

# Impacts Of Emotional Labour On Deviant Behaviour: A Systematic Review

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to examine the impacts of emotional labour on deviant workplace behaviour across various occupational settings. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a systematic approach based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The data gathered was analyzed using thematic analysis. The study found that emotional labour, particularly surface acting, is positively associated with various forms of deviant workplace behaviour, including interpersonal conflict, reduced cooperation, and counterproductive work behaviour. In contrast, deep acting showed mixed results, with some studies suggesting a buffering effect against deviance. The review also found that high emotional demands, lack of organizational support, and role stressors intensified the negative outcomes of emotional labour. This study is limited by its reliance on published literature, which may introduce publication bias and exclude relevant grey literature. Additionally, variations in definitions and measurements of emotional labour and deviant behaviour across studies posed challenges to consistently comparing findings. The study provides a comprehensive and up-to-date synthesis of existing research on the relationship between emotional labour and deviant behaviour, offering a clearer understanding of how different forms of emotional regulation impact employees.

**Keywords:** Deviant Behaviour, Emotional Labour, Workplace Deviance, Surface Acting

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, emotional labour has become an essential component in sustaining organizational efficiency and effectiveness, strengthening brand identity by fulfilling customers' sense of autonomy, encouraging employee resilience, and thereby promoting an agile workforce [82]. Emotional labour is an individual's attempt to display organizationally accepted emotional expressions while hiding their true feelings to meet customers' needs [92]. Emotional labour is an adjustment, masking or control of emotions [56]. Emotional labour is an act of reframing or faking feelings to convey an acceptable emotional display, and it consists of surface, genuine acting, and deep acting [41] and [80].

Surface acting involves suppressing felt emotions and displaying outward expressions and behaviors that meet organizational expectations, without making internal emotional adjustment [32]. Surface acting is the manipulation of emotions to express positive emotions while hiding negative emotions [50]. Emotional strategy is linked to emotional dissonance between feelings and expressions, leading to frustration, increased stress, and burnout [96]. Surface acting is linked to negative effects on the physical and emotional well-being of employees through emotional exhaustion and burnout, which can lead to depersonalization, increased depression, and anxiety. All of this can lead to low job satisfaction, reduced employee commitment, poor service quality, absenteeism, low employee morale, and increased turnover.

In contrast to surface acting, which is often associated with emotional dissonance, burnout, and other distinct workplace outcomes, deep acting is the most adaptive and effective form of emotional regulation [49]. Deep acting is an effort to adjust internal feelings to genuinely display emotional expressions that align with acceptable emotional displays of an organization [2]. Employees who practice deep acting modify their

internal feelings to convey an authentic emotional display to fulfil customer expectations [95]. While more emotionally taxing, deep acting is generally associated with higher customer satisfaction, high organizational performance, and low employee burnout [26]. Although emotional labour has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and overall productivity, it can lead to significant psychological strain and burnout if not well executed [11]. Excessive regulation of emotions leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout among employees [11]. When employees experience high pressure or demand that jeopardize their ability to handle their emotions or control the situation in an environment, they can potentially engage in workplace deviance [43]. Thus, the objective of the study is:

- To examine the impacts of emotional labour on deviant workplace behaviour across various occupational settings

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative approach, adopting a systematic literature review. “To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the publication retrieval process adhered to the outlined standards [57]. This study was conducted through a comprehensive analysis, incorporating timely information on emotional labour with a specific focus on how it influences the occurrence of deviant behaviour in organisations. This systematic review employs a rigorous and systematic approach to identify, evaluate, and integrate concepts and methods from selected journals. In this study, the initial search was conducted utilizing Google Scholar, applying the search terms “impacts” AND “emotional labour” AND “deviant behaviour”. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines were followed to design and report the review. Figure 1 demonstrates the publication retrieval process. Data retrieval was conducted using the outlined standards [57]. A data extraction procedure was employed to identify pertinent information from the 392 selected papers. The data extraction method consisted of the following stages: initially, the researchers used Mendeley as a reference manager to retrieve a database of articles. They then meticulously documented the pertinent details of the concepts, contributions, and discoveries of each of the 93 studies in a spreadsheet. Data collected from each article included the review date, title, authors, references, database, and relevance to the study. The researchers carefully examined the publication and eliminated studies that did not meet the specific exclusion criteria outlined in Figure 1. Ultimately, 93 papers were selected for a thorough and critical analysis. Data extracted from these papers was analysed using thematic analysis.

