ISSN 2657-1013 (digital)
https://doi.org/10.33086/jic.v7i2.9106

The Relationship Between Emotional Labor and Job Satisfaction Among Frontline Employees

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Received: August 3, 2026
Revised: October 14, 2026
Accepted: October 20, 2026

Abstract

Job satisfaction is an important psychological factor influencing employee well-being, service quality, and organizational performance, particularly among frontline employees who interact directly with customers. Frontline employees are frequently required to regulate and display emotions in accordance with organizational expectations, a process referred to as emotional labor. Excessive emotional labor may reduce employees' job satisfaction because of continuous emotional regulation and psychological strain. This study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among frontline employees working in a multisector company. A quantitative correlational research design was employed. The participants consisted of 124 frontline employees selected using a total sampling technique. Data were collected using the Emotional Labour Scale (ELS) developed by Brotheridge and Lee and a Likert-type Job Satisfaction Scale. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the variables. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between emotional labor and job satisfaction ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$), indicating that employees experiencing higher levels of emotional labor tended to report lower levels of job satisfaction. Conversely, lower emotional labor was associated with higher job satisfaction. These findings suggest that emotional labor is an important psychological factor associated with job satisfaction among frontline employees. Therefore, organizations should implement effective emotional regulation strategies, foster supportive work environments, and provide psychological support programs to enhance employee well-being and job satisfaction while maintaining high-quality customer service.

Keywords: Emotional labor; job satisfaction; frontline employee; service employees; organizational psychology

1. Introduction

In today's highly competitive business environment, human resources have become one of the most valuable organizational assets for achieving strategic objectives and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. Particularly in service industries, employees' performance and psychological well-being play a crucial role in determining service quality

and organizational success. According to Kim et al. (2025), job satisfaction is one of the most extensively studied constructs in organizational behavior because it reflects employees' positive psychological evaluation of their work experiences. Employees with higher job satisfaction tend to experience greater happiness, motivation, and commitment while performing their job responsibilities. High levels of job satisfaction have consistently been associated with improved service quality, stronger organizational commitment, higher work motivation, and better job performance (Vientya et al., 2025). Conversely, low job satisfaction has been linked to increased turnover intention, decreased productivity, and reduced organizational effectiveness (Lie et al., 2024). Consequently, maintaining employee job satisfaction has become a strategic priority for organizations, especially within service industries where employee–customer interactions directly influence customer perceptions and organizational reputation.

Frontline employees are individuals who interact directly with customers and represent the organization's image throughout the service delivery process (Hur et al., 2022). Because they serve as the primary point of contact between customers and organizations, frontline employees are expected to consistently deliver professional, courteous, and customer-oriented services. According to Kim and Qu (2024), these employees are required to meet customer expectations, handle complaints effectively, maintain professionalism, and demonstrate appropriate emotional expressions under various workplace situations. Due to the high frequency of customer interactions, frontline employees are particularly vulnerable to work-related stress that may negatively affect both their mental well-being and job satisfaction (Melián-González et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that demanding service expectations, interpersonal conflicts with customers, and organizational display rules contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction among frontline employees. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing job satisfaction within this occupational group is essential, not only for improving employee well-being but also for enhancing service quality and maintaining organizational competitiveness.

Although job satisfaction plays a critical role in organizational effectiveness, maintaining high levels of satisfaction among frontline employees remains a significant challenge. Employees in customer-facing positions are frequently exposed to demanding work conditions, including continuous interactions with customers, strict service standards, and the need to manage difficult customer behaviors. Such working conditions may create considerable psychological pressure that ultimately reduces employees' job satisfaction. Research conducted within the hospitality industry demonstrated that negative customer interactions, particularly customer incivility, significantly increase emotional exhaustion and decrease job satisfaction among frontline employees (Li et al., 2024). Similarly, Utami et al. (2025) reported that work pressure, work–life conflict, and excessive service demands collectively contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction among service employees. These findings indicate that job satisfaction remains an important issue requiring further investigation, particularly among employees whose work primarily involves direct customer interactions.

