

GUEST INCIVILITY IN SERVICE RECOVERY SITUATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR HOTEL ROOM DIVISION EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN SOUTH SUMATERA

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh guest incivility selama situasi service recovery, khususnya dalam penanganan keluhan tamu, terhadap psychological well-being karyawan divisi kamar di hotel-hotel di Sumatera Selatan. Industri perhotelan menuntut interaksi yang intens antara karyawan dan tamu, terutama dalam situasi penanganan keluhan yang sering disertai perilaku tidak sopan dari tamu. Kondisi tersebut berpotensi menimbulkan tekanan emosional dan memengaruhi kesejahteraan psikologis karyawan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang disebarakan kepada 100 karyawan divisi kamar di hotel berbintang di Sumatera Selatan. Data dianalisis menggunakan uji validitas, reliabilitas, serta analisis regresi linier sederhana. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat guest incivility berada pada kategori moderat, di mana karyawan sering menghadapi keluhan tamu yang disampaikan dengan cara kurang sopan. Kondisi psychological well-being juga berada pada tingkat moderat, terutama pada aspek kelelahan emosional dan tekanan psikologis saat menangani keluhan tamu. Analisis regresi menunjukkan nilai korelasi sebesar 0,568 dengan koefisien determinasi (R^2) sebesar 0,323 yang berarti bahwa 32,3% variasi psychological well-being dipengaruhi oleh guest incivility. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa paparan perilaku tidak sopan dari tamu dapat meningkatkan tekanan emosional dan memengaruhi stabilitas psikologis karyawan. Oleh karena itu, organisasi hotel perlu menyediakan dukungan organisasi, pelatihan pengelolaan emosi, serta sistem penanganan keluhan yang efektif untuk menjaga kesejahteraan psikologis karyawan.

Kata Kunci: Divisi kamar; guest Incivility; penanganan keluhan; psychological well-being; service recovery

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of guest incivility during service recovery situations, particularly in complaint handling, on the psychological well-being of room division employees in hotels in South Sumatra. The hospitality industry requires intensive interaction between employees and guests, particularly during complaint handling, which may expose employees to uncivil behavior from guests. Such interactions can create emotional pressure and negatively affect employees' psychological conditions. This research applied a quantitative approach using structured questionnaires distributed to 100 room division employees working in star hotels across South Sumatra. Data were analyzed using validity and reliability tests, as well as simple linear regression. The findings reveal that guest incivility occurs at a moderate level, with employees frequently experiencing it during service recovery situations, particularly when complaints are delivered impolitely. Psychological well-being indicators also show moderate levels, particularly in emotional exhaustion and psychological distress. The regression analysis shows a correlation coefficient of 0.568 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.323, indicating that guest incivility explains 32.3% of the variance in employees' psychological well-being. These findings highlight that repeated exposure to uncivil guest behavior can significantly influence employees' emotional stability and stress levels. Therefore, hotels should provide organizational support, emotional regulation training, and effective complaint handling systems to protect employees' psychological well-being.

Keywords: Complaint Handling; Guest Incivility; Psychological Well-being; Room Division; Service Recovery

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1. INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry is a service sector that relies heavily on intangibles and in which direct interactions occur between employees and guests. In daily hotel operations, particularly within the room division, employees such as front desk agents, concierges, room attendants, and public area attendants experience a high intensity of guest contact, especially during complaint-handling situations. Service recovery situations, such as guest complaints, often become emotionally sensitive moments for employees, as they involve guest dissatisfaction that may manifest as incivility. Recent studies indicate that uncivil customer behavior is a major stressor in the hospitality industry, significantly affecting employees' psychological well-being (Karatepe et al., 2021). Furthermore, guest incivility has been found to contribute to increased employee emotional exhaustion and higher turnover intention among employees (Shahzad et al., 2023).

Guest incivility is defined as low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm, such as speaking in a condescending tone, making unfair accusations, or displaying disrespectful attitudes toward employees (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). In general, this definition emphasizes that uncivil behavior does not necessarily involve overt physical contact, yet it may still generate psychological and social consequences for targeted individuals. In the service industry context, this concept has evolved into the term "customer or guest incivility," referring to uncivil behavior exhibited by customers or guests toward service employees.

