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Discussion paper

Substance use for restaurant servers: Causes and effects

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ABSTRACT

Restaurant industry employees have historically exhibited a high tendency toward substance use. To address this phenomenon, this study aimed to assess if a restaurant front-of-house server's work stress contributes to alcohol and illicit substance use. Specifically, it was hypothesized that a server's role stress (conflict and ambiguity) would stimulate substance use. Also, this study tested the impact of substance use on job and life satisfaction, and the moderating effect of self-control on the relationship between role stress and substance use. The results demonstrated that role ambiguity had a positive influence on substance use. Servers' drug use had a positive influence on job satisfaction, but no significant influence was found for alcohol use. As hypothesized, job satisfaction significantly increased life satisfaction. Lastly, self-control moderated the relationship between role stress and substance use. Detailed results and implications of the findings are provided in the main body of this paper.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has suffered from employees' exhibition of drug abuse (Pizam, 2012), alcohol abuse (Pizam, 2010), divorce (Pizam, 2013a), and suicide (Pizam, 2013b). This is especially concerning given the magnitude of the restaurant industry. By the end of 2017, the restaurant industry is projected to employ approximately 10 percent of the United States workforce and to have sales of $798.7 billion, which comprises about 4 percent of the United States' GDP (National Restaurant Association, 2017). Accordingly, the literature in hospitality have examined the underpinnings of substance abuse among hospitality employees, including those employed in a restaurant (Nusbaumer and Reiling, 2002; Zhu et al., 2010). These studies have examined the negative outcomes of substance abuse behaviors, such as increased theft, employee absenteeism, and lower worker productivity (Krippel et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2012).

One particular aspect to be emphasized in the hospitality industry is that employees are experiencing relatively higher levels of job stress compared to other industries (Boles and Babin, 1996; Gill et al., 2006). Compared to other hospitality employees, front-of-house restaurant servers are individuals who have to satisfy both managers and various customers, regardless of the employees' current mood or emotional state (Jung and Yoon, 2014; Kim et al., 2009; Liming, 2009). In other words, hospitality employees, especially front-of-house (FOH) servers, have to substantiate to their given role. Specifically, these servers contend with certain levels of role stress, which result from the conflict caused by incompatible expectations from multiple parties (e.g., demands from customers and/or managers), or the ambiguity resulting from the lack of knowledge in fulfilling their job role. The former refers to role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964) and the latter is known as role ambiguity (Jackson and Schuler, 1985).

In line with this notion, previous research has identified that both dimensions of role stress had negative influences on employees' job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Jung and Yoon, 2014; Kim et al., 2009). However, these studies did not implement one important relationship within their theoretical frameworks – the relationship between role stress and substance use. Indeed, work-related stress has long been considered as an antecedent of substance abuse, such as alcohol or drug abuse (Armeli et al., 2003; Sayette, 1999). Also, considering the size of the industry and the high tendency toward substance use among restaurant employees (Pizam, 2012), it is necessary to examine the relationship among restaurant employees' role stress, substance use (i.e., alcohol and drug use), job satisfaction, and life satisfaction.

Based on these rationales, this study was designed to examine the impact of restaurant employee's role stress on their substance use behaviors, and how these behaviors affect an employee's job and life satisfaction. Specific objectives were to examine (1) the influence of role stress on substance use (i.e., alcohol and drug use), (2) the influence of substance use on job satisfaction and life satisfaction, (3) the influence of job satisfaction on life satisfaction, (4) the moderating effect of self-control on the relationship between role stress and alcohol use, and (5) the moderating effect of self-control on the relationship between role stress and drug use.

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By fulfilling these research objectives, this study would provide significant implications. By illustrating that substance use results from restaurant-related work stressors, which in turn impacts employee's job and life satisfaction, this study would expand the existing model that examined the direct relationship between role stress and employee's job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2009). Empirically, results of this study would highlight the need for restaurant owners and/or managers to monitor potential workplace stressors. Further, by identifying the moderating role of self-control on the relationship between role stress and substance use, this study would illustrate that hiring employees with greater levels of self-control, or providing training to increase their self-control level, may reduce substance use behaviors.

2. Literature review

2.1. Work stressors and substance use

Early research on work stress and substance usage was initiated by adopting the existing model of tension reduction composed of two premises (Conger, 1956). The first premise is known as stress-response dampening (SRD) substance use, where drug or alcohol use alleviates tension derived from exposure to stressors (Armeli et al., 2003). Specifically, this implies that individuals are aware of pending stressors and turn to substance use as a means of pre-emptive coping. The second premise, referred to as stress-induced substance (SIS) use, states that exposure to stressors will induce or enhance the need for substance use as a means to alleviate tension (Sayette, 1999). In other words, the SIS premise postulates that individuals will turn to alcohol or substance use as a coping mechanism after exposure to stressors. Due to conflicting findings about which premise mirrors contemporary workplace settings, Frone (2016) utilized a fairly large sample size of more than 2800 participants and confirmed the robustness of the SIS premise.

