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Respect & Resilience

Development, Implementation and Program Evaluation

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Insurance and Care NSW

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Foreword

As Head of Community Engagement within icare, I welcome the opportunity to introduce this report detailing the results from our customer misbehaviour trial.

The report outlines the prevalence of customer misbehaviour and the impact that these behaviours have on people, business and the wider community. Customer misbehaviour occurs across a spectrum from low to high intensity actions and includes dismissive, critical and rude responses through to intimidating, aggressive and violent behaviour.

The impacts on those exposed are wide ranging. However, it is only recently that the compounding effect of the almost daily experience of many employees in facing poor behaviours has become recognised and part of the conversation.

The challenge is a complex one. There is no single cause or effect as to how and why these behaviours generate and manifest themselves. What's clear is that the issue affects us all; with the social and economic repercussions felt across our whole community.

Respect & Resilience, as the name suggests, encompasses a body of work applicable across the broad spectrum of stakeholders – employers, employees, unions, customers and communities. The program aims to support the development of integrated solutions and adopts a fluid approach to the expansion and implementation of training resources. The report suggests it is imperative that these stakeholders play a role in addressing customer misbehaviour in a way that is much more meaningful and accountable. Purposeful action will result in greater opportunities and profitability for business and a more pleasant consumer environment and experience.

For the retail and fast-food sectors most impacted by poor customer misbehaviours, Respect & Resilience offers not only a compelling business opportunity, but critical risk mitigation. The sector is continuously innovative, fast paced and evolving. It relies heavily on the resilience and productivity of employees to sustain and be the point of difference in an increasingly automated ecosystem. It would be unwise for decision makers to ignore the evidence and not take meaningful action to secure the future of their business and their people.

I urge all stakeholders to consider the findings and recommendations from this trial – it contains many elements that can be directly and effectively applied in multiple service industry contexts. In addition, there needs to be a corresponding and concerted effort to engage with community to raise awareness and education of the debilitating impact of customer misbehaviour. Respect & Resilience recognises that all stakeholders have a part to play in maintaining a safe and connected environment.

Andrew Ellery
Head of Community Engagement, icare

Executive Summary

This document was written for icare customers, employers and practitioners operating in the retail and fast food industries. It provides a concise overview of findings relating to customer misbehaviour in the sector, and the role of the *Respect & Resilience* Program in seeking to address this problem.

What is customer misbehaviour?

Customer misbehaviour is all too common in the retail services sector. It encompasses the spectrum of negative acts perpetrated by customers and directed at service employees, ranging from incivility, to verbal abuse, and escalation through to physical aggression and violence. It can be defined as unacceptable, often hostile, behaviour exhibited by customers of an organisation towards an employee or employees that creates an offensive, intimidating, or frightening situation.

Risk

Exposure to customer misbehaviour can affect an individual's physical, psychological and social health. If not well managed, it is also likely to have many direct and indirect costs to employers including increases in absenteeism rates, workers' compensation costs, workplace morale and staff turnover. Furthermore, the impact on employees has the potential to have wider consequences to their communities, including friends and family.

Remedy

Respect & Resilience is a collaboratively developed program aimed at addressing customer misbehaviour. The program comprises a training intervention, plus two components that support the intervention: a 'zero tolerance' policy initiative and a set of recommendations for workplace environmental change and standards. A program evaluation package is incorporated to provide empirical evidence as to the impact and feasibility of the program.

Results

The *Respect & Resilience Program* was piloted within two separate retail and fast food organisations. Positive outcomes from the program include:

1. Reduction in the incidence of customer misbehaviour by 47.75%

2. Increased effectiveness in frontline employees' capability to better contain/de-escalate customer misbehaviour

3. Enhanced employee capability (knowledge, awareness, skills, capacity to cope), providing employees with mechanisms for early detection and thereby minimising the impact of customer misbehaviour

4. Increased customer awareness via signage of "zero tolerance"

Recommendations

1. Further development and wider implementation of the Respect & Resilience Program.

2. Continued evaluation of the program across multiple organisations and industries.

3. Implementation of signage to increase customer awareness and educate the customer on a "zero tolerance" approach.

4. Evaluation of environmental components and organisational policies that may be causally related to customer misbehaviour.

5. Development and implementation of a community approach to increase societal awareness of customer misbehaviour in all of its forms, and decrease tolerance of these behaviours in Australian workplaces.

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Key Findings

Key findings from the pilot Respect & Resilience Program are presented below. Findings were obtained using both quantitative (monitoring customer misbehaviour incident diaries, and employee questionnaires) and qualitative (workshop feedback and focus groups) methods.

	Finding
1.	Customer misbehaviour exists on a spectrum ranging from incivility, through personal abuse, to acts of aggression and violence. Lower levels of misbehaviour are frequently not reported.
2.	Frontline employees experience customer misbehaviour, specifically incivility, on a daily basis, with employees recording on average 5 incidents per week.
3.	As customer misbehaviour incidents increase, employees recorded having lower moods at the end of their shifts. Further, the more customer misbehaviour incidents they were exposed to, the worse their moods developed over their shift (comparing their start of shift mood to their end of shift mood).
4.	The Respect & Resilience Program seemingly reduced the frequency of customer misbehaviour and its impact on frontline employees. Specifically, participation in the program was associated with a reduction of 47.75% in incidents of all types of customer misbehaviour combined, and significant improvements in employee mood change over the duration of the working day.
5.	Analysis of the employee questionnaire completed pre- and post- training revealed that the Respect & Resilience Program was associated with a significant reduction in customer incivility and customer abuse, and significant increases in employees' assertion, empathy, and subscales of empathy including perspective taking, and emotional contagion. These changes are suggested to be integral in de-escalating and containing customer misbehaviour within service interactions.
6.	The Respect & Resilience Program was positively evaluated by all participants, with participants reporting retaining key training aspects, applying these within their working day, and finding the techniques effective in reducing customer misbehaviour. Supervisors also reported having seen positive changes in their staff following training, especially in not having to step-in and handle situations as often.
7.	"Zero tolerance" signage was effective in creating customer awareness and was positively evaluated by customers. Participants reported the "zero tolerance" signage to be beneficial within store, with customers and employees using the signage as a conversation starter, with positive interactions often following.

Recommendations

1.1.   General recommendations

Based on the evidence obtained in this pilot Respect & Resilience project, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. A pre-intervention organisational audit tool should be developed and used to ensure organisational readiness to benefit from the program. This tool should gather information pertaining to such issues as organisational psychosocial safety climate, policies and procedures for minimising and responding to customer misbehaviour, and staffing levels and arrangements to permit effective implementation of the training intervention. It should be emphasised that a "zero tolerance" approach or policy is a further recommendation to be adopted and embedded, to support the intervention.

2. The Respect & Resilience Program should be continually revised and improved in light of ongoing feedback from program participants and stakeholders. This may include options to the range of available workshop resources, to enable some selectivity as to the particular training components utilised.

3. The Respect & Resilience Program should be adapted for effective use in other contexts, including other industries, other locations (e.g., remote), settings in which interactions with customers take place mainly via telephone or internet, and organisations that lack the resources necessary to support 8- and 12-hour off-site staff training.

4. The Respect & Resilience Program should continue to be implemented, in a manner that is faithful to its original design, across organisations and industries.

5. Future implementation of the Respect & Resilience Program should be thoroughly evaluated, including the collection and analysis of independent ("hard") evidence as to its medium and long-term impacts. This should include long term evaluation of the impact of the program on organisational elements such as staff turnover, moral and absenteeism, as well as impacts on injury rates. Evaluations of the program will enable comprehensive baseline and follow-up measures of customer misbehaviour within our society, and segments of it, to be obtained, and the robustness of the positive program effects observed in this pilot to be assessed.

6. Signage to increase customer awareness, and to educate customers as to a "zero tolerance" approach in respect of customer misbehaviour, should be further developed, more widely displayed and systematically evaluated, both as a part of the Respect & Resilience Program and external to it.

7. The role of environmental modifications and organisational policies in contributing to customer misbehaviour should be further investigated, with the objective of developing and applying best-practice guidelines regarding environmental and policy initiatives that can help reduce the incidence, intensity and impact of customer misbehaviour.

8. A broader community approach to bring awareness of the full continuum of customer misbehaviours, and the unacceptability of these behaviours within contemporary society, should be introduced, promoted and sustained as an ongoing collaborative endeavour involving industry, unions, government and media agencies and personnel.

9. Investigation of similar areas of concern regarding customer misbehaviour which were external to the scope of this project, including customer perpetrated sexual harassment and theft, should be undertaken to guide further program development for these specific issues within the industry.

SDA Update: No One Deserves a Serve, Sexual Harassment by Customers & Zero Tolerance

The Shop Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA) continues our *'No One Deserves a Serve'* campaign to stop customer abuse and violence in the retail and fast food industry as this continues to be a key issue impacting workers.[1] In December 2018, a fast food specific ad was launched and our Retail specific ads and community messaging, such as ads on billboards and buses were also re-run in an effort to continue to change public attitudes and behaviour.

The Union has continued to run educational campaigns calling workers to report all customer abuse and violence and not accept such behaviour as part of the job. The SDA also continues to raise attention to these issues nationally with governments, industry, employers & safety regulators.

Advert link:
https://vimeo.com/304517464

Radio advert link:
https://au.awp.autotask.net/5/filelink/cf2zy-y2rrfw-5vc4guof

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1   Customer abuse and violence consistently ranks in the top 3 safety issues for fast food & retail workers in surveys from 2015-2018 of over 20,000 workers. In 2018, this was the number one issue reported by workers.

Sexual Harassment

This year, the SDA partnered with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to conduct an in depth survey of SDA Member's experience of sexual harassment at work. The survey found that one in five (21%) employees had been sexually harassed by a customer in their current job in the last 12 months and that sexual harassment perpetrated by customers makes up 36% of all cases of sexual harassment. The types of harassment experienced from customers include:

- Sexually suggestive jokes and comments (24%)
- Intrusive questions (22%)
- Inappropriate staring or leering (22%)
- Unwelcome touching, hugging and cornering or kissing (7%)
- Inappropriate physical contact (7.5%).

Disturbingly, only 33% of victims reported there were no long term consequences due to this harassment, with 23% reporting suffering negative impacts on employment, 35% impacts on self-esteem or confidence, 44% reporting flow on effects on mental health and stress (with 40% reporting impacts on anxiety and 18% on depression), 20% reported impacts on general wellbeing.

Further only 13% of members who experienced sexual harassment made a formal report or complaint and when they do it often results in poor consequences for them and little action taken against the harasser or in the workplace more broadly.

Sexual harassment is a form of customer abuse and violence which needs particular attention and the SDA has been working with organisations like the Australian Human Rights Commission to better understand this issue and to advocate for legislative change to eliminate sexual harassment from workplaces.

Towards Zero Tolerance of Customer Abuse and Violence

The SDA, together with the National Retailers Association and the Australian Retailer's Association, recently held a forum on this issue with employers, safety regulators and other organisations. Together the industry agrees that customer abuse and violence should not be tolerated. An industry statement, taking a zero tolerance approach, has been widely endorsed by many employers and peak groups (Refer to Appendix A). To find out more or to become a signatory, contact Katie Biddlestone at katie@sda.org.au

RETAIL & FAST FOOD INDUSTRY STATEMENT ON ABUSIVE AND VIOLENT CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

The SDA – the union for retail, fast food and warehouse workers (SDA), National Retail Association (NRA), Australian Retailers Association (ARA) and undersigned organisations including retailers, fast food operators, shopping centres, regulators and government;

1. Support the eradication of customer disrespect, abuse and violence from our workplaces
2. Commit to positively and publicly promoting and supporting a culture of respect and dignity for retail and fast food workers in and around workplaces
3. Encourage and facilitate the reporting of all forms of customer perpetrated abuse and violence towards workers, including sexual harassment and assault

Our commitment to a retail and fast food industry free from abuse and violence will contribute to creating vibrant, healthy and safe workplaces and communities for workers and customers across Australia now, and into the future.

1. Introduction

1.1. Nature, extent, and impact of customer misbehaviour

Customer misbehaviour in the retail and fast food industries is pervasive and the effects can be devastating for an individual's physical, psychological and social health. In addition, this behaviour can have many adverse effects on organisations including increases in absenteeism rates, workers' compensation costs, and staff turnover.

An annual survey instigated by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA) in 2017 noted an alarming rise in customer abuse and violent behaviour towards workers in retail and fast food.

- 88% of respondents have been subjected to verbal abuse from a customer in the last 12 months
- 24% of respondents subjected to verbal abuse say it happens every week
- 15% of respondents have experienced physical violence from a customer
- 63% of workers said abusive customers had generally been known to them
- 11% of respondents said the incidents of customer abuse or violence involved behaviour by a customer that was sexual in nature.

These survey findings are consistent with other research conducted in Australia and overseas. Call centre employees in the USA have reported experiencing an average of 10 episodes of customer aggression per working day; 82% of service employees working in the UK hospitality industry have reported witnessing or being the target of customer violence or aggression in the preceding 12 months; and a UK trade union report suggests that retail workers face verbal or physical attack, or threats of attack, nearly every minute of the working day. In addition, between 2013 and 2017 the retail trade accounted for 10% of psychological injury claims lodged with icare's Workers Insurance. The evidenced pervasiveness of customer misbehaviour directed at frontline service employees has led researchers to conclude that it is "systemically present within the service economy"; the norm, rather than a rare exception, in many service environments.

Customer misbehaviour can have a range of negative consequences, or impacts. These can be divided into four broad groups. First, there are adverse consequences for the individual employee's wellbeing, as seen for example in high levels of job stress, psychosomatic illness, absenteeism, and eventual burnout and turnover. Second, customer misbehaviour affects job performance, as evidenced in reduced levels of customer orientation, service quality, and organisational citizenship behaviours. Third, these effects on employees have flow-on effects to the organisation: higher absenteeism and turnover and reduced service quality lead to reduced customer satisfaction and patronage, increased recruitment and training costs, higher insurance premiums, and other financial and reputational costs to the organisation. Finally, the negative effects of customer misbehaviour can spill over to the employee's colleagues, work team, family and friends, as well as to other customers.

Presented with this evidence as to the incidence, intensity, and negative impact of customer misbehaviour, the Respect & Resilience Project was established in 2018 as a collaborative initiative involving the Community Engagement Team at icare, New South Wales, the SDA, and the Rehabilitation Innovation Service Evaluation (RISE) team, part of the Menzies Health Institute of Queensland, at Griffith University. The project aims to investigate the extent of the customer misbehaviour problem, identify potential interventions and solutions, devise and deliver a comprehensive intervention program, and evaluate this intervention. This report provides details of this pilot project – its background, implementation, and evaluation. Recommendations are provided to guide future best practice in this important sphere of worker and organisational performance and wellbeing.

1.2.   Definition of terms

Customer misbehaviour

Throughout this report, we use the term customer misbehaviour to refer to the spectrum of negative acts perpetrated by customers and directed at service employees, ranging from incivility, to verbal abuse, and escalation to physical aggression and violence. These behaviours are common in the retail sector and exposure to them can have adverse consequences in the short- and long-term for psychological wellbeing, physical health, and work attitudes and performance.

Customer misbehaviours vary in intensity as depicted below:

Disrespectful	Rude	Screaming	Threatening	Violence
Customer Incivility		**Customer Abuse**		**Customer Aggression**
Critical	Swearing	Intimidating	Throwing things	
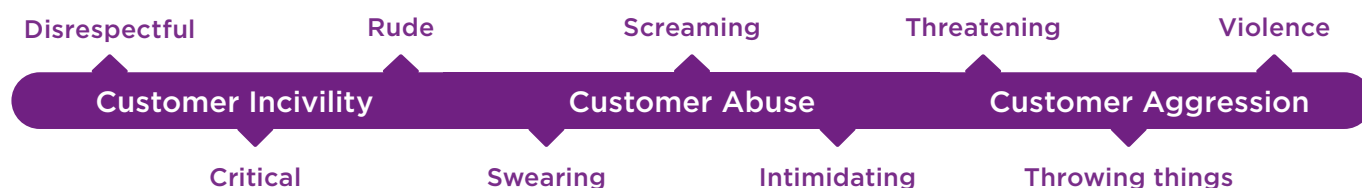
Three critical points on this continuum are acts of incivility, abuse, and aggression.
These three terms are defined and illustrated below:

Customer Incivility	**Customer Abuse**	**Customer Agression**
Low intensity	Increased intensity	High intensity
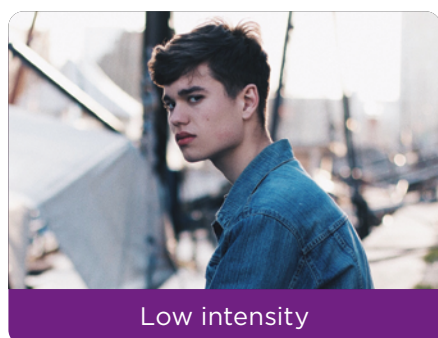
Examples:

- Rude or uncivil behaviour
- Disrespectful or critical comments
- Eye rolling or loudly sighing
- Speaking over an employee

Examples:

- Making rude, belittling or abusive comments targeting the employee or his/her social group
- Name calling
- Shouting or swearing
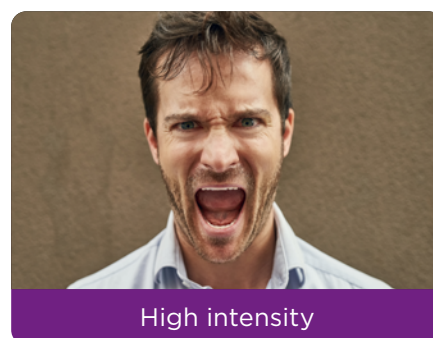
Examples:

- Hostile or aggressive acts
- Screaming
- Intimidation/Standing over
- Throwing objects
- Destruction of property
- Violence or assault

* Customer misbehaviour as a term includes a range of behaviours, such as customer perpetrated sexual harassment and theft, however for the purpose of this pilot, customer misbehaviour refers exclusively to customer incivility, abuse and aggression.

