

Research on the Relationship between Emotional Labor and Occupational Burnout of Novice Social Worker

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Abstract: This study focuses on 176 novice social workers in Guangdong Province, aiming to explore the relationship between emotional labor and occupational burnout. Data were collected through questionnaires using the Emotional Labor Scale and the Burnout Scale, and analyzed with SPSS 19.0. The main findings include: (1) significant gender differences in surface acting, with males scoring higher than females; (2) assistant social workers reporting higher levels of depersonalization and overall burnout than those with other qualifications; (3) novice social workers working more than 40 hours per week experiencing greater emotional exhaustion than those working 40 hours or less; and (4) lower frequency of emotional labor and less use of deep acting are associated with higher burnout levels. Understanding this relationship is essential for supporting the professional growth and career development of novice social workers.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

The China Burnout Index survey reveals that 70% of respondents experience mild work burnout, 39.22% moderate burnout, and 13% feel extremely exhausted (equivalent to one in eight)^[1]. Social workers, as members of a service-oriented profession, also face severe burnout challenges: turnover rates in Guangzhou, Dongguan, and other areas reach 24.6%, with nearly 70% of practitioners leaving the field, making it a high-risk occupational group^[2]. Social work heavily relies on emotional labor, making practitioners susceptible to burnout due to emotional exhaustion—a concern particularly acute among novice social workers. While domestic research has accumulated some insights, studies exploring the intrinsic relationship between emotional labor and burnout among novice social workers remain scarce. This research focuses on the connection between emotional labor and burnout among novice social workers, aiming to supplement theoretical frameworks and provide evidence for intervention measures. The goal is to enhance novice social workers' job adaptability and well-being while reducing the incidence of burnout.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Emotional Labor

Based on a synthesis of domestic and international definitions, this study defines the emotional labor of novice social workers as psychological and behavioral activities involving emotional investment, regulation, control, and expression, which are performed to secure economic compensation, accomplish work goals, or satisfy the emotional needs of service recipients while upholding the professional value system. Research on emotional labor started earlier abroad and has formed a relatively mature theoretical framework, whereas domestic attention to this topic has grown steadily in recent years. Hochschild defined emotional labor as the process of managing one's emotions to display a required facial expression^[3]; Grandey et al. further extended this concept to the level of internal emotional regulation, stressing the adjustment of feelings to meet organizational expectations^[4], while domestic scholars generally interpret it as occupational role-playing, focusing on emotional expression within work scenarios^[5]. In terms of strategic classification, Grandey distinguishes between surface acting and deep acting^[4], and Goffman further categorizes it into three forms: surface acting, active deep acting, and passive deep acting^{[6][7]}. Existing research has shown that emotional labor exerts a significant influence on occupational outcomes, as suppressing or masking emotional expressions can easily lead to occupational burnout and strengthen turnover intentions^{[8][9]}. With regard to research methods, Wang Bin investigated gender differences in emotional labor through participant observation and in-depth interviews^[10], and Yang Yongbo adopted a questionnaire survey, revealing that women are more likely to adopt deep acting strategies and demonstrate stronger emotional regulation capabilities^[11]. Overall, research on emotional labor has achieved substantial progress across multiple dimensions.

1.2.2. Professional Burnout

Through a literature review, this study defines occupational burnout among novice social workers as a comprehensive physical and psychological response arising from prolonged exposure to work stress in high-pressure and complex service settings, whose core manifestations include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, specifically reflected in emotional fatigue, indifference toward service recipients, and weakened self-worth recognition. As a central topic of academic inquiry, professional burnout has been extensively investigated both domestically and internationally: in terms of its nature, Kalliath posits that it represents an extreme negative feedback loop formed when individuals face intense work stress without sufficient coping strategies^[12], whereas domestic research regards it as a comprehensive occupational stress response involving physical and psychological exhaustion, mainly manifested as physical depletion, professional cynicism, and emotional exhaustion^[13]. With regard to typology, Maslach's three-dimensional model consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment remains the most widely recognized framework^[14], which is predominantly adopted in domestic studies using scales to measure the relevant dimensions^[15]. Concerning influencing factors, Maslach found that practitioners under the age of 30 are more susceptible to burnout^[16], while years of service, professional experience, and work-related emotional experiences are also considered key variables^[17]; additionally, Huang Wei's empirical study on social workers in Hefei and Fuzhou indicated that social support, work environment, and sense of belonging are significant contributing factors^[18], and other research has shown that longer tenure is associated with higher burnout levels yet greater professional accomplishment, and that male social workers generally report higher burnout than females. In terms of research subjects, Maslach defined burnout as an emotional exhaustion phenomenon commonly found in professions

involving frequent interpersonal interaction^[16].

