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Collins Badu Agyemang

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## Emotional labour influences on psychological health: The moderating role of religiosity

Collins Badu Agyemang 

Department of Psychology, College of Humanities, University of Ghana, Legon-Accra, Ghana  
Correspondence: [cbagyemang@ug.edu.gh](mailto:cbagyemang@ug.edu.gh)

The present study examined the direct association between emotional labour and psychological health, and the moderating role of religiosity among media practitioners in Ghana. Using a cross-sectional design, 336 media practitioners (female = 31%) completed a survey on emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting), psychological health (general well-being and emotional exhaustion), and religiosity. Following hierarchical regression analyses, results showed that while surface acting significantly predicted psychological health, deep acting had no significant relationship with psychological health. Religiosity had a significant moderating effect on the influence of surface acting on psychological health, through reducing the negative effect of surface acting on well-being. These findings underscore the need for emotional management competence training and intervention for media practitioners to protect their psychological health.

**Keywords:** emotional exhaustion, emotional labour, media practitioners, general well-being, religiosity, Ghana

### Introduction

At the heart of most service sector professional duties, employees are required to be emotionally skilful due to the frequent interactions with customers, co-workers, and employers (Choi & Kim, 2015; Grande & Sayre, 2019). Even though emotional intelligence is crucial within service sector work, emotional labour is emerging as a way to understanding the emotional management skills of service sector workers (Chen et al., 2019; Hochschild, 2012; Mróz & Kaleta, 2016). Emotional labour refers to the intentional management and display of specific and acceptable feelings by service professionals for their job roles (Hochschild, 1983). Jobs which have direct interactions with clients (such as doctors, nurses, media practitioners, teachers, airline staff, social service experts, call centre employees, and salespeople) are among the occupations with an intense emotional labour process (Dursun et al., 2011; Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Rathi et al., 2013; Yoon & Kim, 2013). Poor psychological health is increasingly being reported among media practitioners (Grandey 2003) and may vary by religiosity. However, how emotional labour impact on psychological health and the role religiosity plays in this association among media practitioners from an African context requires further investigation. This study addressed the knowledge gap on how emotional labour influences psychological health among media practitioners in Ghana, a developing country setting.

### *Emotional labour: Its nature and significance*

Employees deploy two main emotional labour strategies in the course of managing their emotions; surface acting and deep acting (Grandey 2003). Surface acting (SA) is when employees hide or fake felt emotions. Deep acting (DA) is when employees experience their genuine emotions.

People with deep acting report higher job satisfaction (Agyemang et al., 2015; Grandey, 2003; Wong & Law, 2002), perceptions of mutually satisfying relationships with others (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), and lower turnover intentions (Agyemang et al., 2015). In contrast,

people with surface acting report negative work-related attitudes (Adelmann, 1989; Kim et al., 2013; Lartey et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016). Therefore, either SA or DA orientation could influence employee psychological health (Grandey, 2003; Karim & Weisz, 2010; Lawtey et al., 2019). For instance, Grandey (2003), Karim and Weisz (2010), and Wagner, Barnes and Scott (2014) reported higher emotional exhaustion and psychological distress with SA among service delivery employees. Additionally, Cheung and Tang (2010) observed age and sex effects on emotional labour strategies, with older aged and female employees likely to express deep acting. However, the relationship between emotional labour and job satisfaction dissipated after adjusting for the effects of job complexity, control, and income (Adelmann, 1989). Religiosity is a well-known influence on how people deal with their life situations, inclusive of work demands (Byrne et al., 2011; Harrowfield & Gardner, 2010).

### *Religiosity, emotional labour, and psychological health*

Religiosity refers the extent to which individuals engage in specific religious beliefs and practices (Harrowfield & Gardner, 2010). It may serve as replenish resources for managing emotional demands of professional duties (Byrne et al., 2011; Harrowfield & Gardner, 2010). For instance, Harrowfield and Gardner (2010) suggested individual religiosity to enhance coping with work stressors. Similarly, Turton and Francis (2007) and Byrne and colleagues (2011) found higher religiosity to lower the experience of work distress. This effect may be from the instrumental role of religiosity revitalising employee personal and social resources for coping with work stressors (Day, 2005; Holman et al., 2008). Thus, religiosity is a critical resource for buffering the negative effect of surface acting on health and well-being (Byrne et al., 2011; Harrowfield & Gardner, 2010). Religiosity may serve as a buffer in reducing employee stress and enhancing positive well-being (Alferi et al., 1999), reduce employee depression (Nguyen & Zuckerman 2016), increase life satisfaction, and reduced levels of anxiety

(Archer et al., 2005). Many employees draw strength from religiosity and its buffering role among Ghanaians has been well emphasised (Anim, 2015; Oti-Boadi, 2015). Religious and social coping are the most common and efficacious forms of resources in dealing with work-life challenges (Osafu et al., 2015). Examining the moderating role of religiosity on the relationship between emotional labour and psychological health of employees will increase our cross-cultural understanding of emotional labour as a construct.

