JOB STRESSORS, EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND SERVICE RECOVERY IN INDEPENDENT QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS IN EGYPT: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

In this study, antecedents and outcomes of the frontline employees' emotional exhaustion were examined in the context of independent Egyptian Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs). Frontline employees participated in a survey which investigates the relationships amongst job stressors (role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload and interpersonal conflict) and emotional exhaustion; as well as emotional exhaustion and service recovery performance. The results from multiple regression analyses identified role ambiguity and role overload as the antecedents of emotional exhaustion. A critical negative relationship was also identified between emotional exhaustion and the service recovery performance of frontline employees.

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian restaurant industry has encountered numerous progressions in the course of the most recent decades. An extensive variety of international brands of Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) are attracted by Egypt's promising market such as Hardee's and Burger King. After McDonalds opened its QSR in Cairo in 1994 (Gareb, 1998), independent (local) Egyptian QSR operators began to follow international management techniques and developed QSRs sector in the country. Recently, QSRs in

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Egypt performed much better than other food service organizations which are more dependent on inbound tourism (Euro-Monitor, 2014). However, with ongoing instability due to the political revolutions, it is increasingly likely that foreign investors will remain reluctant to make major forays into international QSRs in Egypt. Consequently, independent (local) QSRs are expected to flourish in the next few years.

The success of QSRs is mainly dependent on the quality of services offered by frontline employees to customers (Qin & Prybutok, 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010; Tan, Oriade, & Fallon, 2014; Cao & Kim, 2015; Wu & Mohi, 2015). Because of their extensive duties, frontline employees accomplish an essential role on serving customers effectively, and developing positive relationships with them (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Rod & Ashil, 2009; Yavas, Babakus, & Karatepe, 2013). A noteworthy issue for many frontline jobs in the hospitality sector is psychological strain - burnout (Buick & Thomas, 2001; Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Kuruuzum, Anafarta, & Irmak, 2008; Karatepe & Karatepe, 2010). As a form of work-related strain, burnout is a reaction disorder portrayed by emotional fatigue (exhaustion), an inclination to depersonalize others and lessened capacity to perform work obligations (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Particularly, emotional exhaustion is widespread among employees in frontline hospitality jobs (Karatepe, 2011). Emotional exhaustion is the result of serious physical, affective and subjective strain as an outcome of long exposure to certain work demands or stressors (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Emotional exhaustion is described by an absence of power and an inclination that one's emotional assets are vanished (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999). According to Maslach (1982), emotional exhaustion is the soonest manifestation of burnout. Therefore, it requires a substantial attention by researchers and managers alike.

Emotional exhaustion leads to considerable tangible and intangible costs. The substitution of an emotionally exhausted staff with an inexperienced one is going to be one of the hugest expenses connected with emotional exhaustion (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). Such turnover affects the quality of service offered to customers and particularly the quality of service recovery performance (Lewis & Spyrakopoulos, 2001). Service recovery is doing things right the second time (Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000) and the measures required to deal with complaints (Gronroos, 1988). Rod and Ashill (2009) stress that successful service recovery leads to customer satisfaction.

Based on this, the aim of this research is to investigate the potential impact of job stressors on Quick Service Restaurants' (QSRs) employees in terms of emotional exhaustion and the impact of emotional exhaustion on service recovery by using the Independent Egyptian QSRs sector as a case in point. Understanding the factors that may impede the delivery of superior service is crucial for the success of QSRs. A lack of knowledge about which job stressors affect the emotional exhaustion of employees and how emotional exhaustion affects the service recovery performance of employees might lead management to misallocate resources when endeavoring to enhance the quality of service. These issues were addressed in the hotel management (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007, 2008; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe, 2011), healthcare (Krisjanous, 2006; Rubino, 2009; Garrosa, Rainho, Moreno-Jimenez, & Monteiro, 2010) and in call centres (Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Ashill, Rod, Thirkell, & Carruthers, 2009) contexts. To date no attempt has been made to measure these relationships in the context of QSRs. This study addresses this paucity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work stressors are those qualities of the occupation environment that make significant requests on the capacities of employees (Abramis, 1994) and ordinarily include an absence of consistency and control (Sutton & Kahn 1984). Based on findings drawn from the role theory (Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoads, 1996; Singh, 2000) and the job demands-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), this study focused on four job stressors that have been widely studied in the service marketing literature (Babakus et al., 1999; Low, Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001; Ashill et al., 2009) in general and the hospitality literature (Ross, 1995; Karatepe & Uludag, 2008) in particular. These stressors are: role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload and interpersonal conflict.

