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Incidence of workplace bullying among hospitality employees

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to the address the key factors of workplace bullying among hospitality employees, as workplace bullying results in damaging consequences on both individuals and organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – This study first defines the phenomenon of workplace bullying and then reviews the related literature. Data are collected from a sample population of 238 hospitality employees obtained from the latest European Working Conditions Survey. Logistic regression analysis is used to achieve the study objectives.

Findings – Results from the binary logistic regression model show the main personal and organizational factors related to the probability of workplace bullying. The logistic regression model explains 76.4 per cent of the total variations in the sample. The model correctly classifies 78.1 per cent of hospitality employees who did not feel bullied in their profession and 74.1 per cent of employees who did feel bullied.

Practical implications – The authors' findings imply that responsible managers in hospitality enterprises may reduce the organizational levels of workplace bullying by adjusting certain working conditions and establishing a supportive environment.

Originality/value – Studies on personalities inclined to bullying are inconclusive. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this research is the first to develop a comprehensive and exploratory conceptual model of workplace bullying that links personal variables, working conditions and contextual factors to the prevalence of workplace bullying within the hospitality sector in the European context.

Keywords Working conditions, Job satisfaction, Workplace bullying, Labor discrimination, Workplace safety

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In the contemporary working environment, human resource management (HRM) represents the most important sustainable competitive advantage of a firm because it assists employees in facilitating the success of an organization. In this context, Lucia Casademunt *et al.* (2012) emphasized the role of emotional well-being management as a strategic factor for HRM. Emotional well-being management is essential because employees are considered one of the

most important assets of the majority of organizations, particularly service-based organizations, because of the benefits derived from delivering successful performances (Evans *et al.*, 2003). The hospitality sector is undoubtedly a significant service-based organization.

Kusluvan *et al.* (2010) argued that the human element is one of the most necessary factors of service quality, competitive advantage and organizational performance in hospitality organizations. This sentiment is attributed to the fact that primarily service-based outputs are key aspects that characterize HRM in hospitality organizations. Services are produced and availed simultaneously at the service provider's location. Customers typically enjoy interpersonal interaction with employees. These employees are one of the components of the final product; thus, they represent and form the image of the organization (Hartline and Jones, 1996). Considering that employees have their own particular characteristics, Kusluvan *et al.* (2010) proposed a classification that reflects the specificities of both the workforce and the labor market that impede people management in various sectors. These factors include high labor turnover rate, strong relationship with customers, unskilled and semi-skilled nature of certain jobs, heterogeneous labor market and poor employment conditions. Lee and Chen (2013) added that work attitude and involvement are the foundations of delivering quality service. Priyanka (2011) also argued that involved employees provide quality service. Therefore, working conditions are vital in the hospitality sector because such conditions affect everything from retention and productivity to profitability and safety. Therefore, both employee and HRM practices are determinant factors of service quality and business success (Schneider *et al.*, 2003).

However, organizational culture and structure are not neutral because they crystallize specific interests. This political perspective suggests that dysfunctional behaviors exhibited in business organizations may undermine effectiveness and efficiency. Workplace bullying, which is a critical but a seldom-recognized workplace issue, is undoubtedly harmful behavior that has tremendous costs for organizations and their employees. It is also a legal issue that affects the health and welfare of employees (Mckay *et al.*, 2008). In particular, workplace bullying has a negative effect on both organizations and employees. For example, both managerial costs and employee turnover rate increase as productivity decreases (González-Mulé *et al.*, 2013). Measuring and defining other economic consequences with a significant negative influence on profits can be difficult. These consequences include reduction in quality, negative effects on the organization's reputation, increase in absenteeism and mistakes and deterioration of relationships with customers because of limited attention provided to the objectives and commitments of customers (Gumbus and Lyons, 2011). This statement is significant for organizations that are typically composed of employees (e.g. hospitality employees) who assist customers in a close and direct manner.

Studies on personalities inclined to bullying are rather inconclusive. Furthermore, academic research on the influence of labor conditions and certain contextual factors is limited. This study aims to develop the first comprehensive and exploratory conceptual framework of workplace bullying that links personal variables, working conditions and contextual factors in the European hospitality industry.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a review of the relevant literature on workplace bullying in the hospitality industry. Section 3 provides the main characteristics of the methodology followed in the present study. Section 4 encompasses the most relevant empirical results obtained by a logistic regression analysis. Section 5 presents the discussion. Section 6 gives the major conclusions and implications of this study. Section 7 provides the main limitations.

