

## Emotional Labor in Aviation: A Phenomenological Research on Cabin Crew

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the factors affecting the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew in aviation and the results of emotional labor. For this aim, qualitative research method was used to examine the research topic in detail. The research was guided by using the phenomenology design, which is one of the qualitative research designs. The research sample was determined according to purposeful sampling and saturation point methods. In this context, the sample of the research consists of 11 cabin attendants working in different airline companies in Turkey. Interview method was used as a data collection tool. The data obtained was subjected to content analysis with an inductive and descriptive approach. As a result of the content analysis, the research findings were grouped under two main themes as factors affecting emotional labor and the results of emotional labor. Factors affecting emotional labor behavior were examined under six sub-themes: organizational factors, individual factors, demographic features, passenger type, physical work environment and content of the flight task. The results of emotional labor were examined under two sub-themes as organizational and individual results. While organizational results are positive results that increase organizational performance and create a positive organizational impression, it has been observed that individual results seen on cabin crew have positive and negative sides.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Labor, Cabin Crew, Flight Attendant, Aviation*



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The idea of “working life”, wherein individuals devote a large portion of their lives, has persisted throughout history and will do so in the future. Modern factories, workplaces, and working styles have seen several changes since the industrial revolution. Realizing the worth and significance of the human element for businesses has been one of the most significant of these changes. The methods of the past, in which social connections and emotions were disregarded and individuals were viewed as machines that contributed to the industrial process, have been abandoned in this setting. It has been recognized throughout history that people, or more specifically, employees, are the most precious resource that not only physically but also emotionally contributes to organizational success and gives firms a competitive edge.

People are emotional beings. Emotions influence conduct directly, therefore ignoring them hurts people's performances. For this reason, an awareness of emotions is necessary to comprehend and control employees' organizational behaviors (Akçay & Çoruk, 2012). Employees must engage in emotional labor to comprehend client requests, solve their problems, and please them, especially in the service industry. Emotional labor is crucial to the aviation industry, which is a significant part of the transportation sector since it has a functioning system that offers passengers constant service. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), emotional labor is characterized by employee behaviors that are dictated by organizational policies rather than their true feelings. The behaviors that employees display in the workplace align with the expectations set by the firm. In this situation, emotional labor is expressed by the effort and self-control that employees must exhibit to demonstrate the desired behaviors (England & Farkas, 1986). When the reasons behind employees' emotional labor are examined, it becomes clear that employees essentially express their feelings by what their employers demand of them (Seçer, 2007). Based on this fundamental rationale, incompatibility between the emotions felt and displayed results in undesirable outcomes such as burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and stress (Gürel & Bozkurt, 2016). Even if emotional incompatibilities put employees in unpleasant situations, emotional labor has a favorable impact on the productivity and efficiency of the company (Aslan, 2023; Steinberg & Figart, 1999). In this regard, this study aimed to examine the variables influencing emotional labor and its outcomes. The study was carried out on cabin crew, who have frequent social encounters with passengers in aviation and who serve as the public face of airline companies. To achieve this aim, a review of previous research on the topic was done before using a qualitative research approach called content analysis to assess the data from participant interviews.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section of the study, which includes a literature review, the concept of emotional labor is first defined, then the factors affecting emotional labor and the results of emotional labor on organizations and employees are examined.

## 2.1. Emotional Labor

Combining the ideas of emotion and labor creates the concept of emotional labor. Emotions are the internal states people experience in response to stimuli and then project onto their conduct. The sociology of emotions concerns people's feelings, desires, and attempts to feel, as well as how they express, manage, categorize, and make meaning of their emotions (Seçer, 2007; Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Primary and secondary emotions are the two types of human emotions. Primary emotions are the fundamental, innate, and taught emotions that humans experience. These include feelings of joy, rage, fear, surprise, contempt, or humiliation. Experiences teach and grant the acquisition of secondary emotions. Secondary emotions can differ depending on a person's personality features and are a mixture of basic emotions. Among the secondary emotions are pride, humiliation, regret, anger, enthusiasm, and boredom (Kemer & Dost, 2020). On the other hand, the Turkish Language Association dictionary defines labor as “body and head power spent to do a job; sweat of forehead” (<https://sozluk.gov.tr>). Emotions, a human quality, are inextricably linked to the concept of labor since, as its definition makes it clear, labor is the power that individuals expend intellectually and physically.

It is feasible to claim that emotional labor is connected to people's inner lives in their working lives when the concept is examined. The idea of emotional labor was initially proposed and published by Hochschild (1979). According to Hochschild (1979), managing emotions in exchange for the money one receives from this exchange is emotional labor. Emotions are traded like commodities. Asforth and Humphrey (1993) considered emotional labor as an impression management strategy and, in contrast to Hochschild (1983), placed more emphasis on behaviors than emotions. They defined emotional labor as the behaviors that employees exhibit rather than how they feel at work. Since actions are observable and have an immediate impact on the other person. According to England and Farkas (1986), emotional labor is the effort and self-control exerted by employees on the actions that are expected of them within the context of organizational expectations at work. Emotional labor involves transforming one's emotions to perform in a way that satisfies employment criteria, particularly in industries that demand intimate client-customer relationships (Karaman, 2017).

