

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### Background and Significance of the Research Problem

The biggest challenge for the global healthcare system is the shortage of skilled human resource for health at all levels (Sinha & Sigamani, 2016). Internationally, there is an increasing number of inactive nurses and a steadily decreasing total number of nurses (Sato, 2016). A deficient nursing workforce and nursing shortage could decrease the quality of care and the safety of patients (Aiken et al., 2012; Aiken et al., 2014). In order to improve organizational effectiveness, many human resource managers search for the best method to improve organizational effectiveness. Subjective career success is a general topic of concern among human resource managers as well as a hot spot in academic research recently (Wang & Sun, 2012). According to the literature review, enhancing people's subjective career success level for an individual and organization is of great significance (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). For individuals who have a high level of subjective career success, they would not only increase their general confidence and enhance their psychological wellbeing (Laschinger, 2012), but also they would avoid their turnover intention (Laschinger, 2012). Ballout (2009) pointed out that individuals who obtain subjective career success have a higher level of satisfaction, which leads to higher levels of job involvement and job commitment. Thus they would increase their levels of work effectiveness. For organizations, according to the motivation theory by Korman, Witting-Berman, and Lang (1981), individuals who do not feel successful are likely to be less happy, and these negative feelings will affect their motivation (Jeenkool, 2004; Lambrou, Kontodimopoulos, & Niakas, 2010) and performance (Peluchette, 1993), which would result in lower organizational effectiveness. When individuals who feel successful are likely to be happier and be more motivated, their performance and organizational success increases. Nursing personnel plays a vital role in a hospital and nurses are the biggest group in the organization. Nurses' subjective career success is very important to the development of a hospital. Nurses who meet expectations

or career standards of their job will be satisfied which leads to a higher engagement with nursing work thus improving the quality of nursing care (Duan, 2016; Yin, 2012).

However, in China there are some barriers to nurses achieving their subjective career success. Long (2010) showed that there was a lack of support for nurses from hospitals such as training, continuing education, and scientific research projects. Nurses lack the opportunity to participate in decision-making and policy-making roles in a hospital. They felt less support from their superiors in motivating them to carry out their work or they felt they had received little positive feedback about their performance. Therefore, it is very important to improve nurses' perception of subjective career success in hospitals to improve organizational effectiveness.

Subjective career success is an individual's reaction and attitude with regard to his or her work and career. Gattiker and Larwood (1986) defined subjective career success as the individual's evaluation of achievements in his/her work experiences, which includes 1) job success, 2) inter-personal success, 3) financial success, 4) hierarchical success, and 5) life success. Job success refers to all positive results obtained from a job, like job satisfaction, career satisfaction, job performance, receiving developmental opportunities, management support as well as an emotional attachment to the job. Inter-personal success refers to personnel who have a good relationship with others, receive good performance evaluations and have their manager's confidence. Financial success refers to individuals who feel that their salary or benefits from their career are fair and equitable. When compared with other colleagues at the same level, all incomes are appropriate. Hierarchical success refers to the position or status advancement that the individuals feel is appropriate with their work responsibilities, wherein they are encouraged to move into a higher position and achieve career advancement in a given time. Life success refers to balance work and private life, and a feeling of happiness or wellbeing with one's overall life.

It is important that organizations provide a good working environment to encourage employees to contribute more to their jobs and help them in personal subjective career success and to encourage their employees' efforts to achieve the objectives of the organization (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). However, the Chinese nursing work environment is characterized by a heavy workload with a sizeable shortage of nurses (Yin,

