

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND JOB SATISFACTION AS SEQUENTIAL MEDIATORS OF CUSTOMER INCIVILITY IMPACT ON TURNOVER INTENTION: SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AS A MODERATOR



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Abstract

Customer incivility in the service industry has been shown to substantially contribute to high employee turnover. However, the underlying psychological mechanism involving sequential mediation, as well as the moderating role of socioeconomic status in this relationship, remains underexplored. This study investigates the sequential mediating roles of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in linking customer incivility to turnover intention, while examining socioeconomic status (SES) as a moderating factor. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, data were collected from 219 restaurant employees in Surakarta, Indonesia (with a minimum of 6 months' tenure and direct customer interaction), and analyzed using SPSS Regression and PROCESS Macro to test a comprehensive 12 hypothesis encompassing direct effects, simple mediation, sequential mediation, and moderation. The findings supported all hypotheses: customer incivility significantly increased emotional exhaustion and turnover intention while decreasing job satisfaction. Emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction were found to sequentially mediate the relationship between customer incivility and turnover intention. Additionally, SES significantly moderated this process, with lower-SES employees experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion. These results extend COR theory by revealing a stepwise resource depletion mechanism and identifying SES as a critical vulnerability factor. The study offers practical recommendations for proactive organizational interventions, including emotional regulation training, structured peer support, and SES-responsive wellness programs. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal designs across diverse service sectors to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: Customer Incivility, Emotional Exhaustion, Job Satisfaction, Socioeconomic Status, Turnover Intention, Burnout

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's culinary industry has demonstrated significant growth, with 11,223 culinary businesses recorded in 2020, of which 71.65% are categorized as restaurants (GoodStat, 2022). Surakarta, recently proposed as a gastronomic destination by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, attracts approximately 63% of tourists who seek to enjoy local cuisine (Tempo, 2024). In this context, culinary activities carry both cultural and economic significance (Espos, 2024; Kompas.com, 2022).

However, this rapid growth has created an unintended consequence. The expansion in the restaurant sector and rising tourist demand have intensified frontline interactions, giving rise to a pervasive yet underexplored problem: customer incivility (Mulya, 2024). Disrespectful behaviors from customers are increasingly reported as serious stressors that threaten employee well-being and undermine organizational effectiveness (Korir et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2022; Jiang & Dong, 2022). Multiple studies confirm that customer rudeness strongly predicts employee turnover intention (Pu et al., 2024; Bani-Melhem, 2020; Baker & Kim, 2021).

The scope of this problem is alarming. Global statistics show that 90% of employees have encountered verbal intimidation and 64% have faced physical threats (USDAW, 2021). Indonesia faces similar challenges, including customer assaults on staff (Suara, 2022) and intoxicated patrons disrupting service (Tribunnews, 2020). The entrenched belief that "the customer is always right" worsens the emotional burden on employees, who must maintain composure under extreme pressure (Kamran-Disfani et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2020; Chaudhuri et al., 2023).

Drawing from Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), customer incivility is conceptualized as a resource-draining stressor. This leads to emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction, outcomes consistently associated with increased turnover intention (Zhang, 2023; Solovova & Kalmykova, 2022; Loh et al., 2022). As emotional energy depletes, employees experience declining well-being and work engagement (Feng et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022). Reduced job satisfaction further weakens organizational commitment (Doğantekin et al., 2023; Mayr & Teller, 2023).

These theoretical predictions are supported by troubling industry data. Turnover rates have reached 79.6% in the United States (Guinn, 2024) and 75% in Indonesia, representing an 8% increase from pre-pandemic levels (Media Indonesia, 2023). Nationally, 77% of professionals consider resignation (Suara, 2022), posing serious risks to service quality and operational stability (Xu et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2021). Preliminary interviews with Surakarta restaurant workers revealed that 80% experienced customer incivility, with 62.5% expressing desire to quit due to emotional distress, reduced motivation, and diminished self-worth.

Despite these evident risks, critical research gaps remain. Limited empirical work has explored the sequential mediation pathway involving emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, particularly in Indonesian restaurant settings. Moreover, socioeconomic status (SES) as a moderator remains underexplored. COR Theory suggests individuals with lower SES possess fewer coping resources and are more susceptible to stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Given that higher SES individuals exhibit stronger resilience (Effati-Daryani et al., 2020;

Rehman et al., 2021; Markova & Nikitskaya, 2017), incorporating SES is theoretically and practically important, especially in developing countries with social and economic disparity.

