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Fake it or make it to stay? A case of Pakistani frontline emergency rescue workers

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and job characteristics model (JCM), this study examined the relationship between emergency rescue workers' surface acting and turnover intentions through emotional exhaustion. We hypothesized that task significance is a pertinent boundary condition that attenuates the surface acting-emotional exhaustion relationship. We also introduced job control as another boundary condition in the emotional exhaustionturnover intentions relationship. Three-wave data gathered from 256 emergency rescue workers revealed that participants' surface acting increased their emotional exhaustion which triggered their intention to quit. Task significance was found to moderate the surface acting-emotional exhaustion relationship, such that the interaction effect at medium and high levels drastically reduces the exhaustion level of emergency workers. Individuals with high job control show high turnover intentions in the case of those with medium and high emotional exhaustion. These findings have significant implications for human resource management research and practice, especially around job design for those emergency rescue workers likely serving as emotional laborers.

KEYWORDS

Surface acting; task significance; emotional exhaustion; job control; turnover intentions; emotional labors

1. Introduction

With the exponential rise in the number of COVID-19 patients, frontline emergency rescue and healthcare workers have not only encountered a heightened level of job demands, but also an increased level of emotional stress as they care for and interact with highly contaminated virus-infected patients and their concerned family members (Lucchini et al., 2020). Frontline emergency rescue workers are often regarded as emotional laborers (ELs) who have to regulate and manage their emotional expressions

as part of their professional work role (Hochschild, 1983) and to conform with job requirements (Sayre, Grandey, & Chi, 2020). Emotional laborer's such as frontline rescue workers, if not managed properly, are subject to impaired wellbeing and emotional exhaustion that could result in their intent to guit their jobs (Chi & Grandey, 2019; Grandey, Rupp, & Brice, 2015). A high turnover of frontline rescue workers is not only costly for the organization (Wu, Shie, & Gordon, 2017) but also detrimental to the community who desperately need this cohort of workers for help and care in times of crisis. Thus, it is important to understand how frontline emergency rescue workers as emotional laborers effectively manage their emotions, and examine the factors that organizations could identify and use to help mediate the severity of their emotional exhaustion, so that they are willing to stay in these tough jobs to service the infected patients in the midst of sudden pandemic outbreak as well as those victims from natural disasters (e.g., earthquake, flood, fire and tsunami).

Our study is designed to explore how frontline emergency rescue workers perform emotional labor using a surface acting strategy (i.e., faking and suppressing emotions without altering actual feeling) (Grandey, 2000; Wagner, Barnes, & Scott, 2014) in order to control their level of emotional exhaustion, in the context of Punjab Emergency Service unit of Punjab Provincial Government in Pakistan. With three waves of data collection from 256 emergency rescue workers, we further test task significance and job control—two important factors within the well-known job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001) and job characteristics model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldman, 1980; Karasek Jr, 1979). We then examine how these two factors could serve as buffers to moderate or lower the turnover intention of emergency rescue workers.

Turnover intention has been commonly recognized as a critical issue in the realm of human resource management, especially for healthcare organizations with skilled labor shortages (Bhatnagar, 2012; Choi & Kim, 2015; Fitzgerald et al., 2007; Srinivasan & Chandwani, 2014; Vo & Bartram, 2012). Several researchers (Cote & Morgan, 2002; Grandey, 2000) have suggested that surface acting could contribute to the healthcare sector's employee turnover, because it imposes on healthcare workers as a job demand (e.g., doctors need to control their emotions when doing open heart surgery, and nurses need to suppress their emotions when cleaning a patient with broken bloody leg). Subsequently, surface acting may gradually wear down employees, resulting in damaging effects such as stress, emotional exhaustion and work withdrawal behaviors (Schiffinger & Braun, 2020; Wong & Law, 2017).

In the case of emergency rescue workers, surface acting is more or less required as a job demand, because workers must meet the physical

demands of the job without genuinely changing how they actually feel (i.e., faking emotions) when facing the crisis of rescuing victims from, for example, quick fire or flood (Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Hochschild, 2012). Consequently, rescue workers would be more likely to deplete their resources, which in turn could result in poor emotional and physical outcomes (Grandey & Sayre, 2019; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020). Several empirical findings (e.g., Grandey, 2003; Wessel & Steiner, 2015; Zou & Dahling, 2017) in the work related to service delivery showed that deep acting was somewhat unrelated to emotional exhaustion, whereas surface acting was found to be positively related to both emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Furthermore, most prior studies have shown inconsistent effects of deep acting (Grandey, 2000; Hong et al., 2017; Hsieh, 2014; Song & Cho, 2016). Therefore, our study is aimed at exploring whether the Pakistani emergency rescue workers, like service workers, also adopt surface acting (Cho & Song, 2017) when interacting with victims and patients.

Although there is a considerable amount of research on the outcomes of surface acting, the effects on emergency rescue workers have been less investigated. We thus respond to the calls by a few researchers in the field (e.g., Nauman et al., 2019) to identify pertinent boundary conditions and underlying mechanisms that may influence or explain the intricate relationships among surface acting, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions. In particular, we examine two important factors (i.e., task significance and job control) drawn from the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001) and JCM (Hackman, Hackman, & Oldham, 1980). We propose and test task significance and job control as critical boundary conditions that serve as emergency rescue workers' personal resources and which help mitigate the harmful effects of surface acting on emotional exhaustion and the damaging effects of emotional exhaustion on their turnover intentions.