Interactions between employees and uncivil guests may deplete employees' emotional resources, thereby increasing the risk of burnout and turnover intention (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). When employees are continually required to regulate their emotions while handling complaints involving guest incivility, they may experience psychological tension that can disrupt both work-life balance and personal well-being. Therefore, it is important to examine the psychological impact of guest incivility more specifically within the context of complaint handling in hotel room divisions. From a sustainability perspective, employees' psychological well-being constitutes an integral component of sustainable human resource practices. Such practices emphasize the importance of human resource management approaches that focus not only on employees' short-term performance in daily operations but also on long-term workforce sustainability (Aust et al., 2020; Kramar, 2022). A psychologically unsafe hotel work environment may threaten organizational sustainability through increased absenteeism, psychological exhaustion, and employee turnover among room division staff. As a labor-intensive sector in Indonesia, the hotel industry relies heavily on human resources, making the maintenance of employees' mental health an essential component of supporting social sustainability.

Therefore, research examining the relationship between complaint handling and employees' psychological well-being is important for providing a more comprehensive understanding of human resource management in the service sector, particularly in the hotel industry. Although numerous studies have investigated guest incivility and its effects on employees in the hospitality industry, research specifically focusing on room division employees within the context of complaint handling in Indonesian hotels, particularly in South Sumatra, remains limited. Service culture, educational background, hotel organizational structures, and the dynamic demands of local market conditions may influence both service delivery to guests and employees' psychological well-being. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of guest incivility during service recovery, particularly in complaint-handling situations, on the psychological well-being of room division employees in hotels in South Sumatra. Furthermore, this study is expected to deepen understanding of the psychological challenges experienced by frontline hotel employees and provide practical insights for hotel management to develop supportive work environments and sustainable human resource practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies conducted after 2020 have shown that guest incivility has increased alongside rising service expectations and post-pandemic pressures on service quality (Bani-Melhem et al., 2022; Chen & Eyouun, 2021). On the other hand, the growing diversity of hotel types has intensified market competition and expanded guest choices, thereby increasing pressure on hotel operations. Room division employees are often on the front lines of service recovery and, consequently, frequently encounter guest dissatisfaction and complaints. As a result, they constitute one of the employee groups most vulnerable to emotional strain. They are exposed not only to common workplace stressors but also to negative emotions and uncivil behavior from customers (Chung et al., 2021).

Complaint handling refers to employees' ability to receive, respond to, and effectively resolve customer complaints in a professional manner while ensuring that customer concerns are addressed appropriately and service quality is maintained. In handling guest complaints, communication skills, empathy, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities are essential, particularly for room division employees who frequently interact directly with guests during service encounters. Complaint handling can have both positive and negative implications and serves as an important element in maintaining service quality, customer satisfaction, and long-term customer relationships. Effective complaint handling involves prompt responses, empathy, polite communication, and organizational responsibility in resolving customer issues, as these elements help restore customer trust and reduce dissatisfaction resulting from service failures (Zeithaml et al., 2018). On the one hand, complaint handling may constitute a source of psychological strain for room division employees due to the emotional demands associated with managing dissatisfied guests and responding to service-related conflicts; on the other hand, it may also become a source of personal and professional development, depending on how hotels manage the process and support employees in challenging situations. When organizations provide adequate training, clear standard operating procedures, supportive supervision, and opportunities for skill enhancement, complaint handling can serve as an important opportunity for learning, competency development, and emotional resilience. Under such conditions, employees may experience enhanced self-confidence, greater control over workplace situations, stronger interpersonal competence, and a deeper sense of meaning at work, ultimately contributing to their psychological well-being and overall job performance.

In dealing with guest complaints and unpleasant behavior, employees are required to maintain professionalism despite emotionally demanding situations. According to Maxham (2001), effective complaint handling significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty, as customers whose complaints are managed fairly and efficiently tend to exhibit higher satisfaction, trust, and long-term loyalty toward the company. Furthermore, when employees possess adequate competencies and receive sufficient organizational support, complaint handling may enhance self-confidence, job satisfaction, and employees' ability to manage service-related challenges more effectively. However, when complaint handling is carried out under high-pressure conditions and without sufficient organizational support, the process may increase emotional burden, contribute to employee stress and exhaustion, and ultimately have negative consequences for service quality and the overall guest experience in hotels.

Negative incidents in hotels, particularly in departments that interact directly with guests, such as complaints accompanied by uncivil guest behavior, may trigger emotional responses among frontline employees, leading to prolonged stress, especially when such incidents recur. Beyond affecting the mental health of individual room division employees, these experiences may also influence guest satisfaction, organizational performance, and overall service quality (Chen & Eyouun, 2021). Recent studies further indicate that exposure to guest incivility is associated with psychological strain, emotional exhaustion, and decreased psychological well-being among employees (Cho et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021). Such conditions may generate emotional dissonance among room division employees, defined as the discrepancy between emotions

genuinely felt and those employees are required to display in their professional roles (Grandey et al., 2004). Over time, this situation may contribute to employee emotional exhaustion, reduced work engagement, and a decline in the overall quality of hotel services. As a job stressor in the occupational health literature, repeated exposure to uncivil behavior from customers—in this context, hotel guests—has been shown to be associated with increased work stress, burnout, and reduced employee psychological well-being (Sliter et al., 2010).

