et al.* concluded that hospitality is an industry in which abuse of workers is institutionalised. Over half of the respondents in Australia reported that the predominant perpetrators of abuse were customers, whilst 42% of respondents reported that abuse came from their line-management (managers/supervisors). In various surveys, responses concerning sexual abuse/harassment found that it is a commonplace problem. Respondents gave examples such as inappropriate sexualised comments, unwanted touching/grabbing and comments about clothing and how they looked. For example, in New Zealand, the survey of nearly 400 people found that 19% of respondents reported they had sometimes or often experienced sexual abuse. Within the responses, SH was mentioned on 30 occasions, with indicators of this being inappropriate touching/grabbing and sexual or sexist comments/references (Williamson *et al.,* 2022).

Beyond these surveys, the prevalence of CSH is equally apparent in many other regions. For example, a survey conducted in the USA found significant problems (Unite Here Local 1, 2016). A total of 487 respondents who worked across three casinos, one convention centre and thirteen hotels in Chicago, found that 77% of casino workers who participated in the survey had been the victim of SH. Likewise, 65% of casino cocktail workers had been subject to guests trying to touch or succeed in touching them, which was unwanted by the individuals concerned (Unite Here Local 1, 2016). A similar picture was seen with Chicago hotel workers, with 58% of those surveyed reporting that they had been sexually harassed verbally (sexual innuendo), had experienced sexually suggestive looks, had been the victims of attempts at unwanted touching, had been shown sexual material, and faced unwanted sexual advances (Unite Here Local 1, 2016). A further survey in the USA, conducted by the Restaurant Opportunities Centres United (ROCU) of 233 former restaurant workers, found that SH was commonplace, often from customers. Many women did not see this as SH until they reflected on their experience. Interestingly, workers who were tipped were more inclined to exhibit improper behaviour. In addition, SH in restaurants is seen as the norm and is often internalised by workers, therefore, elevating the bar of SH to a higher level (ROCU, 2018).

Mkono (2010) undertook research of Zimbabwean hospitality management students who were involved in on-the-job placement work as part of their degree studies. Interviews were conducted with 77 final year hospitality students, with findings showing that around 78% of participants reported they had been subject to SH by coworkers, managers, and customers while on placement. In Australia, according to Kensbock *et al.* (2015), SH of room attendants was widespread in the five 5-star hotels where those participants worked. Of the 46 interviewees, 44 reported unwanted direct verbal invitations and unwanted touching by hotel guests. Within the context of Italy, Beltramini *et al.* (2020) interviewed 20 female students aged between 21 and 27 years old who worked as bartenders or table servers in the hospitality sector and found that all participants had been subject to SH in multiple ways. In the USA, La Lopa and Gong (2020) surveyed 297 hospitality student interns, 75% of whom were female. Findings showed that a sizable proportion encountered SH primarily from supervisors, coworkers, and customers. Interestingly, the interns received no information or were not informed what was deemed as improper behaviours that may occur in the workplace. Additionally, over half informed that they had no training from those coordinating the employers or those coordinating the internship.

In an Asian context, research using an online survey (n=88) and questionnaires (n=172) with Asian tour leaders in Taiwan, Cheung *et al.* (2018) found that a significant number of respondents reported that they had experienced workplace SH by colleagues and customers. Winter and Papathanassis (2020) found that SH incidents are commonplace in the context of cruise ships and are encouraged by the level of direct consumer contact as well as the overlap between private and public spaces. Meanwhile, Frost *et al.* (2021) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study with spa therapist employees (n=16) working in the spa tourism industry in Australia. Ten of the participants had experienced SH, whilst five had not experienced SH but were aware of other colleagues who had experienced it. The one participant who had not experienced the problem had only just started in the industry. The findings of Winter and Papathanassis (2020) and Frost *et al.* (2021) highlight how working conditions and environments can provide opportunities and raise the chances of workplace SH occurring.

In Europe, the Nordic Union, a federation of seven worker trade unions across Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland covering hotels, restaurants, catering, and tourism industries (Nordic Union, 2023), found that worker SH in Nordic hospitality is part of a worker's day-to-day life. Authoring a survey for the Nordic Union (Bragason, 2016) found that worker SH came from coworkers, supervisors/managers, and suppliers. Typical victims were likely to be immigrants, those aged 18-40, workers who were less educated, single/divorced, and those undertaking precarious work (Bragason, 2016). Further findings indicated that workplace SH is experienced by many workers more than once a month; the most common form of workplace SH was through verbal comments. Those workers who have jobs in which alcohol is served are deemed to be at higher risk of workplace SH, with alcohol consumption being seen as a primary risk factor. Additionally, it was found that younger women are more vulnerable to SH; however, men were frequently found to experience workplace SH (Bragason, 2016). Furthermore, workers with part-time or temporary contracts are more likely to experience SH by customers than their full-time counterparts. Meanwhile, females saw workplace SH as more objectionable than males, with few victims reporting workplace SH to management (Bragason, 2016).

In the UK, the pervasiveness of SH is highlighted by the UK trade union UNITE's "Not on the Menu" survey. Findings show that 90% of hospitality workers have experienced SH at work, with over half of the respondents stating that the perpetrators were members of the public (UNITE 2022). Meanwhile, in Scotland, the setting for this research, CSH is a common feature

in frontline service work (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021, 2022). Using survey methods conducted via social media with hospitality workers, Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2022) gathered 293 usable replies, the majority being under the age of 35 years old. Findings suggested that sexual abuse was a common occurrence, for example, 42.2% of respondents reported they had sometimes experienced sexual abuse/harassment, 12.2% informed they had experienced sexual abuse/harassment half of the time, 6.9% stating experience of sexual abuse/harassment most of the time and 2.0% claiming the experience sexual abuse/harassment all the time. However, it is appropriate to acknowledge that 36.5% of respondents reported they had never experienced sexual abuse/harassment. Meanwhile, over three-quarters of the total respondents reported they had witnessed sexual abuse/harassment.

As can be seen, research suggests that SH by customers against frontline hospitality workers is pervasive throughout the sector. The phenomenon thrives in hospitality services due to deep-rooted characteristics of hospitality service provision and service effort (Poulston, 2008; Ram, 2018). Accordingly, the behavioural norms of the service worker are to provide a service experience that meets or exceeds the expectations of the customer. This means that hospitality service workers and customers are intrinsically linked in the front-line production process in hospitality organisations (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995; Gilbert *et al.,* 1998; Poulston, 2008). Customer actions and the degree of explicit aggressiveness are correlated with the customer's personal assessment of their capacity to exhibit noxious attitudes and behaviour towards a service provider while exposing themselves to the least amount of danger (Fullarton and Punj 2004; Grandey *et al.,* 2007). Due to a customer's ability to avoid future interactions and lower the risk of retaliation, as well as the fact that customers are frequently anonymous, customers perceive little danger from misbehaving towards service workers; this anonymity allows customers to act in undesirable ways without feeling guilty or fear of repercussions (Grandey *et al.,* 2007). Gettman and Gelfand (2007) believe that customers are significantly responsible for their conduct and more likely to engage in hostile behaviour towards a service worker when such behaviour is hidden from others in the company or organisation.

3.5 Under-reporting of workplace sexual harassment to organisational management

Reports and surveys suggest that workplace SH is a phenomenon that is often under-reported. For example, on a global basis, ILO surveys (2019, 2022) note that SH is regularly unreported to organisational management.

In the UK, trade union UNISON conducted a survey (in partnership with the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Surrey) which found that 39% of respondents (nearly two in five) believed that nothing would be done if they complained to the organisation (Unison, 2018). A further UNISON survey in 2019 found that 28% of respondents did not report harassment, whilst only 20% of those subjected to SH reported this to organisational management. Reasons for not reporting included perpetrator retaliation, the concern that they (the victim) would be seen as being over-sensitive and a belief that nothing would be done by the employer. Additionally, a UK Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) report in 2020, *"Managing conflict in the modern workplace",* found that 25% of employees considered that harassment and bullying were swept under the organisational carpet. Meanwhile, research by the TUC (2016) found that four out of five women did not report SH to their employer due to minimisation of the incident, precarity of a victim's work, and unclear perceptions of what SH is. Those who reported SH saw little in terms of a positive outcome, whilst treatment of others after reporting was worse than before the harassment took place. Interestingly, most participants in an Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) survey on workplace SH conducted in 2018 reported feeling that their experience in reporting the occurrence to a trade union representative was helpful (EHRC, 2018). Within the context of hospitality, there is similar evidence of under-reporting of SH and abuse for similar reasons (Curran, 2021; Dahl and Knepper, 2021; Hadi, 2022; MacDermott, 2020; Robinson *et al.,* 2022; Williamson *et al.,* 2022; Zeidan *et al.,* 2022). In Scotland's hospitality sector, this was found to be no different. Often, this is due to a lack of employee awareness of what SH is, the normalisation of SH in the workplace, an absence of adequate remedies, fear of repercussions from coworkers and management and victim blame (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2022). The issue of under-reporting of SH has, so far, been focused on all aspects of SH in hospitality. However, this will now move onto focus on the under-reporting of a particular form of SH that is under-reported in hospitality, that of SH by customers.

SH in hospitality settings remains under-reported and often silenced (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Gupta *et al.,* 2020; Ram *et al.,* 2016; Turkoglu, 2020). This is also the case concerning SH perpetrated by customers, with a variety of reasons being found for this being the case. To gain an understanding of the pervasiveness and persistence of CSH in the tourism and hospitality sectors, researchers have noted the normalisation of this type of conduct (see Coffey *et al,* 2018; Fitzgerald, 2020; Good and Cooper, 2016; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Kensbock *et al.,*

2015; Lugosi, 2019; Matulewicz, 2016; Quyet *et al.,* 2023; Waudby and Poulston, 2017). The hospitality industry tolerates SH more than any other industry (Guerrier and Adib, 2000; Weber *et al.,* 2002; Worsfold and McCann, 2002), with the issue of customer abuse being generally an accepted norm of hospitality work (Booyens *et al.,* 2018; Hadjisolomou and Nickson, 2023; Ram *et al.*, 2016). An employee's tolerance for SH is influenced by the culture of the business. According to Fitzgerald *et al.* (1994), employees of companies with a high organisational tolerance for SH will be more accepting of sexual abuse and have lower employee reporting rates because they think that complaints won't be taken seriously or that offenders will face no consequences (Hulin *et al.,* 1996; O'Leary-Kelly *et al.,* 2009).

The influence of workplace social and hierarchical structures and cultures in hospitality organisations plays a significant role in the ubiquitous nature of SH by customers (Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Poulston, 2008). A reduced amount of formality in service settings can often reinforce the allure of the customer service experience. However, when a service setting is highly informal and has an absence of structure, it may be difficult to distinguish between social interactions, which may lead to customers acting inappropriately (Yagil, 2008). Matulewicz (2016) notes that how an organisation views what "normal" is regarding SH will determine resistance in managing uncomfortable experiences due to how an organisation structures itself to address the phenomenon. Therefore, how SH is determined will depend on what an organisation views as being normal or abnormal relating to interactions of a sexual nature (Matulewicz, 2016). For example, if sexual innuendo, sexual banter or jokes of a sexual nature, be this with customers or coworkers, are widespread within the working environment, this could be considered as the normal conduct in workplace social relations. But the question raised is, in such an organisational culture, in which sexualised conduct is the norm, what would be defined as abnormal conduct and are the workers themselves responsible for drawing the line (Matulewicz, 2016). Additionally, those employees working in this normality of a sexualised culture, and who feel uncomfortable about the environment, may feel the need to accept the culture, or indeed feel pressured to engage in it, as a means of fitting in with the coworkers. Ultimately, this leads to acceptance of these types of working conditions (Matulewicz, 2016). Therefore, reporting episodes of SH incidents may feel like a futile exercise (Booyens *et al.,* 2022).

Furthermore, the customer-focused nature of service work inadvertently normalises power and gender dynamics. The strong attention paid to providing customer service can normalise female

workers (in particular) to undesirable and distressing sexualised experiences, due to the expectation that they should perform in a subordinate manner (Ekselius *et al.* 2024; Matulewicz, 2016). Indeed, it is thought that the customer-centric culture in hospitality and the normalisation of customer abuse have meant that non-reporting of abuse is common (Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023). Wang (2016) notes that it is frequently difficult to distinguish customer harassment from employer interests, and employees are frequently less equipped to stop or disclose harassment from customers than if they are harassed by coworkers. As a result, employees hold back from reporting episodes of abuse to line managers (Wang, 2016). Interestingly, Madera *et al.* (2018) suggest that managers in the hospitality sector tend to be less inclined to label actions as SH when such actions are carried out by a customer rather than a coworker. Furthermore, Huang and Kwok (2021) highlight the point of supervisory management styles being a reason for employees not reporting abuse, noting that an intimidatory style of management can fuel employee silence. Research by Booyens *et al.* (2022) suggests that under-reporting of customer abuse, including that of CSH, was caused by several factors. For example, hospitality employees seem to accept that it was part of the job, with organisational management having expectations of staff tolerating customer abuse (Booyens *et al.,* 2022). Likewise, employees feel that reporting incidents to management was fruitless as management lacked the will to take episodes of abuse seriously and held dismissive attitudes towards reports of abuse. Those subjected to customer abuse also held back on reporting because of a concern of repercussions, for example, loss of overtime or job (Booyens *et al.,* 2022). Furthermore, employees had little confidence that anything would be done if they reported incidents and, in addition, there was concern around poor processes and/or reporting incidents (Robinson *et al.,* 2022; Williamson *et al.,* 2022). Yet the issue of under-reporting seems to continue despite organisational policies and procedures often being in place to support employees.

3.6 Sexual harassment - organisational policies, procedures and employee training

The importance of developing appropriate organisational policies and procedures concerning SH was highlighted in the ILO 2019 convention missive. Additionally, the Nordic Union report by Bragason (2016), surveys by the TUC (2016), Unite (2020), and Unison (2020) all echo this and emphasise the importance of developing organisational policies and procedures to address SH. Meanwhile, academic studies also highlight the value of policies and procedures to curb workplace SH (see Blumell and Mulupi, 2023; Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Diez-Canseco *et al.,* 2022; Hoel and Vartia, 2018; Mitsakis *et al.,* 2024). Although policies and procedures may help

provide a working culture and framework for dealing with the phenomenon of SH at work, Hertzog *et al.* (2008) consider that, whilst the development of policies and procedures is important, they are not enough of a deterrent to eradicate SH behaviour (Cheung *et al.,* 2018; Diez-Canseco *et al.,* 2022; Joubert *et al.,* 2011; Mitsakis *et al.,* 2024). Whilst most organisational SH policies address the matter internally, SH, Handy (2006) found that it would be less likely that organisational policies would cover SH by third parties such as customers, contractors, or contractor suppliers. Ram (2018) found that organisational polices around violent guests are non-existent, with the organisational spotlight being on internal violence and harassment; therefore, there was a lack of policies or procedures in place for third-party harassment. This situation means that FHWs are unsure of how they ought to handle CSH from a corporate perspective. In addition, LMs tasked with dealing with the problem are provided with little organisational support or guidance. Therefore, there is a distinct lack of organisational leadership in dealing with this type of event, which impedes the requirement for corrective action (Ram, 2018).

This point is important as Purcell *et al.* (2003) recognise how the HR function provides policy and procedure guidance on areas that affect human resources. Therefore, it is the responsibility of human HRPs to persuade organisational management of the need for the required policies and procedures, and (for HRPs) to provide adequate training and development of line management so that they can execute policies and procedures accordingly. However, if, as Ram (2018) suggests, polices around customer violence, harassment, and SH are non-existent, it begs the question of how LMs should respond to such situations; and, for that matter, how FHWs should be responding. For example, should FHWs and LMs rely on their experience (or lack of) in dealing with third-party SH? Or should they turn a blind eye and brush incidents off? Therefore, it would seem important as a key part of organisational strategy to develop greater awareness of CSH by training workers and managers to anticipate, spot, handle and address CSH. Furthermore, in the UK, due to potential new legislation being passed making it a legal duty (rather than just a duty) for employers to take all reasonable steps to prevent third-party harassment (see chapter two, Section 2.1), one would consider that UK employers would be updating policies and procedures whilst training employees to take this into account. What's more, one would think that increasing training around third-party harassment for FHWs and LMs would also be on the agenda on an ongoing basis.

Salas *et al.* (2012) in their review of training research, considered that five wide-ranging imperatives for effective training programmes, these being: identifying organisational and workforce needs, detailed and relevant training content, organisational leadership support of training, integration of technology (without overreliance) into training and continuous encouragement of integrating training and on-the-job functions. Interestingly, they note that training is viewed as a vital process to support learning and improve performance at work, rather than just a classroom event (Salas *et al.,* 2012). For Bagdasarov *et al.* (2019), associating organisational training and learning with business strategy is crucial to the effectiveness of SH training, not just in achieving a specific business strategy, but in enhancing the workplace environment for workers. This makes good sense; HRPs would also need to consider the effectiveness of training. Sitzmann and Weinhardt (2015, p.733) point out their definition of training effectiveness as "the extent to which training produced the intended results." Perry *et al.* (2010) question the efficacy of SH training, believing that the effectiveness of SH training depends on the organisational context, while Goldberg *et al.* (2019) conclude that SH training effectiveness is governed by an organisation's tolerance level of SH. Meanwhile, Roehling and Huang (2018) argue that whilst SH training will not reduce SH, it does, however, raise awareness, knowledge and sensitivity of the issue in the workplace. Additionally, Medeiros and Griffith (2019) question the efficacy of SH training and suggest that empirical evidence shows some effectiveness of SH training in dealing with SH. However, there is little evidence that informs of any long-term attitude of behavioural change outside the training room. That said, the authors acknowledge that research on training in dealing with SH tends not to involve the pre- and post-training backdrop (Medeiros and Griffith, 2019). Similarly, Hayes *et al.* (2020) feel that SH training is ineffective in terms of modifying discriminatory or harassing acts. They note that previous training intervention efforts may have been limited by inadequate conceptualisation of the issues at hand, design and methods that create cynicism, and misjudgement of psychological principles underlying attitude and behaviour change. To improve the effectiveness of harassment training, it is suggested that for employees to be treated fairly, attention should be paid to organisational climate and culture and development of professional competence. Moreover, training should be an integral part of performance and corporate social responsibility (Hayes *et al.,* 2020). So, it can be considered that although not a panacea for eradicating SH, there is an argument that training, if nothing else, would at least put third-party harassment in the spotlight and raise awareness of the issue for all employees.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has looked at the hospitality sector, its general characteristics, and workplace SH, including SH of frontline workers by customers. It has been noted that characteristics such as low pay, unsocial hours, job precarity, skills/labour shortages and customer abuse are common factors in the industry. Next, it considered the UK's economic and business climate at the time the research was conducted. Concluding that the economic climate in the UK is volatile and unpredictable in terms of operational costs, labour shortages and shifting changes in UK government business taxes and immigration policy. Consequently, hospitality organisations need to navigate this economic climate with some care and dexterity. The chapter then moved on to discussing the pervasiveness of mistreatment and abuse of frontline workers by customers. It highlighted CSH, with research suggesting that the industry has a persistent and ongoing problem with the phenomenon of CSH among customer-facing workers. Furthermore, it has highlighted the concern of employees under-reporting of CSH to organisational management. Finally, the chapter discussed how organisational policies and procedures can play a part in helping address CSH. It acknowledged that it may not necessarily have policies or procedures that specifically relate to CSH. This may hamper decision-making by frontline workers in reporting incidents of SH by a customer and may cause hesitation by line managers in addressing the phenomenon with perpetrators, due to being unsure of what process ought to take place. The chapter was rounded off by considering the benefits of training frontline service workers and line managers in spotting, handling and addressing CSH. Organisations committing to this regularly may well aid the support for both frontline service workers and line managers in this area and provide an element of confidence in dealing with SH by customers. However, it is acknowledged that whilst raising awareness of CSH, the effectiveness of training will be determined by the tolerance level an organisation has towards the problem, along with its commitment towards employee development. Meanwhile, from an organisational perspective, the impact of individuals and organisations discussed in chapter two, Sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.2, concerning employee well-being, organisational consequences of SH, should signal that workplace SH, including CSH, ought to be an issue that is permanently on the managerial agenda. With managerial matters in mind, the next chapter will consider line management. This will include, but not be restricted to, the roles played by LMs, the barriers to effective line management, organisational relationships, executing their HRM duties and stressors involved in the role of managing at the frontline.

Chapter 4.0 Line managers – roles, responsibilities and human resource management

One of the research questions of this thesis concerns understanding how frontline LMs handle and address CSH among FHWs, and this chapter discusses the LM and the generalities of their role. It is recognised that LMs are essential players in the delivery of HRM, which can have a powerful impact on employees' performance outcomes (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). The chapter defines frontline managers as those with wide-ranging supervisory and managerial responsibilities who directly interact with and control their teams of frontline workers. Some managers will have management obligations, even if their job title does not include the word "manager". For example, someone with a job title such as supervisor or team leader may well hold managerial responsibilities, including responsibility for employees (CIPD, 2023; Hales, 2005). For Teklaeb and Taylor (2003), the interpersonal relationship that LMs have with their employees is a crucial part of people management. In this thesis, the term “line manager” is therefore used to describe supervisors, team leaders and managers who work in the hospitality frontline and have direct responsibility for hospitality FHWs, such as table service workers, receptionists, and bar workers. Moreover, the chapter provides a brief explanation of HRM and sets the scene for the LMs’ HRM devolved responsibilities. Additionally, it highlights the barriers they face in achieving effective HRM with their subordinate teams, including burgeoning workloads, work stressors, and individual capabilities in delivering effective HRM on a day-by-day basis.

4.1 What is a line manager – defining the role

It is widely acknowledged that management has existed long before the industrialised era of the 18th and 19th centuries, with LMs being part of a business for as long as organisations have existed (Townsend *et al.,* 2022). One way or another, it is likely that some form of HRM activity has long been part of the LM's role. It is considered that the 20th-century post-1980s, HRM ushered in a new era for workers and society alongside a growing level of importance of LM roles and activities (Townsend *et al.,* 2022). Line manager is a general term used to describe managers at a variety of positions in the hierarchy, from first-line or frontline managers to senior managers (Townsend *et al.,* 2022). Currie (2006) argues that managers with two or more tiers below them are considered middle managers. They themselves will likely be managed by senior managers. Additionally, these manager roles mean that they are themselves employees of an organisation and will be accountable for overseeing other employees. There is a variety of terminology used in literature for LMs that is synonymous with job titles like supervisors, team leaders, frontline managers and middle managers. All convey the role of LM,

denoting LMs' function in the present-day workplace (Hales, 2005; McConville and Holden, 1999). LMs are typically those in positions that represent the lowest level of management at the operational level. Generally, the position of the frontline manager, by tradition, is the base minimum level of operational management, who has responsibility for overseeing a group of operational (non-managerial) workers on a day-to-day basis (CIPD, 2023; Hales, 2005; Townsend *et al.,* 2022). Hales (2001) argues that managers at varying managerial levels have comparable duties, of which an HRM function forms part of these duties; thus, HRM is not just restricted to frontline management. Thornhill and Saunders (1998) noted that junior, middle, and senior top-level managers all take the lead in implementing HRM in the organisation. Meanwhile, Stanton *et al.* (2010) argue that all line managers will have an element of HR duties within the scope of their roles.

For clarity, it is worth considering the terminology for line managers' roles and supervisor roles; in some organisations, the level of authority may differ. For example, Renwick and MacNeil (2002) consider that there is a difference between LMs and supervisors, yet both believe that they play critical roles in implementing HRM activities. Similarly, Hales (2005) explains the difference between LMs and supervisors. It is argued that LMs are delegated significant responsibility, with the role shifting from traditional supervision to that of team leaders. Slingo (2023) attempts to unpack the differences in the manager versus supervisor dynamics, suggesting that the manager holds a more important and elevated role in the business than that of a supervisor. Managers bear the burden of accountability, taking charge of entire teams and often holding responsibility for financial budgets, the effective execution of corporate policy/procedures, and an array of HR duties, including recruitment, performance management, employee well-being, discipline, and grievance matters. Typical responsibilities for LMs cover allocation of work to employees, monitoring work productivity, performance, and work quality of work, arranging work rotas, provision of technical expertise and operational cost control (CIPD, 2023; Hales, 2001; Slingo, 2023). Meanwhile, Slingo (2023) argues that supervisors are considered below the manager in the organisational structure. Supervisors can be responsible for the work of the employees they are supervising and, just like team leaders, they ensure that goals are achieved and work duties are carried out successfully. Supervisors frequently work directly with managers and are often seen as a link between managers and employees. Managers will delegate tasks and goals to supervisors, with supervisors often being given the autonomy to determine how best to use the resources at their disposal to achieve the tasks and goals delegated. Although supervisors have an element of

autonomy and responsibility, there is likely to be a need for approval from managers on decisions that are important (Slingo, 2023). The LM has conflicting demands in their role, from both their subordinates and from higher management. As a result, they are placed in a seam between worker and management (Hadjisolomou and Simone, 2019). This means they can be caught between two stools in developing positive and proactive relationships with subordinates, whilst also experiencing pressures from senior managers in having to enact orders and corporate demands to achieve organisational aims (Hirszowicz, 1985).

A frontline employee and their LM are connected by a formal, authoritative line. As work activities are delegated to the worker, progress on the work is reported or can be seen by the LM, with resources being exchanged between them, thus the job task relationship continues to develop between the two (CIPD, 2025) Managing employee performance by monitoring and measuring quality of work and providing feedback on performance is an important part of the LMs day-to-day leadership role (CIPD, 2025; Purcell *et al.,* 2003). However, for Posthuma and Campion (2008), discussing job performance is a function of the role that LMs are somewhat disquieted about. One of the main reasons for this is that if an LM needs to give negative feedback to an employee, this sort of criticism frequently creates bad feelings. Often this results in LMs steering away from wholly accurate appraisals of work or providing an assessment of performance that is over-generous, or indeed, sidestep the process completely (Posthuma and Campion, 2008). Performance management can be conducted in both an informal and formal manner, both ways being seen to provide support to the employee in their work. For example, informal performance management activities assist employees in meeting performance standards by offering more immediate feedback, whilst a more formal approach to performance management (an appraisal review) strives to establish explicit goals, expectations, and outcomes from the appraisal. This provides a demonstration to an employee of the commitment of the LM towards the employee being successful in their work (Bannya and Bainbridge, 2022). According to Bak (2020), providing employees with constructive performance feedback is a way of letting them know that the manager is interested in their development. The employee will return this with positive work behaviour. In contrast, employees will respond with negative work behaviour and be less innovative if feedback is untimely and unfair, which is seen as a breach of the psychological work contract by the employee (Eva *et al.,* 2019). Chen *et al.* (2008) consider that LMs who have little time for employee development or who have weak interpersonal relationships with employees, worker commitment and performance are reduced due to perceived breaches of the psychological contract as seen by the worker (Chen *et al.,*

2008). The notion of the psychological work contract was coined by Argyris (1960) when researching organisational behaviour. His research suggested that employees achieve higher performance if mutual expectations of the employee and employer were met (Arnold *et al.*, 2010). There appears to be no one set definition of the psychological contract, and over the years, it has been defined in marginally different ways. (Arnold *et al.*, 2010, p.281). Rousseau (1995) considered it a promissory belief of reciprocal obligations between the organisation and the individual. This is similarly highlighted by Herriot and Pemberton (1997, pp.45-56) and Guest and Conway (2002, pp.22-39). Meanwhile, Armstrong (2014, p.419) defined the psychological contract as "…a set of unwritten expectations that exist between employees and their employers." This is conducted reciprocally. However, a general definition was put forward by Robinson and Rousseau (1994, p.246):

"An individual's belief regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party…a belief that some form of a promise has been made and that the terms and conditions of the contract have been accepted by both parties."

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) suggest that the psychological contract can be problematic, in that employees may struggle in knowing what they can contribute to the organisation or what they wish from them. Additionally, employers may also not be overly clear about what they expect from their employees. Nevertheless, Rousseau (1998) contends that the psychological contract provides a framework for psychological mechanisms that impact on individuals' attitudes, influencing organisational performance. For Alfes *et al.* (2012), trust is a key factor for the employees psychological contract and suggest that developing a climate of trust is crucial noting that, "Trust in one's employer relates to an employee's belief about the likelihood that the employers' future actions will be beneficial, favourable or at least not harmful to an employee's own interest, and it is therefore a crucial factor influencing an employee's behaviour." (Alfes *et al.*, 2012, p.412). Armstrong and Taylor (2020) consider that relationships and reciprocal support are key components of trust. It is produced and sustained by managerial conduct and a deeper comprehension of the expectations that managers and employees have of one another. If management behaves consistently, fairly, and equally, trust will more than likely be enhanced between managers and workers. Overall, this supports the notion of the importance of the LM-employee relationship when it comes to high-quality implementation of HRM processes. For example, Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018) consider that strong manager-worker relationships enhance employee knowledge of HR practice, with

stronger employee commitment being seen as a derivative of this. Furthermore, mutual trust and obligations that arise from manager-worker relationships mean that LMs furnish their team with continuous information and maintenance of ongoing worker development and support (Bannya and Bainbridge, 2022). Relationships between LMs and employees are strengthened by acts like mentoring and coaching, which convey the manager's desire to support staff members' personal and professional development (Marescaux *et al.*, 2019).

In the hospitality industry, Walker (2020) suggests that managers working in the sector assume various roles. It is not just a case of managers being planners, organisers, controllers, or decision makers. Managers often assume roles such as coach and team motivator, a responder to customer expectations, and act as a liaison to company departments. Along with their general operational managerial functions, they often need to execute these roles, in quick succession, in real-time, there and then moments (Walker, 2020). Additionally, Boella and Goss-Turner (2020) note that the hospitality industry workforce is made up of a wide range of skills and experience levels. This means that LMs must listen to and communicate with their teams in a meaningful way. They must be confident that if employees feel engaged, they will be more likely to perform at the levels the company is looking for. Therefore, managers must foster proactive employee relations through effective communication in the workplace (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020).

As can be seen, the role LMs play in managing their teams is hugely important in establishing proactive worker relationships. Reciprocation and trust between LMs and workers are key elements in creating positive relationships and are crucial in effective people management and handling of worker concerns. Thus, as managers of people, it stands to reason that the LM role will incorporate HRM responsibilities for the workers they are responsible for, which means that LMs are a significant actor in operational HRM (Townsend *et al.,* 2022).

4.2 Human resource management in the workplace

One key area of the LM's role is their responsibility for a wide range of people management responsibilities and tasks related to the daily management of workers (Townsend *et al.,* 2022). Whilst the thesis will not discuss HRM in any detail, it is worthwhile briefly discussing the concept of HRM as background in understanding the line manager's role in this area. One of the functions of HR departments and HRPs in organisations is to provide advice, guidance and HR services on all aspects of employing people. HR work can be conducted on a continuum,

ranging from basic matters of recruitment and selection to involvement at a strategic level, such as transformational business change. Whichever level, HR work will have the primary concern of how employees are treated (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). The role of HRPs is varied and tends to be based in two areas: a generalist area or a specialist area. Generalist roles can include HR director positions, HR manager or HR officer roles, whilst specialist roles can be found in areas such as head of learning and development, head of recruitment and head of talent management. In addition, the HR professional can take on the roles of coaches, facilitators, internal consultants, business partners, and external service providers (Tyson and Fell, 1986, p.7). In essence, it depends on the level at which an HR professional may work, whether strategic, executive or administrative (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). HR professionals are required to follow a partnership approach in dealing with LMs. This allows HRPs to work closely with LMs so they can mutually deal with employee problems and support managers in applying HR strategy, policy and practices, rather than dictating to them in these HR areas. Working in a partnership role will allow the HRP to guide and support managers and achieve mutual understanding and agreement on how to proceed with HR matters (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Moreover, HRPs must demonstrate an understanding of the LM's role and the operational responsibilities and pressures that they face in the workplace. Overall, the HRP needs to be seen as a colleague in the business who will listen to LM's concerns, show appropriate flexibility, encourage inputs and agree on joint actions on relevant HR issues. In this regard, HRPs should adopt a developmental, coaching stance with managers rather than a directive or prescriptive approach (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

HRPs have an important role in ethical practice, maintaining and promoting the central organisational values of the treatment of employees and how they are managed. They are guardians of the organisational values and need to act as role models in highlighting unethical business practices (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). On the question of HRM implementation, all HRM activities of an organisation, for example, training and learning, recruitment and selection, performance and reward manager and employee relations ought to be executed ethically across the organisation. This includes employment matters covering, but not restricted to, disciplinary and grievance, diversity and inclusion, job security, redundancy, workplace conditions and employee well-being. Key guidelines in executing HRM are to treat employees as human beings, not merely as a resource. Therefore, HRM should recognise that employees should be treated with equality, with respect and be dealt with fairly (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Employers also have a duty of care towards employees, meaning that they should apply

an approach that is socially responsible towards creating a positive working environment and working conditions that are safe for employees to work in (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). In a report for the UK Institute of Employment Studies, Brown *et al.* (2019, pp.5-6) point out that many employers are now focusing on employee well-being, with this being a recognition that, in a knowledge-based economy that has a focus on high service performance, well-being needs to be enabled and supported in organisational delivery by HR professionals. Guest (2017) points out that societal and workplace pressures are putting employee well-being at risk, with new technologies contributing to job insecurity and skills deficits. While Felstead *et al.* (2015) found that in the UK work demands have expanded, particularly in low-skilled jobs, average levels of worker autonomy have declined, both of which can impact negatively on employee well-being. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) highlight areas that can affect employee well-being, including job demands, working conditions and environment, relationships with LMs and coworkers, balancing work and life and well-being of personal finances. Any of these factors can cause stress for employees. As a result, it makes sense for employers to put into place an employee well-being strategy (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). A strategy will put well-being firmly on the corporate agenda and will serve the purpose of producing a policy and practice framework designed to raise the well-being of employees in the workplace. This policy would be formed as one part of an organisation's general HRM policies and procedures (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

HRM policies specify how a company want to manage important facets of human resources. As guidelines, the goal is to guarantee that any HR-related issues are handled consistently, in line with established principles and the organisation's values. Consequently, HR policies give workers a codified framework to work with for a variety of aspects in an organisation. Overall policies will refer to, explicitly or implicitly, concepts such as working conditions, work performance, well-being, equity, knowledge, learning and quality of work life. Formally, HR policies can be stated as general declarations of the organisation's principles whilst also relating to specific areas. Areas such as employee relations, equality and diversity, employee well-being, bullying and SH, whistleblowing, and many other topics (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). While the HRM policies form the overall principles of an organisation and provide guidelines for people management practices, they do not, generally, provide a step-by-step approach to distinct situations. It will be HR procedures that will provide this detail and spell out what, how, who and when steps are required to be taken in areas like capability procedures, disciplinary and grievance procedures and redundancy procedures, among others (Armstrong

and Taylor, 2020, pp.596-598). Effectively, HR procedures create a formalised approach to dealing with and handling a variety of specific HR matters that relate to the policy and practice, which distinguishes them from HR policies. Meanwhile, employees ought to know about an organisation's policies and procedures, with this being communicated through employee handbooks or as documents that are readily available for employees to view (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). In addition, it is essential that LMs know how to apply HR policy and procedures in the workplace and may well need appropriate training and development to aid implementation. Even so, HRPs will generally have the responsibility to ensure consistency in the implementation of policy and procedures and will generally provide any necessary guidance and support to LMs (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

4.3 Line managers and their human resource management responsibilities

Purcell *et al.* (2003, p.58) consider that LMs "bring HR policies to life," noting that the role they play in acting and applying HR policies is an important aspect of their role. In addition, they argue that they have four important people management roles, these being: 1) HR policy implementation, 2) effective application of HR policy, 3) day-to-day leadership skills, and 4) work control: supervising employees, work quality monitoring, delegating and influencing how work is conducted and completed (Purcell *et al.,* 2003). HR policy implementation and effective application of HR policy mean just that, with the LM's job being to ensure that corporate policies and procedures are operationally effectively applied in the workplace. Day-to-day leadership skills include, but are not restricted to, motivating, developing and coaching workers, dealing with operational matters, and dealing with team and individual problems. Furthermore, controlling employees' work involves supervising workers, work quality monitoring, delegating responsibilities to workers and influencing work on how best to go about completing jobs, which are all elements of the LM role (Purcell *et al.,* 2003). Overall, LMs hold a wide range of people management obligations in daily operations related to team supervision, with the execution of formal HRM duties, policies and practices being a critical part of the LM role (Purcell *et al.,* 2003).

The core of LM HR duties is carried out through creating and developing interpersonal connections with their subordinates, senior managers and HRPs. Within this setting of the LM-worker relationship, LMs use HR policies to guide, develop, and inspire employees (Trullen *et al.,* 2020). As a result, employee views, attitudes, and behaviours are shaped by LMs in affiliation with their implementation of HR procedures and duties (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink,

2018). Relationships between the LM and HRPs can be seen as a transactional relationship, in which the HRP supports managers, who then execute HR policy and procedures (Kilroy *et al.*, 2022; Larsen and Brewster, 2003; Purcell *et al.*, 2003). Typically, HR professionals take the lead in creating HR practices and policies. These practices and policies are shared with LMs, and the effectiveness of this communication influences the comprehension and acceptance of them (Gilbert *et al.,* 2011a). It is considered that the LM's capacity to execute HR successfully is improved by this support (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink, 2018). It is obvious that LMs have a significant influence on the attitudes and work behaviours of their staff, and for those managers who successfully carry out HR practice and procedures, it gives their employees a real sense of the meaning of HR (Sikora, 2022). When HRM is real and tangible to employees, workplace attitudes and behaviours are positively impacted by HR when implemented effectively (Ferris *et al.,* 1998). These achievements can inspire and motivate managers to be more enthusiastic about HR matters. Combined, these lead to a cycle of HR adoption and enhanced productivity at work that reinforces itself (Sikora, 2022).

LM attitudes towards deploying HRM activities, in particular new HR practices, can be influenced by the anticipated employee reactions to what is being conducted or introduced (Sikora, 2022). For instance, managers are more likely to adopt new sickness absence management procedures if they think that their team will be favourable towards the change. Likewise, if LMs think they ought to share the same views as their staff, then these norms will probably influence how they execute their HR duties. On the other hand, managers may decide not to adopt HR procedures if they think that employees will react in a negative manner towards a particular HR practice (Sikora, 2022). For Bowen and Ostroff (2004), robust HR environments are brought about when staff members have a common understanding and comprehension of HR procedures and how these procedures ought to be concluded. They further consider that HR procedures that employees perceive to be in place at work are the only ones that impact on their reactions and behaviours. Therefore, for HR practices to get attention from employees and illustrate the desired impacts on them, HR practices must be made clear and communicated to them effectively (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

In the LM-worker link, resources relating to HR are exchanged through the manager's application of work practices (Kehoe and Han, 2020; Trullen *et al.*, 2020). For example, HR aspects that employees value, such as being able to arrange flexible working hours or access to training and development, resources that are likely to cause enhanced commitment, greater job

satisfaction and increased engagement from employees towards the company (Bannya and Bainbridge, 2022). Researchers suggest that these reciprocal benefits to the company can be attained and established through high-quality, supportive relationships with LMs (Brunett *et al.,* 2014; Fletcher, 2019; Gilbert *et al.,* 2011a). As a result, this manifests into increased employee performance, improved coworker behaviours, innovative outcomes and general behaviour that espouses organisational commitment and work engagement (Bannya and Bainbridge, 2022). LMs who emphasise developing their teams tend to gain high levels of organisational commitment from employees along with increased levels of individual performance (Marescaux *et al.,* 2019). Even though LMs are critical to HR implementation, employees also play a strong supporting role in this area, and the relationship between these two role partners remains crucial (Meijerink *et al.,* 2016). Therefore, LMs have a significant impact on how employees perceive HRM (Sikora and Ferris, 2014), alongside employee behaviours and attitudes (Alfes *et al.,* 2013) and employee depth of commitment towards the organisation (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink, 2018). For Nishii and Paluch (2018), LMs are essential in helping their staff members understand the reality of their organisation's HR policies. In applying HR practice, managers enhance organisational culture as well as developing and understanding of HR practice for their team members. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) consider that managers who adopt HR practices in an organised and dependable manner would see a synergistic effect on the success of the organisation. On the other hand, Ferris *et al.* (1998) point out the possible drawback of managers' inadequate attempts to adopt HR. They consider that ineffective HR implementation attempts by managers lead to negative employee behaviours, which eventually have an unfavourable impact on organisational results. Whilst Sikora and Ferris (2014) consider that LMs' execution of HR responsibilities can be significantly impacted by organisational culture, climate, and political factors. Overall, it can be considered that the implementation of organisational HR policies and practices and effectively applying these is crucially LM dependent. This justifies the consideration that it is LMs who bring human resource policies and practices to operational life (Kehoe and Han, 2020; Purcell *et al.,* 2003; Trullen *et al.,* 2020).

Malhotra and Ackfeldt (2016) note that clear and effective communication mechanisms between HR professionals and LMs are crucial to dealing with HRM matters, whilst weak communication between the two could lead to HRM ambiguity and the dilution of the effectiveness of HRM. Ambiguity of HRM can result from a lack of training and guidance from HRPs, leaving LMs without a clear understanding of their HR role and/or responsibilities

in handling expectations of the HR department. Therefore, HRM implementation may suffer due to differing perceptions of LMs and HR professionals (Hutchison and Purcell, 2010; McConville, 2006). Additionally, Trullen *et al.* (2016) consider that the influence of HR departments over managers plays a critical part in the application and performance in HRM. Strong relationships between HR professionals and LMs can be advantageous to both parties. For example, having access to HR resources and expertise enables managers to deal with both simple and complicated staff issues. If HRPs can successfully implement HR policy and procedures through LMs, then the relationship presents an opportunity for both parties to be influential towards each other (Bannya and Bainbridge, 2022). Meanwhile, Mintzberg (1985) considers that it is not just operational skills and knowledge that LMs require; they also need to be capable of building a good capacity of social capability skills, not just with employees under their responsibility, but with internal partner departments and senior managers. Additionally, LMs need to fully understand the culture and organisational politics of their employers.

Mintzberg (1985) also argues that social interactions are a key requirement for the LM. This includes understanding and the ability to manoeuvre through the organisational culture and political aspects of an organisation. The author considers that, as organisations are political environments, a person's ability to navigate the politics of the organisation is essential to be effective on an individual basis. Ferris *et al.* (2007) believe that there are four key elements to having political skill: apparent sincerity, interpersonal influence, social astuteness and the ability to network. Generally, those with political skills can be adaptive, and these skills provide them with strong self-assurance that fosters trust and confidence in others, with this enhancing their credibility as an individual (Ferris *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, a LM's political acumen could be seen to benefit in a positive way at the team, peers, and organisational level (Sikora, 2022). It is also likely that the LM's level of political proficiency will affect how they execute their HR duties (Sikora, 2022). According to Ferris *et al.* (1998), the political and social climates of an organisation affect and shape the relationships that exist between HR systems, HR implementation, and organisational efficiency and effectiveness. Johns (1993) claims that organisational politics play a major role in the implementation of HR practices rather than their ability to advance business objectives. In a similar vein, Pfeffer (1996) suggests that political and organisational factors create tensions that can shape the implementation of HR processes and procedures in the organisation. Pfeffer also considers that political strains have the potential to help or impede LMs from implementing crucial HR procedures linked to enhancing

performance. Researchers also note the influence of the political nous of LMs in their efforts to apply HRM. For example, Cassell *et al.* (2002) demonstrated that LM decisions concerning HR implementation are influenced by political concerns, whilst van der Zee *et al.* (2002) inform that political and social demands influence recruitment practices. Meanwhile, Watson *et al.* (2007) consider that the strength of belief in HR by an organisation determines managers' attitudes towards HR implementation. Whilst Sikora *et al.* (2015) consider that there is a strong and favourable correlation between HR implementation levels and LMs' political skill.

Such considerations lend credence to the notion that political savvy is a fundamental skill for LMs when tasked with the implementation and effectiveness of HR policy and procedures. When HR is effective, implementation is a key organisational value, particularly at the top organisational levels. Managers with political acumen are more likely to use HR practices consistently. On the other hand, politically astute managers could be less inclined to adopt their company's HR policies if LMs perceive that the organisational culture of HRM is low in value (Sikora, 2022). According to Schein (2016), organisational culture is the set of fundamental values, beliefs and norms that a particular group has created, learned, or evolved to deal with the challenges of internal and external integration. These beliefs have proven successful enough to be accepted as true, and as a result, they are passed down to new members as the appropriate way to view, consider, and react to these issues. Hutchison and Purcell (2003) consider that an organisational culture that places significant emphasis on effective HRM is a key force to gain LM commitment to their HR duties. Importantly, LMs need to be aware that the organisation values HRM and the policies and procedures around executing HR duties to the required organisational standard (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

Overall, LMs who have good, credible connections with their subordinates are likely to feel trusted by their staff when it comes to implementing HR practice (Sikora, 2022). In addition, HR implementation also seems to be significantly influenced by the nature of the social interactions that take place between the HR department and line management (Sikora and Ferris, 2014). For example, LMs are more likely to have faith in the HR department when there is a positive interaction between HR and line management. Managers are therefore more likely to value HR's advice and collaborate with HR to carry out their personnel management responsibilities in an efficient manner. On the other hand, collaboration is questionable when the LM's views of the HR department are negative. HR implementation will likely decrease when this occurs (Sikora and Ferris, 2014). According to Whitaker and Marchington's (2003)

study on managers' perspectives on HR, LMs consider HR support to be essential to their ability to accomplish their jobs. Most of the managers they spoke with thought that having a strong HR relationship increased the efficacy in management of their people. Meanwhile, Renwick (2003), in an investigation which concerned the quality of the interaction between HR and line management when delegating conventional HR duties to the line, revealed that LMs anticipate a certain amount of reciprocity from the HR department when they take on more HR responsibilities. When this fails to materialise, the quality of LM and HR interactions suffers (Renwick, 2003). Renwick also noted that many managers feel that even if they are handling far more HR-related tasks, the HR department rarely shows them appreciation or flexibility for their efforts. In this case, LMs can hold and even show a negative attitude towards the HR department and about HR practice, this becoming an organisational norm (Renwick, 2003). Overall, this has the potential to be a significant barrier to the effective implementation of their HRM duties.

4.4 Line managers - barriers to effective human resource management implementation

Research suggests that LMs hold an extensive obligation for HRM implementation; however, there is an inconsistency in the quality of HRM implementation by them (Evans, 2015; McGovern *et al.,* 1997). One of the key barriers to successful implementation is that of LMs not fully embracing or engaging in the HRM duties, due to conflicting priorities, operational time pressures, absence of desire, or lack of ability (Brewster and Larsen, 2000; López-Cotarelo, 2018; McGovern *et al.,* 1997). For example, in a study of senior managers by Guest and King (2004), low priority was given to HR initiatives due to added bureaucracy and what was seen as faddish initiatives from the HR department. Khilji and Wang (2005) found that some managers simply chose not to apply HR practices, whilst López-Cotarelo (2018) found that significant hurdles for LMs in executing their HRM duties can be time pressures, a sense of powerlessness and conflicting operational priorities. Additionally, Teague and Roche (2012) highlight that organisations do not necessarily have satisfactory structures in place for supporting LMs, such as formal training, coaching or incentives to develop HRM skills, and this can lessen the desire of managers to apply HRM practices. The implications for the effects on HRM due to the lack of engagement of line managers can be considerable (López-Cotarelo, 2018).

For example, LMs whose ability to implement HRM polices is erratic and variable can transfer negative opinions of HRM practices to their employees (López-Cotarelo, 2018). According to

Evans (2017), Gilbert *et al.* (2011b), Hutchison and Purcell (2010), and McGovern *et al.* (1997), conflicting role expectations for LMs, which appear as role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict, might hinder effective HR implementation. Likewise, if organisational performance demands that LMs focus on targets, for example, revenue targets, financial control, customer service targets, and other tangible business measures rather than HR outcomes and duties, this may compound the hindrance to applied HRM (Evans, 2017). As a result, if LMs are prioritising performance demands, they will likely give limited attention to HRM matters due to their concentration on operational matters. Consequently, HRM work moves lower down on the list of their priorities (Woodrow and Guest, 2014).

The importance of consistent implementation and application of HRM systems and practices by LMs should not be underestimated. For instance, at an organisational or group level, consistent implementation of HRM systems underpins the strength of building and developing organisational cultures for performance behaviours (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). And, at the individual worker level, the actions of LMs in executing HRM duties form and fulfil the psychological contract of employees (McDermott *et al.,* 2013). For those LMs who embrace HRM duties, it has been found that their employees are more likely to exceed job performance, are more likely to engage with decision making, and are less likely to leave an organisation (Sikora *et al.,* 2015). Nevertheless, research demonstrates that the complexity and broad-ranging remit of LM duties and responsibilities create a demanding framework for the application of HRM practices. As a result, with the continuous expansion of fulfilling role objectives and expectations of managing physical, financial, and human resources, LMs are under significant pressure to achieve role expectations (Brewster and Larsen, 2000; Trullen *et al.,* 2020). Given their significant role in applying and implementing HRM, managers must competently carry out their HRM duties in a consistent manner that meets the requirements of the organisation's strategy and policy (Trullen *et al.,* 2020). Research suggests that although LMs bear a large portion of the accountability for HRM, they can also contribute to below-par performances in the execution of HR duties (Evans, 2015; McGovern *et al.,* 1997). One of the most stubborn elements that causes this can be the LM's habits of focusing and prioritising business operational concerns, often leading to HR matters being put on hold. Considering the pressure that managers are under from higher management to achieve organisational targets, this could be considered as a legitimate derivative of operational work pressures (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). For Hales (2005), the organisational position the LM has and the variety of operational duties and responsibilities that compete and conflict with HRM affect their

capability in executing these duties. This often leads to HRM practices being implemented less effectively than intended, as LM's commitment and/or capability in fulfilling these duties can be a notable constraint.

4.5 The line manager, worker and human resource practitioner's triangle

This dynamic process is shaped by a group of key actors sometimes referred to as the "HR Triad", comprising HRPs, LMs, and employees (Jackson and Schuler, 2003). HR professionals develop and uphold policies that reflect organisational values, and act as ethical stewards, safeguarding standards of employee treatment, while LMs operationalise these policies in day-to-day practice. This directly influences employees' experiences of HRM (Jackson *et al.,* 2014). Through their interpersonal relationships with workers, LMs play a critical role in translating policy intentions into reality. Thus, effective HRM relies not only on formal systems but on the collaborative enactment of these roles, where HRPs set direction and model ethical behaviour, and LMs bring HR practices to life in frontline contexts (Jackson *et al.,* 2014).

