

Respect and Resilience in Retail and Fast-food

The icare-funded study Respect and Resilience in Retail and Fast-food* identified a number of opportunities to prevent, and reduce the impact of, dysfunctional employee-customer interactions.

A survey of retail employees found that 85% had experienced verbal abuse from a customer, 15% have experienced physical customer violence, and 11% sexual harassment or abuse*.

This can have a significant impact on employee retention, absenteeism and workplace injuries with Workers Insurance claims across the industry totalling around \$85 million per year**.

What is dysfunctional customer behaviour?

Dysfunctional customer behaviour is behaviour towards an employee during a service interaction that goes against what is socially accepted.

Dysfunctional customer behaviour occurs across a spectrum from low to high intensity actions:



What can you do in your workplace?



The physical workplace environment

Making the physical environment easy for customers to navigate and making it clear to customers their behaviour is being monitored can positively influence outcomes.

For example:

- making aisles wider where possible;
- having well-marked queuing areas;
- install highly visible security cameras.

*Respect and Resilience in Retail and Fast-food: Approaches to reduce the incidence and employee impacts of dysfunctional customer behaviour, 2019, www.icare.nsw.gov.au/about-us/publications/

**As at 30 Nov 2018, based on Policy Renewal Year 2017 policies.



Workplace support

Employees who feel they are supported by their employer have been shown to experience less psychological distress following dysfunctional customer behaviour incidents reducing immediate and long-term impacts.

For example:

- introduce a formalised support system such as management-endorsed debriefing sessions;
- include employees in decision making that influences or shapes their role, workplace environment, training or safety policies;
- adopt a 'zero tolerance' culture for poor customer behaviour through strategies like signage or removing customers who mistreat employees.



Customer-service training

Effective training, in both communication techniques and problem-solving skills, for customer-service employees can limit preventable service failures (that may trigger or motivate dysfunctional customer behaviour), and improve employees' confidence in responding to incidences.

Strategies to deliver training that are both effective and accepted by employees include:

- using realistic case studies or video clips of what to do (or what not to do) in a scenario;
- include interactive activities such as role plays in the training program;
- use the opportunity for employees to hear from guest speakers like experienced staff or experts;
- provide workbooks to support retention, rather than handouts.



Incident reaction training

Providing employees with emotional response and coping strategies is important to helping minimise the consequences of dysfunctional customer behaviour.

For example:

- training focused on perspective taking can foster an understanding of the customer's point-of-view, and thereby reduce the number and severity of dysfunctional customer behaviour incidences.

Want to know more?

The full report is available at www.icare.nsw.gov.au/about-us/publications/