According to Grandey (2000), emotional labor refers to emotion regulation theory. Emotion regulation theory (Gross, 1998) refers to a process related to how, when, and how emotions are displayed. The emotion regulation process can be realized in two ways: antecedent-focused and response-focused. In the process of antecedent-focused regulation, the individual perceptually changes the current situation, while in response-focused regulation, the individual changes his/her reaction to the situation (Kamber, 2014). Individuals' reactions are the behaviors and feelings expected from them by the organizations they work for. In this context, there are two ways of displaying emotion. The first is superficial, and the other is deep behavior (Hochschild, 1983). The superficial behavior dimension of emotional labor is that the employee shows the expected behaviors to the service recipients through gestures, mimics, body language, or tone of voice by differentiating them from their own emotions and

controlling them (Aslan, 2023). Superficial behavior is when the employee shows his/her emotions to the customer in a fake way. In-depth behavior, on the other hand, is when employees suppress their own emotions to show their emotions in line with the organization's expectations or make an effort to enter the desired emotion and act like an actor (Hochschild, 1983).

A phony display of emotion by an employee toward a customer is known as superficial behavior. On the other hand, in-depth conduct occurs when staff members try to project the intended mood and behave theatrically, or when they repress their own emotions in order to express their feelings in accordance with organizational standards (Hochschild, 1983). According to Thoits (1989), there are two ways we can manipulate our emotions: through surface acting and deep acting. We transform our emotions from the exterior to the inside when we engage in surface acting. We alter our emotions from the inside out when we engage in deep acting. Employees may exhibit surface behavior when asked to hide their negative emotions, such as anger, resentment, etc., but they will also exhibit deep behavior when they feel the positive behaviors that are expected of them, such as smiling, empathizing, and helping the other party (Kim, 2008). In addition to the deep and surface behavior components of emotional labor, Ashfort and Humphrey (1993) introduced a third dimension: sincere behavior. In terms of sincere behavior, employees sometimes exhibit the behaviors expected of them without effort. Stated differently, sincere behavior occurs when an employee experiences the feelings that are required of them and effortlessly conveys those feelings to the client. As a result, the worker feels less stressed and is more motivated at work.

## **2.2. Factors Affecting Emotional Labor**

Emotion regulation and management is referred to as emotional labor. People express their emotions differently in both their personal and professional lives (Erkuş & Günlü, 2018). Hochschild (1983) highlighted three important traits of emotional labor in the workplace. The first of these traits is that for employees to demonstrate emotional labor, they must be in contact with customers over the phone or in person. Second, staff members must put the customers' needs ahead of their feelings. Lastly, employees must behave in a way consistent with the organization's behavior patterns in the interaction between them and their customers.

Organizational values and belief systems are interwoven with the display of emotional labor. The employees' emotional expression guidelines become apparent when considering the relevant values and belief systems. Emotional labor pertains to determining which feelings one should exhibit in specific circumstances or elicit from the other person. Display rules refer to the rules governing which behaviors are required in particular contexts, whereas emotion rules specify which feelings should be felt in specific circumstances (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Various factors can influence emotional labor behavior in the workplace outside of behavioral norms and organizational expectations. Emotional labor behavior is influenced by both organizational and individual elements, including support from

coworkers and bosses, as well as individual factors like gender, emotional intelligence, and emotional influencing ability (Grandey, 2000).

### **2.3. Results of Emotional Labor**

In the context of emotional labor behavior, controlling and managing employees' emotions leads to various beneficial organizational outcomes, including reaching targeted objectives, boosting performance, making a good impression on the target audience, and guaranteeing customer satisfaction. However, suppression of emotions can result in emotional conflicts, consumer dissatisfaction, and employee emotional resource exhaustion (Ezilmez, 2018). Customers perceive employees as the company since they are the public face of the enterprise. Consequently, consumers' perceptions of quality service are directly correlated with the emotional labor that personnel perform (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Employee emotional incompatibilities resulting from emotional labor lead to stress, job discontent, and burnout over time in industries where there is a fierce rivalry and performance-based compensation (Duman, 2017).

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study is to examine the factors affecting the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew in aviation and the results of emotional labor. For this aim, qualitative research method was used to examine the research topic in detail. The research was guided by using the phenomenology design, which is one of the qualitative research designs. The phenomenology design, which both guides and gives flexibility to the researcher without leaving the focus of the research, allows the in-depth and detailed examination of unknown phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

### **3.1. Sample, Data Collection Tool and Process**

Participants in the research were selected according to the purposeful sampling method. The purposeful sampling method allows the researcher to select participants who provide the best understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2017). For this reason, cabin crew working in civil aviation companies in Turkey were selected as the research sample. The reason why the sample of the research consists of cabin crew is because these employees, who work under extremely flexible working conditions in aviation that provides service at all hours of the day, have to communicate face to face with passengers for a long time and exhibit intense emotional labor towards passengers during this communication.

