

Emotional Labor Among the Service Sector Employees: Evolution of Job Satisfaction with Employee Demographics

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ABSTRACT

The emotional labor, through which workers control their emotions to conform to organizational norms, significantly influences how satisfied workers are with their jobs. This paper focuses on examining the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction and the moderating effect of demographics among service industry employees from different service sectors: healthcare, banking, public utility, secondary education, and higher education. A survey-based quantitative research approach was adopted, and the sample was selected using a stratified sampling technique. The collected sample consisted of 408

responses, and Structural equation modeling was carried out to test the statistical significance of the proposed relationship. Process Macro statistical testing was followed to measure the moderating effects of employee demographics. The results show that emotional labor has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction. Additionally, the findings suggest that the association between emotional labor and job satisfaction is moderated by employee marital status and age. The results add to the body of research on emotional labor's effects on employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: Emotional labor, Deep acting, Surface acting, Job satisfaction, Service sector

INTRODUCTION

Researchers are interested in a wide range of emotions, particularly in the organizational domain, where effective emotional regulation is seen to be essential for favorable outcomes. Higher employee performance, a low employee turnover rate, job satisfaction (JS), and positive work behaviors are examples of such effective results. In the service sector, controlling one's emotions has become essential to performance evaluation (Binod & Singh, 2023). When people's exterior emotions conflict with their inner feelings, the term "emotional labor" comes into play. Since emotional labor involves more face-to-face connection, it is deemed more crucial in service sector organizations (Apsara & Arachchige, 2016).

In recent years, the service industry has expanded significantly in Sri Lanka, emerging as a major force behind job creation and economic growth (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022). The importance of the emotional component in service delivery is

becoming more apparent as the service sector grows. The process through which people control and regulate their emotions on the job to conform to social standards and organizational expectations is known as "emotional labor." Arlie Hochschild originally presented this idea in her influential work "The Managed Heart" in 1983 (Rajak et al., 2023; Hochschild, 1983). It includes the work, preparation, and self-control needed to communicate feelings judged suitable for a certain employment or professional role, even when those feelings may not be entirely accurate.

The service sector in Sri Lanka is distinguished by its distinctive and sophisticated model, which combines elements of traditional and Western contexts to provide a wide range of services to the public. Contributing significantly to Sri Lanka's gross domestic product (GDP), the services sector is essential to economic growth. The Economics Statistics of Sri Lanka 2023 by the Department of Census and Statistics shows that the services sector made 56.11 percent of Sri Lanka's GDP as of 2022. It shows an increasing contribution of the services sector to the Gross Domestic Product over the past few years compared to other economic sectors.

This sizeable portion emphasizes how crucial the industry is to fostering economic expansion and creating job opportunities. The creation of jobs, foreign exchange earnings, innovation and technology, banking and financial services, healthcare and education, professional and business services, tourism, trade, and transportation are significant contributions made by Sri Lanka's services sector. According to Sanjeevanie et al. (2020), human resources are those inside an organization with the capacity for creativity, invention, and decision-making. Further, quality employees are essential to the operation of any business system characterized by rapid, dynamic, complicated, and unpredictable environmental changes. Sri Lanka's distinct socio-cultural fabric—

marked by interpersonal ties, social peace, and collectivism—may impact how employees in the service industry view and handle emotional labor.

Service sector organizations need to comprehend the nature of work-related emotions, their underlying causes, and their implications for the satisfaction, well-being of employees, and the quality of customer care (Rajak et al., 2023). This highlights the significance of acknowledging and tackling emotional labor techniques, such as surface acting and deep acting, to promote genuine feelings of expression within the profession. Effective management of emotional labor is crucial for service sector professionals since it plays a significant role in enhancing work satisfaction (Binod & Singh, 2023).

