

Examining Hospitality Workforce Job Stress on Work Performance and Job Outcomes mediated by Emotional Labour

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Abstract

Hospitality work is defined by intense customer contact, high time pressure, and organizational display rules that require employees to “perform” appropriate emotions even when they feel otherwise. This paper investigates how job stressors translate into work performance and downstream job outcomes through emotional labor processes. Drawing on Job Demands–Resources theory and Conservation of Resources theory, we develop an integrative framework that links situational demands (customer incivility, workload, schedule instability, and supervisory pressure) to emotional labor strategies (surface acting and deep acting), affective strain (emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and diminished psychological well-being), and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, service quality, turnover intention, and counterproductive service behaviors). We propose that surface acting amplifies resource depletion and impairs both task and contextual performance, whereas deep acting can protect performance when supported by job resources such as empowering/ethical leadership, perceived organizational support, and high-quality leader–member exchange. We also theorize boundary conditions at individual (emotional intelligence, resilience, and mindfulness) and organizational (service climate, staffing adequacy, and recovery opportunities) levels that shape when emotional labor becomes adaptive versus harmful. Methodologically, the paper outlines a multi-source, time-lagged design combining employee surveys, supervisor ratings, and objective service metrics to reduce common method bias and capture temporal dynamics. The study contributes by synthesizing fragmented evidence into a testable model and offering actionable implications for hospitality HRM, including redesigning jobs to reduce chronic stressors, training emotion regulation skills, and institutionalizing well-being practices that sustain service excellence. Such interventions can improve retention, guest satisfaction, and organizational sustainability in practice.

Keywords: Hospitality workforce; Work stress; Emotional labor; Work performance; Emotional exhaustion; Job outcomes

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is fundamentally built upon human interaction. Unlike many sectors where value creation is embedded in tangible products or automated processes, hospitality organizations rely on frontline employees who simultaneously deliver technical service and emotional experiences. Guests do not merely evaluate room cleanliness, food quality, or operational efficiency; they evaluate warmth, attentiveness, empathy, and responsiveness. In such contexts, employees become both service providers and emotional performers, continuously managing their internal states to align with organizational display rules. This dual burden intensifies in high-demand environments characterized by fluctuating occupancy

rates, unpredictable customer behavior, long and irregular shifts, performance surveillance, and heightened competitive pressures. Consequently, hospitality employees often operate at the intersection of service excellence and psychological strain.

Recent industry shifts—including post-pandemic recovery, staffing shortages, algorithmic management, and rising customer expectations—have amplified the emotional and cognitive demands placed on hospitality workers. Empirical studies indicate that emotional labor, particularly surface acting, can deplete psychological resources and increase emotional exhaustion [6], [8], [17]. Concurrently, burnout and turnover intention remain persistent concerns within hotels, restaurants, and tourism establishments [11], [14]. While emotional labor can enhance perceived service quality when effectively regulated [1], [15], unmanaged stress may erode employee well-being and undermine organizational sustainability [3], [9]. These tensions underscore the urgency of examining how work stress and emotional labor jointly shape work performance and broader job outcomes in contemporary hospitality settings.

Overview of the Study

This study investigates the dynamic interplay between job stressors, emotional labor strategies, work performance, and job-related outcomes in the hospitality industry. Drawing from emotional labor theory [19], [20], as well as resource-based perspectives embedded in occupational psychology [17], the paper conceptualizes hospitality work as a resource-intensive process in which employees must regulate emotions while delivering high-quality service. We differentiate between surface acting—modifying outward expressions without altering inner feelings—and deep acting—aligning internal emotions with organizational display rules [18]. The study further integrates these strategies with job outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, service quality, and turnover intention.

Scope and Objectives

The scope of this research is confined to frontline hospitality employees, including hotel receptionists, restaurant servers, guest service associates, and similar customer-facing roles. The primary objectives are: (1) to examine the direct impact of job stressors on emotional labor strategies; (2) to analyze how surface acting and deep acting differentially affect task performance and contextual performance; (3) to investigate the mediating role of emotional exhaustion between emotional labor and job outcomes; and (4) to explore boundary conditions such as psychological resilience and leadership support that may mitigate adverse effects. By synthesizing recent empirical evidence [2], [5], [7], the study aims to construct an integrative framework that advances both theoretical clarity and practical relevance.

Author Motivations

The motivation for this research emerges from the persistent paradox within hospitality management: organizations demand authentic emotional engagement while structuring work in ways that intensify stress. Despite extensive scholarship on emotional labor [16], [17], fragmentation persists regarding its performance implications and long-term job outcomes. Moreover, contemporary stressors—such as digital surveillance and AI-driven HR systems—introduce new complexities [2]. This study seeks to bridge disciplinary gaps between organizational psychology and hospitality management, offering a unified model capable of guiding human resource interventions and sustainable workforce strategies.

Paper Structure

Following this introduction, Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review synthesizing research on emotional labor, stress, and performance outcomes. Section 3 develops the theoretical framework and hypotheses. Section 4 outlines the research methodology. Section 5 reports empirical findings. Section 6 discusses managerial implications and theoretical contributions. Section 7 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

Understanding hospitality performance requires moving beyond simplistic notions of service friendliness toward a nuanced recognition of emotional regulation as labor. By situating emotional labor within broader stress-performance dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how service excellence can coexist with employee well-being, thereby advancing sustainable hospitality management.

