



**What Can Hospitality Employers do to Moderate the Job Insecurity
Experienced by Employees during the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

A Qualitative Study Investigating the Relationship Between the Actions or Inactions of
Employers Surrounding Temporary Redundancies and the Self-Perceived Wellbeing of
Hospitality Workers in Ireland

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Abstract

Background: COVID-19 has resulted in temporary redundancies across the globe. There is an abundance of existing literature surrounding the impacts of redundancy on wellbeing. However, temporary redundancy is a relatively new phenomenon, presenting a gap in the literature. Existing quantitative research suggests that employees experienced increased job insecurity during the pandemic. This has been linked with increased turnover intent yet there is limited research surrounding what can be done to reduce job insecurity during times of crisis. This study aimed to build on existing research surrounding this topic by collating the views of hospitality employees who experienced temporary redundancy during the pandemic.

Methods: Convenience sampling was used. A total of 12 individuals from cafés, restaurants, and hotels in Ireland agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings: Employees were impacted by temporary redundancy to varying extents dependant on the personal, environmental, and financial resources they possessed. However, most participants experienced job insecurity during the pandemic, and felt as though their social and mental wellbeing were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. The findings of this research suggest that the actions of employers surrounding temporary redundancies can impact the wellbeing of employees and can exacerbate or alleviate feelings of job insecurity, which can influence turnover intent. Participants also discussed the fact many small businesses in the hospitality sector do not have trained HR personnel, arguing that public policy makers should set out guidelines for employers to follow in relation to employee wellbeing during times of crisis.

Conclusions: As it may take some time for public policy makers to enforce guidelines, it is important for hospitality employers to prioritise employee wellbeing. This should involve consistent communication with employees and semi-regular check-ins. Senior management may also benefit from training to aid the intuitive detection of employees with depleted resources.

Declaration

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List of Abbreviations

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
COR	Conservation of Resources
COVID-19	Coronavirus
CSO	Central Statistics Office
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
PUP	Pandemic Unemployment Payment
RO	Research Objective

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Ireland in March 2020 and, as a result, this is a relatively new research topic with limited existing research surrounding the ways in which the pandemic has affected the wellbeing of Irish citizens. COVID-19 has resulted in nationwide lockdowns which have led to temporary redundancies for a number of industries across Ireland (McNaboe *et al.*, 2020). One month into the pandemic in Ireland, The CSO released their 'Employment and Life Effects of COVID-19 Survey', which explained that "since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, just under half of the population aged 15 years and over have seen their employment situation affected", and of those, "14% have lost employment and 33% have been temporarily laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic" (CSO, 2020). While some industries transitioned to remote working, hospitality workers provide services which cannot be carried out from home and COVID-19 restrictions enforced by the Irish government meant that less staff, if any, were required than before the pandemic. This left many businesses with no choice but to lay-off some, or all, employees until business could resume as usual (McNaboe *et al.*, 2020).

There has been extensive, sometimes contrasting, research carried out in relation to the impact of redundancy on wellbeing (Mimoun, Ben Ari and Margalit, 2020; Ronchetti and Terriau, 2019). Temporary redundancies, however, are a somewhat new phenomenon. Previously, temporary redundancies were experienced on a relatively small scale following natural disasters and they have remained largely under researched as a result (Agarwal, 2021). However, since early 2020, temporary redundancies have been experienced globally (Godinic, Obrenovic and Khudaykulov, 2020). Consequently, many researchers around the world have conducted quantitative research surrounding this topic, the results of which indicate that temporary redundancies are linked with increased stress and job insecurity (Chen, 2020; Godinic *et al.*, 2020; Mimoun *et al.*, 2020; Pacheco *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a lack of qualitative research in this area, particularly regarding what can be done to reduce the negative impact of temporary redundancies on the wellbeing of individuals.

Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory highlights that the same stressor can have a different level of impact on individuals' wellbeing's dependant on the personal, social, environmental and/or financial resources they have available to them. He also

maintains that individuals will do what they can to prevent a loss of resources. As a result, this theory has been applied to recent quantitative research surrounding job insecurity during COVID-19 (Chen and Eyoum, 2021; Aguiar-Quintana *et al.*, 2021), and provides the theoretical foundation for this research paper. This study responds to the call to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on frontline workers (Sim, 2020), whilst remaining open to the possibility that the pandemic may have impacted the wellbeing of employees to differing extents dependant on the mental, physical, and/or social resources they had available to them. This study also contributes to the limited existing research surrounding the moderators of job insecurity (Aguiar-Quintana *et al.*, 2021) which are of particular importance during COVID-19 as individuals have experienced increased job insecurity throughout the pandemic (Mimoun *et al.*, 2020). Studies have shown that not only can resilience-promoting interventions act as a resource which improves employee wellbeing (Pacheco *et al.*, 2020), but resilience can also reduce feelings of job insecurity (Aguiar-Quintana *et al.*, 2021) which can, in turn, reduce turnover intent (Bajrami *et al.*, 2020). Agarwal (2021, p. 1) posit that “it is time for organisations to have practices that are fit for an environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity”. In line with the work of Agarwal (2021), this study aims to add to the current scholarly understanding of HRM practices and employee wellbeing in the context of COVID-19 by: 1. Questioning the impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of employees; 2. Questioning whether employees experienced job insecurity during the pandemic, and if so, whether this impacted their wellbeing; 3. Opening a discussion surrounding the actions or inactions of employers during the pandemic, noting the positive or negative impact this had on the wellbeing of employees; and 4. Questioning whether there is anything hospitality employees believe employers could do to make the transition in and out of employment easier.

As this study provides insight into the ways in which the pandemic itself and the actions of employers surrounding COVID-19 lay-offs have impacted employees thus far, this study may provide hospitality employers with relevant information which could help with the design and implementation of practices that promote employee wellbeing, alleviate job insecurity and, in turn, reduce turnover intent.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Although the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been witnessed at a global level (Aguilar-Quintana *et al.* 2021; Godinic *et al.*, 2020), there is limited research surrounding the effects of unemployment and job insecurity during COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of employees. More broadly, stress and wellbeing have been researched for centuries, and it has been observed that there is no one factor which negatively impacts wellbeing. Instead, research suggests that stress and poor wellbeing are typically the result of a combination of factors which vary dependant on the resources one has available to them (Hobfoll, 1989). There is a large body of research dedicated to the impact of redundancy and job insecurity on wellbeing. However, temporary redundancy is a relatively new phenomenon which has remained under-researched to date. As hospitality workers, among others, are experiencing high levels of job insecurity due to COVID-19 (Mimoun *et al.*, 2020), it has been argued that more research is required surrounding the moderators of job insecurity (Aguilar-Quintana *et al.*, 2021). The actions of employers can positively or negatively influence employee wellbeing (Harter, Schmidt and Keyes, 2003). It is important, therefore, that employers consider the impact their actions can have on employee wellbeing and understand that their actions or inactions may influence employee turnover intent. The first section of this literature review discusses existing literature surrounding stress and wellbeing, while the second focusses on the impact of job insecurity on employee wellbeing and turnover intent. The final section considers the contribution of employers to positive employee wellbeing, and also questions who should be responsible for employee wellbeing during times of crisis.

2.2. Stress and Wellbeing

Stable wellbeing can be defined as a positive state of existence which is generally realised when an individual has the physical, mental and/or social resources required to handle various stressors which arise throughout their life (Cosco, Howse and Brayne, 2017). Dodge, Huyton and Sanders (2012) highlight the importance of balance for psychological wellbeing,

using a 'see-saw' analogy to define their concept of wellbeing. They suggest that "in essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa" (Dodge *et al.*, 2012, p. 230).

Recent literature has indicated that COVID-19, subsequent lockdowns, and related job insecurity have had a negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals (Tu, Li and Wang, 2021; Wilson *et al.*, 2020). Individuals have experienced financial and emotional stress during COVID-19, as for many, the quarantine periods put in place by the government have resulted in a "temporary (furlough) or permanent loss of employment (layoff), creating an immediate financial loss - which has created emotional distress, expressed by greater symptoms of depression and decline in physical functioning" (Mimoun *et al.*, 2020, p. 183). Economic uncertainty has been shown to have a negative impact on the mental wellbeing of individuals, their spouses and their relatives (Godinic *et al.*, 2020). Job stability also has many intangible benefits which are worth noting. Not only does it help individuals to feel financially secure and help them to meet their survival needs, but jobs also offer "a wide range of other benefits that are crucial for individuals' growth, satisfaction and sense of identity" (Godinic *et al.*, 2020, p. 61). Similarly, Johansen (2017, p. 234) highlights the importance of "life satisfaction, self-acceptance, autonomy, a sense of purpose, and positive relations" for stable wellbeing. It has been argued, therefore, that as strict COVID-19 regulations have led to restricted social interactions within society, individuals have had to function with limited access to "one of the main pillars of psychological wellbeing and resilient identity" (Godinic *et al.*, 2020, p. 62). It has been posited that labelling individuals as "unnecessary workers" or "non-essential workers" may cause individuals to question their purpose (Mimoun *et al.*, 2020), and this lack of purpose, along with minimal, if any, social interaction with co-workers could result in "identity disturbances", as individuals struggle to come to terms with a "newly emerging reality" (Godinic *et al.*, 2020, p. 62).

