

# The Relationship between Gender and Emotional Labor: A Research on Flight Attendants

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## Abstract

One of the most important values to be given importance by the businesses has been the human factor. The human factor is affected by both the physical and emotional characteristics of the individuals. The businesses inspect the human factor carefully because whether individuals are affected positively or negatively will also affect the businesses positively or negatively. In this study, the rates of emotional labor of the flight attendants as employees of airlines were analyzed according to gender differences. The analysis shows that there is not a significant relationship between the gender and the emotional labor. Nevertheless, it is observed that females have higher level of emotional labor compared to males.

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## 1. Introduction

Human factor is one of the most essential values in the operational success of the businesses. Today, it is important for the businesses to attach importance to the emotional characteristics of individuals as much as their physical characteristics so that the sustainability of the businesses is ensured. On the other hand, emotional labor is the display of desired emotions by the employees within the communication of businesses with their customers and whether the customers feel these emotions positively or negatively. It will be beneficial for all the employees, customers, suppliers and the managers of the business that the businesses managers call attention and attach importance to emotional labor for the management and shaping of the employees' emotions and employ accordingly. For the businesses to achieve their objectives and reach their goals, the employees are expected to make an effort on the concept of emotional labor.

Emotional labor provides various advantages for the business if managed properly by the managers. The positive outcomes of emotional labor include many issues such as the increase in the motivation of the employees, achievement of business objectives, increased customer satisfaction, high level of work performance and strong organizational commitment. Nonetheless, the negative outcomes of emotional labor for the business can be counted as burnout syndrome, work-family conflict, tendency to quit, psychological and physiological disorders, role conflict and alienation. Every business and

business manager who have the desire to be successful and continue their existence has to use emotional labor in a positive way (Barutçugil, 2003).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Scope and Definition of Emotional Labor

The changes in the feelings of an individual during a psychological assessment and managed by nerve endings of the brain are called emotion. In the process of emotional change, people will have many differences. The emotional changes are caused by the effect of human soul and brain and outside observers can sense these changes in the body language, facial expressions and skin color. The word "emotion" in English corresponds to emotions, that is, it is used to express the emotions outside the body (Keskin et al., 2013).

The emotions can be considered a natural part of human experience. They are reflected in the thoughts and words through previous experiences. The essential means of thought and talk is the sentence suggested through the words. The language communication expressed through emotions in daily life does not always reflect the real emotions of people. Therefore, sometimes the emotions can reveal the emotions of people or expected emotions or the emotions of people affected by the expectations. The mission of the corporate governance is to manage emotions according to corporate objectives (Vainik, 2002).

The emotions directly or indirectly affect the human behaviors cognitively, socially and physiologically. Thus, it can be useful for emotions to be managed in order to make operational activities more effective (Lord et al., 2002).

Emotional labor is the expression of desired emotions in the process of service delivery. The employees reflect their emotions and services in their works. The other field reflecting the emotions can be defined as the services provided to the customers. The emotions that the employees feel and experience during work may not always be as expected. Accordingly, emotional labor varies in accordance with the communication activity between the colleagues and their motivations (Güngör, 2009).

For the benefit of the company, directing and controlling the emotions of the employees can help corporate objectives to be achieved (Oktuğ, 2013).

Emotional labor can be defined as the management and shaping of the emotions throughout their careers while working professionally. Therefore, the employees are required to manage their social cognitions as well in the process of social labor. Emotional labor is a behavior that is observable regarding the service quality provided by the employees and defined as the effects of the employees' emotions on their job (Grandey, 2000).

The employees must not express their emotions the way they want in their daily lives. The people who think that their emotions are under control can be more disposed to exhibit behaviors that do not violate social norms rather than their own emotions. Individuals earning a certain amount of salary can be more disposed to control their emotions to get works done. Emotional labor is also defined as a form of reflecting emotions in accordance with the requirements of the job and exhibiting behaviors appropriate to objectives of the business (Köse and Oral, 2011).

Considering the positive and negative outcomes of emotional labor on people and organization, it has positive effects on motivation, improvement of business objectives, customer satisfaction, work performance and organizational commitment. Nevertheless, it has negative effects on the level of burnout, work-family conflict, tendency to quit, psychological-physiological disorders, role conflicts and alienation (Büyükbese and Aslan, 2019).

## 2.2. Gradual Development of Emotional Labor

The fundamentals of emotional labor concept date back a long time and have approximately 40 years of research field. Even though emotional labor concept which was introduced by Hochschild (1983) for the first time is about the regulation of emotions, it is defined within the scope of code of conduct performed by the individuals in the organization, that is workplace, as a part of their job and its scope has been renewed and expanded by many researchers until today.

