Two Cooks Spoil the Broth: Destructive Outcomes of Supervisor and Customer Mistreatment in Mediating-Moderating Roles of Anger and Self-Control in an Indonesian Context

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Abstract

Drawing on social exchange theory (SET), this study aims to investigate communicative deviance among Indonesian employees because of supervisor and customer mistreatment. We question whether anger mediates the relationship between mistreatment and deviant silence while self-control moderates promotive voice? In this regard, a survey among 1652 frontline service employees working in 60 Indonesian cities reveals perceptions of abusive supervision arouse negative emotions of anger among Indonesian frontliners. Stronger support for self-control as a moderator is found. Practically, there is a need to revisit goal orientation at work. This research is unique in conceptualizing a holistic view of mistreatment and its negative consequences.

Keywords Abusive supervision · Customer mistreatment · Anger · Self-control · Deviant silence · Promotive voice · Indonesia

Introduction

Human behaviour at work can include approach or avoidance tendencies. This is because power asymmetries exist among supervisors and their subordinates. In situations in which power inequality arises, humans remain submissive and avoid confrontation (i.e., conflict between supervisors and employees) (Eissa et al., 2018). Contrarily, the employee-customer relationship also exhibits such power imbalance in which, under a marketing paradigm, customers are perceived as superior to employees (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). True or not, employees believe that their organization cares strongly about customer perceptions...
while lesser attention is devoted to workers (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Employees are advised to obey supervisors while the customers are regarded as superior in a stigmatized marketing paradigm—highlighting a socially superior role of customers in an organizational system. Positive behaviors demonstrated by frontline employees (FLEs) leave memorable impressions on customers during service encounters. However, this is a challenging task, mainly because FLEs face pressure from both customers and supervisors (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b; Restubog et al., 2015). Supervisors and customers as part of a dynamic social environment are driven by extremely high expectations (Gabarro & Kotter, 2007), which tests the emotional skills of frontline employees (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). These emotional skills indicate emotional labor, which is the performance of socially desirable actions, mainly on the part of employees (Chi et al., 2018). Supervisors and customers collectively expect the highest levels of emotional labor from frontline employees. In cases in which emotional labor expectations are not met, mistreatment arises. Supervisory mistreatment can take the form of abusive supervision as well as supervisor undermining (Matthews & Ritter, 2016), and customer mistreatment is also common (Yue et al., 2017). When employees perceive customers and supervisors as mistreating them, they experience negative emotions (Malik et al., 2021).

Abusive supervision refers to hostile yet non-physical aggression by supervisors directed toward subordinates (Kiewitz et al., 2016). These researchers outline several negative outcomes of abusive supervision; i.e., psychological (e.g., detachment) and behavioral (e.g., withdrawal resulting in silence). In addition to abusive supervision, another workplace phenomenon that has gained popularity is supervisor undermining, defined as the tendency of supervisors to underestimate the skills and abilities of their subordinates (Matthews & Ritter, 2016). Although both of these variables are extensively studied, the majority of the existing research has focused on the measurement of traditional workplace attitudes such as job satisfaction, job performance, employee turnover, and organizational commitment (Arasli et al., 2018; Eissa et al., 2017; Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b).

Destructive actions of abuse, both from supervisors and customers, can trigger deviant silence, an avoidance strategy by victims during service interactions (Brinsfield, 2013). Under this circumstance, employees hold their voices and do not share meaningful information. This is true even in cases in which individuals feel that speaking up can enhance performance. It also indicates weaker emotional labor skill. Sometimes employees are good at hiding original emotions while at times they fail to perform deep acting, which is a core requirement while fulfilling service jobs (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). Surface acting involves putting on a fake smile, while deep acting is more internalized service performance, ignoring all of the tangible cues surrounding an environment (Petitta et al., 2019). These are based on role and script theories in which service employees are assigned various roles and scripts to perform according to the job demands (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015; Mannan & Kashif, 2019). While it is certainly an important service skill, employees can fail to perform according to expectations. However, this does not qualify them as being evil at work; rather such a behavior is indeed an undesired consequence of some immoral and anti-social behaviours demonstrated by players of the social system (i.e. supervisors and customers) (Malik et al., 2018).

Highly motivated employees who are willing to work and share their ideas might decide to psychologically disengage and refrain from sharing even useful information with authorities due to negative work practices (i.e., abusive behaviours from customers and supervisors) (Baranik et al., 2017). Employees intentionally hold back useful information at work, a practice that refers to deviant silence (Brinsfield, 2013). This situation is generally based on emotions such as fear and can be transformed into a desire to seek revenge.
In contrast, supportive supervisors can trigger positive behaviors among employees (Rofcanin et al., 2017). Positive elements lead to sharing of constructive feedback and total involvement in workplace events, referred to as promotive voice (Liang et al., 2012). Although promotive voice contributes to employee well-being, it is a consequence of a psychologically comfortable state of mind (Hasan & Kashif, 2020). In cases in which frontliners are silent, feedback does not reach supervisors. However, despite this aggression in the workplace, whether the frontliners still share feedback with their supervisors or not is an important area of inquiry (Eissa et al., 2017). Although the role of self-control is important, it is ignored and rarely positioned in frameworks that examine aggression at work (Johnson et al., 2018).

Self-control refers to an individual situation in which human beings try to control their true sense of self (Johnson et al., 2018). In a service setting, employees are expected to perform emotional labor (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b), which requires a certain level of self-control. As such, there is a close relationship between emotional labor performance and self-control among employees. Thus, a higher level of self-control results in better performance of emotional labor. A demonstration of self-control among frontline employees is important while performing their service jobs for several reasons. First, self-control is considered a core skill among front-liners to perform a job (De Ridder & Lensvelt-Mulders, 2018). Second, social stressors have become a core reality during service work, and despite the extensive research and advisory in the service industry to counter these issues, incidents that trigger stress are happening frequently (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b; Malik et al., 2021). In this vein of research, it is understandable that poor emotional labor performance has the potential to cause stress among employees (Chi et al., 2018; Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Third, employees who experience mistreatment are likely to engage in prosocial behaviours at work, but the reasons are still unknown (Priesemuth & Schminke, 2019). Researchers are now shifting their attention from frameworks outlining the prevention of these incidents to more comprehensive models that offer proactive coping strategies to manage abuse at work (Bennett et al., 2018).