2012). Compared to many countries, the nursing shortage is very serious in China (Cai & Zhou, 2009). In 2010, nearly 88% hospitals in China faced a nursing shortage (Chen & Li, 2010). Nurses must do rotating shift work and finish a heavy workload which means they have less time to think and tend to do their work in a hurry. Also they have less opportunities for advancement and career success (Lu, 2007). Because the Chinese government is allowing families to have a second child, many nurses who are overwhelmingly female in China will have a second child. Thus they will take advantage of maternity leave which the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security of China changed since 1 January 2016 to "female employees enjoy at least 98 days of maternity leave, increased 15 days if the dystocia (such as Caesarean birth), increase 15 days when multiple births (more than one child per birth)". Nurses taking maternity leave will create even more of a nursing shortage in China. (Wang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2014). Nursing is a very hard and stressful profession (Sherring & Knight, 2009). In China, 45% of nurses were dissatisfied with their present job, and 5% of nurses (9,698 nurses from 181 hospitals) reported an intention to leave (Zhang, You, Liu, & Wu, 2014). More than 50% of nurses were dissatisfied with their jobs in Guangdong Province (Liu, You, Chen, & Aiken, 2012). There were 43.85% Registered Nurses (RNs) who chose not to work as nurses, and 5.75% RNs intended to leave hospitals in Beijing (Guo, Zhou, & Ma, 2007). In Changsha City, studies found that nurses' job satisfaction was at a moderate level (Huang, Li, & Tan, 2008). In Kunming of Yunnan Province the overall job satisfaction was at a low level (Duan, 2016). In addition, only 51.08% of 200 nurses felt job success in two hospitals of Sichuan Province (Cui, Li, & Li, 2012). Judge et al. (1999) suggested that job satisfaction is the most important aspect in terms of subjective career success, individuals who are satisfied with many aspects of their current jobs are likely to consider their careers as particularly successful. Therefore, the above statistics of nurses' job dissatisfaction may show the linkage with subjective career success of nurses in China, as shown in the studies of Ji, Zhang, and Gong (2012) and Yin (2012) in that subjective career success was at a moderate level.

For nurses, having a good relationship with others is very important. However, it is a challenge for Chinese nurses to deal with interpersonal relationships with the nursing shortage and overload of work. In China, a nurse's position is always considered lower than a doctor's. Nurses are considered to just only provide injections, medicine, and do

daily life care chores for patients without special training. People think anyone can do it. Patients or family members always prefer to vent their dissatisfaction to the nurses rather than the doctors, especially when the treatment for the patient chosen by the doctor has a poor effect. This phenomenon seriously interferes with the establishment of good care relationship. Several researchers found disputes happened occasionally between nurses and patients (Huang, Zhang, & Li, 2013). And workplace violence has become an alarming phenomenon in hospitals in China. Ninety percent of health workers had experienced conflict with patients or their families at work among 1,129 health workers from 11 public tertiary hospitals in China (Liu, Zhao, Jiao, & Lu, 2015). Yin (2012) showed the inter-personal success level of nurses in Kunming was at a moderate level. Other recent studies (Feng & Tsai, 2012) reported that the hardest aspect of job was for nurses to maintain interpersonal relationships with colleagues. So it is important to improve the level of the nurses' inter-personal success in China.

For nurses who work in public hospitals in China, their main source of income are their salary and bonuses with some benefits. However, studies indicated that nurses are not satisfied with their income or the bonus distribution in China. In 2011, a survey of the National Nurses' Association of China showed that: most of the nurses believed that their income does reflect their labor; while 42% of the nurses thought that their pay was inadequate and they thought that it did not reflect the difference of the performance salary and job responsibilities. 62% of nurses consider their income as not high, and 59% of the nurses reported that their income does not equal their work efforts in four tertiary hospitals of Kunming (Yin, 2012).

Every nurse is eager to have the opportunity to be promoted but in China, "career plateau" (Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977) is a significant factor which hinders nurses' hierarchical success. Career plateau is the state in which people have a very small opportunity of further job promotion in this stage. In China, the traditional mode of the nursing organization structure limits the number of management positions, so most of the nurses cannot expect to be promoted (Hu, 2015). In Chinese hospitals, nurses have only two ways to be promoted: one way is become a manager from staff; another way to be promoted is moving from a low level professional title to a high professional title, for example, from nurse-in-charge to assistant chief senior nurse. Both ways require nurses

to put in extra work by fulfilling certain qualifications such as obtaining a graduate degree, publishing research articles, and gaining working experience.

In general, a person cannot meet the standard of subjective career success without family members' support and a happy life. Due to heavy workloads, high levels of stress and the rotating shifts of nursing work, nurses lack the time and energy to take good care of their own families (Zhang, 2007, as cited in Yin, 2012). Thus, it is difficult for nurses to keep a balance between their job and their personal life. Liu, Gao, and Ran (2013) showed that 88.7% nurses of 478 nurses from 3 tertiary hospitals and 3 secondary hospitals in Jingzhou of China were overworked and were not satisfied with their work/life balance. Thus, nurses feel less happy and less fulfilled. Chinese nurses may feel unhappy in their career since they have always endured these barriers in the work environment.

