**Testing the Structure Model of Emotional Labor, Job Stress, Burnout, and Job Satisfaction in Korea**

Jiho Jang (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies)

Mark Wilding (The Catholic University of Korea)

Kyungjin Chae (Seoul Jeil Graduate University)

**Abstract**

Strong foundations for the study of emotional labor in public administration have been built in recent years. However, these studies have for the most part been conducted in Western countries, and there is still comparatively little research on emotional labor in Asian public administration. One consequence is that theory building on emotional labor has generally given more consideration to American and European contexts. The present study aims to help address this deficit through an analysis of the results of a survey of local government employees in South Korea (n=467). The data is used to test the relationships between four components of emotional labor (frequency, attentiveness, variety and dissonance) on job stress, burn out, and job satisfaction.

After conducting the structural equation modeling process, the variety of emotional labor performed was found to have both a positive and negative effect on job satisfaction, although the positive effect was larger. In addition, emotional dissonance, and particularly job stress were found to have a relationship with burnout, while attentiveness, variety and emotional dissonance were found to directly increase job stress, and indirectly increase burnout. The study concludes by offering suggestions on ways in which governments can reduce the burdens of emotional labor for those providing services to the public.

Key words: Emotional labor; job satisfaction; job stress; burnout

**Introduction**

Emotional labor is a topic which has received considerable attention since Arlie Hochschild (1979) first defined the concept, including a growing body of research from the perspective of public administration (Guy & Newman, 2004; Guy, Newman & Mastracci, 2008; Hsieh & Guy, 2009; Jin & Guy, 2009; Meier, Mastracci & Wilson, 2006; Hsieh, Jin & Guy, 2012). Nevertheless, emotional labor has received less attention in the context of Korean public administration. While some exploratory studies have been conducted in recent years, including surveys on the emotional labor of police officers (Kim Sang Ho, 2009; Kim & Han, 2012), as well as local government employees (Kim Sang Goo, 2009; Yang & Song, 2010), much less is known about the way that emotional labor works in Korea. These studies, written in Korean, have been primarily concerned with questions about who does emotional labor, and with identifying the consequences of emotional labor.

There is a need to connect Korean research on emotional labor in public administration with the wider body of international literature, so that the results of Korean studies can contribute to and help refine our understanding of emotional labor in the public sector, and ultimately, the performance of public sector organizations. In particular, this may help us to understand not only the consequences of emotional labor, but also how emotional labor is influenced by different cultural contexts. Despite the significant international research which has been published on emotional labor, there is still considerable debate as to the consequences of emotional labor – are the consequences of emotional labor positive (i.e., job satisfaction), or negative (i.e., job stress and burn out)?

The present study attempts to contribute to this debate through a survey of local government employees at city hall and ward offices in Bucheon, in Gyeonggi province, just outside of Seoul. More specifically, this study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the relationships between four factors of emotional labor (frequency, attentiveness, variety, dissonance) on job satisfaction, job stress, and burn out. The next part of this paper will review the extant literature on emotional labor which relates to the concept of emotional labor and its consequences for public administrators. Subsequently, the research design will be outlined, and the results explained and discussed. In the final section a conclusion is offered.

**Theoretical Background**

Emotional labor has been used to examine a range of organizations and professions across academic disciplines ranging from sociology and psychology to business, and in the last decade, public administration. Hochschild’s now much quoted definition saw emotional labor as the “management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (1983: 7). It is important to point out that although Hochschild’s description of the negative consequences of emotional labor has received much attention, she also suggested that emotional labor can be good for the employee, depending on how it is enacted (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). It is perhaps unsurprising that as emotional labor has been utilized and developed across a range of disciplines, differing definitions of the term have been applied. For instance, an early definition from public administration emphasized the need to understand others:

“The projection of feelings and emotions needed to gain the cooperation of clients or coworkers, the ability to see another’s side of the issue and integrate that perspective into what the organization does” (Meier et al., 2006: 899).

