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# **A Qualitative Study of Emotional Labour among Domestic Violence Shelter Workers**

**Interviews with professional social workers**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to explore the emotional labour of domestic violence shelter workers. A qualitative approach was used and four professionals were interviewed. The interviewees described that they were expected to provide different types of services which include empowering their clients so that they can survive independently after leaving the shelter. The findings showed that the shelter workers hide or suppress different types of emotions, especially when they are frustrated or emotionally affected by the client's situation. According to the workers, they experienced stress as a consequence of the emotional labour, and they expressed that working in the field of domestic violence had made it difficult for them to trust men. Making a difference in the lives of the clients was described as a source of motivation and help them to cope with the negative aspects of the shelter work. Even though the findings cannot be generalised, the study provides comprehensive information about how emotional labour in this particular context can be perceived. The shelter workers described that the levels of satisfaction they get from helping clients resolve their problems were more significant than the negative consequences of emotional labour.

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**Keywords:** Emotional labour, domestic violence shelter workers

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the study

Emotional labour is part of the human experiences. We carry out emotion work in our day-to-day lives in order to display feelings in a more pleasant way to friends, family and acquaintances, for example, by suppressing anger or shame to maintain social relations (Hochschild, 1990). Emotional labour is also the emotion management we do for a wage (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild continued that there are three criteria that are necessary for emotional labour to take place and these are: that employees interact face-to-face or voice to voice with other people, like customers, clients and guests, it also required that workers produce an emotional state in another person and lastly, that employees should express emotions that are shaped by organisational display rules and requirements. Emotional labour is therefore defined as the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job (Hochschild, 1983).

According to Gopinath (2011), the expression of appropriate emotions is essential to many jobs and plays an important part in how employees are regarded. Generally, it has a huge impact on their relationships and interactions with people, quality of services provided, output, turnover and the feelings that is being expressed (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Some jobs according to Grandey et al. (2013) demand higher emotional labour than others, this is due to the rate at which the employees of this jobs manage emotions and the depth of the emotions to be managed. Examples of some of the jobs are: those in the service sector such as the police officers work, health care providers, customer services and domestic shelter work. Domestic violence work is a work that gives support and protection to people who escape from all forms of domestic violence. Support is given to these women and their families with resources to help them create a life for themselves (Perez et al., 2012).

According to WHO (2013), about 1 in 3 (35%) of women have experienced either physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This violence could be physical and or intimate partner violence or non-partner violence (WHO, 2013). The United Nations (1993) defines violence against women in Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as: any pattern of behaviour that violates the

rights of women and girls, limit them from participating in society, and causes health problem which has tremendous consequences on the victim. The declaration recognised that violence against women is global, it is both a consequence of and a cause of inequality between men and women, and it is used as a mechanism to subordinate women. The declaration calls for the elimination and protection of women against domestic violence by providing support services like safe sheltered accommodation for those women who need it, and to make sure that crimes are reported and prosecuted as well (United Nations, 1993). Ending violence against women has been a global movement which focuses on tackling an epidemic of injustice.

## **1.2. Problem statement**

Despite Sweden being considered as one of the world leaders in equality, men's violence against women is yet to be eradicated (Eriksson and Blessing, 2018). To combat this, the Government offices of Sweden (2016) stated that the government has a strategy that is well-funded and inclusive which will improve the detection and enhance crime fighting as well. This strategy will also improve knowledge, methodological development and most importantly it will consider the participation and involvement of men.

Shelters around the country provide support to women who experience physical or psychological violence from men. The National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's shelters (Roks), and the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centers (SKR) are the two main organisations that are in charge of shelters in Sweden. Many professionals work in this shelters to provide support to those suffering from abuse, they offer support based on the individual needs and wishes of each these women (Helmersson and Jönson, 2015).

Engaging in emotional labour entails that the workers have a wide range of personal and interpersonal skills, this will enable them to identify and understand the needs of the abused women and also be able to respond appropriately (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Moreover, they must be extremely cognizant of individuals and group dynamics. Workers must be aware of the consequences of violence and victimisation on the lives of the clients they work with and make sure that every contacts with these abused

women should be focus on their recovery which will make re-traumatization impossible (Elliot et al., 2005).

Previous research has been carried out on care work, nursing and similar professions, which have emotion management at the center of their labour process (Lewis, 2005). However, research on emotional violence on domestic shelter workers is relatively unexplored, and therefore the authors of this study concluded that it would be relevant to explore this topic in depth.

### **1.3. In relation to social work**

Exploring the emotional labour of domestic shelter workers has an important contribution for social work practices. To be effective practitioners, social workers have to be skilled at managing their emotions on the job. This is because, social workers are at the risk to experience physical and emotional exhaustion due to their job requirements that makes them accessible to those seeking care, and to display appropriate responses as required by the job (Merighi and Dinis, 2005).

Emotional labour is essential to social work practice, as such the meaning and effects of emotional responses on a social worker's professional way of acting and well-being deserve to be explored. Hence, social work institutions can by way of educational technique and training provide social work students the necessary skills that will help them to manage the emotional aspect of social work (Guy et al., 2010). More importantly for the social workers, it will help attend to their emotional labour needs by enabling them understand their role, also providing them technique and skills to use, by that it will make possible to develop an effective worker- client relationships (Humphrey et al., 2008).

### **1.4. Research aim and Research Questions**

The aim of this study is to explore how domestic violence shelter workers perceive emotional labour at their workplace.

The research questions are:

1. What kind of emotional labour is involved in the daily work of the shelter workers?

2. What type of consequences have these shelter workers experienced in their lives due to their work at the shelter?

### **1.5. Explanations of Concepts**

Emotional labour: This is the process of managing feelings in accordance with organisational rules, employees engage in emotional labour in exchange for a wage. As such, they are required to display positive emotions even though they are experiencing negative feelings internally, this is referred to as the commercialisation of feeling, with emotions being seen as part of the labour in exchange for pay Hochschild (1983).

Domestic violence shelter: It is a place that provide temporary protection and support for domestic violence survivors (Perez et al., 2012).

### **1.6. Disposition of the thesis.**

The first chapter of the thesis provides an introduction and background of the study, followed by the aim and research questions, thereafter concepts used in the thesis are explained. The second chapter presents the review of the previous research conducted within the field of emotional labour. Gender based violence was also discussed to provide a frame from the abused. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework used in the thesis, which is Hochschild theory of emotional labour. Chapter four describes the methodology, it includes the selection of respondents, how the interviews were conducted, tools for analysis, research credibility, ethical considerations and limitations of the study. In the fifth chapter, the result are presented and analyzed in relation to the theories and previous research. The 6th chapter presents a discussion on the findings, conclusions as well as suggestions for further research.

## **2. Previous research**

In this section, previous research relating to emotional labour will be reviewed. The aim is to highlight what has been done before this study. We will discuss how emotional labour theory are used in this research and then we will discuss gender-based violence, the terms will be defined and the scope will be limited to violence against women and particularly domestic violence and its complex nature.

Most of the research we referred to were from the United States. To choose the most relevant information for the aim of this study, we used online materials, which was found through databases such as Google, Google scholar, Socindex, and SAGE journal online. The books were found in different libraries in Sweden. The search terms for this study were emotional labour, domestic violence, domestic violence shelter work, gender based violence and intimate partner violence. We were able to find a large number of literature relating to the aforementioned keywords from both European countries and the United States. From these the most relevant literature to the aim of the study was chosen while others were omitted. Though most of the literatures were much older, they still remain very relevant to this study.

### **2.1. Emotional labour and emotional work**

There are many research findings that are related to Hochschild's theory of emotional labour. For instance, Powell-Williams et al. (2013) study on emotional work and victim advocate role, noted that advocates try to set up 'boundaries' so as to prevent getting too emotionally involved with victims, which may perhaps lead to burnout. The above author also noted that they manage their emotions by making a change of what they expected of their victims and themselves. Most of the time they move from having the need to save the women to respecting their decisions, They see themselves as people that give their clients suggestions and allow them make decisions and not to act as people who can provide solutions to all their problems. Similarly in Goldblatt (2009) it was found that the emotional response of nurses in their encounter with abused women changes slowly over time as they interact. These varied from having deep connection and being overwhelmed with emotions to feelings of anger and empathy to the abused women who choose to remain in the relationship, to a complete detachment of oneself

from emotional engagement. Goldblatt explained that the nurses needed emotion work in the second situation as they acknowledge that their approach were unprofessional and judgemental, the nurses avoided being helpless and the feeling of anxiety by concentrating on the medical aspect of the profession.