Workplace bullying among hospitality employees
Advancements in comprehending the primary circumstances that precede workplace bullying are important to develop effective prevention and intervention tools for this behavior (Saam, 2010; Einarsen and Hauge, 2006). The prevalence of bullying significantly varies from one activity sector to another, even within the same country, and from one country to another. In Europe, the occurrence rate of workplace bullying is approximately 4-10 per cent (Zapf *et al.*, 2003), although the inferences may vary depending on the measurement and estimation methods used (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009; Notelaers *et al.*, 2006). With respect to the extent of manifestation of bullying, a significant disagreement is observed on the prevalence of this behavior, from 4 to 5 per cent in Northern European countries (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009, 2011) as opposed to 15 per cent in Southern European countries (Giorgi *et al.*, 2011). Certain factors, such as cultural characteristics and societal changes, may help explain the variations in prevalence rates. Issues related to research methodology should also be considered (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009). Studies on workplace bullying are performed by utilizing an array of measurement methods, instruments and designs (Agervold, 2007; Zapf *et al.*, 2003). Thus, several methodological procedures may influence the observed prevalence rates (Nielsen *et al.*, 2010).

Although the concept of workplace bullying may seem transparent, it includes several nuances that should be analyzed. Scientific studies have explored workplace bullying by different conceptions (Aquino and Lamertz, 2004), such as harassment, emotional abuse, intimidation, psychological harassment, aggression, mistreatment and victimization in the workplace. Despite these various descriptions, a consensus exists on the definition of bullying in terms of intentionality, frequency (e.g. weekly) or duration (e.g. approximately six months), target's reaction to the situation, perceived imbalance, misuse of power between perpetrator and target, inadequate support, inability of targets to defend themselves from such a predicament (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen *et al.*, 2003, 2011), facing negative and constant social interactions (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011), physical or verbal badgering, insulting remarks (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003) and intense pressure (Sandmark, 2009).

The majority of definitions agree that persistence and duration are the key constructs of bullying. However, workplace bullying has a significant psychological component in its materialization, as proven in the current study. An essential condition of bullying is that the act itself should be perceived by the target as an aggressive circumstance (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996). From this point of view, the pernicious effects of workplace bullying (including anxiety, depression, absenteeism and lack of organizational commitment) should be thoroughly externalized the moment the target perceives this objectionable situation. This reaction should be independent of the bullying act's persistence or duration. Based on this view, this study primarily intends to explain the determinants of workplace bullying among hospitality employees resulting from an interaction among personal variables, working conditions and contextual factors.

The perspective of individual antecedents in workplace bullying is a controversial issue because the result can be "blamed on the victim" (Finne *et al.*, 2011). However, studies on personalities inclined toward bullying are inconclusive (Bowling and Beehr, 2006). Most researchers have concluded that no personality type may be predisposed to playing the role of a victim or a bully (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003; Rayner *et al.*, 2002). However, a few studies have identified several factors, such as age, marital status and gender, that can increase the probability of becoming a victim or a bully (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003; Coyne *et al.*, 2000).

Although initial studies have mainly focused on the psychological characteristics of bullies and their victims, researchers have emphasized the influence of working conditions since the 1990s. These studies have analyzed the relationship among workplace bullying and

job stability (Hoel and Salin, 2003; Baron and Neuman, 1996), workload (Salin, 2003; Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), control (Omari, 2003; Vartia and Hyyti, 2002; Rayner *et al.*, 1999; Vartia, 1996; Zapf *et al.*, 1996), role ambiguity (Jennifer *et al.*, 2003; Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), role conflict (Topa *et al.*, 2007; Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), leadership behavior (Vartia, 1996; Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), social support from co-workers and supervisors (Hansen *et al.*, 2006; Zapf *et al.*, 1996), social climate (Agervold and Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen *et al.*, 1994; Vartia, 1996; Vartia and Hyyti, 2002; Zapf *et al.*, 1996;) and organizational change (O'Moore *et al.*, 1998; Sheehan, 1998; McCarthy, 1996).

In addition to the abovementioned factors, bullying may occur because of several factors inherent to the context in which the organization operates. Some contextual variables highlighted in literature include sector/industry, firm size and public/private ownership (Lewis and Gunn, 2007; Hoel and Cooper, 2001). For example, studies on this phenomenon reveal that bullying is common in the service sector (Omari, 2003; Björkqvist *et al.*, 1994).

