

Exploring the human consequences of crisis in the hospitality sector: a study from India

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Abstract

Purpose – The present study aimed to explore the socio-psychological linkages between perceived job insecurity, loneliness, social support, depression, and interpersonal misconduct among hotel workers during a global crisis. The primary motivation behind this research was the significant problem of increased occupational stress resulting from the negative consequences of the pandemic on all hotel employees, including frontline workers and management personnel. This study aimed to investigate the impact of the pandemic on occupational stress within the hotel sector.

Design/methodology/approach – This research obtained 269 original survey data from employees in the Indian hotel industry by distributing a questionnaire and employing a convenience sampling method. Subsequently, the data were examined using (SEM).

Findings – The research findings suggest that there is a positive correlation between interpersonal deviance and depression. Additionally, this study demonstrated that social support can alleviate loneliness but has no significant association with depression.

Research limitations/implications – This study can help hotel managers create guidelines that address the perceived insecurity and psychological issues faced by employees.

Originality/value – By understanding the psychological position of their employees, hoteliers can implement strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on their workforces.

Keywords Social support, Risk of unemployment, Perceived loneliness, Hotel industry employees, India

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the susceptibility of the hotel sector and instability of its workforce. According to previous research, the hospitality and leisure industry has been significantly impacted by the pandemic (Huang *et al.*, 2020), resulting in many hotel

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employees being subjected to layoffs (Heath *et al.*, 2022), furloughs, and reduced working hours. Reduction in employment opportunities and wages has resulted in a volatile and challenging occupational environment for hotel staff, such as stress (Kundu *et al.*, 2022), culminating in decreased job satisfaction, increased job insecurity, and occupational stress. COVID-19 had a significant impact on the overall well-being of hotel employees, encompassing physical, emotional and social dimensions, ultimately resulting in a mental health crisis (Jiménez-Estévez *et al.*, 2023; Rožman and Tominc, 2022; Tuzovic and Kabadayi, 2021). The pandemic has led to social isolation and reduced social support (Hailey *et al.*, 2023; Raza *et al.*, 2021), resulting in the identification of loneliness as a significant issue. Increased exposure to such situations may harm physical and mental health, and social isolation has been linked to depression and anxiety. The pandemic's widespread disruption has also affected hotel employees' engagement in interpersonal deviance, including harassment, verbal abuse, and physical assaults. Prior studies on interpersonal deviance have employed leadership approaches and personality traits; however, several variables play a role. Hence, this study employs socio-psychological factors to explore interpersonal deviance among hotel employees and pinpoints the crucial psychological factors that contribute to such behavior, with the aim of developing effective interventions to mitigate it.

Further exploration of psychological factors could improve our understanding of interventions required to reduce interpersonal misconduct among workers. Previous research on interpersonal deviance has typically employed leadership techniques and personality traits as key variables (Haider *et al.*, 2018; Pletzer *et al.*, 2020). However, as Malik and Lenka (2019a, b) argued, interpersonal deviance cannot be attributed to a single predictor or a character trait. Instead, many factors contribute to this phenomenon. Therefore, this study examines socio-psychological factors to determine the essential psychological elements that contribute to interpersonal deviance and to develop suitable interventions to reduce it by ensuring that hotel employees are in a positive psychological state.

In this study, we proposed that the heightened sense of job insecurity brought about by the pandemic would lead employees to feel lonely, which would subsequently elevate their stress levels, resulting in interpersonal deviance (Abas, 2024). Our findings will enable policymakers and practitioners to understand the psychological elements that contribute to interpersonal deviance, thereby enabling them to develop effective policies and interventions to decrease employee interpersonal deviance, particularly in the hospitality industry (Abas *et al.*, 2024a, b; Chiu *et al.*, 2015). This study's theoretical implications underscore the significance of socio-psychological factors in comprehending interpersonal deviance among hotel employees. Previous research has used leadership techniques and personality traits to examine interpersonal deviance. However, the present study demonstrated that several factors, such as job insecurity, loneliness, and stress, are implicated in such deviant behavior. Therefore, it is crucial for research to explore the complex relationship between socio-psychological factors and interpersonal deviance in greater depth and devise an all-encompassing framework to comprehend and tackle such behavior in workplaces. Furthermore, this study's practical implications hold significant importance for policymakers and practitioners operating within the hospitality industry. The results of this study indicate that it is imperative to focus on the psychological well-being of hotel staff as a means of mitigating interpersonal deviance. Policymakers and practitioners should prioritize the reduction of job insecurity, provision of social support to address loneliness, and implementation of stress management programs to enhance employee well-being. The implementation of these interventions has the potential to induce a favorable psychological state, which may subsequently lead to a reduction in the occurrence of interpersonal deviance among hotel staff. Consequently, this research suggests that policymakers and practitioners ought to give precedence to the well-being of employees and devise efficacious interventions to tackle socio-psychological elements that contribute to interpersonal deviance.