Employee job satisfaction does not emerge independently but is simultaneously influenced by individual characteristics and workplace conditions. Previous studies have identified job design, interpersonal relationships, financial compensation, organizational support, and emotional demands as important determinants of job satisfaction. Among these factors, emotional labor has received considerable attention because employees are frequently expected to regulate and display emotions that conform to organizational standards regardless of their actual feelings (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Consequently, emotional labor has become an essential component of service work and may substantially influence employees' psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

Emotional labor refers to the process through which employees regulate their emotions to display expressions that are consistent with organizational expectations during interactions with customers. The concept was originally introduced by Hochschild (1983), who argued that service employees are often required to express organizationally desired emotions regardless of their genuine feelings. Grandey and Melloy (2017) further explained that emotional labor primarily consists of two emotion regulation strategies: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting involves modifying outward emotional expressions without changing one's genuine feelings, whereas deep acting refers to efforts to modify internal emotions so that they become consistent with the emotions expected by the organization. For frontline employees, emotional labor represents an unavoidable aspect of daily work because they are expected to remain friendly, courteous, and professional even when interacting with difficult customers or experiencing stressful workplace situations. Continuous emotional regulation may therefore become psychologically demanding and negatively affect employees' work experiences, particularly their job satisfaction (Kumarasinghe & Karunarathne, 2024).

Despite this growing body of evidence, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most previous studies examining emotional labor and job satisfaction have been conducted within a single service sector, such as hospitality, banking, or healthcare (Lam et al., 2008; Rupasena et al., 2024; Mehmood & Li., 2020). As a result, little is known about how emotional labor is related to job satisfaction among frontline employees working across different industries within the same organization. Empirical evidence from Indonesia remains concentrated in single occupational groups, such as middle managers, culinary SMEs, and retail salespeople (Gunawan & Eliyana, 2024; Emilisa et al., 2023; Dewi & Parahyanti, 2022), even though cultural values, organizational display rules, and customer service expectations may shape how employees experience emotional labor and evaluate their jobs (Allen et al., 2014; Matsumoto et al., 2008; Nixon et al., 2020). Consequently, findings from single-sector studies in other cultural contexts cannot be assumed to apply directly to frontline employees in multisector companies in developing regions. Addressing this gap is necessary to provide context-specific evidence that can inform human resource management practices in such organizations.

To address these gaps, this study aims to examine the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among frontline employees in a multisector company. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on a multisector organizational context in a developing region, which extends existing findings that have largely been confined to single-sector settings. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature in industrial and organizational psychology by providing empirical evidence on the psychological factors associated with job satisfaction among customer-facing employees. Furthermore, the results may offer practical recommendations for organizations in developing human resource management strategies that enhance employee well-being while improving service quality. Based on the theoretical and empirical review above, the following hypothesis is proposed: H1**:** There is a significant negative relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among frontline employees.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that emotional labor is closely associated with job satisfaction, especially in occupations involving intensive customer interactions. From the perspective of emotion regulation theory, continuously managing emotional expressions consumes substantial psychological resources. Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2013) argued that surface acting often creates emotional dissonance because employees display emotions inconsistent with their genuine feelings, resulting in emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction. In contrast, deep acting enables employees to internalize organizational display rules, thereby reducing emotional conflict and promoting more authentic work experiences that enhance job satisfaction. Empirical evidence supports these theoretical assumptions. Kumarasinghe and Karunarathne (2024) reported that surface acting was negatively associated with job satisfaction, whereas deep acting demonstrated a positive relationship with job satisfaction among service employees. These findings suggest that the way frontline employees regulate their emotions during customer interactions substantially influences how they evaluate their jobs.

Based on the importance of job satisfaction for organizational effectiveness, the demanding nature of frontline service work, and the psychological consequences of emotional labor, this study aims to examine the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among frontline employees. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature in industrial and organizational psychology by providing empirical evidence regarding the psychological factors associated with job satisfaction among customer-facing employees. Furthermore, the results may provide practical recommendations for organizations in developing human resource management strategies that enhance employee well-being while improving service quality.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among frontline employees.

Emotional labor served as the independent variable, whereas job satisfaction was treated as the dependent variable. Emotional labor was operationally defined as the process through which employees regulate their emotional experiences and outward emotional expressions to comply with organizational display rules (Hochschild, 2012). Job satisfaction was defined as employees' overall positive evaluation of their work experiences, reflecting favorable emotional responses toward their jobs (Landy & Conte, 2009). This study was conducted over a three-month period, from April to June 2026. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the company's human resources department to distribute the questionnaires to frontline employees. Data were collected during the first and second weeks of June 2026 using two methods: paper-based questionnaires distributed offline at the workplace and an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Participation was voluntary, and all eligible employees were invited to participate. Data analysis was subsequently carried out within a one-week period.