The hospitality sector comprises hotels, bars, restaurants, catering contractors, fast food establishments, cafeterias and taverns, among other establishments. This sector has become an advocate of the lifestyle and tourism sectors of a particular country. This circumstance may have considerable importance to the study on harassment because it is a critical factor in the quality of jobs offered by a constantly growing industry that accommodated up to 563 million tourists in Europe in 2013 with a gross income of US$489bn (UNWTO, 2014).

To handle a large number of visitors attentively and professionally, the hospitality sector offers direct employment to 10.2 million people in the European Union (EU), a number that translates to an economic contribution of 3.7 per cent to the gross domestic product (Ernst & Young, 2013). This sector is mainly composed of small businesses with 10 or less workers. The workforce of this sector is primarily young (approximately 48 per cent are under 35 years old) and predominantly composed of women (54 per cent of the workforce). The tourism sector provides employment for diverse profiles, from positions with high qualifications to employment without any required skills. The latter makes the tourism industry a major gateway for young Europeans to land their first jobs and the means for the reincorporation of aging, unemployed people. Tourism also provides an opportunity to integrate immigrants and other groups that experience distinct employment difficulties in the labor market.

Although the quantity of jobs is characterized by several advantages, analyzing their quality is a different matter. The tourism industry usually offers jobs with atypical work conditions that lead to stressful or even violent situations (OSHA, 2008). Examples of these conditions are as follows:

• long working hours that occasionally violate labor laws;
• schedules that hinder work–family life balance;
• excessive workloads and time constraint pressure that lead to highly intense work rhythms;
• monotonous and repetitive tasks in most jobs offered that limit the capacity for creativity and individual initiative;
• persistent contact with customers that occasionally leads to tense situations that can result in harassment or violence; and
• lack of training or experience in certain positions.

These work conditions that are inherent in the tourism sector generate stress levels among workers and act as catalysts for harassment (Meloury and Signal, 2014; Hoel and Einarsen, 2003). Night shifts and alcohol consumption, which are typical in many establishments in the tourism sector, increase the probability of violence or sexual harassment occurrences.

Studies on harassment began in the 1980s in Nordic countries because of the innovative studies on school bullying at the time (Leymann, 1990; Matthiesen *et al.*, 1989). Leymann (1990), a German psychiatrist, is considered the pioneer in this type of study (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). Leymann's initial interest in bullying was subsequently extended to harassment at work (which he labeled "mobbing"), because he identified similar dynamics among adult patients (Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.*, 2007). Although sufficient literature has been produced with respect to this matter, only a few studies have focused on the hospitality industry. Hoel and Einarsen (2003) warned about this research gap in their study for the International Labour Office (ILO), but no significant progress was achieved. These authors determined that the previously described stressful situations, combined with the profile of many hospitality sector employees (e.g. limited training and belonging to the most vulnerable population groups, such as immigrants, long-term unemployed or women with family responsibilities), create a situation particularly conducive to the proliferation of violence and harassment.

Limited research has been conducted since then, and most of the studies have focused on the restaurant sector, particularly fine dining (Meloury and Signal, 2014; Alexander *et al.*, 2012; Patah *et al.*, 2010; Mathisen *et al.*, 2008; Bloisi and Hoel, 2008; Johns and Menzel, 1999). However, all these studies commonly assume that the proper functioning of a restaurant's kitchen demands work teams to accept a hierarchical structure and submit to a quasi-military style of discipline. In this context, verbal and even physical violence toward the young and considerably inexperienced members of a team are accepted as normal and inherent to the profession, as well as necessary for their socialization and professional development. This phenomenon is also observed in select culinary schools in which the conduct is deemed appropriate instead of reprehensible (Patah *et al.*, 2010). Harassment statistics in fine dining restaurants is probably inaccurate because of the pervasive acceptance of this behavior. However, Mathisen *et al.* (2008) determined a higher prevalence of harassment in upscale restaurant kitchens than in the rest of the restaurant sector. A high turnover rate in cooking teams has also been found, which further exacerbates the problem of constantly incorporating new members who are susceptible to harassment. In these work conditions, harassment undergoes a ripple effect that leads to irreversible consequences in many cases. Individuals who accept this treatment and opt to remain in the organization (probably because they consider suffering as a price for acquiring their accredited chef's knowledge and experience) may repeat these types of behavior on new members as the former moves up in the organizational hierarchy of a restaurant (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008).