The use of emotional exhaustion and psychological distress in this study is based on the view that psychological well-being is reflected not only by positive psychological functioning but also by the absence of negative psychological states. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, high job demands, such as dealing with guest incivility during service recovery situations, can deplete employees' psychological resources, leading to emotional exhaustion and psychological distress, ultimately contributing to lower levels of psychological well-being (Bakker et al., 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the effect of guest incivility on the psychological well-being of room division employees, aiming to objectively measure the relationships and influences among variables using numerical data. A quantitative approach enables researchers to systematically collect data from respondents, namely, room division employees working in star hotels in South Sumatra, through structured questionnaires, allowing the findings to be analyzed statistically. By applying quantitative methods, this study tested hypotheses and determined the extent to which uncivil guest behavior during complaint handling affects employees' psychological well-being. Furthermore, the use of a quantitative design provides empirical evidence that supports a more objective understanding of workplace psychological challenges faced by hotel employees in service recovery situations.

Quantitative research is widely recognized as an approach that emphasizes testing relevant theories by measuring research variables with numerical data and statistical analysis. In the social sciences, this approach is considered effective for measuring behaviors, opinions, and attitudes to answer questions about what, who, how many, and when. In quantitative studies, data sources constitute an important consideration in determining appropriate data collection methods. In this study, several data collection methods were employed to obtain the information required to provide a clear understanding of the effect of guest incivility during complaint handling on the psychological well-being of room division employees in hotels in South Sumatra, thereby ensuring an adequate empirical basis for the study. The primary method of data collection involved distributing structured questionnaires to research respondents, while secondary data were obtained from written sources such as reports, academic articles, journals, books, and other relevant references. These sources included management theories, literature on customer satisfaction and complaint handling, and reports issued by local tourism authorities to support contextual understanding of the hotel industry.

The sample in this study consisted of 100 room division staff representing hotels in South Sumatra. According to Sugiyono (2019), research variables are characteristics or attributes of individuals or organizations that can be measured or observed and that vary among individuals or organizations under investigation. Variables may generate different categories of data, including categorical (nominal) data as well as continuous data on ordinal, interval, and ratio scales. This study employed two categories of variables: independent and dependent. The independent variable (X) in this study was guest incivility, while the dependent variable (Y) was psychological well-being. Furthermore, the study aimed to examine the extent to which guest incivility experienced during complaint handling influenced the psychological well-being of room division employees in hotels in South Sumatra.

Validity testing was conducted to assess the accuracy and appropriateness of the research instrument used in this study. An instrument is considered valid when the calculated correlation

coefficient (r-count) exceeds the critical value in the correlation table (r-table). In this study, a validity test was conducted on the research instrument, namely the questionnaire, to ensure that each item accurately measured the intended construct. Accordingly, an instrument is regarded as valid if it satisfies the established statistical criteria for validity. Reliability testing, meanwhile, was conducted using data processing supported by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Reliability analysis was performed to determine the extent to which measurement results remain consistent when repeated measurements are conducted on the same phenomenon using the same instrument. In this study, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to Siregar (, a research instrument is considered reliable when the reliability coefficient (r11) exceeds 0.60, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency among measurement items. Furthermore, reliability testing ensures that the instrument yields stable, dependable results, thereby strengthening the credibility of the research findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Respondent Based on Gender

No	Gender	Percentage
1	Male	51%
2	Female	49%

Sources: Authors' data processing, 2026

This study involved respondents with diverse demographic characteristics. By gender, 51% of respondents were male, and 49% were female. In terms of hotel classification, respondents were employed in hotels across different star categories in South Sumatra, with 35% in five-star hotels, 30% in four-star hotels, 31% in three-star hotels, and 4% in two-star hotels. Furthermore, respondents' work experience varied, with 27% having worked for six months, 26% for one year, 22% for two to three years, and 25% for more than three years. These findings indicate that the respondent profile was slightly dominated by male employees, while the largest proportion of respondents worked in five-star hotels and had approximately six months of work tenure. The majority of respondents (63%) were under 25 years old, while 25% were between 25 and 30 years old. A further 5% were aged between 31 and 35 years, and the remaining respondents were over 35 years old. Overall, the diversity of respondent characteristics provides a broader representation of room division employees working in hotels across South Sumatra.