The idea of emotional labor in public administration may initially have seemed quite paradoxical from the perspective of Weberian bureaucracy. However, even if the emotions displayed are neutral, this still requires emotional control on the part of the employee (Parsons, 1951). Moreover, it has also been pointed out how in reality it is difficult to achieve impersonal detachment for employees who may be able to see the impact of their decisions on the people they deal with. Some employees may express their genuine emotions with little prompting, for example when offering sympathy to a service user, however, this should still be considered to be emotional labor if it aids the work of the organization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Mastracci, et al., 2006).

Emotional labor is usually seen to involve two main types of acting; surface and deep acting. Surface acting takes place when an employee attempts to emphasize their emotions, or display emotions that they do not feel, for example, smiling when they are having a bad day. In contrast, deep acting takes place when an employee attempts to change the way that they actually *feel*. For example, instead of merely smiling, they try to actually enjoy the personal interactions which are required by their job. Employees who are better at deep acting are more able to overcome emotional dissonance (i.e., the gap between real and displayed emotions).

All those in paid work may be required to perform emotional labor at one time or another, whether this is through face-to-face contact with the public, or contact with other employees or management (Donald, 2001), or via the telephone (Deery et al., 2002; Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Kinman, 2009). Indeed, despite reasons suggesting that face-to-face contact with the public may require more emotional labor, due to greater emphasis on body language and facial expression, and relatively longer interactions, research suggests similar levels of emotional labor for those involved in voice-to-voice work (Kinman, 2009).

Employee characteristics are also expected to impact on emotional labor. In particular, while studies suggest that greater emotional labor demands are placed on women, the case has been made that women’s ability to perform this work is taken for granted, and thus not properly compensated (Guy & Newman, 2004). It has also been suggested that employees in lower status positions, or even professionals whose emotional labor is monitored by their superiors will face more emotional labor demands or emotional dissonance (Leidner, 1999; Sloan, 2004). To the extent to which age and experience is discussed, research tends to suggest that younger and less experienced employees are less likely to be able to effectively manage their emotions or engage in deep acting (Hochschild, 1983; Erickson & Grove, 2007; Dahling & Perez, 2010).

A factor which complicates our understanding of emotional labor however is variation in the meaning of the concept and its constituent components. In other words, emotional labor is not simply a dichotomous variable, and consequently, it is important to clarify the components of emotional labor. Morris and Feldman (1996) theorized emotional labor as consisting of four components; frequency, attentiveness, variety and dissonance. Frequency was a central part of Hochschild’s (1983) thesis, as she explained that frequent emotional displays may place a heavy burden on employees leading to alienation and exhaustion, and consequently, frequency has been at the center of studies attempting to measure emotional labor (Zapf, 2002). While frequency is a quantitative aspect of emotional labor, attentiveness has both quantitative (i.e., the duration of emotional display), and qualitative aspects (i.e., the intensity of emotional display). Mann & Cowburn (2005) found attentiveness to be an important part of the emotional labor construct. Regarding more qualitative aspects, employees may be required to perform a variety of emotional labor, for example, local civil servants may be generally expected to display positive emotions when dealing with the public, but need to display negative emotions (i.e., appear tough) if a client is being too pushy or aggressive. Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver (2008) suggest that the extent to which different levels of employees may be required to perform a variety of emotional labor may differ. Finally, among the components of emotional labor, emotional dissonance has received considerable attention as a component which has significant variance in consequences (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1997).

Given the differing definitions of emotional labor, and the focus on different components of the construct, it is not surprising that research on the consequences of emotional labor has not led to widespread agreement. This section will discuss three oft cited consequences of emotional labor; job satisfaction, job stress, and burnout.

Firstly, in terms of job satisfaction, while much of the early international literature pointed to a negative relationship with emotional labor, following Wharton’s (1993) study of service work, an increasing number of studies have reported a positive relationship between the two variables (Guy et al., 2008). This is significant because from an organizational perspective, job satisfaction is associated with reduced absenteeism and turnover (Spector, 1997). Still, the evidence remains mixed however, with other studies reporting a negative relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction (Pugliesi, 1999). In the Korean context less research has focused on job satisfaction. However, positive relationships have been reported, particularly for employees who are skilled in deep acting or controlling their emotions (Kim & Han, 2012; Han, 2011; Yang & Song, 2010).