This study addresses these gaps through three key contributions. First, the research extends COR Theory application to the underexplored context of Indonesian restaurants. Second, a sequential mediation model is proposed linking customer incivility to turnover intention through emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. Third, SES is introduced as a moderating variable to highlight individual differences in vulnerability to workplace stressors. Practically, the findings offer insights for human resource management in identifying susceptible employees, designing targeted interventions, and formulating protective policies that enhance employee well-being and reduce turnover, thereby promoting organizational sustainability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Customer incivility is a growing concern in the service industry, often leading to emotional strain, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover among frontline employees. While prior studies have focused on direct effects, few have examined the underlying psychological mechanisms or individual differences. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study proposes a model in which emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction sequentially mediate the impact of customer incivility on turnover intention, with socioeconomic status (SES) as a moderator. Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are developed.

Customer incivility has a positive effect on employee emotional exhaustion

Based on COR theory, employees acquire, maintain, and protect resources for job execution but face depletion when encountering hostile behaviors (Hobfoll, 1989). Service-oriented organizations facilitate direct customer interactions, enabling resource accumulation while exposing employees to stressors threatening their resource base (Zhang, 2023; Solovova & Kalmykova, 2022). Customer incivility triggers negative emotional responses (Cheng et al., 2020), generating frustration and reactive aggression that result in substantial strain and emotional exhaustion (Chan et al., 2022). Empirical research across various countries, regions, and industry sectors has confirmed these detrimental effects (Bani-Melhem, 2020; Lim, Koay, & Chong, 2021; Pu, Ji, & Sang, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Customer incivility has a positive effect on employee emotional exhaustion.

Customer incivility negatively affects employee job satisfaction

Job satisfaction, as conceptualized by Hoppock (1935), refers to the emotional and psychological fulfillment individuals derive from their work. Recent views highlight the role of relational and developmental aspects in shaping satisfaction levels (Farmaki et al., 2022; Silaban & Margaretha, 2021). Customer incivility disrupts this fulfillment by inducing stress, emotional instability, and negative job perceptions, which reduce employee engagement and performance (Bi et al., 2021; Baker & Kim, 2021). In environments marked by discourteous customer behavior, employees often report lower satisfaction and stronger intentions to leave (Williams, 2005). Empirical studies consistently support the inverse link between customer incivility and job satisfaction (Loh et al., 2022; Doğantekin et al., 2023; Chaudhuri et al., 2023). Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2. Customer incivility negatively affects employee job satisfaction.

Customer incivility positively affects employee turnover intention

Customer incivility is a significant predictor of employee turnover intention, defined as the psychological inclination to resign (Korir et al., 2022). In service roles, direct exposure to rude or disrespectful customer behavior creates emotional strain that threatens psychological well-being (Xiao et al., 2022; Jiang & Dong, 2022). Such conditions foster a toxic work environment, diminish job comfort, and contribute to prolonged stress (Chaudhuri et al., 2023). Over time, this leads to reduced organizational loyalty, especially among employees who feel undervalued or frequently encounter unpleasant interactions (Piao & Managi, 2022). Consequently, ongoing incivility increases the risk of employees forming intentions to leave the organization (Mayr & Teller, 2023). Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3. Customer incivility positively affects employee turnover intention.

Emotional exhaustion affects job satisfaction and employee turnover intention

Occupational burnout has emerged as a critical workplace concern with substantial implications for employee well-being and performance (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Emotional exhaustion, the most prominent burnout dimension, reflects depleted emotional resources that undermine employees' ability to find meaning in their work and erode job satisfaction (Feng et al., 2023). When emotional reserves are consistently drained, employees disengage from their roles, leading to reduced satisfaction and increased turnover intentions (Pu et al., 2024). This chronic work-related stress response diminishes professional commitment and escalates employee departure intentions (Matthews & Edmondson, 2022). Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4. Emotional exhaustion negatively affects job satisfaction.

H5. Emotional exhaustion positively affects employee turnover intention.

Employee job satisfaction negatively influences employee turnover intention

Job satisfaction is a central predictor of turnover intention, where dissatisfaction correlates with lower motivation, absenteeism, and poor performance, ultimately increasing the likelihood of resignation (Mobley et al., 1978). Turnover intention, defined as the employee's voluntary plan to leave, is strongly linked to actual turnover (Mobley, 1977; Lee & Mowday, 1987). High satisfaction fosters organizational commitment and reduces withdrawal tendencies (Park & Min, 2020; Hsiao et al., 2020). In emotionally taxing roles, especially in the service sector, job satisfaction declines due to customer incivility and structural challenges like low wages and limited advancement (Madhan et al., 2022). According to COR theory, emotional resource depletion may drive employees to consider resignation as a coping response (Hobfoll, 1989; Pu et al., 2024). Based on these considerations, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6. Employee job satisfaction negatively influences turnover intentions.

