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## Exploring the Relationship between Demographic Variables and Emotional Labour Strategies in Health Care

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### Abstract

*The drastic growth of the service economy and the importance of quality customer service has made employee interactions with the customers critical in determining the success of service organisations, especially in health care. The phenomenon of Emotional labour, that involves the managing of emotions by the employees during service encounters has gained attention recently. The study aimed to explore the relationship between demographic variables and emotional labour strategies of nurses. The survey was conducted among 788 nurses from the private sector hospitals in Kerala with the help of a structured questionnaire. Statistical tests like One way ANOVA and Independent sample T test were used by the researcher to analyze how the three emotional labour strategies (Deep acting, Surface acting and Expression of naturally felt emotions) vary with age, marital status, education and work experience. The findings revealed that all the emotional labour strategies vary significantly with age, but other demographic variables show different impact with the three emotional labour strategies. This will definitely contribute to the extant literature and create platform to further research on the influence of demographic variables on emotional labour. Further the study will help organizations to recruit, train and retain the right ones looking at the employee demographics.*

**Key words:** Deep acting, Emotional labour, Expression of naturally felt emotions, Surface acting.

### Introduction

Emotions play a very vital role in daily life. The display and deployment of emotions by the employees is critical in the success of any organization, particularly service organizations. Service sector employees involved in the customer or client interactions represent the organization and it is their ability and efficiency that determines the service quality and thereby the success and image of the organizations. The intelligent managing of the emotions during the service encounters can only ensure fruitful interactions with the customers or clients. So organizations are directing and monitoring the emotional expressions in these encounters through prescribed display rules. Therefore the display of organizationally desired emotions by the employees in the service encounters is termed as emotional labour. In order to align with the prescribed emotional display rules, employees use different emotional labour strategies and it may differ with respect to the demographic variables like age, marital status, education and work experience.

### Literature Review

#### Emotional labour

The term 'emotional labor', since it has been coined by Hochschild in 1983 has created extensive interest among researchers and academicians. Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as "...the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (p.7). So emotional labor is the regulation of feelings and expressions as part of the work role. (Grandey, 2000)

### **Emotional labour strategies**

According to Hochschild, there are two forms of emotional labour: 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. Surface acting involves pretending 'to feel what do not ... we deceive others about we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves (1983, p. 33).' So surface acting is therefore faking the emotions without actually feeling or "acting in bad faith" (Grandey, 2000). That is changing only the outward display of one's emotions.

But 'deep acting' means 'deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others ... (1983, p.33). That is modifying the inner feelings so as to suit with the required, prescribed emotional demeanour or "acting in good faith" (Grandey, 2000). In other words it is changing one's own feelings so as to do the required display of emotions.

Several conceptualizations and theories of emotional labor have been proposed and one significant contribution is the addition of a third form of emotional labour. Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand (2005) identified expression of naturally felt emotions as the third strategy of emotional labour, in addition to surface acting and deep acting. This was explained earlier by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) and had regarded, genuine experience and expression of emotions, as the third means of performing emotional labour. Later Brown (2010) also proposed natural or genuine emotion as an emotional strategy.

Therefore, for this study, researcher used the three emotional labour strategies: deep acting (DA), surface acting (SA) and expression of naturally felt emotions (EFE).

### **Emotional Labor Strategies and their outcomes**

It has been proved that organizations always benefit when employees use deep acting instead of surface acting during customer interactions (Bono & Vey, 2005). Surface acting is usually related to detrimental effects for the employee and the organization whereas deep acting is more related to desirable outcomes. It is often purported that surface acting is problematic and deep acting is beneficial (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp, 2013; Hochschild, 1983) and various other studies also found surface acting as harmful to the well-being of employees and organisation (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Research has consistently proved that surface acting shows a positive relationship with stress, emotional exhaustion, burnout syndrome, and poor service delivery (Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Grandey, 2003).

So organizations, especially health care organizations, where relation with the customers is intense and need more care, always prefer the use of DA and EFE strategies instead of SA strategy.

### **Emotional Labour Strategies and demographic variables**

Majority of the studies focused on the organizational and related factors and neglected to give importance to verify the demographic variables in relation to the emotional labour strategies.

Among these variables, gender was studied by Wharton & Erickson (1993), whereas other demographic variables were ignored. But Dahling and Perez (2010) examined how the age of service employees influences the emotional labor process and found that age is positively related to deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions, and negatively related to surface acting. So older employees manage interpersonal interactions more effectively (Birditt and Fingerman, 2005) and they develop greater emotion regulation skill as they age according to Gross and his colleagues. (1997). So as age increases, employees use emotional labor strategies (deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions) that are compatible with the organizational prescriptions more, when compared to the surface acting strategy which is considered to be undesirable.



