

## DEEP ACTING AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN PRIMARY HEALTHCARE CENTERS IN OKRIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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### ABSTRACT

This work explores the concept of deep acting and its impact on service delivery. The geographical scope of this study is Primary Healthcare Centers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. The research design adopted in this study was the cross sectional explanatory survey research design. Self - administered structured questionnaires were used to collect data. A population of 313 Primary healthcare workers from all 15 primary healthcare centers in Okrika Local Government area was used, of which 150 respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique. Method of data analysis adopted was mean and standard deviation for the univariate analysis, while the bivariate analysis was done using Spearman Rank Order Correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science Version 23.0. The paper concluded that deep acting and service delivery in the form of responsiveness, empathy and service assurance have a strong relationship. Management should implement continuous professional development programs that equip health care workers with skills to practice emotional regulation techniques aligned with deep acting.

**Keywords:** Deep acting, service delivery, empathy, responsiveness, service assurance

### INTRODUCTION

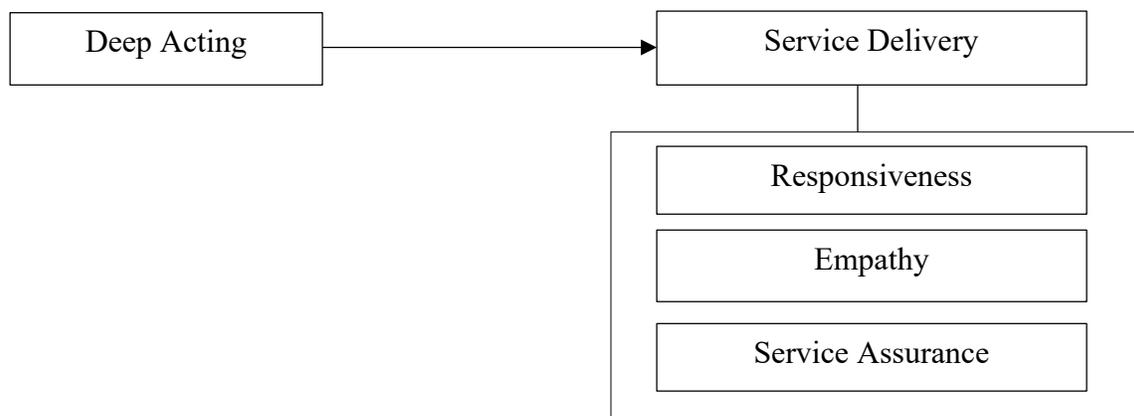
The health of any nation is significantly influenced by the quality of services it provides to its population. Healthcare institutions play a crucial role in advancing this effectiveness, offering specialized medical consultations and treatments for complex ailments and diseases Omoju and Kutu, (2021). Morris and Feldman, (1996) specifically argued that, as a consequence of the industrial paradigm shift, a key component of the work performed by many workers has become the presentation of emotion that are specified and desired by their organizations. For patients seeking medical attention, the emotional display of the healthcare provider is an important consideration of the quality of service they would be receiving, therefore, a significant part of the service itself. Studies have also shown that following the physician's prescriptions, continuing to

use a healthcare facility and recommending their use to others, all depend on how satisfied a patient is with their own previous experience. Interestingly, organizations expect workers to act and behave in certain ways necessary to achieving set goals. In other words, to achieve certain objectives, organizations expect the exhibition of “socially desirable emotions” along a myriad of job roles. One of such emotions is deep acting, which can be said to be the changing of one’s feelings to align with their outward expressions.

The purpose of the study was therefore to examine the relationship between deep acting and service delivery of primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, River State. The objectives of this study include examining:

1. The relationship between deep acting and responsiveness of Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government area, Rivers State
2. The relationship between deep acting and empathy of Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government area, Rivers State.
3. The relationship between deep acting and service assurance of Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government area, Rivers State.

**Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 1:** Relationship between Deep Acting and Service Delivery.

**Sources:** Adapted from Arlie Hochschild (1983), Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml and Leonard L. Berry, (1985)

**Research Questions**

This study found answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between deep acting and responsiveness of Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government area, Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between deep acting and empathy of Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government area, Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between deep acting and service assurance of Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government area, Rivers State?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Foundation

#### Job Characteristics Model

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) is a theoretical framework that explains how job characteristics affect employees' motivation, satisfaction, and performance Hackman & Oldham, (1976). It identifies five main job dimensions; skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Job Characteristics Model says that these five main characteristics influence employees' psychological conditions, including motivation, satisfaction and performance Hackman & Oldham, (1976). These psychological conditions, in turn, affect employees' deep acting and service delivery.

**Skill Variety:** This is the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities and skills. It can also be said to be the unique skills that employees of an organization possess and use in their daily work. Greater skill variety enhances employee motivation by providing a sense of competence and reducing monotony. Jobs with high skill variety may enable employees to express a broader range of emotions authentically, reducing reliance on surface acting and fostering genuine interactions with customers. Greater skill variety enhances emotional competence and reduces emotional dissonance.

**Task Identity:** This is the extent to which an employee completes a whole and identifiable piece of work. Higher task identity which can be said to be an employee seeing their work from its starting point to the final state fosters a sense of ownership and accomplishment among employees. And low task identity refers to an employee that does not get to see how their work impacts the finished product.

**Task Significance:** This can be said to be the supposed importance of a job and its impact on others. This is the extent to which employees feel their work influences other people within their organization and outside of it. When employees feel like their work significantly affects others, it enhances their intrinsic motivation. Employees who see the significance of their roles may feel a stronger intrinsic motivation to engage in deep acting, which involves a more authentic emotional connection with customers. This connection can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

**Autonomy:** The degree of freedom and independence of an employee when performing their job. This can be said to be the extent of freewill given to an employee to make and carry out decisions while doing his job without input from someone else. Increased autonomy contributes to higher job satisfaction and engagement. Employees granted autonomy are less likely to feel constrained by emotional display rules, allowing them to engage in deep acting more often. This autonomy contributes to a greater sense of personal responsibility over their emotional expressions, promoting a positive work environment that is conducive to effective service delivery.

**Feedback:** The extent to which employees receive clear and timely information about their performance. This can be said to be helpful information or criticism given about a person's performance and how to improve said performance in the future. Effective feedback can enhance

learning and performance through continual improvement. Regular and constructive feedback reinforces positive emotional labour practices by acknowledging and rewarding employees' efforts in managing their emotions. It helps employees understand the impact of their emotional expression on customer satisfaction and service quality.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Deep Acting**

Deep acting is a psychological concept that pertains to the process by which individuals modify their internal emotions to align with external expressions required by social roles or professional demands. This concept is primarily used in the context of emotional labor, a term first introduced by Arlie Hochschild in (1983). Emotional labor refers to the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job Hochschild, (1983). Deep acting can be said to be where individuals only modify their outward expressions without altering their internal feelings.

Lazanyi (2001) argued that, a deep actor alters his emotions in order to comply with organisational norms as he sincerely feels in particular situation. Deep acting can be facilitated through various psychological techniques that allow employees to align their internal emotional states with the required external displays. Techniques such as cognitive reappraisal (changing one's interpretation of a situation) and visualization (imagining oneself experiencing the desired emotion) are common methods employed in this process (Gross, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1996). These strategies not only help in creating an authentic emotional experience but also prove beneficial in terms of emotional regulation and stress management.

The impact of deep acting on employees is multi-faceted, with both positive and negative outcomes depending on how it is managed. On the positive side, deep acting is thought to enhance emotional authenticity in interactions, which can lead to greater job satisfaction and emotional well-being Brotheridge and Lee, (2003). Individuals who engage in deep acting may experience enhanced job satisfaction and a stronger connection with their work (Grandey, 2003). Authentic emotional experiences can contribute to a more enriching work environment and better relationships with colleagues and clients. Employees who engage in deep acting may experience fewer emotional dissonance and burnout than those who rely on surface acting Hochschild, (1983). However, while deep acting may reduce surface-level emotional dissonance, it can still be emotionally taxing over time. Prolonged deep acting can lead to emotional exhaustion, as it requires significant cognitive and emotional effort to continually manage one's internal emotions Grandey, (2003).