In a study of emotional labour at an abortion clinic, where the staff divided their patients into three groups and responded to them with different coping strategies, Wolkomir and Powers (2007) found that the staff fully invested their emotions in helping the less difficult patients and this made their work meaningful and satisfying. Alternatively, aggressive patient or those who could not decide what they wanted made the staff feel unappreciated and that they had failed to help them, the staff responded by trying to help them in every way they could and then stepped back and detached themselves from the patients, this they do to avoid the feelings of failure. With the third group who were very difficult, Wolkomir and powers stated that the staffs set up boundaries around those number of patients they could help with their situations and detached themselves from the rest they could not help. Doing this according to the above authors, enabled the staffs focus on those patients they could help by investing in them emotionally which made them feel they were not failures.

These strategies enabled the staff to find balance between what the job needs and what they need themselves. It was also described as a very efficient way of working, though stressful, the staff found it to be valuable and rewarding (Wolkomir and Powers, 2007). Thus from detaching themselves to investing their emotions to help, the staff were able to respond to different situations with different coping strategies thereby producing adjustable range of emotional labour. Despite this, the coping strategies were seen as not protecting the staff adequately from decrease in work performance, distress and burnout as stated by the above authors.

Similarly, Henderson (2001) reported that so much emotional engagement was valued when working with abused women. Though some nurses placed importance on objectivity and detachment, majority acknowledged the risk of too much emotional engagement, as it could make a nurse unable to work. Henderson maintained that finding a balance between the two is essential in emotional challenging situations. Likewise in Jeung et al. (2018) emotional labour was seen as a job stressor in modern

society which leads to burnout. The study also showed that some personality traits, like self-efficacy, is required to understand the link between emotional labour and its consequences, like burnout, it lays emphasis on the significance of stress management programs to reduce the adverse consequences caused by emotional labour and having full range of what can be done to strengthen the potentials of the individual to suit the goals and norms of the organisation as stated by the above authors.

## **2.2 Emotional labour and burn-out**

In a study of emotional labour of police officers, the findings revealed several themes like the importance of anger to the work of police officer and the emotional climate within the police force (Daus and Brown, 2012). The researchers noted that there are perceived emotional norms in regards to police work. Police officers are expected to show certain emotions often like empathy and suppress others frequently like sadness, anger or hatred. The successfulness of the work of the police is seen as reliant on their emotional abilities during their interactions with the people (Daus and Brown, 2012). Also in Kolb (2011) study on sympathy work among victim advocates and counsellors shows that being able to express sympathy with client is very significant. Kolb went further to explain that when a staff notice a client is acting in ways that seems to be a difficult behaviour, for example going back to the abuser, their feelings of sympathy might start to reduce . However to restore the feelings of empathy towards the client, the staff use a strategy to ignore the difficult behaviour then re-directing the blame somewhere else (like to the abuser) and rebuilding of clients- staff relationship. If the client does not fit into the picture of a perfect victim, the shelter worker could engage in emotional labour so as to hide her feelings (Kolb, 2011). According to Erikson and Ritter (2001) workers who hid their feeling when they are distressed experience higher level of burnout.

Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) argues that emotional labour may not always lead to emotional burnout, which is inconsistent to many researcher's view. In their study, it shows that there is no significant higher levels of emotional exhaustion from workers compared to workers in other occupations. Even though the act of suppressing negative emotions could have a link with emotional burnout. However, it was reported that workers felt quite successful in their jobs when their interaction with their client was stronger, frequent and varied in terms of emotional expressions. It was suggested that

the anticipations and sympathetic and friendly service, and the workers deep acting based on these principles, may have led to staffs being satisfied in the value of service that was provided as emphasised by the above author.

The findings that emerge from this previous study, reflects with many of the themes in our interview data. For example, Hochschild (1983) outline that employees seems to approach their work in one of three ways. They may connect very well with their work, then there will be risk of burnout. The employees might see the job as different from themselves and then they will be protected from burnout, but at the expense of feeling deceitful. Lastly, the employees might clearly separate themselves and the work, this will result in being distant from the work and subsequent withdrawal of emotional labour. There is potential for all this three ways to have adverse effect, and in all of them, the employees must acquaint themselves with the role while reducing the strain or pressure the role puts on them as stated by the above author. This research was useful in analysing and supporting the findings of this study.

### **2.3. Gender-Based Violence**

According to the WHO (Butchart and Mikton 2014), domestic violence is defined as systematic pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour through which the abuser seeks power over the victim. Most of this abuse are intimate partner violence. The abusers use different ways and different tactics to maintain power and control (NCK, 2014).

Physical violence is rarely used alone, it is often used together with sexual violence, psychological, threats and coercion to emotional abuse and isolation (Lidman, 2018).

Husso (2003) found in her research on intimate partner violence in Finland, several tactics that the abuser use to maintain control and power. Husso stated that men feelings of ownership of the women makes them use jealousy as a way to justify violence, this happens when they know that they are no more in total control. Husso continued that a death threat may make it difficult for her to consider leaving, at the same time if she stays she will be at the risk of more physical abuse and also be seen as someone who enjoys pains and humiliation and being the cause of the violence. Her ability to function normally and make decision in this type of situation is very difficult and challenging as she is isolated and lonely as explained by the above author.

## **2.4. Abused women: society and shame**

Lidman (2018) posit that even though it has become more acceptable to end relationship and marriages, there is still shame associated to having been abused. Furthermore, the above author stated that it is difficult to believe that a woman will not leave an abusive man once the abuse happened, particularly in a Swedish context where there is high expectations on relationships due to the cultural idea of gender equality and agency. Lidman explained that women who have been abused carry their shame of not being able to build and maintain an equal partnership, as they chose their partner themselves and are extremely ashamed to have ended up being abused.

Lidman (2018) continued that the victims and the abusive men have the tendency to blame the woman and her behaviour for the violence, outsiders also blame the woman for being abused and not leaving as soon as possible. Lidman suggest that accepting blame for violence partly may be easier than acknowledging that it is unpredictable and you are not able to fight back. Such perspectives as these Lidman maintained, are issues to worry about because they remove the blame from the perpetrator and give the idea that women can prevent abuse by being careful with every word they say and to act in a way that will please the man. No form of conformity is enough to protect the woman from being abused, as the abusive man will always find excuse for being violent as Liman emphasised.

According to Eliasson and Ellgrim (2007), when the woman decides to leave the violent man or has succeeded in leaving the abusive relationship, the role of the professionals she comes in contact with is highly important. They should be aware and be able to recognise this way of thinking and help the clients to stop blaming themselves for the violence. When it comes to emotional labour the workers have to act in a supportive way and cautiously hide any personal feelings or views that might question the woman's experience with violence.

According to Keskinen (2005) it is very crucial for workers to be aware of their personal views concerning relationships and partners' responsibilities. It is possible that professionals might use utterances connected to relationships and love instead of violence, thereby failing to consider the unbalanced power hierarchies. Keskinen

explained that women are seen to be the ones to compromise in relationship. For instance, engaging in sexual intercourse is seen as something normal in a relationship which women must not deny their partners. Any attempt to refuse the man is seen as being rigid as the woman does not have a right to deny him of sexual intercourse. Keskinen continued that having this perspectives ignore or overlook the reasons for the woman refusal as well as the man's part in threatening the woman which is part of the way to exert power and control the woman.

The stories shared by the victims might sound questionable to the workers if they are not educated on the impact of traumatization on the victim, as the appearance and behaviour of the victim may not represent the image of a perfect victim as a result of her trauma (Dijk, 2009). For example, Pratt-Eriksson et al. (2014) in their study of battered women living in Sweden encounter with healthcare personnel and their experience of the care given noted that women exposed to violence experienced how their autonomy disappeared when they got the feeling that they were not taken seriously by either society or those who were supposed to care for them. Several of them described it as being betrayed by society. The women got the impression that nursing staffs devoted more time to diseases and accidents than to violence in close relationships as described by the above authors.

Similarly, Tower et al. (2006) shows that women subjected to violence felt that they were being judged and placed in a certain compartment because of the situation they were in, the hospital staffs did not want to get involved in their situation. The above authors further stated that when a woman comes to the emergency room with blood all over her upper body, the nurses thought that she had been involved in an accident that had caused the injuries and wounds. Realising that the woman had been subjected to violence by her partner, she was asked to sit down and wait. Tower et al explained that the abused woman felt that the staff did not want to understand her situation, they would have reacted differently if she had been involved in a car accident and then prioritized her situation as acute case. The above authors stated that even though she was given medication for the injuries, her reasons for looking for help which is the injury caused by her partner was not given attention. Perhaps, if the nurse had asked about her relationship with whoever that cause the injury, it would have led to her addressing her safety and also providing information about shelters and counseling. These actions were

not taken as preventive method. Possibly, the nurses do not want to ask personal questions or get themselves exhausted by being involved in the work against domestic violence (Tower et al., 2006).