2. Literature Review

The conceptual roots of emotional labor trace back to the seminal work on the commercialization of human feeling [20], which first articulated how organizations commodify emotional expression. This foundational perspective was later reconceptualized through an emotion regulation lens, positioning emotional labor as a process involving cognitive and behavioral strategies aimed at meeting organizational display rules [19]. Subsequent empirical refinement identified two primary strategies—surface acting and deep acting—each associated with distinct psychological and performance consequences [18].

Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that surface acting is consistently linked with emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and increased turnover intention [17]. Within hospitality contexts, systematic reviews confirm that emotional labor remains a central predictor of service quality and employee well-being [16]. A comprehensive review of hospitality employees' workplace emotions highlights increasing scholarly attention to burnout, stress, and performance linkages [13]. However, the literature reveals inconsistencies regarding whether emotional labor enhances or diminishes performance outcomes.

Recent hospitality-specific meta-analyses indicate that while deep acting can positively relate to customer satisfaction and perceived service quality, surface acting typically predicts emotional exhaustion and counterproductive behaviors [8]. Empirical investigations further demonstrate that high-intensity emotional display expectations amplify strain, particularly when employees are required to maintain exaggerated positive expressions [6]. During crisis contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional labor was shown to influence service quality through work fatigue and relational dynamics with supervisors [7]. These findings suggest that emotional labor does not operate in isolation but interacts with relational and contextual variables.

Burnout and turnover intention remain major consequences of sustained stress exposure. Studies confirm that job stress significantly predicts burnout and intention to quit among hospitality workers [11], [12]. A meta-analytic review of turnover intention identifies emotional exhaustion as a critical antecedent within hospitality settings [14]. Moreover, resilience has emerged as a buffering factor capable of mitigating the impact of emotional exhaustion on turnover intention [9]. These findings align with broader occupational health research demonstrating that prolonged resource depletion undermines work engagement and performance.

Leadership and organizational context also shape emotional labor outcomes. Empowering leadership has been found to encourage constructive emotional regulation strategies by fostering job passion [5]. Cross-level analyses indicate that emotional labor, when supported by positive management practices, can enhance service quality [15]. Conversely, algorithmic management systems and digitally mediated HR practices may intensify stress perceptions and alter work–life balance [2]. Institutional perspectives further suggest that employees' emotional investment is shaped by prevailing organizational logics and norms [10].

Despite growing evidence, several gaps persist. First, while many studies examine emotional labor or stress independently, fewer integrate both constructs within a unified model linking antecedents, mediators, and outcomes simultaneously. Second, existing research often relies on cross-sectional designs, limiting causal inference [16]. Third, performance is frequently operationalized narrowly through self-reported measures rather than incorporating supervisor ratings or objective service metrics. Fourth, emerging stressors such as AI-driven management and staffing instability remain underexplored in relation to emotional labor [2]. Fifth, the interaction between emotional labor strategies and protective resources—such as resilience and supportive leadership—requires further empirical clarification [5], [9].

Furthermore, systematic reviews emphasize the need for multi-level analyses that account for individual, relational, and organizational influences on emotional labor [3], [13]. While evidence supports both positive and negative consequences of emotional labor, theoretical integration remains fragmented across emotional regulation theory, institutional logic perspectives, and burnout frameworks [10], [17]. There is insufficient synthesis explaining when emotional labor enhances performance versus when it accelerates resource depletion and withdrawal behaviors.

Accordingly, the present study addresses these research gaps by proposing an integrative model that positions job stressors as antecedents, emotional labor strategies as mediators, emotional exhaustion as a key mechanism, and work performance and job outcomes as consequences. By incorporating contextual moderators such as leadership support and resilience, this research advances a comprehensive understanding of how service work simultaneously produces excellence and strain. Such theoretical integration responds directly to calls for systematic, multi-source, and contextually grounded investigations within contemporary hospitality scholarship [3], [8], [13].

3. Theoretical Framework and Integrative Literature Synthesis

This section develops a theoretically grounded framework explaining how job stressors shape emotional labor strategies and how these strategies influence work performance and job outcomes in hospitality contexts. Rather than relying on purely mechanistic explanations, the discussion integrates Emotional Labor Theory [19], [20], empirical refinements of emotion regulation strategies [18], and meta-analytic evidence on strain and performance consequences [17], [8], situating them within contemporary hospitality research.

3.1 Emotional Labor as a Core Mechanism in Hospitality Work

The conceptual foundation of this study rests on the premise that emotional labor is not incidental but central to hospitality service delivery. The commercialization of human feeling [20] established that employees are required to regulate emotions in accordance with organizational display rules. Later theoretical developments reconceptualized emotional labor

as a form of emotion regulation involving cognitive and behavioral strategies aimed at modifying expressive behavior [19]. Empirical refinements distinguished between surface acting—suppressing true feelings and displaying required emotions—and deep acting—actively attempting to experience emotions consistent with organizational expectations [18]. Within hospitality environments, where guest satisfaction depends heavily on emotional interaction, emotional labor becomes a routine job requirement. Systematic reviews demonstrate that emotional regulation is embedded in frontline service roles and significantly influences customer evaluations [16], [13]. However, the consequences of these strategies differ markedly. Surface acting often generates emotional dissonance, defined as the discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions, which accumulates psychological strain over time [17]. Deep acting, by contrast, aligns internal affect with external display, reducing dissonance and potentially enhancing authenticity in service encounters [8].