Understanding the particular means by which these experiences affect job satisfaction might provide valuable insights for developing mechanisms aimed at improving emotional well-being and job satisfaction among employees in the service sector in Sri Lanka. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine the implications of emotional labor on job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Labor

The complex nature of emotional labor within the professional domain is emphasized by a variety of researchers. Arlie Hochschild's influential conceptualization, first introduced in her landmark work "The Managed Heart" (1983), provides a comprehensive understanding of emotional labor as a purposeful practice, including the strategic regulation of emotions to construct visible expressions, which has significant importance within certain occupational contexts. In the current aggressively

competitive corporate landscape, the service industry strongly values the quality of client experience (Rajak et al., 2023). Emotional labor plays a crucial role in fostering favorable customer encounters, exerting an impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the likelihood of repeat business (Ghaffar et al., 2022). Service sector employees frequently encounter the need to regulate their emotions during client interactions, therefore engaging in emotional labor to varied degrees. Service workers experience energy depletion and consequently, diminished capacity (exhaustion) to operate or willingness (removing oneself from emotional demands in their jobs) to appropriately control their mental and emotional systems, resulting in both emotional and cognitive impairment (Edokpolor et al., 2024). According to Lartey et al. (2019), workers frequently use "surface-acting and deep-acting" as a coping mechanism for their feelings.

Deep Acting

Deep acting refers to the genuine process of internalizing and authentically expressing emotions to conform to specific display norms, as described by Hochschild in 1983. Surface acting involves the exhibition of emotions without any actual interior alignment, whereas deep acting necessitates employees genuinely experiencing the emotions they express in the workplace (Hochschild, 1983). Academics frequently emphasize the genuineness inherent in the practice of deep acting. Deep acting refers to employees making an effort to feel the feelings they are supposed to convey to clients (Asumah et al., 2019).

According to Grandey (2000), deep acting refers to a sincere emotional encounter in which personnel are not simply according to a predetermined script but genuinely experiencing and expressing emotions. Studies indicate a direct relationship between engaging in deep acting and the overall well-being of

employees. According to Hassan and Samy (2024), the term "emotional labor-deep acting" refers to the deliberate manipulation of one's own emotions to conform to organizational standards and expectations, even when doing so goes against one's own feelings. Brotheridge and Lee (2003) revealed a positive correlation between deep acting and higher levels of work satisfaction, as well as a decrease in emotional exhaustion. Deep acting is of utmost significance in the service sector. According to a study conducted by Brotheridge and Lee (2003), healthcare workers in the service sector who engage in deep acting, which involves expressing emotions that are in line with the objectives of their organization, tend to feel increased levels of job satisfaction and less emotional weariness.

Surface Acting

Hochschild (1983) emphasized the concept of surface acting as a tactic employed by individuals to manage their emotions by adopting a facade that aligns with the expectations set by the organization, even if it opposes their own emotional state. The act of concealing emotions is the fundamental characteristic of surface acting. Existing research suggests that surface acting has an unfavorable effect on the satisfaction and well-being of employees (Wang & Groth, 2013). The study conducted by Grandey and Sayre (2019) revealed a positive correlation between surface acting and heightened emotional exhaustion, as well as a negative relationship with work satisfaction. The disparity between genuine feelings and exhibited emotions in the practice of surface acting adds to emotional stress, which has the potential to result in burnout and diminished overall welfare. The phenomenon of surface acting also carries significant implications for relationships with customers. Although employees may resort to surface acting as a means to adhere to organizational expectations,