Meloury and Signal (2014) conducted an in-depth study on the factors associated with these types of behavior in high-standing restaurants and determined that these restaurants are similar to other establishments in the hospitality sector. The authors particularly emphasized the exhausting workdays and stress resulting from the rapid pace of the workplace. Such a condition is essential to enable employees to serve customers within a short period.

Overall, limited research has been conducted on bullying in the hospitality sector, and these studies have focused mainly on the restaurant sector, particularly that related to fine

cuisine. The present study addresses the key factors of workplace bullying among hospitality employees in general who may respond to different casuistries.

Methods

Data collection and sample

The data for the study were collected from the latest European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). The questionnaire offered information on the working conditions in the 27 EU member states (the EWCS also includes Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey, Norway, Croatia, Kosovo and Albania). The methodology of the survey was as follows:

- *Coverage*: The survey covered all 27 EU member states, Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro.

- *Target population*: The target population was the residents of all the abovementioned countries aged 15 or older (aged 16 or older in Spain, the UK and Norway) and employed at the time of the survey.

- *Sample*: The basic sample was a multi-stage, stratified, random sample. Each country was divided into sections based on region and degree of urbanization; a number of primary sampling units (PSU) were drawn randomly in each section. Subsequently, a random sample of households was drawn in each PSU. Finally, in each household, the person selected for interview was whoever worked and had their birthday next.

- *Sample size*: The target sample size in most countries was 1,000. Exceptions were Germany and Turkey (2,000), as well as Italy, Poland and the UK (1,500). Moreover, three countries decided to finance larger national samples, resulting in a target sample size of 4,000, 3,000 and 1,400 in Belgium, France and Slovenia, respectively. The total number of interviews in 2010 was 43,816.

The study denoted a prevalent workplace-bullying rate of 5.6 per cent among hospitality employees. This rate was higher than the general rate among European employees (4.2 per cent). The current study extracted 2,125 hospitality professionals (workers in hotels, bars, restaurants, cafeterias, taverns, cruises, etc.) included in Section I of the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE), which states Accommodation and food service activities (NACE codes 55-Accommodation and 56-Food and beverage service activities). A total of 119 employees reported having experienced workplace bullying. To construct the final sample, another 119 employees were selected randomly within the group of those who indicated they did not consider themselves having been bullied at work. The sample was balanced to prevent the classifier from including all subjects in the majority class when an imbalance in the size of learning classes was present.

The sample comprised 114 males (47.9 per cent) and 124 females (52.1 per cent). The average age of the participants was 37.42 years (standard deviation [SD] = 13.3 years), and the average tenure was 5.8 years (SD = 7.4). Approximately, 6.3 per cent of the participants declared, they did not have formal qualifications or that they had completed primary education only; 79.8 per cent had secondary education; and 13.9 per cent had completed university studies. The average age of hospitality employees harassed in the workplace was 36.0 years (SD = 13.0), and the average tenure was 5.6 years (SD = 6.7). The average age of hospitality employees who did not experience workplace bullying was 38.8 years (SD = 13.4), and their average tenure was 6.1 years (SD = 8.0). A high educational level was observed among non-bullied employees; 16.0 per cent claimed to have studied in universities in comparison with the 11.8 per cent of the bullied hospitality employees.

Measures

Workplace bullying was the dependent variable in this study. Respondents were required to answer the following question: Have you been subjected to bullying/harassment during the course of your work over the past 12 months? Two essential methodological designs are commonly used in the bullying literature, namely, self-labeling and operational approaches.

Most authors (Salin, 2003) agree that workplace bullying emerges because of the interaction of several factors that manifest in the individual, organizational and contextual ambits. In the original survey, some of the questions were codified into a dichotomous variable and others in the Likert scale. Some of the latter were recoded into dichotomous variables to facilitate the explanatory process of the statistical model. Table I provides a list of the explanatory antecedents of workplace bullying from this perspective and the scales to be used in this study.

Analysis and results

This study primarily intends to identify the individual, organizational and contextual factors that contribute to the development of workplace bullying among hospitality employees. In the first stage, an analysis of a contingency table and a Pearson's chi-square test for independence were conducted. The bivariate relationship between bullying and several previously discussed independent variables was examined. The first analysis also prepared the multivariate analysis that was subsequently performed using a logistic regression model. This approach demonstrated the combined effect of the independent variables with statistically significant predictive power to determine the probability that an event will occur (in this case, workplace bullying).