Semi-structured interview method was used to collect data in the research. The research questions prepared by taking into account the literature review and scales regarding the concept of emotional labor and addressed to the participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Research Questions

<b>Questions</b>
1. Does your job as a cabin crew require emotional labor?
2. When you perform emotional labor, do you do it because of your job or do you actually want it? What factors influence this behavior?
3. In your opinion, does performing emotional labor differ according to demographic features?
4. What are the results of emotional labor in your job in terms of organizational performance?
5. Does emotional labor as part of your job have a positive impact on your individual skills at work or in daily life?

Due to the intensity of the participants' workload, flexible working hours, and time constraints, the interviews were held online with each participant separately between May and July 2023. 50 minutes were planned for the interview with each participant. However, the duration of some interviews exceeded the planned time to collect sufficient data. The data collection process was finished when it reached the saturation point. In qualitative research, data collection is finished if the data obtained for the formation of research themes reaches a certain level of saturation and new perspectives do not emerge (Creswell, 2017). The data collection process was finished after interviewing 11 participants within the framework of the saturation point. Descriptive statistics of participants are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Working Time (Year)</b>
P1	Female	Single	46	Master's Degree	Cabin Chief	20
P2	Female	Married	37	Bachelor's Degree	Cabin Chief	13
P3	Male	Married	29	Bachelor's Degree	Attendant	4
P4	Female	Single	41	Bachelor's Degree	Cabin Chief	13
P5	Female	Married	38	Master's Degree	Cabin Chief	14
P6	Female	Single	27	Bachelor's Degree	Attendant	5
P7	Male	Married	37	Bachelor's Degree	Cabin Chief	11
P8	Female	Single	37	Bachelor's Degree	Cabin Chief	12
P9	Male	Single	28	Bachelor's Degree	Attendant	6
P10	Male	Married	38	Master's Degree	Attendant	6
P11	Male	Single	26	Bachelor's Degree	Attendant	3

### 3.2. Data Analysis Method

The audio recordings obtained through the interviews were deciphered and edited together with the notes taken by the researchers during the interviews and evaluated according to content analysis. Content analysis, which is the most suitable method for qualitative research (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999), consists of coding the data, finding categories and themes, organizing the resulting codes, categories, and themes, and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The emerging themes were supported by quotes from participant statements, and the findings were interpreted by the researchers in the conclusion. In addition, the findings obtained during the content analysis were supported by quantitative data such as frequency and percentage and visualized by creating a word

cloud. The approaches adopted regarding the validity and reliability of the research are listed below (Creswell, 2017; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018; Sığırı, 2021):

- While determining the research topic and questions, experts working in the aviation industry were interviewed and the content of the research was guided according to their feedback.
- Information about the research method, process, and results are explained in detail.
- The sample of the research was determined according to the purposeful sampling method.
- Long-term interaction was achieved with the data obtained in the research; The data were cross-examined separately by two researchers and the raw data was stored.
- The codes, categories, and themes that emerged from content analysis were presented to the reader without being interpreted by the researchers.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The themes of the research resulting from the content analysis are presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Themes of The Research

Themes	Sub-Themes	Categories	Codes	Code Freq.	Sub-Themes/ Categories Freq.	Sub-Themes %	
Factors Affecting Emotional Labor	Organizational Factors		Organizational Rules	16	41	%11.4	
			Organizational Trainings	16			
			Professionalism	9			
	Individual Factors			Feeling Good	11	39	%10.8
				Internalizing Emotions	3		
				Loving Your Job	4		
				Personal Satisfaction	5		
				Desire to Please Passengers	15		
				Fear of Dismissal	1		
	Demographic Features			Gender	11	50	%13.8
				Age	11		
				Working Time	11		
				Marital Status	10		
				Personality Traits	7		
	Passenger Type	Special Passengers		Passenger with Fear of Flying	11	70	
				Passenger with Child/Baby	12		
				Disabled Passenger	11		
				Sick Passenger	11		
				Elderly Passenger	11		
			Some Destination Passengers	14			
Unruly Passengers				Drunk Passenger	14	79	%41.5
				Stressed Passenger	3		
				Group Passenger VIP	15		
				Business/Economy	14		
				Demanding Passenger	12		
				Famous and Government Official	16		
		Tired Passenger	3				
		Swearing Passenger	2				