clients frequently possess the ability to perceive the absence of genuineness (Semmer et al., 2015). According to Sousan et al. (2022), research indicates that service workers who engage in surface acting may encounter increased levels of emotional fatigue and diminished job satisfaction. The misalignment between authentic emotions and shown expressions, influenced by organizational demands, presents difficulties for healthcare professionals, possibly affecting their welfare and the quality of interactions with patients (Sousan et al., 2022).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction encompasses several aspects and indicates an individual's overall fulfillment and happiness with their profession. According to the literature, there has been much research on the theme of job satisfaction, with studies beginning in the 1930s (Dar, 2023). Since then, a large number of international studies have examined its causes and effects (Teng et al., 2022; Haar & Brougham, 2022). Many researchers have examined job satisfaction from many angles, highlighting its subjective character and the diverse aspects that impact it (Zhang et al., 2022). Even after a great deal of research, the idea is constantly improved to suit the requirements of various fields. According to Boccoli, Gastaldi, and Corso (2023), job satisfaction is dynamic and changes over time and between different areas. Locke's (1976) definition of job satisfaction is often regarded as the most comprehensive, despite the existence of numerous other definitions. "A pleasant or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience" is how he defines job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is described by Badri et al. (2022) as a blend of emotional and cognitive happiness. According to Becerra (2023), there has been a shift in the perception of job satisfaction from one to several perspectives. The significance of job satisfaction can be

attributed to its correlation with an individual's attitude and beliefs. This could have an impact on how they behave. A person may become unhappy in other aspects of their life if they are dissatisfied with their job (Kaur & Malodia, 2017).

Emotional Labor and Job Satisfaction

A substantial body of empirical research suggests a varied relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. In the banking industry of the service sector in Sri Lanka, researchers have identified a weak positive relationship between surface acting and job satisfaction (Himanthi & Arachchige, 2014). Sousan et al. (2022) indicate that service workers who engage in surface acting may encounter increased levels of emotional fatigue and diminished job satisfaction. The study conducted by Grandey and Sayre (2019) revealed a positive correlation between surface acting and heightened emotional exhaustion, as well as a negative relationship with job satisfaction.

The body of research shows conflicting findings about the relationship between "emotional labor and job satisfaction" (Gulsen & Ozmen, 2020). According to Wen et al. (2019), suppressing one's emotions results in negative satisfaction. The authors also think that a major contributing factor to low job satisfaction is the commercialization of employees' emotions. Lartey et al. (2019) suggest that employees frequently use a combination of deep-acting and surface-acting to regulate their emotions, hence verifying previous research. Job satisfaction is significantly impacted by these factors. Some argue the presence of a favorable correlation between "deep acting and surface acting and job satisfaction" (Amissah et al., 2022). The body of research also shows that expressing real emotions improves job satisfaction, while surface acting increases unfavorable job satisfaction

(Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021). Accordingly, the first hypothesis was developed, as shown below.

H1. Emotional labor affects job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

Another objective of this study is to determine the moderating effects of control variables on the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. The intended investigation was conducted by referring to the gender, marital status, and age of employees. When referring to the emotional experience, individual differences are crucial to consider, and gender matters in particular. Some scholars highlight the emotional labor that goes into gender studies at work (Saraff, 2018). Such moderating effects in the service sector have not been observed before in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed.

H2a. Gender significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

H2b. Marital Status significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

H2c. Age significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

METHODOLOGY

The study focused on examining the implications of emotional labor on job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka. The conceptual framework along with the respective hypotheses, are shown below (Figure 1).