As known to be introduced by Hochschild (1983) for the first time, emotional labor has been defined as the service provider's regulation of the forms of emotions that can be observed by the service receiver based on the ways of expression that the organization considers appropriate. Just like an actor who cries, gets angry, laughs and displays the characteristics of a character in spite of not being so, the service providers try to exhibit the emotions and behaviors required within the work environment even though they do not comply with their personality or current emotions (Hochschild, 1979; 1983).

While introducing emotional labor concept, similar with the social skills learnt through collaboration in the Zone of Proximal Development concept by Vygotsky (1980), Hochschild (1983) stated that there are certain rules in the display of behaviors, the emotions that need to be shown in certain conditions are learnt within the social environment in which the person is and can depend on the settings and the conditions. However, when the emotions that is to be felt in a certain condition is not the same with what the person actually feels, the person tries to resolve this inconsistency by regulating his/her emotions and behaviors, that is, using his/her thoughts (cognitive), and changing the physical indications caused by the emotions (physical) or the facial expressions (control of mimics and gestures). From this expression and the definition of emotional labor, it can be inferred that the factors such as the existence of display rules in organizations (i.e., in some shops, the salesperson does not sit at all), the relationship between the service provider and receiver (i.e., the interaction between the doctor and the patient while explaining the test results) and the inconsistency between the service provider's emotions and behaviors in accordance with the organization rules and the actual emotions and behaviors (i.e., the hotel receptionist welcomes a client with a smile even though s/he does not feel so) (Hochschild 1979; 1983).

Finally, Hochschild (1983) expresses that regardless of the actual emotion felt in a certain condition in the workplace, the individual uses the surface acting subdimension of emotional labor while displaying the expression of the emotion which is to be felt in that condition, and that when the individual regulates both his/her emotions and their expressions in accordance with the display rules in the same condition, s/he uses deep acting subdimension of emotional labor.

It can be said even by just looking at the definition part that Morris and Feldman (1996) handle the concept of emotional labor more comprehensively. According to this approach, emotional labor is comprised of 4 dimensions: the frequency of emotion display subdimension that considers the frequency of communication with the employees and service receivers and expresses that the increase in the frequency results in individuals exerting more effort; attentiveness subdimension expressing for how long and how severe the display rules will be in the interactions with the service receivers and that the duration of and increase in emotion display cause the individuals to exert more effort; variety of emotions subdimension expressing the types of positive, neutral or negative emotion display, respectively, to enhance the relationships with the service receivers, to transfer the authority to the service receiver and to control the service receiver, and that the increase in the variety requires more planning, effort and control; and lastly, emotional dissonance subdimension expressing the inconsistency between the emotion to be displayed and the emotion that is felt, and that an increase in this inconsistency results in individuals exerting more effort.

Throughout the years, Grandey (2000) defines the emotional labor concept the definitions and scope of which have been developed by various researchers, as the individual's regulation of his/her emotions and display of emotions to reach the objectives set by the organization and actually reveals the common aspect of the definitions mentioned from the very beginning.

By aiming to assert the research conducted until his time as a unifying model, Grandey (2000) has based his model upon Emotion Regulation Theory. Accordingly, the antecedent

focused emotion regulation based on changing the interpretation of the condition causing the emotion felt and the reaction focused emotion regulation based on changing the display of the emotion felt were used to explain emotional labor concept (Grandey, 2000).

Distraction method (i.e., when a salesperson is scolded by a customer in vain, s/he can think of his/her happy memories by saying "You are right" and distract himself/herself from anger) and cognitive change method (i.e., every time a customer says something negative, the salesperson infers that "S/he is an angry person I guess" and exclude himself/herself) is included in the antecedent oriented emotion regulation and these methods are associated with emotional labor deep acting method according to Grandey (2000).

In the reaction (response) focused emotion regulation method, the person changes the display of his/her emotions (i.e., the doctor who is nervous about a critical surgery controls his/her facial expressions and betrays no emotion) to show reactions appropriate to the situation instead of changing his/her emotions regarding a situation and this method is associated with surface action dimension of emotional labor according to Grandey (2000).

Grandey (2000) who generally includes emotion regulation model in emotional labor states that it is necessary to consider 3 main factors (situational signs and emotional events, the process of emotion regulation and emotional labor, long-term outcomes of emotional labor) and additional factors such as individual and corporate factors, and that emotional labor has a complex structure.

### 2.3. Relationship between Emotional Labor and Gender

There have been many studies conducted on the relationship between emotional labor and gender. In a study carried out in 1993, gender factor was observed between the relationships of work-family conflict and work-family role. It was concluded that females had more tendency towards emotion management under the conditions of both home and work compared to males (Savaşkan and Gökteş Kulualp, 2019). In the study by Dursunova and Geylan in 2020, it was presented that females experienced more emotional labor than males. As a result, a significant relationship between gender orientation and emotional labor (Dursunova and Geylan, 2021).