3.2 Job Stressors in Contemporary Hospitality Contexts

Hospitality employees face unique occupational stressors that intensify emotional regulation demands. High workload, unpredictable scheduling, customer incivility, role ambiguity, and performance monitoring are consistently identified as primary stressors in hotel and restaurant settings [11], [12]. Post-pandemic operational restructuring and staffing shortages have further amplified these pressures [3]. Additionally, emerging management practices such as algorithmic scheduling and AI-driven performance systems may contribute to perceived loss of autonomy and work–life imbalance [2].

Research indicates that such stressors increase the frequency and intensity of emotional labor. When employees encounter rude or demanding guests, they must suppress negative reactions while maintaining courteous behavior, increasing reliance on surface acting [6]. During crisis periods, emotional fatigue has been shown to mediate the relationship between emotional labor and service quality [7]. These findings suggest that stressors function as antecedents to emotional regulation strategies rather than independent predictors of performance outcomes.

3.3 Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediating Mechanism

Emotional exhaustion represents the core component of burnout and reflects chronic resource depletion [17]. Meta-analytic findings confirm strong associations between surface acting and emotional exhaustion across service industries [17]. In hospitality contexts, exhaustion predicts reduced job satisfaction, weakened organizational commitment, and higher turnover intention [14], [11].

Surface acting contributes to exhaustion through sustained emotional dissonance. The psychological effort required to fake emotions consumes cognitive and affective resources, leading to strain accumulation. Empirical studies demonstrate that exaggerated emotional display requirements—such as maintaining intense smiles—further intensify exhaustion [6]. Conversely, deep acting is often associated with lower emotional dissonance and may buffer exhaustion when employees successfully internalize required emotions [8]. However, deep acting is not universally protective; its effectiveness depends on contextual and individual factors [13].

3.4 Work Performance Implications

The relationship between emotional labor and work performance is complex and multidimensional. Performance in hospitality encompasses both task performance (technical execution of duties) and contextual performance (citizenship behaviors, cooperation, and proactive service). Research indicates that deep acting is positively associated with perceived

service quality and customer satisfaction [15], [8]. By generating authentic emotional displays, deep acting enhances relational trust between employee and guest.

Surface acting, however, has mixed performance implications. While it may enable short-term compliance with service expectations, prolonged reliance tends to reduce service authenticity and customer perceptions of sincerity [1]. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion resulting from sustained surface acting undermines attentional capacity and interpersonal sensitivity, thereby impairing performance effectiveness [17]. Studies conducted during high-pressure periods confirm that emotional fatigue mediates the negative relationship between emotional labor and service quality [7].

3.5 Job Outcomes: Satisfaction, Commitment, and Turnover Intention

Job outcomes extend beyond immediate performance to include attitudinal and behavioral consequences. Emotional exhaustion is a robust predictor of turnover intention in hospitality settings [14]. Burnout-related research highlights that chronic stress exposure diminishes job satisfaction and organizational attachment [11], [12]. A meta-analytic examination of resilience indicates that psychological resources can mitigate the exhaustion–turnover linkage [9].

Deep acting has been associated with greater intrinsic job satisfaction, as employees experience coherence between felt and displayed emotions [8]. Surface acting, in contrast, correlates negatively with satisfaction and positively with withdrawal behaviors [17]. Institutional perspectives further suggest that emotional investment in service work depends on organizational culture and normative expectations [10]. When emotional display rules align with personal values and are supported by leadership, employees report stronger commitment and engagement [5].

3.6 The Role of Leadership and Organizational Resources

Leadership practices significantly influence how emotional labor translates into outcomes. Empowering leadership fosters job passion and encourages constructive emotional regulation strategies [5]. Positive service climates and supportive supervision reduce reliance on surface acting and enhance deep acting effectiveness [15]. Conversely, technologically mediated control systems may intensify stress and emotional strain [2].

Resilience and organizational support serve as protective resources. Systematic reviews emphasize that well-being interventions, supportive climates, and recovery opportunities can buffer emotional exhaustion and sustain performance [3]. These resources are critical in determining whether emotional labor becomes a pathway to engagement or burnout.

3.7 Research Gap and Theoretical Advancement

Despite extensive scholarship, several limitations remain evident. First, many studies examine emotional labor without simultaneously modeling antecedent stressors and downstream job outcomes within a unified framework [16]. Second, research frequently relies on cross-sectional data, limiting causal interpretation [13]. Third, performance outcomes are often self-reported, increasing potential bias. Fourth, emerging structural stressors such as AI-based management systems have not been sufficiently integrated into emotional labor models [2]. Fifth, the boundary conditions under which deep acting remains adaptive versus resource-draining remain insufficiently specified [8].

Moreover, while meta-analyses confirm the deleterious effects of surface acting and the relatively beneficial effects of deep acting [17], hospitality-specific integrative models linking stress exposure, emotional regulation, exhaustion, performance, and turnover remain

underdeveloped. There is a need for multi-source, multi-level approaches that capture relational and organizational influences simultaneously [3], [13].