Role ambiguity is a distressing condition caused by an employee's perplexity concerning what his or her occupation obligations are (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Role conflict describes the distinction observed by an employee between his or her duties and the instructions passed on to him or her by numerous managers or supervisors (Perrewe, Zellars, Ferris, & Rossi, 2004). Role overload depicts inappropriately burdensome duties (Schick, Gordon, & Haka, 1990). Finally, interpersonal conflict manifests regular and hard interactions with colleagues (Spector & Jex, 1998; Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Dormann & Zapf, 2004).

The Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) empirically indicated that burnout occurs through exposure to job demands (via emotional exhaustion) and lack of resources such as training (via depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment). Further research by Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Achaufeli, and Schreurs (2003) and Lewig and Dollard (2003) demonstrated that job stressors significantly influence emotional exhaustion and do not necessarily influence personal accomplishments and depersonalization. Given that the study only focused on the relationship between job demands (stressors) and emotional exhaustion, it was not considered appropriate to address personal accomplishment and depersonalization.

While evidences manifest the direct influence of job demands (stressors) on emotional exhaustion, the need to determine which stressors influence the emotional exhaustion of QSRs' employees is essential, because the literature currently offers contradicting results related to which stressors affect emotional exhaustion. For example, the research of Krisjanous (2006) reported that role overload, role conflict and interpersonal conflict are the antecedents of emotional exhaustion in health care organizations in New Zeeland. Karatepe and Uludag (2008) demonstrated that role ambiguity and role conflict are the only stressors responsible for developing the emotional exhaustion of hotel employees in Cyprus. Ashill et al. (2009) found that role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity are the stressors causing emotional exhaustion to call center employees. Moreover, Rubino (2009) indicated that role ambiguity is the sole cause of emotional exhaustion of frontline employees. Surprisingly, Garrosa et al. (2010) concluded that there are no relationships between the aforementioned stressors and the emotional exhaustion of nurses. These contradicting findings require further empirical investigation in the hospitality management context.

In light of these contradicting results, the following hypotheses are proposed for frontline employees of QSRs in Egypt:

H1: Role ambiguity is positively associated with the emotional exhaustion.

H2: Role conflict is positively associated with the emotional exhaustion.

H3: Role overload is positively associated with the emotional exhaustion.

H4: Interpersonal conflict is positively associated with the emotional exhaustion.

Previous studies (Licata, Mowen, Harris, & Brown, 2003; Ashill et al., 2009) showed that emotional exhaustion can negatively influence the service recovery efforts of frontline employees. However, there are contradicting findings in the hospitality literature regarding the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service recovery performance. For example, in a study of frontline hotel employees in Northern Cyprus, Karatepe and Uludag (2007) reported that emotional exhaustion reduced the service recovery performance of frontline employees. Karatepe (2011) also found a significant relationship between these two constructs among frontline hotel employees in Iran. However, the results of a study conducted with frontline hotel employees in Nigeria demonstrated no significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). These contradicting findings require further empirical investigation in the context of QSRs.

Based on the current research in the context of QSRs, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Emotional exhaustion of frontline employees of QSRs in Egypt is negatively associated with their service recovery performance.