The Mediating Effect of Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion, as the core dimension of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), reduces job satisfaction and weakens motivation (Feng et al., 2023; Pu et al., 2024). Customer incivility intensifies this exhaustion and dissatisfaction, thereby increasing turnover intention (Wen et al., 2023; Chen & Wang, 2019). Prolonged exposure to incivility depletes emotional resources, leading to fatigue and a stronger desire to resign (Pu et al., 2024). This impact is particularly evident among employees who frequently interact with customers and those who

endure heavy workloads with inadequate compensation (Matthews & Edmondson, 2022). Additionally, perceived organizational unfairness amplifies emotional strain and contributes further to withdrawal tendencies (Cheng et al., 2020). Based on these considerations, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H7. Emotional exhaustion mediates the effect of customer incivility on employee job satisfaction.

H8. Emotional exhaustion mediates the effect of customer incivility on employee turnover intention.

The Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion

Customer incivility elicits adverse emotional reactions that erode job satisfaction and elevate turnover intention (Baker & Kim, 2021; Yang, 2023). These emotional responses, marked by stress and discontent, deplete psychological resources, resulting in emotional exhaustion that further undermines job satisfaction (Pu et al., 2024). In service industries, direct exposure to disrespectful customer behavior is a major source of emotional strain (Xiao et al., 2022; Jiang & Dong, 2022), creating toxic work environments and chronic stress that impair psychological well-being and reduce organizational commitment (Chaudhuri et al., 2023; Piao & Managi, 2022).

Prolonged exposure to incivility encourages employees to consider leaving their jobs (Mayr & Teller, 2023). This process operates through both direct and indirect pathways: incivility leads to turnover intention directly and also indirectly via emotional exhaustion and diminished job satisfaction (Wen et al., 2023; Chen & Wang, 2019; Doğantekin et al., 2023). According to Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the depletion of emotional resources caused by incivility fosters dissatisfaction and departure intentions (Hobfoll, 1989). This aligns with prior research showing job satisfaction as a key determinant of turnover intention (Doğantekin et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2020). The compounded psychological burden of incivility reduces motivation and strengthens turnover inclinations (Farmaki et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2022; Pu et al., 2024). Based on these findings, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H9. Job satisfaction mediates the effect of customer incivility on employee turnover intention.

H10. Job satisfaction mediates the effect of emotional exhaustion on employee turnover intention.

H11. Emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction sequentially mediate the effect of customer incivility on employee turnover intention

SES Moderates the Effect of Customer Incivility on Employee Emotional Exhaustion

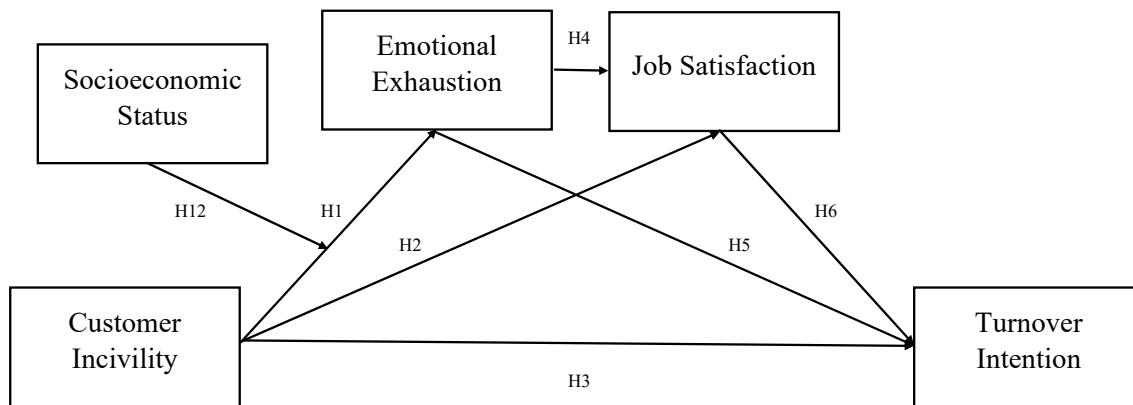
Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a crucial role in shaping individual responses to workplace stressors (Sainz et al., 2021). According to Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals with limited resources, often those with lower SES, are more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion when facing stressors such as customer incivility (Hobfoll, 2001; Sainz et al., 2021; Vinkers., 2020; Götz; 2018). In service contexts where customers hold significant power, employees tend to suppress their reactions to incivility. This dynamic increases psychological strain, particularly among lower-SES workers (Kim et al., 2021).