### **Service Delivery**

Ahmad (2011) defines services as any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. He asserts the view that services are intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable and also added that services normally require more quality control, supplier-credibility, and adaptability. The concept of service delivery has become a central focus in the service management and marketing literature, as businesses across various industries recognize the critical importance of service quality in customer satisfaction, loyalty, and business performance. Due to the fact that services are

intangible, consumed at the moment of production, and frequently include contact with clients, it can be challenging to define quality in service firms Okemwa, (2016).

### **Responsiveness**

Responsiveness, as a key dimension of service delivery, has been a critical focus in service management literature. Responsiveness, in the context of service delivery, has emerged as a critical dimension for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of services across various sectors, including healthcare, education, government, and customer service. It transcends mere availability and accessibility, focusing instead on how well services are tailored to meet the perceived needs, preferences, and expectations of those who utilize them (Donabedian, 1988; World Health Organization, 2000). Responsiveness, at its core, refers to the ability of a service provider to acknowledge and address the legitimate expectations of service users in a timely, efficient, and respectful manner WHO, (2000). Responsiveness is also defined as the willingness and readiness of a service provider to assist customers and provide prompt service Parasuraman et al., (1988).

### **Empathy**

Empathy defined by Rogers, (1957) as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another has long been a subject of interest in psychological, sociological, and service management literature. It is recognized as a crucial element in interpersonal relationships, customer service, and organizational behavior. Empathy encompasses two principal components: cognitive empathy, or the ability to understand another person's emotions and thoughts, and affective empathy, which refers to the capacity to emotionally respond to those feelings Decety and Jackson, (2004). According to Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996), empathy reflects the extent to which service providers are attuned to their clients' needs and requirements. When employees exhibit empathy, they are more likely to create positive emotional connections with customers, leading to heightened satisfaction and perceived service quality Kwortnik and Thompson, (2009). In service contexts, empathy is essential for delivering quality customer experiences, as it influences how service providers respond to customer needs, emotions, and concerns. Empathy plays a pivotal role in service delivery, especially in industries where interactions between service providers and customers are frequent and emotionally charged

### **Service Assurance**

Service assurance refers to the actions and practices employed by service providers to build and maintain customer confidence in the reliability and quality of the service provided. It encompasses various elements such as guaranteeing the consistency of service delivery, providing clear communication about service standards, and ensuring customers feel confident that their expectations will be met or exceeded. Service assurance is particularly important in services characterized by intangibility, variability, and inseparability, where customers often rely on external cues to assess service quality before consumption Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, (1985). This shows the role of service assurance in service quality, its relationship with customer satisfaction and its impact on customer loyalty and organizational success.

### **Empirical Review**

## Deep Acting and Service Delivery

Han, Han and Kim (2018) examined deep acting and service delivery in general hospitals located in Seoul, Korea. The research aimed at developing a hypothetical model using emotional labour performed by nurses in clinical settings as exogenous variable, work engagement and job burnout as the parameters and service level and customer orientation as result variables. The research was carried out using a cross sectional survey. Questionnaires were distributed to 378 nurses in general hospitals with more than 500 beds located in Seoul, Republic of Korea, between March 25 and April 8 2013. The results showed that deep acting and work engagement had direct and indirect effects on increasing the level of service delivery and customer orientation of nurses. However, surface acting had an indirect effect on reducing the level of service delivery and customer orientation.

The conclusion was that it would be more effective to develop interventions to enhance deep acting and work engagement than to attempt to reduce surface acting and work burnout in clinical nursing settings. Igbojekwe (2017) studied the impact of deep acting on quality service delivery in their work *Recognition of Impact of Emotional Labour on Quality Service Delivery: A Study of Some Hotels in South East Nigeria*. Data was gathered by the use of structured questionnaires designed in the Likert format and interviews. The focus group was customer-contact employees, managers and customers of selected hotels. Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 17.0 software. Formulated hypotheses were tested using regression and correlation methods, analysis of variance (ANOVA), Z-test and t-test for tests significance. Analysis revealed that deep acting was found to have a significant relationship with quality service delivery. The conclusion of the study was that performance of emotional labour (deep acting) has a significant impact on quality service delivery.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between deep acting and responsiveness

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between deep acting and empathy

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between deep acting and service assurance

## METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional explanatory survey research design was adopted for this research. This is because data was collected from a large sample of respondents over the span of two (2) weeks using structured questionnaires which helped the researcher to statistically analyze the data collected in order to test the hypotheses of the study. The target population of the present study is 313 which cut across all 15 Primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government area as stated by the Rivers State Primary Health Care Management Board. The sample size of this study consists of the entire population of three hundred and thirteen (313) staffs and fifteen (15) Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. Thus, this study adopts the simple random sampling technique which involves using the entire population. This is informed from the fact that fifteen (15) Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government Area are not too large to cover. 10 respondents each were randomly selected at each of the fifteen (15) Primary Health Centers. The study used primary source of data. Primary source of data were original data or information that are collected firsthand by a researcher for a specific research study. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. The reliability for

the study was determined using the Cronbach alpha coefficient which is an internal form of reliability measurement which assesses the internal consistency of data. The reliability index for the study construct is shown in table 1.

**Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha for Constructs**

S/N	Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Deep Acting	4	0.893
2	Responsiveness	4	0.840
3	Empathy	4	0.715
4	Service Assurance	4	0.826

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

From the results of the test of reliability, it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha reliability values for each of the constructs were greater than 0.7. Therefore, the constructs are reliable.

The bivariate analysis was done using Spearman Rank Order Correlation with the aid of SPSS Version 23.0.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Deep Acting and Service Delivery

Table 2 shows the result of correlation matrix obtained for deep acting and measures of service delivery. Also displayed in the table is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes us able to answer our research question and generalize our findings to the study population.

**Table 2: Correlations for Deep Acting and Service Delivery**

			Deep Acting	Responsiveness	Empathy	Service Assurance
Spearman's rho	Deep Acting	Correlation	1.000	.733**	.737**	.723**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	141	141	141	141
	Responsiveness	Correlation	.733**	1.000	.731**	.696**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	141	141	141	141
	Empathy	Correlation	.737**	.731**	1.000	.666**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	141	141	141	141
Service Assurance	Correlation	.723**	.696**	.666**	1.000	
	Coefficient					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	
	N	141	141	141	141	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

**Research Question 1-3:** What is the relationship between deep acting and service delivery in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Table 2 showed the correlation coefficient between deep acting and responsiveness in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State using Spearman Rank Order Correlation ( $r$ ) techniques. From the analysis the result showed the correlation coefficient of  $\rho = 0.733$  which show the direction and strength of this relationship. This value implies a strong relationship between deep acting and responsiveness in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. The direction of the relationship indicates that the relationship is positive, implying that an increase in responsiveness in primary health care centers was as a result of the presence of deep acting. Therefore, there is a strong and positive relationship between deep acting and responsiveness in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers.

Secondly, Table 2 also showed the correlation coefficient between deep acting and empathy in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State using Spearman Rank Order Correlation ( $r$ ) techniques. From the analysis the result showed the correlation coefficient of  $\rho = 0.737$  which show the direction and strength of this relationship. This value implies a strong relationship between deep acting and empathy in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. The direction of the relationship indicates that the relationship is positive, implying that an increase in empathy in primary health care centers was as a result of the presence of deep acting. Therefore, there is a strong and positive relationship between deep acting and empathy in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers.

Finally, Table 2 also showed the correlation coefficient between deep acting and service assurance in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State using Spearman Rank Order Correlation ( $r$ ) techniques. From the analysis the result showed the correlation coefficient of  $\rho = 0.723$  which show the direction and strength of this relationship. This value implies a strong relationship between deep acting and service assurance in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. The direction of the relationship indicates that the relationship is positive, implying that an increase in service assurance in primary health care centers was as a result of the presence of deep acting. Therefore, there is a strong and positive relationship between deep acting and service assurance in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers.

Therefore to enable us accept or reject hypotheses  $H_{01}$ ,  $H_{02}$  and  $H_{03}$  as well as generalise our findings to the study population the p- value was used as shown in table 2.