LMs do not work in a vacuum; they work with a network of organisational actors whose expectations shape their roles and behaviours (Evans, 2022, p. 5). In delivering their HRM responsibilities, they work closely with their teams and may also engage directly with customers and internal stakeholders. Their duties often require collaboration with HRPs, middle and senior managers and, at times, organisational directors (McDermot *et al.,* 2015; Trullen *et al.,* 2016). Consequently, the HR department is a key partner for LMs, with regular communication between the two is essentials for addressing HR matters (Yuliza *et al,* 2019). The foundation responsibilities of LMs in HR are fulfilled through building and maintaining interpersonal relationships with HRPs, senior leaders, and the employees they supervise. It is within the LM–worker relationship that managers apply HR policies to guide, develop, and motivate their teams (Trullen, Bos-Nehles and Valverde, 2020). The HR triad is a structure, and this configuration, like the customer service triangle, is not without its power dynamics. For example, HR professionals' intrinsic standing as policy developers allows them to provide stringent controls over HRM delivery by establishing HR-compliance enforcement practices to guarantee that LMs adhere to process execution (Kurdi-Nakra and Pak, 2023). LMs have hierarchical authority over their employees, as demonstrated in the customer service triad in Section 2.5.3. Since LMs are responsible for carrying out and upholding HR policy, there is an indirect hierarchical power dynamic that favours the HR professional over the worker.

Line managers and employee relationships

LMs work closely with their team of subordinates, who play an important role in helping managers meet organisational objectives and goals (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020). Essentially, managers are there to get outcomes, and they can only do so when they witness their team members contributing effectively (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Although LMs are central to frontline HR implementation, employees still contribute significantly to this process (Meijerink, Bondarouk and Lepak, 2016). The relationship between the two is therefore critical, with LMs influencing employee behaviours and attitudes (Alfes *et al*, 2013), organisational commitment (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink, 2018) and how employees perceive HRM (Sikora and Ferris, 2014). Additionally, Gilbert *et al.* (2015) consider that the number of employees a LM supervises can shape how staff perceive the effectiveness of HR practices delivered by their manager Gilbert *et al.*, 2015). The relationship between employees and LMs is inherently dynamic, shaped by mutual expectations that influence day-to-day interactions. When well-matched, employees are more likely to experience job satisfaction, while LMs are better positioned to achieve their operational goals and broader organisational objectives (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020). So, for this relationship to function effectively, expectations on both sides must be aligned, yet in the customer-facing service sector, these expectations can be brought under pressure. Section 2.5.3 of this thesis discussed the concept of the customer service triangle, highlighting that customers. For Hales (2005, p. 473), this means that in an organisation's management structure, frontline managers are the *"final frontier"* serving as middlemen between the organisation, its customers and frontline workers. This broadening of the boundaries can add additional strain to the LM's role, as customer relationships, service quality and efficiency in delivering service, frequent traits of the service sector, are key demands from organisational management (Korczynski, 2000; Troyer *et al.*, 2000).

Line manager and HR practitioner relationships

Typically, LMs hold a wide range of people management obligations in daily operations related to team supervision, and the execution of formal HRM duties, policies and practices is a critical part of the LM role (Purcell, 2003). When investigating the relationship between HR departments and LM implementation of HRM, Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018) concluded that LM perceptions of HR advice and support influenced the motivation of LMs to implement HR practices. This implies that manager perceptions of, for instance, a lack of support from HR departments, could lead to weak HR practice implementation. This finding suggests that HRPs need to be conscious of how the advice and support provided to LMs is perceived and

that implementation of HR policies, processes and procedures is effectively applied by LMs (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink, 2018). The overarching role of people management professionals is to provide informed guidance and specialist support on all matters relating to the effective management of an organisation's workforce. Contemporary HR practice encompasses a broad spectrum of responsibilities, which are commonly categorised into transactional and transformational domains (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). From a transactional perspective, people management professionals undertake the operational activities necessary to maintain the routine functioning of HR processes. These activities typically include recruitment and selection, onboarding, record management, and the administration of employment-related procedures. Such tasks are essential for ensuring procedural consistency, regulatory compliance, and organisational efficiency. Conversely, the transformational dimension of the HR role reflects a more strategic orientation, whereby practitioners contribute to shaping organisational direction and influencing how employees experience their work (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

This strategic contribution may involve the design and implementation of HR policies aligned with organisational objectives, leading cultural or organisational change initiatives, developing leadership capacity, and supporting long-term workforce planning. Through these dual functions, people management professionals are instrumental not only in sustaining operational stability but also in facilitating organisational development. Their strategic involvement ensures that people-related practices reinforce broader organisational goals, while their operational responsibilities underpin the everyday employee experience (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). However, for many HRPs, the focus is on transactional activities, for example, recruitment, onboarding, assisting in the resolution of people problems, managing daily employment matters, and handling employment law issues—the latter of which is considered as an area time-consuming and difficult in the service offer and advice that they provide to management at all organisational levels. As a result, LMs frequently assess HR performance not on strategic contribution, but on the perceived quality, responsiveness and effectiveness of the services provided (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Therefore, in working on transactional matters, it is likely that HRPs will become involved, one way or another, with employees who work on the frontline

Employees and HR practitioners

Ulrich (1987) identified four central components of HR delivery: acting as a strategic partner, serving as an administrative expert, championing employees, and functioning as a change agent. Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) later revised this framework, redefining these responsibilities as those of an employee advocate, human capital developer, functional expert, strategic partner and organisational leader. Due to the adoption of HR's more strategic focus, the line management is taking on a greater responsibility for people-focused HRM. Additionally, Hailey *et al.* (2005) found that as the strategic importance of the HR department increased, knowledge of the human element of employees' daily work experiences declined. This resonates with Caldwell (2003), who considers that employees and the HR department have become alienated from each other. Meanwhile, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) emphasised the significance of the employee advocate role, noting that HR professionals typically devote around 20% of their time to employee relations. Therefore, service delivery remains a central component of HRPs' work, and an emphasis on strategic or business-partner responsibilities should not overshadow its significance (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). In essence, supporting, listening to and responding to employees, therefore, remains a fundamental aspect of HR practice (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). However, as Caldwell (2003) and Hailey *et al.* (2005) note, the shift of HR to a strategic focus, with more HR activities being devolved to line management, HR's understanding of the day-to-day activities of frontline workers appears to be in recession, thus reducing the chances of effective relationships between HR and frontline workers as well as line management.

4.6 Addressing customer sexual harassment and human resource management capability

Line managers – addressing SH

According to Bohle *et al.* (2017), workplace problems like abuse, bullying, and harassment are widespread in the hospitality industry, which can often lead to employee dissatisfaction. These issues of people management would all come under the HRM responsibility of the LMs (Townsend *et al.,* 2022). Clearly, the matter of SH is fraught with consequences for the employer, with Kane-Urrabazo (2007) considering that knowing how to handle allegations of SH from an employee is an absolute must for LMs. Meanwhile, in Skarlicki and Kulik's (2004) model of reactions by the third party, LMs would be classed as an actor who would witness or learn about the mistreatment of an individual. In these instances, the third party runs through a personal attribution and perception process, leaving them to decide whether an incident is one

of misconduct or not. Following this, the third party will decide whether to act or not act against the said misconduct.

In the UK, the CIPD (2025) recognises that LMs have an obligation for the well-being of employees under their responsibility. This includes LMs ensuring that the workplace and working conditions are fully appropriate for employees to work in. Under this responsibility, it means that they will need to establish a workplace environment that excludes SH by coworkers and by customers. Fitzgerald *et al.* (1994) argue that SH is an outcome of the tolerance level an organisation has towards the phenomenon; therefore, the organisational climate influences the prevalence of the issue. Meanwhile, Poulston (2008) considers that when LMs ignore, overlook or disregard CSH, it bolsters the normalisation of the problem in the workplace. The way managers respond to CSH as opposed to coworker SH may provide insight as to the reasons why the hospitality sector frequently disregards the matter (Ram *et al.,* 2016). SH is dependent on elements of subjectivity, for example, how an LM (a third party) perceives and judges an incident, such as whether actions or behaviours are sexualised. This type of judgement is often a first step response as to whether an incident is classed as SH (Madera *et al.,* 2018). In effect, the LM, as a representative of the company, may be considered as being responsible for the actions of the perpetrator; the manager and the organisation could be held responsible for taking limited or no action to avert CSH (Madera *et al.,* 2018). Kensbock *et al.* (2015) and Poulston (2008) argue that the gender of the manager is a factor in how managers label an incident of SH, as, typically, men see customer sexualised actions and behaviours as part of the demanding nature of the hospitality service sector and do not consider these behaviours as SH. Whilst Hughes and Tadic (1998) believe that women are more likely to interpret sexualised actions and behaviours as SH than men, men are more amenable to sexualised actions and behaviours than women. For McDonald (2012), women are more susceptible to harassment from customers than men and may well be more tuned into perceptions of SH, resulting in them classifying actions towards them as SH. Meanwhile, Adkins (1998) considers that male customers are more than likely to be sexually harassing female workers, and that male LMs will generally inform them that it is part and parcel of the job and just get on with things. This reaction by LMs was mainly found in CSH, rather than in coworker SH. Yagil (2008) contends that because female employees are under pressure to tolerate SH as a part of their jobs, they are less likely to report instances of SH by customers. Yagil further argues that, as men may lack sensitivity towards SH by customers, they do not apportion blame to the organisation. However, women generally consider and expect the

organisation to protect them from SH by customers and proactively rectify the problem (Yagil, 2008). The hospitality sector has a strong focus on customer satisfaction with a climate that has a "the customer is king" philosophy, ensuring that the customer is happy and satisfied, which frequently results in organisational tolerance of SH by customers (Gettman and Gelfand, 2007). Furthermore, the imbalance of power in favour of the customer can be taken advantage of in the worker-customer relationship (Yagil, 2008). So, LMs and workers, working in a pressurised service environment, where customer satisfaction is raised on a pedestal, may simply accept deviant behaviours from customers due, in part, to the organisational philosophy on customer service (Madera *et al.,* 2018). Research in hospitality settings suggests that the high orientation given to customer service in the industry may cause LMs to "turn a blind eye" to a range of customer misbehaviours, including SH (Ram, 2018). As Doe and Essiaw (2023, p.319) put it, LMs feel obliged to customers and "will bend over backwards" to retain customer satisfaction, even to the detriment of their workers. It is arguable whether this predilection towards customer satisfaction is a potential excuse for LMs making decisions based on taking the shortest, less contentious route out of a potential complex HRM situation. Meanwhile, López-Cotarelo (2018), in her research in the service industry with retail LMs, argues that LMs will implement the required level of HRM that suits the local situation best, a case of what the LM may think is best for the matter that is being dealt with. López-Cotarelo sees this as LMs using their discretion and "exerting cognitive and political abilities", but there is no indication if this is linked to LMs' simplistic decision making due to individual stress workload, their sense of capability or incapability in handling a complex HRM situation. In other words, are they making the decision based on "simplistic ease" due to not having the confidence or training in dealing with a complex issue? As already discussed in this thesis, working conditions whereby CSH is tolerated negatively affect an employee's physical and mental well-being (see Sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.2). Failing to act appropriately with an allegation of CSH, that is, informing workers to just get on with it, means that the obligation aspect towards employee-friendly working conditions and supporting the well-being of the worker falls short in terms of LMs applying effective HRM. Meanwhile, research suggests that workload pressures LM capability and personal competencies also have a considerable effect on the quality of applied HRM and, by nature, could impact LM decision making and judgement on CSH incidents.

Line managers: competing workloads and human resource management capability

Hales (2005) considers that the organisational position the LM has and the variety of operational duties and responsibilities that compete and conflict with HRM affect their

capability in executing their HRM. Cunningham and Hyman (1995; 1999) and Cunningham *et al. (*2004) also note the aspect of burgeoning LM workloads and consider that LMs who have difficulty in handling HRM issues may well put these issues off, give them low priority, or not execute them at all because of increasing workloads. The expanding demands of LMs are compounded by rising organisational demands and expectations in completing their extensive range of tasks effectively. As a result, this leaves LMs with constricted time to deliver on work jobs, which can result in weak task performance, including their HRM duties (Evans, 2022). Moreover, as many companies demand increased efficiencies while maintaining strict quality standards, LMs are forced to balance quality standards against organisational efficiency demands (Evans, 2022). Additionally, when the emphasis is placed on tangible measures and results along with financial budget management expectations, this can exacerbate the problem of demanding priorities for LMs (Evans, 2017). Consequently, LMs emphasise operational responsibilities above HR matters and pay less attention to the intended application of HRM (Woodrow and Guest, 2014). This lack of clarity and direction regarding their HRM role has the potential to undermine their capacity to execute HRM to expected organisational standards and may result in weaknesses in the process (Evans, 2022). As a result, an LM may deal with a CSH matter in the most simplistic manner they can, even to the point of avoiding addressing the problem.

LM capability in HRM is clearly a factor that needs to be taken into consideration to put into place effective HRM. In addition to organisational relationships already discussed, several other individual aspects for LMs need to be considered when implementing HRM. These include the manager's ability to handle their workload, personal drive and motivation, their accountability, their HR competency and their judgement and efficacy surrounding appropriateness of HR practices (Sikora, 2022). Typically, LMs' demands on workload and time can be considerable, with managers having to balance their time against tasks that compete. For instance, the need to achieve targets and objectives, meet service needs, adhere to operational procedures, solve unforeseen work problems and effectively manage their teams are all part of the day-to-day remit for LMs. (Sikora, 2022). Owing to such working pressures, LMs may have to make tough choices about how to allocate their limited time resources. The sheer quantity of these demands combined dictates whether the manager is able or even willing to take on additional duties. For McConville (2006), the broad range of managerial and HRM responsibilities that LMs have can lead to a lack of clarity for LMs in what exactly is expected of them. This could potentially be a barrier to the effective implementation of their HRM

responsibilities. As a result, HR obligations compete with numerous other tasks for the little time that LMs have available (Sikora, 2022). In recommending how the quality of people management can be improved, Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) suggest that enough time must be given to complete people management responsibilities, as often other management responsibilities take precedence. Researchers have drawn attention to the volume of responsibilities LMs have and their capacity issues. For instance, LMs frequently receive HR-related tasks without reducing other job or operational responsibilities; therefore, due to capacity problems, there is less time available for efficient people management (Brewster and Larsen, 2000). Secondly, LMs prioritise operational responsibilities and targets more, rather than many other supervisory activities (McGovern *et al.,* 1997). Similarly, studies show that LMs usually cannot commit enough time to HR duties when short-term operational demands predominate (Gratton *et al.,* 1999; Renwick, 2000). In these situations, many LMs are more prone to prioritise operational concerns over HR implementation when presented with what could be deemed as potentially contradictory requests (Sikora, 2022). Additionally, LMs often depart from planned HRM matters with conflict and excessive workload, resulting in renegotiated HR policy implementation. In addition, a lack of clarity in their HRM role impacts their capacity to deliver HRM confidently and consistently (Evans, 2017).

Sikora (2022) considers that the LMs' personal competencies are crucial to their ability to do their jobs well. LMs require a wide range of HR talents to effectively manage their team, including workforce scheduling, planning, recruitment skills, coaching and training skills, performance evaluation, and skills in employee relations. These qualities undoubtedly play a significant role in the effective implementation of HRM (Sikora, 2022). Effective HR implementation is likely to be challenging for those managers who lack the HR competencies necessary to resolve challenging employee situations. Some managers might merely rely on their gut feelings and act in accordance with their beliefs in these circumstances (Nehles *et al.,* 2006). According to van der Zee *et al.* (2002), it is not unusual for LMs to lack the HR abilities and the training necessary to execute their company's HR strategy effectively. Cassell *et al.* (2002) note that LMs usually lack HR competencies, which typically creates a barrier for them in implementing HRM tasks. Meanwhile, Sikora and Ferris (2014) argue that LMs' accountability is a political behaviour which influences the implementation of HRM. Different organisations, companies, businesses and even divergent departments in organisations will hold different levels and standards of manager accountability. Those LMs who have political nous are likely to take on board being held accountable for fulfilling their duties when they see

accountability as a crucial corporate standard (Sikora, 2022). Therefore, they may also be more inclined to carry out their HR responsibilities under these circumstances; as a result, LM HR implementation is likely to rise with increased HR accountability. On the other hand, managers who are not directly responsible for HR implementation are more likely to neglect those duties because of their numerous workloads (Sikora, 2022). LMs' assessments of the benefits and worth of their company's HR procedures in assisting them in achieving their professional objectives are reflected in perceived HR effectiveness (Sikora and Ferris, 2011). This can involve raising workplace competence, boosting productivity, hitting production targets, and/or fostering better relationships between coworkers. If the LMs see a high perceived value in HR practice, this should result in LMs continuing to raise levels and standards of HR implementation (Sikora and Ferris, 2011). Consequently, LMs will step up their operational efforts when they have positive opinions about the worth of their company's HR practice. Conversely, HR implementation decreases and risks becoming less effective if LMs' perception is a negative one (Sikora, 2022).

Ulrich *et al.* (1995) considered that three essential qualities assess HR manager capabilities: 1) change management capability, 2) customer expertise, and 3) knowledge of the business. In exploring HR competencies, Han *et al.* (2006, p.392) defined these as "a person's underlying attributes such as their knowledge, skills or abilities." Whilst these competencies are noted as essential qualities for HR managers, such skills are also required for LMs in managing and supporting the people they are responsible for. As an example, HR skills such as managing performance, recruitment, and employee relations, along with the development and training of employees, are all required in ensuring that LMs can successfully apply their HR duties (Sikora, 2022). Therefore, if LMs lack the skills necessary to manage and deal with the required HR needs, some of these people matters can be complex; it could be considered that they will have difficulty in exercising their HR duties to the standards required by the business (Sikora, 2022). In short, if LMs lack the skill and capability to execute HRM, then the effectiveness of HRM application is limited. When this type of thing occurs, it is not unusual for LMs to act in accordance with their own convictions. However, this form of action may not fall in line with the way the organisation expects HR practices to be enacted (Nehles *et al.,* 2006). Moreover, it is not uncommon for LMs to be weak in HR skills and expertise, alongside not fully understanding their legal responsibilities in HR (Hall and Torrington, 1998; Lo *et al.,* 2015; Op de Beeck *et al.,* 2016). With reference to employee relations, some LMs may execute HR procedures on what they see as a judgement of common sense or what they think needs to be

done or indeed fail to deal with HR issues early enough to resolve problems effectively (Harris *et al.*, 2002). Researchers suggest that many employees who have been promoted into their first line management position and tasked to implement HR practices may well lack HR skills. Therefore, they worry about the degree of HR expertise required to execute the organisation's HR policies and procedures (Harris *et al.*, 2002; Keegan *et al.*, 2012; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). In fifty-one semi-structured interviews with frontline managers in the retail industry, Evans (2015) highlighted the critical role that LMs play in HRM, finding that they had a high level of responsibility towards their subordinate team. However, a lack of organisational monitoring, support and reward for implementing HRM policies, along with inherent tensions in the LMs' role, caused them to forgo or reshape predetermined organisational policies. This, in effect, was a manipulation of the LMs' HRM responsibilities (Evans, 2015). Meanwhile, findings of research by Renwick (2002) from interviews with LMs (n=40) who worked in two large privately owned utility groups and one public sector local authority showed that they delivered mixed results in HR work. Renwick considered that they were found wanting when it came to being capable and responsible in some HR work and were often willing to bypass procedure to facilitate speedier decision-making (Renwick, 2003). In a similar vein to Renwick, Trullen *et al.* (2016) consider that LMs' poor HR knowledge and lack of capability can impair the chances of HR duties being carried out effectively. Therefore, it makes sense to ensure that LM capability gaps are closed through regular training and development to ensure they feel confident in implementing their HR duties effectively (Sikora, 2022).

Evidently, the role of managers in HRM and the range of skills required in executing, not just HR duties, but managerial duties in general, is not without its stressors. According to Evans (2022), the variety of roles and responsibilities can be a source of role stress, which impacts LM decision-making. Evans (2017) argues that frontline managers who work in service sector industries are high up in the league table of role stress because of the nature of the frontline role they play. The broad range and variety of work tasks, demanding workloads, role conflict and ambiguity, and the need to achieve high service standards mean that LMs in service sectors are vulnerable to role stress (Evans, 2017, 2022). Gilbert *et al.* (2015) highlight that LMs' duties include operating as a leader, coordinator, innovator and change agent whilst, at the same time, being a manager, collaborator, team player and employee within the organisation. This means that they fill a fundamental and crucial position which links corporate operations with workers and customers and the relevant expectations in shouldering a variety of tasks. Given

that LMs across the board have some HR responsibilities as part of their job description, the various expectations placed on them impact how well they carry out their HRM duties (Stanton *et al.,* 2010). It is considered that LMs are agentic players in the workplace, equipped with a variety of skills, abilities, and knowledge (Kehoe and Hun Han, 2020; Vermeeren, 2014). The function of LMs and how the application of their HRM responsibilities is influenced by organisational characteristics like systems and processes, procedures, culture, size, and organisational structure (Kehoe and Hun Han, 2020; Vermeeren, 2014). The nature of LMs' jobs and their experiences of workplace stressors are also influenced by the larger environment, including the type of industry sector and the country in which the organisation operates. Such contextual factors have a significant impact on LMs' understanding of HRM and how they implement their HR duties (Evans, 2022). It has been demonstrated that HRM-friendly organisational cultures motivate managers to carry out policies as planned (Sikora and Ferris, 2014). However, if contextual factors such as laissez-faire organisational procedures, discretionary management and a cultural leaning to flexibility, there is more of a likelihood that LMs will deviate from corporate policies (Kehoe and Hun Han, 2020). Therefore, the managerial boundaries that LMs work within can be an important factor in delivering effective HRM. For instance, managerial discretion and ambiguity for LMs may be higher in some organisations that have sites covering a broad geographic spread, whereas role clarity and the pressure to implement HR practices consistently may be greater in bureaucratic hierarchies with robust HRM processes (Gilbert *et al.,* 2015; Kehoe and Hun Han, 2020). The reasoning behind this is that effective HRM procedures enhance role clarity and give LMs less leeway in how they carry out their HR responsibilities (Gilbert *et al.,* 2015). However, in organisations that have little bureaucracy and hold a strong approach to flexibility and adaptability, such as in small businesses, small and medium enterprises and those with matrix structures, LMs may be more inclined to forgo their HR responsibilities (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006). Another organisational aspect that can either lessen or increase LMs' role stress is the essence and content of organisational and HR strategy. Corporate initiatives that are mutually reinforcing and reflective of culture and climate will improve role clarity and lower the likelihood of role conflict (Evans, 2022). Meanwhile, HR strategy, if it is to assist managers in fulfilling their HR responsibilities, must be consistent in its content and should run hand in hand with organisational context (Evans, 2022).

Boxall *et al.* (2011) consider that HRM itself can be complicated and contradictory, and when LMs apply HRM, they must balance the conflicting demands of treating employees fairly and equally (Fu *et al.,* 2020). Furthermore, there is a greater likelihood that LMs would stray from

desired HRM intentions when strategic HR policies are inadequately detailed or do not correspond with the context in which they are working (Kehoe and Hun Han, 2020). This can be caused by deficient policies and LMs' experiences of role conflict because of a poorly matched strategy (Evans, 2022). LMs have been observed to employ themselves in renegotiating the role, role reconstruction and reshaping tasks to supersede the expectations required of them. This is achieved by undertaking physical and cognitive adjustments that reshape the context of the job, which also influences their role partners' relationships (Evans, 2022). As already discussed in this chapter, it has been seen that, when it comes to HR implementation, LMs will modify their HR roles, often because of operational role stressors. This calls into question the idea that LMs consistently apply HRM in the way which the organisation intends. Therefore, renegotiation of their HR behaviour demonstrates the agentic actor of LMs, which in turn influences HR implementation, namely the calibre and consistency of applied HRM (Evans, 2022).

It is clear then, that LMs are involved in a complex and convoluted role with differing demands, conflicts and varying organisational contextual factors, including the expectations of others. This adds to existing workplace role stressors for LMs (Evans, 2022). When examining the reasons behind LM actions, an important contextual factor to consider is the type of industry sector that they work in. Troyer *et al.* (2000) believe that due to the interaction between their organisational position and the service context in which they operate, LMs in the service industry are particularly prone to role stress.

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the role of LMs, their HRM responsibilities, the basics of HRM and skills required in managing difficult employee matters such as CSH. It showed the importance of building a proactive working relationship with their subordinate teams in building a climate of trust, equity, fairness, reciprocation and honesty as being key elements of successful LM/employee relations. It is considered that LMs assume a variety of roles and responsibilities apart from their managerial roles, with this having the potential to be a source of role stress for the LM. This is particularly the case for service sector industries such as hospitality. In hospitality, LMs are involved in a range of roles, which often must be delivered in quick succession in there and then moments. This requires an LM to be quick-thinking with the need to make practical decision-making “on the hoof,” which can add to the pressure and stress of their role. Moreover, the chapter looked at the HRM duties of the LM, the wide-ranging people

responsibilities and the importance of successful implementation of organisational HRM policies and procedures, with Purcell *et al.* (2003, p.58) considering that LMs "bring HR policies to life" Therefore, it stands to reason that they will have responsibility for ensuring that corporate policies around handling and addressing workplace SH will be a concern under their jurisdiction. This would also include third-party SH by customers. In addition, the chapter considered personal and individual requirements that LMs need to be successful in their role. This included factors such as political skills, personal effectiveness, managing contextual factors and building relationships and partnerships with HR managers, HR departments and senior managers in the organisation. Meanwhile, the barriers for LMs in implementing effective HRM in the workplace were highlighted, with research suggesting that LMs, whilst bearing a large amount of HRM responsibility, can also contribute to poor HRM implementation due to prioritising organisational operational concerns, revenue targets and working within financial budgets. Burgeoning workloads and role ambiguity were accepted as factors that can impact the quality of HRM delivery, with results being at best mixed. This suggests that regular and consistent training in HRM skills and organisational HR policies and procedures, along with the impact on the organisation if not carried out effectively, is required to achieve improved performance in HRM implementation. Finally, the chapter discussed LMs and their handling of CSH, noting that due to perceived customer power, challenging workloads and quick-fire decision making on judging incidents of SH may cause LMs to adopt "simplistic ease" and turn a blind eye to sexualised actions and behaviours of customers. This was followed by discussing the capability aspects of LMs and the effect a lack of capability has on effective HRM implementation.

The main argument of this chapter is that the role of an LM is complex. It argues that due to the array of responsibilities in their operational managerial role, HRM responsibilities can often become a low-priority factor in day-to-day work. To achieve effectiveness, building positive relationships with subordinate teams is crucial for workplace well-being in applied HRM, as it fosters trust in the line manager. But if LMs are seen by workers as brushing away their concerns, this could corrode that trust amongst workers, whilst also eroding the workers' psychological contract. This is particularly so in handling and allegation of CSH. Having a reciprocal and trusting relationship can be advantageous in securing a mutually agreeable outcome of this form of customer abuse. The manager-worker relationship, from the workers' viewpoint, is a significant factor in the workplace relationship, impacting performance and the workers' daily work experiences. Additionally, this relationship will more than likely impact

the worker's well-being (Cabral-Cardoso and Santos, 2025; Mathafena and Hewitt, 2018). Yet, these relationships can also be complex due to fundamental resource dependency and imbalance of power, loaded towards the LM (Bono and Yoon, 2012).

Chapter 5.0 Research methodology

This chapter addresses the researcher's philosophical presuppositions, provides an overview of the epistemological considerations, and describes the methodology undertaken to achieve the objectives of the research study. It will explain the methodology, procedures and techniques used in the study and show how the research questions were operationalised within the framework of this thesis's logic of discovery.

The research focuses on CSH of frontline service workers in Scottish hospitality and the challenges frontline workers and line managers have in addressing the phenomenon. The study explores the nature of frontline service work in Scottish hospitality and how the customer service triangle influences frontline work of the service worker and line management at the time of this research. In addition, the research considers how frontline service workers and line managers deal with CSH and the challenges that line managers have in addressing the issue. Additionally, HR structures that were provided to support frontline workers and line managers in dealing with CSH and managing their well-being were also investigated. Due to the social phenomena and social facts surrounding the research problem, this research study adopted a critical realist approach. Section 5.1 highlights critical realism as the ontological position that impacted the study design. Following this, an explanation of the theoretical and practical aspects of the research strategy will be provided. Section 5.2, meanwhile, describes the stages of gathering primary data, which is followed by the process of analysing data analysis of data and discussion of potential research constraints. Finally, the lessons learned from conducting research into the sensitive matter of CSH will be highlighted in the last section.

5.1 The philosophical assumptions

It is important in organisational/business research that the philosophy of social science, ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches are considered carefully before conducting research (Bell *et al.,* 2022). According to Johnson and Duberley (2000), our individual behaviour and actions, both inside and outside of our workplace, are motivated and justified by the view we have of the world; as a result, this affects our individual ontological views. Ontology, according to Bell *et al.* (2022, p.19), "refers to theories about the nature of reality". Meanwhile, Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000, p.6) suggest ontology is the study of "what kind of things exist", with typical ontology questions considering "What is the form of their existence?" This differs from the epistemology, which refers to "theories of what is known or

what we can know." (Bell *et al.,* 2022, p.19), in which epistemological questions would be relating to "How do we know what exists?" As our behaviour, actions, conceptions and, maybe, even our conversation is tied to our knowledge (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000) it raises the importance of the researchers' ontological views. Thus, as stated very clearly by Fleetwood (2005, p.198), in research, "ontology matters". Correspondingly, researchers should employ a paradigm when executing their research.

In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Kuhn (1970) coined the term "paradigm", this determined from his work on analysing upheavals in science. Derived from the ancient Greek word *paradeigma,* meaning pattern, model or framework, Kuhn considered paradigms in research as being "models for thinking" (see Clark and Clegg, 2000). In the scientific research arena, the term paradigm has its roots in the history of natural sciences and is used to depict a bundle of beliefs, ideas, values, and rules which, for scientists in their given field dictate a) what should be researched; b) how research should be carried out; c) how interpretation of the results should be portrayed (Bell *et al.,* 2022). A key characteristic of paradigms is that they are contrary to one another due to contrasting assumptions and methodologies (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Interestingly, the concept of the term paradigm posited by Kuhn is ambiguous in that it lacks specificity (Bell *et al.,* 2022, p.35; Bonache and Festing, 2020). Meanwhile, when considering ontology and epistemology, it can be considered that there are elements of interrelatedness.

Johnson and Duberley (2000) remark that epistemology establishes the ontological conditions of what is classed as knowing, whilst O'Mahoney and Vincent (2014) contend that our ontological commitments and beliefs have an impact on our epistemological matters. In scientific research, both ontology and epistemology have a role, and they should be distinguished from one another to the extent that they prevent the possibility of erroneous reasoning (Kant, 2014). As a result, ontology and epistemology are extremely important when researching, as these concepts provide a guide for the researcher when creating the research questions. Likewise, they provide the bedrock for establishing the research design that will be used to examine and answer those questions and make statements about what constitutes knowledge (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). Given the social phenomena of the research problem, this study embraced the philosophical stance of critical realism. Focusing on social relations and processes of social transformation, critical realism promotes a structural realist and causal powers approach to natural and social ontology

(Danermark *et al.,* 2019). Exploring the concept of SH by customers on FHWs in the Scottish hospitality industry is part of the study's primary goals, as is exploring the social, organisational and socioeconomic dynamics of tourism and hospitality in Scotland. Additionally, probing the role of LMs and HRPs in dealing with and managing such issues is also of significant interest. Conducting research with a critical realist paradigm allows for the importance of considering the stratified reality of the tourism and hospitality organisations in which the research is conducted. This will help determine social and organisational conditions, organisational architecture, organisational systems, and actions that endure in critical realist ontological, actual, and real domains. It is considered that understanding what exists in those domains will support the aims of the research. Furthermore, the flexibility of a critical realist approach creates broader forms of knowledge and understanding of the realities of research topics (Leung and Chung, 2019), meaning that, for the author, there is logic and reasoning in conducting research under a critical realist paradigm. To establish the personal ontological beliefs which underpin this thesis, the next section will discuss the main tenets of critical realism and show the appropriateness of the relationship between the research study and critical realism.

5.1.2 Critical realism

Critical realism and its ramifications for social science are subject to a growing body of literature, yet much of this, according to Fletcher (2017), falls into two groups: high-profile philosophy of theory and science or empirical research reports that do not go into great depth about the methodologies used, since they aim to explain societal problems or provide policy guidance. This chapter is not intended to delve into the large amount of philosophical literature around critical realism; it is to outline and describe the fundamental tenets of critical realism and explain the fit for this current research.

Based on the publications in 1975, 1978 and 1989 of Roy Bhaskar, critical realism is a realist methodology that considers the identification of the structures that create social reality should be the focus of social science research (Zachariadis *et al.,* 2013). Bhaskar is principally responsible for developing critical realism as an alternative to combat the limitations of the dominant philosophical paradigms (Gorski, 2013; Syed *et al.,* 2010). Practitioners of critical realism, whilst recognising that scientific knowledge is socially constructed, also accept that the ontological concept of naturalism for the presence of the objective world (Elger, 2010). In essence, while an object and its causal mechanisms have a necessary accord, the relationship

between generative processes and their effect is contingent (Danermark *et al.*, 2019). Since the initial development by Bhaskar, the concept has been further developed and broadened by other researchers such as Andrew Sayer, Margaret Archer, and others. Given its relatively recent arrival in philosophical terms, it can be considered a contemporary philosophical trend among sociologists (Zhang, 2022).

Archer *et al.* (2016), see critical realism positioning itself as an alternative research paradigm to positivist and interpretivist paradigms, with Zachariadis *et al.* (2013, p.856) arguing it is frequently viewed as a medium ground between anti-naturalism/interpretivism and empiricism/positivism, opening a "more nuanced version of realist ontology". The ontology of critical realism is a stratified one with three domains: the empirical, "what can be observed", the actual ", what is known but cannot be seen", and the real ", what is hidden, but a necessary precondition for the actual and empirical" (Zachariadis *et al.*, 2013), shown in Figure 1 below.

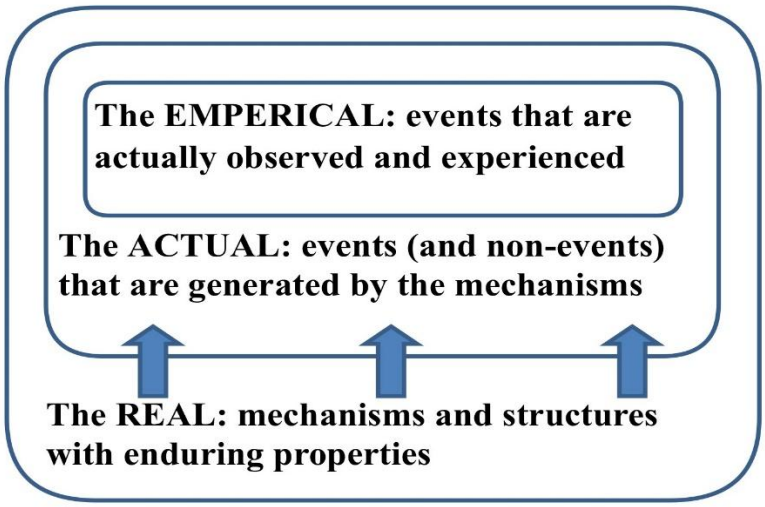


Figure 1: The domains of the real, the actual and the empirical (Mingers, 2006, p.205)

Critical realism considers that, despite the existence of one reality, researchers do not necessarily have direct access to it or the capacity to observe and comprehend all its complex facets. The realm of reality contains objects and structures with fundamental causal capacities and liabilities that lead to mechanisms that may not be immediately apparent. Thus, social actions are embedded in complex stratified realities and not created in a vacuum (Zachariadis *et al.*, 2013). The concept of stratification in critical realism will be elaborated on further in this chapter.

Mingers (2004) sees critical realism as a halfway house between positivism and interpretivism and, in terms of validity, claims that it is highly pluralist and welcomes a variety of research methods without acknowledging the primacy of any one method. This is acknowledged by Leung and Chung (2019), who believe that the flexibility that critical realism brings can provide entry to divergent forms of knowledge, therefore helping to comprehend various realities. Critical realism makes the case for the necessity of ontological realism, which is a key feature of the concept. It argues the presence of transcendental reality and "may occur independently of any external observation" (Gorski, 2013, p.668). Observable occurrences are the manifestation of unobservable real, manipulable, and internal systems. As a result, only those who have a thorough understanding of the structures that cause occurrences can properly comprehend the social world. Therefore, the empirical study of the observable world should be complemented by sufficient "ontological" investigations of the real, hidden generative structures (Zhang, 2022). Sayer (2000) nailed his argument to the mast by stating that, "Critical realism provides an alternative to several philosophical and methodological positions which have been found wanting…it seeks to avoid both scientism and science-envy on the one hand, and radical rejections of science on the other", whilst also commenting that it, "offers great promise for social science and theory" (Sayer, 2000, pp.2-3). In summing up critical theory it holds "that an objective world exists independently of individuals' perception of it, language, and imagination (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, p.3) with Easton (2010, p.120) commenting that "Critical realists assume that there is a real world out there, which cannot be approved or disapproved as social constructionists argue". Like naturalists, critical realists behave as though the world is essentially real and truthful.

Fleetwood (2005) used a critical realist viewpoint to illustrate the ambiguity and mistakes fostered by postmodernism's commitment to a socially constructed ontology, putting forward the notion that critical realism's ontology is a more beneficial one. Considering the natural world and the social world, Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000) note that the natural world is considered natural, since it does not require human intervention for it to exist. Contrastingly, the social world is social because it depends on human effort for existence; thus, it is a product of human action. However, whilst the social world is a result of human activity, it is not necessarily always the result of human design, conceptualisation, or discourse. Social phenomena can therefore exist without the human actors involved being aware of them. As a result, we can assert that some social phenomena exist regardless of how they are identified (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). Additionally, Ackroyd and Fleetwood believe that social

phenomena are concept-reliant or constructed socially…nevertheless, they continue to exist outside of them, influencing and shaping their opinions and actions (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, p.11).

This thesis argues that tourism and hospitality organisations and the management of work exist in a physical, actual reality and consist of productive mechanisms. Such mechanisms include regulations, rules, policies, procedures and controls. Organisations prevail as independent entities, despite the perceptions of the organisation by the human actors, that is, employees, managers, and customers. For instance, whether actors recognise or do not recognise the ingrained authority in the way work is organised in the industry. Likewise, the social phenomenon of control by management endures independently, regardless of how actors perceive it; nonetheless, they still produce probable actions and behaviours, for example, engagement, intransigence, compliance, and productivity. Accordingly, managerial control is a real entity that survives autonomously of our recognition and is not manufactured by discussion. That said, even though it is not influenced by employees' impressions of control, it lies dependent on how they will perceive it may affect their work-life and working conditions. Employees can change or at least attempt to make changes to the latter (Fleetwood, 2005). Reed (1997, p.30) sums up the purpose of scientific research and considers that to understand phenomena as discernible contingent practices or tendencies, there is a need to "identify the underlying generative mechanisms" that produce such phenomena. In essence, this clearly chimes with the philosophy of critical realism.

Critical realism objects to the "ontological determinism" of traditional beliefs of positivism/functionalist ideals, which infers that organisations have a separate independent identity from social relations, practices and interactions that gave rise to the organisation (Reed, 2011, p.58). Consequently, the employment relationship happens independently of the involvement of human composition. However, as it is a component of larger complex systems such as state legislation, the market, and regulatory requirements, which influence its architecture, the employment relationship, as it is in a closed system, cannot be inspected or quantified. Therefore, in a complex stratified reality, social phenomena are not created in a vacuum, rather they are produced inside social formats, in a complex stratified reality (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). At this point, it would be worthwhile to provide some discussion concerning the stratification of the world and the power of objects. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, critical realism is a realist methodology that considers the identification of the

structures that create social reality and should be the focus of social science research. The ontology of critical realism is a stratified one with three domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real (Zachariadis *et al.,* 2013).

Critical realism commits to both ontological realism and epistemological relativism (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2018). It accepts actual events that occur; however, it believes that these events are caused by real mechanisms which are often invisible to people. As a result, the empirical, actual, and real are separated by a complex multi-layered world which is often referred to as a stratification of "deep" ontology (Olsen, 2010, p.xxi; O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2018, p.203). Therefore, ontologically, critical realism expounds the notion that within the domain of "Real" exist elements such as structures, systems, events, mechanisms, and abiding properties. These factors interact causally, resulting in certain occurrences to materialise or indeed, not to materialise – this is what is considered the "Actual" domain. Elements in the actual domain can be items that are conceptual, physical, or social. Some may be observable to people, whilst others may not be visible, save from their consequences, thus they become empirical events themselves and have causal properties (Mingers, 2006).

The notion of ontological depth arises from Bhaskar's (2008) considerations of the three domains, in which he makes a case that the universe is a multi-layered open system of interconnected elements of bodies that engage in interaction. Although linked through convoluted systems and relationships, the three domains are differentiated by critical realists, who consider the domains as not something that can be unified with each other. Reed (2011) informs that in critical realism, the terms "experience", "events", and "structures" would fall into the domains of the "empirical", the "actual" and the "real" respectively. For Reed, critical realists place a great deal of what he calls "ontological stock" in the concept of emergence, as it assists in differentiating diverse social reality strata and new possibilities that emerge from interactions and mergers of mechanisms operating within the three strata domains. As a result, critical realists support a tiered social ontology made up of tiers of realms of symbolic and material bodies that are connected through complicated relationships and systems that cannot be amalgamated with one another (Reed, 2011, p.59). Critical realism as a philosophy of science challenges the polarised discussion between positivism and constructivism whilst providing navigational pathways that "crosscut" quantitative/qualitative division in research traditions (Mills *et al.,* 2012). It accepts the convoluted nature of reality and aims to understand, structure, system mechanics and power that prevails in the actual and real domains,

this in contrast to positivist and postmodernists. Positivists research in closed systems of reality, whilst postmodernists give backing to the existence of multiple realities, which are constructed through discourse. Critical realists argue that complexity must be examined and studied to be fully understood, as opposed to simplification or regulation of stratified complex reality, as naturalists do, or indeed, as postmodernists do, simply observe discourse (Clark, 2008).

Analysis of causality is closely related to the acknowledgement of a stratified reality. For critical realists, causality is recognised through the examination of the powers that caused the event rather than being limited to a balanced presentation and demonstration of causation through deductive methods. The key component of this perspective is the abstract identification of mechanisms and structures, which, despite being unobservable, operate as triggers and guides for experience, explaining why certain patterns have emerged (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). This research investigates the phenomenon of CSH of FHWs in the Scottish tourism and hospitality business sector and explores the challenges that LMs have in addressing the issue. This research has three key objectives that have been defined. Firstly, to understand the dynamics of frontline service work in the Scottish hospitality sector and how the service worker-line manager- customer triad influences frontline work. Secondly, to explore the prevalence of CSH among FHWs and how LMs handle and address incidents of the phenomenon. The final objective is to examine HR structures that help support workers and managers in dealing with CSH and explore the impact of CSH on victims of the experience.

The three leading interrelated goals do not materialise in a vacuum. The goal is to analyse the complex reality of frontline service work in the hospitality industry by promoting the "depth ontology" of critical realism. The first objective of this research aims to analyse the dynamics of frontline service work in the Scottish hospitality industry and how the worker-line manager-customer triad influences frontline work. Understanding the causal relationships that impact employment relationships in the hospitality industry is the rationale behind this. To provide elucidation, a key element of this research is to examine the frequency of CSH in the Scottish hospitality industry. Although this phenomenon has been covered in the literature review, knowledge of the broader context in which the relationship arises is necessary to empirically comprehend the causal effect. Therefore, to understand the nature of frontline service work in the hospitality sector, there is a need to understand the wider contextual elements and the conditions and structure that construct hospitality job features, for example, the

socioeconomics, competition, financial cost controls, customer service demands, and work intensity, as outlined in Figure 2.

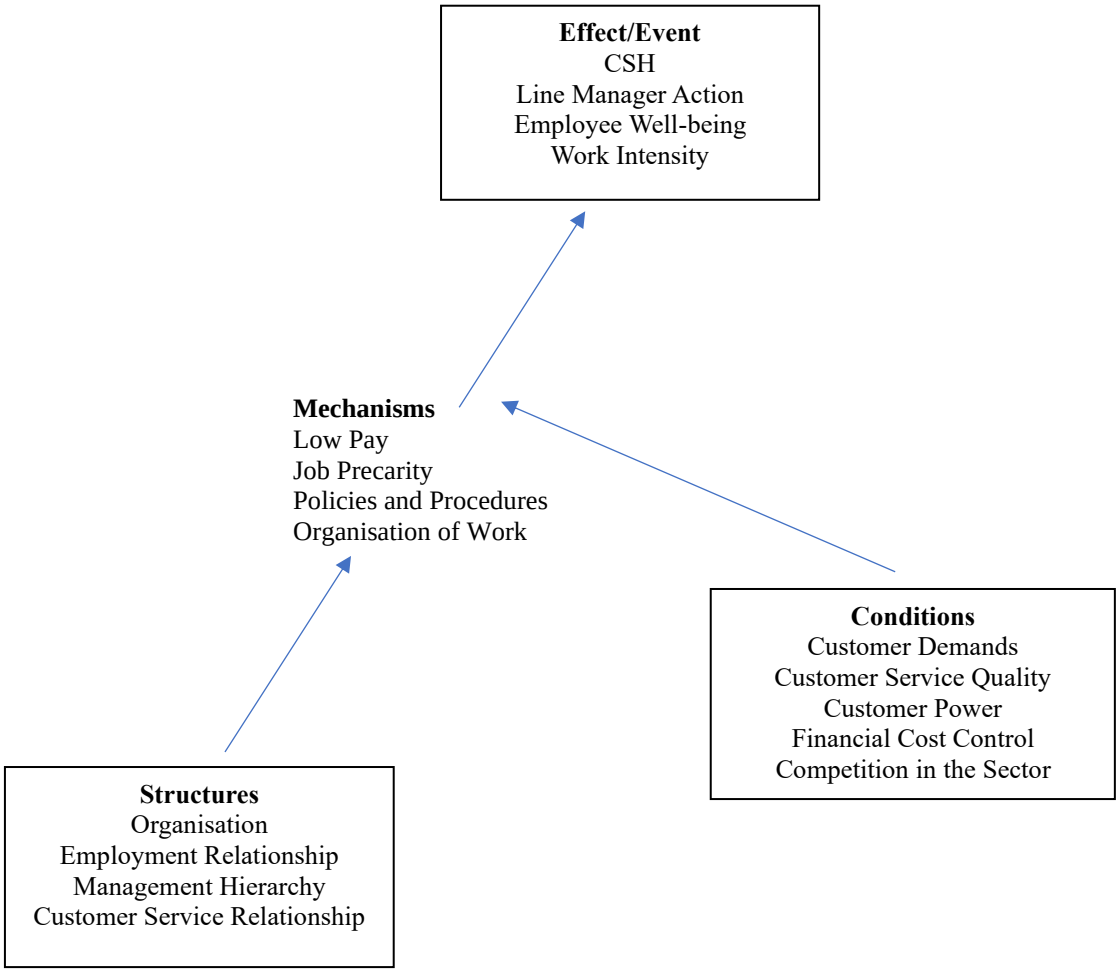


Figure 2: Critical realist view of causation – for this research (adapted from Sayer, 2000, p.15)

Adopting critical realism's "depth ontology", it follows Korczynski's (2009) consideration of the concept of the customer service triangle in service work. Korczynski (2002) sees complexity in this service work structure and does not see it as a straightforward form of work organisation, that is, service provision (service worker) and service received (customer). Rather, he considers that service work is a form of "customer orientated bureaucracy" which he views as an organisational working structure in which there are two likely conflicting elements at play. These are "routinisation and efficacy" and "customer and customer orientation" (Korczynski, 2002, p.4). Korczynski notes that intense competition in service industries like hospitality has placed the customer as the centre of attention, particularly as service work involves direct communication with the customer. As discussed in Section 2.5.3,

this gives the customer a position of power within the service triangle, a view echoed by Bélanger and Edwards (2013), who emphasise the influence of customers in the power triangle. Korczynski (2002) notes that a service worker in the triad effectively has two bosses: the customer who holds power over the worker, and the manager who has the power of authority over the worker. Service workers, their LMs and customers hold different places within the power dynamics of the customer service triad (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010). Within the triad, Bolton and Houlihan (2010) put forward the notion that frontline LMs are "powerless" with service delivery issues often being hamstrung by senior management and other departmental decision-making. In essence, service delivery is a complex matter within the customer service triangle and fraught with power imbalances for workers and their line managers. For the worker, service expectations of the customer, sense of customer "sovereignty", and LM authority can create a complicated and stressful working environment. Additionally, the worker will have a low-level sense of power in the power relations in this triadic working structure. For the line manager, the customer's service expectations, sense of customer power, and the need to bend to organisational decision-making also put them in a position of power loss. For the customer, the sense of power in the service triangle is at a high level. What is clear is that the customer service triangle is a complex working structure which is generated by deeper mechanisms, with critical realism being highly relevant to access and assess these deeper mechanisms. This also relates to the second objective of this research in exploring the prevalence of CSH among FHWs and how LMs handle and address incidents of the phenomenon.

Additionally, the same is true for the third objective of examining HR structures that help support FHWs and LMs in dealing with CSH, and to explore the impact of CSH on victims of the experience. As a result, this research seeks to determine the causal mechanisms of CSH, the challenges in addressing it, and organisational support functions that may help the actors involved address and manage the matter. With these objectives in mind, along with the complexity of hospitality service work, it is considered appropriate to view this through a critical realist perspective. The research endeavours to analyse the reality of frontline service work in hospitality settings and recognise the causal affiliation within hospitality frontline relationships. In sum, the philosophical underpinnings and conceptual and methodological tools of critical realism enable researchers to conduct social research that will yield explanatory theories that are richer in context and more perceptive in their analytical abilities than those offered by positivist or constructivist-based theories. (Reed 2011). To put it broadly, the goal

of critical realism is to solidify realist ontology. That is, acknowledging the autonomous presence of mechanisms and architectures, some of which might be non-physical and unseen, like ideas and social systems. Through their intricate interactions, these mechanisms are considered to causally generate the actual events that occasionally occur, as well as those that do not (Mingers, 2006). For Sayer (2004), critical realism favours "epistemic gain" over claiming to know the whole truth about a situation.

5.2 Research design

This section explains the research design used in this study. It first explains and gives reasoning concerning the sub-sectors of the hospitality industry and the rationale for involving external stakeholder participants in the research. Following this, it will inform of the research design methodologies, participant selection and the learning gained from pilot testing of interviews (see Appendix 1 for pilot test checklist). Next, it considers the ethical considerations of the research before moving on to discussing the fieldwork itself. Finally, the section will comment and conclude on the researcher's reflexivity and limitations of the research.

