

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purposes of this correlational descriptive study were to identify job stressors, measure levels of burnout, identify the relationships between job stressors and burnout, and compare job stressors and levels of burnout among staff nurses in four clinical units in four urban Chinese teaching hospitals. The instruments used in this study were the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), a researcher-developed demographic questionnaire and a Nursing Job Stressor Inventory. Lazarus' (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) stress and coping theory and Maslach and Jackson's (1986) burnout theory provided a theoretical framework for this study. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's product moment, and one-way ANOVA under SAS and SPSS program were used to analyze the data and test hypotheses.

The data showed that the frequently encountered job stressors for staff nurses were professional and career issue, workload and time pressure, resources and environmental issue, nursing care and patient interaction, and interpersonal relationships and management issue. The most frequently encountered job stressors in relation to professional and

career issue were the low status of the nursing profession, less opportunity for education, low salary, and low opportunity for promotion. Heavy workload and not enough staff to cover the units were common job stressors related to workload and time pressure.

The findings showed that more than half of the staff nurses had a high level of burnout. There was a positive relationship between job stressors and burnout. There was a significant difference in job stressors among the four clinical units. Although there was a significant difference in level of burnout among four clinical units in the overall scale of Maslach Burnout Inventory, there was no significant difference of burnout in the three subscales of Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Findings and conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following can be concluded:

1. Nursing is a stressful profession. The frequently encountered job stressors for staff nurses in the teaching hospitals of China were related to professional and career issues, workload and time pressures, resources and environmental issues, nursing care and patient interaction, and interpersonal relationships and management issues.

2. There was a high rate of burnout among staff nurses, with 59.1% of staff nurses experiencing high levels of emotional exhaustion, 34.5% of staff nurses experiencing high levels of detached relationships with patients, and 20.5% having feeling of low personal accomplishment.

3. There was a significantly positive relationship between job stressors and level of burnout. The first hypothesis was accepted.

4. There was no significant difference in job stressors among staff nurses in the four clinical units. Therefore the second hypothesis was rejected.

5. There was a significant difference in level of burnout among staff nurses in the four clinical units on the overall score of Maslach Burnout Inventory ($P < 0.05$), with pediatric nurses having a higher level of burnout than the other groups of nurses. There was no significant difference in the three subscales of Maslach Burnout Inventory, thus the third hypothesis was accepted.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited in terms that the data were collected in only four clinical units in four university teaching hospitals in Xian, therefore the results may be generalized only to the target population.

Significance of the Study

The study was significant in terms of the following areas:

1. Identification of the most frequent job stressors among nurses can provide direction to job stress management. The results of this study may provide information to hospital and nursing administrators to enable them plan for job stress management for staff nurses. Knowing what job stressors exist among staff nurses is the first step toward creating an atmosphere of change to counter job stress at its core. Understanding the nature of stress experienced by nurses in different clinical settings is essential for planning effective stress management programs. Knowledge gained from the study may be useful to nurse managers because some stressors may be eliminated or minimized with proper strategies.

2. Information obtained from the study can be useful to nurse managers and educators in designing group specific stress prevention measures and suggesting strategies to avoid burnout and maintain self-preservation for staff nurses. So the level of burnout would possibly be reduced in staff nurses, thereby increasing the effectiveness of nurses in their work and improving the quality of nursing care.

Implication of the findings

The findings of this study have important practical implications for nursing and hospital administration, for nursing practice, for nursing education, and for nursing research.

1. Nursing and hospital administration

The findings of the study provide empirical evidence supporting nurses' repeated statements that their work situation is overwhelmingly stressful. Nursing is a stressful profession. Job stressors are inherent in the nurses' role. Hospitals and nursing administrators should help to identify job stressors for staff nurses. Reducing the frequency and intensity of these stressors is essential to promote job satisfaction and to retain nurses, and eventually improve the quality of nursing care. If nurses are to continue in their profession and patients are to be safe in the hospital setting, increased support for nurses, by way of reducing their job stressors and increasing the amount of control over their work must be provided. Furthermore, nursing and hospital administrators should be aware of aspects of the work environment which result in stress. In addition, improving the work environment, increasing nurses salary, and provide more opportunity for education and promotion could lead to more positive feelings of nurses to their work which may in

turn lower rates of nurses' burnout and eventually job leaving. Organizational intervention efforts to prevent burnout might profitably focus on such objectives as providing adequate staffing and flexible scheduling, implementing conflict management strategies, promoting social support, and improving the flow of information among nurses, physicians, administrators, and other hospital staff. Therefore, a functional, respectful, and productive working environment for patient care can be provided.

The study recommends that nurses be sent to stress management programs. This would develop and promote nurses' ability to reduce and control some part of their job stressors and increase nurses' self-awareness to stress and burnout. Furthermore, nursing administrators should initiate efforts to buffer the effect of stress on staff and to provide resources for support groups or counselling services.

2. Nursing practice

In addition for others to help, Bailey (1981) cited some self-regulatory mechanisms to control stress. These include humor and laughter as a parasympathetic nervous system stimulant, effects of heat and cold, meditation and imagination. All are self-controlled mechanisms that can be utilized to cope effectively with stress and minimized negative effects.

Since stress has been linked to physical and emotional health, and can lead to turnover, nurses should become familiar with methods used to promote well-being in these areas. Patrick (1987) suggested several strategies to avoid burnout and maintain self-preservation for caregivers which may have wider application for ameliorating the frequency of job stressors among nurses. According to Patrick (1989), self-preservation is based on self-assessment. Approaches to self-assessment may include the use of a nursing job stressor scale, such as the nursing job stressors inventory used in this study. Scores on the questionnaires would alert the nurse to the need for further in-depth analysis and provide a basis for implementing and evaluating self-care strategies. Self-care strategies are designed to reduce stress, thereby increasing the effectiveness of nurses in their work. Patrick (1987) suggested nurses make a commitment to themselves to re-establish a source of control over their lives which include setting flexible and reasonable goals in work.

3. Nursing research

A large-scale national survey which facilitates the categorization of common stressors in nursing and which allows the interpretation of the present results in terms of identified norms and standards.

Continued research is needed to compare perceived

stressors and factors which mediate stressors across all hospitals, to determine if the results of the present study are consistent in different settings.

4. Nursing education

The findings of this study signal that nurse educators should provide the opportunities for student nurses to gain the knowledge and experience that will be useful in developing a successful career. Increased educational emphasis should be placed on stress and burnout theory, group psychology, assertiveness training, problem solving, and health education and promotion. The school should also provide workshops or continuing education programs for nurses who are already out of school.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for further research are suggested:

1. Replicate the study to support the results of this study by using different populations or samples.
 2. Study the need for a job stress management program for staff nurses and conduct a follow-up study after the stress management program has been used.
 3. Investigate the relationships among job stressors and burnout, using both longitudinal studies.
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