Also rooted in the tension reduction model is the idea of a positive or negative spillover (Ragland and Ames, 1996). In brief, spillover refers to an intra-individual diffusion of job stressors and subsequent strain from one realm of life to another (Byron, 2005; Martin et al., 1992). The spillover model posited that individuals are not able to segregate their work lives from their personal lives, which results in emotional, physical, or mental states spilling over from the workplace to the home (Grunberg et al., 1998; Kohn, 1976; Martin et al., 1992). In line with the SIS premise, various research in spillover theory confirmed that high-stress work conditions leads to excessive substance use outside of the workplace (Grunberg et al., 1999; Grunberg et al., 1998; Martin et al., 1992).

Within a hospitality context, previous studies have pointed out hospitality employees' proclivity towards substance use (Belhassen and Shani, 2012; Nusbaumer and Reiling, 2002; Pizam, 2010). Pizam (2010) argued that food-service work conditions like high stress and different aspects of shift work, such as odd hours, contribute to the heavy consumption of alcohol among employees. In addition, due to workplace characteristics like easy access to alcohol, hotel and foodservice employees are more prone to develop a dependency on alcohol compared to employees in other industries (Belhassen and Shani, 2012; Nusbaumer and Reiling, 2002). Recent studies have found that the level of substance use could differ according to employee age (Moore et al., 2009), self-selection by personality type (Borchgrevink and Borchgrevink, 2013), and societal norms among foodservice employees (Moore et al., 2012). The common theme of these recent studies was that substance abuse could be a serious problem in the hospitality industry. However, no study in a hospitality setting has applied the SIS premise when considering the relationship between role stress and job satisfaction. Following the SIS premise (Frone, 2016) and spillover theory (Grunberg et al., 1998; Kohn, 1976; Martin et al., 1992), highly stressed employees may seek to engage in drinking and/or drug use to relieve their stress from work. Therefore, it can be argued that work-related stressors inherent to the restaurant industry may drive front-of-house restaurant employees to use drugs and/or alcohol to aid in post-work relaxation.

2.2. Role stress and substance use

Stress in the workplace has been a growing concern for both researchers and practitioners (Kim et al., 2009). Managing work-related stress is important because various counter-productive consequences (e.g., job dissatisfaction, absenteeism) may occur when it remains unresolved. Among various types of workplace stressors, role stress refers to job stressors that individuals can incur as a result of dysfunction within a complex organization (Rizzo et al., 1970). Role stress has been considered as a distinct form of workplace stressor because it is the stress derived by an individual from their unique job role (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). Further, role stress has been known as an important source of overall stress for high customer contact employees (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). According to Rizzo et al. (1970), role stress is comprised of two sub-constructs: role conflict and role ambiguity (Rizzo et al., 1970). Role conflict results from incompatible expectations from two or more parties (Kahn et al., 1964), and these conflicting pressures from multiple role demands increase stress for employees (Kopelman et al., 1983). Comparably, role ambiguity occurs when an employee lacks the knowledge of what is expected from them in their job role (Jackson and Schuler, 1985), or what resources are available to them to perform their job functions (Kahn et al., 1964).

In the hospitality industry, restaurants are identified as a high-stress workplace because employees are subject to the often-conflicting demands of supervisors and customers. For example, restaurant servers must satisfy the demands of each customer (who want to feel like they are the number one priority) and their managers (who want the server to maintain company procedures), which create a state of dissonance for the employee. Particularly, in addition to adhering to management directives, front-of-house employees are unique due to the close physical proximity to customers, time spent with customers, the immediacy of feedback provided by customers, and the amount of information provided by customers (Rafaeli, 1989). Further, restaurant servers can be seen as a boundary spanner (Boles and Babin, 1996), because servers are receiving salaries following the policies of the employer (i.e., restaurant), and earning tips based upon customers' satisfaction level (van Baaren, 2005). As such, due to consistent and simultaneous interactions with a diverse clientele, role ambiguity and role conflict among front-of-house employees are unavoidable (Karatepe and Uludag, 2008). Further, prolonged exposure to conflicting expectations and ambiguity can lead to high levels of stress (Kim et al., 2015). Following the SIS premise, Frone (1999) states that employees use alcohol as a coping mechanism to alleviate stresses they receive from the workplace. Similarly, Sinha (2001) posits that employees facing perplexing events (i.e., job stressors) are conditioned to turn to drug and/or alcohol use to alleviate their negative experiences at work. These studies consistently argue that there can be a positive relationship between role stress and alcohol/drug use. Based on these studies, we propose the following hypotheses:

H_{1a}. Role conflict will have a positive influence on drug use behaviors

H_{1b}. Role conflict will have a positive influence on alcohol use behaviors

H_{1c}. Role ambiguity will have a positive influence on drug use behaviors

H_{1d}. Role ambiguity will have a positive influence on alcohol use behaviors

2.3. Substance use and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to a favorable emotional attitude derived from an individual's perceived experience with his or her job (Locke, 1969). Job satisfaction has been considered important for managers and owners because low job satisfaction can lead to absenteeism, workplace

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