Job stress has also received a considerable degree of attention. This emphasis may be understood, as high levels of job stress have long been considered to have negative consequences for individuals and organizations. Indeed, even definitions of job stress refer to the negative consequences, for example the National Institute for Occupational Health defines job stress as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker (1999: 6). The literature has tended to emphasize the negative effects of emotional labor on job stress (Pugliesi, 1999), however there is also research which has found emotional labor to decrease stress (Coward & Witte, 1994). Korean research has generally found a positive connection between emotional labor and job stress (Kim Sang Goo, 2009; Kim Sang Ho, 2009; Yoo et al., 2011), or between surface acting and job stress (Kim & Lee, 2011; Lee & Kim, 2011), or emotional dissonance and job stress (Kim & Han, 2012).

While burnout shares some common characteristics with job stress, they are actually different concepts. Burnout can be identified by prolonged exhaustion, cynicism or inefficiency as a response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). As such, burnout may be a consequence of long term stress. Hochschild (1983) identified that the downside of surface acting may be employees feeling emotionally drained or exhausted, and this has been supported by subsequent research (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, [1998](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02678370601065182#CIT0008); Grandey, 2003; Näring, Briët, & Brouwers, 2006). Korean research has also emphasized the connection between emotional labor and emotional exhaustion or burnout more generally (Lee & Yang, 2008; Lee & Kim, 2011). This is important because burnout has been linked to increased turnover intention and reduced levels of performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

**Research Design**

**1. Case selection and sample**

The decision to focus on a Korean case was due in part to due to the comparatively lower number of studies on emotional labor in Korean public administration, along with the absence of published studies in English. These issues in combination mean that theory building about emotional labor in public administration in the English speaking world has so far taken place without consideration for the Korean context. This is particularly significant given the characteristics of Korean public administration and Korean society more generally. Korea has traditionally been a Confucian society which has emphasized love, harmony, kindness and benevolence, and this continues to impact on Korean government (Kee, 2008; Park, 1997). Similarly, Korean society has been characterized as being a hierarchical society, where people have a loyalty to the group, where people have strong uncertainty avoidance, and are driven to be busy and work hard (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). More specifically, the emotional culture in Korea may be regarded as institutionally oriented (as opposed to impulsively oriented) as usually emotions must fit with institutional standards (Gordon, 1989). In particular, Korean culture discourages open displays of emotion, and has a term (*myupojung*) to refer to the positively viewed “expressionless” face (Lynch & Hansen, 1992). These cultural characteristics raise questions about whether emotional labor in the Korean context will have similar consequences to in the West. As such, by focusing on Korea, one of the aims of this study is to help to feed into the wider theory of emotional labor in public administration.

Bucheon local government was selected as the site of the survey as it is a busy local government which regularly processes a significant number of civil applications, for example property and vehicle registrations and sanction permissions. Indeed administrators processed 11,788 civil applications each working day in 2010 (Bucheon city government, 2011). More generally, despite the successes of Korean e-government, the majority of applications are still processed in person, meaning that there is significant contact between officials and the public (Moon, 2009).

In terms of the sample demographics, there were more male (58.5%) than female respondents (41.1%), reflecting the greater participation of men in the Korean labor force. The sample also contained more older employees, with approximately two thirds of respondents being aged 40 or older. More specifically, employees reported their age as follows; 20s (4.9%), 30s (28.5%), 40s (42.4%), and 50 or over (23.8%). Again, this reflects wider employment demographics in Korean public administration. In particular, the extensive preparation required to pass the government entrance exam, and mandatory military service for men help to explain the low proportion of respondents in their 20s. The great majority of Koreans now complete university degrees, and so the 15.4% of respondents without degrees are more likely to be older employees. The age of respondents is also consistent with their length of service, with 14.1% of employees serving for 0-5 years, 26.8% for 6-15 years, and 57.6% for 16 years or more. Still, the majority of employees occupied lower positions. Korean government positions range from level 1 to 9 (highest to lowest). However only 14.8% reported that they were a team leader or higher (level 6 or above). Significantly, more respondents were obtained from employees who are not required to have face-to-face contact with the public. This does not denote a lack of contact with the public however, as these employees may be required to communicate with the public via telephone.

