

Emotional Labour and its impact among Front-Desk Employees and Nursing Staff of ICU - An Exploratory Study

Mr. Mubarak A P, M.Sc. Applied Psychology, Department of Psychology, Central University of Pondicherry, Puducherry, India, mubarakap77@gmail.com

Ms. Amani K, Forensic Professional, Central Forensic Science Laboratory, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bhopal, India, kanugoluamani@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Emotional labour is the process of displaying job appropriate emotions while managing or hiding actual emotions to fulfil the demands of occupation. Nurses from Intensive care units (ICU) and Front desk employees are expected to show a certain set of opposing emotions. While the nurse population in ICU is expected to not display joy or laughter, front desk employees are expected to express happiness to greet their customers. This study explores the emotional labour involved in these two populations and its varying impact. Findings of this study suggests that the impact of emotional labour is stressful for both the population regardless of the emotions that they have to display but it is influenced by the nature of norms involved and also the difficulty level of work in addition to emotional labour. This study also suggest a relationship between gender stereotypes and jobs involved with emotional labour

Keywords: Emotional Labour, Nursing staff, Front desk Employees, Qualitative study

I. INTRODUCTION

Satisfaction of customers is considered as one of the prime determinants of an organization's success. A company's financial performance is highly dependent upon customer satisfaction. To achieve and maintain this index to an optimal level, organizations had started giving prime importance to customer relationship management from the early 1970s. One of the basic ways through which organizations obtained satisfied customers was by making employees customer friendly. Appropriate display of emotions and appropriate behaviour patterns were considered as the major characteristics of a customer friendly employee. The process that an employee will go through to display job appropriate emotions by hiding actual feelings is known as 'emotional labour'. Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labour as "the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and body display to fulfil the demands of a job." Emotional labour has emerged as a prime factor of service related works (Lewig & Dollard, 2003) where employees have to interact with clients directly. Hochschild coined the term 'emotional labour' to describe the occupational emotional demand in her book "The Managed Heart". From that point, emotional labour and its consequences has been studied in several industries in a number of countries.

There were numerous studies with regard to the relationship between emotional labour and its effects on customer satisfaction. Due to the influence of the classic shift of attitude in industries, from human resource management to human resource development, studies later started to shift the focus from studying the effects of emotional labour on customers to its effects on employees itself. Social and

behavioural scientists still continue the quest to understand emotional labour and its impact on employees. According to Hochschild, employees generally show these (emotional) changes so as to realize a positive emotional statue toward customers while fulfilling their responsibilities under psychological pressure. Emotional labour does not necessarily always involve positive emotional statue. Some jobs might demand or invite negative emotional statue to fulfil its purpose.

Morris and Feldman identified emotional labour as the "effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions". This definition includes the organizational expectations for employees concerning their interactions with the clients, as well as the internal state of tension or conflict that occurs when employees have to display fake emotions, which is known as 'emotional dissonance'. Grandey defined emotional labour as the process of managing emotions such that they are suitable to organizational or professional display rules. This conceptualization assumes that some organizations or professions have their own limited or typical set of emotions that are to be displayed while interacting with clients.

Jobs that have been identified with involvement of emotional labour include but are not limited to public administration, jobs involves professional secrecy, flight attendants, child sitters, social workers, healthcare professionals, front desk managers, restaurant employees, jobs in media houses. Employees engaged in these jobs at this era, are highly expected to perform emotional

labour in a daily basis. This demand comes from the huge benefit that organizations can achieve from customers due to their increased satisfaction, trust or increased self esteem. To fulfil this demand, organizations advise or provide norms for employees to carry out emotional labour.

Intensive care units and Emergency wards in hospitals are perceived to be serious places. A visit to these premises even for once will be emotionally exhaustive for a layman due to the intensity of the situation and seriousness involved. People who are employed in these settings would end up spending one third of their life fulfilling the demands of these settings. Beyond the occupational hazard, these employees are expected to display appropriate emotions and to carry themselves in that body language. These emotional appropriateness norms are not only provided from the organization but also as a social norm to act accordingly. Hence it is very likely that nurses from Intensive care units are expected to carry out an extensive amount of emotional labour to fulfill the demands in their organizational settings. An exploratory understanding to the process involved and its impact on their daily life can be achieved through this study.

