

# **Antecedents of Work-Related Depression among Frontline Hotel Employees: A Study in Iran**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to develop and test a research model that examines burnout as a full mediator of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. Data were collected from service employees (i.e., employees with intense face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers) in the four- and five-star hotels in Iran. Such data were collected with a one-week time lag. These relationships were tested using LISREL 8.30 through path analysis.

According to the results, customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics exacerbated burnout (i.e., exhaustion and disengagement). The results demonstrated that exhaustion did not have any significant effects on depression. However, the results showed that disengagement triggered depression. The results of this study revealed that disengagement fully mediated the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on depression.

Based on the study findings, implications for management and limitations and implications for future studies are also presented in this thesis.

**KeyWords:** Burnout, Customer Verbal Aggression, Employees' Perceptions of Organizational Politics, Iran, Work-Related Depression.

## ÖZ

Bu tezin amacı, müşterilerin sözlü saldırgan davranışları ile çalışanların örgütsel politika algılamalarının işten tükenmişlik sendromu aracılığıyla iş kökenli depresyon üzerindeki etkilerini inceleyen bir araştırma modelini geliştirmek ve test etmektir. Veri İran’da dört ve beş yıldızlı otellerde çalışan servis personelinden (müşterilerle yoğun bir şekilde bire bir iletişimde bulunan çalışanlar) toplanmıştır. Söz konusu veri bir haftalık süreyle iki ayrı zaman diliminde toplanmıştır. Bu ilişkiler, LISREL 8.30’da yol analizi kullanılarak test edilmiştir.

Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, müşterilerin sözlü saldırgan davranışları ile çalışanların örgütsel politika algılamaları işten tükenmişlik sendromunu (fiziksel ve duygusal yorgunluk ile işten ve insanlardan uzaklaşma/soğuma) artırmıştır. Bulgular, fiziksel ve duygusal yorgunluğun depresyon üzerinde herhangi bir anlamlı etkisinin olmadığını göstermiştir. Ancak, bulgular, işten ve insanlardan uzaklaşmanın depresyonu tetiklediğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, müşterilerin sözlü saldırgan davranışları ile çalışanların örgütsel politika algılamalarının işten ve insanlardan uzaklaşma aracılığıyla depresyonu artırdığını göstermiştir.

Bu tezde bulgular doğrultusunda yönetsel belirlemelere ve araştırmanın sınırları ile gelecek araştırmalar için önerilere de yer verilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çalışanların Örgütsel Politika Algılamaları, İran, İş Kökenli Depresyon, İşten Tükenmişlik, Müşterilerin Sözlü Saldırgan Davranışları.



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### **Chapter 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents information about the research philosophy of the empirical study conducted with frontline hotel employees in Iran. This is followed by the purpose of this thesis and its potential contributions to the hospitality management literature. This chapter concludes with the methodology of the study and information regarding the rest of the chapters in the present thesis.

### **1.1 Research Philosophy**

Researchers employing deductive approach develop hypotheses using well-established theories and empirical findings in the relevant literature (Ali & Birley, 1999; Neuman, 2003). They also benefit from the existing measures to operationalize the study variables. In this thesis, deductive approach is utilized, and hypotheses are developed based on well-established theories and empirical evidence.

In this thesis, the study variables are also operationalized via the existing measures in the relevant literature. This thesis develops hypotheses among stressors, burnout, and depression using a well-established theory, which is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and empirical findings in the relevant literature. Simply put, the purpose of this thesis is to develop and test a research model, which examines burnout as a full mediator of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Thesis**

Depression, which refers to “prolonged negative feelings, inability to concentrate or function normally and other related depressive symptomatology” (Baba, Galperin, & Lituchy, 1999, p. 166), is one of the most severe health problems in the world and has detrimental effects on individuals and organizations (Shani & Pizam, 2009). Employees with frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers in the hospitality industry are faced with stressors. For example, employees in frontline service jobs of the hospitality industry are faced with aggressive customer behaviors. Customer verbal aggression, which refers to customers’ verbal communications of anger that violate employees’ social norms (cf. Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004), is a stressor in the workplace and is one of the examples of aggressive customer behaviors (Karatepe, Yorganci, & Haktanir, 2009). As another stressor in the workplace, organizational politics refers to “phenomena in which organizational members attempt either directly or indirectly to influence other members by means not sanctioned by formal standard operating procedures or informal norms, in an attempt to achieve personal or group objectives” (Witt, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2000, p.

342). It is a potential threat to organizational performance (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999).

Such employees are also confronted with burnout, which is a psychological response to stressors on the job (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009). In the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), burnout is composed of two dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement. Exhaustion refers to “a consequence of intensive physical, affective, and cognitive strain, for example as a long-term consequence of prolonged exposure to certain demands” (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001, p. 500). In addition, disengagement is defined as “distancing oneself from one’s work, and experiencing negative attitudes toward the work object, work content, or one’s work in general” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). If frontline employees cannot cope with difficulties associated with stressors and burnout, they become depressed.

Against this background, the purpose of this thesis is to develop and test a research model, which examines burnout as a full mediator of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. In other words, customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics influence depression indirectly via exhaustion and disengagement. These relationships are tested through data obtained from frontline hotel employees in Iran.

### **1.3 Contributions of the Thesis**

Investigating the abovementioned relationships contributes to the hospitality management literature in the following ways. First, studies demonstrate that

employees in frontline service jobs of the hospitality industry are faced with stressors and burnout (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008a). More importantly, they experience high levels of depression, if they cannot cope with stressors and burnout in the workplace (Shani & Pizam, 2009). However, empirical research concerning the antecedents of work-related depression in the hospitality management literature is scarce (Karatepe & Tizabi, 2011; Pizam, 2008; Shani & Pizam, 2009). Therefore, this thesis tests burnout as a full mediator of the impacts of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression.

Second, empirical research based on data derived from the samples of frontline hotel employees in Iran in this research stream is sparse. That is, what is known regarding the issue of work-related depression is largely based on empirical studies whose samples have been derived from the developed Western countries or societies (Baba et al., 1999; Karatepe & Tizabi, 2011). With this realization, this study uses data collected from frontline employees in the hotel industry in Iran, which is a developing Middle East country.

#### **1.4 Proposed Methodology**

As stated before, this thesis used deductive approach for the development of the relationships among the study variables in the research model. Data were collected from a sample of full-time frontline employees with intense face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers (e.g., front desk agents, guest relations representatives, bell attendants, food servers) in the four- and five-star hotels of Tehran and Esfahan.

Data were obtained from frontline hotel employees with a one-week time lag. This is important for minimizing the potential problems of common method bias in empirical studies (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The time I questionnaire consisted of the customer verbal aggression, perceptions of organizational politics and burnout measures as well as demographic variables, such as age, gender, education, organizational tenure, and marital status. The time II questionnaire included the work-related depression measure. Frontline employees responding at Time I were required to participate in the study at Time II. Respondents self-administered the questionnaires. Both questionnaires promised anonymity and confidentiality. Customer verbal aggression was measured using five items from Dormann and Zapf (2004). Perceptions of organizational politics were measured using twelve items from Kacmar and Ferris (1991). The OLBI was used to operationalize burnout (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003). This inventory consisted of two dimensions of burnout: exhaustion and disengagement. Exhaustion and disengagement each were measured via eight items. Depression was operationalized via twenty items from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) scale developed by Radloff (1977).