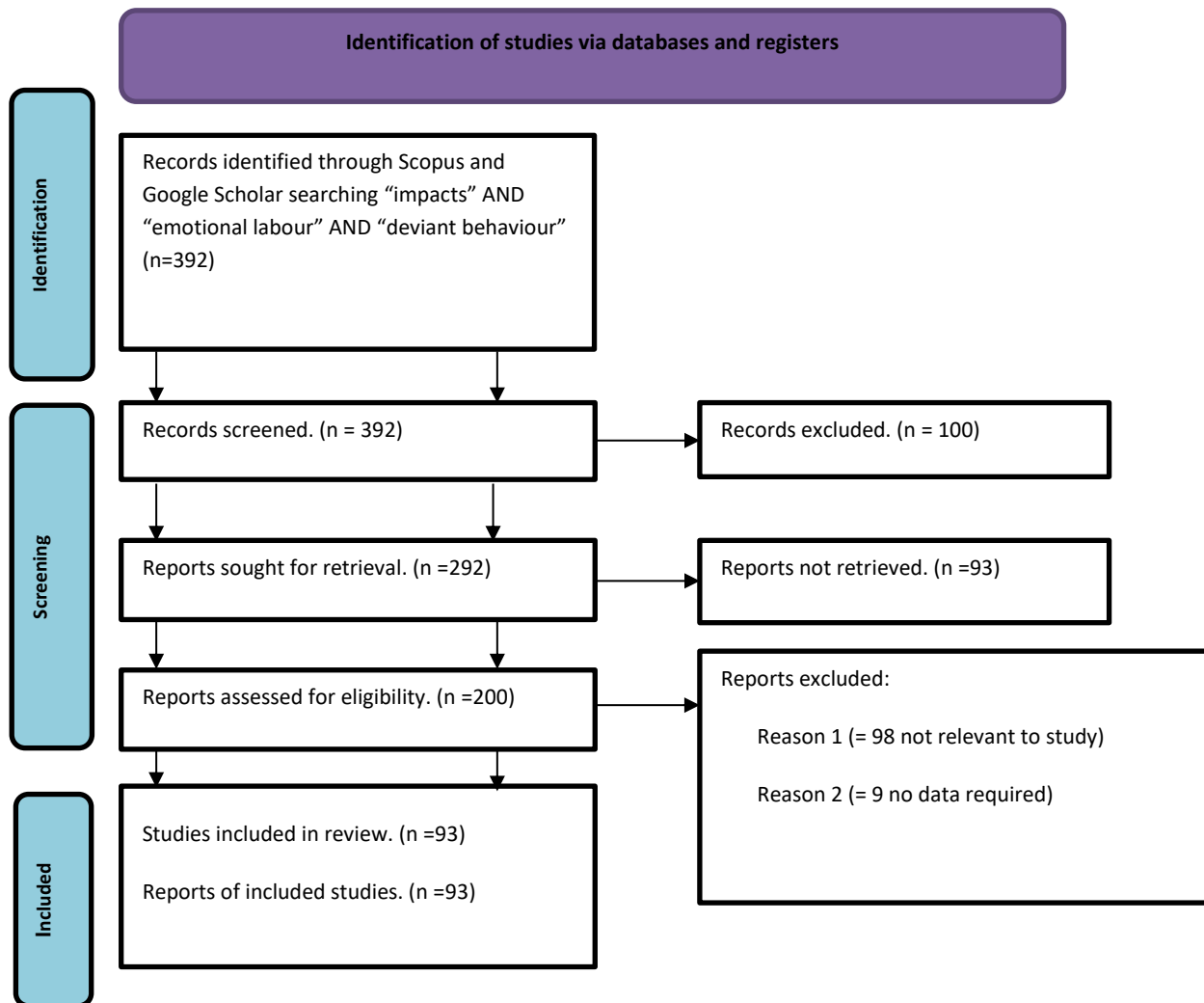


Figure 1: Data retrieval process

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section thematically outlines the findings from the study and provides discussions based on the existing literature to gather the relationship of the identified constructs with the literature.

#### Theme 1: Workplace Deviant Behaviours Impacts From Emotional Labour Strain

Impacts	Description	Citation
Deliberate Service Sabotage	Employees drained by persistent emotional labor strain may secretly sabotage customer service	[65]; [13]; [75].
Interpersonal conflict	Excessive emotional labour leads to interpersonal conflict, which negatively affects the well-being of an employee.	[47]; [107]; [108].
Reduced cooperation	Employees trained by extensive emotional labour may reduce their cooperation and engagement at work	[38]; [66]; [89].
Counterproductive work behaviour	When employees are emotionally exhausted due to high job demands, they may start engaging in counterproductive work	[71]; [98]; [1]

	behaviour.	
Increased Absenteeism (Skipping Work)	Emotional exhaustion or burnout may subsequently increase the rate of employee absenteeism in organisations	[18]; [61]; [99].
Chronic Tardiness	Prolonged employee engagement in emotional labour can lead to employees experiencing chronic tardiness.	[106]; [30]; [74].
Time Wasting and “Cyberloafing”	Emotional strain or burnout may influence employees to engage in go-slow, take long breaks, or leave early from work, allowing them to regain their emotional resources.	[84]; [62].
Theft	When employees' emotional resources are depleted, they may try to recover them by stealing the resources of the organisation	[109]; [79]; [114].
Passive Work Resistance	Continuous emotional labour may drain employees emotionally, causing them to disengage from their work duties due to lack of motivation.	[86]; [42]; [46].