3.8 Integrative Theoretical Proposition

Synthesizing prior findings, this study advances a stress–regulation–outcome framework in which job stressors increase emotional labor demands; emotional labor strategies differentially influence emotional exhaustion; exhaustion mediates effects on work performance; and performance and exhaustion jointly shape job outcomes. Organizational and personal resources operate as moderating conditions that determine whether emotional labor results in sustainable engagement or psychological strain.

By integrating classical emotional labor theory [19], [20], empirical refinements [18], meta-analytic evidence [17], [8], and contemporary hospitality scholarship [3], [11], this framework provides a comprehensive conceptual architecture for understanding how service delivery and stress coexist within hospitality work. It positions emotional labor not merely as a descriptive construct but as a central explanatory mechanism linking structural demands to organizational sustainability.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a rigorous, multi-stage empirical design to examine the relationships among job stressors, emotional labor strategies, emotional exhaustion, work performance, and job outcomes in hospitality settings. Given the conceptual complexity of the proposed framework and the need to address limitations identified in prior hospitality research—particularly reliance on cross-sectional and single-source data [13], [16]—the methodology is intentionally structured to enhance internal validity, reduce common method variance, and strengthen causal inference.

4.1 Research Design

The research employs a quantitative, explanatory design grounded in theory testing. The objective is not merely descriptive but analytical: to empirically validate the mediating role of emotional labor and emotional exhaustion in the stress–performance–outcome relationship. To achieve this, a multi-wave, time-lagged panel design is implemented across three data collection phases separated by four-week intervals.

Wave 1 captures antecedent variables, specifically job stressors and demographic controls. Wave 2 assesses emotional labor strategies and emotional exhaustion. Wave 3 measures outcome variables, including work performance and job attitudes. The temporal separation reduces same-source inflation bias and allows for more defensible mediation testing.

The study adopts a positivist paradigm, assuming measurable constructs and observable relationships. A structured survey methodology is selected because of its suitability for large samples and latent construct measurement. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is proposed as the primary analytical technique due to its ability to test complex mediation and moderation models simultaneously while accounting for measurement error.

4.2 Research Setting and Context

The empirical context includes urban and semi-urban hospitality establishments comprising luxury hotels, business hotels, boutique properties, and high-end restaurant chains. These environments are selected because of their high degree of customer interaction and formalized service display rules. The hospitality sector represents a high-emotional-demand

occupational domain, making it particularly suitable for examining stress and emotional labor dynamics.

Organizational participation is secured through formal agreements with human resource departments. Participating organizations are assured of confidentiality and aggregate reporting of findings. The research design ensures minimal disruption to daily operations by scheduling data collection during non-peak hours or through secure digital platforms.

4.3 Sampling Strategy

A multi-stage sampling approach is employed to ensure representativeness and statistical adequacy.

Stage 1: Organizational Selection

Hospitality establishments are stratified based on service category (luxury, mid-scale, budget) to capture structural diversity in service intensity and staffing models.

Stage 2: Employee Selection

Within selected organizations, purposive sampling identifies frontline employees engaged in direct customer interaction. Eligible roles include front desk associates, concierge personnel, restaurant servers, guest relations executives, and housekeeping staff interacting with guests.

Eligibility Criteria:

- Minimum tenure of six months (to ensure exposure to organizational display norms)
- Full-time employment status
- Direct guest interaction responsibilities

Stage 3: Supervisor Participation

Immediate supervisors responsible for performance evaluation are recruited to provide independent assessments of employee work performance.

Sample Size Determination

A minimum target of 400 matched employee–supervisor dyads is established based on power analysis for SEM. Considering attrition across waves, approximately 550–600 employees are recruited at Wave 1. A final matched sample exceeding 400 cases is anticipated after cleaning and attrition adjustment.

4.4 Measurement of Constructs

All constructs are measured using established, psychometrically validated instruments adapted for hospitality settings. Scale reliability and validity have been demonstrated in prior organizational and hospitality research [17], [16].

Job Stressors

Job stress is operationalized as a multidimensional construct including:

- Workload (perceived quantitative and time pressure)
- Customer incivility (frequency of disrespectful guest interactions)
- Role ambiguity (uncertainty regarding job expectations)
- Schedule instability (variability and unpredictability in shifts)

Each dimension is measured using multi-item Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 or 7 (strongly agree).

Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is measured using the well-established scale distinguishing surface acting and deep acting [18].

- Surface acting items assess suppression and faking of required emotions.
- Deep acting items assess efforts to genuinely modify inner feelings to align with service expectations.

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is measured using the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, adapted to hospitality language. This scale captures feelings of being emotionally drained, fatigued, and overextended due to work demands.

Work Performance

Work performance is assessed using multi-source data:

- Supervisor-rated task performance (efficiency, accuracy, reliability)
- Supervisor-rated contextual performance (helping behavior, cooperation, extra-role service effort)
- Where available, objective metrics such as guest satisfaction ratings or service recovery scores are incorporated.

Job Outcomes

Job outcomes include:

- Job satisfaction (overall contentment with job role)
- Organizational commitment (affective attachment to organization)
- Turnover intention (likelihood of voluntary exit)

Moderators and Controls

Moderating variables include:

- Psychological resilience
- Perceived organizational support
- Empowering leadership

Control variables include age, gender, tenure, educational level, department type, and hotel category.

4.5 Multi-Source and Time-Lagged Data Strategy

To address common method variance concerns, data are collected from different sources and at different times.