The Respect & Resilience Program

> The term, *Respect & Resilience Program*, refers to an aggregate of activities and materials collaboratively developed in 2018-2019 by the RISE team at Griffith University in conjunction with representatives from the Community Engagement Team at icare and the SDA. The program comprises a training intervention, plus two components that support the intervention: a "zero tolerance" policy initiative and a set of recommendations for workplace environmental change and standards, including recommendations regarding design and placement of signage. An evaluation package is incorporated to provide empirical evidence as to the impact and feasibility of the program.
>
> *"Respect"* is focused on upskilling and educating the frontline worker to best handle service interactions in a manner that is respectful of both the employee and the customer. *"Respect"* can also be seen within the organisation providing employees with a safe and supportive environment, including respecting their right to a "zero tolerance" working environment. *"Resilience"* introduces coping skills and strategies to enhance the frontline worker's ability in dealing with the impact of customer misbehaviour.

Other key terms and definitions

Term	Definition
Active listening	a receptive communication technique that involves giving full and active, visual and auditory, attention to a speaker speaking.
Aggression	any behaviour intended to harm another person (or animal, or object)
Assertive Communication/ Assertiveness	a direct, firm and polite mode of communicating, often distinguished from passive communication (which is indirect, wavering and overly-apologetic) and aggressive communication (which is overly-forceful, intimidating and potentially offensive).
Cognitive appraisal	a way of interpreting the world and the people, objects and events within it. Hence, cognitive re-appraisal involves re-thinking, or changing one's initial interpretations.
Conflict management/ resolution	the process used by parties in disagreement to reach a settlement. This process may be fair and efficient, or not.
Containing customer misbehaviour	managing misbehaviour at its source; keeping it under control, or reducing its intensity as much as possible.
Coping with customer misbehaviour	managing and minimising the impact of misbehaviour (rather than accepting it or putting up with it).
Customer-orientation	a set of skills and behaviours that involve interacting with customers in ways aimed at meeting their needs; adapting and individualising service.
Debriefing	a process in which a second person, usually someone who has not been directly involved in an incident, formally or informally talks to a person who directly experienced and was potentially harmed by the incident. It involves an open discussion and analysis of an experience so as to assist in evaluating and integrating lessons learned.
Emotional contagion	the tendency to experience the same emotion as others around us.
Emotional intelligence	the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.

Term	Definition
Emotional regulation	intentionally controlling emotions experienced and expressed (usually to meet personal, societal or organizational goals).
Empathy	the capacity to understand and feel what it is like to be another person, or at least to be "in their shoes."
Empowerment (of staff)	provision of high or increased levels of autonomy and responsibility to employees for decision making in their daily work.
Non-verbal communication	a general term encompassing all forms of communication that do not entail use of words. It includes communicating through bodily positioning and movement, gestures and postures (together often referred to as 'body language'), facial expressions, non-verbal vocalisations, and use of space, touch, grooming, and other media.
Perspective taking	the tendency and/or capacity to see the world as another person sees it; to view things from their vantage point.
Resilience	the capacity to maintain high levels of functioning despite exposure to threats.
Social perception (or 'person perception')	the process through which people observe other people and use this sensory information to form impressions and interpret their social world. It is a subjective and potentially biased process.
Vicarious trauma	also known as secondary trauma, can be described as indirect exposure to a traumatic event through first-hand account or narrative of that event. Within this report, vicarious trauma refers to the second-hand experience of employees witnessing colleagues directly experiencing customer misbehaviour. For example, frontline employees, who have witnessed or heard of a colleague being verbally abused, may have resulting concerns for their own safety when dealing with customers.

1.3.   Background to the Respect & Resilience Program

An evidence based systematic review of available literature on customer misbehaviour was undertaken in 2018 by the Rehabilitation Innovation Service Evaluation (RISE) team, part of the Menzies Health Institute of Queensland at Griffith University. The review explored the extent of the issue at hand and identified potential best practice interventions. A collaboration between the Community Engagement team at icare, the SDA, Menzies Health Institute of Queensland at Griffith University, employers, employees and government agencies identified four key areas of focus in dealing with customer misbehaviour: specialised training, policy development, improved service environment and staff support.

The combined view and experiences of these stakeholders, the limited findings from the systematic review, and the industry's need to address the increase in aggressive acts towards frontline workers saw the establishment of the Respect & Resilience Project. The project aimed to investigate and co-design a number of customer, employer and employee led, sustainable solutions to reduce the number and severity of incidents experienced by staff, as well as to provide strategies for building resilience for the frontline worker, addressing the four key focus areas above.

More specifically, the following were used to inform the development of the Respect & Resilience Program.

Systematic literature review

The systematic literature review was undertaken in 2018 by the RISE team at Griffith University. The criteria used to select relevant literature was designed to specifically address two key questions:

1. What approaches have been shown to be effective in preventing or reducing **incidents** of customer incivility, abuse and aggression in retail and fast food settings?

2. What approaches have been shown to be effective in reducing the **impact** of customer incivility, abuse and aggression on employees in retail and fast food sectors?

Focus Groups

A total of four focus groups were conducted in late 2018 with employees who were representative of the retail and fast food industry. These focus groups included employees across multiple sectors of the participating organisations, ranging from junior staff to store managers, with a particular emphasis on frontline customer service employees. The focus groups were semi-structured and ran for approximately one-hour, with groups containing between three and seven participants. The focus groups addressed, and sought participant reflection and comment on, four key themes:

1. Participants' experiences of customer misbehaviour and/or mistreatment, how these experiences affect them, and what behaviours they found most stressful.

2. Their own behaviour during negative customer interactions and any actions that could potentially reduce the severity of customer misbehaviour.

3. The socially supportive actions of their co-workers and supervisors/management either during and/or after a negative customer interaction.

4. Their workplace's current approaches to customer misbehaviour, and any strategies they thought should be incorporated into an intervention aiming to reduce such behaviour.

Roundtable workshops

The roundtable workshop included a cross-section of employers, employees, unions, government agencies and academics. During the roundtable forum a series of breakout workshops asked attendees to address six important questions. All questions were preceded with the statement *How Might we......:*

1. Modify the workplace to ensure a safer environment for all

2. Influence community attitudes to improve customer behaviour

3. Empower workers so that they have a sense of job control

4. Improves and policy so that both worker and customer are treated fairly

5. Train staff members to effectively deal with customer aggression

6. Better support workers in dealing with effects of aggression

As can be seen from below, consistent themes were identified across these three sources, with the findings forming the basis of the Respect & Resilience Program.

Systematic Literature Review

- Environmental modifications
- Workplace support
- Specialised customer-service training
- Emotional regulation training

Focus Group

- Specialised training
- Manager training
- Policy
- Support

Roundtable Workshops

- Specialised training
- Environmental modification
- Policy
- Workplace Support
- Customer Awareness
- Organisational Culture

Respect & Resilience Program

## 2.	Overview of the Respect & Resilience Program

The Respect & Resilience Program includes several key components:

- Specialised training via workshops
  - Workshop 1: Understanding & Preventing Customer Misbehaviour
  - Workshop 2: Containing, & Coping with, Customer Misbehaviour
  - Workshop 3: Supervisor Skills, Strategies & Support for Dealing with Customer Misbehaviour

  All workshops included slides, and corresponding workbooks for participants to retain

- Additional components
  - Environmental checklist with recommended environmental modifications
  - Organisational commitment policy for "zero tolerance" of customer misbehaviour
  - Store signage for customer education and awareness

- Program evaluation
  - Workshop feedback
  - Monitoring customer misbehaviour incident diaries
  - Employee questionnaires
  - Focus groups

The specialised training intervention is described in detail in Section 3 of this report. The evaluation of this intervention is reported in Section 4 of this report. In the remainder of the current section, we describe the three additional components of the Respect & Resilience Program.

Additional Components

The above mentioned (Section 1.3) key themes identified in the systematic review, focus groups and roundtable were further addressed, in collaboration with the SDA and the participating organisations, by the following components of the program:

- **Workplace modification → Environmental Checklist:**
  Environmental aspects that staff can improve to reduce incidence or severity of customer misbehaviour. The environmental checklist draws on the research behind potential causes of customer misbehaviour in the environment and subsequent changes to the store. Stores were provided with two separate documents: 1) the research from which the environmental checklist is derived, and 2) a checklist for staff to use to minimise potential causes of customer misbehaviour and record potential problems within their store environment. The checklist included aspects across the following eight categories:

  Temperature   Noise

  Lighting   Housekeeping and Cleanliness

  Signage   Store Layout and Design

  Staffing   Safety and Security

- **Policy → Organisational commitment:**
  All collaborators on this project agreed that organisational culture and commitment are a necessary precursor to ensure buy-in from frontline staff and supervisors, to make sure rapid escalation of incidents and also reduce effects of customer misbehaviour when it occurred. A commitment policy was signed by representatives of both the retail and fast food organisations to specify **"zero tolerance"** of customer misbehaviour, and an "abuse cut-off point" for frontline employees beyond which misbehaving customers would be elevated to the supervisor (Refer to Section 6). Staff were made aware of this commitment from their organisation during the intervention.

- **Customer awareness ➜ In-store signage:**
  Signage and under badges (small signs stuck under name badges) within specific sites were created to educate customers on the "zero tolerance" of abuse and violence within store and to further highlight the human-side of frontline employees. The signs were printed and laminated on A4 cards, with four copies of the sign (see beside) provided to two of the intervention sites (one retail and one fast food store). These signs were displayed at the check-out/registers of the stores, and also in the drive-through window of the fast food store. Under badges were attached to name badges and worn by employees in selected stores (see below). These featured 2 elements:

  ◦ A message humanising the staff member ("I am a father", "I am a mother", "I am a son", or "I am a daughter").
  ◦ The SDA's No One Deserves a Serve Logo – due to the widespread recognition of the logo.
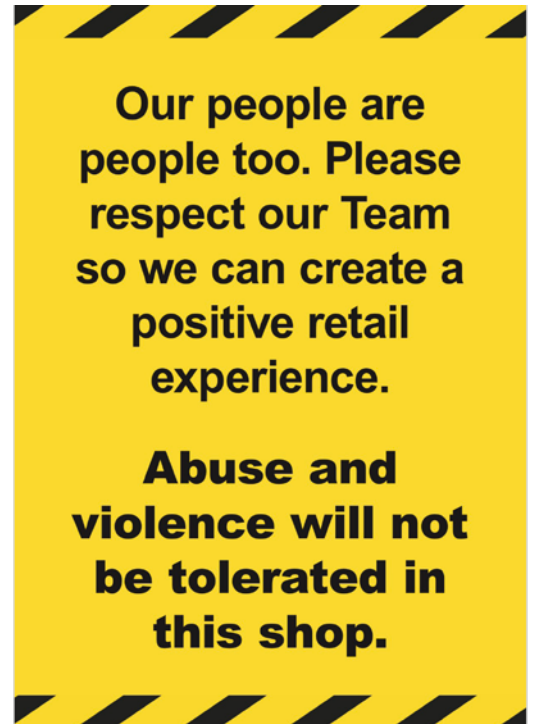
3. Description of the Respect & Resilience Training Intervention

3.1. Aims of the Intervention

The Respect & Resilience Training Intervention aimed to reduce the incidence (frequency), intensity (severity), and impact (harmfulness) of customer misbehaviour.

Workshop 1 aimed to reduce/minimise the **incidence** of customer misbehaviour through the development of deeper understandings of human aggression, in general, and customer misbehaviour in particular, and the acquisition of improved knowledge and skills for dealing with these.

Workshop 2 aimed to reduce/minimise the **intensity** of instances of customer misbehaviour by the development in participants of effective ('de-escalating') observational, cognitive, verbal, and behavioural responses. It also aimed to enhance/maximise the capacity of service staff to cope with customer misbehaviour, manage their emotional and behavioural responses to it, and minimise adverse personal, team, and organisational **impacts** of it.

Workshop 3 aimed to reduce/minimise the incidence, intensity, and impact of customer misbehaviour through the development of enhanced **supervisor skills and strategies** for dealing with customers and managing employees, and the provision by supervisors of mentoring, counselling, and debriefing that support and sustain their staff.

Core 'theoretical' topics covered in the intervention and contributing to these aims include:

- Human aggression
- Emotion and its various facets
- Social perception and cognitive processes
- Social interaction and communication processes
- Stress and coping
- Social and emotional support

Core practical skills developed to facilitate the aims of the intervention pertain to:

- Perspective taking and empathy
- Rapport/relationship building
- Emotional recognition and regulation
- Effective (and assertive) communication
- Staff empowerment and customer-oriented control
- Coping skills and strategies
- Seeking, providing, and receiving peer and supervisor support.

In sum, the intervention aimed to reduce customer misbehaviour through the development in participants of a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in all of these domains. The model underlying the intervention is presented in the following diagram. This model shows that, intervening between exposure to customer incivility, abuse and aggression (on the upper side) and positive outcomes (on the lower side), is the training intervention, here represented by seven theoretically- and research-supported skill sets.

Model Underlying Respect & Resilience Intervention

Customer Incivility, Abuse and/or Aggression

Enhanced (theoretical) Understanding

More Effective (esp. assertive) Communication

Greater Customer Oriented Control

Greater Coping Strategies & Skills

Increased Peer and Supervisor Support

Greater Perspective-Taking Capabilities

Improved Rapport / Relationship Building Skills

Elevated Skills in Emotional Recognition & Regulation

Enhanced (theoretical) Understanding

Greater Capacity to Reduce the incidence, Intensity and Impact of Customer Incivility, Abuse and Aggression

Positive Job-related Impacts, e.g. Job Satisfaction, Job Stress, Intention to Quit

Positive Broader Impacts: General Wellbeing

3.2. Development of the intervention

The training program comprised three half-day workshops that were developed for this project by a team of staff members from RISE, Griffith University, staff members led by Associate Professor Graham Bradley, Dr Samantha Ferguson, Melanie Davis, Dr Leanne McGregor and Professor Nicholas Buys. Development of the project took place between August 2018 and June 2019. The team aimed to develop an intervention that is:

- Firmly based on recent, valid research and theory
- Representative of best training practices and principles
- Fasible and efficient, given the time and resource constraints and opportunities, and
- Well-matched to the demographic, educational and occupational profile of potential participants, and the jobs and organisations in which they work.

Development of the training intervention occurred in three stages:

1. Background research

2. Designing and writing the intervention

3. Testing, feedback, and revising the intervention.

3.2.1. Background research and development (August 2018 - February 2019)

As described in part, in Section 1.3 above, initial work on the training intervention involved accessing and critically evaluating information and ideas from five main sources:

1. Recent theory and research in social, health, organisational and counselling psychology, retailing and other services marketing and management, and related disciplines. This included:

    (1) A systematic review (conducted in August 2018, updated in April 2019) of research literature published between 1998 and 2018 investigating the question "What interventions or approaches can reduce the incidence or impact of customer incivility, abuse and aggression?"

    (2) A search of the corresponding "grey" (that is, unpublished, but publicly accessible, private and government) literature.

2. Paper, online, and in-person sources of information and advice regarding practices and programs adopted by contemporary training and consultancy professionals and agencies. This included an examination of relevant in-house training provided by various organisations, including those participating in the pilot Respect & Resilience Program.

3. Discussions in, and outcomes from, four focus groups, conducted by icare and Griffith University in October 2018, involving frontline employees and managers from fast food, petrol, liquor, and small and large retailer organisations.

4. Discussions in and outcomes from a collaborative roundtable event addressing the prevalence, consequences and possible solutions to customer misbehaviour, held in October 2018, facilitated by representatives from the Community Engagement team at icare and the RISE team at Griffith University, and involving a cross-section of employers, employees, academics, SDA union and government representatives.