Yunnan, is an economically underdeveloped province located in southwest of China. According to the Bureau of Health of Yunnan (2015), at the end of 2014, there were 110,000 registered nurses, and the nurse to population ratio was 2.05:1,000 which was lower than the country's standard of 2.20:1,000 (Ministry of Health of China, 2015). The shortage problems are more serious in Yunnan Province, especially in Dali hospitals, where the nurse to population ratio is only 1.82:1,000. In general, Chinese nurses believed that for career advancement they need to take the position of management. The traditional mode of nursing organization structure limits the number of head nurses or nursing department managers so most nurses cannot expect to be promoted (Hu, 2015). In China, administrative title nurses are divided into five levels: director of nursing department, associate Director of nursing department, supervisor, head nurse, and staff nurse. However, in the People's hospitals of Dali, there is a lack of supervisor of nurse administrative title. It means there is a limited number of the head nurse or nursing department managers so nurses have less opportunity to be promoted which make future subjective career success less likely. There are 15 ethnic minorities in Dali, so most patients come from different minority nationalities with different languages and different habits. It is difficult to have a good communication between nurses and patients. In summary, the nurses in the hospitals of Dali are facing a lot of difficult situations, which indicates that there may be some problems to achieve the subjective career success.

In order to find a way to obtain subjective career success, researchers have found that core self-evaluation has been shown as a successful strategy to manage subjective career success individually (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Core self-evaluation is defined as a basic assessment that a person made about his/her ability, overall value and competence with four traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control. Self-esteem refers to a person's overall appraisal of his or her own worth. Generalized self-efficacy refers to an individual's estimate of his or her own ability to perform well and handle a variety of situations. Neuroticism refers to an enduring tendency to experience unpleasant emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression easily. Locus of control refers to a tendency for individuals to attribute life's events to their own doing or to outside forces beyond their control. (Judge et al., 1997). Individuals who have high scores on core self-evaluation are well adjusted, positive, self-confident, efficacious, and believes in his or her own agency. Those with low core self-evaluation may set low resource access targets (Erez & Judge, 2001) and for this reason feel their careers are less successful. Therefore, core self-evaluation plays an important role in enhancing employee's subjective career success.

Nurses' core self-evaluation level have been measured widely by researchers in foreign countries and China. In studies in Canada and Iran researchers found nurses' core self-evaluation was at a moderate level (Karatepe, Keshavarz, & Nejati, 2010; Laschinger, Wong, & Macdonald, 2013). In China, the results of research studies in Wenling, Harbin, Guangzhou City, and Zhejiang Province showed that the nurses' core self-evaluation was at a moderate level (Cai, Zhao, & Chen, 2012; Wu, Tong, Liang, & Jiang, 2014 ; Xu, Qi, Chen, & Hou, 2011; Zhong, Guo, & Guo, 2012). However, in Guangxi and Xi'an, researchers found that the nurses' core self-evaluation was at a high level (Peng, Li, Zhang & Zhang, 2016; Zhou, Cao, Jiang, & Xiao, 2014). Thus, the inconsistent findings by country and location in China is a gap of knowledge to explore core self-evaluation among nurses in Yunnan province.

In addition, the previous studies' showed a correlation between core self-evaluation and subjective career success. In Germany, Stumpp, Muck, Hülshager, Judge, and Maier (2010) showed that core self-evaluation correlated to three indicators of subjective career success: job satisfaction ( $r = 0.40, p < 0.01$ ); career satisfaction ( $r = .45, p < 0.01$ ); life

satisfaction ( $r = .42$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). In the United States, Ng and Feldman (2014) used a meta-analysis review of 191 empirical articles which were published over the past 30 years with 94,090 employees from 216 groups, and found that low core self-evaluation was negatively related to subjective career success ( $r = -.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In Israel, Ganzach and Pazy (2014) studies with 12,686 participants in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), revealed that there was no significant relationship ( $r = 0.0008$ ,  $P > 0.7$ ) between core self-evaluation and subjective career success. In China, Wang and Sun (2012) indicated that there was a positive relationship ( $r = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between core self-evaluation and subjective career success among 212 employees from three organizations in Beijing. In Zhejiang, Chen (2015) conducted a study among 226 employees of eight enterprises in which the findings showed that subjective career success was affected by core self-evaluation. Gattiker and Larwood (1986) suggested that job features and occupational self-concept (self-esteem and self-evaluated job qualifications) were correlated positively with subjective career success. Anderson (1981) commented that occupational self-concept was a subset of one's overall self-concept and people's beliefs about themselves in the workplace. So, the degree of people's own approval or disapproval of themselves as being capable can strongly impact their own subjective career success assessment. Individuals with high occupational self-concept will have a positive attitude and beliefs about themselves, which make future subjective career success more likely.