Literature review and hypotheses development

This work is grounded in the Conservation of Resources theory proposed by [Hobfoll \(1989\)](#). This theory posits that individuals experience psychological stress when they perceive a loss of valuable resources, such as time, energy, or skills, and are unable to restore them despite investing in additional resources ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). These resources may encompass tangible assets, intangible qualities, or environmental factors that are advantageous to employees. Consistent with COR, when resources are depleted, employees must allocate new resources to compensate for lost resources. When workers are unable to recuperate their resources, it may lead to serious consequences and negatively impact their well-being ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). COR ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)) was used to ascertain the relationship between study variables. Using COR theory, we categorize unemployment as a factor that depletes resources. Employees typically view employment as a source of social support, recognition and fair treatment. Drawing on COR's assumptions, we postulate that unemployment may deplete social resources, leading to psychological stress and burnout. In response to such negative behaviors, employees may engage in deviant activities and behaviors. Employees may not allocate new resources because of resource depletion, which could impede their ability to perform well ([Schonpflug, 1985](#)). Loss of resources triggers a protective system against additional losses ([Schmidt, 2014](#)). Given the uncertainty that employees feel about their future due to COVID-19, it can be deduced that the result may present a potential threat of joblessness that could result in monetary instability. ([Halbesleben et al., 2014](#)). This, in turn, can exacerbate their perception of loneliness and sadness. Additionally, when employees are instructed to work from home, they lose vital social resources, and the resulting feeling of loneliness from this loss may be substantial ([Schmidt, 2014](#)). Negative consequences arise from depleted resources ([Kalshoven and Boon, 2012](#)). When there is minimal social connection and uncertainty about losing one's job, employees may experience loneliness. This can result in poor psychological state. Conversely, when workers experience loneliness, they may feel as though their freedom is threatened, leading to depression and an increased likelihood of engaging in deviant behavior.

Risk of unemployment and perceived loneliness

Unemployment refers to a situation in which individuals aged between 16 and 64 are neither employed nor self-employed during a specific period, despite being physically and mentally capable of working and actively seeking employment. This is typically defined as individuals who do not have a paying job or are not self-employed despite being available for work. Unemployment is associated with the depletion of financial resources, which also limits social interactions outside the family, influencing status, dignity, personality, and even an employee's ability to properly contribute to the economy ([Griep et al., 2016](#)). Unemployment is regarded as one of the most significant, discrete, and rational life events that necessitate any behavioral and psychological change on the part of an individual. Unemployment frequently triggers a sense of solitude, especially when an individual's employment status is unclear and perceived to be at high risk (high perceived risk of unemployment) ([Hiswåls et al., 2017](#)). Subjectively perceived disparity between one's real and desired social relationships is referred to as loneliness ([Jang et al., 2021](#)). Low levels of social interaction are usually indicative of social isolation ([Emerson et al., 2020](#)). The risk of unemployment has increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and workers with limited financial resources may be unable to uphold widely recognized societal norms, leading to loneliness. Unemployment, perceived as a potential resource loss, can be challenging to replace. The anxiety of unemployment may be interpreted as a deficiency in financial and social capital, consequently leading to sensations of solitude. When workers are apprehensive about losing their jobs, they are inclined to feel detached from their peers and social networks.

H1. The risk of unemployment is positively related to loneliness during COVID-19.