To recap, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding the study and the associated hypotheses. The model aims to show the relationships between job stressors and emotional exhaustion; and between emotional exhaustion and the service recovery performance of QSRs frontline employees. The model was developed based upon the role stress theory (Singh et al., 1994) and job demands-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001).
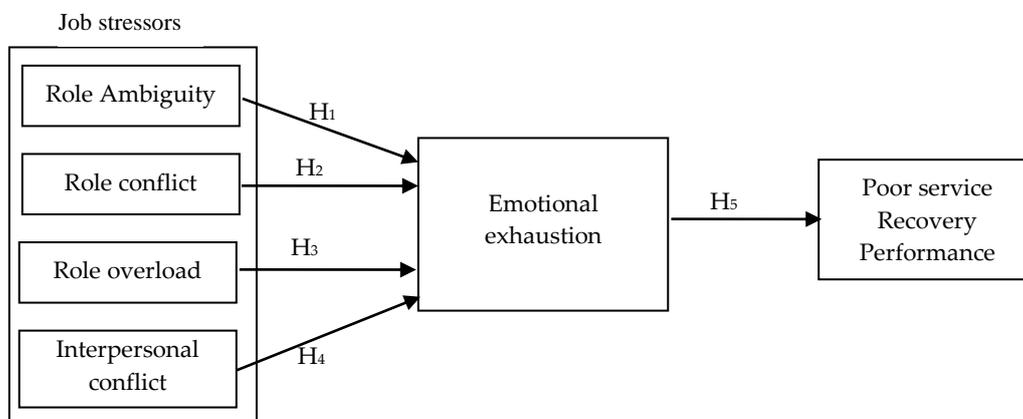

Figure 1. *The Research Model*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Procedures

A total of 21 independent QSRs operating in Cairo, Egypt participated in this research. A paper and pencil style of survey was distributed to full time frontline employees who have direct contact with customers and deal with customer complaints. To expand the likelihood of discovering varieties of emotional exhaustion side effects, questionnaires were given to employees working in various working times (weekday, weekend, night, afternoon, beginning of the working shift and end of working shift). Given that there were no statistically significant differences between frontline employees over these diverse working times, individual level analysis was considered acceptable. A total of 213 acceptable questionnaires were considered valid for analyses. The majority of respondents (86.3%) were males; 61.5 % of respondents were married; 73.7 % were between the ages of 25 and 30 years and 59.6 % had vocational diplomas.

Measures

The main variables of this study were job stressors, emotional exhaustion and service recovery. All these variables were measured via multiple items with a five-point rating scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Job stressors were operationalized with four role stressor variables, each of which has been shown to lead to symptoms of emotional exhaustion. Of these variables, role ambiguity was measured with six items developed by Low et al. (2001). Role ambiguity is the apparent deficiency of essential work-related data or the absence of clarity at work (Rubino, 2009). The scale items used to measure role ambiguity had reverse scored measurement items such as "My job has clearly defined objectives, targets and goals" and " I know exactly how much authority I have", so that a high score reflected low role ambiguity and low score reflected high role ambiguity.

Role conflict was measured by five items from the work of Low et al. (2001) and described the distinction an employee considers between employment goals and duties passed on to him or her by different supervisors and managers (e.g. " I have to deal with and satisfy too many different supervisors"; " When completing a task, I get conflicting information from two or more supervisors"). Role overload depicted an improperly grave extent of job duties and it was measured with four items

developed by Glazer and Beehr (2005). Sample measurement items include "The amount of work that I have to do sometimes stops me from doing my job to the best of my ability" and "I often notice a marked increase in my workload".

Interpersonal conflict was measured by utilizing a four-item scale created by Spector and Jex (1998). That scale measured extreme and hard connections with colleagues with items such as "I often get into arguments with other staff at work" and "I often have other staff being rude to me at work". The emotional exhaustion scale of Maslach and Jackson (1986) was employed to gauge sentiments of being emotionally exhausted. The scale comprised five items and included statements such as ''I feel exhausted at the end of the workday" and "I feel emotionally drained from my work". Finally, the service recovery construct depicted the activities that a frontline employee takes to deal with service problems. It was measured with five items developed by Boshoff and Allen (2000). Sample of items used to measure service recovery are "Resolving a complaint for a customer is a great thrill for me" and " No customer I deal with leaves with problems unresolved".