Previous studies have found the situations of nurses' core self-evaluation, subjective career success and the relationship between these two variables were inconsistent when comparing by countries or locations in China. Furthermore, the major gap identified in the literature review is that no research study has been found to examine the relationship between core self-evaluation and subjective career success among nurses in China. Based on these reasons, it is necessary to examine the relationship between core self-evaluation and subjective career success among nurses in China. The results of this study may provide information and evidence for nursing researchers, hospital, human resource managers and nursing administrators, and nursing educators.

## Research Objectives

1. To examine the core self-evaluation of nurses in the People's Hospitals of Dali, the People's Republic of China.
2. To examine subjective career success of nurses in the People's Hospitals of Dali, the People's Republic of China.
3. To examine the relationship between core self-evaluation and subjective career success of nurses in the People's Hospitals of Dali, the People's Republic of China.

## Research Questions

1. What is the level of core self-evaluation of nurses at the People's Hospitals of Dali, the People's Republic of China?
2. What is the level of subjective career success of by nurses at the People's Hospitals of Dali, the People's Republic of China?
3. Is there any relationship between core self-evaluation and subjective career success of nurses at the People's Hospitals of Dali, the People's Republic of China?

## Definition of Terms

The operational definition of terms used for this study include:

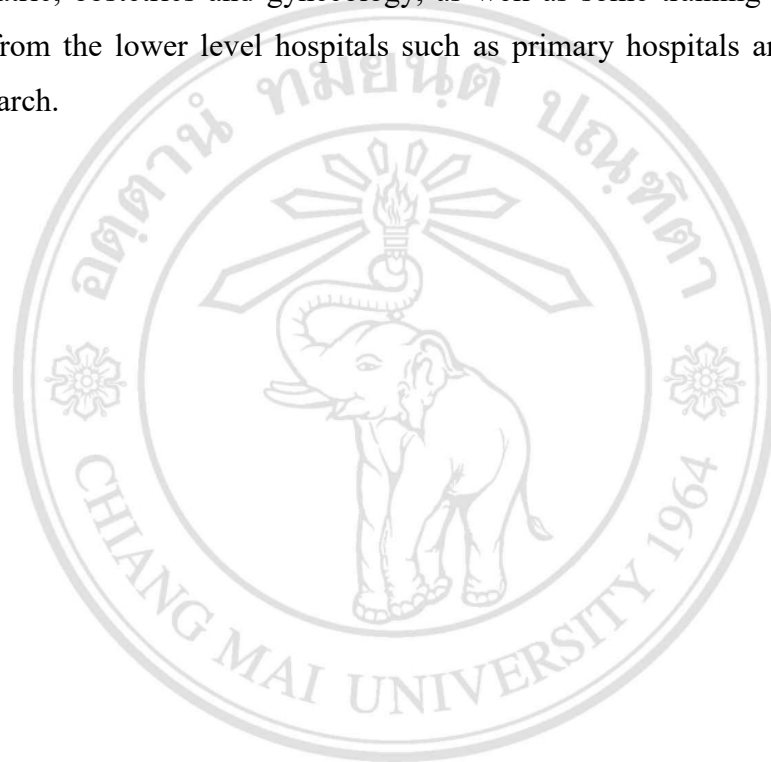
**Core self-evaluation (CSE)** is defined as a basic assessment that a nurse makes about her/his ability, overall value and competence (Judge, et al., 1997). Core self-evaluation was measured by a modified version of the Core Self-Evaluation Scale which was developed by Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen (2003) and modified and translated into Chinese by Du, Zhang, and Zhao (2012).

**Subjective career success (SCS)** is defined as a nurse's evaluation of achievements in his/her work experiences, which includes job success, inter-personal success, financial success, hierarchical success, and life success (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986). It is measured by a modified version of the Subjective Career Success Scale which was developed by Gattiker and Larwood (1986) and modified and translated into Chinese by Yin (2012).



**Nurses** refers to persons who graduated with a certificate from an approval nursing education institution, hold a registered nurse (RN) license granted by the Ministry of Health, the People's Republic of China, and are currently working as clinical nurses.

**The People's Hospitals of Dali.** The People's Hospitals of Dali are secondary government hospitals and has received the certification of upper second-class hospital from the Ministry of Health, P.R. China. It provides the following services: medical, surgical, pediatric, obstetrics and gynecology, as well as some training for healthcare professional from the lower level hospitals such as primary hospitals and conducting scientific research.



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