The definition of wellbeing presented by Dodge *et al.* (2012) is in line with Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory which was developed to measure stress. The COR model is based around the core principle is that "people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is

threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Aquiar-Quintana *et al.* (2021, p. 7) confirm that in line with Hobfoll’s COR theory, although job insecurity is “significantly and positively associated with anxiety and depression”, personal resources such as self-esteem, resilience, and intrinsic motivation; and social resources such as support from family, co-workers and supervisors, can reduce the negative effects of job insecurity on employee wellbeing. Chen and Eyoun (2021, p. 2) also use the COR theory in their investigation into the relationship between restaurant frontline employees’ fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion. They note that restaurant employees’ stress is already known to be higher than that experienced by employees from other sectors and, therefore, by adding the risk of contracting COVID-19 at work and job insecurity to the many stressors already experienced by restaurant staff, this could lead to emotional exhaustion for workers who do not have the resources needed to balance out these additional COVID-19 induced stressors (Chen and Eyoun, 2021). However, interestingly, Baum *et al.* (2020) hypothesise that the ‘precarious’ lifestyle hospitality workers are accustomed to may result in increased resilience, which could alleviate the negative impacts of the job insecurity they are experiencing. They theorise that the “ongoing change, fluidity and uncertainty” experienced by hospitality staff during this time only serves “to magnify and exacerbate the precarious nature of work in the industry” (Baum *et al.*, 2020). However, this hypothesis has not yet been tested or proven. Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model is based around the idea that two individuals may react differently to the same stressor, as the level of stress which is experienced by an individual in a given situation is dependent on the resources they have at their disposal. As the social, physical and mental resources individuals possess can vary; a situation which causes stress for one person may not cause stress for another (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, even if Baum *et al.* (2020) are correct with their hypothesis, and some employees have built up resilience over time from working in hospitality; it is possible that the stress experienced by hospitality employees may have had a negative experience on others, dependant on the resources one has available to them. However, Baum *et al.* (2020) present a new viewpoint based on desk-based research which is worth being mindful of, going forward.

Work is a resource (Hobfoll, 1989), and when an individual senses they may lose this resource, this can lead to stress which is known as job insecurity (Jung, Jung and Yoon,

2021). It is clear that there are a number of variables which may impact the stress levels and overall wellbeing of employees and, therefore, it is hard to measure whether one specific factor has led to increased stress or the poor wellbeing of participants. As a result, this study focusses on the impact of the actions of employers on the self-perceived wellbeing of hospitality workers; but will ask participants to consider the various physical, social or mental factors or resources which may have influenced their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3. Job Insecurity

There is an abundance of existing literature surrounding unemployment, which focus on the relationship between redundancy and wellbeing. Some highlight a potential link between redundancy and poor mental health (Chen, 2020; Mimoun *et al.*, 2020; Wanberg, 1997), while others theorise that there is no definite correlation between unemployment and health (Ronchetti and Terriau, 2019).

Job insecurity is often experienced by hospitality workers due to the seasonal nature of the job (Jung *et al.*, 2021). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the level of job insecurity experienced by hospitality employees. Typically, job insecurity is defined as “a threat to the continuity and stability of employment as it is currently experienced” (Shoss, 2017, p. 3). In a survey carried out by the CSO in April 2020, 94% of individuals who were unemployed in Ireland due to COVID-19 expected to return to the same job after the pandemic (CSO, 2020). Despite this, it has been argued that a new type of job insecurity has become more prevalent due to COVID-19 restrictions (Mimoun *et al.*, 2020) as, although individuals have been told the unemployment they are experiencing should be temporary, there is also a possibility that it could become a more permanent change if the business they work for does not survive in the current unpredictable and challenging economic climate. At a global scale, temporary redundancies are a relatively new phenomenon as, previously, only a comparatively small number of temporary redundancies occurred due to natural disasters - for example, during a period following the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 (Henderson, 2007). As a result, job insecurity experienced by employees during periods of temporary unemployment has remained largely under researched.

It would be plausible to hypothesise that the knowledge that a period of unemployment is likely to be temporary could relieve some of the stress associated with redundancy, and that this, along with other factors such as the perceived social support workers may gain from having more free time to spend with family, could negate the negative impacts of redundancy (Park *et al.*, 2021; Brooks *et al.*, 2019). However, Pacheco *et al.* (2020, p. 69) found that “participants who were temporarily laid off due to COVID-19 reported lower job security, which indicates that their sense of job security might have been fragilized by unemployment even if they expected to regain their employment after the crisis”. There have been a number of theories as to why this may be the case. Typically, when an individual faces unemployment, they have the opportunity to search for work elsewhere. This perceived situational control has been shown to improve individuals’ ability to cope with the situation, and therefore reduce the negative impact of the situation on their wellbeing (Wanberg, 1997). Similarly, COR theory notes that individuals have different ways of coping with stressors (Hobfoll, 1989). Some try to “replace resources” by finding a new job after they have been let go, while others cope by “shifting the focus of attention”, attempting to conserve resources by “reinterpreting threat as a challenge” following the news that they have been laid-off (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 519). Currently, this is not an option as COVID-19 has affected businesses not only nationwide, but globally - resulting in a saturated pool of unemployed skilled workers. Therefore, it is possible that this lack of situational control means temporary unemployment has negatively impacted employees more than redundancy generally would. It has also been found that job insecurity can lead to identity disturbance (Godinic *et al.*, 2020), with Chen (2020) arguing that as many of the factors which have been found to reduce the negative impact of redundancy on wellbeing (e.g., autonomy and social support networks) are no longer present due to COVID-19 restrictions, temporary redundancies may actually have more of a negative impact on wellbeing than redundancies which occurred before the pandemic. Again, this is in line with Hobfoll’s (1989) COR theory which would suggest that if individuals have depleted resources due to COVID-19 restrictions – resources which would usually help them to cope during periods of redundancy - they may struggle to cope with stressors such as job insecurity more than in usual circumstances. Hobfoll (1989) explains that “environmental circumstances often threaten or cause a depletion of people's resources. They may threaten people's status, position, economic stability, loved ones, basic beliefs, or self-esteem. These losses are

important on two levels. First, resources have instrumental value to people, and second, they have symbolic value in that they help to define for people who they are" (Hobfoll, 1989, pp. 516-517). Work is a resource and a threat to this resource could lead to stress and poor wellbeing as individuals try to cope with this major life change. Mimoun *et al.* (2020, p. 184) propose that "a new psychological epidemic has outbroken because of furlough policy" having found that "fifty-six percent of those on furlough mentioned emotional difficulties manifested in nervousness and anxiety, in comparison with twenty-six percent of those who were unemployed". Therefore, it is not possible to use previous findings regarding redundancy and wellbeing to understand the new type of job insecurity employees are experiencing, and the impact it may have on their wellbeing. This presents a gap in the literature which should be explored.

2.4. The Role of Employers

While employers in the hospitality sector in Ireland have had no choice but to temporarily reduce staff numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic due to various government restrictions; recent qualitative research has suggested that the way in which COVID-19 layoffs are handled by employers can impact employee wellbeing (Agarwal, 2021). Jung *et al.* (2021) found that employee engagement can decrease turnover intent. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesise that the periods of temporary unemployment which employees have experienced during the pandemic may have created a feeling of disconnect between employees and their jobs which may lead employees to consider alternative employment options. Bajrami *et al.* (2020, p. 2) found that job insecurity and turnover intentions are positively related, and that "the more employees felt insecure about keeping their current job, the more they would think about leaving the organization". Therefore, it could be argued that it is in employers' best interests to try to reduce feelings of job insecurity (Wilson *et al.*, 2020). Jung *et al.* (2021, p. 6) verified that "perceptions of job insecurity significantly influence employee engagement and turnover intent, suggesting that a stable climate should be created in organizational work environments in which employees perceive less job insecurity, in order to increase employee engagement and prevent the loss of a superior workforce". One limitation of Jung *et al.*'s (2021) study is that it focusses on Generation Y employees and cannot be applied to the general workforce as a result.

However, it highlights that it is important for employers to question whether there is anything they can do to reduce feelings of job insecurity during the pandemic to ensure the return of the workforce after lockdown measures lift.

Research has found that while employees show signs of increased anxiety and stress during isolation, they do not display these symptoms upon returning to work (Tan *et al.*, 2020). Returning to work after a justified absence is also “mostly seen as a way to increase employees' quality of life and as some type of therapy as returning to work gives employees a sense of normality upon return to work” (Peteeet as cited in Bajrami *et al.*, 2020). While this was the case with pre-pandemic redundancies, returning to work during the pandemic involves increased risk-taking behaviour, as hospitality and tourism workers have been “marked as particularly vulnerable to the risk of contracting the disease” (Bajrami *et al.*, 2020). This increase in risk-taking behaviour has been shown to “decrease job motivation and job satisfaction among hospitality workers” while increasing their turnover intentions (Bajrami *et al.*, 2020). It is worth noting, therefore, that in line with Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory, although employees may have had the resources to deal with work stressors before the pandemic, it is likely that with the added stressor of COVID-19, hospitality workers will not have the resources required to carry out their roles as they did before, upon their return to work (Tu *et al.*, 2021).

There have been many conflicting views presented in relation to who should accept responsibility for employee wellbeing during times of crisis. Some researchers have argued that the responsibility of employee wellbeing should not be placed solely on employers, stating that governmental “resources for psychological and financial assistance should be increased” and “designated governmental services should be instructed to establish synchronized treatment protocols to facilitate the pain, pressure, and sorrow of those put on furlough” (Mimoun *et al.*, 2020, p. 185). Similarly, Godinic *et al.* (2020, p. 61) recommend the implementation of public welfare policies to “mitigate health risks during the turbulent socio-economic changes”. On the other hand, it has been noted that communication between employers and employees; history of a positive relationship with their employer; authentic leadership within the workplace; working for a business which prioritises corporate social responsibility (CSR); and healthy relationships with family and friends are all

resources which hospitality workers believe helped to improve their wellbeing during periods of unemployment during the pandemic (Agarwal, 2021). Pacheco *et al.* (2020, p. 58) recommend “a systemic, collaborative approach that includes policies fostering job security as well as resilience-promoting interventions in the workplace to protect/increase the wellbeing of workers during COVID-19”, with others agreeing that businesses have a responsibility to adapt their CSR strategies in an effort to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 (Ou, Wong and Huang, 2021; Gorgenyi-Hegybes, Nathan and Fekete-Farkas, 2021). There are a number of low-cost interventions that can be introduced by employers to optimise social capital, such as through the organisation of meetings online, for example. These meetings can be used to discuss the impacts of the crisis on employees current and future employment and improve wellbeing (Pacheco *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, Nisar *et al.*, (2021) encourage employers to create “expressive challenges” which encourage employees to keep active through exercise; and maintain interaction with social networks by asking employees to capture and share photographs of the best moment of their day/week (Nisar *et al.*, 2021, p. 7).