Physical Work Environment		Narrow Space	3	22	%6
		Pressure	5		
		Light	6		
		Noise	3		
		Small Aircraft	2		
		Temperature	3		
Task Type		Night Flight	5	7	
		Long Flight	2		
Content of The Flight Task	Critical and Urgent Phases of the Flight Task	Passenger Welcoming	6	52	%16.5
		Passenger Settlement	1		
	Departure	6			
	Service Phase	22			
	Turbulence	3			
	Descent	10			
	Slide Explosion	2			
	Unsafe Door Opening	2			
Total		360	%100		
Organizational Results		Organizational Profit Increase	11	41	%36.6
		Positive Organizational Impression	8		
		Organizational Advertisement	7		
		Happy Passenger	4		
		Frequent Flyer	1		
		Increase in the Number of Loyal Passenger	8		
			2		
Results of Emotional Labor	Negative	Emotional Dissonance	4	24	
		Internal Conflict	4		
		Suppression of Emotions	4		
	Individual Results	Burnout	3		
		Stress	7		
		Outbursts of Anger	2		
Positive	Patience	18	50	%63.4	
	Anger Management	5			
	Conflict Management	2			
	Problem Solving	7			
	Practical Thinking	3			
	Empathy	9			
	Self-Confidence	3			
	Crisis Management	2			
Discipline	1				
Total		115	%100		

As seen in Table 3, the research findings are grouped under two main themes as factors affecting emotional labor and the results of emotional labor. The theme of factors affecting emotional labor is divided into six sub-themes, and the theme of the results of emotional labor is divided into two sub-themes. However, some sub-themes are divided into categories within themselves. The classification of categories and sub-themes were made according to codes that create semantic integrity with each other. The content analysis carried out by taking into account the themes is presented below.

#### 4.1. Theme 1: Factors Affecting Emotional Labor

Under Theme 1, the factors affecting the emotional labor behavior of employees were examined in six sub-themes: organizational factors, individual factors, demographic features, passenger type,





#### **4.1.2. Individual Factors**

Individual factors refer to the sincere feelings and behaviors of employees when performing emotional labor. Individual factors are generally similar to the sincere behavior dimension of emotional labor.

P2: *“We are actually obliged to do emotional labor, but I have internalized this situation.”*

P4: *“We show our emotions as per our nature, not by force, and the emotions we show generally match the expectations of the organization from us.”*

P5: *“We cannot convey emotions to the passenger without internalizing them.”*

P8: *“We display emotional labor willingly, but sometimes we fake our emotions because the workplace demands it”.*

P9: *“I perform emotional labor for my own personal satisfaction, not because the organization demands it.”*

P3: *“If you cannot perform emotional labor, you will be fired or you will have to leave yourself.”*

Some participants stated that they exhibited emotional labor willingly, but that the emotional labor they showed coincided with the behaviors that the organization expected from them. In cases where emotions cannot be internalized, it has been observed that emotional labor is performed, even if unintentionally, by the organizational rules. As in P2's statement *“I internalized emotional labor”* participants' working time may be effective in the internalization of emotional labor. As Hochschild (1983) suggests, employees show emotional labor with sincere behavior in some cases. In this context, factors such as employees' feeling of well-being, internalizing emotions, liking their job, personal satisfaction, and the desire to please passengers were evaluated as individual factors affecting emotional labor. However, *“fear of dismissal”* was seen as an exceptional and negative individual factor affecting emotional labor.

#### **4.1.3. Demographic Features**

Emotional labor differs according to participants' gender, marital status, age, working time and personality traits; however, it was observed that there was no significant difference according to education level.

##### **4.1.3.1. Gender**

P1, P2, P9, P10 and P11: *“Women show more emotional labor than men.”*

P10: *“Women are better at emotional labor than men. Men cannot show the kindness that women show. Women are more developed in terms of body language and emotional intelligence. Men are a little more straightforward in this regard.”*

P3 and P4: *“Men are more successful in emotional labor than women because they perform more easily due to their nature.”*

P11: *“Being a cabin crew member and doing emotional labor suits women better. However, men are indispensable in the cabin in terms of emotional labor in jobs that require strength or in situations where you need to be stricter (for example, handcuffing an unruly passenger).”*

P6, P7 and P8: *“There is no difference between men and women when it comes to emotional labor.”*

Most participants think that women are more successful than men in emotional labor. However, some participants stated that there was no difference in emotional labor behavior according to gender. When the literature is examined, the concept of emotional labor is associated with feminine behaviors. According to Hochschild (1983), women engage in more emotional labor behavior than men. The friendly attitudes and attractive appearances of female employees who establish close relationships with customers are considered sexy or romantic by men. For this reason, businesses expect their female employees to show more emotional labor (Türkay et al., 2011).

#### **4.1.3.2. Age and Working Time**

P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10: *“People gain experience as age and working time increase, and experience positively affects emotional labor.”*

P2: *“Some of our young friends get stressed when they encounter problems and have difficulty communicating. You will not have any difficulties with experience.”*

P8: *“Age affects emotional labor, of course your perspective changes over time. Experienced people are more successful.”*

P11: *“I think age affects emotional labor. In recent teams, young colleagues may experience communication problems with their superiors and may oppose everything. If the employee has gained experience in different sectors, he does his job well, but those whose first job is as a cabin attendant may have difficulty.”*

Participants seem to agree that as employees' age and working time increase, their professional experience also increases, and this reflects positively on their emotional labor behaviors. In the study conducted by Doğan and Sıgır (2017), employees exhibited more superficial behavior in the first years of their career; it has been determined that they display more in-depth behavior in their later years with age and experience. Emotions and behaviors of employees vary according to gender and age, as well as the sector, institution and work experience they work in (Kaya & Özhan, 2012). Similarly, in his study, Çolak (2022) concluded that cabin crew with six years or more of experience are more successful in exhibiting emotional labor.