**2. Defining and measuring the variables**

Drawing on Morris and Feldman (1996), and Sang Goo Kim (2009), the survey conceptualizes the emotional labor construct according to the four factors of frequency, attentiveness, variety, and emotional dissonance. Statements about the possible consequences of job satisfaction, job stress, and burnout were also included. In total, responses to 22 statements were utilized, 12 of which measure the components of emotional labor, while 10 measure the consequences. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement according to a 5-point Likert scale (1=very slightly or not at all, 5 = extremely). The variables were defined as follows:

***Frequency*** is concerned with how often an employee is required to display socially appropriate emotions. This variable is used to probe how much of their time employees spend and how regularly they must manage their feelings to get the job done. A sample item is “I frequently hide my emotions when dealing with the public”.

***Attentiveness*** assesses the level of attentiveness which employees give to displaying the “right” emotions. This variable includes both duration and intensity of emotional display (Morris and Feldman, 1996). A sample item is “I attempt to appear kind and to serve the public with a smile even in a long meeting”.

***Variety*** probes the extent to which employees vary the emotions which they use. Employees may feel it necessary to change the emotions they are displaying within a particular transaction or between transactions. A sample item is “I change my emotion from positive to negative on a case by case basis”.

***Dissonance*** measures the conflict between the emotions which an employee feels and those that they are required to display. Managing emotions at this time may require greater skill and effort. A sample item is “There is a big difference between my real and displayed emotions”.

***Job satisfaction*** is a variable used to measure the extent to which the employee feels content with and fulfilled by their work, and to assess whether this is influenced, either positively or negatively, by any of the components of emotional labor. A sample item is “My work is satisfying”.

***Job stress*** is a scale used to assess the degree to which employees feel pressure or tension when working. The extent to which employees feel overworked or irritated at work are included in this variable. A sample item is “I feel frustrated by my work”.

***Burnout*** represents the extent to which employees report feeling emotionally exhausted. In other words, whether they have less energy due to the emotional requirements of serving the public. A sample item is “I feel mentally fatigued at the end of each working day”.

**3. Research model**

Based on the components and consequences of emotional labor, discussed above, the present study designed a research model, as seen in figure 1. The research model attempts to measure the relationships between each of the components of emotional labor, the effects of the components on the possible consequences, and of job stress on burnout, and job stress and burnout on job satisfaction.

Figure 1: Research Model

**4. Data collection[[1]](#footnote-2)**

A paper and pencil survey was distributed in March 2012 to 500 mostly non-managerial level administrative employees in Bucheon city government. The survey was distributed along with a cover letter which explained the study objectives, requested participation, and guaranteed anonymity. The survey was completed in regular working hours, and in total 467 employees (93.4%) responded with usable data.

**Results**

In order to test the model, we began with confirmatory factor analysis to check the extent to which each of the components are consistent with our understanding of the emotional labor construct. Confirmatory factor analysis was used due to the existence of an a priori factor structure (Armstrong, 1967). The results, displayed in table 1, suggest a good fit for the four factor model of emotional labor. To test convergent validity, AVE was tested, and for all components was 0.5 or greater, which is usually considered to be adequate. All four factors met the criteria of Cronbach’s alpha values of .70 or higher, as suggested by Hair et al (1998), and therefore demonstrated internal consistency.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Factor loading | AVE | Cronbach’s Alpha |
| Frequency → el01 | 0.81 | 0.57 | 0.79 |
| Frequency → el02 | 0.80 |
| Frequency → el03 | 0.66 |
| Attentiveness → el04 | 0.61 | 0.64 | 0.80 |
| Attentiveness → el05 | 0.85 |
| Attentiveness → el06 | 0.82 |
| Variety → el07 | 0.65 | 0.5 | 0.63 |
| Variety → el08 | 0.74 |
| Variety → el09 | 0.45 |
| Emotional dissonance → el10 | 0.64 | 0.7 | 0.84 |
| Emotional dissonance → el11 | 0.87 |
| Emotional dissonance → el12 | 0.88 |
| Job stress → jst1 | 0.84 | 0.75 | 0.85 |
| Job stress → jst2 | 0.92 |
| Job stress → jst3 | 0.67 |
| Burnout → bo1 | 0.72 | 0.63 | 0.82 |
| Burnout → bo2 | 0.83 |
| Burnout → bo3 | 0.78 |
| Job satisfaction → jsa1 | 0.80 | 0.55 | 0.74 |
| Job satisfaction → jsa2 | 0.83 |
| Job satisfaction → jsa3 | 0.41 |
| Job satisfaction → jsa4 | 0.57 |