Responses to the items in customer verbal aggression were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 5 (*absolutely true*) to 1 (*not at all true*). Responses to the items in perceptions of organizational politics were elicited on a five-point scale ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Responses to the items in exhaustion and disengagement were elicited on four-point scales ranging from 4 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Responses to the items in depression were elicited on a

four-point scale ranging from 4 (*most or all of the time*) to 1 (*rarely or none of the time*). Higher scores indicated higher customer verbal aggression. After positively worded items in perceptions of organizational politics, exhaustion, disengagement, and depression had been reverse scored, higher scores indicated higher perceptions of organizational politics, exhaustion, disengagement, and depression. All items were originally prepared in English and then translated into Persian via the back-translation method (Parameswaran & Yaprak, 1987). The time I questionnaire was tested with a pilot sample of ten employees. The time II questionnaire was also tested with a pilot sample of ten employees. Respondents did not have difficulty understanding the items. Accordingly, no changes were made in the time I and time II questionnaires.

Frequencies were used for reporting respondents' profile. Both bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses were used. Specifically, the psychometric properties of the measures were evaluated based on a series of confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996) and reliability analysis. The correlations among the study constructs were also assessed via Pearson product-moment correlation. The hypotheses were tested via LISREL 8.30 through path analysis (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996).

## **1.5 Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The introduction chapter provides information about the research philosophy and purpose of the study. In addition, this chapter



presents information about the contributions of the thesis to the hospitality management literature and gives information about its proposed methodology.

The title of the second chapter is literature review. In this chapter, the potential antecedents of work-related depression, such as role stress, conflicts in the work-family interface, customer aggression, perceptions of organizational politics, and burnout are discussed. This chapter provides information about the differences between the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) / Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) and the OLBI. In this chapter, detailed information about the JD-R model is also provided.

The research model and hypotheses are presented in chapter 3. In this chapter, the development of the study hypotheses is discussed. That is, the study hypotheses are developed based on the JD-R model and empirical findings in the relevant literature.

Chapter 4 consists of information about the methodology of the empirical study. Information about deductive approach is provided. The issues of sampling, data collection, and questionnaire structure and measures are discussed. Information about the study setting is also given. Finally, this chapter provides information about the analytical methods used in the empirical study.

Chapter 5 includes information about the results of the empirical study. That is, the findings, which pertain to respondents' profile, psychometric properties of the measures and research hypotheses, are provided in chapter 5.

Discussion of the empirical findings, implications for managers, limitations of the study, and implications for future research are provided in chapter 6. Chapter 7 consists of the conclusion part of the thesis.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents detailed information about the potential antecedents of work-related depression. Specifically, the antecedents of work-related depression, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, work-family conflict, family-work conflict, customer aggression/customer-related social stressors, exhaustion and disengagement are discussed. This chapter provides a discussion of the differences between the MBI / MBI-GS and the OLBI. This chapter also presents detailed information regarding the JD-R model as a theoretical framework for the effects of the abovementioned stressors and burnout on work-related depression.

#### **2.1 Work-Related Depression**

##### **2.1.1 Antecedents of Work-Related Depression**

Depression, which is one of the most severe health problems, will become the most common disease by 2020 (Murray & Lopez, 1996). Depression has detrimental effects at the macro level. For example, depression costs the US economy between \$30 and \$44 billion with 200 million lost workdays each year (Gabriel & Liimatainen, 2000). Depression also reduces productivity and increases absenteeism (Blackmore et al., 2007). Recognizing the outcomes of work-related depression, it is important to identify factors leading to depression in the workplace. An examination of the relevant literature associated with frontline employees in the hospitality

industry indicates that role stress, conflicts in the work-family interface, customer aggression, and burnout are among stressors and strain that may lead to work-related depression. Although there may be some other variables (e.g., emotional dissonance and emotional demands), and these variables may be equally important in predicting work-related depression, this thesis provides a discussion of role stress, conflicts in the work-family interface, customer aggression, and burnout due to their prevalence in the hospitality industry.

#### **2.1.1.1 Role Stress**

Role conflict and role ambiguity are the two major dimensions of role stress. Role conflict occurs when an employee finds that the expectations of two or more of his role partners are incompatible and he or she cannot meet all the demands at the same time (Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1976). An employee experiences role ambiguity when he or she is unsure of his or her responsibilities and does not have the necessary information to perform his or her job adequately (Churchill et al., 1976). Role conflict and role ambiguity are among the stressors frequently experienced by frontline employees in the hospitality industry (e.g., Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006).

Prior research shows that role conflict and role ambiguity are positively associated with depression for a sample of full-time employees in a variety of occupations and organizations (Heinisch & Jex, 1997). Past research also indicates that role conflict influences depression through burnout among nurses in the Caribbean (Baba et al., 1999).

The abovementioned information indicates that employees experiencing elevated levels of role conflict and ambiguity are faced with high levels of work-related depression.

#### **2.1.1.2 Conflicts in the Work-Family Interface**

Work-family conflict and family-work conflict are the conflicts in the work-family interface. Work-family conflict refers to “a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities”; and family-work conflict refers to “a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities” (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996, p. 401). Employees who are unable to balance their work and family responsibilities are faced with such conflicts. Research shows that frontline employees in the hospitality industry have difficulty managing their work and family roles and, as a result, experience work-family conflict and family-work conflict (e.g., Karatepe & Kilic, 2007; Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006).

Previous research indicates that family-work conflict increases depression, while work-family conflict does not significantly affect depression (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Past research also shows that both work-family conflict and family-work conflict amplify depression, poor physical health, and heavy alcohol use (Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 1996).

As can be understood from the information above, work-family conflict and family-work conflict are among the antecedents of work-related depression.

### **2.1.1.3 Customer Aggression**

Customer aggression occurs when customers intentionally disrupt services, act dishonestly, shout at and humiliate employees, and even violently attack employees (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). In addition, Dormann and Zapf (2004) propose that there are four types of customer-related social stressors: disproportionate customer expectations, customer verbal aggression, disliked customers, and ambiguous customer expectations. Disproportionate customer expectations refer to “situations in which customers tax or challenge the service that they want to receive from the service provider” (Dormann & Zapf, 2004, p. 75). Disliked customers refer to “interactions with hostile, humorless, and unpleasant customers and interruptions by customers”, while ambiguous customer expectations describe “... unclear customer expectations” (Dormann & Zapf, 2004, p. 76). Customer verbal aggression occurs when customers yell at employees and make sarcastic remarks (Dormann & Zapf, 2004).

Employees in frontline service jobs of the hospitality industry are faced with such stressors, and the presence of customer aggression or customer verbal aggression leads to emotional exhaustion and has detrimental effects on job and life outcomes (e.g., Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Karatepe et al., 2009; Karatepe, 2011). Research also shows that employees who are faced with dysfunctional customer behaviors on a

continuing basis and cannot manage them effectively are likely to be depressed (Yagil, 2008).

As is the case with role stressors and conflicts in the work-family interface, customer aggression is also an antecedent to work-related depression.

#### **2.1.1.4 Organizational Politics**

Organizational politics, which refers to “behavior not formally sanctioned by the organization, which produces conflict and disharmony in the work environment by pitting individuals and/or groups against one another, or against the organization” (Ferris et al., 1996, p. 234), is prevalent in organizations and can emerge from the behaviors of supervisors and coworkers as well as organizational policies and practices. It is important to study organizational politics, because it is a stressor and has negative effects on job outcomes. For example, Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (1997) reported that perceptions of organizational politics increased burnout and turnover intentions and influenced job satisfaction deleteriously. Poon (2003) showed that perceptions of organizational politics eroded job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions among the Malaysian employees in a variety of occupations and organizations. Vigoda-Gadot (2007) found that perceptions of organizational politics decreased in-role performance and organizational citizenship behavior among employees of a public security division of a law enforcement agency in Israel.

The abovementioned findings clearly indicate that perceptions of organizational politics increase employees’ burnout and have negative effects on their job outcomes.