#### **4.1.3.3. Marital Status**

P2: *“Married people are more understanding, and those with children are more sensitive towards passengers with children.”*

P4: *“I can say that married employees tend to find middle ground with passengers.”*

P6: *“I think that married people with children exhibit more emotional labor. They are more helpful and responsive to passengers.”*

P7: *“Marital status affects emotional labor. Because employees who are married and have children are more sensitive to passengers who are mothers and try to help them.”*

It has been observed that the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew varies according to marital status. Compared to single employees, it has been revealed that married employees and especially those with children behave empathetically towards passengers who are like them and, in this context, exhibit more sensitive, helpful and understanding behavior.

#### **4.1.3.4. Personality Traits**

P3: *“Most of my friends who resigned were unsocial, introverted and lacking empathy.”*

P6: *“In terms of emotional labor, cold-blooded, sincere and practical personality traits are more suitable for cabin crew.”*

P8: *“Extroverted, attractive, psychologically resilient, prone to team work, social and friendly people are preferred for cabin crew positions.”*

P11: *“As a personality, someone who is talkative, extroverted and perceptive is suitable for a cabin crew position. People with limited perception cannot do this job.”*

It has been observed that especially employees with extroverted and social personality traits are more suitable for performing emotional labor. Extroverts; while exhibiting personality traits such as being friendly, talkative, easy to communicate, sincere, prone to team work, and strong in social aspects; Introverts, on the other hand, are individuals who are calm, shy, live in their own inner world, and have less social interaction with people (Çoban & Deniz, 2021).

#### **4.1.4. Passenger Type**

It was seen that passenger type had an important impact on the emotional labor of cabin crew. The sub-theme of passenger type was examined in two categories special and unruly passengers. Passengers with a fear of flying and children/babies, as well as disabled, sick, and elderly passengers, are considered special passengers since they need assistance during air travel. Additionally, passengers of certain destinations (Russian and Indian) were also considered special passengers. Passengers who are drunk, taking pills, stressed, swearing, VIP, business/economy, demanding, famous, government official, tired, and group are considered as unruly passengers. Unruly passengers are passengers who

disturb the peace of other passengers, damage items inside the aircraft, and disrupt the flight order (Schaaf, 2001).

#### **4.1.4.1 Special Passengers**

P4: *On flights to Russia, we are tired of Russian passengers asking for more than one drink at the same time. On flights to India, passengers have special requests. For example, they want vegan food."*

P5: *"Mother cabin attendants are emotional and nurturing. She takes better care of the passengers. When she sees a passenger with a baby, she wants to bring him food."*

P8: *"We show more emotional labor to passengers who are afraid of flying or have children."*

P10: *"We touch people's hearts. We are not just service people. We have elderly, sick, children, babies and disabled passengers. We immediately notice these passengers when they enter the plane and help them."*

#### **4.1.4.2 Unruly Passengers**

P3: *"The passengers I have difficulty performing emotional labor with are drunk passengers because we cannot communicate with them."*

P5: *"Trying to deal with a unruly passenger makes us tired. For example, drunk and stressed passengers challenge me."*

P7: *"A foreign passenger, who probably took pills and was swearing, started attacking the surroundings and was handed over to the police upon landing."*

P6: *"Groups are becoming more exuberant. They need to be together and talk. Therefore, they disturb other passengers."*

P3: *"Hajj passengers, among the group passengers, may not eat some foods because they are haram. This makes us sad. We also empathize. This can increase our workload and we get stressed. Also, Hajj passengers, create problems in seat selection."*

P10: *"Football player groups are tiring. Their demands never end."*

P8: *"I can say that I have difficulty in performing emotional labor for VIP passengers."*

P11: *"Famous passengers challenge us in terms of emotional labor. Because they act like waiters towards us when communicating. VIP, government officials and business passengers do not want to give up their bags. We tell them the flight rules."*

P6: *"Business passengers are a little more controlled. You make jokes in economy class and they laugh. In business class, you can think twice about whether he will laugh if I tell a joke. So we are more careful business class"*

P8: *“When the economy passenger gets on the plane, he wants something immediately. But he can complain by saying it didn't come right away. For example, he asks for water during boarding. I say I can't give him water right now, but he insistently wants something that doesn't exist.”*

P2: *“When I compare business and economy class, economy class challenges me even though we treat both classes the same.”*

P8: *“I would like to share with you a moment when I had difficulty doing emotional labor. A passenger died on the plane, and while we were upset about it, other passengers asked for food. When I went towards the back, I saw a passenger watching a porn movie. Facing such a situation on an airplane with a funeral, I can say that it forced me in terms of emotional labor by causing me to be confused about which emotion I should feel.”*

Although specific emotional patterns need to be shown to passengers in the aviation industry, it has been observed that the emotional labor behaviors of cabin crew towards special and unruly passengers vary. The cabin crew exhibits more sensitive and helpful behavior towards special passengers. These behaviors stem from the fact that special passengers are more in need of help than other passengers and the cabin crew empathizes with them. However, passengers, who are intoxicated and not conscious as a result of using drugs such as alcohol, medicine, and pills, act outside the rules and force the employees in the context of emotional labor. IATA (2015) grouped unruly passenger behavior into four groups according to their levels. In this context, many unruly passenger behaviors are depending on their level, such as verbal attacks, failure to comply with the flight crew's instructions, discourteous behavior, unreasonable demands, suspicious behavior, physical attack, sexual harassment, threats of violence and damage to flight equipment.