Plenty of research concerning supervisor-related stressors (i.e., mainly abusive supervision) has been published (Mackey et al., 2017), but the studies in which these stressors are combined with customer-driven stressors are scant (Arasli et al., 2018; Kashif et al., 2020). Filling this important gap can advance a theory as well as bring improvement in practice. Customer mistreatment and supervisor abuse are common incidents at work and can result in negative consequences (Malik et al., 2021). This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive framework that holistically conceptualizes both sources of mistreatment; i.e., customers and supervisors. Results of studies on mistreatment have demonstrated that employee turnover, job dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion are outcomes of customer and supervisory aggression (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). In addition to the frequency of these events, another important reason these stressors are combined is that they produce similar outcomes.

The arousal of negative emotions is a common phenomenon among human beings. In situations in which employees feel discomfort, the emotion of anger is aroused, which adversely affects their on-the-job performance (Petitta et al., 2019). Arousal of anger among service employees is quite common and is a consequence of destructive work behaviors (Jung & Yoon, 2019). Emotional exhaustion as an outcome and employees’ emotional responses such as fear and revenge motives are discussed but rarely investigated as outcomes of customer and supervisory mistreatment (Restubog et al., 2015). The role of employee emotions, emanating from broad yet interconnected social stressors (i.e., work and family) is also extensively studied in service settings (Lim et al., 2018). However, a
combined effect of the customer and supervisory mistreatment to arouse anger is an area that is scantly investigated (Kashif et al., 2020). Since frontliners perform emotional labor, they are expected to display socially desirable emotions during work. Whether they can cope with mistreatment at work and can still display socially desirable behaviors is an area of theoretical and practical significance (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). A combination of customer and supervisor mistreatment at work is logical, as both of these social stressors and resulting negative emotions are common in the workplace (Malik et al., 2021). The research has revealed that frontline employees struggle to cope with these aggressive behaviors from supervisors and customers (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). Researchers found coping to be an individual phenomenon, thus highlighting the importance of individual-level elements that can ensure success for frontliners. Researchers investigated customer and supervisor mistreatment with its traditional outcomes (i.e., emotional exhaustion) while the form emotional exhaustion takes remains unaddressed (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Malik et al., 2021).

These unvisited topics represent practical issues of culture and practice that require our scholarly attention. Another contribution of this study is the selection of Indonesia as a country context. Indonesia, the fourth largest country in terms of population in the world, has a high-power distance culture (Hofstede, 2007). In this cultural context, superiors are perceived as possessing control and unlimited power over their subordinates (Khatri, 2009). Particularly in the service sector, Indonesian frontline workers not only face supervisors but also customers as their superiors. This is because a wider application of a traditional marketing concept (i.e., the attitude that “the customer is always right”) prevails in Asian societies (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). In Indonesia, incidents of supervisory abuse are common (Cahyono et al., 2020). Since a strong power hierarchy exists in these settings, employees reciprocate aggression from supervisors in a submissive manner, and silence is a common response to abusive actions (Martono et al., 2020). They also intentionally underperform in an effort to reciprocate supervisor and customer aggression. This damages effective service operations, as silent employees tend to withhold useful information that otherwise could benefit service decision-makers (Brinsfield, 2013). Service employee engagement and their well-being is a contemporary agenda among Indonesian service firms (Iqbal et al., 2020). Issues such as work pressure, disengagement, and employee turnover intentions in the Indonesian service sector are quite relevant yet warrant some management strategies to manage effectively (Lin et al., 2017). These practical issues require scholarly attention. The study of superior-subordinate relationships, especially related to superiors’ mistreatment in the high-power distance culture such as Indonesia, is hitherto still limited (Martono et al., 2020; Wulani et al., 2014). By conceptualizing self-control and anger, this framework explains the boundary conditions of deviant behaviors as well as strategies that can help Indonesian service organizations to improve managerial practice. We envision outlining a few strategies to improve the performance of emotional labor among service frontliners.

Social Exchange Theory and Conceptual Framework

We had several choices to explain the framework for the study. For instance, role and script theories can be used to explain service frameworks. According to these theories, customers and frontline employees are social actors who are assigned roles and boundary conditions within which they perform their roles (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Once these boundaries
are crossed, role inconsistency arises, which produces a lack of role performance, either on the part of customers or employees or both. A lack of performance might result in misbehavior (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b), ultimately causing stress and burnout. However, our perspective in this research differs from the existing research. The issue of the performance of employees to cause stress and burnout is beyond the scope of this study. Thus, the framework is based on social exchange theory (SET) (Gouldner, 1960).

Reciprocity is a core assumption of social exchange theory. Social exchange is widely used by researchers investigating the detrimental effects of destructive supervisory behaviors at work (Valle et al., 2018). Social exchange as a theory represents social interactions and has been used by researchers to investigate issues at work (Valle et al., 2018). Since the core of social exchange is reciprocity, the role of the relationship partner is of extreme importance and ensures equity. For instance, leaders expect employees to perform assigned tasks efficiently and effectively. Likewise, employees expect to be rewarded, equally treated, and respected at work. In situations in which employees perceive to be humiliated, they reciprocate with similar actions and responses (Jung & Yoon, 2019), though they remain submissive depending upon the cultural system in which such events occur (Mannan & Kashif, 2019). Exchange relationships at work are classified into the social and economic exchanges. When employees ask for rewards in return for their work service, they expect an economic exchange in an equitable manner (Casimir et al., 2014).

One challenge in social exchange is the abstract nature of this relationship, as these are based on the perceptions of exchange partners. When employees as relationship partners feel their supervisors abuse them, they reciprocate with disengagement, which they believe is an equitable form of abusive supervision (Valle et al., 2018). Based on the core assumption of reciprocity in a SET framework, the supervisor and customer-directed social stressors, self-control, and resulting emotions and (non) deviant actions are grouped together to indicate a reciprocal response from employees to the pressures they absorb. Studies have proposed similar logic; i.e., employees reciprocate with submissive behavior due to power asymmetries that exist between supervisors and subordinates (Jahanzeb et al., 2019). In a submissive culture, subordinates reciprocate through submissive actions such as remaining silent in response to supervisory abuse (Kashif et al., 2020; Mannan & Kashif, 2019). Before moving further to determine hypothetical relationships, some important points and conditions must be emphasized to accurately grasp the conceptualization of the proposed framework. First, effective management of workplace aggression caused by both supervisors and customers has become a part of frontline employees’ job descriptions since they are well trained in terms of social skills to perform service jobs (Chi et al., 2018). Thus, supervisory abuse and undermining as well as customer mistreatment might not always result in negative consequences of deviant silence or lack of promotive voice. Studies have been published in which negative behaviours have resulted in positive employee outcomes and vice versa (Yue et al., 2017). Second, it is not a condition that customers and supervisors mistreat employees simultaneously. Sometimes one relationship partner might mistreat the other, while other times, both parties show aggression simultaneously, which can affect the arousal of a different set of emotions and behaviours (Chi et al., 2018). Third, personal relationships in the workplace can result in a variety of consequences in a negative work behavior setting. For instance, a stronger positive relationship between employee and supervisor (Valle et al., 2018) and perceived homophily between employees and customers (Sharma et al., 2018) can result in different consequences of negative behaviours. Fourth, a new inquiry involves investigating the positive effects of destructive workplace practice (Smith et al., 2018). This is because perceptions vary over time and depend on many factors in a service setting (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Furthermore, employees have
a tendency to self-regulate. At times they attribute abuse to being a consequence of their poor work performance, which might arouse different set of emotions and behaviours (Zhang et al., 2014).