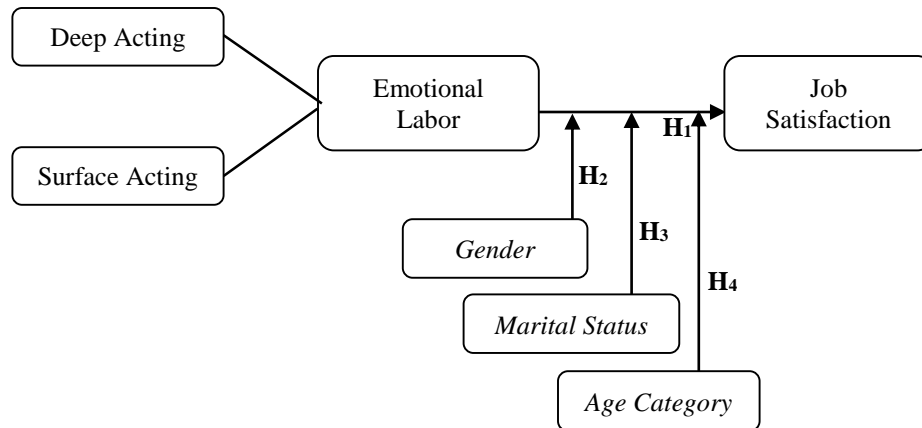


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

A quantitative research approach was used for this study. To guarantee a representative and varied sample of employees from various Sri Lankan service sector organizations, the study used a stratified random sampling approach with an estimated target sample group of 384 based on the Morgan sampling table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Using a structured questionnaire, a 408 sample of employees was surveyed from different service sector organizations, such as healthcare, banking, public utility, secondary education, and higher education, to get information on emotional labor and job satisfaction. Prior to the analysis, the validity and reliability of the measuring scale were examined. Then, the relationship represented by H1 was tested using structural equation modeling statistical testing. Process Macro statistical testing was followed to measure the moderation effects denoted by the rest of the hypotheses.

The first section of the survey questionnaire consisted of questions relating to demographic factors, and the descriptive analysis helped gain insights into the composition of the study sample profile. The sample consisted of 53% female respondents,

and 75% of the sample included married employees. In terms of employee age, 18.87% of the respondents were below 30 years, 32.05% were more than 40 years, and the rest represented the 30-40 year age category (48.78%). 38% of the sample profile have work experience below nine (9) years, and 19% have more than 19 years. The remaining 43% of respondents belonged to the 10-18 years of work experience category. In terms of the highest educational level of the respondents, 72% were graduates or postgraduates. The service sector categories among the sample profile were healthcare, higher education, public utility, banking & finance, and secondary education, which carried 24%, 22%, 18%, 16%, and 16%.

To measure the indicated constructs of the model; emotional labor and job satisfaction, an 18-item measuring scale was employed. The measurements were adapted from previously validated surveys, emphasizing research done in the service industry. The 11-item scale developed by Näring et al. (2007) was adapted to measure emotional labor comprising both deep-acting and surface-acting. The job satisfaction scale was adapted from a questionnaire developed by Muya et al. (2014). A five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was used to collect all item measurements. The English questionnaire was translated into the local language, Sinhala, to facilitate the respondent's understanding of the measurements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

The proposed model was analyzed using SPSS AMOS through structural equation modeling. The sample's internal consistency was examined to assess the reliability of the data. Using Maximum Likelihood Estimation, an exploratory factor analysis of each construct was initially carried out. One cross-loading factor was

found and removed from the analysis during the factor analysis. The deep-acting construct of emotional labor contained the eliminated item. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was used to confirm the sampling adequacy, and the study found acceptable sample adequacy (0.792) to proceed with the analysis. Additionally, the Rotated Component matrix revealed an ideal factor separation, and this model explained almost 60.7% of the total variation. After this elimination, the reliability of the study factors was examined, referring to Cronbach's alpha value. A sound reliability level was noted, obtaining more than 0.7 for each construct (Deep Acting = 0.811, Surface Acting = 0.865, Job Satisfaction = 0.851).

Convergent validity evaluates construct validity by examining the correlation between related constructs (Hair et al., 2010). The average variance explained (AVE) and standard loading (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) were referred, and convergent validity can be confirmed when it satisfies the conditions: $AVE > 0.5$, $CR > AVE$, and $CR > 0.70$ (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1. Construct and Discriminant Validity Results

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ELS	JS	ELD
Surface Acting (ELS)	0.848	0.535	0.058	0.884	0.732		
Job Satisfaction (JS)	0.895	0.569	0.048	1.007	-0.019	0.754	
Deep Acting (ELD)	0.828	0.508	0.058	1.007	0.241	0.218	0.712

A factor that is unique and uncorrelated with other constructs passes discriminant validity testing (Hair et al., 2010). It satisfies the following requirements when examined using maximum shared variance (MSV) and average validity explained: Both