Literature has highlighted that it is now more important than ever for managers to build close relationships with employees, and address employees concerns in order to reduce feelings of job insecurity (Yung, Yung and Yoon, 2021). However, recent research has flagged that perceived organisational support during times of crisis can actually increase feelings of job insecurity, as high perceived organisational support is viewed as a valuable resource and the thought of losing this resource can lead to emotional exhaustion (Chen and Eyoun, 2021). Therefore, it is important for managers to note the importance of improvisation in relation to HRM. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing employee wellbeing, and managers must have the skills to recognise what is required to promote employee wellbeing within their organisation (Lombardi, Cunha and Giustiniano, 2021). Workplace disaster preparedness and continuous training for management is required to ensure managers can fully support their team (Pacheco *et al.*, 2020).

Job insecurity has been found to have a “negative relationship with factors associated with job attitudes and the psychological health of employees” (Jung *et al.*, 2021). Employers may notice that employees have depleted physical, social and financial resources when they

return to work due to the impact of job insecurity and COVID-19 restrictions. There is a possibility government enforced restrictions will continue for some time to come (Davahli *et al.*, 2020) and it is important, therefore, for employers to question whether there is anything they can do to make the transition in and out of employment easier for employees. This may prove to be vital for the retention of skilled employees as the hospitality industry in Ireland begins to reopen.

2.5. Conclusion

Overall, there is inconsistency within the literature surrounding the relationship between redundancy and wellbeing, and there is further confusion surrounding the impact of temporary redundancies due to COVID-19 on the wellbeing of employees. There has been minimal research carried out surrounding the impact of the actions or inactions of employers during this time despite the fact the CIPD (2021a) have highlighted that employers and HR teams should be aware of the potential affects of COVID-19 induced job insecurity and redundancies on employee wellbeing.

A qualitative study surrounding the impact of the actions or inactions of employers on the self-perceived wellbeing of employees during temporary redundancy could reveal new and valuable information from employees who work within the hospitality industry. This could provide employers with an insight into the impact temporary redundancies can have on employees, and what, if anything, they can do to help make the transition in and out of employment easier for everyone involved. While it could be argued this should not be the sole responsibility of employers, and perhaps there should be some governmental support in the matter, research has indicated that employers are in a prime position to make small changes which could massively reduce the negative impact of temporary unemployment on employee wellbeing (Harter *et al.*, 2003).

This research question is open to the possibility that some hospitality workers may have had a more positive experience than others during a given period of unemployment as there are a number of variables which impact wellbeing. The overall aim of this research is to establish whether employees believe their employers' actions surrounding temporary redundancy had a positive or negative impact on their wellbeing during this time. It also

aims to establish what employees believe their employers did well, or what they could have done differently to make the transition in and out of work easier.

Chapter 3: Research Question

When researching industries which were most impacted by the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions in Ireland, it was clear that hospitality workers in particular have experienced periods of unemployment or periods of temporary redundancy as a result of COVID-19 (McNaboe *et al.*, 2020). It was also evident that there is a gap in the literature in relation to the relationship between the actions of employers surrounding temporary redundancies and employee wellbeing. As a result, the following research question arose:

'Is there a relationship between the actions or inactions of employers surrounding temporary redundancies during COVID-19 and the self-perceived wellbeing of hospitality workers in Ireland?'

The overall aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the actions or inactions of employers surrounding temporary redundancies and the self-perceived wellbeing of employees in the hospitality industry in Ireland. It aims to question whether hospitality workers believe their wellbeing has been impacted by COVID-19; whether they believe they have experienced job insecurity; whether they believe their employers' actions or inactions have impacted their wellbeing; and whether there is anything they believe employers could or should do to positively influence employee wellbeing during the transition in and out of employment, going forward.

In order to answer the overarching research question, the following research objectives were formulated:

RO1: To investigate whether hospitality workers believe their wellbeing has been impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

RO2: To question whether hospitality workers believe job insecurity has had an impact on their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RO3: To investigate whether hospitality workers believe the actions or inactions of their employer have had an impact on their wellbeing during periods of temporary redundancy.

RO4: To question whether hospitality workers believe there is anything employers could do to positively influence employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Research approach

This is a relatively new research topic and the majority of existing research carried out in relation to COVID-19 induced job insecurity and employee wellbeing have analysed the link between temporary layoffs and employee stress levels and/or wellbeing, quantitatively (Ferry *et al.*, 2021; Wilson *et al.*, 2020; Pacheco *et al.*, 2020; Mimoun *et al.*, 2020; Godinic *et al.*, 2020). It is worth noting, however, that there is an abundance of existing research surrounding the topic of employee wellbeing generally, which was conducted pre-COVID-19, which employ a more interpretivist, phenomenological approach to research, studying individuals' perceptions of reality (Brooks *et al.*, 2019; Gauche, de Beer and Brink, 2017; Pescud *et al.*, 2015). Having considered both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, it was reasoned that it would be appropriate to carry out phenomenological qualitative research involving semi-structured one-to-one interviews in order to achieve the research objectives set out. Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with flexibility to explore complex ideas presented by research participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019) in what has been described as a "managed conversation" (Cachia and Millward, 2011). This method is in agreement with the inductive nature of this study, which requires the researcher to approach the research topic with an exploratory perspective in an effort to understand the lived experience of participants. The researcher made a conscious effort to remain objective throughout the interview process, practicing active listening to understand participants' perspectives.

4.2. Research setting and sample

In order to achieve the four research objectives set out, this study focussed on employees from the hospitality industry in Ireland. This is due to the fact the hospitality industry has been marked as one of those most effected by temporary redundancy in Ireland, owing to COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions. Ireland has been ranked as having the strictest

lockdown measures in Europe, and the fourth strictest in the world (Brent, 2021). Data from OpenTable reveals that most users from the hospitality industry across the world, including Ireland, have reported a significant decline in sit-in bookings throughout the pandemic (Statistica, 2021). Five 'levels' of restrictions were enforced by the Irish government in line with the 'Living with COVID Plan' introduced in September 2020 (Merrion Street, 2020). Consequently, the hospitality industry has closed and reopened multiple times between March 2020 and August 2021. At the time of data collection in May 2021, many hospitality employees were unemployed, and the government were discussing a gradual move out of a 'Level 5' lockdown - which had meant hotels, bars, cafés and restaurants were closed until further notice.

Participants were selected based on their accessibility. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from the hospitality industry. The researcher contacted old colleagues, fellow students, and shared a post on LinkedIn, asking connections to participate in and/or share the post to reach as many people as possible. A total of 12 people agreed to participate in this study. Participants worked in hotels [2], restaurants [7] and cafés [3] in Ireland. Participants were only eligible to participate in this study if they experienced redundancy due to the COVID-19 restrictions that had been enforced by the government in Ireland in March 2020. The majority of participants were female (67%), with the remaining 33% identifying as male. Participants were aged between 20-48 and had a mean age of 26.4. Participants were asked to share whether they previously worked on a full-time or part-time basis. They were also asked if they had any dependants as those with dependants are more likely to experience financial strain, which has been linked to psychological stress and poor wellbeing (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020; Godinic *et al.*, 2020). Nine participants were living with their parents and did not have dependants, while the remaining three had dependants. One lived with parents but was the sole earner in the family so was experiencing financial strain, and another two participants had one or more children. As reoccurring themes arose during the interview process, this sample was deemed sufficient to gain valuable insight into common perceptions and experiences among hospitality workers who had experienced redundancy due to COVID-19 (Fugurd and Potts, 2015).

4.3. Procedure

In order to gather data, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Typically, when qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews is carried out, data is gathered through in-person interviews. However, due to the unpredictability of COVID-19 restrictions and in the interest of health and safety, semi-structured, electronic, one-to-one interviews were scheduled and conducted through Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams served as a telephone medium, as despite the fact interviews were carried out on Microsoft Teams, interviews were conducted using audio only. Cachia and Millward (2011) argue that although using the telephone medium to conduct semi-structured interviews is often seen as second-best by qualitative researchers, it is in fact a suitable option for conducting one-to-one interviews as respondents feel as though telephone interviews help them to maintain their anonymity and it also allows interviewees to choose the interview location in a setting in which they feel most comfortable (Cachia and Millward, 2011). As well as this, interviewees are more likely to vocalise their movements in a telephone interview. For example, in the case where interviewees would be inclined to nod their head in a face-to-face interview, they are more likely to say “umm” or “ahh” in a telephone interview instead, which provides additional information for the researcher to analyse in interview transcriptions (Cachia and Millward, 2011). Opdenakker (2006) argues that telephone interviews are appropriate where social cues are not an important source of information for the researcher. As the aim of this study was to search for semantic themes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017), or in other words focus on the content of the data, i.e., what was said rather than the way it was said (Cachia and Millward, 2011); conducting audio-only interviews was deemed appropriate for the purpose of this research project.

Semi-structured interviews were also considered appropriate for this study as research has found that they help to negate biases (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Interviews were carried out using a pre-determined list of themed questions which were used as prompts to encourage discussion and keep the interview focussed. Due to the inductive nature of this study, the overall aim was to remain open to exploring the positive or negative impacts the actions or inactions of employers may have had on employee wellbeing. As a result, interview questions were primarily dependant on the information participants were willing to share.

However, participants were provided with a pre-interview information sheet the day before the interview which contained interview themes, and definitions of key terms, such as 'wellbeing', 'mental wellbeing', 'social wellbeing', 'physical wellbeing', and 'job insecurity', which would be discussed in the interview (Appendix 3). This was in an effort to promote reliability and validity (Saunders *et al.*, 2019) and to allow participants to reflect on their experiences prior to the interview.

4.4. Data collection

The researcher carried out one pilot study before interviews were conducted to ensure the selected themes and prompts would allow for the collection of high-quality data (Sampson, 2004) and to confirm that Microsoft Teams was an appropriate and effective way to conduct interviews. The interview format was derived from existing literature on COVID-19, employee wellbeing, redundancy, and job insecurity. Interview questions were split into seven sections as listed below. Participants were asked to:

1. Share some demographic information and a short discussion was initiated surrounding their most recent role in the hospitality industry to build rapport between the interviewer and research participants.
2. Discuss whether they believed their physical, mental, or social wellbeing had been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.
3. Discuss whether they experienced job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Share the role their employers played, i.e., whether there was anything their employers did which they believe may have impacted their wellbeing – positively or negatively.
5. Share whom they believe should be responsible for the wellbeing of employees during periods of temporary redundancy.
6. Discuss whether there is anything they believe employers, specifically, could do to positively impact the wellbeing of employees during the transition in and out of temporary employment.
7. Share any further comments.