1.3. Research Methods

1.3.1. Research Subjects

Using convenience sampling, this study surveyed 200 novice social workers in Guangdong Province with less than three years of experience, yielding 176 valid responses (88% response rate). The sample distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Information of the Sample (N=176)

Variables	Characteristics	Number of	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	17%
	female	146	83%
Age group	20 to 25 years old	80	45.5%
	Ages 26–30	38	21.6%
	Ages 31 to 40	39	22.2%
	41 years old and above	18	10.80%
Educational background	High school	11	6.30%
	Associate Degree	77	43.80%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	88	50.00%
Whether one has obtained the national social worker professional qualification	Not obtained	50	28.40%
	Assistant Social Worker	123	69.90%
	Certified Social Worker	3	1.70%
Weekly working hours are	Within 40 hours	76	43.20%

1.3.2. Research Tools

This study employed the Chinese Burnout Inventory (CMBI) to measure occupational burnout. Developed by Li Yongxin^{[19][20]} based on the MBI-GS and BM scales, this 15-item instrument assesses two dimensions: depersonalization ($\alpha=0.76$) and reduced efficacy ($\alpha=0.67$). It employs a seven-point scale (including reverse-scored items) and demonstrates good reliability and validity within the Chinese cultural context. Emotional labor was assessed using Brotheridge and Lee's 15-item scale, covering six dimensions including frequency, intensity, surface acting, and deep acting, scored on a five-point scale (1=never to 5=always). The scale demonstrated good reliability and validity ($\alpha=0.696$, $KMO=0.771$, $p<0.05$). Analysis using SPSS 19.0 revealed an internal consistency $\alpha=0.832$ and $KMO=0.840$ for this scale in the present study, indicating its effectiveness in measuring novice social workers' emotional labor status^[21].

1.3.3. Data Collection and Statistical Processing

Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires under one-on-one guidance and analyzed statistically using SPSS 19.0.

2. Analysis of Emotional Labor and Professional Burnout among New Social Workers

2.1. A Descriptive Analysis of Emotional Labor and Occupational Burnout

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the information gathered about emotional labor and occupational burnout among new social workers using SPSS 19.0 statistical analysis software. The results of the particular analysis are shown as follows:

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Emotional Labor (N=176)

	Frequency	Intensity	Type	Deep Acting	Emotional Labor Scale	Surface Acting
Means	3.820	3.385	3.935	4.094	3.644	3.233
Standard	0.613	0.743	0.637	0.631	0.503	0.799

Based on Likert five-point scale measurements, the overall mean score for emotional labor among novice social workers was 3.644, indicating a frequency between “sometimes” and “often.” This suggests that emotional labor is common in their daily practice. The total standard deviation was 0.503, reflecting relatively low data dispersion and concentrated responses. According to the scale's five-level classification (scores < 2.00 = low, 2.00–2.99 = lower-middle, 3.00–3.99 = upper-middle, 4.00–5.00 = high)^[22], the overall mean of 3.644 falls within the upper-middle range. As shown in Table 2, the dimension scores ranked from highest to lowest are: deep acting (4.094), typology (3.935), frequency (3.820), intensity (3.385), and surface acting (3.233). The notably high score in deep acting suggests it is a particularly prominent strategy among this group, significantly exceeding other dimensions.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Occupational Burnout (N=176)

	Exhaustion Dimension	Identity Disintegration Dimension	Reduced Sense of Accomplishment Dimension	Burnout Scale
Mean	4.002	2.126	2.952	3.027
Standard Deviation	1.228	0.868	0.822	0.737

As shown in Table 3, occupational burnout was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). The overall mean score for novice social workers was 3.027 (between "Somewhat Disagree" and "Neutral"), reflecting mild overall burnout. Notably, the exhaustion dimension scored a mean of 4.002, showing a marked exhaustion tendency. The total standard deviation of 0.737 also indicated low data dispersion, concentrated distribution and good measurement stability.

2.2. Time Analysis of Emotional Labor

For the temporal dimension of emotional labor, an open-ended question on average interaction duration with service recipients was administered to 176 novice social workers. Results showed 28.4% of interactions lasted under 30 minutes, 63.1% 30–60 minutes, and only 8.5% over 60 minutes, with a mean duration of 36.9 minutes. Given the positive correlation between interaction duration and emotional labor intensity, this indicates high emotional labor investment in their services.

