

# Emotional Labor Education in Intern Nursing Students: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** In clinical work, nursing students have to perform a lot of physical and mental labor as well as emotional labor, which effectively ensures the smooth implementation of work, but also has an impact on individuals. In recent years, the physical and mental health of nursing staff has gradually been emphasized, because only when nurses maintain their own physical and mental health can they better practice their role and fulfill the new mission in the field of medical services. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical basis for the further development and promotion of emotional labor education and the promotion of emotional labor management.

**Keywords:** Emotional labor, Education, Nursing students, Overview

## 1. Introduction

In 2018, the Circular on the Guidance on Promoting the Reform and Development of the Nursing Service Industry issued by the state proposed the establishment of a high-quality and efficient nursing service system and the continuous development of high-quality nursing services. With the transformation of the nursing model, high-quality nursing services are not only a test of skilled nursing expertise and operational skills, but also a test of soothing and caring for patients' hearts, which can relieve patients' psychological stress such as tension and anxiety through effective and timely communication with them. In this process, nurses are required to give a third form of labor-emotional labor in addition to physical and intellectual labor. As we all know, intern nursing students are the mainstay of the future nursing team, and the internship period is an important career start for nursing students and a critical period for the formation of professional values. It is crucial to effectively manage the intern nursing students' own emotional labor strategies, correctly select and apply emotional labor strategies, and maintain the stability of their emotional state to be competent in their future work.

## 2. Overview of emotional labor

The term "Emotional labor" was first introduced by Hochschild in 1983<sup>[1]</sup>. He considered emotional labor as a third type of labor in addition to physical and intellectual work for workers in the service industry and defined it as the following: individuals It is defined as the management of the emotions and inner feelings of individuals in order to create facial or physical expressions that can be observed by the public and that comply with organizational rules. Emotional labor has been studied in a wide range of fields, such as corporate type people, hotel service workers, tour guides, etc. and service people, health care workers, teachers, family caregivers, etc. At present, Hochschild's three-dimensional division of emotional labor is accepted and used by a large number of scholars at home and abroad<sup>[2]</sup>, which are Surface acting refers to the individual's expression of emotions by regulating the visible aspects of emotions, such as body language, facial expressions, etc., so that the emotional performance conforms to the rules of expression required by the organization, but retains the true feelings inside; Deep acting refers to the individual's expression of emotions through memory, thinking, and thinking. Acting refers to the individual's internal mental processes such as memory, thinking and imagination to make the real emotional experience conform to the organizational rules and express it through behavior; The expression

of genuine emotion refers to the individual's natural and real expression of inner feelings, and the inner emotional experience is consistent with the organizational rules of expression.

### 3. Current status of emotional labor research

The phenomenon of emotional labor is prevalent among service workers, such as flight attendants<sup>[3]</sup>, teachers<sup>[4]</sup>, bank tellers<sup>[5]</sup>, and hotel employees<sup>[6]</sup>. However, health care workers face and deal with negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, fear, and grief of patients and their families on a daily basis, and emotional labor is particularly prominent among health care workers (especially in the nursing profession)<sup>[7]</sup>.

Nurses in gynecology<sup>[8]</sup>, pediatrics<sup>[9]</sup>, geriatrics<sup>[10]</sup>, and cardiology<sup>[11]</sup> also have moderate or higher levels of emotional labor, and nurses have more severe emotional load. Research studies show that nurses in China mostly experience moderate to high levels of emotional labor<sup>[12]</sup>, and appropriate emotional labor can improve nurses' effective communication skills and help create a good departmental atmosphere, thus better carrying out clinical nursing work<sup>[13]</sup>; however, long-term excessive levels of emotional labor can make nurses physically and mentally exhausted, leading to increased job burnout and a tendency to leave<sup>[14-15]</sup>. Since the theory of emotional labor, regulating emotions at work is usually an important source of job stress and an important source of stress for nursing students early in their careers.

### 4. Current status of research on the emotional labor of intern nursing students

Nursing internship is an important part of the syllabus. Internship allows students to test the effectiveness of their application of course knowledge learning to clinical practice, and internship also increases the application of learning knowledge skills and the acquisition of experience. Nursing students enter the clinical phase with initial contact with society, including interpersonal interaction with inpatients, nursing students, physicians and other people, and face death and near-death situations in the clinical setting, which may be the nursing profession as an important part of the health care industry. The nursing profession, as an important component of the health care service industry, is considered to be an emotionally labor-intensive profession<sup>[16]</sup>, and therefore the proper selection and application of strategies for emotional labor is critical to maintaining a good emotional state and being competent for future work.

