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## Emotional Labor and Burnout at Work: A Study from Turkey

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to evaluate which variables of emotional labor dimensions have a significant effect in explaining the levels of burnout of employees in the service sector. The study participants ranged in age from 23 years to 56 years, approximately 61% were female, 52% were married and the mean duration of their work was calculated as 8.33±6.65 years. No statistically significant difference was found in the emotional labor and burnout variables from the results of the analysis according to gender. The highest relationship obtained in the emotional labor scale subdimensions was between faking emotions and hiding emotions ( $r=0.44$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). In the explanation of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization levels of the employees, the hiding emotions variable of the emotional labor variable was found to be statistically significant.

*Keywords:* Emotional labor, faking emotions, deep acting, hiding emotions, burnout

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### 1. Introduction

Hochschild (1993:7) defined emotional labor as, ‘management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’. According to another definition, emotional labor is ‘the display of expected emotions by service agents during service encounters’ (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993: 90). Morris and Feldman (1996) defined emotional labor as ‘the effort, planning and control required for the organization’s desired emotions to be reflected in the interpersonal process’ (Aslan and Çaldağ, 2011: 12). These are primarily professions such as doctors, nurses, teachers, airline staff, social service experts, call centre employees and salespeople. In other words, occupations which have direct interaction with

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customers or patients etc are the occupations with an intense emotional labor process (Dursun, Bayram and Aytacı, 2011: 651).

When there is incompatibility between the emotions actually felt by the employee and the emotions displayed, various negative results ensue (Güngör, 2009:108). In this aspect of emotional labor there are negative effects on the mental and physical health of employees. Studies in this area in literature have revealed that emotional labor causes an increase in levels of employee burnout (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002, 2003; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Näring, Briët, and Brouwers, 2006; Köksel, 2009; Çelik et al, 2010, Schaible and Gecas, 2010; Noor and Zainuddin, 2011; Basım and Begenirbaş, 2012), a decrease in job satisfaction (Uysal, 2007; Yang and Chang, 2008; Köksel, 2009; Başbuğ, Ballı and Oktuğ, 2010; Oral and Köse, 2011), an increase in work-related stress (Pugliesi, 1999), an increase in health problems, sleep problems, and psychological problems such as anxiety and suicidal tendencies (Karim, 2009), and family conflict (Seery and Corrigan and Harpel, 2009).

The aim of this study was to evaluate which variables of emotional labor dimensions have a significant effect in explaining the levels of burnout of social service experts and shop workers employed in the service sector.

## 2. Method

*Study participants:* The study comprised 202 service sector employees, of whom 103 were social service experts and 99 were shopworkers. The reason for determining the study participants in this way is that those who carry out these occupations have direct interaction with customers or those being offered service. A questionnaire oriented to social service experts was sent electronically by email to members of the 'Social Service Specialists Association' and was returned in the same way by e-mail. A questionnaire oriented to shopworkers was given directly to the participants and collected after 1 week.

*Emotional Labor Scale:* This scale was developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) to consist of deep acting and surface acting. In a later revision (Lee, Lovell and Brotheridge, 2010a; Lee, Lovell and Brotheridge, 2010b; Lee and Brotheridge, 2011), the dimension of surface acting was subdivided to two dimensions of hiding emotions and faking emotions. The translation of the scale into Turkish and adaptation was made by the current study authors. The revised scale with three dimensions of Faking Emotions, Deep Acting and Hiding Emotions was used in this study. The 9 items of the scale were to be answered as 5-point Likert-type items between 'never' and 'always'.

*Burnout scale:* The Maslach Burnout Inventory, which was developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) and evaluated for validity and reliability in Turkey by Ergin (1992), was used. The inventory, formed of 22 items, has 3 dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Low Personal Accomplishment. The items of the inventory were to be answered as 5-point Likert-type items between 'never' and 'always'.

*Data Analysis:* Data were analyzed by SPSS Version 16.0 software using descriptive statistics, Cronbach Alpha values for reliability analysis, t-test, correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis.