Studies also show that there are problems associated with organizational politics in the hospitality industry. That is, unfair reward and promotional practices, favoritism, and inconsistency in managerial decisions regarding employees can be observed in the hospitality industry (Karatepe, Babakus, & Yavas, 2011; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, & Buyruk, 2010; Wan, 2010). Such practices in the hospitality industry result in a number of undesired outcomes, such as burnout, job dissatisfaction, poor job performance, and turnover intentions.

#### **2.1.1.5 Burnout**

Burnout is a psychological response to stressors on the job (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009). According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), burnout consists of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is characterized by “a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up” (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, p. 623). Depersonalization refers to “the development of negative, cynical attitudes and feelings about one’s clients” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). Diminished personal accomplishment is related to a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). These dimensions and their items are in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). In addition, the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS), which included dimensions labeled exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy, was developed and used in a number of empirical studies (Demerouti et al., 2001, 2003). In the MBI-GS, exhaustion refers to fatigue; cynicism refers to a distant attitude toward work in general; and



professional efficacy is related to both social and non-social aspects of occupational accomplishment (Kim, Shin, & Umbreit, 2007).

Demerouti et al. (2003) developed and validated the OLBI, which included exhaustion and disengagement. According to Demerouti et al. (2001, 2003), contrary to exhaustion in the MBI or MBI-GS, exhaustion covers affective, cognitive, and physical aspects of exhaustion. Demerouti et al. (2001) also state, “Although the depersonalization scale includes attitudes that refer to recipients (e.g., becoming impersonal, callous, hardening), the disengagement scale refers to attitudes toward the work task (e.g., uninteresting, not challenging) as well as to a devaluation and mechanical execution of work” (p. 501). Finally, the exhaustion and disengagement scales have both positively and negatively worded items, while the MBI or MBI-GS does not have (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Research indicates that burnout has negative effects on job outcomes and triggers health-related outcomes. Specifically, Baba et al. (1999) reported that burnout was positively related to depression. Shani and Pizam (2009) also found similar findings among hotel employees. Karatepe et al. (2011) found that perceptions of organizational politics positively affected exhaustion and disengagement among frontline hotel employees in Turkey. Karatepe and Tizabi (2011) indicated that emotional exhaustion fully mediated the effects of positive affectivity and intrinsic motivation on depression for a sample of full-time frontline hotel employees in Dubai.

The abovementioned information explicitly shows that employees who are faced with organizational politics experience burnout. Such employees, in turn, are highly depressed.

## **2.2 The JD-R Model**

The JD-R model posits that every occupation may have its own specific risk factors associated with job stress, and these factors can be categorized in two groups: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Job demands refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort and are therefore associated with certain physical and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Workload, role stress, and work-family conflict are among these job demands. Job resources refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that either/or (1) reduce job demands and the associated physical and psychological costs; (2) are functional in achieving work goals; and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Social support, participation in decision-making, and performance feedback are among these job resources.

The JD-R model explains two psychological processes: the health impairment process and the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The health impairment process contends that having chronic job demands (e.g., role conflict, work-family conflict, and customer aggression) in the workplace may result in depletion of mental and physical resources of employees

(burnout) and thus lead to health problems, such as depression, disrupted sleep, and increased irritability. The motivational process contends that job resources foster employees' growth, learning and development, leading to work engagement. Under these circumstances, work engagement may result in positive outcomes, such as effective job performance, job satisfaction, and lower turnover intentions.

As Karatepe et al. (2009) discuss, customer verbal aggression is widespread in many service settings, and employees are frequently confronted with customers' verbal communications of anger (e.g., yelling, swearing, and threats) violating employees' social norms. Karatepe et al. (2011), Kusluvan et al. (2010), and Wan (2010) discuss that favoritism and poor management decisions about employees are prevalent in the hospitality industry. In addition, it is argued that as a response to stressors on the job, burnout appears to be inevitable in frontline service jobs of the hospitality industry (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe & Uludag, 2008a; Kim et al., 2007). Work-related depression is one of the most serious health problems in today's global work environment (Shani & Pizam, 2009). These explanations shortly demonstrate why it is important to pay attention to these variables.

In this thesis, the health impairment process of the JD-R model provides guidelines for developing relationships among stressors, burnout, and work-related depression. The availability of customer verbal aggression and organizational politics leads to burnout, which, in turn, triggers work-related depression. Technically put, burnout fully mediates the positive effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. In other words, customer verbal

aggression and perceptions of organizational politics influence work-related depression indirectly via burnout.

The research model including the relationships mentioned above is presented in the following chapter. The following chapter also provides empirical evidence for developing the relationships among the study variables.

## **Chapter 3**

### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

This chapter provides information about the development of the research model. Broadly speaking, this chapter presents information regarding the development of hypotheses based on the JD-R model and empirical evidence. The antecedents of work-related depression discussed in this chapter are customer verbal aggression, perceptions of organizational politics, and burnout. This chapter also provides information about burnout as a full mediator of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression.

#### **3.1 Research Model**

The research model, which includes the relationships among the study variables, is shown in Figure 1. The research model proposes that both customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics exacerbate employees' exhaustion and disengagement. Employees with elevated levels of exhaustion and disengagement, in turn, are highly depressed. In other words, exhaustion fully mediates the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. Disengagement also functions as a full mediator of the impacts of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. Simply put, customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics influence work-related depression indirectly

through exhaustion and disengagement. As can be seen in Figure 1, age, gender, education, organizational tenure, and marital status are treated as control variables to avoid statistical confounds.

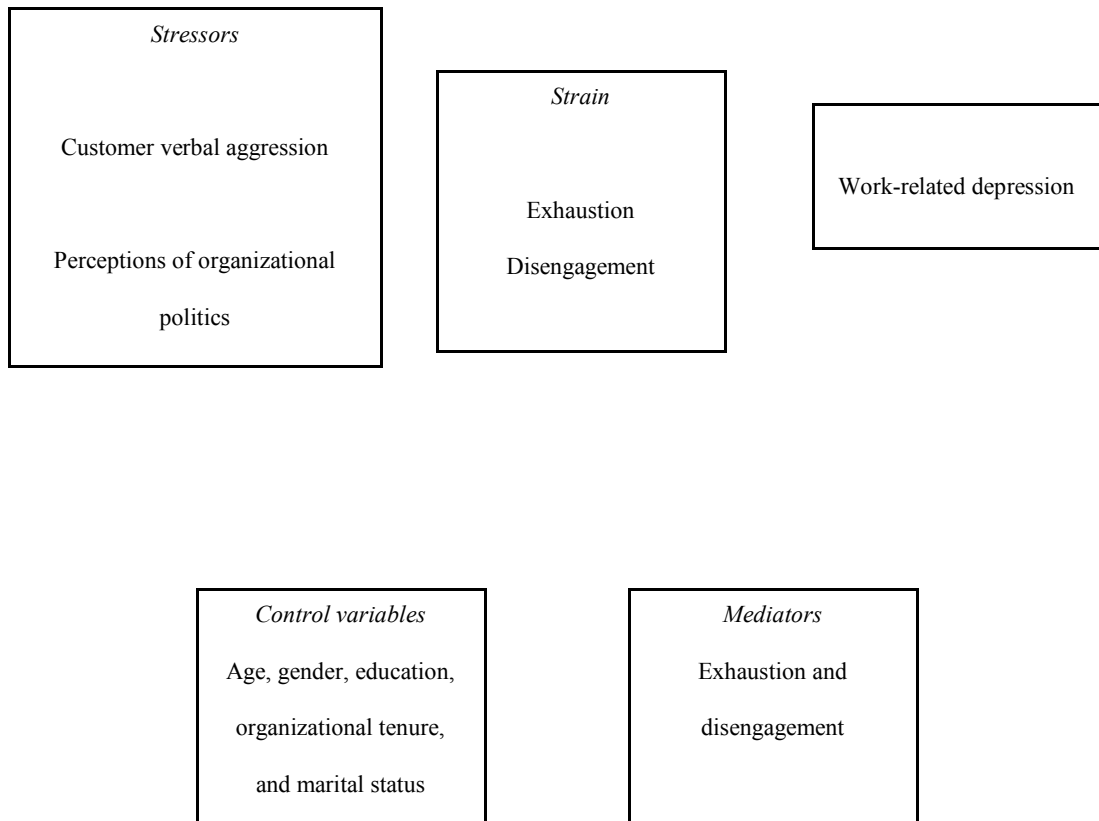


Figure 1: Research Model

## 3.2 Hypotheses

### 3.2.1 Customer Verbal Aggression

In the hospitality industry, frontline employees are frequently faced with verbal aggressive behaviors of customers (Karatepe et al., 2009). If such employees cannot manage this stressor or cannot cope with difficulties associated with this stressor,