Our study contributes to the emotional labor and turnover literature in four ways. First, we aim to understand why and under what conditions surface acting affects employees' turnover intentions. Even though surface acting does not benefit employees, the buffering role of task significance and job control has not been explored in the domain of ELs. Thus, our second contribution is to draw specific and highly relevant elements from both JD-R and JCM models to test the roles of task significance in the surface acting–emotional exhaustion relationship, and the role of job control in the emotional exhaustion–turnover intentions relationship. As a result, we extend the nomological network of surface acting. Third, this research tests and generalizes the job design concepts to emergency rescue workers in a developing country context. Fourth, this study was conducted when COVID-19 hit frontline workers

hardest, such as emergency rescue employees. The findings help inform public sector organizations to design better human resource management strategies to protect employee wellbeing and enhance organizational effectiveness without losing valuable emergency rescue workers in time of pressing needs.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We first provide a brief overview of the theories underpinning the development of research hypotheses in Section 2. This is followed by an outline of research methods in Section 3. Results are presented in Section 4. We discuss our study findings with both theoretical and practical implications and conclude with the study limitations and future research direction in Section 5.

2. Theory and hypotheses development

The JD-R model proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001) explains that job demands are the factors that cost employees' energy, whilst job resources are the physical, social or organizational factors that help employees achieve personal and professional goals and reduce stress (see also (Bakker, 2015). The JD-R model suggests that either energy depletion or motivation can effect high job demands and low job resources, which in turn cause job burnout and disengagement from work (Demerouti et al., 2017; Lesener, Gusy, & Wolter, 2019). Based on the energy depletion perspective, high job demands deplete employees' energy to deal with their various job roles (Bakker, 2015). For example, emergency rescue workers are expected to have high job demands as they interact with either victims of natural disasters or infected patients from a pandemic outbreak. They must not only do their jobs, but also take care of the immediate needs of victims and their families. Thus, to do their job properly, rescue workers often apply surface acting (i.e., faking their emotions) with the victims for two reasons: first, to carry out their job roles which is often hectic and involves long hours, and second, for the betterment of victims and their family members (Gabriel, 2013).

Consistent with the energy depletion perspective of the JD-R model, it is proposed that surface acting as a job demand results in depletion of energy in terms of both physiological and psychological resources leading to rescue workers' emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Following prior work (e.g., Grandey, 2003; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005), we theorize emotional exhaustion as a state of resource loss. Consequently, in line with the tenets within the JD-R theory, we posit that emergency rescue workers may consider quitting their job when they experience severe energy depletion and have no ability to cope with job demands.

In contrast, the motivation perspective of JD-R suggests that job resources provide efficient coping mechanisms to deal with demands of work and help to reduce the stress associated with physiological and psychological costs (Dawson, O'Brien, & Beehr, 2016; Demerouti et al., 2017; Lesener et al., 2019). More job resources can be obtained by employees who have either a stronger sense of their task importance and the meaningfulness of their job (Demerouti et al., 2017), or higher levels of job control with more autonomy and support in decision-making and the ability to job craft (Dawson et al., 2016). Following this line of argument, we speculate that emergency rescue workers could also have stronger task significance and job control as their personal resources to help attenuate the harmful effects of their surface acting on emotional exhaustion. Consequently, this process could mitigate their energy depletion, which reduces the effect of emotional exhaustion on turnover intentions.

2.1. Surface acting and turnover intentions

Turnover intention is defined as the probability that an employee will leave his or her job within a certain time period (Kim, 2018). Turnover has long been a topic of interest to organizational scholars and practitioners alike and is associated with job dissatisfaction (Chung, Jung, & Sohn, 2017; Tett & Meyer, 1993), ; disengagement and work withdrawal behavior (Azeem et al., 2020), and job burnout (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Recent research findings (e.g., Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020) provide some evidence to suggest that surface acting influences work withdrawal behaviors, which in turn lead to turnover intentions. Faking emotions to cope with high job demands leads to two unfavorable outcomes: 1) ego depletion for individuals (Grandey, 2003; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). Both results can cause work withdrawal behaviors, triggering employees to quit their organization (Xu et al., 2017).

Ego depletion theory posits that continuous acts of self-control, such as surface acting, draw from a limited pool of personal resources, which are the most vulnerable to depletion (Baumeister et al., 1998; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Yam et al., 2016). Once depleted, not only will employees find subsequent work activities more demanding, they will also become less motivated to engage (Muraven & Slessareva, 2003) and their ability to exert self-control when faced with subsequent challenges will be reduced (Yam et al., 2016). It is most likely that the excessive ego depletion derived from extensive surface acting would cause job stress for employees who may decide to withdraw from their work and reduce ego depletion. Those experiencing job burnout as a result of ego depletion are most likely to decide to quit their jobs (Chau et al., 2009;

Xu, Martinez, & Lv, 2017). The relationship between surface acting, burnout and turnover intention has been tested and confirmed by several researchers in the field (Chau et al., 2009; Goodwin, Groth, & Frenkel, 2011). According to Goodwin et al. (2011), employees who frequently engage in surface acting may start to believe that their job is unsuitable and incongruent with their true self, which may consequently compel them to leave their organization. It is possible that the more emergency rescue workers are engaged in surface acting, the more likely they are to quit their jobs (Chau et al., 2009).