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Limitations

As the results of this study can vary according to the current sample, the findings are limited to the sample and must be tested with different sample groups. The results obtained from the research may vary over time. Therefore, the results must be evaluated considering the time period. The scales used can vary according to the perception of applied sampling.

### 3.1. Universe and Sampling

The flight attendants working at airline companies constitutes the universe of the research. The sample includes participants from different airline companies and representing the universe. The sample in this study was determined through "quota sampling" as a nonrandom sampling method. In order to apply quota sampling, it must be determined according to which characteristics the information to be collected will be evaluated. Besides, the sample representing the universe must be in accordance with the current distribution (İslamoğlu and Almacık, 2014, p.190). The data obtained from 650

individuals working at airline companies through surveys were evaluated. The survey was distributed to the flight attendants and 385 of them were taken back. The rate of return is 59.23%.

### 3.3. Method of Analysis

At the beginning of the research, reliability analyses were conducted and Cronbach alpha values were detected. Cronbach alpha coefficient shows the internal consistency of the survey. Alpha coefficient is evaluated according to the intervals below (Kalaycı, 2008):

1. The scale is "not reliable" if  $a < 0.40$
2. The scale is "less reliable" if  $0.40 < a < 0.60$
3. The scale is "rather reliable" if  $0.60 < a < 0.80$
4. The scale is "very reliable" if  $0.80 < a < 1.00$ .

Questions regarding demographic information were included in the first part of the survey, while questions for emotional labor scale were included in the second part. 5-point Likert scale was used in the scales (1-Strongly Disagree/5-Strongly Agree). Emotional Labor Scale was generated by Diefendorff et al. (2005) by adapting some items and improving some other items of emotional labor scales by Grandey (2003) and Kruml and Geddes (2000). Turkish adaptation and the analyses of reliability and validity were conducted by Basım and Beğenirbaş (2012). The scale consists of 3 dimensions as surface acting, deep acting and natural (sincere) emotions. In the scale, surface acting is evaluated through 6 items, while deep acting is evaluated through 4 and natural emotions through 3 items. The scale includes items such as "I act like I feel good when I am with the passengers" and "I make an effort to feel the emotions that I need to display in real life". Cronbach alpha reliability value of three-factor emotional labor scale was found to be 0.813 (rather reliable).

As a result of factor analysis for Emotional Labor Scale, 3 factors were validated. Total variance explained is 53.347%. Considering the scale factors, it was found that the "surface acting" factor had a share of 12.732%, the "deep acting" factor 11,358%, and the "natural emotions" factor 10.889% of the explained variance. The test result of Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) sample suitability was 0.857. Cronbach alpha reliability values for emotional labor dimensions were found to be 0.889 for surface acting factor, 0.861 for deep acting factor and 0.803 for natural feelings factor.

Data obtained were analyzed on SPSS 22 program and the mean, frequency and percentage distributions of the answers were calculated and the results were exhibited both in table and in written. T Test was conducted while hypotheses were tested. As a result of the analysis, Ho was rejected if the p value was lower than alpha value 0.05. If the p value was higher than alpha value 0.05, it was stated that there was a significant relationship between the two variables.

For normality, normal probability plot where the observed and expected values of data in distribution was shown on a chart and also Kolmogorov-Smirnov values which is a normality test were analyzed. It was observed that the values were gathered on or around a line in the probability plots and that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test values were at  $p < 0.05$  significance level and all data were normally distributed.

### 3.4. Hypotheses

In the study, whether there was a relationship between gender and emotional labor were evaluated and this hypothesis was put forward:

Ho: Emotional Labor does not vary by gender.

H1: Emotional Labor varies by gender.

4. Findings

In this section, survey results applied during research process are given. Gender data, mean of answers for survey

questions, mean of answers according to gender and T Test results are given both in table and in written.

3.4. Gender Data

From the demographic characteristics of survey, it is observed that there are 235 female participants and 150 male participants. Because it is known that women prefer this profession more than men, this difference can be acceptable

Table 1. Gender Data

Gender	Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Female	235	61.0	61.0
Male	150	39.0	100.0
Overall	385	100.0	-