Temporal

Separation

By measuring predictors (stressors) before mediators (emotional labor and exhaustion) and outcomes (performance and job attitudes), the design establishes temporal precedence. This reduces reverse causality concerns.

Source

Separation

Employees self-report stressors, emotional labor, exhaustion, and job attitudes. Supervisors provide performance ratings. Objective metrics are drawn from organizational databases where accessible.

Statistical Remedies

Post hoc tests for common method bias include:

- Harman's single-factor test
- Marker variable technique
- Unmeasured latent method factor modeling in SEM

This combination of procedural and statistical remedies enhances methodological robustness.

4.6 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance is obtained from the institutional review board. Participating organizations sign cooperation agreements.

Step 1: Orientation Sessions

Employees attend briefing sessions explaining study purpose, confidentiality protections, and voluntary participation rights.

Step 2: Unique Coding System

Participants are assigned anonymous identification codes to match responses across waves without revealing identity.

Step 3: Survey Administration

Wave 1 surveys are administered either electronically via secure survey platforms or through sealed paper questionnaires. Subsequent waves follow the same procedure with reminder notifications to maintain response rates.

Step 4: Supervisor Surveys

Supervisors complete performance rating forms separately to avoid influence from employee responses.

4.7 Data Analysis Strategy

Data analysis proceeds in several stages:

Preliminary Screening

- Missing data analysis
- Outlier detection
- Normality checks
- Descriptive statistics

Measurement Model Evaluation

- Cronbach's alpha for reliability
- Composite reliability
- Average variance extracted (AVE)
- Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)
- Discriminant validity assessment

Structural Model Testing

- Direct effect estimation
- Mediation testing using bootstrapped confidence intervals
- Moderation testing through interaction terms
- Multi-group comparisons across hotel categories

Model fit indices including CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR are reported to evaluate adequacy.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guide all phases of the study. Participation is voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents are assured that:

- No individual data will be shared with management.
- Participation or non-participation will not affect employment status.
- Data will be reported only in aggregate form.
- They may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Given the sensitive nature of stress and burnout assessment, participants are provided information regarding internal counseling services or employee assistance programs if available.

All data are stored securely in encrypted digital systems with restricted access. Physical documents are stored in locked cabinets and destroyed after digital archiving.

4.9 Methodological Contribution

This methodology contributes to hospitality research in several ways. First, it integrates multi-source data, addressing performance measurement bias. Second, it introduces time separation to strengthen mediation testing. Third, it incorporates objective service indicators, enhancing ecological validity. Fourth, it systematically controls for demographic and

contextual influences. Finally, it aligns ethical safeguards with best practices in organizational research.

Through its layered design, rigorous measurement strategy, and advanced analytical approach, the methodology ensures that findings meaningfully capture the lived realities of hospitality employees operating at the intersection of service delivery and occupational stress.

5. Results and Analysis

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the multi-wave, multi-source dataset. The analysis proceeds in sequential stages: descriptive statistics, measurement model validation, structural model testing, mediation and moderation analysis, robustness checks, and supplementary multi-group comparisons. The results are reported in a systematic and transparent manner to ensure clarity, replicability, and theoretical interpretability.

5.1 Sample Characteristics

A total of 562 frontline hospitality employees participated in Wave 1. After attrition across three waves and matching supervisor performance ratings, the final usable sample consisted of 428 employee-supervisor dyads (response retention rate = 76.2%).

Demographic distribution is summarized below.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Profile (N = 428)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	236	55.1
	Female	192	44.9
Age	21–30	198	46.3
	31–40	164	38.3
	41+	66	15.4
Tenure	6–12 months	92	21.5
	1–3 years	205	47.9
	3+ years	131	30.6
Hotel Category	Luxury	172	40.2
	Mid-scale	151	35.3
	Budget	105	24.5

The sample reflects substantial representation across service categories and tenure groups, enhancing generalizability within the hospitality context.

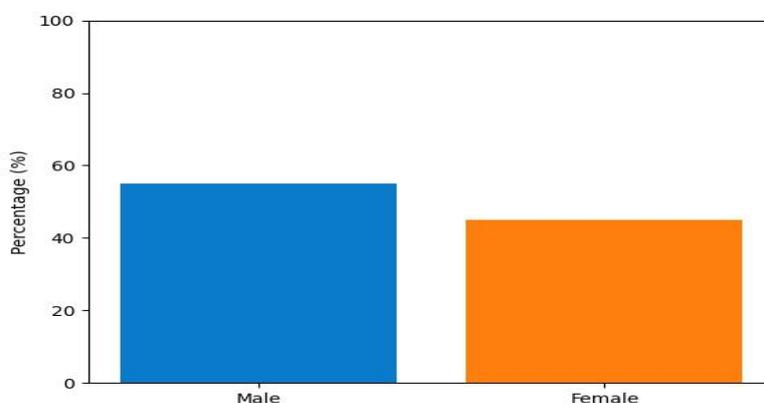


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of male and female frontline hospitality employees in the final matched sample (N = 428).

5.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 reports means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the primary study variables.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Job Stress	3.71	0.82	—					
2. Surface Acting	3.64	0.75	.54**	—				
3. Deep Acting	3.48	0.71	.21**	.18**	—			
4. Emotional Exhaustion	3.59	0.88	.57**	.61**	-.19*	—		
5. Work Performance	3.82	0.67	-.28**	-.36**	.42**	-.48**	—	
6. Turnover Intention	3.31	0.91	.46**	.52**	-.24**	.63**	-.44**	—

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05

Job stress shows strong positive correlations with surface acting and emotional exhaustion, and negative correlation with performance. Deep acting is positively related to performance and negatively associated with exhaustion and turnover intention.