5.2.1 Hospitality sub-sectors and external agencies involved in the research

As noted earlier, the tourism and hospitality sector covers several subsectors. Within that context, the research for this thesis was conducted in hotels, bars/restaurants, and a nightclub. Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction to the thesis (see Section 1.0), much research around CSH in Scotland has been conducted through quantitative approaches using questionnaires, this being focused mainly on frontline service workers only. However, this research has chosen to take a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews conducted with FHWs, LMs and other stakeholders, which included internal and external HRPs, trade union representatives and a hospitality industry representative (see Section 5.2.6).

5.2.2 An intensive design

Research following the philosophy of the critical realist requires "an intensive study, with a limited number of cases, where the researcher systematically analyses the interplay between the ontological layers" (Bygstad *et al.,* 2016, p.85). As things go, although effects are observable, the causal mechanisms resulting from structures and actors are not observable (Bygstad *et al.,* 2016, p.85). As such, research must allow for the opportunity to draw conclusions based on evidence that will identify and characterise the mechanisms that give rise to the observed events (Stutchbury, 2022). Critical realism is compatible with a broad range of

research methods and does not favour one research method over another. From an epistemological perspective, it permits researchers to choose their investigative instruments according to the nature of the subject they are studying and what learning they are seeking to achieve (Sayer, 2000). The approach used by critical realists respects social structures and the stratified reality of these. The social structures would involve the one-on-one relationship that a frontline worker has with customers, the nature of the relationships in the customer service triangle (FHW-LM-customer) and the LM and HR partnership. Understanding the interconnections between agency and architecture is a key aim, as is identifying the array of structural trends while constantly taking the participants' and agents' interpretations into account (Pratten, 1993).

Sayer (2000, pp.20-21) considers that critical realists' choice of research method depends on the differentiation between intensive and extensive research designs. Extensive designs seek out patterns within taxonomically specified populations and groups. By using quantitative approaches, the researchers look for statistical associations among the variables, and the approach suggests that extensive quantities of repeated observations indicate that relationships are significant. However, Sayer contends that this method ignores the causal groups that the agents and entities are a part of. Accordingly, it is considered that an extensive approach is inappropriate to address the research questions for this thesis. This is because it would only present a recurrent observation that suggests there is a relationship between the variables of the structures involved in this research. These are the multi-level relationships of frontline worker relationships with LMs, the customer service triangle relationships, and LM and HR partnership rather than offering a statistical association between them (Sayer, 2000). Therefore, adopting an extensive approach for this thesis is constraining as it would only respond to the commonality of CSH of the phenomenon at the frontline rather than the challenges in addressing it. Such limitations are decreased through using an intensive approach (Sayer, 2000). Taking this into account, and due to the researcher's ontological assumptions, the research followed an intensive design along with using qualitative methodology in conducting semi-structured interviews with participants (see Section 5.2.3.3 concerning data collection). Sayer (2000, p.20) informs that concentrating on the individual, but not always specific individuals, the design tracks causal relationships into which they enter and studies their qualitative nature and focuses itself with "what makes things happen, in specific cases."

5.2.3 A quantitative or qualitative approach?

Given the nature of the research questions, a qualitative approach was chosen to be the most appropriate method of data collection for this research. It is not unusual for proponents of critical realism to adopt mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative methods, as research methodology (Hurrell, 2014), with this becoming an increasingly common convention in business research (Miller and Cameron, 2011; Molina-Azorin *et al.,* 2017). So, it is worth discussing briefly both quantitative and qualitative approaches to give greater detail around the reasoning as to why a qualitative approach has been chosen for this research.

Generally, quantitative research refers to methods that try to quantify and offer numerical information on social phenomena and the relationships between them. This kind of research prefers a natural science approach (positivist) and is deductive in nature (Bell *et al.*, 2022), and it can be depicted as a macro-level approach with researchers involved in exploring large-scale social trends. Bryman and Bell (2015). For example, if a large quantity of data is required, a quantitative approach, say, using questionnaires, would be more appropriate. Thus, the aim is to uncover a breadth of social trends and links between variables. Such approach methods lend themselves to being objective, in which a broad range of hard, reliable, and robust data is scrutinised and objectively measured (Bell *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the quantitative researcher is in command of the investigation, with these normally being highly structured around the concerns that they set for the research. Typically, the researcher tends to be isolated from participants and can face the problem of missing a relationship with them. Investigators wish for findings that are generalisable towards the pertinent population. Furthermore, some consider that quantitative research is more concerned with the behaviour of people, rather than the meaning of the actions, in what could be considered as an unnatural setting rather than a natural one (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Quantitative research is not without its critics. Schutz (1962), for example, suggests that quantitative researchers simply approach the social world and natural world as if they were identical to each other, ignoring any distinctions between the two. As Schutz believes that quantitative researchers trample over and ignore the reality that people interpret the environment around them, a capacity absent from natural sciences like "molecules, atoms, and electrons." Moreover, Bell *et al.* (2022, p.182) consider that "…quantitative data are often qualitative data which have been forced into "numerical" form." As a result, the relationship between the notions that social scientists are meant to be disclosing and the measurements that they have established is assumed rather than actual (Bell *et al.*, 2022). In

addition, a dependence on structure, tools and processes can make this difficult to connect research to real-world situations.

Researchers point out the problem of meaning in that participants may not have the same understanding or knowledge to answer questions on a questionnaire (Briggs, 1986; Cicourel, 1982; Filmer *et al.*, 1972; Mishler, 1986). For example, in relation to research for this thesis, the meaning of SH or line manager can be interpreted differently, and the researcher needs to be sure that a participant has an understanding or definition of these concepts and how they are expressed in the workplace. This indicates that we are unable to determine how the people and/or groups to whom it relates have created a relationship between the variables. As a result, the significance of events to individuals is disregarded, and we are unsure of how these findings relate to real-world situations. Having briefly considered quantitative approaches, the next section will provide a short discussion of qualitative approaches.

5.2.3.1 Qualitative approach – a brief discussion

When gathering and analysing data, qualitative research places more significance on words than on figures. It is typically an interpretative, constructionist, and inductive research approach. Additionally, it pays full attention to naturalism as the process of attempting to comprehend reality in its own terms by offering detailed descriptions of individuals and interactions in environments that emerge naturally without the researcher trying to manipulate them to get data. According to naturalism, humans are active producers of their social environment rather than passive recipients of it; thus, they provide meaning to their actions (Bell *et al.*, 2022). The objective of qualitative researchers is to seek meanings of action and interaction, contextual understanding, and opinion. Therefore, the interest is in analysing in depth aspects of social reality. Through researching participants in natural environments, the concentration is on collecting deep and rich data (Bell *et al.,* 2022). In comparison to the quantitative approach, where the researcher is distant from participants, qualitative investigators are more involved with people who are participant subjects, with the aim being to get a full understanding and clear perspective of the world the participant inhabits. Doing so will help provide a theory to emerge from the data collection. (Bell *et al.*, 2022). Qualitative research is frequently portrayed as sensitive to the way events develop over time and to the relationships that exist between participants and social environments. In the main, compared to the structured nature of quantitative research, qualitative research is relatively unstructured to increase the likelihood of understanding actors' meanings and conceptions that emerge from

data collection. The qualitative researcher aims to comprehend the behaviour, values, and beliefs of actors in relation to the setting of the research and to obtain data that is deep and rich (Bell *et al.*, 2022).

As with quantitative research, qualitative research also has its critics, one of which is that it is too subjective. Quantitative research critics consider that results are overly dependent on the researcher's frequently jumbled opinions about what is essential, as well as on the close personal rapport the researcher creates with the subjects of the study. Furthermore, due to the relatively unstructured nature of qualitative researchers' work, it is considered that qualitative research is difficult to duplicate. Moreover, the researcher's age, gender, and personality may have an impact on participants, and this, coupled with researcher bias, may impact the results (Bell *et al.,* 2022). There is also the issue of the generalisability of findings. For example, it can frequently be challenging to determine from qualitative research exactly what the researcher conducted and how they came to the study's conclusions. Qualitative research papers, for instance, can occasionally be ambiguous regarding issues such as participant selection processes. Furthermore, critics highlight the lack of transparency in qualitative research in that it is not always clear how data analysis was carried out—that is, what the researcher was doing when the data was examined and, consequently, how the study's findings and conclusions were reached (Bell *et al.*, 2022). Yet it is arguable whether there is an inherently superior approach, be it quantitative or qualitative, nor indeed a mixed methods approach. However, it is worth noting that this research aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of social relations, and it is primarily believed that quantitative methods would be somewhat deficient in achieving this aim. Meanwhile, returning to the ontology of critical realism, selecting the appropriate methodology mechanism is not just a matter of considering validity, as seen by proponents of positivism, but also a question of diving much deeper into comprehending the meanings of social phenomena and understanding the topic being studied (Maxwell, 2018).

5.2.3.2 Research validity

On the question of validity, Brinberg and McGrath (1985, p.13) argue that “Validity is not a commodity that can be purchased with techniques…” Rather, “validity is like integrity, character and quality, to be assessed relative to purposes and circumstances” Maxwell (1992) considers validity as referring to the information, accounts, or conclusions obtained by applying a specific method in a specific situation for a specific goal rather than being an

intrinsic feature of the method used. In this thesis, the issue of validity is acknowledged, but the concern of the research lies with the accuracy and reliability of interview discussion, explanation or meaning, and conclusion rather than implying the presence of an objective certainty to which an account should be related (Maxwell, 1992). According to Ackroyd (2004, p.138), “ideas about research methods are closely related to ideas about explanation”. Therefore, the goal is to gain entry to and explain reality rather than to assert the "absolute truth" (Thompson, 2004). Realists are curious about what truth is and how to secure it because they think that truth is achievable. However, they also acknowledge that social research is flawed (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). Therefore, rather than just aiming for scientific validation, when addressing methodologies, one should consider how to better grasp reality. This study involves sourced data from a variety of sample participants across multi-levels (see Section 5.2.3.5), this being a strategy of triangulation to develop the best possibility of interpretation of reality and strengthen the validity and reliability of findings (Bell *et al.*, 2022). Having established the broad framework in which this research developed, the thesis now moves to consider the research tools utilised for data collection.

5.2.3.3 Data collection

There is a substantial volume of literature on research methodology that outlines several methods for obtaining qualitative data (Anderson *et al.,* 2020; Bell *et al.,* 2022; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Corbett, 2003; Saunders *et al.,* 2023). A qualitative approach was the chosen methodology for this study, with the research methodology used in this thesis being purposeful and pertinent for addressing the research questions. Qualitative researchers are committed to viewing the social world and events through the eyes of the participants involved in the research they are conducting. Furthermore, they are alert to put forward ample detail that will routinely place emphasis on the influence of contextual understanding of social actions (Bell *et al.*, 2022). Collection of qualitative data can be conducted using focus groups, case study, ethnography/participant observation and interviews with participants (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Interviews are probably the most popular methodological tool in qualitative research (Bell *et al.,* 2022; Smith and Elger, 2014). Initially, focus groups were considered as a means of collecting data for this study. However, research shows that people may feel uneasy about speaking up in front of others in a group environment (Madriz, 2000). For example, concerns of group conformity in which people bow to group norms can impact group members (Bell *et al.* 2022). Given these group problems and the fact that a key topic of this research was SH, the researcher decided to rule out the focus group option. In addition, case studies across

individual hospitality venues were also considered as an option, these being an accepted, popular and extensively used in business research (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). However, access to hospitality venues proved to be a considerable problem for the researcher. This was due to a lack of support from senior management, who had concerns about the subject matter of the research. As a result, the researcher ruled out this method of collecting data. Additionally, participant observation was also considered by the author of this research. A problematic issue with participant observation is gaining access to the relevant social setting that is pertinent to the research (Bell *et al.,*2022). This proved to be the case for this study, as it held the same concerns with the senior management of hospitality venues approached when considering case study methodology. Whilst the problem of access for participant observation could potentially be averted by using covert observation rather than overt observation (Bell *et al.,*2022), the researcher rejected this option because of the ethics around this consideration and the sensitivity of the topic. As a result, and to yield the rich data that the research objectives aimed for, individual semi-structured interviews with participants (see 5.2.3.4) were thought to be the most appropriate method of data collection to achieve the goals of the research. (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Moreover, Smith and Elger (2014) consider research interviews to be conversations in which respondents express their interpretations, justifications, and feelings, and researchers take them seriously. Similarly, Ehigie and Ehigie (2005, p.627) believe the research interview is a "conversation between equals rather than a formal question and answer exchange."

Two forms of interviewing can be used in qualitative research: the unstructured interview and the semi-structured interview. For unstructured interviews, researchers often have a brief written aid available that can be used as a prompt for the interviewer, which allows a free manner of response from the interviewee. The interviewer may or may not ask for further information or seek clarification on items that they have an interest in. Often, unstructured interviews can be like a conversational exchange reflecting the nature of the unstructured approach (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Semi-structured interviews differ slightly in that the researcher will formulate a list of questions that relate to the research topics; thus, they will be pretty much specific to what is being covered. The questions may not necessarily be asked in the order noted on the researcher's question guide, as, given the nature of this type of interview, the interviewer may ask other questions if they believe there is a rich seam of data to be obtained. In general, though, the planned interview questions will be asked. (Bell *et al.,* 2022).

It is worth pointing out that the qualitative interview process is not an open dialogue that is under the control of the interviewee. It is driven by theory and reality-structured practice that is, at least in part, under the interviewers' theoretical framework and that seeks to highlight the multifaceted and intricate nature of social reality. Realists believe that interviews give them access to situations, events, and experiences that represent the various facets of the multilayered social reality (Smith and Elger, 2014). So, as critical realism ontological assumptions are being followed in the research, semi-structured interviews were employed as the instrument for collecting data. Refusing the naturalistic structured interviews, and at the same time rejecting the abstract nature of postmodern unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews were used to provide an element of structure in the methodology, as critical realism suggests, as a resource to understand the multilayer social world as suggested by critical realism, and to help comprehend the layered social world (Smith and Elger, 2014).

5.2.3.4 Semi-structured interviews

The desire of the qualitative researcher is to understand the meaning and context of a participant's experiences and focus on their view. Using semi-structured interviews as a research method allows the researcher to be open-minded and non-judgmental about answers to the topics being investigated (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Watson (1994) argues that the way research questions are framed influences research design and methods. Consequently, decisions around research questions play a significant part in design and data collection for a study. For this study, decisions around its design and data collection were very much influenced by the questions the research was asking about the topics being investigated. As a result, semi-structured interviews were the preferred means of obtaining data. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide covering broadly four main themes: 1) the nature of work of frontline service workers and prevalence of CSH, 2) the role of line managers in dealing with CSH, 3) the nature of HRP support in addressing CSH, and 4) the organisational challenges in addressing CSH. These broad themes helped create an interview guide which was formulated around the role occupied by the participant; therefore, the guide differed to accommodate this. The guide is shown in Appendix 2, which shows all questions; however, not all questions were asked, rather a permutation of these occurred.

5.2.3.5 Participant recruitment

According to Warren (2002), as a general guideline for sample size, the more comparisons across groups in the sample that are necessary and the wider the breadth of the qualitative study,

the greater the number of interviews will be required. Relating to this, Morse (2004) suggests that if several comparisons are needed, then samples should include different genders, varying age groups, and different types of research participants. Originally, the researcher was considering using case studies with three global hotel groups that had been approached through his own contacts within an HR network. At this early stage, interest was shown by the hotels concerned; however, as time went by in the planning and arranging of the research, it was made clear that higher levels of management within the hotel businesses were less than enthusiastic. Three of the researcher's hotel contacts informed that one of the main research topics, CSH, was too sensitive a subject for the hotel senior management to allow their employees to be involved in. The researcher had considered this concern in the early stages of considering the research and already had an alternative plan in mind. This was to recruit participants via the researcher's broader network of hospitality workers, managers, management, and HRPs built up over the period of his 50-year working career. As a result, the recruitment approach was based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling (also known as snowball sampling) is a type of non-probability sampling where the researcher intentionally selects participants whom they think will have an interest in taking part in the study. Furthermore, the sampling is based on the participant's potential to advance theoretical understanding of the topic or topics at the centre of the study (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Purposive sampling entails carefully defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria that will be applied when choosing research participants. Key characteristics of the target participants that qualify them to offer information pertinent to the study questions are described by inclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria, on the other hand, are extra traits of possible participants that, although they fit the inclusion requirements, make it improbable that the data they submit would be pertinent to the study objectives (Anderson *et al.,* 2020).

There are several methods for selecting a purposive sample. First, the researcher can find key informants—individuals with specialist or distinctive knowledge and expertise of the topics under investigation. The second option is to employ a sliced sample, in which participants are selected based on their positions across the organisation. Slicing can be done vertically, for example, participants from the top, middle, or bottom of the hierarchy or horizontally, such as the selection of middle managers from a variety of functions. Thirdly, snowball sampling entails locating new individuals from whom to obtain information and referrals from those who are already part of the sample (Anderson *et al.,* 2020).

In this instance, the researcher made contact, both verbally and via e-mail, with his personal network of contacts, asking if they had an interest in taking part in the study. Likewise, they were requested to forward this request onto their own network, who worked in the sector and pass the researcher's university e-mail address to those who express an interest in volunteering. Additionally, they were asked to inform the researcher of their job role and the area of hospitality in which they worked. From this request, several people contacted the researcher, giving an expression of interest and requesting further information, and this snowballed as time went on. In instances of purposive sampling, Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) highlight that, rather than depending solely on referrers' suggestions about whether participants are suitable for involvement in the study, the researcher must make decisions regarding the participants' eligibility to take part. This entails determining if the attributes and experiences of the participants match the objectives of the research. It is argued that snowball sampling is particularly helpful when trying to access groups of people that are hard to reach or when the subject of the research is of a sensitive nature (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the topic of investigation in this research, this sampling was considered an appropriate manner of seeking volunteer participants.

Willing participants expressing interest were emailed details of the research via a participant information sheet, which was tailored to the type of role they worked in. It also showed an example of research questions likely to be asked. These examples were provided (as suggested by the university research ethics committee) due to the sensitivity of the research topic. As a result, it would mean that participants would be under no illusion of the nature of the research (see examples in Appendix 3). At the same time, they received a copy of the university's privacy notice for research participants. Participants were asked to read this information and, should they wish to continue, a consent form (see Appendix 4) would be sent out to them to sign and once returned, a mutually agreeable date for an interview would be arranged. Participants, once interviewed, also reached out to people they knew in hospitality, causing the snowball effect of sampling to grow at a pace. Over the period from January 2024 to the end of August 2024, a variety of stakeholder participants working within the hospitality industry took part in the research. This included frontline service workers, line managers (of differing titles), internal HRPs, external HR service providers, trade union representatives and a hospitality industry representative. A total of 44 participants were involved with 30 of these being workers and line managers who worked across a range of hospitality venues these being, a Glasgow city centre bar/restaurant chain, a West of Scotland restaurant chain, a 5-star hotel group, a global budget

hotel group, three separate brand global hotels, a family owned (small medium enterprise) hotel/restaurant group, one UK wide hotel group and Glasgow city nightclub. A total of 11 HRPs were involved, 5 of whom worked in venues where frontline worker and line manager participants worked, while 6 provided external HR services to a broad range of hospitality clients. The remaining 3 participants, 2 trade union representatives and 1 industry representative, did not work at any of the venues involved in this study. Table 2 shows the breakdown of participants, and it should be noted that participants were given pseudonyms rather than their real names to protect their identities. Additionally, the table shows gender, age group, role and hospitality venue type they worked in.

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender	Age Grp	Role	Venue Type
Esh	M	25-35	External HR Cons	HR Services external
Bailey	M	25-35	Bar/Table Server	Bar/Restaurant Chain City
Tom	M	18-24	Table Server	5* Hotel Group - Scot
Katie	F	25-35	External HR Cons	HR Services external
Felicity	F	46-55	Internal HR Manager	Global Hotel Group - C
Robert	M	25-35	Night Auditor	Global Budget Hotel - City
Keira	F	18-24	Table Server	Restaurant Chain - WoS
Jackie	F	18-24	Table Server	Restaurant Chain - WoS
Kayleigh	F	18-24	Bar/Table Server	Bar/Restaurant Chain - City
Maddie	F	18-24	Bar/Table Server	Bar/Restaurant Chain City
Hannah	F	18-24	Bar Manager	Bar/Restaurant Chain - City
Susan	F	46-55	External HR Cons	HR Services external
Carol	F	46-55	External HR Cons	HR Services external
Sean	M	25-35	Internal HR Manager	Global Hotel Group - B
Audrey	F	46-55	External HR Cons	HR Services external
Mary	F	36-42	External HR Cons	HR Services external
Harvey	M	18-25	Internal HR Manager	Global Hotel Group - A
Sebastian	M	46-55	Industry Representative	N/A
Caroline	F	25-35	Hotel Manager	Global Hotel Group - A
Sarah	F	25-35	Food and Beverage Manager	Global Hotel Group - A
Nathan	M	25-35	Trade Union Representative	Trade Union Rep
Adam	M	25-35	Bar Worker	Nightclub
Bobby	M	25-35	Trade Union Representative	Trade Union Rep
Irene	F	25-35	Bar Manager	Nightclub
Karolina	F	36-45	Hotel Manager	Global Hotel Group - B
Dave	M	18-24	Waiter	UK Hotel Group
Yvonne	F	25-35	Bar Worker	Nightclub
Mille	F	46-55	Deputy Hotel Manager	Global Hotel Group - B
Diana	F	25-35	Bar Manager	Budget Hotel City
Izzy	F	46-55	Bar/Table Server	Budget Hotel City
Scott	M	25-35	Events Manager	Global Hotel Group C
Sally	F	25-35	Internal HR Manager	5* Hotel Group Scot
Abigail	F	25-35	Internal HR Manager	5* Hotel Group - Scot

Caoimhe	F	18-24	Table Server	Global Hotel Group B
Alan	M	25-35	Events Manager	Global Hotel Group - C
Ellen	F	18-24	Bar/Table Server	Global Budget Hotel - City
Tess	F	18-24	Receptionist	Global Budget Hotel - City
Gary	M	18-24	Bar/Table Server	Bar/Restaurant Chain - City
Eileen	F	46-55	Restaurant Manager	Restaurant Chain - WoS
Chloe	F	46-55	Hotel Manager	Hotel/Restaurants - WoS
Emma	F	18-24	Table Server	Hotel/Restaurants - WoS
Dee	M	18-24	Table Server	Hotel/Restaurants - WoS
Derek	M	25-35	Bar Manager	Nightclub
Alice	F	36-45	Restaurant Manager	Bar/Restaurant - City
Total = 44				

Table 2 Participants – general overview

For additional clarity around participants involved in the research, Table 3 below shows the participant gender and role breakdown.

Participant Role	Male	Female	Total
Frontline Service Workers	6	11	17
Line Managers	3	10	13
External HR Practitioners	1	5	6
Internal HR Practitioners	2	3	5
Industry Representative	1		1
Trade Union Representative	2		2
Total	**15**	**29**	**44**

Table 3: Participants - gender and role breakdown

Meanwhile, for additional information, Table 4 below highlights the hospitality venue breakdown in which the participants worked.

Venue Type	FLS	LM	HR external	HR internal	Ind Rep	TU Rep
Bar Restaurant City	4	2				
Global Hotel Group A		2		1		
Global Hotel Group B	1	2		1		
Global Hotel Group C		2		1		
Budget Hotel City	4	1				
5* Hotel Group Scot	1			2		
Restaurant Chain WoS	2	1				
Hotel/Restaurants WoS	2	1				
Nightclub	2	2				
UK Hotel Group	1					
HR External			6			
Ind & TU Reps					1	2
Total	**17**	**13**	**6**	**5**	**1**	**2**

Table 4: Participants - venue breakdown

The next section will provide information on the nature of the interviews, which were conducted via Microsoft Teams software.

5.2.3.6 The nature of the interviews

Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential for participant discomfort, a conscious decision was made to conduct interviews using online video software. The researcher considered a range of video conferencing software, including Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Webex, and Microsoft Teams, with Microsoft Teams being chosen for the superior nature of its auto-transcribing feature. There are advantages to executing interviews by this method in that communication is synchronous and occurs in real time, with research questions being responded to immediately by participants (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Next, geographic barriers are virtually eliminated as locations for the interview can easily be agreed to suit the individuals concerned, with problems of distance and travel being reduced dramatically (Lo Iancono *et al.,* 2016). Online interviews can also be seen as being convenient in a way that may encourage people to take part when they may otherwise turn down the opportunity. Similarly, participants may feel more committed to taking part when they can locate themselves in their own environment in which they feel comfortable, which is potentially an advantage for people who may be introverted or hesitant. As a result, they could feel more prone to talk freely in an online video setting (Seitz, 2016). Additionally, interviewing by video will have fewer concerns relating to safety for those involved, including the interviewer, as it is generally more flexible than in-person interviewing, which facilitates last-minute scheduling changes (Bell *et al.,* 2022). But there can be downsides to this research tool, which ought to be raised. An obvious limitation is that people may have problems with internet connectivity or have limited access to the internet, therefore being unable to participate. Additionally, not all people have access to the required hardware for online participation, such as a computer or laptop. Additionally, some people are not skilled in using technology or don't even wish to use technology (Bell *et al.,* 2022). There is also the concern around internet connection quality, which affects both video and poor sound quality, with the knock-on effect here of issues with sound having a negative effect on transcriptions. Furthermore, it is clearly a benefit that both interviewee and interviewer are visual, and observable cues can be seen; it is possible that some of the emotional elements can be missed from a face-to-face encounter (Bell *et al.,* 2022). Finally, some ethical issues may arise in using online software, and these will be discussed in Section 5.3.

Overall, 42 interviews were conducted, with 40 of these being interviews with individual people, and two interviews being dyadic, one with two managers and the other with two frontline service workers. The dyad interviews were agreed upon as this was more convenient for the participants, as it tied in with their working schedule. Recordings of the interview and auto-transcribing were used during the online interview; this was noted in participant consent forms and double-checked with them prior to the interview commencing. The length of the interviews varied from participant to participant; average times are shown in Table 5 below.

FLS (17)	**LM (13)**	**HR external (6)**	**HR internal (5)**	**Ind Rep (1)**	**TU Reps (2)**
Average Timings	**Average Timings**	**Average Timings**	**Average Timings**	**Average Timings**	**Average Timings**
50 mins	63 mins	63.5 mins	61 mins	66 mins	76 mins

Table 5: Participant interviews – average interview times

As a matter of note, the information in table five does not include timings from the pilot interviews, which are discussed in the following section.

5.2.3.7 Interviews - pilot testing

It was considered that, given the topics of this study, it would be useful to conduct pilot test interviews with participants who work in the hospitality sector. Three pilot interviews were conducted, two with frontline services workers, both working in the same organisation, and one with a line manager who worked in a different company.

Piloting allowed for the testing of the research instruments to ensure that they functioned satisfactorily and were appropriate for the formal research work. Conducting pilot testing can be a valuable tool when conducting both quantitative and qualitative research work, for example, allowing quantitative researchers to consider the suitability of questions given questionnaires, along with figuring out if respondent instructions for questionnaires (Bell *et al.,* 2022). For the qualitative researcher, a strong indication can be gained as to whether the research questions are fit for the purpose intended, or if they need to be re-phrased, tweaked or removed from the plan and a new question formulated. Pilots can be useful in checking the timings for interviews, which can aid in scheduling future interviews, whilst also having the potential to identify questions that could make a participant uncomfortable. Additionally,

piloting can help in discovering whether any questions may come across as confusing or pressuring towards an interviewee (Bell *et al.,* 2022). All in all, executing pilot testing is an invaluable tool for testing out a research design, which enables researchers to modify the design and improve research instruments; thus, it is an invaluable tool for the researcher (Hanna, 2004; Malmqvist *et al.,* 2019)

Pilots for this research were conducted to test out the online software covering such tasks as setting up and sending out Microsoft Teams invitations, use of its recording and auto-transcription facility and general ease of use of the software in interview situations. Additionally, it was anticipated that piloting the use of the semi-structured interview questions that had been formulated would give a strong indication as to whether they were suitable to use in the formal research interviews. Therefore, it offered the opportunity to change or alter these for the main research work. Additionally, it provided the chance to find out if an online interview would be suitable for interviewing for the research topic. During the pilot tests (each lasting roughly 60 minutes), it was apparent that there were too many questions in the original set of questions formulated for the research, which left little time in the interview to delve deeper into the rich seams of information that participants were providing. As a result, the original set of questions was condensed into a set of core questions for the formal research interviews. Small adjustments were made to administrative items (participant information sheet and consent form), along with some minor areas of process and procedure that would aid a smoother operation when the formal research was conducted. Todd *et al.* (1995) consider piloting a research scheme as highly advisable as a means of identifying difficulties in coding and categorising. In addition, Bryman and Bell (2015) recommend conducting a pilot as best practice, as it will augment the coding scheme by highlighting problems. For example, such as not having a coding set up for a distinct item, or coding ambiguity. This was found to be useful learning as practice of thematic analysis from the pilot interviews provided a useful guide to gauge data analysis schedules and timescales, along with assessing and addressing any difficulties with codes and categories. Finally, a key point in learning from the pilot interviews was that the sensitive nature of the topic of CSH caused the interviews to be rather intense for the researcher. From this learning, the researcher made the decision not to interview more than two participants in one day, partly due to the researcher's mental fatigue (see Section 5.6 researcher reflexivity) and partly due to ethical considerations, which are discussed in the next section.

5.3 Ethics

5.3.1 Ethics definition

In relation to business research, any researcher carrying out studies involving people will need to examine the ethics of conducting the study. It is important to consider how participants are treated and whether there are any activities planned for research, to be included or excluded from the project (Anderson *et al.,* 2020, p.133). In considering ethics, Prabhakar (2009, p.3) provided a simple explanation in that "Ethics involves learning what is right or wrong, and doing the right thing." This research followed the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics, authored by Oates *et al.* (2021). Whilst the code is quite detailed, it notes the following important elements for conducting research with humans.

1. *Harm to participants* – the research should not be harmful or place participants in a situation of harm.
2. *Lack of informed consent* – participants should consent to the research and have a detailed understanding of the research they are consenting to, what will happen with their data, privacy and storage of data, their right to withdraw their consent and/or data at any time. Therefore, there is a requirement for participants to sign an informed consent form.
3. *Invasion of privacy* – all interviews/discussions remain private; sensitivity should be shown by the researcher, no covert methods should be used to obtain data, anonymity is guaranteed, all data is anonymised, and respect for confidentiality.
4. *Deception* – research is not presented as something other than what it is, no untruths or falsifying of information, no pretence.

5.3.2 Research background and overall ethics considerations

Because of the nature of the research topic, potential vulnerability of the study group, alongside the possibility of psychological discomfort for some, it was considered that this study holds an element of ethical concern. Whilst this research was not seeking any specific details about episodes of CSH, the researcher acknowledged the sensitivities that some participants may have in discussing the topic. The purpose of the research was to explore the management of episodes of CSH in which hospitality front-line workers had been subjected to in their normal day-to-day work activities. The research focus was not on incident recall, but on examining how this issue is handled and addressed by line management. Also, the research sought to

explore the challenges that FHWs, LMs, and HR support have in addressing the phenomenon of customer misbehaviour (including SH).

5.3.3 Ethics – some key points

Ethics approval was submitted for this research to the University of Strathclyde's Work, Employment and Organisation department ethics committee. Following consideration by the committee, and after giving some further suggestions, due to the sensitivity of the topic being investigated, it was suggested that the submission should go to the main ethics committee of the University of Strathclyde. As a result of these submissions and further comments from the university ethics committee, the university granted ethics approval. Therefore, what follows is a highlight of some of the key ethical points that were instigated in this research (see also Section 5.6, research reflexivity and limitations for more detail).

5.3.4 Power relations – researcher and interviewee

The researcher understood the power relations between the researcher and participant and the potential that this can cause ethical issues (Brinkmann, 2007). As a result, a conscious effort was made by the researcher to cover any ethical issues that could arise. These were noted in the submissions for ethical approval. Before and during the interviews, the researcher fully understood that female participants (but not restricted to) may feel uncomfortable talking with a male researcher. The researcher was empathetic to this, and no details of information about episodes of CSH were pursued.

5.3.5 Informed consent and research information for participants

Informed consent allows potential participants to make an informed choice as to whether they wish to take part in a research study. Therefore, there is a need for the researcher to ensure that people are provided with as much information about the research to meet the requirements of informed consent (Bell *et al.*, 2022; Brinkmann, 2007). In this research study, people who expressed an interest in the research project were forwarded a participant information sheet. This information sheet varied slightly depending on the job role of the interested person (see example Appendix 3). Additionally, the information sheet gave a list of the likely questions to be asked and contact details of free counselling services if a person experienced any distress or anxiety about the research, before, during and after the research process. Furthermore, a participant consent form (see Appendix 4) and information on the University of Strathclyde's privacy policy for research participants were also sent as email attachments. This was approved

by the university ethics committee. Once a participant had returned the signed consent form via email, the researcher replied with an acknowledgement of receipt. Within the body of the reply, it was reiterated to the participant the privacy and confidentiality (see Section 5.3.5) of the data information and that they could, at any time, before, during and after, withdraw their consent to the research. In addition, prior to the actual interview starting, the participant was reminded verbally of the privacy and confidentiality of the research and the fact that they could withdraw consent to use the data collected at any time. All participants interviewed were happy to do so, and there were no withdrawals at all.

5.3.6 Privacy and confidentiality

Privacy is a fundamental human right recognised in Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The confidentiality and privacy of the participants and the information exchanged with the researcher must be protected, controlled, and safeguarded when researching sensitive topics (Fontes, 2004). The participants were advised and assured of the confidentiality of the data/information collected and that it would only be used for academic purposes. Precautions to safeguard the identities of interviewees were taken, with all personal and organisational identifiers being removed. For example, the names of transcription files were anonymised, and identity coded so that participant names and the names of the organisations they worked for were completely anonymous. Likewise, this was the same for entries in all the transcriptions from interviews. Storage of data from the research was stored in the university's secure storage facility of OneDrive, with the full anonymised thesis being deposited into the University of Strathclyde’s data depository for a maximum period of 10 years.

5.4. The fieldwork

The fieldwork was implemented over a period from January 2024 to August 2024. The interview schedule and organisational breakdown have already been discussed (see Sections 5.2.3.5 and 5.2.3.6). Participants were interviewed via Microsoft Teams conference software. All arrangements for participant interviews were conducted via e-mail. Once a participant had confirmed that they would be happy to take part in the research project, a mutually agreeable date for the interview was arranged. When a date and time had been fixed, the researcher emailed the participant a link for connection to Microsoft Teams. Following the pilot interviews and the intense nature of the interviews, the researcher made a conscious choice to hold a maximum of two interviews per day. However, the nature of participant recruitment, the, at

times, flexibility of participants, and the time span planned by the researcher meant that interviews were spread out over the period of January 2024 to August 2024. Therefore, this allowed the researcher to ensure that they were mentally refreshed for each interview.

The snowballing effect worked well in obtaining volunteer participants. All FHWs and LM participants were willing to pass the researcher's details on to colleagues and friends of people who worked in hospitality organisations. As a result, it was possible to speak with clusters of workers, managers and HRPs working on or responsible for the same sites. This allowed for a comparison of perspectives from the different roles people were employed in. These clusters ranged from two to six people, but there was one outlier in that one frontline service worker participant was the only person interviewed at one hotel site. In relation to LMs, whilst there was no specific focus on levels of management involved, manager participants' roles ranged across the piece, covering the likes of restaurant managers, event managers and general managers of SMEs. This occurred through the natural occurrence of snowballing. All external HRPs involved in the research were from organisations that provided HR services to hospitality businesses for several years. These included nightclubs, bars, pubs, restaurants, and hotel venues of varying SME sizes. Four out of this group also provided services to global hotel chains as an HR support backup. Furthermore, two hospitality industry trade union representatives and a hospitality industry representative were recruited through the researchers' network. As the research interviews were conducted online, there were no issues about gaining access to sites; however, it was clear that interview times would need to be flexible in meeting participant shifts. As a result, several interviews were arranged for early morning for those exiting a nightshift or late evening for embarking on a nightshift. This did not affect the quality of the interviews.

5.5 Data analysis

5.5.1 Thematic analysis

According to Bell *et al.* (2022), data analysis is one of the most problematic steps in qualitative approaches. The interpretation of the analysis of large volumes of data and the ambiguous images that emerge from it makes the analysis complex. For this research, creating four broad themes (see Section 5.2.3.4) provided a framework to formulate the interview guide, which provides the backbone of analysing the immense amount of data gained from the study. Braun and Clarke (2022, p.283) define the meaning of analysis as "the practice of exploring and explaining the meaning and significance of data." There are various strategies for analysing

qualitative research (Bell *et al.,* 2022; Corbin and Straus, 2015; Okoko *et al.,* 2023; Saunders *et al*, 2023). For this research, thematic analysis was used to break down data. Thematic analysis is one of the most prevalent forms of data analysis approaches in qualitative research, and, as an analytic strategy, it is considered a highly useful tool (Bell *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, Braun and Clarke (2022) believe that thematic analysis is an accessible and reliable means for assessing qualitative data. It is a technique for creating, evaluating, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative data set that uses systematic data coding to identify and establish themes. Thus, thematic analysis is a method, but not a methodology, as a way of analysing data. Hence, this research used thematic analysis coding to achieve a deep and rich analysis of data that had been collected through interviews with participants.

5.5.2 Coding

Following completion of the fieldwork, the process of transcribing and data analysis of the 44 participants interviewed was implemented. Coding is at the heart of analysing qualitative datasets. The purpose of a code is to convey the meaning of items of data. Coding is the labelling of categories of a dataset with codes as a mechanism for seeking out patterns and distinct features of the situations under investigation. (Anderson *et al.,* 2020). A code, in the context of thematic analysis, is generally a word or phrase that denotes a summative and pertinent element of expressive quality that is found in language-based statements or transcription. During the initial or first coding cycle, the amount of data that is coded might vary in size from a single word to an entire paragraph (Saldaña, 2021). Coding is conducted to establish patterns of actions or data that occur on a regular or constant basis in a transcription. Patterns show pertinent habits, customs and routines that have significance in a person's day-to-day life, and they become reliable evidence in the findings or research (Saldaña, 2021). While there may be varying techniques and language used around coding, as a method, there is an accepted emphasis on group classifying and establishing links and connections to these classifications, which make up the essence of qualitative analysis (Saldaña, 2021). Williams and Moser (2019, p.54) suggest that coding is essential for researchers using qualitative approaches to "identify, organise, and build theory." This research utilised the three-step coding practice of open axial and selective coding to organise and interpret the data from the transcripts (see Figure 3 following).

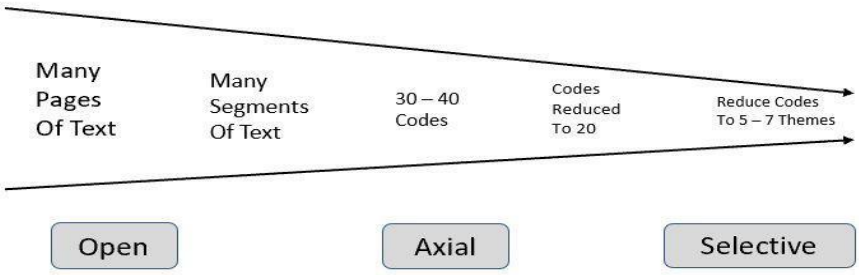


Figure 3: Overview of coding process; open, axial and selective coding from Williams and Moser (2019, p.47)

This allowed the data to be separated and broken down to recognise relationships between the assembled categories, themes, and sub-themes so that meaning can be constructed from them (Williams and Moser, 2019). Significantly, the open, axial, and selective coding approach permits a cyclical and dynamic data loop where the researcher continuously engages, continuously compares, and applies approaches for data reduction and consolidation. The dynamic function and nonlinear directionality of the coding process allow for the identification, codification, and interpretation of key themes as it advances, supporting the emphasis of a research project and adding to the body of related literature. This repetitive process cycle is essential in requiring the researcher to have intimate knowledge of the data so that theory and meaning can be developed out of the data, see Figure 4 (Williams and Moser, 2019).

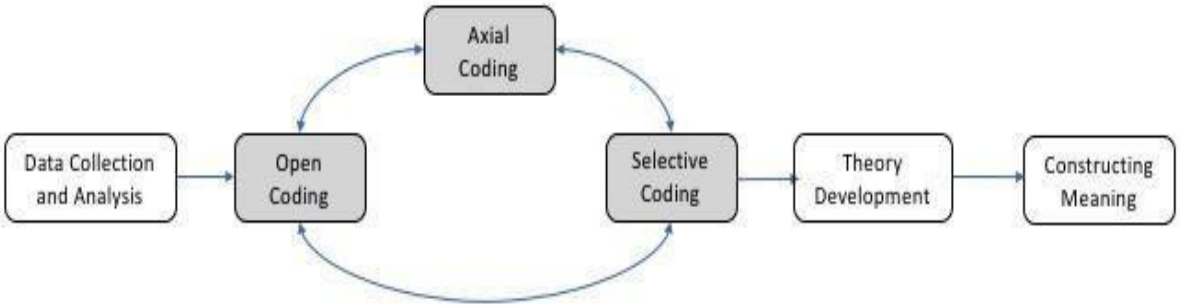


Figure 4: Non-linear process: qualitative research from Williams and Moser (2019, p.48)

Analysis for this research followed the non-linear coding procedure with a matrix format, considered by Bell *et al.* (2022) as an important tool, to identify conceptual themes across the different cases to aid comparison of theory. By highlighting the frequency of occurrences in the data, the use of a matrix format to identify constructs along one axis and occurrences along the other does add a quantitative element to the analysis. The significant amount of data generated from the research required some strategic thinking about how best to tackle the job

of analysis and coding. Resultantly, consideration was given towards the development of major codes and sub-codes, to organise emerging findings and to accommodate comparison of the different cases. The conceptual framework, objectives of the research, and the main themes and sub-themes were categorised and coded in a detailed manner. As a result, coding was affirmed, revised, or placed on hold for further consideration. This meant that conscious decisions had to be made for some data not to be included, as it was deemed not to be as well-suited as other data in answering the research questions. Nevertheless, the risk in holding onto data can be considerable, with Wolcott (1990) arguing that much of the rich data collected needs to be discarded to ensure the study retains its focus on the questions it is addressing.

5.6. The researcher's positionality and limitations of the research

This section will be written in the first person as it reflects the researcher's positionality and their personal thoughts about the research project.

The term "positionality" describes a person's location in relation to their various social identities, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, and geographic location. These identities, along with their intersections, influence how we perceive and interact with the world, including our knowledge, viewpoints, and methods of instruction. As individuals, we inhabit a variety of identities that are contextually located, dynamic, dialogical, and constantly modified and replicated (Alcoff, 1988). Closely intertwined with positionality is reflexivity. In research methodology, reflexivity is generally seen as “an awareness on the part of researchers of their ontological and epistemological assumptions and how their actions in conducting research shape the knowledge they produce” (Bell *et al.,* 2022, p.593). For Parahoo (2006), reflexivity is an ongoing mechanism of introspection and reflection whilst in research practice, whilst Hesse-Biber (2007) considers that researchers ought to be attentive to and understand how their own “social background, location and assumptions affect their research” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p.17).

First, I will address the limitations of this research, which need to be identified. In this chapter, a discussion was provided around the sensitive nature of one of the topics, this being SH. And it would be remiss of me not to recognise myself as a UK, white, heterosexual male in my late sixties, alongside my personal beliefs, values, and biases. Additionally, my early years of upbringing in the UK, the culture of the times and the culture I was brought up in during my employed life need to be acknowledged. As does the fact that I have over 50 years of

employment experience in the UK, in which I have worked at the service frontline, both as a frontline worker and as a frontline manager. Additionally, I have worked in middle management and senior executive management positions as well as in a variety of HR management and generalist roles (across an array of business sectors, including hospitality). Therefore, the age differences, involved, my working life and personal life experiences could have an impact on participants' willingness to divulge sensitive information when being interviewed. I was also conscious of my potential biases when analysing and producing research data. As a result, the effect my working background may have on participants and the analysis of the data collected was very much part of my conscious mind throughout the research project. In short, I adopted mindfulness techniques and protocols when interviewing participants and analysing data. Nevertheless, whilst these techniques and protocols were used to good advantage. This included preparing for the interview by anchoring my attention through focused breathing (inhalation and exhalation) and focusing my mind in the moment. Whilst, during the interviews, being sensory aware, and noticing what I see, hear and sense from the interviewee and being conscious of mind drifting, so I can bring myself back to the current moment. These actions need to be identified and may have affected research outcomes. That said, it should also be brought to attention that some advantages that my career background brought to the research work.

On a personal basis, planning, planning and organisation, time management, and self-motivation skills provided a solid working platform for conducting a PhD project. Having conducted many different forms of interviews throughout my career, the skills and experience I have built up when interviewing over the years have helped me establish an empathic and trusting relationship with participant interviewees in the early stages of the interviews. This relationship created an environment that allowed me to elicit detailed information from participant interviews, which brought incredible richness to the data collected. Moreover, my knowledge of working at the frontline as both a worker and in management was a significant advantage in being able to create empathy and reflect on interviewees, and an understanding of the challenges and environment that frontline workers and line managers talked of in the interviews. This can also be said of the interviews held with HRP interviewees. Overall, I believe my career skills provided me with significant advantages while working through this PhD project.

Meanwhile, for this piece of research, I was heavily influenced by the feedback from the departmental ethics committee and the university ethics committee. My career has been in business and operations management and human resources at multiple levels of managerial seniority. Over a 50-year working career, I held managerial responsibility (business operations and HR) for employees under my remit for 48 years. Consequently, I have had firsthand experience of dealing with a myriad of HR issues in the workplace. As I started the PhD journey, I reflected on the years and realised I had over 40 occasions when I had to address and manage workplace SH by coworkers as a manager or HRP. Six of these were serious episodes of workplace SH, which resulted in dismissal and, consequently, the perpetrator being involved with law enforcement. It is worth noting that none of these occasions involved third parties; they were all coworkers of the victims. The fact that I can remember each episode over such a long period makes clear how deeply this type of workplace problem can be ingrained in one's mind, especially for survivors of SH. As a result, I had a clear sense of how sensitive these matters can be and was confident in dealing with the subject matter and participants in a respectful and dignified manner. When I submitted my ethics application to the university ethics committee, the feedback and suggestions for amendment made me realise that I had completed it with my former career hat on, rather than as a researcher. By that, I mean I was viewing this from the perspective of someone responsible for addressing SH in the workplace. In essence, it was expected of me, by those who had been subjected to such an episode, to get involved in the issue, either as the manager responsible or as an HRP, in resolving the matter. This was in sharp contrast to my role as a researcher, inviting someone to discuss their workplace experiences of this. At the same time, I realised that my ethics application perhaps reflected this, and I was disappointed with myself for having missed some obvious points that the committee had raised. It was indeed a key learning point for me, and it forced me to look at the ethics application in a new light. With advisory support from my supervisors and other departmental academics, I resubmitted a more detailed application that took greater account of the sensitivity of the topic. The application was accepted the second time of asking.

The learning from the ethics application made a strong impression on me, leading me to commit to moving into the recruitment and interview phases of the data collection process in a state of conscious competence rather than unconscious competence. This meant spreading the interviews over eight months, with an average of three interviews a week and no more than two in a day. This allowed time to plan each interview thoroughly and to enter each one in a conscious state of mind, as well as being mentally refreshed. It also prompted me to consider

carefully how I would ask questions and to be mindful of my tone of voice and facial expressions, particularly in an online environment. Additionally, it allowed me to reflect on my status as a researcher and the perceived and potential power differentials. Power dynamics between the participants and me were a key concern throughout. Bell *et al.* (2022, p.140) argue that "giving voice" to participants by using their direct quotations in the researcher's study, in a manner not influenced by the researcher's own judgements or interpretations, can assist the researcher in exhibiting reflexivity and recognition of researcher-participant relations. Similarly, on the matter of questions, a potential pitfall for researchers is to use leading questions. This can be a problem when researchers control and manipulate interviews, thereby arriving at conclusions that bias the research findings (Agee, 2009; Roberts, 2020). As a result, I believe I maintained conscious vigilance in refraining from asking leading questions. Meanwhile, Smith and Elger (2014) argue that a good way of reducing the ambiguity of participant answers or any struggle with answering is to ask probing, insightful questions, as this will usually achieve more reliable results. They also argue that the researcher should concentrate on definitive events rather than generalisations of events. In this research, I was mindful of the different roles of participants and very aware of the need for me to tailor the questions depending on the role or position they occupied. Moreover, I was watchful of the need to ensure that I needed to listen to participants with unconditional positive regard, considered by Rogers (1957) as showing understanding, empathy and acceptance as well as being non-judgemental. As a result, I believed that all interviews were conducted well and that the participants involved were relaxed and comfortable with the relationship built up with the researcher from the initial contact to the end of the interview. The pilot interviews helped enormously in providing me with one-to-one experience in conducting this type of research interview, and I learned much from conducting these. Timings of interviews, relationship building online, effectiveness of questions (open and probing), understanding potential pitfalls and use of appropriate language were all important learning points from the pilots, which set the scene for more effective and productive interviews thereafter.

Meanwhile, the discussion of the findings will be conducted through two distinct chapters. Chapters 6 and 7 draw on findings from participants in relation to the intensive work pressure and contextual environment in the hospitality setting. Chapter 6 discusses the nature of work on the frontline, actions of customer misbehaviour, including CSH, whilst also bringing to attention the dilemma of whether to report or not report an incident of CSH to management

and HR support. Following this, Chapter 7 considers findings from research data concerning organisational structures that highlight challenges for FHWs, LMs and HRPs in the matter of dealing with CSH.

Chapter 6.0 Customer sexual harassment – an interpretive, hierarchical problem

Drawing on the interview findings with participants, this chapter looks at CSH and considers that the concept is interpreted by individuals who view the phenomenon through a personal "interpretive prism." This results in a hierarchical scale of decision-making by a person who will then determine if a CSH incident is irrelevant, low-level, medium-level or high-level.

Firstly, the chapter will aim to set the frontline hospitality scene by considering the nature of hospitality work in the hospitality venues in which FHWs and LM participants involved in this research worked. The discussion allows for an understanding of the working environment that they work in, namely, bars/restaurants, hotels, and nightclubs. Participants would often note the positive "buzz" of frontline hospitality work, but also the fact that the work was intense. The second section will focus on research data from FHWs and LMs, which brought up a common issue faced in the hospitality frontline, this being customer misbehaviour. Whilst personal abuse, aggression and condescension were a feature of frontline work, research data also highlighted the commonality of CSH, which is discussed in some depth in section three. This third section will include data concerning how workers and managers define CSH and bring forward the notions of the individual's interpretive prism and the CSH level of hierarchy in determining an episode of this form of personal abuse. In addition, it will draw on research data on how contextual factors and alcohol can impact the working environment and decision-making on incidents of CSH. This discussion will be followed by personal experiences of FHWs and LMs who have experienced episodes of CSH which they thought had crossed a personal line. In addition, it will outline data about the quandary of reporting or not reporting incidents of CSH to LMs, following which, the chapter will close with a summary of the content and conclusion.