they experience high levels of burnout. Empirically, it was shown that customer verbal aggression increased emotional exhaustion among frontline service employees in Germany (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). Ben-Zur and Yagil (2005) indicated that customer aggression increased burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) among service employees in Israel. In a study of frontline hotel employees in Northern Cyprus, Karatepe et al. (2009) demonstrated that customer verbal aggression intensified emotional exhaustion. Karatepe (2011) also found similar results among frontline hotel employees in the United Arab Emirates.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Customer verbal aggression is positively related to (a) exhaustion and (b) disengagement.

### **3.2.2 Perceptions of Organizational Politics**

Frontline hotel employees work in an environment that is stressful and pressing. For example, favoritism, unfair decisions about employees' promotions, and unfair distributions of rewards can be observed in the hospitality industry. Burnout becomes a reaction or a response to these stressors. There is empirical evidence that the presence of organizational politics in the workplace triggers burnout. Specifically, Vigoda (2002) showed that perceptions of organizational politics increased burnout among employees in different settings of Israel. Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud (2010) reported that perceptions of organizational politics were significantly and positively related to burnout among faculty members of a university in Israel. Karatepe et al. (2011) also found that frontline hotel employees experiences high levels of exhaustion and disengagement due to organizational politics.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Perceptions of organizational politics are positively related to (a) exhaustion and (b) disengagement.

### **3.2.3 Burnout**

If frontline employees frequently experience elevated levels of burnout and do not have any job (e.g., social support) or personal (e.g., self-efficacy) resources to cope with burnout, they are highly depressed. It is evident that the workplace generates depression due to burnout. Under these circumstances, managers should find effective ways for reducing burnout.

Empirically, Baba et al. (1999) indicated that burnout significantly and positively influenced depression. Shani and Pizam (2009) reported that hotel employees suffered from depression due to elevated levels of burnout. It was found that emotional exhaustion was a significant predictor of depression (Karatepe & Tizabi, 2011).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3(a): Exhaustion is positively related to work-related depression.

H3(b): Disengagement is positively related to work-related depression.

### **3.2.4 Burnout as a Full Mediator**

As depicted in Figure 1, burnout fully mediates the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression.

The JD-R model provides useful guidelines for developing these relationships.



According to the health impairment process of the JD-R model, high job demands, such as workload and emotional dissonance exhaust employees' resources and result in energy depletion and create health-related problems, because these high job demands require sustained effort (Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2006; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). There are empirical studies showing burnout as a full mediator of the effects of job demands on health-related outcomes. Specifically, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) reported that burnout completely mediated the effects of job demands on health problems among employees of different organizations in the Netherlands. Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006) found that burnout had a full mediating role on the relationship between job demands and ill health among Finnish teachers. In their longitudinal study of Finnish dentists, Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola (2008) showed that job demands influenced depression indirectly through burnout.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Exhaustion fully mediates the effects of (a) customer verbal aggression and (b) perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression.

H5: Disengagement fully mediates the effects of (a) customer verbal aggression and (b) perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression.

## Chapter 4

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, information about the methods and procedures used is given. That is, deductive approach is described, and the sampling approach used is defined. This chapter gives information about data collection. In addition, this chapter presents information about the questionnaire structure and how the scale items have been measured. Finally, this chapter concludes with a description of data analysis.

#### 4.1 Deductive Approach

As Graziano and Raulin (1993, p. 37) state, “A *deductive theory* is more traditional and formalized theory in which constructs are of major importance. The constructs (the ideas) guide the researcher in making and testing deductions from the constructs.

The deductions are empirically tested through research, and thus support or lack of support for the theory is obtained.” This thesis uses deductive approach. That is, the relationships among customer verbal aggression, perceptions of organizational politics, burnout, and work-related depression are developed using the JD-R model and empirical evidence in the relevant literature. Accordingly, this thesis develops and tests a research model that examines exhaustion and disengagement as full mediators of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. Model testing requires advanced

statistical techniques. Advanced statistical techniques, such as confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were used in this thesis.

## **4.2 Sample**

Judgmental sampling is a non-probability sampling technique. In this sampling procedure, “the sample elements are selected because it is believed that they are representative of the population of interest” (Churchill, 1995, p. 582). The sample of this study included a judgmental sample of frontline employees in the four- and five-star hotels of Tehran and Esfahan in Iran. These frontline employees had intense face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers (e.g., front desk agents, guest relations representatives, bell attendants, food servers).

According to the information obtained from the Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization at the time of the present study, there were 11 four- star hotels and 5 five-star hotels in Tehran. In Esfahan, there were 4 four-star hotels and 1 five-star hotel.

Iran (officially known as the Islamic Republic of Iran) is a developing country in the Middle East. Tehran is the capital city of Iran, and Esfahan is one of the tourism destinations with historical attractions in Iran. Although Iran has a wealth of historical and natural attractions, the tourism and hospitality industry is still devoid of proper infrastructure and superstructure and quality service standards. More specifically, as discussed by Karatepe, Keshavarz, and Nejati, (2010), the lack of quality accommodation facilities and technological infrastructure, bottlenecks in internal transportation, poor marketing efforts, the negative image of the country

worldwide, regional political concerns, and the national social and cultural matters such as the hijab requirement for women and the ban for alcohol seem to prevent the development of international tourism demand.

In the hotel industry of Iran, there are three types of hotel category (cf. O’Gorman, Mclellan, & Baum, 2007). The first category includes hotels, which are privately owned. The second category includes the quasi-state hotels. The third category includes the state hotels. More than fifty percent of ownership for a state hotel belongs to the government. Under these circumstances, state and quasi-state hotel firms are susceptible to high levels of political interference (O’Gorman et al., 2007). High labor turnover is evident in the hospitality of Iran (Anvari, Amin, & Seliman, 2010).

The Iranian society is collectivist and male-dominated (Karimi, 2008). In recent years, there is an increase in the number of women participating in the workforce (Karatepe et al., 2010). However, women are still responsible for housework and child care despite their participation in the workforce. In addition, in this setting, kinship relationships, favoritism, and nepotism are not social embarrassments (Karimi, 2008; O’Shea, 2003).

### **4.3 Data Collection**

The managements of the abovementioned hotels were contacted via a letter demonstrating the objectives of this empirical study. Managements of 4 five-star hotels and 7 four-star hotels in Tehran provided permission for data collection. Managements of 4 four-star hotels in Esfahan also provided permission for data

collection. Consequently, a total number of managements of 15 hotels agreed to participate in the study. Due to the fact that managements of hotels did not allow the researcher to directly contact their frontline employees, each hotel management assigned a senior employee to coordinate data collection with the researcher. That is, in each hotel there was a senior employee who was responsible for distributing the self-administered questionnaires to frontline employees and collecting them back from frontline employees.