Contrary to the first population of interest (nurses from ICU settings), front desk employees are expected to be seen as welcoming and smiling. Qualitatively understanding the implications of facially expressing happiness for a significant amount of time in their life can shed some light into the extensiveness of applying facial feedback hypothesis into organizational settings. According to the facial feedback hypothesis, if we are forced to smile at a social gathering, we might recall the time that we spent on that party as a happy memory. Applying this hypothesis into the above mentioned context, front desk employees are expected to recall their worklife as relatively happy than anyone else considering the fact that they express happiness for a significant amount of time to fulfill the demands of their work.

Complete estrangement of personal feelings for one third of every day can exert influences on a person's remaining personal life and mental health. General health of an individual is also taken into consideration to find out any possible differences with relation to emotional labour. Medical professionals and Nurses have always been a population of interest for studies related to emotional labour. Yet no studies have been conducted on emotional labour of nursing staff in intensive care units in India. Front desk employees or receptionists and the presence and impact of emotional labour also have been studied by several researchers. But no exploratory-qualitative studies have been conducted on emotional labour. Similarly, every study concentrates on a single population instead of comparing two possible contrasts. To find out the affecting factors, differentiating the type of emotional labour and its impact is a necessity. Hence two contrasting populations are

selected in terms of expressed emotion and importance of emotional labour for the study.

II. METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study follows a qualitative method which is exploratory in nature. Exploratory method helps to understand underlying factors and it gives the researcher enough freedom to collect data without binding to restrictions. Research design The study follows a focus group design. The data was collected using interview method Participants The samples chosen were Front desk employees and nursing staffs of intensive care units. Sample size A total number of 20 samples were interviewed. 10 front desk employees and 10 nursing staff.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Purposive sampling method is used for interviews as they sample is specific in nature Method of interview: Semi-structured Interview: It is a qualitative method in which a set of pre-determined questions are made, and the interview is conducted based on these, but the questions can be modified by the interviewer according to the responses of the participant. The main objective of this method is to collect the necessary information from the participant, without any restrictions on their thoughts, decisions or opinions and they are completely free to express what they want to. One disadvantage of this method is that it is time consuming and takes more effort to be completed. The information collected is later transcribed into written form for future references.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The information collected through interview was analysed using Thematic Content Analysis. The interview content was coded and later these codes were used to explore larger themes and subthemes. These themes later reverse coded to find appropriateness of themes with composing codes. Thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set.

III. RESULT

MAJOR THEMES EMERGED

1. **Emotional labour and related norms:** Front-desk employee participants well-adjusted with emotional labour and there was no mention of stress when they described the nature of

their job and activities related to it. "My job is to greet every customer without any failure, I should stay with a happy face and I should greet them with respect. That is my job here." They identify emotional labour as their job itself than something remote. Nursing staff of emergency wards explain their job as stressful in two dimensions. One, the seriousness related to their job and how they perceive themselves to be responsible for others' lives. Two, they cannot display any sign of happiness while they are at their shift. "Our job is very stressful. Because any failure can result in death of a person." "We can not display our happiness. How could we? When people are struggling with life and crying in front of us always, how can we show we are happy". They do not identify emotional labour as their job, yet, they practice it on a regular basis. "Our job is assisting doctor and treating patient with respect to the advise of doctor. We also have to help patients to carry out their needs if they have any physical difficulties" "No one told me don't show happiness. I am a matured person. I can't laugh while someone is grieving." While front-desk employees practice emotional labour to conform to the work-related norms, nursing staff was doing the same to conform to the social norms.

2. Emotional labour and job difficulty:

Emotional labour is difficult to perform for both groups on a day-to-day basis without any failure. "Yes it is difficult to smile at people while we are in a bad mood. (Front-desk employee, Age: 28), "We can't always stay with a sad face. It is more than eight hours every day. But we have to. I do that every day." (Nursing staff – ICU, Age:34) However, the attitude towards it, is different for both groups. Front-desk employees have no complaints about emotional labour because the job is very easy to carry out. They find that their job demands minimal physical effort when compared to co-workers from other departments. "my only job is this. I have no complaints about it. I have to stand all day, that is the only problem. But with relation to people from other department, my job is super easy" (Front-desk employee, Age: 24) Nursing staff of emergency wards finds their job

as highly stressful because it demands both physical, mental and emotional effort to fulfil the requirements of their job. "in addition to the huge amount of work and busy schedule, I have to be always aware that I am dealing with death. Because any expression of happiness will result in guilt" (Nursing staff - ICU Age: 32). Because emotional labour is the only responsibility they have to fulfil, front-desk employees have a positive attitude towards their job. On the other hand, when emotional labour becomes an additional responsibility, nursing staff of emergency wards finds their job as more difficult.