6.1 The frontline "buzz" and work intensity in frontline hospitality service

All FHWs interviewed in the research enjoyed the jobs they had held in hospitality, with the majority of them commenting about the "buzz" they get from working in the industry. In part, this was due to the relationship they sought to build with customers when providing the service. Bailey summed up the feeling of most FHWs interviewed:

> "I think the best part for me is the kind of interaction with the customers, it's great, you get a real buzz from it, obviously, it plays a big part in what we do" (Bailey, male, bar/table worker, bar/restaurant chain, city).

Additionally, for many frontline participants, the enjoyment of their work was not diminished when the work location was busy; rather, it was an additional positive factor that created the buzz. Comments by Keira and Izzy mirrored those of many of the customer-facing participants:

> "I mean, the place is very busy, and you are rushed off your feet, but...it's kinda OK, as you're just buzzing all the time" (Keira, female, table server, restaurant chain WoS).

> "Yeah, but I like it when it's non-stop like that, the time goes really quickly, and you get a…a kind of satisfaction like you've achieved something, you know" (Izzy, female, bar/table worker, global budget hotel city).

The sense of achievement and satisfaction of work from all research participants was expressed by Caoimhe, who was passionate about creating a great customer experience:

> "So, it's like you know, you are doing something worthwhile. So, people come in here and pay for their food and the service they want, and I like doing that, I get...Like, I get real satisfaction out of that" (Caoimhe, female, table/server, global hotel group B).

The buzz of the frontline was not restricted to FHWs; most of the LMs interviewed also brought up the feeling of satisfaction and work fulfilment from working at the frontline:

> "I mean, the place is a busy business, you don't get much time to stop…very often the days are non-stop, but that's the buzz, and that's what I love about it" (Hannah, female, bar manager, bar/restaurant chain, city).

> "Yeah, I mean, I really love it, and I think it's made for me. There's always something going on, and the job is non-stop; the place is always jumping" (Scott, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

A strong sense of pride in the standard of service provided to customers was evident among workers and managers, resulting in a high level of engagement in their work. However, there was another side to the coin in striving to deliver a great experience for customers, namely, a strong element of work intensity. Data from the research showed that all FHW participants

involved, irrespective of the venue or location they worked, commented on the intense working environment. Kayleigh explained:

> "So, it's kind of… the bar is busy when I'm working…it can be rammed, and you just don't stop, and it is hard work to say the least" (Kayleigh, female bar/table worker, bar/restaurant chain city).

Meanwhile, Tess, a receptionist at a budget hotel, explained how she covers other roles in the hotel, which adds to her workload:

> "So, I've covered in the admin office for sickness a few times …and I help behind the bar, and wait on tables when we get busy, which, to be honest, is most days of the week (laughs)" (Tess, female FLS global budget hotel city).

The comment by Tess, about being involved in different roles, provides an indication of the strategy of multi-tasking that managers have adopted to help ease staff shortage problems, which was not an uncommon practice in sites across this research. However, research data showed that LMs themselves were not immune from the stress and intensity of work at the customer frontline, as hotel manager Chloe and restaurant manager Eileen explained:

> "…weddings can be quite stressful to arrange as they can be very much an emotional thing and a once-in-a-lifetime, well, for some anyway (laughs) event. So, our reputation can be at risk if event planning for a wedding isn't as good as it should be or doesn't meet client expectations" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotel/restaurants WoS).

> "You are constantly on the lookout for customers, so customers entering the building and making them welcome as soon as they arrive, and then providing a great restaurant experience, it's very satisfying, but it can stress you out a bit" (Eileen, female, restaurant manager, restaurant chain WoS).

Chloe and Eileen's comments summed up one of the most common causes of work intensity and stress that emerged from LM data, that of customer service expectation. Expectations of service and quality add to the intensity for managers, who, in turn, demand the same expectations of the FHWs. Moreover, findings strongly indicate that customer demands have

grown following the COVID-19 pandemic. For LMs, the customer service experience is sacrosanct and one which is strongly focused on, adding to the intensity and stress for the FHW, as noted by several of the workers:

> "…one of my managers used to talk about military precision in the standards we need to achieve at banquets" (Tom, male, table server, 5-star hotel group).

> "… no matter how busy it is, you still have to hit the service standards that managers want" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

Managers also feel the pressure of customer expectations, which can often result in customer anger. LMs Hanna, Millie and Karolina commented:

> "…well yeah, like we get awkward customers and that, but, well, for example, since COVID, people seem to have higher expectations and get angrier quicker" (Hanna, female, bar manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "But guests expect a lot, and they can get too angry about it at times…" (Millie, female, deputy hotel manager, global hotel group A).

> "…so, yes, we get some guests who behave not in a good way [sic] if they don't get what's expected" (Karolina, female, hotel manager, global hotel group B).

The research data was clear that customer service expectations were hugely important to FHWs and LMs. This is a dual-edged sword in that it created a positive buzz for them, whilst at the same time, adding to the intensity of the work. The data also revealed that it was not uncommon for customer anger to rise when demands were not met, which could escalate into customer misbehaviour.

6.2 Customer misbehaviour – personal abuse, aggression and condescension

This section will consider participant findings concerning customer misbehaviour in general, and whilst also highlighting the issues of customer power, alcohol use/abuse and social events as triggers of misbehaviour. In keeping with published research, the findings suggested that mistreatment towards customer facing hospitality employees was a regular occurrence across

a continuum. Examples included condescending attitudes, disregard, sarcastic comments, insults, name-calling, general bad manners/rudeness and disregard. Aggressive behaviour was often fuelled by alcohol, with aggressive tones of voice, shouting, and threats of physical harm being common events. Firstly, to gain an insight into the prevalence of customer misbehaviour, key stakeholders in hospitality were interviewed in this research, these being a hospitality industry representative and two trade union representatives who represent workers in the hospitality sector.

The hospitality industry representative, who was also a hotelier, was aware that customer misbehaviour in the industry was a growing problem, highlighting his personal experiences from his own business:

> "...I think before COVID, I wouldn't have seen a lot of customer misbehaviour…so I think it's probably been the worst I've seen in my own business, and I think that this has been the same for others in the hotel industry. So, I think that after COVID…people lost their manners…" (Sebastian, male, hospitality industry representative).

Meanwhile, trade union representatives Nathan and Bobby commented:

> "Yeah, yeah, customer misbehaviour, it happens quite a lot. I think if you speak to anyone in hospitality, you'll find…you'll struggle to find somebody who hasn't come across it" (Nathan, male, hospitality trade union representative).

> "…every day I come across workers who have been abused by customers, like call it misbehaviour if you want, but I call it abuse… harassment based on a protected characteristic is massive in hospitality, whether that be racism, homophobia, sexism, or ageism" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

The picture emerging from these comments from people who have an overview of a variety of hospitality sub-sectors is one in which customer misbehaviour is a significant problem. This consideration was affirmed by all FHWs and LMs in this research, with one of the apparent drivers of this being the sense of customer "sovereignty".

Customer power

FHWs commented that customer misbehaviour was part and parcel of the service working environment. People can get annoyed and upset if, for example, a delay in their food order occurs, or if the food is considered cold or seen as undercooked by the guest. Likewise, participants suggested that customer misbehaviour had increased post-COVID and that customers appeared to be more impatient and less tolerant of service standards that did not meet their perceived level of expectation. Bar/restaurant work, Bailey was scathing in his comments about some customers' attitudes:

> "...there can be some real bastards, and smart arses who have no patience and want everything done right now. These will moan and groan at the slightest problem and take a dig at you…" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

Meanwhile, customer manners and attitudes such as being condescending were highlighted and seen as a negative part of the job and one in which many of the frontline staff interviewed encountered:

> "… some customers, to be honest, a lot of customers can be arrogant and snap at you and talk down at you, that really gets me, but I have to keep calm and try to be helpful" (Robert, male, night auditor, global budget hotel city).

> "… they get a bit lippy or snappy with you and… it's, well, they can get sarcastic with you, so like "I'm over here" or "about time to" or "can we have some service here please…You know, things like that er…but it's the tone of voice they use, it pisses you off, so like sarcastic if you get what I'm saying" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

These comments illustrate poor customer attitudes towards FHWs and were consistent across all the hospitality establishments where research participants worked. Such behaviour by customers was considered a downside of the job. Bailey from the bar/restaurant summed up the feelings of all customer-facing staff interviewed, reflecting their acceptance of the position they are in, by noting:

> "But what can you do? These people pay our wages and expect a standard of service in the restaurant, like it's the customer is always right philosophy" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

LM participants echoed the comments of the FHWs with customer attitudes towards workers, and themselves as managers, being something that managers face regularly:

> "…I think that customers have become more demanding; it seems to be worse since COVID. People's attitudes towards our servers can be awful. I get it as well, although not as much as when I served the tables. I think the suit I wear may hold back some customers" (Alice, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant, city).

> "…there is always someone who gets pissed off with something. I mean, it's mainly poor attitudes, and they can get angry and aggressive" (Alan, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Front-of-house staff face the dilemma of providing a standard of customer service that must meet not only customers' expectations but also those of the business, as set by line management. Workers take personal pride and professionalism in delivering great service, as noted in Section 6.1; delivering excellent service is part of the buzz of the frontline hospitality role. The research data showed that the perceived need to keep the customer satisfied was a default element in frontline service work across all establishments. As Bailey's comment states, the "customer is always right" philosophy is generally accepted as just how it is, despite how annoying it can be for individuals. Meanwhile, Irene, a bar manager at a nightclub venue, differentiated between "just" customer misbehaviour and serious behaviour, and described the prevalence of this that she sees in her place of work:

> "…so maybe something I would consider serious customer abuse, maybe like twice a month…so serious would be like if someone had to be ejected from the venue, that would be something I would consider serious if it had to get to that point. Whereas you know our customer, just misbehaving or being verbally abusive, that goes on weekly" (Irene, female, bar manager, nightclub).

Diana, a bar manager in a budget hotel group in the city centre, echoed the thoughts of Irene when reporting:

> "But to be honest, all of us here like putting up with bad customers, it's like from shouting and swearing to personal abuse, it's the usual stuff, something goes on every other day, but we just get on with it, and it becomes water off the back of a duck if you know what I mean" (Diana, female, bar manager, budget hotel group, city).

These types of comments were common in LM interviews. These accounts were expressed matter-of-factly, suggesting that customer misbehaviour is commonplace in hospitality. Irene's comments indicated that misbehaviour is considered in terms of levels of abuse and/or aggression, whilst Diana noted that it is "the usual stuff".

Beyond workers and managers, it is useful to acknowledge the views of internal HRPs who were asked about their knowledge of customer misbehaviour in their organisations. In this sense, it is interesting to note that the HR interviewees perceived this as a management issue and one they would not normally get involved with:

> "One thing I would say is that there aren't really any immediate examples of customer misbehaviour that come to mind where there has been an issue. I've sort of not had to get involved or deal with anything at all like that in my career…I think this type of thing would be dealt with by the manager, or I'd expect it to be dealt with by the manager" (Sean, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group B).

> "No, as I say, no one in HR has picked up on anything like that. So, yes, we hear stories about awkward or difficult customers, and things when some kind of organisation went wrong…" (Abigail, female, internal HR manager, 5-star hotel group).

Whilst HRPs are aware of the customer service challenges that FHWs and managers face, they often lack insight into how widespread these challenges are. It is perhaps no surprise that this area is left to LMs, as it could be argued that it falls within their jurisdiction. Thus, unless HR are informed by a worker or manager about a problem, they will largely be unaware of any issues relating to customer misbehaviour.

The data also indicated that this was generally the case for external HRPs who provided HR services to the hospitality sector. Unless there was a significant reason arising from an incident of customer misbehaviour, HRPs were unlikely to be involved, as Esh explains:

> "These types of calls, like sexual harassment, the ones that I get involved in, tend to come in after the horse has bolted (short pause), like what I mean is that these tend to come in as soon…er… after something has happened. But you know, the sexual harassment stuff I've been involved in has been by work colleagues, not customers. To be honest, I've no idea how bad it may be with customers, as I've never been advised of that" (Esh. male, external HR services provider).

Esh notes that he is unaware of whether customer abuse or CSH of FHWs is an issue, as none of his hospitality clients has ever commented on it. This was a common feature of the external HRP interviews, with only one of the six interviewed having been involved in a case of CSH. In the main, therefore, external HRPs have limited knowledge of the extent of customer misbehaviour, including SH by customers.

The scale of the customer misbehaviour problem can be seen in the data for this thesis, which brought up the darker side of the issue, that of CSH, and these research findings are the focus of the next section.

6.3 Customer sexual harassment in hospitality

6.3.1 Defining sexual harassment

The definition of workplace SH under the UK Equality Act 2010 was previously discussed in Section 2.1, page 11 of this thesis. The legislation states that it is the employer's responsibility to do all they can to prevent workplace SH (ACAS, 2024). Under recent amendments to the UK Equality Act, employers must take "reasonable steps" to protect employees from harassment by third parties, such as clients and customers/guests. It could be argued that the definition of workplace SH is self-explanatory. However, the data from this research found that individual perceptions and interpretations of SH were very much a matter of personal opinion. The section will begin by considering the views of the industry representative and the trade union representative concerning the prevalence of SH by customers.

When questioned about the prevalence of CSH, industry representative Sebastian commented on the changing social landscape, noting that people are more aware of societal changes, which are affecting hospitality workplaces:

> "I think landscapes have changed, certainly, and these obviously have an impact on our sector. As the whole issue around gender and all these kinds of things have changed, the old guard, I think, some want to go on that journey with the younger team. You know stuff like gender, hate crime, a person's rights, sexual harassment and that. The whole landscape again has changed because people are more aware now…" (Sebastian, male hospitality industry representative).

Sebastian acknowledges that hospitality has been affected by societal change and that it can be difficult for some to respond to and accept certain levels of that change. Regarding SH, he implies that the industry must understand and embrace the change. He was pressed further on the prevalence of CSH in the industry. In response, he stated that, in his hospitality career, he has neither seen nor been informed by anyone in the sector that CSH is a problem:

> "But from a sexual harassment point of view, I don't think in my whole time in the sector, I have ever seen it. And I certainly have not been made aware of it. Because in the olden days, I guess you know, we could have got away with. But I think it's more in bars and nightclubs. Again, you know, maybe grabbing somebody or whatever the case is…I think the main issues would be with nightclubs and bars because that's where people continue drinking and get a bit more alcohol" (Sebastian, male, hospitality industry representative).

That said, when asked how FHWs and hospitality businesses in general define SH, he seemed to acknowledge that this was an issue:

> "Yeah, frontline staff, they see a lot of that stuff like sexual innuendo, jokes and leering, but it's seen as banter. But I think you know the different members of staff will take it in different ways depending on their age" (Sebastian, male, hospitality industry representative).

On the one hand, Sebastian suggests that CSH is not an issue for hospitality businesses. In contrast, he recognises that FHWs will encounter many incidents that fall under the legal definition of SH, yet these are often brushed off. He suggests this is due to individual differences, with age being a factor. In addition, he reiterated that bars and nightclubs would be more susceptible to CSH. On being pressed further on the phenomenon, Sebastian did note:

> "… and I don't know, males or females going around lifting empty glasses and things like that out there, and the male or the female or the female, whoever grabs them, they are so all right, love or whatever the case is. And that could be man to man, female to female, whatever. I think it's a feeling that they can get away with it more in that scenario because always having a good time and then get away with everything else, right? So, like, just bump into you. Well, you can't get away with that in a restaurant, you know, or a hotel. But again, it goes back to that. You know, it depends on the definition of harassment. So, like the customer asking a bar person, male or female, for their telephone number, you ask yourself, "Is that harassment?" The people who don't want to change, there'll still be people around who think that sexual harassment is OK" (Sebastian, male hospitality industry representative).

Sebastian offered some reasoning for why bars and nightclubs could be more prone to CSH considering that alcohol and/or drugs were the driver of such behaviour. Additionally, he suggested that customers feel they can avoid repercussions because of the social environment that is generated. Hence, customers do not see, as Sebastian notes in his example, grabbing or touching as a problem. He also differentiated between the bars/nightclubs environment and that of a restaurant or hotel. Additionally, he raised the issue of defining and interpreting SH. In essence, it's as if Sebastian appeared to suggest that CSH can be an issue in bars and nightclubs, but in sectors such as restaurants and hotels, in his experience, the phenomenon is not a concern.

Yet for trade union representatives Nathan and Bobby, it was clear that CSH was prevalent in the hospitality industry:

> "So, it's like minor stuff like innuendo, sexual jokes or comments about you, and I've seen people grabbing and kind of touching staff. I've even had that myself from women slapping my arse, stuff like that. But it's been in every place I've worked. And I also

get trade union brother and sister members telling me that they see a lot of it" (Nathan, male, hospitality trade union representative).

"But you know, sexual harassment is one of our primary issues, sexual harassment in general, whether it's coworkers or customers and guests, but also abuse in general…but employers sometimes don't believe trade unions when we say that sexual harassment or abuse in general is rife, not just internally but also by customers" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

Nathan and Bobby, informed that they are often out and about hospitality sites supporting union members as required, paint a grimmer picture than that of Sebastian. It could be argued that in many instances, trade union representatives may only get called in when a member is aggrieved or has a concern about a workplace issue. Therefore, their perspectives on CSH and its prevalence are viewed from a different standpoint than that of industry representative Sebastian. Interestingly, Nathan comments on "minor stuff" of CSH, which indicates that he views SH by customers as classified on a hierarchical level.

Indeed, this point about differing interpretations was a key finding from the interview data from all FHW participants, where there was a common uncertainty about what was classed as SH, apart from what could be considered as the obvious:

"…well, I suppose I'd have to say I don't know fully…" (Keira, female, table server, restaurant chain WoS).

"…no, I can't say I do, but I think it would be like groping or touching up someone, things like that" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

These comments indicate that, apart from the undeniably obvious, workers have little clarity about what other elements make up the definition of SH. Yet LMs thought workers ought to have clarity due to organisational handbooks and access to policies and procedures for all employees:

"…so, we have policies and procedures manuals, manager manuals, service standard training videos and all that type of thing, so we can read up on these things…everyone

gets access as soon as they start, and everyone has to view the induction videos and read the policies and procedures and then click to sign them off" (Eileen, female, restaurant manager, restaurant chain WoS).

"…we have this in the HR system, and it comes under the bullying and harassment policy, and all staff will know where this is. I don't know it word for word off the top of my head, but it's things like people not touching you are saying explicit sexual things, you know, stuff like that" (Hannah, female, bar manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

Indeed, most of the LMs interviewed spoke about the fact that their organisations had policies and procedures which included bullying and harassment, of which SH was clearly defined. In the main, these would be provided during new employee inductions. Table server, Caiomhe had some experience with this during her induction and did have some understanding of SH, commenting:

"…so I don't know it off the top of my head, but I know when I started, all the staff who started at the same time as I did, we all had an induction day, and it came up on that day….but remember that it's not allowed for people to touch you or frighten you at all…" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

In contrast, Dave's experience was vastly different:

"I can't recall seeing anything anywhere…it's not something that was ever discussed" (Dave, male, Table Server, UK hotel group).

Keira, Maddie and Dave's comments about what their employers defined as SH were more commonplace than the statement made by Caoimhe. In that respect, data from workers suggests that there is a lack of clarity, apart from what can be considered as obvious, around other elements of the definition of SH in their workplace. Yet line management data implies that employees should be aware of the organisational policies which are defined in handbooks and HR systems. When internal HRPs were asked about the company's definition of SH, what it is, and where employees would find it, all of them were unambiguous in their replies. They were clear on how employees could access information and the company's definition of SH. The following examples reflect the opinions of all internal HR interviewed:

> “There’s a specific section on sexual harassment...like, under sexual harassment, in the policies, so I'd expect all employees to know about this...” (Harvey, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group A).

> “...sexual harassment comes under our policy on bullying and harassment. So all our employees have access to this on our intranet” (Abigail, female, internal HR, 5-star hotel group).

> “Sexual harassment is in the company policy under bullying and discrimination, and all employees who start with us get a handbook with at least the main company policies and discrimination and bullying are in that” (Sean, male internal HR, global hotel group B).

HRPs were adamant that all employees would be aware of the definition of SH and that these definitions can easily be found in the corporate policies available via a handbook and/or the intranet. There is a general assumption that new starters will read and, if not fully understand, the corporate policies and procedures, at least be aware of them and know where they can be found. Similarly, employees who have any queries concerning work will know that they should approach their LM, who will answer any queries. Yet, many LMs interviewed implied that there was some leeway in determining what was classed as SH and the comment below mirrors comments from most managers interviewed:

> “The definition of sexual harassment is something… so, on one hand, it's black and white, but on the other hand, it doesn’t take into account context, so the environment, the way something is said, why it was said. I mean, one person’s sexual harassment is someone else’s having a laugh or joke” (Alan, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Apart from the nightclub, all venues involved in this research had an intranet which workers could access to view bulletins, policies and procedures, enter working hours, record absence, and complete online training modules relating to their work role. LMs hold the responsibility for ensuring employee inductions are carried out, along with compulsory training modules that are relevant to an employee's role. HR have little involvement in employee inductions, apart

from monitoring induction and training sign off by line management and employees usually via the online intranet.

The data indicates that LMs see themselves as having good knowledge of what the elements of SH are and how their company defines them. There is a common assumption from line management that FHWs will know what constitutes SH and that they will be aware of where to find the relevant employer policies and procedures. Internal HRPs hold the same view and have confidence that their corporate policies reflect the legal definitions required. Additionally, they hold the same confidence that new employees have ease of access to these and therefore, should be aware of what SH is and what procedures to follow if they have any concerns. Despite this, research evidence from the FHWs indicated that this was not as cut and dried as LMs and/or internal HRPs may think. Indeed, as the next section further outlines, this disparity in the views of the participants extended to what constitutes SH.

6.3.2 Customer sexual harassment: "it depends" – interpretive and hierarchical

The data collected suggested that FHWs were unclear about the constitutive elements of SH, apart from what could be considered as obvious. FHWs were asked if they had ever been subjected to or been a witness to CSH while working in hospitality:

> "…so no, I don't think I have, and neither have I seen any work colleague being harassed" (Dee, female, table server, hotel/restaurants WoS).

> "So, I can't say that I have, I mean, I personally haven't, and I have not seen it happen to any of my colleagues" (Ellen, female, bar/table server, global budget hotel city).

> "…no, I can't say that I have" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

> "…no, I can't say that I have been subjected to it or witnessed it at all" (Maddie, female bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

These types of comments were typical of FHWs. On the face of it, these remarks indicate that SH by customers does not appear to be a problem. But comments by Kayleigh, Adam, and Emma provide insight into the thinking around what they consider CSH to be; these comments are also typical of worker participants:

> "I suppose it would be what you'd say was sexual harassment" (Kayleigh, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "…it depends on what you class as sexual harassment" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

> "Yes, I think it's fair to say it depends on how someone says something like that, it kind of depends, doesn't it?" (Emma, female, table server, hotels/restaurants WoS).

Surprisingly, even though the data suggests that LMs have a clear definition of what the elements of SH are, there is still the commonality of the "it depends" notion arising from LM interviews:

> "…it depends on the severity of the issue" (Caroline, female, LM, global hotel group A).

> "…it depends on what you rate as sexual harassment" (Hannah, female, LM, bar/restaurant chain).

> "…it depends on what has happened and how it has happened" (Diana, female, LM, global budget hotel, city).

These comments indicate that personal judgment plays a significant part for FHWs and LMs when considering whether an incident of CSH has taken place. Dave and Izzy commented:

> "Well, yeah. I mean, I don't really think that some of my colleagues see innuendo and sex jokes, that type of thing, as sexual harassment. It's just part of what goes on in these cases" (Dave, male, waiter, UK hotel group).

> "…since I started here, when a guest has asked me for a date, but you know, in a joking way, I think. But I don't think that is sexual harassment" (Izzy, female, bar/table server, global budget hotel city).

All FHW participants commented in comparable ways about determining what they classify as SH. However, lower-level harassment, for example, as commented on by Dave and Izzy, seems to be an area in which individual interpretation abounds, irrespective of any definition an employer may have. Nevertheless, generally, there was uncertainty when interpreting CSH. Maddie, Tess and Bailey commented about this when asked what they considered constituted CSH:

> "I'm thinking it would be something like if a customer assaulted you or something like that, you know, grabbed you or tried to kiss you, you know, that type of stuff... So, I'm not sure if I'd see that as sexual harassment myself, but er…maybe some people may think it is" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "…so, if someone says hugged me, and I knew they were having a laugh, and that's happened a few times (laughs), but I wasn't bothered about it, no, I wouldn't see that as sexual harassment" (Tess, female, receptionist, global budget hotel city).

> "…well, I think it would be stuff like…I mean, touching staff (medium pause), I mean, touching someone on the leg and arse, you know, stuff like that. I mean…ehhh, I don't really know, really" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

Bailey's comment was delivered with some uncertainty, and when he was asked if he himself had been subjected to or witnessed SH by customers, he noted:

> "I had a couple of women grab my arse when there was a hen party in. It wasn't where I work now, but at another site. They were just…you know, kind of teasing me, you know… we just, you know, accept it as part of the job, like it just happens from time to time" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

These comments, mirrored by other FHWs, give a strong indication of the unique personal interpretation of incidents of CSH. Interviews showed that "stuff happens" to servers, a lot of it is not what they consider to be SH. Rather, they accept it as the norm and deal with it in their own way, generally by brushing things off, as Ellen and Adam explained:

> "Yes, it's comments, things like, move over, the lady is coming, or come on over, darlin, and hi hon, or hi babe. That type of thing, it just grates on you, but I've got used to that now, so it mostly goes over my head, and I just brush it off" (Ellen, female, bar/table server, global budget hotel city).

> "I mean, for me, as I say, it's women and men asking you for a date or telephone number, and sometimes they grab at you or try to hug or kiss you and that stuff. Like I say, you just shrug it off or just say no thanks or fuck off….to be honest, it happens a lot, so it doesn't bother me now…" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

However, the level of threat a worker may feel is a consideration that emerged from the research data. The comments below were typical sentiments from FHWs:

> "If I felt scared or threatened, I'd say that was harassment, yes" (Tess, female, receptionist, global budget hotel city).

> "If I didn't feel threatened? No, there would be no need to think it was sexual harassment…" (Dee, female, table server, hotel/restaurants WoS).

Emerging from worker interviews, and their interpretation of a CSH incident is that they view harassment as being on a hierarchical level, with incidents classed as being irrelevant, low-level, medium-level, and high-level harassment. This interpretation leads to the worker assessing what action they take, either the incident is disregarded, they are ambivalent towards it, subtle action is taken, or firm action is taken. FHWs have ways of dealing with such forms of harassment, often directly and unambiguously and would not necessarily let line management know about what had happened. For Izzy, the potential of going over the top with a customer in fending a customer off is something that is at the back of her mind. Thus, she sees the advantage of covering herself with her superiors in a just-in-case manner:

> "…I suppose, well, if a guest kind of did something that was not just the light stuff but clearly sexual harassment, you know, if they touched me and that type of stuff, to be honest, I wouldn't be waiting to tell the manager I'd tell the guest where to get off. I might tell the manager afterwards what I'd done so I don't get in trouble" (Izzy, female FLS, global budget hotel city).

In this case, it indicates that, despite the level of harassment a customer may inflict on Izzy's mind, there still lies a strong element of customer power. Meanwhile, the "it depends" notion also figured as a recurring theme in LM interviews, as did personal judgment and personal interpretation of CSH.

Although LMs argued that they understood the elements of SH, many noted that they saw harassment on a low-to-high continuum, which aligned with FHWs' views. With this perspective, LMs determine whether customer comments or actions constitute SH, regardless of their knowledge of its components. In essence, it remains a matter of personal judgment about how comments or actions by customers/guests are viewed. Food and beverage manager Sarah highlights the "it depends" factor:

> "…well, er…I think it would depend on how it was said, you know, if I felt it was any, like anything threatening, or maybe how it was said. So… (medium pause) …so, I mean…like it depends" (Sarah, female LM, global hotel group A).

Other managers similarly provided insight on how they interpret SH:

> "… the server tells me they are being harassed, you know, pestered for a date, then we'd tell the customer to pack it in, or they'll be out. Personally, I wouldn't see that as sexual harassment, but it is harassment, though, isn't it? If someone is pestering you for a phone number or a date, well, I think so anyway" (Derek, male bar manager, nightclub).

> "Also, maybe this is wrong for me to say this, but asking for a date or telephone number, well, it's at the bottom of the scale, I think, but if someone starts groping or making suggestive remarks, then that could be higher up the scale. As long as the staff weren't or didn't feel uncomfortable or threatened about it, I'd say no, it wasn't sexual harassment" (Eileen, female, restaurant manager, restaurant chain WoS).

> "So, I think if a guest is ogling someone or making suggestive comments and that type of thing, it's kind of low scale, isn't it? So, going up to a guest and saying, "My employee says you are ogling her, please stop", like…, well, it's a bit …er…not right" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotels/restaurants WoS).

What emerges from LM data is that, like FHWs, they view CSH through their own interpretive prism.

6.3.3 Customer sexual harassment – the contextual factor and alcohol

It was evident from data collected from front-of-house workers and LMs that context was a factor in determining whether a customer's comment or action was considered SH. For example, if workers or LMs considered the working environment to be non-threatening and loud but good-natured, and were not discomforted by it, comments or incidents would, more than likely, not be thought of as SH. Conversely, if the working environment at the time of a comment or incident was raucous, febrile, or threatening, this would lead to a different opinion. In such instances, the research suggests that workers and LMs will have an enhanced awareness of the environment. It is in these types of environments that a worker may feel more inclined to consider that what they are experiencing could be classed as harassment. Ellen explains:

> "…I think context plays a part. As I say, we have lots of stags and hens come in and, alright then can get a bit loud, but they are out to have fun, and we are there to play our part in their night out. If it's a threat or frightening, for me, I'd just go to the manager and tell them something isn't right" (Ellen, female, bar/table worker, global budget hotel city).

Maddie and Gary commented on how the context can alter how FHWs' views of behavioural actions by customers can be seen as understandable in the circumstances or questionable:

> "I suppose context is important, so like at a hen party it's kind of funny and (medium pause), like kind of expected" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "Context, yeah. It may be important. Yeah, but if it's something quite vulgar, I think the context is a whole lot less important than the fact that the customer has said something that is morally bankrupt. Also, I think that it is very much dependent on the venue and the person. As I said, the difference between a cafe like Lynn's Cafe on the side of the A8 and a gay bar in the centre of Edinburgh or Glasgow" (Gary, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

It was noted that context plays a part in employees' thinking and decision-making about whether actions or comments by a customer are classed as SH:

> "For me, context is like, so when people are having a bit of a laugh, you just sense that, so, yeah, they flirt a bit and say stuff that's over the edge, but I don't see that as sexual harassment, not really" (Dee, female, table server, hotel/restaurants WoS).

> "…yes, I think that context is the case… it really would be something that I'd need to decide for myself. So, it may say that flirting comes under sexual harassment, but if I'm OK with someone doing that, then that's up to me, isn't it? It's not up to the company to say that" (Tess, female, receptionist, global budget hotel city).

Meanwhile, nightclub worker Adam explained that the context and general environment are on his radar. He not only commented on the context but also on the speed of decision-making he must make in response to incidents that arise:

> "…so…aye, it depends on the context of the situation you have at the time and how you see it. I mean, if there is an aggressive feel about it, I just get the hell out of there (laughs)…I mean, you have to make a quick decision on how to tell people where to go or get off if you get what I'm saying" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

All LM participants discussed context when making judgments about incidents of alleged CSH, with the seriousness of a customer's actions or comments being determined by the context in which they occurred. Additionally, this was a considerable factor in decision-making about an incident. The data suggests that the legal definition of workplace SH can be breached regularly by customers. However, like FHWs, LMs deem these breaches acceptable given the context surrounding them:

> "I suppose that depends (long pause) …I mean, I'm thinking of the context around it, like I mean it could be just banter… (long pause) …like I mean it depends on the way it was said…" (Hannah, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "So, I guess this is where context is important again. If the customer appears to be trying to make a joke with you or they're trying to be personal but they're not understanding,

it's not welcome. That would probably be considered less serious" (Irene, female, bar manager, nightclub).

"…what I'm saying here is that the low-level things (short pause), it's like…er…so a lot of it was just banter and you know…just a laugh. So (short pause) it's sort of the context in which this type of thing gets put over in…but other stuff like the higher stuff, I think that is when the line is crossed" (Scott, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Similarly, for LM interviews, tolerance levels are important, noting that these levels can differ depending on the situational context:

"So yes, there is a tolerance level; this can be different depending on context, for example, a guest asking for a date a few times could be OK, maybe if someone who looks like Tom Cruise asks you… (laughs)" (Karolina, female, hotel manager, global hotel group B).

Many LMs spoke of the customer as part of the context when deciding whether an episode of SH had occurred. Generally, they thought there was a need to tread carefully when addressing an allegation of CSH. Managers are very aware of the importance of the customer and consciously respond to it, even when they know it might not necessarily be the ethical thing to do. Comments below were not uncommon from LMs when making judgments about customer matters:

"So, er…I mean, I suppose that being in a management position, you are always making some kind of judgment call with people...ehh…you know, like guests and staff. But I think with guests, you are a little more conscious of the way you deal with it, as you don't want to do anything that may upset them at all" (Sarah, female, food and beverage manager, global hotel group A).

"I mean, for me, in the back of my mind, I'm also thinking about the consequences of how I'm dealing with a guest" (Caroline, female, hotel manager, global hotel group A).

> "…but as they are a customer, you still have to be careful how you deal with that kind of stuff" (Irene, female, bar manager, nightclub).

Managers explained that hospitality organisations set their stall on the customer experience, with managers tasked with doing everything within their control to ensure customers have a positive experience. As a result, they are keen to ensure customers are happy and satisfied, and this sense of customer power may affect how LMs deal with customers. This is particularly the case when dealing with allegations of negative customer misbehaviour. Caroline captured the view of all the managers by noting:

> "I think in hospitality in general, it's difficult. I think that it's the customers always right and that's the attitude of most people who work in the industry…" (Caroline, female, hotel manager, global hotel group A).

Moreover, within the area of contextual environments, data revealed that there were key drivers that accelerated and fuelled customer misbehaviour in general, but more notably, the CSH of customer-facing employees. Alcohol, perhaps unsurprisingly, was seen as a key driver:

> "And you know it's the drink, like when people have a bevvy, they just go nuts…like you witness and experience anything… I've witnessed a lot more aggressive behaviour by customers, including violence, and sexual harassment…" (Nathan, male, hospitality trade union representative).

> "Yeah, excessive alcohol is a common cause of a problem and is something that, if a customer or guest has had a few, it can kick off just like that, your bad behaviour, aggression and sexual harassment. It's an incredibly frequent problem across all industry sectors" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade representative).

Sebastian also considered that alcohol was a problem with customers misbehaving:

> "And together and in a bar or a night club where you have drinks and maybe drugs, and I don't know, I mean, think type of stuff can drive misbehaviour by customers. But as I say, I've not seen any sexual harassment in my time in hospitality" (Sebastian, male, hospitality industry representative).

The triggering effect of alcohol would often be further exacerbated when people were in social groups. For example, attending social events such as stag and hen parties, office parties, weddings, functions and when football matches are being played in the locality:

> "…groups of parties, in my opinion, can be the most difficult to deal with, particularly if they are drinking a lot" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "…most stag and hen dos, the people are out to have fun and a good time, so I think it's only drink that causes things to get out of hand… so for people who are at the party, I don't think that after a drink, they know where the line is" (Ellen, female, bar/table server, global budget hotel city).

However, Ellen also commented on the action the hotel takes when a guest has had too much to drink, while also noting that not all stag and hen groups get into a situation where they misbehave:

> "For us in the bar, well…we have had to refuse to serve people anymore as they are totally hammered…we've had plenty of stags and hens in the bar, and they have been no problem at all" (Ellen, female, bar/table server, global budget hotel city).

Meanwhile, football matches are often screened in hotels and bars/restaurants, which are occasions when misbehaviour is aggravated. Robert, working in a city budget hotel, reported that the hotel did good business from visiting football supporters. However, he thought that team rivalries were a problem and noted that, within the specific context of Glasgow, games between the two city clubs were events that made him more conscious of this when working on these occasions:

> "…when we have a football match going on….that's kind of my least favourite shift to work. I think it's the rivalries, particularly when the Old Firm are playing" (Robert, male, FLS budget hotel city).

Jackie, who used to work in a bar and now worked in a restaurant chain, commented on her previous job when football matches were screened in the bar and made comments about the alcohol intake of customers:

> "So, you'd get people buying two or three pints at a time, so they wouldn't need to keep coming back to the bar until half-time or at the end of the game (laughs). So, by the time the games finished, they're blooterred" (Jackie, female FLS restaurant chain WoS).

Additionally, frontline staff highlighted social functions, conferences/meetings and Christmas as times when the social occasion itself, coupled with excessive alcohol intake, provokes problematic behaviours from customers:

> "Aye…that would be conferences or meetings and that. I mean, sometimes you get that in the restaurant, but when someone is at events, I think they drink more…" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

Robert noted that the Christmas period was also a time when his stress level rose slightly. He believes many people get caught up in the atmosphere and drink more than they normally would:

> "…December was quite bad. A lot of people who don't often go out and drink suddenly go out and drink in December because it's work nights out... meeting up with friends and family ... groups of parties, in my opinion, can be the most difficult to deal with, particularly if they are drinking a lot" (Robert, male, night auditor, global budget hotel city).

Overall, alcohol, particularly when combined with social events, was identified by all FHWs as a driver of misbehaviour. This was also reported by all managers. On the question of alcohol, LMs stated that it was a cause of unruly behaviour, with the following comments being typical:

> "Yes, alcohol...it just gets people to go over the top…. It's just not cool for our staff and our other guests to see guests drunk…" (Millie, female, deputy hotel manager, global hotel group B).

> "So, it is mainly aggressive behaviour, the drink, as I say. So, it's stuff like being loud and shouting, swearing at people, anyone, not just our staff. And then sometimes this type of thing breaks out into scuffles" (Scott, male, events manager, hotel group C).

LMs also reported that the combination of alcohol and social events was a common trigger for misbehaviour:

> "…like there was one of our barmen who got a punch in the face, people were running around, and it was expected that it was kind of made out as a bit of a joke. They had drunk too much, as simple as that" (Sarah, female LM global hotel group A).

> "…when the Old Firm have European games on… the bar can get busy, and it's not unusual for people to drink too much when that type of stuff is on. That's when there is a greater chance of stuff kicking off, and it can get quite tense" (Diana, female, LM budget hotel group city).

Findings from workers and managers were abundantly clear about the positive relationship between excessive alcohol consumption at social events and customer misbehaviour. This behaviour can occur at all levels, with aggressive misbehaviour being a common problem, often every week. The findings concerning the combination of alcohol and the array of social events noted bring about a situational background in which customer misbehaviour flourishes. With this background in mind, the next section will highlight findings from interviewees which exemplify their personal experience of CSH.

6.3.4 Experiences of customer sexual harassment at the frontline

The research findings showed that four of the seventeen customer-facing participants interviewed had themselves been subjected to what they considered SH. As noted in Section 6.3.2, workers view customer misbehaviour and CSH on a hierarchical scale and often do not consider an incident SH. However, the four FHWs, two male and two female, believed they had been sexually harassed because a red line had been crossed. These incidents were interpreted as SH because the participants considered there was a level of threat, and the attention was unwanted to a significant degree.

Robert, who works night shifts in the budget hotel chain, reported an incident in which he was sexually harassed by a male guest in a hotel corridor. He considered that his sexual identity may have been a reason for the incident:

> "…Yeah, there was a guy that was just 18, or so a couple of weeks ago, who harassed me…(long pause)…you know, I'm gay, so I think that may play a part in things and (medium pause)…I was in the corridor, and this guy had just come up, taunting me, coming out with comments of a sexual nature….that stuff…" (Robert, male, night auditor, global budget hotel city).

Maddie recounted how she had been subjected to an incident of SH by a customer, who claimed that pulling her towards him by the hip was a way of gaining her attention:

> "A middle-aged guy started trying it on with me when I was serving the table, next to where he was sitting. He grabbed me around the hips with his arm…like pulling me towards him...said he wanted to get my attention…" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant city).

Nightclub worker Adam brought to attention two occasions when he had been sexually harassed by customers, stating that these incidents occurred during parties of social groups who were in the venue:

> "I've had women put their hands up my shirt and had my arse grabbed…so when that type of thing has happened, it was when birthday parties and hens were happening. And, I also had my arse felt when there was a group of men in, like it was clear that they were gay…but that type of stuff happens every week, not just to me but the lassies and other guys here" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

In relation to the above comment, Adam reflected on how it increased his awareness of customer misbehaviour:

"…but you know, I'm ready for it from anyone if I think they are (short pause) …I mean, you learn to recognise times when you say to yourself, aye OK, I need to be on the lookout here for stupid bastards" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

Adams's coworker at the nightclub, Yvonne, similarly commented that SH by customers was a regular occurrence and that the number of incidents was increasing:

> "I've had people pawing me and making comments about my looks and body, asking for my phone number ...but definitely I've had like personal experience with like sexual harassment from customers…it's either it's, you know, sexual harassment is comments, or it's, you know, try to get your number or whatever…I think it's definitely becoming more of a problem…like it's noticeable that incidents are getting much closer together" (Yvonne, female, bar worker, nightclub).

The reports put forward by Robert, Maddie, Adam, and Yvonne stated that the incidents they referred to were unwanted, clearly unacceptable, and that a boundary of risk and threat had been breached by the customer. Robert's experience could be considered an intersection of factors, as his sexual identity was a possible cause of attention from a male guest. Adam also commented on the sexual identity of the guest who sexually harassed him, which made him feel he was the victim because he was male. Adam told of CSH occurring week in and week out. Yvonne, a coworker of Adam, also reported regular SH from customers and affirmed what Adam says about the regularity of the problem, one that she sees as getting steadily worse. Meanwhile, bar/restaurant worker Maddie's experience seemed to reinforce the notion of customer "sovereignty". The perpetrator was a middle-aged male, twice Maddie's age, who thought it was OK to grab her attention to serve his own purposes of being served. Here is an example of intersections being in play, in this case, one of age differences, along with a further example of the perception of power the customer is exercising. These examples of CSH by the participants were expressed in a way that made it clear they were unhappy about them, and that the incidents were unwanted and crossed the personal boundary of each worker. However, these episodes were also put forward in a matter-of-fact manner, which seemed to be a form of acceptance that this is just the way the job is; this manner was also a feature of LM's experiences.

In essence, it is once again a matter of personal judgment about how someone may interpret customer comments or actions, which plays a significant part in an individual's decision-making around a customer incident. Karolina's comments were typical of LM participants:

> "…so, what I would consider as being er…sounding as though they are, let me say over friendly for a guest, and on the odd time being asked out, but I was a lot younger then (laughs). But I never took this type of thing as being a form of sexual harassment. I

mean, I never felt scared or worried about that type of thing" (Karolina, female, hotel manager, global hotel group B).

Within this context, it is noteworthy that when asked whether they had been subjected to CSH, several LMs answered affirmatively. Five out of the thirteen managers confirmed that they had been victims of this form of harassment, with all five being female. Chloe, Caroline, Diana, Alice, and Irene commented:

> "Not while I've been working with this company, but yes, I have, in my younger days...not just me but most of the women who worked in the place I was at the time. But I'm more experienced now and can handle guests better; you learn to see the signs and sort it out before it goes over the line. So, I just learned how to spot it and keep a distance, and if anyone did or said anything that I felt had crossed the line, I'd tell them to back off in no uncertain terms. I think a well-aimed fuck off to someone in a tone of voice that means it is recognised as a global language to show what you think" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotel/restaurants WoS).

Chloe has worked in hospitality for over eighteen years, and her experience in the sector has helped her develop a personal strategy for dealing with abusive customers. She did not indicate that she had received training during her career on how to deal with customer misbehaviour; rather, experience, self-learning and an assertive approach give her the confidence to fend off unwanted attention. Meanwhile, Caroline commented:

> "… It was a few years ago, and someone was inappropriate to me. You were always taught that you're never rude to a guest, but when it goes too far, like you don't say no, you don't do this. So, it was always kind of trying to reassure that person while being politely dismissing them" (Caroline, female, hotel manager, global hotel group A).

Like Chloe, Caroline had over a dozen years of experience in hospitality, which has shaped her approach to dealing with difficult customers. Aware of dealing with a paying customer and the need to maintain her composure, she dismisses incidents in a firm but polite and professional manner.

The correct handling of incidents was also on the mind of another LM:

> "But I had the woman who really hit on me, not just verbally, but with her hands and that just crosses a line for me. So, I just told her to go get stuffed, politely; she was still a guest and blooterred at that (laughs) as she was gross (laughs), but it's all just banter to me" (Diana, female, bar manager, global budget hotel city).

For Diana, laughing off incidents as a coping strategy seems to be the most effective way of dealing with customer harassment. Like Caroline, she is conscious of handling matters in a polite but firm manner and, with over eight years of hospitality experience, feels this is the most appropriate way for her to manage these situations. Irene also commented on dealing with difficult situations:

> "I've had my fair share of experiences of difficulty with customers or something unpleasant, including sexual harassment…it's like banter has gone beyond a joke" (Irene, female, bar manager, nightclub).

Irene, having worked in nightclubs for over eight years, indicates that she has had multiple experiences throughout her career. She suggests that customers often make jokey comments with a sexual connotation, which, in the environmental context, are classed as banter. However, she notes that, at some point, the joke crosses a line and becomes an unpleasant experience for the worker. For Alice, twenty-five years of working in the hospitality industry have also included numerous incidents of being sexually harassed by customers:

> "So, I've experienced sexual harassment quite a lot during my jobs in hospitality, just people crossing that line. For example, I worked in a place and at the time, I remember I'd had, and it was older men, and they were in at the bar, and they'd just been at it with their comments and innuendo. And eventually I turned and said fuck off, just go out of the bar because I'm fed up with you. And I remember one of the managers came over, and he was saying you can't speak to people like that" (Alice, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

Interestingly, Alice also suggested that, since she had been in a managerial position, incidents of SH had decreased, though they still occurred. She wondered whether this was due to her

being in a more authoritative position in the business or whether aesthetics played a part in the fact that she now wears suits:

> "Perhaps not as much when I got into a manager's job, but I'd say it was like half as much. I don't know if it's a perception of my authority that customers or guests may have, like title, or if I'm wearing a suit or something, I'm not sure" (Alice, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

LMs who had been victims of CSH were asked if they had reported the incident to their own LMs when these incidents had happened. Apart from Alice, none of the managers said they had reported any of the episodes that they had been involved in. Alice commented further on the incident in which she pushed back at the customer:

> "The manager took it to HR, and HR were saying it was a case of you can't speak to people like that, no matter what they're doing. And people speaking to you like that is part of the job. And it's like, no, it's not. So, what's the point in reporting it up the way?" (Alice, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

There are some underlying points in the comments that Alice makes, including the exasperation of working in a customer-hostile environment and the feeling of needing to address this herself. Her LM was ambivalent about the situation and, in effect, did not back her up. The comments made by HR about how she dealt with the situation made Alice feel unsupported and believed HR do not understand what it is like working at the frontline. This situation is clearly indicative of the attitude of why bother reporting an incident anyway, as it seems the customer can do anything they want with impunity, highlighting the notion of customer "sovereignty". Similarly, concerns about the way managers might handle an incident of CSH led Chloe and Diana to refrain from reporting to their LMs. In a similar vein, Chloe and Irene highlighted how their peers handled such matters, leading them to feel little confidence that line management could address the problem:

> "So, we just kind of laughed it off as if we said anything to the managers, they'd just shrug their shoulders as if, well, this is how it is. So, we all just accepted it and got on with it. So, I think the challenge is just to get managers to care enough about it" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotel/restaurants WoS).

> "…well, as for reporting these to my manager, I'd have to say no. As they'd just say, I'm a manager myself, so just deal with it how you see fit, and we'll back you up. So maybe they are passing the buck on that, but that's how I think it would play out" (Irene, female, bar manager, nightclub).

The case highlighted by Diana below further illustrates how an incident can be processed in the minds of those subjected to an episode of SH by a customer, and the personal judgments individuals make about their interpretation of SH. Additionally, Diana notes a possible dilemma when no witnesses to an incident are available, in which she seems to question the worth of reporting higher up the line:

> "I mean, I never felt threatened by it, maybe not, I don't see it as harassment, and there's no point in reporting it to anyone, as it wasn't threatening to me, and it's my word against a guest. So, I just told others to keep an eye on her" (Diana, female, bar manager, global budget hotel city).

Regarding a CSH episode noted by Caroline, she had confidence in the way she handled the incident. Interestingly, lurking in the back of her mind was a sense of the power of the customer. She acknowledged that she had been brought up in the hospitality industry with the mindset of not being insulting towards a guest. However, the episode she was involved in, in her own interpretation of the event, had crossed a line for her:

Commenting further, Caroline said:

> "…but I was happy about the way I dealt with and contained it, and that was it, end of" (Caroline, female, hotel manager, global hotel group A).

For Caroline, the way she self-managed the matter was enough to ensure that the customer was sufficiently chastised and that she had been professional with the customer in dealing with the matter. And, in that sense, that was enough for her to close the incident off in her own mind.

However, for Alice, the closure of incidents of SH by customers was not something that could be forgotten about:

> "Speaking from personal experience, no. The fact that I can remember loads of times, and I've not forgotten about them, and I've not moved on, that maybe indicates that there's no closure. I mean, it's not as if I think about them every single day, I don't. But the fact that I can remember these things happening gives me cause to think that you don't get any real closure" (Alice, female, LM bar/restaurant chain city).

Participants, FHWs and LMs alike, who confirmed they had been subjected to SH by customers, were clear that what they experienced was indeed SH. These episodes were overt, uninhibited and conscious acts by the perpetrators, and tended to be spontaneous, meaning there was an element of surprise for the victims. In the episodes of CSH that the nine victims discussed, the consideration was that a line had been breached. Participants often raised feelings of concern, risk or threat, and if the individual believes that a threshold has been crossed, they are more likely to consider an incident as SH. Conversely, if no sense of threat, risk or harm is perceived by an individual, their judgement would likely be one of acceptance of a normal working environment.