2.2. Participants

The study involved frontline employees working in a multisector company operating across several business sectors, including retail, fashion retail, hospitality, travel services, restaurants, and beauty care. These employees were selected because their job responsibilities require frequent direct interactions with customers. A total of 124 frontline employees participated in this study. Participants were recruited using a total sampling technique, whereby all eligible employees meeting the inclusion criteria were invited to participate.

2.3. Instruments

Data were collected using two self-report questionnaires. Emotional labor demands. Emotional labor was measured using the four-item Emotional Labor Demands Index (ELI) constructed by Antonakakis (2026) from items of the European Working Conditions Survey. The four items cover (a) having to hide one's feelings at work, (b) handling angry clients, customers, or similar parties, (c) being in emotionally disturbing situations, and (d) dealing directly with people outside the workplace. Together they represent the situational conditions that require emotional management. They do not measure the regulation strategies (surface or deep acting) that employees use in response (Antonakakis, 2026). The four items were averaged into a composite score [on the original response metric]. The original index was instead standardized to a 0–1 scale before averaging (Antonakakis, 2026). In the original study, the ELI showed acceptable reliability for a short, broad construct (α =.65, mean inter-item r = .33), a single-factor structure, positive correlations with work stress and end-of-day exhaustion, and a near-zero correlation with general health (Antonakakis, 2026). The index was constructed from available survey items rather than a dedicated emotional labor scale and was developed in European samples, so its use among Indonesian frontline employees is exploratory.

Job satisfaction was measured with the Indonesian adaptation (Purwanto et al., 2025) of the Short Index of Job Satisfaction (SIJS; Sinval & Marôco, 2020). The SIJS is a short global

measure that treats job satisfaction as a single dimension. It has five items, two of them unfavorable (for example, workdays feeling very long and the job being not very enjoyable). In its Indonesian validation among 112 employees in the Greater Jakarta area, a one-factor model initially showed poor fit, and acceptable fit was reached only after allowing some measurement errors to correlate. Four items loaded significantly on the factor, one did not (loading = .088), and internal consistency for the four valid items was α = .766 (Purwanto et al., 2025). In the present study, responses were given on a [four-point] Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree). Unfavorable items were reverse-scored, and item responses were averaged so that higher scores indicate greater job satisfaction.

Reliability in the present sample. Internal consistency was evaluated with Cronbach's alpha, standardized alpha, mean inter-item correlation, and corrected item-total correlations. The ELI showed α = .65 and a mean inter-item correlation of .33, which falls within the .15–.50 range recommended for broad constructs (Clark & Watson, 1995) and matches the modest but acceptable reliability reported for the original index (Antonakakis, 2026). Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .31 to .78. The Job Satisfaction Scale showed α = .70, standardized α = .71, and a mean inter-item correlation of .33. One unfavorable item (JS5) had a low corrected item-total correlation (.09), a pattern of one weakly performing item that is also reported in the Indonesian validation of the SIJS (Purwanto et al., 2025). All five items were retained to keep the scale intact and comparable with earlier work, and the weak item is acknowledged as a limitation.

2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and study variables. Instrument reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and corrected item-total correlations. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction. Statistical analyses were performed using R Studio, and statistical significance was determined at the .05 level. The scope of this study is limited to frontline employees of a single multisector company operating in the retail, fashion retail, hospitality, travel services, restaurant, and beauty care sectors. The quantitative correlational design allows the examination of the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction, but it does not permit causal inferences. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires at a single point in time (cross-sectional), which may be susceptible to common method bias and social desirability bias. The use of both offline and online questionnaires was intended to reach all eligible employees, although differences in the data collection mode may have influenced responses. In addition, the use of total sampling from one company limits the generalizability of the findings to other organizations and cultural contexts, and the Emotional Labour Scale showed only moderate internal consistency in this sample (α = .65).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

A total of 124 frontline employees participated in this study. Female respondents accounted for the majority of the sample (63.7%, n = 79), while male respondents represented 36.3% (n = 45). Most participants were between 21 and 25 years old (70.2%), followed by those older than 25 years (24.2%) and younger than 21 years (5.6%). These findings indicate that the sample was predominantly composed of young adults.