RESULTS

Preliminary Results

The study variables were exposed to three exploratory factor analyses with varimax rotation. The first factor analysis comprised the four job stressors. In this regard, four factors stemmed with eigenvalues above than 1.0. The factor loadings and the communalities of one item was below than 0.50. This item was eliminated. Hence, eighteen items out of nineteen were used for later analyses (Table 1). The job stressor factors achieved 71.2 percent of the variance in item scores. The second factor analysis was for the emotional exhaustion factor. The analysis shows (Table 1) that only three items out of five items of the emotional exhaustion factor were retained (the ones with factor loadings above than 0.50). Finally, the third factor analysis was for the service recovery factor. Table 1 highlights that only three items out of five items appropriately loaded on one factor. Table 1 also represents the reliabilities of each factor.

Table 1. *Independent Factor Analyses for Job Stressors, Emotional Exhaustion and Service Recovery Factors*

Constructs and items	Factor loadings	Eigen value	Cronbach's reliability
Job Stressors			
Role ambiguity		5.2	0.808
I know what is expected of me at work*	0.782		
I know what my responsibilities are*	0.727		
My job has clearly defined objectives, targets and goals*	0.772		
My supervisor clearly explains what needs to be done*	0.783		
I know exactly how much authority I have *	0.873		
Role conflict		3.9	0.750
I have adequate resources to complete my job tasks *	0.739		
Sometimes I need to bend a rule or policy in order to carry out my job	0.761		
I do things that are often accepted by one person but not accepted by others	0.629		
I have to deal with and satisfy too many different supervisors	0.628		
When completing a task I get conflicting information from two or more supervisors	0.725		
Role overload		2.1	0.876
It seems like I have too much work for one person to do.	0.626		
The amount of work that I have to do sometimes stops me from doing my job to the best of my ability.	0.748		
I am given enough time to do what is expected of me in my job*.	0.853		
I often notice a marked increase in my workload	0.739		
Interpersonal conflict		1.7	0.923
I often get into arguments with other staff at work.	0.761		
I often have other staff yell at me at work.	0.537		
I often have other staff being rude to me at work.	0.725		
I often have other staff do nasty things to me at work.	0.839		
Burnout (emotional exhaustion)		5.5	0.732
I feel exhausted at the end of the workday.	0.973		
My work requires a lot of emotional energy.	0.826		
When I get up in the morning I look forward to coming into work*.	0.809		
Service recovery		6.4	0.912
No customer I deal with leaves with problems unresolved	0.947		
Resolving a complaint for a customer is a great thrill for me.	0.893		
Customers for who I have resolved an issue/complaint are now some of the most loyal.	0.846		

Total variance explained are 71.2%, 62.6%, and 64.3% for job stressors, emotional exhaustion, and service recovery constructs respectively.

Assessing Reliability and Validity

Previous studies (Ashill et al., 2009; Liang, 2012) recommend assessing the reliability of variables by using the internal consistency method (coefficient alpha). A low coefficient alpha, 0.50 or less, is an indication that the representative items are performing poorly in capturing the variables. For marketing research studies, reliabilities of 0.70 or beyond

are acceptable. The Cronbach's reliability alpha of all the variables used in this research study extended from 0.732 to 0.923 (Table 1) which are within the acceptable levels identified by George and Mallery (2003).

Regarding the validity of constructs, the essential two aspects of construct validity assessed in this study were the convergence and divergence of variables. Regarding convergence validity, item-to-total correlation indicated that each scale item used in this research positively correlates with the sum of the scores of the remaining scale items of the same construct i.e. correlation above 0.30. This indicates that the responses to each item reflect clear, consistent, strongly held and well-informed attitudes (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). In addition, Pearson's bivariate correlation coefficients demonstrated that the factors used in this research study do not correlate with other variables from which they should vary. Table 2 indicates that the role stressor variables are not correlated. Based on these assessments, the divergence validity of variables was considered acceptable (Churchill, 1995).