5. The Griffith University research team's own past research, practice and work experience, over several decades, in a range of service industries, plus ongoing critical discussions involving the team members.

(A list of illustrative sources used in the development of the intervention is given in Appendix B of this report).

3.2.2. Designing and writing the intervention (February – May 2019)

The team drew upon and adapted the 'collected wisdom' contained in the sources referred to above and listed in more detail in the appendix. The aim was to produce a coherent training package that comprised an appropriate mix of:

- Mini-lectures
- Video-presentations
- Group brainstorming and discussion segments
- Live demonstrations and role-plays
- Other individual and group interactive exercises.

Specific tasks completed by the team at this stage of the development of the intervention included:

- Writing mini-lectures
- Creating and/or adapting interactive training activities
- Drafting video scripts and producing videos
- Applying for Griffith University ethical clearance for the evaluation research component of the project
- Preparing power-point presentations and accompanying scripts for each of the workshops
- Writing participant workbooks.

In addition, the team developed four resources for use in the evaluation of the intervention:

1. Monitoring customer misbehaviour incident diaries
2. Pre- and post- workshop questionnaires
3. Workshop feedback forms
4. Focus group interview schedules.

3.2.3. Testing, feedback, revision and refinement (March – June 2019)

Once a good first draft of the three training workshops had been developed, the proposed intervention was tested in a variety of forums over a 3-month period. Feedback and advice was sought, and aspects of the intervention were revised and refined accordingly. This iterative process of consulting, pilot-testing, and revising began with critical examination of the proposed intervention aims, scope, content and mode of delivery with colleagues within RISE and Griffith University generally.

The process was then broadened in March 2019 to include representatives of the Community Engagement team at icare and one of the participating organisations. A focus group and trial run of critical aspects of the intervention, involving six employees of one of the organisations, was held in April 2019. Following receipt of feedback and modification of the draft intervention, it was further tested in May 2019, with an audience comprising four junior and four more senior employees from the retail/fast food sector, and representatives of icare, the SDA, a participating retail organisation, a local secondary school, and University colleagues. Written and oral feedback were sought and provided, and this prompted further refinements to the program.

3.3. Components and Organisation of the Intervention

3.3.1. Workshop Overview

The Respect & Resilience workshops comprised two face-to-face sessions (4 hours each) for all employees, with an additional 4 hour face-to-face session for supervisors and managers. The training was designed specifically for frontline employees dealing with customers within the retail and fast food industry.

The workshops aim to:

- Reduce the incidence of customer misbehaviour through the development of:
  - Deeper understanding of its causes
  - Improved interpersonal skills
  - Improved customer service quality
- Increase frontline employees' effective responding so as to better contain/de-escalate customer misbehaviour
- Enhance employee capacity to cope, thereby minimising impact of customer misbehaviour.

The training specific for supervisors and managers aims to:

- Reduce incidence and severity of customer misbehaviours through enhanced strategies and skills for dealing with difficult customers
- Minimise impact of customer misbehaviour on employees by:
  - Empowering, rewarding, coaching, mentoring, and supporting them
  - Debriefing them after experiencing a customer misbehaviour incident

The workshops provide an opportunity for staff to practise skills and interactions within a safe environment. The in-person interactive training model provides opportunities for participants to share their experiences in a supportive and collective environment.

3.3.2. Topics Covered in the Workshops

Workshops 1 and 2 emphasise the following content:

- What is customer misbehaviour? (Types, prevalence, and impact)
- Identifying customer misbehaviour

All employees (4hrs/workshop)

Workshop 1: Understanding & Preventing Customer Misbehaviour

Workshop 2: Containing, & Coping with, Customer Misbehaviour

Supervisors / Managers (4hrs/workshop)

Workshop 1: Understanding & Preventing Customer Misbehaviour

Workshop 2: Containing, & Coping with Customer Misbehaviour

Workshop 3: Supervisor Skills, Strategies & Support for Dealing with Customer Misbehaviour

- Causes of aggression and customer misbehaviour
- Identifying and minimising triggers to customer aggression
- Perspective taking to better understand the service interaction and to defuse problems before they escalate
- Strategies for getting customers on side so as to minimise the incidence of customer misbehaviour: customer orientation, rapport building, etc.
- Human perception, preconceived notions, and other biases in social perceptions: why they matter when encountering difficult customers
- The role of emotions in the service interaction, with particular reference to emotional expression, emotional contagion, emotional intelligence, and related concepts

- Recognising and regulating non-verbal expression of emotions: anger as an example
- Managing customer misbehaviour: What to Observe; Think; Say; Do
- Understanding the role of stress and coping within and after difficult service interactions
- Coping with experiences of customer misbehaviour: Five coping strategies

A conceptual overview of key concepts addressed in these first two workshops is presented below:

Overview of Key Concepts Presented in Workshops 1 and 2
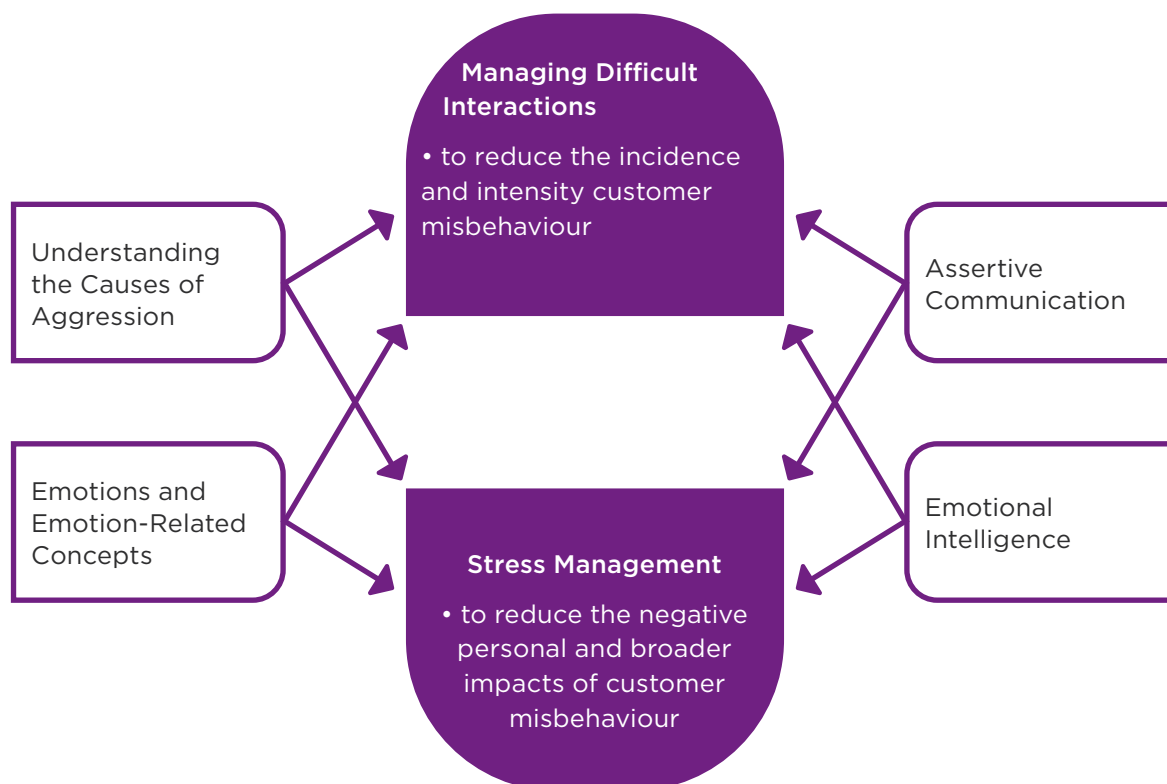
Workshop 3 presents content related to the following topics:

- "Top down" approaches to managing customer misbehaviour:
  - Policy approaches
  - Environmental approaches
  - Surveillance and enforcement approaches
  - Human resources approaches
  - Educative approaches
  - Supervisory approaches
- Critical communication skills for effective management of customer misbehaviour
  - Active listening
  - Conflict management
  - Assertive communication

- Three types of customer complaints, and approaches by management
- The importance of supervision (in the customer misbehaviour context):
  - Empowering staff
  - Rewarding, re-motivating, and maintaining staff morale
  - Mentoring and coaching staff
- Peer and supervisor support of staff exposed to customer misbehaviour
- Debriefing following a customer misbehaviour incident to minimise impacts on employees and the organisation.

3.3.3.   Workshop Presentation and Learning Modes

All three workshops are presented using a mix of:

• Mini-presentations by the instructors ('lecturettes')
• Video demonstrations
• Facilitated group brainstorming/debate/discussion activities
• Live demonstrations and role plays
• Other interactive exercises

Emphasis is placed on activity-based learning within a safe and supportive environment. In the table below, we highlight examples of the use of each of these presentation and learning modes, in each of the three workshops:

	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3
Instructor Mini-presentations	Human aggression. Tips for getting customers on side.	Emotion and its facets. Effective and assertive communication.	Active listening. Conflict resolution.
Videos	3 types of CM*.	Examples of effective and ineffective CM de-escalation behaviours.	Debriefing staff after a CM incident.
Brainstorming and Discussion topics	Experiences of CM. Behaviours that annoy staff & customers.	Effective CM de-escalation: what to observe, think, say, and do.	"Top-down" strategies for reducing CM.
Live Demonstrations and Role-plays	Getting customers on-side.	Emotional contagion. Effective CM de-escalation.	Conflict resolution. Mentoring and Coaching.
Other exercises	Perspective taking. Pre-conceived notions.	Cognitive re-appraisal. Relaxation techniques.	Help customers be right. What to do if..?

Note: CM = customer misbehaviour

3.4. Delivery of the Intervention

3.4.1. Sites

The Respect & Resilience Program was piloted with one retail organisation and one fast food organisation, with three sites (stores) chosen by each organisation. The original design of this project entailed staff members employed at the control sites only completing the evaluation measures (incident diaries and questionnaires), with staff employed at the intervention sites (sites 1 and 2) also completing the specialised training (workshops), and one of these two sites having the additional signage displayed in store.

Retail	Fast food
Site 1: Training	Site 1: Training
Site 2: Training + Signage	Site 2: Training + Signage
Site 3: Control	Site 3: Control
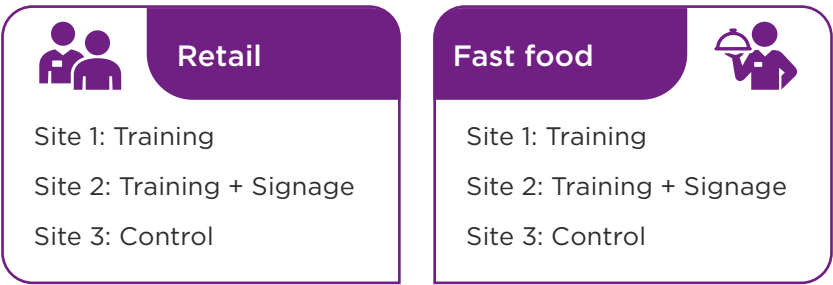
3.4.2. Identified barriers

As noted above, we initially planned for the project to include one site per organisation that did not receive the training and thus act as a control group. Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts, it was not possible to obtain full cooperation or sufficient data from the intended control sites. We were thus unable to follow through on the plan to compare outcomes in the intervention and control stores.

In addition, data collection from both the intervention sites was limited further than expected, with staff rostering impacting the number of employees at work during the period of data collection. Furthermore, the quality of data was also compromised with participants not recording details that allowed for pre and post data to be matched (i.e., participants not providing their unique code, demographics, or providing new codes). This led to the analysis only being performed on the intervention impact pre and post, with training and signage combined.

Also potentially affecting the conduct of the program were some background organisational culture issues that were brought to the attention of the workshop presenters. In order to achieve the best outcomes within multi-layered organisations, there should be strong managerial support for the implementation and evaluation of the program. More specifically, it is important for all levels of managerial tiers to be informed of, engaged with, and supportive of the program, ensuring flow-on effects among all layers of staff, from high to localised management, and frontline employees.

3.4.3. Workshops

Workshops 1 and 2 were conducted across two days with all staff from the selected sites and supervisors attending. Supervisors and managers attended an additional supervisor-specific workshop, conducted some days after Workshops 1 and 2. Each workshop ran for 4 hours, with breaks throughout for morning tea/afternoon tea and lunch. Workshops were facilitated by trained Griffith University staff with standardised content. Two staff members convened and presented the workshops, with 3 additional staff facilitating the workshop's small group activities. The same two presenters facilitated all workshops, with the same team of group facilitators for Workshop 1 and 2.

Key features of the workshop delivery are highlighted below:

Training Module

- Griffith University Facilitators
- Presentation via PowerPoint
- Rapport-building
- Anecdotes
- Examples
- Questioning
- Informational videos
- Video demonstration of skills
- Adjustment of session timing based on active engagement within group

Participant Group

- Maximum of 30 employees
- Organisation specific sessions
- Active participation
- Group discussion
- Sharing of experiences
- Role-play of interactions
- Role-play of skills
- Individual workbook use for reflection and re-enforcement of learning

As a result of the first round of participants' responses, aspects of the workshop presentation were altered to increase participant engagement. More specifically, following the first workshop iteration:

1. Interactive activities were used more extensively while lecture style presentations were contracted, and

2. Some activities that required individuals to record their ideas in the workbooks were replaced by group-based activities in which ideas were written on butcher's paper.

4.   Evaluation of the Respect & Resilience Training Intervention

4.1.   Overview of how the intervention was evaluated

The program evaluation aimed to investigate the impact of the training workshops on employees':

• Capacity to reduce incidence, intensity and impact of customer misbehaviour
• Job-related commitment and performance
• General wellbeing

The program evaluation was completed using two separate study protocols, both with ethical approval from Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (GU Ref No: 2019/323 and GU Ref No: 2019/245).

The evaluation was derived from four key sources of data:

• Post-workshop feedback
• Quantitative Monitoring Customer Misbehaviour Incident Diaries across two time points (pre and post-training)
• Quantitative Questionnaires across two time points (pre and post-training)
• Qualitative Focus Groups (post-training)

A fifth potential source of evaluation data, namely, absenteeism and incidents reports extracted from organisational records, was not available at the time this report was printed).

The overall design of the evaluation is summarised in this diagram:

Pre-training Diaries

Monitoring Customer Misbehaviour Incident Diaries

- 2 weeks, all sites
- Measuring customer misbehaviour incidence and mood change across shifts

Pre-training Questionnaires

Employee Questionnaires

- All sites
- Measuring perceived customer misbehaviour, employee general wellbeing, wellbeing within the workplace, interpersonal style, responses to difficult customers, job-related impacts and demographics

Specialised Training

Respect & Resilience Workshops

- Intervention sites (2 x retail, 2 x fast food)
- All employees - Workshop 1 and 2
- Supervisors and managers additional - Workshop 3
- Each immediately followed by participants completing post-workshop feedback questionnaires

Post- training Diaries

Monitoring Customer Misbehaviour Incident Diaries

- 2 weeks, all sites
- Measuring customer misbehaviour incidence and mood change across shifts

Post-training Questionnaires

Employee Questionnaires

- All sites
- Measuring perceived customer misbehaviour, employee general wellbeing, wellbeing within the workplace, interpersonal style, responses to difficult customers, job-related impacts and demographics

Post-training Focus Groups

Program evaluation for workshop participants

- Semi-structured interviews with self-selected participants
- Impact of training within store, use of skills/techniques, recollection of training, feedback on training components, improvements, changes, final thoughts

4.2. Post-workshop feedback

4.2.1. Description

After each workshop, participants anonymously rated the workshops (on scales in which 1 = *not at all*, through to 5 = *a great deal*) on the following five dimensions:

	Not at all	A little	A medium amount	Quite a lot	A great deal
How much did you **enjoy** participating in these workshops					
How **interesting** did you find the content of the workshops?					
How **relevant** was the content to the customers you deal with in your job?					
Is the workshop content **useful** for you in the current work role?					
Overall, how **valuable** did you find these workshops?					

In addition, participants were asked to answer three open-ended questions:

- What were the best things about the workshops?
- What were the least enjoyable/interesting/relevant/valuable things about the workshops?
- Please suggest ways in which you think the workshops could be improved.

4.2.2. Feedback Completion

Workshop 1 and 2 evaluations were completed by 35 participants, ranging from 15 years of age to 61 years (average or mean (M) = 22.54 years, SD = 10.42), with a duration working within the retail/fast food sector ranging from 3 months to 45 years (M = 5 years 4 months, SD = 9 years 4 months).

25 Retail   **10** Fast Food

Workshop 3 evaluation was completed by 7 participants, ranging from 19 to 32 years of age (M = 22.71 years, SD = 4.39), and with a duration of working within the retail/fast food sector ranging from 3.5 years to 7.75 years (M = 5.8 years, SD = 1.5 years).