Pearson test at the 0.05 significance level excluded a few variables that were initially considered for analysis. First, personal characteristic variables related to gender (significance level = 0.552), education (significance level = 0.602) and marital status (significance level = 0.950) were discarded. Second, working condition variables, including length of service (significance level = 0.913), type of employment contract (significance level = 0.853), responsibility (significance level = 0.590), weekly working hours (significance level = 0.072), work at night (significance level = 0.067), work at day (significance level = 0.772), capacity to decide timetable (significance level = 0.568), monotonous tasks (significance level = 0.188), complex tasks (significance level = 0.268), team work (significance level = 0.492), work dependent on direct demands (significance level = 0.460), work dependent on numerical production targets (significance level = 0.208) and motivation (significance level = 0.107), were eliminated. Company size, which was the only context factor, was also rejected (significance level = 0.354).

Previous estimates assumed the preparation for multivariate analysis because the latter logistic regression model only incorporates independent variables with statistically significant predictability. The variables that survived this initial screening were used to propose a logistic regression model. This statistical technique was used to determine the probability that an event may occur (in this case, workplace bullying).

Table II presents the results of the logistic regression estimates. Bullied hospitality employees were coded as 1, and those who claimed they did not feel bullied were coded as 0. The Hosmer–Lemeshow analysis revealed the model's robust validity (chi-square test: 56.712; significance level = 0.000). The model specifically affirms that the set of personal and job-related variables considered in the general model of this study can satisfactorily explain whether a hospitality employee is exposed to bullying at work. The degree of such exposure is also explained. The variables used provided the model with a significant ability for

Explanatory antecedents	Factors
Individual factors	Gender (0: male; 1: female)
	Age (0: 55 years or over; 1: 40-54; 2: 25-39; 3: 15-24)
	Level of education (0: university; 1: secondary; 2: elementary)
	Marital status (0: partnered; 1: single)
Working conditions	Length of service (0: more than 10 years; 1: 5-10 years; 2: 1-5 years; 3: up to one year)
	Type of contract (0: permanent contract; 1: temporary contract)
	Responsibility (0: executive; 1: non executive)
	Weekly working hours (0: >40 hours, 1: 31-40 hours, 2: 20-30 hours, 3: < 20 hours)
	Working hours (0: less than 10 hours/day; 1: more than 10 hours/day)
	Work at night (0: no; 1: yes)
	Work on weekend (0: no; 1: yes)
	Working day (0: full time; 1: part time)
	Shift work (0: no; 1: yes)
	Capacity to decide timetable (0: flexibility; 1: no flexibility)
	Harmony between working hours and personal matters (0: yes; 1: no)
	Monotonous tasks (0: no; 1: yes)
	Complex tasks (0: yes; 1: no)
	Rotating tasks (0: no; 1: yes)
	Team work (0: no; 1: yes)
	Handling angry clients, patients . . . (0: no; 1: yes)
	Working at very high speed (0: no; 1: yes)
	Flexibility in work methods (0: yes; 1: no)
	Work dependent on direct demands, e.g. customers (0: no; 1: yes)
	Work dependent on numerical production targets . . . (0: no; 1: yes)
	Work dependent on the direct control of the boss (0: no; 1: yes)
	Job involvement (0: yes; 1: no)
	Work stress (0: no; 1: yes)
	Motivation (0: yes; 1: no)
	Working conditions satisfaction (0: yes; 1: no)
	Wage satisfaction (0: yes; 1: no)
	Health or safety at risk because of work (0: no; 1: yes)
Contextual factors	Size (0: micro enterprise; 1: small enterprise; 2: medium-large enterprise)

Table I.
Explanatory
antecedents of
workplace bullying

generalization to indicate its prediction efficiency. The results indicated that 76.4 per cent of the total variation in the sample was explained by the logistic regression model in the overall model estimate. Therefore, the explanatory variables are relevant in explaining the perception of workplace bullying. The model also correctly classified 78.1 per cent of hospitality employees who did not feel bullied in their profession. However, the percentage decreased to 74.1 per cent among those who felt bullied.