6.3.5 Customer sexual harassment – report or not report?

This section will consider data from participants, in which a common aspect emerging from research data was the non-reporting of CSH. A sense of threat or risk can determine if a person feels that a line has been crossed, and they will decide in their own mind what action to take if this happens. However, even if an individual considers they have been subjected to SH, they will often not report the incident to line management. So, the question in the mind of someone who has been subjected to CSH is to report or not report? The research findings suggested that LMs lacked interest in dealing with reports of CSH, resulting in workers not bothering to report such incidents. For example, Tom mentioned a problem to an LM when a customer was pestering him. The manager's response was to inform Tom to steer clear of the guest. He also added that non-reporting was common in the hotel where he worked:

> "… I told my manager, and she said, "Don't bother yourself about it, the event will be finishing soon, just stay clear of her as much as you can" I mean, why bother, like there's not much point in reporting anything… I mean, none of us wants to get into trouble. I know just from speaking with my colleagues that they don't report stuff because nothing will happen" (Tom, male, table server, 5-star hotel).

Yvonne similarly highlighted the reasons she didn't report incidents:

> "…no point in telling management, they're not going to do anything. It's again. It's one of those things that you just like to deal with. You just have to (short pause) you're supposed to deal with it. But I don't think you should, but yeah" (Yvonne, bar worker, nightclub).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Bailey and Caoimhe, who thought a lack of confidence in line management doing anything; however, they both placed a caveat on reporting in that it would depend on the seriousness of the incident:

> "Anyway, I think the manager will just tell us that we should just suck it up, I suppose. (short pause). To be honest, I suppose I don't really know what they could do…I mean, I think me [sic] and my colleagues and I just get on with it and don't see any point in telling managers…" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "No, it's just how it is. I don't bother reporting that to anyone, and they get that just the same; it's not worth bothering with." (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

Hotel worker Robert commented about a work colleague who had been sexually harassed by a customer and brought up the issue of race, which raised an intersectionality concern:

> "…one of my colleagues was…. (medium pause) well, he wouldn't want to report stuff to a white manager because he felt he didn't feel supported" (Robert, male, night auditor, global budget hotel city).

Robert worked the night shift and was one of four frontline participants in the research who confirmed that he had been sexually harassed by a guest. He was asked whether he had reported the incident to his LM, and he confirmed that he had and had followed the company procedure for incident reporting. The hotel where he worked does not have night shift managers due to budget restrictions, but a manager was on call. In this instance, the company procedure was to record incidents of concern about a guest in a digital handover file, which can be viewed by all

staff and management. These concerns include customer rudeness, drunkenness, or worrying behaviour towards other guests or staff. Robert recorded the incident in question, which was duly recorded as per procedure, after which the hotel manager arranged to speak with Robert. At this meeting, he was asked to explain what had happened, and once he had, he was then asked what he had done to provoke the guest to act. Being asked this question by the manager had a demoralising effect on him:

> "So, she asked me to explain the incident, which I did, then went on to ask if I did anything to provoke it. Like I mean, that's just deflating and to be honest, it's not worth reporting anything when you get a question like that... (short pause) … she just didn't get it. Like, (short pause) like I know it's my word against the guest, but I'd like to think that I can be trusted to tell the truth, so I asked myself, why bother reporting stuff?" (Robert, male, night auditor, global budget hotel city).

Robert was clearly wondering about the value of reporting an incident to management, and there was a strong sense of exasperation on his part as his trustworthiness was being questioned. Two other participants, nightclub workers Adam and Yvonne, who stated that they had been sexually harassed by customers, were asked if they had reported the incidents to line management. Like many workers, Adam considered the seriousness of an incident before letting line management know:

> "Well, (short pause) …no, not really 'cos it's just the usual stuff. But, if something serious happens, you know, like if someone physically, you know, really grabs you, then I'd get security or the manager…well, both really and then usually the customer is hoofed out" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

Yvonne was more critical of line management, commenting that it would be the nightclub security who would deal with the issue rather than management. This chimed with Adam's comment about security being involved:

> "But reporting it to management just didn't do anything. There was no kind of process or procedure to deal with those kinds of issues. It was mainly just, you know, reported to the bouncer, and they dealt with that then and there, and that was it, the customer was kicked out" (Yvonne, female, bar worker, nightclub).

Adam and Yvonne gave the impression that the nightclub management was laissez-faire in dealing with customer abuse of workers. If any employee informed management of a customer's SH incident or any element of threatening behaviour, the club security personnel would be called over, often by the worker themselves. Generally, the customer was either asked to leave or would be removed from the premises.

It was clear from both nightclub workers interviewed that the nightclub was a very busy environment, with workers and managers stretched. LMs appeared to be happy to delegate decision-making on customer misbehaviour to customer-facing staff and security. At best, this could be seen as managers empowering workers, and at worst, as abdicating responsibility for dealing with customer misbehaviour. However, the overall outcomes could be seen as dealing with problematic customer misbehaviour efficiently and may suit the nightclub working environment. However, for Yvonne, whilst some form of closure is gained from this kind of response, it tends to be short-term in nature:

> "I think, and it might just be like a personal thing, but I think that having that person removed is often a form of closure, and just because it's, it's simply stopping it. And there's a recognition from, you know, because usually when you're removing somebody, somebody else must get involved, whether that's another member of staff, management or a bouncer. So having that recognised by somebody else is like a form of closure. Like, yeah, it's a very immediate sort of short fire closure. But then, you know, it just happens again the next week to me or somebody else…" (Yvonne, female, bar worker, nightclub).

The fourth participant, Maddie, who was grabbed around the hip by a customer, was asked whether she had reported the incident to LMs. She explained what had happened and said she was fortunate that her manager was close by and had witnessed the incident:

> "I pulled away from him, and he could see I was raging. He tried to laugh it off, but I wasn't having any of it. Fortunately, one of the managers saw what happened and went over to tell the fella he was out of order to do that. The guy just paid his bill and left with the others he was with" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

Asked whether she would have reported the incident if the LM hadn't witnessed the episode, she said she would have done so because the episode had made her angry about what had happened. Likewise, she believed the manager would have dealt with it and that the outcome would be the same:

> "Yeah, er...So, I think I would have said something to my manager because of how the customer made me feel, like I was raging and what he did was bang out of order, so yes, I would have told the boss, as I think they would have sorted it like they did anyway" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

Maddie was asked why she had not informed her LM of the SH incident she had been subjected to, and she noted:

> "So, like, I'd only been there a couple of months when this happened, so ... (short pause) it's like I didn't want any trouble if you know what I mean" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

There is a sense here that the managerial hierarchy may have been involved in Maddie's decision-making, along with management trust. Management trust was also a concern for other participants when deciding whether to report incidents to line management. For example, Kayleigh noted this issue of trust:

> "…how would a manager know if a staff member had been sexually harassed by a customer? It's my word against the customers, and I know who the boss wouldn't want to rock the boat with the customer (laughs)" (Kayleigh, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

Dave similarly commented on an incident he witnessed when a colleague informed their LM about an episode of SH by a customer who had been making sexual comments:

> "But yeah, at the time she was, she was annoyed that the guest trusted, but she was even more annoyed at management because from what we've seen, it seemed as though they were just sort of siding with the guest and not trusting what was said by my colleague.

> I reckon it was just a case of them, like trying to prevent a guest from complaining" (Dave, male, waiter, UK-wide hotel group).

These comments evoke the concept of power relations and the power a customer can wield in the relationship between the customer, the service worker, and the LM. Furthermore, they raise the dilemma of keeping the customer happy whilst also highlighting the issues of proof and trust between the FHW and the LM. Of the four FHWs who confirmed that they had been subjected to SH by a customer (Robert, Maddie, Yvonne and Adam), only Robert reported the incident to his LM. The resulting action from the episode was one of indifference, leaving Robert to feel that it was not worthwhile reporting.

LMs, Chloe, Caroline, Alice, Diana and Irene, who had also been victims of CSH, were asked whether they had reported the incident to their own LMs at the time. Apart from Alice, none of them said they had reported any of the episodes they had been involved in to their managers. A lack of confidence in how their managers might handle an incident of CSH was the reason for non-reporting. Chloe and Irene were informed about how she and her peers handled such matters and expressed little confidence that management would address the problem:

> "So, we just kind of laughed it off as if we said anything to the managers, they'd just shrug their shoulders as if, well, this is how it is. So, we all just accepted it and got on with it. So, I think the challenge is just to get managers to care enough about it" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotel/restaurants WoS).

> "…well, as for reporting these to my manager, I'd have to say no. As they'd just say, I'm a manager myself, so just deal with it how you see fit, and we'll back you up. So maybe they are passing the buck on that, but that's how I think it would play out" (Irene, female, bar manager, nightclub).

Meanwhile, Alice's comments about how her LM and HR handled the situation (see Section 6.3.4) left her feeling unsupported and with the sense that HR do not understand what it is like in a customer-facing position. Furthermore, the disinterest shown in the fact that she was sexually harassed has led to Alice's trust in line management and HRPs being somewhat eroded.

HRPs involved in this research were asked about their knowledge of CSH of FHWs and LMs. Sally and Abigail, who both work at the same 5-star hotel, commented:

> "So, I've never had a manager or any employee who has contacted me to complain about being sexually harassed by a guest, and I've not heard of this in my time in hospitality" (Abigail, female, internal HR, 5-star hotel group).

> "… No, I'm not aware of anything; no managers have mentioned this type of thing at all from guests since I've been in this company" (Sally, female, internal HR, 5-star hotel group).

Both Abigail and Sally were very clear that they were unaware of CSH and gave no indication of any concerns about it. Other interviewees were a little more pragmatic about the phenomenon:

> "I'm sure stuff goes on that I'm not aware of, or even that managers are not aware of. I think anything with guests can be a bit of a challenge for the staff and managers in here" (Felicity, female, internal HR manager, global hotel group C).

> "So, in the hotels in my cluster, I certainly have not come across CSH…but that's not to say it's not happening, it's just that we don't get wind of it. But I think that I'd only get to know if something serious had happened" (Harvey, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group A).

Interestingly, Harvey raises the point about the seriousness of an incident, which aligns with viewing CSH through hierarchical lenses. This suggests that HRPs themselves may view the phenomenon in this way. Additionally, practitioners acknowledged that they may not necessarily be aware of CSH. This could reflect the point that LMs deal with incidents as they see fit and feel that whatever incident has occurred has been closed and dealt with accordingly, seeing this as part of their HR duties. Therefore, they would not necessarily inform HR of incidents. HRP Sean offers his thoughts on this:

> "Well, I think this type of thing would be dealt with by the manager, or I'd expect to be dealt with by the manager. So, I think that managers just deal with this type of thing

> and believe they've closed it, and that's maybe why we in HR don't get wind of stuff if it goes on" (Sean, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group B).

It was clear from internal HRPs that they were unaware of CSH, as nothing was communicated to them, particularly when LMs believed an incident had been fully dealt with. Meanwhile, external HR service providers were also asked if they had any experience of being involved with a hospitality client in the matter of CSH of an FHW. Five out of the six had not been involved with a client with this type of incident. For example, one of the five noted:

> "None of my hospitality clients has ever mentioned any issues about customer misbehaviour or CSH. They (short pause), it wouldn't surprise me, you know, if they may think it's just, you know, you get awkward customers, and if misbehaviour happens, it's just a customer being upset about service or something" (Esh, male, external HR services provider).

However, one external HR participant, Katie, had experience with one, and it is worth considering this case in a little more depth.

The case of CSH and unwanted attention

In this instance, a client of Katie's, the owner/director of a large, well-renowned upmarket restaurant, contacted Katie and informed her that one of her FHWs had brought to her attention a problem with a customer. The worker had told her LM in the restaurant that she was having repeated problems with a regular customer, someone who was a well-known local celebrity, and one who visited the restaurant two to three times a week. Katie commented:

> "…there are, I think, three managers on site, but whoever she spoke to just told her to contact HR, and they'll sort it out. But I think in this case, because a customer was involved, I just think the manager she spoke with didn't know how to deal with it and batted it over to HR" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

This evidence indicates the difficulty and lack of confidence that LMs may have in dealing with anything other than routine situations, as the manager grapples with how to address the situation with the customer. In the end, it was left to the worker to contact Katie and explain

the problem. Following this, Katie contacted the owner/director to inform them of the employee's call and to request permission from her to investigate the matter. As she noted:

> "I spoke with the manager, and she pretty much said that to me word for word, like "I didn't know what to do as it was a customer, so I thought it best to suggest it went to HR." There or thereabouts. I don't think it helped because the customer was a regular and a well-known local celebrity" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

Katie continued:

> "After repeated problems with the customer over a long period, eventually the worker, a young restaurant girl, made a complaint that he (the customer) was treating her, in her mind, not the way that she wanted to be treated. She had tried to tell him, but I think you know, yes, she was young. The thing with this case was that for the director of the business, it was kind of awkward, as this customer was very well known" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

In this instance, LMs had difficulty with this type of situation, and there was a lack of policy and/or procedure for dealing with it. Rather than address the workers' complaint, they took refuge in passing the buck to HR. One concern emerging from customer-facing workers' research data was that they often felt they would not be believed by LMs in cases of one-on-one SH. Generally, this was due to it being the worker's word against a well-known celebrity and the power relations this created. On being asked whether she thought the owner/director initially believed the employee, Katie said:

> "I guess there was a bit of that (short pause), but I often wonder in cases of workplace sexual harassment that managers or owners perhaps think that first because they don't know how to deal with it and maybe struggle with how to have the awkward conversation" (Katie, female, external, HR services provider).

Katie's comment above reinforces the consideration that managers at no matter what level struggle with CSH. Katie further explained the difficulty of confidentiality in SME's and the fact that "stuff" gets around, which can potentially create a problem of credibility for a business:

> "I mean, in an SME, if anything like sexual harassment occurs, no matter how much you inform those involved that all discussions are private and confidential, stuff gets out. I mean, if you are working in an SME and someone is, for example, suspended pending investigations, then it can be difficult to keep that from getting out, as people will ask where so and so is. In the case of the restaurant, I know that the employee who was receiving unwanted attention had discussed this with her work colleagues before ever mentioning this to us as HR or the employer. I mean, it was we who told the employer of the problem after speaking with the employee" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

The concern that Katie raises here is one of confidentiality, and it was clear that the owner/director was concerned about the reputation of her business. Katie was aware that reputational damage to the business would occur if she needed to take some kind of action against the customer. She had to point out to the owner/director the other aspects of reputational damage that would remain unaddressed:

> "It took some persuasion with the employer on my part. The director was the owner and was concerned about the reputation. And I said to her, what about reputation? If it goes the other way? Anyway, the outcome of this was that she understood why the employee was complaining and had a word with the customer, who now doesn't go into the restaurant anymore. And yes, this has probably cost the business £200 plus revenue per week; it could have cost more in terms of cash and reputation if the employee had taken the business to an employment tribunal for constructive dismissal" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

This case exhibits several hallmarks of CSH identified in this research. For example, reporting. It took some time for the FHW to complain to her LM about the issue. What followed was perfunctory concern from the manager, who preferred to pass the problem on to the HRP. Interestingly, in this case, the LM did not report the complaint to the owner/director. The manager's capability to address complaints of CSH is also brought into question. Then there is the matter of perceived customer power, with the LM struggling to determine how best to deal with the customer, particularly as the person was a local celebrity. This could have been exaggerated somewhat, as the customer visited several times a week, so the consistency of

revenue could also be a matter of concern. However, a telling point was made by Katie about employee well-being in this case:

> "But you know, it was me who had to inform the manager and owner/director of the duty of care towards the well-being of the employee, and if they don't do that, it puts the business at real risk, that's what put the heebie-jeebies up them. It's like I'd better act, as it could cost me a lot of money, and I say, yes, it could, but what about the well-being of your workers? It's your responsibility. But in my experience, businesses, not just hospitality businesses, but in general, only think about well-being and act if they think it's going to hit their wallet" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

Duty of care and well-being of employees were rarely mentioned across all participant interviews. On the odd occasion, it was mentioned by LMs and HRPs (internal and external), it was the concern of risk and reputation towards the organisation rather than that of empathy and understanding of the employee. And, as Katie's example shows, it's only when it is considered as a potential cost to the business, whether reputational or financial, that people sit up and take notice. Therefore, action by management appears to be mainly reactive, with indifferent concern towards the employee, most certainly in Katie's example of her involvement in this episode of CSH.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter examined CSH (CSH) at the hospitality frontline. FHWs and LMs reported strong motivation and job satisfaction, but also high work intensity driven by the sector's commitment to exceptional customer service. The chapter outlined the spectrum of customer misbehaviour—from discourtesy and condescension to verbal abuse, aggression and SH. Workers commonly viewed such behaviour as an inherent aspect of service work, with tolerance increasing through experience. Alcohol was consistently identified as a major trigger of customer misconduct. A strong sense of customer "sovereignty" left both workers and managers feeling powerless, helping to explain the widespread and persistent nature of customer misbehaviour across venues. The findings showed that customer-facing workers were often unclear about the employer's definition of SH, while LMs reported greater confidence in their understanding.

Beyond overt behaviours, assessments of CSH were highly subjective, with workers and managers frequently interpreting the same incident differently. In addition, judgements of incidents were also shaped by contextual factors, leading many participants to respond with "it depends." Social occasions such as conferences, hen and stag parties, office events and Christmas functions were consistently identified as environments that can escalate customer misbehaviour and increase the likelihood of SH.

Moreover, findings showed that FHWs rarely reported incidents, largely because many believed LMs would minimise the behaviour or prioritise appeasing the customer. As a result, participants expressed limited confidence in managers' willingness or ability to act, leading them to remain silent. This was illustrated by two workers who did report CSH but were met with managerial and organisational ambivalence. The evidence further indicates that power dynamics within the service triad influence whether workers feel able to report incidents. LMs face similar pressures, having to balance customer satisfaction with their responsibility to support employees and uphold their duty of care.

Chapter 7.0 Organisational structures - skills gaps, assumptions and perfunctory concern

This chapter considers the findings around the challenges of addressing CSH. It also highlights comments around the employee organisational support structures of policies/procedures, and training concerning workplace SH, including CSH. Furthermore, it will consider findings arising from the triadic relationship between customer-facing service workers, LMs and HRPs and how these impact addressing CSH. The final section of the chapter provides insight from the data about the well-being of workers who are subjected to customer misbehaviour, including SH by customers.

7.1 Unfounded assumptions

As highlighted in Section 6.3.1, FHWs lacked clarity of their employer's definition of the elements that came under the banner of SH, apart from, of course, what can be considered as the obvious, for example, clear sexual assault. They were asked whether they recalled the definition coming up as part of their induction into their job. Restaurant workers Gary and Tess had some sense of awareness of their company's definition:

> "They have this on the online e- training course. You just watched videos and answered questions on it. Umm, and they had sexual harassment, workplace guidelines" (Gary, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "… I've seen it in the policies and procedures section on our intranet; I was thinking there as to where I had seen it" (Tess, female, receptionist, global budget hotel).

However, it appeared to be a different case at the employer where Chloe and Dee worked. Both noted that generally, they were aware of the definition of SH, but this acquaintance came through at school and university. However, they were unsure what their employer's definition was, but assumed it was the same or similar. They explained:

> "I don't know what the hotel says, but I can tell you what I've picked up at school and Uni" (Dee, female, table server, hotel/restaurant WoS).

> "Not for sure, but when I went to Uni, I was told about it, and at school as well, so it was the law, so I guess that's what the hotel would say about it" (Emma, female, table server, hotel/restaurant WoS).

Adam suggested that in the absence of any company direction, an employee would make their own mind up as to defining SH:

> "I've never seen any definition in any place I've worked. So, I'm guessing here when I say that it's when someone starts to grope or grab you and stuff their hands in your shirt or jeans" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

These comments may go some way towards understanding why there appears to be a lack of clarity for FHWs around their employer's definition of SH. New worker inductions appear to be hit and miss in terms of understanding corporate policies, procedures and definitions of SH. Evidence from workers indicated that new employees have little time to understand their employer's policies and procedures. This is often due to the haste and common experience of being engaged at the frontline immediately on starting work, which was often likened to being dropped in at the deep end:

> "So, I was told that we had some videos to watch, but like I say, I was dropped in at the deep end, so, with one thing and another, I haven't really looked at them" (Dee, female table server, hotel/restaurant WoS).

> "So, like when I first started, it was all a bit of a rush. The manager and assistant manager told me to just tag along with them and watch what they did. They said I could do the online training when I had the time" (Keira, female, bar/restaurant chain city).

Comments like these were typical of interviews, and it was apparent that inductions focused more on the practicalities of getting people up to speed on frontline work than on the nuances of policies and procedures. However, statements from LMs and internal HR seem to be at odds with what emerged from service worker data. To explore the phenomenon of CSH, LMs were first asked to describe their understanding of their employers' definition of CSH. Chloe, the manager in the hotel in which FHWs Dee and Tess worked, suggested the definition was clear:

> "…so, the group definition will be the one that most companies have, and I'm pretty sure it is on the group intranet in the policies and procedures. I think it comes under bullying and harassment, and all staff will know about that" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotels/restaurants WoS).

Similarly, Hannah, who is the manager of the venue that Bailey and Keira worked at, commented:

> "…we have this in the HR system, and it comes under the bullying and harassment policy, and all staff will know where this is. I don't know it word for word off the top of my head, but it's things like people not touching you are saying explicit sexual things, you know, stuff like that" (Hannah, female, restaurant manager, bar restaurant chain city).

Generally, the evidence suggests that LMs were familiar with the corporate definition of SH and expressed confidence in this. However, there was one exception, Derek, who worked in the nightclub, did not know of his employer's definition or where to find it. He did, though, offer his own definition of SH:

> "To be honest, I don't know if the business has a definition, and I don't know where something like that would be kept. But for me, I'd just say that sexual harassment is when a guy starts groping someone, and it doesn't matter if it's a male or female who is groped" (Derek, male, bar manager, nightclub).

Derek's comment implies that his employer may not necessarily have any definition, and in the absence of direction, he will just go by what he considers it to be. All other managers interviewed considered that they were aware of the elements that constituted workplace SH and where these could be found. In effect, the evidence indicates that LMs assume that FHWs will, in theory, know the corporate definition of SH. Furthermore, they considered that workers read the policies and procedures when first starting their employment. Consequently, managerial assumptions that employees are aware of what constitutes SH appear misplaced, being at odds with employee data.

Internal HRPs were also asked the question concerning the company's definition of SH and how employees are imparted this knowledge. Common responses were:

> "...sexual harassment comes under our policy on bullying and harassment. So all our employees have access to this on our intranet" (Abigail, female HR internal, 5-star hotel group).

> "Sexual harassment is in the company policy under bullying and discrimination, and all employees who start with us get a handbook with at least the main company policies and discrimination and bullying are in that" (Sean, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group B).

> "There's a specific section on sexual harassment...like, under sexual harassment, in the policies, so I'd expect all employees to know about this…" (Harvey, male internal HR manager, global hotel group A).

Internal HRPs were very clear in their opinions that all employees will have knowledge of the definition of SH and that they will know where to find these, as they are available via a handbook or the intranet, which employees have access to. Like LMs, this assumption that service workers read and fully understand the policies and procedures differs from the data from the workers themselves. Therefore, there appear to be unfounded assumptions by line management and HRPs that workers understand the corporate definition of SH and what to do if they experience it. It seems here that the challenge for LMs and HRPs is to advance knowledge of corporate definitions of SH into the consciousness of the FHWs.

7.2 Skills gaps

Recognising the point about FHWs lacking understanding of CSH, and managers' hesitancy in addressing it, the trade union representatives interviewed advocated the need for greater awareness and training for frontline staff and managers alike:

> "…workers need to be trained in this stuff, and it's huge for the union to get management on board with this and get them to spend money on training workers in dealing with abusive customers. But to be honest, I don't think the managers are

> trained, so what chance do the working staff… training is so far down their list of priorities, if it's a priority at all" (Nick, male, hospitality trade union representative).
>
> "You have young women, vulnerable adults who are faced with physical and sexual abuse every single day, like, you know, on a spectrum from someone coming in and going, oh, sweetheart, give us a smile, love or baby or darling, or, you know, worse, much worse than that. And you know, they've hardly had an ounce of training on how to spot or deal with this abuse...serving and service standards, yes, abuse no" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

These comments highlight a skills gap for FHWs and LMs in spotting, handling and addressing customer abuse. This is particularly so when confronting the phenomenon of SH by customers. As Bobby further noted:

> "So, you need to put training in place for managers, and you know, security to make sure that you have done everything you can to prevent third-party harassment… There are managers, and there are even entire companies that do get sexual harassment, and they've got good policies, but whether they're trained and implemented is a different story. Like they are the bystanders, they are the people who are supposed to do something about sexual harassment. They, either don't know what to do, they genuinely don't know how to intervene in those situations because they haven't been trained or they act in a way that worsens the situation… managers are both ill equipped in terms of training, but also just mentally and physically exhausted in their role and have lost a lot of the empathy that they should have. Yes, I get that all hospitality businesses are up against the wall when it comes to costs and finances, but this stuff should be part of a worker's and manager's basic training" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

There is no doubt among hospitality trade union representatives that FHWs and LMs are ill-equipped to deal with abusive customers, which they see as a challenge for the hospitality industry and urge employers to address. To understand how customer-facing staff serve and deal with difficult customers, participants were asked about the training they received from their organisations. Hotel workers commented that much of their training was mainly around customer service standards, with other training around areas of compliance. Often, training was through online modules and on-the-job coaching from buddies or team leaders/LMs. When

asked about their customer service training and how they were trained in dealing with customers who are difficult or misbehave, frontline hotel workers Tom and Izzy commented:

> "…so I did the videos online the week before I started, it was stuff on standards of service, and safety things, like food hygiene and fire safety…so like since then, I like had a buddy who just helped me along and showed me what to do on the job, and I learned stuff that way, like what to say and do with awkward customers…" (Izzy, female, bar/table server, global budget hotel city).

> "...when I first started, the manager and assistant manager in my training told me what to do if I had a customer who was being awkward. Like, they told me not to argue back at a customer and if they were being stroppy, just to tell them that you'll go and get a manager" (Keira, female, table server, restaurant chain WoS).

These experiences were typical of the findings from those who worked in hotels and bars/restaurants. Referring difficult situations with customers up the line to someone in a supervisory or LM position was a frequent comment by FHWs. Viewing online video training and reading policies and procedures via the company intranet was also a common feature arising from worker data. But, for most workers, little, if anything, is highlighted in these training and reading activities that provides information about how to deal with customer misbehaviour, abuse or CSH. The following responses from the worker participant group:

> "I did read the policies and procedures when I first started, but I can't remember anything about customer misbehaviour. Er…like there is stuff on there about standards of customer service we have to give, but…I can't think of anything about bad customers" (Kayleigh, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "I was told to get onto some training video stuff, so how to serve on tables and standards. Also, I needed to know about health and safety, fire safety and food hygiene. But I can't remember seeing anything about dealing with difficult customers" (Jackie, female, table server, restaurant chain WoS).

Dave highlighted what he considered was a less-than-satisfactory experience of training in dealing with difficult customers, recognising:

> "…there's no training at all on when it comes to tackling stuff from customers unless it's physical, and it was like call the manager in. That's the only basic sort of training we've had. But even then, it's not, it's like, I mean, it's just online training. It's not, it's nothing in person, so I think it's a bit weak, to be honest" (Dave, male, waiter, UK hotel group)

Meanwhile, nightclub FHWs Adam and Yvonne commented that they had little formal training in any of the night venues they had worked in. Training was elementary and consisted mainly of the "housekeeping" basics such as fire exits, staff facilities, staff washrooms, layout of the venues and introductions to fellow workers. As they recognised:

> "So, like on training, in all the night venues I've worked in, I can't say that I've had any real training. I mean, it's kind of like learning on the job" (Adam, male, bar worker, nightclub).

> "So, I've worked in three or four different night venues over the years, and I've never had any training on dealing with difficult customers. I've kind of learned what to do and not do from my work colleagues and obviously just through my experiences. Also, if any customer starts up a shitstorm, we call security, and they'll haul them out, but they won't come over unless someone calls them" (Yvonne, female, bar worker, nightclub).

Clearly, then, the evidence suggests that formal training for front-of-house staff in handling CSH does not happen. Training was focused on service standards towards customers and the "housekeeping" areas of regulatory compliance. Research data from workers echoed the sentiments of the trade union representatives in that few staff have had training on how to spot, manage and deal with abusive customers. This lack of training for frontline staff was mirrored in LMs, with most of them not receiving specific training in handling CSH. The comments below were typical of the managers interviewed:

> "And certainly nothing on training about dealing with sexual harassment, whether this was by internal staff or customers" (Caroline, female, hotel manager, global hotel group A).

> "… so, nothing at all, no sexual harassment training really in any of the companies I've worked at. I've just learned on the job through experience when dealing with awkward HR issues" (Diana, bar manager, budget hotel group, city).

Rather, they relied on the skills and experience of customer management during their career in hospitality, with data suggesting that this is not without its challenges. On the question of what they thought the challenges would be of dealing with CSH, many of the comments from LMs were based on their experience of dealing with difficult customers. The customer experience and the reputation of the venue and company were constant elements in LMs' thinking. Hannah and Karolina's comments were a common feature arising from manager data:

> "Yes, I've had a lot of experience with this. We don't want any scenes in the restaurant, so we look to try to deal with anything like this as soon as possible" (Hannah, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant chain city).

> "So, the challenge is dealing with a difficult guest in front of other guests. And if the problem guest is er…very loud, it can upset other guests if nothing is done quickly…this can also be a challenge as we don't want any bad comments about the hotel..." (Karolina, female, hotel manager, global hotel group B).

The LMs here are acknowledging the sensitive nature of approaching a customer about an alleged incident of CSH against a worker. These statements were echoed by many of the LM participants, and a common factor in service delivery. Clearly, they are concerned about how best to deal with the matter without upsetting other guests in the vicinity, let alone the alleged perpetrator. Meanwhile, Alan talks about getting the balance right in the way they treat guests and the fact that the organisation has responsibility for staff well-being at work. He was one of two managers who commented on employee well-being:

> "…then the other thing is that it's a guest, we have to treat guests right, but we also have to think of the well-being of our staff, so we need to get it right with the guest and the staff. So, for me, it's stuff that happens in the moment…we have to make a judgment call on the issue. So, it's an immediate judgment call on something that has happened. And this can be quite a stressful thing, perhaps having to deal with

> a guest and make an immediate decision" (Alan, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Scott, a fellow events manager working in the same hotel as Alan, also commented on the challenge of backing workers up and balancing this support with how guests are treated:

> "Then, the balancing act you have to do with guests, how we treat them. And then you have your responsibility in backing up your staff…dealing with things on the spot, having to make a quick decision, probably when you are mad busy…" (Scott, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Both Alan and Scott raise the point that they have a responsibility in being seen to back their employees up, whilst also considering their well-being. These comments about well-being were the only ones that emerged from all the LM data collected. They also show that managers must think on their feet and make on-the-spot decisions in a challenging environment. This was a typical comment that emerged from LM data. Meanwhile, the data also showed that managers were confident in their customer management, frontline commitments and HR duties. However, data findings from HRPs suggest they did not necessarily hold the same confidence as LMs in enacting HR matters, often feeling that managers simply want to bat employee issues back to HR:

> "Yes, it's not uncommon for a manager to say to me, What's the decision then? That's not my job. My job is to support the manager so that they can make a decision. A lot don't get that" (Felicity, female, internal HR manager, global hotel group C).

> "And I do see a bit of that, because at the end of the day, I can only advise like I can't and won't say, move aside while I step into your department and start managing people for you. I'm not the decision maker here" (Harvey, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group A).

Like their internal counterparts, external HRPs held the same position on the challenge of ensuring that LMs are the decision makers and that HR's role is to advise:

> "We can advise, help and support. But we're not the decision makers" (Katie, female, external HR services provider).

> "…it's ever been the same for a lot of LMs. So, they don't expect that they need to do anything themselves. It's a bit like, oh, HR will just fly in, fix it all, and it will all be done and dusted" (Susan, female, external HR service provider).

For HRPs, the relationship with LMs can be a frustrating one. HRPs draw a clear line between providing advice and support for managers, and there is no ambiguity in their minds about the decision-making role of the LM. This may not be the case for LMs, and that can cause an amount of annoyance for HRPs who feel that they end up "picking up the pieces." This leads HRPs to bemoan the manager's capability in dealing with what they consider to be the awkward HR duties. Most of the internal and external HRPs considered that managerial capability is something that can be improved. Unsurprisingly, they believed that training and regular follow-up training were the key to improving capability, particularly in dealing with awkward employee relations issues. However, as much as this sounds the best and most logical way of improving capability, internal HR managers, Sean and Abigail, explained current difficulties around corporate funding, which was a common feature arising from HRP data:

> "…but you had regular follow-through training if you were a manager. So, I mean, you may go on a course, usually these were internal on how to have difficult conversations, or dealing with discrimination or harassment, you'd like to go on these again about 18 months later as part of the process. But costs are a big issue for us now…" (Sean, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group C).

> "Also, we don't have much of a training budget now as budgets got shot to pieces after COVID and have never gone back up" (Abigail, female, internal HR manager, 5-star hotel group).

External HRPs brought up similar concerns about financial constraints that were affecting many of their hospitality clients. Interviewees explained the potential consequences to businesses of what could be seen as overly tight financial constraints that businesses may put in place. These concerns were echoed by all external HRPs:

> "I mean, the price of energy and wages rise without necessarily improving, and businesses are struggling. They won't pay for extra things, so like extra for skills development training, which I think sexual harassment and how to manage it would be hugely beneficial for managers" (Katie, female, external HR service provider).

> "I think it's the easiest thing to always do for companies to say that they don't have a budget for it, or it's too expensive or that we can't take our managers off the job because it will cost too much…you are asking them to manage serious situations like sexual harassment, is it really a cost?" (Mary, female, external HR service provider).

Other external practitioners acknowledged that most, if not all, their hospitality clients had reduced their management development for LMs. Audrey summed up the feelings of the external HRPs interviewed in this research, noting:

> "But you know, I get it that my hospitality clients are strapped for cash, but it costs them more in paying for my time and their managerial time when I'm then asked to go in and pick up the pieces because a manager didn't know how to handle it and has made a dog's breakfast of it" (Audrey, female, external HR service provider).

The research data indicates that customer-facing staff have had little or no training in spotting, handling and managing sexual abuse from customers, which is echoed by research evidence from hospitality trade union representatives. Furthermore, the staff are hesitant in approaching LMs and reporting CSH, believing that managers will do little about the matter. However, LMs' research data shows that they themselves feel confident in their approach to addressing customer abuse, due to their career experience in customer management. However, this seems to be at odds with research data of FHWs and HRPs.

Both internal and external HRPs consider that developing LMs in people management and in handling SH from coworkers or customers is a crucial part of management development. However, the challenge of keeping finances in check for many hospitality businesses means that HRPs have little or no funds allocated to execute the type of development.

7.3 Navigational Caution

The research data so far has highlighted a skills gap for front-of-house workers and LMs in spotting, handling and addressing CSH. This issue, combined with power imbalances of the customer service triangle (see Section 2.5.3), can impact when, how or indeed if a worker or manager addresses an incident. In effect, this will impact their decision-making. Hospitality trade union representative Nathan provided some insight into FHWs ' decision-making when confronted with an abusive customer:

> "I guess it depends on where you're working. A lot of places, workers just wouldn't trust the manager, so they don't report a sexual harassment problem, and you know, if they did, the manager would think they cannot do the job, so they'll either get fewer hours or get told to just leave if they don't like it. But even when workers know that consciously, you know, what sexual harassment is, they are scared, like, oh, like, what did I do, because they're scared that management will get on their back if they stop serving somebody because of it, and the customer kicks up a fuss about it" (Nathan, male, hospitality trade union representative).

Nathan's comments exemplify the perceived unseen underlying power that customers hold in the customer service triangle; additionally, there is the known hierarchical power of the LM. The consequence of this is that FHWs will think carefully about whether they report an incident of CSH to line management. A similar observation was made by Bobby, which again highlights the power of the customer and the hierarchical power of the manager:

> "I mean, how many cases have I had where, like times where the manager wouldn't even throw out the people who have sexually assaulted staff…so how can workers trust managers when they don't back them up by taking some action? Like a lot of them are on zero or minimal hours, and a lot of the time, it's their only means of income. So, are they really going to hassle the manager?" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

In these instances, the hierarchical power that the manager holds over the worker in the customer service triangle is one that Nathan and Bobby, the worker, have in mind when making decisions about an incident. The trade union representatives imply that reporting incidents to an LM can lead to negative consequences for workers, as the manager has the power to hold

back on providing working hours to employees or, indeed, ask the employee to leave. Furthermore, how much trust a worker puts in their LM in dealing with an incident of CSH is one of the key factors considered in determining whether an incident of CSH is reported.
A further aspect highlighted was the extent to which FHWs and LMs will have in mind the potential consequences of reporting an issue of CSH:

> "…they (LMs) worry about consequences. They worry about how both the customer and the wider public are going to react if they verbally or physically act to remove that person. So, the first obstacle is like the reaction of the customer, the reaction of the public, you know, all you need is that one guy who's been thrown out to do this big, you know, Twitter post about how they were, you know, physically abused and that venue is cancelled. You know that the venue is basically boycotted. The reputation of restaurants can be ruined by drunk customers who verbally or physically abuse workers, and then the person will go on to give someone a one-star review because they were thrown out. So, that's why most managers, and for that matter, FHWs, don't do anything as they don't want to be the one responsible for addressing customer abuse" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

Bobby and Nathan consider that managers are wary of addressing alleged incidents of customer abuse. In part, this is due to the potential of negative customer feedback about a venue on social media forums, which may cause reputational damage (both personal and to the company) and revenue loss. An additional aspect that Bobby raised was the potential consequence of LMs having to account for their actions with their own manager in the event of negative feedback from customers. Once again, this highlights the power of the customer, with both trade union representatives considering that this is a cause for managerial inertia. Bobby summed up the challenge for managers around this by stating:

> "This is almost the biggest issue, as the reaction from the employer … for example, will the employer defend their actions, you know, the actions of the manager?" (Bobby, hospitality trade union representative).

Meanwhile, hospitality industry representative Sebastian was asked about the dilemmas that LMs faced in addressing SH of customer-facing workers by customers. As he commented in Section 6.3.1, he thought the issue was more of a problem in bars and nightclubs. As a hotelier,

he had not encountered the phenomenon during his career in hospitality. As a result, he reasoned that he could not accurately answer the questions but could anticipate what challenges there could be. However, he did offer his thoughts on the difficulty an LM may find themselves in:

> "But you know, in a case of sexual harassment by a guest, I can imagine that a manager would be treading carefully in dealing with something like that. I mean, you'd need to be very clear that something that had happened was justified, and you could really piss a guest off if you got it wrong or went about it the wrong way" (Sebastian, male, hospitality representative).

With these comments, Sebastian notes that managers would likely need to proceed with caution. He also implies the concern regarding potential consequences if a manager did not address the issue in the right way. Likewise, in raising the issue of potential consequences, the issue of the power of the customer is apparent. Moreover, he acknowledged that frontline staff see "a lot of stuff", and he referred to the individual's interpretation of SH as a challenge for management:

> "Yeah, frontline staff, they see a lot of that stuff like sexual innuendo, jokes and leering, but it's seen as banter. But I think you know the different members of staff will take it in different ways depending on their age. You know, it depends on the definition of harassment. So, like the customer asking a bar person, male or female, for their telephone number, you ask yourself, but is that harassment? So, it's a person's interpretation of a comment or action that is the problem, so someone's sexual harassment is another person's banter or flippant comment" (Sebastian, male, hospitality industry representative).

In addition to the challenge of individual interpretation, Sebastian acknowledged that managers may not necessarily have the skills to deal with an allegation of CSH if they have never dealt with a matter like that before. However, he cited the hospitality trading environment as a challenge when training and developing management:

> "You know, the trading environment that hospitality is in now means that training in stuff other than the basics is almost out of the question, as businesses are struggling to

keep their heads above the water. It's been the case since COVID-19" (Sebastian, male, hospitality industry representative).

Overall, Sebastian appeared to be cautious in providing comments about the challenges for LMs in addressing SH by customers. This seemed to be partly due to his lack of experience with the phenomenon in his own working career, and that he could not really account for individual organisations. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the challenges around the definition and interpretation of SH and considered that workers and managers will likely interpret customer actions from their own perspectives. In sum, views of the hospitality industry and trade union representatives show that there is clearly an element of caution in the way that FHWs and LMs deal with CSH.

Mirroring some of the findings above, all front-of-house workers spoke about having to get on with the job even when customer abuse was apparent, all to provide a positive customer experience. The power imbalances between customers, LMs and frontline staff were seen as being the primary reason for this situation:

"So, we have to smile nicely and say thank you, don't worry, I'll see what I can do. So, aye, that's a challenge" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

"…but when you are working, we are expected to treat guests with respect… so I think I'd think twice about putting myself in a situation where I'd be up for losing my job" (Dee, female, table server, hotels/restaurants WoS).

These typified comments from FHWs. The expectations of their employers in providing customer service excellence were paramount, which is obviously followed through by LMs as part of their remit. This reinforcement seems to bolster the acceptance of FHWs of customer misbehaviour and abuse; therefore, there is an accepted perpetuation of a hostile working environment, often due to managerial ambivalence. That said, LMs do recognise that working environments can become unfriendly, but largely, the customer experience factor overrides this acknowledgement, and effectively, this leads to managers accepting that things are just the way they are and that employees should just get on with the job as best they can. For example, Millie and Chloe acknowledged this point:

> "But guests expect a lot, and they can get angry about it at times, and do stuff that's not right, and our staff and managers take the brunt of it; it's just the way it is" (Millie, female, hotel manager, global hotel group A).

> "I've worked in hospitality for nearly twenty years, and it's like, people just expect more and get angry when they complain, you know, like swearing at you and…just treating you like shit. And, you know, it can get tense and not a nice situation to be in" (Chloe, female, hotel manager, hotel/restaurants WoS).

Overall, the data suggested that hostile working environments were part and parcel of hospitality work and that employers hold the expectation that employees work through this type of environment. Unless something of real significance happens, for example, a worker considering a red line had been crossed in terms of threat level or seriousness of an incident, both workers and LMs adopt navigational caution in their interactions with dealing with customer abuse. However, navigational caution is not reserved just for workers and managers; it also extends to their HRPs, as data suggests that FHWs have a wariness of HR. Customer-facing staff were asked whether they had approached HRPs at any point to express any concerns they had about their work or working conditions. The comments below were typical of many of the FHWs:

> "No, I haven't had verbal contact, and I have never seen any HR person on the premises" (Gary, male, bar/table server, FLS bar/restaurant chain city).
> "I can't really say I've seen anyone from HR on my shifts, but I've been told that if you see an HR person, someone is in trouble (laughs)" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

The sense of HR only intervening in certain matters was further highlighted by Keira:

> "HR send stuff out on the intranet about things like, you know, general stuff and other stuff like maternity stuff, carers leave or reminders about online training, you know, stuff like that, and we get chased up if we don't do stuff they want back" (Keira, female, table server, restaurant chain WoS).

These comments indicate that, from the employee's perspective, HRPs are generally not visible in front of the house. These types of comments were not uncommon responses from workers

about their HR department. Workers interviewed for this research viewed the HR department as a distant arm of corporate management that errs on the side of policing employees rather than providing support to workers. Similar comments were made by one of the trade union representatives who provided an excoriating view of hospitality HR departments and practitioners:

> "…when it comes to HR in hospitality, I will be unequivocal in my condemnation, because maybe 10 years ago I could have said there was, you know, 10 or 20 per cent of HR that still had empathy. But I honestly think, especially in hospitality, it has just become an arm of operations…I'm talking about the way in which corporations, especially in hospitality, use HR as an absolute stick to beat people with… No wonder workers don't see HR as a supportive entity" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

Bobby considered that HR departments have shifted the balance of focus from employees to organisational strategy. He notes the change of HR focus has brought about the change in role names, which he believes is evidence of the shift in focus. He also implies that this shift makes workers wary of contacting HR, as they may lack confidence in supportive actions being taken.

Meanwhile, LMs were also asked if they sought some form of support from their HRP and/or HR department when working in hostile work environments caused by customers. The comments below were typical in highlighting that contact with HR tended to be minimal and mainly on a need-to-know or functional basis:

> "I don't really see anyone from HR, I just speak with them on the phone or contact them by e-mail, but that may be only 3 or 4 times a month, I suppose, and it's usually about a staff member's wages or sick note, or them wanting some starter items, you know, like basic stuff really" (Hannah, female, restaurant manager, bar/restaurant chain city).
> "Yes, so when I think about now, it's not that often. So, when she is in here each week, I tend to say hello and ask how things are, but she doesn't really hang around the front of the house; she is usually in the back offices with the senior management team" (Scott, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Reflecting the employee interviews, LMs similarly suggested that HRPs (internal and external) are largely unseen in front-of-house, with Millie considering the opportunity to develop positive relationships with HR is much weaker now than in years gone by:

> "… you used to meet your HR people when they were conducting training for you. So, you interact with everybody in the training, but you also get to know the HR, but that doesn't happen now" (Millie, deputy hotel manager, global hotel group B).

Scott, meanwhile, recognised that HRPs are busy, particularly those practitioners who are responsible for a cluster of hotels, which limits their ability to mix with other functional managers:

> "I know she is busy and seems to get pulled from pillar to post with the hotels she's having to deal with…she goes to hotels to support managers with disciplinary stuff …so yes, I think she can be quite busy one way or another, so she may just not have time to just chat with people… I mean, I don't really see much of the HR manager" (Scott, male, events manager, global hotel group C).

Internal HRPs also mentioned that the relationship with LMs can become a little tetchy and frustrating, with the sentiments below being typical:

> "It really pisses me off when we find out something serious has happened, and I don't get told. But all managers seem to do this, even the senior ones, and, you know, the politics…" (Sean, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group B).

> "It's fair to say that managers don't always keep me in the loop on things. It's a bit of a frustration for me because it means I then get dragged in after something has happened. And then we have the hotel manager politics and having to tiptoe around these" (Abigail, female, internal HR manager, 5-star hotel group).

These comments were commonplace from internal HRP data. Internal HRPs saw a lack of communication from LMs as a frustrating and challenging part of their job. Additionally, hotel managerial politics appear to add to the frustration of HRPs; as a result, they adopt a navigational caution due to internal politics and territorial hierarchy.

Similarly, external HRPs had the same problem with a lack of LM communication, but this was mainly due to the nature of the contract that they may have agreed with their client. Some had contracts that were simply on-call services; others included a half-day or one day per month of on-site presence, but even with these, they were often involved in post-event problems. Meanwhile, all external HRPs considered that they are far more robust in dealing with operational management as an external consultant than when they worked as an internal HRP:

> "…when I worked as an internal HR, I had to navigate the organisational politics and culture of the company. I don't necessarily need to do that with my clients, so you don't hold back; you tell them straight" (Mary, female, external HR services provider).
> "As an HR consultant, I think you can be a lot more objective and…objective, maybe forceful, might not be the right word, but I think you can be maybe a little bit more direct" (Susan, female, external HR services provider).

A question was asked to external HRPs about how they viewed the capability of LMs in dealing with HR duties, particularly that of dealing with SH. Carol was less than complimentary about LM's capability around HR duties, full stop, l*et alone* one dealing with an SH problem, and other external HRPs commonly shared this view:

> "So, I'm going to show you the equivalent of the face plant emoji. That is my summation of line management skills around HR. So, I just tell them straight, no messing about…in my opinion, there are two types, those who are over-cautious and tread carefully in any awkward HR issue… and don't want to upset anyone…" (Carol, female, external HR service provider).

The research findings suggest that workers, LMs and internal HRPs all show elements of navigational caution in the workplace. This is less so for external HRPs, who all claimed they tell clients how it is, warts and all. This caution is particularly the case for customer-facing workers and their LMs, and is also shown towards line management and HRPs by workers when considering whether to highlight a concern about CSH. Data suggests that FHWs have a weak relationship with HRPs, considering that they are a distant department and are unsure as to how the department fits in the workplace, hence the reason for a cautious approach.

Meanwhile, internal HRPs tend to navigate cautiously when advising line management on employee relations matters so as not to usurp the responsibility of LMs or cause offence to anyone in the hierarchical managerial framework. This is less so for external providers who hold less concern for company politics. Overall, all HRPs interviewed positioned themselves as risk mitigators to the company for employee matters, with corporate risk and reputation being a considerable focus of their work. As a result, this focus was a key, if not the key, consideration when employee relations matters arose.

7.4 Perfunctory concern

The data from workers relating to trust in LMs and HRPs has already been highlighted. Significantly, one of these workplace matters is non-reporting by FHWs if they have been sexually harassed by a customer, this being a common feature that emerged from this research. An additional finding from the research was the managerial and HRP ambivalence towards worker well-being. LMs expected workers to put up with customer abuse, including CSH, and there was little understanding being shown towards the workers' position. Internal HRPs were generally unaware of these types of customer misbehaviour, as LMs rarely communicated this, considering this was a customer relations matter. Nevertheless, when HRPs became aware of an employee relations matter, they would raise with managers the duty of care to the employee. However, this was based around organisational risk and reputation first, rather than well-being and empathy towards the employee. Hospitality trade union representative Bobby commented about FHW reporting and trust of organisational management:

> “Do you think they're (frontline worker) going to tell you that they were sexually assaulted last week by a 50-year-old man who got increasingly drunk? The general manager refused to cut him off. Are they going to tell that HR manager that, and in the 5% of cases where an employee does have the balls to do that, are they going to do anything about it? Both at the very top of organisations and, unfortunately, the very bottom of organisations, you have people who are in complete denial after decades of either abuse or, you know, exploitation” (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative.

When asked about how he found the issue of CSH in the hospitality industry, Bobby noted that:

> "CSH is not on the radar as much as it should, or it doesn't move most managers into a kind of defensive advice or conversation with workers, you know, like an acknowledgement of being aware of it, I mean" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

Bobby's comments suggest that LMs do not seem to take the issue of CSH as a factor that should be brought up with FHWs or even acknowledge it as a concern. To illustrate managerial ambivalence, Bobby talked of a recent incident that happened towards one of their members:

> "One of the guys (a customer) put his hand up her skirt, fully sexually assaulted her. She took her own action and obviously threw him back on the chair. The general manager comes over to her and says, "Why are you assaulting customers?" Realising what's happened. Pulls her over at the bar. It's like, why? Why are you assaulting customers? She's like, are you fucking joking? I've just been sexually assaulted. He then goes to the till, gets £50 out of the till and basically tries to pay it off so she doesn't say anything. I remember her telling me that he (the manager) wouldn't throw them out because they'd spent £300 on vodka. So, they bought, like, six bottles of fucking £50 vodka, and that was his reason for why you couldn't throw them out, because they'd spent that money on vodka. And you know, not a thing about how the worker felt, so like how are you, take a break, go home, etcetera, not even that, it was there's £50, just get on with your work" (Bobby, male, hospitality trade union representative).