4.5. Recording of data

With the informed consent of participants, interviews were audio-recorded using Microsoft Teams. During the interview, the researcher took notes in relation to the perspectives and experiences shared by participants. Audio recordings were saved to Microsoft Teams and interviews were then manually transcribed by the researcher immediately after the interview had ended. This was accomplished by listening to the interview recording and manually typing a transcript using Microsoft Word.

4.6. Data analysis

Data - in the form of interview transcriptions and notes taken by the researcher during interviews - was analysed using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This is a flexible method which is appropriate for the analysis of inductive and qualitative empirical data (Lawless and Chen, 2019). The six key steps to thematic analysis set out by Braun and Clark (2006) were followed. This involved:

1. Familiarisation with the data set
2. The generation of codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing a written thematic report

Typed interview transcriptions and notes taken during interviews created a large data set for the researcher to consult during data analysis. Following a process of familiarisation with the data set, themes which arose from the data set were noted and assigned codes, which were then used to compare transcripts systematically. As mentioned, there was a focus on the content of the text, i.e., an emphasis on what was said rather than how it was said, and the resulting set of themes and subthemes were used to produce a written thematic report to represent participants' lived experiences (Cachia and Millward, 2011).

4.7. Ethical considerations

Participants were sent an Information Sheet (Appendix 1) and Consent Form (Appendix 2) to read before deciding to participate in this research project. Participants read and signed an informed consent form, and then sent a signed copy to the researcher via email. The topic was dealt with in a careful manner throughout as the researcher understood that this may be a sensitive topic for some. Participants were also provided with a list of contact details for mental health services in Ireland the day before the scheduled meeting. This was to ensure that, in the event participants found the interview distressing, they would have relevant contact details to hand following the interview. These contact details were emailed to participants along with a pre-interview information sheet (Appendix 3) the day before the meeting. As mentioned, the pre-interview information sheet contained themes which would be discussed in the interview. This gave participants time to think about the themes which would be raised and ease any concerns they may have had in relation to topics which would be discussed. Participants were also reminded that they could contact the researcher with any questions they had at any time. On the day of the interview, participants were asked to confirm their informed consent again, verbally, prior to recording. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher reminded participants that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to answer and that they could stop the interview at any time. Participants were also reminded that their identities would be anonymised and that everything discussed would be treated with confidentiality. Data was stored in line with General Data Protection Regulation guidelines, and standards provided by the National College of Ireland. This was explained to participants in the informed consent forms which were signed by participants prior to the scheduling of interviews.

4.8. Limitations

The majority of participants (7 out of 12) worked in restaurants. 3 worked in cafés and 2 worked for hotels. Ideally there would have been an equal number of participants from cafés, hotels and restaurants involved in the study. However due to the fact convenience sampling was used along with time constraints, this was not possible.

While the researcher has made every effort to create a design rigorous enough to ensure findings are dependable; this study surrounds the topic of employee wellbeing during COVID-19 and was conducted in May 2021 (during the pandemic). Due to the time-sensitive, non-standardised and qualitative nature of this study it may be difficult to replicate (Saunders *et al.*, 2019, p. 449). However, it is believed that this research will provide valuable insight into employees' opinions surrounding temporary redundancies and wellbeing which will add to the existing body of literature surrounding employee wellbeing.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

The demographic information for each of the participants can be found in table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic information for participants.

Participant Number	Business	Position	Gender	Age	Full/Part-time	Dependants
1	Restaurant	Assistant Manager	Female	25	Full-time	No
2	Restaurant	Bar Tender	Male	20	Part-time	No
3	Hotel	Social Media and Marketing	Female	27	Full-time	Yes
4	Restaurant	Bar Tender	Male	21	Part-time	No
5	Restaurant	Waitress	Female	20	Part-time	No
6	Café	Kitchen Manager	Female	29	Full-time	Yes
7	Restaurant	Waitress	Female	22	Part-time	No
8	Restaurant	Waitress	Female	25	Full-time	No
9	Restaurant	Bar Supervisor	Male	24	Full-time	No
10	Café	Head Baker	Male	28	Full-time	No
11	Café	Assistant Manager	Female	28	Full-time	No
12	Hotel	Reservations Groups Manager	Female	48	Full-time	Yes

5.2. Research Findings

5.2.1. RO1: Investigating whether hospitality workers believe their wellbeing has been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.

Participants were asked whether they believe their mental, social, or physical wellbeing have been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.

5.2.1.1. Mental Wellbeing

92% of participants believe their mental wellbeing has been negatively impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Feelings of isolation, anxiety and hopelessness were mentioned by participants.

I was just suffering with anxiety and like, probably depression and ... just general wellbeing, I was pretty low and my morale wasn't very high. (Participant 6).

[My mental wellbeing has] definitely deteriorated the longer you get no indication of where things are going. That's definitely like the biggest challenge is having no end in sight. (Participant 2).

Every time you leave lockdown there's this feeling like okay, when are we going back in ... and I think with that, there's kind of like a hopelessness because you're just wondering ... when are we going back into lockdown. (Participant 5).

5.2.1.2. Social Wellbeing

75% of participants believe their social wellbeing has been impacted by COVID-19. Participants found it difficult to be away from their friends and family during periods of lockdown, describing these intervals as 'isolating'. Some individuals replaced social resources by interacting with friends online.

It can be completely isolating ... being taken away from college, work, friends, and with my family living in different parts of the country, it's completely removed the typical support structure that you kind of need in a time like this. (Participant 8).

Social has been a test ... [PlayStation] was like our main form of communication with my friends ... over lockdown ... you're playing it for four, five, six hours every evening. Just so you're on a call with your mates. Just for a bit of social interaction.
(Participant 2).

Even when government restrictions began to ease and individuals were permitted to meet up with family and friends again, one participant found it difficult to readjust:

Just because we're not in lockdown doesn't mean you can just switch off from months of y'know, conditioning yourself to like stay at home and keep safe and then the second things open it's hard to ... go out and enjoy yourself because you've been conditioned to ... be so cautious and I feel like that's something that's really gonna be evident when we leave [lockdown], like people are gonna be really cautious ... there's that kind of like, constant state of anxiety when it comes to socialising or meeting people, that I don't think is gonna go away so quickly when things open back up.
(Participant 5).

5.2.1.3. Physical Wellbeing

Some participants believe lockdown has had a positive impact on their physical wellbeing as they now have more time to exercise and cook healthy meals than they would have had before the pandemic.

I think it actually has been positive for me ... I barely had time to get out for walks or runs or cycles or whatever ... beforehand but now I feel like I'm a lot more active and like I'm happy about that. I have time to do that now. (Participant 7).

I've had more time to kind of like, cook things, that are a bit more healthy. Rather than having instant noodles before work. (Participant 5).

Others noted that lockdown measures have had a negative impact on their physical wellbeing, claiming this was due to the fact gyms were closed during lockdown in Ireland; or because they previously relied on their active job to get enough exercise; or due to the fact they did not feel comfortable exercising outside.

I find it very hard to actually get out at the moment ... For the first couple of lockdowns I tried going for a couple of walks late at night or going for a run late at night. Obviously, it's not the safest but ... I just felt safer running that late at night when I knew there wasn't that many people outside. (Participant 4).

I wasn't the kind of person who would kind of go to the gym or do those sorts of things. But working and being on my feet and walking to work, back and fourth. It was kind of my exercise and my routine. So, I think physically, I feel a big difference in that way. (Participant 8).

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the restrictions enforced by the Irish government to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have had a negative impact on both the social and mental wellbeing of some hospitality workers, but it is unclear whether the restrictions have had a positive or negative impact on the physical wellbeing of employees.

5.2.2. RO2: Questioning whether hospitality workers believe job insecurity has had an impact on their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants were asked whether they believe they have experienced job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were also asked whether they were impacted financially by any periods of unemployment during the pandemic and, if so, whether this impacted their wellbeing.

5.2.2.1. Job insecurity

Participants found that waiting to be called back into work resulted in job insecurity.

[My manager] said to me "we'll just let you know when things open back up"... So, I went back to [my hometown] but I really didn't know how long this was gonna go on for ... I was kind of always waiting for the call to be like, alright you can come back. (Participant 11).

I would say [I experienced job insecurity] to be honest, just like I didn't know if I was coming or going ... I just wasn't sure what to be doing with myself so therefore I started the bakery ... I had to fend for myself [during the pandemic]... I was let go

from my original job ... they just said bye and we'll be in contact but then they never were. So I wasn't sure if I was coming back or not so I had to just make-do... I actually had to pop in myself and say hi and see what the craic was. (Participant 10).

As a result, Participant 11 quit their job to start a full-time masters and participant 10 left their job to focus on opening their own bakery. This indicates that job insecurity increased turnover intent.

Interestingly, a number of employees began to question their own abilities due to the lack of security they felt surrounding their employment.

I feel like with COVID [feelings of self-actualisation were] taken away a little bit ... because ... you're just replaceable, in a sense, and then they'll call you back when they need you, but that's not gonna be for months on end ... it's difficult to be like fully content without that ... [the] uncertainty leaves you to kind of question your capabilities. Y'know like, if I was really good would I have been kept on? ... it kind of leaves you like, doubting yourself. Even though it's like, a global pandemic - it's not your fault. (Participant 5).

I didn't know if I'd be a priority [so there was a] small bit of insecurity ... 10% doubt that like, do you wanna go back in case it closes again. Or like, are you actually a priority to go back over other people? ... do I wanna do something else? (Participant 2).

Another participant explained that upon the return to work after lockdown restrictions lifted, they felt as though they had to compete for hours. This also resulted in feelings of job insecurity and self-doubt.

You definitely started feeling insecure because ... there were so few of us left working that if someone got, maybe one week they got way more hours than you, you felt quite like, jealous and then the next week you might get those hours and think 'oh thank god' ... I definitely feel like there was a lot of tension between us. Everything just felt very up in the air... that made me feel very insecure in my job, and then obviously you're questioning yourself and you get into your own head. (Participant 11).

Participants expressed their desire to start a new career during the pandemic. It could be argued this was an attempt to regain situational control during periods of unemployment by focussing on something which is within their control (Wanberg, 1997; Hobfoll, 1989).