\* AVE: Averaged Variance Extracted

MLE: Maximum Likelihood Estimation

Next, regression weight analysis was conducted in order to test the degree of the relationship between the factors of emotional labor and job stress, burn out, and job satisfaction. We also tested the effects of job stress on burn out, and job stress and burn out on job satisfaction. As can be seen in table 2, the coefficient of determination (R2) was much higher for burn out (0.76), than job stress (0.19), or job satisfaction (0.24). However, only particular variables had a statistically significant effect – attentiveness, variety, and emotional dissonance on job stress, emotional dissonance and job stress on burn out, and variety and burnout on job satisfaction. Interestingly, the relationship between frequency and all three potential consequences had a high p-value, meaning that it is less likely that frequency has an effect on job stress, burn out, or job satisfaction. After removing those factors which were not statistically significant, we tested the model fit.

Table 2: Regression Weight (Default Model)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Beta | p | DRW00001ca0525a |
| Job stress | ← | Frequency | 0.06 | 0.30 | 0.19 |
| ← | Attentiveness | 0.20 | 0.01\*\* |
| ← | Variety | 0.22 | 0.06\* |
| ← | Emotional dissonance | 0.19 | 0.01\*\* |
| Burnout | ← | Frequency | 0.03 | 0.55 | 0.76 |
| ← | Attentiveness | 0.1 | 0.12 |
| ← | Variety | 0.1 | 0.29 |
| ← | Emotional dissonance | 0.21 | 0.00\*\*\* |
| ← | Job stress | 0.78 | 0.00\*\*\* |
| Job satisfaction | ← | Frequency | 0.04 | 0.42 | 0.24 |
| ← | Attentiveness | -0.04 | 0.61 |
| ← | Variety | 0.57 | 0.00\*\*\* |
| ← | Emotional dissonance | 0.03 | 0.35 |
| ← | Job stress | 0.08 | 0.5 |
| ← | Burnout | -0.41 | 0.00\*\*\* |

\*p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

As highlighted in table 3, the absolute, incremental and parsimonious fit measures used in the path analysis all indicate good to acceptable fit for the new model which has a similar level of fit to the default model discussed above. A range of measures was used due to the disparity in agreement over which indices to report. Dealing with the absolute fit measures first, the relative chi-square, Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted GFI and Root Mean Square Residual are all at acceptable levels (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). As such, the model which suggests that job stress, burn out and job satisfaction are consequences of attentiveness, variety and emotional dissonance is a good fit. When it comes to incremental fit measures, the Normal, Incremental, and Comparative Fit Indices are all below recommended upper limits (Bollen, 1989; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Due to the saturation level of the model, parsomonious fit measures were also utilized. While these are more difficult to interpret they again appear to be within generally acceptable levels, Parsimonious GFI is 0.69, while the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation .08 which it is recommended indicates good model fit (Hu & Bentler 1999).

Table 3: Model Fit

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model fit | Saturated | Default model | Model 2 |
| Absolute for measures | X²/df | < 3 | 3.12 | 3.03 |
| GFI | >0.9 | 0.90 | 0.90 |
| AGFI | >0.9 | 0.86 | 0.86 |
| RMR | p＜0.08 | 0.054 | 0.056 |
| Incremental fit measures | NFI | >0.9 | 0.88 | 0.88 |
| IFI | >0.9 | 0.91 | 0.91 |
| CFI | >0.9 | 0.91 | 0.91 |
| Parsimonious fit measures | PGFI | >0.5 | 0.67 | 0.69 |
| RMSEA | p＜0.08 | 0.07 | 0.07 |

\* Model 2: Estimates calculated after the deletion of eight hypotheses

After checking the model fit, we again tested the regression weight. The results, which are displayed in table 4, were all statistically significant, and once more showed that the coefficient of determination was much higher for burn out than for job stress and job satisfaction. In particular, the relationship between job stress and burn out was very strong, suggesting that those who felt stressed at work are likely to also feel burned out. However, the model also estimated a strong relationship between emotional dissonance and burn out, suggesting that those employees who are required to display emotions which are different than how they actually feel are more likely to burn out. Perhaps unsurprisingly, burnout was negatively correlated with job satisfaction. On a more positive note however, variety was found to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction – in other words, those employees who were able to express a range of emotions and vary the emotions which they felt and displayed received more satisfaction from their job.