4.2.3. Results

Participants reported positive evaluations for all Workshops (1, 2 and 3), with all mean ratings above 4.5 (rated 1-5) on all dimensions (enjoyment, interest, relevance, usefulness and value). These evaluations were reported by all participants, with positive evaluations received regardless of participant age, gender and organisation.

	Workshop 1 and 2 Mean (SD)	Workshop 3 Mean (SD)
Enjoyment	4.93 (0.27)	4.27 (0.54)
Interest	4.86 (0.36)	4.57 (0.54)
Relevance	4.79 (0.43)	4.57 (0.54)
Value	4.71 (0.47)	4.86 (0.38)
Usefulness	4.93 (0.27)	4.71 (0.49)

The following feedback was provided by participants in response to the three above questions.

Prompt: What were the best things about the workshops?

Based on participants' responses three key themes were evident, with Workshop 1 and 2 participants indicating the best things about the workshops to include:

- Activities (with the role-plays and videos specifically mentioned)
- Learning (content, knowledge, skills and training being relevant and helpful)
- Group interaction

These themes, and the qualitative responses gathered, provide support for the usefulness of the workshops for attendees. They also highlight the importance of the workshop design, especially, the activities and the facilitated group interaction components.

Similar to Workshop 1 and 2 evaluations, participants reported that Workshop 3 provided valuable learning experiences. They also commented that they felt empowered due to the workshops, with one participant reporting: *"our voices and opinions felt valuable and as if they can make a difference".*

Verbatim participant responses to the question about the best aspects of the workshops are reproduced below:

Workshops 1 and 2
Activities. Role play
All the knowledge and skills, training and information, role-plays
Content is very relevant and helpful to deal with angry rude customers and controlling ourselves
Engaging, fun. Safe space, relaxed. Group discussion
Gave a great insight into different ways of coping with customers. How to adapt to each customer and to place myself in the customer's shoes. I will take on positive thinking and catching my thoughts and find solutions to problems in a positive manner
Interacting with others. Learning new ways to deal with customers
Learning techniques. Understanding people's emotions
Learning. Activities. interactions
Mixing of stores. Role-play. Interaction of psychologists. The work placed into the research
Relatable content. Learning new strategies. Cohesion between everyone. Affirmation of my own feelings and knowledge

Workshops 1 and 2 (cont.)

Role playing. Pooling thoughts

Role playing. Swapping seats. Filling out surveys. Interacting with the videos

Some great lessons e.g. catching your negative thought, communication skills, happy place etc. The presenters were very professional, welcoming etc.

They clearly stated the problems we've encountered, provide solutions and helped us to know what's really we need to admit? If it's part of our job or not? They let us know those answers

Workshop 3

Being very interactive, understanding how to deal with customers and when to take over from the front liners

Getting strategies to deal with employees and coping mechanisms

It was great to be able to talk about what it's like being a supervisor in this industry with people who know what it's like. It was also great to know that what I have been doing is the best thing to do which has validated me as a manager

Learning different strategies, how to cope. Hearing others experiences and how they've dealt with it. I enjoyed that it was more interactive rather than classroom type

Open discussion where able to talk through different experience and learn from each other

That our voices and opinions felt valuable and as if they can make a difference

Understanding the major common issues in the workplace and trying to come up with the best solutions to that. Knowing the importance of individual's working

Prompt: What were the least enjoyable/interesting/relevant/valuable things about the workshops?

Participants' responses provided very few negative appraisals of the workshops, with only one participant indicating the heavy amount of content to be least favourable from Workshops 1 and 2. A participant from Workshop 3 provided some insight regarding employee attitudes, demonstrating the need for well-trained presenters and facilitators to overcome personality barriers and maintain engagement during sessions.

Participant responses to the question about the least enjoyable/interesting/relevant/valuable aspects of the workshops are presented here:

Workshops 1 and 2

Everything was enjoyable

Ice breaker. Had to wake up early

It was amazing

N/A

Nothing really

Nothing that I could find

The heavy amount of content

Waking early

Workshop 3
I felt all where enjoyable and I was able to learn from the workshop
Nothing
Nothing comes to mind, the course was good, however some of the team members' attitudes from the stores weren't great but nothing you can do to help that. Overall very good course
Nothing it was all interesting and relevant
Nothing that I can find. keep up the good work

Prompt: Please suggest ways you think the workshops could be improved.

Very few suggestions for improvements were made by participants for the first two workshops. Participants in the final workshop did not indicate any suggestions for improving Workshop 3, with the exception of one participant indicating the workshops could be improved by *allocating more time*.

Participant suggestions regarding ways to improve the workshops included the following:

Workshops 1 and 2
Honestly, it was perfect. Thanks
I think it's not relevant, but in Australia, culturally diverse environment is really important thing that could affect the behaviours of employees
More activities. More videos
No suggestions, this was a great experience overall
Nothing
Nothing much it was really fun
Perfect
Time scheduling

4.3. Monitoring Customer Misbehaviour Incident Diaries

4.3.1. Description

All sites were asked to have those frontline employees who were participating in the training workshops to complete customer misbehaviour incident diaries (Refer to Appendix C for participant details). Prior to training all frontline employees across four sites were allocated two 7 day diaries which were completed on a daily basis following any incidents. This process was administered over 14 days. On completion of training the same process was repeated for 14 days. The diaries were to be completed each day the employee worked during two data collection periods. Diary completion entailed employees recording (1) every instance of four types of customer misbehaviour they experienced, and (2) their mood at the start and at the end of each work shift, as shown below:

Construct	Measurement
Customer misbehaviour	**Indicate the number of customers within a shift that were:**

1 — Rude, but not Aggressive: E.g. Making sarcastic comments; huffing or eye-rolling; speaking over you.

3 — Verbally Aggressive: E.g. Threatening or trying to intimidate you - making you feel at risk or harm.

2 — Verbally Abusive: E.g. Swearing or shouting at you; calling you names.

4 — Physically Agressive E.g. Standing over you; throwing something at you; shaking their fist at you.

Mood

Indicate Mood:
- Start of shift
- End of shift

1	2	3	4	5
Very Happy	Happy	Neutral	Sad	Very Sad

4.3.2. Results

Prior to Training: What are our frontline employees facing?

Summing across all four sites, in one of the two single weeks in which data was collected (2-3 weeks prior to the training), the following was reported by employees who completed the pre intervention diaries.

- 256 Customer Misbehaviour Incidents in total were reported
- 240 of these were customer incivility incidents, 13 were of verbal abuse, and 3 were of verbal aggression
- No physical aggression incidents were reported
- The maximum number of incidents of incivility reported by a single employee in one shift was 21

Participants were also asked to rate their mood prior to commencing, and on completion of their shift. Data collected for participants' mood indicated a significant relationship between recorded number of customer misbehaviour incidents and mood change. This means that the more rude incidents employees experienced, the more their mood changed over their shift duration. Further analysis identified that employees' moods worsened as the number of incidents increased.

Let's put this into real terms

- In this particular pre-training week, each frontline employee was exposed to on average 5 (M = 4.92) customer misbehaviour incidents per week
- On this basis, each frontline employee would be exposed to on average 260 customer misbehaviour incidents per year

Assuming an average of 15 frontline employees per store, and 510 retail and fast food stores in total for these organisations.

75	38,250	1, 989, 000
(5x15) incidents	incidents	incidents
(per week for all stores)	**(per week for all stores = 75 x 510 stores)**	**(per year across all stores = 38,250 x 52)**

*These figures refer *only* to personally experienced incidents, with vicarious exposure further increasing these figures. *For example,* this could be doubled if only one extra person witnessed each incident.

Pre and Post: Monitoring Customer Misbehaviour Incident Diaries: The Impact of Training

To investigate the change in customer misbehaviour incidents that were reported pre and post the training intervention, analyses were limited to just those employees who attended training workshops and who fully completed the diaries both prior to and after the workshops. For these participants, there was a significant reduction in customer misbehaviour and customer incivility incidents following training.

More specifically, a **47.75% reduction in customer misbehaviour** incidents was recorded.

In addition, following the training, over the duration of their working day, employees' moods changed less dramatically, and for the better. This may suggest that training assisted in minimising the impact of customer misbehaviour on the employees' moods, quite possibly as a result of experiencing less incidents.

4.4. Employee Questionnaire

4.4.1. Description

All frontline employees at all four intervention sites were asked to complete self-report paper and pencil questionnaires that investigated a range of constructs targeted by the Respect & Resilience Training Intervention including customer misbehaviour, job-related impacts, and general wellbeing. See the next figure where the key variables measured in this questionnaire are presented. Refer to Appendix D for participant details.

Model Underlying Respect & Resilience Questionaire
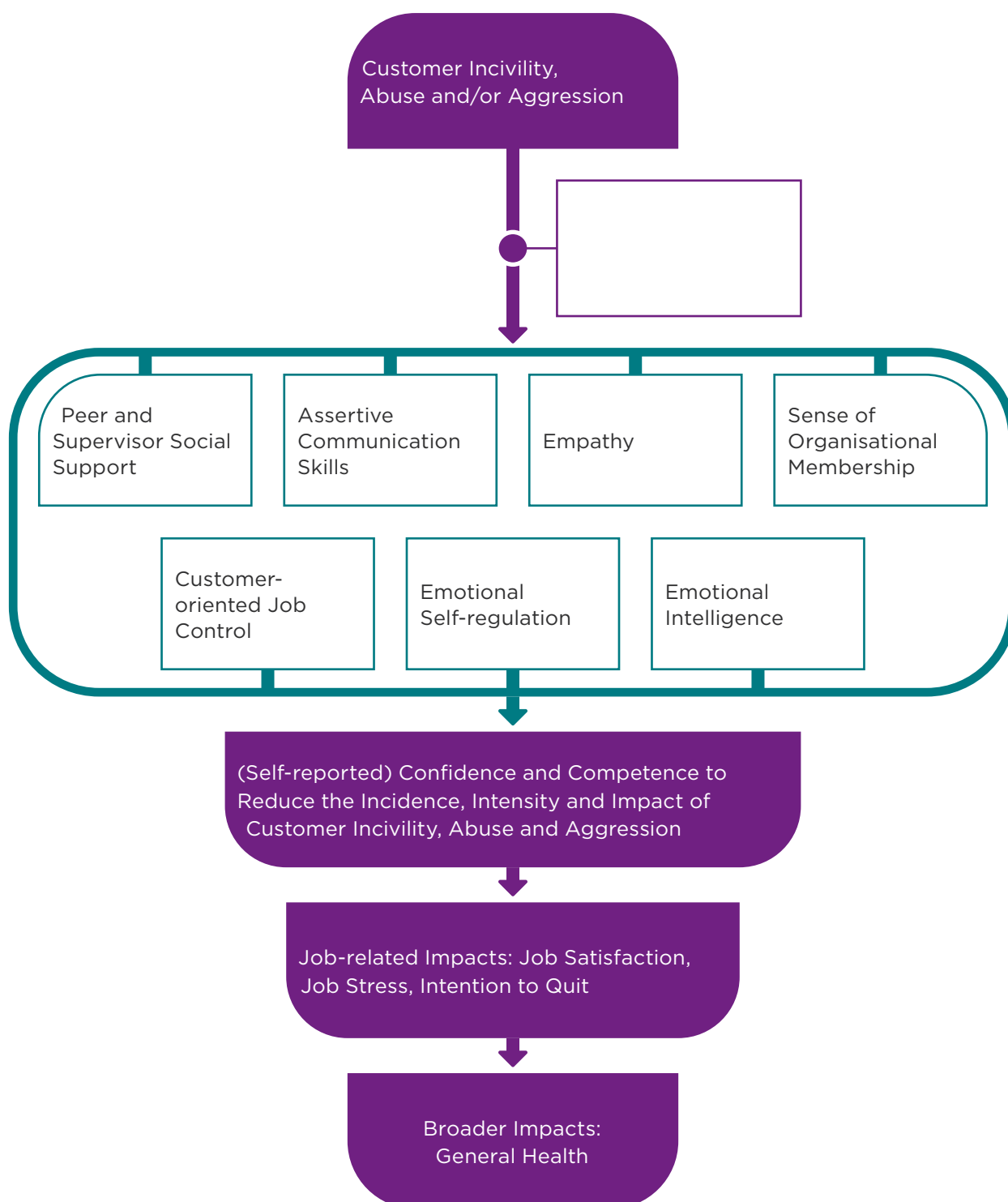
To measure these constructs, a suite of 16 established, reliable, valid, multi-item scales were selected from the occupational health and related literature, and then adapted to the customer misbehaviour context. In addition, questionnaire items were designed especially for this study to measure employees' emotional reactions to, and emotional and cognitive appraisals of, their performance in dealing with customer misbehaviour. Details of the scales used are shown in Appendix E, and complete references can be found in Appendix F.

Questionnaire Completion

Questionnaires were distributed prior to commencement of the intervention. One month after completing the intervention program, all participating staff were issued a post-training questionnaire that contained the same items as in the initial questionnaire.

4.4.2. Results

Analyses of the responses to the questionnaires that were completed before and after training revealed statistically significant changes in the expected (positive) direction in the average responses to four of the 16 scales:

- Customer incivility
- Customer abuse
- Employee empathy
- Employee assertion.

Positive changes, albeit non-significant ones, were also observed in relation to:

- Customer aggression
- Job satisfaction
- Job stress
- Cognitive re-appraisal coping
- Emotional suppression coping
- General health.

The failure in the case of these variables to achieve improvement that were large enough to reach statistical significance can be attributed in part to:

(1) The small sample size

(2) The myriad of other factors, some of which are highly stable and resistant to change, that influence these outcomes.

Small changes in a negative direction were evident in response to five other scales. None of these changes were large enough to be statistically significant, although there was a notable trend for participants to report reduced levels of supervisor support after training, than was the case prior to training. There was no change between pre- and post-training in participants' intention to quit. Refer to Appendix G for a summary of all results from the employee questionnaires. Below, we highlight those variables that changed significantly from pre- to post-training.

4.4.2.1. Customer Misbehaviour

Similar to the reduction in customer misbehaviour reported by participants when completing the incident diaries, the questionnaires also showed a statistically significant reduction in customer incivility and abuse following training, as can be seen below.

Customer Incivility

Employees reported experiencing less incivility from customers following training compared to pre-training.

Customer Abuse

Employees reported experiencing less customer related social stressors following training.
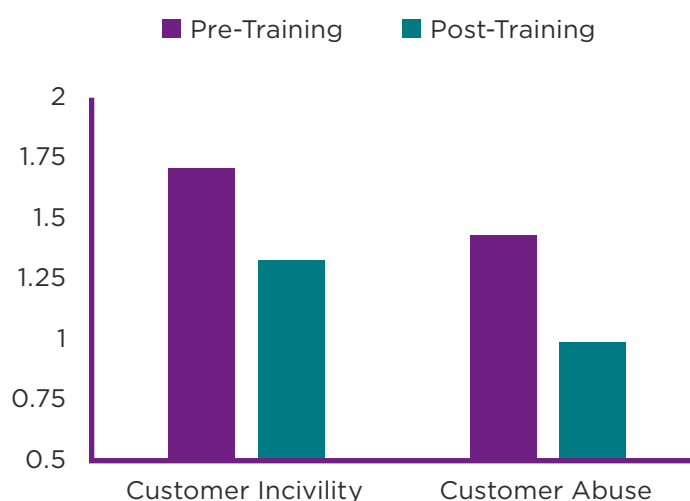
4.4.2.2. Empathy

The questionnaire included measures of total empathy, plus two more specific aspects of empathy: perspective taking, and emotional contagion. Following training, results demonstrate an increase in all three aspects of empathy. These concepts were integral to the workshop training and are suggested to be key mechanisms for decreasing the escalation cycle of customer misbehaviour.

Training introduced the concept of emotional contagion, making participants more aware of this phenomenon. The post-training increase in scores on the emotional contagion scale are likely to reflect this greater awareness of the concept, rather than reflecting an increased likelihood that participants' service performance would be adversely affected by instances of inappropriate emotional contagion within service interactions. Refer to the figure below:

Total Empathy

Employees reported higher empathy for customers following training compared to beforehand.

Empathy-Perspective Taking

Employees reported increased ability to take on the perspective of customers following training.

