

# The Impact of Emotional Labor on Burnout among Law Enforcement Officers

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## Abstract

The definition of emotional labor is that the workers when confronting their customers create a publicly observable facial and bodily display expected by their organization or society by means of management of feeling in order to complete the job. Most law enforcement officers' work involves substantial emotional labor, who must control their own emotional displays when facing citizens, even when they are injured, upset, or angry. Because few studies have examined the emotional labor for law enforcement officers, this article intends to explore the impact of emotional labor on burnout among them. As a result, we find the phenomenon of burnout and emotional suppression among law enforcement officers is quite serious; field officers' depersonalization is higher than the others inside the office; the higher degree of emotional exhaustion, the higher depersonalization degree and the lower personal accomplishment. In addition, emotional suppression, emotional expressions are positively correlated to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but have a negative correlation with personal accomplishment.

**Keywords:** Emotional Labor, Burnout, Law Enforcement Officers

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## **1. Introduction**

What is emotional labor? The definition of emotional labor is that the workers when confronting their customers create a publicly observable facial and bodily display expected by their organization or society by means of management of feeling in order to complete the job. Emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value; It is a type of labor (Hochschild, 1983: 7; Guy, et al., 2008: 6). So the emotional labor is different from the physical or intellectual labors. For example, 911 operators answer calls from citizens who are in dire straits; the flight attendants' smiles to airline passengers are the expression of emotions required by the organization. These public service jobs require interpersonal contact that is either face-to-face or voice-to-voice. And, the effort to display an "expected" caring or smile is emotional labor. Then, so-called burnout means symptoms of workers including depersonalization, personal low accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982). Because most law enforcement officers work on the street and confront citizens very often, burnout among them is well-documented phenomenon. However, few studies have examined the emotional labor for them. This article intends to explore the impact of emotional labor on burnout among law enforcement officers.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Emotional Labor***

The definitions of emotional labor are numerous. Both Morris and Feldman (1996: 987-988) also defined emotional labor as the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions. They conceptualize the emotional labor construct along four dimensions: frequency of appropriate emotional display, attentiveness to required display rules, variety of emotions to be displayed, and emotional dissonance as the following:

#### **Frequency of Emotional Display**

Frequency of emotional display has been the most examined component of emotional labor. Consequently, the more often a work role requires socially appropriate emotional displays, the greater the organization's demands for regulated displays of emotion will be (Morris and Feldman , 1996: 989).

### **Attentiveness to Required Display Rules**

According to Hochschild (1983), employees perform emotional labor in one of two ways. *Surface acting* involves simulating emotions that are not actually felt. In contrast, *deep acting* involves attempts to actually experience the emotions one is required to display (Morris and Feldman , 1996: 990). In other words, surface acting involves “pushing down” one’s authentic expression of self in favor of an *emotional mask*, while deep acting involves “pumping up” by trying to bring the required emotions and one’s true feelings into alignment. Accordingly, these management efforts may require evoking and modifying privately felt emotions (Guy, et al., 2008: 101).

### **Variety of Emotions Required To Be Expressed**

The third major dimension of emotional labor is the variety of emotional displays required by work roles. The greater the variety of emotions to be displayed, the greater the emotional labor of role occupants will be.

Emotional displays in organizations have been characterized as positive, neutral, or negative in nature. Positive emotional displays are aimed at increasing bonds of liking between employees and customers; display rules emphasizing emotional neutrality are used to convey dispassionate authority and status; negative display rules emphasizing anger and hostility often are employed to intimidate or subdue clients. For example, professors often require frequent changes of emotions that are displayed: positive emotions to build enthusiasm, negative emotions to support discipline, and neutrality of emotions to demonstrate fairness and professionalism (Morris and Feldman , 1996: 991).

### **Emotional Dissonance**

Emotional Dissonance means the conflict between genuinely felt emotions and emotions required to be displayed in organizations. Emotional dissonance can and should be considered as the fourth dimension of the emotional labor construct (Morris and Feldman , 1996: 992).