## 3. Results

The study participants were 61% female and 39% male with a mean age of  $31.50 \pm 8.38$  years (range 23-56 years). The mean duration of work in the service sector was  $8.33 \pm 6.65$  years (range 1-36 years). The mean duration of the service encounter was  $16.83 \pm 11.44$  minutes (range 2-45 mins). Descriptive statistics are given in Table 1.

It was determined that 52% of the participants were married and approximately 61% were university graduates.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Gender	N	%	Marital Status	N	%	Education	N	%
Male	79	39.1	Single	97	48.0	Primary	17	8.4
Female	123	60.9	Married	105	52.0	High	61	30.2
Total	202	100.0	Total	202	100.0	University	124	61.4
						Total	103	100.0

Table 2. Results of *t*-test according to gender

Variables	Female	Male	t	p
Emotional Labor				
Faking Emotions	2.19±.81	2.12±.85	.586	.558
Deep Acting	2.76±1.07	2.61±1.07	.969	.334
Hiding Emotions	2.46±.77	2.60±.81	-1.229	.221
Burnout				
Emotional Exhaustion	21.34±6.73	21.71±6.69	-.378	.706
Depersonalization	9.44±3.65	9.85±3.65	-.780	.436
Personal Accomplishment	29.89±4.38	30.90±4.15	-1.663	.098

In the results of the analysis made according to gender, no statistically significant difference was found in the emotional labor and burnout variables.

The results of the mean and standard deviations, the reliability analysis of the scales and correlations are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, C. Alpha values and correlations

Variables	Item	Mean ±S. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Emotional Labor								
1-Faking Emotions	3	6.44±2.50	(0.73)					
2-Deep Acting	3	8.00±3.21	.264**	(0.81)				
3-Hiding Emotions	3	7.65±2.37	.435**	.141*	(0.74)			
Burnout								
4-Emotional Exhaustion	9	23.52±5.87	.134	.054	.264**	(0.79)		
5-Depersonalization	5	9.69±3.64	.228**	.045	.341**	.619**	(0.71)	
6-Personal Accomplishment	8	30.55±4.26	.021	.096	-.078	-.299**	-.331**	(0.74)

\*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05; Cronbach  $\alpha$ 's are in parentheses

The Cronbach alpha values obtained for the scales varied between 0.71 and 0.81 and were determined to be within acceptable limits. When correlations between the scales were examined, the highest relationship in the burnout inventory subdimensions was obtained between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization ( $r=0.62$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). The highest relationship in the emotional labor scale subdimensions was obtained between faking emotions and hiding emotions ( $r=0.44$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). In the relationships between emotional labor and burnout variables, a positive significant relationship was seen between hiding emotions and emotional exhaustion ( $r=.264$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, a positive significant relationship was determined between faking emotions and depersonalization ( $r=.228$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and hiding emotions and depersonalization ( $r=.341$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

At this stage of the study, hierarchical regression analysis was applied to determine which dimension of the emotional labor variables had a significant effect in the explanation of employee's burnout levels. Personal identity variables were added in the first step of the analysis and emotional labor variables were

added in the second step. Thus it was aimed to determine the strength of the explanation for each group of variables. The results of the analysis are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Burnout variable

Variables	Emotional Exhaustion		Depersonalization		Personal Accomplishment	
	Step1	Step2	Step1	Step2	Step1	Step2
Age	.073	.252	-.142	.012	-.066	-.036
Gender <sup>1</sup>	-.007	-.036	.037	.001	.190**	.206**
Marital Status <sup>2</sup>	.024	.010	.075	.055	-.156	-.144
Duration of work	-.052	-.170	-.165	-.266*	.389**	.369**
Service encounter	.027	.012	-.147*	-.174*	.040	.067
Faking emotions		.098		.049		.088
Deep acting		.048		-.009		.102
Hiding emotions		.259**		.319**		-.149
R <sup>2</sup>	0.005	0.10*	0.09**	0.20**	0.12**	0.15**

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; All coefficients are standardized coefficient.