According to the Socio emotional Selectivity Theory (SST), as cited in Dahling and Perez (2010) individuals, as they gets older, become more motivated to increase the experience of positive emotions and minimize the experience of negative emotions (Charles &Carstensen, 2007; Consedine&Magai, 2006; Ready & Robinson, 2008) and employees show greater emotion regulation skill as they gets older (Gross et al., 1997). As explained by Dahling and Perez (2010) deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions are the emotional labor strategies that would be frequently employed with increasing age. In consistent with SST, their findings showed that individuals use DA and EFE as they become older and reduce the use of SA.

In a study among nurses by Kaur S. and Luxmi (2014) it is noted that there are no significant differences between unmarried and married nurses with regard to deep acting, but there is significant differences in the case of surface acting. It was observed that the married nurses are using the surface acting strategy more than the unmarried nurses.

A study in the hotel industry by Satyanarayana, S. V., &Shanker, S. (2012) pointed out that employees with varying academic qualifications have different ways of managing their feelings or there is significant difference in the emotional labor with the difference in educational qualification of the employees.

In a study by Baruah& Patrick (2014), among airline employees, significant difference in the experience of emotional labour -deep and surface acting across demographic variables was explained.The employees with 2 to 5 years of work tenure engage more in surface acting than employees with more than 6 years of work experience. Also, employees who were married and belonging to the age group of 31 to 35 years, experience more emotional labour than unmarried employees and those who are in the age group of 20 to 30 years.

But, still, the relationship between demographic variables and emotional labour strategies were not given considerable interest by the researchers. Though very few studies examined how demographic variables influence deep acting and surface acting, the third emotional labour strategy (expression of naturally felt emotions) was not taken into consideration.

So in order to bridge the gap observed in the available literature, the current study is having the objective to investigate the relation of the three emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) with the employees' demographics. Based on this the following hypotheses were developed.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the age of the respondents

H2: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the marital status of the respondents

H3: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the education of the respondents

H4: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the experience of the respondents

### **Participants and Procedure**

The data was collected using structured questionnaire from 788 nurses working in the allopathic private hospitals with 100 or more beds from the three districts geographically representing the north, south and central regions of Kerala. Table 1 represents the demographic profile of the respondents.

**Table 1: Profile of the Respondents**

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percentage
Age	< 30 years	588	74.6
	31 to 50 years	181	23.0
	> 50 years	19	2.4
Gender	Male	45	5.7
	Female	743	94.3
Marital status	Married	443	56.2
	Single	345	43.8
Educational qualification	Diploma	491	62.3
	Graduate	277	35.2
	Post graduate	20	2.5
Experience	< 5 years	508	64.5
	5 to 10 years	155	19.7
	10 to 20 years	99	12.6
	> 20 years	26	3.3

Source: Primary Data

The distribution of respondents among the different age group are as follows: 74.6% respondents are in age group of less than 30 years, 23% respondents are in age group of 31 to 50 years and only a very few respondents (2.4%) are above 50 years old. It is observed from the table that majority of the respondents (94.3%) are female as nursing is a female dominated profession. Among the respondent nurses 56.2% are married and 43.8% are single. From the table, the education level of nurses indicates that 62.3% are diploma holders, 35.2% are Graduates and only 2.5% are Post Graduates. Regarding the working experience 64.5% are having less than 5 years experience. 19.7% with 5 to 10 years experience, 12.6% with 10 to 20 years and 3.3% with more than 20 years experience.

### Measures

The scales of Diefendorff et al.(2005) were used to measure the emotional labour strategies. For measuring deep acting (DA), the four item scale developed by Diefendorff et al. (2005), is used. The surface acting (SA) strategy of Emotional labour is measured using Diefendorff et al.(2005) scale with the five items from the seven item scale. The two items adapted from Kruml and Geddes' (2000) emotive dissonance scale to measure dissonance is omitted. The three item scale developed by Diefendorff et al.(2005) is used for measuring expression of naturally felt emotions (EFE). Participants rated each item using a 7-point Likert scale (7 = "Always; 1 = "Never").

### Analysis

The researcher used one way ANOVA and t-test to verify whether Emotional labour (EL) strategies vary significantly across the demographic variables like age, marital status, education and experience. The gender is not taken into account because the sample distribution of the nurses showed that it is a female dominated professional group.

### H1: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the age of the respondents

**Table 2: Emotional labour Strategies and Age**

Sl. No	Age group	Emotional Labour						
		(DA)		(SA)		(EFE)		
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
NURSES (N= 788)	1	N = 588 Upto 30 years	47.6	9.16	24.45	6.43	13.61	4.13
	2	N = 181 30 to 50 years	45.16	10.67	23.39	7.25	12.06	5.30
	3	N = 19 Above 50 years	52.10	7.38	21.58	8.28	14.36	3.25
<b>F value</b>			7.220		3.166		9.177	
<b>P value</b>			.001		.043		.000	
<b>Level of significance</b>			**		*		**	

\*Denotes significance at 5% level    \*\* Denotes significance at 1% level    NS = Not significant

It is evident from the table that Mean score of DA, SA & EFE varies significantly across the age group of nurses. From the mean value and standard deviation it is observed that elder nurses who are above 50 years use DA and EFE more when compared to younger nurses. Also it can be noted that with the increase in age the use of SA among employees is decreased. Elder nurses when compared to younger ones are less inclined to SA strategy.