The exercise of discretion requires emotional labor: reading the situation, sizing up how the people involved are feeling, anticipating outcomes, and measuring one's own affect and reactions (Mastracci, et al., 2012: 134). Considering the preexisting conflicts in the police role and recent trends in law enforcement, it is argued that officers have become increasingly subject to paradoxical expectations (Schaible and Gecas, 2010: 319). The emotion displayed by law enforcement officers usually conflicts with the required emotion expected by citizens, so the officers' emotional dissonance exists.

In addition, Peter Manning(1997: 30)assumed metaphorically that the police are dramatic actors, and they must wrestle collectively and individually with the salient dramatic dilemmas of their role and occupation. Manning(1997: 27) said that “policing in this sense means controlling, monitoring (in terms of correcting misguided behavior), tracking, and altering, if required, public conduct”; “policing also refers, in a more specific sense consistent with contemporary usage, to the public's expectations of the police force.” As a result, most police officers may suppress their emotion in order to satisfy the public.

## **2.2 Burnout**

The concept of burnout was firstly used by psychologist Christina Maslach (1978) and empirically studied by Robert T. Golembiewski(1993: 278). Burnout, characterized as a state of vital exhaustion by the World Health Organization ([www.who.int/classifications/icd](http://www.who.int/classifications/icd)), can happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime, as a result of life management difficulty (Hsieh, 2012: 3). Most observers now agree that a person's degree of burnout can be expressed along three dimensions. They include (Golembiewski, 1993: 278):

*Depersonalization*, or the tendency to view others as things or objects rather than as feeling, valuing persons;

*Personal accomplishment*, or the degrees to which a person sees self doing well on tasks worth doing;

*Emotional exhaustion*, or the degree of experienced strains relative to one's normal coping skills and attitudes.

Golembiewski (1993: 279) proposed that the three dimensions are not equally significant in burnout. Depersonalization is considered the least virulent contributor to burnout, and Emotional Exhaustion the most severe.

Researches on organizational variables related to burnout may be classified into two different focuses. One focus has been the employee-client relationship, looking at variables such as the type of client problem involved and the nature of the employee's personal relationship with the client. The second emphasis has been on the employee-organization relationship, studying the role of feedback, control and role clarity, social support, and expectations (Burke and Richardsen, 1993: 279). Because the street-level law enforcement officers facing to citizens they served have a heavy workload and few resources to use, therefore law enforcement is a stressful profession. Stress reactions found among police officers include repression of emotion, displacement of anger, isolation and unspoken fears. They may argue with supervisors, criticize the actions of fellow officers and supervisors, lose interest in the job or sleep on duty. At its most extreme, stress may result in burnout (Bennett and Hess, 2007: 351, 367). So, the burnout of law enforcement officers is a serious problem, and the study of which is significant.

### ***2.3 The Impact of Emotional Labor on Burnout***

Burnout has been of great interest to police researchers for its practical consequences, however, few studies to date have examined the consequences of emotional labor for burnout except the work of Schaible and Gecas in 2010. According to the findings of Schaible and Gecas (2010: 330-331), first, deep acting and value dissonance produce significantly higher levels of depersonalization. Second, deep acting and emotional expression may increase levels of emotional exhaustion. Finally, emotional dissonance has an effect on levels of personal accomplishment. As a result, the impact of deep acting on burnout including depersonalization and emotional exhaustion is significant.

These findings are similar to the work of Guy, et al., they claimed that greater emotional labor demands lead to greater degrees of burnout (Guy, Newman, and Mastracci, 2008: 108). In practice, though law enforcement officers are anticipated to obey the laws and stand operation procedures, they exercise discretion very often and always feel emotional dissonance in real situation. We believe the nature of emotional labor may result in burnout spontaneously for the law enforcement officers.