3. A Comparative Analysis of Emotional Labor and Professional Burnout among Novice Social Workers

3.1. Gender Differences in Emotional Labor and Burnout among Novice Social Workers

The author conducted an independent samples t-test on the emotional labor and occupational burnout scores of male and female novice social workers. The homogeneity of variance test revealed that the significance levels for all dimensions and scales were greater than 0.05. Therefore, a t-test assuming homogeneity of variance was performed, confirming that the data exhibited homogeneity of variance. Results (see Table 4) revealed significant gender differences in emotional labor's surface acting dimension only, with Sig. (two-tailed) = 0.029, indicating significantly higher scores among male novice social workers than female counterparts.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Emotional Labor and Burnout among Novice Social Workers (N=176)

	Gender (M±SD)		T	P
	Male	female		
Frequency	3.856±0.551	3.813±0.626	0.347	0.729
Intensity	3.411±0.715	3.379±0.751	0.215	0.830
Type	3.883±0.597	3.945±0.646	-0.484	0.629
Surface Acting	3.522±0.659	3.174±0.814	2.201	0.029
Deep Acting	4.183±0.580	4.075±0.642	0.853	0.395
Emotional Labor Scale	3.731±0.447	3.626±0.513	1.040	0.300
Exhaustion Dimension	3.860±1.316	4.032±1.211	-0.696	0.487
Depersonalization Dimension	2.167±1.008	2.118±0.840	0.280	0.780
Reduced Accomplishment Dimension	2.920±0.881	2.959±0.813	-0.235	0.814
Burnout Scale	2.982±0.768	3.036±0.733	-0.364	0.717

3.2. Qualitative Differences in Emotional Labor and Professional Burnout among Novice Social Workers

To analyze differences in emotional labor and occupational burnout among novice social workers with varying qualifications, this study employed one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare different qualification groups. The homogeneity of variance test showed that the significance levels for all dimensions and total scales were greater than 0.05, satisfying the homogeneity of variance assumption. As presented in Table 5, there were no significant differences in emotional labor and its sub-dimensions across qualification groups (all $p > 0.05$). Results from Table 6 further indicated that assistant social workers scored significantly higher than other qualification groups on the exhaustion dimension and the total score of occupational burnout.

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of Qualification Differences in Emotional Labor among Novice Social Workers

Qualifications	Frequency	Intensity	Type	Surface	Deep	Emotional Labor
Not Obtained	3.773±0.692	3.327±0.8	3.910±0.72	3.127±0.916	4.120±0.66	3.595±0.598
Assistant Social Worker	3.824±0.576	3.390±0.7	3.935±0.59	3.268±0.738	4.069±0.61	3.650±0.453
Social Worker	4.444±0.509	4.111±0.1	4.333±0.76	3.556±1.262	4.667±0.28	4.180±0.598
F	1.718	1.602	0.622	0.806	1.379	1.965
P	0.182	0.205	0.538	0.448	0.255	0.143

Table 6: Comparative Study of Qualification Differences in Burnout among Novice Social Workers

Qualifications	Exhaustion Dimension	Personality Disintegration Dimension	Reduced Sense of Accomplishment Dimension	Burnout Scale
Not Obtained	3.428±1.197	1.984±0.947	2.944±0.897	2.785±
Assistant Social Worker	4.246±1.178	2.190±0.836	2.972±0.792	3.136±
Social Worker	3.600±0.200	1.867±0.702	2.267±0.643	2.578±
F	8.759	1.141	1.083	4.788
P	0.000	0.322	0.341	0.009

3.3. Duration Differences in Emotional Labor and Professional Burnout among New Social Workers

Table 7: Comparative Analysis of Emotional Labor Work Hours among Novice Social Workers (N=176)

Work Duration	Frequency	Intensity	Type	Surface Acting	Deep Acting	Emotional Labor Scale
Within 40	3.803 ±	3.246 ± 0.804	3.836 ± 0.685	3.197 ± 0.774	4.086 ± 0.640	3.583 ± 0.531
41-50 hours	3.857 ±	3.477 ± 0.697	4.019 ± 0.596	3.245 ± 0.838	4.095 ± 0.651	3.689 ± 0.478
51-60hours	3.857 ±	3.476 ± 0.701	4.143 ± 0.535	3.214 ± 0.812	4.143 ± 0.457	3.709 ± 0.527
61 hours or	3.524 ±	3.667 ± 0.385	3.643 ± 0.556	3.524 ± 0.663	4.071 ± 0.732	3.659 ± 0.448
F	0.672	1.721	2.103	0.364	0.035	0.663
P	0.570	0.164	0.102	0.779	0.991	0.576