Table 2. Respondent Based on Ages

No	Gender	Percentage
1	≤ 25 Years old	63%
2	25 – 30 years old	25%
3	31 – 35 Years old	5%
4	≥ 35 Years old	7%

Sources: Authors' data processing, 2026

The questionnaire items were analyzed for validity and reliability, and the research instrument was found to be valid (> 0.30) and reliable (> 0.70). Therefore, the instrument used in this study was considered capable of measuring the intended constructs accurately and consistently. Based on Table 1, the Guest Incivility variable demonstrated mean scores ranging from 3.09 to 3.15 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating that respondents' perceptions of uncivil guest behavior were at a moderate level. The highest mean score was observed for indicator CI3 ($M = 3.15$), suggesting that hotel guests occasionally express complaints in an impolite manner. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score was observed for indicator CI4 ($M = 3.09$), indicating that hotel guests sometimes behave less respectfully toward employees when making complaints. Overall, these findings suggest that room division employees experience moderate levels of guest incivility during complaint-handling situations.

Table 3. Variabel Descriptive Statistic of Guest Incivility
Item Statistics

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
CI1	3.10	.704	100
CI2	3.13	.895	100
CI3	3.15	.687	100
CI4	3.09	.780	100

Source: Authors' data processing, 2026

Based on Table 2, the Psychological Well-Being variable demonstrated mean scores ranging from 3.05 to 3.20 on a five-point Likert scale. Within the Emotional Exhaustion (EE) dimension, mean scores ranged from 3.05 to 3.19, with the highest value observed for indicator EE4 ($M = 3.19$), indicating that room division employees had difficulty recovering emotionally after handling guest complaints. Meanwhile, the Job Satisfaction (JS) dimension showed mean scores ranging from 3.09 to 3.17, with the highest values recorded for indicators JS2 and JS4 ($M = 3.17$). These indicators showed that room division employees felt pressured by the demands of handling guest complaints and experienced stress that was difficult to manage. In the final dimension, Psychological Distress (PD), mean scores ranged from 3.13 to 3.20, with the highest value for indicator PD2 ($M = 3.20$), suggesting that room division employees felt anxious when handling guest complaints. Overall, these average scores indicate that respondents' perceptions of their psychological condition while handling guest complaints were at a moderate level.

Table 4. Variable Descriptive Statistics of *Psychological Well-Being*
Item Statistics

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EE1	3.09	0.653	100
EE2	3.05	0.821	100
EE3	3.08	0.787	100
EE4	3.19	0.734	100
JS1	3.12	0.924	100
JS2	3.17	0.888	100
JS3	3.09	0.944	100
JS4	3.17	0.911	100
PD1	3.13	0.747	100
PD2	3.20	0.841	100
PD3	3.14	0.975	100
PD4	3.14	0.817	100

Source: Authors' data processing, 2026

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that respondents demonstrated relatively consistent perceptions regarding the conditions they experienced in their work environment. Hotel employees, in the course of performing their duties, occasionally experience psychological pressure, including emotional exhaustion, when handling guest complaints. These findings indicate that complaint-handling situations may create emotional demands that affect employees' psychological conditions, particularly among room division staff who frequently interact directly with guests.

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change statistics F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.568 ^a	.323	.316	6.767	.323	46.770	1	98	.000

Based on the results of the simple linear regression analysis, the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.568, indicating a moderate relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.323, indicating that 32.3% of the variation in the dependent variable (Y) is explained by the independent variable (X), with the remaining 67.7% attributable to other factors outside the model. Furthermore, the F-statistic of 46.770, with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicates that the regression model is statistically significant and appropriate for explaining the relationship between the variables. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the independent variable contributes meaningfully to variations in the dependent variable, although additional factors beyond the model may also play an important role.

Guest incivility refers to uncivil or disrespectful behavior displayed by hotel guests toward employees during service interactions. The findings of this study indicate that respondents' perceptions of the guest incivility indicators were moderate. This suggests that hotel employees in South Sumatra, particularly those in the room division, occasionally encounter unpleasant or disrespectful guest behavior while providing services, especially during complaint handling. Guest incivility may become a source of psychological pressure for hotel employees, potentially affecting their emotional condition and contributing to work-related stress. These findings are supported by the study of Sonia et al (2025), which reported that uncivil treatment from customers may lead to emotional exhaustion and increase employees' intention to leave their jobs. Furthermore, repeated exposure to uncivil guest behavior may gradually deplete employees' emotional resources, undermining both their psychological well-being and their ability to maintain service quality in hospitality settings.