On the other hand, individuals with higher SES may be better equipped to preserve emotional resources and maintain work engagement despite negative customer interactions (Hobfoll, 1989; Gustiawan et al., 2023). Empirical findings show that full-time

employees, who are commonly associated with higher SES, cope with stress more effectively than part-time workers (Ramli et al., 2022; Perreault et al., 2017). SES is also linked to adaptive coping strategies and lower levels of psychological distress (Markova & Nikitskaya, 2017; Effati-Daryani et al., 2020; Khademian et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2021). Based on these points, this study puts forth the following hypothesis:

H12. Socioeconomic status (SES) moderates the effect of customer incivility on employee emotional exhaustion.

Figure 1.
Research Model



RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using purposive sampling to recruit restaurant employees in Surakarta who had direct customer interaction and a minimum of six months' work experience. This method ensured participant relevance to the research aims. Guided by Hair et al. (2021), a minimum of 190 respondents was required, based on 5–10 observations per parameter and a 10% margin of error at 90% confidence level.

Data were collected through an online survey distributed via Google Forms between April and May 2025. The final sample comprised 219 valid responses, meeting statistical power requirements.

All constructs were measured using previously validated instruments. Customer incivility was assessed with 6 items from Cho et al. (2016), emotional exhaustion with 3 items from Watkins et al. (2015), job satisfaction with 3 items from Duan et al. (2015), and turnover intention with 4 items from Pomaki et al. (2010). All items were rated on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Socioeconomic status (SES) was measured using 3 items adapted from Adler et al. (2000) occupational status, income level, and educational attainment. Each indicator was categorized, standardized, and averaged to form a composite SES score.

Hypotheses were tested using IBM SPSS Statistics v29 and PROCESS Macro v4.2 (Hayes, 2022), applying Models 4 (simple mediation), 6 (sequential mediation), and 1 (moderation) to examine indirect and conditional effects. Additionally, construct validity and reliability were tested using SmartPLS v4.1.1.2 through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This combined strategy ensured the empirical rigor of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

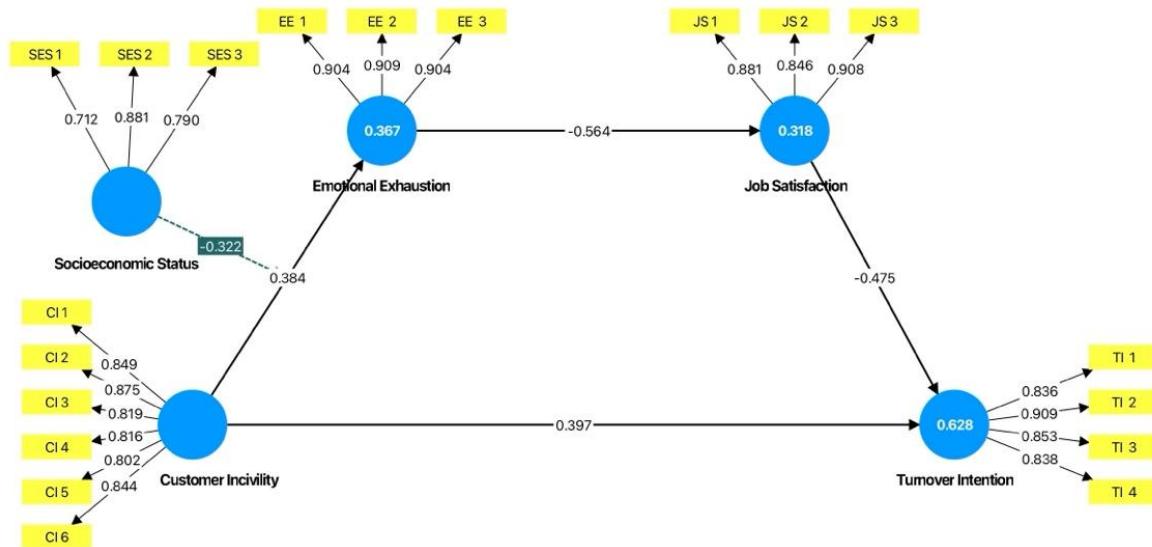
Table 1 presents the results of convergent validity and reliability analysis for all constructs examined: emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, customer incivility, turnover intention, and socioeconomic status. All factor loadings exceed the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2021), ranging from 0.712 to 0.909, indicating strong representation of each construct. The AVE values, ranging from 0.636 to 0.820, all surpass the 0.50 cutoff (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming convergent validity. Reliability is demonstrated by Cronbach's Alpha (0.711 to 0.913) and Composite Reliability (0.839 to 0.932), both above the 0.70 threshold, indicating high internal consistency.