**Hypotheses Development**

**Supervisor-Driven Stressors and Their Outcomes**

Supervisors are high in authority and direct the performance of service workers. From a sociological perspective, employees can observe how supervisors treat them and their peers. Fair treatment brings positive outcomes, while destructive gestures trigger issues such as communicative deviance (Mackey et al., 2019). Communication in the form of voice is an integral part of service jobs. Frontline employees interact with peers, supervisors, and customers, thus bringing a wealth of information that if shared can significantly improve organizational performance (Lam & Mayer, 2014). From a social exchange perspective, the positive attitude of a supervisor result in constructive outcomes, and voice is no exception. There is evidence that employees’ psychological comfort is pivotal to encouraging them to share their voices (Liang et al., 2012). For instance, when they feel psychologically safe and empowered, they raise their voice (referred to as promotive voice) and share very important information with peers and supervisors (Hasan & Kashif, 2020). Stress levied by supervisors disturbs employees’ psychological peace and adversely affects their attitude toward work. When supervisory abuse haunts employee creativity, individuals tend to avoid interaction with their bosses. This is when employees hide useful information which otherwise could improve the service system (Jahanzeb et al., 2019). Supervisors can perform various destructive actions. Supervisors can abuse their employees by underestimating and discouraging them, which adversely affects their attitude and motivation to perform (Mackey et al., 2019). Since there is a clear difference in the authority of a subordinate and his/her supervisor, it is customary to remain silent in submissive cultures with high power distance orientation (Mannan & Kashif, 2019). Indonesia is a good example of a country where high power-distance culture can significantly affect the relationships between subordinates and supervisors, thus motivating subordinates to enact deviant silence (Handoko et al., 2018; Hanifah et al., 2021). This argument suggests that supervisor-driven stressors in the form of destructive actions hinder positive voicing while triggering deviant silence. Thus, we hypothesize:

\[ H1a: \text{Supervisor Driven Stressors (SDS) positively relate to deviant silence among FLEs.} \]

\[ H1b: \text{Supervisor Driven Stressors (SDS) negatively relate to promotive voice among FLEs.} \]

**Customer Mistreatment and its Outcomes**

In line with role and script theories, customers need to play a role during service encounters so that quality is assured. However, both parties, the service provider and the customer, rarely play their defined roles (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). Customer role play depends on many factors that are beyond the scope of this discussion. Several forms of customer role failure can arise as well. For instance, customers can aggressively speak to
service providers, which affects service quality perception, and value is destructed (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Research has shown that frontline employees also try to get even with abrasive customers (Skarlicki et al., 2008), which might affect the service environment in which a service is provided. There is evidence that customer mistreatment not only hinders work performance but also affects employee health (Baranik et al., 2017). When employees feel that customer mistreatment is not properly manageable, employees opt for avoidance strategy and quit from their position (Hanifah et al., 2021; Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). Employees seek revenge from customers, which can take aggressive as well as submissive forms (Bedi & Schat, 2017). In response to customer mistreatment, employees reciprocate with equally destructive behaviors; i.e., lack of interest to help customers during service encounters (Garcia et al., 2019). As argued by Schepers and van der Borgh (2020), the frontline workers’ role differs across cultures, including interactions between frontlines and customers. Concerning Indonesia’s high power-distance culture, frontline employees tend not to challenge customers as power holders (Schepers et al., 2012). Since promotive voice is a form of voluntary behavior, we extend a similar argument that aggressive customer treatment results in a lack of intentions to perform voluntary behaviors and propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: Customer-Driven Stressors (CDS) positively relate to deviant silence among FLEs.
H2b: Customer-Driven Stressors (CDS) negatively relate to promotive voice among FLEs.

Mediation of Anger

Anger is a negative emotion in organizational research in response to destructive events. It is a natural reaction to balance emotional stimulants in human beings (Biaggio & Maiuro, 1985). Anger is aroused due to various configurations at work; i.e. aggressive supervisory and customer attitudes (Kashif et al., 2020). Broadly, in a power asymmetry in which supervisors have authority and customers are taken care of, employees can feel emotionally disturbed. In these situations, employees use either approach or avoidance reactions (Mackey et al., 2017). In situations that they cannot avoid, they reciprocate with submissive behavior but still feel emotionally disturbed, thus resulting in negative emotions such as anger (Mackey et al., 2019). Recently, negative behaviours of customers have been found to trigger negative employee responses at work (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b), but the inclusion of emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, hate, and alike have been rarely positioned (Mackey et al., 2019).

Negative treatment and the resulting consequence are incomplete without the mediation of emotion. There is evidence in organizational psychology research that destructive treatment arouses negative emotions, which then leads to some undesirable consequences at work (Chi et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2018). Contemporary researchers found that supervisors’ undermining actions lead to negative work behaviours and performance (Eissa et al., 2017). For instance, such treatment leads to self-esteem depletion and then to poor work performance. These researchers have discussed the role and importance of employee emotions but have not positioned emotion in their framework. However, emotional processes interact with cognitive processes such as information processing and judgment and consequently have an impact on human behavior. In another study, social undermining has been associated with hostility at work, leading to service sabotage (Hongbo et al., 2018). These researchers further suggested bringing more variables to extend workplace aggression.
research. Moreover, in another study, supervisor undermining is associated with negative work outcomes, but again, the employee’s emotions are missing from the framework (Eissa et al., 2018). A recent meta-analysis highlights the need to study workplace emotions (Mackey et al., 2019). A critical examination of this meta-analysis reveals that most of the research has lacked the conceptualization of a framework that includes employee emotions, since the core focus has been on the measurement of traditional work outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance, and turnover. Thus, we extend the existing frameworks by including anger as an emotion that triggers negative behaviours at work.