#### 4.1 Current status of research on the three dimensions of nursing students' emotional labor

In nursing, when authentic emotional expression does not meet organizational expectations, nursing students choose either surface playing or deep playing to mask their internal emotions. As the expression of emotions in superficial play is not consistent with internal feelings, it can lead to mental health impairment; while in deep play individuals can adjust their experience to achieve emotions consistent with organizational requirements and improve their level of self-real emotion expression, where superficial play is negatively related to job satisfaction<sup>[17]</sup> and deep play is positively related to employment trend scores<sup>[18]</sup>. Caique<sup>[19]</sup> found that deep play was positively related to humanistic care quality and surface play was negatively related to it. However, AUSTIN et al.<sup>[20]</sup> showed that emotional labor was only negatively correlated with superficial play ( $p < 0.05$ ), but not with deep play and true emotional performance, and that emotional labor strategies that promote deep play among nursing students are more positive.

#### 4.2 Factors affecting the emotional labor of intern nursing students

In Jiang Liting's study<sup>[21]</sup> individual characteristic factors affecting the emotional labor of intern nursing students are mainly reflected in the influence of gender, career satisfaction, length of internship, and psychological training<sup>[22]</sup>. Currently, the research on the emotional labor of intern nursing students is mainly in the areas of career satisfaction, career selection and employment, self-efficacy and coping styles. Foreign research on nurses' emotional labor has gradually shifted from status quo investigations to how to mitigate the adverse consequences of nurses' emotional labor in order to stabilize the nursing workforce and improve the quality of care<sup>[23]</sup>.

### ***4.3 The role of emotional education for intern nursing students***

Emotions and emotions have been considered by psychologists as an important aspect of human behavior, and it is especially important to educate nursing students about rational emotions, first and foremost because of their physical and mental development. As a prominent external expression of emotion, emotional expression is not only an important criterion for evaluating the emotional and social development of individuals, but also has important functions such as adaptation and signaling. Emotional expression is important for promoting interpersonal harmony, reducing stress, and promoting psychological health. Emotion regulation can coordinate emotion with cognition and behavior, make emotion in physiological arousal, subjective experience and expression behavior to achieve a good state, promote task and cognitive activities, improve the performance of homework<sup>[24]</sup>, cognitive evaluation is an important part of the emotional process, is an important process to cause and regulate emotion<sup>[25]</sup>.

## **5. Emotional labor education**

### ***5.1 The significance of emotional labor education for nursing students***

Under the circumstances that the nurse-patient relationship is tense and the general working environment cannot be changed, the emotional labor must be regulated and educators, staff nurses, administrators would take on important roles in this regard. Emotional labor education can help nurses to better manage the relationship with patients, provide quality nursing services to patients, reduce patients' emotions during treatment, help to establish a good relationship between nurses and patients, reduce patients' professional fatigue, and improve the quality of medical services. Psychological interventions such as emotional labor education and emotional therapy are effective and practical interventions that can relieve stress and tension by adjusting nursing students' mindset without changing the external environment, organizing the learning of psychological-related knowledge, guiding nursing students to treat occupational stress correctly, and thus improving the overall quality of nursing students.<sup>[26]</sup> To overcome the problems caused by the emotional labor behavior, the stress levels and behavior of the emotional labor of students should be determined and measured before practice in addition to the training provided on emotional management strategies and behavior of emotional labor. Moreover, emotional management and training modules to reduce the emotional labor behavior should be included in the nursing curriculums<sup>[27]</sup>.

Nursing students should consciously strengthen their own emotion regulation ability training and adjust their emotions according to the actual situation in a timely manner to make them as consistent as possible with organizational requirements, so that they can better integrate into the nursing work environment to serve patients. Studies have pointed out<sup>[28]</sup> that good empathy will facilitate nursing students to establish a harmonious and healthy nurse-patient relationship with patients and help nursing students to alleviate burnout. Emotional labor education will enable nursing students to better handle the relationship with patients at work, provide quality nursing care to patients, reduce patients' emotions during treatment, help establish a good relationship between nurses and patients, reduce patients' professional burnout, and improve nursing students' satisfaction with their work and the quality of medical services<sup>[29]</sup>.