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's psychological condition that reflects one's ability to manage emotions, cope with pressure, and perform roles in a positive manner. The findings of this study indicate that respondents' perceptions of the psychological well-being indicators were moderate. This suggests that room division employees frequently encounter service-related demands that may contribute to work-related stress and difficulty maintaining emotional balance. In the hotel context, continuous exposure to demanding service situations, particularly complaint handling and guest interactions, may increase employees' psychological burden and affect their emotional stability. These findings are consistent with the study by Lestari & Aprilia (2025), which defined work stress as pressure that alters employees' psychological conditions and may affect their thoughts, emotions, and overall health.

The results of the simple linear regression analysis conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics indicate that guest incivility during guest complaint handling has a significant effect on employees' psychological well-being, with an R value of 0.568 and an R^2 value of 0.323. This means that 32.3% of the variation in employees' psychological well-being can be explained by uncivil guest behavior, while the remaining 67.7% may be influenced by other factors outside the research model. The significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) indicates that the effect is statistically significant; therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted. These findings suggest that guest incivility is an important factor influencing employees' psychological well-being, particularly among room division staff who are directly involved in complaint handling.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the concept of Psychological Well-Being proposed by Ryff (Ryff, 1989), which emphasizes the importance of positive interpersonal relationships and individuals' ability to effectively manage their environment (environmental mastery). Exposure to guest incivility may disrupt these dimensions, as uncivil interactions can create emotional pressure and diminish the quality of workplace social relationships. Consequently, higher levels of guest incivility experienced by employees may increase the likelihood of diminished psychological well-being. In this regard, repeated exposure to disrespectful guest behavior may weaken employees' emotional resilience and reduce their ability to maintain positive psychological functioning in service-oriented work environments.

These findings may also be explained by Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which suggests that stress arises when individuals experience the loss of or perceive a threat to their psychological resources. Guest incivility, as a form of social stressor, may deplete employees' emotional energy and undermine their sense of self-worth, thereby

negatively affecting psychological well-being. In service-oriented environments such as hotels, repeated exposure to uncivil guest behavior may gradually exhaust employees' emotional resources, increasing vulnerability to psychological strain and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, organizations should provide adequate support systems and emotion management strategies to minimize the negative consequences of service interactions for employee well-being and to promote a healthier, more sustainable work environment.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that room division employees' perceptions of both guest incivility and psychological well-being were moderate, with mean scores ranging from 3.05 to 3.20. These findings indicate that hotel employees in South Sumatra fairly frequently encounter uncivil, disrespectful, or unpleasant guest behavior during service recovery processes, particularly in complaint-handling situations, although the intensity of such experiences is not considered extremely high. In hotel operations, this condition indicates that interactions between guests and employees, especially during complaint management, continue to pose challenges requiring organizational attention, as they may affect employees' psychological and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the findings suggest that maintaining supportive working conditions and effective service management is essential to reducing the negative psychological consequences associated with demanding guest interactions.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that guest incivility experienced by room division employees may generate psychological pressure that negatively affects psychological well-being, including emotional exhaustion, work-related stress, reduced workplace comfort, and diminished psychological well-being during service delivery. These findings suggest that guest complaint handling should be viewed not only as a service responsibility but also as a potential source of emotional strain for employees, particularly when interactions are accompanied by disrespectful or uncivil guest behavior. Such conditions may place additional emotional demands on employees who are expected to maintain professionalism while managing dissatisfied guests. Therefore, hotel management should pay greater attention to psychological support, supportive work environments, and training programs on conflict resolution and guest complaint handling to help employees maintain their mental and emotional well-being. In the long term, these efforts may contribute to healthier working conditions, improved employee resilience, and more sustainable service quality within hotel operations.

In addition, the analysis revealed a coefficient of determination of 0.323 (32.3%), indicating that the guest incivility variable accounted for 32.3% of the variation in employees' psychological well-being, while the remaining 67.7% was attributable to other factors outside the scope of this research model. These findings suggest that employees' psychological well-being is influenced not only by unpleasant or uncivil guest behavior but also by other factors not examined in this study. Such factors may include organizational support, workload, leadership style, workplace climate, emotional regulation capacity, and broader job-related conditions that influence employees' psychological experiences in service environments. Therefore, this study highlights that improving hotel employees' psychological well-being requires a more comprehensive, multidimensional approach that encompasses not only the management of guest-related interactions but also broader organizational strategies to promote employee mental health, resilience, and sustainable workplace well-being.

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