Conclusively, the positioning of anger is attributed to emotional and cognitive reasoning. First, anger is among the primary natural reactions and responses to interpersonal misconduct (Biaggio & Maiuro, 1985; O’neill et al., 2009). Thus, it is logical to apply a mediation of extreme emotions such as anger. Second, while feeling negative emotions (i.e. anger) due to workplace misconduct, individuals can still perform their job with full zeal, as they feel hidden emotions, which may or may not lead to deviance at work in the short run (Yue et al., 2017). In the Indonesian context, where companies apply the policy that “the customer is always right” (Triandis, 1995), this may encourage customers to abuse their power by being more demanding, especially to frontline employees. Most likely, the frontline workers feel like victims and are emotionally affected (Akkawanitcha et al., 2015). However, instead of expressing anger, they try to manage their emotions by being silent and keeping customers satisfied (Nguyen et al., 2019). This attitude is also observed when the Indonesian workers face aggressive supervisors (Hanifah et al., 2021) and still deliver positive outcomes in some cases (Handoko et al., 2018). This theoretical confusion is yet another important reason anger as an emotion is mediated to further explain relationships (Petitta et al., 2019). Considering these conditions, the extant literature published in the field of organization sciences, and the logic of social exchange theory, we propose the following hypotheses:

\[ H3a: \text{The relationship between SDS and deviant silence is mediated by an emotion of anger.} \]
\[ H3b: \text{The relationship between CDS and deviant silence is mediated by an emotion of anger.} \]

**Moderation of Self-control**

The destructive behaviour at work can result in revenge-like thoughts and activities among victims, but not for individuals with high self-control (Restubog et al., 2015). This way it highlights the importance of high self-control to perform organizational tasks. The concept of self-control refers to the exhibition of control over an individual’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviours (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Self-control is an important element to establish and strengthen interpersonal relationships at work and negatively correlates to destructive behaviours (De Ridder & Lensvelt-Mulders, 2018). There is evidence to support the fact that individuals with high self-control do not involve themselves in negative activities, even after a breach of psychological contract (Restubog et al., 2015). Self-control is an important aspect of a service workplace, as the employees with high self-control can achieve their goals and also can help in achieving organizational goals (Johnson et al., 2018). In this context, the researchers have highlighted self-control as a solid mechanism to examine negative emotion-action relationships. In the Indonesian context, in which collective well-being and keeping
harmony are paramount, maintaining social levels between superior and subordinate is important as well (Irawanto, 2009; Triandis, 1995). One study about the high level of stress among Indonesian workers during the COVID-19 pandemic corroborates that self-control is a solid coping mechanism (Ni’matuzahroh et al., 2021).

In continuation of the argument that self-control is a personality trait that helps individuals to refrain from or select to get involved in an action, we posit that anger might moderate the relationship between deviant silence and a promotive voice. This relationship is inspired by the assumptions of social exchange. For instance, when individuals face a destructive action, they reciprocate similarly except in circumstances under which their self-control is stronger. Researchers offer evidence that self-control helps with self-regulation. When individuals have high self-control, they can realize the consequences of actions, which helps them to refrain from performing a particular task (Johnson et al., 2018). Another group of researchers presented self-control as a moderating mechanism that buffers the relationship between destructive action and its negative consequence in the form of negative action (Restubog et al., 2015). Recently, high self-control has been positioned as a moderator to encounter the negative consequences of counter-productive work behaviors (Newton & Perlow, 2021). In addition, high self-control moderates the relationship between bullying perceptions and depression among individuals. These researchers found that bullying does not cause depression in individuals with high self-control (Wang & Ge, 2021). Instead, the attempt to manage their own emotions with the purpose of satisfying customers (Nguyen et al., 2019) tends to manage their emotions and feelings. Keeping in view the rationale and logic based on recently published work, we hypothesize:

**H4a:** Self-control moderates the relationship between anger and deviant silence.

**H4b:** Self-control moderates the relationship between anger and promotive voice.

All of the hypothesized relationships are presented in Fig. 1 below:

![Theoretical framework](image-url)
Research Methods

Participants and Procedures

Data for this study is collected from the white-collar frontline employees of the service sector in Indonesia. The choice of the Indonesian service sector is made following the logic that, globally, frontline service jobs are considered high-pressure jobs (Hasan & Kashif, 2020). Moreover, incidents of aggression against frontline service employees are mounting with the threat to the occupational reputation of services. This has happened especially in Indonesia in recent years (Cahyono et al., 2020). A survey-based approach has been adopted to collect the data using questionnaires written in the Indonesian language. The respondents of this study are frontline employees of four companies, currently operating in approximately 60 cities in Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique is used to reach the frontliners who could answer questions relevant to their knowledge about supervisor-related and customer-related stressors. Compared with other methods, such as random sampling, the purposive method is more reliable to measure a special case (namely, workplace aggression) by referring to inputs from experts. In this study, the researchers purposively selected four large service companies that involved routine activities to contact their customers in their operations. We regarded the managers of each company as experts who could give us input into which group of frontline employees most likely faced mistreatment at work, particularly from customers and supervisors, who were selected as sample participants. This method closely served the purpose of this study, thus justifying the choice of a purposive sampling technique. As requested by each company, all names (i.e. the company, managers, and employees) have been kept confidential.

Several steps were taken to minimize selection errors that might arise from the sampling methods. First, the managers of each company were contacted to seek input and ethical approval. The managers were informed that their frontliners would be encouraged to participate in the survey, but the participation was completely voluntary. After seeking approval, online questionnaires using Google Forms were shared among the respondents via WhatsApp Groups. The respondents were assured that their answers would be kept confidential (anonymous and directly sent to the researchers) and that the information would be used solely for academic purposes. Since the executives are busy, data collection presented a potential challenge. Moreover, media such as Google Forms and WhatsApp were used because frontlines can be reached easily this way. In addition, since Indonesia is a highly populous country, collecting data from 60 cities via traditional paper-and-pencil surveys could have been time consuming. These were a few reasons that justify the choice of techniques to collect data for this study. An online survey was chosen, as this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where social distancing was applied. We successfully collected 1652 data points through Google Forms. The ease of completing the online questionnaires might have encouraged the quick response of the respondents. The large-sized data represents the huge Indonesian population as well as a large number of Indonesian frontline workers in particular.

Measures

All of the constructs in the study were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”.
Abusive Supervision A 6-item scale developed and used by Harris and Colleagues (Harris et al., 2011) was employed to measure abusive supervision. Originally a 15-item scale was developed by Tepper (2000) to measure abusive supervision. However, there is now a rising tendency to use shorter versions of scales to ensure that respondent interest and focus are not lost while responding to scale items. A sample item includes, “My supervisor is rude to me”. The value of alpha (α) was 0.91.