ASV<AVE and MSV< AVE. Hence, the constructs in the current study model show good construct and discriminant validity. The respective values are shown in Table 1.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to validate the established model further. Reviewing the analysis results, the construct fitness for the study was evaluated. Goodness of fit (GFI) = 0.964, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.964, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.980, adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) = 0.908, root mean square residual (RMR) = 0.070, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.54 indicate that the validity evaluation standards were met in a generally satisfactory form. Furthermore, the constructs' convergent validity was verified by the Normed Fit Index (NFI), which stands at 0.964. Table 2 below presents the details.

Table 2. Index of Fit of the Measurement Model

Index of fit	χ^2	(df)	P	CMIN/ DF	GFI
Value	132.154	60	.000	2.203	.964
Index of fit	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA
Value	.908	.964	.980	.070	.054

Structural Model

To determine the statistical significance of the proposed association between emotional labor and job satisfaction, structural equation modeling was developed. Figure 2 displays the structural model. Common model fit criteria employed in AMOS, including the chi-square test statistic, CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, RMR, NFI, CFI, and RMSEA, were applied to evaluate the acceptability of structural models. Table 3 presents the summary of model fit

indices, and all criteria indicate acceptable measures for the structural model.

Table 3. Index of Fit of the Structural Model

Index of fit	χ^2	(df)	P	CMIN/DF	GFI
Value	148.554	65	.000	2.285	.961
Index of fit	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA
Value	.907	.960	.977	.071	.056

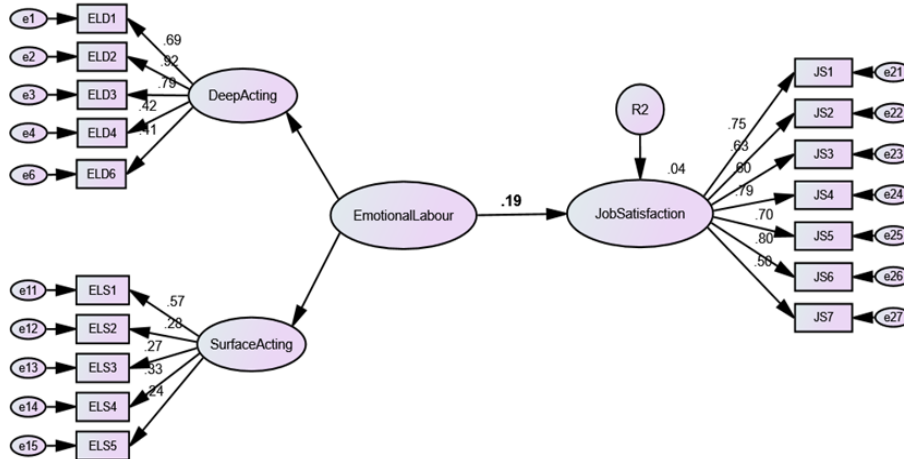


Figure 2. Structural Model

Moderation Analysis

The moderating effect from selected demographics was analysed by following the Process Macro statistical testing method. As an initial step, data representing respective variables were

converted to composite values following data imputation in AMOS. These values were referred to as calculation moderation effects on employee gender, marital status, and gender.

Referring to the employee gender perspective, the moderation analysis indicated a significant model ($F=25.727$, $p=0.000$), and 16.04% of overall change in employee job satisfaction is accounted by emotional labor and gender. Furthermore, the model results indicate a significant difference ($p=0.011$) between male and female employee groups. Results imply that female employees have lower job satisfaction than male employees. Even though the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in female employees is not significantly different ($p=0.145$) from that of male employees. This claim was made referring to the interaction terms of the moderation analysis. The test result of this analysis is shown in below Table 4.