Use of surface acting with faked emotions can be taxing and would diminish an individual's ability to regulate his or her impulses and behaviors, causing dissonance among team members. Yam et al. (2016) examined how leaders, when exercising a higher level of self-control, or surface-acting per se in their customer interactions, can in fact have a higher tendency to abuse their followers. The findings suggested that excessive self-control to override or change one's inner responses, as well as to interrupt undesired behavioral tendencies (such as impulses) and refrain from acting on them, can reduce self-regulatory resources, leading to interpersonal conflict between leaders and followers (Yam et al., 2016). Dissension among the organisational members, especially antagonistic relationships between co-workers and/or supervisors, would further deplete ego resources (Yam et al., 2016). Another recent study of 230 nurses working in Turkish hospitals by Özkan (2021) showed a negative impact of abusive supervision, workplace incivility and ostracism on increased turnover intention. In the case of emergency rescue workers who continually exert surface acting, the ability to regulate their impulses and behaviors in non-work settings may be similarly depleted, leading to non-task related organizational conflict with co-workers or victims, similar to that experienced by the Turkish nurses who decided to quit (Özkan, 2021). To resolve the ego-depletion dilemma, emergency rescue workers in our current study may also choose to escape the depleting experience and leave their organizations. Therefore, we propose that:

 H_1 : Surface acting will be positively associated with employee turnover intentions.

2.2. Emotional exhaustion as mediator

Emotional exhaustion refers to "a feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 101). Research has consistently suggested that surface acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion (Bono & Vey, 2005; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Glomb & Tews, 2004; Grandey et al., 2005; Nauman et al., 2019). Employees working in a service industry are more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion than others, as they frequently engage in interpersonal interactions over a long duration and at high intensity (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Following Nauman et al. (2019), it is argued that working odd hours, time limitations and physical job demands to deal with emergencies compel rescue workers to frequently fake their expressions. Surface acting involves spending energy and resources to suppress felt emotions and demands substantial mental effort (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007), resulting in further resource depletion leading to emotional exhaustion (Beal et al., 2013; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Cheung & Tang, 2010).

From the energy depletion perspective of the JD-R model, surface acting as a job demand is perceived to deplete employee's cognitive and emotional resources. When emergency rescue workers need to self-regulate their own emotions in order to cope with their high job demands, further emotional exhaustion would likely be induced (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 2012). Consequently, rescue workers may employ avoidance or withdrawal coping strategies to handle their potential job burnout (Leiter, 1991) or leave the organization altogether to terminate the burnout effects (Goodwin et al., 2011). Following prior work (Lee et al., 2011), we propose that emotional exhaustion is not only a predictor of turnover intentions, but also the outcome of applying the surface acting. It is, therefore, predicted that emotional exhaustion will have a mediating effect on the relationship between surface acting and turnover intentions.

H2: Emotional exhaustion positively mediates the relationship between surface acting and turnover intentions.

2.3. Moderating role of task significance

Task significance has gained attention in human resource management as employees are increasingly concerned about the social value and meaningfulness of their work (Turban & Greening, 1997). Task significance as a core work characteristic reflects the extent to which the work itself influences the life or work of people within and outside the organization (Farooq, Rupp, & Farooq, 2017; Hackman & Oldman, 1980). Task significance is measured by the degree to which individuals perceive that their job tasks make a difference to others and hence would choose their work attitudes and performance accordingly (Grant, 2008). Thus, employees whose jobs are perceived to be higher in task significance are likely to experience their work as more meaningful, more purposeful and valuable (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976).

Prior studies (e.g., Steger et al., 2013; Varga et al., 2012) focusing on buffering resources against occupational stress have emphasized the moderating effects of job-related meaningfulness. The findings have suggested that how employees evaluate their tasks has an important

influence on emotional exhaustion (e.g., Best, Stapleton, & Downey, 2005) and turnover intentions (Steger et al., 2013). On one hand, perceived meaningfulness in one's own work buffers stress and reduces the vulnerability of being emotionally drained (Tummers & Dulk, 2013). On the other hand, lack of perceived job-related meaningfulness may deplete available personal resources (Steger et al., 2013), potentially leading to burnout (Vinje & Mittelmark, 2007). Taking a sample of 171 nurses from Spanish hospitals, Blanco-Donoso et al. (2017) reported a highly significant negative relationship between meaningfulness and emotional exhaustion. When nurses perceived more meaningfulness in their work and sensed the higher level of their task significance to help others, they experienced less emotional exhaustion.

We thus consider task significance as a psychological resource that would likely help to manage the harmful effects of surface acting on employees' emotional exhaustion (Grant, 2008). According to the JD-R theory, we therefore argue that emergency rescue workers with a higher sense of task significance are more likely to justify the effort of performing surface acting because they are internally motivated to do it (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010) and view their work as creating a positive impact on others and contributing to society. Therefore, we propose that:

H₃: The effect of the surface acting on emotional exhaustion will be conditional on task significance, such that the positive relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion will be weaker for emergency rescue workers who experience higher levels of surface acting.