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1)Role ambiguity	4.52	0.12	1					
(2) Role conflict	2.02	1.03	0.01	1				
(3) Role overload	4.33	0.57	0.13	0.15	1			
(4) Interpersonal conflict	1.98	0.93	0.22	0.19	0.36	1		
(5) Emotional exhaustion	4.03	0.83	0.65*	0.39	0.69*	0.17	1	
(6) Service recovery	1.69	1.53	0.53*	0.27	0.73*	0.46	-0.63*	1

* $p < 0.01$

Hypotheses Testing

Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to test the relationships between variables. Before applying the analysis, the data were checked to evaluate the regression analysis assumptions. Tests for normality were performed and the results indicated that the regression assumptions were upheld. This is because the skewness and kurtosis of the factors utilized in this study were between -1 and 1 (Table 3). This demonstrates a normally distributed data.

Table 3. *The Normality of Variables*

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Role ambiguity	-0.254	-1.000
Role overload	-0.264	-0.563
Role conflict	0.185	0.473
Interpersonal conflict	0.287	0.751
Emotional exhaustion	-0.392	-0.632
Service recovery	0.528	0.857

To test the research hypotheses, the research model was divided into two layers. Both layers exhibited acceptable model fit statistics as indicated in Table 4. Hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4 examined the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion. The results in Table 5 demonstrates that role ambiguity has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion (ß = 0.82; Sig = 0.000) but role conflict has no direct impact on emotional exhaustion (ß = 0.10; sig = 0.400). Hence, Hypothesis 1 receives support but Hypothesis 2 does not.

Table 4. *The Model Fit Statistics of the Two Model Layers*

Models	Independent variables	Dependent variable	Adjusted R square	St. error of the estimate	ANOVA (F)	ANOVA (Sig)
Model 1	Role ambiguity, role overload, role conflict and interpersonal conflict	Emotional exhaustion	0.684	0.573	113.847	0.000*
Model 2	Emotional exhaustion	Service recovery performance	0.456	0.634	83.882	0.002*

* $p < 0.01$

The direct effect of role overload on emotional exhaustion (ß = 0.74; sig = 0.001) is supported, thus Hypothesis 3 is accepted. However, interpersonal conflict did not have a significant effect on emotional exhaustion (ß = 0.01 =; Sig = 0.584). Hence, hypothesis 4 is rejected. Finally, emotional exhaustion revealed a negative effect on service recovery (ß = -0.53; Sig = 0.020). Hence, hypothesis 5 is supported.

Table 5. *Tests of The Research Hypotheses*

Hypotheses	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Standardized Beta	Significance	Decisions
Hypothesis 1	Role ambiguity	Emotional exhaustion	0.82	0.000**	Accepted
Hypothesis 2	Role conflict	Emotional exhaustion	0.10	0.400	Rejected
Hypothesis 3	Role overload	Emotional exhaustion	0.74	0.001**	Accepted
Hypothesis 4	Interpersonal conflict	Emotional exhaustion	0.01	0.584	Rejected
Hypothesis 5	Emotional exhaustion	Service recovery	-0.53	0.020*	Accepted

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

The results of this research supported the proposed hypotheses, with two exceptions. Emotional exhaustion is related to role ambiguity and role overload but not to role conflict and interpersonal conflict. Role ambiguity was also considered as a significant factor affecting the emotional exhaustion of frontline employees in the context of hotels in Cyprus (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). This demonstrates that frontline employees in hotels and in QSRs suffer from the lack of clear information regarding their jobs. Additionally, research in various contexts apart from hospitality confirmed the relationship between role ambiguity and emotional exhaustion (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Ashill et al., 2009). Role overload was also reported as an antecedent of emotional exhaustion in various fields such as healthcare (Krisjanous, 2006; Rubino, 2009) and call centers (Ashill et al., 2009) but not in hospitality. This may indicate that role overload is one of the characteristics of QSRs.