Table 4. Model of Moderation-Gender

Items	coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	3.3684	.0368	91.6142	.0000	3.2962	3.4407
EmoLabour	1.2705	.1515	8.3851	.0000	.9726	1.5683
Gender	-.1880	.0737	-2.5513	.0111	-.3328	-.0431
Int_1	.4350	.2980	1.4596	.1452	-.1509	1.0209

The output of unconditional interaction was referred to understand the moderation effect on the studying relationship. The output indicates that the employee gender category does not moderate the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. A summary of this test is given in Table 5.

Similar to the above analysis, the moderation effect on employee marital status was analyzed, and the output indicated a significant model ($F=31.212$, $p=0.000$). Also, according to the test results,

emotional labor and marital status accounted for an 18.82% change in employee job satisfaction.

Table 5. Test(s) of Highest Order Unconditional Interaction(s): Gender

	R ² -chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0044	2.1305	1.0000	404.0000	.1452

Further, model results indicate a significant difference ($p=0.010$) between married and unmarried employee groups. Also, results implied higher job satisfaction among married employees than unmarried employees. Also, referring to the interaction terms in the analysis, the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in unmarried employees is significantly different ($p=0.001$) from that of married employees. The test result of this analysis is shown in below Table 6.

Table 6. Model of Moderation-Marital Status

Items	coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	3.3740	.0362	93.2858	.0000	3.3029	3.4451
EmoLabour	1.3498	.1467	9.2011	.0000	1.0614	1.6382
Gender	.2167	.0841	2.5759	.0104	.0513	.3821
Int_1	1.1669	.2967	3.9332	.0001	.5837	1.7502

The output of unconditional interaction was referred to in order to understand the moderation effect of marital status on the relationship studied. Test results of unconditional interaction indicate that the employee's marital status moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. The summary of the test output is given in Table 7 and the graphical representation of this change is shown in Figure 3.

Table 7. Test(s) of Highest Order Unconditional Interaction(s): Marital Status

	R ² -chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0311	15.4701	1.0000	404.0000	.0001

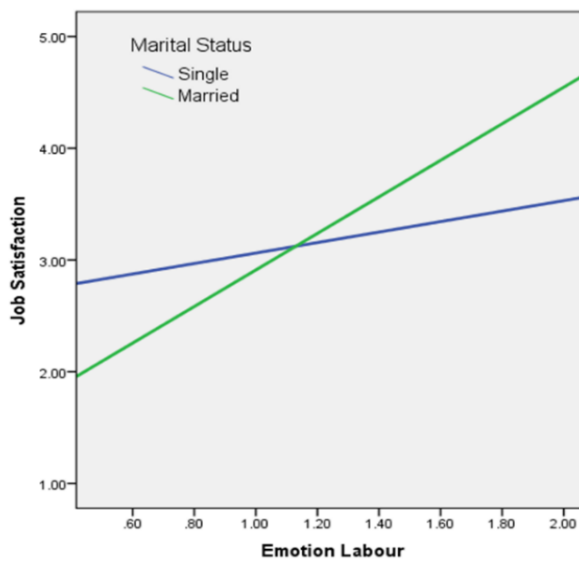


Figure 3. Moderation effect of Marital Status

Further analysis was carried out to identify the moderation effect referred to the employee's age. For this purpose, employees were categorized into six groups representing: below 30 years, 30-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, and above 50 years old. The moderation analysis indicated a significant model ($F=11.159$, $p= 0.000$), and emotional labor and different age categories accounted for 23.66% of overall change in employee job satisfaction. Further, according to the model results, all employee age groups have significant differences between the younger age group, which represented

below 30 years' age category (w1, w2, w3, w4, w5, $p < 0.05$). Further, all the age groups have higher job satisfaction in comparison to the younger age group. The test result of this analysis is shown in below Table 8.