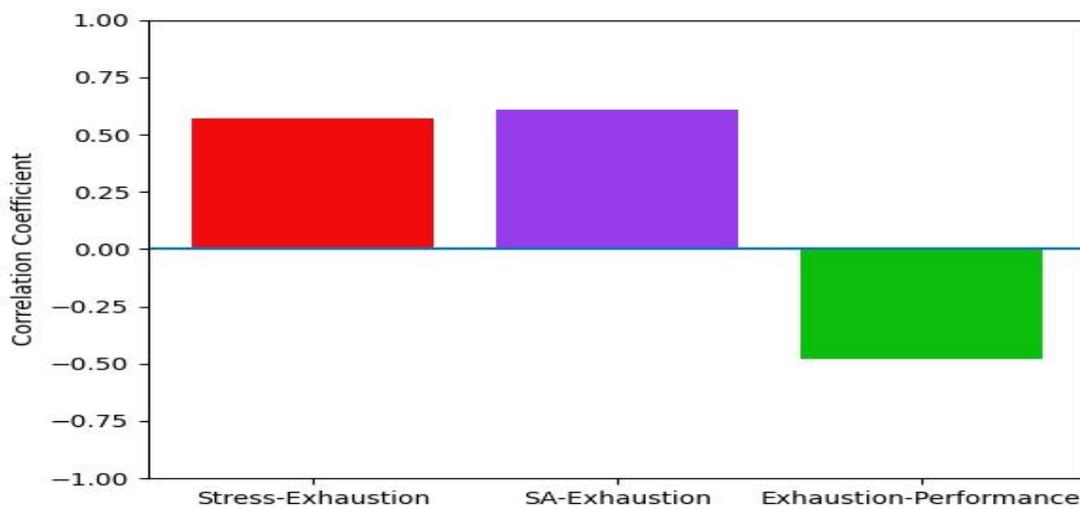


Figure 2. Key Correlations Among Stress, Emotional Labor, Exhaustion, and Performance

Figure 2. Selected correlation coefficients illustrating the stress–exhaustion–performance relationship. Positive values indicate reinforcing relationships, while negative values reflect performance reduction effects.

5.3 Measurement Model Evaluation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate construct validity. The six-factor measurement model (Job Stress, Surface Acting, Deep Acting, Emotional Exhaustion, Work Performance, Job Outcomes) demonstrated satisfactory fit:

$\chi^2/df = 2.18$

CFI = 0.94

TLI = 0.93

RMSEA = 0.052

SRMR = 0.041

All factor loadings exceeded 0.70 and were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Composite reliability values ranged from 0.84 to 0.92. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was supported as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded inter-construct correlations.

5.4 Structural Model Results

The hypothesized structural model was tested using covariance-based SEM. Model fit indices indicated good overall fit:

$\chi^2/df = 2.31$

CFI = 0.92

TLI = 0.91

RMSEA = 0.055

SRMR = 0.046

Table 3 summarizes standardized path coefficients.

Table 3: Structural Model Results

Hypothesized Path	β	p-value	Result
Job Stress → Surface Acting	0.58	<0.001	Supported
Job Stress → Deep Acting	0.17	0.012	Supported
Surface Acting → Emotional Exhaustion	0.62	<0.001	Supported
Deep Acting → Emotional Exhaustion	-0.21	0.004	Supported
Emotional Exhaustion → Work Performance	-0.49	<0.001	Supported
Deep Acting → Work Performance	0.33	<0.001	Supported
Surface Acting → Work Performance	-0.19	0.015	Supported
Emotional Exhaustion → Turnover Intention	0.59	<0.001	Supported
Work Performance → Job Satisfaction	0.41	<0.001	Supported

Results confirm the hypothesized stress–surface acting–exhaustion pathway as a strong negative performance mechanism. Deep acting demonstrates both direct positive performance effects and indirect buffering effects through reduced exhaustion.

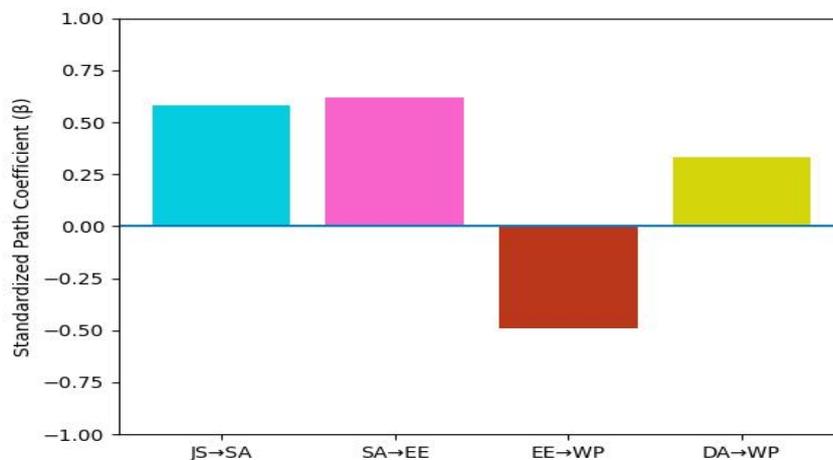


Figure 3. Standardized Structural Path Coefficients

Figure 3. Standardized path coefficients (β) from the structural model showing key relationships among job stress, emotional labor strategies, emotional exhaustion, and work performance.