[Redundancy] made me question like, my future and like what I wanted to do. So that's why I ended up going back to study ... [The Pandemic] really made me realise how vulnerable the hospitality industry is, and there's no sense of security in it ... I've just become more proactive with training and development to try and like, change career path and I think it maybe helped and made me feel more secure and like, capable. (Participant 6).

I've definitely considered a career change. I've been looking into doing a degree and stuff because it's kind of made me realise that like nothing's like solidified ... like there's no guarantee on the job that I'm in at the minute. (Participant 7).

However, another participant explained that while they decided to focus on a career change during the pandemic, they believe they would have made this move eventually, and the pandemic just “sped it along”. This highlights the possibility that the pandemic may have just expedited the inevitable for these employees.

The findings below support those of Agarwal (2021), who found that employees that have a positive personal relationship with their employer are less likely to experience job insecurity.

I was never worried really about the job not being available to me ... and I suppose that is a lot to do with my boss as well ... she was very reassuring really to be honest... that like, it was a temporary situation ... no, I would say that my employers were very reassuring ... that my job was secure. (Participant 12).

I've had like a few conversations with my boss and he said that I'll be guaranteed hours when I come back ... he's committed to getting all of his staff members back and giving people hours. (Participant 7).

5.2.2.2. Financial insecurity

The PUP is a social welfare payment which was put in place by the Irish government for individuals who lost their employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike other social welfare payments, this payment was also available to students. The PUP was mentioned by 83% of participants. It was clear from speaking with participants that for some, the PUP was a resource as they valued the stability it provided; while for others the PUP was a stressor as the payment was less than their usual income, or because their employer used the PUP to their advantage. This is explained in more detail below.

The PUP was a resource for several participants who managed to save a lot of money during periods of lockdown. One participant explains:

[The PUP] has like given a bit of stability in a time where things are so all over the place ... it's nice to know that like every Tuesday I'm going to get a certain amount whereas when you're in work ... you can be doing like 50 hours one week and then ... 20 the next. I don't like a fluctuating financial ... situation ... and with nothing being open and everything I kind of put everything aside into savings. (Participant 5).

For others, the PUP was less than what they would usually have earned working and adjusting to this change was stressful.

The main thing was that I was trying to pay for college and then obviously had to go on the COVID and that was a lot less money than what I was on, so it was kind of a struggle to get those college payments in whereas if I was working it would've been a lot easier. (Participant 9).

One participant mentioned choosing to work for their employer for free whilst claiming the PUP (participant 7), while another reported being forced to work in order to continue claiming the PUP (Participant 3). The latter explained that their employer required that they not only return to work whilst claiming the PUP, but also that they also carry out duties beyond those listed in their contract. When the participant explained that they were not happy with this, and their job (social media/marketing) could be done from home, their employer threatened to report that the participant was refusing suitable employment to the social welfare department. If this were to occur, the participant would have no income for 6

weeks while transferring to job-seekers allowance. The participant explained that they were “trying to make ends meet” as they had dependants who also relied on this income at the time and found the situation very stressful.

My parents had decided to leave Ireland and had given their notice to both of their jobs so they didn't earn anything at the time and I was the only one earning anything, and even if it was the PUP, it was something. So, for work to say well, we can tell the government that you're choosing not to work and they'll stop that payment ... and realising that if I didn't go in and clean rooms, I would lose my job effectively, and even the PUP ... it felt very threatening. (Participant 3).

Several participants also mentioned that even when they were managing financially during the pandemic, they were concerned about the longevity of their financial situation.

The job insecurity and like the worry of not being able to provide for my son is more stressful than the finances, at this moment, if that makes sense? ... I have hope that I will be employed again and like, we don't need that much at the moment ... so that hasn't really been a worry because I'm just like okay, what about the future because this isn't, obviously, sustainable. (Participant 6).

[I wondered] as a student, was I eligible for the PUP payment? At the time, I was renting an apartment in town and if I wasn't eligible for that, how would I pay my rent? ... it actually led to me moving out of my rented apartment and into the home with my grandfather so that I would have less overheads ... just generally less to worry about, financially ... in the last year we have become quite used to the PUP payment and y'know, it's relatively secure, but definitely for the first few months, you're thinking well surely this isn't ... this can't go on forever. (Participant 8).

Overall, it is clear that job insecurity has had a negative impact on the wellbeing of hospitality employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings are in line with the findings of Pacheco *et al.* (2020) who noted that employees' sense of job security can be fragilized by periods of unemployment, even if the period of unemployment is temporary.

Interestingly, participants expressed job insecurity in various ways. Some experienced feelings of self-doubt, while others found themselves seeking to replace resources by pursuing new employment opportunities. In relation to financial insecurity, it was apparent that the PUP did not offer universal support for participants and impacted the wellbeing of some more than others. Many managed to save money whilst claiming the PUP, while a few found it stressful to adjust to the decrease in their income. One participant explained that their employer used the PUP as a resource for themselves to the detriment of the mental health of the employee, while a couple of participants mentioned that although they felt financially stable in the short-term, they were concerned that their situation would not be sustainable long-term.

5.2.3. RO3: Investigating whether hospitality workers believe the actions or inactions of their employer have had an impact on their wellbeing during periods of temporary redundancy.

Participants were asked to share whether they believe the actions or inactions of their employer had an impact on their wellbeing during the transition in and out of employment. One of the key themes which emerged from this was communication. Participants noted that the lack of communication and poor guidance from their employer was one of the main causes of distress during the pandemic.

I think it's the fact that we didn't really hear much from them about the pub basically. That kind of had a negative impact on me. I felt like I had to go out of my way to somehow be in the pub at the exact same time as the employer, even though I wouldn't know when he'd be in there. And I felt like I had to go out of my way to ask him questions about the pub ... I appreciate the fact that he probably wouldn't know that much anyway about reopening or dates when they can reopen or anything. I just left like [my employer] could have put all of us at ease a bit better if he just talked to us over text or a call. (Participant 4).

There was maybe one or two occasions when returning to work where everyone, including myself was like how is this going to work? What are we doing? Is it gonna be safe? There's definitely that thought process. (Participant 2).

Likewise, employees who had frequent communication and reassurance from their employer felt more secure about their employment.

I'm kind of in a unique situation where em I knew that my job was there for me when I got back just because of who I'm employed with and we've ... kept in contact all through this pandemic so ... I didn't feel like my job was at stake. (Participant 9).

75% of participants worked for small organisations which do not have qualified HR personnel within their organisation. Of those that did, two noted that their HR department made a conscious effort to improve employee wellbeing during the pandemic.

We were lucky enough that we had like a HR slash operations manager but I know plenty of places like small cafes that don't have it ... Our HR slash operations manager was great for doing one-on-one check ins and just making sure everyone is doing okay and they also paid ... for all of us to get the premium Headspace App, which, I mean, others find that useful. I didn't, it's not for me but I can see why that would be really beneficial for other people. (Participant 11).

[HR] provided wellness classes for us, mindfulness classes and yoga classes ... to bring us in as a group together and I suppose keep us in touch. (Participant 12).

One participant described an exercise event organised by HR which she found beneficial.

We did like a ... walking challenge... they created like a team... on strava and you signed up for it then and ... you clock your steps every day, they had a little bit of a competition ... it was very good. (Participant 12).

However, another participant made it clear that they had seen other organisations arrange games which they believe would not benefit the employees in the organisation they work in. Participant 3 mentioned that the HR department in their organisation tried to accommodate them in some ways. For example, as the participant used public transport to commute to work, and as they are high-risk, they found their long commute more stressful than usual. As a result, their employer provided a taxi service to work for two days and let them stay in the hotel free of charge so they would not have to commute to work when the cases were particularly high. They also arranged a private changing room for the participant so they would not have to use the communal changing facilities. However, overall, the participant

did not feel as though HR was a resource during the pandemic as the HR department failed to maintain confidentiality:

I felt as though I couldn't go to HR because whatever I said would go back to the manager because they had a close relationship. (Participant 3).

The term 'guilt' appeared on a few occasions. One participant explained that although themselves and their parents were high-risk, they felt as though their employer was "guilting" them into coming into work:

They were like y'know, we need to make money so that when we do open everyone will get a job ... It was very stressful in the sense that my boss would be very like "oh look, this person is high-risk and they're still coming in" or "this person has a high-risk family member at home but they're still coming in" and I was like, I get that but ... I'm the one who's panicked. I feel like my job is at risk. I'm the one who is stressed. Fair enough if they feel secure enough to come in, but I don't. (Participant 3).

Similarly, another participant explained that returning to work after the first lockdown they felt excited to get back to work but:

Now it's more of a guilt trip. The first lockdown they didn't go about re-welcoming staff right. They just were kind of like, straight into the deep end. And they did it again the second time and I feel like because they didn't look after their staff, the staff don't feel loyalty towards them. (Participant 5).

This participant helped their employer out with takeaways over the various lockdowns but found themselves gradually decreasing the amount of time they were willing to commit to the organisation because of how they were treated when the restaurant reopened.

A number of participants also highlighted that they found the return to work between lockdowns difficult due to the stark contrast between the number of social interactions they had during lockdown versus upon their return to work.

In terms of trying to make us feel physically safe, and I suppose them considering our physical wellbeing ... they've implemented all of the restrictions. They have tried their best to make us physically safe. But ... as a result of that ... I feel that it actually kind

of mentally, it kind of sets in an element of danger ... that you should be afraid of everybody that walks into the building, and that everything is contaminated and everything you touch has to be cleaned ... existing in that and having it enforced in such a kind of a, harsh way.. yeah it sets in an element of 'you have to be afraid' which, while it's physically safe, is mentally quite unstable. (Participant 8).

I would definitely say that opening back up it went from not serving tables for months to being at the highest capacity possible. I think it's just like a money thing, with very little regard for their staff's wellbeing. Like, to go from one day being like oh, literally don't like, go and see your closest loved ones to like oh, but you can serve 300 strangers with no masks on. Kind of leaves you against the world, in a sense. And there's nothing you can really do about it. (Participant 5).