Table II shows that the "estimates" are the ordered log-odd regression coefficients. The standard interpretation for these estimates is that the response variable levels for a one-unit increase in the predictor are expected to change in the ordered log-odds, but the other variables remain constant (Bruin, 2006). For example, the *working at very high speed* estimate means that if its value changes from negative to positive, its ordered log-odds of finding a bullied worker will increase by 1.445. By contrast, the other variables remain constant. Wald statistic is the square of the ratio of the coefficient to its standard error. The predictors' odds ratios are calculated by exponentiating the estimates (i.e. odds ratio [OR] = e^{β}). Thus, they

Table II.
Logistic regression

| Results of the logistic regression estimates | Variables in the model | | | | | Odds ratios | |
| | Estimate | Standard error | Wald | Significance | Odds ratio | 95% confidence interval | |
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Age (0: + 55 years; 1: 40-54; 2: 25-39; 3: 15-24)	0.372	0.203	3.364	0.043	1.451	0.975	2.159
Handling angry clients, patients ... (0: No; 1: Yes)	0.972	0.412	5.556	0.018	2.643	1.178	5.932
Working at very high speeds (0: No; 1: Yes)	1.445	0.432	11.196	0.001	4.241	1.819	9.887
Working conditions satisfaction (0: Yes; 1: No)	1.125	0.428	6.912	0.009	3.080	1.332	7.125
Health at risk because of work (0: No; 1: Yes)	1.213	0.416	8.497	0.004	3.363	1.488	7.602
Constant	−2.726	0.559	23.739	0.000	0.065		

Notes: Overall estimate: 76.4% (bullied hospitality employees: 74.1%; non-bullied hospitality employees: 78.1%); Chi-square test = 56.712; significance level = 0.000

indicate probabilities that the response variable level will change to a considerably high score because of the one-unit increase of the predictor. The lower and upper bounds of the odds ratio for each predictor are presented as the confidence interval (CI) at the 0.95 confidence level.

Table II indicates that the probability of hospitality industry professionals being bullied, compared with non-bullied workers, is significantly high among young employees who have to deal with angry clients, work at high speed, feel unsatisfied with their working conditions and think their health or safety is at risk because of work. The remaining variables, such as working hours, work–life balance, flexibility, work stress and job involvement, do not explain the perception of workplace bullying among hospitality employees.

Nonetheless, the analysis of the confidence intervals reveals that each explanatory variable has a different effect on the emergence of workplace bullying. Therefore, the most influential variables related to workplace bullying are working condition factors:

- working at a considerably high speed; this variable has the most significant effect on the probability of feeling intimidated, multiplying the chances of encountering a bullied professional by almost four (OR: 4.241; CI: 1.819-9.887);
- health at risk because of work (OR: 3.363; CI: 1.488-7.602); and
- working condition satisfaction (OR: 3.080; CI: 1.332-7.125).

These factors are the robust predictors of whether an employee is exposed to bullying. The odds ratio coefficients for the two remaining variables (i.e. dealing with angry clients and age) remain below 3.0, with a CI ranging from 0.975 to 5.932.

Discussion
Conclusions
Bond et al. (2010) explained that workplace bullying has harmful effects on the mental health and well-being of employees. Thus, understanding the factors that determine this phenomenon is essential for designing human resource policies that can guarantee the success of an organization. A consensus has been achieved in the scientific literature concerning this issue. The causes of aggressive behavior in organizations are generally complex and significantly understood as the interaction between environmental factors and cognitive processes (Brees et al., 2013). Therefore, the present study aims to determine whether a specific workplace-bullying model that is primarily or exclusively associated with the hospitality industry exists. If yes, the factors should be identified.

The current rapid pace of technological evolution and innovation in product materials and the emergence of new distribution channels have complicated the competitive challenges facing the tourism sector. The complexity of this scenario increases the changes in work organization, skills demanded in jobs; and the quantity, quality and conditions of employment in this sector. Employees are immersed in the depths of this maelstrom, and thus their perception of the meaning of their work changes. In the current economic crisis, the individual attitude of workers in the tourism sector is essential to develop trust and forge new and stable relationships with consumers. The level of employee involvement definitely determines and guarantees the quality of the message conveyed during interactions with customers. The advantages of having staff members who feel comfortable and integrated in their daily work environment are evident, as the success of any organization primarily depends on the workforce. Furthermore, an activity that misinterprets an untimely gesture or grimace, which is similar to the well-known butterfly effect, can result in an irreparable blow to the final income statement of a company. Therefore, industrial harmony produces employees who are satisfied with their jobs and committed to their professional careers and the organizations employing them. These workers rarely consider the

possibility of changing jobs. They perceive that their personal goals and the firm's objectives are compatible and complementary. This eurhythmy, which is difficult to achieve, does not exist in aggressive work environments that are prone to bullying. Therefore, knowing the factors that favor or hinder the development of harassment is a key element in designing and implementing preventive policies intended to mitigate the harmful effects of workplace bullying.