Even though using violence is universal, there is a cultural and gender aspect to how it is organised and carried out, the forms in which it takes and how it is judged by society and different institutionalized practices. Knowing that male violence against women is not the only form of violence against women, it is however, connected to our study and domestic violence shelter is presumed to be advocacy of domestic violence movement to end the violence and provide services to those who have been abused.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the concept of emotional labour will be explained, using the theory by Hochschild (1979, 1983). First, we will define the concept of emotional labour, and its dimensions. Second, we will highlight some of its criticism.

### 3.1. Emotional Labour

Emotional labour was first theorized by Arlie Hochschild (Hochschild, 1983). She describes emotional labour as: ‘the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value’ (Hochschild, 1983, p., 7). This theory was developed by looking at the process that makes emotion work and how practicable emotional labour is. She emphasises on surface and deep acting. According to Hochschild (1979, 1983) surface acting is when an individual express feelings that shows the expected feelings they perceive are in adhering with the feeling rules shaping that specific social interaction, notwithstanding if they feel that way or not. Surface acting according to Hochschild is not genuine, as the individual only show or represent what they think is expected of them and hide those feelings that are inappropriate. The individuals are not required to internalise those feelings as their own, they only hope to make it convincing to others (Hochschild, 1983).

Surface acting is being aware of how to act in a certain circumstances (Hochschild, 1983). This means knowing and understanding those feeling rules that shape the interactions in the workplace. Feeling rules is a concept by Arlie Hochschild which bring into awareness the existence of socially shared norms that influence what feelings is or is not appropriate to a given social setting. It is also about which emotions employers expect their workers to display in the workplace (Hochschild, 1979). Knowing how to express this emotions is vital so that you can be able to fit well in the workplace. To be able to surface act correctly, you need to consider the audience, most often your clients or co-worker, this is to enable you know if the emotional performance is convincing to them. Hence in surface acting, while the employee interact with the clients, she tries to also see if the performance is convincing or not. The essence of surface acting is to engage in a performance that makes the client believe that the

interaction was meaningful. The employee tries to hide their true feelings and pretend to display emotions that is expected of them (Hochschild, 1983).

Deep acting is another feature of Hochschild's emotion management theory. This is performed when an employee try to genuinely express an emotion so that when it is displayed, it is felt convincingly by the clients as real and not fake (Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting is when employees decide what they want to feel and what they must do to produce the feelings (Hochschild, 1983). The employee tries to make the emotions they express to look real to themselves and also to the clients. For example, an employee can self produce real feelings of happiness or sadness and express them spontaneously.

The employee in both method, uses a conscious intervention to create either an appropriate feeling or an outward appearance (Hochschild, 1983). In the course of interacting with clients shelter workers may have to hide their feelings of surprise when difficult stories are told by their clients by taking on a composed facial expression (surface acting). On the other hand, they may work on themselves into feeling empathy towards the client that will result in a corresponding outward display (deep acting). Practicing deep acting can be referred to as when you work hard to feel a certain emotion, then you recall the memory of that emotion, invoke and connect it to the present situations to shape the mind and bodily behaviour. To deep act, we have to feel what we sense we ought to feel or want (Hochschild, 1983). Working on emotions at a deep level to make it feel real can be realised through imagining. This is about thinking about the emotion we wish and desire to feel and then imagine it as if they were real (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild argue that by producing an imagine emotion through deep acting, It will be seen and accepted as part of the real self.

Organisations have formal rules that determine what emotions that the employees are expected to display. These emotions are in some way control by the employers. (Hochschild, 1983). Domestic shelter workers would most likely be in high need of emotional management in their demanding job. When interacting with survivor of domestic abuse, they must be understanding and thoughtful in their approach. For example, it will be appropriate for them to show concern and interest in the wellbeing of their client while it will be inappropriate to invalidate their experiences.

Hochschild's (1983) theory of how to manage emotion in certain social settings and around certain people arose out of her research into flight attendants in the airline industry. They have the closest contact with passengers, and must be able to easily present a certain type of image. Her research looks at how employees become who they are expected to be at work. She finds out that these flight attendants were expected to act in a particular way at work to fit in with the expectations of the organisation. Hochschild stated that, for these female employees this include being regarded as caring, and the feeling of not being affected by the behaviours of rude customers, and dressing in a particular way as well as keep smiling. This feelings of being inauthentic shows that emotional labour is performed for a wage in this context, as the flight attendant does not truly feel like smiling. (Hochschild, 1983). In the same way a shop attendant is expected to smile at their customers and tell them to "have a nice day" this they do because it is required of their job even if they are not in a good mood.

### **3.2. Criticism of Hochschild's emotional theory**

Bolton (2005) criticises Hochschild's theory, indicating that she did not differentiate feeling rules in the workplace that are not perform for wages which should also be considered. Bolton emphasises that there are some jobs in which employees follow professional feeling rules not for financial reason but because of selfless concern for the well-being of others. These acts of emotions are genuine. Furthermore, according to Bolton, employees will not lose their sense of self in the process performing emotional labour even though the organization require regulations, the employees will still have aspirations. Looking at the work at domestic violence shelters, which are mostly done by non-profit organisations, it is obvious that financial gain is not the goal of emotional labour. Most of the workforce in this line of work can be presumed to be advocacy of domestic violence movement to end the violence and provide services to those who have been abused.

Similarly, Hearn and Parkin (2007) noted that when the relation between the organisation and clients involves violence, whatever pains and damages that result from such emotions will be taken care of. Performing emotional labour with this type of establishment is to seek for support for people which would bring about change. Thus

financial gain is not the ultimate goal. Any gains from this will probably be put into use for services that are more beneficial to clients.

Hochschild (1983) propose that when the emotional performance work well, the worker feels satisfied in how personal the service provided was. Deep acting assist in achieving this and also help to prevent the feelings of being deceitful (Hochschild, 1983).

Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000) argues that deep acting can produce surface authenticity, this is when the emotional display reflect actual feelings. While deep authenticity is when an individual internalise the feelings and then the emotions they display is in accordance with such feelings. This feelings becomes a part of the self. The individual display this feelings no matter if they are feeling it or not as long as they believe in it as emphasised by the above authors. This notion of authenticity may help in understanding shelter workers connection with their professional role.

Notwithstanding the criticism of this theory, it provides useful theoretical concepts for understanding emotional labour. Hochschild (1983) present two main methods of how feelings are managed in certain social settings or in other to fit in within the workplace, surface acting and deep acting. Hochschild stated that surface acting is when one changes his outward appearance, while deep acting is when you self-induce and display feelings through conscious mental work. Deep acting is not only when you control or suppress your emotions, it is also when you evoke or shape your thoughts, memories and images to produce the desired feelings as stated by Hochschild. In deep acting, there is a discrepancy between what a person feels and what they want to feel or should feel (Hochschild, 1979). There are differences on the effects surface acting and deep acting has on the individual, they both are connected to our interview data and provide a deeper understanding to the work done at domestic violence shelters. Shelter workers must be able to understand the needs of their clients and also be able to interpret these needs as well as respond appropriately.

## **4. Methods**

As this research thesis aimed at exploring how domestic violence shelter workers perceive emotional labour at their workplace, qualitative interview with semi-structured questions were considered to be the most suitable method to use in collecting relevant data. This method, in accordance with Patton (2002) provides an in-depth understanding of the participant's experience. Furthermore, by interviewing, the authors were able to focus on those topics they found more interesting, and asked clarifying questions as needed. The verbal and transcribed data produced using this method was rich and descriptive. Using interview also allowed the interviewees to share their experiences which may encourage more expression than simply typing out responses as stated by (Kvale, 2007).

### **4.1. Selection**

The authors collected the interview data in a domestic violence shelter in mid Sweden. Recruiting participants for the interview was not difficult as one of the authors was an intern in an organization that has a shelter for domestic violence. The authors approached the potential participants with a request to interview and an informed consent form (see Appendix 1) was sent through email. The aim and purpose of the research was explained in the form. The interview questions (see Appendix 2) was sent to the respondents before the interview, this enabled them to read and understand the questions and also prepare their answers before the actual interview. Four women working in the same domestic violence shelter were interviewed. The participants were all Swedish and have University education in relevant fields, such as social work and psychology. The respondents' age ranged from mid-twenties to fifties and their working experiences varied from 2 to 7 years. We chose this participants as we wanted professionals who have had some years of experiences in domestic violence shelter work.