Table 2. Emotional Labor Items

Questions	N	Min.	Max.	Avg.	S. D.
I act like I feel good when I am with the passengers	385	1	5	2.6831	1.44639
It feels like I wear a mask to display the emotions my job requires.	385	1	5	2.9922	1.38159
When I am with passengers, I put extra effort as if I am in a show.	385	1	5	2.9299	1.37983
I act to deal with passengers appropriately.	385	1	5	3.0571	1.31571
I act like I feel the emotions that I do not feel while working.	385	1	5	3.1455	1.36536
When I am with passengers, I display emotions different than I actually feel.	385	1	5	2.9143	1.26468
I make an effort to actually feel the emotions I need to display.	385	1	5	2.3844	1.13549
I do my best to feel the emotions I have to display to the passengers.	385	1	5	2.2597	1.13425
I make a great effort to feel the emotions that I have to display to the passengers.	385	1	5	2.4519	1.13807
I try to really experience the emotions that I have to display to the passengers.	385	1	5	2.2831	1.08029
The emotions I display to the passengers arise spontaneously.	385	1	5	3.6545	1.11226
The emotions I display to the passengers are sincere.	385	1	5	3.9740	0.98391
The emotions I display to the passengers are the same as those I felt at that moment.	385	1	5	3.7039	1.14365
<b>Overall Mean</b>	-	-	-	2.9564	-

In the survey results, while 1 means that emotional labor is low, 5 means it is high. As a result, the answers that the participants gave show that overall mean of emotional labor analysis is 2.9564

Table 3. Mean by Gender.

From the answers of females or males to emotional labor questions, it is observed that females have a mean rate of 3.0085, while males have 2.8720. Accordingly, it can be inferred that women have more emotional labor than men.

Group Mean					
	Gender	N	Avg.	S. D.	Avg. Std. Error
DE_Mean	Female	235	3.0085	.65413	.04267
	Male	149	2.8720	.72064	.05904

**Table 4.** T Test

	Levene Test for the Equality of Variances		T test						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tails)	Mean difference	S. D.	95% conf. interval	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
DE_Mean	3.747	.054	1.916	382	.056	.13654	.07128	-.00361	.27670
			1.874	292.530	.062	.13654	.07284	-.00682	.27991

As a result of T Test, Ho cannot be rejected because sig. value in Table 4 is higher than alpha value 0.05. In accordance with this sample, no significant relationship between gender and emotional labor could be found.

### 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to show whether there was a difference between the genders of flight attendants working at airlines and emotional labor.

It is important for the emotional labor to be measured in aviation which is within service sector in terms of aviation safety and the future of the companies. Data of 385 participants in total were evaluated in the study. The number of female flight attendants was 235 and male flight attendants was 150 in this evaluation. Because women prefer this profession more than men, this difference can be acceptable.

The analysis of the answers to survey questions shows that the mean of 365 flight attendants' emotional labor is 2.9564. From this mean, it is observed that the mean of emotional labor is generally low. Nevertheless, except for the overall mean, the mean of emotional labor for women is 3.0085 while for men 2.8720 based on gender mean. This shows that women are in emotional labor more than men.

Considering whether there is a significant relationship between gender and emotional labor factor, no significant relationship was found. However, it must be remembered that this result is limited to the sample of this study and can vary in other studies.

To summarize in general, there is not a significant relationship between the gender and the level of emotional labor to be experienced in accordance with this sample. Nevertheless, it is observed that women slightly have a higher level of emotional labor mean than men.

In the forthcoming periods, new analyses can be made through a more comprehensive study with flight attendants working domestically and abroad from different control variables. Except for the flying aviators, studies can be conducted with the aviation personnel working at the ground operations or administrative departments and the emotional labor results of employees from different fields can be obtained. New studies especially in the service sector where emotional labor is intensely experiences and in the aviation sector where the circulation rate is much higher than the other sectors on a sectoral basis or in other sectors can provide important and valuable results.

As a suggestion to the airline companies, it is thought that this kind of studies can be helpful for the department of human

resources to obtain important information in the process of employment. There is a system called Crew Resource Management (CRM) which is important in terms of aviation safety in the aviation industry as a sector where the human factor is intense and errors can never be allowed. CRM is always used in the trainings of all cabin crews and in their career. The main goal of CRM is to keep the human factor at the lowest level in this operation by minimizing errors with the coordinated and appropriate risk management of the entire crew in order to carry out the flight operation to be performed in a safe and effective way, and thus to prevent possible accidents or incidents (Terzioğlu, 2010). Since CRM is essential for the aviation safety, flight attendants are essential for CRM. Therefore, the airlines must elect the appropriate persons in terms of CRM. Additionally, as the flight attendants are always with the passengers, they are the ambassadors of the airlines in a way. This is why the emotional labor behaviors of the flight attendants are highly important and this cannot be ignored by the airline companies. In this sense, the airline companies must establish a professional and corporate human resources department, create human resources for the corporate culture, determine various stages for the employment process and make evaluations through personality tests and psychological interviews. Otherwise, the probability of moral and material damage in short- and long-term especially in the aviation sector will be inevitable.

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