Data were collected from full-time frontline hotel employees with a one-week time lag. This is important to minimize common method bias. As Podsakoff et al. (2003) state, one of the potential remedies to minimize common method bias is to separate the independent and dependent variables. This is done through introducing a time lag between the measurement of independent and dependent variables. Therefore, data were gathered for customer verbal aggression, perceptions of organizational politics, and burnout as well as demographic variables at time I. Data were collected for work-related depression at time II. Those responding at time I were required to participate in the study at time II. Specifically, by paying utmost attention to the issue of confidentiality, a master list containing the name of each frontline employee in the hotel was prepared. Each employee in this master list had an identification number. An identification number was also written on each questionnaire. This procedure was used at both time I and time II data collection stages so that the questionnaires at time I and time II could be matched.

A total number of 320 questionnaires were distributed to frontline hotel employees at time I. By the cut-off date for data collection at time I, 249 questionnaires were retrieved. 7 questionnaires were not usable. In total, 242 questionnaires were retrieved. The original response rate was 75.6%. However, by the cut-off date for data collection at time II, 231 questionnaires were retrieved. That is, 11 frontline employees did not participate in the second data collection stage. This resulted in a response rate of 95.5% of the original sample and 72.2% of the entire population.

#### **4.4 Questionnaire Structure and Measurement**

As noted above, data were collected from frontline hotel employees with a one-week time lag. The time I questionnaire included the customer verbal aggression, perceptions of organizational politics, and burnout measures. The time I questionnaire also consisted of demographic items, such as age, gender, education, organizational tenure, and marital status. The time II questionnaire consisted of the work-related depression measure. In this thesis, the items regarding the study variables were obtained from the well-established scales in the relevant literature.

Consistent with the works of Karatepe (2011) and Karatepe et al. (2009), the following procedure for the back-translation was employed. All items in the questionnaires (Time I and II) were originally prepared in English and then translated into Persian using the back-translation method (Parameswaran & Yaprak, 1987). Specifically, the researcher prepared the original questionnaire in English. Then, two bilingual individuals (fluent in both Persian and English) in Iran participated independently in the translation process. Finally, the researcher further checked the two versions of the questionnaire in English for any inconsistencies. The time I questionnaire was tested with a pilot sample of ten (10) employees. The time II

questionnaire was also tested with a pilot sample of ten (10) employees. Consequently, no changes were made in the questionnaires, because frontline hotel employees did not have any difficulty understanding the items. In the Appendix, the first questionnaire is the Time I questionnaire, while the second questionnaire is the Time II questionnaire.

#### **4.4.1 Customer Verbal Aggression**

Customer verbal aggression was measured using four items from Dormann and Zapf (2004). Sample items are, ‘Customers often shout at us’ and ‘Customers personally attack us verbally’. The scale items were used in recent empirical studies (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2009; Karatepe, Yorganci, & Haktanir, 2010). Responses to the items in customer verbal aggression were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 5 (*absolutely true*) to 1 (*not at all true*). Higher score indicated higher customer verbal aggression.

#### **4.4.2 Perceptions of Organizational Politics**

Twelve items from Kacmar and Ferris (1991) were used to operationalize perceptions of organizational politics. Sample items are ‘There is a group of people in this department who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them’ and ‘Employees are encouraged to speak out frankly even when they are critical of well-established ideas’. The scale items were used in other empirical studies (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2011; Witt et al., 2000). Responses to the items in perceptions of organizational politics were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). After positively worded items in perceptions of organizational politics had been reverse scored, higher scores indicated higher perceptions of organizational politics.

#### **4.4.3 Burnout**

The OLBI was used to measure burnout (Demerouti et al., 2003). The OLBI includes two dimensions of burnout, which are exhaustion and disengagement. Exhaustion and disengagement each were operationalized using eight items. Sample items for exhaustion and disengagement are ‘During my work, I often feel emotionally drained’ and ‘I always find new and interesting aspects in my work’. These items were used in past and recent empirical studies (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Karatepe et al., 2011). Responses to the items in exhaustion and disengagement were rated on four-point scales ranging from 4 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). After positively worded items in exhaustion and disengagement had been reverse scored, higher scores indicated higher exhaustion and disengagement.

#### **4.4.4 Work-Related Depression**

Depression was measured via twenty items from the CES-D scale developed by Radloff (1977). Sample items are ‘I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me’ and ‘I felt hopeful about the future’. These items were used in other empirical studies (e.g., Baba et al., 1999; Karatepe & Tizabi, 2011). Response options to the items in depression ranged from 4 (*most or all of the time*) to 1 (*rarely or none of the time*). After positively worded items in work-related depression had been reverse scored, higher scores indicated higher work-related depression.

#### **4.4.5 Control Variables**

Age and education were measured via five-point scales. Organizational tenure was measured using a six-point scale. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0 = male and 1 = female). Marital status was also coded as a binary variable (0 = married 1 =



single or divorced). Age, gender, education, organizational tenure, and marital status were controlled to avoid statistical confounds. This is consistent with other studies in the relevant literature (e.g., Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009; Karatepe, 2011; Karatepe et al., 2011).

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

Frequencies were used for reporting respondents' profile. Coefficient alpha was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The commonly accepted cut-off value is 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Convergent validity was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996). Convergent validity is based on "the correlation between responses obtained by maximally different methods of measuring the same construct (Peter, 1981, p. 136). The magnitudes of standardized loadings and their *t*-values as well as model fit statistics were used for evaluating convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Model fit statistics considered in this thesis are  $\chi^2/df$ , GFI (Goodness of fit index), CFI (Comparative fit index), and RMR (Root mean square residual).

Kelloway (1998, pp. 24-31) define these tests as follows: *Chi-square*: Since chi-square test is sensitive to large sample sizes ( $n \geq 200$ ), other fit statistics are to be taken into account.

*GFI*: The goodness-of-fit index is based on a ratio of the sum of the squared discrepancies to the observed variances (for generalized least squares, the maximum likelihood version is somewhat more complicated).

*CFI*: The comparative fit index is based the non-central chi-square distribution.

*RMR*: This is the square root of the mean of the squared discrepancies between the implied and observed covariance matrices.

Karatepe and Uludag (2008b) provide the following information for the fit indices:

When the  $\chi^2 /df$  value ranges from 2 to 5, it indicates a good fit. Generally, fit indices whose values are equal to or above .90 demonstrate a good fit. RMR having values below .10 shows a good fit.

Composite scores for each variable were obtained by averaging scores across items representing that measure. There is empirical support for issue of discriminant validity, when “a measure does not correlate very highly with another measure from which it should differ” (Peter, 1981, p. 137). Consonant with the works of Karatepe and Ekiz (2004) and Yavas, Karatepe, Babakus, and Avcı (2004), the results of Pearson product-moment correlations of composite scores were used to evaluate discriminant validity.

The study relationships were tested using LISREL 8.30 through path analysis (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996). That is, the correlation matrix was used for testing the study relationships in LISREL 8.30 via path analysis.

## **Chapter 5**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter presents the findings of this empirical study conducted with frontline hotel employees in Iran. That is, the results regarding respondents' profile are given. A series of confirmatory factor analysis are used for evaluating convergent validity, while Pearson product-moment correlation analysis is used for assessing discriminant validity. Cronbach's alpha is used for the assessment of coefficient alpha. The study relationships are assessed based on the results of path analysis.

#### **5.1 Respondents' Profile**

The findings in Table 1 are related to respondents' profile. Specifically, the findings in Table 1 demonstrated that 35% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-27, 45% between the ages of 28-37, 16% between the ages of 38-47, and the rest were older than 47. The findings showed that 55% of the respondents were female. According to the findings in Table 1, 32% of the respondents had secondary and high school education, 36% two-year college degrees, 21% four-year college degrees, and 10% graduate degrees. The rest had primary school education. 63 percent of the respondents had organizational tenures below five years. 19 percent of the respondents had tenures between six and ten and the rest had tenures more than ten years. 60 percent of the respondents were single or divorced, while the rest were married.