Breaking Rules or Policies	When employees engaging into emotional labour are drained, they may start bending organizational rules and policies	[17]; [39]; [58].
Rudeness and Incivility Toward Coworkers	During service encounters employees may be emotionally exhausted, this exhaustion can later spill over in a form of anger and incivility towards other co-workers	[33]; [104]; [73].
Disrespectful Customer Interactions	Customers may treat employees with disrespectful interactions once or	[52].
Emotional Exhaustion	High emotional labour may lead to emotional overstrain leading to emotional exhaustion.	[12]; [103].
Angry Outbursts and Verbal Aggression	Employees who are emotionally exhausted by experience stress leading to aggression	[76]; [67]; [60]
Workplace Bullying or Harassment	Constant emotional labour can increase employee exhaustion and stress, causing them to bully and harass other employees as a way of coping with intense stress and frustration.	[15]
Open Cynicism and Negative Attitude	Constant emotional regulation can lead to exhaustion causing employees to question the sincerity and intentions of their organizations and as a result express cynicism and negative attitude within the organization	[4]; [14]; [111].
Insubordination	When employees are emotionally exhausted due to constant emotional labour they may start breaking the rules of the organization, disengaging from their allocated duties	[53]; [45]; [91].
Negligence and Low-Quality Work	Employees engaging in emotional labour are more likely to become stressed and burnout, as they feel disconnected from themselves and as a result, they may neglect their daily routines leading to reduced service quality.	[55]; [77]; [69]
Property Damage or Misuse	Emotionally strained employees damage can damage organizational property of as a silent protest or leases of emotional frustrations caused by persistent emotional labour.	[105]; [72]; [88].
Team Conflicts	When employees are emotionally exhausted and stressed,	[113]; [48]; [64]

