

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and significance of the problem

Nursing is a service profession that affects changes in the client's biopsychosocial environment to promote health, learning and growth. The nurse is supportive and therapeutic, interacting with client to explore his needs, feeling and goals (Potter & Perry, 1995). The nurse facilitates the client's positive adaptation as a unique individual to the stress he is experiencing. Nursing care can be given in any settings, and the goal of this care is to maximize the person's positive interactions with his environment, level of wellness, and degree of self-actualization (Sundeen, Stuart, Rankin & Cohen, 1994).

The nature of nurses' work requires nurses to become deeply involved in the field of human behavior. Sympathy, understanding, compassion, competence, and personal involvement in the lives and deaths of other human beings are key elements in caring and the professional nursing role (Bailey, 1980). The intense interaction with the patients, as well as personal involvement and interactions with the patients' families or significant others, members of the

health care team, administrators, and the community can create stress for nurses, irrespective of their position or setting.

Therefore, being a nurse means there is little room for error, stress is rooted in the nurse's work. Common job stressors for nurses are environmental conditions, emotional problems of patients and their families, demands of patients and supervisors, working conditions and interpersonal relationships (Dewe, 1989). Investigators have documented a number of major job stressors that staff nurses typically encounter, including patients' death and dying, emotional demands of patients and their families, work overload and inadequate staffing, and conflicts with administrators, physicians, and other nurses (Gray-Toft & Anderson, 1981, MaCranie, Lambert & Lambert, 1987, Tyler & Cushway, 1992).

One potential consequence of chronic exposure to such job stressors is burnout. Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The consequences of burnout are potentially very serious. It can lead to somatic complaints, absenteeism, staff conflict, rapid staff turnover, leaving the profession, and attempted suicide (Yu, Mansfield, Packard, Vicary & McCool, 1989). Meanwhile, the impact of burnout on the nurse and the organization may directly or indirectly affect the quality

of nursing care provided to patients and their families (MacNeil & Weisz, 1987).

Since job stress is purported to be costly to the nurse, organization, patients and patients' families, it is important to examine job stressors among nurses and the level of burnout among them. Job stressors and burnout in nursing have been studied a lot in western countries (Tyler, Carroll & Cunningham, 1991), mostly in the United States, which is characterized by democratic principles, a market economy, and a emphasis on individual choice. However, little is known about nurses' job stress in the People's Republic of China which is drastically different from the United States in terms of the political system, government organization, and the emphasis on interpersonal harmony. With respect to the nursing system, most nurses do not have the opportunity to choose the area of nursing in which they practice. The system takes precedence in determining the assignment of personnel (Duff, Johnston & Laschinger, 1992).

Furthermore, shortage of nurses is a serious problem in China now. According to the standard set by the Ministry of Public Health of People's Republic of China, the ratio of hospital beds to nurses should be at least 10 to 4 (Ye & Yang, 1996). From this ratio, it is calculated that China need at least 1,253,600 nurses for a total hospital beds of 3,133,600 now. However, there are only 1,126,000 nurses at the present

time (Ye & Yang, 1996). Thus, there is a shortage of 127,600 nurses in China now. One survey done by the Ministry of Public Health in Shaanxi, Guang Dong and Gui Zhou provinces revealed that only two hospitals in these three provinces had enough nurses. The other hospitals in these three provinces had a serious problem of nurses' shortage (Ye & Yang, 1996). The problem is now more serious throughout the whole country than previous time because nurses have more opportunities to leave the profession (Li & Zhang, 1995).

Moreover, it is hard for the nursing schools to recruit nursing students. Nursing education continues to be the least popular choice among high school students even at the university level in China (Duff, Johnston & Laschinger, 1992). In addition to the difficulties in recruiting nurses, there has been a steady increase in the number of nurses leaving the profession each year. For example, in big teaching hospitals such as the First Teaching Hospital of Beijing Medical University, there were about 30 to 50 nurses leaving the profession each year from 1990 to 1995 (Ye & Yang, 1996). In Shanghai, there were about 384 nurses in 17 hospitals leaving nursing in 1993, which is about the number of 18.2% new graduate nurses (Zhang & Zhang, 1994).