Social support, perceived loneliness, and depression

Individuals without a sense of belonging often experience persistent isolation, low self-esteem, and social distrust (Lee and Robbins, 1998). The feeling of interaction and participation with others is referred to as social connectedness (de Jong-Gierveld *et al.*, 2016). The term “social support” has been described as “a social network’s provision of psychological and material resources intended to benefit an individual’s ability to cope with stress” (Marroquín, 2011; Cohen *et al.*, 2004). Individuals who believe they are cut off from social groups feel vulnerable. Human life requires social support (Matthews *et al.*, 2016), and depressed people receive less social support on average than non-depressed people, and higher perceived support predicts potential depression remission. (Lahey and Cronin, 2008). Some evidence suggests that enacted social support is related to reduce depressive symptoms (Collins *et al.*, 1993). There is a connection between perceived loneliness and social support has a direct impact on depression levels (Chang *et al.*, 2018). Employees who are depressed will benefit from perceived social support. Social support is a crucial factor in mitigating feelings of isolation and eliciting favorable cognitive, behavioral, and psychological reactions. According to Cacioppo and Hawkey (2009), social support from peers, families, and other sources can trigger these responses. Furthermore, when employees receive social support, they do not experience resource loss, which reduces their stress and isolation. Hence, we hypothesize as follows:

H2. Perceived social support is negatively related to loneliness during COVID-19.

Perceived loneliness and depression

Loneliness has a significant impact on well-being. Loneliness is closely linked to morbidity, hypertension, and immune system dysfunctions. Loneliness is a distressing feeling caused by a person’s sense of inadequacy in social relationships. (Brown *et al.*, 2018; Spreng *et al.*, 2020). Social isolation has also been linked to a decline in mental wellbeing (Coyle and Dugan, 2012). Loneliness, in addition to objective indicators of social connections, is a significant risk factor for depression (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2006). Severe depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder are all linked to social isolation, according to a survey of over 33,000 adult population residents in the United States. (Teo, 2013). Mental disorders and depression are strongly linked to subjective alienation from friends and family (Santini *et al.*, 2020). During the early stages of COVID-19, studies have shown that a significant percentage of the general population experienced symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Hyland *et al.*, 2020). Perceived loneliness resulting from social isolation due to the pandemic has been identified as a major stressor that can lead to workers feeling depleted of resources, ultimately resulting in negative outcomes. Many employees have been unable to attend work, socialize with friends and colleagues, or participate in activities and parties due to the pandemic, leading to feelings of loneliness and depression. Hence, we hypothesize as follows:

H3. Perceived loneliness is positively related to depression during COVID-19.

H4. Perceived social support is negatively related to depression during COVID-19.

Depression and interpersonal deviance

It is difficult to ensure that employees’ conduct meets organizational standards and system criteria when they feel emotionally exhausted. Negative emotions such as depression, decadence, exhaustion, anxiety, and stress can contribute to a loss of motivation at work,

unjustified absences, passive laziness, complaining, avoiding accountability, and other behaviors. Depression is a prevalent psychological condition that characterizes a state of low mood and influences a person's thoughts, actions, and sense of well-being. It extends beyond mere sadness (American Psychological Association, 2013). Depression is a mental illness in which an individual experiences feelings of weakness, misery, unhappiness, unmotivation or hopelessness. Anxiety impairs an employee's judgment by causing cognitive and emotional obstacles, which may negatively impact organizational adherence (Rahmani *et al.*, 2021). Interpersonal deviance refers to employees' actions that harm others within the organization (Abas *et al.*, 2023; Bennett and Robinson, 2000). Predictors of interpersonal deviance indicate that depressed workers have limited control over situations, which reduces their ability to perceive and respond appropriately. Consequently, employee depression tends to lead to interpersonal deviance (Markova, 2018). Depression continues to obstruct individuals' ability to think clearly, resulting in interpersonal deviance. Employee depression can contribute to deviant behaviors (Mathur and Chauhan, 2018). Emotionally exhausted employees are more susceptible to internal and external stimuli in the workplace and an increase in emotional fatigue often leads to interpersonal deviance (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. Perceived depression is positively related to interpersonal deviance during COVID-19.

The following conceptual model was developed based on the literature review mentioned above, see Figure 1.