In the hotel business, role conflict was considered as a significant factor affecting the emotional exhaustion of employees (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). The low mean scores of the role conflict (factor mean score = 2.02) and interpersonal conflict (factor mean score = 1.98) factors relative to the scores of role overload (factor mean score = 4.33) and role ambiguity (factor mean score = 4.52) factors suggest that the sample of frontline employees of QSRs in this study does not experience high levels of role conflict and interpersonal conflict. This contradicts with the earliest and recent studies of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Um & Harrison, 1998; Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). The lack of role conflict and interpersonal conflict in the presence of other known job stressors (role overload and role ambiguity) is an interesting finding. It could be the result of job design, objectives and descriptions that are not clear to frontline employees and/or the management of QSRs have not communicated expectations, responsibilities and levels of authority clearly.

The finding of perceived role ambiguity and role overload in the relative absence of role conflict and interpersonal conflict in this study may mean that respondents find that they can enact their duties and roles; however, they are not clear to them. This extends and enriches the understanding that a high level of ambiguity and role overload and, therefore, a poor conviction or belief in one's job description may not lead to conflict both at the role and interpersonal levels. This finding is in agreement with the work of Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander (2008) and

Rubino (2009). This may be because frontline employees in QSRs are working in a small place and compete to perform to some extent similar tasks.

The results are also consistent with the expectation that emotional exhaustion leads to reduced service recovery performance. At higher levels of emotional exhaustion, frontline employees perform at lower levels in dealing with customer complaints. This is in agreement with the results of previous research (Ashill et al., 2009) in the context of frontline employees in call centers. Because of the significant relationship between service recovery performance of frontline employees and emotional exhaustion, exhaustion issues need to be addressed not only for the well-being of the individual staff members, but also for organizational performance. The responsiveness of frontline employees in QSRs was reported as a key success factor in QSRs by various researchers (Tan et al., 2014; Wu & Mohi, 2015). Following the findings of previous research studies and the results of this study, the effect of emotional exhaustion on service recovery performance should be regarded as a negative influence on goals aimed at building and implementing customer service recovery-oriented systems.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study advance and broaden the comprehension of the variables that influence the service recovery performance of frontline employees in QSRs. It is known from the role stress theory (Singh et al., 1994) that the emotional exhaustion of frontline employees affects job performance generally. This research contributes to theory by adding that emotional exhaustion as a consequence of work stress can particularly affect the adequacy of the service recovery performance of employees in the context of QSRs. The findings also enrich and extend the comprehension of the system by which role stress moves through emotional exhaustion to influence service recovery performance. This contribution is important, because there are contradicting results across the empirical studies in the hospitality management literature (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe, 2011).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest some managerial implications. In regards to role ambiguity and role overload, the management of QSRs should alleviate these factors in order to reduce the likelihood of the emotional exhaustion of frontline employees. Management should clearly prepare job descriptions and distribute them to employees (Rubino, 2009). When a frontline employee does not have appropriate knowledge to fulfill required duties and there is an absence of clarity with respect to appropriate techniques of performing job duties (role ambiguity), he or she will be less ready to react appropriately to job demands (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008) as a consequence of emotional exhaustion.

Second, frontline employees should be well prepared on how to deal with exhaustion. Effective training on that issue is not widespread in hospitality organizations (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). Karatepe (2011) suggests that having mentors in hospitality organizations can help employees to manage problems related to emotional exhaustion. Finally, training on service recovery issues in stressful times is also needed for frontline employees (Rod & Ashill, 2009). When frontline employees are progressively sure about what is anticipated from them, they ought to perform better when interacting with disappointed clients.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study focused on emotional exhaustion as a measure of burnout. Although, exhaustion is a necessary component of burnout, it is not the only reason of burnout. In fact, exhaustion reflects the stress dimension of burnout, it fails to capture the critical aspects of the relationship that people have with their work. A future research agenda should examine other variables of burnout including depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment and the relationships between these dimensions and job resources. The relationship between depersonalization and poor job performance was reported by several researches (Singh, 2000; Bakker et al., 2003) in various contexts but not in the context of QSRs. Additionally, an investigation of further moderators of the job stressors/emotional exhaustion association, for example the compensation variable which might lighten the negative impacts of job stressors on emotional exhaustion is recommended for future studies.

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