### ***5.2 Collective intervention of emotional labor education for intern nursing students***

For emotional labor education collective intervention has the following aspects, (1) collective training method<sup>[30]</sup>: Organize nursing students for 1 month emotional labor training, training time is every Friday afternoon after work, each training time is 40min, a total of 4 times training, specific content: ① emotional labor concept: introduce the concept of emotional labor, classification, surface behavior and their own to the psychological situation, analyze the emotional labor on the behavior of nursing students and let everyone discuss, and assign homework for nursing students after the class. ② Nursing soft skills training: including verbal expression ability, non-verbal communication ability and analysis and judgment ability, and instructing nursing students to make reasonable use of correct communication to close interpersonal relationships in order to gain patients' trust and eliminate nurse-patient disputes and conflicts. ③ Emotion management: including learning to observe their own emotions, learning to express their emotions and channeling their emotions in an appropriate way. ④ Empathy: to enable nursing students to experience the emotional experiences of patients and their families and to better understand the patient's state of mind. (2) Positive stress reduction method: Invite psychology experts to provide

nursing students with theoretical and practical guidance on positive stress reduction techniques for three to five consecutive times, with each training lasting 100 min, to guide nursing students to master the skills of relieving stress and improving positive emotions. (3) Cathartic therapy: Psychological counselors are set up to provide psychological guidance to nursing students and instruct them to learn to adopt a positive attitude toward problems encountered at work. (4) Group discussion: ① Learning by example: Invite colleagues who are recognized to have handled an emotional event well to talk about their emotional feelings and experiences, and we will discuss and learn together. ② Insights exchange, record emotional diary: encourage the exchange of learning experiences during this period, mutual evaluation, learning and comments. ③ Cause of failure analysis: Let nursing students analyze conflict and dispute events caused by inappropriate emotions, and encourage nurses to find out relevant causes and solutions to avoid recurrence. (5) VR study<sup>[31]</sup>: Learning with VR can provide a safe environment both for acquiring knowledge and for revealing students' emotional management, which, in turn, can be leveraged by educators to redirect the emotion work required in the nursing profession.

### **5.3 Individual intervention of emotional labor education for intern nursing students**

Individual nursing students who were not able to attend the group training due to many factors such as busy departments and health can watch the recorded class replay or consult online, or for those with low scores on the comprehensive assessment, individual intervention can be conducted to analyze the causes of emotional labor. The main focus is on emotional labor education and mental health education. For individual emotional labor education, we use a psychological treatment room and arrange psychological guidance and cathartic tools in the room, including comfortable sofas, relaxation wall charts, books related to psychological counseling, graffiti walls, music players, and control the brightness of room lights to reduce the nervousness of nursing students. Understand the physical and psychological state of nursing students, guide and describe the problems of nursing students, nursing students may not adapt to the psychological treatment room for the first time, you can use the instruments to familiarize nursing students with the environment of the treatment room, and then conduct listening interviews, rational emotion therapy, systematic desensitization therapy, cognitive reassessment training and other psychological counseling<sup>[32-33]</sup> after they drop their guard.

## **6. Emotional labor-related scales**

In 2003, Grandey<sup>[34]</sup> developed the Emotional Labor Scale, which includes 2 evaluation dimensions of surface play and deep play with 8 entries and has good structural validity and internal consistency reliability. In 2008, Luo Hong et al<sup>[35]</sup> revised the Chinese version of the Emotional Labor Scale for nursing students based on the Emotional Labor Scale developed by Grandey and combined with the nursing reality in China, including 3 dimensions with 14 entries. Among them, there were 7 entries of surface role, 3 entries of deep role and 4 entries of emotional expression, and the total score of the scale was 14~84. Diefendorff developed the Emotional Labor Scale on the basis of the Grandey Emotional Labor Scale, which was translated into Chinese by Qiaoyang Bo<sup>[36]</sup>. The scale is used to assess emotional labor performance strategies and includes 14 entries in three evaluation dimensions, three entries for natural performance, seven entries for surface acting, and four entries for deep acting, with higher scores indicating more frequent use of that performance strategy. The Emotional Labor Scale developed by Andela et al<sup>[37]</sup> was used to measure students' emotional regulation processes while caring for patients over a three-year period. The questionnaire consists of 20 items divided into five factors, namely emotional dysregulation, expression inhibition, emotional amplification, attention deployment and reappraisal. The multidimensional nature of the scale helps to distinguish the different components of emotional labor, and one study<sup>[38]</sup> confirmed the reliability and validity of the instrument through a three-year qualitative study of nursing students' emotional labor to assess those in undergraduate nursing essential emotional factors that need to be considered in clinical practice.

## **7. Conclusions**

As a new force in the nursing field, internship is a key way for nursing students to move from school to society. Since nursing students are new to society, they are immature in all aspects of the internship process, and the nursing profession is in an emotionally labor-intensive field, making it difficult for nursing students to handle emotional labor, which can lead to many bad emotions and burnout. Therefore, emotional labor education for intern nursing students can not only reduce the psychological impact of emotional labor on intern nursing students, but also improve their satisfaction with their work and thus

provide better quality of nursing services to patients, so it is advocated that emotional labor education should be widely used among intern nursing students.

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