Table 4: Regression Weight (Model 2)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Beta | p | DRW00001ca0525c |
| Job stress | ← | Attentiveness | 0.23 | 0.00\*\* | 0.2 |
| ← | Variety | 0.25 | 0.03\* |
| ← | Emotional dissonance | 0.18 | 0.01\* |
| Burnout | ← | Emotional dissonance | 0.28 | 0.00\*\* | 0.76 |
| ← | Job stress | 0.8 | 0.00\*\* |
| Job satisfaction | ← | Variety | 0.56 | 0.00\*\* | 0.23 |
| ← | Burnout | -0.34 | 0.00\*\* |

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

Table 5, below, reveals the total effect of each of the components of emotional labor on job stress, burn out and job satisfaction. In addition to the direct effects noted above, emotional dissonance, variety and attentiveness were found to have an indirect effect on burnout due to the relationship between job stress and burnout. Job stress, emotional dissonance, variety and attentiveness were also found to have a small indirect (and negative) effect on job satisfaction, due to the relationship between job stress and burn out. One explanation for variety having both a positive and a negative relationship with job satisfaction, is that, in addition to the positive reasons discussed above, some employees may have felt that experiencing and expressing a range of emotions was burdensome.

Table 5: Total Effect

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Job stress | Burnout | Job satisfaction | Total |
| Direct ef. | Direct ef. | Indirect ef. | Direct ef. | Indirect ef. |
| Frequency |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Attentiveness | 0.23 |  | 0.18 |  | -0.06 | -0.06 |
| Variety | 0.25 |  | 0.2 | 0.56 | -0.07 | 0.5 |
| Emotional dissonance | 0.18 | 0.28 | 0.14 |  | -0.14 | -0.14 |
| Job stress |  | 0.80 |  |  | -0.27 | -0.27 |
| Burn out |  |  |  | -0.34 |  | -0.34 |

Figure 2, below, illustrates the relationships between the components and consequences of emotional labor, including both direct and indirect factors.

Figure 2: Result

**Discussion**

The results represent a mixed picture for the consequences of emotional labor in the context of Korean local government. While performing a variety of emotional labor has a mostly positive effect on job satisfaction, it also has a negative effect, although this is somewhat smaller. This suggests a division between those employees who prefer to do a variety of emotional labor, and take satisfaction from performing their duties in this way, and those who find it burdensome to switch between displaying different emotions. Less attention has been given to variety of emotional labor, however, the results suggest that this variety is an important component of emotional labor. In practical terms, there may be benefits for local government of attempting to recruit employees who both enjoy and are capable of doing a variety of emotional labor.

On a more negative point, emotional dissonance was found to increase job stress. While this finding is consistent with previous research (Han & Kim, 2012), emotional dissonance was also found to indirectly increase burnout, via its relationship with job stress. However, given that burnout is defined as a response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors, this is not surprising. These negative consequences are interesting given that the majority of respondents were 40 years old or more and had at least several years of experience. In other words, these are employees who should be less likely to experience emotional dissonance or burnout (Hochschild, 1983; Erickson & Grove, 2007; Dahling & Perez, 2010). However, despite their age and experience, the respondents were mainly relatively low level employees, and so our findings are similar to previous research which has suggested that low level employees are likely to be required to perform more emotional labor (Leidner, 1999; Sloan, 2004).

Significantly, frequency was not found to have a significant impact on any of the consequences of emotional labor included in this study. This is interesting given the initial emphasis on frequency in studies of emotional labor (Morris & Feldman, 1996). However, this finding is consistent with later research which has tended to give more emphasis to other factors, and particularly emotional dissonance (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Lewig & Dollard, 2003).

