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The optimal shift length for the resilient millennial chef

Abstract. The amount of millennial employees who are employed in the hospitality and tourism industry has increased significantly. The millennial generation does not endorse the same level of commitment and work ethic to their careers as previous generations. The millennial are more likely to develop mental health problems as they are often dissatisfied with the working conditions. The purpose of the study was to determine the optimal shift length for chefs between the ages of 25 and 39 to promote resilience. A quantitative research approach and a cross-sectional design was used. Two groups of chefs working various work shift lengths were identified. Shift length was divided into two categories: up to 8 hours and more than 8 hours. The Adult Resilience Measure (ARM-R) was used to measure resilience. There were 150 millennial chef participants who took part in this study. The study found that the millennial chefs who worked more than 8 hour shifts are less resilient than those who worked more than 8 hour shifts. The results furthermore indicated that social skills play a significant role in a millennial chef's levels of resilience. Social support and an 8 hour or less work shift contributes to the resilience levels of millennial chefs and is therefore, and optimal shift length for resilience. This study serves as a guideline to provide advice to both restaurant managers and chefs on coping with stressors in the kitchen environment specifically post COVID-19 where longer working hours would be required.

Keywords: resilience, millennial chefs, work hours, shift lengths, wellbeing in the workplace

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1. Introduction

The amount of millennial employees who are employed in the hospitality and tourism industry has increased significantly (Hammond, Gnika & Ravichandran, 2019), since they are replacing baby boomers (Wubbe, 2014). The millennial generation is defined as those who were born between 1981 and 1996. Whereas the term 'baby boomers' refers to individuals born between 1946 and 1964 (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), who are now close to retirement age.

The millennial generation does not endorse the same level of commitment and work ethic to their careers as baby boomers (Wubbe, 2014) and this often conflicts with the hospitality industry's standards and expectations of millennial chefs' supervisors. In the hospitality industry, employees need to work long hours, often at short notice and on public holidays, weekends and at nights (Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007; Pratten, 2003). On top of the long hours, hospitality employees also experience high levels of work stress. For example, chefs must work fast and produce quality food in a timely manner (Ariza-Montes et al., 2018). However, the realities of the hospitality industry are in contrast with millennials' main motivation, which is their personal goals and not necessarily their work goals, as their priorities are more focused on creating a work-life balance for themselves (Twenge, et al., 2010).

Millennial employees who enter the hospitality industry are more likely to develop mental health problems such as stress and burnout as they are often dissatisfied with the working conditions (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Park & Gursoy, 2012). Subsequently, many of them quit their jobs because they are not prepared to work the long, unsociable hours for relatively poor wages to the detriment of their social life (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008).

A commercial kitchen is a high stress environment. Stressors in the kitchen include but are not limited to long shifts, poor ventilation, blocked drains, extreme heat, not enough counter space that leads to health complaint issues (Ceresa et al., 2020). Related to stress and health complaint issues are abusive work practices and bullying, harassment and having to train new chefs, which is time consuming and puts pressure on the whole kitchen because one chef cannot function at optimal speed and efficiency and with limited practical experiences (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Ariza-Montes et al., 2018). Subsequently, the longer a shift is, the longer a chef will be exposed to the stressors. Continuous stress leads to burnout (Maslach, 2003); however, resilience reduces stress levels and also burnout (Kang, Twigg & Hertzman, 2010).

Resilience is an individual's ability of positive adjustment when faced with challenging situations (Luthar & Zigler, 1991). Resilient individuals have learnt

to successfully adapt and manage stress and trauma (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011), and experiences lower levels of burnout when working a shift that is not longer than 8 hours compared to one who works more than 8-hour shifts.

Furthermore, a commercial kitchen is a system. Each step (chef) depends on another step (chef). If one of the steps falters, the whole system will eventually fail. In other words, if one chef experiences high levels of stress and burnout, it can influence the rest of the kitchen brigade and kitchen operations. It is important therefore to determine the length of the optimal work shift for millennial chefs in order to improve their resilience.