### **4.2. The interviews**

The interview took place at the respondents' workplace. We used our phones as the recorder. Having the aim of the research in mind, we thematised our interview

questions and they centered around the topics of day-to-day work at the shelter, interactions with clients, professional trained worker, and the consequences of shelter work (see Appendix 2: Interview Questions). The two researchers conducted the four interviews in English. During the interview process the researchers took turns to ask questions and the other researcher can ask additional questions when needed.

Our questions were open-ended which enabled the respondents to freely choose what to say and enable the researchers gain access into the interviewees perspectives which cannot be obtain by observation. Most of the questions were follow-up questions which gives more detailed response and clarification as stated by Brinkmann and Kvale, (2015). We asked for clarification when the interviewees used words or terms that we don't understand or recognise. Furthermore, prior to the interviews we asked for permission to record the interview which the participant agreed to. Therefore, recording the interview with our phones enable us to focus attention on the interviewee and also to ensure that the data collected is accurate (Patton 1990).

### **4.3. Tools of analysis**

We chose theoretical informed empirical content analysis as a method for analysing the empirical data. Content analysis is a research technique used in studying the content with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in the data (Krippendorff, 2013). In addition, we used the emotional labour theory as a method of finding related expressions in the data.

According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009) when you transcribe data you make a translation from one narrative mode to another mode. The four recorded interviews were transcribed into a text by the researchers as soon as the interviews were done. The researchers transcribed two interview data each by carefully listening and presenting the interview word by word. After the transcriptions were done, the next step according to Patton (2015) is identifying, classifying, coding, labeling and putting the data in categories or themes. This entails marking and separating sections that are related in the data and leaving out the rest. The data that are marked should be put together and kept in a separate place from the remaining data. After that, the marked data should be

divided into categories or themes, this helps the data to be grouped into different themes you have chosen according to the above mentioned author.

In this respect, the authors re-read through the transcribed data over and over again in order to be familiar with the whole data. The researchers then created files for two main themes and other sub-themes that are in line with the research questions. After this, the authors concentrated on a specific theme, that of being aware of their trauma and culture and remaining calm. From there we began to see the logic of emotional labour and we also began to understand that organisational display rules guide the process and manner in which they interact with their clients at work. On this basis we went back to the transcribed data and highlighted expressions that are related to emotional labour and left those that were not. Then we looked for recurring expressions and copied them together and placed them under appropriate themes thus, starting the analysis with what kind of emotional labour is involved in the daily work of the shelter workers by which the findings were presented. Thereafter, we look for ways they practice emotional labour. Lastly, we looked at the consequences of shelter work, and our focus was to understand what type of consequences have these shelter workers experienced in their lives due to their work at the shelter?

#### **4.4. Essay Credibility**

##### **4.4.1. Pre-understanding**

Prior to this research, the researchers have pre knowledge understanding of domestic violence and experience of emotional labour work as they were intern in an organization that has domestic violence shelter. These provided the basic knowledge on men's violence against women and how to engage in emotional labour while providing support for the abused women. It also enable us to recognise emotional labour in the interview data when analysing the findings in the study.

##### **4.4.2. Reliability**

Reliability according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) is how consistent and trustworthy the result of the research is. Also, our questions were open-ended which allow the

respondents to choose the topics they regard as the most important. According to Patton (1990) standardised open-ended interview aims at asking each participants the same questions to reduce differences in them, and to make sure that the quality and the amount of data collected from each of the respondents are well ordered. In the view of this, the interview questions were well thought out in advance. The language and the expression used also played a significant role.

In addition, using an interview guide also increases reliability as the authors have limited experience in qualitative interview prior to this research. Interview guide help in moving the interview forward so that we are able to keep track of what questions we have already asked and what respondents has said as emphasised by Mason (2002). We also referred to relevant research to support our analysis, this we did in other to increase reliability in our study.

#### **4.4.3. Internal validity**

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) validity is about whether a study investigated what it intended to investigate. Kvale and Brinkmann stated that it is a knowledge claim that is defensible and if the research provide a correct answer. Thus, the researchers intend that the study will reach its aim of exploring the emotional labour done by domestic violence and therefore investigate what it intended to do.

Furthermore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stated that the credibility of researchers is vital for the validation of research, validation here is dependent on the quality of researchers' craftsmanship where the findings are validated to include the whole process of the research. Considering this and bearing the aim of the study in mind, the research design chosen was the most logical method to use in collecting relevant data. The open-ended questions standardised are well patterned. It was also connected to the theoretical frame. The structure of the interview questions was also followed throughout the sessions of the interview.

In addition, Mason (2002) assert that it is impossible for researchers to be objective, neutral, or detach themselves from the knowledge and evidence they are producing. Hence, it is imperative that the researchers reflect on how their research was influenced by their thoughts and decisions (Mason, 2002). Patton (1990) also argues that our

culture, values and early childhood socialisation influences how we interpret the world. Therefore, researchers should make known any training, personal and professional experiences and perspectives that may have affected the research process. Even though the authors of this study have pre knowledge understanding of domestic violence and experience of emotional labour work, we tried to separate our values from the study during the research process, though it helped the researchers to understand new information and possibly find certain patterns in the data. However, in some instances when the respondents was answering questions and had to pause to search for the right words, the researchers had to go over the border line of neutrality to give suggestions. In this case, it was clear that we could relate to the respondents as a result of our knowledge of violence against women.

#### **4.4.4. Generalizability**

Because of the small sample size of qualitative research it is impossible to generalise findings as in quantitative research (Patton, 1990). Therefore, our study sample of four qualitative interviews cannot provide generalizable information on all domestic violence shelter workers. It can however, provide comprehensive information about and understanding of particular cases and situations.

#### **4.5. Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are very important when carrying out research involving humans (Rubin and Babbie, 2011). In protecting the participant's rights, the authors complied with the ethical principles and guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council, this include information about the study, consent, confidentiality and data utilization (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

Due to the ethical considerations on information requirement, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and what the information gathered will be used for. They were also informed that participation in the research is voluntary and that they have a right to decline to take part in the research or withdraw consent anytime during the interview. According to D'Cruz and Jones (2004) prior to conducting an interview the participants consent should be obtained. Guided by this principle, all the participants

were given a written consent form before the interview via email and on the day of the interview, the consent form was read out and they all agreed to it.

The third ethical principle of confidentiality was also adhered to by informing the participants that the information they'll provide will only be used for the purpose of this study, and that their personal data and information will not be disclosed to anyone outside the research (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this regard, the recorded interview data was stored in USB drive and kept safe, and after the transcription, we created files and stored the transcribed interview data were only the author to this study have access to. Additionally, to secure the privacy and anonymity of the interviewees' identities, their names and cities where they are active were not displayed in the research. In the presentation of the result, the interviewees were marked p1, p2, p3, and p4 in the order in which they were interviewed.

#### **4.6. Limitations of the study**

During the course of the research interview, there were language limitations. Rasta (2005), argued that cultural difference exist between the interviewer and the interviewee, the researchers must be aware of and be able to overcome language limitations as well as other factors that could make it difficult for the interviewer and interviewee's to understand each other. The interview was conducted in English, the authors have no problem with English as they have been using English as their primary language. On the other hand, the interviewees are native Swedish speakers and English is a second language to them, though they spoke extensively and there English were understandable, they however pause sometimes to search for the correct wordings. To avoid these languages barrier, the participants were given the interview questions before the actual interview to enable them prepare their answers. Furthermore, there were difficulties in finding participants from other domestic violence shelter and also due to time frame the sample selection for this research was restricted to four participants from Mid Sweden.

## 5. Results and analysis

In this section, we present the results and analysis from the perspective of our research questions. The analysis centers around the approach and method of performing emotional labour in domestic violence shelters. We looked at what is expected of the workers, what factors they should consider that will determine the type of emotional labour to be displayed at any given situation. Finally, we analysis the consequences emotional labour had on the shelter workers.

### 5.1. What kind of emotional labour is involved in the daily work of the shelter workers?

At the domestic violence shelter emotional labour comes in various ways. It is important for shelter workers to know what is expected of them, before engaging in emotional labour. In the course of the interviews, we asked our participants about their personal views on what they call professional and unprofessional in their work. Their answers gave us an understanding into some of the expectations from the organisation they work for, their goals in terms of client outcome and the kind of feelings they are expected to create in their clients, and how it is connected to emotional labour.