### ***The Ghanaian media industry: Its demands on employees***

With the established ambiguities in findings on emotional labour (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Nixon et al., 2020), context and cultural leanings may supply some valuable answers to refine the concept of emotional labour. Industry culture learning would predispose media practitioners to assume the voices of others in curbing social challenges and interrogating the tough questions from their work assignments (Thomson, 2018). Related work stressors and psychological health outcomes may depend on whether the employees primarily utilised SA or DA.

Media practitioners often deal with on-going trauma-centred cases, some from the aftermath of political upheavals. Trauma centred cases expose media practitioners to violence, accident scenes, unrest, and verbal and physical assaults. For example, the UNESCO Report (2015) indicated that one journalist dies every five days from work-related events. In the Ghanaian setting, like elsewhere, media practitioners put priority on reporting in real time as issues unfold, which places them in harm's way directly or vicariously through digital image exposure (Nyarko & Akpojivi, 2017).

However, little research attention has been given to media practitioners' work-related stressors, their social resources to manage emotional labour experiences, and any potential psychological effects from an African perspective. Moreover, among Ghanaians, religion tends to be an instrumental tool for managing challenges of life (Assimeng, 2010; Gyekye, 1996; Osafu et al., 2015) and media practitioners are no exemption. Thus, religion tends to serve as a protective factor against the emotional demands of professional duties of media practitioners.

### **Goal of the study**

The present study aimed to examine emotional labour influences on psychological functioning employees in the Ghanaian media industry. Accordingly, the study sought to address the following hypotheses in the Ghanaian media context:

- Surface acting orientation will decrease psychological health (general well-being and emotional exhaustion).
- Deep acting orientation will increase psychological health (general well-being and emotional exhaustion).
- Religiosity will significantly moderate the relationship between emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting) and psychological health (general well-being and emotional exhaustion), augmenting deep acting effects.

Research on emotional labour has largely been conducted within the Western cultures and among service-oriented industries (Nixon et al., 2020). This study was conducted to study media practitioners in a developing country context where emotional labour is deemed a prominent stressor.

## **Method**

### ***Participants and setting***

A convenience sample of 336 media practitioners within the research triangle of Ghana (Ashanti, Greater Accra, and Western Regions) were participants (female = 31%; mean age = 29.29 years; SD = 6.47 years). To be included in the study, the media practitioners met the following criteria: (i) either fulltime or part-time employees with over one-year cumulative work experience in electronic media; and (ii) 18 years old and above. Most participants (87%) worked in private media organisations. Over a half (56%) of the respondents worked with radio stations; 36% worked with television stations, and the remaining 8% respondents worked with both television and radio stations. Most participants (71%) were full-time employees and self-identified as Christians (92%), Muslims (6.8%), and 'other (including traditional African religion)' (0.6%).

### ***Measures***

Participants completed the Emotional Labour Scale (ELS: Brotheridge & Lee, 2003), General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-6: Rao et al., 1992), Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS: Maslach & Jackson, 1986), and the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS: Huber & Huber, 2012).

### ***Emotional Labour Scale***

The ELS is a 6-item measure of SA (3 items) and DA (3 items). Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = never, to 5 = always (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). An example deep acting items is: "I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show as part of my job." An example surface acting item is: "I just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job". In this study, scores from the SA and DA scales achieved Cronbach's alphas of 0.72 and 0.76, respectively.

### ***General well-being***

The GHQ-6 consists of 6 questions on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = better than usual or not at all or more so than usual, to 4 = much less than usual or much more than usual. Sample items on this subscale include "Lost much sleep over worry", and "Felt capable of making decisions about things" (Rao et al., 1992). In the current study, scores from the GHQ-6 achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.63.

### ***Emotional exhaustion***

Five items from the MBI-GS- assess emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The items on the scale are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = never, to 5 = every time. Sample items on the scale include: "I feel emotionally drained from my work"; and "I feel used up at the end of the workday". Higher scores indicate greater

emotional exhaustion. In the present study, scores from the MBI-GS yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92.

### Religiosity

The CRS consists of 15 items with five subscales of three items per subscale (Huber & Huber, 2012). The five subscales are intellect, ideology, experience, private practice, and public practice. Items are scores on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 = never, to 5 = very often. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for scores from the total scale was 0.92.