This author adopts Michael Ungar's views (2011) that relationships are resources that affect the level of resilience. The theoretical framework underlying the study is Stevan E. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1988). Conservation of resources (COR) can be described as the process of experiencing, dealing with, and becoming resilient to continuous and traumatic stress. It is assumed that depleted resources create stress and that individuals aim to keep and maintain these resources. Some resources are vital for survival. Furthermore, participation in non-work and work activities uses energy and time. Since work consumes a person's resources, it can interfere with their ability to perform in their daily life. For some individuals, the depletion of resources due to work can result in poor wellbeing (Grandley & Cropanzano, 1999). Because chefs have to work long hours and experience stress, they spend little time with the family and friends, which is a positive resource to boost resilience. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the optimal shift length to ensure better resilience.

2. Literature review

2.1. The millennial employee

According to Eileen Wubbe (2014), millennials will account for approximately 75% of the workforce by 2024. This segment will keep raising as previous generations are slowly retiring. Many restaurants and companies are struggling to attract and retain representatives of this generation. According to Forbes (2020), millennials seek jobs that offer benefits supporting a healthy work-life balance. Much of the power to satisfy millennials lies within employers' action and protocols (Forbes, 2020).

The work values of millennial employees differ from those of the older generations, such as baby boomers. Millennials prefer their work environments to be flexible and require personal freedom to perform optimally in their occupations (Bano, Vyas & Gupta, 2015). Millennial employees value their families more than their jobs (Gursoy, Maier & Chi, 2008). They also display lower levels of

work engagement than older generations. However, according to Forbes (2020), millennials value social connection. They enjoy the ability to work openly in teams where they are constantly collaborating and receiving help and feedback from their colleagues. Social interactions between co-workers have been shown to boost job satisfaction (Forbes, 2020).

Representatives of the Y generation are perceived as entitled because they were taught from a young age that they can achieve anything that they put their minds to (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennial employees are characterised as being energetic, creative and charismatic and with correct guidance they can be mentored to become competent employees (Casben, 2007). Millennial chefs have often experienced tough times to become as resilient as more mature colleagues, who are older, have higher levels of resilience in the workplace (Liebenberg & Moore, 2016). Most individuals who experience job burnout are also familiar with work stress, which is one of its major causes (Childs & Stoeber, 2010).

The long, unsociable working hours, combined with low wages, are some of the reasons why the turnover rate among millennial employees in the hospitality industry is quite high (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). Faced with high levels of stress, burnout, industry realities and their supervisors' expectations, many of them prefer to quit (Barron et al., 2007). This trend will most likely increase among millennials, especially in the hospitality industry (Hammond, Gnika & Ravichandran, 2019).

2.2. Resilience in the workplace

Faced with challenges in the workplace, resilient individuals are able to learn new things, develop additional skills and enhance their talents to overcome difficulties and grow. Resilience is regarded as a key competence of the 21st century (Donders, 2015). Resilience allows one to face daily struggles and rely on inner strengths to succeed (Donders, 2015).

A resilient individual can bounce back from a negative event because resilience is developed through life experiences (Luthar & Zigler, 1991). Resilient individuals are able to handle stress and other demanding life situations (Liebenberg & Moore, 2016). Resilience generates the confidence to approach life creatively. Resilient individuals are more stable in their emotions, find it easier to overcome difficult situations and gain useful insights from them. They understand the benefits of recreation and recovery, have developed a masterful lifestyle that aligns with biological rhythms and know how to focus attention in the workplace.

Individuals experience stressful situations differently depending on their levels of resilience, which is required not only to effectively negotiate, modify and control the causes of substantial stress and/or trauma (Windle, Bennett & Noyes, 2011) but also to stimulate positive development as well as mental and physical

health (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Resilience has a positive influence on health, productivity, work-life balance and interactions with others (Donders, 2015). In addition, resilient individuals find it easier to be more flexible in how they react to changes in the workplace and grow personally while doing so.