Research methods

Measurement

The questionnaire was the result of a thorough literature review. Five items were adopted to investigate perceived loneliness as obtained by Hughes *et al.* (2004). Ten items were obtained from Zimet *et al.* (1988) to assess social support. Five items were used to assess interpersonal deviance, and were obtained from Bennett and Robinson (2000). Depression was measured by four items and was derived from (Santini *et al.*, 2020). Five items were adopted to investigate perceived risk of unemployment, as obtained by Kinnunen and Natti (1994). A three-point

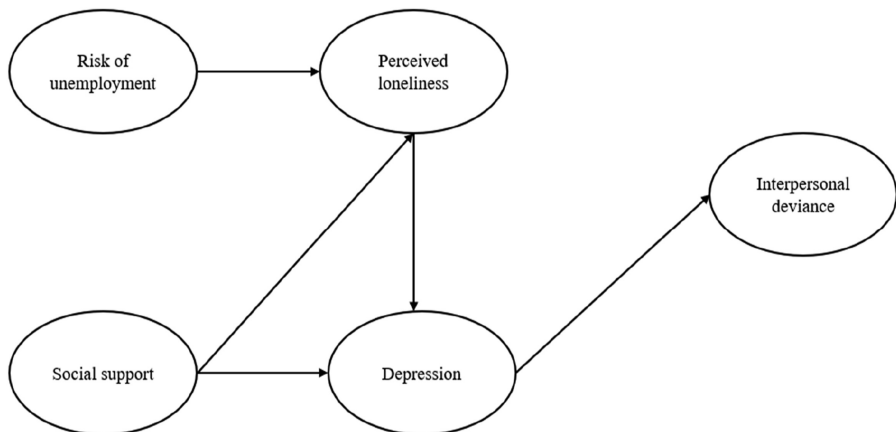


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

Source(s): Authors' own creation

scale was used to measure loneliness and the perceived risk of unemployment. Five-point scales were used to measure interpersonal deviance, depression, and social support.

Sampling and data collection

The study's target population was hotel employees in UT J&K, India. A convenience sampling approach was employed to collect responses from hotel industry employees. In total, 402 questionnaires were distributed, 315 of which were returned. Following a comprehensive assessment, 269 returned questionnaires were deemed suitable for data analysis. This response rate corresponded to the average rate observed in employee-based hospitality studies (Ali et al., 2021). Respondents' sociodemographic and employment data are presented in Table 1.

Data analysis approach

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized in the current research to test the hypotheses. The SEM procedure involved two stages: the first was conducted prior to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and the second was a structural equation analysis. The initial step in SEM was to confirm that the estimation models associated with the analysis were appropriate and well established. In addition, it is necessary to properly characterize the latent factors before running the SEM. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the items in a specific instrument on a hypothetical or theoretical basis. CFA examined whether the hypothetical or theoretically defined factorial structures of the scales in the SEM were valid and suitable.

Results

Measurement model

To ensure the reliability and internal consistency of the Likert-type scale data before testing the Confirmatory Model, it was essential to calculate the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Giem and Gliem, 2003). As Hair et al. (2010) note that evaluating reliability is essential for determining the consistency of multiple measurements of a variable. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (C.R.) were used to evaluate the consistency and dependability of the scale. The values for Cronbach's alpha and C.R. typically fall between 0 and 1, with a value close to 1.0, indicating a higher degree of internal consistency among the data items on a scale. In the initial screening of the data, Cronbach's alpha was lower than acceptable. After

	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	201	74.7
Female	68	25.3
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	112	41.4
Unmarried	157	58.36
<i>Seniority</i>		
Less than 1 year	48	17.84
1-3 years	67	24.9
3-5 years	33	12.26
More than 5 years	121	44.98

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table 1.
Information of the respondents (*n* = 269)

removing one item from perceived loneliness, four items from social support, and three items from interpersonal deviance, according to George and Mallery (2021), a Cronbach's value above 0.70, as displayed in Table 2, is generally considered to be quite good, as per the commonly accepted guideline. The results showed that both Cronbach's alpha and C.R. were greater than 0.7. Hence, it can be concluded that the scales are reliable, which supports the measurement model (Abas et al., 2024a, b; Hair et al., 2016). Additionally, to evaluate the reliability of the scale used in this study, the average range of variance extracted (explained) by a construct's items was above the threshold of 0.5, as summarized in Table 3. Normality tests were performed before model fitting and hypothesis testing to check the normality of