In order to avoid job stress, and ultimately, burn out, a concern must be with helping employees to become better at deep acting, or at recruiting employees who are already good at deep acting. In this respect Hsieh and Guy (2009) have argued that the ability to perform emotional labor should be included in job descriptions. In the Korean case, there is a particularly strong need for job descriptions to contain this information because usually job descriptions for jobs in the public sector only contain information on very formal requirements, such as qualifications and years of experience. However, this may be misleading, because, as the results of this survey show, Korean employees are performing emotional labor, and as such employers should be clear from the start that this is part of the job. More explicit recognition of the fact that employees are engaging in emotional labor and that this may lead to stress or burnout could also be a first step in the planning of training programs which focus on deep acting. While Bucheon city currently offers training to reduce stress, the survey evidence suggests that these programs could be improved by including substantive content on deep acting.

The results of this study are important as they can feed into and help to enrich the international literature on emotional labor in public administration. Rather than suggesting significant differences between emotional labor in Korean public administration and elsewhere, the results are broadly similar to international studies. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain the impact of Korean culture on the results. A high level of uncertainty avoidance, which means that people are driven to be busy and work hard, may help to explain why the frequency of emotional labor does not have any significant negative impact. However, it does not help to explain why the other categories, and attentiveness in particular, do have a relationship with stress. Emotional culture may be more useful as an explanation here however, and as Korean culture is more institutionally oriented, meaning that employees are required to regulate emotions in order to comply with institutional norms, it is not surprising that employees may feel stressed or burned out, even if the expectations placed on employees do differ from the “service with a smile” culture prevalent in countries such as Canada and the United States (Grandey et al., 2005).

**Conclusion**

This study has found emotional labor in the Korean public sector to have both positive and negative consequences. Dealing with the positives first, we found the variety factor of emotional labor to have a significant positive effect on job satisfaction. However, on the negative side, we also found emotional dissonance, and particularly job stress to have a relationship with burn out. Moreover, attentiveness, variety and emotional dissonance were likely to increase job stress, but also likely to indirectly increase burnout. More generally, we were unable to confirm that frequency impacts upon job stress, burnout or job satisfaction, suggesting that the level of attentiveness, variety of emotions expressed, and dissonance are more likely to have an effect on employees.

These results are important, because while the findings regarding the negative consequences of emotional dissonance, or the relationship between job stress and burnout may not be particularly new, they help reconfirm findings from the international literature. Less has been written on variety of emotional labor however, and so the findings regarding the relationship between variety and emotional labor may carry more significance in terms of understanding the components of emotional labor and their consequences.

This information can be useful for managers in the public sector. In particular, this research supports the recommendation that employees who are more suited to emotional labor and deep acting be employed in jobs working with the public (Guy et al., 2008). However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are things that management can do to support existing employees, such as training in deep acting and emotion management. Moreover, given the lack of control which individual employees have in the workplace, efforts which place the emphasis at the level of the organization, rather than the individual, are also required (Maslach et al., 2001). In the context of this study, this could involve initiatives which allow employees to engage in a variety of emotional labor. This could be achieved through giving employees opportunities to deal with a range of customer enquiries, including those which are expected be met with both positive and negative emotions.

There are also some limitations to the present study however. In particular, we have reported the results of a survey of employees within one city in Korea. As such, the extent to which these results can be generalized may be questioned. A further limitation regarding the scope of this study is that it focused on emotional labor required in exchanges with the public, and did not include intra-organizational interaction between co-workers and supervisors. Still, the findings presented in this study can contribute to the broader understanding of emotional labor in Korea, and thereby help to feed into a more detailed and complex picture of emotional labor internationally.

Studies of emotional labor in Korean public administration are still in their infancy, and as such, more studies are required in this area. International studies have focused on a wider range of government areas in which emotional labor may be required, for example, 911 call workers, and various parts of central government (Hsieh et al., 2012), and so there is considerable scope for future studies on emotional labor in Korean public administration. Indeed, these kinds of studies are necessary in order to improve our understanding of emotional labor, not just in Korean public administration, but more generally.

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1. This study reanalyzes data used in a previously published study (Wilding & Chae, 2012). Due to the formative nature of studies on emotional labor in the Korean context, the earlier study focused on who does emotional labor (employee demographics), and which of these employees are more likely to report feeling stressed, exhausted or satisfied. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)