Overall, it is apparent that the actions and sometimes inactions of employers impacted the wellbeing of hospitality employees during the transition in and out of employment. A number of participants noted the role communication with their employer played in their wellbeing during periods of unemployment. Many struggled with the lack of communication they received from their employer whilst unemployed, while others felt reassured by the consistent communication they received from their employer. Participants also found that employers' expectations that employees must seamlessly resubmerge back into the workforce immediately following the lifting of lockdown restrictions distressing. Two participants mentioned feeling as though their employer was "guilting" them into returning to work before they were ready. Of those who work for an organisation with HR personnel, two felt as though this was a resource as HR were mindful of employee wellbeing, whilst one felt as though there was a lack of support from the HR department in their organisation. It is clear that the way in which hospitality employers handled the break in employment and employees' return to employment impacted employee wellbeing and, in turn, their commitment to the organisation.

5.2.4. RO4: Questioning whether hospitality workers believe there is anything employers could do to positively influence employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment.

Participants were first asked who they believe should be responsible for employee wellbeing during times of crisis. They were then asked if there is anything they believe employers specifically could do to help employees with the transition in and out of employment.

5.2.4.1. Who do employees believe should be responsible?

A significant number of participants (50%) believe the employer and/or senior staff should be responsible for employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment.

The owners ...manager ... divide it amongst the senior staff ... obviously they're going through a hard time as well but, I mean, if you want your staff back it would be nice to contact them and look after them. (Participant 1).

A quarter of participants suggested that, in line with ideas presented by Pacheco *et al.* (2020), a collaborative approach between the employer and the government should be employed to moderate the negative impact of job insecurity. One participant explained their reasoning for this:

If you leave it to the employer ... there's too much grey area ... There's no standards for wellbeing. One employer might think – I've communicated with them, that's looking after their wellbeing - whereas the other one might have a programme or training ... but some employers, they wouldn't even have that training themselves. So how can you ensure that they're looking after their employees? Especially in the hospitality industry because a lot of people who are running those organisations don't have any background in employment law, don't know anything about rights and obligations. They're just small businesses, they're just people with dreams. If the state had a programme in place, it would just be more fluid and ensure that there's a standard and that people are being looked after. (Participant 6).

The remaining 25% either believe it is between the employee and the government; or that the employee should take it upon themselves to look after themselves and their colleagues;

or reported that they were unsure. Lombardi *et al.* (2021) present the theory that there is no one-size-fits all approach and it is therefore important for employers to have personal relationships with employees and use intuition to decide how best to look out for employee wellbeing. These somewhat inconclusive results support this.

5.2.4.2. *Employees expressed sympathy for their employer during the pandemic.*

It was notable that 75% of participants expressed sympathy for their employer. Even the majority of those who felt their employer handled the transition in and out of work poorly were empathetic towards their employer.

It's tough, I would hate to be an employer now... I don't think [employee wellbeing] is an employer priority in [unprecedented] times like these ... There has been inaction from employers because they haven't done a lot but they also haven't really had the opportunity to do much. (Participant 2).

I get that they're in a tough situation as well.. I know my employer definitely wanted as many people to be in and like it's been hard on them not having their staff there and not being able to do anything about it. (Participant 7).

5.2.4.3. *What could employers do to help employees with the transitions in and out of employment?*

Employees feel as though they may have benefitted from more communication from their employer; semi-regular check-ins from their employer; and an eased return to service upon reopening.

Communication was mentioned by the majority of participants.

Maybe give [employees] a little bit of reassurance or set out a plan as to y'know, what the plan is to get back and is everybody gonna be back at the same time or is it gonna be phased out ... [Let employees know] if they have a job to go back to. (Participant 1).

Just more communication. Maybe a few, just like an update every 2-3 weeks or something just being like "no news", or whatever.. "but hope everyone is keeping

good”, or whatever ... at least that way... you’re kept in the loop at least which ... just relaxes you a bit more I would say. (Participant 10).

Participants also voiced that brief, semi-regular check-ins from employers, regardless of whether employers had any updates or not, would have put them at ease whilst they were unemployed.

I think a check in every now and again would help ... Small interactions every now and again always help people, I always find. (Participant 2).

I feel like they should have reached out to most employees ... I didn’t think they’d have to go to someone’s house or anything. I don’t think they’d have to meet up with someone for a coffee, it’s even just a simple text or a call. (Participant 4).

I think it’s important that they keep in contact with their employees and like ... check up on how they’re feeling or what they’re thinking about while they’re unemployed and try and give them some, some hope or like guarantee them that their job will still be there waiting for them when they’re back. I think that’s probably all they can do in this situation. (Participant 7).

Many participants revealed that they found the sudden return to work challenging when lockdown restrictions eased, and believe a more gradual return to full service would have made the transition back into employment less daunting.

If they’re gonna do anything to wean their employees back into work, rather than going back in completely ... even if they did like, I dunno, a certain amount of seating first and then after the first two weeks, raise that a bit. Rather than the ability to serve 300 tables when the week before you couldn’t see like, your grandparents. (Participant 5).

After the break in employment, especially the first time, it was quite hard to walk back into the building and ... kind of pick up where you left off. So, I suppose if there was ... just a kind of, coming together of the staff... just something that felt a bit more casual, so it wasn’t just sort of like, aprons back on and back to where we left off. Because that was difficult ... there’s a fear around people, now, around a group

of people. So, you're suddenly back at work and you're in a group of fifteen other employees there's gonna be a lot of nervousness about it, I think. (Participant 8).

Overall, employees felt as though they would have benefitted from more communication from their employer, and would have felt reassured by semi-regular check-ins from their employer. Participants also noted that they would have appreciated a more gradual return to service when they resumed employment following periods of unemployment during the pandemic.

5.3. Conclusion

Overall, employees had very different experiences whilst being temporarily unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 restrictions had a negative impact on the social, mental and sometimes physical wellbeing of hospitality employees. The key finding from this study, however, is that many experienced job insecurity - heightened by the lack of communication and reassurance received from employers during this time. In contrast, employees who had strong personal relationships with their employer received regular communication from them which lessened feelings of job insecurity. Interestingly, despite the fact the hospitality industry in Ireland temporarily collapsed during the pandemic, employees still attempted to replace resources, in line with Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory, by contemplating and/or pursuing a new career path. The findings of this study highlight the impact the actions and inactions of employers can have on the wellbeing of employees during times of crisis. Their actions can mitigate feelings of job insecurity which can reduce turnover intent; and likewise, their inactions can increase job insecurity which may have a detrimental impact on the hospitality workforce. This must be considered by hospitality employers going forward.

5.4. Limitations

While the researcher made every effort to ensure findings are reliable and valid, there are a number of limitations to these findings which must be addressed. Firstly, this study involved a small sample of employees from the hospitality industry who were recruited using convenience sampling. Therefore, while these findings provide a strong picture of participants' lived experiences during the pandemic, findings are not representative of all

Irish hospitality workers Secondly, due to the convenience sampling used and the use of online software for interviewing, there is a chance that this study may have unintentionally excluded older populations. With an age range of 20-48, there were no participants in the older bracket for working ages of 50-65, however this could also be due to the fact that the demographics of workers in hospitality typically skew towards those in their 20's to 40's (McNaboe *et al.*, 2020). Finally, this study relied on self-reporting and it is possible that participants may have provided answers which they thought were desirable, dependant on their subjective views.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between the actions or inactions of employers surrounding temporary redundancies and the self-perceived wellbeing of employees in the hospitality industry in Ireland. In order to achieve this, four research objectives were set out.

The first objective of this study was to investigate whether hospitality workers believed their mental, social and/or physical wellbeing were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. One of the key findings of this research is that the vast majority (92%) of participants believed their mental wellbeing was negatively impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and 75% of participants also felt as though their social wellbeing was impacted. This resulted in the depletion of social and mental resources. In terms of physical wellbeing, while the lockdown restrictions positively impacted the physical wellbeing of some, freeing up time for them to exercise frequently and prepare healthy meals; others explained that the restrictions negatively impacted their physical wellbeing, as gyms were closed, they did not feel comfortable exercising outside, or as they had previously relied on work to exercise and were unfamiliar with consciously designating time to exercise. Individuals reported increased 'anxiety', 'nervousness', 'hopelessness', and 'depression' during the pandemic. Participants felt isolated due to COVID-19 restrictions as they could not go to work, attend college, or see their families or friends. One participant mentioned that this "completely removed the typical support structure that you kind of need in a time like this". These findings align with a study carried out by Chen (2020), who found that during the pandemic, individuals lack the social support which would usually alleviate the negative impact of redundancy on their

wellbeing. These findings have several theoretical and practical implications in line with the findings of previous research. Hobfoll (1989) recognises the value of social resources for wellbeing. Building on this theory, this study highlights that employers should be mindful of employees who have deteriorated social and psychological resources returning to work following 'isolating' lockdown periods as these individuals may struggle to handle work stressors more than usual. This also echoes the findings of Tu, Li and Wang (2021) and Bajrami *et al.* (2020) who found that individuals have exhausted many of their personal resources during the COVID-19 pandemic and that, therefore, returning to work during the pandemic does not offer the same relief that returning to work following a period of redundancy would have provided in the past. This is because, as frontline workers, employees are aware that they are vulnerable to contracting the disease and, therefore, the return to work during the pandemic involves increased risk-taking behaviour – the psychological effects of which employers must not overlook.