Item	Skewness	Loadings
<i>Risk of unemployment</i>		
RU1	-2.038	0.889
RU2	-2.054	0.896
RU3	-1.845	0.888
RU5	-1.795	0.885
<i>Social support</i>		
SC1	-2.087	0.913
SC2	-1.939	0.88
SC3	-2.096	0.919
SC4	-1.943	0.894
SC6	-1.446	0.521
SC8	-1.633	0.742
<i>Perceived loneliness</i>		
PL1	-0.037	0.837
PL2	0.203	0.923
PL4	-2.272	0.521
PL5	0.228	0.801
<i>Depression</i>		
DP1	-1.614	0.915
DP2	-1.589	0.929
DP4	-1.572	0.932
<i>Interpersonal deviance</i>		
ID1	-0.964	0.754
ID2	-0.87	0.857
ID3	-0.939	0.793
ID5	-1.036	0.85

Table 2.
Item properties

Source(s): Authors own creation

Constructs	Cronbach alpha	AVE
Unemployment	0.76	0.79
Social support	0.89	0.66
loneliness	0.92	0.67
Depression	0.83	0.61
Interpersonal deviance	0.78	0.85

Table 3.
Reliability and validity

Source(s): Authors own creation

the data. The standard acceptance of skewness is “ $< \pm 3$ ” (Hung *et al.*, 2011). In our study, all skewness was within the band of “ $< \pm 3$ ”, as shown in Table 2.

Confirmatory factor analysis

A five-construct measurement model consisting of 23 indicators was examined. Two variables, one from depression and the other from the perceived risk of unemployment, were removed based on standardized loading and error variance to maintain the unidimensionality of the model. After the low-loading variables were eliminated, the confirmatory model displayed a satisfactory fit, with a chi-square value of 406.643, degrees of freedom at 186, CFI at 0.95, RMSEA at 0.067, and a probability level of 0.00. The model's reliability was confirmed by verifying the standardized loadings of items, with a minimum estimation of 0.50 (Julmi *et al.*, 2021). The factor loading estimation for each item ranged from 0.77 to 0.99, as shown in Table 2, and the CA and AVE in Table 3, indicating that the confirmatory factor analysis model was dependable and valid for structural equation modeling.

Structural equation modeling

The results of the SEM analysis indicated a satisfactory match between the data. The Chi-square statistic was 337.543 with 181 degrees of freedom. The CFI value was 0.96, and the RMSEA was 0.057, with a probability level of 0.00. The proposed relationships in the Structural Equation can be analyzed through path relationships, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 presents the results of the SEM examination to test the hypotheses. According to the p -values, H1, H2, H3, and H5 were confirmed, with p -values of 0.06, 0.03, 0.001, and 0.001, respectively. However, the p -value for H4 was 0.136, leading to the rejection of H4.

H1 suggests a positive correlation between unemployment and loneliness, and our study confirms this relationship at a significance level of 0.06. Therefore, we accept the following hypothesis: H2 indicates that when individuals perceive social support from their society, their loneliness decreases. Our study supports H1, as the quotient symbol is negative with a p -value of 0.03. H3 examined the positive association between loneliness and depression. Our research supports H3 as the quotient value is positive ($p = 0.001$). H4 described the negative relationship between social support and depression. However, our study failed to reject H4, as the quotient was positive but the p -value was greater than 0.10. The H5 explores the negative association between depression and interpersonal deviance. Our results support H5, with a p -value of 0.001.

Discussion and conclusion

During the outbreak of COVID-19 in India, this study investigated the mitigating and modeling impact of social support on interpersonal deviance triggered by depression, perceived loneliness, and perceived risk of unemployment in the hotel industry in UT J&K, India. In line with the existing literature, the threat of losing employment has a major impact

Hypotheses		Estimate	S.E.	P	Results
Unemployment → Loneliness	H1	0.127	0.041	0.06	Supported
Social support → Loneliness	H2	-0.146	0.03	0.031	Supported
Loneliness → Depression	H3	0.54	0.221	***	Supported
Social support → Depression	H4	0.086	0.082	0.136	Rejected
Depression → Interpersonal deviance	H5	0.251	0.072	***	Supported