**$H_{01}$ :** There is no significant relationship between deep acting and responsiveness in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Similarly displayed in the table 2 is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtain from table 2, the tests of significance show that the relationship between deep acting and responsiveness in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State is significant ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ). Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship

between deep acting and responsiveness in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between deep acting and empathy in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Similarly displayed in the table 2 is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtain from table 4.1, the tests of significance show that the relationship between deep acting and empathy in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State is significant ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ). Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between deep acting and empathy in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between deep acting and service assurance in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Similarly displayed in the table 2 is the statistical test of significance (p – value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtain from table 4.1, the tests of significance show that the relationship between deep acting and service assurance in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State is significant ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ). Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between deep acting and service assurance in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Deep Acting and Service Delivery in Primary Health Care Centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State**

The findings of the study demonstrate a significant relationship between deep acting and service delivery in primary health care centers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. Health care workers who engage in deep acting genuinely aligning their emotions with professional expectations are more likely to deliver services with empathy, patience and attentiveness. This emotional alignment fosters trust and satisfaction among patients resulting in improved patient-provider relationships and more effective communication. Deep acting contributes to a caring environment where staff appear sincere and committed which enhances the perception of quality care and boosts the overall experience of service users.

Furthermore, the study shows that when health care personnel internalize positive emotions and display authentic concern, it reduces emotional dissonance and promotes consistency in service behavior. This authenticity strengthens the morale and well-being of staff, enabling them to manage challenging situations with greater composure and resilience. In the context of primary health care, where patients often present with sensitive or urgent concerns, the ability of staff to express genuine empathy becomes a valuable component of service quality. As a result, health centers that encourage emotional regulation through deep acting are better positioned to meet patient expectations, enhance community trust, and promote long-term satisfaction with public health services.

This finding agrees with finding by Igbojekwe (2017) studied the impact of deep acting on quality service delivery in their work Recognition of Impact of Emotional Labour on Quality Service Delivery: A Study of Some Hotels in South East Nigeria. Data was gathered by the use of structured questionnaires designed in the Likert format and interviews. The focus group was customer-contact employees, managers and customers of selected hotels. Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 17.0 software. Formulated hypotheses were tested using regression and correlation methods, analysis of variance (ANOVA), Z-test and t-test for tests significance. Analysis revealed that deep acting was found to have a significant relationship with quality service delivery.

The finding of the study is supported by the study by Han, Han and Kim (2018) on deep acting and service delivery in general hospitals located in Seoul, Korea. The research aimed at developing a hypothetical model using emotional labour performed by nurses in clinical settings as exogenous variable, work engagement and job burnout as the parameters and service level and customer orientation as result variables. The research was carried out using a cross sectional survey. The results showed that deep acting and work engagement had direct and indirect effects on increasing the level of service delivery and customer orientation of nurses. However, surface acting had an indirect effect on reducing the level of service delivery and customer orientation.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The study examined the connection between deep acting and service delivery in primary health care centers within Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State, and findings reveal a meaningful relationship between the two variables. Deep acting, which involves a person changing their internal feelings or emotions to match their external expressions, plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of care delivered. Health care workers are often faced with emotionally demanding situations, and their ability to handle these situations while maintaining composure and professionalism significantly contributes to patient satisfaction, trust, and overall service experience. The study highlights that the deliberate use of deep acting practices supports a more compassionate and responsive healthcare environment.

Deep acting when applied was found to contribute the most to high-quality service delivery. When health care workers genuinely engage with their patients on an emotional level, it enhances the authenticity of care and strengthens relationships between staff and patients. This level of emotional engagement helps build a supportive atmosphere where patients feel understood, respected, and valued.

The following recommendations were hereby made:

- i. Management should implement continuous professional development programs that equip health care workers with skills to practice emotional regulation techniques aligned with deep acting. These programs should focus on enhancing empathy, active listening, and genuine patient engagement, which support the delivery of personalized and compassionate care.
- ii. Primary health care centers should foster a workplace culture that recognizes the importance of emotional authenticity, allowing staff to express genuine emotions appropriately. Encouraging respectful and open emotional expression, when aligned with patient-centered values, can enhance trust and improve the overall patient experience.

- iii. Institutional support systems such as counseling services, peer support groups and routine debriefing sessions should be provided to help staff cope with the demands of deep acting. These initiatives can reduce emotional fatigue, maintain morale and ensure that the quality of service remains consistent even in emotionally demanding situations.

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