Table 1: Respondents' Profile (n=231)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Age</b>		
18-27	80	34.6
28-37	103	44.6
38-47	36	15.6
48-57	11	4.8
58 and above	1	0.4
Total	231	100.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	103	44.6
Female	128	55.4
Total	231	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	2	0.9
Secondary and High School	74	32.0
Two-Year College Degree	84	36.3
Four-Year College Degree	48	20.8
Graduate Degree	23	10.0
Total	231	100.0
<b>Organizational Tenure</b>		
Less than 1 year	58	25.1
1-5	87	37.7
6-10	44	19.0
11-15	16	6.9
16-20	11	4.8
More than 20 years	15	6.5
Total	231	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	93	40.3
Single or divorced	138	59.7
Total	231	100.0

## 5.2 Measurement Results

All measures were subjected to a series of confirmatory factor analysis. Several items were dropped due to low standardized loadings (<.40) and correlation measurement errors. Items dropped during confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Scale Items and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Scale items	Standardized loadings	t-values
<b>Customer verbal aggression</b>		
Customers often shout at us	.84	14.72
Customers personally attack us verbally	.87	15.51
Customers are always complaining about us	.63	10.10
Customers get angry at us even over minor matters	.61	9.68
Some customers argue all the time	-.*	-
<b>Perceptions of organizational politics</b>		
There is a group of people in this department who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them	.51	7.58
There has always been an influential group in this department that no one ever crosses	.52	7.84
I have seen changes made in policies here that only serve the purposes of a few individuals, not the work unit or the hotel	.59	9.03
People in this hotel attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down	.68	10.88
Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead around here	.71	11.42
People here usually don't speak up for fear of retaliation by others	.51	7.65
Promotions in this department generally go to top performers(-)	.56	8.44
Rewards come only to those who work hard in this hotel(-)	.54	8.07
Employees are encouraged to speak out frankly even when they are critical of well-established ideas(-)	.56	8.48
There is no place for yes-men around here; good ideas are desired even when it means disagreeing with superiors(-)	-.*	-
In our hotel, pay and promotion policies are not politically applied(-)	-.*	-
When it comes to pay raise and promotion decisions policies are irrelevant	-.*	-
<b>Exhaustion</b>		
There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work	.66	10.20
After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better	-.*	-
I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well(-)	-.*	-
During my work, I often feel emotionally drained	.57	8.50
After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities(-)	.55	8.19
After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary	.68	10.43
Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well(-)	-.*	-
When I work, I usually feel energized(-)	.53	7.78

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Table 2. Scale Items and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results(Continued)

Scale items	Standardized loadings	<i>t</i> -values
<b>Disengagement</b>		
I always find new and interesting aspects in my work(-)	-.*	-
It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way	.55	7.71
Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically	.54	7.90
I find my work to be a positive challenge(-)	.53	7.79
Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work	.47	6.77
Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks	.71	10.98
This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing(-)	-.*	-
I feel more and more engaged in my work(-)	-.*	-
<b>Work-related depression</b>		
I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me	.58	9.32
I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor	-.*	-
I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends	.62	10.06
I felt that I was just as good as other people (-)	-.*	-
I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing	.67	11.12
I felt depressed	.72	12.23
I felt that everything I did was an effort	-.*	-
I felt hopeful about the future (-)	.44	6.77
I thought my life had been a failure	.59	9.49
I felt fearful	.68	11.42
My sleep was restless	.58	9.16
I was happy (-)	-.*	-
I talked less than usual	-.*	-
I felt lonely	.62	10.04
People were unfriendly	.59	9.43
I enjoyed life (-)	-.*	-
I had crying spells	.63	10.21
I felt sad	.72	12.11
I felt that people dislike me	.62	10.03
I could not get "going."	.73	12.52

\* Items were dropped during confirmatory factor analysis.

Model fit statistics for a five-factor model were as follows:  $\chi^2 = 1046.10$ ,  $df = 619$ ;

GFI = .80; CFI = .85; RMR = .066). The result for  $\chi^2 / df$  value (1.69) did not fall

within a range of acceptable values (2 to 5), and the results for GFI and CFI were



below .90. The result for RMR was below .10. Overall, the results concerning fit statistics were not satisfactory. On the other hand, all loadings were significant ( $>2.00$ ), and the magnitudes of the loadings ranged from .44 to .87. Consequently, there was evidence of convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Discriminant validity was checked via the results of Pearson product-moment correlations. The results in Table 3 showed that none of the correlations among the study variables was higher than  $|.70|$ . Accordingly, these results provided evidence of discriminant validity (Karatepe & Ekiz, 2004; Yavas et al., 2004). Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables are shown in Table 3.

In addition, as can be seen in Table 3, all coefficient alphas for customer verbal aggression (.83), perceptions of organizational politics (.81), exhaustion (.73), disengagement (.70), and work-related depression (.90) were deemed acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). The results in Table 3 demonstrated that older employees experienced less exhaustion. Married employees had higher perceptions of organizational politics.

Table 3: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Model Constructs and Control Variables and Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. Age</b>	1.000									
<b>2. Gender</b>	.179**	1.000								
<b>3. Education</b>	-.050	-.230*	1.000							
<b>4. Organizational tenure</b>	.590**	.227**	-.069	1.000						
<b>5. Marital status</b>	.367**	.258**	-.285**	.320*	1.000					
<b>6. Customer verbal aggression</b>	-.008	-.068	-.051	.118	-.057	1.000				
<b>7. Perceptions of organizational politics</b>	-.068	.004	.085	-.016	-.145*	.201*	1.000			
<b>8. Exhaustion</b>	-.178*	-.121	-.030	-.036	-.086	.334*	.455*	1.000		
<b>9. Disengagement</b>	.004	-.001	-.077	.075	-.034	.349*	.392*	.570*	1.000	
<b>10. Work-related depression</b>	.079	.065	-.024	.117	-.094	.218*	-.014	.208*	.289*	1.000
<b>Mean</b>	1.92	.55	3.07	2.48	.60	2.06	3.27	2.51	2.33	1.80
<b>Standard deviation</b>	.85	.50	.98	1.40	.49	.88	.75	.60	.55	.62
<b>Cronbach' alpha</b>	-	-	-	-	-	.83	.81	.73	.70	.90

**Notes:** Composite scores for each variable were obtained by averaging scores across items representing that measure. The scores for customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics ranged from 1 to 5, while the scores for exhaustion, disengagement, and work-related depression ranged from 1 to 4. Age and education were measured using five-point scales. Organizational tenure was measured using a six-point scale. Higher scores indicated older age, more educated, and longer tenure. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0 = male and 1 = female). Marital status was also coded as a binary variable (0 = married and 1 = single or divorced).

\* Correlations are significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\* Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level. Correlations without asterisks are not significant.

In addition, one-way analysis of variance and Scheffe test were employed to examine differences among respondents in terms of hotel category (i.e., private hotels, quasi-state hotels, and state hotels) concerning customer verbal aggression,

perceptions of organizational politics, exhaustion, disengagement, and work-related depression. The results indicated that respondents in private hotels (Mean = 2.67) experienced higher exhaustion than the ones in quasi-state hotels (Mean = 2.44). This result suggests that employees in private hotels appear to work in more demanding and stressful situations and thus experience higher exhaustion.