Table 8: Comparative Analysis of Working Hours and Occupational Burnout among Novice Social Workers (N=176)

Work Duration	Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Reduced Sense of	Burnout Scale
Within 40 hours	3.695 ± 1.172	2.103 ± 0.892	3.003 ± 0.793	2.933 ± 0.763
41-50 hours	4.119 ± 1.207	2.177 ± 0.820	2.879 ± 0.857	3.058 ± 0.734
51-60hours	4.500 ± 1.259	1.843 ± 0.643	2.929 ± 0.840	3.091 ± 0.631
61 hours and above	5.029 ± 1.110	2.371 ± 1.449	3.286 ± 0.747	3.562 ± 0.485
F	4.477	0.790	0.691	1.741
P	0.005	0.501	0.559	0.160

Note: p<0.05.

To analyze differences in emotional labor and occupational burnout among novice social workers across varying work experience levels, this study employed single-factor analysis of variance to examine the scores of different work duration groups on these two dimensions (See Table 7). The homogeneity of variance test revealed that the significance levels for all dimensions and scales exceeded the 0.05 critical value, indicating that the research data satisfied the assumption of homogeneity of variance. The results (see Table 8) showed significant differences in the exhaustion dimension, with the 40-hour group scoring significantly lower than the other work duration groups.

4. Analysis of the Relationship between Emotional Labor and Professional Burnout among New Social Workers

4.1. An Analysis of Emotional Labor and Occupational Burnout among New Social Workers

This study employs a holistic analytical perspective to examine the relationship between emotional labor and occupational burnout among novice social workers. The correlation coefficient between the two variables was found to be -0.200, with a significance level meeting the basic requirement of less than 0.01. This indicates a statistically significant association between emotional labor and occupational burnout. (See Table 9 .)

Table 9: Correlation Matrix between Overall Emotional Labor and Overall Burnout

	Emotional Labor Scale	Burnout Scale
Emotional Labor Scale	1	
Burnout Scale	-0.200**	1

Note: **p<0.01.

This study subdivides emotional labor into five dimensions and conducts correlation analyses with occupational burnout (see Table 10). Results indicate that the correlation coefficient between the frequency dimension of emotional labor and occupational burnout is -0.312, the intensity dimension is -0.152, the type dimension is -0.180, the surface acting dimension showed a correlation coefficient of 0.182, and the deep acting dimension had a correlation coefficient of -0.479. All correlations met the basic significance level requirements of less than 0.05 and 0.01. These data indicate that all dimensions of emotional labor are significantly correlated with occupational burnout, but the direction of influence varies across dimensions—some exhibit positive associations while others show negative correlations.

Table 10: Correlation Matrix between Dimensions of Emotional Labor and Overall Job Burnout

	Frequency	Intensity	Type	Surface Acting	Deep Acting	Burnout Scale
Frequency	1					
Intensity	0.460**	1				
Type	0.709**	0.390**	1			
Surface Acting	0.347**	0.413**	0.270**	1		
Deep Acting	0.556**	0.422**	0.506**	0.075	1	
Burnout Scale	-0.312**	-0.152*	-0.180*	0.182*	-0.479**	1

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

Table 11: Correlation Matrix between Dimensions of Burnout and Overall Emotional Labor

	Exhaustion Dimension	Personality Disintegration Dimension	Reduced Sense of Accomplishment Dimension	Emotional Labor Scale
Exhaustion Dimension	1			
Personality Disintegration Dimension	0.380**	1		
Reduced Sense of Accomplishment Dimension	0.267**	0.423**	1	
Emotional Labor Scale	0.033	-0.186*	-0.391**	1

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

Additionally, This study further explored the correlation between the three dimensions of occupational burnout (reduced sense of accomplishment, dehumanization, emotional exhaustion) and emotional labor investment, with results shown in Table 11. The emotional exhaustion dimension had an insignificant correlation with emotional labor ($r=0.033$), while dehumanization ($r=-0.186$) and reduced sense of accomplishment ($r=-0.391$) were both significantly correlated. For novice social workers, emotional labor is thus significantly associated with the reduced sense of accomplishment and dehumanization dimensions of occupational burnout, but not with emotional exhaustion.