2.4. Moderating role of job control

Based on (Hackman & Oldman, 1980) job characteristics model and (Karasek Jr, 1979), job control refers to having autonomy and control over one's job and has been associated with improved psychological health and positive outcomes (Dubois et al., 2014; Kuoppala et al., 2008). Employees' degree of autonomy or decision authority over tasks and control over their jobs have a profound impact on their stress level, health and occupational wellbeing, motivation and productivity (Day, Crown, & Ivany, 2017; Fila, Purl, & Griffeth, 2017; Ganster & Fusilier, 1989). Thus, job control allows employees to intervene when facing high job demands and reduce potential resource loss.

Job control has been found to be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion (Cukur, 2009; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Näring, Briët, & Brouwers, 2006) and is regarded as one of the most important elements of the occupational stress-reduction process (Fila et al., 2017; Ganster & Fusilier, 1989; Spector & Fox, 2002). However, the study findings that treated job control as a moderator showed mixed results (e.g., (Häusser et al., 2010; Taris, 2006). In some cases, job control was found to accentuate the negative effects of job demands (e.g., (Mullarkey et al., 1997; Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997) and have no moderating effect on the stressor/strain relationship (e.g., (O'driscoll & Beehr, 2000). In another case, job control was found to moderate the positive relationship between emotional demands and emotional exhaustion (e.g., (Vegchel et al., 2004). According to Kim and Stoner (2008), employees with high job autonomy or control tended to experience less burnout than those reporting low job control. To understand these varying findings and to determine how and when job control is beneficial, we propose job control as a moderator in the emotional exhaustion-turnover intentions relationship.

Employing the buffering perspective of the JD-R model, we propose that job control as a resource would minimize the harmful effects of emotional exhaustion on turnover intentions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) for emergency rescue workers in this study. Higher levels of job control show that more resources are given to employees to determine their own work, pace, and effort in completing their jobs (Hackman & Oldman, 1980). We, therefore, posit that when the level of job control is high, the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions is likely to be reduced.

 H_4 : The effect of the emotional exhaustion on turnover intentions will be conditional on job control, such that the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention will be weaker for emergency rescue workers who experience high levels of emotional exhaustion.

The conceptual framework outlining the relationships among the key constructs of our proposed job-design model for emergency rescue workers is depicted in Figure 1.

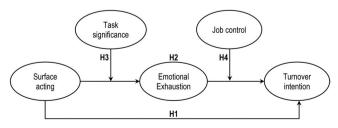


Figure 1. Proposed model.



3. Methods

3.1. Sample and data collection

Rescue 1122 is an initiative of the Punjab Provincial government, one of the most densely populated provinces of Pakistan. The purpose of this initiative is to maintain a state of preparedness to deal with emergencies, to provide timely response, rescue and emergency medical treatment to the persons affected, and to recommend measures to be taken by related organizations and their emergency rescue workers (extract from the Punjab Emergency Service Act, 2006, p. 1). Therefore, it would be right to say that job demands of the Punjab emergency rescue workers, especially when coping with an increasing number of affected COVID-19 cases in 2020, would be consistently high. This cohort of workers would be required to carry out surface acting for two reasons: first, they are in public service and have direct contact with public-facing emergency situations and thus must conduct themselves professionally. Second, emergency rescue workers in Punjab would also be required to control their emotions while experiencing difficult and disturbing situations throughout their working day. We believe that using a sample from this cohort is appropriate to test our hypothesized framework.

The sample was contacted at three time points. At Time 1, entry level questionnaires were distributed to 400 emergency rescue workers to collect data about workers' demographics and their perceptions of task significance and job control. We requested this group of participants to provide the last three digits of their national ID and phone number for matching purpose. After a month (Time 2), surveys were distributed to the same 400 participants as Time 1, asking about their surface acting and experiences of emotional exhaustion. A total of 324 completed surveys were received (response rate of 81%). After two months (Time 3), data on turnover intentions were collected. This time, we received 262 responses; eight responses were discarded due to missing information, leading to a final sample of 256 responses (overall response rate of 64%).

The Punjab emergency rescue workers are reasonably young, with the majority (79.7%) of the respondents aged between 23 and 30 years. Almost half of the cohort (46.5%) have 6 to 9 years of work experience in the sector, indicating that the respondents are in a good position to talk about their experiences of surface acting, their perceptions of task significance and job control, and whether they were thinking about leaving the emergency rescue service.

3.2. Measures

Surface acting was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Grandey (2003). A sample item is, "I fake a good mood when interacting with victims" (α =0.89). The *Emotional exhaustion* scale consisted of 9 items adapted from Maslach and Jackson (1981). A sample item is, "Working with victims is really a strain for me" (α =0.93).

Task significance was measured through a 4-item scale adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). A sample item is, "My job provides opportunities to have positive impact on victims on a regular basis" ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Job control was measured with a 3-item scale adopted from Karasek Jr (1979). A sample item is, "To what extent does your job allow you to make a lot of your own decisions?" ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Turnover intention was measured through a 3-item scale adopted from Cropanzano, James, and Konovsky (1993). One reverse coded item was dropped due to low loading during confirmatory factor analysis. A similar 2-item scale of turnover intentions has been used in several prior studies (α =0.86.) (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2001; Powell & Meyer, 2004).

