


Emotional Labor and Management of Emotions in Nursing

ABSTRACT

Determining the level of the emotional labor of nurses who play an important and indispensable role in the health system has become one of the most important issues. It is thought that nurses experience a lot of emotional labor as a result of many factors such as spending more time with patients and having more empathy and feeling emotions because the majority of occupational members are women. To increase the service quality of nurses, strategies should be developed to make nurses' emotional labor behaviors more positive. Within this framework, all nurses, especially the managing nurses, should be provided with training on patient communication, emotion management, and emotional labor behavior. First, it is necessary to increase the awareness of nurses who engaged in superficial behavior, study the reasons that lead them to this behavior, and try to eliminate these factors. In addition, by examining the emotion management and emotional labor behaviors of students in nursing education, it can be suggested to address the issues that support the empowerment of nursing students in the emotional dimension.

Keywords: Emotion, emotional labor, management of emotions, nursing

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Introduction

Although the phenomenon of emotion does not have as wide a usage area as it is today, it is an area that has been studied since the late 1800s, and various opinions have been put forward. Examining the moods of human beings and predicting their various effects have always had an interesting position in the literature.¹ From the past to the present, researchers have approached the concept of emotion from different perspectives in biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects. Whereas it is emphasized that emotions negatively impact the rational thinking process in the past, many studies today reveal that emotions actually lead to realistic thinking. In a sense, emotions are defined as moods that stimulate and energize people, contrary to rational approaches. The word emotion is expressed in Latin as motus anima, which means soul that activates.² Therefore, the emotions experienced in daily life have a great impact on human behavior.³

For the first time in the scientific field, those who carry emotions to organizations are the first group dynamics theorists to address the approach of human relations in organizations.⁴ Especially since the 1980s, the existence of emotions in working life, forms of expression, and their role in organizational success have been increasingly discussed.⁵ Mayo with his research on employee morale and its relationship to success and Lewin who worked on social changes stated that emotions cannot be ignored in the workplace.⁴ In Homans's human group approach, 3 elements of the model are determined as activities, relationships, and emotions. Homans states that emotions are very important in explaining the causes and consequences of these processes.⁵

Especially in the service sector, emotion management is very important owing to the intense communication between those who provide the service and those who receive the service. At this point, the efforts of the service providers are essential. How employees manage their emotions is important for all organizational processes as it is for customer satisfaction. In this direction, enterprises exert effort to have a competitive advantage, to create brand dependence, and to provide customer satisfaction.⁶ Research points out the importance of employees who are in direct contact with customers in ensuring customer satisfaction and achieving the goals.⁷ Employees trying to influence customers by using their emotions becomes an obligation of the job, and this is being demanded from more and more employees every.⁶

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Accordingly, organizations expect their employees to manage their feelings in line with corporate policies and strategies while providing services.^{4,8} In fact, the feelings of the employees are the goals that the institution expects them to realize, and the deviations from these goals negatively impact their own performance and indirectly the performance of the institution.^{9,10}

In organizations with a positive emotional climate, relationships between employees develop more effectively and constructively, whereas it is difficult to harbor negative emotions in this working environment.⁸ Thus, the synergy occurs in the organizations and results in an increase in the performance of the organization.⁹ Thereby, the efforts of managers to understand, direct, and mobilize emotions throughout the organization facilitate emotion management.^{11,12}

Emotional Labor Concept

In 1983, Hochschild first defined the concept of emotional labor in his book "The Managed Heart" as "Regulating emotions in a way that is observed by other people and showing facial and bodily representation."^{13,14} In other words, "It is the planning and control of the efforts needed to show the emotions that the organization expects from the employee during interpersonal interaction."¹⁵ This concept has become a subject of interest for scientists working in the field of organizational behavior and by adding new dimensions to comprehension; some researchers in the field of organizational psychology, management, and sociology have begun to focus on how emotional labor affects the work attitudes and behaviors of employees.¹⁶ With the realization that emotional labor is one of the main elements required for effective work performance, the importance of emotions in the field of organizational behavior has begun to be understood.³

On the basis of the fact that the emotional state of the employee facing the customer in this process is also perceived by the customer, emotional labor becomes one of the role requirements expected within the framework of customer satisfaction of the employees. Therefore, it is stated that the psychological (spiritual) effort that employees in the service sector should exert for emotional labor is higher than that exerted in other fields.¹⁶