There are many extremely stressful situations in commercial kitchens as chefs must perform under pressure (Ariza-Montes et al., 2018). According to Robert A. Karasek and Tores Theorell (1992), workplace stress occurs when the exertion associated with specific tasks exceeds one's ability to cope. Chefs often turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with high levels of stress at work (Pidd, Roche & Fisher, 2015).

Resilient individuals are better at dealing with rejection, disappointment, criticism and negative influences (Donders, 2015; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Access to resources and support enables individuals to adapt in challenging circumstances and remain resilient in stressful situations (Liebenberg & Moore, 2016; Citrin & Weiss, 2016). Resilience supports the development of competences required to handle multiple activities, multitasking and take responsibility for a wider range of tasks (Donders, 2015). Teams of resilient individuals are more effective and productive. The findings from a study by Bolanle Ogungbamila et al. (2019) suggest that resilient hotel employees display significantly lower levels of burnout. Some studies investigated whether there were any differences in this regard between the sexes, but the results are not conclusive. Aydin Çivilidağ (2014) found that male employees in the hotel industry experienced higher levels of burnout than their female counterparts. A study by Burat Aksu & Erdem Temeloğlu (2015), however, did not show any significant differences in the levels of burnout between males and females.

Support in the workplace is considered a positive factor for employees, whereas social support helps them to cope with workplace stress (Wadsworth & Owens, 2007). If an individual receives social support from their family, friends or peers and can get professional support from a colleague or a supervisor, their stress level is reduced and their resilience grows (Pidd, Roche & Fischer, 2015; Ariza-Montes et al., 2018). Ichiro Kawachi and Lisa F. Berkman (2001) conclude that social support stimulates the psychological well-being of individuals. According to Paul Donders (2015), higher levels of resilience are not only a personal asset for an individual but have a beneficial effect on their partner, children, colleagues, friends and family, the organisation and its customers. According to Paul Levy (2013), employees' organisational commitment increases when they receive support from their colleagues and superiors.

There are two dimensions to resilience: individual and relational (Liebenberg, Ungar & Van de Vijver, 2012), both of which play a role in mitigating the negative effect of stress (Ungar, 2011). Individual resilience refers to personal temperament, cognitive skills and self-regulation, whereas relational resilience represents associations with family, friends and social networks (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007,

Wakelin-Theron, Ukpere & Spowart, 2019). The relational dimension of resilience provides social resources to combat burnout (Ungar, 2011). A person's level of resilience, however, depends on how accessible and significant these social resources are (Ungar, 2019).

2.3. Shift length

Employees in the hospitality industry work unsociable, odd hours, often during the night, at weekends or on public holidays. Findings from previous studies (Aksu & Temeloğlu, 2015; Shanafelt et al., 2015) suggest that lengthier and irregular work hours contribute to burnout and employee dissatisfaction. Moreover, high pressure and the stressful environment frequently give rise to conflicts among chefs (Ariza-Montes et al., 2018; Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007; Pratten & O'Leary, 2007; Pratten, 2003). Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: The optimal work shift for millennials is 8 hours or less.

2.4. Restaurant as a system

System theory focuses on understanding a system as a whole, along with the underlying interactions of all the forces that make it up, rather than dissecting a complex process and studying its individual parts. In system theory, it is important to remember that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and a change in one part of the system may affect the other parts or the whole.

Commercial restaurants can be viewed as a system consisting of the following elements:

1) Inputs: energy or materials that are introduced into the system (e.g. ingredients);

2) Processes: what occurs within the system that changes the input (storing, preparing, cooking and serving);

3) Internal system variables: factors that have positive, negative and neutral effects on all the aspects of the system (chefs, equipment and economic aspects);

4) Outputs: what results from the processes (final menu items served to customers);

5) Outcomes: what happens as a result of the outputs (customer satisfaction and profit or loss);

6) Feedback: information that can be used to evaluate and monitor the system (feedback indicates how processes and internal variables should change).