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table 4.
Results of path relationships

on feelings of loneliness. As indicated by H1, the results of our study revealed a positive correlation between unemployment and loneliness. This relationship was confirmed at a significance level of 0.06, which led us to accept the hypothesis. Employees who worry about losing their jobs are more likely to feel alienated from their co-workers and social circles. Fear of losing one's job has a significant impact on feelings of loneliness. (Lee *et al.*, 2001). Loneliness is a problem that arises when social support is scarce (Perlman and Peplau, 1984). Perceived loneliness was predicted by perceived social support in a major and negative manner. (Pehlivan *et al.*, 2012). Social support helps minimize loneliness (Bernardon *et al.*, 2011). Loneliness has been known to be one of the variables of relevance for depression (Liang *et al.*, 2019). Employee depression can be a factor in deviant behavior (Mathur and Chauhan, 2018). Long-term unemployment harms the social facets of an employee's life. In recent years, the unemployment rate in Japan and Korea has risen dramatically. According to a study published in the Deccan Herald, J&K has a 16% unemployment rate, which is significantly higher than India's overall employment rate of 6.7% (*Greater Kashmir*). A thorough investigation has revealed definitive evidence in various disciplines, such as medicine and psychology. Unemployment can lead to hostile conduct that extends beyond the consequences of financial losses (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005). Thus, Hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H5) were supported.

According to our findings, the perceived risk of unemployment increases loneliness, which in turn is diminished by social support, and loneliness increases depression levels. Depressed employees are more prone to interpersonal deviance. This study showed that social support reduces employees' feelings of loneliness in the Indian hotel industry. Employees surrounded by a large social network are less likely to experience psychological problems, such as perceived loneliness. As a result, this study examined the perceived risk of unemployment as a potential trigger for perceived isolation. Loneliness is reduced by social support, and when an employee feels lonely, depression levels rise. Depression facilitates interpersonal deviance. This study sheds light on how family, colleagues, and peers can help minimize the negative effects of depression, which could result in deviant behavior.

Managerial/practical implications

The implications of this study for managerial practice in the hotel industry are substantial, especially in developing countries such as India, where unemployment rates are relatively high. The fear of losing a job and its detrimental effects on psychological and behavioral implications may have disastrous consequences for both individuals and organizations. This study aimed to shed light on the processes through which the risk of unemployment causes feelings of loneliness, which in turn triggers depression and leads to interpersonal deviance. This study adds to the literature on the subject by demonstrating how social support has a substantial impact on isolated individuals. Our study found an unremarkable association between social support and depression, which sets it apart from the findings of other studies. The results showed a noticeable correlation between perceived risk of unemployment and loneliness. The data indicated the importance of social support in reducing loneliness among hotel workers. They believed that loneliness increases the risk of depression, which can lead to interpersonal deviance, suggesting that increased social support among these workers may prevent feelings of alienation and other negative thoughts. The implications of this scholarly work for preventing mental and behavioral problems in the hotel industry are intriguing. From a practical standpoint, social support from family, colleagues, friends, and others can reduce isolation significantly. While the pandemic has had a significant impact on employee mental health, especially in the hotel industry, which relies heavily on social interaction, the industry must brace for challenging times ahead. Therefore, it is crucial to support those who fear job loss, as social support and interactions can help to minimize

loneliness. Given that our results show that employee isolation can contribute to depression, which in turn leads to workplace deviance, it is critical to recognize at-risk individuals, identify them, and devise a plan to help them overcome their feelings of loneliness. Hotels should assist their employees by implementing a “no-layoff policy during difficult times” and boosting morale by prioritizing employee well-being. By offering access to counseling services and providing social support from top-level management, employees feel less isolated and more connected. To foster social interaction and cohesion, practitioners can use platforms such as Google Meet, Cisco WebEx, Skype, IMO, and Zoom to start initiatives. Additionally, employees can register for free online mental health counseling to prevent loneliness and depression, which can lead to interpersonal deviance.

Limitations

However, there are a few drawbacks to this analysis that should be addressed when evaluating the findings. First, a loneliness scale was developed using self-reported evidence. Interpersonal deviance is often self-reported, which may be misleading; managers or supervisors are the appropriate people to report deviance. Financial strain, which could have played a vital role, was not considered. In this study, the sample size was small; in future studies, a relatively large sample size should be considered. As our study used only a questionnaire for data collection, multiple sources of information could be used in future studies. In the future, responses from retired and less skilled employees may also be gathered. However, as this can only provide a narrow view of a specific industry, such as the hotel industry, future research may take a more systematic approach by examining other industries. Another significant drawback that should be addressed is that the study’s viewpoints are from Jammu and Kashmir, India. These results cannot be generalized because culture differs significantly across countries. Addressing these flaws will help fill in any gaps in knowledge and strengthen scholars’ and researchers’ understanding of how to cope with the current crisis and minimize possible consequences.

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