3. **Perception of co-workers:** Nursing staff of emergency wards perceives their co-workers as generally unhappy while front-desk employees perceive their co-workers as happy in general. "they are happy. I am not that close to anyone. But they all seem happy to me." (Front-desk employee, Age: 29), " nobody is that happy. Maybe because of the job" (Nursing staff -ICU, Age: 30) But, both of them perceive themselves as having no general states; they are equally happy or unhappy at times.

4. **Preference for jobs that involve no emotional labour:** Front-desk employees do prefer jobs from other departments that involve no emotional labour if they are offered better monetary benefits. As they feel that they take minimal physical effort for the current job, they are not ready to go for another job of the same salary that involves more physical effort instead of emotional labour. In the case of nursing staff, they prefer jobs from other departments with no emotional labour even if they are offered the same level of pay.

5. **Monitoring Front-desk employees:** who undergo random checks and monitoring from higher authorities feel always stressful. "There are monitoring squad. They'll come in disguise. If I fail to greet them as they expect, my job is at stake" (Front-desk employee, Age: 28) The feeling of being monitored removes any possible relaxed phases in their work life. Reports from authorities who conduct undercover checks can result even in

the termination of their jobs. Due to these fears, employees try to smile and greet customers even when they grieve in deep sadness.

6. **Job relevance:** Front-desk employees perceive their job as unproductive and they have not been briefed about the relevance of their jobs. "I am actually doing nothing here. I am similar to a smiling statue." (Front-desk employee, Age: 29) When customers do not acknowledge their presence, they feel awkward, embarrassed and rejected. Smiling at people who don't smile back was very difficult for them at the beginning.
7. **Stereotypes:** From the observation, it is seen that people who perform emotional labour are mostly women. All of the front-desk employees are women and there were no men to even consider as a token. Most of the front-desk employees identify their appearance as the reason for selection and this makes them forced to look pleasing in work settings than any other occupation.

From the emerged themes, it is understood that emotional labour has different levels of implication with regard to the norms it plays with. If the emotional labour norm is purely driven by organization, the pressure is comparatively lesser than a norm driven by societal values. Hence, nurses in Intensive care units feels the necessity to fulfill their emotional labour regardless of organizational supervision as it is expected from them as a social being. It is also understood that when the job description carry less weight, emotional labour is considered as an easy job by employees and when the nature of job is intensive, emotional labour is considered as an unwanted addition to their existing pressure.

It was eye-opening to find that smiling and expressing happiness did not made the front-desk employees perceive their work life as happier than nursing staff of ICU. Hence, there is no sign of facial feedback hypothesis in function with relation to emotional labour. Instead, employees were wrongly perceiving their co workers with relation emotional labour. Front desk employees consider their co workers as generally happier and Nursing staff perceive their co workers as generally sad. This can be an outcome of perceiving their facial expression which is a part of the emotional labour and associating it with their actual emotions.

The major finding of the study is the existence of emotional labour with reference to social norms. Emotional labour which has studied prior always looked into emotional labour driven by job description. In the case of nursing staff from ICU, their emotional labour is driven mainly by societal values. Even though they are in a serious job environment