3. Method

3.1. Sample

A cross-sectional quantitative study was carried out using data collected from a convenience sample of 150 chefs aged between 25 and 39, who were employed in restaurants in the Western Cape, South Africa. Restaurants selected for the study were sit-down establishments which served at least two meal courses. The sample consisted of two groups: 75 chefs who worked up to 8 hours and another 75 who worked more than 8 hours.

3.2. Measuring instruments

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information about the respondents, such as sex, age and years of experience in the hospitality industry. The second section consisted of 17 statements that make up the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM-R). The measure contains two subscales: personal resilience (10 items) and relational resilience (7 items). Each statement was accompanied by response options on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot) (Resilience Research Centre, 2018). The scale has been shown to have acceptable reliability: Jefferies et al., (2018) reported the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: 0.82 (personal resilience); 0.82 (relational resilience) and 0.87 (overall resilience).

Paper questionnaires were distributed in restaurants that were still operating during the Covid-19 pandemic and were collected a couple of days later. The data for the study were collected between 11 February and 31 May 2021. Raw data were entered in an Excel spreadsheet and were sent to a statistician for analysis.

3.3. Statistical analysis

The SPSS statistical package version 27 (IBM SPSS Statistics, 2010) was used to conduct analyse the collected data. After ensuring that the data were normally distributed an independent samples t-test was administered to check if there were significant differences between the two groups of chefs. Levene's t-test was employed to check the equality of variances between the two samples. Cohen's D was used to examine the effect size of the t-test.

4. Results

The aim of the statistical analysis was to find any statistically significant correlations between the variables and determine if there were any statistically significant differences in resilience of the chefs depending on shift lengths (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive information about the participants

Data		Frequency	%
Gender (n =150)	Male	80	53.3
	Female	70	46.7
Age (n = 150)	25-28	61	40.7
	29-32	39	26.0
	33-36	25	16.7
	37-39	25	16.7
The average length of shifts (n = 150)	8 hours or less	75	50.0
	More than 8 hours	75	50.0
Years' experience (n = 150)	Less than one year	6	4.0
	1-3 years	26	17.3
	4-6 years	45	30.0
	7-9 years	26	17.3
	10 years or more	47	31.3

Source: own elaboration.

5. The resilience construct

The KMO test for multi-collinearity was administered to determine the strength of partial correlation between the factors of the resilience scale (Mayer, 2013). The results are shown in Table 2. According to Julie Pallant (2007), the KMO should be higher than 0.6.

Table 2. KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity

KMO and Bartlett's test		
KMO measure		.803
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	867.525
	Df	136
	Sig.	.000

Source: own elaboration.

Factor analysis was used to determine if the validity of the ARM-R scale. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the resilience construct, which was found to consist of two factors, namely personal and relational resilience. The individual items loaded onto these factors as intended (Resilience Research Centre, 2018) by the authors who developed the ARM-R scale. However, the following questions had factor loadings smaller than 0.3:

Factor 1: *Relational resilience*:

- My family is supportive towards me.
- If I am hungry, I can usually get enough food to eat.
- I talk to my family/partner about how I feel.

Factor 2: *Personal resilience* the following statements had factor loading smaller than 0.3:

- I cooperate with the people around me.
- Getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me.
- I know how to behave in different social situations.
- People like to spend time with me.
- My friend stands by me when times are hard.
- I'm treated fairly in my community.