Clearly, the implication here is of customer "sovereignty" as LMs battle with their decision-making of backing up an allegation of CSH from an FHW, versus the focus of providing a great experience for customers. The research data suggests that only when a clear line is crossed by a customer will line management back away from appeasement towards a customer and move into acting proactively on an episode of CSH. However, this line is very blurry and open to the LM's interpretive prism. In the example Bobby gives, the LM acted proactively towards the customer and not the employee, making a conscious decision to placate the customer, taking no action on the incident, with the result being to treat the employee with complete disregard. There is no empathy from the LM towards the worker and the experience that she has been through, and, as far as Bobby is concerned, has been treated appallingly and with disdain.

Table server Dave similarly recounted an incident he witnessed when one of his coworkers informed their LM of an aggressive and abusive customer, whilst bar worker Yvonne provides insight into LM concerns of customer abuse in the nightclub she works at:

> "He wouldn't stand up for her and like, calm it down, and you know, he kept saying, oh, yeah, it was unacceptable what he said, but it's like suck it up. It doesn't matter how you feel about it; you just get on with it" (Dave, male, table server, UK hotel group).

> "…we're just sort of left our own devices to deal with issues of customer abuse, I mean, no managers question us when things like that happen, they don't want to know" (Yvonne, bar worker, nightclub).

It was clear then that FHWs often considered that managers concentrate more on generating revenue rather than standing up for them when they are being abused by a customer:

> "But I think as a manager, you're probably more interested in getting in and getting the money out of their pockets. I don't think they'd give a flying flamingo, so to speak, in comparison, even if the sexual harassment was a physical thing" (Garry, male, bar/restaurant, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain, city).

However, it must be said that it's not all frontline participants who expressed such negative feelings about LM ambivalence, as Kayleigh explained:

> "So, if there is a big rammy in the place, you know, like an argument and something blows up, or it's easy to see a drunken customer, I've seen managers and security move over and deal with it" (Kayleigh, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain, WoS).

When asked about reporting CSH to her LM, she continued:

> "Like, I think I'd just go to the manager and tell them what was going on, you know, that customers were getting, like as you say, aiming stuff at me…I'd expect them to deal with it and tell the customer to stop or go over and tell them to calm down or cut it out. But only if it was, you know, like heavy stuff" (Kayleigh, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain, WoS).

Kayleigh's work colleague, Maddie, was asked how confident that her LMs would deal with CSH. She expressed total confidence:

> "…that for me would be 100% confident, but as I say, I've not had something like that happen to me. Like I've had the sexual innuendo stuff and teasing, but not, you know, the touching stuff" (Maddie, female, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain, city).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Caoimhe:

> "But if it were serious, I think I would tell a manager" (Caoimhe, female, table server, global hotel group B).

The comments by Maddie and Caoimhe are interesting in that they show some confidence in their LMs addressing SH by customers; however, neither Maddie nor Caoimhe, fortunately in their opinion, have fallen victim to an episode of CSH. However, whilst these views from FHWs show some confidence towards LMs, it remains that LMs do not hear about CSH unless an FHW considers a line has been crossed by a customer. This research has already shown that, even when abuse has been reported, the LM will interpret the abuse through their own interpretive prism. Generally, this results in little or no action against the perpetrator of the abuse.

Meanwhile, internal HRPs will more than likely not know about such incidents, as LMs will see frontline work under their remit, as comments from Sean indicate:

> "Very often, stuff doesn't get reported to HR" (Sean, male, internal HR manager, global hotel group B).

This lack of information is the same for external HRPs, and it always seems to be the case that they are the last to find out about employee relations concerns:

> "And you know, most of the things we get called in for have already happened, so we have to try and get to the crux of stuff, and that can be a nightmare" (Susan, female, external HR services provider).

> "…so first off, you've got to remember that we in HR, like 99% of the time, we'll find out things by pure chance or when something has kicked off. LMs don't contact us unless they think there's trouble" (Mary, female, external HR services provider).

These types of comments were frequent from both internal and external HRPs and exemplify the lack of information that they may receive from LMs. However, the research suggests that HRPs are largely unseen at the front of house, which seemingly puts them at a disadvantage regarding what is happening at the frontline. Therefore, it begs the question that, if LMs are apathetic towards allegations of CSH and internal HRPs mirror this or are not in the know about it, who or where do FHWs turn to when seeking support when functioning in a hostile working environment? Beyond managers, data offered some evidence that FHWs turn to their coworkers for support, as the comments show:

> "… but most of the time it was talked about in the break room afterwards. I mean, we'd tell the manager, and they'd just say leave it with them, and that was it. But we'd still talk about it between ourselves, as we all get some kind of abuse from customers at times" (Tom, table server, 5-star hotel group).

> "I go to Mhairi, who works the tables, and we usually work the same shifts. So, Mhairi is the one who you know, showed me the ropes and tells me the dos and don'ts and tells me how best to do things, makes suggestions, all that type of stuff…" (Keira, female, table server, restaurant chain, WoS).

> "Usually, we just sit at the end of a shift, I mean, that's sort of the only way that we have of dealing with it" (Yvonne, bar worker, nightclub).

This view was apparent amongst all FHWs interviewed. The research found that, often for new starters and early learners, it was their allocated buddy that they would use as a sounding board for queries or concerns. The buddy system in hospitality was a familiar approach in training and developing new starters and other workers who had been moved across into a new property or into the property where they were working. The buddy will usually be someone who has experience in hospitality work and is allocated to a new starter or someone occupying a new role by line management. Apart from the developmental role they occupy, the buddy provides a supportive role to new starters. Almost by default, this supportive role extends across the rest

of the FHW team, irrespective of the team members' experience. In effect, the buddy becomes the first port of call for a worker who has queries or concerns, and, in the main, they will deal with these as far as their remit allows. Consequently, line management may not become aware of issues or concerns about customer misbehaviour, abuse or indeed SH by a customer if any episodes of these are considered as minor by the buddy. Bailey, a bar/table server who acts as a buddy, explained:

> "… the table server mentioned this to me when she came to the bar to order drinks…she said that the customer was abusive and sarcastic and made comments about her looks. I didn't go any further with it with her, as I could see she was...I don't know…you know, like nervous. I mean, I couldn't do anything as I was allocated to work behind the bar. So, when one of the male waiters came to order drinks, I asked if he would switch tables, which he said he would. I told the bar manager about what I'd suggested, as we need to switch the table numbers of the servers, you know…for checking who serves who. The bar manager said nothing really; he just said it was fine" (Bailey, male, bar/table server, bar/restaurant chain, city).

Bailey's example was not an unusual one. At best, the bar manager trusted Bailey with his decision-making, yet the LM appears to be indifferent to the FHWs' plight. In this example, the LM seems to abdicate responsibility rather than have some form of responsible awareness overview; in other words, there is merely a perfunctory concern.

As a result, this thesis contends that LMs show perfunctory concern towards FHWs who are subjected to customer abuse, including SH. Any concern raised by a worker, if in fact it is raised, is brushed off by management. Additionally, LMs are unlikely to report any such incident to HRPs, as LMs see the service frontline as within their personal bailiwick. However, if any employee relations incident may arise in which an HRP gets involved, their first concern lies with the risk and reputational damage towards the company, with the employee being some distance below. This consolidates the argument that both LMs and HRPs show a prefunctory concern towards customer-facing staff who face abuse from customers.

7.5 Chapter summary

Chapter seven presented findings which showed that both LMs and HRPs frequently assume that FHWs understand the corporate definition of SH and are familiar with the relevant

organisational policies and procedures. The research indicates that this assumption is unfounded. Many workers reported limited follow-up or clarification from HR or line management, highlighting weaknesses in communication and onboarding processes. In addition, HRPs expressed concern about LMs' capability in handling complex or sensitive employee relations issues. They acknowledged significant skills gaps among LMs in this area. Additionally, data findings indicate that front-of-house employees receive minimal, if any, training in recognising, managing, or responding to SH abuse from customers. The same gap exists for LMs, whose ability to address such incidents is largely based on their own working experiences and general operational experience in handling difficult customer interactions. Consequently, their skills are often insufficient when dealing specifically with customer-perpetrated SH. Despite this, LMs reported feeling confident in managing customer abuse, attributing this confidence to their broader career experience in customer management. In contrast, both internal and external HRPs identified clear skills gaps across all front-of-house roles, including LMs, regarding how to address SH effectively. However, the financial pressures faced by many hospitality businesses mean that little to no budget is allocated for the type of training and development required to equip workers and LMs with the necessary competencies to respond appropriately to CSH.

Data from the research indicated that communication between LMs and HRPs is largely pragmatic and guided by the immediate issue at hand. HRPs view their role as advisory rather than operational and are careful not to be seen as assuming managerial responsibilities. Consequently, they adopt a cautious, hands-off approach that reinforces the LM's accountability for decisions and outcomes in employee relations matters. This dynamic often results in interactions that are functional and transactional, and at times strained, with HR becoming aware of issues only after they have escalated. The limited communication also hinders the development of stronger relationships between HRPs and frontline service workers, who frequently remain disconnected from HR within the worker-line manager-HR triad. This disconnect further explains why FHWs may be reluctant to approach HR with concerns. Moreover, findings suggest that FHWs often have a limited understanding of the HR function, largely due to limited direct contact with HRPs. This is reinforced by evidence that HRPs rarely engage with frontline operations, reducing opportunities to build effective relationships. The data further suggest that HR professionals prioritise organisational risk management and reputation, with employee well-being receiving comparatively less attention. Most HRPs interviewed were unaware of the extent of CSH occurring within their sites, frequently because

such matters were left to LMs. Although many acknowledged that issues “likely occurred,” they lacked mechanisms to identify or monitor them. This approach reflects an alignment between HR and line management in demonstrating only minimal concern for worker well-being following incidents of customer abuse.

Chapter 8.0 Discussion

This chapter analyses the research findings and evaluates them in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks. It examines the key themes that emerged from the study, including the intensity of frontline work, customer power, customer misbehaviour, CSH, unfounded managerial assumptions, LM ambivalence, limited concern for worker well-being, and the challenges LMs face when responding to CSH.

8.1 Dynamics of frontline services work and customer power relations

One of the objectives of this research was to explore and understand the dynamics of frontline service work in Scottish hospitality and to consider the power dynamics within the worker-line manager-customer triad. The hospitality sector is driven by an emphasis on delivering excellence in the customer service experience, creating a working environment that is pressurised and high intensity for hospitality workers (Nickson, 2013). This was found to be the case in this study. Many workers and managers interviewed commented on the intensity of the work and being physically and mentally "worn out" after a shift. As Gatta (2009) suggests, this is not an uncommon feature of hospitality service work. For restaurant and bar table servers, it is not just a case of taking an order and delivering food or drinks. Among other things, they need knowledge of the ingredients in food and drink and to impart this information to customers if asked; they also need to be understanding, know of any special requests by customers, and understand correct combinations of food and drink (Gatta, 2009). Within this, the table server must communicate effectively with customers and manage the relationship with them, using appropriate emotional skills (verbally and visually) whilst also managing their time across different tables and different types of customers, smoothly and coherently (Gatta, 2009). Moreover, increased work intensity can damage the psychological contract if employees perceive that the organisation has breached its obligations, which may, in turn, negatively affect their attitudes and reduce constructive workplace behaviours (Turnley and Feldman, 2000). However, whilst the study found high levels of work intensity, workers and managers accepted this as the norm for hospitality work.

The socioeconomic crisis in the UK during the period of this study exerted a substantial influence on frontline operations within the hospitality sector. As highlighted by Timmins and Race (2022) and Scriven (2023), rising operational costs, inflationary pressures, and unpredictable demand patterns intensified the need for stringent cost-control measures. Within this context, the organisations participating in the study adopted minimally staffed operational

models, compelling both managers and frontline employees to take on extensive multitasking responsibilities. This practice extended beyond routine flexibility, with staff frequently required to remain on-site and work additional hours to compensate for sickness and other absences. Reliance on multitasking was not simply a response to day-to-day disruption, but a deliberate organisational strategy designed to curb labour expenditure and maintain service continuity despite persistent workforce shortages. These findings align with Liu *et al.* (2021), who similarly observed that hotels increasingly depend on employee multitasking as a structural response to labour scarcity rather than as a temporary operational adjustment.

While multitasking in hospitality work increased work intensity, it is, in effect, a two-edged sword. On one hand, it added to the work intensity, which, according to Osei *et al.* (2023), can lead to burnout and psychological detachment from work. Similarly, Xie and Tan (2024) found that multitasking increases pressure on workers and reduces innovative service behaviours. Conversely, multitasking can have a positive impact by enhancing motivation, work engagement and job performance (see Asghar *et al.,* 2020; Dalkhjav *et al.,* 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2021). All the venues involved in this thesis study proved to be workplaces with high levels of work intensity, which, in essence, is an accepted feature of hospitality service work, as reflected in the works of Gatta (2009) and Nickson (2013). But despite the demanding nature of the work, FHWs described experiencing a strong sense of energy and motivation driven by the fast pace of hospitality. Many were highly engaged, took pride in delivering high-quality service, and viewed the pressure, multitasking, and constant activity as integral and rewarding aspects of their roles. As Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) note, engaged workers perceive themselves as fully capable of handling their job demands and feel an active, productive connection with their work. Meanwhile, Trullen *et al.* (2020) believe that customer-facing workers operate under significant pressure to meet LM targets while upholding demanding customer service standards. Within service industries, customers are routinely granted high status, and LMs regard exceptional service delivery as a core organisational priority (Gettman and Gelfand, 2007; Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014; Manfreda *et al.*, 2024). This emphasis further reinforces customer power over both workers and managers.

An important aspect of frontline service is the notion of customer "sovereignty" as considered by Korczynski (2009), which is strengthened by corporate expectations and enforced by LMs. The perceived power of the customer was highly evident, aligning with research on customer power dynamics (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013; Korczynski, 2009). For FHWs, the intensity of

meeting customer service standards stemmed from corporate requirements to deliver service quality and customer satisfaction (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014; Manfreda *et al.*, 2024). Meanwhile, for hospitality managers, when it comes to customer service, Pont (2015) states, "Your number one job is to make your guests happy…making your guests happy will increase revenue for your brand" (p.17). Many LMs interviewed acknowledged that they push their teams to achieve service excellence. Whilst conscious that this could create a degree of work intensity, they considered it simply part and parcel of the job, considering that this was also the case for FHWs. This emphasis on the customer is king philosophy for workers starts on the first day of employment and is constantly and consistently reinforced and followed through by LMs thereafter. This should not be a surprise, as hospitality researchers note that customer satisfaction through service quality is significant in gaining a commercial advantage over competitors (Ali *et al.*, 2021; Chun Wang *et al.*, 2016; Manfreda *et al.*, 2024). As Korczynski (2009) argues, the customer's perceived dominance within the worker–manager–customer triad is a central influence on frontline service dynamics, shaping interactions that typically defer to customer expectations. It was clear from this study that customer power dynamics have an important influence on the nature of frontline service work. As a result, it significantly influences the behaviours of actors in the customer service triangle.

Customer misbehaviour

Customer misbehaviour, defined by Ineson *et al.* (2013, p. 2) as "forms of discernment or aggression that involve unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical advances from one person to another," emerged as a pervasive feature within this research. This finding aligns with a growing body of scholarship in the hospitality sector (Booyens *et al.*, 2022; Mitsakis *et al.*, 2024; Ram *et al.*, 2016; Turkoglu, 2020), which consistently recognises customer misconduct as widespread and a significant challenge in hospitality work. Customer-facing employees experienced a spectrum of negative behaviours, ranging from sarcastic remarks, condescension, and indifference to overt anger, aggression, and threatening conduct. Notably, line managers (LMs) and frontline staff often normalised such behaviours as an inherent aspect of their working environment. Despite this, workers and managers retained pride and professionalism in their work in delivering service excellence. Hospitality service workers are shaped not only by organisational expectations but also by broader ideals that emphasise individual responsibility, self-regulation, and productivity (Fryberg Yngfalk and Fellesson, 2025). As argued by Sullivan and Delaney (2017) and Gill and Scharff (2013), workers often internalise these norms, adopting behavioural standards that prioritise emotional restraint and

professionalism, even when confronted with customer misconduct. Such competencies are valued within hospitality work environments, where maintaining composure and productivity is frequently rewarded, sometimes at the expense of workers' dignity, equality, and sense of justice (Fryberg Yngfalk and Fellesson, 2025). Within service industries, being selected or preferred by customers constitutes a central organisational goal and simultaneously becomes a personal imperative for employees. Workers must navigate managerial pressure, occupational norms, and the social expectations inherent in face-to-face customer encounters (Sliter *et al.,* 2010; Yagil, 2017). As a result, hospitality employees are expected to accommodate customer demands (Bowen and Schneider, 2014) and suppress negative emotional responses (Hochschild, 1983), even when such emotions are legitimate reactions to disrespect, hostility, or abuse (Yagil, 2017). Rather than challenging customer behaviour or the broader structural power imbalance it reflects (Shamir, 2008), employees often continue "playing the game" (Sherman, 2007). This compliance functions as a coping mechanism, providing temporary relief in stressful interactions, and simultaneously reinforces their professional identity as competent service workers (Gill & Scharff, 2013). Contesting abusive behaviour may feel "impossible," as it would require disrupting deeply ingrained expectations of what it means to demonstrate professionalism in service work. Consequently, customer violations and harassment become institutionalised as routine, if regrettable, features of hospitality labour. Meeting customer needs thus extends beyond a functional job requirement; it assumes an existential dimension in shaping workers' actions, self-reflection, and evaluations of their own professional worth (Skålén, 2009; Skålén *et al.,* 2008).

Meanwhile, a key insight from the study was the central role of alcohol in driving customer abuse and misbehaviour. Both industry representatives and trade union participants acknowledged this association. Alcohol consumption increases the likelihood of unruly and aggressive behaviour by lowering individuals' inhibitions (Field *et al.*, 2010; George and Stoner, 2000; Giancola *et al.*, 2010; Parrot and Eckhardt, 2018; Steele and Josephs, 1990). One of the most influential theoretical frameworks in this area is the alcohol myopia model (Steele and Josephs, 1990), which provides a comprehensive explanation of how alcohol impairs behavioural regulation (Giancola *et al.*, 2010). According to this model, acute alcohol use diminishes the capacity for demanding and disciplined cognitive processing, particularly tasks requiring sustained attention. As attention narrows, individuals become less able to process a broad range of internal and external cues, resulting in a disproportionate focus on salient, simple, or highly noticeable stimuli (Giancola *et al.*, 2010). For instance, the sensory cues

associated with food can promote overeating (Hofmann *et al.*, 2011), while the attentiveness and friendliness of table servers may be misinterpreted as intimate, potentially eliciting an inappropriately sexualised response (George and Stoner, 2000). Although individuals often consume alcohol to relax or ease social interaction, and it can indeed temporarily reduce anxiety and depression, its cognitive effects can also distort perception, influence thought processes, and generate implied associations, attentional biases, and extreme social reactions (Field *et al.*, 2010; Giancola *et al.*, 2010; Steele and Josephs, 1990), including heightened aggression. Meanwhile, front-of-house staff and managers reported that during events such as hen and stag parties, office functions, weddings, corporate gatherings, and televised or local football matches, customers were more likely to consume excessive alcohol and engage in deviant behaviour. Ostrowsky (2018) highlighted the correlation between alcohol consumption by sports fans and aggressive behaviour, whilst Thurnell-Read and Young (2022, p.195) noted that for hen and stag party events, alcohol is an essential factor at these types of events. Intoxication and inebriation play a fundamental role in these ritualistic pre-wedding functions. Alcohol consumption is often intended to generate a sense of excitement and emotional elevation in the immediate moment of an event. It is viewed as a key component in the ritualistic choreography of pre-wedding functions and an integral feature of broader social and celebratory occasions (Grant and MacAvoy, 2011; Thurnell-Read and Young, 2022).

The influence of crowds and groups on individual behaviour has long been recognised within social psychology. In *The Crowd* (1895), Gustave Le Bon argued that a "collective mind" can subsume the individual, diminish personal responsibility and reduce inhibitions, thereby enabling behaviours that diverge from one's typical conduct. According to Le Bon, individuals immersed within a crowd relinquish their personal feelings, ideas, and behavioural norms, adopting instead the attitudes and actions of the collective once full submergence occurs (Le Bon, 1895). Building on these foundations, Festinger *et al.* (1963) proposed that individuals undergo de-individuation within group settings, a process that further weakens self-regulation and accountability. These theories of crowd dynamics and de-individuation could help explain why social group events may catalyse deviant behaviours, including customer sexual CSH. As both Le Bon (1895) and Festinger *et al.* (1963) note, the erosion of social responsibility and the reduced likelihood of being confronted for antisocial behaviour create conditions in which misconduct can flourish. When combined with the inhibitory effects of alcohol, well-documented in its capacity to lower restraint and increase impulsivity (Field *et al.,* 2010; George and Stoner, 2000; Parrot and Eckhardt, 2018), these environments can foster hostile

working conditions. Stockdale *et al.* (2004) suggest that such contexts significantly heighten the risk of CSH within hospitality frontline settings. Excessive alcohol consumption and crowded social environments, therefore, constitute a volatile combination that may promote aggressive and inappropriate behaviours towards service workers, including forms of sexual misconduct. Alcohol has been consistently linked with risky sexual behaviour, sexual aggression, and related forms of harm (Field *et al.,* 2010; George and Stoner, 2000; Giancola *et al.,* 2010; Parrot and Eckhardt, 2018; Steele and Josephs, 1990). George and Stoner (2000, p. 92) argue that cultural imagery frequently represents alcohol and sexuality as intertwined, reinforcing the notion that drinking enhances opportunities for sexual engagement—whether through romanticised settings, celebratory rituals, or social scenarios in which alcohol consumption is paired with sexualised visual cues. Collectively, these cultural and situational factors contribute to environments where sexualised behaviours become more likely.

Excessive alcohol consumption is a significant factor in creating HWEs, directly affecting workplace conditions. Recognising this, alongside the influence of customer power, underpins the first objective of this research: to examine the dynamics of frontline hospitality work and the power relations within the customer service triad. Meanwhile, findings from this study indicate that such influences can facilitate SH by customers, which often occurs spontaneously and without restraint.

8.2 The prevalence of customer sexual harassment in Scottish hospitality

This study examined CSH experienced by FHWs in Scottish hospitality venues. While the findings highlighted a significant and persistent issue of customer misbehaviour, the research also demonstrated that SH has become an entrenched and routine aspect of frontline service work across the sites included in the study. These results align with wider scholarship in the Scottish hospitality sector. For example, Booyens *et al.* (2022) and Hadjisolomou *et al.* (2021) similarly identified verbal abuse, intimidation, aggression, and SH by customers as commonplace within hospitality environments. Participants in this study, including workers and managers, were employed across a varied range of venues, including bars, bar-restaurants, large international hotel chains, small and medium-sized hotel groups, and a nightclub. Across these contexts, workers described a widespread normalisation of customer-perpetrated SH, often viewing such behaviour as an inevitable component of their roles. However, the research also revealed important complexities regarding how SH is understood and interpreted. The Equality Act of 2010 makes it clear that organisations are accountable for ensuring that the

obligations in the Act are enacted, yet regarding sexual harassment, this research found that accountability was a grey area.

Frink and Klimoski (1998) defined the concept of accountability as "the perceived need to justify or defend a decision or action to an audience that has the power to reward or sanction, where those outcomes are seen as contingent on accountability conditions" (p. 9). Within this framework, accountability functions as a regulatory mechanism through which norms, rules, and legal expectations are enforced (Tetlock, 1985). Importantly, accountability is embedded in a social system that requires individuals to explain their actions, with failures to do so potentially resulting in reputational, legal, or financial consequences (Schlenker, 1982). This highlights the extent to which accountability depends not only on formal rules but also on shared understandings of expected behaviour. O'Leary *et al.* (2004) suggest that when role expectations are unclear or absent, accountability mechanisms are weakened. Furthermore, in organisational contexts where explicit behavioural standards are not articulated, individuals retain greater discretion over their actions. The authors argue that the absence of clear prohibitions against sexual harassment implicitly signals that such behaviour does not violate managerial expectations. As a result, behaviour is more likely to be guided by personal values rather than organisational norms, reducing the likelihood that individuals will anticipate sanction or censure for inappropriate conduct (O'Leary *et al.,* 2004). From the accountability perspective, this ambiguity poses a significant challenge. In theory, individuals cannot reasonably be held accountable for behaviour they do not clearly understand to be unacceptable. Sexual harassment is particularly susceptible to such ambiguity, as interpretations of what constitutes harassing behaviour vary widely across individuals and are a matter of individual opinion (Peters *et al.,* 2012). For example, research indicates that men and women may evaluate identical behaviours differently when assessing whether they constitute harassment (Abbey, 1982; Blumenthal, 1998). These divergent perceptions complicate efforts to apply universal standards and undermine the consistency with which accountability is enforced. Frink and Klimoski (1998) further suggest that ambiguity not only limits individual accountability but also diminishes the effectiveness of formal organisational policies. Accountability research consistently demonstrates that vague or ambiguous standards are less likely to influence behaviour, even when formal policies exist. In this respect, policies prohibiting sexual harassment may have a limited practical impact. This is even more of a problem if they are not supported by clear behavioural expectations and shared interpretations

of the issue. This finding raises important questions about the adequacy of policy-based approaches to harassment prevention in isolation (Frink and Klimoski, 1998)

The literature also sheds light on how accountability ambiguity influences the responses of harassment victims. Prior research indicates that individuals who experience sexual harassment often initially adopt passive coping strategies, such as avoidance or ignoring the behaviour, rather than confronting the perpetrator or making a formal report and conceptualise this as a reflective decision-making process (O'Leary *et al.,* 2004). Whereby inaction provides time to assess potential risks, consequences, and future options, these response strategies differ notably in their reversibility. While confrontation and reporting represent definitive and often irreversible actions, avoidance and ignoring remain adaptable over time. Under conditions of uncertainty, particularly when organisational accountability mechanisms are unclear, this reversibility may make passive responses appear safer and more attractive during the early stages of harassment experiences (O'Leary *et al,* 2004). This research found extensive examples of avoidance in ignoring CSH incidents, which reinforced the normalisation of the phenomenon. Such normalisation was in common with academic research (see Fitzgerald, 2020; Good and Cooper, 2016; Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2023; Kensbock *et al.*, 2015; Lugosi, 2019; Waudby and Poulston, 2017). LMs have the responsibility and bear accountability for delivering HRM, which includes worker well-being (Armstrong and Tayler, 2020; Evans, 2015). This research found that LMs adopted a passive approach regarding addressing CSH; this could be seen as an abdication of responsibility and, indeed, accountability. It is debatable as to whether the organisations that LM and FHW participants worked for had clarity about who was accountable for addressing and managing CSH. This ambiguity may account for the victim's responses highlighted in this research. Similarly, LM ambivalence meant that HRPs were not kept in the loop about CSH and were largely oblivious to the problem. This finding resonates with Nimri *et al. (*2021), who discovered that hotel management and HRPs had little knowledge of CSH in their properties. Therefore, clarity of accountability of who, how and when CSH is addressed would be a sound starting point in providing transparency of the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, this research found that SH frequently depended on an individual's subjective judgment and personal appraisal of an incident, rather than on consistent organisational or sector-wide criteria. Furthermore, environmental and contextual factors, such as workplace culture, the nature of customer interactions, and situational dynamics, shaped how incidents

were perceived and evaluated. This supports Peters and Bourne's (2012, p. 1) assertion that "sexual harassment is fluid and based solely on one's perception," highlighting the inherently interpretive nature of workers' experiences and responses.

8.2.1 Customer sexual harassment at the frontline

Research shows that SH by customers is a common feature of the industry (Beltramini *et al.,* 2020; Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015; Ram, 2018; Williamson *et al.,* 2022), and Scottish hospitality is no exception to this (see Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021). However, research findings from frontline service workers and LMs involved in this study found that defining SH was not a black-and-white process. It was complex in thought, involving contextual and environmental working conditions along with personal perception and judgment. Although there is an expansive range of behaviours associated with SH, from covert, understated psychological manipulation to outright physical assault (Frost *et al.,* 2022), the study found that frontline workers were not fully aware of their employer's definition of SH. Contrastingly, the research findings revealed that LMs, and indeed the organisation and the internal HRPs, were more aware of corporate definitions of SH. These actors also held the assumption that workers would be aware through the reading of corporate policy documents. However, research findings suggest that this assumption is not one that is substantiated.

The definition of workplace SH used as the foundation of this research is that of the UK Equality Act of 2010. As a reminder, in the UK workplace, SH is defined as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, be this physical, verbal, films, images, or any degrading conduct. Any unwanted behaviour that disregards a person's dignity, predetermined or not, or creates an unpleasant, intimidating, demeaning, or embarrassing environmental situation, whether intended or not, will all fall foul of the legislation (ACAS, 2024). Constituents of SH are making sexual remarks to a person or flirting with them; sexual innuendo; sexually offensive jokes, including jokes about gender or orientation; asking someone about their sex life; touching someone without their consent; showing or sharing of pornographic material/photos/images; physical assault and/or rape (UK Equality Act, 2010). When taking this definition of workplace SH, all the frontline service workers and LMs who were interviewed, irrespective of gender, reported that during their careers in hospitality, they had experienced levels of SH across a continuum. This continuum was based on a hierarchical level of what an individual thought about an incident, which ranged from an incident being irrelevant through to low, medium and high levels of seriousness. The seriousness of which was

determined through the individual's interpretive prism of CSH. Nine of these participants considered that, during their careers, they had been subjected to a level of SH that had crossed the line of seriousness. The general definition of a prism is when a beam of white light is passed through a solid transparent piece of material that has several flat sides, which separates and presents many different beams of colours (Collins Dictionary, 2025). In this research, the phrase interpretive prism is used to describe an episode of CSH, which is split and categorised into hierarchical levels by both FHWs and LMs. Therefore, there is a duality when interpreting an incident of CSH, yet the duality generally leads to opposing interpretations of incidents.

CSH – an interpretive prism

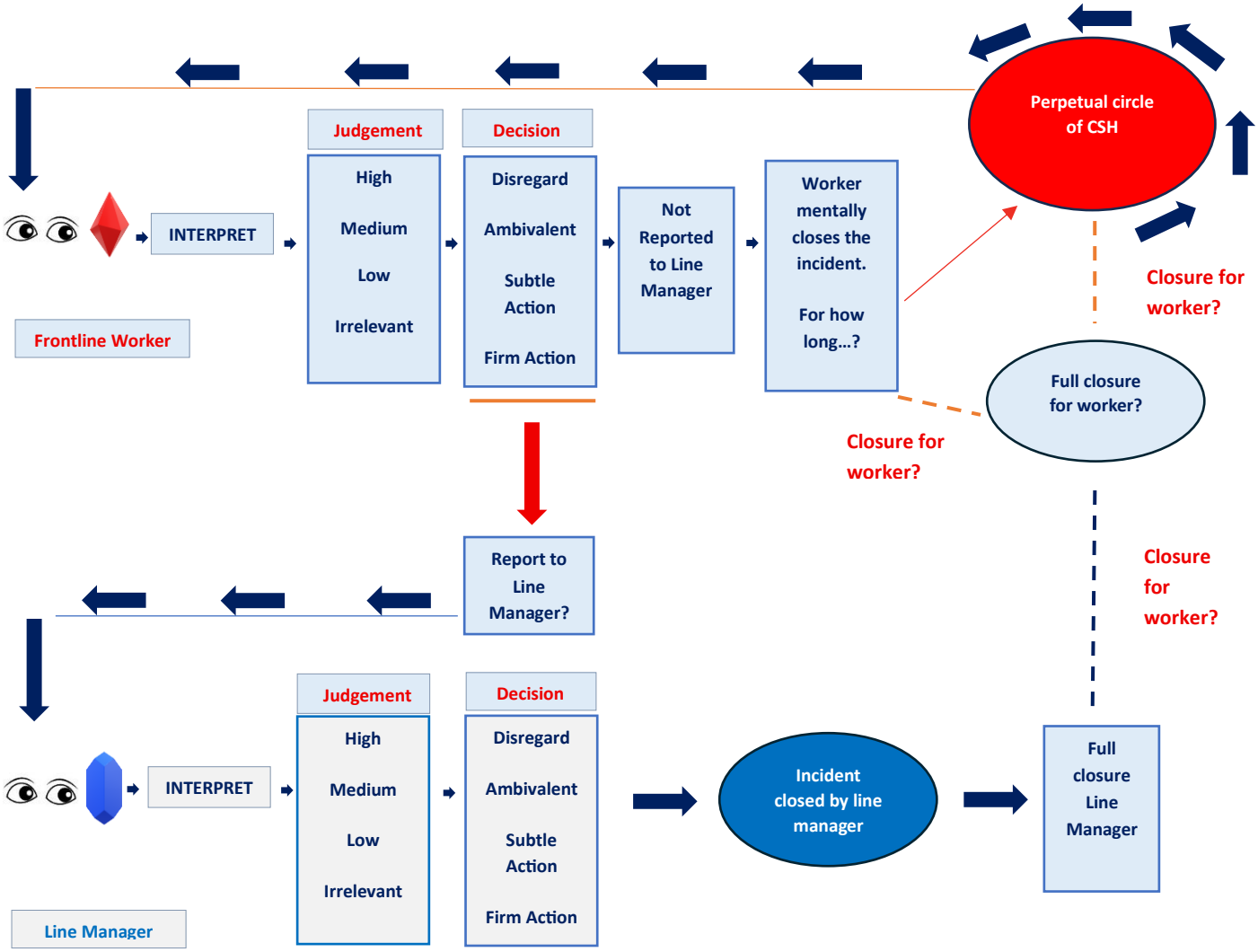
Figure 5 (see page 195) illustrates the CSH Interpretive Prism. The graphic is designed to be read from left to right, beginning with the frontline worker at the top, who initially interprets the incident through their own experiential and perceptual framework. The worker then evaluates the incident and determines the severity of the behaviour encountered. A worker may choose to disregard it; be ambivalent to the matter; respond with subtle action, for example, asking for the behaviour to stop; or take firmer action they feel is appropriate to the situation. This assessment subsequently informs their decision on whether to report the issue to their LM. If the worker chooses not to report the incident, they mentally set it aside until the next occurrence, which is represented by the solid red arrow feeding into the ongoing cycle of CSH. However, this raises important questions: how long does this closure last, and can it ever be complete when the worker anticipates future incidents? The dotted red line between the full closure for the worker shows that this closure is not solid or final because the worker anticipates further incidents in the future. In short, the dotted line visualises the fragile, temporary and uncertain nature of the workers' attempt to put the incident behind them.

Meanwhile, if the worker considers that a behavioural red line has been crossed by the customer and chooses to inform the LM – shown in the figure with a downward-facing arrow under the worker's decision-making box – the incident is then interpreted through the manager's own personal experiential and perceptual framework. In effect, the LM repeats the same cycle of interpretation, judgement and decision-making. The key difference is that once the LM has made the decision, an action (or inaction) has been taken, and they consider the incident fully closed in their view. The question, however, is whether this constitutes full closure for the worker? The dotted blue line connecting the manager's closure to the "full closure for the

worker" circle indicates that, if the worker does not experience full closure, the incident feeds back into the ongoing cycle of CSH.

Figure 5: Customer Sexual Harassment: the interpretive prism

(source: the author)



CSH - hierarchical levels

The perceived seriousness of an incident for both workers and LMs is shaped primarily by their personal experience and individual interpretation (see Kaiser and Major, 2006), and the wider normalisation of such behaviour seen within the hospitality sector (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Coffey *et al.,* 2023; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023). These judgements are not shaped by organisational policies or formal procedural frameworks. In the UK, organisational responses to workplace SH typically draw on the Worker Protection Act (Amendment of the Equality Act 2010), supplemented by guidance on how to deal with such matters issued by ACAS and the EHRC (see ACAS, 2024; EHRC, 2024). ACAS further provides recommendations concerning policy formulation and managerial processes and procedures on dealing with workplace SH. However, these do not delineate thresholds of seriousness. As outlined in Section 2.1, the statutory definition of workplace SH centres on "unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature." Although the legislation provides illustrative examples, it does not provide organisations with criteria for distinguishing between the levels of seriousness of SH misconduct. Consequently, assessments of severity remain a matter for individual judgement. Keenan *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that contextual elements, including the perceived severity of the sexually harassing behaviour, significantly influence whether an incident is interpreted and labelled as SH. For Nitschke *et al.* (2019), perceived harm plays a significant role in credibility assessments of an incident; victims who appear more visibly distressed are typically viewed as more credible, which provides some reasoning as to the hierarchical judgement of victims and, for that matter, LM's. That said, one would expect that elements of common sense come into play regarding what can be considered as obvious incidents, such as physical sexual assault. Notably, none of the participants in this study reported receiving any organisational clarification regarding the seriousness of incidents of SH. This suggests that organisations rely almost exclusively on the legal definition contained within the UK Equality Act (2010), without providing any additional interpretive guidance to employees, whether they are workers or managers. Similarly, organisations in this study did not provide employees with guidance on what process or procedure should be adopted for incidents of customer abuse. Whilst organisations have a responsibility for providing workplaces that are safe to work in (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020), concerning CSH, organisational leadership is lacking as there is a paucity of policy and procedures specific to CSH, this resonating with Ram (2018). In this instance, with unclear organisational leadership, it is left to LMs, who are responsible for implementing operational practicalities for safe workplaces (CIPD, 2023), to make their own decisions. In effect, this lack of organisational leadership causes procedural ambiguity in how

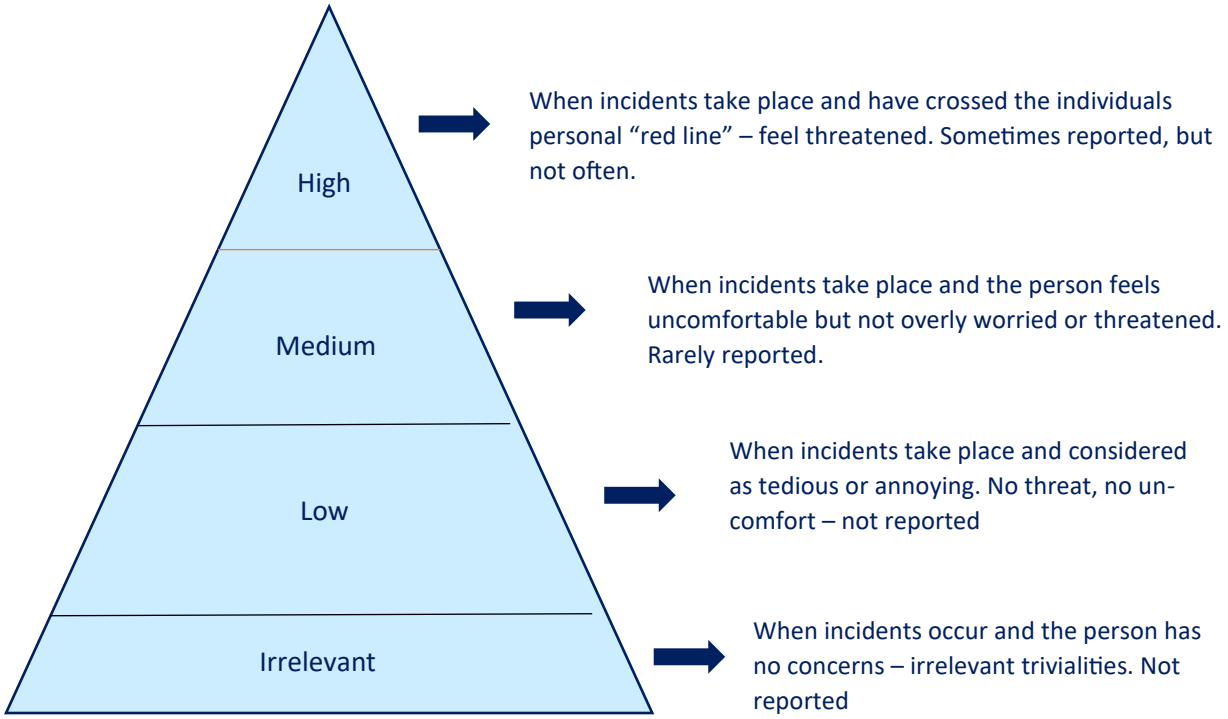
to address and manage CSH. The unintentional outcome is that LMs appear to show ambivalence towards CSH and thus, the responsibility towards worker well-being. McDonald (2012) suggests that the development of clear SH policies is critical in assessing risks and predicting SH. However, the fact that organisations may have policies of workplace SH, ambiguity in managerial interpretation remains a persistent barrier to effective implementation. Walker *et al.* (2019) found that even when SH policies formally existed, managers were often unsure whether customer-perpetrated sexual harassment constituted a distinct category from coworker-perpetrated SH. This uncertainty meant that incidents involving customers were frequently misclassified, deprioritised, or handled informally, further weakening the intended protective function of workplace policies. The finding highlights the critical gap between policy presence and policy comprehension, demonstrating that written procedures alone are insufficient without clear definitions, training, and managerial guidance on how to respond to different sources of harassment (Walker *et al.* 2019). Moreover, McCann (2005) considers that SH policy details can vary and that there are no universally accepted procedures for implementing them. McCann (2005) argues that the content and specificity of SH policies vary considerably across organisations, noting that there are no universally accepted or standardised procedures for their implementation. This absence of consensus means that organisations often develop SH policies in an ad hoc manner, resulting in inconsistent practices, ambiguous guidelines, and uneven levels of protection for employees (McCann, 2005). Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place may not in themselves help prevent CSH; however, at the very least, it would show employees that they are aware of the phenomenon. On a legal basis, for employers, Parker (1999) suggests that the mere presence of SH policies may assist the employer in cases where vicarious liability could be a concern.

Meanwhile, the hierarchical levels of seriousness depicted in Figure 6 (shown on page 201) arise from the perceptions and interpretive frameworks of the workers and LMs, rather than from any organisationally defined criteria.

Figure 6: Hierarchical Levels of CSH

As seen by Frontline Service Workers and Line Managers

(source: the author)



Important Note: the above levels are generated by workers and line managers alone and are not based on any organisational criteria. Therefore, organisational definitions, perceptions, or responsibilities play no part in creating or defining hierarchical levels.

Clearly, then, and notwithstanding the very broad legal definition of SH, one of the key findings emerging from interviews with FHWs and LMs was the role of personal interpretation of what constitutes CSH, with this being viewed through the individual's personal interpretive prism of what is considered SH. This finding has a link to Kaiser and Major (2006), who consider that, given that perceptions are shaped by individual motivations, life experiences and cognitive frameworks, determining whether an incident constitutes SH can be challenging. Perceptions play a crucial role in determining whether SH has occurred and whether it warrants reporting and/or action being taken, yet these judgments are often challenging because potentially harassing behaviour may be misinterpreted as welcomed by the recipient or attributed to an innocent intention (Crocker and Major, 1989; Pickel and Gentry, 2017). Findings from this study resonate with these considerations about perception. Additionally, organisational and personal factors shape how employees view and experience SH. Characteristics such as a worker's age, gender, gender role, prior exposure to SH, and their perception of how tolerant

managers are toward such behaviour all influence how SH is perceived (McCabe and Hardman, 2005), adding to the complexity in perceiving SH. For clarity, Table 6 below illustrates the types of SH participants perceived by FHWs and LMs. These are shown in the hierarchical levels which emerged from the research. The hierarchical levels outlined below are established exclusively by workers and line managers, independent of any organisational framework. Accordingly, organisational definitions, perceptions, and formal responsibilities did not influence the interpretation of these levels.

Examples of Hierarchical Levels of CSH	
High Level	Grabbing. Groping. Mauling. Sexual Assault. Sexualised hostility. Sexual intimidation. Dignity violation. Aggressive propositions and sexual advances.
Medium Level	Sexualised remarks. Displaying pornographic images. Unwanted hugging/kissing. Questions about sex life. Inappropriate touching. Some unwelcome advances. Degrading sexual comments. Offensive catcalling. Offensive sexual gestures. Propositions.
Low Level	Leering. Some sexual gestures. Some sexual innuendo. Some sexually offensive jokes. Some unwelcome advances. Constant flirting. Pestering for a date.
Irrelevant	Flirting. Asking for a date and/or contact. Some sexual innuendo. Some sexualised jokes. Some catcalling. Wolf whistling. Some unwelcome advance. Some suggestive looks.

Table 6: Examples of sexual harassment actions by customers

Evidence found that workers and managers tended to accept CSH as part of the job. Often, they perceived incidents as minor, and as Peters and Bourne (2012) indicated, defining SH is based on one's own perception of it, even if there is a clear legal definition or organisational policy that defines it. However, LM evidence suggested that they did not necessarily consider the impact of an incident on the victims themselves. Instead, the impact they considered mainly involved other guests, for example, when an incident of CSH was likely to cause annoyance or discomfort among other patrons in the venue. If this were the case, it was more likely that they would acknowledge the matter but not necessarily act against the customer. None of the participants in this research was provided with any formal definition of SH by the researcher. They were asked what their employer's definition was and what they personally regarded as SH. Aside from what could be considered obvious SH, such as physical assault, the research made it clear that individual interpretations were very personal. Even so, Keenan *et al.* (2025) found that even when there is a definition of SH, irrespective of type, it does not necessarily influence how a person perceives the behaviour as SH or how harmful they judge it to be.

Moreover, it suggests that individual recognition of an action as SH is critical in judgements of the behaviour. Meanwhile, tolerance levels for incidents were very consistent across FHWs and LMs. Participants who had worked in different hospitality sub-sectors and organisations indicated that CSH was something they had become accustomed to and that it was part of the culture of hospitality work. This suggests that this could be a potential reason for the high tolerance levels of the phenomenon, aligning with organisational theory of SH (Gruber, 1992; Pina *et al.*, 2009; Tangri *et al.*, 1982). Furthermore, it is believed that the frequency and prevalence of SH are significantly influenced by perceptions of tolerance levels (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1994; O'Connell and Korabik, 2000). In addition to tolerance levels, both workers and managers recognised environmental contextual factors that influence whether an incident of CSH is perceived to have occurred. This led to a common phrase among frontline service workers and LMs: "It depends on what you consider as sexual harassment", when asked if they had experienced CSH in their careers. This aligns with Peters and Bourne (2012), who argue that the definition of SH is fluid, and individuals will define it according to their personal opinions. Meanwhile, this research has found that how FHWs and LMs interpret an incident of SH depends on their subjective lens. As a result, these individual perspectives lead to an assessment of the incident using a hierarchical scale. Consequently, if an FHW reports an incident, the LM will undergo the same interpretive process and decide on the most appropriate way to address or not address an allegation of CSH.

Power and sexual harassment

Theoretical approaches to the reasons for SH were discussed in Section 2.3. Organisational theory puts forward the notion that inequalities, power and status within organisations have the potential to increase the prospects of SH taking place (Gruber, 1992; Tangri *et al.,* 1982). The theory considers that differentials of power due to hierarchical structures promote the possibility of SH materialising (Kensbock *et al.,* 2015). This theory relates to organisational hierarchical structures in organisations and does not necessarily directly relate to third-party harassment, so it could be considered that this theory does not necessarily link to the phenomenon of CSH. However, as LMs manage subordinates who are also subordinates themselves, they are, of course, part of the organisational hierarchical structure. When examining the power structure and power imbalances within the customer service triangle (see Section 2.5.3), the hierarchical power of the LM over the frontline service worker is clear. The LM, when viewing an incident of CSH through their own interpretive prism, will decide if an

incident warrants any form of action. Research for this thesis indicated that if an LM, for example, informs a FHW that what has occurred is not considered as SH, the worker will likely accede to the LM's decision and take it no further. At the same time, evidence from this research suggests that LMs will be very conscious of the risk and reputation of the company when dealing with customers. Similarly, they have in the back of their mind some concern about any criticism being received from their own LM or senior management if problems escalate from an incident. Moreover, the power inequalities and hierarchy of the customer in the customer service triangle also come into play. Although the customer is not an actual member of the organisational hierarchy, the nature of the customer service triad means they hold a hierarchical power advantage over the worker and manager, which allows them a sense of customer power. Organisational theory suggests that the notion of power augments the power imbalance and can enhance the chances of SH occurring (Cleveland and Kerst, 1993). Additionally, a key factor in organisational theory is that organisational norms, ethics and tolerance of hostile workplace climates can enhance the chances of SH (Gruber, 1992; Tangri *et al.,* 1982). Employers, and for that matter, LMs, of the FHWs interviewed for this research, had a high tolerance level of customer misbehaviour and CSH. As a result, if management accepts these tolerance levels and the normalisation of CSH, then organisational theory and its notions of power imbalances can provide some insight as an explanation for the phenomenon.

Gender: sex and gender roles in sexual harassment

SH constitutes a form of gender-based discrimination and is defined by the USEEOC as unwelcome sexual conduct or advances that adversely affect an individual's employment, undermine work performance, or create a hostile work environment (USEEOC, 2022). Sociocultural theory, which is generally feminist in orientation, suggests that gender inequality occurs due to societal norms that legitimise dominance of males over females and that SH is a mechanism for control over women by men (Gutek, 1985; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015). By highlighting sex role expectations and supporting sex status norms, such as male power and female subordination, SH is thought to reinforce the idea that women are the inferior sex, thereby contributing to the gender stratification that already exists (Malovich and Stake, 1990; Schacht and Stake, 1993). According to feminist theory, this grants men the opportunity to justify actions such as SH (Vaux, 1993). However, the focus on males and class by sociocultural feminist theory tends to rule out other reasons for SH, such as sexual orientations, ethnicity or age (Dillabough, 2004). Evidence from this research into CSH found that participants were sexually harassed by both opposing genders and the same sex gender. As a

result, sociocultural theory, although holding merit, around male power, does not explain the commonality of same sex CSH or harassment by females on males, which was a noteworthy feature of the research findings.

Meanwhile, a third theoretical approach to SH is that of the natural/biological approach. According to the natural/biological approach, SH is a common and natural attraction between males and females and is, in general, a component of evolutionary theory in mating behaviour. SH is therefore regarded as a normal element of selecting a relationship and is a sign of sexual interest (Barak *et al.,* 1995; Kensbock *et al.,* 2015). From an evolutionary standpoint, it suggests that men will take advantage of their power as a means of obtaining sex (Browne, 1997). However, the approach treats SH in a basic, straightforward manner, whilst also suggesting that SH is innate to men. Furthermore, it focuses on women as being the only victims of SH, with men being left out of consideration as victims (Pina *et al.,* 2009). The findings from this research align with other research and surveys (Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Jones, 2006; USMSPB, 2022), which suggest that men are also victims of SH. Whilst this theory can be compelling to some, particularly as it indicates male power dominance, like sociocultural theory, it reduces the issue of SH to basic levels of humans, and does not consider their higher-cognitive faculties like consciousness, the perceptual mind, reasoning, and morality (Frimpong, 2025; Pina *et al.,* 2009). Furthermore, it does not account for same sex SH, which several of the participants in this research had encountered.