and Lack of Cooperation	more conflicts arise among team members, hindering effective team cooperation.	
Withholding Effort	Constant emotional labour can be overwhelming and therefore employees may start withholding their effort, reducing their engagement and doing only the minimum required as a way to protect their well-being.	[37]; [102]; [10].
Ethical Lapses and Rule-Bending	Intense and prolonged emotional labour can cause employees stress and as a result employees may start bending the rules and standards of the organization to cope with stress at work.	[19]; [16]; [22].
On-the-Job Substance Use	Employees who engage in emotional labour may make use of alcohol and drugs at work as a way of coping with stress from high emotional demands.	[97]; [29]; [83]

According to Table 1, there are various impacts of workplace deviant behaviours stemming from emotional labour strain as discussed in the literature. Emotional labour strain, which results from workers consistently having to suppress their emotions to meet organizational requirements, can significantly contribute to deviant workplace behaviour. A prominent indicator is intentional service sabotage, where emotionally drained employees deliberately provide subpar service as a form of resistance or retaliation due to emotional labour strain [13]; [75]. Similarly, interactive conflict and team conflict also arise from escalated cantankerousness and poor emotional regulation, damaging workplace relationships and alliances [47]; [113]. This emotional toll further leads to counterproductive work behaviours such as time wasting, cyber loafing, and withholding effort, as workers disengage to conserve their remaining emotional resources [84]; [37].

Apart from reduced productivity, workers may display passive resistance, rudeness and insubordination, which may challenge norms and lead to undermining of the authority [86]; [104]; [53]. Furthermore, as burnout deepens, some employees may engage in more severe forms of deviance, which may consist of property damage, theft and job substance use as coping mechanisms for unrelenting emotional strain [105]; [109]; [97]. These behaviours indicate loss of personal control and an attempt to reclaim autonomy in an emotionally exploitative environment. Lastly, these deviant behaviours emanate from the prolonged emotional misalignment between internal states and internal expectations, which contributes to emotional exhaustion, chronic tardiness, and absenteeism [103]; [106]; [18]. Workers may also be cynical, show negative attitudes and ethical lapses as they no longer take organizational values into consideration [4] and [19]. These effects erode organizational culture, decrease morale, and increase turnover, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable emotional labour practices and psychological support systems in high-stress service environments.

## Theme 2: Impacts Of Emotional Labour on Deviant Workplace Behaviour at the Organizational Level

Impacts	Description	Citations
Reduced Service Quality	Employees constantly engaging in emotional labour can be less attentive, positive, and helpful to customers due to high emotional exhaustion	[23]; [54]; [78].
Increased Employee Turnover	As employees experience high levels of stress at work, due to high emotional demands, they may leave the organization and look for jobs elsewhere to avoid stress.	[40]; [69]; [44].
Higher Absenteeism Rates	When employees are emotionally trained, stressed, and exhausted due to extensive emotional Labour, they may	[36]; [68]; [8].

	take time off to recover from high stress in the workplace.	
Workplace Incivility and Conflict	Emotional labour can influence conflict and incivility in the workplace when employees experience emotional strain; they may become less patient, easily frustrated, and more likely to engage in negative interactions, which can escalate tensions and damage workplace relationship.	[93]; [110]; [5].
Decline In Productivity	Organisational productivity may decline due to burnout and stress caused by emotional labour on employees	[35]; [25]; [101].
Increased Risk of Workplace Errors and Accidents	Emotional labour can strain employees, causing stress and burnout, which can lead to the occurrence of errors and accidents within an organisation	[31]; [85]; [90].
Damage To Organizational Reputation	When employees are stressed and exhausted from persistent emotional labour, they may engage in workplace deviant behaviors, which may destroy organizational reputation and image.	[20]; [112]; [34].
Reduced Employee Engagement	Employees may start disengaging from the work duties when are experiencing stress and burnout and this may affect organisational effectiveness	[27]; [100]; [24].
Escalated HR And Disciplinary Costs	Organisations may incur high disciplinary costs and HR costs such hiring new staff due to high employee turnover caused by emotional strain.	[81]; [59].
Lower Team Cohesion	High stress and emotional exhaustion may reduce the cohesion of the team on employees.	[28].
Disruption Of Customer Relationships	Emotional labour can disrupt customer relationships; when employees are drained from constantly regulating their emotions, they may struggle to provide authentic, consistent service, leading to dissatisfaction and a breakdown in trust with customers.	[63]; [94]; [51].
Organisational Cynicism	Emotional labour may create a feeling of distrust and lack of organizational support, especially when employees feel forced to display positive emotions and hide their true feelings, and this can cause organizational cynicism	[7]; [3]; [87].