According to those who participated in the interview, the main quality of a shelter worker is readiness to learn. Although they may have applicable work experience or education in the aspect of domestic violence, it is essential to be humble and show readiness to receive new information and learn from it. The participants mentioned that empathy has an important role to play when they work with clients. Self-control according to our participants is essential in circumstances where a worker is overwhelmed with emotion, as some emotions need to be put aside. For it can make their work with client “personal”, and may also reduce the quality of service if not put aside. This is a typical illustration of emotional labour in a way of hiding emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Outlined in the themes below are the emotions shelter workers can experience and display when interacting with their clients.

## **Empowerment**

During the interview we found out that empowering the clients is an important theme that the organisation expect from the shelter workers. Even though the shelter workers wish that their decisions are taken by the clients, it is important not to force or compel them into taking the workers decisions. The participants said that the clients must be able to survive independently after leaving the shelter. Some of the participants used the word empowerment while others used the word improvement, growth, betterment, self-dependence or self-support. All these words are similar and can be interpreted as empowerment. From these responses, it is clear that the main goal of the shelter workers wish to achieve with their client is to empower their client.

I can assist them get housing and job. For instance if they leave the shelter without been properly empowered with other things like coping with unhappiness and other difficult situations, then I don't feel our work with the client was successful. P (2)

The interviewees said that they wish that their clients leave the shelter with a new sense of reasoning or independence. They may own their own businesses or work for people or even go to school. The participants hoped that when clients leave the shelter, they are able to start a new life and living around those who cares about them. Also, the workers at the shelter expressed that they hoped to break generational violence, so as the children who experience the violence of their parent will not become abusers or be abused in their future relationships. Focusing on the end results for clients can assist staff at the shelter to stay motivated even with their daily frustration.

The participants talked about times when they felt like protecting the clients, leading them back to the right path or putting things right and straight for them. The participants said they felt like telling their clients to leave the abuser for good then start life afresh. However, they said that they can only give suggestions but the decision is left for the clients to make. In Powell-Williams et al. (2013) it was reported that victim advocates manage their emotions by changing the anticipations of victims and themselves, often going from wanting to rescue women to accepting their choices. They see themselves as those who give suggestions and not of saviors. The idea of them distancing themselves from the work makes them less emotionally vulnerable and to prevent possible exhaustion.

I know we are concern about their growth, for them to be self dependent. But we can't tell them what do, we can only give them suggestions and it is left for them to decide what they want to do and we can only hope for the best for them. P (1)

The shelter workers interviewed understood that their feelings does not matter in this process, it is the client's feelings. They are there to support the clients towards a solution rather than being in control and dictating to them.

## **Empathy**

The participants agreed that empathy is essential when working with a client. According to them, empathy helps in understanding the consequences of domestic violence trauma, particularly in the aspect of psychological harm. Cerulli et al (2012) noted in a study of women who have been victims of intimate partner violence, that the victims experienced symptoms like muscle pain and fatigue, alongside breathing problems, headache, and immune dysfunction and weight issues. Meeting their abuser unexpectedly or having a high level of stress made the pain worse. Cerulli (2012) also found that even after lawful actions have been taken against the abuser, the victim continued to live in constant fear, and suffer from panic attacks, depression, anxiety and flashbacks. Feelings of pain in the body are always reminders of the abuse which causes re-traumatizing and which makes the victim live a frustrating and difficult life as stated by the above authors. In our interview data, most of the participants mentioned that they recognized depression in their clients.

They might be traumatized, they might even be frustrated, without empathy it's like you pushing them and they might get re-traumatized. P (3)

It is advised that workers ought to empathize with how their clients feel based on their personal situation, instead of propelling them. This might be very helpful, especially if a client comes from a different background. As it could be challenging for shelter worker to comprehend a client's pains, life experiences, frustrations and their overall orientation about life. Although the workers may not understand what their culture entails, a shared discussion from the client could be of assistance in supporting the client overcome whatever she is going through.

Participants in this study also talked about controlling their emotions in terms of producing a desired emotion. Most participants talked about how empathy or feelings of compassion could be produced when they see the clients as a victim or when they understand the difficulties the clients are going through. This could happen even in the midst of them feeling angry and frustrated towards the clients.

It is about trying to understand the client's experience and to see the situation from their point of view. When I work with a client I try to put myself in their shoes and I try to empathize with them. I do all that is required to make them feel better. P (4)

According to Kosny and MacEachen (2010) empathy work can be so exhausting, it may sometimes require one working extra time and it also requires emotional engagement. Workers may be involved in management of client emotion, empathy, and constant assessment of their client emotions and psychological state of mind and this they also do even when they are not in direct contact with them (Kosny and MacEachen, 2010).

## **Patience**

The participants talked about how their clients react differently to trauma. One of our participant used the word being trauma informed. This she further explained as being knowledgeable in trauma symptoms and also understanding the reason for the client behaviour. She also discussed that her clients express their feelings by being aggressive, angry or withdrawn. This shows that people are different and have different ways of dealing with issues. According to the interviewees, an ideal shelter worker should have patience, be compassionate, and empathetic. The interviewees also said it is important that shelter workers are patience because recovery from domestic violence can be difficult.

People have different way of recovering and the effects of trauma on people are different. For some people recovery from domestic violence is fast, why for some it is slow. P (1)

The participant revealed that it's important to be patient and show calmness while working with clients even if a worker is getting frustrated. She also reveals that in cases when the clients do not progress as the worker would hope they do. She talked about

“stepping back” and accepting that clients are different and requires several ways of dealing with these conflicts.

In the past, I have realised that when you're in negative situation you remain patient and focus on positive things, this will help in relieving stress and calm the situation down, and at this same time you're modelling this behaviour to calm others down. P (3)

In times when clients' attitude may be getting out of proportion, like for instance the client may just start screaming. Situation like this requires that workers remind themselves of what is behind this behaviour. It is also important to note that even though the client have to be in charge of their lives, the worker has to be sympathetic and calm the clients'

When some women come here and they are in crisis, we have to do a lot of encouragement. We remind them why they have come here. We see that they continued to have fear of the perpetrator even though they have left their homes. We try to calm them down and help them reach that place where they are relaxed. P (1)

The participants were aware that their clients were still fearful of their abuser, they responded appropriately. According to the participants, in the situation where the clients are going through disturbances, what they need at that time is for the workers to calm them and bring them to that place where they will have peace.

## **Culturally sensitive**

According to the participants their clients come from different background. The participants mentioned about being aware of cultural values, one of our participant mentioned she has heard stories from her clients on how their culture frowns upon women who leave their husband and also how women are seen as men's property .Thus the participant are aware about cultural differences and are willing to assist their client in such issues. Siddiqui (2013) argue that some cultures see women as vessels of the family reputation. They must act in accordance with the traditional female roles and bring honour to their families by being good, calm and obedient daughters, wives and daughters in law. Any female family members who are perceived to have brought

shame and humiliation to the family are punished with violence for dishonouring the family.

We are aware about cultural differences and how it can affect them. One of my client comes from a culture where a woman is looked down upon if they leave their husbands. P (1)

According to our participants being culturally sensitive, explained why some clients find it difficult to leave the abusive partner. The participants further said that without being aware of cultural values, working with such clients can be challenging and workers can get frustrated. Such clients do not accept the idea of starting life afresh. One of our participant said it is difficult for a client to understand and accept independence and empowerment, for they did not grow up like that. Irrespective of a client's background, workers should set aside their pre-conceived ideas about other people's cultures and "individualize that person. Being aware of client's culture is very important. It is needed to find out what the shelter workers are feeling and why, it is also needed to know if to display such emotions and how to display the emotions and finally it is also needed so that the workers can step back and observed the client's emotional state. One of the participant said that awareness has made her see her clients as the system and not as a woman who is seeking help due to abuse.

## **Self-control**

The ultimate goal of the shelter workers are to empower their clients so as to enable them live independently. However, as individuals are different and unique, the same method for conveying these ideas will certainly not work for everyone. Knowing a client's background can be helpful, as the worker can render support to fit individual's need. Thus this could be an ideal approach but may be challenging, some workdays can also be very busy and inadequate resources may not allow for much concentration on a client's case. Generally, for the participants, leaving an abuser to become independent is the best outcome for clients. But the fact is that not everyone does, and in such cases the workers try their best to hide their feelings so as to appear non-judgemental.