Table 8. Model of Moderation – Employee Age Category

Items	coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.0220	.0841	35.9275	.0000	2.8566	3.1873
NegEm	.8363	.3455	2.4204	.0160	.1570	1.5155
W1	.2880	.1128	2.5528	.0111	.0662	.5097
W2	.3557	.1097	3.2435	.0013	.1401	.5712
W3	.5480	.1272	4.3066	.0000	.2978	.7981
W4	.6134	.1519	4.0390	.0001	.3148	.9119
W5	.5979	.1388	4.3090	.0000	.3251	.8707
Int_1	-.0742	.4447	-.1668	.8676	-.9485	.8002
Int_2	.6992	.4762	1.4683	.1428	-.2370	1.6354
Int_3	1.2449	.4957	2.5112	.0124	.2703	2.2196
Int_4	.7942	.6138	1.2939	.1965	-.4125	2.0009
Int_5	.1825	.4981	.3664	.7143	-.7967	1.1617

Referring to the interaction terms of the above test result, a significant difference was noted with the 41-35 age group ($p = 0.012$). This implies that the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in the 41-45 age group is considerably different (higher) from that of the less than 30 age group. However, the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in age groups belong to 31-35, 36-40, 46-50 and above 50 years are not significantly different from the younger generation.

Table 9. Test(s) of Highest Order Unconditional Interaction(s):
Age Category

	R ² -chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0225	2.3323	5.0000	396.0000	.0417

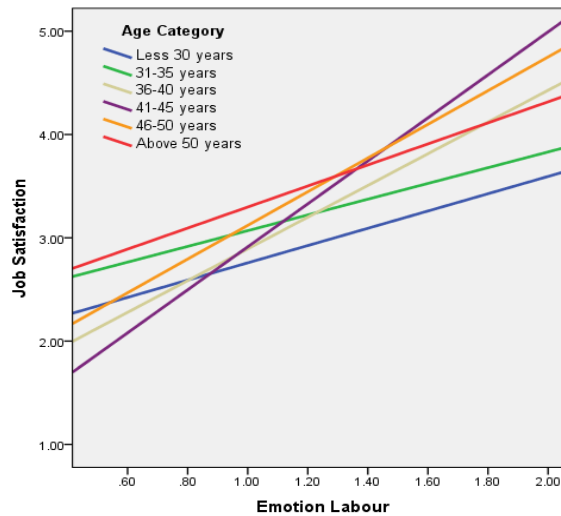


Figure 4: Moderation effect of Age Category

The output of unconditional interaction was referred to in order to understand the moderation effect of employee age categories on the relationship. It indicates the change of R-Square due to interaction (X*W). Outputs of the test of unconditional interaction indicate a significant difference ($p = 0.042$), which implies that the change of R-Square occurred due to the inclusion of interaction terms representing the employee age category. Further, it implies that the employee age category moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. The

summary of the test output is given in Table 9, and the graphical representation of this change is shown in Figure 4.

Hypothesis Testing

H1. Emotional labor affects job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka.

The relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction of service sector employees is investigated under this hypothesis, H1. Therefore, path analysis was used to analyze the data. Following the parameter estimates, the results of the path analysis show that emotional labor was positively and significantly related to job satisfaction. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected as the significant level is less than 0.05. A moderate positive correlation between emotional labor and job satisfaction is shown by a squared multiple correlation (SMC) value of 0.191. This shows that job satisfaction is generally associated with the efforts made by employees to control their emotions at work in the Sri Lankan service sector.

According to Gulsen and Ozmen (2020), there are conflicting findings about the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. The current research finding is consistent with some previous scholars. Employees frequently use a combination of deep-acting and surface-acting to regulate their emotions, and there is a favorable correlation between “deep acting and surface acting and job satisfaction” (Amissah et al., 2022; Lartey et al., 2019). Wen et al. (2019) and Binod and Singh (2023) suggest that emotional labor results in negative satisfaction in the contexts of healthcare and tourism service industries.