Participants stated that they could not communicate with drunk passengers or that they had difficulty communicating with them due to their excessive behavior. Passengers who try to relax or overcome their fear of flying by drinking alcohol may become drunk after a while and react more emotionally in the challenging flight environment (Fogg, 2001). In addition to drunk passengers, the difficult-to-control behavior of group passengers due to their desire to communicate with each other and the demanding and unethical behavior of the crowded economy class put a strain on the cabin crew. It has been observed that VIP, business, celebrity, and government official passengers do not comply with the rules due to reasons such as their social status, seat class, or ego satisfaction, and cabin crew members act more carefully when communicating with these passengers and are under stress in terms of emotional labor. However, it has been determined that tired passengers, behave sexually, and lack empathy also act unruly.

#### **4.1.5. Physical Work Environment**

Since people spend most of their daily lives in the work environment, the physical characteristics of the work environment directly affect employees' behaviors such as job satisfaction, organizational

commitment, and individual performance (Akça & Yurtçu, 2019). In this context, it has been observed that the physical work environment of cabin crew affects emotional labor.

P1: *“The cabin environment affects our emotional labor. A narrow workspace can be uncomfortable. Working under pressure for a long time can trigger migraine pain.”*

P3: *“Physical conditions such as temperature, light, and noise affect our emotional labor. Not feeling comfortable in the physical environment can cause us to experience physical fatigue and decrease our capacity, which in turn can be reflected in our emotions.”*

P4: *“Working on small planes rather than large planes makes us tired. If the plane is small, we have to lie down bent over and can not rest. We do not reflect this situation on the passenger, but it affects us.”*

P8: *“Pressure causes physical fatigue. When you get physically tired, it becomes difficult to perform emotional labor.”*

P9: *“In my opinion, noise and hot weather are important physical factors that affect emotional labor.”*

It was observed that physical factors in the working environment such as narrow space inside the aircraft, temperature, light, noise and pressure affected emotional labor. Since the physical environment in which cabin crew work in aviation industry is different from other aviation employees, the problems they experience are also different. For example, vibrations felt during aircraft takeoffs and landings, confined spaces, and turbulence can lead to hearing, balance, musculoskeletal system problems, and stomach and circulatory problems (Hava & Erol, 2023; Nazlıoğlu, 2014). However, depending on the physical conditions in the cabin, even if cabin crew are unhappy, sick or tired, they are expected to be friendly towards passengers and exert emotional labor (Çolak, 2022).

#### **4.1.6. Content of the Flight Task**

According to research findings, it has been observed that the content of the flight task affects the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew. This sub-theme was examined in two categories as task type and critical and urgent phases of the task.

##### **4.1.6.1. Flight Task Type**

P3: *“On long-distance and night flights, getting up at certain times (around 3-4 am), getting dressed and starting the service causes fatigue. This negatively affects emotional labor.”*

P4: *“Our successive night flights negatively affect our sense of belonging.”*

P6: *“I have difficulty performing emotional labor during night flights when I am sleepless for more than 24 hours. The reason for this situation is that lack of sleep causes mood disorders and stress in me.”*

P11: *“The number of services is increasing on flights across the ocean. In this case, it is difficult for us to provide continuous service and meet the requests of the passengers. Sometimes we may make a sloppy service due to fatigue.”*







#### **4.2.1. Organizational Results**

P1: *“My friendly face will increase passenger satisfaction. This means loyal passenger s and profit for the company.”*

P3: *“If emotional labor is performed well, organizational performance, passenger numbers and satisfaction increase.”*

P5: *“Our behaviors towards passengers is an advertisement for our company”.*

P6: *“We are the showcase of our company. Our good behavior causes passengers to fly with us again and attracts others to our company.*

P9: *“The emotional labor we show becomes an advertisement for the business. Advertising means more passengers and businesses gain.”*

P10: *“Passengers make the company happy, and company makes the employees happy. The passenger you make happy brings new passengers. This is the best advertisement.”*

As participants see themselves as the visible face of the company, they think that positive behaviors in terms of emotional labor will bring new and loyal customers to the company and create a positive organizational impression. Moreover, participants seem that emotional labor will increase organizational profitability, passenger satisfaction, and numbers. Customer satisfaction in the service sector is important for the survival of companies. To ensure customer satisfaction, customers' demands and expectations must be met (Türk, 2005). While human resources can be effective in increasing the competitive advantage and market share of companies, they also provide benefits to customers in terms of their loyalty and satisfaction to the company. In addition, with intense communication in service sectors, people and their emotions become more important (Aslan, 2023; Steinberg & Figart, 1999).