A final approach to SH is that of sex-role spill-over theory. The main approach of this theory is that men and women enter the workplace with their own expectations and beliefs about the conduct of genders, regardless of whether expectations are fitting in the workplace. The approach suggests that gender-related beliefs of sexual harassers supplant beliefs that reinforce equality of workers (Sbraga and O'Donohue, 2000). Sex role is drawn into gender-based workplace behavioural norms and the overall working environment. Sex-role spillover happens when female workers work in a position where they are tasked to display their sexuality through their appearance, clothing and behaviour towards others, more than males in similar working situations (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). Sex-role spill-over will be evident if actions by a female towards, for example, a male customer, if she acts in an overly familiar manner, shows the appearance of flirting with a customer, or acts in what can be seen as a seductive way towards them (Gutek and Morasch, 1982). However, it is generally considered that the sex-role spill-over theory by itself does not establish why SH happens (Gutek and Done, 2001).

The hospitality industry is characterised by a strong emphasis on service provision, creating a fundamentally servile working environment (Gummerus, 2014; Manfreda *et al.,* 2024). The sector attracts a high proportion of young workers, with young women particularly dominant in customer-facing roles (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020). SH is prevalent in hospitality partly because the nature of service work requires close personal engagement with customers, which can blur boundaries and heighten vulnerability (Poulston, 2008; Ram, 2018). When such interaction is performed by young female workers, who may also be perceived by customers as occupying a low-status role, the dynamics described in sex-role theory offer a lens for understanding the occurrence of SH. Employees come to internalise the expectation of maintaining a "friendly" disposition toward customers, thereby conforming to gendered norms that reproduce patriarchal relations of dominance and female subordination, which are framed as conventional and legitimate features of service work (see Hochschild, 1983; Pettinger, 2005). Sex-role theory suggests that when customers interpret behaviours such as friendliness or perceived flirtation as expressions of gendered expectations, the theory may offer some explanatory value for provoking SH. However, consistent with the limitations of the other theories discussed, sex-role theory does not account for incidents of same-sex SH by customers.

Hostile working environments and customer SH

Findings from the research suggested that it was not uncommon for frontline hospitality workers and LMs to work in HWEs, often caused by customer and contextual situations. The ILO notes that HWE significantly provoke workplace SH (Lippel, 2016). A HWE is created when the working environment involves coworkers, line supervisors/managers, organisational hierarchy, and customers/clients who intimidate, insult, ridicule, and assault workers based on their sex or sexuality (Aalberts and Seidman, 1994; Ram *et al.*, 2016; Rhee, 1997; Thomas, 2021). McGinley *et al.* (2007) observe that a HWE occurs when an employee, whether male or female, subjectively perceives the working environment as sufficiently hostile to alter the circumstances of their job and considers the situation severe enough to change the terms and conditions of their employment. Unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, verbal or physical acts of a sexual nature are regarded as SH when they directly or indirectly impact a person's employment, hinder their ability to perform their duties, or create an uncomfortable, intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment (Buchanan *et al.*, 2014; O'Leary-Kelly *et al.*, 2009; USEEOC, 2022).

Regarding workplace SH, Fitzgerald *et al.* (1995) proposed three dimensions which could be regarded as behavioural domains for SH: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. The term gender harassment describes a wide range of derogatory, aggressive, and demeaning words and actions used towards employees without the intention of sexual collaboration. Examples can include presentation of pornographic or obscene materials; taunts and insults of a sexual nature; and aggressive, threatening, or intimidating activities. Undesired sexual attention encompasses a broad spectrum of unreciprocated verbal and nonverbal behaviour, such as unwanted comments, unwanted attention, and unwanted touching. Regarding sexual coercion, this could be considered as the quintessential form of SH, that is, the extortion of sexual cooperation in exchange for job-related considerations (Fitzgerald *et al.,* 1995). Stockdale *et al.* (2004) also note three types of hostile work environments, which generate SH, approach-based SH, rejection-based SH, and generalised SH. The foundation of approach-based SH is sexual interest towards the subject of the harasser's interest, which can be conducted through nonverbal or verbal harassment. In such cases, the harasser seeks to pursue an amorous relationship with the person of interest to them. The goal of rejection-based SH is to belittle the victim because of their gender. Once more, harassment may be either vocal or nonverbal. Instead of displaying a sexual attraction, this behaviour is intended to denigrate the victim. Meanwhile, Stockdale *et al.* (2004) generalised SH, stating that it is when sexual abuse is made towards women or men rather than any specific victim.

As discussed earlier, what was clear from this study was that excessive alcohol consumption triggered CSH, especially during group and social events. The combination of these two factors creates a working environment that can be intense and pressurised, increasing the likelihood of an HWE forming. Furthermore, the research interviews revealed that in such environments, the immediate risk of a customer sexually harassing a worker accelerated, meaning that spontaneous, uninhibited SH by a customer was often completely unexpected by the victim. As Anasori *et al.* (2020) note, HWEs can increase the risk of abuse against employees. Therefore, the concept of HWEs provides a strong and convincing explanation for provoking CSH, aligning more closely with the findings of the thesis research.

Gender, power and discrimination

At this juncture, it is worth making a brief comment concerning intersectionality – gender, power and discrimination in this research project. It is generally recognised that females experience more incidents of SH than men (Baltag *et al.,* 2021; Friborg *et al.,* 2017; Ineson *et*

al., 2013; Lim *et al.,* 2019; McLaughlin *et al.,* 2012; Vettori and Nicolaides, 2016; Yagil, 2008). In the UK, it is legally recognised under the UK Equality Act (2010) that SH is a discriminatory act against both genders (UK Equality Act, 2010).

Intersectionality explores how power dynamics influence and affect interpersonal relationships across different societies, as well as the daily lived experiences of people. Intersectionality holds that aspects such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability mutually influence one another and are interconnected. Therefore, intersectionality is a way of comprehending and rationalising the complex matter of human experiences (Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2020, p.2). All FHWs and LMs interviewed in this research were white UK citizens, apart from one FHW who was white Irish. The research found no issues around racial discrimination. However, as power dynamics influence daily lives (Smith and Hofmann, 2016), it is appropriate to comment about the intersectional social categories, highlighting the potential of gender, sexual orientation and age discrimination arising from the research. Out of the nine participants who considered that CSH abuse crossed the line, seven were female, and two were male. Both male and female customers sexually harassed the male FHWs. However, a significant proportion of CSH abuse was taken by their female coworkers, mainly by male customers. In this sense, it can be considered these as intersecting discriminatory acts around gender. (Rosette *et al.,* 2018). Two out of the nine participants were subjected to the same gender SH, one male-on-male and one female-on-female. In both these instances, the abuse came from customers who, the participants stated, were from the LGBTQ community. In these two instances, sexual orientation can be seen as intersecting with both masculinity and femininity, respectively (Rosette *et al.,* 2018). FHW and LM participants, meanwhile, were informed of often being talked down to, treated as a skivvy, and generally being spoken to with disregard by customers. Additionally, sexualised elements such as innuendo, sexualised comments and leering were also types of behaviour experienced from customers. FHWs and LMs across all age groups experienced this type of behaviour as common. However, the participant age group 18-24 tended to be treated much less respectfully and with indifference, often by customers much older. This was less of a case for LMs, who reported that they do not necessarily feel the same indifference from customers. Once again, intersections could be considered as being in play here concerning categorisation of role, age differences and perceived differences in class on the part of the customers. Otherwise, the research found no obvious instances of racial or ethnic discrimination. That said, in a legal sense, SH is a

discriminatory action, and by nature, it intersects with social and gender identities (Rosette *et al.,* 2018).

The theoretical approaches discussed perceptions of power, power structures, and gender are to the fore. To synthesise the findings with the theoretical approaches discussed, Tables 7 and 8 (see page 210) provide some details of those participants who had confirmed they had been subjected to CSH. Table 7 provides a breakdown of the role and the total number of workers/managers interviewed. Additionally, the number of workers and managers who considered that a red line had been crossed by customers. This is broken down into victim gender and percentages accordingly.

Job Role	Total Interviewed	Red Line Crossed	Red Line %		Female Victim	Female %	Male Victim	Male %
FoH Worker	17	4	23.5%		2	50.0%	2	50.0%
Line Manager	13	5	38.4%		5	100.0%	0	0.0%
Total	**30**	**9**	**30.0%**		**7**	**2**	**23.3%**	**6.66%**

Table 7: Participant breakdown of confirmed customer sexual harassment

Meanwhile, presents the role and gender breakdown of workers and managers, as well as the gender of the perpetrator. It should be mentioned that the participants were questioned if they had experienced CSH; they were just required to provide a yes or no response. Nonetheless, most participants voluntarily offered a comment on what had transpired (see Table 8). Additionally, the participants explained that the red line had been crossed on multiple occasions. For example, all five managers reported that a red line had been crossed on multiple occasions during their careers in hospitality.

Job Role/Gender	Total Interviewed	Obvious Sexual Harassment	Male Perp	Female Perp
FoH Worker - Female	11	2	2	
Line Manager Female	6	5	4	1
FoH - Male	10	2	1	1
Line Manager - Male	3	0	0	0
Total	**30**	**9 (30%)**	**7 (23%)**	**2 (7%)**

Table 8: Gender breakdown of confirmed customer sexual harassment and gender of perpetrator

8.2.2 Line managers - challenges in addressing customer sexual harassment

Section 8.2.1 of this chapter brought to attention the notion of the interpretive prism that is unique to a person's interpretation of an incident of CSH. It is not proposed in this section to discuss the interpretive prism any further, but it is recognised here, deservingly so, for the challenges that fall out of an individual's personal interpretation of events in addressing SH by customers, be these coworkers or LMs.

Meanwhile, in Section 8.8.1, customer "sovereignty" was briefly discussed in relation to its role in the power dynamics of frontline service work. It will be explored further in this section as a challenge for LMs addressing CSH. Within the service encounter, Hochschild (2012) considers that where organisations uphold a customer- is- king philosophy, a normality of unequal exchanges with workers inevitably exists (Hochschild, 2012). The term "customer sovereignty" was coined in 1936 by English economist William Hutt in his book Economists and the Public (Magness *et al.*, 2025). It refers to the customer- is- king philosophy, which grants controlling power to customers over service providers (cited in Borna *et al.*, 2024). LMs in hospitality services can feel both empowered and powerless within the customer service triad (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010). Meanwhile, Laemmli (2023) suggests that FHWs, due to their limited autonomy and subservience to customers, can become caught in what could be called "interactional entrapment" (Laemmli, 2023, p. 12). Research data for this thesis indicates that this was often the case for managers, and it could be argued that they are also caught up in the interactional entrapment concept when considering how best to address CSH. Additionally, whilst exercising some power within the service triad, managers tended to be deferential towards customers; consequently, they held back from incidents that might cause confrontation

or offence. Furthermore, the organisations where the worker and manager participants were employed had no clear, definitive process or procedure for addressing CSH, aligning with findings by Good and Cooper (2016). Without a process to follow, managers typically handled allegations of CSH by minimising the incident; this generally resulted in taking no or only subtle action against the customer, such as switching servers to different tables. While this might be viewed by victims as a quick fix, it offered only a limited solution to their concerns, as the customer remained on the premises. Only in cases where managers perceived serious incidents- mainly affecting the organisation's risk reputation- was it suggested that the customer leave the venue or be removed from the site. Subramanian and Suquet (2018) note that quick solutions are a key principle in managing customer complaints. This could explain why LMs often choose to address CSH issues through the organisation's process for dealing with difficult customer complaints.

Research data found that the real-time nature of decision-making in which a decision needs to be made on the spot with incidents of CSH is a significant challenge; this contrasts with SH by coworkers, when more time can be given to investigating incidents as per the ACAS disciplinary and grievance process (ACAS, 2015). As a result, there is little time for the same thoroughness when investigating SH by customers. This is another possible reason for erring on the side of caution when considering a customer incident. Overall, the perception of the customers' power that managers hold creates a mental schema for avoiding damaging customer relationships. This is a significant challenge for LMs, which results in them addressing difficult customer transactions with navigational caution. Furthermore, the research findings suggested that it would be even more difficult to address this type of issue in the absence of proof, such as CCTV or witnesses to an incident, which is in line with Findley *et al.* (2013). In essence, having no firm proof of an incident taking place, LMs will again act with navigational caution towards addressing an allegation of SH by a customer.

The second objective of this research was to explore the prevalence of CSH of FHWs, how LMs address incidents of the phenomenon and the challenges they face. This study recognises that CSH in its legal form is rife within Scottish hospitality, but the issue is a complex one in which industry norms, contextual environment and personal judgement play a significant part in a customer-facing worker and LM decision-making about incidents that occur. Additionally, the contextual environment provides challenges for managers in addressing CSH. The perception of customer power, proof and the real-time nature of decision making are noted as

challenges that can lead to managers taking the least line of resistance in dealing with the phenomenon. The FHW and LM research participants who had experienced SH by customers had clearly considered that a line had been crossed with the incidents they had been involved in. Furthermore, the abuse was across gender, that is, male-on- female, female-on- male, and same gender abuse (Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Holland *et al.,* 2016; Jones, 2006; Stockdale *et al.,* 2004). However, only one out of the nine reported the incident to their LM, meaning that, irrespective of gender, non-reporting of CSH was significantly apparent.

8.2.3 Non-reporting of customer sexual harassment and line manager ambivalence

Non-reporting of CSH of hospitality workers is commonplace (Gupta *et al.,* 2020; Ram *et al.,* 2016; Robinson *et al.,* 2022; Turkoglu, 2020), so it should come as no surprise that the lack of reporting emerged from the thesis research. The lack of reporting was due to workers believing they may be seen to be overreacting, they were too busy to bother about it, and, alarmingly, the lack of trust in the manager taking any action. Research suggests that these reasons are a common factor of under-reporting (non-reporting) of incidents of SH (MacDermott, 2020; Russell *et al.,* 2021; Wieslander and Lundgren, 2024). Evidence from customer-facing workers indicated that, only if an incident was threatening, would they consider informing line management; even so, that was few and far between for the same reasons noted. Thus, in line with other research, for example, Booyens *et al.* (2022), Vettori and Nicolaides (2016), Waudy and Poulston (2017), it seems that the hospitality industry accepts that SH by customers is seen as a part of the job, irrespective of how serious an incident may be, therefore normalising the problem. The outcome of this type of behaviour is seldom reported to line management due, in part, to assigning such behaviour as a standard norm (Baltag *et al.,* 2021; Matulewicz, 2016; Walker *et al.,* 2019). Ford *et al.* (2021) suggest that employees in workplaces that are more accepting of SH may choose not to speak up, with a potential negative impact being that they may become more inclined to leave the organisation.

This study found that customer-facing workers who reported incidents to managers were generally met with ambivalence towards their concerns. This ambivalence can, in part, be explained by the normalisation of the phenomenon, which research suggests is widespread across the hospitality sector (see Fitzgerald, 2020; Good and Cooper, 2016; Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2023; Kensbock *et al.*, 2015; Lugosi, 2019; Matulewicz, 2016; Quyet *et al.*, 2023; Waudby and Poulston, 2017). FHWs interviewed in this research stated that the most managers would do was to move them to another table or to a different part of the venue. Managers saw this as

decisive action, and it was regarded as closure from their perspective. The research revealed that little, if anything, is communicated to the customer, and the best outcome might be that LMs are simply aware of customers' misbehaviour. Consequently, the workers interviewed affirmed that they refrained from reporting further incidents, deeming it pointless. This finding supports the view of Spiliopoulou and Witcomb (2023, p.1854) that "…a culture of non-reporting/non-action underlies the narrative of workplace SH is uncommon."

Meanwhile, Zeidan *et al.* (2022) argue that an outcome of not reporting CSH means that the phenomenon will be an ongoing cycle that will continue to persist in the workplace. Similarly, Behzadi Fard *et al.* (2024) and Chang and Cho (2016) consider this lack of support by LMs as being common when SH is reported. Ineson *et al.* (2013), in their research into hospitality environments, found that LMs did not take issues of CSH seriously and effectively lacked interest in dealing with cases that were brought to their attention. Data from this research suggested another reason for non-reporting was the considerations by victims that, unless they had some form of proof of an incident, for example, witnessed by others or captured on CCTV, then it would be the word of a customer against the word of a victim. This burden of proof issue is highlighted by MacDermott (2020) and Otsri (2020) as a reason why SH goes unreported; consequently, workers consider they would not be supported by management Behzadi Fard *et al.*, 2024). Overall, many frontline service workers interviewed in this research considered that line management showed ambivalence and a reluctance to intervene if workers expressed a concern about troublesome customer interactions. When incidents of customer misbehaviour occurred, including SH, the "just suck it up" approach by LMs meant that FHW participants simply did so, without mentioning incidents to line management. Tseng and Kang (2013) report that managerial integrity, which includes characteristics of reliability, trust and lack of hypocrisy, promoted the chances of workers reporting CSH to management. In this research, workers' lack of trust and reliability in management dealing with CSH was lacking. Consequently, CSH was often not reported; managers considered that the issue was not a big problem in their venues. Therefore, this research argues that LM's ambivalence towards FHW allegations of customer abuse, including SH, highlights a perfunctory concern of worker well-being.

8.3 Frugality of organisational support from line manager and human resources

At this juncture, it is worth considering the definition of the well-being of employees. Warr (1987) considered it to be "the overall quality of an individual's subjective experience and

functioning at work." It is influenced by the quality of working life created by the employer, the conditions of the working environment, and the employee's own feelings of satisfaction, fulfilment, and happiness derived from their work (cited in Armstrong and Taylor, 2020, p.573). The LM's ambivalence towards victims of CSH was a highlight that emerged from the findings of the research. This self-same ambivalent manner was also seen in internal and external HRPs.

8.3.1 Line manager and human resource practitioner- perfunctory concern of well-being

There was a strong sense of passive management in interviews with LMs regarding allegations of CSH, specifically in how or whether such allegations should be addressed with the perpetrator. The research found that LMs generally tend to avoid confrontation with the customer, thereby avoiding decision-making. The balancing act of showing support to workers and the need to provide excellence in customer service is a significant problem for LMs, as negative consequences could arise if a customer were to complain to the company. Consequently, LMs tended to show a passive approach towards incidents of CSH. For Bass (1990), management passiveness does not meet the responsibilities required by the LM role, with Lee (2018) arguing that both males and females are more likely to be subjected to SH under a leader who adopts a passive approach. As discussed earlier, managers have recognised the tensions involved when handling difficult customer relations. This balancing act should not be underestimated, as it represents a significant challenge for managers (Korczynski, 2009). Essentially, it stems from the conflict of interest within the customer triad. Firstly, the manager is responsible for the service worker, ensuring they are adequately trained and receive ongoing support and development in managing customer interactions. Additionally, the LM is accountable for worker welfare and well-being in the workplace (CIPD, 2023). Similarly, within the triad, the manager holds overarching responsibility for the design and oversight of the customer experience, the cultivation of customer loyalty and retention, and the advancement of the organisation's corporate image and reputation (Ingram and Grieve, 2013). Moreover, the concern about upsetting customers highlights the influence that customers hold within the customer service triad (Hadjisolomou, 2019; Chatterjee, 2025). Basically, management increasingly expects service employees to maintain a courteous and engaging demeanour, even when confronted with instances of customer abuse or harassment, to uphold service standards and organisational reputation (Handy, 2006).

Daunt and Harris (2013) suggest that LMs' attitudes and behaviours towards customer misbehaviour are influenced by the delicate balancing act they must perform during customer

interactions. This may explain why LMs tend to adopt a cautious approach towards CSH, as reflected in research findings. Such caution means that LMs are watchful when approaching a customer involved in an allegation of SH towards a front-of-house worker. For example, they consider customer signals and hazards such as intoxication, aggression, and confederate supporters, highlighting how hostile the environment might be. Furthermore, they are wary of the potential consequences of their actions, including reactions from other customers and the possible risks and reputational damage for themselves and the organisation. These decisions are made in real-time, requiring swift judgment to manage the incident with minimal fuss. Additionally, managers keep in mind the importance of treating customers with respect and fairness. Hospitality organisations aim to provide visitors with a positive experience, which is vital given the nature of the industry (Grobelna, 2021; Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014; Ostergllava and Loku, 2024). This experience is delivered through maintaining standards and quality service; hence, LMs focus strongly on pleasing customers. This customer-centric approach was a key factor leading managers to navigate CSH cautiously.

Overall, this resulted in a lack of concern for the well-being of workers subjected to CSH. Among the thirteen managers interviewed, only two mentioned their duty of care, and even then, it was largely in the context of employment legislation, such as the UK Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974, rather than in showing empathy or understanding for worker well-being. While employee well-being is a vital part of the LM's role (CIPD 2023), the research found that actions towards CSH and supporting victims were generally insufficient across venues. This is worrying because support, along with holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring their protection, is essential for providing victims with some form of recourse (Goh *et al.*, 2022). Interestingly, the research revealed that peers offered the most support to victims, which is consistent with other studies on SH (see Batool *et al.*, 2023; Gregory *et al.*, 2021; Lai *et al.*, 2024). FHWs reported that they often had to handle issues themselves, relying heavily on peer support to manage their well-being and cope with the emotional toll of incidents or busy nights. This peer support aligns with the findings of Russen *et al.* (2024), who explored coworker support in the hospitality industry and found that, in environments where SH was prevalent, peer support helped reduce emotional exhaustion among workers. All of this contributes to the apparent ambivalence of LMs towards CSH, as they seek to avoid jeopardising customer relations. Essentially, LMs tend to revert to what they perceive as their organisational role expectations. They conform to the social and organisational role of the LM and internalise these expectations, leading them to adopt a non-accusatory stance towards customers out of respect,

while maintaining a hierarchical stance with FHWs. However, they are deeply concerned about the corporate risks, reputational damage and customer loss, this resonating with Ingram and Grieve (2013). These concerns are at the forefront of their minds and are incorporated into their role as managers. This behaviour is linked to Zimbardo *et al.* (1970) and their theory of individuals conforming to social roles. It helps explain why these managers adopt a corporate stance, prioritising organisational risk and reputation over empathy for victims of CSH. This passive approach to CSH perpetuates the normalisation of customer abuse and reflects the attitude of FHWs, who often believe that reporting incidents will be futile.

Meanwhile, this study found that HRPs (both internal and external HR service providers) held ambivalence towards CSH, along with a notion of superficial concern for worker well-being, which also emerged. This seems to be at odds with the purpose of the HR triad, which Jackson *et al.* (2014) consider as being a key element of HRM in the workplace. This lack of concern and empathy for the worker was likely due to limited knowledge about what FHWs face in their roles and weak communication channels with LMs regarding CSH. Overall, the perfunctory concern shown by LMs and HRPs contributed to the underreporting of CSH, something which is all too common in hospitality settings (Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Gupta *et al.,* 2020; Ram *et al.,* 2016; Turkoglu, 2020). Internal HRPs were unaware of the issue because no incidents had been reported by workers or LMs. This lack of awareness was further reinforced by HR's minimal presence on the frontline, where their rare visits led workers to assume someone was in trouble. Malhotra and Ackfeldt (2016) emphasise that effectively addressing HRM issues requires establishing clear and effective communication channels between HR professionals and LMs. Conversely, poor communication between the two can result in HRM ambiguity and reduced effectiveness. This appears to be the case with CSH. HR professionals play a vital role in upholding and promoting the organisation's core principles of employee management, serving as role models for raising concerns about employee treatment (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). The research found that only basic transactional communication existed between managers and HR professionals, which helps explain why HR lacked awareness of CSH. For workers, HR was seen as an authoritative, policing body rather than a supportive one, with this being similar to the considerations of Vosburgh (2007). This perception was reinforced by HR's role in enforcing compliance with induction training, which falls under both HR and management's responsibilities (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). These views discouraged workers from approaching HR with concerns, fostering a perception that HR was detached and functioned more as an extension of management than as a resource for

employee support. As a result, workers viewed HR's concern as superficial, leading to a neutral and distant relationship with the department. Meanwhile, internal HRPs remained unaware of CSH incidents, interpreting the lack of reports from LMs as evidence that such events were rare. One of the reasons for the lack of awareness could potentially be that when HR professionals are required to play a greater role in strategic objectives and cost-efficiency, the pressure on the function can become particularly pronounced (Winstanley and Woodhall, 2007). Similarly, external HRPs held comparable assumptions about CSH. However, none of the HR professionals had in place management mechanisms that could provide a clearer picture of frontline conditions. As Armstrong and Taylor (2020) note, they (HR) have a fundamental interest in employee treatment; however, regarding CSH, HR know little of this problem of frontline work, as they do not walk front-of-house and engage with workers. Therefore, they appear to exhibit the same perfunctory concern for employee well-being as LMs, which has the effect that CSH is sanitised and trivialised by LMs and HRPs.

Human resource practitioner frustrations – line manager capability and training

Meanwhile, a common theme emerging from interviews with HRPs was that LMs' capability to handle awkward HR matters, such as workplace SH, was relatively weak. This form of HR employment relations issue is also an operational one, which, as far as HRPs were concerned, sits fairly and squarely with the manager. McGovern *et al.* (1997) consider that LMs will often focus on and prioritise operational responsibilities over HR matters. In this instance, this could lead them to consider that CSH is purely an operational matter and deal with it as they see fit, rather than consider it as a HR related concern. In short, dealing with CSH as an operational issue in as simple and brief a way as possible, rather than treating CSH as an employee relations matter, could prevent needing to conduct an HR process/procedure after the event. Guest and King (2004) found that managers saw HR as bureaucratic and tended to give a low priority towards HR activities. In treating CSH as an operational matter, it lies in the manager's territory, in which they can make decisions themselves without the need to involve the HR department. Overall, whilst HRPs saw LM's having capability weaknesses in dealing with difficult HR situations, managers consider it differently; this is possibly due to them viewing CSH as an operational concern.

HR professionals considered the answer to capability concerns was to train managers to handle difficult employee relations matters (including CSH and coworker SH) on a regular and consistent basis. However, they also acknowledged that time to do training, the will to do

training, plus the financial costs of providing training were seen as significant problems. This is perhaps even more so with the clear need for hospitality organisations to retain strong control of operating costs, as highlighted by Timmins and Race (2022) and Scriven (2023). HRPs reported a lack of funds to put this in place, which is due in part to UK hospitality being disproportionately hit by the performance of the wider UK economy (UK Hospitality, 2025). Furthermore, bemoaned the fact that their employers were keeping tight control of expenditure, and that financial cuts to training budgets had reduced management development to must-have topics. Notably, none of these important topics related to training on handling workplace SH, including CSH. HR interviewees were acutely aware of the reasons for financial constraints and accepted that this was a negative by-product of the trading environment. As far as HRPs were concerned, training budgets were an easy target for financial savings. However, training may not be as full an answer to the problem as HR professionals see it to be.

Buckner *et al.* (2014) consider that training is effective in increasing awareness of SH, yet existing research has not demonstrated that such training equips managers to accurately recognise SH or to respond to it appropriately. Furthermore, contrary to optimistic assumptions about the benefits of training, Buckner *et al.* (2014) indicated that training did not enhance expertise; in fact, it reduced expertise in certain areas. Specifically, increases in both the *amount* of training and the *variety* of training programs led to decreased managerial accuracy in identifying harassment. Meanwhile, Sherwyn *et al.* (2001) suggested that training can negatively affect expertise, which may discourage organisations from investing in meaningful development efforts. Instead, it could lead them to provide only the minimum training required by law, rather than pursuing comprehensive programs that genuinely enhance employees' capabilities (Sherwyn *et al.,* 2001). Moreover, Behzadi Fard *et al.* (2024) highlight the inadequacy of training for both employees and managers in addressing workplace SH. They note that although an organisation may have policies, procedures and guidelines for employees, there were barriers to reporting incidents of SH. These barriers included uncertainty about receiving support from the organisation, social image, internal inhibitors and a lack of support from people around them. Furthermore, Behzadi Fard *et al.* (2024) noted that even when employees became aware of organisational procedures, some did not know how to report incidents of workplace SH.

Issues arising from inadequate training in managing customer-related CSH and insufficient policy knowledge were frequently highlighted by participants in this thesis. Many workers

reported being “thrown in at the deep end,” with learning occurring in real time and primarily focused on basic customer service standards and service excellence. Notably, no formal training was provided on how to respond to any form of customer abuse. Similar concerns feature across the hospitality literature, where customer-initiated harassment is recognised as an endemic and normalised workplace problem (Mitsakis *et al.,* 2025). Zelin and Magley (2022) argue that defining SH remains a fundamental obstacle to eliminating it within the workplace, as the absence of a clear and comprehensive definition limits individuals’ understanding of its various forms. This aligns with research demonstrating that SH is conceptually complex and spans behaviours from gender harassment to sexual coercion (Perry, 2024; Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018). This also resonates with the findings of this thesis, where FHWs demonstrated only a partial grasp of what constitutes SH. Although LMs claimed familiarity with corporate definitions, contextual influences frequently obscured their interpretation. Consequently, both FHWs and LMs rely on their interpretive prism when determining what constitutes SH.

While training may appear to be an appropriate intervention, it is not without limitations. Literature consistently notes that the effectiveness of SH training varies considerably depending on design quality, contextual support, and organisational culture (Eatough *et al.,* 2019). Conversely, interactive and psychologically safe training environments tend to demonstrate more promising outcomes (Cronin *et al.,* 2023). Nevertheless, even where training is well designed, organisational tolerance of SH can undermine its effectiveness (Goldberg *et al.,* 2019). Behzardi Fard *et al.* (2024) argue that improved SH training has the potential to reduce workplace incidents, especially when accompanied by clear policies and procedures. Evidence from this thesis indicates that none of the organisations represented by participants had policies explicitly addressing CSH. This finding echoes Ram’s (2018) observations that corporate policies on customer violence, including SH, are largely absent, an issue also highlighted in contemporary tourism sector analyses, which document persistent under-reporting and managerial inaction in cases of customer abuse (Nimri *et al.,* 2024; Chatterjee, 2025).

Although HR responsibilities are undertaken, their quality is often limited. Line managers’ heavy workloads and the necessity for multitasking mean that HR issues are frequently deprioritised. This mirrors Evans’ (2017) findings that role conflict, work overload, and role ambiguity diminish the quality of HRM implementation in retail settings. Broader HRM

literature supports this, emphasising that HR system effectiveness depends heavily on line-manager implementation capacity, motivation, and social exchange relationships (Kehoe and Han, 2019; Bos-Nehles and Meijerink, 2018). External service providers acknowledge the financial constraints affecting the hospitality sector, and while regular training is considered beneficial, its effectiveness remains context-dependent (Perry *et al.,* 2010). This is consistent with evidence that the hospitality industry's structural characteristics, such as high interpersonal contact and customer dominance, exacerbate risks of workplace harassment and violence (Kim, 2024; Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022). Buckner *et al.* (2014) similarly argue that although SH training may increase conceptual understanding, it does not necessarily enhance managers' ability to identify or appropriately respond to SH incidents. Roehling and Huang (2018) also conclude that SH training raises awareness but does not independently reduce SH prevalence, a finding echoed in recent interdisciplinary reviews of harassment prevention efficacy (Roehling and Huang, 2017; Eatough *et al.,* 2019).

8.3.2 The line managers and human resource professionals in the human resource triangle

Human resource departments have an all-encompassing role in employee relations. Boxall and Purcell (2003, p.1) defined HRM as "all activities associated with the management of employment relationships". Boxall (2007) elaborated on this, considering that HR included the abilities, knowledge, competence, and commitment of people (all employees), with this being underpinned by their (employee) motivations and well-being. The findings for this thesis highlighted a fractious and sometimes distant relationship with HRPs, with LM contact being on a need-to-know basis and HR contact with employees being purely functional. Many LMs interviewed saw HR as a bureaucratic function, this resonating with Hammonds (2007, p.2) who somewhat scathingly considered HR as "…a dark bureaucratic force that blindly enforces nonsensical rules, resists creativity and impedes constructive change…" Research has indicated that due to the variety of HRM duties and responsibilities, LMs ought to foster collaborative relationships with HRPs (McDermot *et al.,* 2015; Trullen *et al.,* 2016). Whilst Yuliza *et al.* (2019) argue that the organisational HR department plays a key role as a partner for LMs. Meanwhile, Malhotra and Ackfeldt (2016) believe that, to prevent ambiguity and dilution of HR matters, clear and practical communication mechanisms between LMs and HRPs are crucial. It was clear from LM participants and HRPs interviewed for this research that communication overall was an area that could be improved on, and resulted in HRPs having a lack of knowledge (if any) of the nature of frontline service work and the prevalence of CSH of frontline service workers. Emerging from this research was the finding that internal

HRPs' knowledge of CSH was limited; in fact, most considered it was not a problem. This showed some resonance with findings of Nimri *et al.* (2021), whose research into the SH of hotel room attendants by guests found that hotel HR directors and, for that matter, hotel management, were largely unaware of any SH by guests.

In this thesis, three main reasons were found for HRPs' lack of knowledge. Firstly, LMs do not communicate incidents to HR as they (LMs) feel that front-of-house matters are within their own remit and not HR's. This appears to be reinforced by HR themselves, who often inform managers that HR are there in an advisory capacity only and, ultimately, decisions on employment relations matters rest with management and not HR. Armstrong and Taylor (2020, p.105) point out that "…people management professionals provide advice, guidance and services on all matters concerning employment of people." Research findings suggested that this default message was hammered home by HRPs, resulting in LMs taking this literally, acting as they saw fit. Thus, managers rarely inform HR of outcomes relating to front-of-house matters, as this area is under their control and authority. Overall, the research found that there was a palpable distance in the relationship between LMs and HRPs.

This issue of weak collaboration and often tense relationships in HR-line management relations resonates with academic research, such as that by Sanders and Frenkel (2011) and López-Cotarelo (2018). Whilst Mayne (2024) reports that in a poll of 2000 managers, 40% report their HR relationship is weak. Like their internal counterparts, and perhaps with more reason, external HRPs also lament the lack of communication with their clients and almost by default, they only usually get called in when clients have a problem and struggle in dealing with it. Generally, the client contact tends to be after a problem has occurred. Given that communication is a critical factor in relationships between HRPs and management (McDermott *et al.,* 2015; Trullen *et al.,* 2016), it seems strange that HR and LM communication was found wanting in this research. For both parties, there was, at times, a sense of frustration between the two concerning what ought to be communicated to each other. Chen *et al.* (2011) indicate that good relations between LMs and HRPs will influence the managers' thinking on the effectiveness of HR, whilst Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018) consider that LM perceptions of HR support influence their motivation to implement HR practices. This means that LM perceptions of HR and the support they give will, for example, influence their thinking about reporting or not reporting of CSH. The sense of frustration LMs held about HR bureaucracy may well affect LMs' thinking about communicating with HR.

The second main reason for HRPs believing CSH was not a problem was that, like managers, FHWs did not report incidents to HRPs. The research highlighted that workers, in their day-to-day work, see little or nothing of HRPs and relate any HR presence front of house with the notion that someone must be in trouble. Consequently, front-of-house workers saw HR as a "policing" entity rather than a supportive one. As King (2011) puts it, HR can be seen by some as "the company hitman." Vosburgh (2007) suggests that it is not uncommon for employees, including managers, to see HRPs as the "policy police", with HRPs being aware that this is how the HR function can be viewed. Meanwhile, Ulrich *et al.* (2017, p. 230) argue that HRPs should aim to strike a balance between serving as the regulatory compliance police and serving as the compliance manager. Internal HRPs in this research considered themselves to be balancing policing and managing compliance issues. Yet this was at odds with the view of customer-facing workers. Meanwhile, external HRPs, who tend to be brought in for specialised knowledge and activities (Csapo *et al.,* 2018), considered that they were being brought in by their clients to curtail risks to the company concerning employment legislation. Additionally, they tend to push to take on expansive strategic and compliance work and aim for a more proactive role with their clients (Kock *et al.,* 2012). External HR interviewees considered that they had to push compliance strongly to get things done. The unintentional and unfortunate outcome of this is that workers are wary of HRPs (internal and external) and are cautious towards approaching them. This leads to the third reason for the lack of HRP knowledge of CSH, which was the weak relationship that HRPs have with FHWs.

Internal HRPs interviewed commented that they rarely get to walk out into the front of house. A key reason for this was that much of their time was taken up with transactional affairs, for example, administrative requirements, and compliance work, with this resonating with Gavio *et al.* (2012). Consequently, this limits the chance of building relationships with front-of-house workers, which may explain the apparent cursory relationships they have with HR. One of the concepts of HRPs is to understand the whole of the business (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). However, this research found that while HRPs may understand the very basics of the frontline hospitality role, they are unaware of the darker nature of customer-facing service work. The outcome of this is that they are largely unaware that CSH of FHWs exists. Like their internal counterparts, and perhaps with more reason, external HRPs also lament the lack of communication with their clients and almost by default, they only usually get called in when clients have a problem and in dealing with it. This reinforced the consideration that CSH was few and far between in the industry as far as HRPs were concerned.

For the HRPs interviewed, corporate risk management and reputation are foremost in their thinking, and their management advice is based on it. In HR, employee risks are classed as business risks, and HRPs are tasked with managing these risks (CIPD, 2025). The research findings of perfunctory concern by LMs towards worker well-being following customer abuse are mirrored by HRPs. However, it must be recognised that HRPs interviewed were not aware of CSH on their sites. Nevertheless, it was clear that legislative concerns and risk trumped the well-being of employees when advice was given to management. Research evidence suggested that little concern was shown towards empathy and understanding of the worker, unless that is, there was a risk to the company in not doing so. Overall, it appears that HR hold a shallow understanding of the effect on victims of the phenomenon. Resultingly, the sense of CSH as being normalised is strengthened, therefore sanitising and trivialising the phenomenon.

As discussed in Sections 8.3.3 and 8.3.4, this research found that relationships between LMs and HR were at times fractious, with communication concerning CSH found to be wanting. LMs considered that they had full responsibility for dealing with customer relationship matters and only saw the need to contact on a transactional basis, as one manager put it, “technical employment relations matters.” This had the effect of causing a distance in the triadic relationship with HRPs, which was only brought closer together in certain situations.

8.3.3 The worker in the worker-line-manager-human resource triangle

In a similar way to the customer service triangle (see Korczynski, 2009), power relations are in play in the dynamics of the HR triad. LMs hold responsibility for people under their supervision and are responsible for the implementation, amongst other things, of HRM practices (CIPD, 2025). Meanwhile, HR professionals are responsible for developing policies, procedures and people strategies for LMs to put into practice in the workplace, whilst also providing HR advice in an array of people matters, including employee relations (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). The third element of the triad is the target employees (Jackson *et al.,* 2014), and in the case of this research, the target employees were the front-of-house hospitality workers who worked for LMs. Interpersonal relationships in this triad are key to the effective implementation of corporate policies and procedures in the workplace (Jackson *et al.,* 2014). Regarding HRM matters, HR professionals are encouraged to work in partnership with managers, providing advice and support as required (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). As a result, managers and HRPs see equality in power, with LMs generally deferring to HR’s expertise, whilst HR defer to LMs' practical knowledge of the workplace and their people in

implementing advice from HR (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). As in the customer triangle, the manager holds hierarchical power over the worker, with the HR professional holding power (mainly an indirect power) over the worker through their knowledge of compliance matters, employment laws, and organisational policies and procedures (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). In essence, this triad enacts HRM systems (Jackson *et al.,* 2014). However, in this study, it was found that workers and LMs had what could be classed as a standard hierarchical manager-worker relationship. Moreover, findings suggested that the worker-HRP relationship in the triad was incredibly weak. Communication was restricted mainly to HR communicating with FHWs when something other than routine came along. In short, the relationship distance between FHWs and the HR professionals was nothing short of significant.

8.3.4 Other stakeholder perspectives - trade union and industry representatives

A last point of note to finish this chapter, research evidence suggests there are differing perspectives on the matter of CSH within the hospitality industry. The stakeholder groups, a) FHWs and LMs, b) HRPs, c) trade union representatives, and d) the industry representative, all hold different views of the prevalence of CSH in the hospitality industry. Obviously, workers see the phenomenon directly from the frontline perspective, whilst the trade union representatives' view is mainly a reactive one when taking complaints from a trade union member, often, after the event. Evidence from this thesis suggests that trade union representatives are frustrated that they do not have stronger leverage with organisations, as the trade union struggles with low membership. Trade unions in the hotel and wider hotel, restaurant and café sector consistently demonstrate low union density, often below 15% across EU member states. This remains true despite sectoral diversity and decades of industrial growth (UKEssays, 2018). Draskovic *et al.* (2022) note that unionisation levels have remained persistently low, and employees often express limited confidence in union power or effectiveness. Wood (2020) argues that hospitality trade unionism has long been overshadowed by conservative economic policy trends, employer hostility, and labour fragmentation. As a result, union membership has not collapsed completely but remains marginal, despite widespread poor working conditions in the sector. This is despite hospitality workers experiencing job precarity, high levels of turnover, and exploitation, union representation has struggled to gain a stable foothold. In cases of CSH, trade union representatives are unlikely to see an episode directly and, significantly, they will only find out if a victim is a union member. However, when they do become aware, as can be expected, they may rail against the company concerning safeguarding victims, with this seen as an organisational inadequacy.

Relationships between unions and hospitality organisations are mixed. Research demonstrates substantial variation in union effectiveness across hospitality workplaces, particularly regarding the relationships between trade unions and management. Rahman's (2023) case study of UK hotels identifies stark differences between strongly and weakly unionised establishments. In hotels with strong union presence, bargaining power, active representation, and membership growth were evident, while weakly unionised hotels showed declining membership and employees turning directly to management for issue resolution. None of the varied venues represented in this research had a strong union presence. And it needs to be considered that if stronger union representation were seen, would the findings regarding CSH be much different? Meanwhile, hospitality trade industry representatives focus on highlighting the significance and value of the hospitality sector by providing strategic support, expanding marketing reach, acting as an intermediary between brands and hospitality businesses, fostering strategic partnerships, and driving overall business development (RegionBridge, 2025). The representative interviewed for this thesis was highly positive about the industry, and they exemplified the focus of their role. And, whilst acknowledging the problem of customer misbehaviour as a concern in the industry, they considered CSH was a minimal issue.

Understandably, these groups will have their own perspectives, but research findings showed little evidence of any initiative-taking, communication and considered understanding around CSH. For example, what the key issues are, how to counter these, how best the problem can be addressed and what is needed to kick start a proactive approach. Rather, all stakeholders follow the well-trodden parallel route with a shrug of the shoulders, acceptance of an industry normality.

Chapter 9.0 Research conclusions, contributions and implications

The objectives of this study, originally articulated in Chapter One, have been examined throughout the thesis. This chapter synthesises the principal research findings and delineates the study's distinctive contributions to the field. It subsequently addresses the managerial and theoretical implications arising from the research. The chapter then revisits the initial aims of the investigation, assessing the extent to which they have been fulfilled, and concludes by outlining directions for future scholarly inquiry.

9.1 Research conclusions and contribution

When looking at the elements of workplace SH as defined by the UK Equality Act (2010), amended in 2023, CSH in Scottish hospitality is rife and is likely to be more prevalent in the sector than the industry currently recognises.

Customer sexual harassment – an interpretive prism and hierarchical levels

The legal definition of "unwanted" sexualised behaviour, whether verbal or physical, is well established, and this study found substantial evidence of customer actions that meet this threshold of SH. However, the findings also indicate that SH is interpreted differently within hospitality contexts, influencing how both FHEs and LMs understand and respond to such incidents. This study demonstrates that defining CSH is inherently complex and introduces the concept of an *interpretive prism*, through which workers and managers assess and rank incidents. The CSH interpretive prism and its hierarchical levels constitute the study's first key contribution.

Apart from what can be considered as obvious sexual actions against workers, for example, groping, touching someone without consent or sexual assault, other elements, such as flirting, sexualised jokes/innuendo, sexual remarks and leering, are a matter of individual interpretation, yet they all are factors in the definition of workplace harassment (UK Equality Act, 2010). In addition, contextual factors play a role in interpreting a customer's comment or action towards a worker or even an LM. Often, the important word "unwanted" is replaced in the minds of FHWs and LMs with terms such as "tedious," "childish," or "stupid," which are familiar words used in research interviews with participants. This means that FHWs and LMs do not determine that incidents of CSH, many of which meet the legal definition of SH, are harassment matters. The uniqueness of an individual's interpretive prism surrounding CSH can be challenging because workers' views can easily differ from those of the LM. Workers would rarely challenge

the LM on the interpretation they have, due to the hierarchical power of the managers (Korczynski, 2009) and the fact that many aspects of SH are normalised in the sector (see Coffey *et al.*, 2023; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023). Once the interpretation has been made, the individual will decide on the action they will take. Forms of SH by customers are interpreted by workers and managers through their personal interpretive prism, which grades incidents in four levels: irrelevant, low, medium, and high. Most episodes in the first three levels were accepted by both actors as the workplace norm, the outcome of which is that it creates a high tolerance of these types of actions by customers, which resonates with other academic research (see Good and Cooper, 2016; Lu-Ming, 2013; Madera *et al.,* 2018; Yagil, 2008. Yet even the highest levels of incidents do not necessarily get reported to the individual's LM. As a result, reporting of incidents to line management is a rarity. The under-reporting of customer abuse is well-documented in the academic literature (see Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Gupta *et al.,* 2020; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Ram *et al.,* 2016; Robinson *et al.,* 2022; Turkoglu, 2020).

The CSH interpretive prism, which determines the level of seriousness of an incident, causes worker and manager ambiguity when interpreting CSH. Involved in this determination are the contextual elements that are in place at the time of an incident, which Keenan *et al*. (2024) consider will influence an individual judgement of the severity of it. This, added to low levels of reporting are a significant reason why the hospitality industry in Scotland does not necessarily see CSH as a real problem. Therefore, this qualitative research thesis argues that CSH in Scottish hospitality is rife, tying in with findings of quantitative survey research seen in this region of the hospitality sector (see Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021; STUC, 2022). Furthermore, the research indicated that the reluctance of managers to address negative customer relations matters, in part, due to the sense of customer "sovereignty", the effect of which means that the normalisation of CSH is reinforced. This leads to the second key contribution of this thesis, that of navigational caution shown by managers in addressing CSH.

Line manager – navigational caution

A crucial point of the thesis research suggests that the perceived power of the customer impacted the tolerance level of CSH, causing managers to approach issues concerning any negative issues in customer relations (let alone CSH) with navigational caution. As Gruber (1992) and Tangri *et al.* (1982) point out, if organisational tolerance levels of SH are high, it escalates the chances of SH occurring. Therefore, if organisational tolerance levels are high, this would likely impact LM judgments of incidents. The tolerance level, coupled with the

sense of customer power held by managers, resulted in a navigationally cautious approach to addressing any concerns with the customer. If incidents of CSH were in fact reported to an LM, they would interpret the episode through their own interpretive prism and decide on what, or if any action should be taken. It was not uncommon, unless the incident was witnessed and proven, for the LM to take the line of least resistance. For example, moving the staff member to another table or a different part of the venue results in a sense of appeasement towards the customer. This was seen as a "quick fix" by workers, but the fact that the perpetrator remained was disconcerting for them; the worker expected something different from line management.

Additionally, if an FHW reports an incident, LMs often dismiss or downplay the seriousness of the event, which victims may interpret as appeasement towards the perpetrator. As Tseng and Kang (2013) observe, trust and reliability in management are crucial factors for workers, but the "quick fix" approach remains an unresolved issue for them. This can be seen as a breach of the worker's psychological contract, according to Robinson and Rousseau (1994), with trust being a key element of that contract (Alfes *et al.*, 2012). Ram (2018) suggests that LMs may simply overlook or ignore addressing customer misbehaviour (including SH) due to their high regard for the customer. Furthermore, Booyens *et al.* (2022) found that dismissive attitudes of managers, characterised by an attitude of "it's not a big deal," contributed to workers not reporting incidents. In brief, these research findings are closely connected. This study proposes that this ambivalence by LMs towards tackling CSH stems from their cautious navigation of the issue, driven by concerns about potential negative customer repercussions. This leads to the third contribution of the research: it shows that both LMs and HRPs only show superficial concern for workers' well-being when dealing with customer misbehaviour, including CSH, a stance seemingly influenced by the superficial nature of HR's relationship with LMs.

Line manager and HR practitioner in the HR triad – perfunctory concern of worker well-being

Perfunctory concern of worker well-being by line management and HRPs was an important element of this research. LMs' reluctance to address cases of CSH generally stemmed from their perceptions of customer "sovereignty" and the consequences of negative customer reactions. This, allied with their own interpretative prism, plus the need to make speedy decisions, often without proof, caused managers to choose to avoid difficulty and confrontation. This type of action promoted the normalisation of CSH, with victims often feeling demoralised and less likely to report CSH incidents, which resonates with Booyens *et al.* (2022) and leads workers simply to accept the working conditions (Matulewicz, 2016).

Meanwhile, HRPs were largely unaware of the prevalence of CSH. This was due to the manager's apparent reluctance to communicate front-of-house issues to HR, the lack of HR-line manager-worker communication mechanisms concerning front-of-house work, and the fact that HRPs were largely unseen front-of-house, causing a weakness in HR-worker relationships. Overall, workers held the feeling that, in terms of CSH, there was very little support from LMs and HRPs, leading workers to consider that concern for their well-being was perfunctory. As Jackson *et al* (2014) note, the HR relationship triad is an important factor in HRM. In this instance, the workers seem to be in a situation in which there is little consideration by the other two actors in the triad. As a result, this leads to the fourth contribution, that of the distance of HR in their understanding of the day-to-day working conditions for front-of-house staff at the hospitality frontline.

The human resource triangle – worker and line manager at a distance with human resources

Research consistently characterises the relationship between internal HRPs and LMs as one marked by continual oscillation. Purcell *et al.* (2003) emphasise that the contribution of LMs to the enactment of HRM should not be underestimated, noting that HRM constitutes a central component of their managerial responsibilities. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) further argue that effective relationships and mutual support form the foundation of organisational trust. Such trust is developed and sustained through managerial behaviour and through a clear understanding of reciprocal expectations between managers and employees. Consequently, trust is more likely to be strengthened when managers demonstrate consistency, fairness, and equity in their actions. Similarly, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2001) consider that employees who believe that their organisation genuinely supports their well-being and appreciates their contributions are more likely to feel a reciprocal obligation to respond with positive behaviours that advance the organisation's interests. Therefore, it makes sense that management adopts a positive approach to employee well-being. How employees are treated by their managers can have a significant impact on their overall well-being. Research by Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) found that between 60 and 75 per cent of employees surveyed reported that the worst or most stressful aspect of their job was their immediate supervisor. Because LMs have frequent, day-to-day contact with the staff they oversee, they are well-positioned to recognise the early signs of stress or concern and intervene appropriately. This research found that the well-being of victims of CSH was rarely prioritised by either LMs or HRPs. Instead, organisational risk and reputation dominated managerial considerations, often eclipsing any meaningful focus on

employee welfare. As outlined in Section 8.3.3, communication and collaboration between managers and HRPs regarding CSH were weak, with HR frequently unaware of the scale of the issue. More broadly, limited communication and, in the case of front-of-house workers, ambivalence, apprehension, and elements of mistrust about approaching HR further contributed to HRPs being detached from the realities of customer abuse, including incidents of CSH directed at workers.