Table 1. Participants' Characteristics (N=124)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	45	36.3
	Female	79	63.7
Age (years)	< 21	7	5.6
	21 – 25	87	70.2
	> 25	30	24.2
Highest education	Bachelor's degree	80	64.5
	Senior high school/vocational school	44	35.5
Length of employment	< 1 year	41	33.1
	1 – 3 years	72	58.1
	4 – 6 years	11	8.9
Industry sector	Retail/Fashion	67	54.0
	Restaurant/Cafe	28	22.6
	Others	29	21.8
Employment status	Permanent	81	65.3
	Contract	34	27.4
	Others	9	7.3

Regarding educational background, most participants held a bachelor's degree (64.5%), whereas 35.5% had completed senior high school or vocational education. In terms of work experience, most respondents had worked for one to three years (58.1%), followed by less than one year (33.1%) and four to six years (8.9%). The majority were employed in the retail and fashion sector (54.0%), followed by restaurants and cafés (22.6%) and other service industries (21.8%). Furthermore, most respondents were permanent employees (65.3%), while 27.4% were contract employees and 7.3% had other employment statuses.

Table 2. Variabel Descriptive Analysis (N = 124)

Variable	n	M	SD	Median	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtois
Emotional Labor	124	3.81	0.95	3.62	1.50	5.00	0.68	0.09
Job Satisfaction	124	2.89	0.28	3.00	2.20	3.40	-0.46	-0.38

Notes. *M = mean (rata-rata); SD = standar deviasi.*

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 2. Emotional labor showed a mean score of 3.81 (SD = 0.95), with scores ranging from 1.50 to 5.00. The

skewness value (.68) indicated a slightly positively skewed distribution, whereas the kurtosis value (.09) suggested a distribution close to normal.

Job satisfaction yielded a mean score of 2.89 (SD = 0.28), with observed scores ranging from 2.20 to 3.40. The skewness (-.46) indicated a slightly negatively skewed distribution, while the kurtosis (-.38) suggested a slightly platykurtic distribution. Overall, the skewness and kurtosis values for both variables were within the acceptable range (±1), indicating that the data were approximately normally distributed and suitable for parametric analyses.

Table 3. Reliability Test of Emotional Labor Scale (N = 124)

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
EL1	3.70	1.10	.57	.57
EL2	3.70	1.20	.78	.43
EL3	3.60	1.60	.60	.58
EL4	4.30	1.40	.31	.72

Notes. *The corrected item-total correlation represents the correlation between each item and the total score of the remaining items.*

Table 4. Item Statistic of Emotional Labor Scale

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
EL1	3.70	1.10	.57	.57
EL2	3.70	1.20	.78	.43
EL3	3.60	1.60	.60	.58
EL4	4.30	1.40	.31	.72

Notes. *The corrected item-total correlation represents the correlation between each item and the total score of the remaining items.*

The Emotional Labour Scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .65 and a standardized alpha of .67. The mean inter-item correlation was .33, indicating adequate homogeneity among the items. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .31 to .78, suggesting that all items contributed adequately to the measurement of the construct.

Table 5. Reliability Test of Job Satisfaction Scale (N = 124)

Indicator	Score
Number of items	5
Cronbach's Alpha	.70
Standardized Alpha	.71
Mean Inter-item Correlation	.33
Range of corrected item-total correlation	.09 - .87

The Job Satisfaction Scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70 and a standardized alpha of .71. The mean inter-item correlation was .33. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .09 to .87. Although one

unfavorable item (JS5) showed a relatively low corrected item-total correlation, the overall reliability of the instrument remained acceptable for subsequent analyses.

Table 6. Item Statistic of Job Satisfaction Scale

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
JS1	2.90	0.51	.80	.57
JS2	2.90	0.60	.87	.43
JS3	2.30	0.73	.44	.70
JS4	2.80	0.57	.73	.59
JS5	1.90	0.56	.09	.79

Notes. *The corrected item-total correlation represents the correlation between each item and the total score of the remaining items.*

The reliability analysis indicated that the Job Satisfaction Scale, consisting of five items, demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70. This result suggests that the instrument is sufficiently reliable for research purposes. The mean inter-item correlation was .33, indicating an adequate level of association among the items in measuring the same underlying construct. This value falls within the recommended range of .20–.40, suggesting satisfactory item homogeneity.