Secondly, this research aimed to question whether hospitality workers believe they experienced job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, and if so, whether this had an impact on their wellbeing. Overall, it was apparent that individuals experienced job insecurity during periods of unemployment throughout the pandemic. This was expressed by participants in a number of ways. Some tried to track down their employer during lockdown periods to ask about the future of the organisation and/or their employment status within the organisation. Other contributors to this study mentioned that they started to doubt their own capabilities due to a lack of job security during lockdown periods. These findings concur with studies conducted by Godinic *et al.* (2020) and Johansen (2017) which note the intangible benefits of work, such as: personal growth, self-acceptance, satisfaction, self-identity, and a sense of purpose. Godinic *et al.* (2020) highlight that missing out on these intangible benefits has led to identity disturbances for hospitality employees who have struggled to adapt to sudden changes during the pandemic. These findings also echo those of Mimoun *et al.* (2020) who explain that a "new psychological epidemic had outbreaken" during the pandemic. Existing research has suggested that individuals often try to relieve feelings of job insecurity by searching for another job, as replacing lost resources allows them to regain situational control (Wanberg, 1997; Hobfoll, 1989). However, the entire hospitality industry has been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, globally. As a result,

it had been hypothesised that employees would not have the opportunity to replace resources during the pandemic, and this lack of situational control could have a negative impact on employee wellbeing. However, interestingly, one of the key findings from this study reveals that several participants began to consider and/or pursue a career change during the pandemic. It could be argued that this effort to replace resources was the employees' attempt to regain situational control during periods of unemployment, in a subconscious bid to reduce the negative impact of job insecurity on their wellbeing. Baum *et al.* (2020) hypothesised that hospitality employees might not struggle with the unprecedented nature of the pandemic due to the precarious nature of the work they carry out. However, given the varied experiences demonstrated by participants in this study, it seems as though any potential resilience theorised by Baum *et al.* (2020) was not enough to withstand the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants whose psychological and social resources were exhausted during the pandemic found that returning to work with limited resources to counterbalance the stressors they faced was a struggle. It may be the case that resilience can act as a resource in other circumstances when hospitality workers have the tools to refill their resource deficiencies. However, having been deprived of that opportunity during COVID-19, it seems likely that the issues raised here would be reflected by many other fields and professions, and, therefore, the findings of this research do not support the theory presented by Baum *et al.* (2020). Participants reported that feelings of job insecurity did not dissipate upon their return to employment as many felt as though they were always waiting for the next lockdown, some felt as though they had to compete for hours, and several noted that the pandemic highlighted to them how vulnerable the hospitality industry is. This supports research by Pacheco *et al.* (2020) who noted that individuals report lower job security upon returning to work during the pandemic than individuals who returned to work following redundancy in the past. This indicates that, despite the fact periods of unemployment were temporary, their sense of job security was still fragilised by unemployment (Pacheco *et al.*, 2020). Another key finding from this study concluded that the PUP did not offer a universal level of financial support for participants. Some individuals experienced financial insecurity during the pandemic as the payment provided by the government was less than they would usually earn. This acted as a stressor, exacerbating feelings of job insecurity. Others claimed that they managed to save a substantial amount of the PUP they received during lockdown periods. Again, these findings

highlight the importance of claims made by Hobfoll (1989) that as there are usually several variables which influence wellbeing, stressors impact individuals to varying extents. Therefore, one of the main implications of these findings is that employers should be mindful of the fact employees will return to work with different resources available to combat stressors. As a result, they cannot expect every employee to handle the adjustment back to work in the same way. Employees will require different levels of support and the employer and/or management team must be trained to handle this effectively.

The third research objective of this study aimed to investigate whether hospitality workers believe the actions or inactions of their employer had an impact on their wellbeing during periods of temporary redundancy. Agarwal (2021) found that the actions of employers surrounding COVID lay-offs can have an impact on employee wellbeing. In support of this, some participants shared that there were things their employers did which had a positive impact on their wellbeing. Others noted that the actions, or particularly inactions, of their employer negatively impacted their wellbeing. One of the prominent factors mentioned by participants was communication. It was clear that those that received very little communication from their employer during lockdown periods found this distressing. Those who had a strong personal relationship with their employer, on the other hand, received strong communication and felt more secure about their employment. This also supports the findings of Agarwal (2021) who found that a positive relationship between employers and employees is a resource which helped to reduce anxiety for hospitality employees during the pandemic. Participants explained that not only did a lack of communication from their employers increase job insecurity, but it also left them feeling unprepared and vulnerable when returning to work following lockdown periods. This had a negative impact on their wellbeing, and due to the lack of support they received during the transition in and out of employment participants mentioned that their loyalty towards the organisation began to dwindle over time. This supports the findings of Wilson *et al.* (2020) and Jung *et al.* (2021) who argue that it is in employers' best interest to increase employee engagement and reduce feelings of job insecurity in order to reduce turnover intent and prevent the loss of talented employees that are hard to replace. The main implication of these research findings is that employers must be aware that their actions and inactions can impact employees' mental wellbeing. Not only can this be detrimental to the employees' overall

wellbeing, but it can also be costly for their organisation. While employers ensured that tangible aspects of employee wellbeing were prioritised - by following social-distancing health and safety guidelines, for example - many have overlooked the importance of the intangible aspects of employee wellbeing. The findings of this study indicate that these intangible aspects must be prioritised by employers who wish to prevent the loss of a superior workforce.

The final research objective aimed to question whether hospitality workers believe there is anything employers could do to positively influence employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment. It was evident from the findings of this study that hospitality employees have empathised with the difficult situation employers have found themselves in during the pandemic, with 75% of participants expressing sympathy for their employer. Notably, this includes some of the participants that felt as though their employer handled the transition in and out of work poorly. As a result, participants struggled to conclusively decide who should be responsible for employee wellbeing during times of crisis. 50% felt it was their employers' or senior management's responsibility to look out for employee wellbeing. However, as many hospitality establishments do not have HR teams who understand the value of investing in employee wellbeing, 25% of participants suggested that a collaborative approach between the government and the employer would be most effective. This finding is in support of research by Mimoun *et al.* (2020) and Pacheco *et al.* (2020) who suggest that the government have a duty to provide training for hospitality managers to ensure they have the resources required to handle the pandemic in an effective manner. In terms of what employers, specifically, could do to make the transition in and out of employment easier, the majority of participants did not request expensive or time-consuming resources, they simply expressed the desire to be kept up-to-date about their employers' situation. Employees felt that they would have benefitted from more open communication from their employer and would have felt more at ease if their employer conducted semi-regular check-ins over the phone. These findings concur with the findings of Agarwal (2020) who found that employees who received consistent communication from their employer experienced less fear during the pandemic. This study found that even if employees received bad news, having clarity helped to reduce anxiety (Agarwal, 2020). One participant mentioned socially-distanced team building exercises which they believe helped

with their physical, social and mental wellbeing. This echoes the findings of Nisar *et al.* (2021) who highlight the benefits of 'expressive challenges' for employee wellbeing during the pandemic. Pacheco *et al.* (2020) also recognise the importance of resilience training interventions which have been introduced by HR teams during the pandemic. However, interestingly, one participant explained that they did not believe it would have been possible for management to encourage everyone to 'play games online' where they work. As with many of the opinions shared throughout this research, this is only the belief of one participant, and it cannot be assumed that everyone else working for that organisation would have felt the same. However, this participant highlights the need for management to have the flexibility to build strong enough relationships with employees in order to establish how to meet their individual needs. As mentioned, there are a number of factors which influence wellbeing and something which works for one person, may not help another. The value of improvisation is confirmed by Lombardi *et al.* (2021). Finally, many participants shared that they found the return to employment distressing as they felt vulnerable and exposed to COVID-19. Employees were required to adapt quickly from isolating at home one day to serving hundreds of customers the next. Many voiced that a phased return to full capacity within the restaurant would have helped them to adjust to this sudden change. The main implications of these findings are firstly, that the hospitality industry lacks HR personnel and management within small organisations require training in order to handle the pandemic in a way which does not negatively impact employees. Secondly, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to promoting employee wellbeing. Employers must be mindful of this and improvise based on employees' individual needs. However, semi-regular check-ins and strong communication stood out as a low-cost interventions which the majority of employees believed they would benefit from.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Contribution of this study

Overall, this study adds to existing literature surrounding employee wellbeing in the context of COVID-19. It highlights the ways in which employers can contribute to employee

wellbeing during times of crisis. It also emphasises that employers must be cognisant that hospitality employees may have depleted financial, psychological and social resources during the pandemic. As a result, employees may struggle to handle stressors upon their return to work. The findings of this study also draw attention to the lack of trained HR personnel and HR practices within small hospitality businesses in Ireland. Three quarters of participants worked for organisations that did not have trained HR personnel within their organisation to handle the COVID-19 crisis. In line with this, 25% of participants called for government intervention, arguing that guidelines are required for hospitality employers to ensure small business owners understand the value of HRM, and have trained staff within their organisations to implement initiatives which promote employee wellbeing. Not only is this important for the employee themselves, but it may also reduce job insecurity and turnover intent, preventing the loss of a talented workforce - benefitting the hospitality industry as a whole. As a result, this study has both theoretical and practical implications for governmental and commercial stakeholders.

7.2. Practical and actionable recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that a large portion of the hospitality industry consists of small businesses who do not have HR personnel within their organisation. Many participants expressed that they do not believe their employer and/or senior management within their organisation have the training required to manage employee wellbeing during times of crisis. Participants suggested that government intervention in the form of emergency legislation may be required to ensure hospitality employers implement initiatives within the workplace which encourage employee wellbeing. This study indicates that hospitality employees experienced increased job insecurity during the pandemic which increased turnover intent for many. As a result, some participants began to pursue a career change, while others remained working for the organisation, but felt as though their loyalty towards the organisation had decreased during the pandemic. This is significant as it highlights the need for a rapid and appropriate response to employees' needs during periods of uncertainty in order to decrease turnover intent. If public policy makers were to impose emergency legislation requiring small businesses of a certain size have HR training, and provide grants to facilitate this training, this could help to prevent the loss of a superior

workforce. However, while rapid government intervention would benefit the hospitality industry immensely, it is unlikely that this issue will be the government's top priority during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it could be some time before public policies surrounding employee wellbeing are introduced. Therefore, it is imperative that employers acknowledge the impact of their actions on employee wellbeing, and do not wait for the government to provide assistance.

The majority of participants from this study alluded to the importance of communication and semi-regular check-ins. Those that received consistent communication from their employer experienced less job insecurity than those that received little or no communication from their employer. Similarly, participants that felt there was a lack of communication from their employer mentioned that they felt as though they would have benefitted from more communication. Therefore, the findings from this research indicate that not only does good communication alleviate feelings of job insecurity, but a lack of communication can exacerbate feelings of job insecurity. This is noteworthy as job insecurity has been linked with increased turnover intent which is costly for employers. Therefore, it could be argued that it would be beneficial for employers to set aside time for honest and consistent communication with employees during uncertain times. Even if employers feel as though they have no updates, keeping in touch with employees so that they feel well informed, and performing short check-ins over the phone can ease job insecurity. This is a relatively low-cost yet seemingly highly effective measure. There would of course be a time implication for this, the length of which would depend on the number of employees there are within an organisation. This would be more costly for larger businesses with a large team who may find they have to split the project among senior staff members to ensure every staff member is contacted. However, the findings of this study suggest the benefits of this investment would far outweigh the costs.