In the present study, the prevalence rate among hospitality employees is 5.6 per cent. This rate decreases to 4.2 per cent among employees in Europe. This dispersion is in accordance with prior studies that confirm a high prevalence of bullying in the hospitality industry. Thus, based on 12 sub-samples from different industries in Norway, Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) determined that bullying is particularly frequent in the hotel and restaurant industries (prevalence rate = 4.3 per cent). Hoel and Cooper's (2000) UK-wide survey on bullying also reported high levels of bullying from clients in the service sectors, such as the hotel industry (7.5 per cent). Using a sample of workers from Estonia, Tambur and Vadi (2012) found a harassment rate of 4.4 per cent in the travel and hotel industry. A possible explanation for the high-prevalence rate of bullying in the hospitality sector can be attributed to its major service orientation toward customers. Moreover, Di Martino et al. (2003) determined that working in industries with high customer service orientation is associated with incidents of psychological violence. The orientation of the hospitality industry toward customers implies that many workplaces have a substantial emotional component that constitutes a suitable scenario for workplace bullying and harassment. Harassment and a strong quasi-military-style hierarchy in several tourism sector establishments, such as restaurants, are acceptable and a natural component of the work environment (Mathisen et al., 2008).

Within this aforementioned view, an emerging body of literature has attempted to explain the causes of workplace bullying among hospitality employees. This body of literature is mainly focused on two areas, namely, personal factors and organizational variables. Regarding sociodemographic features, current regression analysis outcomes suggest that employee age is a decisive factor in the occurrence of harassment. This circumstance is mainly caused by young workers who feel less protected and those who subsequently become potential victims of abuse. However, this age-related harassment is not as clear as one may initially think. Rayner (1997) found that harassment victims are generally less than 25 years old. Hoel and Cooper (2000) also determined that younger people tend to experience higher levels of harassment than do older employees. However, Einarsen et al. (1994) and Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) found the contrary, that is, the older employees experience more harassment than the younger ones. The same conclusion was drawn in Vartia (2003) and Piirainen et al. (2000). The general confusion completely disappears when referring to the hospitality sector, because most studies in this area agree that youth is a factor in explaining harassment (Meloury and Signal, 2014; Alexander et al., 2012; Mathisen et al., 2008; Hoel and Einarsen, 2003). This reality is accentuated in restaurant kitchens, in which aggressive conduct toward junior staff members is conceived as a means of gaining acceptance into the culinary industry (Alexander et al., 2012). Apprentices are the lowest in the social hierarchy. Different from chefs or other considerably old and experienced colleagues, apprentices in this industry have few means to defend themselves or retaliate. Therefore, being an apprentice may be a specific risk factor for exposure to bullying (Mathisen et al., 2008).

From an organizational perspective, researchers have suggested that the hospitality industry's strict and hierarchical environment promotes opportunities for bullying, as well as workplace aggression and violence. The results obtained in the present study reveal that several peculiarities inherent to the hospitality sector favor the occurrence of bullying outbreaks. In order of importance, the main factors related to harassment in this sector are the excessive rhythm in the workplace, the perception that work in this industry has a

negative effect on the health of individual employees, dissatisfaction with working conditions and transactions with clients who occasionally become angry or upset and those who do not value or respect these professionals' efforts.

Overloaded and excessive work rhythm has been extensively studied as a factor in explaining harassment in different activity sectors. In this sense, Bowling and Beehr's meta-analysis, which was used in 90 studies on bullying published between 1987 and 2005, revealed that bullying tends to occur in work environments where other stress factors, such as overload ($r = 0.28$), are present. In terms of time constraint pressures, which many hospitality sector employees find themselves subjected to, employees should work at full speed (depending on the number of guests) on short notice (Mathisen *et al.*, 2008). Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons (2007) identified this high exposition to tighten time constraints in the culinary industry. In this context, the results of the current study are consistent with the variable time constraints in the hospitality sector found in the conclusions of Hoel and Einarsen (2003) and Meloury and Signal (2014).

Directly interacting with customers is also a determinant of the presence of harassment. Scenarios that favor violence and harassment outbreaks include hotel reception jobs that handle demanding customers who complain about service quality or length, the catering sector and particularly the nightlife, during which alcohol or even drug intake occurs. These circumstances are reflected in the reports prepared by Hoel and Einarsen (2003) for the International Labour Office and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2008).