Empathy-Emotional Contagion

Employees reported increased emotional contagion following training.
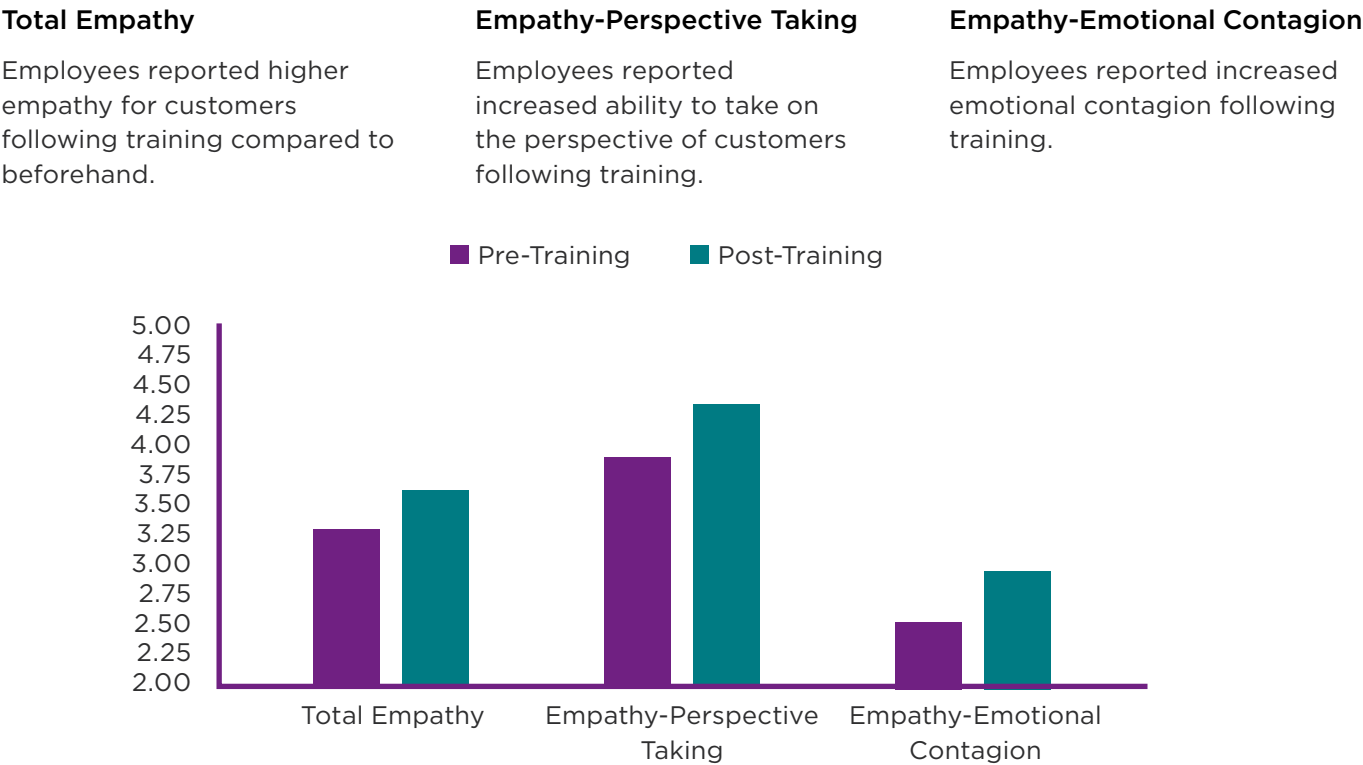
4.4.2.3. Assertion

Following training, participants reported being assertive more often at work (e.g., initiating a conversation with a customer), see figure below:
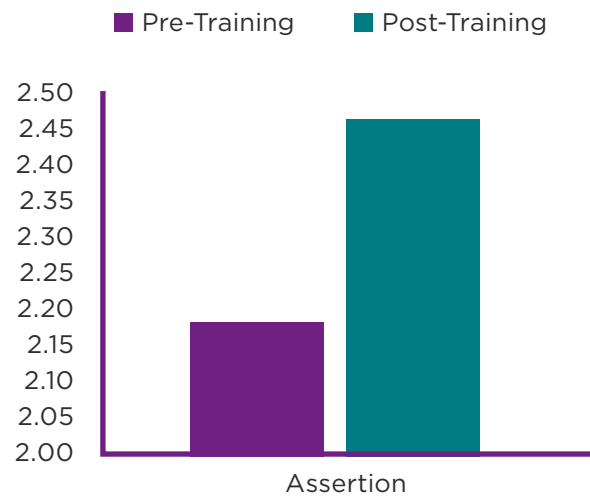
4.5. Focus group, interviews, and testimonial responses

4.5.1. Description

Workshop participants were asked to indicate their interest in participating in focus groups to provide feedback on training and the results of training within store. Individuals indicating their interest participated in 30-minute semi-structured interviews regarding:

- Their subjective experience of the impact of training within the store
- The aspects of training they had personally used following the workshops
- Evaluation of the program; what was effective, what could be improved/changed, and if they would recommend the program to others.

Testimonial responses were also provided by participants freely, with participants asked to indicate how they felt training had impacted them.

One in-person focus group was conducted with workshop participants, five weeks after the completion of the Respect & Resilience Training Intervention. The focus group included a total of 8 participants (5 females, 3 males, aged between 15 and 30 years), ranging from customer service employees, to supervisors and a store manager. In addition, two individual (2 males) telephone interviews were completed with volunteering workshop participants. Both the focus group and telephone interviews were completed within 30 minutes, and were audio-recorded for later transcription and thematic analysis.

Testimonials were received from five workshop participants (3 females and 2 males) via text message correspondence, 7 weeks after the completion of the Respect & Resilience Training Intervention. These participants included supervisors and frontline employees.

4.5.2. Results

4.5.2.1. Focus group and interviews with individual employees

All interviews focused on the use of the training skills and techniques following training, any changes participants had noticed following training, and their recommendations for changing or improving the program. The following themes were identified following each prompt:

Prompt: Have you noticed any changes at work following the training?

customer misbehaviour. Participants commented that, post-training, there are fewer customer misbehaviour incidents, fewer complaints from customers, and fewer aggressive customers. As a consequence, supervisors/managers have to intervene less often.

knowledge and awareness. Participants reported greater knowledge and awareness regarding customer misbehaviour. More specifically, participants reported that they had previously thought of customer incivility as part of the job and the norm, and that following the workshops they had more knowledge that it is not acceptable and not part of the job.

skills to deal/manage service interactions and difficult customers. Participants reported less escalation within the service interaction, remaining calm, and not requiring supervisor intervention as often. In addition, participants reported greater knowledge of when to escalate to a supervisor/manager. Frontline employees also suggested that supervisors/ managers had improved in how they were dealing with situations by remaining calm, as well as being more ready to step in when required.

confidence. Participants reported that training had validated their knowledge and skills when dealing with customers, in addition to providing further skills and knowledge. This suggests that training affirmed for staff that their actions were correct and increased their self-efficacy. It was also suggested that following training there was greater frontline employee empowerment to handle the difficult customers, resulting in less supervisor/ manager involvement.

support. Participants reported a greater sense of support, with participants reporting a subjective feeling of being cared for, and "not alone". Changes in supervisor support were also suggested, with participants reporting supervisors to be using more active listening, showing more care and time given to staff. Frontline employees also reported greater consistency from supervisors across service interactions, and confidence in staff. Participants also reported feeling greater peer support. More specifically, participants reported increased personal interaction between colleagues, and that their fellow team members to be putting greater effort into interacting/ checking in. Participants also reported that they felt that their colleagues were quicker to provide back up during service interaction, and to be more observant during customer misbehaviour.

assertiveness. Participants reported feeling that staff were more assertive with customers following training. More specifically, they reported that they were more assertive when customers made unreasonable requests or requests inconsistent to policy. For example, prior to training when requests were made that were inconsistent with policy, staff were more likely to be passive to the customer requests and give the customer what they wanted. Whereas, following training, staff were more willing to say no, and be assertive during the service interaction.

Participants suggested that they felt they had been reacting differently following training, better able to cope with incidents, and that their whole team were better able to identify and classify customer misbehaviour as a result of training.

Prompt: What aspects of training can you easily recall?

- Discussion of the problem (customer misbehaviour) and how best to solve
- Importance of remaining calm and breaking the escalation cycle by awareness of own behaviour and responses
- 8 Tips to engage customers
- Perspective taking
- When to escalate to a supervisor/manager
- Assertiveness
- Non-verbal communication and expression of emotions
- Problem solving
- Debriefing

One theme that was also identified, while not related to a training segment was the importance of the workshop style on *team building*, especially the collective sharing and care that was evident from the in-person collaboration workshop design. With this point identified, further discussion followed, highlighting the felt importance of the in-person training.

> I: Do you think you would get the same level of team-building if the training was online?

> P: No. Definitely not. Just no, being there in person, listening to people. Just across the table from you saying the same thing that you've gone through just the other day or the other week, whatever. There's a catharsis to that and the real physical comraderie from that.

Prompt: What aspects of training have you used in store?

- Perspective taking – trying to understand the situation from the customers' perspective, and empathising with the situation
- Remaining calm – breaking escalation cycle and not catching emotions, being aware of own behaviours/responses and knowing when to step away
- Reading the situation – non-verbals and early warning signs and altering response to prevent escalation, and the best method of engagement

- Use of the 8 Tips – communication with customer and building relationship, using similarities and light humour to increase receptiveness of customer and provide a positive service interaction, use of active listening
- Debriefing (supervisor) – had to complete a debrief, made sure to give correct amount of time, support, care, checking-in and focusing on the staff member involved.

External to the training segments, the signs that were used as part of the Respect & Resilience Program were identified by staff as having a positive impact within the intervention site stores. The signs were seen as effective for the following reasons:

- Customers taking notice. Participants reported that the signs were increasing customer awareness and education. Customers commenting on the need for similar signs at their own place of work, demonstrating a positive association with signage, with no negative feedback provided to employees.
- Increasing customer empathy and conversation starter. Participants reported the signage to be a point of communication with customers. For example, one participant reported "I'm pretty sure some of the customers wouldn't really talk to us otherwise".
- Participants reporting experiencing less calling, clapping, clicking of fingers from customers. Participants suggested that customers may be realising these behaviours were inappropriate, and that the signs provided customers with a "reality check" of their behaviour.

Our people are people too. Please respect our Team so we can create a positive retail experience.

Abuse and violence will not be tolerated in this shop.
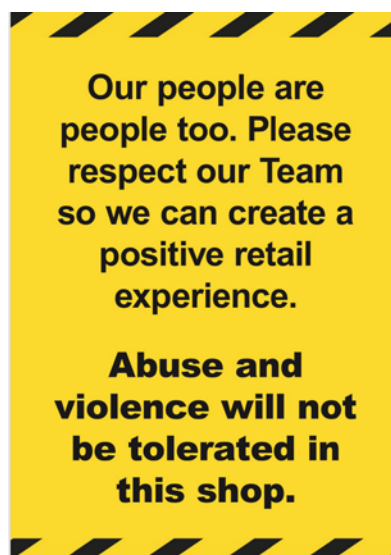
Prompt: What do you think was effective from the program?

- Validation of skills, ideas and experiences ("I trust myself to make the right decision now")
- Team building. Participants reported that training reinforced that they are not alone, and that customer misbehaviour is a shared problem. In addition, participants reported reduced feelings of isolation, and increased feelings of support
- In-person training at a new independent and safe location, creating equality across team members
- Learning that incivility was a part of aggression, and not just a part of the job
- Escalation cycle. Participants reported that having a structure to validate and further understand the service interaction to be effective and beneficial for de-escalation via early warning signs
- Perspective taking. Participants reported that thinking from the customers' point of view, empathising and then separating the situation from the staff personally assisted in reducing the impact of aggression
- Increasing awareness of customer misbehaviour, own behaviour and responses (i.e., non-verbals), and importance of focusing on early warning signs and possible triggers of customer misbehaviour in the service interaction and environment
- Use of 8 tips. Participants reported the 8 tips to be effective, with specific mention of the use of similarities and humour to create a positive service interaction
- Reducing the emotional impact of customer misbehaviour, mechanisms of coping
- The psychological side of training. Participants also reported the psychological research and studies presented were of interest, referring to their own interest to further understand others' behaviours.

Participants reported the program to be fun, with positive reviews for the videos and role-plays, and suggestions that these practical applications of skills to be helpful.

Prompt: What would you change about the program?

- Increase the realness of service interaction video scenarios. Participants reported that the use of incident reports, and breaking down the situation into steps would improve the program
- Increase customer and community awareness to change the norms and acceptance of customer misbehaviour
- Extraction of ice-breaker which separated friends, to allow for more comfortable conversation. This recommended change was opposed by some participants who suggested it was good to have people with different experiences for group discussions, with the group coming to the conclusion that having groups composed of half from each store would be the best option
- Improve the diaries, changing from paper and pen to electronic for immediate data collection.

One participant reported that they would not change a thing, and further referred to training as "comprehensive, thorough, inclusive and pleasantly presented".

Prompt: Would you recommend the program to others?

When asked if participants would recommend the program to others a resounding yes was heard from all participants. One participant went further to suggest the need for the program to be mandatory for the whole organisation and recommending the training for other service industries that require it desperately.

Participants also made suggestions for the creation of resources for staff to have access to, specifically at the register, to reinforce skills (e.g., 8 Tips posters). Participants also recommended the use of a refresher course to assist employees in retaining and maintaining the skills from the training workshops over time. Further discussion was had regarding how the program could be further delivered across stores, with participants suggested a train-the-trainer style program to increase program reach, followed by in-store delivery during staff meetings.

4.5.2.2. Testimonial Responses

Workshop participants were asked to provide feedback, if they were happy to do so, on their use of training within their store, and the impact that attending training had on them individually. The following testimonials were received by email or text messaging, six weeks after training.

As can be seen, the following aspects of training were identified as impactful by participants:

- Supervisor debriefing
- Non-verbal behaviour
- Interactions with customers
- Coping, de-escalation and forming relationships
- Active listening
- Assertiveness

Supervisor debriefing

"

Recently after me and another staff member completed our training there was an incident where a lady was trying to steal a shopping trolley full of items, but she was stopped by me as she tried to leave the store. I asked her if she was alright then tried to make out as if she was looking for someone. This same lady has in the past verbal abused the staff member. As the lady walked out again through the check-out, she threatened the staff member again and said she would be back with a group. 20 min later the lady had returned with a group of her friends. The staff member saw them and quickly made her way to the office to call security. The ladies started to swear and say "Where is she? Where is that bitch?" Shortly security arrived and escorted the ladies out. It turns out the group of ladies are banned from the centre. The staff member was extremely shaken by this incident and noticing this I began a debrief which I had just learnt from training. We talked about what had happened, why we thought it turned out that way and then to plan what would happen if it happens again.

The training we received was truly valuable and helped us through a difficult time.

Later the staff member admitted that doing the debrief helped her.

[How the participant thought they would have felt, if they had not attended training]

Knowing what can happen without a debrief and the negative effects an incident like this can have on a person. I think it would have been likely that she wouldn't have wanted to return to work. Plus, I would have felt helpless myself as I wouldn't know what to do.

"

Non-verbal behaviours

"

The biggest thing that's helped me is my body language

"

"

I didn't realise that sometimes it can come off in a negative way that might annoy someone already having a bad day. I think if I didn't do the training, I'd still be giving off negative body language to customers.

"

Interactions from customers

"

I've noticed a big difference in the way customers treat me at <my first retail job> and <my second retail job.> <My second retail> job needs to do this training.

"

Coping, de-escalation, and forming relationships

"

It's helped me a lot with how I feel and how what happens at work affects me outside. I've used the training with customers who seemed a little upset or not okay and their response has been very positive towards me. Sometimes just listening is all they need. Plus, they remember me next time they come in and always have a happy reaction when they see me. This had also made me feel happy. Without the training I probably wouldn't have bothered getting to know them.

"

Forming relationships and active listening

"

I've found the training really helps when I'm on the checkouts I always ask them how was their day and be more personable with them when I am helping them. Before the training I would just say hi how are you but not actually listen. Customers have been very nice to me since I used the training.

"

Assertiveness, while maintaining positive customer service

"

I was helping a customer look for certain products. Every time I found it, she'd asked another question. 20min I was helping this customer and I knew I had a lot of work to complete. So, I used my training and said I'm sorry I've got boxes on the ground I need to attend to I can't neglect them as it's a safety risk to others…

The lady said, " oh of course you do those", and thanked me for my help. If I didn't say that I could see myself spending another 20min with her! If it wasn't for the training, I wouldn't have known what to do and just kept helping her.

"

4.6. Supervisor and Manager Insights

An additional outcome of the Respect & Resilience Training Intervention was insights provided by supervisors and store managers attending workshop 3 regarding their perspectives of customer misbehaviour.

During the supervisor workshops, supervisors and managers were asked to provide ground level insight into the problem of customer misbehaviour. The feedback provided was grouped into the following categories:

Policy	Store environment	Organisational climate	Enforcement of consequences for customer misbehaviour	HR
• Inconsistent policies • Specials and promotions • Refunds • Receipt keeping	• Customer visibility and surveillance • Store layout • Signage • Equipment and store refurbishment	• Staff recognition/ appreciation • Staff empowerment • Support and relationships	• Banning logistics • Customer complaint types	• Training • Staffing • Meetings

In addition, the supervisor and manager feedback identified changes that their stores had implemented, which, they believe, was reducing the impact of some customer misbehaviours.