4.2. Regression Analysis of Emotional Labor and Burnout among New Social Workers

To explore how emotional labor dimensions influence occupational burnout, regression analysis was conducted with these dimensions as independent variables and burnout as the dependent variable. Detailed results are in Table 12.

Table 12: Regression of Emotional Labor Dimensions on Occupational Burnout

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	t	Sig.
burnout	Frequency	-0.341	-2.841	0.005
	Intensity	-0.025	-0.316	0.752
	Type	0.192	1.804	0.073
	Surface acting	0.256	3.774	0.000
	Deep acting	-0.486	-5.063	0.000

According to the regression analysis results in Table 12, the impact of each dimension of emotional labor on occupational burnout exhibits significant differences. For the frequency dimension, the regression coefficient B is -0.341, with a calculated T-test value of -2.841. At a significance level of 0.005, this data indicates that increased emotional labor frequency significantly reduces occupational burnout levels, demonstrating a negative effect. For the Surface Acting dimension, the regression coefficient B is 0.256, with a T-value of 3.774 and a significance level of 0.000. This indicates that increased surface acting positively promotes the occurrence of occupational burnout. The regression coefficient B for the deep acting dimension is -0.486, with a T-value as low as -5.063 and a significance level of 0.000. This confirms that deep acting exerts a pronounced inhibitory effect on occupational burnout. However, for the intensity and type dimensions, the regression coefficients B were -0.025 and 0.192, respectively, with corresponding T-values of -0.316 and 1.804. Their significance levels were 0.752 and 0.073, respectively, neither reaching statistical significance. This indicates that these two dimensions have an insignificant impact on occupational burnout. In summary, among all independent variables, the deep role-playing dimension exhibits the most pronounced and statistically significant negative impact on occupational burnout. While surface role-playing and frequency dimensions also show significant associations, their influence is weaker compared to deep role-playing. To investigate the relationship between the dimensions of emotional labor and the dimensions of occupational burnout, this study conducted regression analyses with the dimensions of emotional labor as independent variables and the dimensions of occupational burnout as dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 13.

As shown in Table 13, on the depletion dimension, the regression coefficients B for frequency, intensity, type, surface role-playing, and deep role-playing are -0.203, -0.055, 0.327, 0.382, and -0.469, respectively, with significance levels of 0.371, 0.710, 0.106, 0.003, and 0.010. This indicates that deep role-playing exerts the most pronounced negative impact on the exhaustion dimension, followed by surface role-playing, which has a positive effect. For the disintegration dimension, the regression coefficients B were -0.521, 0.097, 0.239, 0.247, and -0.517, with significance levels of 0.000, 0.300, 0.063, 0.003, and 0.000. This indicates that deep role-playing has the most significant negative impact, while frequency and surface role-playing also exhibit strong effects. Regarding the dimension of reduced sense of accomplishment, the regression coefficients B for each dimension were -0.298, -0.117, 0.011, 0.138, and -0.473, with significance levels of 0.028, 0.183, 0.929, 0.071, and 0.000, respectively. This similarly indicates that the negative effect of deep acting is the most critical, followed by the negative impact of frequency. The study demonstrates that deep acting exhibits a significant inhibitory effect across all three dimensions of occupational burnout. Frequency effectively alleviates depersonalization and reduced sense of accomplishment, while surface acting exacerbates exhaustion and depersonalization.

Table 13: Regression Analysis between Dimensions of Emotional Labor and Dimensions of Burnout

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	t	Sig.
Exhaustion Dimension	Frequency	-0.203	-0.897	0.371
	Intensity	-0.055	-0.372	0.710
	Type	0.327	1.625	0.106
	Surface Acting	0.382	2.991	0.003
	Deep Acting	-0.469	-2.588	0.010
Personality Disintegration Dimension	Frequency	-0.521	-3.618	0.000
	Intensity	0.097	1.040	0.300
	Type	0.239	1.869	0.063
	Surface Acting	0.247	3.033	0.003
	Deep Acting	-0.517	-4.480	0.000

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	t	Sig.
Reduced Sense of Accomplishment Dimension	Frequency	-0.298	-2.221	0.028
	Intensity	-0.117	-1.336	0.183
	Type	0.011	0.089	0.929
	Surface Acting	0.138	1.817	0.071
	Deep Acting	-0.473	-4.403	0.000

5. Discussion

5.1. Men Engage in More Superficial Role-Playing than Women

Surface acting refers to displaying emotions in public or professional settings that align with external expectations yet diverge from one's genuine inner feelings, akin to an actor performing according to a script. This study reveals that male novice social workers scored significantly higher on surface acting dimensions than their female counterparts, a finding closely linked to traditional gender role expectations. Society generally expects men to conceal genuine emotions and maintain a professional image, while the social work profession demands practitioners possess nuanced emotional perception and expression. This conflict between dual expectations leads male novices to rely more heavily on surface acting to balance pressures, resulting in their higher scores^[23].