The conditions in which hospitality sector employees perform their tasks lead to a certain degree of dissatisfaction, and they cause this variable to become another factor related to the perception of harassment. From this perspective, the work environment described could result in a climate of general dissatisfaction that could make the worker susceptible to any hostile act by customers, fellow workers or superiors. This result is in accordance with that of other studies that determined similar relationships in other service occupations, such as nursing staff members (Out, 2005) or prison officers (Vartia and Hyyti, 2002).

When the physical conditions of restaurants are uncomfortable, cramped, hot and noisy (Pratten, 2003; Johns and Menzel, 1999; Fine, 1996), hotel sector employees who are occupationally harassed tend to perceive that their health is at risk because of their work. In this sense, the profile drawn by the logistic regression model generates a negative health risk perception of workers in the sector that probably influences, conditions or manipulates the sensation of being bullied. This relationship between harassment and health has been studied in other activity sectors, mainly healthcare. This relationship reveals the effect of harassment on depression, psychosomatic disorders, anxiety and irritation (Hoel *et al.*, 2004; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001; Mackensen von Astfeld, 2000; Niedl, 1996; Zapf *et al.*, 1996).

At the 1 per cent significance level, the logistic regression model indicates that other variables (i.e. shift work, rotating tasks, work stress and wage dissatisfaction), which jointly act with those included in the final model, do not improve the explanation for harassment perception among hospitality sector employees. This result occurs even though a few of these factors are traditionally associated with the phenomenon under study (e.g. job stress). This situation presented a significant and positive relationship between occupational stress scores and the propensity for aggression in a sample of Australian chefs (Meloury and Signal, 2014).

Theoretical implications

Existing studies on personalities inclined to bullying are rather inconclusive. Moreover, how working conditions and organization size affect bullying have hardly been examined. The present study has a strong theoretical meaning, and it is the first to introduce and develop a

comprehensive and exploratory conceptual framework of workplace bullying by linking diverse personal factors, working conditions and contextual factors in the European hospitality industry.

Practical implications
Workplace bullying usually results in damaging consequences for an organization and its employees. In this study, key variables triggering the workplace bullying of hospitality employees were discussed and identified. This study provides reasonable evidence that can be significantly applied to the responsibility of human resource policy implementation in the hospitality sector, as early intervention is critical before workplace bullying emerges as an established pattern (Tracy *et al.*, 2006). From the managerial aspect, we surveyed actual hospitality professionals (workers in hotels, bars, restaurants, cafeterias, taverns, cruises, etc.) to ensure this research was practically meaningful. Approximately half of the survey respondents who were actual employees in a hospitality company revealed having experienced workplace bullying. Our results can be generalized to the real hospitality world. Our findings imply that responsible managers in the hospitality enterprises may reduce the organizational levels of workplace bullying by adjusting certain working conditions and improving the working atmosphere. From the perspective of the job demand–resources model, the availability of job resources affects the level of job involvement while reducing burnout among hospitality employees (Nahrgang *et al.*, 2011). Thus, establishing a supportive environment in these organizations is indispensable in increasing the motivation of their employees to be competitive in the hospitality industry.

The corollary of this study is clear. The perception of bullying in the hospitality sector can be reduced by changing the working conditions of employees. A basic cost–profit analysis is sufficient to justify this idea; otherwise, managers can calculate the number of potential clients that can be lost because of a bad TripAdvisor review motivated by the bitter complaints of disgruntled employees. In such a hostile and competitive sector, taking special care in this type of issue can maintain the fragile line that separates survival from failure.

Limitations and future research
Despite the significant findings identified in this study, the latent methodological limitations should be prudently considered. First, the EWCS uses self-reporting to measure workplace bullying and does not provide a precise definition of the phenomenon. Thus, the prevalence rate can be conditioned for this circumstance. Second, social desirability emerges as another limitation because of the difficulty of obtaining public recognition from being subjected to harassment. Third, the results should be understood with caution because the present study utilizes a cross-sectional research design, and the research is not experimental in nature. Fourth, when we asked if the employees had been subjected to bullying during the course of their work over the past 12 months, we could not guarantee that the independent variables (e.g. type of contract, working hours, type of work, etc.) were the same at that time. Finally, the questionnaire we used failed to identify the origin of bullies (e.g. superiors, colleagues and customers).

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