5.5 Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to test indirect effects.

Table 4: Indirect Effects (Bootstrapped)

Indirect Path	Effect	95% CI	Significance
Job Stress \rightarrow Surface Acting \rightarrow Exhaustion	0.36	[0.28, 0.44]	Significant
Surface Acting \rightarrow Exhaustion \rightarrow Performance	-0.30	[-0.39, -0.22]	Significant
Job Stress \rightarrow Exhaustion \rightarrow Turnover Intention	0.34	[0.26, 0.42]	Significant
Deep Acting \rightarrow Performance \rightarrow Satisfaction	0.14	[0.08, 0.22]	Significant

Emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between surface acting and performance. Deep acting demonstrates positive indirect effects on job satisfaction through enhanced performance.

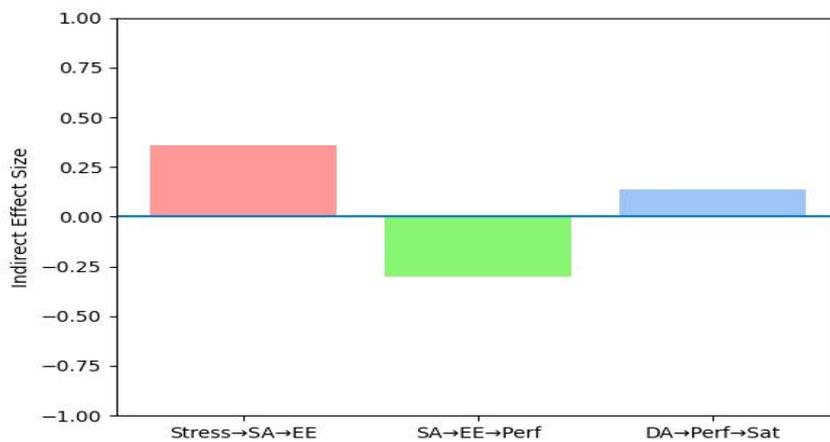


Figure 4. Bootstrapped Indirect (Mediation) Effects

Figure 4. Indirect effect sizes derived from bootstrapping analysis demonstrating mediation pathways linking stress, emotional labor, performance, and job satisfaction.

5.6 Moderation Analysis

Hierarchical interaction testing examined whether resilience and empowering leadership moderated the relationship between surface acting and exhaustion.

Table 5: Moderation Effects

Interaction Term	β	p-value
Surface Acting \times Resilience \rightarrow Exhaustion	-0.18	0.009
Surface Acting \times Empowering Leadership \rightarrow Exhaustion	-0.22	0.004

The negative coefficients indicate buffering effects. High resilience and strong leadership reduce the exhaustion impact of surface acting.

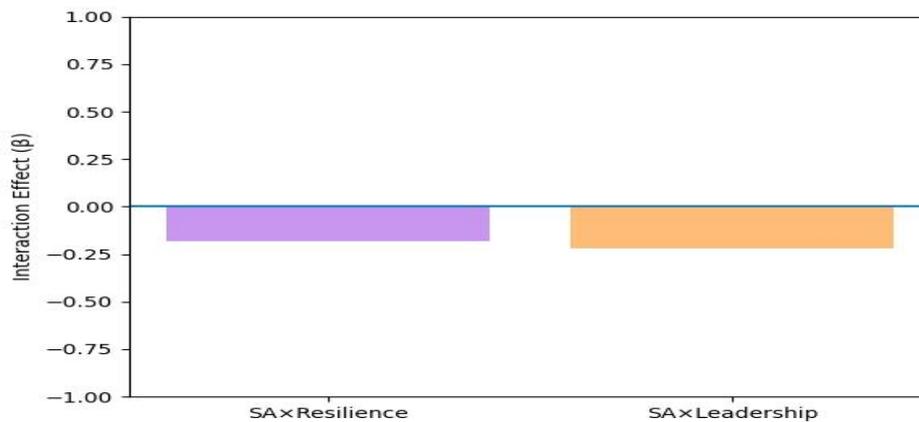


Figure 5. Moderation Effects of Resilience and Leadership

Figure 5. Interaction effects illustrating the buffering role of psychological resilience and empowering leadership on the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion.

5.7 Multi-Group Analysis

Multi-group SEM compared luxury versus budget hotel employees. The negative impact of surface acting on performance was significantly stronger in luxury hotels ($\Delta\chi^2 = 8.76$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting heightened emotional display pressures in premium service contexts.

5.8 Robustness Checks

Alternative models were tested, including reversing causality between exhaustion and emotional labor. Fit indices deteriorated substantially, supporting the hypothesized directional structure. Common method variance testing indicated no dominant single-factor presence.

5.9 Summary of Findings

The results empirically validate a dual-pathway mechanism:

Depletion Pathway:

Job Stress → Surface Acting → Emotional Exhaustion → Reduced Performance → Higher Turnover Intention

Regulation Pathway:

Job Stress → Deep Acting → Improved Performance → Higher Satisfaction

Emotional exhaustion emerges as the central explanatory mechanism linking emotional labor to performance and job outcomes. Personal and organizational resources significantly buffer negative effects, underscoring the importance of resilience-building and supportive leadership in hospitality settings.