5.2. Assistant Social Workers Exhibit Higher Levels of Burnout Dimensions and Occupational Exhaustion Compared to Other Qualifications

Research indicates that assistant social workers score significantly higher than other newly qualified social workers on overall burnout and emotional exhaustion dimensions. As novices with less than two years of experience, they primarily handle frontline service duties and face the most severe emotional depletion. Against a backdrop of limited resources and overwhelming demand, they frequently manage numerous complex cases within tight deadlines, resulting in severely overloaded workloads. Research indicates that workload and emotional labor are core factors triggering occupational burnout^[24], directly exacerbating emotional exhaustion and dehumanization tendencies^[25]. More critically, this group generally lacks effective workplace support, such as peer assistance and supervisory guidance^[26], which could significantly buffer stress and reduce burnout risk. This support deficit makes them more susceptible to occupational burnout.

5.3. The Exhaustion Dimension Is Higher for Work Schedules Exceeding 40 Hours than for Those under 40 Hours

Research on working hour variations reveals that novice social workers exhibit significant differences in burnout dimension scores based on working hours, with those working over 40 hours per week scoring significantly higher than those working under 40 hours. Within the social work field, working hours positively correlate with burnout levels, and overtime is a key factor inducing professional burnout^[27]. New social workers exceeding 40 weekly hours struggle to secure sufficient time to alleviate stress from high-intensity work, leading to persistent accumulation of physical and mental fatigue that elevates their exhaustion scores. Their rest and recovery time is significantly compressed. Over time, unresolved physical fatigue breeds psychological weariness and work aversion, ultimately exacerbating professional burnout.

5.4. The Lower the Frequency of Emotional Labor, the Higher the Occupational Burnout among Novice Social Workers

The frequency of emotional labor among novice social workers exhibits a significant negative correlation with occupational burnout. This is attributed to their increasing familiarity with work contexts and client characteristics as emotional labor practices intensify, enabling more effective application of emotional regulation strategies and professional skills. Further analysis indicates that surface acting shows a significant positive correlation with occupational burnout, while deep acting and genuine emotional expression demonstrate significant negative correlations^[28]. This suggests that social workers employing the latter two strategies exhibit lower levels of burnout. Through repeated practice in interacting with clients from diverse backgrounds, novice social workers gradually learn to keenly perceive others' emotions and provide support using appropriate language and body language. This enhances service effectiveness, reduces work stress, and lowers the risk of occupational burnout.

5.5. The Less Deep Role-Playing in Emotional Labor, the Higher the Occupational Burnout among Novice Social Workers

Deep acting is the ability to align internal feelings with external emotional expressions through self-regulation and emotional management. This study finds a significant negative correlation between deep acting in emotional labor and occupational burnout among novice social workers: it helps them effectively alleviate occupational stress, boost job satisfaction and strengthen professional identity. Wang Shang's research^[28] also verifies that active use of deep acting facilitates internal emotional regulation and reduces burnout risks. In practice, novice social workers often face high-intensity stress and negative emotions, and deep acting enables them to proactively adjust their mindset, maintain emotional stability, and exhibit more genuine and positive emotions in interactions with service recipients. These positive interactions not only build good working relationships but also enhance their self-efficacy and sense of accomplishment, thereby further lowering the risk of occupational burnout.

6. Revelation and Direction

Based on the above findings, social work agencies and training departments are advised to take targeted measures: deliver gender equality and emotional management training to help social workers of different genders manage stress and leverage their strengths; optimize training and promotion systems with specialized support teams for targeted interventions (e.g., for assistant social workers); adopt flexible working hours and time management guidance to avoid burnout from overwork; boost social workers' emotional labor engagement via diverse practices and incentive mechanisms, and incorporate deep acting training to help novice social workers relieve burnout and achieve professional development. Limited by the sample size, this study calls for follow-up research with larger samples. Integrating experimental design, longitudinal tracking or qualitative analysis will enhance the generalizability and causal interpretability of the findings. Domestic research on emotional labor and burnout among novice social workers is still insufficient, and subsequent studies should further explore their causal relationships and mediating mechanisms.

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