On the contrary, based on his empirical research, Hsieh(2012: 17) claimed that "emotional labor requirements are not necessarily stressful"; "In human service

professions, the management of emotions is considered a central part of work”; “This finding urges researchers to have a new perspective on the job demands-burnout relationship”; “Thus, when a job demand is well institutionalized and internalized as a norm, it is hardly perceived as a demand and accordingly causes no harm to employee will-being.”

To sum up, whether the impact of emotional labor on burnout among law enforcement officers is significant or not, the topics of emotional labor and burnout happened in the law enforcement agency are interesting.

### **3. Research Design**

#### ***Street- Level Law Enforcement Officers***

Law enforcement is highly challenging, dangerous and stressful (Zeng & Lin, 2003). As the role of police officers in law enforcement easily to conflict the public interest, it is usually a lack of social support (Roberg and Kuykendall, 1990). On the one hand, based on the *Policy and Procedures for Police Officers* (NPA, 2002), the police service content is covering widely, such as, patrol police, criminal investigation police, traffic police, peace-keeping police, and a variety of professional police and other types of work. On the other hand, professional police organization in accordance with its mandate, there are a variety of different police agencies, such as the Harbor Police to maintain the harbor security, the Border Police deal with foreign affairs , as well as smuggling, illegal immigration and the investigation; Aviation Police checks people and goods and maintain the public order in the airport, and the Railway Police protect railway facilities, stations, and in charge of crime prevention and crime investigation along the railway.

Besides, the law enforcement personnel of this study includes: personnel on Coast Guard Administration, the fire police officers of National Fire Agency, all are the generalized police, and the nature of their work are equal to the police. The research subject is specifically for the law enforcement agencies in street-level (as a police officer or sergeant duties). They all have the experience on face to face

connection to public.

### ***Methodology and Sample Characteristics***

This study collected quantitative data by conducting a survey. The main participants of the survey were two-year undergraduate program students in Central Police University. According to the provisions brochures, for police want to apply for this programs, it required to have been verified the qualification of employment by the Ministry of Civil Service, all below 52 years of age, with good character, able-bodied, no bad habits, and are active police officers in police agency, fire department or the Maritime Patrol Directorate General (MPDG) of Coast Guard Administration. The survey was conducted in mid-May, 2013, to a total of 288 students, including 168 sophomore students (class 782), and 168 freshmen/fresh women (class 792). There are 261 valid returned questionnaires; with the returned rate of 90.63%. The characteristics of the sample response presents in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics

Item	Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	217	85.10
	Female	38	14.90
Age	Under 30 yr	111	43.19
	31-35 yr	47	18.29
	36-40 yr	58	22.57
	41-45 yr	35	13.62
	More than 46 yr	6	2.33
Nature of Work	Internal affairs	34	13.28
	Field work	222	86.72
Job Category	Patrol police	152	59.61
	Criminal investigate police	19	7.45
	Traffic police	30	11.76
	Fire fighter	16	6.27
	Coast Guards	16	6.27

	Professional police (ex. Railroad, Aviation)	12	4.71
	Others	10	3.92

Source: The authors.

According to result of the census survey to the two-year undergraduate program students of Central Police University, 85% respondents were male and only about 15% were female. The proportion of male and female of the samples is closed to the population of Central Police University. In addition, there are more than 40% respondents were below 30 years, and more than 85% mainly work in the field. Finally, the main job categories for the Patrol Police are nearly 60%.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

##### ***Descriptive Statistics***

The descriptive statistics presents in table 2. From table 2, the emotional exhaustion of street-level law enforcement officers is quite serious. For example, the questions 1: "I always feel exhausted at the end of the work day." The level of agreement appears to the average score of 6.01 (scale of 1-7, where 7 is the highest level of agreement). Also in the question 4: "I feel I'm working too hard on my job." in this issue, there has been an average of 5.28 score. Finally, in this variable of emotional suppression, question 38: "I usually hide my fear of someone who appears threatening." This issue is as much as 5.09 to the average score.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables

Factors	Questions	Likert Scale	Mean	SD	% of Variance	Communalities Extraction	KMO	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<b>Emotional Exhaustion (Y1)</b>	Q1. I always feel exhausted at the end of the work day.	1-7	6.01	.077	58.38%	0.677	0.65***	0.767
	Q2. I dread getting up in the morning and having to face another day on the job.	1-7	4.16	.106		0.815		
	Q3. I feel frustrated by my job.	1-7	3.85	.103		0.818		
	Q4. I feel I'm working too hard on my job.	1-7	5.28	.092		0.752		
<b>Depersonalization (Y2)</b>	Q5. I feel I treat some people as if they were impersonal objects.	1-7	3.72	.099	59.15%	0.649	0.60***	0.653
	Q6. I've become more callous toward people since I took this job.	1-7	3.43	.110		0.841		
	Q7. I feel people I deal with blame me for some of their problems.	1-7	3.49	.106		0.803		
<b>Personal accomplishment (Y3)</b>	Q8. I can easily understand how people I deal with feel about things.	1-7	5.06	.076	50.46%	0.715	0.80***	0.802
	Q9. I deal very effectively with the problems of people I deal with.	1-7	5.15	.073		0.761		
	Q10. I feel I'm positively influencing people's lives through my work.	1-7	4.58	.081		0.716		
	Q11. I feel very energetic.	1-7	4.83	.078		0.662		
	Q12. I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.	1-7	4.83	.075		0.710		
<b>Emotional Suppression (X1)</b>	Q13. In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.	1-7	4.92	.077	65.16%	0.695	0.65***	0.726
	Q36. I usually hide my amusement about something someone has done.	1-7	4.31	.097		0.732		
	Q37. I usually hide my anger about something someone has done.	1-7	4.92	.084		0.852		
<b>Emotional Expression (X2)</b>	Q38. I usually hide my fear of someone who appears threatening.	1-7	5.09	.093	74.11%	0.833	0.50***	0.648
	Q41. I usually express disgust about something someone has done.	1-7	3.26	.092		0.861		
	Q42. I usually apologize to someone for something.	1-7	3.43	.102		0.861		

Note. (1). Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. (2). \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: The authors.

### ***The Nature of Work and Burnout***

Table 3 presents the major difference of the nature work in law enforcement officers:

Table 3 T-test of the Nature of Work and Work Exhaustion

	Nature of Work	Number	Ave.	S.D.	S.E.	T
Emotional Exhaustion	Internal Affairs	32	-.0550892	.87590987	.15484045	-.408
	Field work	216	.0202794	.98932541	.06731507	
Depersonalization	Internal Affairs	32	-.4184870	1.18023225	.20863756	-2.499*
	Field work	216	.0538630	.96854937	.06590144	
Personal accomplishment	Internal Affairs	32	.2673137	.93872545	.16594478	1.504
	Field work	216	-.0138626	.99342270	.06759385	

Source: The authors.

In this study, the nature of work will be mainly divided into internal affairs and field work, by the independent sample T-test, it can be found in the "depersonalization" presents significant differences. Table 3 presents the degree of depersonalization of law enforcement officers who engage in field work is higher than whom engage in internal affairs. We think that because the field of law enforcement officers may encounter criminals, suspects or emergency situation at any duty time, they must always hold a high degree of alertness and hostility, it may cause field officers depersonalization with higher extent than those inside the office.

### ***Job Familiarity and Personal Accomplishment***

The study analyzed through ANOVA to further explore that job familiarity of the street-level law enforcement officers is whether or not related to personal accomplishment. The result is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 ANOVA of Job Familiarity and Personal Accomplishment

DV: Personal Accomplishment

Source	Sum of Square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean square	F	Critical Value of F
Job Familiarity	17.109	3	5.703	6.232	.000
Error	228.766	250	.915		
Total	245.917	254			

a.  $R^2 = .070$  (Adj.  $R^2 = .058$ )

Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons

DV: Personal Accomplishment

(I) Job Familiarity	(J) Job Familiarity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Very Familiar	Familiar	.1559460	.16504865	.827	-.3086044	.6204964
	Slightly Familiar	.6726854(*)	.19054269	.007	.1363788	1.2089920
	Not Familiar	.7957649	.34995835	.163	-.1892374	1.7807671
Familiar	Very Familiar	-.1559460	.16504865	.827	-.6204964	.3086044
	Slightly Familiar	.5167394(*)	.14816781	.008	.0997023	.9337766
	Not Familiar	.6398189	.32881307	.288	-.2856673	1.5653051
Slightly Familiar	Very Familiar	-.6726854(*)	.19054269	.007	-1.2089920	-.1363788
	Familiar	-.5167394(*)	.14816781	.008	-.9337766	-.0997023
	Not Familiar	.1230795	.34232074	.988	-.8404258	1.0865847
Not Familiar	Very Familiar	-.7957649	.34995835	.163	-1.7807671	.1892374
	Familiar	-.6398189	.32881307	.288	-1.5653051	.2856673
	Slightly Familiar	-.1230795	.34232074	.988	-1.0865847	.8404258

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: The Authors.

Table 4 presents the respondents' degree of job familiarity is related to personal accomplishments significantly. By Scheffe post hoc method, it also found that the higher degree of job familiarity, the higher of their personal accomplishment.

***Correlations of Emotional Expression, suppression and Burnout***

The Pearson correlation in emotional expression, emotional suppression and burnout presents in table 5.

Table 5 Correlations of Emotional Expression, Emotional Depression and Burnout

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
<b>1. Emotional Exhaustion</b>	Pearson correlations Sig. (two-tailed)					
<b>2. Depersonalization</b>	Pearson correlations Sig. (two-tailed)	.402**				
<b>3. Personal accomplishment</b>	Pearson correlations Sig. (two-tailed)	-.183**	-.156*			
<b>4. Emotional Suppression</b>	Pearson correlations Sig. (two-tailed)	.250**	.396**	-.022		
<b>5. Emotional Expression</b>	Pearson correlations Sig. (two-tailed)	.168**	.348**	-.126*	.106	
		.007	.000	.045	.090	

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: The authors.

From Table 5, it shows the correlation among the burnout dimensions. The personal accomplishment with other two dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization) presents a negative correlation. The results show higher degree of emotional exhaustion, the higher depersonalization degree and the lower personal accomplishment. In addition, emotional suppression and emotional expression are positively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and a negative correlation with personal accomplishment. Especially, the high degree of emotional suppression results in a high degree of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

## 5. Conclusion

From the preliminary findings of this study, there are some recommendations as

follows:

Firstly, *The law enforcement agency should improve the working environment and conditions for their officers*: This study found that the degree of burnout of law enforcement officers is very high. In order to avoid serious behavioral consequences derived from burnout, to improve the work environment and conditions is important. Especially, owing to 12 hours overwork in each duty-day, many police in Taiwan have suffered sick or burnout symptom.

Secondly, *That is necessary to strengthen the law enforcement ethics training*: This study found that there are a high degree of depersonalization among law enforcement officers who engage in field work. It may mean that most street-level law enforcement officers usually hostile to those who don't comply with the police. In order to avoid the police to use excessive force in dealing with trouble person, the police education institute and police agency should strengthen the law enforcement ethics training.

The third recommendation is *to increase profession of law enforcement officers*: The study found that street-level law enforcement officers own the higher degree of job familiarity, the higher of their personal accomplishment. In order to increase their job familiarity and personal accomplishment, to increase profession of law enforcement officers is very important.

Finally, *The law enforcement agency should train and help their officers to manage their emotion*: This study found that the emotional labor, such as emotional suppression, and burn out, such as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, of Taiwan street-level law enforcement officers are quite serious, it is recommended to strengthen the officers emotional management training and counseling, and to enhance its public service motivation. Thus, it is possible to improve the quality of law enforcement.

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