As a worker we want a positive ending, but this does not always happen. For instants after working hard for a client and she goes back to her abuser. Or after working for a client they come up with a

decision that the worker do not agree with. But you have to be cool, and know that she took the decision herself. P (2)

We consider that by being “cool”, the participants’ means that she suppresses her feelings of frustration and anger in order to be seen as supportive in the presence of the clients. This repeatedly occur for one of the participants. She keep referring to how angry she get towards women who allow men to control them. At the same time, she said she understand how the cultural background or upbringings can affect some abused women. However, she has mixed feelings on the issue:-

I don't want to be seen as judging my clients, you know I can´t, well it is the culture, yet i don´t understand why these women will not want to do things on their own and also do well. P (4)

This participant seems to be focused on being independent. She finds it difficult to understand why her client cannot embrace this way of thinking. Obviously, the Swedish individualism can be seen here in how independence is valued more than dependence

## **5.2. What type of consequences have these shelter workers experienced in their lives due to their work at the shelter?**

### **Dis-belief**

The participants talked about their disbelief about women with children, who are unable to take a bold step by moving forward or take the necessary decision concerning them. Their children’s well-being are supposed to be put into consideration. In Hiitola (2015) mothers are a lot of times blamed for exposing their children to harm of seeing the abuse of their mother by their father. The above author claims that the mothers are most times in some cultures seen as responsible for the children and as a result, called a bad mother:

There are several times when I get so angry and frustrated, for example I do understand a client is going through a lot but children are involved here and I am like why can she think about the future of this kids and move on. P (1)

The above responses can mean that the woman ought to put into consideration the well-being of the children and as such a good reason to walk out of the abusive relationship,

or even if she is finding it difficult to leave for her own good, she should do it for her children for the violence can have a negative impact on them.

It is so frustrating to know some of them go back to the abuser, then years later they are back again to the shelter seeking for assistance....in such situation I find it really hard to have empathy, if you can't do it for yourself then do it for the children. P (3)

More importance seems to be placed on the children than the women from both the participants and Hiitola (2015) perspectives. It is uncertain if these ideas are directly discussed with the clients. On the other hand, when the thoughts of discussing such idea arises, it usually leads to suppressing of actual feelings and staying supportive which is required from a professional shelter worker.

Shelter workers are not in the position to make the men responsible for their actions, so the onus lies on the abused women to change and better their lives. Bearing in mind the vulnerable state of the children and the women, this is a huge task on their side. However, in Lapierre (2010) it was discovered that women who have been abused usually endeavor to be good mothers, they use available means to respond to their children's needs and protect them, even if domestic violence sometimes make it difficult for this women to play their role as a mother, they may appear happy and normal as if they were not abused. They usually do not talk about the violence with their children, they go about pretending that it never happen thereby, making the man look good (Peled and Gil, 2011).

A report by Boeckel et al. (2014) revealed that the mental health status of women is related to their protective behaviour when their abusive partner is a threat to them or the children. He also went further to explain that, women are less protective of their children, if their level of depression is severe. It was also noted that they are socially impaired when it comes to parenting style (Boeckel et al., 2014). According to the participants, understanding the negative effect of domestic violence on children, may make it easier for those who work at the shelter to say their mind in situation where children are involved. In such situation they may perhaps feel more permitted to cross boundaries and take moral actions. According to the participants being judgemental can be considered acceptable in such situations.

## Suppressing emotions and hiding frustration

Emotional labour and managing emotions is mainly about suppressing emotions. It is likely that this is possible by applying surface acting in practice. Professional shelter workers have the required skills to help their clients irrespective of their own point of view on the issue, even if they disagree with their client decision. They do understand that at the time a client was experiencing abused, she was unable to decide on her own, for her own decisions was strictly limited by the abuser. Gaining control over her life is one of her healing process at the shelter.

To make the clients to learn about being independent, the workers need to perform emotional labour with surface acting. This can be done by managing their emotions, they can be neutral in their emotional display. The participant did not disclose how they particularly perform this type of emotional labour. We can say that in their word “being cool”, they mean that they try to hide their true feelings. There is no way to know if they actually succeeded in doing this, there is the possibility that they didn't, as one of the participants showed in her comment.

Is there a time that I will share how I really feel with my clients, especially when I'm angry and frustrated and I will show it or express it as it is. Well it can happen (laughs). But it hasn't. P (1)

All the participants were in agreement that some of the emotions they experience and which they did not display were negative emotions. And this negative emotions were anger, fear, disgust, annoyance and frustrations.

There are some clients who feel they cannot stay on their own or cope on their own. I find myself getting so angry with such clients but I try to hide my feelings P (2).

From the above comment, the participant struggles to hold back from expressing her annoyance to some clients. By applying surface acting, she was able to be patient while listening to her client and was able to continue working with them. At work, she cannot mention these thoughts, she can only discuss it with her co-workers while controlling her reactions. Thus, outside the workplace she won't suppress her feelings.

## **Managing clients and setting boundaries**

The participants reported that their clients' stories affected their emotions. They mentioned that their clients told stories that were sometimes difficult, horrible, or painful, this they said makes them have deep feelings for the clients and also connected deeply to these clients. According to one of the participants: "It's difficult not to get emotionally involved with these amazing women who have suffer abuses" the participant also mentioned that getting too attached with the clients can make their work become difficult and even more personal. Another participant talked about how she is connected with young clients who were approximately the same age with her daughters.

I have had some clients who are so young like nineteen and early twenties, these were the ones I connected with easily. Listening to them makes me feel for them and think about them as my daughters (sad). Working with them was actually challenging for me, I felt a stronger need of hugging them and protecting them. They are so young and already been abused. P (3)

In a situation like this, it is likely that the boundaries between the client and worker became unclear. The young clients reminded the participant of her daughter, which she felt a strong need to rescue. This possibly would have happened as a result of keeping loved ones out of trouble and thereby extending such protection to her clients who look like her daughters. Hence, some workers take their work so deeply and due to this clients can remind a worker of someone close to them, or even their own vulnerability. Goldblatt and Buchbinder (2003) in their study on the consequences of working with abused women on female social work students, found out that the boundaries between professional and private lives was unclear, this lead to worry and anxiety for the student's safety. An empathic intervention with women who have been abused needs clear lines between them this allows the worker to do their work effectively, without been controlled by the reality of the violence a client experienced (Goldblatt and Buchbinder, 2003).

In such cases when the workers identify strongly with a client, it makes them feel that the normal assistance is not enough and will want to do more. This is unprofessional as a worker should desist from bringing their private life into a client issue. Therefore the emotional labour here might be the act of transferring the appropriate feelings of being concern from her relatives, friends or oneself (the worker) to her client. In this situation

by saving a client the worker will take it personal and feel as if she is keeping loved ones or herself safe. The action performed here is like deep acting, that is the worker is redirecting existing feelings instead of summoning feelings. Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000) argues that you can internalise emotions and it becomes part of the self and lead to deep authenticity.

Though it is needed to know a client's emotional state and history of violence, the worker should avoid getting too emotionally involved. In Covington et al. (2008) it was found that the autonomic nervous system of a therapist could be triggered merely listening to a client. It is very important for a therapist to set boundaries between her client and herself, for this can help keep her in control of herself.

I see it as unhealthy getting too emotionally attached to clients, as it can lead to burnout, and then secondary trauma. You can decide to not be emotional with your client, but then it will be difficult for you to work with them, especially when you have to empathise with them. If you're also too emotional, it will have an effect on you. And if you get burnout, then it becomes totally difficult to assist your client as much as you should as well. P (2)

This participant was particularly focused on keeping her professional boundaries. Also she was against connecting strongly with a client and she went further to explain her thought on the issue as being unhealthy. She was the only participant that talks about separating self from client, others express being emotionally involved and frustration. She discussed about emotional labour as mostly about being conscious and observing of client's state of mind. She talked about only once when she was frustrated because she could not see the effect of her work on her client's lives. We assume that probably the participant is able to not engage in emotion management due to her focus on boundaries. However, boundaries could protect workers in a domestic violence shelter from getting too emotionally involved with clients, it can also make them to feel safe in their private lives. Boundaries can help in suppressing anger or frustration. Powell-Williams et al. (2013) in their study, reported that advocates see themselves as people who give suggestions and not people who have come to solve all their problems. Also the idea of them distancing themselves makes them less vulnerable emotionally. This can also make them less affected and not feel as failures at their work.