Supervisor Undermining We used a 13-item scale developed by Duffy and colleagues (Duffy et al., 2002). The choice of this scale is based on its popularity and strong Cronbach Alpha i.e. 0.95. A sample item includes, “My supervisor hurts my feelings”.

Customer Mistreatment The 8-item scale was used to measure customer mistreatment (Skarlicki et al., 2008). This scale had high reliability where Cronbach alpha is 0.88. The sample item includes, “The customer uses foul language”.

Anger This variable was measured using a 4-item scale, originally developed by Ilferd (Ilferd, 1978) and later used by organizational behaviour researchers (O’neill et al., 2009). The alpha (α) value was reported as 0.88 for this scale. A sample item included, “In response to mistreatment by customers and my supervisor, I tend to lose my temper”.

Deviant Silence The DS was measured using a 4-item scale developed by Brinsfield (Brinsfield, 2013). The alpha (α) value reported for this scale is 0.95. For this scale, a sample item was, “In response to mistreatment by my supervisor and customers, I try to get even with them”.

Promotive Voice Promotive voice is measured using a 5-item scale used by Liang and colleagues (Liang et al., 2012) with an alpha (α) value of 0.90. The sample item reads, “I proactively voice my constructive suggestions that help the unit reach its goals”.

Self-control We used a 13-item self-control scale developed by Tangney and colleagues (Tangney et al., 2004). Cronbach’s Alpha for this scale is reported above a value of 0.8, which shows stronger reliability. The sample item included, “I am good at resisting temptation”.

Results Table 1 demonstrates the gender, age, and job tenure of the respondents. The sample is predominantly comprised of males; i.e., 72 percent. Almost 82 percent of the respondents were aged between 21 to 40 years. The dominant job tenure was 1 to 5 years, representing 46% of the respondents.

Data Analysis Procedures At first, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed. Loadings that did not satisfy the score of 0.5 were dropped. To test the fitness of the proposed model, the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique was used to analyse the data while using the latest version of AMOS. The SEM is used to run a variance-based structural equation
modelling for both factor-based and composite-based measurement models (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015; Henseler, 2017). According to Henseler et al. (2015), covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and variance-based SEM results are similar for large samples. We carefully examined and classified each construct either being reflective or formative based on the criteria (Rigdon, 2016). Accordingly, the constructs are all operationalized as reflective constructs in which the indicators are the reflections of the construct and are interchangeable. Furthermore, the deletion of an indicator does not change the construct. Therefore, the constructs in this study are reflective. Next, the mode of the analysis is identified as suggested (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015).

Common Method Biases

Since data collected is cross-sectional and gathered from a single source, issues of common method bias could arise. Thus, to test for common method bias, we used Harman’s Single Factor Test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). This test is widely used by researchers investigating similar issues (Kashif et al., 2020). Results of this analysis demonstrated that first-factor loading is 33.44 percent, which is lower than 50 percent. Hence, there is no common method bias in the data. As Table 2 shows, no multicollinearity issues arose, since the tolerance level is above 0.2, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is less than 5.

| Table 1 Sample demographics | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| **Gender**                  |           |                |
| Male                        | 1189      | 72             |
| Female                      | 463       | 28             |
| **Age**                     |           |                |
| 21–30                       | 897       | 54.3           |
| 31–40                       | 623       | 37.7           |
| 41–50                       | 118       | 7.1            |
| 51 and above                | 14        | 0.8            |
| **Job Tenure**              |           |                |
| Less than 1 year            | 332       | 20.1           |
| 1–5 year                    | 770       | 46.6           |
| 6 -10 year                  | 347       | 21             |
| More than 10 years          | 203       | 12.3           |

| Table 2 Collinearity statistics | Construct | VIF |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| AS                               | 4.113     |
| SU                               | 4.404     |
| CM                               | 1.367     |
| AG                               | 1.294     |
Model Fit Analysis

To estimate the model fit, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out using the structural equation model (SEM) technique. SEM was employed to test the relationship between research variables using the latest version of AMOS. CFA was run for the entire model consisting of abusive supervision (6 items), supervisor undermining (13 items), customer mistreatment (5 items), deviant silence (5 items), promotive voice (4 items), anger (4 items), and self-control (5 items).

Several goodness of fit indices were evaluated including chi-square statistics, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the goodness of fit index (GFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). RMSEA value below 0.5 and other indices of CFI and AGFI and GFI above 0.90 (Hair et al., 2011) indicate that the measurement model exhibited a good fit with the data collected. These are indices that are calculated and presented by researchers performing quantitative data analysis (Jahanzeb et al., 2019; Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b).

The CFA is used to measure the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model. While convergent validity is an agreement between measures of the same construct, discriminant validity is the distinctiveness between different constructs (Guo et al., 2008). The latent variable has a value above 0.60 and an average variance extracted (AVE) value above 0.50. It means that good convergent validity is obtained (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of CFA indicated that the model without the mediation of anger fits well with the data (CMIN/df. = 3.899, GFI = 0.915, AGFI = 0.904, CFI = 0.952, RMSEA = 0.042). The result of CFA along with mediation of anger indicated that the model is fit (CMIN/df. = 4.863, GFI = 0.917, AGFI = 0.905, CFI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.048).

As per Table 3, the score of all variables crossed a value of 0.7, which indicates good composite reliability. Composite reliability is calculated in conjunction with SEM, as Cronbach’s alpha is criticized for being lower bound, causing underestimation of true reliability (Peterson & Kim, 2013). As per the rule of thumb, alpha levels higher than 0.70 indicate internal consistency among the items of scale. All the variables have an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.5, which indicates good convergent validity in the variables. Also, Abusive Supervision (AS) and Supervisor undermining (SU) are clubbed into one single factor, Supervisor Driven Stressors (SDS), and the rest of the analysis is undertaken accordingly. Customer mistreatment is analysed as Customer-Driven Stressors (CDS), presented in Table 3. This is performed to present a more focused and practically relevant framework that can be used to advance theory and also to improve managerial practice.

To understand the data and its patterns, several values of means, standard deviation, and correlations are presented. Results reveal excellent scores for these dimensions. For a rigorous quantitative assessment, researchers must ensure that discriminant validity is achieved. Hence, to assess discriminant validity, the value of the average variance extracted (AVE) is recommended (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Sarstedt et al., 2016). The average variance extracted demonstrates the quality of a measure, used to collect empirical evidence. AVE should be greater than the corresponding correlation between the variables. As a rule of thumb, correlations should be greater than a value of 0.5, which demonstrates that the items truly represent variables of the study, as is the case in this study, presented in Table 4.