due to their profession, they carry out emotional labour due to the effect of social norms. This process is not included in the current definition of emotional labour. Hence, further studies should be conducted to explore the effects of emotional labour carried out to fulfill social norms in a work environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explores how emotional labour is affected by various factors and also the effects of emotional labour on employees. The study has found out that the effects of emotional labour is dependent upon the norms of emotional labour, other jobs that they have to carry out, also the emotion specificity. People who have to display happiness are perceiving their emotional labour with a very different approach than people who can not display their happiness. The perception about co-workers of the same department also influenced by emotional labour and the kind of emotional labour that they are carrying out. I also found an interesting detail about emotional labour. When emotional labour is not forced by work norms but societal norms, it's not just emotional labour, It is a result of continuous conformity to the societal norms. The study also notices the gender roles related to jobs involving emotional labour. Qualitative approach helped to understand how emotional labour is affecting employees and what are the factors involved in emotional labour and its consequences. This study also points to a concept which is significantly different from both the concepts of 'emotional labour' and 'emotional work'.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abraham, R. (1998). Emotional dissonance in organizations: A conceptualization of consequences, mediators and moderators. *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, 19(3), 137-146.
- [2] Abraham, R. (1999). The impact of emotional dissonance on organizational commitment and intention to turnover. *The journal of Psychology*, 133(4), 441-455.
- [3] Alvesson, M., & Berg, P. O. (1992). *Corporate culture and organizational symbolism: An overview*, Berlin: de Gruyter.
- [4] Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619644.
- [5] Ashforth, B. E., & Humphrey, R. H. (1993). Emotional labor in service roles: The influence of identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(1), 88-115.

- [6] Ashforth, B. E. & Tomiuk, M. A. (2000). Emotional labor and authenticity: Views from service agents. In S. Fineman (Ed), *Emotions in organizations* (pp. 184-203). New Delhi: SAGE Barrett,
- [7] L. F., & Gross, J., (2001). Emotional intelligence: A process model of emotion representation and regulation. In T. J. Mayne & G. A. Bonanno (Eds.), *Emotions: Current issues and future directions* (pp. 286-310). New York: Guilford.
- [8] Barrett, L. F., Gross, J., Christensen, T., & Conner, B. (2001). Knowing what you are feeling and knowing what to do about it: Mapping the relation between emotion differentiation and emotion regulation. *Cognition and Emotion*, 15(6), 713-724. Brotheridge,
- [9] C. M., & Grandey, A. A. (2002). Emotional labor and burnout: Comparing two perspectives of "people work". *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60, 17-39.
- [10] Friedman, H. S., Prince, L. M., Riggio, R. E., & DiMatteo, M. R. (1980). Understanding and assessing nonverbal expressiveness: The affective communication test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 333-351.
- [11] Gardner, III, W. L. (1992). Lessons in organizational dramaturgy: The art of impression management. *Organizational Dynamics*, 21(1), 33-46.
- [12] Grandey, A. A., Fisk, G. M., Mattila, A. S., Jansen, K. J., & Sideman, L. A. (2005b). Is "service with a smile" enough? Authenticity of positive displays during service encounters. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 96(1), 3855.
- [13] Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3), 551-575.
- [14] Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling* (Twentieth anniversary edition). Berkeley: University of California press
- [15] Lockenhoff, C. E., & Carstensen, L. L. (2004). Socioemotional selectivity theory, aging, and health: The increasingly delicate balance between regulating emotions and making tough choices. *Journal of Personality*, 72(6), 1395-1424.
- [16] Losada, M., & Heaphy, E. (2004). The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams: A nonlinear dynamics model. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(6), 740-765.
- [17] Pugliesi, K. (1999). The consequences of emotional labor: Effects on work stress, job satisfaction, and well-being. *Motivation and Emotion*, 23(2), 125-154.
- [18] Rafaeli, A. (1989). When cashiers meet customers: An analysis of the role of supermarket cashiers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 32, 245-273.
- [19] Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. (1987). Expression of emotion as part of the work role. *Academy of Management Review*, 12(1), 23-37. W.P. No. 2006-12
- [20] Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. (1989). The expression of emotion in organizational life. In L. L. Cummings & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior*, 11, 142. Greenwich CT: JAI Press
- [21] Tsai, W. (2001). Determinants and consequences of employee displayed positive emotions. *Journal of Management*, 27, 497-512.
- [22] Tushman, M. L. (1977). Special boundary roles in the innovation process. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22, 587-605.
- [23] Updegraff, J. A., Gable, S. L., & Taylor, S. E. (2004). What makes experiences satisfying? The interaction of approach-avoidance motivations and emotions in well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(3), 496-504.
- [24] Witt, L. A., Andrews, M. C., & Carlson, D. S. (2004). When conscientiousness isn't enough: Emotional exhaustion and performance among call center customer service representatives. *Journal of Management*, 30(1), 149-160.