In this context, many employers determine how to behave toward customers, and in-house trainings are provided in this direction. As a result, employees are expected to display these behaviors. Employees may experience job satisfaction or burnout as a result of sincerely feeling these behaviors or acting by masking them.¹⁷

The concept of emotional labor is the intensity of emotion that an employee feels and experiences in work processes.¹³ The level of this intensity has positive and negative effects on his business success, morale and motivation, and contribution to the enterprise. In this regard, it is necessary to diagnose emotional labor to understand its determinants and the relative importance of each determinant.¹⁸

Grandey¹³ in 2000 mentions 3 basic components in the emotional labor process model. These components include:¹³

- Situational signs-interaction expectations (frequency, diversity, and display rules) and emotional events (positive and negative);
- Emotion management process-superficial and in-depth role playing; and
- Long-term results-individual well-being (exhaustion and job satisfaction) and corporate well-being (performance and withdrawal behavior).

In addition to these components, individual (gender, emotional influence, emotional intelligence, and empathy ability) and institutional (business autonomy and support of managers and colleagues) factors were mentioned. As can be understood from these components, the emotional labor process is a concept that should be addressed both in an individual and organizational context in terms of inputs and outputs. Whereas the positive outcomes of the emotional labor process are customer satisfaction and profitability of the organization as a result of satisfaction, the negative consequences are expressed as burnout, decreased job satisfaction and organizational performance, and increased business turnover rate.¹⁹

Dimensions of the Concept of Emotional Labor

In the literature, there are different approaches to the dimensions of the concept of emotional labor, defined as the display of the emotions expected from the service provider during the service procurement/delivery. It takes place in 3 ways: superficial role playing, deep role playing, and expression of real feelings.¹⁵

Ashforth and Humphrey¹³ stated that emotional labor may not require conscious effort, that is, it may arise as a result of emotions that employees can actually feel in the process. In this context, they added natural (intimate) feelings as a third dimension to the Hochschild's approach, thinking that there may be behaviors that employees can actually feel. For example, the sad crying of a nurse whose patient has passed away is evaluated within the dimension of natural emotions.¹⁶ Ashforth and Humphrey's¹³ approach differs from Hochschild's at this point. In addition to these, it is stated by some researchers that emotional dissonance should be considered as the fourth dimension of emotional labor. Another point at which Ashforth and Humphrey's approach differs from Hochschild's approach is that emotional labor focuses on task effectiveness rather than on its effect on an individual's health or stress.^{13,15}

Superficial acting is the management of observable emotions; it means hiding our real emotions and the facial expressions that these emotions bring to show the emotion we need to express.²⁰ In a sense, it can be expressed as the arrangement of our observable expressions. It is the superficial role for a salesperson who smiles at the customer even if he/she does not feel like it or for a police officer to display safe or brave behavior even if he has felt fear or hatred.

The deep role is to try to change our true feelings in order to show the emotion we need to express. The behavior of a nurse who really tries to empathize with his/her patient is a deep role. It is stated that there are 2 ways to act deeply: stimulations of emotions and taking advantage of indirectly trained imagination.⁵

The superficial role is about the emotions shown, and the deep role is about the emotions that are felt. Whereas superficial role-playing behaviors adhere to the rules, deep role-playing behaviors go beyond adherence to the rules and tries to add authenticity to these behaviors.

It is also stated that superficial role playing may be inadequate to guarantee the perception of quality service. In this regard, the individual makes different emotional displays by masking his/her real feelings for different reasons, especially in line with corporate priorities.³ Deeply role playing is the management of what is felt.²¹

The individual strives within the framework of the desired role, especially in line with corporate priorities, and tries to convey his/her feelings to the opposite party as a result of this effort.²¹ Although he/she does not feel like, the behavior of a smiling nurse when talking to his/her patients is superficial, whereas the nurse who plays the role of superman when taking care of the child with cancer exhibits deep role-playing behavior.¹⁹

Emotional Labor and Nursing

Today, hospitals, which are the most important subsystems of the healthcare system, are considered among the most complex and difficult organizations to manage. The involvement of complex technology and intensive human relations in nursing services, which constitute an important part of health services, causes significant administrative problems. In this case, it requires nurses to be individuals who can be aware of their emotions and can manage their emotions, show empathy, become self-motivated, have effective communication.⁴