3.3. Control variables

We have controlled for three potential variables that can influence our results. First, the number of weekly working hours is taken as a control variable, because emergency rescue jobs demand high physical efforts and long working hours in the field. Longer working hours were found to affect turnover intentions (Tsai et al., 2016). Similarly, age can affect the intention to quit for such challenging jobs for two reasons: first, increased age, particularly among emergency rescue workers was found to be positively related to job satisfaction (Lloyd, Streiner, & Shannon, 1994). Second, as exhibited in this study sample, young individuals tend to join the emergency services in their early 20 s but then, after gaining work experience, move on to other jobs with better career prospects (Chen et al., 2018; Tschopp, Grote, & Köppel, 2016). For this very reason, we have also controlled employees' job tenure because it is likely that young individuals might leave the emergency services voluntarily in the first few years of their service and take their work experiences to other jobs (Chen et al., 2018).

3.4. Common method bias

The data were collected in three time points to minimize common method bias. We also communicated to participants that there were no wrong and right answers and that their anonymity was ensured (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012, p. 888). However, the chance still exists that there may be common method bias due to the data being collected

from the same source. Thus, a post-hoc latent factor approach was used to detect the presence of common method bias (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010, p.181; Conway & Lance, 2010; Williams & Anderson, 1994). There was no difference in the results of unconstrained model $(X^2 = 509.59, df = 282, p-value = n.s.)$ and zero constrained model (ΔX^2 = 0.00 and Δdf = 0.00). This demonstrated no threat of bias affecting the hypothesized model (Gaskin & Lim, 2017).

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis, convergent and discriminant validity

In the first step, we carried out confirmatory factor analysis. Factors loadings above 0.60 were retained in the model, and an item of turnover intention (TOI3) was removed due to low loading (0.211) (MacCallum et al., 1999, 2001). We calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the convergent validity of each construct in the model. We obtained AVE of each construct through a standard formula $(AVE = \frac{\sum_{k}^{2} \lambda_{k}^{2}}{\sum_{k}^{2} \lambda_{k}^{2} + \sum_{var(E)}})$ that indicates an average amount of variance in variable that a construct explains through its items. The AVE of each construct was above the threshold of 0.60 (Hair Jr et al., 2006, p. 144). The discriminant validity was further assessed through maximum shared variance. The results show that each construct was distinct and empirically unique, sufficiently capturing the phenomena of interest (MSV < AVE) (Byrne, 2013, p. 275; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Composite reliability (CR) was measured to test the internal consistency of each factor, and all the factors in the model hold values greater than the threshold of 0.70 (Hair Jr et al., 2016). Table 1 shows the complete results of factor loadings, composite reliability, AVE and MSV.

4.2. Model-fit, correlations, and reliability

The proposed five-factor measurement model was a better model fit (χ^2 = 375.84, df=238, p-value < 0.000; CFI = 0.964, AGFI = 0.866, TLI = 0.958, RMESA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.04) than any of the nested measurement models where relationships were constrained. The one-factor measurement model had the poorest model fit ($\chi^2 = 1858.65$, df = 226, p-value < 0.000; CFI = 0.568, AGFI = 0.528, TLI = 0.516, RMESA = 0.17, SRMR = 0.16). Complete results in Table 2 show that the five-factor hypothesized model achieved sufficient goodness of fit indices.

Table 3 shows correlations among the variables. Surface acting is positively and significantly related to emotional exhaustion (r=0.189)and turnover intentions (r = 0.265). Similarly, emotional exhaustion is positively and significantly related to turnover intentions (r = 0.383) but

Table 1. Factor loadings, composite reliability, discriminant and convergent validity.

Surface Acting	SA1	0.694	0.899	0.641	0.083
	SA2	0.833			
	SA3	0.941			
	SA4	0.797			
	SA5	0.608			
Emotional Exhaustion	EE1	0.664	0.933	0.610	0.172
	EE2	0.688			
	EE3	0.768			
	EE4	0.869			
	EE5	0.857			
	EE6	0.837			
	EE7	0.867			
	EE8	0.651			
	EE9	0.737			
Task significance	TS1	0.902	0.889	0.668	0.079
	TS2	0.833			
	TS3	0.829			
	TS4	0.690			
Job Control	JC1	0.722	0.841	0.641	0.049
	JC2	0.918			
	JC3	0.749			
Turnover Intention	TOI1	0.835	0.863	0.759	0.172
	TOI2	0.907			
	TOI3	*			

^{*}deleted item due to low loading (TOI3 = 0.211).

Table 2. Discriminant validity (model fit with only SA).

Model	χ²	df	$\Delta \chi^2$	∆df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	AGFI	CFI
Five-factor (hypothesized)	375.84	238	-	-	.05	.04	.958	.866	.964
Rival model 1 (combined TS & JC)	685.53	220	309.69***	18	.09	.08	.858	.763	.877
Rival model 2 combined (TS, JS, & TOI)	932.82	223	247.29***	3	.11	.12	.787	.713	.812
Rival model 3 (combined TS, JC, & EE)	1210.82	223	278***	0	.13	.12	.704	.629	.739
Rival model 4 combined (SA, EE) (TS, JC, TOI)	1389.36	225	178.54***	2	.14	.16	.654	.622	.692
Rival model 5 combined (combined all)	1858.65	226	469.29***	1	.17	.16	.516	.528	.568

Note. N=256, ***p < .001. SA=surface acting, DA=deep acting, EE=emotional exhaustion, TS=task significance, JC=job control, TOI=turnover intentions.