Policy

When asked what policies could be contributing to customer misbehaviour, the following themes were identified, with a lot of the suggestions relating to educating the customer:

- *Inconsistent policies* across stores within the industry, and across stores within the organisation due to manager discretion, leading to incorrect customer expectations and resulting frustration. This suggests the need for more consistent and well-defined policies within and across organisations to minimise potential customer frustrations.

- *Specials and promotions*, with the suggestion to increase print size of terms and conditions to provide customers with more knowledge, preventing customer frustration and creating more reasonable customer expectations based on these terms and conditions.

- *Refunds*. Need for further customer awareness/ education around the procedure of refunds. Specifically, refunds without receipts were suggested to be a point of contention within the service interaction, and were becoming a more frequent occurrence with customers now asked if they would like a receipt. Key points of contention related to the time for processing a refund without a receipt, bank statements not being able to identify item price, and reduced prices at time of refund. Identifying the need for further customer education regarding policy, to minimise frustration, and point of sale (POS) improvements to assist the processing and recall of purchases. In addition, the cut-off for escalation of refunds was addressed, with participants suggesting a $10 cut-off was too low, and needing to be increased.

- *Receipt keeping*. The process of re-printing, recording codes and maintaining a paper audit was also suggested to cause time delays, leading to customer frustration.

Environment

The feedback highlighted some aspects of the environment that could be contributing to customer misbehaviour:

- Visibility and surveillance
- Store layout
- Signage
- Equipment and refurbishments

A major element was *customer visibility*, with the presence of cluttered and highly stacked stores limiting visibility. In addition, a need for greater surveillance was also discussed. *Limited staffing* was identified as a concern as it left staff isolated and alone when an incident occurs, with participants making suggestions for push-to-talk devices and increased store surveillance. Monitors within aisles was also suggested as a means to increase customers' perception of being watched and visible, thereby deterring customer misbehaviour.

Store layout and signage was also addressed, including

- The width of aisles noted as causing customer frustration
- Increasing customer accessibility of products, by sorting aisles by products, including products on the aisle end, and clearly identifying products within aisles
- Store supervisors/managers further communicated the need for signage for customers who did not speak English as their first language, reporting that miscommunication due to language barriers was a common cause of complaints and misbehaviour
- The use of voice-overs within stores was also recommended, with different languages used to provide educative messages to customers.

Problems with *equipment and lack of store refurbishments* were also highlighted as potential problems within the service interaction. More specifically, equipment malfunctioning was reported as impacting service (e.g., lifts breaking and impacting stock availability), and lack of store updates/renovations were reported as increasing customer discomfort associated with seating areas within the fast food organisation.

Within the retail organisation, the state of the store was reported as a source of customer dissatisfaction, with examples drawn from the antiquated shelving type, which collects dust, and limited rostered hours for the cleaning of shelving.

The environmental aspects identified were mirrored to the Respect & Resilience Environmental Checklist, with supervisors/managers supporting the use of this checklist and suggesting there is a current need to clearly and concisely report the state of their store environments to management.

Organisational Climate

Throughout the supervisor workshop, the culture/climate of the stores was discussed, with a focus on:

- Staff recognition/appreciation
- Staff empowerment
- Support
- Debriefing

Staff recognition/appreciation was reported to be currently lacking within participants' stores. Supervisors/managers discussed the importance of staff recognition generally and as a means of improving organisational climate.

The current within store recognition programs were viewed as negatively impacting store profit, causing store managers to juggle between the competing goals of maintaining profits (which is looked upon favourably by the organisation), and spending money to increase morale (which may detract from profits). Discussion suggested that managers often elected to maintain profit, and therefore reassessment of the existing programs may be required to encourage managers to invest in store morale. Suggestions to provide rewards to staff for work above and beyond their routine duties were made, as were methods to increase recognition of staff.

Staff empowerment was discussed by supervisors/ managers, suggesting scaffolding to be used within store to best empower staff to complete tasks as their abilities developed. Suggestions were raised to further emphasise staff duties and titles to acknowledge abilities and provide recognition. Empowerment outside of the store, referring to area managers and above, was a point for discussion, with some store managers feeling micro-managed, which they felt was detrimental for their own store performance. Suggestions were also raised for middle and high management to try to understand store situations further, including providing more feedback and listening to the ground level store staff to develop further insight.

Staff relationships were also addressed, with supervisors suggesting that higher management be discouraged from viewing staff friendships as a barrier to work, especially following promotion. The supervisors/managers suggested that friendships between newly promoted supervisors and team members actually facilitate effective and productive work.

The *support* provided by managers was highlighted as impactful on store culture. More specifically, varying levels of managerial support were highlighted, with some attendees reporting experiencing micromanagement, which was suggested to limit supervisors' authority and negatively influence the store culture. Other issues raised, by a minority of attendees, included inconsistency in managerial styles and consequences, at times making it difficult to work with specific managers.

While the supervisors and managers provided support for the use of a buddy system and debriefing within store, current barriers were identified. Specifically, rostering was viewed as preventing buddy system utilisation due to understaffing. Understaffing was also a reported barrier for debriefing, as were time constraints due to workload, and a current lack of policy or procedures pertaining to debriefing.

Enforcement of consequences

The supervisor workshop highlighted policies and procedures relating to consequences for customer misbehaviour within the two organisations, however feedback suggested limited utilisation within store. More specifically, the structured banning/do not serve registers were rarely used, and the enforcement of banning was also suggested as a point for further revision. The following recommendations were made in relation to banning of misbehaving customers:

- Banning to be enforced upon entry, due to difficulties when customers had entered the store and delays in security/police attendance.
- Unspoken policy of "less hassle to just give", providing no consequences and further reinforcement of bad behaviour.

The type of customer most commonly reported by supervisors was dubious complainers (those who genuinely, although erroneously, think they are in the right). The prevalence of this type of difficult customer demonstrates the importance of educating the customer. Deceitful complainers were also reported, with repeat offenders' details needing to be recorded in full detail.

Human Resources

Current organisation training was discussed throughout the workshop, with the following feedback provided:

- Online training programs were not realistic, and tended to sugar coat the problem of customer misbehaviour
- Difficult/aggressive customer and conflict resolution training is lacking
- Training of registers was limited, with trainees only exposed to a limited number of transaction types. Suggestions were offered to expand the training of new employees in different transaction modes and to provide them with a checklist to ensure they are exposed to all transaction types.

Further feedback reported understaffing was a common cause of customer frustration, with a need for more team hours and staff rostered on to reduce customer service delays and increase power of teams both to deal with problematic situations with customers and to ensure completion of store maintenance.

Supervisors also raised concerns with how the store status was currently being registered, with figures not a true representation of busy-ness status, and not adequately factoring in the number of trainees present.

Also highlighted were the needs for more frequent meetings, greater encouragement of staff attendance, and a fuller agenda, beyond safety and company reports.

Minimising impact

Throughout the feedback sessions, discussion between stores highlighted a ground-level network established by the supervisors/managers to provide nearby stores a "heads up" regarding deceitful or difficult customers. This communication between stores, while not policy, was suggested to assist in reducing the impact of deceitful/habitually difficult customers, preparing the employees for specific customers and their habitual behaviours.
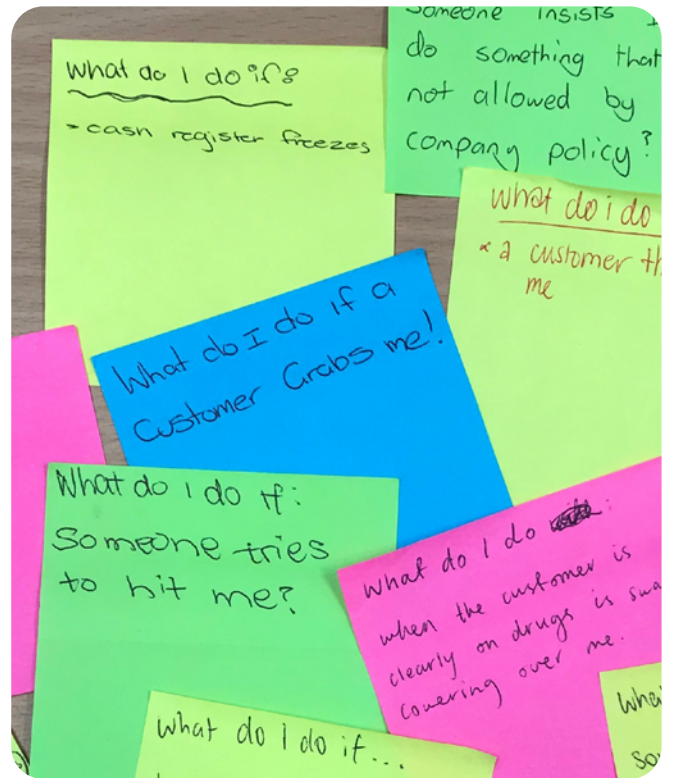
What do I do if?

Supervisor responses

As a part of the supervisor/manager workshop, supervisors were asked to respond to their staff's "What do I do if" scenarios/questions. These scenarios were reported by frontline employees within Workshop 2 as either situations that they have been in and had not known how to respond or situations that if presented with they were unsure on the correct procedure. A total of 80 scenarios were recorded, all of which fell under the following themes:

- Physical contact from a customer, including being grabbed, a colleague being grabbed, being spit at or punched
- Customer under the influence of alcohol
- Customer has a weapon
- Aggressive customer regarding refund
- Customer throwing products around the store
- A customer not acknowledging employee as a supervisor
- Customer caught stealing
- A customer having a good reason to bypass store policy
- Customer jumping the counter
- Manager taking too long to come to provide assistance (i.e., refund)
- Customer over-sharing of personal information

- Customer making accusations, including not receiving correct change
- Customer short-changed by minor amount (5c-$1)
- Stealing customer sees employee outside of work
- Emergency situations within store location (e.g., someone passed out in car in parking lot or customer having allergic reaction)
- Customer cannot speak English
- A hold-up
- Customer querying employee requests
- Customer refusing to back down
- Refund seems unworthy
- Customer wanting money back
- Equipment failures.

This segment of the workshop revealed two important insights:

- Supervisors/managers did not have a clear or ready response for a large number of the scenarios presented.
- There was a disconnect between the supervisor/manager and staff knowledge, with supervisors/managers assuming staff already possessed knowledge relevant to a large number of scenarios.

These responses highlighted the need for further policy and procedural training, and clearer guidelines for both supervisors and frontline employees. The number and wide array of scenarios suggested by employees also highlighted the need for employees to receive additional training as to the procedures to follow in these circumstances, so that they are prepared and able to respond in a manner that is consistent with company policy.

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1. Summary of Main Findings

This project was the first known to investigate the frequency of aggression on a continuum, with findings showing on average our frontline employees experience five incidents of customer misbehaviour per week, with some employees experiencing over 20 incidents per shift. These findings demonstrate how pervasive this societal problem is. Results further demonstrated the impact of these incidents on employee mood, highlighting its impact for those on the frontline of our service industries.

Both the quantitative and qualitative results suggest that the Respect & Resilience workshops were advantageous for reducing customer misbehaviour and for building employee skills and resilience. Results demonstrate a significant reduction in total customer misbehaviour incidents, and in customer incivility incidents. These findings were shown in both the diary and questionnaire results, and were further supported by the qualitative findings, with frontline employees reporting fewer customer incidents following training than beforehand. In addition, the questionnaire results demonstrated a significant reduction in customer abuse perceived by employees following training.

The qualitative findings highlight a possible reason for the decrease in customer misbehaviour incidents, with employees after training reporting feeling more capable, confident, and having greater knowledge, awareness and skills, including an increased ability to be assertive in the service interaction. These improvements may have provided employees with mechanisms for early detection of looming customer misbehaviour and may thereby have assisted employees in the de-escalation of this misbehaviour. These findings were further supported by quantitative changes from pre- to post- training.

Based on the changes in questionnaire data, it seems likely that each of the following made a positive impact on customer misbehaviour:

- Increased employee assertion in dealing with difficult customers
- Increased employee empathy for the concerns expressed by customers
- Increased employee perspective taking when interacting with customers
- Increased likelihood of understanding and taking on the emotions felt by customers (employee emotional contagion).

Findings further demonstrate that the program was well-received by participants, with workshop evaluations and focus group responses demonstrating the benefits of the program. Responses also suggested that the in-person format of the program was integral to its success, with participants anticipating that online training would not be as beneficial. Findings also suggest support for the additional program components in increasing customer awareness. Specifically, the display of signage of the organisations' "zero tolerance" of customer misbehaviour was highlighted as increasing customer awareness of the issue, with multiple employees reporting it to be a key conversation starter and positively evaluated by community members.

To be noted, while significant improvements in the above mentioned were found, no change from pre- to post- training was evident in relation to several other variables (i.e., organisational belonging, supervisor support, emotional intelligence, cognitive appraisal, job satisfaction and stress; refer to Appendix G). It is possible that these measures require further time to demonstrate change, with the current program being run over a period of two months, and some measures representing trait constructs which may be resistant to immediate change. The small, albeit not statistically significant, decline in perceived supervisor support over the duration of the training intervention is especially noteworthy: perhaps the program alerted participants to the important role potentially played by supervisors in reducing the customer misbehaviour problem, and thereby raised employee expectations in this regard.

It is also possible that there were further barriers preventing change in several variables, such as a culture in some stores and a not entirely supported stance taken by some supervisors/managers. These findings provide areas for future investigation and development, and suggest the need for organisational culture audits prior to implementing the intervention.

5.2. Roundtable Event Insights

The 2019 icare roundtable event "Respect & Resilience in Retail" held on the 11th September, was attended by employers, employees, and industry bodies (i.e., the National Retail Association) from across the retail industry. The event focused on the results of the Respect & Resilience Program, providing details of the development, design and outcomes of the program. In addition, two break-out sessions were conducted, the first addressing scaling and "next steps", and the second collectively addressed organisational policies and how they may be improved to better protect frontline employees. Major outcomes were as follows.

Scaling and Next Steps
Prompt: What do you need to utilise this training in your workplace?

Three main themes were extracted from attendees' responses:

| 1. Organisational Commitment | 2. Financial Considerations | 3. Flexibility in Program Design |

1. The first emergent theme, **organisational commitment**, highlighted the need for managerial support to endorse, adhere to and engage in both the implementation of the training and the follow-up of customers who display aggressive or abusive behaviours to frontline employees. Consistent with this recommendation, attendees repeatedly asserted that management buy-in is critical for successful implementation of the training within the workplace.

2. **Financial considerations** emerged as a prominent theme among attendees, with three key concerns raised. Firstly, from the organisation point of view, attendees acknowledged that implementation of the training for frontline workers was dependent on the availability of financial resources. Secondly, attendees questioned whether they had sufficient staff to cover shifts and allow for time offsite whilst their staff were attending training sessions. Thirdly, a small number of attendees raised potential subsidies (e.g., reduced insurance premiums), and/or assistance (e.g., government).

3. The final emergent theme addressed the desirability of building greater **flexibility into the design of the program** so that employers have a range of options in the administration and application of the program. Many recorded a desire to have more options for training, referring to cost effectiveness and versatility of the program. This included shorter training sessions and/or reduced content (e.g., a reduction from 8 hours across two sessions to one session of 4 hours). Others reported wanting to implement their own training with a train-the-trainer option, and some replied that they would like an online option (e.g., for remote and outlets with low staffing).

Prompt: What barriers exist in your workplaces which would impact the effectiveness of the training?

The second question produced an array of responses from attendees, with four major themes identified:

1. Organisational Culture

2. Human Resources

3. Financial Burden

4. Scalability

1. Attendees recognised that **organisational culture** was pivotal to the success of the training, identifying multiple factors within the organisational culture that may pose barriers to the effectiveness of the training. These factors included lack of ownership and buy-in from management, and the need for organisations to address policies and procedures that allow for accurate incident reporting, as well as amended policies and procedures, to reinforce what is acceptable customer behaviour for frontline employees. It was noted that these changes would need to be reflected in the values and behaviours within the organisation, and integrated into everyday practice.

2. **Human resources** was identified as a potential barrier to training effectiveness. More specifically, two sub-themes emerged: recruitment and staffing. Recruitment of the right people was an important point of discussion. Concerns were raised regarding the ability of organisations to hire frontline employees with the emotional intelligence to deal with the public. Emotional intelligence was also raised as a defining feature for facilitators of the program to possess, especially if organisations were to utilise a train-the-trainer format to train their own staff. Further barriers to the effectiveness of the training were reported in relation to staffing. More specifically, with high turnover evident within the industry, participants reported turnover to be a barrier to implementing training within their organisations. In addition, the ability to take staff off the floor, and off-site for training, while also maintaining sufficient onsite staffing, was raised as a barrier, with staff availability for training limited.