#### **4.2.2. Individual Results**

In addition to the organizational results of emotional labor behavior, it has also been observed that it has negative and positive individual results on cabin crew.

##### **4.2.2.1. Negative Results**

P1: *“When performing emotional labor, sometimes you need to leave the problems in your private life behind. Suppressing emotions can sometimes be difficult for us and we may experience emotional outbursts.”*

P2: *“Performing emotional labor makes me feel nervous.”*

P3: *“I experience stress along with negative thoughts while performing emotional labor. Especially demanding flights make me tired.”*

P4: *“Working like a robot without rest during busy flights makes me feel worthless and reduces my work motivation. Frequent night flights negatively affect my sense of belonging. Also, when there are*

*passenger tensions and we cannot manage this situation, constantly being cheerful creates internal conflict in us.”*

P6: *“When passenger criticizes you and goes beyond measure, you normally respond even if you are outside. But you can't say anything because he is a passenger. Then I contradict myself. This situation creates stress for me afterwards. After all, I can't be like myself.”*

P7: *“Negative experiences create mood disorders, stress and burnout.”*

#### **4.2.2.2. Positive Results**

P1: *“Your work becomes ingrained in your character after a while. Thanks to my job, I am always smiling.”*

P3: *“I have become more patient thanks to my job.”*

P4: *“Exerting emotional labor as part of our job provides us with conflict management and problem-solving skills.”*

P5: *“This job contributes to my self-efficacy, conflict management and problem-solving skills. These skills contribute to us both in private and business life.”*

P6: *“Emotional labor provides skills such as empathic thinking, practicality, anger management, calmness, being proactive and crisis management over time.”*

It is seen that the inability to show real emotions toward passengers, and the effort to constantly be cheerful and suppress emotions cause many negative situations such as emotional disharmony, internal conflict, burnout, and stress in cabin crew. Although performing emotional labor causes some positive results for companies, deep role behaviors of cabin crew members, compared to their surface role behaviors, may have undesirable consequences such as individual burnout and negative work attitudes (Grandey, 2000). In some studies, it has been observed that surface role behavior increases the intention to quit (Yürür & Ünlü, 2011; Çelik & Atilla, 2019) and emotional exhaustion (Chau et al., 2009; Köse et al., 2011). However, it has been observed that emotional labor does not always cause negative results on cabin crew, but also produces positive results. Basic communication skills such as patience, practical thinking, self-confidence, solution focus, and crisis management gained through emotional labor positively affect the social interactions of employees in their private lives.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Emotional labor is an important professional employee behavior that must be exhibited to create satisfaction in customers and to create the desired positive organizational impression, especially in the service sector. Organizations expect their employees to exhibit professional behavior according to the rules they set, taking into account their goals and the people they serve. In this study, which was conducted with a qualitative research method on cabin crew in aviation, the factors affecting the

emotional labor behavior of the participants and the results of emotional labor were tried to be examined in depth. As a result of the content analysis, the research findings were collected under two main themes: factors affecting emotional labor and the results of emotional labor.

When the theme of factors affecting emotional labor is examined; it has been observed that organizational factors, individual factors, demographic features, passenger type, physical work environment, and the content of the flight task affect the emotional labor of cabin crew. Organizational factors (%11.4) emerge as a key factor behind cabin attendants' emotional labor. Organizational factors such as organizational rules, passenger satisfaction, and professionalism lead employees to emotional labor behavior, so it is possible to say that employees' surface and deep emotional labor behaviors are greatly affected by organizational factors. According to Seçer (2007), emotional labor in the workplace occurs when employees create some emotions in service recipients through verbal or non-verbal means, as required by an employment contract.

Individual factors (%10.8) refer to the behaviors that cabin crew exhibit willingly and sincerely, regardless of organizational factors, for reasons such as liking their job, internalization, and personal satisfaction. Individual factors can generally be seen as factors that contribute to cabin crew's voluntary display of emotional labor and overlap with the sincere behavior dimension of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). However, fear of dismissal has also emerged as a negative individual factor affecting emotional labor.

Participants' gender, age, working time, marital status and personality traits (%13.8) have an impact on emotional labor; However, there was no significant difference in emotional labor according to education level. Most of the participants stated that women show more emotional labor than men because they are more patient, detail-oriented, emotional, kind, and empathetic. The fact that female employees are more successful in showing deep emotional behavior than men causes women to be more preferred in the service sector (Oğuz & Özkul, 2016; Tekin & Akgemci, 2019; Hochschild, 1983). It has been observed that as age and working time increase, employees are more successful in performing emotional labor as their professional experience increases. According to Hochschild (1983), employees can show their emotions more easily in older ages. In addition, it has been observed that married cabin crew members are helpful and friendly towards passengers who are also married and have children, and employees with extroverted, talkative, practical, and perceptive personality traits are more successful in performing emotional labor.