**H2: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the marital status of the respondents**

As there are only two levels of one independent variable, t-test is used



**Table 3: Emotional labour Strategies and Marital status**

NURSES (N= 788)	Sl. No	Marital Status	Emotional Labour					
			(DA)		(SA)		(EFE)	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	N = 445 Married	46.50	9.97	23.81	6.94	12.80	4.72	
2	N = 343 Single	48.00	8.96	24.54	6.33	13.89	4.01	
<b>t' value</b>			-2.136		-1.555		-3.452	
<b>P value</b>			.033		.120		.001	
<b>Level of significance</b>			*		NS		**	

\*Denotes significance at 5% level    \*\* Denotes significance at 1% level    NS = Not significant

Mean score of DA and EFE vary significantly with marital status of nurses, but SA does not differ significantly. The table shows that single unmarried nurses are more inclined to perform deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions when compared to married nurses

**H3: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the education of the respondents**

**Table 4: Emotional labour Strategies and Educational qualification**

NURSES (N= 788)	Sl. No	Education	Emotional Labour					
			(DA)		(SA)		(EFE)	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	N = 491 Diploma	47.75	9.63	24.15	6.59	13.64	4.19	
2	N = 277 Graduate	46.00	9.49	24.14	6.98	12.44	4.85	
3	N = 20 Post graduate	48.52	7.60	23.36	4.93	15.84	2.40	
<b>F value</b>			3.153		.127		9.937	
<b>P value</b>			.043		.881		.000	
<b>Level of significance</b>			*		NS		**	

\*Denotes significance at 5% level    \*\* Denotes significance at 1% level    NS = Not significant

The table indicates that surface acting shows no significant association with the educational qualification of nurses, whereas the other two emotional labour strategies differ significantly with the educational level. Post graduates perform DA and EFE more when compared to graduates and diploma holders.

**H4: Emotional labour strategies (DA, SA and EFE) vary significantly across the experience of the respondents**

**Table 5: Emotional labour Strategies and Experience**

Sl. No	Experience	Emotional Labour					
		(DA)		(SA)		(EFE)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	N = 508 Upto 5 years	47.67	8.99	24.30	6.33	13.82	3.96
2	N = 155 5 to 10 years	45.14	10.58	24.09	7.05	11.61	5.27
3	N = 99 10 to 20 years	46.64	10.48	23.84	7.43	12.90	5.05
4	N = 26 Above 20 years	51.53	8.50	22.15	8.20	13.80	3.41
<b>F value</b>		4.705		.925		10.414	
<b>P value</b>		.003		.428		.000	
<b>Level of significance</b>		**		NS		**	

\*Denotes significance at 5% level    \*\* Denotes significance at 1% level

NS = Not significant

From the result displayed in the table it can be noted that DA and EFE vary significantly with the work experience of the nurses and SA does not vary significantly with the experience. Those who are having more than 20 years of experience and with less than 5 years of work experience use more DA and EFE strategies when compared to others with experience between 5 to 20 years.

**Discussion**

The aim of the study was to investigate the relation between demographic variables and the different emotional labour strategies used by the nurses in private hospitals. So from the results it is clear that SA does not vary significantly with the any other demographic variables except age of the employees. But DA and EFE vary significantly across age, marital status, education and work experience of the nurses.

It is found that older employees use more DA and EFE than younger ones. As they age, the use of SA is decreased. Single unmarried nurses use more DA and EFE than married nurses. Post graduates prefer using DA and EFE strategies when compared to others. Employees with more than 20 years of experience and less than 5 years experience showed more inclination to use DA and EFE strategies during interactions.

In the light of the findings of the study, the organizations can take proper decision in recruiting right candidates by looking at the demographics. It also helps to make better judgement in retaining older and experienced employees who are more inclined to perform DA and EFE. Because, majority of the existing studies showed that SA is related to negative outcomes that affect the individuals and organizations adversely whereas DA and EFE is associated to positive outcomes and thereby enhancing the wellbeing of individuals and organizations.

### Conclusion

The study to explore the association of the employee demographics with the different emotional labour strategies by the researcher will definitely shed light to select appropriate candidates best suitable for the caring profession. It also will help in understanding the category of employees who need training so as to use the proper EL strategies while involving in customer interactions. This study will definitely create a platform for the researchers to further discuss the rationale in using different EL strategies by employees according to their demographic difference.

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