3. The third theme raised as a barrier related to the **financial burden** imposed by the training, specifically additional wages for employees to attend training, the cost of the training program, and high staff turnover limiting organisational willingness to invest in employee training.

4. The final identified theme related to the practicalities surrounding **scalability** of the training. This incorporated the need for care to be taken to ensure consistency of training quality, regardless of geographical location, business size or cultural diversity. These points further highlighted attendees' concerns regarding the capacity of the training to maximise industry reach.

Prompt: How could we overcome those barriers?

The final question prompted attendees to indicate how to overcome the barriers previously identified. This resulted in a diverse range of suggestions and five main themes emerged:

1. Engagement	**2. Accreditation**	**3. Scalability**

4. Funding and Incentives	**5. Industry Collaboration**

1. **Engagement** with the program from both management and employees was identified as a key element to successful implementation of training. The need to ensure organisational culture and willingness to learn new skills was noted by many as an important precursor prior to commencing any training or intervention program. In addition, suggestions were made for the continued communication with trainees prior to the implementation of training as necessary to increase program engagement. Raising community awareness was also identified as a mechanism to overcome barriers, with engagement and understanding from the community as to the importance of the customer misbehaviour issue suggested to be critical for the continued wellbeing of retail workers and their families.

2. Many attendees felt that **accreditation** of the training would increase its value and appeal. The program could then be expanded to include alternative organisations such as Registered Training Organisations (RTO) and Vocational Education Training (VET). This would allow training to encompass those yet to enter the workforce (e.g., students), and those looking to improve their skills outside of their employer. Offering multiple pathways to educate potential retail workers would allow for growing collaboration across industries and increased awareness of the issue. Attendees proposed that promoting programs aimed at reducing customer misbehaviour and improving staff safety and wellbeing should be introduced as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for management and supervisors. Additional management KPIs could relate to ongoing workplace utilisation of the knowledge and skills learned in the training.

3. The ability to provide employees with an alternative accredited pathway, led to the next theme which centred on the **scaling** of the program, with suggestions relating to the need for variety and flexibility in delivery. This included suggestions such as providing employees with online alternatives (e.g., e-learning and application software), as well as acting as a host for resources and refresher materials (e.g., website). Industry specific training packages were also recommended to allow for the unique environmental and customer variables relevant to each outlet (e.g., fast food versus supermarket, rural versus city). Employers also noted they would like the flexibility to offer the training in a specialised workshop, to have it modularised and/or included in employee induction, as well as in a train-the-trainer format for larger organisations.

4. Issues of **funding and incentives** were also raised. Many employers recognised the benefits of implementing the training for their frontline employees but were concerned with the financial strain this may have on their organisations. To combat this, many suggested that a scheme that provided recognition of their efforts to protect their staff was compensated with either a reduction in insurance premiums or a form of government subsidy.

5. The need to continue with the **industry collaborative** approach was highlighted. Suggestions pertaining to collaboration included transparency in reporting incidents, creating a central data point to establish industry norms, and introduction of a follow-up system to permit continued monitoring of incidents following training programs. It was further suggested that the gathering of key industry organisations, continue so that insight, information and experiences can be shared. This would help ensure that research and progress in this area will continue to guide best practice. From an industry perspective, collaboration with other key stakeholders such as SDA and SafeWork Australia were identified as pivotal to legislation and industry workplace health and safety standards, and that would ensure the introduction and maintenance of strong guidelines and policies to address the issue.

Summary

Regardless of the question asked, when discussing the scalability of, and next steps for, the program, attendees focused on the following key areas:

- Organisational culture, including commitment and engagement
- Financial consideration, including cost, resources, funding and incentives
- Program design, including flexibility, scalability and accreditation
- Human resources, including staffing and recruitment.

Policy

The second breakout group assigned a policy-themed topic to each table. These themes had previously been highlighted in the Respect & Resilience Supervisor Training workshop as being possible causes of customer misbehaviour. The following section provides a summary of the discussion that results from each of the policy prompts.

Prompt: Customer Complaints

The discussion regarding customer complaints identified multiple pathways to increase understanding, and improve responding to customer complaints. The solutions focused on a bottom-up approach which included talking to frontline workers for insights on how to best address the issue from their perspective. More broadly, suggestions included empowering team members with more decision-making power to resolve the customer complaints. Educating staff on company policy was a suggested way to provide them with a deeper understanding of the motivating factors and decisions underlying policies. An example provided was favouring the customer leaving the store, over arguing and upsetting the frontline employee as well as the customer. A complaint-specific training program was also recommended as a way to counteract the increased stress angry customers can cause. Last, compilation of advice and commonly encountered scenarios was suggested to be potentially useful as a resource to allow retail workers to hear from others regarding strategies and tips for dealing with customer aggression that arises when handling complaints.

Prompt: Returns and Refunds

When addressing returns and refunds, the overarching message was that policy should be clearly defined and communicated to all staff members. In addition, return policies should be clearly displayed for consumers. However, attendees stated that this was only half of the solution. Adhering to policies to satisfy customer needs and defaulting to the "customer is always right" mentality was also raised. More specifically, traditional compliance to customer demands was suggested to create an inconsistency in messaging, often resulting in the frontline employee receiving further abuse and feeling disempowered. This also risked creating inappropriate customer expectations for the future, thereby reinforcing their misbehaviours. Along this line of discussion, attendees suggested that, if senior staff felt an exception from policy was warranted, the reasons and isolation of this decision should be made clear to the consumer so that future behaviours will be deterred, and the retail worker should also be informed as to why the exception was made.

A further area that could be improved within the customer returns and refunds domain centred on environmental factors such as reducing wait times (e.g., availability of a supervisor to complete the return or refund, specified area for transaction type, or use of a ticket system to minimise queuing).

Lastly, some attendees suggested that policy could be adapted to support easier return of low-cost items. This would allow for staff to be able to refund low cost items and reduce some of the time restraints placed on supervisors.

Prompt: Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment was a topic of much discussion with multiple concerns raised. Attendees acknowledged that current policies are well tailored for internal sexual harassment (e.g., between colleagues). However, attendees generally agreed that policies pertaining to sexual harassment perpetrated by customers require further attention, as clear guidelines and consequences have yet to be defined and implemented within the retail industry. Areas requiring attention were grouped into four main categories:

1. Definition, explanations and boundaries
2. Reporting
3. Staff training
4. Consequences

Attendees clearly identified that there was a lack of understanding in many organisations, and among their employees and consumers, regarding sexual harassment from a consumer and how to deal with the issue. Attendees suggested that more attention is needed from all stakeholders to provide definitions and clear guidelines as to the consequences to be applied for the full spectrum of behaviours starting with innocent but unwelcomed physical contact (e.g., touching on shoulder) to peeping into dressing rooms. In addition, education and support was nominated as being necessary for those at a higher risk of unwanted sexual attention, especially females working in female dominated outlets (e.g., lingerie), and young female staff rostered alone at night.

Attendees agreed that better reporting systems, specifically for sexual harassment by customers, needed to be developed. The current systems, or lack thereof, do not cover the unique questions, or reporting processes required for those who have experienced this behaviour from consumers. Concerns were raised as to when to call the police, and when counselling should be provided. Attendees also considered debriefing procedures to be unclear.

Also addressed by the group was the need for training of both employees and managers to help with understanding of sexual harassment, and more importantly, the boundaries, and actions to take following an incident. Training was suggested to be implemented with a scaffolded approach, in which a comprehensive step by step or modularised guide could be provided to employees. Suggestions were made that managers and supervisors also need to be upskilled on the topic in order to best support frontline employees. Attendees also noted the requirement for management to recognise the need for action within their own outlets, and to commit to supporting their employees (i.e., checking in, debriefing procedures, and enforcing perpetrator consequences).

Once policy is defined, the need for implementation and enforcement of appropriate and prompt consequences was highlighted by attendees, not only to protect frontline employees, but also as a mechanism to deter future offenders.

Prompt: Theft

The discussion around theft was dominated by references to barriers when dealing with offenders. Attendees noted that many instances of theft are not reported to the police, making the situation more difficult as consequences for stealing were not being adequately deterred. Also highlighted was that, for better and more reliable follow up and successful enforcement from the police, employees need to record clear checklist markers of each incident. This includes information such as time, date and perpetrator characteristics (height, hair colour, dress, etc.). Lastly, attendees noted the need to consider possible environmental factors including store layout that make theft more difficult, and the need for better staff training to minimise theft occurrences (i.e., frontline employees being told to provide potential thieves "super service" to discourage theft).

Prompt: Handling of aggressive customers/ enforcement of consequences

The key theme identified from discussion of this topic relating to handling of aggressive customers and enforcement of consequences for misbehaviour, related to current inconsistencies between policy and in store norms/procedures. Attendees acknowledged that they could see how policy and in store procedures were misaligned.

For example, some attendees noted the existence in many organisations of a policy stipulating that staff should not follow, chase, or attempt to apprehend perpetrators. However, most commonly, employees tended to default to their "instinctual" response to retaliate and protect the organisation. In addition, attendees reported that employees were sometimes required to give extra attention to suspected shoplifters, in an attempt to deter their actions, but this tended to result in a blurring of the boundary between intervening and not apprehending, and, as such, could create conflict for employees. Another concern raised was that, while banning of customers may be suggested, capacity to do this is often limited. More specifically, practicalities and an inability to control some customers were identified as limiting implementation and restricting enforcement of consequences.

Summary

The break-out session identified further areas for investigation and development regarding policy, procedures and pragmatics, with the concerns raised highlighting barriers that need to be overcome to further address customer misbehaviour. Suggestions were made in relation to environmental aspects, training, reporting and minimising inconsistencies across the five policy areas (customer complaints, returns and refunds, sexual harassment, theft, handling of aggressive customers/enforcement of consequences) that had previously been identified as potential sources of customer misbehaviours.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. General recommendations

Based on the evidence obtained in this pilot Respect & Resilience project, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. A pre-intervention organisational audit tool should be developed and used to ensure organisational readiness to benefit from the program. This tool should gather information pertaining to such issues as organisational psychosocial safety climate, policies and procedures for minimising and responding to customer misbehaviour, and staffing levels and arrangements to permit effective implementation of the training intervention. It should be emphasised that a "zero tolerance" approach or policy is a further recommendation to be adopted and embedded, to support the intervention.

2. The Respect & Resilience Program should be continually revised and improved in light of ongoing feedback from program participants and stakeholders. This may include options to the range of available workshop resources, to enable some selectivity as to the particular training components utilised.

3. The Respect & Resilience Program should be adapted for effective use in other contexts, including other industries, other locations (e.g., remote), settings in which interactions with customers take place mainly via telephone or internet, and organisations that lack the resources necessary to support 8- and 12-hour off-site staff training.

4. The Respect & Resilience Program should continue to be implemented, in a manner that is faithful to its original design, across organisations and industries.

5. Future implementation of the Respect & Resilience Program should be thoroughly evaluated, including the collection and analysis of independent ("hard") evidence as to its medium and long-term impacts. This should include long term evaluation of the impact of the program on organisational elements such as staff turnover, moral and absenteeism, as well as impacts on injury rates. Evaluations of the program will enable comprehensive baseline and follow-up measures of customer misbehaviour within our society, and segments of it, to be obtained, and the robustness of the positive program effects observed in this pilot to be assessed.

6. Signage to increase customer awareness, and to educate customers as to a "zero tolerance" approach in respect of customer misbehaviour, should be further developed, more widely displayed and systematically evaluated, both as a part of the Respect & Resilience Program and external to it.

7. The role of environmental modifications and organisational policies in contributing to customer misbehaviour should be further investigated, with the objective of developing and applying best-practice guidelines regarding environmental and policy initiatives that can help reduce the incidence, intensity and impact of customer misbehaviour.

8. A broader community approach to bring awareness of the full continuum of customer misbehaviours, and the unacceptability of these behaviours within contemporary society, should be introduced, promoted and sustained as an ongoing collaborative endeavour involving industry, unions, government and media agencies and personnel.

9. Investigation of similar areas of concern regarding customer misbehaviour which were external to the scope of this project, including customer perpetrated sexual harassment and theft, should be undertaken to guide further program development for these specific issues within the industry.

5.3.2.   Respect & Resilience Program Scaling

Given the success of the current pilot, scaling of the Respect & Resilience Program is currently being formulated. It is proposed that the next iteration of the program be a multi-pathway model comprising three options, namely, a train-the-trainer option for organisations that have multiple, mostly low-risk sites, a specialised 8-12 hour training program for staff employed in high-risk stores, and a modified 5 hour program to be offered to staff employed at lower-risk stores. These different pathways are expected to cater for all business sizes, contexts, and needs, taking into consideration logistical, financial, geographic, and other business characteristics.

Also recommended is the development of a website for ongoing training and continual refreshment of skills and support. This website is proposed to house industry information, resources, webinars, research and latest reports.

In all of the respects identified above, the Respect & Resilience scaling will be informed by industry feedback and research, with feedback from key industry partners (at the 2019 icare NSW and SDA Roundtable event) providing organisational insights into how the program could be integrated into their organisations.

5.3.3.   Respect & Resilience Program Next Steps

To date, the Respect & Resilience Program has focused on providing skills and techniques for employees. Training for employees was chosen as the first steps of the program as a means to give greater control to employees within service encounters and mitigate customer misbehaviour impact on employee health and wellbeing.

The next step is to create community awareness of the program and highlight the systemic behaviours within society that need to be changed. To address this challenge, collaboration with industry is being undertaken.

In addition, while beyond the scope of this pilot program, other concerns within the retail and fast-food industry have been identified (i.e., customer perpetrated sexual harassment), highlighting the need for further investigation and development of programs to address the specific and unique characteristics of such issues.

The Respect & Resilience Program next steps will include:

- Development of a community engagement program, in which best practice methods to increase community awareness and education surrounding the impact of customer misbehaviour on our community members will be implemented. Various organisations and programs that have been successful in raising awareness will be approached and lessons learnt from similar public awareness programs (e.g., domestic violence, neighbourhood watch, community centres, SDA campaigns) may be modelled to maximise the effectiveness of campaigns. It is also proposed to further develop community awareness using signs and overhead recordings within stores, centres, and the general community.

- Further iteration of the program guided by industry insights identified from the 2019 icare Respect & Resilience in Retail roundtable event. More specifically, this will focus on training barriers that were identified, including organisational culture, and program design, taking into consideration financial costs and human resources.

- Further investigation of similar areas of concern within the industry, including customer perpetrated sexual harassment and theft. These topics demonstrate unique factors needing to be addressed.

- Further development and adaptation of the Respect & Resilience Program for implementation into a broader range of service industries. More specifically, employees within healthcare, call centres, banking, and government offices, are currently facing customer misbehaviour problems that parallel those within the retail and fast food industries. Given that the underlying theoretical and practical skills identified in the Respect & Resilience Program are integral to the de-escalation of aggression, regardless of industry, the program can provide workers across NSW (and Australia) with relevant skills and knowledge, and can expand the reach of the campaign, combating the systemic problem of customer misbehaviour currently faced by service industry employees.

It is also important to acknowledge that training will provide those trained with skills and techniques that can be applied beyond their specific place of employment. Because employees within one organisation/industry are also customers of many other organisations and industries, training these individuals will serve to increase community awareness. Customer misbehaviour will thereby be targeted from multiple different angles.

5.4. Conclusions

Both anecdotal evidence and systematic research confirm the prevalence and adverse impacts of customer misbehaviour in many contemporary service industry workplaces. Most of the available evidence pertains to behaviours at the high end of the customer misbehaviour continuum, including physical aggression and violence, where well-structured reporting and remediation measures are often already in place. In contrast, through an integrated package of training workshops, signage and policy initiatives, the Respect & Resilience Program, a collaborative endeavour involving academic experts, industry leaders, the union (SDA), and employees, targets lower-level instances of customer misbehaviour.

This initial pilot run of the Respect & Resilience Program has been successful in documenting the nature and extent, and in reducing the incidence, of customer misbehaviour in service staff employed in two retail sites and two fast food sites. The evidence obtained suggests that the mechanisms by which these gains were achieved include a combination of increased employee empathy and increased employee assertiveness. Less clear-cut evidence of a decrease in the impact of customer misbehaviour was obtained, although the Respect & Resilience training was associated with gains in positive moods across the duration of the working day. The program was very well received by participants, many of whom provided useful suggestions for program and workplace improvements.

While these findings are promising, they are only the beginning, with future directions identified to increase success of the program and new approaches required to extend industry and community reach. These directions are recommended to include a multifaceted approach to address concerns in a comprehensive way, which includes:

- Changes to policy
- Community engagement and messaging
- Environmental design
- Specialised training

These initiatives must be underpinned by a strong commitment to "zero tolerance" to customer misbehaviour by industry, supported by community and government organisations (Refer to Appendix A for SDA Industry Statement on Abusive and Violent Customer Behaviour.