Item-level statistics showed that the corrected item–total correlations ranged from .09 to .87. Four items—JS1 (.80), JS2 (.87), JS3 (.44), and JS4 (.73)—exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of .30, indicating that they adequately represented the job satisfaction construct. In contrast, JS5, which was a negatively worded (unfavorable) item, demonstrated a corrected item–total correlation of only .09, well below the recommended criterion. This finding indicates that JS5 exhibited a very weak association with the overall scale score and represented the weakest item in the instrument.

The alpha-if-item-deleted analysis further revealed that removing JS5 would increase Cronbach's alpha from .70 to .79, suggesting that this item reduced the overall internal consistency of the scale. Therefore, JS5 should be carefully evaluated by first confirming that reverse scoring has been correctly applied, given that it is a negatively worded item. Additionally, the wording of the item should be reviewed to ensure that it adequately reflects the intended construct. Overall, despite the weakness of JS5, the Job Satisfaction Scale demonstrated acceptable reliability (α = .70) and was considered appropriate for subsequent analyses. Nevertheless, revising or removing JS5 is recommended in future research to improve the psychometric properties of the instrument.

Table 7. Pearson Correlation and Effect Size Between Emotional Labor and Job Satisfaction **(N = 124)**

Variabel	N	r	95% CI	p	r^2	Effect size
Emotional labor – Job satisfaction	124	-.45	[−.58, −.30]	< .001	.20	Medium to large

Notes. *P < .001 (two-tailed)*

Pearson's product–moment correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction (r = −.45, p < .001). The magnitude

of the correlation indicates a moderate effect size, suggesting that employees who experienced higher levels of emotional labor tended to report lower levels of job satisfaction. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction, $r(122) = -.45$, 95% CI [−.58, −.30], $p < .001$. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this represents a medium-to-large effect size, with emotional labor accounting for approximately 20% of the variance in job satisfaction ($r^2 = .20$). Conversely, lower levels of emotional labor were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. Because the significance level was below the conventional threshold ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis (H_0), which stated that no relationship exists between emotional labor and job satisfaction, was rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that emotional labor is significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction among the employees included in this study.

3.2. Discussion

This study examined whether emotional labor demands are related to job satisfaction among frontline employees of a multisector company. Emotional labor demands, defined here as how often and how intensely employees face situations that require them to manage their emotions (hiding feelings, handling angry customers, facing emotionally disturbing situations, and dealing with people outside the organization), were negatively and significantly correlated with job satisfaction, $r(122) = -.45$, 95% CI [−.58, −.30], $p < .001$. H1 was therefore supported. With $r^2 = .20$, emotional labor demands shared about one-fifth of their variance with job satisfaction, a medium-to-large association by Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. Employees who reported more emotionally demanding work tended to evaluate their jobs less favorably.

Because emotional labor was measured with a demand-based index (Antonakakis, 2026), the finding concerns the overall burden of emotional labor rather than particular regulation strategies. Only one of the four items (hiding feelings) directly reflects emotion regulation, and the other three capture exposure to emotionally charged encounters. A plausible reading is that managing emotions across many difficult interactions draws on limited psychological resources (Grandey & Melloy, 2017), so heavier exposure accumulates strain and lowers satisfaction. This reading fits the health-impairment logic of job demands–resources (JD-R) theory, in which sustained demands that resources do not offset are linked to strain and poorer outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The hiding-feelings item is also conceptually close to emotion-rule dissonance, which a meta-analysis of 95 studies linked to impaired well-being and less favorable job attitudes (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). Stress, exhaustion, and other possible mediators were not measured here, so this mechanism remains untested.

The present data cannot speak to surface acting or deep acting. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that these strategies relate to job outcomes in different ways. Across 116 primary studies, surface acting showed negative relationships with job satisfaction and stress or exhaustion, whereas deep acting showed positive relationships with work outcomes

(Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). A later meta-analysis concluded that emotional labor can be harmful or beneficial depending on the strategy used (Humphrey, 2023), and studies that separate the strategies among service employees report a similar pattern (Kumarasinghe & Karunarathne, 2024). Because the composite used here combines exposure to emotional demands without distinguishing strategies, such differences are neither confirmed nor contradicted by our results, and this literature is cited as background only.