Creating boundaries is important, but is different when you are living in the shelter, as it seems like you are living with your clients. I am here at the shelter 40 hours a week living with clients. So it may be hard separating oneself from their clients. P (1)

The main goal is to empower the women and sometimes this may require the workers crossing boundaries to assist, especially when some clients issue is challenging and needs extra time. According to the participants, shelter workers are expected to be caring, compassionate, and capable of dealing with different types of people. However, it is essential for workers to protect themselves against burnout (Harr and Moore, 2011; Hunsaker et al., 2015).

### **Emotional Labour: Workers well-being and safety**

The need for emotional labour with regards to working in a domestic violence shelter, put lots of pressures on the shelter workers. For appropriate delivering of services to women who have suffered violence, the workers at the shelter are expected to control their emotions, for example suppressing of anger. Erickson and Ritter (2001) argue that workers who suppresses their feelings revealed higher levels of exhaustion. Mann and Cowburn (2005) noted in their study of mental health nurses, that there is a link between emotional labour and “communication stress and day to day job stress” that is, the more the emotional labour the higher the “communication stress and day to day job stress”.

If you're emotionally involved, it will cause burnout and you will feel drained and unable to work with your clients. But we still have to connect to our clients. P (3)

Some participants mentioned how they are usually unable to stop thinking about what happened at work when they get home, one of our participant said sometimes she replays a client story in her head. This could be as a result of the high demand of empathy that the job requires.

You need to be emotionally involved, you need to be concerned, and you need to care, for my work expects me to be compassionate. If you are not emotionally involve or you don't care then you won't move anywhere with a client case. P (1)

Professionally, it is demanded that shelter workers put in a great deal of emotion in their jobs and without doubt this affects them. Meyerson (2000) study shows that social workers who work in a hospital believe burnout is a normal consequences of their work. Professional competence is built on how a worker uses emotions and empathy at the workplace, thus emotions and being empathic allows workers to connect with clients (Meyerson, 2000). Workers have to be willingly interested in the outcome of the lives of women who are, at first, complete strangers to them. So it is essential to develop client -worker relationship, as these clients are strangers to the workers they may have to pretend to demonstrate an appropriate level of caring, this they do by applying deep acting. This can be tiring, for it does seem like a warm client-worker relationship can be established with all clients.

Emotional labour can affect the workers, especially in an environment like a domestic violence shelter. These workers listen to different stories of abuse and must show empathy. It is impossible that the workers emotions will remain in one piece as they listen to client's stories of violence. Some of these emotions may fall under deep or surface acting (Hochschild 1983). It has been reported that emergency nurses that have witnessed the suffering of survivors of intimate partner violence suffered emotional distress (Missouridou, 2017). Likewise in Yancy (2005) study of rape work it was found that, having negative feelings at work include: feelings of distress, discomfort, powerlessness and being angry at the society as well as the system. This studies reflect situations of most domestic violence shelter workers in this study. As empathy is required in their work with clients, it will be difficult to avoid all the negative consequences.

As earlier stated, empathy is very important in the work with domestic violence victims, as it enables the worker help the client more easily and be more effective and efficient in their work. Without empathy, it will be difficult for a worker to help the client as they should. It will make the shelter work challenging.

Sometimes when they share their stories, I am so touched and I just feel like holding and crying with them, and I am like no I can't do that because I am supposed to encourage and support them. P (2)

Empathy in this way, can be effective and also have unfavourable consequences on the worker. Covington et al. (2008) talk about the issue of a therapist in a rape crisis who

have turn out to be fearful of violence through her work. According to Covington et al. (2008) she developed a habit of unconsciously imagining her clients' stories of rape as if it was happening to her. If a shelter worker uses the above method, they may begin to visualize themselves as potential victim or victim of domestic abuse. The participants made mention of different consequences of their work on their private lives and most of them have this fear for their safety.

Working here you are talking to victims of domestic violence, you are planning their safety with them, you access their emotions and you even follow up in their everyday lives. It can create some anxiety, especially in your private life if you are not careful enough. P (3)

Most of the participants, said that due their work, as domestic violence shelter workers, they find it difficult to trust men. In the course of their work, they have seen and heard a lot, as such they have become more cautious about men. Even though they understand that not all men are violent and do not want to group all men as the same, they find it hard trusting men they meet for the first time. Goldblatt and Buchbinder (2003) remark that those who work with abused women are at a high risk of such fears and mistrust. This explains the consequences of emotional labour on the workers through what is demanded of them. This implies that as shelter workers offer to assist abused women, they unconsciously expose themselves to harm. Even with the frustrations and the stress those interviewed have experienced in their personal lives, they are driven by the progress they see in this women to keep working with victims of domestic violence. They have this joy and satisfaction within them knowing that they are helping others, changing lives positively and making a difference in people's lives.

That kind of feeling, knowing that I contributed to her success story... Knowing that I was able to make a positive change in one's life that is all that matters. That's what I am glad about just knowing that I helped someone. P (1)

There is a special kind of satisfaction that the participants feel knowing that they have reached the goal of emotional labour by empowering their clients. They have been with these women and have seen the progress they have made in their lives. Knowing that their emotional labour have been successful in empowering their clients from being called victims of abuse to now survivors. This feeling of being successful in helping their clients is what motivates them and help them to cope with the negative consequences.

Additionally, the shelter workers felt that their self-confidence has increased as a result of their work in domestic violence shelter. They stated that as they help their clients to grow, they had also grown side by side them. They had learned so much from their clients and discover new things about themselves which had enable them know themselves better and develop their personalities. Most of the interviewees referred it as a positive impact of empowering their clients.

When you are empowering your clients, you know you are also empowering yourself. I feel so much empowered in so many ways. P (4)

As earlier stated, shelter workers in this study reported feelings of fears and concerns about their personal safety due to their work at the shelter, the above quote is in contrast to that. According to the participants, one of the ways to learn is to teach others, in so doing you end up investing in yourself. The shelter workers in this study described the effort they put in encouraging their clients, telling them that they don't deserve to be abused by their partners, doing this they became even more confident in their work against domestic violence in their private lives.

## 6. Discussion

In this section, we will present the methodological discussion focusing on their advantages and limitations. Thereafter we will discuss the result in relation to previous research and theoretical framework, followed by the conclusion and then suggestions for further research.

### 6.1. Methodological discussion and research process

The aim of this study was to explore how domestic violence shelter workers perceive emotional labour at their work place in Mid-Sweden. In order to get in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences of the phenomenon, a qualitative method was used for gathering and collecting the empirical data. This method is considered to be the most suitable as it allowed the researchers to explore the phenomenon of emotional labour of domestic violence shelter workers experiences and collect data through semi-structured interviews using standardized open-ended question pattern.

Furthermore, by interviewing, the authors were able to focus on those topics they found more interesting, and asked clarifying questions as needed. The verbal and transcribed data produced using this method was rich and descriptive. However, there are some limitations using this method. Firstly, the information the participants described are based on their own experiences, therefore the study is more subjective than objective (Grinnell and Unrau, 2018). In addition, English is not the primary language of the participants, this could have affected the quality of the information provided.

Moreso, in analysing the data, the researchers make their own interpretations since text does not have a single meaning, others would present a different analyses of the same data making the study more subjective (Krippendorff, 2013). Patton (2015) stated that even though there are some principles for analysing data, there are no measurement tools to estimate which findings should be given consideration or not. As for validity and reliability, the above mentioned author stated that there are also no pretest available. Lastly, the findings from this study cannot be generalised due to the small sample size.

## **6.2. Discussion of results in relation to previous research and theories**

Regarding our first research question: What kind of emotional labour is involved in the daily work of the shelter workers? The shelter workers interviewed in this study described that they are expected to provide different type of services to their clients which include; empowering the clients which was found to be the most important goal for these workers. As the workers believed that by the time the clients move out of the shelter, they will be able to live and support themselves independently.

The results show that the shelter workers in this study perceive that they are expected to display positive emotions that are appropriate and consistent with those of the clients and also to hide emotions that are negative and inappropriate. Positive emotions like compassion, feeling concern, showing calmness to the clients and empathy are some of the emotions that they display. Though the situation and the problem determine which particular emotions they seem to display at any given time. In displaying emotions their goal is to support whatever decisions the clients have taken irrespective of their personal point of view, the clients must be empowered to get back to their normal lives.