### Procedure

The study protocol was approved by the Humanities Ethics Committee of the University of Ghana (Protocol number ECH 099/15-16). The various media houses in Ashanti, Western, and Greater Accra Regions granted permission for the study. Participants individually consented to the study. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that their data would be treated with confidence. The self-administered surveys took about 30 minutes to complete. The data was collected over a period of 10 weeks and all key ethical principles were adhered to throughout the data collection process.

### Data analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS software version 24. First, the Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationship among study variables in the study. Next, a series of hierarchical regression analyses was implemented to predict employee well-being from emotional labour, as well as to test for the moderation effect of religiosity on the relationship between emotional labour and psychological health. The regression analysis involved three steps: (i) entry of control variables into the regression equation (age, fulltime employment, and female); (ii) entry of predictors (surface acting, deep acting, and religiosity); and (iii) entry of the moderators (surface acting \* religiosity, and deep acting \* religiosity). Multicollinearity checks among the predictors using tolerance values and variance inflation factors indicated low levels; allowing the regression analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the data on the relationship among variables. Psychological health was positively associated with emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.19$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) but negatively associated with surface acting ( $r = -0.15$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, surface acting (portending lower

emotional labour) significantly positively correlated with psychological health variables namely emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and general well-being ( $r = -0.15$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Religiosity was significantly associated with DA asset ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting it to be a workplace coping mechanism.

### Predicting employee well-being from emotional labour

As shown in Table 2, the demographic factors collectively contributed 1% of the changes in the employee well-being [ $R^2 = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ], which suggests that the demographic factors only weakly predicted well-being. Being a female was a significant positive predictor of well-being [ $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ]. At step 2, surface acting and deep acting collectively contributed 3% of the changes in employee well-being [ $R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ], indicating that emotional labour is a weak predictor of employee well-being in this setting. Surface acting was a significant negative predictor of employee psychological well-being [ $\beta = -0.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ], confirming Hypothesis 1 (Surface acting orientation will decrease psychological health: general well-being and emotional exhaustion). However, religiosity did not significantly moderate the relationship between emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting) and general psychological well-being, contrary to Hypothesis 3 (Religiosity will significantly moderate the relationship between emotional labour and psychological health, augmenting deep acting effects).

### Predicting emotional exhaustion from emotional labour

As indicated in Table 3, surface acting and deep acting contributed 2% of the change in emotional exhaustion scores ( $R^2 = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that emotional labour collectively influenced emotional exhaustion. However, surface acting was the only significant predictor of emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Consistent with Hypothesis 1, and contrary to Hypothesis 2).

Further, the moderating role of religiosity was only significant in the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that religiosity attenuated emotional exhaustion, if combined with low work engagement (contrary to Hypothesis 3).

The significant moderation effect of religiosity in the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion is presented in Figure 1.

## Discussion

Results indicate that surface acting significantly predicted general well-being and emotional exhaustion. However, deep acting did not significantly predict any of the psychological health variables namely, emotional

**Table 1:** Relationship among the study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1 General well-being	18.85	3.21	–			
2 Emotional exhaustion	14.37	3.55	0.19**	–		
3 Surface Acting	10.34	2.21	-0.15**	0.14*	–	
4 Deep Acting	8.15	2.34	0.05	0.02	0.26**	–
5 Religiosity	61.24	9.38	0.06	-0.07	0.08	0.17**