Using the standardized path coefficients between constructs, the direct and indirect effects of each construct on deviant silence are calculated (Tables 5 and 6). We tried
### Table 3  Measurement model

| Construct                                           | Variables | Loadings | AVE  | Cronbach alpha | Composite Reliability |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Makes negative comments about me to others          | AS1       | 0.732    | 0.600| 0.885           | 0.9666                |
| Gives me the silent treatment                       | AS2       | 0.726    |      |                 |                       |
| Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason | AS3       | 0.722    |      |                 |                       |
| Is rude to me                                       | AS4       | 0.705    |      |                 |                       |
| Breaks promises he/she makes                        | AS5       | 0.715    |      |                 |                       |
| Puts me down in front of others                     | AS6       | 0.832    |      |                 |                       |
| Hurts my feelings                                   | SU7       | 0.819    | 0.600| 0.957           | 0.9666                |
| Puts me down when I question work procedures        | SU8       | 0.796    |      |                 |                       |
| Undermines my efforts to be successful on the job   | SU9       | 0.784    |      |                 |                       |
| Tells me that he/she did not like me or something like that | SU10      | 0.651    |      |                 |                       |
| Talks negatively about me behind my back            | SU11      | 0.812    |      |                 |                       |
| Insults me                                          | SU12      | 0.784    |      |                 |                       |
| Belittles me or my ideas                            | SU13      | 0.829    |      |                 |                       |
| Spreads rumours about me                            | SU14      | 0.787    |      |                 |                       |
| Makes me feel incompetent                           | SU15      | 0.83     |      |                 |                       |
| Delays work to make me look bad                     | SU16      | 0.809    |      |                 |                       |
| Talks down to me                                    | SU17      | 0.796    |      |                 |                       |
| Gives me the silent treatment                       | SU18      | 0.79     |      |                 |                       |
| Does not defend me when people speak poorly of me   | SU19      | 0.67     |      |                 |                       |
| Make demands that I cannot deliver                  | CM20      | 0.728    | 0.539| 0.851           | 0.854                 |
| Raises irrelevant discussions                       | CM21      | 0.791    |      |                 |                       |
| Doubts my ability to meet his/her expectations      | CM22      | 0.751    |      |                 |                       |
| Yells at me                                         | CM23      | 0.711    |      |                 |                       |
| Makes demands that I cannot deliver                 | CM24      | 0.758    |      |                 |                       |
| Lost my temper                                      | AG28      | 0.806    | 0.580| 0.840           | 0.845                 |
| Felt easily annoyed or irritated                    | AG29      | 0.83     |      |                 |                       |
Table 3 (continued)

| Construct                                         | Variables | Loadings | AVE    | Cronbach alpha | Composite Reliability |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|--------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Felt critical of others                          | AG30      | 0.76     |        |                |                       |
| Got angry over things that are not important at all | AG31      | 0.685    |        |                |                       |
| I am good at resisting temptation                 | SC32      | 0.728    | 0.565  | 0.800          | 0.866                 |
| I have a hard time breaking bad habits            | SC34      | 0.829    |        |                |                       |
| I am not lazy                                     | SC35      | 0.84     |        |                |                       |
| I say appropriate things                          | SC37      | 0.761    |        |                |                       |
| I do certain things for fun                       | SC38      | 0.736    |        |                |                       |
| I get even with them                              | DS45      | 0.779    | 0.628  | 0.898          | 0.894                 |
| I try to harm others purposefully                 | DS46      | 0.814    |        |                |                       |
| I retaliate against them                          | DS47      | 0.791    |        |                |                       |
| I intend to harm the organization                 | DS48      | 0.826    |        |                |                       |
| I intend to make the management look bad          | DS49      | 0.79     |        |                |                       |
| I proactively develop and make suggestions for issues that may influence the unit | PV51      | 0.802    | 0.739  | 0.917          | 0.918                 |
| I proactively suggest new projects which are beneficial to the work unit | PV52      | 0.874    |        |                |                       |
| I raise suggestions to improve the unit’s working procedure | PV53      | 0.882    |        |                |                       |
| I proactively voice constructive suggestions that help the unit reach its goals | PV54      | 0.87     |        |                |                       |

Note: AVE: Average variance extracted, CR- Composite reliability
to test the hypotheses using the path significance. Table 5 shows the standardized total effects, and Table 6 shows standardized indirect effects. Results reveal that supervisor-driven stressors have a direct impact on both deviant silence and promotive voice, thus supporting hypotheses H1a and H1b. Likewise, customer-driven stressors also impact deviant silence and promotive voice, thus supporting hypotheses H2a and H2b. These results are presented in Table 5.

To untangle the direct and indirect effects of supervisor-driven stressors and customer-driven stressors on deviant silence, a mediation analysis using SEM was carried out. Direct and indirect effects were carried out after the model fitting process. Results of the direct and indirect estimates are reported in the table. The findings reveal that anger mediated the relationship between supervisor-driven stressors and deviant silence ($\beta = 0.22$, LLCI: 0.009, ULCI: 0.68), which suggests partial mediation. All estimates including the mediator are significant. Not only does a significant relationship exist between the mediator

### Table 4 Descriptive statistics, correlations, and discriminant validity

|       | Mean | SD  | SDS  | PV    | CDS  | SC   | AG   | DS    |
|-------|------|-----|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|
| SDS   | 1.5  | 0.72| 0.775| 0.86  |      |      |      |       |
| PV    | 1.8  | 0.98| 0.12*| 0.86  |      |      |      |       |
| CDS   | 1.8  | 0.73| 0.43*| 0.06* | 0.734|      |      |       |
| SC    | 2.05 | 0.95| 0.07*| 0.53* | 0.07*| 0.752|      |       |
| AG    | 1.8  | 0.8 | 0.37*| 0.08* | 0.49*| 0.08*| 0.761|       |
| DS    | 1.22 | 0.48| 0.44*| 0.26* | 0.39*| 0.19*| .41**| 0.793 |

*SDS—Supervisor driven stress, PV—Promotive Voice, CDS—Customer Driven Stressors, SC—Self-control, AG—Anger, DS—Deviant Silence

Note: Values on the diagonal (italicized) represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) while the off diagonals and correlations