The items mentioned above were omitted. Without the weak items, the data were analysed again, using CFA. The subsequent results still indicated a poor fit. Thereafter, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to analyse the resilience items to determine if the items extracted from the CFA were truly weak or if there might be more underlying factors.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of resilience

Item	Mean	*SD*	*α* >	Skewness		Kurtosis		Number of items	Inter--item correlations mean
				less than 8 h	more than 8 h	less than 8 h	more than 8 h		
Resilience (overall)	4.37	0.53	0.85	–1.30	–0.64	1.39	0.82	17	–
Family support	4.53	0.64	0.73	–2.24	–1.41	5.91	1.54	5	–
Social skills and aspirations	4.68	0.51	0.72	–3.71	–1.95	16.37	4.61	4	–
Friends and community	4.17	0.72	0.75	–1.20	0.41	1.78	0.77	6	–
Wellbeing	3.97	1.06	0.54	–1.35	–0.68	1.40	–0.41	2	0.372

Notes: *SD* – Standard deviation, *α* – Cronbach alfa. The inter-item correlations mean is only applicable to scales with Cronbach's alpha >0.7 and fewer than 10 items.

Source: own elaboration.

EFA was then utilised. Principal axis factoring (PAF) was used as the factor extraction method for the exploratory factor analysis, as it doesn't make any distribution assumptions. PAF is an experimental method that examines the shared variance between items (Mayers, 2013). Varimax rotation was used as the first--order rotation method. The varimax rotation decreases the number of variables with high loadings on each subscale (Pallant, 2007; Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012).

The EFA indicated that there were four factors instead of two: Factor 1 – *Family support*; Factor 2 – *Social skills and aspirations*; Factor 3 – *Friends and community*, and Factor 4 – *Wellbeing* (Table 3).

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to confirm the reliability of the ARM-R scale. Alpha coefficients were calculated for each statement of the scale, and then values for all items were averaged. The reliability of the scales was good, as the alpha coefficients were equal to or greater than 0.70 (Pallant, 2007), and was reliable on the inter-item correlations mean.

Normality was checked by means of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which showed that none of the four factors was normally distributed for both groups (up to 8 hours and more than 8 hours). Because of the large and similar group sizes, a T-test was used to compare the shift lengths, as it is quite robust against deviations from normality (Table 4).

Table 4. T-test of significance for the different shift lengths

Variable	Resilience						*T*	*Df*	*p*-values	*D*
	8 hours or less			more than 8 hours						
	N	Mean	*SD*	*N*	Mean	*SD*				
Family support	75	4.69	.498	75	4.38	.736	2.963	74	0.004*	0.48
Social skills and aspirations	75	4.75	.528	75	4.61	.490	1.643	74	0.103	0.27
Friends and community	75	4.26	.754	75	4.08	.681	1.516	74	0.132	0.25
Wellbeing	75	4.17	.957	75	3.78	1.128	2.303	74	0.023*	0.37

Source: own elaboration.

Higher mean resilience scores were reported by respondents who worked shifts of up to 8 hours for all four factors, i.e. *Social skills and aspirations* (4.75), *Family support* (4.69), *Friends and community* (4.26) and *Wellbeing* (4.17). These differences were found to be significant (lower than 0.05) for two factors: *Family support* (0.004) and *Wellbeing* (0.023). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. In the case of Family support, the effect size, as indicated by the value of Cohen's d (0.48 standard deviations) was close to what is commonly regarded as medium (0.5). For the other three factors, it was less than medium to small (ranging from

0.37 for *Wellbeing* to 0.25 for *Friends and community*). It can therefore be concluded that family support and wellbeing contributed to the difference in resilience levels displayed by chefs working shifts of different length.

6. Discussion

Working shifts of not more 8 hours, millennial chefs have more time to spend with their family and receive family support and more time to take care of their wellbeing. This is consistent with the conclusions of Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti (2007), who report that relationships with family, friends and peers are crucial to promote resilience.

Social support derived from different relationships affects emotional wellbeing (Ungar, 2019). Ken Pidd et al. (2015) found that employees reporting good mental health indicated they had good social support.

Chefs who work fewer hours have more time to socialise with their family and friends, which has a positive effect on resilience (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013).

Of the four factors on the resilience scale, both groups of chefs reported the highest scores on Social skills and aspirations. This indicates, that social support is crucial in the workplace (Ariza-Montes et al., 2018).

A study by Jeongdoo Park and Dogan Gursoy (2012) showed that faced with difficult work conditions in the hospitality industry many millennial chefs either leave their jobs, which results in high staff turnover.

7. Implications and recommendations

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many restaurants reduced their operating hours due to curfews and restrictions introduced in South Africa. Chefs whose normal shifts were longer than 8 hours would typically work more than 10 hours. However, due to the lockdown restrictions, their shifts were reduced to 9 hours. This measure was adopted by many restaurants.

Employers need to make an effort to create optimal working conditions for their employees and enable them to achieve a healthy work-life balance. If employers make small investments in the right places, they can dramatically change the level of job satisfaction and employee productivity (Donders, 2015). Restaurants should therefore be more accommodating towards their employees, especially after the pandemic, by providing stress management training which includes stress coping mechanisms. Stress management training will be vital post COVID-19 as many chefs will have to return to their normal longer shifts. During the pandemic

most restaurants worked with reduced staff or did not operate every day to minimise operational costs. Therefore, chefs had shorter working hours or worked fewer days per week.

It is essential that millennial chefs learn healthy coping mechanisms to deal with the stress they may face when returning to normal work routine and in the kitchen environment. Restaurant managers should promote a better work-life balance, asking chefs for their input with regards to creating menus, offer training to improve their skills and reward them with better pay or other social benefits.

8. Limitations of the study

Because permission had to be obtained from restaurants before their chefs were allowed to participate in the study, the results obtained in the study may not be entirely representative of the millennial chef population. This is because managers who knew or suspected that their chefs were experiencing stress or had difficulties regarding their working hours might not have given them permission to participate.

Another limitation of this study is the use of self-reported data, which may not always be reliable. Also, the questionnaire itself may have been too long for some respondents, which may have affected the quality of responses. Although the respondents could take the questionnaires home to complete them if their manager did not allow them do finish it at work, some chefs did not participate because they did not have enough time to do so. This is why in future studies it would be advisable to combine quantitative measurement of resilience with qualitative evaluation performed by professional psychologists.

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Optymalna długość zmiany zapewniająca odporność psychiczną kucharzy z pokolenia Y

Streszczenie. W ostatnich latach znacznie wzrosła liczba milenialsów zatrudnionych w branży hotelarskiej i turystycznej. Pokolenie to nie godzi się na takie zaangażowanie i etykę pracy co poprzednie pokolenia. Przedstawiciele pokolenia Y są bardziej narażeni na problemy ze zdrowiem psychicznym z powodu niezadowolenia z warunków pracy. Celem badania było określenie optymalnej długości zmian dla kucharzy w wieku 25-39 lat w celu wspierania ich odporności psychicznej. Przeprowadzono ilościowe badanie przekrojowe z udziałem dwóch grup kucharzy pracujących na zmianach roboczych: do 8 godzin oraz ponad 8 godzin. Do pomiaru odporności psychicznej zastosowano skalę ARM-R. W badaniu wzięło udział 150 kucharzy. Stwierdzono, że odporność psychiczna kucharzy, którzy pracowali do 8 godzin, była większa niż tych, którzy pracowali ponad 8 godzin. Wyniki wskazują ponadto, że na poziom odporności psychicznej kucharzy z pokolenia Y wypływają ich umiejętności społeczne. Wsparcie społeczne i zmiany robocze nieprzekraczające 8 godzin poprawiają odporność psychiczną kucharzy z pokolenia Y i dlatego taką długość zmiany można uznać za optymalną. Wyniki badania mogą stanowić zalecenie dla kierowników restauracji i szefów kuchni w zakresie radzenia sobie z czynnikami stresu w tej branży, szczególnie po pandemii, gdy oczekuje się dłuższych godzin pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: odporność psychiczna, kucharze, pokolenie Y, godziny pracy, długość zmian, dobre samopoczucie w miejscu pracy