Table 3. Descriptive, correlation and reliability.

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Surface Acting	1.90	0.90	(.891)				
2. Emotional Exhaustion	1.63	0.75	.189**	(.932)			
3. Task significance	4.40	0.70	101	245**	(.885)		
4. Job control	3.22	0.87	.068	199**	.101	(.836)	
5. Turnover intentions	2.30	0.82	.265**	.383**	181*	.047	(.860)

^{**}p-value \leq 0.01, *p-value \leq 0.05. Alpha value in parentheses.

CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, MSV = maximum shared variance.



negatively and significantly related to task significance (r = -0.245) and job control (r = -0.199). The Cronbach alpha of all the variables met the threshold of $\alpha \ge 0.70$.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

We used Mplus (version 7.11) to test the hypothesized model through structural equation modeling with a latent factor approach. We borrowed the conditional process modeling from Hayes but applied a latent variable approach (Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017; Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). This approach was considered more robust than path modeling (Geiser, 2010) for our model that aimed to test complex relationships (direct, indirect and interaction effects in one model, along with control variables). We were motivated to use a latent variable approach because it deals with two sub-models (one of measurement and one of prediction) and avoids bias in parameter estimates and standard errors and allows for more accurate model estimation.

The results of direct effect show that surface acting is positively associated with turnover intention among the Punjab emergency rescue workers ($\beta = 0.22$, p-value = 0.003), thus Hypothesis 1 is supported. The results of simple mediation analysis show that emotional exhaustion positively mediates the relationship between surface acting and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.08$, p-value = 0.044), supporting Hypothesis 2. The results of the first-stage interaction (surface acting x task significance → emotional exhaustion) show that task significance perceived by emergency rescue workers reduces their level of emotional exhaustion (β = -0.14, p-value = 0.003), supporting Hypothesis 3. Similarly, results of second-stage interaction (emotional exhaustion x job control \rightarrow turnover intentions) show that the level of job control experienced by Punjab emergency rescue workers in fact increases their turnover intentions while interacting with their level of emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.20$, p-value = 0.023). This result does not support Hypothesis 4. Results of all possible relationships, including hypothesized ones, are presented in Figure 2.

In addition to the hypothesized relationships, we tested conditional indirect effect in the presence of first and second stage moderators. Table 4 shows that the magnitude of indirect effect (- 0.469) is strongest when task significance is low and job control is medium. It is important to note that when task significance is high and job control at all three levels (low, medium, and high) conditional indirect effect remained insignificant. This implies that neither moderator has an effect when task significance is high on indirect relationship of surface acting on turnover intentions via emotional exhaustion. We plotted two

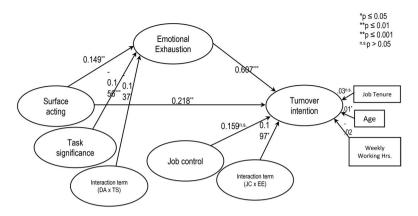


Figure 2. Hypotheses testing results.

Table 4. Conditional indirect effect.

Moderator	Indirect	SE	p-value
Low task significance, low job control	0.107	0.040	0.007
Low task significance, medium job control	-0.469	0.086	0.000
Low task significance, high job control	0.191	0.066	0.004
Medium task significance, low job control	0.065	0.029	0.022
Medium task significance, high job control	0.116	0.048	0.016
Medium task significance, medium job control	0.091	0.037	0.014
High task significance, low job control	0.024	0.029	0.419
High task significance, medium job control	0.033	0.040	0.415
High task significance, high job control	0.042	0.052	0.416

N = 256, SE = standard error.

interactions separately to better understand the results at three levels (low, medium, and high). Figure 3 shows the interaction effect between surface acting and emotional exhaustion. The interaction (surface acting x task significance) at low level had a minor effect on emotional exhaustion, while the interaction effect at medium and high levels drastically reduced the exhaustion level of emergency workers.

Different results displayed in Figure 4 show the interaction effect (emotional exhaustion x job control) between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions at low, medium, and high level. Contrary to Hypothesis 4, it shows that a minor increase in turnover intentions of emergency rescue workers is associated with those having low and medium level of job control. Whereas turnover intentions dramatically increase when emergency rescue workers have a high level of job control but also a high level of emotional exhaustion. Put simply, in the case of low emotional exhaustion and low job control, individuals are less likely to have the intentions to quit the job. However, in both medium and high emotional exhaustion and job control, emergency rescue workers in fact have high intentions to quit, when comparing the result to the interaction of emotional exhaustion and job control on the low level.

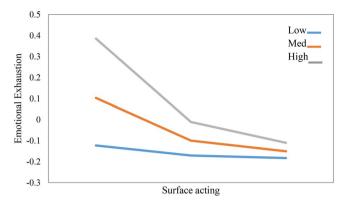


Figure 3. Interaction effect between surface acting and emotional exhaustion.