Tabel 1.
Convergent Validity Result

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	EE 1	0.904	0.820	0.891	0.932
	EE 2	0.909			
	EE 3	0.904			
Job Satisfaction (JS)	JS 1	0.881	0.772	0.853	0.910
	JS 2	0.846			
	JS 3	0.908			
Customer Incivility (CI)	CI 1	0.849	0.697	0.913	0.932
	CI 2	0.875			
	CI 3	0.819			
	CI 4	0.816			
	CI 5	0.802			
	CI 6	0.844			
Turnover Intention (TI)	TI 1	0.836	0.739	0.882	0.919
	TI 2	0.909			
	TI 3	0.853			
	TI 4	0.838			
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	SES 1	0.712	0.636	0.711	0.839
	SES 2	0.881			
	SES 3	0.790			

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Figure 2.
Outer Model Diagram



Based on the analysis, all constructs satisfy the Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity, as indicated by the square roots of AVE exceeding the inter-construct correlations, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Discriminant Validity Results

Variables	Fornell-Lacker Criterion				
	EE	JS	CI	TI	SES
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.906				
Job Satisfaction (JS)		0.564	0.879		
Customer Incivility (CI)			0.463	0.649	0.835
Turnover Intention (TI)				0.693	0.733
Socioeconomic status (SES)					0.266

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Normality Test

A normality test was performed to assess whether the distribution of the research data conformed to the assumptions of normality. This was assessed using the non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, supported by visual analysis of histograms. The normality analysis results were obtained using SPSS version 29 :

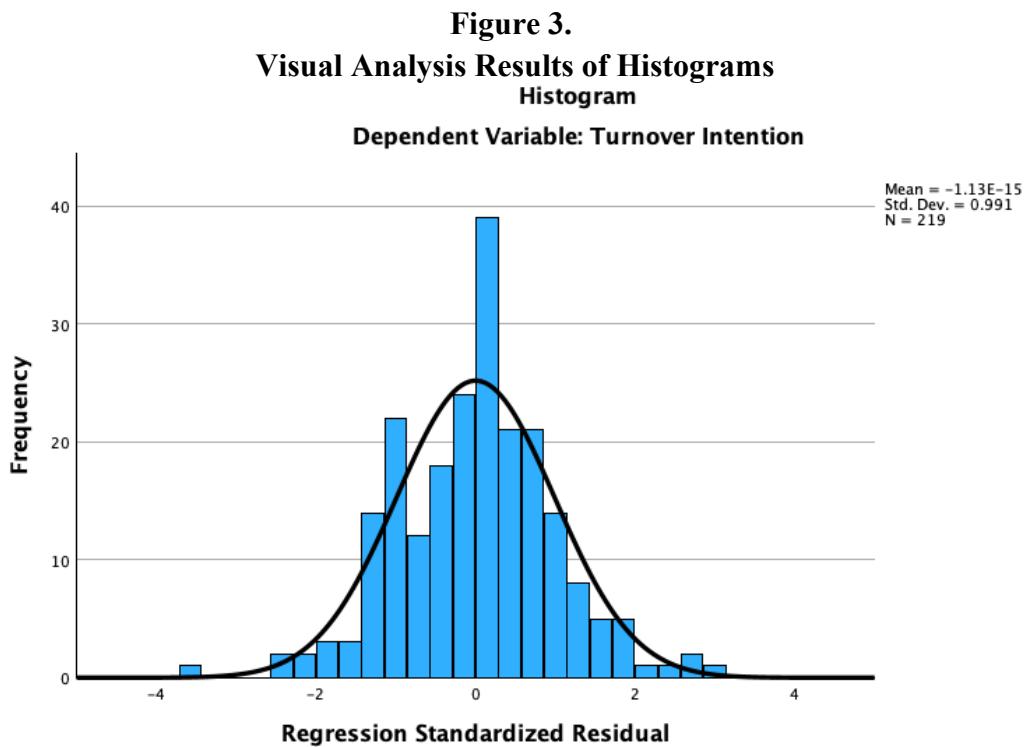


Table 3.
Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

Statistic	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Description
0.59	219	0.065	Normally distributed

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

The analysis results indicate that the data are normally distributed, as evidenced by the histogram and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test with a significance value of $0.065 > 0.05$.

Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity test was conducted to detect high linear relationships among independent variables in the regression model. The model is considered free from multicollinearity if tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10 . The multicollinearity analysis was performed using SPSS 29, with the following results:

Table 4.
Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	VIF	Tolerance	Description
Customer Incivility (CI)	1.772	0.564	No multicollinearity was detected
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	1.602	0.624	No multicollinearity was detected
Job Satisfaction (JS)	2.021	0.495	No multicollinearity was detected
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	1.102	0.907	No multicollinearity was detected

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

According to Table 4, the multicollinearity examination reveals that all predictor variables demonstrate tolerance values > 0.10 and VIF values < 10 , confirming that multicollinearity is not a concern in the regression framework.

Heteroscedasticity Test

An assessment for heteroscedasticity was performed to examine whether the regression model exhibits uniform residual variance throughout different levels of the predictor variables. The analysis was performed using SPSS 29 :

Table 5.

Heteroscedasticity Test Results via Glejser

Variable	Sig.	Description
Customer Incivility (CI)	0.965	No indication of heteroscedasticity
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.119	No indication of heteroscedasticity
Job Satisfaction (JS)	0.352	No indication of heteroscedasticity
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	0.439	No indication of heteroscedasticity

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2025

Every value is above 0.05, suggesting that there is no heteroscedasticity present in the regression analysis. Thus, the model meets the homoscedasticity assumption both statistically through the Glejser test.

Hypothesis Test

The estimation results reported in Tables 6 and 7 provide a comprehensive summary of the hypothesis testing outcome, encompassing direct effects, mediation effects, sequential mediation effects, and moderation effects.

Table 6.
Simple Regression Hypothesis Test Results

No	Hypothesis	Coefficient (B)	Sig.	R ²	Description
1	Customer Incivility → Emotional Exhaustion	0.215	0.001	0.198	Supported
2	Customer Incivility → Job Satisfaction	-0.277	0.001	0.414	Supported
3	Customer Incivility → Turnover Intention	0.426	0.001	0.485	Supported
4	Emotional Exhaustion → Job Satisfaction	-0.495	0.001	0.310	Supported
5	Emotional Exhaustion → Turnover Intention	0.877	0.001	0.481	Supported
6	Job Satisfaction → Turnover Intention	-1.038	0.001	0.534	Supported

Source: Data processed (2025)

Table 7.
Process Macro Hypothesis Test Results

No	Hypothesis	Direct Effect	p	Indirect Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	R ²	Description
7	CI → EE → JS	-0.212	0.000	-0.064	-0.091	-0.040	0.505	Supported (Partial)
8	CI → EE → TI	0.295	0.000	0.130	0.089	0.176	0.668	Supported (Partial)
9	CI → JS → TI	0.236	0.000	0.189	0.138	0.250	0.620	Supported (Partial)
10	EE → JS → TI	0.526	0.000	0.351	0.260	0.450	0.653	Supported (Partial)

Sequential Mediation Effect

No	Hypothesis	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	R ²	Description
11	CI → EE → JS → TI	0.426 p (0.000)	0.202 p (0.000)	0.028	0.015	0.045	0.716	Supported (Partial)

Direct Effect

Effect (b)	p	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Description
0.202	0.000	0.144	0.259	Supported

Indirect Effect

Path	Effect (b)	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Description
Total	0.223	0.029	0.168	0.285	Supported
Ind1	0.102	0.018	0.068	0.140	Supported
Ind2	0.093	0.019	0.057	0.133	Supported
Ind3	0.028	0.007	0.015	0.045	Supported