### **5.3 Test of Hypotheses**

Initially, the control variables were allowed to influence the study variables in the model. However, none of the control variables had significant effects on perceptions of organizational politics and disengagement, whereas some of the control variables had significant effects on customer verbal aggression, exhaustion, and work-related depression. Consistent with the work of Karatepe, Yavas, and Babakus (2007), the model was retested by constraining the non-significant path coefficients of the control variables to “0” on model constructs. The results of the study relationships did not change with or without the control variables. The results in Table 4 shows that the model fit the data well on the basis of a number of fit statistics ( $\chi^2 = 27.91$ ,  $df = 12$ ;  $\chi^2 / df = 2.33$ ; GFI = .97; CFI = .95; RMR = .066). The model explained 1% of the variance in customer verbal aggression, 26% in exhaustion, 20% in disengagement, and 9% in work-related depression.

Table 4: Model Test Results

Control variables and hypotheses	Standardized estimates	T-values
<b>(I) Impact on CVA</b>	.12	1.82
<b>Organizational tenure</b>		
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = .01</b>		
<b>(II) Impact on EXH</b>		
<b>Age</b>	-.16	-3.19*
<b>CVA</b>	.25	4.43*
<b>POPS</b>	.40	7.12*
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = .26</b>		
<b>(III) Impact on DENG</b>	.28	4.85*
<b>CVA</b>	.33	5.71*
<b>POPS</b>		
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = .20</b>		
<b>(IV) Impact on WDEP</b>		
<b>Marital status</b>	-.08	-1.21
<b>EXH</b>	.06	.74
<b>DENG</b>	.25	3.28*
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = .09</b>		
<b>(V) Mediating effects</b>		
<b>CVA → DENG → WDEP</b>	.06	2.72*
<b>POPS → DENG → WDEP</b>	.08	2.84*
<b>Model fit statistics: <math>\chi^2 = 27.91</math>, <math>df = 12</math>; <math>\chi^2 / df = 2.33</math>; GFI = .97; CFI = .95; RMR = .066</b>		

**Notes:**

\* *t*-values are significant at the .05 level or better.

The results indicate that customer verbal aggression significantly and positively influences both exhaustion ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $t = 4.43$ ) and disengagement ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $t = 4.85$ ).

Therefore, hypotheses 1a and 1b are supported. The results also show that perceptions of organizational politics have significant positive effects on both exhaustion ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = 7.12$ ) and disengagement ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 5.71$ ). Therefore, hypotheses 2a and 2b are supported.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b predict that exhaustion and disengagement significantly and positively affect work-related depression. According to the results in Table 4, disengagement has a significant positive impact on work-related depression ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $t = 3.28$ ), whereas exhaustion does not ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $t = .74$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3b is supported, but there is no empirical support for hypothesis 3a.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b are not supported, because exhaustion does not significantly influence work-related depression. That is, since the mediating variable does not significantly affect the dependent variable, the mediating hypotheses are not supported.

In addition, the results indicate that the indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on work-related depression through disengagement is significant and positive ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $t = 2.72$ ). This result shows that disengagement fully mediates the impact of customer verbal aggression on work-related depression. Therefore, hypothesis 5a is supported. The results reveal that perceptions of organizational politics influence work-related depression via disengagement ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $t = 2.85$ ). This finding indicates that disengagement has a full mediating role on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and work-related depression. Therefore, hypothesis 5b is supported.

As for the control variables, the results show that older employees are confronted with less exhaustion. Organizational tenure does not significantly affect customer

verbal aggression, while marital status is not significantly related to work-related depression.

## **Chapter 6**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents a detailed evaluation of findings reported in chapter 5. In this chapter, a number of useful implications for managers are provided. This chapter concludes with limitations and future research directions.

#### **6.1 Assessment of Findings**

The purpose of this thesis was to develop and test a research model that investigated exhaustion and disengagement as full mediators of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. These relationships were tested using data collected from frontline hotel employees in Iran with a one-week time lag. Examining such relationships is important, because a careful examination of the hospitality management literature suggests that there is a dearth of empirical research regarding the antecedents of work-related related depression in frontline service jobs. In addition, there is a need for examining these relationships based on data collected from the developing non-Western countries to have richer insights.

The results suggest that both customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics lead to exhaustion and disengagement. Frontline hotel

employees who are faced with customers' verbal aggressive behaviors experience high levels of exhaustion and disengagement. This makes sense, because customer verbal aggression is among the most common stressors in frontline service jobs of the hospitality industry (Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Karatepe et al., 2009), and employees who cannot manage such customers in the workplace will experience burnout as a response to this stressor. The result regarding the effect of customer verbal aggression on burnout/emotional exhaustion is consistent with other empirical studies (e.g., Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Grandey et al., 2004; Karatepe et al., 2009).

In addition, employees working in an environment where there are unfair distribution of rewards and promotional practices and favoritism have perceptions of organizational politics. Under these circumstances, they experience exhaustion and disengagement/burnout. Consequently, problems associated with the application of pay and promotions politically, lack of opportunity for speaking out frankly, and favoritism in the workplace lead to burnout. These results are consistent with other empirical studies (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2011; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010).

The results suggest that disengagement is a significant predictor of work-related depression, while exhaustion is not. This is surprising, because studies demonstrate that employees are highly depressed due to elevated levels of physical and emotional exhaustion (e.g., Karatepe & Tizabi, 2011; Shani & Pizam, 2009). The inclusion of disengagement as one of the dimensions of burnout in the equation seems to be responsible for the non-significant relationship between exhaustion and work-related depression. On the other hand, the results indicate that employees who distance



themselves from the work and display negative attitudes toward the work content are depressed. Such a finding is consistent with a previous empirical study (cf. Baba et al., 1999).

According to the results reported in this thesis, disengagement fully mediates the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. However, this is not valid for exhaustion, since the effect of exhaustion on work-related depression is not significant. The results concerning disengagement as a full mediator of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression are also in line with the health impairment process of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Specifically, the presence of job demands, such as customer verbal aggression and organizational politics lead to the depletion of mental and physical resources for employees. Under these circumstances, they experience disengagement, which, in turn, results in work-related depression. Since depression is among the most severe health problems in today's workforce, understanding the factors amplifying depression among frontline hotel employees is of great importance to managers.

When the results of this thesis are compared with those conducted with employees in the developed Western countries, there are differences and similarities. For example, the result regarding exhaustion and disengagement as a full mediator of the effects of job demands on work-related depression are partially consistent with the work of Hakanen et al. (2008) in Finland. The results regarding the effect of burnout (i.e.,

exhaustion and disengagement) on work-related depression are partially consonant with the work of Shani and Pizam (2009) in the USA.

## **6.2 Management Implications**

The results reported in this thesis provide a number of useful implications for managers. First, a supportive work environment is inevitable for the management of stressors and strain. Therefore, managements of the hotels should be committed to establishing and maintaining such a work environment where their employees would be able to cope with various stressors and strain. This work environment should not permit political decisions and behaviors. Otherwise, employees would have feelings that they work in an environment that is threatening and unfair (Karatepe et al., 2011). Second, managers and employees should record the incidents of customers' verbal aggressive behaviors and the actions taken by frontline employees (Karatepe et al., 2009). These incidents and actions could be used as case studies in training programs to create awareness about the importance of managing customer verbal aggression in service encounters and emphasize prevention rather than reaction.

Third, managements of the hotels need to employ mentors who would provide employees with assistance in terms of vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Lankau, Carlson, & Nielson, 2006). Such mentors would spend much time with employees who seek advice and help regarding burnout and depression. This is important, because employees with elevated levels of burnout and depression have lower productivity and leave the organization. Fourth, state and quasi-state hotel firms in Iran are devoid of consistent management decisions and practices, and

they are susceptible to high levels of political interference (O’Gorman et al., 2007). Managements of these hotels should not be susceptible to political interference. The implementation of contemporary human resource management decisions and practices requires professionalism in every aspect of the operation. Otherwise, it would almost be impossible to implement the abovementioned implications in these hotels.