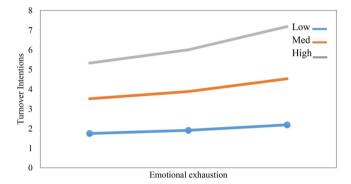


Figure 4. Interaction effect between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions.

5. Discussion

The corona virus situation has heightened not only the greater need for frontline emergency rescue workers who can look after affected patients and the public, but also the importance of looking after the wellbeing and retention of this cohort. Several theoretical models (e.g., JD-R, job characteristics, job control) underpinning human resource management strategies, especially work design, have been developed in an attempt to address the issues of burnout (emotional exhaustion) and turnover intention commonly experienced by service workers engaging in emotional labor (Cho & Song, 2017; Grant & Parker, 2009). However, there is still much progress to be made to advance our understanding of underlying factors that cause the dissonance between wellbeing (or burnout) and performance outcome (or turnover), in particular with regard to the wellbeing of emergency rescue workers. Thus, the current study integrated surface acting, emotional exhaustion, task significance, job control and turnover intentions to form a new job design model that can inform rescue organizations about how to develop more effective HRM policies and practices to manage employee wellbeing and staff turnover among the frontline emergency rescue workforce.

The testing of the proposed model found that emotional exhaustion is a meditating mechanism through which surface acting increased employees' intention to leave the job. The study findings suggest that task significance serves as a buffer that attenuates the harmful effects of surface acting on emotional exhaustion experienced by Punjab emergency rescue workers. Further, job control was found to serve as another buffer to attenuate the harmful effects of emotional exhaustion on employees' intention to leave. Overall, our model testing results lend overall support for our proposed hypotheses, except for the buffering role of job control. We also found a positive relationship between surface acting and turnover intentions in the context of Pakistan, consistent with the results from several prior studies in other countries (Chau et al., 2009; Goodwin et al., 2011).

Our proposed model has responded to calls for an investigation into the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between surface acting and turnover intentions, the moderating role of task significance in the surface acting-emotional exhaustion relationship, and the moderating role of job control in the emotional exhaustion-turnover intentions relationship (Grandey and Sayre (2019)Nauman et al., 2019). By integrating surface acting, emotional exhaustion, and employee turnover intentions that drew from the tenets within the JD-R, job characteristics and job control models, we found evidence of an indirect effect of surface acting on employees' turnover intentions via emotional exhaustion. Our findings indicate that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between surface acting and employee turnover intentions. Furthermore, the study findings show that employees who are higher in task significance are more capable of managing the effects of surface acting on their emotional exhaustion. We also found support for the idea that when emergency rescue workers are engaged in low surface acting, individuals with low task significance show less emotional exhaustion, whereas when emergency rescue workers engage in medium and high surface acting, individuals with low task significance show high emotional exhaustion. In the case of medium and high surface acting, emergency rescue workers with high task significance have drastically lower emotional exhaustion. Interestingly, the results appear to be consistent with (Grant, 2008) findings from his multiple experiments on fundraising callers. People are generally motivated to work happily when they perceive their work to have positive impacts on others and as a result, they are unlikely to be emotionally depleted.

We further illustrate that employees who are low in job control are not capable of reducing the positive effects of emotional exhaustion on their intentions to quit their jobs. We found support for the idea that in case of low emotional exhaustion, individuals with low job control show low turnover intentions, whereas when emergency rescue workers experience medium and high level of emotional exhaustion and they possess low job control, then their intentions to quit would be high. Further, in the case of low emotional exhaustion, emergency workers with high job control show slightly high turnover intentions. However, in the case of medium and high emotional exhaustion, individuals with high job control show a much higher level of turnover intention. In fact, high job control with high emotional exhaustion enhances turnover intentions. This finding is in contradiction to the previous findings by several researchers (Portoghese et al., 2014; Yamaguchi et al., 2016) who suggest that job control creates a balance between authority and responsibility, leading to an ability to adjust workload, and decrease emotional exhaustion and turn over intentions. There are several explanations for this different finding. The sample in our study was comprised of males only and they may have a higher intention to leave the emergency rescue service than females. Further, emergency rescue work is taxing and employees must follow strict standard operating procedure requirements, thus there might be less autonomy to make decisions which may result in high emotional exhaustion and quitting as the best coping strategy.

The theoretical and practical implications of our findings for the emergency rescue workers are further discussed next.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study presents key theoretical implications for job design for emotional laborers to reduce turnover intentions. One such implication is that surface acting, used extensively by emotional laborers such as emergency rescue workers in our case, should be acknowledged in the job design process as it could have detrimental effects on employees' emotion regulation and management and on key human resource outcomes such as turnover intentions. Surface acting was found to cause more resource loss, resulting in emotional exhaustion, leading to employees leaving their organizations. With reference to developing any HRM model that links emotional laborers' wellbeing and performance, surface acting should be built in as an antecedence to be assessed as it indeed was found to be linked to wellbeing and turnover outcome.

Second, proper management of emotional exhaustion among this group of emergency rescue workforce was found to significantly mediate the relationship between surface acting and turnover intentions. We compared our the findings with prior research in the banking (Chau et al., 2009) and hospitality (Xu et al., 2018) industries that examined the degree to which emotional exhaustion experienced by bank tellers and hotel service workers could mediate the relationship between their surface acting and turnover intentions. It is suggested that emotional exhaustion (or measures used to reduce exhaustion) should be considered as a stable mediator and included in the job design model for emotional laborers such as emergency rescue workers, and service workers.