The direction of the association agrees with research on frontline and other emotionally demanding occupations. Kim and Qu (2024) and Li et al. (2024) linked stressful customer encounters to lower job satisfaction through emotional exhaustion, and Dewi and Parahyanti (2022) examined emotional exhaustion as a mediator between emotional labor and job satisfaction among retail sales employees in Indonesia. Exhaustion and stress also appear as pathways in other occupations. Emotional exhaustion mediated the effect of emotional labor on the physical and mental health of health professionals (Chen et al., 2022). Job-related stress fully mediated the link between emotional labor and burnout among school administrators in Türkiye (Coşkun et al., 2025). Emotional exhaustion partially mediated the links between emotional labor strategies and job satisfaction among preschool teachers (Peng et al., 2026). In a large European sample, Antonakakis (2026) found that higher emotional labor demands were associated with lower mental wellbeing, mainly through work stress. That outcome differs from job satisfaction, but the direction is the same.

The relationship may not be uniform across contexts, however. In robustness analyses of the same European data, Antonakakis (2026) reported a positive coefficient for job satisfaction and suggested it may reflect the rewarding side of interpersonal work. A meta-analysis also found that the associations of emotional labor with burnout and job satisfaction differ between collectivist and individualist cultures (Humphrey, 2023), in line with arguments that cultural values, display rules, and service expectations shape how employees experience emotional demands (Allen et al., 2014; Matsumoto et al., 2008; Nixon et al., 2020). The negative association found here therefore applies to this sample and should not be assumed for other settings.

The sample may also help interpret the result. Most participants were young adults (70.2% aged 21–25) with three years of experience or less (91.2%) who worked in retail, fashion, and restaurant settings with constant customer contact. Employees early in their careers may have had less time to develop ways of coping with emotional demands, but this is speculative, and evidence on experience is mixed: UK teachers with more experience reported higher emotional labor (Kinman et al., 2011). Tenure and sector were not analyzed here. Although the sample covered several sectors within one company, no sector comparison was made, so the study cannot say whether the association differs between sectors.

The correlation of −.45 also shows that emotional labor demands are only one influence on job satisfaction. Perceived organizational support, leadership, compensation, workload, coworker relationships, and career development have all been linked to satisfaction among

service employees (Hur et al., 2022; Utami et al., 2025). Resources may also buffer the impact of demands, as JD-R theory proposes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Kinman et al. (2011) found some evidence that social support lessened the negative impact of emotional demands on exhaustion and job satisfaction among teachers, and Antonakakis (2026) found that social support weakened the link between emotional labor demands and poor wellbeing, whereas job control alone did not. This suggests, without being tested here, that organizations may benefit from combining measures that reduce exposure to the most difficult interactions (for example, clear procedures and backup for handling angry customers) with supportive supervision and peer support, instead of relying on individual coping training alone.

Several limitations should be noted. First, emotional labor was measured with a four-item demand-based index constructed from survey items and developed in European samples, and its structure was not re-tested in this Indonesian sample. Its reliability was modest (α = .65), and the composite cannot distinguish surface acting from deep acting or other dimensions, so no conclusions about their separate relationships with job satisfaction can be drawn. Second, one job satisfaction item (JS5) performed weakly (corrected item-total r = .09), a pattern also noted in the Indonesian validation of the scale (Purwanto et al., 2025). Third, the correlational, cross-sectional design rules out causal conclusions, and the association could also run from low satisfaction to heavier perceived emotional demands. Fourth, self-report data collected through both paper and online questionnaires may be affected by common method bias, social desirability, and mode effects. Fifth, the sample of 124 employees came from a single company, which limits generalizability.

Future research should pair a demand-based measure with a validated multidimensional emotional labor scale so that surface acting and deep acting can be analyzed separately, since meta-analytic work indicates that they relate differently to well-being and job attitudes (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Studies should also test mediators such as stress and emotional exhaustion, and moderators such as social support. Longitudinal designs and sector comparisons would clarify the direction of the relationship and whether it differs across service settings. Finally, validating the demand index among Indonesian employees would strengthen its use in this context.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrated a significant negative relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction among frontline employees. Employees who experienced higher levels of emotional labor tended to report lower levels of job satisfaction, whereas those experiencing lower emotional labor generally reported higher job satisfaction. These findings suggest that the emotional demands associated with service interactions constitute an important factor related to employees' psychological well-being and overall job satisfaction. From a practical perspective, organizations should implement strategies to help employees effectively manage emotional demands in the workplace. Such strategies may include providing emotion

regulation training, strengthening supervisory and coworker support, offering employee counseling services, and fostering a work environment that promotes psychological well-being. By addressing the challenges associated with emotional labor, organizations can enhance employees' job satisfaction while maintaining high-quality customer service and improving overall organizational performance.

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