<sup>1</sup> Gender: 1-Male, 2-Female; <sup>2</sup> Marital Status: 1-Single, 2-Married

In the second stage of the model established for emotional exhaustion, 10% of the total variables, 20% for depersonalization and 15% for personal accomplishment were explained. In the first stage of the regression established to explain the emotional exhaustion levels of the employees, no statistical significance for any variable was found. In the second stage, the variable of hiding emotions from the emotional labor scale was found to be statistically significant. When the variation of R<sup>2</sup> was considered, the dimension of hiding emotions of the emotional labor scale was seen to be a significant variable in the explanation of the emotional exhaustion of employees. In the first stage of the regression established to explain levels of depersonalization of the employees, the variable of duration of service encounter shown in the interaction with the person/patient being offered service was found to be statistically significant. In the second stage, duration of work, duration of service encounter and hiding emotions from the emotional labor scale were found to be statistically significant. In the first and second stage of the regression established to explain the level of personal accomplishment of the employees, the variables of gender and duration of work were found to be statistically significant.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, which aimed to determine which dimensions of the emotional labor scale had a significant effect in explaining the levels of burnout of social service experts and shop workers, no statistically significant difference was found in the results of the analysis according to gender. Similar results were obtained in studies by Uysal (2007), Köksel (2009) and Oral and Köse (2011) where no significant difference was found between emotional labor dimensions and gender. The results of the correlation analysis showed a positive relationship to have been determined between faking emotions from emotional labor dimensions and hiding emotions from burnout dimensions. In addition, a positive relationship was determined between emotional exhaustion and hiding emotions from the burnout dimensions. On the other hand, no significant relationship was determined between emotional labor dimensions and burnout personal accomplishment dimension. In studies by Zhang and Zhu (2008) and Näring, Briët and Brouwers (2006), a positive relationship was determined between surface acting from emotional labor dimensions and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment. In the same studies, a negative relationship was determined between deep acting and depersonalization and low personal accomplishment. Similarly, in studies by Brotheridge and Lee (2002, 2003), Köksel (2009), Çelik et al (2010), Oral and Köse (2011) and Basım and Begenirbaş (2012), a

significant relationship was determined between surface acting and deep acting variables and burnout dimensions. In the regression analysis established to explain the emotional exhaustion levels of the employees, the hiding emotions variable of the emotional labor scale was found to be statistically significant. According to this, employees hiding the emotions they actually feel while offering service increase their emotional exhaustion levels. In a study by Lee et al (2010b) it was reported that the variable of hiding emotions had a positive significant effect on emotional exhaustion. In studies by Zhang and Zhu (2008) and Noor and Zauniddin (2011), the variable of deep acting was found to be significant in the explanation of emotional exhaustion of employees.

In the regression established to explain the depersonalization levels of the employees, duration of work, duration of service encounter and hiding emotions from the emotional labor scale were found to be statistically significant. According to this, the longer the employees have been doing the work and increases in the duration of the service encounter were seen to decrease the level of depersonalization. On the other hand, employees hiding the emotions that they were actually feeling during the service encounter caused an increase in the employees' levels of depersonalization. In a study by Lee et al (2010b), the variable of faking emotions was found to have a positive significant effect on depersonalization. In studies by Zhang and Zhu (2008) and Noor and Zauniddin (2011), the variables of deep acting and surface acting were found to be significant in the explanation of the variable of depersonalization. In the first and second steps of the regression which was established to explain the personal accomplishment levels of the employees, while the variables of gender and duration of work were found to be statistically significant, no findings were obtained showing a significant effect of emotional labor dimensions. In a study by Lee et al (2010b), in the explanation of the variable of personal accomplishment, only the faking emotions variable was found to be significant and no significant relationship was determined in respect of the other emotional labor dimensions. In a study by Zhang and Zhu (2008), the variables of deep acting and surface acting were found to be significant in the explanation of the personal accomplishment variable.

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