Moderation Effect

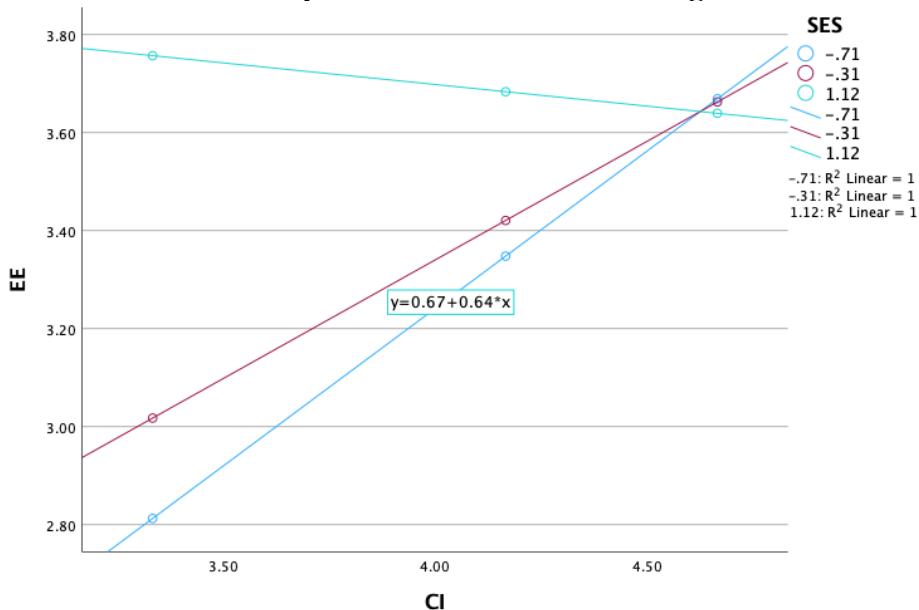
No	Hypothesis	Effect (b)	p	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	R ²	ΔR ²	Description
12	CI × SES → EE	-0.400	0.000	0.074	-0.547	-0.252	0.358	0.085	Supported

Conditional Effect of the focal predictor at value of the moderator(s)

SES Level	SES (Z)	Effect (b)	p	t	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Description
Low	-0.710	0.642	0.000	9.807	0.065	0.513	0.771	Supported
Moderate	-0.310	0.483	0.000	9.014	0.053	0.378	0.589	Supported
High	1.120	-0.088	0.428	-0.79	0.111	-0.307	0.130	Not Supported

Source: Data processed (2025)

Figure 4.
Graphical Plot of the Moderating Effect



Statistical analyses revealed that customer incivility has a significant negative impact on various psychological and behavioral aspects of employees. The findings confirmed that customer incivility significantly increases emotional exhaustion (H1: $B = 0.215$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.198$), reduces job satisfaction (H2: $B = -0.277$; $p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.414$), and heightens turnover intention (H3: $B = 0.426$; $p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.485$), explaining 19.8%, 41.4%, and 48.5% of the variance, respectively. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion was found to significantly reduce job satisfaction (H4: $B = -0.495$; $p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.310$) and increase turnover intention (H5: $B = 0.877$; $p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.481$), accounting for 31.0% and 48.1% of the variance. Finally, job satisfaction significantly lowered turnover intention (H6: $B = -1.038$; $p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.534$), explaining 53.4% of the variance and indicating a systematic chain of psychological effects.

Mediation analyses using PROCESS Macro Model 4 supported four partial mediation hypotheses. Emotional exhaustion mediated the relationship between customer incivility and job satisfaction (H7: indirect effect = -0.065 ; BootLLCI = -0.091 , BootULCI = -0.040 ; $R^2 = 0.505$) as well as the relationship between customer incivility and turnover intention (H8: indirect effect = 0.130 ; BootLLCI = 0.089 , BootULCI = 0.176 ; $R^2 = 0.668$). Similarly, job satisfaction mediated the effect of customer incivility on turnover intention (H9: indirect effect = 0.189 ; BootLLCI = 0.135 , BootULCI = 0.249 ; $R^2 = 0.620$), and the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention (H10: indirect effect = 0.351 ; BootLLCI = 0.264 , BootULCI = 0.450 ; $R^2 = 0.653$). These mediation models explained a substantial portion of variance, ranging from 50.5% to 66.8%, which underscores the central roles of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction as psychological mechanisms linking customer incivility to negative employee outcome.

A sequential mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro Model 6 supported H11, demonstrating that emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction sequentially mediated the relationship between customer incivility and turnover intention ($b = 0.202$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 =$

0.716). This model identified three significant mediation paths, through emotional exhaustion, through job satisfaction, and through the sequential link between the two. The total indirect effect was 0.223 (BootLLCI = 0.067; BootULCI = 0.139), explaining 71.6% of the variance in turnover intention. Additionally, H12 was supported through moderation analysis (Model 1), indicating that SES moderates the relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion ($b = -0.400$; $p = 0.000$; $R^2 = 0.358$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.085$). Conditional effects analysis revealed that the impact of customer incivility was strongest among employees with low SES ($b = 0.642$; $p = 0.000$), moderate among those with medium SES ($b = 0.483$; $p = 0.000$), and nonsignificant among employees with high SES ($b = -0.088$; $p = 0.428$). These results confirm that higher SES serves as a protective factor against the emotional strain induced by customer incivility.

Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrate that customer incivility functions as a pervasive occupational stressor that systematically depletes employees' psychological resources, thereby triggering emotional exhaustion, diminishing job satisfaction, and ultimately intensifying turnover intentions, particularly among service industry employees. Consistent with Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, customer incivility operates as a resource-depletion mechanism that precipitates emotional exhaustion when psychological resources cannot be adequately replenished (Zhang, 2023; Solovova & Kalmykova, 2022). This theoretical premise is further reinforced by the burnout framework proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), which identifies emotional exhaustion as the primary response to sustained interpersonal stressors. The universality of this relationship has been established across diverse sector contexts, indicating that customer incivility constitutes a fundamental threat to employee well-being regardless of national or organizational boundaries (Pu et al., 2024; Bani-Melhem, 2020; Bi et al., 2021).

The simple and sequential mediation mechanisms identified in this study elucidate the complex psychological processes through which customer incivility affects employees' psychological states and work attitudes. Emotional exhaustion emerges as a critical mediator that intensifies the adverse impact of uncivil customer behavior on job satisfaction and turnover intention. This finding aligns with Maslach and Leiter's (1997) burnout model, which posits that emotional depletion progressively drives psychological disengagement and the development of withdrawal intentions (Feng et al., 2023; Wen et al., 2023; Matthews & Edmondson, 2022). Simultaneously, job satisfaction operates as a parallel mediator, consistent with Hoppock's (1935) conceptualization of satisfaction as a subjective response to environmental conditions, and with March and Simon's (1958) model that identifies dissatisfaction as a primary antecedent of turnover intention (Park & Min, 2020; Serin et al., 2022). The sequential mediation pathway reveals a cascading deterioration process wherein customer incivility initially depletes emotional resources, subsequently reduces job satisfaction, and ultimately culminates in turnover intention as a self-protective response. These findings demonstrate the presence of both direct and sequential pathways that collectively amplify the overall effect of customer incivility on employees' intention to leave the organization (Pu et al., 2024; Doğantekin et al., 2023; Yang, 2023; Wen et al., 2023; Baker & Kim, 2021).

The moderating role of socioeconomic status (SES) provides crucial insights into individual differences in vulnerability to occupational stressors. Higher SES functions as a

protective buffer that attenuates the impact of customer incivility on emotional exhaustion, consistent with COR theory's proposition that individuals with greater resource access demonstrate enhanced resilience to stress (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees with higher SES typically possess superior access to healthcare services, financial stability, and recovery opportunities, which can neutralize emotional depletion (Sainz et al., 2021; Effati-Daryani et al., 2020; Khademian et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2021). Conversely, employees with lower SES exhibit greater vulnerability to exhaustion due to limited coping resources and reduced recovery capacity (Ramli et al., 2022; Götz et al., 2018; Vinkers et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals how customer incivility systematically reduces restaurant employee well-being through a cascading psychological process where uncivil customer behavior triggers emotional exhaustion, diminishes job satisfaction, and ultimately intensifies turnover intentions. The research establishes emotional exhaustion as the primary mediator linking customer incivility to adverse work outcomes while identifying socioeconomic status (SES) as a critical moderator that differentially affects employee vulnerability to workplace stressors. The study also validates the loss spiral mechanism of COR Theory in high-contact service environments and identifies a sequential mediation pathway in which customer rudeness drains emotional energy, reduces job satisfaction, and heightens resignation intention. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on direct relationships, this research addresses a critical gap by uncovering the underlying psychological processes. The moderating role of SES offers new insights into differential individual vulnerabilities, emphasizing that material resources function as psychological buffers, a dimension largely overlooked in prior customer incivility literature.

Practically, this study offers actionable strategies for restaurant managers, including emotional intelligence training, peer support systems, and structured debriefing sessions following difficult customer interactions. Human Resource (HR) departments are advised to implement early warning systems using HR analytics to monitor trends in emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. Building trust through transparent communication and providing comprehensive mental health support are essential, along with training managers to recognize signs of emotional depletion and align workplace policies with core organizational values. Despite its significant contributions, this study has several limitations, including the use of a cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and its limited focus on the restaurant sector, which may restrict generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, involve supervisor or third-party assessments to reduce self-report bias, and extend the scope to other service sectors such as hospitality, retail, and healthcare. Moreover, exploring additional mediating variables such as Psychological Capital (PsyCap), comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the internalization process of stress caused by customer incivility. In conclusion, by establishing a sequential mediation mechanism and highlighting SES-based vulnerabilities, this study offers both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for developing psychologically safe workplaces that support employee well-being, enhance service quality, and promote organizational sustainability in the hospitality sector.

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