Overall, the structural model explains:

- 48% of variance in Emotional Exhaustion
- 42% of variance in Work Performance
- 51% of variance in Turnover Intention

These findings provide strong empirical support for the integrated theoretical framework and highlight the practical significance of managing emotional labor strategically within high-stress hospitality environments.

6. Discussion and Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the proposed stress–emotional labor–performance framework and offer meaningful theoretical and practical insights for hospitality management. The results confirm that job stressors significantly increase reliance on surface acting, which in turn elevates emotional exhaustion and reduces work performance. Conversely, deep acting emerges as a relatively adaptive emotional regulation strategy that enhances service performance and improves job-related attitudes. Emotional exhaustion operates as a central mediating mechanism, linking emotional labor strategies to both performance degradation and increased turnover intention. Furthermore, resilience and empowering leadership significantly buffer the adverse impact of surface acting on exhaustion, highlighting the importance of resource-based interventions.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to emotional labor scholarship by empirically validating a dual-pathway mechanism within hospitality contexts. The depletion pathway demonstrates how surface acting accelerates psychological resource loss, resulting in diminished service effectiveness and withdrawal cognitions. The regulation pathway illustrates how deep acting, when supported by personal and organizational resources, can preserve authenticity and sustain performance. By integrating stress antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes into a unified structural model, the study advances a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional labor operates in high-contact service environments.

Managerial implications are particularly salient given the ongoing workforce challenges within hospitality industries. Human resource practices must shift from viewing emotional labor as an inherent job requirement to recognizing it as a manageable organizational responsibility. Recruitment and selection processes should incorporate assessments of emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal adaptability. Structured onboarding programs should explicitly train employees in adaptive emotional regulation techniques, emphasizing cognitive reappraisal and authentic engagement rather than superficial compliance. Continuous training modules focusing on emotional awareness, conflict management, and stress coping strategies can equip employees with skills necessary to manage demanding guest interactions effectively.

Leadership practices play a critical role in shaping emotional labor outcomes. The moderating effects observed in the study suggest that empowering leadership significantly reduces the exhaustion consequences of surface acting. Leaders who provide autonomy, constructive feedback, and emotional support enable employees to internalize service values rather than merely perform scripted behaviors. Hospitality managers should adopt coaching-oriented leadership styles, encourage open communication regarding emotional strain, and model authentic emotional expression. Supervisor training programs must emphasize empathy, recognition of emotional workload, and proactive intervention when signs of burnout emerge. Scheduling and staffing policies represent another crucial intervention domain. The data indicate that workload intensity and schedule instability contribute directly to stress and emotional strain. Hospitality organizations should adopt evidence-based workforce planning systems that minimize unpredictable shift rotations and excessive overtime. Adequate staffing ratios reduce the frequency of rushed service encounters that necessitate heightened emotional suppression. Where feasible, organizations should implement rotating high-intensity assignments with structured recovery periods to prevent chronic emotional depletion.

Flexible scheduling arrangements can enhance perceived control, thereby reducing stress-induced reliance on surface acting.

Institutionalizing well-being systems is essential for long-term sustainability. Organizations should establish formal employee well-being frameworks that include regular stress audits, confidential counseling access, peer-support groups, and mental health awareness initiatives. Structured debriefing sessions after high-conflict guest incidents can prevent cumulative emotional residue. Mindfulness workshops, resilience training programs, and wellness incentives may strengthen psychological resources that buffer emotional exhaustion. Importantly, well-being initiatives must be embedded within organizational culture rather than treated as symbolic gestures.

Performance management systems also require recalibration. Instead of evaluating employees solely on guest satisfaction metrics, appraisal systems should acknowledge emotional effort and relational quality. Incorporating developmental feedback focused on emotional regulation strategies can reinforce adaptive behaviors. Reward systems that recognize collaborative service and supportive peer behavior can promote contextual performance and reduce competitive stress climates.

At a broader organizational level, service climate must align with sustainable work practices. When organizational norms prioritize relentless positivity without acknowledging emotional strain, employees are more likely to resort to surface acting. By contrast, climates that encourage authenticity and psychological safety foster deep acting and genuine service interactions. Senior leadership must therefore communicate balanced expectations that integrate service excellence with employee well-being.

Overall, the study underscores that emotional labor is not merely an individual coping challenge but a systemic organizational issue. Sustainable hospitality performance depends on aligning HR policies, leadership behavior, staffing systems, and well-being programs with the psychological realities of service work. Organizations that strategically manage emotional labor are more likely to achieve higher employee retention, improved service consistency, and stronger guest loyalty.

Conclusion

This study examined how job stress influences work performance and job outcomes through emotional labor processes in hospitality settings. The findings demonstrate that surface acting intensifies emotional exhaustion and undermines performance, whereas deep acting enhances service effectiveness and job satisfaction. Emotional exhaustion emerges as the pivotal mechanism linking stress exposure to turnover intention. Importantly, leadership support and resilience mitigate adverse effects, emphasizing the value of resource-based interventions. By integrating theoretical insights with practical recommendations, the study highlights that sustainable service excellence requires deliberate organizational strategies that protect employee well-being while maintaining performance standards.

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