### Table 5 Hypothesis testing

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Standardized coefficients | Standard Error | Decision |
|------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------|
| H1a: SDS-DS | 0.22        | 0.021                     | Supported      |
| H1b: SDS-PV | 0.156       | 0.039                     | Supported      |
| H2a: CDS-DS | 0.201       | 0.024                     | Supported      |
| H2b: CDS-PV | 0.041       | 0.044                     | Supported      |

### Table 6 Mediation effect of anger (AG)

| Hypothesis | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect | Estimate | LLCI | ULCI | Decision |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|----------|------|------|----------|
| H3a: SDS-AG-DS | 0.34         | 0.046           | 0.009    | 0.68 | Supported |
| H3b: CDS-AG-DS | 0.25         | 0.093           | 0.006    | 0.127| Supported |

(*p < 0.05)
(AG) and dependent variable (DS) but also between the independent variable (SDS) and dependent variable (DS), making it a case of partial mediation. The standardized estimate of the direct effect with mediation at p-0.01 is 0.293. Similarly, the indirect estimate with the mediation variable at p-0.01 is 0.046, suggesting that anger mediated the relationship between SDS and DS. Likewise, anger also mediated the relationship between customer-driven stressors and deviant silence (β = 0.201, LLCI: 0.093, ULCI: 0.127), which suggests partial mediation. The standardized estimate of the direct effect with mediation at p-0.01 is 0.157. Similarly, the indirect estimate with the mediation variable at p-0.01 is 0.093, suggesting that anger mediated the relationship between CDS and DS.

Moderation analysis was carried out to see if self-control moderated the relationship between anger and deviant silence. The moderating effects were determined by the independent variable, anger, and moderator variable, self-control multiplied, known as interaction. Likewise, moderation analysis was also carried out to see if self-control moderated the relationship between anger and promotive voice. The unstandardized regression coefficient of the independent variable (AG) is 0.454, and when multiplied with the moderator (SC) 0.229 gives an interaction effect (AG*SC) of 0.219, which is significant. Results in Table 7 suggest that self-control moderated the relationship between anger and deviant silence. Also, self-control moderates the relationship between anger and promotive voice, thus providing support to our hypotheses H4a and H4b.

Figure 2 below suggests that self-control strengthens the positive relationship between anger and deviant silence. The graph indicates that the positive linkage of the relationship between anger and deviant silence is stronger when self-control is higher than when it is lower.

Figure 3 below presents the moderation performed for self-control. It demonstrates how self-control strengthens the positive relationship between anger and promotive voice. The unstandardized regression coefficient of the independent variable (AG) is 0.038.

![](image1.png)

**Table 7** Moderation effect of self-control

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Interaction | Decision |
|------------|--------------|-------------|----------|
| H4a:       | AG*SC – DS   | 0.219       | Supported|
| H4b:       | AG*SC – PV   | 0.049       | Supported|

(*p < 0.05)
This, when multiplied with the moderator (SC) of 0.591, gives an interaction (AG*SC) of 0.049, which is significant. It suggests that the linkage between anger and promotive voice is stronger when self-control is high. We employed a product indicator approach. This approach has been widely used to test the moderation of variables in reflective models (Marsh et al., 2004).

**Discussion**

Research and theory on reciprocity in the workplace is theoretically enriching. The nature of reciprocal relationships in which aggression brings negative deviance is debatable, because employees are given rigorous training to perform their jobs (Chi et al., 2018). Employees have mood states. Thus, aggression might not lead to deviant silence all of the time (Chi et al., 2018). Moreover, employees and supervisors might have stronger relationships (Valle et al., 2018). Likewise, customers and frontline service employees may have stronger associations (Sharma et al., 2018). These conditions might not support a reciprocal relationship between aggression and deviance. Sometimes employees might self-blame and attribute aggression to their poor performance (Zhang et al., 2014). Despite this excellent evidence, our study somewhat contradicts these conditions. A large sample size, carefully collected data, and a rigorous analysis reveal a stronger presence of the law of reciprocity, a core assumption of SET. Empirical evidence in this study concludes the debates, which illuminated the issue of reciprocity.

Results support the notion that supervisor-driven stressors predict deviant silence among FLEs. This can be attributed to several contextual and theoretical reasons. A service job involves socially visible work in which unjust treatment can be observed by customers (Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b). In this regard, while speaking up to supervisors, if the employees are being scolded or undermined by their bosses where customers are observing, there is evidence that employees do not share even useful information and that they will reciprocate aggression with aggression (Mackey et al., 2019). Moreover, when customers mistreat frontliners, usually it is visible to others (i.e., peers and other customers), and employees reciprocate by withholding some information (Skarlicki et al., 2008). This way our findings complement previously held studies and, notably, employees reciprocate aggression with a similar aggressive behaviour that is damaging to the long-term growth and survival of an organization. Theoretically,
based on the SET perspective, employees have a tendency to reciprocate aggressive behaviours with another form of destructive behaviour, which we found through the conduct of this study. The episodes of mistreatment at work arouse different negative emotions which have the potential to result in negative work behaviours (Kiewitz et al., 2016). In a context such as Indonesia, where people are more implicit in their response to supervisors, the results are logical (Handoko et al., 2018). In a power imbalance where people have differences in terms of rank and authority, employees cannot reciprocate aggression with direct aggression (Hanifah et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019). Thus, remaining silent or hiding some important information is a defensive tactic to respond to aggressive actions (Akkawanitcha et al., 2015). Researchers present similar findings in which data is collected from managers working in Asian countries (Handoko et al., 2018; Hasan & Kashif, 2020; Kashif et al., 2017a, 2017b).

Self-control moderates the anger to deviant silence path that highlights an important role of this variable to perform service jobs. Previously, researchers stated that high self-control helps employees to control their aggressive behaviours in response to aggression (Restubog et al., 2015). Our findings support research through which self-control is studied to buffer the effects of negative consequences for individuals even in virtual environments (Wang & Ge, 2021). Contextually, this is also a requirement on the part of FLEs to demonstrate self-control while performing service jobs, even in undesirable circumstances (Chi et al., 2018; Ni’matuzahroh et al., 2021). Since frontliners are given extensive training and are expected to demonstrate self-control while performing service jobs, the findings that self-control moderated the path are understandable.

Results support mediation hypotheses. This highlights the role of anger as an emotion to intervene between social stressors and deviant silence. Mistreatment at work often triggers negative emotions among employees (Kiewitz et al., 2016), unless it is complemented with stronger relational ties among core members of a service system (i.e. employees, supervisors, and customers) (Sharma et al., 2018). Notably, frontline jobs involve an emotional display of performance in most cases, and these frontliners usually are psychologically stronger individuals who cannot be exploited easily (Hanifah et al., 2021; Ni’matuzahroh et al., 2021; Yue et al., 2017). Since anger is a natural emotion and emanates in situations that are beyond individual control, these findings are understandable. In a system in which a power imbalance exists, arousal of negative emotions among employees is natural. Despite this fact, they are found to speak positively of their jobs if they have high self-control. These findings provide several important managerial implications for service managers.