Most nurses leave nursing for job-related reasons, including low salary, low status, heavy workload, rotating shift work, low social welfare, and less opportunity for

advancement (Liu, Zhang & Wang, 1994). The literature suggested that job stressors and burnout might be two of the reasons for nurses leaving the profession that contributed to nurses' shortage (Robinson, et al., 1991). Therefore, this study intended to examine job stressors and burnout in staff nurses in the four urban Chinese teaching hospitals in Xian.

There are four largest teaching hospitals in Xian, they are: the First Teaching Hospital of Xian Medical University, the Second Teaching Hospital of Xian Medical University, Tangdu Hospital of the Fourth Military Medical University, and Xijing Hospital of the Fourth Military Medical University. They are at the same level of care and serve various kinds of patients in the northwest part of China. They are tertiary care centers where the more sick and complicated patients are referred. The patients come from various kinds of socioeconomic backgrounds and speak different dialects. Nurses have to cope with many different emotions and behaviors of both the patients and their families. The requirement for the quality of care is high. Furthermore, nurses have to care for their patients and to supervise nursing students for their clinical practice.

The study involved the staff nurses in four clinical units: medicine, surgery, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology. These clinical units were chosen because the

patients represented a wide range of conditions, requiring different types of nursing care, which exposed nurses to different job stressors. The literature suggests that certain hospital units expose nursing staff to higher levels of stress, such as intensive and coronary units (Yu, Mansfield, Packard & Vicary, 1989). However, most researchers found that certain job stressors were common to all nurses (Gray-Toft and Anderson, 1981, Hipwell, Tyler & Wilson, 1989).

Therefore, this study was designed to identify the specific job stressors encountered by staff nurses and the level of burnout experienced by them in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals in Xian, People' Republic of China. The information obtained would be benefit to both staff nurses and administrators to reduce or lessen job stressors and develop strategies to manage burnout. The expected outcome was that nurses and administrators became aware of the job stressors and level of burnout that staff nurses were facing and encouraged them to find strategies to lessen or reduce stressful working condition.

Objectives of the study

The study had five main objectives:

1. To identify the various job stressors among staff nurses working in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.
2. To determine the level of burnout among staff

nurses in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

3. To investigate the relationship between job stressors and the level of burnout among staff nurses in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

4. To compare job stressors among staff nurses in four clinical units (medical, surgical, pediatric, and obstetric and gynecological units) in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

5. To compare levels of burnout among staff nurses in four clinical units (medical, surgical, pediatric, and obstetric and gynecological units) in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

Hypotheses

There were three hypotheses for this study:

1. There was a relationship between job stressors and the level of burnout among staff nurses in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

2. There were differences in job stressors among staff nurses in the four clinical units (medical, surgical, pediatric, and obstetric and gynecological units) in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

3. There were differences in levels of burnout among nurses in the four clinical units (medical, surgical, pediatric, and obstetric and gynecological units) in four

urban Chinese teaching hospitals.

Scope of the study

This study was aimed at investigating job stressors and burnout in staff nurses in the four urban Chinese teaching hospitals. Data were obtained from a sample of 220 staff nurses in the four urban Chinese teaching hospitals in Xian, Shaanxi province, People's Republic of China. The research was conducted in a six month period from October 1995 through April 1996.

Definition of the Terms

Job stressors Any characteristics of the job environment which threaten the person; job demands which are perceived as difficult to meet or supplies perceived as insufficient to meet one's needs. Job stressors were identified by using the Nursing Job Stressor Inventory (NJSI) developed by the researcher.

Burnout It is a response to chronic job stressors and expressed as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Levels of burnout will be measured by Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986).

Staff nurses Registered nurses who provide direct care to patients in the four urban Chinese teaching hospitals in Xian.

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