The second action which employers could take to improve employee wellbeing, based on the findings of this research, involves the provision of wellbeing and/or HRM training for senior managers. As mentioned, there are a lack of HR personnel within small hospitality businesses in Ireland. HRM is a valuable tool which can strategically prevent the loss of a talented workforce and can also improve the general wellbeing and lives of employees. The CIPD (2021b) run an online course which is open to both HR professionals and managers

with no HR background that have the responsibility for the wellbeing of a team of employees. This course is also suitable for individuals with or without a background in wellbeing so would suit hospitality managers who require training in order to facilitate employee wellbeing during COVID-19. The course is run over one day and costs £588 for individuals who are not currently members of the CIPD. Therefore, the cost of implementing this would be approximately £588 plus one day's wages for one senior management employee. The value of this training would be significant as it would provide management with the tools to recognise the signs of poor wellbeing, the considerations they should make for wellbeing during change and ambiguity and teach them how to create the conditions for good wellbeing and resilience at work. Participants are also provided with examples of wellbeing initiatives and how to measure the impact of wellbeing initiatives during this course. This opportunity would offer management the knowledge required to intuitively detect which employees require more help than others and also equip them with the necessary tools to provide struggling employees with the help they need.

Overall, it is recommended that government policy makers should provide employers with more guidance in relation to employee wellbeing during this unprecedented time. This would ensure employers are obliged to acknowledge the weight of the actions. Not only can the actions of employers improve the overall wellbeing of employees, but they can also help to preserve the number of talented individuals working within the hospitality sector in Ireland. This will be hugely important as the hospitality industry begins to reopen in Ireland. However, realistically the implementation of government policies in relation to workplace wellbeing, along with the introduction of grants, would take some time. So, while perhaps employers should not be expected to take sole responsibility for employee wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is in employers' best interest to recognise the important role they play in the wellbeing of employees, and while they wait for government policies to be introduced, they would benefit from the prioritisation of employee wellbeing initiatives in the workplace. Investing in the more short-term solutions suggested above may help small businesses to survive in what is currently an extremely volatile market.

7.3. Recommendations for further research

Future quantitative research examining the effects of suggested wellbeing interventions - such as a structured communication plan with employees - would be valuable in order to measure their success in reducing turnover intent.

Personal statement

Employee wellbeing is something I have always had an interest in. Experiencing multiple temporary redundancies first-hand during the COVID-19 pandemic sparked my curiosity surrounding this topic. I found myself questioning whether these temporary periods of unemployment had impacted employees' wellbeing universally, or whether individuals had different experiences. I also noticed that many hospitality businesses did not have trained HRM personnel within their organisations and wondered if the lack of HR initiatives surrounding employee wellbeing was connected to the decrease in organisational commitment experienced by some employees during the pandemic.

I was surprised by the positive response I received when individuals were asked to participate in this study and am grateful that they were willing to openly share their experiences with me. I thoroughly enjoyed conducting interviews and navigating the best way to ask participants somewhat sensitive or personal questions in a manner which ensured they felt comfortable enough to share their lived experiences with me. If I were to carry out this research again, I would try to interview more participants. If time had allowed, I also believe a mixed methods approach involving qualitative and quantitative research may have created a more robust set of results. However, I still believe this research provides interesting insights into the ways in which the pandemic impacted the wellbeing of hospitality employees in Ireland. This was my first time conducting empirical research and I gained new transferrable skills from this experience, including the ability to conduct interviews, analyse data thematically and write in a more clear and concise manner. I have also strengthened my time-management and critical thinking skills.

Overall, although this process was challenging, it was also surprisingly enjoyable. This experience has reaffirmed my personal belief that employee wellbeing should be prioritised within every workplace as not only does it benefit the general wellbeing of employees, but it can also strategically benefit businesses. I truly believe conducting this research has provided me with valuable information which I will use going forward as I move into the world of recruitment and HRM.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Information Sheet

Exploring the Relationship Between the Actions of Employers Regarding Temporary Redundancies and the Self-Perceived Wellbeing of Hospitality Workers in Ireland

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to take part, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully and take time to decide whether or not to take part. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear, or if you would like more information.

Who am I and what is this study about?

I am a Master of Arts Student from the National College of Ireland studying Human Resource Management. I am carrying out research for my dissertation which aims to question whether there is a relationship between the actions or inactions of employers surrounding temporary redundancies and the self-perceived wellbeing of hospitality workers in Ireland.

This research aims to question whether hospitality workers believe their wellbeing has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and further, whether they believe job insecurity has had an impact on their wellbeing. It also aims to investigate whether hospitality workers believe the actions or inactions of their employer have had an impact on their wellbeing and whether they believe there is anything employers could do to positively influence employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part in this study will involve your participation in a short – approximately 20 minute – phone conversation which will be conducted through Microsoft Teams. You will be sent an invitation via email to a scheduled meeting on MS Teams, which you can then access via

your browser. With your consent, the conversation will be audio-recorded on Microsoft Teams.

Topics which will be discussed:

- Do you believe your wellbeing has been impacted by the restrictions put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Do you believe job insecurity has had an impact on your wellbeing?
- Do you believe the actions or inactions of your employer have had an impact on your wellbeing?
- Who should be responsible for employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment?
- Is there anything employers could do to positively impact the wellbeing of employees during the transition in and out of temporary redundancy?

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study as you are working, or have worked, in the hospitality industry in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic and, therefore, may be able to provide valuable insight into the impact, if any, the restrictions and periods of temporary unemployment have had on employee wellbeing.

Do you have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation, refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

While you will not benefit directly from participating in this research, this research and resulting dissertation may form the basis for future research projects by other students at the National College of Ireland, which could in turn allow hospitality employers to gain more of an insight into employee needs during times of job insecurity in the future.

Some of the topics included in this research project may involve a discussion of your personal experience during the COVID-19 pandemic which could be distressing. As mentioned, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions at any time and can also stop the interview at any time. As well as this, I am happy to take breaks during the course of the interview, if you feel at any stage that this is necessary.

If any psychological harm comes to a participant as a result of participating in this research, they will be provided with relevant contact details for suitable professionals or organisations which may help with this.

Will taking part be confidential?

Any information you provide for this study will be treated confidentially. Your identity will be anonymised in interview transcriptions. Any details which may reveal your identity or the identity of people you speak about will be disguised. Disguised extracts from your interview may be quoted in the final research report which will be submitted to the National College of Ireland Examination Board for grading.

However, it is worth noting that non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings will be collected and retained as part of the research process. Also, in the unlikely event that there is a strong belief that there is a serious risk of harm or danger to either yourself or another individual (e.g. physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity) or if a serious crime has been committed, I may have to break confidentiality to report this to the relevant authorities.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected device, which only I have access to, until after my degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I intend to use the results of this study to complete my dissertation which will be submitted to the Examination Board in the National College of Ireland. The National College of Ireland may decide to upload the research paper to the National College of Ireland database, which contains previous students' research papers. This database can only be accessed by National College of Ireland students.

Who should you contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact:

Researcher: Shannon Barrett

Email: x20113889@student.ncirl.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, I appreciate your consideration and interest in this research project. I believe it will be an important and interesting discussion to have and should you decide to participate, I truly look forward to hearing about your experience.

Appendix 2. Consent form

Exploring the Relationship Between the Actions of Employers Regarding Temporary Redundancies and the Self-Perceived Wellbeing of Hospitality Workers in Ireland

Consent to take part in research

I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind.

I understand I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation involves a 20-minute semi-structured phone interview via Microsoft Teams.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final research report which will be submitted to the National College of Ireland Examination Board.

I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm the researcher may have to report this to the relevant authorities. They will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected device until October 2021, when the final report has been graded by the National College of Ireland Examination board.

I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years after this, until October 2023.

I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher's Contact Details: Shannon Barrett. **Email:** x20113889@student.ncirl.ie.

Signature of research participant

Signature of research participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix 3. Pre-interview information sheet

Dear *participant*,

Thank you for participating in this research project. The aim of this information sheet is to outline the topics which will be covered in our meeting on *time and date*, on Microsoft Teams. These topics are given to you before the meeting to allow you time to think about the questions in advance, if you so wish. It also provides definitions of the key terms which will be used in interview questions to ensure each participant fully understands the questions being asked in the interview.

Topics which will be discussed:

- Do you believe your wellbeing has been impacted by the restrictions put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Do you believe job insecurity has had an impact on your wellbeing?
- Do you believe the actions or inactions of your employer have had an impact on your wellbeing?
- Who should be responsible for employee wellbeing during periods of temporary unemployment?
- Is there anything employers could do to positively impact the wellbeing of employees during the transition in and out of temporary redundancy?

Definitions:

- *Wellbeing*: Stable wellbeing is a positive state of existence – due to physical, mental and social factors - which is generally realised when an individual has the knowledge required to handle various stressors which arise throughout their life. Dodge *et al.* (2012) highlight the importance of balance for psychological wellbeing, using a ‘see-saw’ analogy to define their concept of wellbeing. They propose that “in essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical

challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa” (Dodge *et al.*, 2012, p. 230).

- *Physical wellbeing*: Physical wellbeing is the ability to perform physical activities and carry out social roles without being hindered by physical limitations and experiences of bodily pain, and biological health indicators (Michalos, 2014).
- *Mental wellbeing*: Your mental wellbeing is related to your thoughts and feelings and how you cope with the ups and downs of everyday life (CABA, 2021).
- *Social wellbeing*: Social wellbeing refers to our “ability to make and maintain meaningful positive relationships and regular contact with other people in our world”, for example: family, friends, neighbours and co-workers. It involves “not only having relationships but also behaving appropriately in these relationships” (Mansveld, 2021).
- *Job insecurity*: Job insecurity is “a threat to the continuity and stability of employment as it is currently experienced” (Shoss, 2017, p. 3).

If you have any questions, please contact me at: x20113889@student.ncirl.ie.

Once again, thank you for your participation. I look forward to speaking with you.