All of these hypothetical relationships are supported by empirical results. In some ways, our research contradicts previous studies. Studies found that the arousal of negative emotions does not affect service performance (Al-Hawari et al., 2019). Considering promotive voice as one of the core tasks assigned to frontline workers, results reveal that the arousal of anger negatively correlates with promotive voice. Contextually, in collectivist Asian societies, people generally are more emotionally associated with each other and thus can easily get exhausted (Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Thus, the results are understandable in such a context. Theoretically, social exchange reflects reciprocity. Positive treatment brings positive outcomes and vice versa (Valle et al., 2018).
Theoretical Implications

The positioning of a combined role of customer-related and supervisor-related stressors to study deviance among employees is an important contribution stemming out from this study. The combined effects of both these stressors are studied, while they were missed by researchers (Kiewitz et al., 2016; Yue et al., 2017). These findings enrich our understanding of social exchange in which collective impact can be foreseen at a service workplace. There is evidence that supervisor and customer abuse are common—a dilemma faced by frontline service employees (Al-Hawari et al., 2019). In workplace aggression research, mediation of anger is also an original contribution and has not been positioned to investigate employee deviance as a consequence of customer and supervisor-driven stressors (Mackey et al., 2019). Previously, researchers highlighted the role of self-control to study workplace aggression (Johnson et al., 2018), but empirical evidence was limited. The provision of empirical evidence for self-control as a variable is yet another contribution that enriches our understanding of a social exchange mechanism. For instance, deviance is not a direct consequence of supervisory and customer aggression; rather it takes a path via arousal of negative emotions and intentions such as revenge. Contextually, Indonesia is a setting in which workplace aggression issues are burgeoning, and practitioners are finding ways to address them; this represents another contribution of this study. The Indonesian context is unique, given the size of population as well as the increased reported incidents of workplace abuse. In a high-power distance society, deep-down understanding of the aggression-deviance mechanism is important to design managerial strategies. Empirical evidence from the unique Indonesian context contributes to workplace aggression research by presenting a new country context.

Managerial Implications

In line with the results of this study, a tweaking of organizational culture is important. An environment in which employees are treated fairly and are kept safer from any type of aggression can result in positive behaviors which otherwise are impossible to consider (Restubog et al., 2015). Researchers have recommended strategies to counter workplace aggression, but these are not successful thus far (Mackey et al., 2019). There is a need to take some proactive measures; the establishment of a welfare culture at work can make life easier. The management of supervisor stressors is more important, since it has a trickle-down effect on employee behaviors (Chi et al., 2018) and has the potential to damage customer-employee relationships. Employees might behave in a similar manner in which they are treated by bosses. In this way, organizational culture and the whole system will become so noxious that it cannot survive.

Second, service jobs are high-pressure positions in which everyone faces a certain amount of pressure at work, even the supervisors. Thus, there is a need to manage the power imbalance that exists between bosses and their subordinates at work (Sharma et al., 2018). Supervisors should explain their circumstances (i.e., the elements of work that they can share while retaining/hiding some information that might be useful for all concerned) with their FLEs, thus strengthening their confidence in their supervisors. This communication can strengthen the supervisor-employee relationships so that FLEs can understand the reasoning behind the pressures exerted by supervisors. Mediums
can also be established (i.e., WhatsApp) for communication, thus lessening the power distance.

Third, we propose that organizations counter customer aggression with a zero-tolerance attitude for customer mistreatment of employees while at the same time preparing employees for unforeseen circumstances. An employee-centric policy will not only protect employees from destructive consequences of customer aggression but also instill confidence in their employers that the firm cares for them. In this regard, the core challenge is to hold employees and/or customers responsible for misbehavior. This way, an organization can also control the damage caused by aggressive supervision and customer misbehaviors.

Fourth, firms must extend beyond traditional training programs. Some mentorship programs can be designed for frontline employees in which employees work closely with their immediate bosses and share instant feedback. This can also enhance trust between supervisors and their subordinates while at work.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Despite its unique contribution, the study has some limitations that offer some avenues for future research. First, we did not consider the elements that can trigger abusive behaviors among supervisors and customers. There is a handful of research that discusses these factors from the supervisor’s perspective; i.e., episodes of aggression with subordinates at the workplace and mechanisms that prevent the arousal of shame or sadness among supervisors (Atwater et al., 2016). Future research can focus on the perpetrator’s perspective in a post-episodic form. Data can be collected from customers and supervisors concerning their feelings and thoughts after they have an episode of aggression with the frontliners. Moreover, even beyond the emotional perspective, there has been recent discussion on the positive side of darker phenomena such as workplace abuse (Smith et al., 2018). An important question for future researchers is whether abusive supervision can enhance employee skills. There is some evidence that abusive supervision is merely a perception (Zhang et al., 2014).

The second limitation is the design of this study. The data is cross-sectional, although it is supplemented with a large sample size and the calculation of Harman’s test to investigate social biases. Theoretically, we did not plan to predict a change in employee behaviors that could have resulted in a longitudinal design. Moreover, since the data is collected online, practically, the time-lagged approach was not possible. In contrast, the frequency of events indeed results in strongly negative or positive employee emotions (Chi et al., 2018). Thus, future researchers can collect data from employees with multiple time lags.

Third, although supervisor- and customer-driven stressors are discussed, family-driven stressors are scantly examined to combine with these workplace-driven social stressors (Arasli et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2018). This is another area of inquiry for future researchers and warrants the identification of a unique set of emotions that might arise when a lack of family support is rendered to the employees to perform their routine jobs. Moreover, it would be interesting to position positive support from supervisors (i.e., family-oriented supervisors) (Rofcanin et al., 2017), while the absence of support from the family could result in interesting findings. The core reason for this potential interest is gender stereotypes, having very different power balances in households. For instance, in masculine societies in which gender roles are fixed and in parts of Asia where men have authority and are supposed to earn to support their families, an interesting area of investigation lies in how
this power divide affects employees’ attitudes. Such differences in power from a gender perspective are examined but are limited mainly to individualistic cultures and developed economies (Atwater et al., 2016).

Declarations

All procedures performed in this study followed the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent All participants gave their consent to participate in the study.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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