According to Table 2, based on the organizational level impacts, emotional labor is often vital for the frontline employees; it can substantially impair service quality and customer satisfaction. Workers who are frequently required to manage their emotions may become emotionally drained, which reduces their attentiveness, warmth, and effectiveness during customer involvement [23]; [54]; [78]. This fatigue does only affect the workers at the personal level but also contributes to the disruption of customer relationships, as emotionally tired workers struggle to maintain authenticity and consistency in service rendering [63]; [94]. As a result, customer dissatisfaction may grow, undermining brand loyalty and weakening the organization's market competitiveness.

The tension from emotional labor also contributes to increased employee turnover and higher absenteeism rates. Employees subjected to chronic stress and burnout mostly view resignation and taking long leave as the only resolution, which contributes highly to organizational instability due to an inconsistent workforce [40]; [9]. Furthermore, declines in employee involvement and productivity contribute to emotional detachment from their roles and responsibilities [27], [101]. This disengagement reduces the overall

effectiveness of teams and departments while also placing added pressure on remaining employees to maintain output levels.

Beyond individual performance, emotional strain can contribute significant organizational consequences. One such impact is workplace incivility and conflict, where emotionally exhausted employees become short-tempered and less cooperative, enhancing tensions among colleagues [93]; [110]. This environment weakens team cohesion and increases the likelihood of workplace errors and accidents, as stressed workers struggle to maintain concentration and precision [31]. Over time, such dysfunction can inflict reputational damage on the organization, particularly when negative customer experiences or internal conflicts become public [21].

Lastly, continuous emotional labor without convenient support systems contributes to a broader organizational decline. The financial cost becomes evident through escalated HR and disciplinary fees, as turnover requires continual recruitment, onboarding, and disciplinary engrossments [81]. Emotionally drained workers may develop organizational cynicism, perceiving their employer as manipulative or uncaring, especially when required to show genuine emotions [6]. These perceptions erode trust, reduce morale, and impede any efforts to cultivate a resilient and productive workplace culture. Hence, organizations must recognize emotional labor as a critical area of intervention to preserve both employee well-being and organizational performance.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, emotional labour, particularly when excessive and unregulated, significantly contributes to negative outcomes such as service sabotage, interpersonal conflict, absenteeism, and counterproductive work behavior. These acts often indicate underlying emotional distress, including burnout, emotional fatigue, and an increasing cynicism towards the organisation. Employees who consistently repress or manage their emotions to fulfil professional expectations may encounter psychological exhaustion, leading to maladaptive coping strategies that appear in both overt and covert deviant behaviours. This research emphasises the need for companies to recognise emotional labour as a significant determinant affecting employee behaviour and organisational success. Interventions like emotional intelligence training, supportive leadership, explicit job-role requirements, and employee wellness programs help alleviate the detrimental impacts of emotional labour. Moreover, cultivating an organisational culture that prioritises authenticity and emotional support may mitigate emotional dissonance and improve employee engagement. By addressing the fundamental causes of emotional distress, companies may mitigate deviant behaviours, enhance workplace relationships, and foster a better, more sustainable work environment.

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