### **Surface acting**

The results indicate that hiding or suppressing emotions occur in line with displaying rules. This display rule guide the shelter workers' behaviour with clients. Shelter workers' description of hiding and suppressing of emotions are examples of emotional labour they performed. Hochschild (1983) presented two types of acting, which are deep acting and surface acting. In the study the workers described showing emotions they did not feel to clients. When they are feeling scared, angry, or frustrated they seem to hide or suppress those emotions and make effort not to display them. They describe that they use facial expressions and body language for example to express those feelings they may not have been feeling at that particular time, like being calm and distancing oneself from the job. This acting is regarded as surface acting.

## **Deep acting**

Furthermore, the shelter workers in this study also seem to perform deep acting when they try to understand their clients' experiences, especially when they are dealing with more difficult clients. With deep acting the shelter workers were able to control and regulate their emotions not only when they are displaying such emotions, but they also feel that emotion internally. Deep seemed to acting improved the shelter workers' ability not to be judgemental but to be empathetic. It also made them have a deep connection with the clients, as such they were able to understand those factors that might affect the course of the client's recovery since clients are different and react to trauma differently. Additionally, the clients' mindset in terms of their culture could also be a barrier for not leaving their abuser and living a more independent life. Therefore, seeing clients as victims, rationalising their difficult behaviour as a symptom of their emotional state, and seeing the situation from the client's perspectives for instance, were used to improve positive emotions while they deep act. These are related to what Hochschild (1983) illustrated in the flight attendants as they try to fit in with the organisational display rule and express positive emotions when in reality they are feeling negative.

Victims of domestic violence are highly vulnerable to being re-traumatised alongside having self destructive behaviours. Also, the inability to detect signs of abuse as well as provide adequate care, may place them in further danger of re-traumatization (Wallace and Roberson, 2015). It is based on this that staffs that work with them as well as the victims themselves are encouraged to learn about the physical and psychological consequences of trauma and abuse as they will benefit from the coping skills. In Cerulli et al. (2012) study of focus group of women who have been victims of intimate partner violence. The victims recount experiencing symptoms like muscle pain and fatigue, alongside breathing problems, headache, and immune dysfunction and weight issues. Meeting their abuser unexpectedly or having a high level of stress made the pain worse. Even after lawful actions have been taken against the abuser, the victim continued to live in constant fear, and suffer from panic attacks, depression, anxiety and flashbacks. Feelings of pain in the body are always reminders of the abuse which causes re-traumatising and which makes the victim live a frustrating and difficult life as stated by the above authors.

According to (Cerull et al., 2012), it is important for shelter workers to be sensitive as the littlest things could trigger the victims, reminding them of the difficulty they had to go through which made them not to function normally. Having knowledge of trauma will make it possible for the shelter workers to provide more appropriate and effective services to the clients according to the above authors.

## **Positive and negative consequences**

The last section of our analysis concentrated on our second research question - What type of consequences have these shelter workers experienced in their lives due to their work at the shelter? The study shows that the shelter workers in this study experienced stress as a consequence of the emotional labour. This should not come as a surprise as performing emotional labour in domestic violence shelter which is a complex environment can be stressful. According to the participants, shelter workers are expected to understand their clients' situations and respond appropriately, this is usually connected to unhealthy experiences such as vicarious trauma, which is also known as secondary trauma (Lerias and Byrne, 2003.)

Shelter workers have to bear the cost of having been exposed to clients who have experienced trauma and abuse, hearing their stories and witnessing their fear, terror and pain that they have to endure as well as having empathic engagement with them. Therefore, shelter workers have to be aware of these trauma symptoms and have sufficient tools to address or prevent them. In Yancy's (2005) study of rape work it was found that, having negative feelings at work include: feelings of distress, discomfort, powerlessness and anger at the society as well as the system. Also, even though empathy can be effective in working with abused women in domestic violence shelter, it can also have unfavourable consequences on the workers, as the shelter workers in this study might not be able to separate themselves from their jobs. In Covington et al. (2008) the problem a therapist who works in a rape crisis center had was described. It was reported that she usually found herself unintentionally imagining her clients' stories of rape as if the incident happened to her.

Furthermore, in spite of the negative aspect of domestic violence shelter work, there are still positive aspects. In Henderson (2001) the positive side of emotional labour was highlighted, as nurses were able to experience so much emotional engagement and use it to improve their work. This was seen as high level skill that needs persistence and determination. This skills were also used in professional and private life of the nurses. Similarly, Yancy (2005) points out the positive emotional bond between workers and rape victims, as the workers were able to use it to help them grow from being victims to survivors. Thus, the shelter workers in this study described the satisfaction they get by making a difference in the lives of the clients which was a sources of motivation to them and it also help them cope with the negative aspects of the shelter work.

## **7. Conclusion**

From the result of this study, we can draw the conclusion that these shelter workers understand that the reality of each client is complex. They know what the goals they want to achieve with their clients are; i.e., empowering the clients and providing them with skills that enable them to live independently. Furthermore, mapping various aspect of the client's identity will also help to know the peculiar consequences of the violence they experienced. By applying empathy, the participants do not need to undertake responsibility for the client's problem. The clients are considered able to find solutions to their problems with the information and options provided by the shelter workers. Also, with clients coming from different cultures and backgrounds, providing for their needs require that the shelter workers would have to learn a specific client's background.

In practice, this can be very challenging as noted earlier (in section 5.1). Most of the time, the shelter workers in this study seemed to be, in many instances overwhelmed with frustrating situations which they must hide from their clients and continue to show support and display only the emotions that are appropriate for the job, despite how they feel. Though it is not clear how much the shelter workers focused on this, it is however very important in providing quality services to their clients. According to the participants once the shelter workers are in control of their emotions, their focus should thereafter be on finding out the most important needs of the clients and providing them with support needed. Shelter workers in this study reported remarkable levels of satisfaction when they're able to help their clients find a solution to their problems.

### **7.1. Suggestions for further research**

The findings that emerged from this study was generated by interviewing four professionals about their experience of emotional labour working with abused women in a domestic violence shelter. The authors suggest that it would be interesting to see if this findings can be replicated or not by conducting a study that compare different cultural groups making up the client populations, and examine the similarities and differences that could be found in the emotional labour of the professionals working with them.

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## **Appendix 1: Research Informed Consent**

The research project is a compulsory part of the Bachelor's degree programme in International Social Work at University of Gävle. The researchers are Freda Bunmi Omo-Izobo and Florence Chijiamara Nwoko. The research is not funded.

The aim of this research is to gain information on shelter workers' experiences with female survivors of violence. The specific areas of interest are everyday work at the shelter, relationship to clients, and the consequences of shelter work on their life. Hopefully, the findings from this research will provide the workers with some tools to reflect on their profession.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can decline answering it. You have a right to withdraw consent any time before or during the interview. Information will be gathered during one interview of approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed.

Research findings will be reported in a manner which prevents identification of any participant. When the interviews are transcribed, the names of the interviewees will be changed into pseudonyms. The name of organization will not be mentioned and the place or city will be categorised to prevent any identification (e.g. Mid-Sweden). When the research is completed, interview audio tapes and contact information to participants will be destroyed.

If you have any further questions, please contact Freda Bunmi Omo-Izobo at [vsn16foo@student.hig.se](mailto:vsn16foo@student.hig.se) or Florence Chijiamara Nwoko at [vsn16fno@student.hig.se](mailto:vsn16fno@student.hig.se)

## **Appendix 2: Interview guide**

### **Interview questions**

Day-to-day work at the shelter

What is a typical work day at the shelter?

Please describe a typical client at the shelter?

Do you get information about a client background and situation? What type of information are important?

Please describe a typical way you interact with clients.

How do you assist a client?

Can you describe an Ideal work environment?

Interactions with clients

What does the role of empathy play when you interact with your client?

How do client show their emotions and how do you respond to such emotions?

What is the required level of emotional engagement at your workplace?

Can you describe some of the feelings and thought that arises when you relate with a client and how do you manage them?

Do you think relating to a client situation affect your work?

When it is hard to work with someone, what type of thoughts and feelings do you experience and how do you manage them?

Professional trained worker

What do you consider as unprofessional of a worker at a domestic violence shelter?

If you are in a bad mood, how do you manage your feelings so as to appear pleasant to your clients?

How do you guide your clients through sensitive and/ or emotional issues?

#### Consequences of Shelter Work

Does working in a domestic violence shelter have any consequences on your private life?

Can you please describe some of the positive and negative consequences of your work?

How do you cope with negative feelings from your workplace?

How does your workplace assist you in coping with stress related to your work?

What are the things that keeps you motivated?

How do you feel knowing that your work makes a difference to your client life?