The body of research also shows that expressing real emotions improves job satisfaction, while surface acting increases unfavorable job satisfaction (Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021). In the banking industry of the service sector in Sri Lanka, researchers

have identified a weak positive relationship between surface acting and job satisfaction (Himanthi & Arachchige, 2014). Sousan et al. (2022) indicated that service workers who engage in surface acting may encounter increased levels of emotional fatigue and diminished job satisfaction. This study did not test deep-acting and surface-acting with job satisfaction separately. Therefore, this kind of contradictory finding could be obtained with the cultural effects in the Sri Lankan service sector. Further research may be needed to explore additional factors contributing to job satisfaction in this context.

H2a. Gender significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

Results indicate a significant difference ($p=0.011$) between male and female employee groups, highlighting that female employees are having lower job satisfaction than male employees. Referring to the interaction terms, the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in female employees is not significantly different ($p=0.145$) from that of male employees. It demonstrates that the employee gender does not moderate the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted as the significant level is more than 0.05. However, Saraff (2018) has identified moderating effects of gender on the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction in the service sector. In contrast to the current research findings, Wharton (1993) has shown that women who perform emotional labor are significantly more satisfied than men who perform the same type of job.

H2b. Marital status significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

A significant difference ($p=0.010$) between married and unmarried employee groups was identified, and results indicate that married employees are having higher job satisfaction than unmarried employees. Referring to the interaction terms, the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in unmarried employees is significantly different ($p=0.001$) from married employees. The findings indicate that the employee's marital status moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected as the significant level is less than 0.05.

H2c. Age significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka

All age groups have significant differences between younger age groups, representing below 30 years' age category ($w1, w2, w3, w4, w5, p<0.05$). Referring to the interaction terms, results show that interaction with the 41-35 age group is significant ($p = 0.012$). It implies that the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction in the 41-45 age group is considerably difference (higher) from the less than 30 age years' group while age groups belong to 31-35, 36-40, 46-50 and above 50 years are not significantly different from the younger generation. It implies that the employee age category moderates the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected as the significant level is less than 0.05.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As the service sector contributes significantly to job creation and economic growth in Sri Lanka, employees need to meet the emotional demands of their jobs in quality service delivery. Therefore, the emotional component plays a crucial role in

increasing job satisfaction as well as the well-being of employees. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the implications of emotional labor on job satisfaction among service sector employees in Sri Lanka. Further analysis was carried out to investigate the moderation effect of three control variables; gender, marital status, and age, on the effect of emotional labor on job satisfaction.

The analysis highlights the significance of emotional labor, which shows that it explains 19% of the difference in job satisfaction among Sri Lankan employees in the service industry. Employers ought to support training initiatives that improve workers' coping mechanisms and emotional intelligence since these initiatives will increase job satisfaction. The detrimental effects of emotional labor can be lessened by establishing a supportive work atmosphere with frequent check-ins, counseling services, and stress management programs. Employee happiness and morale can be raised by recognizing and rewarding employees for their emotional contributions through recognition programs. Administrators need to receive training on recognizing emotional distress and providing suitable assistance to cultivate a happier and more efficient team.

This study investigated how age, marital status, and gender influence the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among Sri Lankan workers in the service industry. The results show that although female employees are less satisfied with their jobs than their male counterparts, gender has no obvious impact on the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. On the other hand, the association is strongly moderated by marital status, with married employees reporting better job satisfaction than single employees. Additionally, age is a moderating factor; individuals between the ages of 41 and 45, in

particular, exhibit a greater impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction than younger employees.

These findings will affect the management practices used in the service industry in many ways. To improve job satisfaction among single female employees, organizations should introduce focused interventions like work-life balance programs and support systems tailored to the gender of the employee. Furthermore, age-specific tactics, such as flexible work schedules and professional growth, can assist in meeting the specialized requirements of various age groups, especially those in their mid-life. All things considered, implementing a thorough strategy for employee well-being that takes age, gender, and marital status into account can increase job satisfaction, improve staff retention, and boost organizational performance. To back up and expand on these findings, future studies should look into these relationships in more detail and in a variety of contexts.

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