In this respect, it can be said that health services are the area where face-to-face communication is common, and therefore, emotional labor is most intense at every stage. Nurses are undoubtedly the health professionals who communicate or have to communicate with patients and their relatives face to face in the field of health. Nurses are expected to approach with empathy to maintain the morale of the patients, to alleviate the anxiety of a patient experiencing pain, or to calm the relatives of a deceased patient.¹⁹

This brings with it emotional interaction with patients and their relatives. During this interaction, nurses experience the process of emotional conflict and emotion regulation. Therefore, controlling and managing emotions effectively is a point to be considered in the emergence of the behaviors of the nursing service desired.²²

In previous studies on emotional labor among nurses, that is, emotional labor-management changes in different genders, there is a same-directional relationship between emotional labor (subdimension of superficial role playing) and burnout: emotion display rules are inversely related to job satisfaction, deep role playing is in the same directional relationship with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and emotional labor is inversely related to the welfare level of nurses but in the same direction with perceived work stress level.²³ In the few studies on emotional labor in the context of the healthcare sector in Turkey, it has been determined that there is a relationship between emotional labor and burnout, which is one of its most important outcomes.¹⁹

The management of emotional processes in the work environment is not only limited to relationships with patients but is also related to patient relatives, managers, colleagues, and other members of the healthcare team. Executive nurses play an important role in ensuring effective coordination in this complex interaction process.¹⁹

Emotional labor tendencies are expected to be high, given that nurses strive to show emotion toward their supervisors, colleagues, and patients.^{13, 24} In the literature, it was concluded that demographic variables do not make any difference in emotional labor dimensions. However, in this case, nurses with more work experience are expected to be more successful in evaluating and managing emotions and especially to have lower levels of superficial role playing in the emotional labor subdimension.^{25,26} Nurses work in almost every department of hospitals. Although the job descriptions are basically the same, there are some differences according to the departments in which they work. For example, intensive care units and operating room nurses have less interaction with patients and their relatives, whereas nurses in emergency departments, clinics, and outpatient clinics interact more frequently and for a longer period with patients and their relatives. In addition, patient profiles vary depending on the department. Units such as internal medicine and oncology have less patient entry and exit and longer treatment periods, whereas surgical units have more patient entry and exit and shorter treatment processes. In this context, it is expected that the nurses use different emotional labor strategies according to the department they work in.¹⁹

Dogan and Ünsal Sığrı¹⁹ concluded in his study that individual and focus group interviews, personality characteristics of employees, position in the institution, professional experience, individual and cultural characteristics of patients, characteristics of the disease (long-term or short-term), duration of hospital stay of the patient, and stress situations in the work environment are factors impacting emotional labor tendencies.

It has been determined that the support of colleagues and supervisors is important in dealing with these factors. Among these factors, it is seen that work stress is one of the issues emphasized in the literature.⁸ Karimi et al.²⁴ in their study of emotional labor, emotional intelligence, and work stress in nurses found that nurses with high levels of emotional labor had low welfare levels and high work stress.

Result

Determining the emotional labor levels of nurses who play an important and indispensable role in the health system has been one of the issues that are emphasized today.²⁷ In the nursing profession, in which there is one-to-one and long-term communication with people, the dimensions of emotional labor are experienced at different levels. Environmental factors have a role in this process as well as the characteristics of the employee and the patient. Emotional labor behavior results in burnout, results in decreased performance and job satisfaction for employees, and results in an increase in the speed of work turnover for the organization. On the other hand, the fact that the fraudulent behavior of the service provider has negative impacts on the perception of service quality of the service users requires managers to take some precautions. Some of the precautions that administrators can take are listed as follows: supporting employees through their managers to reduce work stress (being appreciated more often, asking whether they have any needs, and so on), questioning the satisfaction of the department, and employing the employee in a department suitable for their personality characteristics.¹⁹

It is necessary to increase the awareness of the nurses who are engaged in superficial behavior and to examine the reasons that lead them to this behavior and try to eliminate these factors through organized trainings by executive nurses to the nurses, especially those who are new in the institution, about patient communication, emotion management, and emotional labor behavior. In addition, it may be recommended to address issues that support the emotional empowerment of students in health policy and nursing curriculum by examining the subdimensions of emotion management and emotional labor behavior of student nurses.^{8,28}

This study is important because it gives a holistic perspective to the concept of emotional labor in nurses. In this direction, it is thought that this research, which aims to understand the emotional labor process of nurses, will contribute to the literature.

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