6. Participating Workplace Intervention Commitment

The effectiveness of the *Respect & Resilience in Retail and Fast-Food* intervention program relies on committed and proactive participation from your store, store managers, supervisors, and employees.

The Respect & Resilience in Retail and Fast Food intervention program has been developed in-line with research supported key principles regarding customer misbehaviour (incivility, abuse, aggression):

- Long term exposure to a lack of respect, including dysfunctional customer behaviour at any level, can result in a negative impact on employee health and wellbeing.
- Employee health and wellbeing has a direct effect on their families and broader society.
- Provision of a respectful, safe and supportive workplace is a key determinant of employee health and wellbeing.
- Good health and wellbeing outcomes are more likely when employees feel they are supported and understood by management.

An important element of your store's participation is a commitment to the key principles underpinning the program, and implementation of policies and procedures that support these principles.

The following guidelines should be incorporated into your workplace policy and procedures for the duration of your participation in the intervention program.

6.1. Customer Misbehaviour: What is it?

Customer misbehaviour refers to any behaviour during a service interaction that goes against what is socially accepted.

Customer misbehaviour ranges from incivility (i.e., being disrespectful, dismissive, rude and/ or critical), to abuse, both verbal and non-verbal (i.e., swearing, yelling, inappropriate gestures, repeatedly interrupting, name calling and/ or denigrating), to aggression which involves intimidating, threatening and confrontational style resulting in employee genuine feel of risk of harm (i.e., threats, throwing objects and violence).

Incivility	Abuse	Aggression

Regardless of the level of customer misbehaviour, all incivility, abuse and aggression have negative outcomes on health and wellbeing of your employees.

Resulting in decreased productivity and increased turnover intentions, and knock on effects to employee families and the broader community.

A zero-tolerance policy to all forms of customer misbehaviour is important to prevent such outcomes during the intervention period.

6.2. Guidelines

For the duration of the intervention program, our store and employees commit to:

6.2.1. Work Environment

1. A respectful and fair work environment that supports workplace safety and wellbeing is of the utmost importance to all employees – regardless of employee level.

2. Minimise manageable risk factors (as identified during training; see environmental checklist) to contribute to a workplace free from dysfunctional customer behaviour.

6.2.2. Customer Behaviour

3. A proactive zero-tolerance approach to customer abuse and/or aggression across all workplace practices.

4. A standardised response to customer abuse and/or aggression that involves:

    a. asking the customer to reassess and reduce negative behaviour; or,

    b. asking the customer to leave the store.

5. Removal of existing policies or procedures that directly or indirectly suggest that the customer is always right.

6.2.3. Management / Supervisors

6. Demonstrate support for set store policies and administration of policy by employees, ensuring that employees following correct procedures are not undermined, but instead validated and reinforced to the customer.

7. Enact the "tap in" procedure as a strategy to mitigate aggression and prevent employee distress, ensuring that employees can escalate issues to management at any point they feel unsafe or distressed, or a situation increases in severity – management should be provisioned to assess service interactions as to necessity for "tap in" occurrences.

8. Follow the guidelines relating to customer behaviour and provide employee support and debriefing as necessary after a dysfunctional customer service interaction.

9. Review policy and guidelines addressing sexual harassment from consumers as an organisational issue - ensuring guidelines are provided for action when consumer initiated sexual harassment occurs.

Appendices

Appendix A: Industry Statement on Abusive and Violent Customer Behaviour

RETAIL & FAST FOOD INDUSTRY STATEMENT ON ABUSIVE AND VIOLENT CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

The SDA – the union for retail, fast food and warehouse workers (SDA), National Retail Association (NRA), Australian Retailers Association (ARA) and undersigned organisations including retailers, fast food operators, shopping centres, regulators and government;

1. **Support the eradication of customer disrespect, abuse and violence from our workplaces**
2. **Commit to positively and publicly promoting and supporting a culture of respect and dignity for retail and fast food workers in and around workplaces**
3. **Encourage and facilitate the reporting of all forms of customer perpetrated abuse and violence towards workers, including sexual harassment and assault**

Our commitment to a retail and fast food industry free from abuse and violence will contribute to creating vibrant, healthy and safe workplaces and communities for workers and customers across Australia now, and into the future.

Appendix B: Selection of Sources Used in the Development of the Training Intervention

Books/Book Chapters

Argyle, M. (1974). *The social psychology of work.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin.

Argyle, M. (Ed.) (1981). *Social skills at work.* London: Methuen.

Argyle, M. (1982). *The psychology of interpersonal behaviour.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin.

Beebe, S. A, Beebe, S. J., & Redmond, M. V. (2011). *Interpersonal communication: Relating to others.* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bolton, R. (1987). *People skills: How to assert yourself, listen to others, and resolve conflicts.* Brookvale, NSW, Simon and Schuster

Cialdini, R. B. (2009). *Influence: Science and practice.* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon

De Dreu, C. K. W., & Gelfand, M. J. (Eds.) (2008). *The psychology of conflict and conflict management in organizations.* New York: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

De Vito, J. A. (2000). *Human communication: The basic course.* (8th ed.). New York: Harper & Row,

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Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it matters more than IQ.* London: Bloomsbury.

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Training Manuals

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Geldard, D., Geldard, K., & Yin, R. (2005). *Basic personal counselling: A training manual for counsellors.* (5th ed.). French's Forest, NSW: Pearson Education.

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Neff, K., & Germer C. (2018). *The mindful self-compassion workbook: A proven way to accept yourself, build inner strength and survive.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

(Various confidential training manuals and related resources)

Training Videos/Blogs, etc.

Customer service strategist, Jeff Mowat:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoA-IK-0UHY

Dealing with an angry customer training:
https://Youtube/T20hV4ynU7o

How to handle an aggressive customer (Steve Stauning):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miCmg6M1Fms

Learning Empathy:
https://youtu.be/pWDHJ1ZdSnY

Other Online Resources/Blogs/Websites

Anger management workbook [online resource]:
https://www.seasonstherapy.com

Body Language:
https://www.businessballs.com/self-awareness/body-language

Davidson Trahaire Corpsych (nd). Dealing with difficult customer behaviour:
http://www.davcorp.com.au/wpdata/files/43.pdf

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What are Interpersonal Skills and Why are they so Important?:
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Appendix C: Monitoring Customer Misbehaviour Incident Diary Participants

This appendix provides the demographic details of the participants that completed the incident diaries.

40.5% Male   **39.2%** Female

20.3% did not disclose.

	Range	Average
Age*	15 – 62 years	21.6
Organisation tenure**	1 month – 22.1 years	33.5 months
Customer-service tenure**	1 month – 30 years	62.1 months

* 23% did not disclose their age.

** 26 Participants did not disclose their tenure within their organisation or their customer-service tenure.

Job Title	Frequencies (%)
Customer service team member	50.0
Supervisor	5.4
Regional general managers/ assistant managers	1.4
Did not report	43.2

Language spoken at home	Frequencies (%)
English	63.5
Arabic, Dari, Filipino, Greek, Nepali, Telugu, Turkish	9.8
Did not report	26.7

Appendix D: Employee Questionnaire Participants

This appendix provides the demographic details of the participants that completed the employee questionnaire.

47.6% Male

52.4% Female

	Range	Average
Age* (years)	15 – 61 years	22.3
Work Hrs/Week*	3 – 50 hours	20.5
Customer interaction/day*	0 - 10 hours	5.2
Duration of customer interaction**	1 - 15 minutes	3.4
Organisation tenure*	5 months – 14.5 years	34.5 months
Customer-service tenure*	5 months – 45 years	64.5 months

* 23% did not disclose their age.
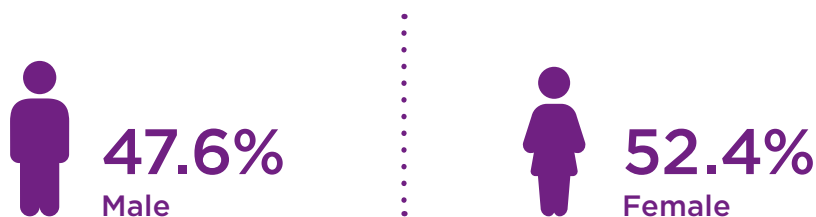
** 26 Participants did not disclose their tenure within their organisation or their customer-service tenure.

Job Title	Frequencies (%)
Customer service team member	73.8
Supervisor/management	23.8
Did not disclose	2.4

Level of Education Completed	Frequencies (%)
University Degree	9.5
Trade Qualification	4.8
Year 10 or 11	16.7
High School	64.3
Less than Year 10	2.4
Did not disclose	2.4

Construct	Scale	Example Item
Perceptions of Customer Behaviour		
Customer Incivility	Incivility from Customers Scale (Wilson & Holmvall, 2013)	How often in the past two weeks have your customers: • Made gestures (e.g. eye rolling, sighing) to express their impatience Response: 0 (Never) → 5 (3+ times a day)
Customer Abuse	Verbal Aggression sub-scale of the Customer-related Social Stressors scale (Dormann & Zapf, 2004)	Indicate the extent to which the statement is true of the customers you have served in the past two weeks: • Customers have personally attacked me Response: 0 (Not at all true) → 4 (Absolutely true)
Customer Aggression	Violence at Work Scale (Rogers & Kelloway, 1997)	Indicate how often the following has happened to you while serving a customer in the past two weeks: • You have been hit, kicked, grabbed, shoved, or pushed Response: 0 (Never) → 3 (4+ times)
Employee General Disposition and Wellbeing		
Assertion	Assertion Scale (Gambrill & Richey, 1975)	Indicate how often you display each of the following behaviours at work: • Tell a customer when he/she has done something that is unfair to you Response: 0 (Always do it) → 4 (Never do it)
General Health	General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg et al., 1997)	In the past two weeks have you: • Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities Response: 0 (Not at all) → 3 (Much more than usual)
Employee Emotionality and Emotional Regulation		
Empathy	Empathy Scale (McBane, 1995)	Thinking about your interactions with customers, indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: • *When I am upset at a customer, I usually try to put myself in their shoes* (Perspective Taking) • *Customers' misfortunes usually disturb me a great deal* (Empathic Concern) • *I become nervous if customers around me are nervous* (Emotional Contagion) Response: 0 (Strongly disagree) → 6 (Strongly agree)

Construct	Scale	Example Item
Emotional Intelligence	Emotional Intelligence Scale (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006)	Indicate how inaccurately or accurately each statement describes you as you are now: • By looking at people's facial expressions, I recognize the emotions they are experiencing Response: 0 (Very Inaccurate) → 4 (Very Accurate)
Emotion Regulation (Re-appraisal and Suppression)	Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003)	Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: • I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I am in (Re-appraisal) • I control my emotions by not expressing them (Suppression) Response: 0 (Strongly disagree) → 6 (Strongly agree)
Responding to Difficult Customers		
Emotions resulting from difficult customer interactions	Independent Items designed for current study	Indicate the extent to which you felt each emotion in relation to your interactions with difficult customers over the past two weeks: • Annoyed, angry Response: 0 (Not at all) → 6 (A great deal)
Affective appraisal of service performance	Independent items designed for current study	Indicate the extent to which you felt each emotion in relation to your interactions with difficult customers over the past two weeks: • Guilty, ashamed Response: 0 (Not at all) → 6 (A great deal)
Cognitive appraisal of service performance	Independent items designed for current study	Thinking back to your interactions with difficult customers over the past two weeks, indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: • I felt competent to respond effectively to difficult customers Response: 0 (Strongly disagree) → 6 (Strongly agree)
Employee Relationship with the Organisation		
Organisational belonging	Psychological sense of organisational membership (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010)	Indicate which response most applied to the way you feel regarding your workplace or organisation • I feel like a real part of (ORGANISATION NAME) Response: 0 (Not at all true) → 4 (Completely true)

Construct	Scale	Example Item
Organisational support	Supervisor support (Caplan et al., 1980)	Indicate the extent to which you feel support has been available to you over the past two weeks from your supervisor when dealing with customers: • How much can your supervisor be relied on when things get tough with customers at work Response: 0 (Not at all) → 4 (Very much)
	Co-worker support (Caplan et al., 1980)	Indicate the extent to which you feel support has been available to you over the past two weeks from your co-workers when dealing with customers: • How much can your co-workers be relied on when things get tough with customers at work Response: 0 (Not at all) → 4 (Very much)
Customer-oriented job control	Customer-oriented control at work (Dormann, C., Spethman, K., Weser, D., & Zapf, D., 2003)	Thinking about your work, indicate how much the following applies to you: • At work I can respond individually to my customer's demands Response: 0 (Not at all) → 4 (Very much)
Job Stress	Job Stress (Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986)	Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about how you've been feeling over the past two weeks about your work: • I feel a great deal of stress because of my job Response: 0 (Strongly disagree) → 4 (Strongly agree)
Job Satisfaction	Job Satisfaction (McLaney & Hurrell, 1988)	Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about how you've been feeling over the past two weeks about your work: • Overall, my job is extremely satisfying Response: 0 (Strongly disagree) → 4 (Strongly agree)
Intention to leave	Intention to Leave Scale (Nissly, Barak, & Levin, 2005)	Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: • In the next few weeks I intend to leave this organisation Response: 0 (Strongly disagree) → 6 (Strongly agree)

Appendix F: References to the Scales used in the Respect & Resilience Employee Questionnaire Measures

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Appendix G: Table Comparing Mean Responses to the Multi-Item Scales included in the Pre-Workshop and Post-Workshop Questionnaires

Variable being Measured	Pre-workshop Mean *(SD)*	Post-workshop Mean *(SD)*	Paired Sample t-test results	Conclusion
Perceptions of Customer Behaviours				
Customer Incivility (-)	**1.71 (0.83)**	**1.33 (0.89)**	*t*(40) = 2.50 *p* = .005, η2 = .069	**Significant Improvement**
Customer Abuse (-)	**1.43 (1.06)**	**0.99 (1.09)**	*t*(41) = 2.44 *p* = .019, η2 = .066	**Significant Improvement**
Customer Aggression (-)	0.18 (0.22)	0.17 (0.39)	*t*(41) = 0.22 *p* = .829	No significant change
Employee Emotionality and Emotional Regulation				
Total Empathy (+)	**3.31 (0.95)**	**3.63 (0.84)**	*t*(41) = 2.29 *p* = .027, η2 = .059	**Significant Improvement**
Perspective-taking (+)	**3.90 (1.38)**	**4.33 (1.23)**	*t*(41) = 2.26 *p* = .029, η2 = .057	**Significant Improvement**
Empathic Concern (+)	3.61 (1.14)	3.78 (1.04)	*t*(41) = 0.99 *p* = .326	No significant change
Emotional Contagion (+)	**2.55 (1.15)**	**2.97 (1.06)**	*t*(41) = 2.47 *p* = .0.18, η2 = .068	**Significant Improvement**
Emotional Intelligence (+)	2.40 (0.42)	2.37 (0.40)	*t*(41) = 0.40 *p* = .690	No significant change
Cognitive Re-appraisal (+)	3.79 (1.04)	3.87 (0.96)	*t*(40) = -.042 *p* = .675	No significant change
Suppress Emotion Expression (-)	3.50 (1.31)	3.14 (1.33)	*t*(40) = 1.73 *p* = .090	No significant change
Employee Relationship with the Organisation				
Customer-oriented Job Control (+)	2.41 (0.78)	2.39 (0.75)	*t*(40) = 0.16 *p* = .876	No significant change
Support from Supervisor (+)	3.04 (0.89)	2.80 (1.06)	*t*(41) = 1.50 *p* = .140	No significant change
Support from Co-workers (+)	2.67 (0.78)	2.64 (1.24)	*t*(41) = 0.17 *p* = .865	No significant change

Variable being Measured	Pre-workshop Mean *(SD)*	Post-workshop Mean *(SD)*	Paired Sample t-test results	Conclusion
Job Stress (-)	2.34 (0.73)	2.24 (0.69)	$t(41) = 0.79$ $p = .436$	No significant change
Job Satisfaction (+)	1.60 (0.86)	1.74 (0.73)	$t(41) = -1.18$ $p = .245$	No significant change
Employee Relationship with the Organisation				
Sense of Organis'l Membership (+)	2.85 (0.72)	2.77 (0.86)	$t(41) = 0.69$ $p = .491$	No significant change
Intention to Quit Job (-)	2.10 (1.89)	2.10 (1.83)	$t(40) = 0.00$ $p = 1.00$	No significant change
Employee General Disposition and Well-being				
Assertiveness (-)	**2.19 (0.54)**	**2.46 (0.52)**	**$t(41) = 2.78$ $p = .008$, $\eta2 = .084$**	**Significant Improvement**
General Health (-)	1.78 (0.42)	1.83 (0.45)	$t(41) = -.0.55$ $p = .586$	No significant change

Note. + means <u>high</u> scores are good/desirable; - means <u>low</u> scores are good/desirable.

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