We have also made a significant contribution to theory in answering Grandey and Sayre (2019) and Nauman et al. (2019) calls for more research into identifying variables that can mitigate the harmful effects of surface acting on employee wellbeing. We tested the role of task significance and our research indicates that task significance as a resource attenuates the emotional exhaustion caused by surface acting, therefore, broadening the domain of JD-R and emotional labor research. Use of task significance as a protective effect on emergency rescue workers' emotional exhaustion was found to be mostly effective to reduce their stress levels. This is because employees with high task significance focus on making a difference to others (Grant, 2008), so they adapt their work attitudes and performance in accordance with their sense of meaningfulness of their work and task significance. Following the same line of argument, we posit that emergency workers are aware of the impact of their actions on the wellbeing of beneficiaries (in our case victims) and have a desire to protect them from any harm. Thus, task significance to a certain extent (up to the medium level), is beneficial as a tradeoff for the cost of surface acting and emotional exhaustion thus contributing to literature which advocates for the redesign of work theories (Grant & Parker, 2009).

Furthermore, we found that high job control did not mitigate emotional exhaustion but increase emergency rescue workers' intention to leave their organization. Drawing from the tenets of the JD-R, job characteristics and job control models, prior research (Grant & Parker, 2009), argued that positive and high level of job control could help employees reduce their intention to leave, our findings suggest that work design in the context of emergency rescue workers should take job control as a negative factor to control turnover intentions of this cohort of employees. The reason might be that high job control puts more pressure on emergency rescue workers and they may feel stressed about being accountable for the wellbeing of victims (Elsbach & Hargadon, 2006) which then translates into their intention to leave their organization. Too much job control may lead emergency rescue workers to become less communicative with their teammates and make more ego-centric decisions which may not be helpful during a crisis when circumstances around rescuing victims are often unpredictable and chaotic, requiring more coordination and teamwork. Further, we only tested



task significance, so future research should consider and test other underlying factors such as social relationships, interaction with teammates or affected family members.

5.2. Practical implications

We propose several implications for practice. One important practical implication is that supervisors should anticipate the negative influence of surface acting on emotional exhaustion as well as the negative influence of emotional exhaustion on emergency rescue workers' intention to leave the organization. Organizations should thus introduce some HR practices to manage the negative effects of surface acting, such as training employees to be aware of its impact and the likelihood that it will be an emotional drain, because surface acting cannot be eliminated entirely (Scott & Barnes, 2011). Other HR strategies to manage emotional exhaustion could include information sharing, regular communication, and check-ins with employees so that they are informed and able to recognize surface acting and learn about tools/techniques to manage it (Nauman et al., 2019).

Further, there is a need to identify ways to reduce emotional exhaustion among emergency rescue employees. According to Kinnunen, Mauno, and Siltaloppi (2010), the need for emotionally exhausted employees to periodically take breaks from their jobs was found to be greater than that of employees who are not emotionally exhausted. Therefore, organizations should ensure that their employees have sufficient time off work, such as weekends, free evenings, and vacations, to prevent emotional exhaustion (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Rook & Zijlstra, 2006). Organizations should also consider work breaks during the workday, including lunch/tea breaks, to reduce emotional exhaustion among these employees (Trougakos et al., 2008, 2014).

Another practical implication is recognizing and highlighting the importance of task significance. Employees who perceive their work as meaningful can use this perception as a personal resource to manage surface acting's negative outcomes. Task significance helps to reduce emotional exhaustion caused by surface acting thus attenuating emergency workers' inclination towards turnover. Supervisors should foster continuous and fair feedback (Alarcon, 2011) as well as communicate about objectives of the work (Arnold et al., 2015) that could enhance perception of meaningfulness of working as emergency workers.

5.1. Study limitations and future directions

The study is not without limitations. First, the study's generalizability is limited to a single gender, as all our respondents were males. Second, we used self-reported measures to collect data, which could raise concerns about common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012); however, our three-wave design may have minimized this concern. Moreover, discriminant validity, common method bias test as well as support for mediation and moderation indicate that this might not have been the case. Future research should collect data from multiple sources (e.g., supervisors and peers) other than employees to minimize the common method bias. Further, we are unable to establish causality in the hypothesized relationships. Future studies can employ multiple-wave, longitudinal design, and experimental methods to clarify the direction of causal relationships. Another possible avenue for future research would be to include other job demands and job resources that may influence the proposed relationships. Future research should thus examine more variables (e.g., building teamwork, social relationships, personal interactions between workers and affected family members, faith/spirituality) that can serve as buffers for mitigating the harmful effects of surface acting on employees' emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Further, future research should focus on understanding the costs and benefits of job control.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, our research offers unique insights on how surface acting stimulates emergency rescue workers' turnover intentions through emotional exhaustion in a developing country context. Furthermore, our study findings reveal that individuals high in perceived task significance experience less emotional exhaustion compared to those low in perceived task significance. We hope that this research paves the way for future researchers to examine the job design process for emotional laborers such as emergency rescue workers, and investigate the underpinnings and conditions in which surface acting may trigger turnover intentions for emotional laborers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon request.



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