### **6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This thesis is not without its limitations. First, this study collected data from frontline hotel employees with a one-week time lag. However, this is enough for temporal causality (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Therefore, future studies should collect data from frontline hotel employees over a longer period time (e.g., six months) to investigate the relationships among the study variables in the research model of this study. Second, this thesis tested the effects of two job demands, such as customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on burnout and work-related depression. Other job demands, such as role stress, work-family conflict, and emotional dissonance are also among the stressors frontline hotel employees are faced with (Karatepe et al., 2009; Karatepe & Kilic, 2007; Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006). Therefore, incorporating these job demands into the research model would enhance the understanding of the effects of various stressors simultaneously on burnout and work-related depression.

Third, this thesis tested work-related depression as an outcome, because depression is one of the most severe health problems in today’s global work environment. Since

turnover is still a critical problem the global hospitality industry, using actual turnover data in future studies would enhance the understanding of burnout as a full mediator of the effects of various job demands on turnover. Finally, replication studies with larger sample sizes in different hospitality settings in Iran as well as in other Middle East countries would be fruitful for broadening the database in this research stream.

## **Chapter 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this thesis was to develop and test a research model, which examined exhaustion and disengagement as full mediators of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. These relationships were developed based on the JD-R model and empirical evidence in the extant literature. This thesis used obtained from a judgmental sample of frontline employees with a one-week time lag in the four- and five-star hotels of Tehran and Isfahan in Iran. Examining these relationships is important for at least two reasons. That is, there is a lack of empirical research regarding the antecedents of work-related depression in the hospitality management literature. In addition, this study extends the research to Iran, which is a developing Middle East country and has a different cultural setting from the ones in the developed Western countries.

The results suggest that customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics are significant determinants of exhaustion and disengagement. The results also suggest that disengagement significantly and positively influences work-related depression, while exhaustion does not. With this realization, it is obvious that exhaustion does not have a mediating role on the relationships between job demands

and work-related depression. On the other hand, disengagement functions a full mediator of the effects of customer verbal aggression and perceptions of organizational politics on work-related depression. Such a finding provides full support for the health impairment process of the JD-R model. The frequent occurrences of customer verbal aggression and organizational politics deplete employees' physical and mental resources which, in turn, result in health-related problems, such as high levels of work-related depression.

Using the previously mentioned results, this study presents a number of useful implications for managers for business practice in the hotel industry. Limitations and directions for future research are also presented in this thesis. Consequently, it is believed that this empirical study conducted in Iran contributes to the existing knowledge base by examining the previously mentioned relationships.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A: A Field Study in the Hotel Industry of Iran**

Dear Respondent:

This research is aimed to better understand your daily experiences at work. Therefore, we kindly request that you self-administer this questionnaire.

Any sort of information collected during our research will be kept in confidential. We appreciate your time and participation in our research very much.

If you have any questions about our research, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Elaheh Ehsani through her e-mail address: [elaheh.ehsani@yahoo.com](mailto:elaheh.ehsani@yahoo.com).

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

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**SECTION I.**

Please indicate your disagreement or agreement with each statement by crossing the number using the following five-point scale:

- (1) I strongly disagree
- (2) I disagree
- (3) I am undecided
- (4) I agree
- (5) I strongly agree

1. There is a group of people in this department who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them.	1	2	3	4	5
2. There has always been an influential group in this department that no one ever crosses.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have seen changes made in policies here that only serve the purposes of a few individuals, not the work unit or the hotel.	1	2	3	4	5
4. People in this hotel attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead around here.	1	2	3	4	5
6. People here usually don't speak up for fear of retaliation by others.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Promotions in this department generally go to top performers.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Rewards come only to those who work hard in this hotel.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Employees are encouraged to speak out frankly even when they are critical of well-established ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
10. There is no place for yes-men around here; good ideas are desired even when it means disagreeing with superiors.	1	2	3	4	5
11. In our hotel, pay and promotion policies are not politically applied	1	2	3	4	5
12. When it comes to pay raise and promotion decisions policies are irrelevant.	1	2	3	4	5

**SECTION II.**

Please indicate your disagreement or agreement with each statement using the following four-point scale.

- (1) I strongly disagree
- (2) I disagree
- (3) I agree
- (4) I strongly agree

13. I always find new and interesting aspects in my work.	1	2	3	4
14. It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.	1	2	3	4
15. Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.	1	2	3	4
16. I find my work to be a positive challenge.	1	2	3	4
17. Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.	1	2	3	4
18. Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks.	1	2	3	4

19. This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing.	1	2	3	4
20. I feel more and more engaged in my work.	1	2	3	4
21. There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.	1	2	3	4

## SECTION II. (Continued)

Please indicate your disagreement or agreement with each statement using the following four-point scale.

- (1) I strongly disagree
- (2) I disagree
- (3) I agree
- (4) I strongly agree

22. After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.	1	2	3	4
23. I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well.	1	2	3	4
24. During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.	1	2	3	4
25. After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities.	1	2	3	4
26. After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.	1	2	3	4
27. Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well.	1	2	3	4
28. When I work, I usually feel energized.	1	2	3	4

## SECTION III.

Please indicate your disagreement or agreement with each statement by crossing the number using the following five-point scale:

- (1) Not at all true
- (2) Not true
- (3) I am undecided
- (4) True
- (5) Absolutely true

29. Customers often shout at us.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Customers personally attack us verbally.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Customers are always complaining about us.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Customers get angry at us even over minor matters.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Some customers argue all the time.	1	2	3	4	5

## SECTION IV.

Please indicate your answer by placing a (√) in the appropriate alternative.

1. How old are you?

18-27 ( )

28-37 ( )

38-47 ( )

48-57 ( )

58 and over ( )

**SECTION IV. (Continued)**

Please indicate your answer by placing a (√) in the appropriate alternative.

3. What is the highest level of

education you completed?

Primary school ( )

Secondary and high school ( )

Vocational school (two-year program) ( )

University first degree ( )

Master or Ph.D. degree ( )

2. What is your gender?

Male ( )

Female ( )

4. How long have you been

working in this hotel?

Under 1 year ( )

1-5 years ( )

6-10 years ( )

11-15 years ( )

16-20 years ( )

More than 20 years ( )

5. What is your marital status?

Single or divorced ( )

Married ( )

**Thank you for your kind cooperation.**

## **Appendix B: A Field Study in the Hotel Industry of Iran**

Dear Respondent:

This research is aimed to better understand your daily experiences at work. Therefore, we kindly request that you self-administer this questionnaire.

Any sort of information collected during our research will be kept in confidential. We appreciate your time and participation in our research very much.

If you have any questions about our research, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Elaheh Ehsani through her e-mail address: [elaheh.ehsani@yahoo.com](mailto:elaheh.ehsani@yahoo.com).

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

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Below is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often you have felt this way during the past week using the following scale:

- (1) Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)
- (2) Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)
- (3) Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)
- (4) Most or all of the time (5-7 days)

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.	1	2	3	4
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.	1	2	3	4
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends	1	2	3	4
4. I felt that I was just as good as other people.	1	2	3	4
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.	1	2	3	4
6. I felt depressed.	1	2	3	4
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.	1	2	3	4
8. I felt hopeful about the future.	1	2	3	4
9. I thought my life had been a failure.	1	2	3	4
10. I felt fearful.	1	2	3	4
11. My sleep was restless.	1	2	3	4
12. I was happy.	1	2	3	4
13. I talked less than usual.	1	2	3	4
14. I felt lonely.	1	2	3	4
15. People were unfriendly.	1	2	3	4
16. I enjoyed life.	1	2	3	4
17. I had crying spells.	1	2	3	4
18. I felt sad.	1	2	3	4
19. I felt that people dislike me.	1	2	3	4
20. I could not get "going."	1	2	3	4

**Thank you for your kind cooperation.**