9.2 Managerial implications

This study highlights that customer-perpetrated SH in Scotland's hospitality sector is more widespread than the industry currently acknowledges. Hospitality organisations must recognise that such behaviour toward front-of-house staff is a persistent and potentially escalating issue. To address this, attention should be paid to organisational culture, climate and professional development. Timmeran and Bajema (2000) argue that a positive social culture and climate within an organisation is associated with fewer reports of unwanted sexual behaviour. Employees who view their workplace as socially supportive experience such behaviours less frequently than those who perceive a weaker social climate. Additionally, departments that demonstrate a strong commitment to gender equality report lower incidences of unwanted sexual behaviour. Meanwhile, Ollo-López and Nuñez (2018) found that the climate and culture of organisations where sexually harassing behaviours are tolerated enable harassers to operate more freely. Tan *et al.* (2020) argue that organisations play a critical role in helping and supporting victims of workplace sexual harassment, with the quality of the organisational climate for psychosocial safety being crucial in the primary and secondary prevention of sexual harassment at work. As a result, positive organisational culture and climate should not be underestimated. For example, in the case of CSH, hospitality businesses ought to adopt and rigorously enforce zero-tolerance policies and procedures specific to CSH as a standard organisational practice. In short, organisations need to develop strategies to increase awareness of the phenomenon and create proactive approaches that advance CSH onto the organisational agenda and be clear to customers of accountability for their behaviour. Information ought to be made clear to customers about the expected standards of behaviour towards employees, for example, through brochures, poster signage, websites, online booking forms, key card wallets and booking confirmations (Bell *et al.,* 2017). Similar information should also be placed in the back-of-house areas so that employees fully understand the corporate philosophy concerning SH by customers. Furthermore, LMs, senior managers and HRPs ought to be clear of their accountability in managing the phenomenon of CSH. Meanwhile, the training and development

of employees should also be a key feature of managing CSH. McDonald *et al. (*2015) consider that primary prevention focuses on eliminating the underlying causes of violence by implementing organisational policies, providing training to increase awareness and correct misconceptions, and issuing visible statements to employees and customers that sexual harassment will not be tolerated in the workplace. Meanwhile, as Voorhees *et al.* (2017) suggest, it is vital that organisations proactively educate workers and LMs through robust and consistent training in organisational expectations of social service interactions with customers, including norms and tolerances of service encounter relationships. Training ought to be ongoing, and this will need to be applied in the workplace so that both workers and LMs can learn from experiences.

Doing so would be at least a start, however small, to help reduce the effect of maladaptive or negative mental schemas concerning FHWs and LMs address CSH and start the journey of replacing them with mental schemas that are more positive. This is particularly required so that both actors can be instilled with confidence in dealing with difficult customer situations and develop a more trusting relationship in addressing the phenomenon. Individuals make sense of situations by drawing on personal mental schemas, a cognitive framework through which events are interpreted (Goldberg and Singell, 2024). These schemas, often referred to as frames or scripts, organise knowledge, guide understanding, and shape expectations about the consequences of events, all based on prior experiences stored in long-term memory. Because schemas contain extensive accumulated knowledge, they play a crucial role in helping individuals interpret events and anticipate their outcomes (Eysenck and Keane, 2010, p. 401). Schemas can be seen as an implicit tool for interpreting and categorising things and are often used to explain how a person comprehends and figures out a situation (for example, an episode of CSH) and then adopts appropriate behavioural scripts towards the event (Goldberg and Singell, 2024). Immediately a person experiences something in their world, categorising and interpreting that experience occurs in the present; consequently, it affects a person's reactions. Categorisation can therefore be seen as the bedrock of the interpretation of events (Goldberg and Singell, 2024). Consequently, these schemas will impact through the CSH interpretive prism. The prism also determines that CSH is viewed at different levels and will accommodate a range of variations for workers and LMs, who often differ in their interpretations. This has the effect of causing tensions between both in handling and addressing the phenomenon. However, Kennan *et al.* (2025) demonstrated that enhancing the clarity of SH definitions did not meaningfully alter participants' judgements regarding whether the behaviour qualified as

SH or their acknowledgement of its potential harm. This finding resonates with the individual's own perception of SH and affirms the complexity of the problem. Nevertheless, to raise workplace CSH to a higher place in the organisational agenda, it needs to be made abundantly clear to all employees the constituents of SH and, more so, make it clear that the bar of tolerance is fixed at zero.

As suggested by Pina *et al.* (2009), organisations need to create an open and understanding working climate that encourages employees to be able to communicate and discuss concerns they may have with line management and HRPs without fear of loss of respect or any form of retribution towards them. This research found that HRPs were largely unseen on the front-of-house, which was a factor towards HR interactions with a key player of the HR triad, the worker, being weak. Consequently, workers were unsure of trusting HR, with the department being seen as an organisational arm of management rather than as a support to employees.

Whitener (1997) considers that trust is a critical driver of successful HRM outcomes; mistrust can significantly undermine their effectiveness, whilst Alfes *et al.* (2012) suggest that employee trust in an employer is a more crucial factor than can determine the employee's behaviour. Additionally, Thompson (1998, p.69) considers that "trust is an outcome of good management". Moreover, Armstrong and Taylor (2020) note that organisations that proclaim core values such as "people are our greatest asset" yet fail to enact practices that are consistent with these assertions are likely to cultivate low-trust organisational climates. Furthermore, trust is more effectively fostered when management demonstrates fairness, transparency, and consistency in the implementation of organisational policies. This research calls for some considered remodelling of HRP applied working relations with FHWs. For example, toning down the focus on strategic HR practice and seeking regular avenues of activity for HRPs and worker employment relations at the frontline. In short, give more precedence to the employee champion role of the HRP postulated by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005). Avenues of activity should also be created with LMs who work at the frontline. For example, being seen at the front-of-house regularly with managers and chatting with workers about their jobs. Likewise, holding a weekly or monthly "HR clinic" for workers (and for that matter managers) could be an activity which may help in creating trust with frontline staff, whilst also providing an opportunity for HRPs to improve their understanding of front-of-house working conditions. This may help to address the apparent imbalance between strategic HR and applied meaningful HR relations with front-of-house workers that was evident from this research. Overall, LMs and HRPs need to put in place mechanisms to improve the dynamics of the HR triad and ensure front-of-house staff are brought into this relationship. These ought to cover mechanisms for

awareness, (what needs to be put in place for this), knowledge (what needs to be done to be really in the know), communication (how best to improve worker/line manager/HRP communication), planning and organisation (organisational planning for known events) and follow through (how individual managers and the organisation as a whole follow through on what's happening and have a process for following through on incidents).

On a legal level, the prevalence of CSH that has emerged from this research has the potential to be a significant problem in the Scottish hospitality sector. This could be a far bigger problem in the future for organisations, once the potential new UK employment laws relating to third-party harassment are fully enacted (see Section 2.1). Failing to develop proactive policies to address this issue could open organisations to financial penalties if falling foul of employment law. Policy developments aimed at curtailing workplace violence have been notoriously slow within the hospitality sector, where legal protections against various forms of harassment, particularly customer-perpetrated harassment, remain fragmented and inconsistent (Gupta et al., 2020). In both the UK and the USA, legislative frameworks addressing workplace harassment have evolved unevenly, resulting in erratic and often insufficient protections for FHWs. This regulatory patchwork contributes to substantial variation in how organisations interpret their obligations, further exacerbating the gap between policy expectations and the lived realities of workers who routinely encounter customer misconduct (Gupta *et al.,* 2020)
The ongoing frequency of abuse and harassment directed at front-line service employees has prompted trade unions to increasingly advocate for stronger measures to tackle customer mistreatment (Booyens *et al,* 2022). Therefore, this research calls on organisations to develop robust policies and procedures that specifically address SH by customers (and, for that matter, other third parties). Importantly, clear and understandable step-by-step processes should be in place for workers and LMs to adopt when placed in this form of hostile working environment, with regular training in handling such situations being mandatory. This would do away with any procedural and accountability ambiguity in addressing and dealing with CSH.

Furthermore, weekly follow-through (toolbox talks) with workers and managers by HRPs and senior management, inviting recent experiences at the frontline, should be implemented so that all employees recognise that CSH is on the organisational agenda. Moreover, as suggested by Nimri et al. (2021), every effort should be made to ensure that these policies are enforced by management. Moreover, supportive routes for workers ought to be established (Shanker *et al,* 2015). Accordingly, this research calls for organisations to provide obligatory "post-incident"

supportive structures for workers as part of a well-being plan and/or policy. For instance, quiet/safe spaces for downtime and/or a well-being or mental first aid buddy with any incidents being recorded with HR support, so that the prevalence of incidents can be fully understood by HR and the organisation.

In summary, this research has laid out the extent of CSH of front-of-house workers in the Scottish hospitality industry and has shown it to be a significant issue in the sector. Organisations need to acknowledge the extent of the problem and put into place proactive measures to address the phenomenon. Not just for the legalities around the matter, but also for the moral aspect of safeguarding their workers and committing to ensuring worker well-being is well and truly an organisational priority.

9.3 Theoretical implications

The findings of this research demonstrate the fundamental complexity of defining CSH. Organisations involved in this research held clear definitions of SH as per the UK definition of workplace SH (see Section 2.1). However, none of the organisations had a definition that was specific to CSH. In effect, having a corporate definition of SH alone did not influence workers or LMs in their judgment of CSH episodes. Arguably, without a clear definition of CSH, the current description seems inadequate in shaping individuals' interpretations, perceptions, and judgments of CSH incidents. Therefore, simply providing a definition does not appear sufficient to change how people interpret CSH events. Magley *et al.* (2013) considered that focusing on legal definitions of SH can be too narrow for the complexity of women's experiences. Additionally, pre-existing mental schemas can affect what individuals perceive as undesirable sexual attention, with incidents not fitting harassment scripts (Shupe, 2020), and this would likely be true for participants involved in this research. These cognitive frameworks seem largely unaffected by corporate definitions. This underscores how difficult it is to alter deeply held perceptions of CSH among both workers and managers. Meanwhile, this research found that incidents of CSH were viewed through an individual's interpretive prism, which resulted in the person judging incidents in terms of seriousness. According to Stockdale *et al.* (1995), the type and severity of an encounter will determine whether an incident qualifies as SH because sexually harassing behaviours can range from direct physical assault to subtle remarks and sexist jokes. In addition, Fitzgerald *et al.* (1989) consider that people frequently mistakenly believe that sexual coercion and gender harassment differ significantly in terms of classification because it is difficult to see such a wide variety of acts as belonging to a

continuum. In fact, studies employing SH situations repeatedly demonstrate that the degree of objectionable behaviour will determine whether it will be classified as SH (Baker *et al.,* 1990; Hunter and McLelland, 1991). What is clear is that defining SH from what can be considered blatantly obvious is complex. Unwanted behaviour such as flirting, sexual innuendo, sexualised jokes and comments, which are considered as elements of SH in UK legislation (ACAS, 2024), none of the workers or managers interviewed considered these *"lower-level elements"* of sexually harassing behaviour as unwanted. Rather, such behaviour was tolerated and considered tedious, childish, and part of the job. Corporate definitions of SH that meet UK legislation are the starting point in guiding the definition of SH. However, to reduce the complexity around CSH and achieve crystal clear clarity of the phenomenon, this thesis argues for extensive ongoing training and coaching support for front-of-house workers and LMs with the aim of creating a meaningful and lasting impact on mental schemas and attitudes of workers and managers towards CSH. Furthermore, it calls for a zero-tolerance with this being acted on rigorously by management.

An influential factor in CSH was the power of the customer, with both workers and managers holding ingrained perceptions of the customer's power within the hospitality setting. The research also aligned with existing theoretical literature concerning the power dynamics of the customer service triangle. The tensions and sense of powerlessness experienced by workers and managers, due to their perceptions of customer power and the organisational emphasis on prioritising the customer. Similarly, perceptions of power are seen by the customer themselves (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013; Korczynski, 2002, 2009), with this being very evident from the thesis findings. As noted in the thesis, the hospitality industry is a highly competitive service sector where customer service standards are prioritised to gain a competitive edge over a wide range of hospitality competitors (Ali *et al.*, 2021; Grobelna, 2021; Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014; Ostergllava and Loku, 2024). Moreover, this study revealed that the priority that lies in managers' minds is to meet the corporate requirements of achieving excellence in customer service. Daunt and Harris (2013) point out that the balancing act LMs have with their behaviour and attitude towards customers is a challenging one, particularly when having to deal with allegations of misbehaviour by customers. FHWs faced breaches of the UK legal definition of workplace SH on a day-to-day basis. This ranged across the continuum of the elements defined in Section 2.1. Examples given by workers could be considered criminal acts. The hospitality sector's business model is fundamentally grounded in the principles of prioritising the customer experience (Wang *et al.,* 2022). According to these authors, this orientation perpetuates service

cultures that embrace the maxim “the customer is king,” thereby aiming to secure customer satisfaction and encourage repeat patronage. However, this approach can lead to power relations in favour of the customer, reinforcing perceptions of customer superiority and fostering various forms of customer misbehaviour (Wang *et al.,* 2022; Yagil, 2017; Zampoukos, 2021). Within this context, customers may engage in abusive behaviour, including SH of workers, often without facing meaningful consequences. Workers, in turn, may feel compelled to tolerate such conduct, remain silent (Kim *et al.,* 2014; Ram *et al.,* 2016), or accept it as an inherent aspect of their occupational role (Poulston, 2008). As Yagil (2017) argues, the continued mistreatment of service workers, coupled with the absence of penalties for such behaviour, ultimately normalises and legitimises these actions. Normalisation of CSH noted by academics (see Coffey *et al,* 2018; Fitzgerald, 2020; Good and Cooper, 2016; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2023; Lugosi, 2019; Matulewicz, 2016; Quyet *et al.,* 2023; Waudby and Poulston, 2017) should not be seen as justification for any form of customer abuse, let alone CSH. Neither can it be a fallback reason for LMs to dismiss or ignore CSH. The LM's failure to address abuse by customers legitimises these behaviours and can affect workers negatively (Taylor, 2019). Additionally, it was clear from the research data that managerial inaction often stemmed from deference towards the customer. Such deference is also responsible for the non-reporting of incidents to management by workers, which is in alignment with Booyens *et al.* (2022), who also consider that the superiority of customers over workers continues to be a problem in the hospitality sector. Research for this thesis found that workers within the hospitality sector frequently underreport incidents of abuse, including CSH. This pattern of underreporting was reinforced by the dismissive attitudes of managers who often considered abuse to be part of frontline service work (Mitsakis *et al,* 2024). This contradicts the claims of LMs who said they were aware of the organisational definition of SH. Consequently, the effectiveness of current organisational policies on SH and are questionable, with managers seemingly considering that these do not apply to customer actions. This thesis argues that CSH is a significant problem in Scottish hospitality and is under-estimated by the industry. It should be treated by governmental and legislative authorities with the seriousness a social phenomenon like this deserves. Furthermore, the thesis calls for hospitality organisations to raise the bar on addressing CSH and place the issue higher up on the organisational agenda. Organisational policies and procedures specifically addressing CSH should be created so that effective and concrete actions can be taken by line management. And, from an individual perspective, Voorhees *et al.* (2017) assert that educating employees, managers, and customers on the social norms that govern service-encounter relationships is essential. In the case of CSH, implementing and applying

this consistently with regular follow-through may provide another tool in the toolbox for individuals and the organisation to address and manage CSH.

Meanwhile, research findings suggest that communication between LMs and HRPs concerning customer abuse, including SH, was minimal. Armstrong and Taylor (2020, p.111) highlight the partnership role that HRPs ought to adopt with line management in which people issues are dealt with jointly. In this study, the strength of the partnership role was lacking on both sides. both parties. Research indicates that HRPs, through their career working experiences with LMs, may well develop stereotypical narratives about the LM. This has the potential to hamper trusting relationships with LMs and enhance their shortcomings and vice versa (Birkenmeier and Sanséau, 2016). This study indicates that communication and, indeed, trust, between LMs and HRPs were at best neutral and only occurred if one of the parties believed information ought to be communicated. Research evidence suggested that LMs see any concerns relating to customers as being within their remit, and, as they have more experience in dealing with customer matters than HRPs, they view customer issues as being their territory. Additionally, the evidence indicated that LMs were often being told by HR that they (HR) are not the decision makers, with line management deciding following HR advice and support (if any). Thus, they (LM) take responsibility for HR decisions as they see fit. This was particularly true in addressing customer misbehaviour and any concerns around allegations of CSH. Therefore, HR decision-making is what LMs do, and they make HR decisions in what is considered their territory and apply the decision accordingly. However, this was often done without consulting HRPs. This element of territorial boundaries could be a potential reason for the lack of HRP knowledge of CSH and its impact on front-of-house workers. In examining functional boundaries and silo working. Aligning with Ulrich on HR professionals' expertise (1997), Forsten-Astikainen *et al.* (2017) suggested that HR professionals must have skills outside of their speciality as this will go some way to reducing the negative consequences of silos. Meanwhile, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) put forward the notion of the employee advocate role of HR professionals, yet evidence from interviews of workers and managers for this thesis suggests that this was lacking considerably. The role of HRM is taking a more strategic orientation (Liu, 2017), and this may well be one of the reasons why this research found that HRPs held a limited knowledge of the conditions that front-of-house staff work in and particularly, the prevalence of CSH. Furthermore, in relation to the HR relationships triad, Jackson *et al.* (2014) consider it an important dynamic in HRM, in which the worker, LM and HRP bring organisational HRM strategy and values into the workplace. However, this study

found distant relationships between LMs and HRPs. Additionally, the worker and HRP relationship was significant in its isolation. Strategies are required to develop proactive and positive communication between the actors in the triad so that awareness and knowledge of issues affecting frontline working conditions, such as CSH, can be highlighted accordingly.

9.4 Revisiting research questions

The first objective of the thesis was to explore and understand the dynamics of front-line service work in the hospitality industry and to ascertain the effect and impact of the customer service triad on customer misbehaviour.

The thesis has investigated and analysed the aspects of frontline service in the hospitality sector. It highlighted the common characteristics of the hospitality sector, one of which was the intense nature of service work at the frontline. Evidence from the research showed that work intensity was a common factor across the variety of properties where frontline service workers and LMs were employed. This intensity was often driven by tight staffing levels and customer service expectations. For FHWs, the hierarchical power of the LM was an additional factor that added to the work intensity. Exploring the dynamics of frontline service work and the customer service triad allowed for some depth in comprehending the nature of work in frontline hospitality. Furthermore, it has provided an understanding of power imbalances within the triad. Research evidence suggests that the perceived power of customer "sovereignty" and the hierarchical power of the LM are significant factors in frontline staff refraining from reporting customer misbehaviour, including CSH, to line management. The hospitality trade union representatives interviewed in this research were very clear about the SH of frontline service workers by customers being rife across the Scottish hospitality industry. However, the hospitality industry representative, whilst accepting that customer misbehaviour appeared to be a growing problem, saw CSH as being mainly restricted to nightclubs and/or night venues, with the hotels and restaurant sub-sector being far less of a problem. Yet evidence in this research supports the argument that SH by customers in hotels, bars and restaurants in Scotland is highly prevalent, with this also being the same for nightclubs. Power imbalances in the customer triad feature as a significant reason for non-reporting by frontline workers, alongside the ambivalence of LMs in addressing the phenomenon. A further significant feature that causes non-reporting of SH is the personal interpretive prism of CSH by frontline service workers and line management. This means that individual workers and LMs often hold different and opposite positions about an alleged incident of CSH. The interpretive prism is influenced by

environmental contextual factors in which an incident takes place, which impacts the seriousness level of how the person views a situation. These levels of seriousness are classed as irrelevant, low, medium and high. Due to the LMs' interpretation and their hierarchical authority, plus the power of the customer, incidents of CSH are often dismissed and downplayed by management. Generally, LMs took no action with the customer. As a result, CSH is swept under the organisational carpet. This thesis argues that the perceived power of the customer, the hierarchical power of the LM, and contextual factors can mean FHWs will refrain from reporting incidents to line management. These factors, and the crucial factor of the CSH, individuals' interpretive prism of the levels of SH, mean that incidents of SH are suppressed.

The second research objective was to explore the prevalence of CSH among frontline service workers and how LMs handle and address CSH incidents. This section has already discussed power imbalances of the customer service triad and has noted that the perceived power of the customer impacts the judgment of LMs as to whether an incident is classed as SH. Due to the personal interpretive prism, CSH is regarded in levels of concern by FHWs and LMs. Interpretation of the level is an individual judgment often affected by the contextual environment in which an alleged incident has taken place. The challenge here is that both parties may well have a different perspective on the level of an incident because they judge the level of the incident differently. The real-time nature of allegations of CSH requires swift decision-making by LMs, which adds to the pressure of decision-making. In essence, decision-making is often with limited proof, and along with the LM's sense of customer power, their own interpretive prism and contextual factors involved can all impact LM judgments of incidents. These challenges, when fused, can cause reluctance and hesitation by line management in addressing CSH, if indeed addressing it at all. Associated with this is the impact on the well-being of those workers who have been subjected to SH. Evidence indicated that frontline service workers generally accepted SH by customers as part of the nature of the job. Often, this was because peer coworker colleagues informed them that this was the case and that LMs would usually do little or nothing about incidents reported to them. The data collected from FHWs in this research did not indicate that LMs held much concern about the impact of SH on workers by customers; it was a case of accepting the issue and just getting on with their job. This thesis considers that CSH is rife in the Scottish hospitality sector. Furthermore, CSH is likely underestimated by senior management in hospitality organisations due to FHWs not reporting incidents of the phenomenon. Time constraints, the need to make decisions on

incidents quickly, contextual factors, and the LM's personal interpretive prism are all challenges for line management in addressing CSH. As a result, LMs will address the problem with the least line of resistance (which is often speedier) than dealing with an allegation of CSH. This also achieves a service goal of not antagonising the customer.

The third and final objective of this research was to examine HR structures that could potentially help frontline service workers and LMs deal with CSH. Research suggested that both sets of HRPs, internal support and external service providers, see themselves as advisory partners that execute strategies for organisational leadership, whilst ensuring that the organisations follow and meet legislative requirements. HRPs were very clear that while they provide advice, it is management who makes decisions based on the HR advice given. Evidence from interviews with LMs and both internal and external HRPs gave reason to consider that the relationship between the two parties can often be fractious. Regarding HRP relationships with frontline service workers and their union representatives, data from FHWs indicates that they see organisational HR as an arm of management, who err on the side of policing employees rather than supporting them. As a result, there is a strong sense from FHWs and trade unions that HR focus too much on executing management strategy, with limited attention being given to frontline service workers. LM data suggested that HR presence in front-of-house was few and far between. It gave LMs the feeling that what HR knew about frontline work was gained only anecdotally, with this creating a lack of understanding about the frontline dynamics of hospitality work. As a result, LMs tend to deal with frontline matters such as CSH of FHWs in the way they feel is appropriate at the time of an incident, whilst not informing HR of the outcome. Evidence suggests that HRPs will not be aware of an incident unless the LM considers it to be sufficiently serious to report it or for the FHW to contact, which research highlights happened infrequently. Data confirmed this situation as the HRPs interviewed demonstrated that they do not consider CSH by customers as a problem in their organisation or, for external HRPs, their clientele.

Meanwhile, HRPs and, for that matter, LMs acknowledged that their organisations (apart from the nightclub involved in this research) have policies and procedures around workplace bullying and harassment, which include SH. However, the evidence from this thesis gave cause to suggest there was nothing in the policies and procedures that specifically related to SH by customers. Although a default procedure for all organisations involved in this research was for FHWs to inform their LM if they had any workplace issues or problems. Nevertheless, with no

specific policy or procedure for CSH, in the absence of any corporate direction, the LM will more than likely make their own up on how best to deal with the problem. Interestingly, HRPs noted that LM's capability in addressing awkward employee relations matters can be a challenge. Yet research data from LMs did not indicate that they themselves were concerned about their confidence in dealing with employment relations matters, such as CSH. However, the way LMs dealt with this issue was through normalising the matter, with little evidence of them showing preventative support or real-time support for worker victims.

The normalisation of CSH by LMs means that incidents are not reported to HRPs, so HRPs were generally in the dark on the prevalence of the matter. Therefore, organisational support mechanisms for those who have been subjected to the phenomenon are rarely registered in the research data. Evidence from LMs and HRPs indicated that any concern around FHW well-being was based on the risk and reputation of the organisation rather than the well-being of the employee. That said, the external practitioner who had the one experience of dealing with a CSH case did note that worker support in the way of occupational health can be provided to the organisation. However, that would be an additional cost; in the incident quoted in this research, this suggestion about occupational health being involved was not taken up by management.

Lack of specific policies and procedures relating to SH by customers causes LMs to deal with the matter as they see fit as part of their delegated HR responsibilities. Lack of communication between LMs and HRPs often means that HRPs are not aware that CSH is a problem. This delegated HR responsibility to LMs, in this matter, seems to have been abdicated by HR rather than delegated. Furthermore, evidence from HRPs suggests that LMs can struggle in dealing with awkward HR issues; there was little evidence, apart from policies and procedures, of other forms of HR support for LMs. In addition, the limited time HRPs spend front of house, plus FHW perception of HRPs as the organisational police makes them (the worker) means that relationships between the two are weak. This causes a lack of clarity about how HR can support FHWs, resulting in workers being wary of approaching the department.

Therefore, this thesis argues that organisational structures are not robust enough to support frontline service workers and line management in addressing CSH and need to be strengthened to attain credibility. The lack of specific policies and procedures on how to address CSH means that managers have no framework for how the organisation expects the LM to address the

phenomenon. Furthermore, the thesis argues that LMs and HRPs display a perfunctory concern towards worker well-being, with the risk of reputation superseding that of the employee.

Overall, it is argued that this thesis has addressed the research objectives set out at the outset. These are i) to understand the dynamics of frontline service work in Scottish hospitality and explore the impact of the service worker-manager-customer triad on customer misbehaviour; ii) to explore the prevalence of CSH of frontline service workers, and how LMs handle and address incidents of the phenomenon; iii) to examine HR structures that help support frontline service workers and LMs in dealing with CSH. The next section, 9.4, will conclude the thesis by setting out the areas for future investigative research.

9.5 Proposals for future research

In bringing this thesis to a conclusion, it is appropriate to contemplate areas for future investigative research. However, it is only right to comment on some imperfections of this study and how these could be addressed in any further investigations. Firstly, this research involved participants who worked in different hospitality provision covering nine properties. Six properties involved were hotel chains (UK and global and SME's), with one property being a bar/restaurant chain and one other property belonging to a restaurant-only chain – these being SMEs. Finally, one nightclub property, which was privately owned, was involved. On the one hand, the varying sizes of these properties in terms of staffing could be seen as an advantage to the research, as it provides a variety of venues in which participants were employed. However, the research is limited in that it was not possible to recruit front-of-house workers from two of the global hotel groups (A and B), with only one worker from global hotel group B. In addition, only one interviewee came from the 5-star hotel group involved and one from the UK-wide hotel group. The other worker participants were spread across the rest of the properties involved in the research. Therefore, there is an imbalance of front-of-house workers interviewed between the larger hotel groups and the rest of the properties, namely bar/restaurants and small hotel/restaurant chains. This means that the dynamics of frontline work in the larger hotels involved in this research have a limited focus. It would be of future interest to examine how much difference, if any, there is between larger organisations compared to smaller organisations/properties. Focus could be on looking at new starter inductions, training, and the understanding of company policy/procedures and see if these alter the dynamics of addressing CSH. The interest would lie around whether a larger company's greater

resources would make any developmental difference towards service workers and how this may impact an individual's interpretation of SH by customers.

Additionally, the overall findings from participants who worked in the nightclub property indicated that this form of venue could be more susceptible to CSH than other hospitality sub-sectors. However, as this was the only nighttime venue involved in this research, it would be useful to examine other nighttime economy venues to gain further insight into the prevalence of customer CSH in this sub-sector of hospitality.

This research aimed to gain a holistic view of CSH by interviewing other hospitality stakeholders apart from worker managers and HRPs. However, only one trade industry representative was interviewed, so the research lacked broader perspectives from the industry stakeholders. The same could be said for the trade union representatives, although both had worked in the hospitality frontline, it would have been preferred for more trade union and industry representatives to have been involved. So, whilst some element of a holistic view has been achieved, future research involving more stakeholders' representatives could prove beneficial in gaining broader perspectives.

Another potential area of research lies around the interpretive prism, as discussed in this thesis, and the apparent consideration of normalisation of the phenomenon by both service workers and LMs. The thesis research has identified a seemingly ambivalent approach towards CSH by LMs and HRPs, and further examination of the reasons for this would be of interest. For example, it is worth considering whether LMs (many of whom started as frontline hospitality service workers themselves) downplay the issue due to their own career experience and the apparent normality of CSH in the sector. Perhaps this form of customer misbehaviour has become a phenomenon that has been normalised in their minds, hence their ambivalent approach to the issue. As a result, this could have the potential to be passed down to their team of FHWs, from which the workers themselves start to consider CSH as being part and parcel of hospitality work. Academic research suggests customer abuse as part of the nature of hospitality work (see Booyens *et al.,* 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.,* 2021; Mitsakis *et al.,* 2024). Therefore, an area of research consideration would be to examine the impact of how length of service, experience in the hospitality frontline, and worker/manager age may reinforce normalisation, while also exploring the impact of how these elements impact how they personally manage SH by customers.

The factor of normalisation may also be one of the reasons for LMs and FHWs showing indifference to informing their human resource practitioner about episodes of SH by customers. As a result, this has the effect of HRPs being unaware of incidents of CSH and a reason why, in the main, HRPs do not view the issue as a problem. This argument then leads to a further area for future research, which would involve internal HRPs. Research evidence suggested that LM relationships with HR are often in a state of flux, with LMs viewing HR as a distant support rather than a close partner. Additionally, the research found that HR and manager communication was limited to transactional matters; generally, workers were out of the loop in the HR triad. Regarding CSH, there appeared to be little joined-up thinking between HRPs and managers in the matter of addressing CSH and supporting survivors of the phenomenon. Additionally, evidence from front-of-house workers suggested that managers and HRPs were ambivalent towards customer abuse, including CSH. It highlighted the lack of concern by managers and HRPs towards the well-being of victims subjected to customer abuse. Therefore, investigating the triadic nature of relationships of worker, LM and HRP in hospitality organisations, and how this triad impacts CSH would be an interesting area of examination for the future. It should focus on current communication and support mechanisms for ensuring workers have safe working conditions, and how these could be enhanced to help victims of CSH. Meanwhile, a key finding emerging from the research was that CSH is viewed in levels of severity. Often, workers and managers differed in their interpretation, apart from what was considered the obvious, such as serious sexual assault. Further research would be useful to remove "less blatant elements" which lie under the definition of workplace SH and examine these independently, with consideration as to why these may not be thought of as SH. Additionally, exploring how and why contextual environments are factors in determining CSH should also be included.

Finally, in Section 2.4.1, aesthetic labour was discussed as a potential driver of CSH. Research findings did not show that this concept was a significant driver; however, one of the LMs, Alice, commented that she had been less of a target of CSH since she moved into a LM's role in which she had to wear a suit. This is considered worthy of further examination in considering how wearing more formal, and /or authoritative clothing can either provoke or reduce the impact of episodes of SH by customers.

Thesis word count: 97, 972 (including contents)
References and appendix word count: 21,958

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Appendix One – Pilot Interview Checklist

1. Full test of administrative process/procedures.

2. Testing of Microsoft Teams invite links and participant access to these.

3. Check participant understanding of informed consent and overall confidentiality.

4. Testing of Microsoft Teams video and sound quality and appropriateness as a research interview tool.

5. Check participant's understanding of the research topic question.

6. Participant understanding of the process of data collection and the anonymous nature of the data.

7. Researcher's practice and experience of conducting a semi-structured interview online.

8. To check if the semi-structured interview questions guide works and that the questions achieve the aims of the research.

9. To check that Microsoft Teams recording and auto-transcription are practical and meet the quality needs for the research.

10. The experience and practice of coding, themes and patterns using thematic analysis following transcription completion.

Appendix Two – Researchers' Interview Guide

The questions below relate to interviewing front-line workers, line managers, HR practitioners (internal/external) and other bodies such as trade unions and hospitality industry bodies.

The interviews will be semi-structured, so not all questions will be asked. Rather, a selection of relevant, appropriate questions will be used, dependent on the participant's role. However, the interview will 'move with the flow' following the participants' answers.

Front-line worker Interviews

Front-line Worker Role Interviews – General Questions

- Tell me about the job you do, your responsibilities and general activities.
- Tell me about your normal day-to-day work shift.
- What is the best thing about your job?
- What is the worst thing about your job?
- What is the general work environment like?
- What are the working conditions like?
- How well do you get on with your line manager?
- How supportive is your line manager?
- Tell me about the training for the job you have?
- How adequate is the training you have had?
- What motivates you in your work?

Front-line workers and Customers

- Tell me about the customer service training you have had.
- Have you had any training in dealing with awkward and/or difficult customers? If so, what was this and how useful was it for you?
- Have you encountered any awkward or difficult customers in your job? If so, in what ways do you deal with them?
- What support do you get from your line management when having to deal with awkward and/or difficult customers?

Front-line worker and Customer Misbehaviour (including CSH)

- Are you aware of any organisational policies and procedures concerning customer misbehaviour?
- What are the organisational policies and procedures concerning CSH?
- Where would you find information about any policies?
- Have you ever been subjected to or been a witness to customer misbehaviour in your work in hospitality? If so, tell me about your experiences with this.
- Have you ever been subjected to or been a witness to CSH in your work in hospitality?
- Have you reported any of these experiences to line management? If so, what action was taken? If not, what were your reasons for this?

- Have any of these experiences included CSH? If so, did you report this to line management, and what action was taken? If not, what were your reasons for not doing so?
- Were you happy with the line manager's response? If so, why? If not, what were your reasons for this?
- What communication or involvement did you receive/ have from the HR Practitioner?
- Are you aware of the organisational policy and procedure relating to Customer Misbehaviour?
- What support would you expect from line management if you were subjected to customer misbehaviour, including being sexually harassed by a customer?
- What support would you expect from an HR Practitioner if you were subjected to customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH?

Line Manager Interviews

Line Manager Role Questions - General

- How long have you worked in hospitality? What other business sectors have you worked in?
- For what length of time have you been a line manager?
- Tell me about your line manager role?
- How many people do you manage?
- What are the work activities that the people you manage get involved in?
- Tell me about your normal working day?
- What accounts for success in your role?
- What training and development have you had in your role as Line Manager?
- What motivates you in your work?
-

Line Manager and HR responsibilities.

- Tell me about the HR responsibilities and activities you are required to do in your role as a line manager?
- Were you fully aware of the HR responsibilities and activities before taking on the role of line manager? If so, how did you find this out?
- How much time, on average per week, do you spend on HR responsibilities and activities?
- Tell me how you balance your work between line management activities and HR activities?
- Are HR responsibilities and activities a help or a hindrance? And why?
- What training and development in HR responsibilities/activities have you had in your role as line manager?
- Do you feel you have the ability and capacity to conduct your HR responsibilities and activities effectively?
- If so, why? What further development would you wish to have?

- If not, why? What development would you wish to have, and what forms of support and guidance would be useful?
- What are the common HR issues that arise?
- How would you describe your relationship with the HR department and/or your HR practitioner?

Line Manager and Customer Misbehaviour, including sexual harassment)

- How does your organisation define customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What organisational policies and procedures are concerning customer misbehaviour, including CSH? Where would you find this definition?
- How many people under your supervision would know the organisational definition of customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- Tell me about incidents of customer misbehaviour, including CSH within your unit.
- What is the organisation's policy when one of their employees is subject to customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What is your role in dealing with customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- Tell me about the action and/or process you would take if a member of your team told you he or she was being subject to customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH.
- Tell me about the action you would take if you saw a member of your team, male or female, being subjected to customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- How confident are you in dealing with a case of customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What organisational support is available to you when dealing with customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What challenges are there for you when dealing with customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What steps do you think the organisation can take to reduce customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What authority do you have around decisions about customers, for example, asking them to leave the premises without payment?
- How serious is customer misbehaviour, including CSH?

HR Practitioner Interview – Internal

General HR role questions

- Tell me about your career in human resources.
- How much time of your HR career has been spent in tourism and hospitality?
- How does working in tourism and hospitality differ from other sectors you have worked in?
- What was it that attracted you to the tourism and hospitality sector?
- As an HR practitioner, what do you find most exciting about working in the sector?
- Tell me about the key demands, challenges, and pressures you face in your role?
- In what ways do you liaise and contact line managers?

- Tell me about the challenges you face in partnering with line managers?
- In line management contracts of employment, are their HR responsibilities and activities 'explicit' in what is expected of them in their HR role?
- What motivates you in your work?

Customer Misbehaviour, including CSH.

- How does your organisation define customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- Is this definition the same in other organisations and/or sectors you have worked in?
- Would the organisation's line managers be aware of the definition of customer misbehaviour, including CSH? If so, where would they 'learn' this from? If not, what do you think would be the reasons for this?
- Regarding customer misbehaviour, including CSH, are you aware if this is a problem within the business?
- Does customer misbehaviour, including CSH, get reported? If so, how is it recorded within the business?
- How common is customer misbehaviour, including CSH, in your organisation, and what is the process for reporting it?
- What is the organisational process for dealing with customer misbehaviour, including CSH, and who is responsible for implementing this process/procedure?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting front-line staff and line managers in dealing with customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH?
- What steps do you think the organisation can take to reduce customer misbehaviour, including CSH?

Policy and Procedures

- Does your organisation have a customer misbehaviour policy, including CSH? If so, whose responsibility is to cascade this policy down to Line Managers, and how is this executed?
- If so, how do you monitor the effectiveness of the policy?
- Does your organisation have a separate policy for customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- If not, what is the reason for this? If so, how do you monitor its effectiveness?
- If not, do you think it would be appropriate to do so for the sake of clarity?
- Would line management be aware of where to find information on the process of managing and dealing with customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- In what ways has the policy changed during the last few years?
- Does the policy make clear the reporting process of those who have experienced customer misbehaviour, including CSH, alongside the role and expectations of line management towards the employee concerned?
- What is the reporting process, and how clear is it to understand for anyone who experiences customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What role does the line manager play and what are the organisational expectations of line managers in this process?

- What would be classed as ‘required outcomes’ (what would be deemed as closure) of investigations into customer misbehaviour, including CSH for both employees and the organisation?

Line Manager Involvement in their HR duties

- On a scale of 1-10 (1 being poor, 10 being excellent), how effective do you believe line managers are in your organisation when executing their HR duties?
- What do you believe are the key issues that managers in your organisation face in the effectiveness of executing their HR duties effectively?
- In what ways do line managers show their effectiveness in dealing with and managing the process of customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- How does your organisation monitor line manager effectiveness in cases of customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What training do line managers receive in managing and dealing with customer misbehaviour?
- How different is this training for dealing with CSH?
- How effective are line managers in ‘investigation techniques’ into HR issues in general?
- What kind of support is provided to line managers when a case of customer misbehaviour, including CSH, arises?
- What does this support ‘look like’, for example, guidance, advice, coaching, etc.
- What is the HR Practitioner's role when a customer misbehaviour, including a CSH case, arises?

HR Practitioner Interview – External (HR Services Provider)

General HR role questions

- Tell me about your career in HR?
- How long have you been providing HR Services – externally?
- In what ways does this differ from being an internal HR Practitioner?
- Tell me about the key demands, challenges, and pressures you face in your role as an external provider of HR services.
- Tell me about your overall perspective, from an external point of view, of line managers' capability and capacity in executing their HR responsibilities?
- Tell me about the effectiveness of organisations in training and developing their line managers in HR duties, responsibilities, and activities.
- How do you think this differs if there is no one in the organisation to deal with HR?
- In what ways/or when do you liaise and contact line managers?
- Tell me about the challenges you face in partnering with line managers as an external practitioner?
- In your experience, how explicit are line manager HR responsibilities in the contract of employment?

- In your experience, do you think that line managers are fully aware of the HR responsibilities they hold? If they are not fully aware, how could this be remedied?

Sexual Harassment and Customer Misbehaviour and CSH

- In general, do you think organisations (and their line managers) who approach you for HR services have a clear definition of customer misbehaviour and sexual harassment?
- In your experience, do organisations understand their responsibilities concerning customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH of front-line service workers?
- Regarding CSH – is this a phenomenon that you have had to advise clients?
- What do you think would be the barriers for line managers in dealing with CSH?
- What steps do you think an organisation ought to take to reduce customer misbehaviour, including CSH?

Policy and Procedures

- In what ways do you support organisations in policy development, and how often are these updated?
- How do you monitor the effectiveness of policies with your clients?
- In organisations whose front-line employees are in face-to-face contact with customers. Do you believe that customer misbehaviour, including CSH, should be integrated into an organisation's general policy, or should it be seen as a separate policy altogether? If so, why? If not, why?

Line Manager – training and development

- Ideally, what would you like to see your clients doing to improve line manager skills and knowledge around their HR responsibilities?
- How do you think line managers who work for your clients view the HR Service provider, for instance, are they seen as a partner integrated into the business, advisor, safe place as a sounding board, trustworthy in answering queries, corporate puppet or simply a service provider?
- Are line managers encouraged by your clients to contact you directly should any incidents arise?
- In what ways are you seen as 'being around for HR support' in the business?

Employees – contact

- How do you think employees who work for your clients view the HR Service provider, for instance, are they seen as an advisor integrated into the business, a safe place as a sounding board, trustworthy in answering queries, etc.?
- Are line managers encouraged by your clients to contact you directly should any incidents arise?
- In what ways are you seen as 'being around for employees' in the business?

External stakeholders - hospitality industry bodies

- Tell me about the phenomena of customer misbehaviour, including CSH within the hospitality industry – this from an external body perspective.
- How prevalent is customer misbehaviour, including CSH, within your membership?
- What business category does this occur in, for example, pubs/clubs, casinos, hotels, restaurants, etc.?
- Which jobs are more susceptible to customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What are your expectations of your members in addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- In what ways are you, as an industry body, supporting your members and their employees in this area?
- What do you believe are the five key reasons behind customer misbehaviour?
- What do you think are the five key difficulties for your members in addressing customer misbehaviour?

External stakeholders – trade unions (hospitality)

- Tell me about the phenomena of customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH within the hospitality industry – this from a union perspective?
- How prevalent is customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What sector does this occur in, for example, pubs/clubs, casinos, hotels, restaurants, etc.?
- Which jobs are more susceptible to customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What do you believe are the five key reasons behind customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- How confident are you that employers are addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH? Why is this the case?
- How confident are you of line management in addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH? Why is this the case?
- What do you think are the five key difficulties for line managers in addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What do you think are the five key difficulties for employers in addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- What are your expectations of employers in addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH?
- In what ways are you, as a union body, supporting your members in this area?
- Overall, in what ways do you believe that customer misbehaviour, including CSH, can be reduced?

Appendix Three – Participant Information Sheet – example

Participant Information Sheet

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

Frontline Service Worker Participants

Project Working Title:
Customer Misbehaviour: the challenges and opportunities facing line managers and organisational management in addressing customer misbehaviour, including CSH, in the Scottish hospitality industry.

Introduction
My name is Paul Prescott. I am a PhD student in the Department of Work, Employment, and Organisation at the University of Strathclyde Business School. The research is being conducted as part of my PhD thesis.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
This investigation will consider customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH of front-line service workers in the Scottish hospitality industry and will focus on the challenges and opportunities that frontline workers, line managers, and organisational management face in addressing the issue of customer misbehaviour.

Do you have to take part?
Your participation is voluntary, and therefore, you can decide whether you want to participate or not. Equally, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time, even after you have given your consent. No prejudice, loss or negative consequences will result should you wish to withdraw.

What will you do in the project?
Your participation will involve taking part in an interview with me lasting around 30 minutes, this conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams software. You will be asked if you consent to audio and/or transcription recordings to be conducted using this software, as this will help for purposes of accuracy. However, I would be happy to take notes if you would prefer this. If I haven't heard from you after ten (10) working days of emailing this information to check if you would wish to participate, if so, to arrange a suitable time for the interview.

Why have you been invited to take part?
You have been invited to take part because you work or have worked as a front-line service worker in an organisation within the Scottish hospitality business sector. I am interviewing front-line workers, line managers, HR practitioners and external stakeholders as their knowledge and perspectives will provide critical input for this thesis. Alongside this, it will also help me gain a thorough understanding of the issues relating to the thesis subject matter.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?
This research will take place online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams meeting software, and there are no risks associated with participating. You will be asked if you consent to audio recording and auto transcription to be conducted using this software for purposes of research accuracy. You have the right to decline consent. No video recordings will be used.

What information is being collected?
This research will request basic information about your job role and your experiences with customer misbehaviour (including that of CSH) in your workplace. You will be asked to confirm your age group (18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65) and gender, as this will aid the research in considering if age and gender play a part in customer misbehaviour.

What types of questions may be asked? Examples.
As a frontline worker who may have experienced customer misbehaviour, some examples of the types of questions that will be asked are shown below.

- Tell me about your work role and your responsibilities?
- Tell me about the organisational policies/procedures concerning customer misbehaviour, including those of CSH.
- Tell me about your experiences of witnessing customer misbehaviour, including that of CSH.
- Were any of these incidents reported to line management? If so, what action was taken? If not, what were the reasons for this?
- What support would you expect from line management if you were subjected to customer misbehaviour?

It is acknowledged that some of these questions may be upsetting. However, the research will require no detail at all concerning episodes of customer misbehaviour, including that of sexual harassment. The research concerns itself with how line management and organisations are currently addressing the phenomenon of customer misbehaviour.

Should any participant feel distressed during an interview, they will have the option to stop the interview to gather their thoughts and continue if they choose to do so. Meanwhile, should anyone feel distressed during the recruitment process or during the research participant journey, details of additional support are shown on page four (4) of this information sheet.

Confidentiality/Privacy - Who will have access to the information?

In line with the University of Strathclyde's Privacy Policy, the information you provide will be treated as confidential. No one other than myself, Paul Prescott (PhD researcher) and my two PhD supervisors, Dr Anastasios Hadjisolomou (first supervisor) and Prof. Dennis Nickson (second supervisor), will have access to this data, which will be anonymised.

The PhD supervisors will have access to interview transcriptions but not your name, your contact information or the name of the organisation you work for. None of this data will be publicised in a way that can be used to identify you or the organisation you work for.

Direct quotations from interviews may be used, but only parts that will not directly identify you. The researcher will not attach the name of a participant to any quotes/wording, even if the participant requests to do so. This is to maintain the strict confidentiality of the research. Age group and gender will be used to ascertain if these elements play any part in provoking customer misbehaviour or if it is necessary to explain the context of a quote.

All data will be anonymised at the point of transcription, coded, aggregated, and might be disseminated in academic publications in a format that guarantees that you and your organisation remain anonymous. Your employer will not be provided with any information or answers you may give in your interviews.

Where will the information be stored, and how long will it be kept for?

All data will be kept securely on a private server at the University of Strathclyde. The recordings of interviews, records of names and email addresses will be deleted upon completion of the thesis, up to a maximum period of three years.

Anonymised data will be kept until the research is fully written and published, up to a maximum period of three years, and then will be deleted. Fully anonymised data (e.g., nothing that can be used to connect to you) will be securely stored in a permanent database at the University of Strathclyde.

Thank you for reading this information; please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next? If you do not wish to participate

If you do not wish to participate in the project, that is not a problem, and your initial interest has been much appreciated. Any personal contact details given along with any e-mails or other information received with your personal contact information will be fully deleted from the system.

What happens next? If you wish to participate

Once informed that you wish to participate in the research, the timeline below shows the next stages.

- Within two working days of you notifying the researcher of your wish to participate, the researcher will e-mail a consent form, and the University of Strathclyde Privacy Policy will be attached. You will be asked to read Participants will both documents and contact the researcher if you have any queries.
- The researcher will allow 10 working days to read all the documentation, and you confirm your wish to the researcher to go ahead before then.
- If you have not contacted the researcher within ten working days, the researcher will email you for an update on their position, asking if you wish to go ahead or withdraw at this point.
- If you agree to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign the consent form and return it via email, at which point a mutually agreeable date for the research interview.
- On the day of the interview, you will be asked again if you wish to participate and if you understand the previous information that has been sent out to you. Likewise, the researcher will check if you wish for anything else to be clarified. Thereafter, once agreed, the interview will commence.

The research will be published as part of a PhD thesis. Should you have any questions or wish to know anything further about the project, please feel free to contact me – details noted below.

Researcher Contact Details:
Paul Prescott
paul.prescott@strath.ac.uk

Chief Investigator details:
This research is supervised by Dr Anastasios Hadjisolomou. You can contact him at a.hadjisolomou@strath.ac.uk or 0141 548 3219

This investigation has been granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee and the Research Ethics Committee of the University's Department of Work, Employment and Organisation.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde
Graham Hills Building
50 George Street
Glasgow
G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707

Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Should you experience any distress or anxiety following involvement in this research, you can contact the free counselling services below,

The Spark Counselling service can be reached by freephone on 0800 802 2088 or by contacting via the hyperlink.
https://www.thespark.org.uk/counselling/free-counselling-and-support/.

Breathing Space – free counselling service call freephone on 0800 838587 or contact via the hyperlink,
https://breathingspace.scot/

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline – free helpline service on 08088 01 03 02 or contact via hyperlink,
https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/contact-support/#:~:text=here%20for%20you.-,Helpline,every%20day%2C%205pm%20to%20midnight

Samaritans UK – free help line from any phone call 116 123
https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/

Appendix Four – Participant Consent Form

Consent Form
Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

Title of the study:

Project Title:
Customer Misbehaviour: the challenges and opportunities facing line and organisational management in addressing CSH, in the Scottish hospitality industry.

- I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project, and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e., how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of personal information that identifies me, and that whenever possible, researchers will comply with my request.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e., data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential, and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project. Yes / No
- I consent to auto transcriptions being used as part of the project. Yes / No

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date: