



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The antithesis of hospitality: Unpacking workplace bullying and advancing a Māori-centric response

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## Abstract

This paper examines workplace bullying in the hospitality sector – an industry paradoxically defined by welcoming others – through a mixed-method approach integrating large-scale quantitative analysis with an in-depth qualitative case study. Study 1 draws on survey data from 2,302 hospitality employees in Aotearoa, New Zealand, to identify the prevalence, patterns, and perpetrators of bullying, and employees' confidence in employer responses. Over half (56%) reported experiencing or witnessing bullying, with women and supervisors most affected. Study 2 explores a Māori hospitality business guided by manaakitanga (care), whanaungatanga (relationships), and tika (fairness), illustrating how Māori values can counter bullying behaviours. Together, the studies reveal the gap between hospitality's ideals and workplace realities, proposing Māori-informed approaches as a pathway towards more respectful, inclusive, and restorative organisational environments. The paper contributes to management and hospitality scholarship by demonstrating how Indigenous relational ethics can operationalise organisational care as an antidote to workplace harm.

**Keywords:** bullying; hospitality; employees; employer; indigenous management; Te Ao Māori; workplace bullying

## Introduction

Workplace bullying refers to harmful behaviours that employees experience or witness (Hutchinson & Eveline, 2010). These detrimental acts can take various forms – such as harassment, offensive or insulting remarks, social exclusion, shouting, or even practical jokes (Conway et al., 2018). Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003) explain that for the label bullying to be applied, it has to 'occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about 6 months)' (p. 15). Ultimately, there is meta-analytic evidence showing that bullying is detrimental to employee outcomes, including job attitudes, work behaviours, and well-being (Yao, Lim, Guo, Ou, & Ng, 2022) and persists partly because employees fear retaliation and job insecurity (Chen & Li, 2020).

Bullying acts and outcomes undermine the philosophy and work of hospitality. Hospitality, as Derrida (2000) explains, is to invite and welcome the 'stranger.' Hospitality should also be extended to the workers, to keep them safe at work. Hospitality workers experiencing violence in the form of bullying at work are not hospitality. Bullying in the workplace can create damaging physical and psychosocial risks (Xiang, Liu, Qiao, Gao, & Zhang, 2023), including emotional exhaustion (Biswakarma et al. 2024). Acts of bullying are often visible, leading to negative tourism and hospitality employment

experiences and perpetuating deep social cleavages and economic inequalities (Harris, Tregidga, & Williamson, 2011; Robinson, Martins, Solnet, & Baum, 2019; Williamson, 2017).

Various forms of abuse are prevalent in the working experiences of hospitality workers in Australia, with over 60% reporting experiences of verbal or psychological abuse, bullying, or sexual harassment and 70% reporting having witnessed such behaviours (Robinson, 2022). Hadjisolomou, Mitsakis, and Kouki (2024) examined abuse and harassment in hospitality and tourism from a criminological perspective, classifying such misbehaviours as everyday workplace crimes. These behaviours are typically unmanaged, accepted, and tolerated in the sector, violating employees' well-being and dignity at work. Vulnerable groups such as younger employees (Robinson et al., 2019), women and/or migrant workers (Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley, 2017) are particularly susceptible to discrimination and exploitation by managers. Additionally, customer interactions can be a source of incivility and harassment, as highlighted in studies such as Woo and Chan (2020), which explore the dynamics of customer-worker relations in hospitality settings.

The paper makes several contributions, beginning with presenting findings on bullying in New Zealand's hospitality sector. Data on employment experiences and wages were collected from 2,302 hospitality employees, making this one of the largest surveys of its kind ever completed in New Zealand. Second, we explore the prevalence of bullying in hospitality organisations, as experienced by victims or witnessed, to establish some baseline data on the sector. Third, we focus on differences within these bullying experiences, including position and gender and then gendered position. We also examine data around perpetrators of bullying and perceptions around how hospitality organisations respond to bullying claims by employees. Finally, we then draw on three Te Ao Māori concepts (Haar, Brougham, & Roche, 2023; Haar & Martin, 2022) to discuss approaches that could be taken to preventing and addressing bullying in hospitality workplaces.

The first of the three Māori concepts drawn on is *Manaakitanga*, which itself is translated as hospitality – encompassing care, support, and mutual respect for others. Next is the concept of *Whanaungatanga*, focusing on relationship and kinship, created through shared experiences and working together to create a sense of belonging. The third concept is *Tika*, which embodies ideas of justice, fairness, correctness and doing what is right. We argue that these three concepts could work individually and collectively as an antithesis to bullying in hospitality employment.

### Background: bullying in hospitality and the paradox of hospitality

Workplace bullying behaviours can be multidirectional, involving peers, subordinates, and managers, and often include actions such as suppressing opinions or overturning decisions. Recurrence is an important concept, as workplace bullying is an ongoing, recurrent act marked by a power imbalance between victim and perpetrator (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). It also involves a subjective element related to the victim's perception of the behaviour and its consequences. A targeted individual can find themselves in an inferior position within the workplace.

Bullying remains a persistent challenge in the hospitality sector, as its hierarchical structures, autocratic management styles, and diverse workforce create conditions that perpetuate such behaviours (Jung & Yoon, 2018). Hospitality is portrayed as a high-pressure environment. Kitchen work, known for its demanding nature and the normalisation of aggressive behaviours, has been popularised by television such as 'Hell's Kitchen' (Bloisi, 2021). However, being yelled at, belittled, and excluded from the group (i.e., other kitchen staff) all represent bullying behaviours (Conway et al., 2018; Hutchinson & Eveline, 2010). Such portrayals reflect a culture where workplace bullying is sometimes perceived as a rite of passage. Environments of sustained high pressure foster conditions conducive to bullying behaviours (Park & Kim, 2023).

The precarity of employment in hospitality can also make workers disproportionately dependent on employers (Ram, 2018). Unequal power dynamics can manifest as hostile management practices toward lower-status employees. Furthermore, the strong ethos of serving guests and the notion that 'the guest is always right' reinforce a culture where customers wield considerable power over employees (Baltag, Bosman, Wilson, Huisman, & Zwaal, 2021; Williamson, 2017). Doe and Essiaw (2023)

found that a high level of permissiveness for guests significantly encouraged customer bullying of hospitality staff. Sexual harassment has also received significant attention in tourism and hospitality, particularly because this sector often employs young women and minority workers (Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020; Douglas, Williamson, & Harris, 2020; Pearlman & Bordelon, 2022).

Various forms of workplace bullying have been identified in hospitality settings. Ram (2018) reported that verbal abuse, excessive criticism, and social exclusion were the most reported behaviours, particularly affecting front-line employees, as these workers need to maintain professionalism while managing demanding customers. According to Anasori *et al.* (2023), workplace bullying in hospitality significantly predicted psychological distress and negatively impacted on employee engagement. Strong correlations between bullying incidents and increased employee turnover, decreased job satisfaction, diminished service quality, and revenue losses have also been found in hospitality (Wong & Wang, 2020).

An alternative dark side can also be found in bullying literature. Van Der Wal, Nisbet, and Haw (2021) highlighted a troubling degree of victim-blaming, reflecting a broader acceptance of bullying in the Australian hospitality industry. Some participants even perceived bullying as an appropriate exercise of power, arguing that it contributed to a stronger, more cohesive team. Bullying in hospitality is not limited to interactions among employees; it can also stem from customers. Subtle forms of bullying, such as verbal abuse, are commonly experienced across various workplace relationships, including manager-to-employee and co-worker-to-co-worker interactions. Customer abuse and harassment are increasingly recognised as prevalent aspects of workplace violence in the industry (Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2024). Ram (2018) describes intervention plans in the sector often focusing primarily on managerial policies while neglecting immediate responses to customer-perpetrated violence and harassment.

This paper ultimately undertakes two studies, building upon each other. The first study seeks to answer the following research questions using a large survey of hospitality employees:

1. What are the workplace experiences of bullying in the Aotearoa New Zealand hospitality sector?
2. Do these experiences differ by gender, position, or both?
3. Who are the perpetrators of bullying within hospitality?
4. How open is Aotearoa New Zealand's hospitality to responding to bullying allegations?

## Method

### *Researcher positionality*

This mixed-method study was conducted by a team of Māori and non-Māori scholars navigating two distinct epistemological worlds. As researchers, we acknowledge our positionalities: some of us are grounded in Te Ao Māori and Kaupapa Māori traditions, while others are situated within Western academic paradigms. These positions shape how we engage with knowledge, interpret findings, and relate to participants. Study 1 employed a large-scale quantitative survey grounded in a Western positivist paradigm, while Study 2 adopted an interpretive Kaupapa Māori approach situated within Te Ao Māori. Our collaboration was guided by a commitment to bridging Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, ensuring that the research process was both respectful and rigorous. It is advisable in Kaupapa Māori research to use rich contextual cases and qualitative research to hear the voices of participants, as these add depth and meaning to the quantitative insights we have identified and discovered (Haar & Martin, 2022). Statistical analysis in Study 1 provided a diagnostic lens on sectoral issues, whereas the case study in Study 2 offered a culturally grounded exploration of potential solutions to prevent and address bullying in hospitality workplaces. This dual-world design reflects both the complexity of the research context and our commitment to integrating empirical evidence with Indigenous ways of knowing, while remaining critically aware of the power dynamics and responsibilities inherent in cross-cultural research.

### Study 1: survey

The data for this paper are from an anonymous online survey run from October to November 2023. With data gathered from 2,302 hospitality employees, this represents the most extensive survey on employment and wages in the New Zealand hospitality sector to date. The survey was developed and administered using the Qualtrics XM platform. Participants were recruited through a voluntary response approach via a circulated survey link, utilising snowball sampling techniques.

The demographic profile of survey respondents reflects a diverse cross-section of the New Zealand hospitality workforce. Overall, 60.2% of respondents identified as women, with the average age falling within the 19–24 age group. Notably, nearly a quarter (24.9%) were aged 18 or younger, while 17.1% were aged 41 years or older. In terms of tenure in the industry, the majority of respondents had between 1 and 3 years of experience, with 30.2% reporting less than 1 year, and 11.8% having worked in the sector for 10 years or more. Ethnically, 54.8% identified as New Zealand European, followed by 10.8% Māori and 3.0% Pacific Peoples, with the remaining respondents representing a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. Regarding residency status, 74.4% were New Zealand citizens, 14.1% permanent residents, 11.1% visa holders, and 0.4% reported not holding a visa. By employment role, the majority were employees (78.9%), followed by supervisors (11.2%) and managers (9.9%).

### Measures

Because the survey was in conjunction with hospitality industry partners, they stressed the need for a short survey. As such, wherever possible, single-item measures were used.

*Bullying experienced* was measured with a single item drawn from the literature (e.g., Conway et al., 2018). We asked, ‘Have you ever personally experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment in the workplace?’ and responses were coded yes = 1, no = 0.

For those who answered yes, we followed up with the following item on perpetrators.

Perpetrators were assessed with a single item: ‘Who were the main perpetrators of the bullying or harassment you witnessed?’ coded 1 = co-workers/other employee, 2 = manager or owner, 3 = customer, 4 = other (with details provided).

*Gender* was coded 1 = women, 0 = men and others.

*Position* was coded 3 = manager, 2 = supervisor, and 1 = employee.

*Position and Gender* were created through combining the items of Gender and Position. Options were coded 1 = men employee, 2 = women employee, 3 = men supervisor, 4 = women supervisor, 5 = men manager, 6 = women manager.

*Organisational Response to bullying* was asked with a single question ‘How well do you feel your employer would deal with a complaint about bullying and harassment?’, coded 1 = not at all, 2 = poorly, 3 = adequately, 4 = very well.

### Analysis

#### Study 2: case study

Study 2 employed a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to examine how Māori cultural values can operate as an antithesis to workplace bullying within a hospitality context. Rather than seeking statistical generalisability, the approach prioritised depth of meaning and process, exploring how tikanga Māori principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and tika are enacted in daily organisational life to foster respectful, relational workplaces (Durie, 2003; Mead, 2003). While Study 1 quantified bullying prevalence across New Zealand’s hospitality workforce, this case provides a situated example of how culturally grounded values can restore mana and relational integrity.

Guided by a Kaupapa Māori methodology, the research ensured cultural safety and epistemological alignment (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Haar & Martin, 2022). Protocols such as karakia, kai, and whakawhanaungatanga were observed, and Māori ways of knowing, reciprocity, and protection of participants’ mana were privileged throughout (Smith, 2021). Knowledge was co-constructed through sustained dialogue and relationship-building, grounding the study in aroha ki te tangata

**Table 1.** Correlations and descriptive statistics of study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	2.85	1.59	–					
2. Gender	.60	.49	.01	–				
3. Position	1.31	.64	.26**	.02	–			
4. Bullying Experienced	.56	.50	.02	.09**	.06**	–		
5. Bullying Perpetrators	1.07	1.39	.05*	.08**	.05*	.69**	–	
6. Organisational Response to Bullying	2.84	.86	.03	–.06**	.03	–.39**	–.30**	–

*N* = 2302. \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01.

(respect for people). This approach worked with and for Māori participants, aligning intent and process with the values under investigation.

Māori cultural values offer distinctive organisational benefits, enhancing cohesion, ethics, and collective wellbeing (Kuntz, Näswall, Beckingsale, & Macfarlane, 2014). While most visible in Māori enterprises, these principles can inform wider practice (Haar *et al.*, 2021; Haar, Spiller, Mika, Rout, & Reid, 2025). Study 2 focuses on *manaakitanga* (care and hospitality), *whanaungatanga* (relationships and kinship), and *tika* (fairness and doing what is right), which together position hospitality as care rather than compliance (Mead, 2003). Data collection involved observation and semi-structured interviews, analysed inductively and collaboratively to ensure cultural resonance. The resulting themes illustrate how Māori values underpin bullying-resistant, relationally just workplaces, offering an alternative organisational logic to the dynamics identified in Study 1 (Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022).

## Findings

### Survey results

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that bullying experienced is significantly correlated with gender ( $r = .09, p < .01$ ), position ( $r = .06, p < .01$ ), but not age ( $r = .01, p = .629$ ). It is also significantly correlated with bullying perpetrators ( $r = .69, p < .01$ ) and organisational response to bullying ( $r = -.30, p < .01$ ). From the descriptive statistics, it is shown that from the sample of 2,302 respondents, the overall rate of bullying experienced or witnessed was 56%.

The *t*-test examining whether women reported higher bullying experienced than men was supported (Table not shown):  $t = 4.271$  ( $df = 2287$ ), LLCI = .049, ULCI = .132,  $p < .001$ , with women reporting 60% bullying experienced versus 51% men.

The ANOVA results are displayed in Table 2.

Overall, all four ANOVA results were significant. Age reports significant differences:  $F(5, 2282) = 4.340$  ( $p < .001$ ), showing that employees aged 19–24 years reported the highest levels of bullying experienced (62%), followed by 41–50 years (58%), and then 31–40 years (57%), followed by 51+ years (55%) and 25–30 years (54%). The lowest levels were by the youngest group – those aged up to 18 years (49%). Position reports significant differences:  $F(2, 2286) = 6.836$  ( $p < .001$ ). This shows that supervisors report the highest bullying experienced (66%), followed by managers (59%), with employees (54%) with employees reporting the lowest prevalence.

We next examined the interaction between age and position by gender. In combination, age and position reported significant differences:  $F(16, 2271) = 2.952$  ( $p < .001$ ). The highest groups are young managers (19–24 years) at 79%, tied with supervisors aged 41–50 years (79%). The next two groups are supervisors aged 31–40 years (68%) and those aged 25–30 years (67%). The lowest groups are the youngest employees (up to 18 years) at 49%. Managers aged 51+ years were at 44%, and supervisors aged 51+ years were the lowest at 43%. Finally, in combination, gender and position

**Table 2.** ANOVA analysis of bullying experienced

	Age	Position	Age and position	Gender and position
F-Statistic	$F = 4.340$ ( $p < .001$ )	$F = 6.836$ ( $p < .001$ )	$F = 2.952$ ( $p < .001$ )	$F = 6.439$ ( $p < .001$ )
Details	<b>19–24 years</b> (62%) > <b>41–50 years</b> (58%) > <b>31–40 years</b> (57%) > <b>51+ years</b> (55%) > <b>25–30 years</b> (54%) > up to 18 years (49%)	<b>Supervisors</b> (66%) > <b>Managers</b> (59%) > <b>Employees</b> (54%)	<b>19–24 years, Managers</b> (79%) + <b>41–50 years, Supervisors</b> (79%) > <b>31–40 years, Supervisors</b> (68%) > <b>25–30 years, Supervisors</b> (67%) > <b>19–24 years, Supervisors</b> (64%) > <b>up to 18 years, Supervisors</b> (64%) > <b>19–24 years, Employees</b> (61%) > <b>25–30 years, Managers</b> (61%) > <b>51+ years, Employees</b> (58%) > <b>31–40 years, Managers</b> (57%) > <b>41–50 years, Managers</b> (56%) > <b>31–40 years, Employees</b> (55%) > <b>41–50 years, Employees</b> (52%) > <b>25–30 years, Employees</b> (51%) > <b>up to 18 years, Employees</b> (49%) > <b>51+ years, Managers</b> (44%) + <b>51+ years, Supervisor</b> (43%)	<b>Women Supervisors</b> (66%) + <b>Men Supervisors</b> (64%) > <b>Women Managers</b> (61%) > <b>Women Employees</b> (58%) > <b>Men Managers</b> (57%) > <b>Men Employees</b> (48%)
Eta-squared	.01	.01	.02	.01

Significantly higher groups are **bolded**. N/A = no significant interaction effect detected.

**Table 3.** Analysis of bullying experienced by perpetrators

Bullying experiences by perpetrators	Total percentage <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of those bullied <sup>b</sup>
Not bullied	44.3	–
Co-worker or other employee	24.5	44.0
Owner/Manager	20.7	37.2
Customer	6.9	12.3
Multiple sources	2.3	4.2
No details offered	1.3	2.3

<sup>a</sup> $n = 2,302$ . <sup>b</sup> $n = 1,281$ .

reported significant differences:  $F(5, 2283) = 6.439$  ( $p < .001$ ). It shows that women supervisors report the highest levels of bullying experienced at 66%, followed by men supervisors (64%). Women make up the next two groups – managers at 61% and employees at 58%, with men the lowest at managers (57%) and employees (48%).

Having established that high levels of bullying occur and with differences across age, gender, position, and in combinations of these demographic factors, we now turn to the analysis of perpetrators. The frequency results are shown in Table 3.

Overall, the data indicate that most employees who are bullied receive such unwanted attention from co-workers or other employees (44.0%). Managers and owners are the next largest group with 37.2%, with customers being 12.3%. A small number of respondents (4.2%) report more than one perpetrator (such as customers, managers, and coworkers). A small percentage (2.3%) provided no details about perpetrators. We conducted analysis (Tables not provided) on those bullied with named perpetrators ( $n = 1252$  which excludes those with no details) and found no significant gender differences by perpetrators:  $F(3, 1248) = 1.040$  ( $p = .374$ ), by position:  $F(2, 1249) = .059$  ( $p = .943$ ), or by age:  $F(7, 1243) = 1.246$  ( $p = .274$ ). There are also no significant differences across gender and position:  $F(5, 1246) = 1.024$  ( $p = .402$ ), or by age and position:  $F(16, 1234) = .893$  ( $p = .577$ ). Consequently, we

**Table 4.** Analysis of organizational response to bullying

Organisational response to bullying	Total percentage <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of those bullied <sup>b</sup>
Not at all well	6.5	10.0
Poorly	26.7	38.7
Adequately	43.5	37.5
Very well	23.3	13.7
Missing response	5.3	3.7

find that those experiencing bullying from their perpetrators do not differ by age, gender, or position, or any combination of these demographic factors.

Finally, we explore employee perceptions of how their employer would react to bullying in the workplace. The frequency results are shown in [Table 4](#).

Overall, we can see that most employees think their employer will respond adequately (43.5%) or very well (23.3%) to workplace bullying. However, around a third think their employer's response will be poor (26.7%) or not at all well (6.5%). However, when we compare this data with only those who have been bullied, we see a different story. Instead of a third, this increases to almost a half, with 10.0% rating their employer not at all well and 38.7% poorly. The very well group drops to 13.7%. We conducted ANOVA tests, and the results are displayed in [Table 5](#).

Overall, significant differences were found between adequate employer responses and being bullied or not:  $F(3, 2176) = 138.391$  ( $p < .001$ ). It shows that those who have been bullied are much more likely to rate their employer response as not at all well (88%) or poorly (82%), with only 49% adequately and 33% very well. Additional analysis showed that perceptions of organisational responses to bullying do not vary by age:  $F(5, 2174) = 1.776$  ( $p = .114$ ), but they do by position:  $F(2, 2178) = 8.485$  ( $p < .001$ ). This showed that managers reported the highest confidence their employer would deal adequately with a bullying complaint ( $M = 3.0$ ), which is greater than employees ( $M = 2.84$ ), which in turn, is statistically significantly higher than supervisors ( $M = 2.67$ ), who reported the lowest levels of confidence. This shows that managers, on average, rate their employer responses as adequate (a score of 3 out of a maximum 4), with employees slightly less, and supervisors lower still. When tested by gender ( $t$ -test, results not tabulated), we find a significant difference:  $t(2179) = -2.846$  ( $p = .004$ ), showing women ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) report significantly lower levels of confidence in their employers' response than men ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = .86$ ).

Next, we looked at age and position in combination and found significant differences:

$F(16, 2163) = 1.997$  ( $p = .011$ ). The following groups reported the highest levels of confidence in their employer's reaction to bullying: managers aged 31 years and older, followed by employees up to 18 years, plus those aged 25–50 years. It is important to note that even across the age groups, there is not one single group of supervisors in this total. This is confirmed by the bottom four groups being supervisors across all age groups except supervisors aged 41–50 years (who are near the middle). Finally, in combination, gender and position reported significant differences:  $F(5, 2175) = 5.519$  ( $p < .001$ ). It shows that men who are managers report the highest levels of confidence in employer reactions to bullying, followed by women managers. This was followed by employee's men and women, with supervisors providing the lowest confidence, with men the lowest and women second lowest.

## Case study results

The case study examines a Māori-owned hospitality business that actively embeds Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) into its operations. Māori cultural values have been shown to enhance cohesion, ethics, and collective wellbeing across organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Haar *et al.*, 2021).

**Table 5.** ANOVA analysis of employer responses to bullying

	Bullied	Age	Position	Age and position	Gender and position
F-Statistic	$F = 138.391$ ( $p < .001$ )	$F = 1.776$ ( $p = .114$ )	$F = 8.458$ ( $p < .001$ )	$F = 1.997$ ( $p = .011$ )	$F = 5.519$ ( $p < .001$ )
Details	<b>Employer Response: Not All at Well<sup>a</sup></b> (88%) + <b>Poorly</b> (82%) > <b>Adequately</b> (49%) > Very Well (33%)	N/A <sup>b</sup>	<b>Managers</b> ( $M = 3.0$ ) > <b>Employees</b> ( $M = 2.84$ ) > Supervisors ( $M = 2.67$ )	<b>41–50 years, Managers</b> ( $M = 3.18$ ) + <b>31–40 years, Managers</b> ( $M = 3.07$ ) + <b>51+ years, Managers</b> ( $M = 3.04$ ) + <b>41–50 years, Employees</b> ( $M = 2.90$ ) + <b>31–40 years, Employees</b> ( $M = 2.89$ ) + <b>25–30 years, Employees</b> ( $M = 2.87$ ) + <b>up to 18 years, Employees</b> ( $M = 2.85$ ) > <b>25–30 years, Managers</b> ( $M = 2.82$ ) > <b>19–24 years, Managers</b> ( $M = 2.79$ ) > <b>19–24 years, Employees</b> ( $M = 2.79$ ) > <b>41–50 years, Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.78$ ) > <b>51+ years, Employees</b> ( $M = 2.77$ ) > <b>31–40 years, Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.75$ ) > <b>51+ years, Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.74$ ) > <b>19–24 years, Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.65$ ) > <b>25–30 years, Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.59$ ) > <b>up to 18 years, Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.25$ )	<b>Men Managers</b> ( $M = 3.09$ ) > <b>Women Managers</b> ( $M = 2.93$ ) > <b>Men Employees</b> ( $M = 2.92$ ) > <b>Women Employees</b> ( $M = 2.79$ ) > <b>Women Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.72$ ) > <b>Men Supervisors</b> ( $M = 2.57$ )
Eta-squared	.16	.00	.01	.02	.01

<sup>a</sup>Significantly higher groups are **bolded**. <sup>b</sup>N/A = no significant interaction effect detected.

**Table 6.** Te Ao Māori concepts to address bullying in hospitality

Concept	Focus	Key practices	Application to workplace bullying in hospitality
<b><i>Manaakitanga</i></b>			
Hospitality, kindness, care, and generosity toward others.	Ensuring the well-being of others.	<p>Creating a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace.</p> <hr/> <p>Setting clear rules and policies.</p> <hr/> <p>Offering support and care to those affected by bullying as either a victim and/or a witness.</p>	Promotes a culture that prioritises employee well-being, reducing harm and providing support for victims of bullying.
<b><i>Whanaungatanga</i></b>			
Building and nurturing relationships and connections.	Strengthening bonds and kinship.	<p>Fostering relationships, collaboration and team unity.</p> <hr/> <p>Encouraging mutual respect, protection and care among staff.</p> <hr/> <p>Robust anti-bullying training.</p>	Encourages strong relationships to both discourage bullying and promote collective care and responsibility.
<b><i>Tika</i></b>			
Justice, fairness, and doing what is right.	Upholding ethical and legal behaviour and accountability.	<p>Clear rules and policies to both prevent and manage bullying.</p> <hr/> <p>Ensuring fair processes for addressing complaints.</p> <hr/> <p>Taking decisive and fair action against bullying.</p>	Provides a framework for consistent and fair enforcement of anti-bullying policies, fostering trust, accountability, restoration and healing.

While visible in Māori enterprises, these values are not exclusive to them and can inform organisational practice more broadly. Study 2 focused on three interrelated Māori values that align closely with the ethos of the hospitality sector: *manaakitanga* (care, generosity, hospitality), *whanaungatanga* (relationships and kinship), and *tika* (fairness and doing what is right). Together, these values offer a relational framework for fostering respect, reciprocity, and justice – an approach especially relevant in a sector where Study 1 revealed that 56% of employees had experienced or witnessed bullying.

The business studied was a small café employing around a dozen staff and connected to a local Māori business network. The owner and team consciously framed their work through Māori values, which shaped how they hired and developed staff, related to customers, and maintained collective wellbeing. The findings show that these values were not abstract ideals but lived practices that defined the business's success and created a workplace largely free from bullying or harassment. Table 6 outlines the three Māori cultural values examined in the case study and their relevance to organisational wellbeing.

### ***Manaakitanga – care, hospitality, and respect***

*Manaakitanga*, as showing kindness, generosity, and respect, was a defining feature of the workplace. The owner viewed hospitality not simply as customer service but as an ethical obligation to care for all who enter the space, including employees. 'I see my job as looking after people – my staff, my customers, my suppliers. Everyone should feel cared for here,' she explained. This ethic of care extended to the daily rhythms of the café, from inclusive decision-making to ensuring everyone was acknowledged and supported.

Employees repeatedly described the café as 'like *whānau*' (family). They valued the strong sense of belonging and the owner's hands-on leadership style. One young worker explained, 'This isn't just a job; it's a place where I'm learning and looked after.' The researchers observed numerous examples

of manaakitanga in action: warm greetings in te reo Māori, collective meals, and blessings (karakia) before special events. These practices reinforced cultural identity and strengthened bonds among staff and customers. Care was a visible organisational value.

Manaakitanga also functioned as a protective mechanism against bullying and mistreatment. When a customer was reported as behaving inappropriately toward a staff member at an evening event, the owner intervened immediately, setting a clear standard for respect. Staff noted that such decisive responses created a sense of safety and trust. Through everyday acts of care and vigilance, manaakitanga served as the first line of defence against harmful behaviour.

### Whanaungatanga – relationships and kinship

Building off the notion of whanaungatanga, the owner stated, ‘we work hard at hiring network member whānau (their extended family) because it benefits both my business [access to much needed labour] but also provides their whānau with employment.’ Indeed, the owner stated, ‘we look at providing both income and skills – because we want to develop the rangatahi (young Māori).’ The owner suggests that skill development was an important part of their mahi (work) because many whānau staff are unskilled; they provide them ‘skills for life’, including kitchen work, barista training, etc., which helps make them better people.

Staff described strong trust between team members and management. One employee reflected: ‘The boss acts more like my mum than my manager as she looks out for me but expects me to look out for others too.’ This reciprocal responsibility replaced the competitive and fragmented culture often seen in hospitality with one of shared purpose and reciprocal relationships. The owner maintained close oversight of the workplace, ensuring that tensions – whether they be with staff and/or customers were addressed early and respectfully. As a result, staff felt empowered to raise issues without fear of reprisal. This relational approach fostered loyalty and reduced the instability typical of hospitality workplaces.

Flexibility was another way whanaungatanga was expressed. The owner accommodated staff around family and study commitments. One staff member stated, ‘the owner gives me less working during exam times when I need the time off, but when I needed the work, she offered my more hours.’ Overall, staff felt they were cared for and well supported, with the manaakitanga approach making the café a safe and positive place to work, where they felt like they were family (whanaungatanga). This practical support reinforced trust and strengthened the relational bond between employer and employee. In return, staff were willing to take on extra duties when needed, reflecting a balance of care and accountability. Observations confirmed that interactions among staff and with customers were warm and respectful, characterised by laughter and ease rather than hierarchy or pressure.

### Tika – fairness, integrity, and doing what is right

Tika, meaning fairness, correctness, and ethical integrity, provided the moral foundation for decision-making within the business. The owner described it simply: ‘We often provide services to other Māori businesses [in their network] but I don’t charge them my commercial rates – it’s a point of doing what is right by my network.’ This principle shaped how the café interacted with its network, often providing discounted services to other Māori businesses as an expression of reciprocity and community support.

For the café’s employment practices, Tika guided fairness, transparency, and opportunity. The owner was committed to training and developing young Māori workers (rangatahi), offering both employment and skills for life. As one employee noted, ‘She teaches us how to be confident, not just how to make coffee.’ Staff trusted that they would be treated equitably and with dignity. The owner summed this up: ‘Parents in our network know I’ll do right by their kids – we support them, treat them fairly, and help them grow.’

Tika also shaped how misconduct was handled. Rather than relying on formal discipline, the owner preferred immediate, relational resolution consistent with Kaupapa Māori principles. Staff understood that fairness was non-negotiable, but correction was delivered with empathy. Tika was a core value undermining the philosophy of the business, which could be why bullying or harassment was not largely discussed or reported by staff. When one did mention a case, from an evening event where alcohol was served, they noted a customer was harassing a young staff member. The owner swooped in ‘and sorted that guy out straight away.’ This approach swiftly shut down bullying of staff by a customer, thereby maintaining harmony and trust throughout the workplace.

### Interconnected values in practice

While each value was expressed distinctly, *manaakitanga*, *whanaungatanga*, and *tika* operated as an interconnected system. Acts of care built strong relationships, which in turn reinforced fairness and accountability. Together, they fostered a workplace culture that was self-regulating, cohesive, and safe. The researchers found no evidence of bullying or harassment among staff. Instead, employees reported feeling valued and respected – conditions that encouraged commitment and performance.

These findings show that Māori cultural values, when authentically enacted, can create workplaces that are both humane and productive. *Manaakitanga* ensured care and protection, *whanaungatanga* strengthened belonging and trust, and *tika* upheld fairness and integrity. Collectively, these values formed a model of restorative hospitality – one that transforms hospitality from a service transaction into a relationship of mutual respect. By embodying Māori ethics in daily practice, the business achieved what many in the sector struggle to realise: a workplace where the spirit of hospitality extends to all who contribute to it.

### Discussion

This mixed-method study reveals the depth of the hospitality sector’s cultural paradox: an industry built on care for guests, that too often neglects care for its own people. Study 1 provides a stark empirical picture of this contradiction. Over half of New Zealand hospitality workers (56%) reported experiencing or witnessing bullying, echoing findings from Australia (Robinson, 2022) and underscoring bullying’s systemic nature. Yet these experiences are not evenly distributed. Women and supervisors were the most affected, suggesting gendered and positional vulnerabilities within a sector that relies on emotional labour and hierarchical service structures. Supervisors, positioned between front-line workers and management, appear especially exposed – responsible for enforcing standards while lacking authority to resist poor treatment. Although younger workers reported higher rates overall, bullying affected employees across all demographic groups, confirming that this behaviour is embedded in the social fabric of hospitality work rather than confined to any one segment.

The perpetrators of bullying found in Study 1 were most often co-workers and managers rather than customers, revealing that bullying is primarily an internal organisational problem, not a by-product of demanding clientele. Equally concerning were employees’ perceptions of employer responses. While two-thirds believed their organisations would respond adequately to bullying, this confidence collapsed among those who had been targeted, particularly supervisors. Formal policies appear insufficient to translate into protection or trust. These findings portray a workplace culture that normalises mistreatment through its very ethos of service under pressure. It highlights a culture that rewards endurance, silence, and compliance over relational well-being.

Study 2 demonstrates how Māori cultural values can inform strategies to reduce workplace bullying in Aotearoa New Zealand. Given the high prevalence of bullying in hospitality (Williamson & Harris, 2024), prevention and intervention have become central to management research. Huang and Hsu (2016) emphasise the need for clear anti-bullying policies and tailored training, while Lee, Kim, and Kim (2019) highlight the role of supportive organisational cultures in discouraging harmful

behaviours. Building on these insights, Study 2 suggests that embedding Māori values – such as *manaakitanga*, *whanaungatanga*, and *tika* – offers a culturally grounded approach to counter the patterns identified in Study 1, reframing workplace practices around care, fairness, and collective well-being.

Study 2 was two-centred on three Te Ao Māori concepts: *tika*, *whanaungatanga*, and *manaakitanga*, which recognise deep interconnections between humans, nature, ancestors, and spiritual dimensions (Durie, 2001). It also emphasises relationships and reciprocity, where identity is defined through community connections (Pihama, Tipene, & Skipper, 2019). A collectivist orientation that prioritises collective well-being (*whānau/community*) over individual interests (Haar, Roche & Brougham, 2019; Walker, 1990) is also fundamental to the Māori worldview. *Manaakitanga* loosely translates to hospitality, and this concept shapes how Māori engage with the world, emphasising generosity, kindness, and the prioritisation of relationships to foster mutual respect. It aligns strongly with the relational principles of Māori culture, accentuating the well-being of individuals, groups, and the collective community.

Study 2 provides a counterpoint, showing that alternative organisational logics are not only possible but already practised within some Māori enterprises. The case study of a Māori hospitality business demonstrates how *manaakitanga*, *whanaungatanga*, and *tika* can transform everyday work practices. These values operate collectively to embed relational ethics within organisational life. *Manaakitanga* was not expressed as a slogan but as a lived ethic of mutual respect – care extending not just to guests but to staff, suppliers, and the wider community. This approach redefines what it means to provide hospitality, suggesting that the care traditionally directed outward must also flow inward if the industry is to be sustainable.

Study 2 highlighted that the Te Ao Māori concept of *manaakitanga*, with its emphasis on welcoming and caring for others, aligns closely with workplaces committed to eliminating bullying. Likewise, *whanaungatanga* centres on building and nurturing relationships and connections (Haar & Martin, 2022), ensuring that interactions respect and enhance the *mana* (esteem) of individuals, families, communities, and the collective. This value calls for showing respect and care to strengthen bonds, fostering a sense of belonging and value for all. Overall, the three concepts of *tika*, *whanaungatanga*, and *manaakitanga* emphasise collective responsibility for nurturing relationships, maintaining harmony, and ensuring fair treatment for all. Study 2 showed that a business applying and living these Māori cultural values in the hospitality sector can enjoy an engaged and positive workforce, who appear largely free from bullying experiences.

Within the case organisation, staff, owners, and customers interacted in ways that mirrored extended family (*whānau*) relationships. Aggression and exclusion became culturally incongruent, as relationships were built on shared purpose rather than transactional exchange. In doing so, *whanaungatanga* and *manaakitanga* addressed one of the central problems highlighted in Study 1 – the internally focused bullying – by reconfiguring workplace dynamics around connection rather than misuse of power and control.

*Tika* provides a moral and procedural framework that connects fairness with accountability, prioritising restorative approaches over punitive compliance mechanisms. Grounded in *tikanga Māori*, *tika* emphasises balance, integrity, and collective wellbeing, guiding decision-making processes that value transparency and dialogue (Durie, 2001; Mead, 2003). In Māori business contexts, this was evident in practices that ensured correction and care co-existed, even in high-pressure sectors, such as hospitality, by fostering open communication and ethical responsibility. *Tikanga Māori* can also offer insights on how to handle issues such as bullying, discrimination, redundancy and dismissal in a fair and respectful manner (Buckett, 2024; Duncan Cotterill, 2025; Walsh & Hikuroa, 2025). Such an approach ensures enforcement is restorative, promoting reconciliation and healing, which can support workforce recovery from bullying experiences.

Rather than accepting bullying as an unavoidable feature of hospitality work, integrating insights from Study 1 and Study 2 reveals that such behaviour is culturally contingent, shaped by organisational norms rather than industry inevitability. The persistence of harmful practices reflects a logic that prioritises efficiency and endurance over empathy and fairness. In contrast, the Māori case

study demonstrates an alternative grounded in relational ethics and collective wellbeing (Pihama *et al.*, 2019). By embedding manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and tika into leadership practice and workplace structures, hospitality organisations can redefine professionalism as care rather than mere compliance. Together, these values form what we term a framework of restorative hospitality – an approach that restores mana (dignity and authority) through fairness, connection, and ethical responsibility.

For management, the concept of restorative hospitality signals that preventing and addressing bullying cannot rely solely on formal policies or disciplinary procedures. Instead, it requires cultivating everyday practices of respect and reciprocity. Training, leadership development, and team functioning should emphasise empathy, shared accountability, and relational competence. Managers and supervisors – those most at risk of both experiencing and perpetuating bullying – need particular support to enact these relational ethics in their roles. Embedding Māori values in performance systems, conflict resolution, and staff recognition could provide the scaffolding for such change (Haar *et al.*, 2025).

For scholars, these findings extend organisational and hospitality research by demonstrating the theoretical relevance of Indigenous worldviews to workplace wellbeing. Te Ao Māori does not merely offer cultural context but contributes to theory by reframing ethics as collective rather than individual, and by positioning care as a structural rather than emotional practice. Integrating Indigenous perspectives challenges Western managerial assumptions that wellbeing is ancillary to performance, revealing that in relational systems the two are mutually reinforcing. The mixed-method design strengthens this contribution by combining statistical evidence of harm with qualitative evidence of hope – illustrating how large-scale diagnoses and localised solutions can be mutually informative.

For policy, the research underscores that anti-bullying legislation and guidelines must recognise cultural diversity in conceptions of fairness and care. Current frameworks often prioritise procedural compliance, yet the Māori case study shows that restorative, relational models may achieve bigger and more sustainable change. Policymakers and industry bodies should therefore consider embedding Indigenous and relational ethics into sector-wide standards, providing space for culturally grounded practices that maintain harmony rather than simply punish misconduct.

## Conclusion

This research exposes the gap between hospitality's ideals of care and the lived realities of its workforce, while offering a culturally grounded pathway forward. By combining a national survey with a Māori case study, it reveals both the scale of bullying – affecting more than half the sector and disproportionately impacting women and supervisors – and the potential for Te Ao Māori values to reshape organisational life. The integration of manaakitanga (care), whanaungatanga (relationships), and tika (justice) provides more than moral guidance; it offers a relational framework for leadership, policy, and daily practice that restores mana and collective well-being. Together, these insights point toward a model of *restorative hospitality*; an approach in which relational ethics are not merely stated but enacted. In such workplaces, the industry's promise to welcome, respect, and nurture is no longer reserved just for guests, but it is extended to the people whose labour makes hospitality possible.

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