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

**Table 2.** Emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting) as predictors of employee well-being

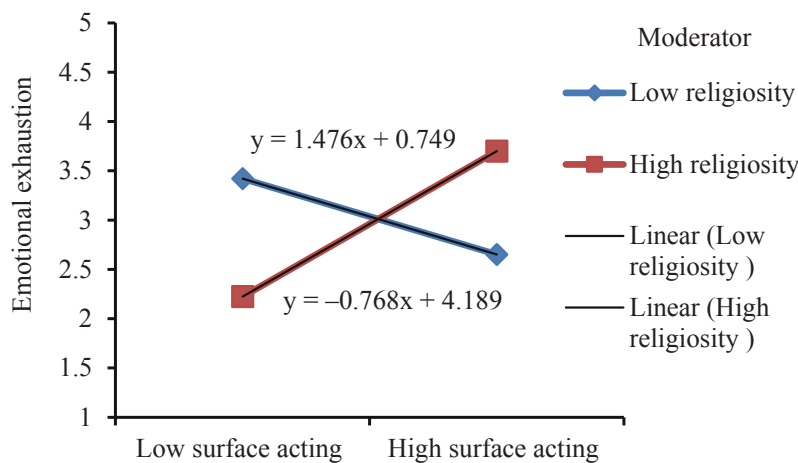
	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i> change
<i>Step 1:</i>				0.01*	
Female	0.16	2.89	0.02		
Age	0.09	0.58	0.560		
Fulltime	0.08	1.02	0.311		
<i>Step 2:</i>					
Female	0.08	1.13	0.08		
Age	0.05	0.49	0.65		
Fulltime	0.03	0.09	0.45		
Surface acting	-0.17	-3.11	< 0.00	0.03**	5.26
Deep acting	0.09	1.64	0.10		
Religiosity	0.06	1.09	0.28		
<i>Step 3:</i>				0.04	0.433
Female	0.05	0.08	0.95		
Age	0.03	0.36	0.73		
Fulltime	0.02	0.06	0.54		
Surface acting	-0.17	-3.00	< 0.00		
Deep acting	0.09	1.53	0.13		
Religiosity	0.06	1.16	0.25		
Surface acting × religiosity	-0.04	-0.69	0.49		
Deep acting × religiosity	-0.02	-0.29	0.77		

Note. \**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01

**Table 3.** Emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting) as predictors of emotional exhaustion

	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i> change
<i>Step 1:</i>				0.02*	3.33
Surface acting	0.14	2.55	0.01		
Deep acting	-0.02	-0.31	0.76		
<i>Step 2:</i>				0.03	2.29
Surface acting	0.15	2.60	0.01		
Deep acting	-0.00	-0.05	0.96		
Religiosity	-0.08	-1.51	0.13		
<i>Step 3:</i>				0.05*	3.95
Surface acting	0.14	2.40	0.02		
Deep acting	-0.02	-0.26	0.80		
Religiosity	-0.10	-1.81	0.07		
Surface acting × religiosity	0.17	2.80	0.01		
Deep acting × religiosity	-0.06	-0.95	0.34		

Note. \**p* < 0.05



**Figure 1.** Moderation effect of religiosity on the relationship between SA and EE

exhaustion and general well-being. The finding on the predictive strength of surface acting over deep acting suggests that employees in the media industry may be less personally engaged and prefer to use their persona to manage their work situations (see also Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Rathi et al., 2015).

Media practitioners preferred to surface act most of the time as they shoulder their work role (see also Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Rathi et al., 2013). What this means is that media practitioners in Ghana adopt an outward demeanour to professionally accepted displays. This finding is consistent with some previous studies such as Grandey (2003); Kinman and colleagues (2011); Wagner and colleagues (2014); and Zapf (2002). With the exception of Adelmann (1989), all the other researchers found surface acting to affect emotional exhaustion and general well-being of employees in other service sectors. Nonetheless, the need to manage inner feelings by modifying display rules in the surface acting mode would create emotional dissonance for some (Grandey, 2003) and psychological stress from the inner tension to manage frustration by acting nice (for example, by smiling).

The interaction effect of religiosity on the relationship between surface acting and psychological health suggests that, when surface acting is low, emotional exhaustion is higher for those media practitioners who are less religious but better for those who are more religious. When surface acting is high, emotional exhaustion is lower for media practitioners who are less religious but higher for those who are more religious. This finding suggests that media practitioners with high levels of surface acting while religious may have higher psychological dissonance from not being their genuine selves in their job roles. This would be true of media practitioners subscribing to the charismatic Christian religion orientation (Osafo et al., 2015).

### Limitations and recommendations

The limitations of the study include use of a convenience sample, so that findings may not be generalisable to Ghanaian media practitioners in general. Our reliance on self-report surveys was a limitation in that they are susceptible to social desirability biases. Use of a cross-sectional design was a limitation in that the design does not allow for the study of cause-and-effect relationships. Future studies can employ a probability sample, longitudinal design, and/or mixed methods approaches for a better understanding of the relationship between emotional labour and psychological health of media practitioners. Finally, the results of this study necessitate the need to examine industry level cultural displays within other industry sector contexts. Moreover, there is a need for studies to examine emotional labour influences on media practitioners across cultures (collectivistic versus individualistic).

### Conclusion

Surface acting emotional labour processes lowered the psychological health of media practitioners. This finding may be explained by the fact that media employment comes with an emotional toll on employees. Personal

religiosity may be a resource for managing emotional labour demands among media industry practitioners. The emotional labour demands explained a small proportion of the variance in employee psychological health. Therefore, media owners should adopt workplace strategies to minimise risks to employees from work-related emotional labour.

### ORCID iD

Collins Badu Agyemang – <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0490-9193>

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