Passenger types (41.5%) were observed to be an important factor affecting the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew due to the continuous social interaction between passengers and cabin crew and the service they provide to passengers. Some passengers are seen as special passengers by the cabin crew because they are afraid of flying, are sick, have children, or are elderly, and the cabin crew acts more understanding and helpful towards these passengers. However, it has been observed that unruly

passengers who are drunk, drugged, dissatisfied, demanding, traveling in groups, and disturbing other passengers, who risk flight safety and security, have an extremely negative impact on the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew. It has been revealed that cabin crew has to perform more emotional labor, especially against drunk and group passengers. Unruly passengers can prevent the flight crew from performing their duties with verbal or physical attacks (Çoban, 2022; Nase & Humphrey, 2014).

According to research findings, physical factors (%6) such as narrow space inside the aircraft, noise, temperature, light, pressure, humidity, cabin air quality, and vibration affect the emotional labor performance of employees. The physical conditions of the working environment have significant effects on the physical and mental health of employees (Sundstrom et al., 1994). Pressure and sunlight exposure during flight may cause concentration and performance problems. Low humidity levels can cause respiratory illnesses. The cabin crew's shift work schedule, uncontrollable situations, conflicts, passenger demands and needs, and constant cheerfulness, when combined with employees' problems in the physical environment, can cause stress and low performance of employees (Schmitz-Felten, 2022; Michie, 2002). Finally, the content of the flight task (%16.5) is another factor that affects emotional labor. In particular, night and long-distance flights cause cabin crew to interact with passengers for longer periods, increase the number of services, and cause physical fatigue. Physical fatigue and long-term interaction with passengers reduce employees' emotional labor performance. In addition, it has been observed that critical and urgent phases of the flight task, such as takeoff, meal service, turbulence, and landing, put a strain on cabin crew in terms of emotional labor.

It has been revealed that emotional labor has organizational (%36.6) and individual (%63.4) results. It has been observed that the emotional labor behavior exhibited by cabin crew, who are seen as the visible face of the organization, within the framework of organizational rules, causes positive organizational results such as an increase in organizational profitability, a positive organizational impression, passenger satisfaction, and an increase in the number of loyal and new passengers. It has been observed that emotional labor has some negative and positive individual results on cabin crew, as well as positive organizational consequences. The fact that cabin crew are always friendly to the passengers and suppress their emotions within the framework of organizational rules causes negative situations such as internal conflict, emotional disharmony, stress, and burnout in the crew. Studies on emotional labor have shown that emotional labor is positively related to variables such as burnout, job dissatisfaction, stress, and intention to quit (Gürel & Bozkurt, 2016; Çelik & Atilla, 2019; Chau et al., 2009). Although emotional labor has negative individual consequences, it has also been observed that it leads to positive results in the communication skills of cabin crew.

When the research findings were examined in general, it was seen that organizational factors were the main factors that directed the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew. Although this finding appears to be compatible with the relevant literature (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000), the emotional labor behavior of cabin crew is also directly affected by individual

factors, demographic features, passenger type, physical work environment and the content of the flight task has been seen. In this context, apart from organizational expectations, different factors in the workplace also affect the emotional labor behavior of employees. These findings add unique value to the study, unlike the literature. Looking at the literature, it is seen that emotional labor has positive organizational consequences and negative individual consequences on employees (Gürel & Bozkurt, 2016; Çelik & Atilla, 2019; Chau et al., 2009). These results were also obtained in this study. However, the positive contribution of emotional labor to the communication skills and personal development of flight attendants over time is thought to increase the unique value of the study, as a different finding emerges from the research.

Within the scope of the research findings, some suggestions can be made to managers and employees. First of all, it should not be forgotten that emotional labor is a concept that has bright and dark sides both organizationally and individually. Since the research shows that employees internalize emotional labor behaviors as their age and working time increase and they can regulate their emotions more easily, organizations can develop and apply methods to measure the emotional labor ability of new personnel to join the organization during the recruitment processes. In addition, the unwritten rules for emotional labor behavior that should be exhibited in line with organizational expectations can be conveyed to employees more clearly, specifically, and concretely through organizational training. Organizational and psychological support can be provided to employees through arrangements to reduce the adverse effects of emotional labor on workers.

The fact that this study was conducted in aviation by sampling only a certain number of cabin attendants and using a qualitative research method may pose a limitation in terms of the generalization of the research results. Therefore, to overcome these limitations, the concept of emotional labor can be studied with different variables and with qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods on other employee groups of the service sector that communicate intensively with customers. The relationships between job insecurity, fear of dismissal, and emotional labor can be investigated in this context. It is thought that the research results will contribute to the literature on the concept of emotional labor and shed light on future studies on this concept.

Ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from the İstanbul Gelişim University Ethics Committee on October 20, 2023, with document number 2023-08.

The study has been crafted in adherence to the principles of research and publication ethics.

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The authors declare that they all equally contributed to all processes of the research.

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