

# 5 The paradox of workplace abuse and dignity in the Scottish hospitality sector

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## Abstract

The chapter explores the widespread prevalence of verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and bullying within the Scottish hospitality industry. Through an examination and analysis of customer misbehaviour and violence, it reveals that both men and women experience abuse and sexual harassment, with customers identified as the primary perpetrators. Drawing on a discussion on workplace dignity, the chapter uncovers a paradox that challenges traditional assumptions about the impact of workplace abuse on employees' perceptions of dignity. Specifically, while many participants report incidents of abuse and harassment, paradoxically, the majority also expressed feeling respected and dignified at work. This paradox highlights the normalization of workplace abuse and harassment in the industry, with workers 'blocking out' its effects on their dignity. The chapter concludes the critical need to resolve this paradox to foster decent and dignified working conditions within the hospitality sector.

## Introduction

Abuse remains worryingly pervasive in contemporary workplaces, particularly in low-paid sectors like hospitality (Booyens *et al.*, 2022; Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2023; Minnotte & Legerski, 2019; Ram, 2018). While abusive behaviours in hospitality workplaces, and indeed in other service industries as well, such as retail, are a longstanding concern (Baum *et al.*, 2020; Good & Cooper, 2016; Mayer *et al.*, 2022; Poulston, 2008b; Ram, 2018; Yagil, 2008), sexual harassment in hospitality has received renewed attention since the #MeToo movement (Heymann *et al.*, 2023; Pearlman & Bordelon, 2022). Several recent studies highlight the scale of the problem around the world. According to Coffey *et al.* (2023), sexual harassment in the hospitality industry affects 42% of women in the United States, 75% in 27 European countries, 50% in the Nordic Region, and 60% in Taiwan. Furthermore, in Africa, sexual harassment presents a significant safety concern in