

The Impact of Work Stress on Turnover Intentions among Palliative Care Nurses in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Palliative care nurses are vulnerable to work stress because their role involves continuous exposure to deaths and family grief. Despite the importance of research on work stress among nurses, there is limited available information about work stress and turnover intention among palliative care nurses. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the impact of work stress on turnover intention among 126 palliative care nurses using a descriptive correlational design. A majority of the nurses had three or fewer years of experience. More than 60% of the nurses reported high and moderate levels of intentions to leave the workplace. Further, turnover intention was significantly correlated with work-stress ($r = 0.288$, $P < 0.01$; 2-tailed). A stressful work environment can lead to multiple negative consequences. Therefore, more attention must be paid to palliative care nurses because they are at a higher risk for work stress and turnover intention. Work-related strains can lead to many negative consequences including high rates of turnover among nurses. Nurse Managers can use these findings to make informed decisions about improving the work environment and devising strategies to reduce stress among nurses.

Keywords: palliative care nurses, work stress, turnover intention, death, family grief

1. Introduction

Palliative care services improve the quality of life of those who have life threatening conditions and other serious physical, psychological, and spiritual problems (World Health Organization, 2018). Palliative care nurses are vulnerable to work stress because their roles involve continuous exposure to deaths and family grief (Peters et al., 2012). Stress is an adverse reaction to extreme pressures and demands that are placed on an individual (Young, Schieman & Milkie, 2013).

Stressful work environments can contribute to multiple negative consequences such as headaches, sleep disturbances, anger outbursts, anxiety, insomnia, high blood pressure, and a weak immune system. It can also contribute to health conditions such as depression, obesity, and cardiovascular disease (Aycokk& Boyle, 2009). Work stress refers to the excessive pressure that is caused by an imbalance between work demands and one's abilities and knowledge (World Health Organization, 2018). Such a work environment can create an uncomfortable atmosphere that increases turnover intentions among nurses (Chiang & Lin, 2009). Further, work-related stressors affect job satisfaction and health outcomes (Young, Schieman & Milkie, 2013).

The intention to leave, which is also referred to as turnover intention, has been described as an employee's willingness or attempt to voluntarily resign from his or her workplace (Takase et al., 2017). Therefore, the intention to leave is an antecedent to actually leaving the workplace, and it has been described as a process that entails psychological, cognitive, and behavioral stages (Takase et al., 2017). Scholars have found that nonnursing responsibilities and levels of stress can increase turnover among nurses (Chiang & Lin, 2009).

Unfortunately, the quality of patient care can be compromised by high turnover rates among nurses (Moore, 2014). Many hospitals around the world have witnessed a sharp increase in turnover rates among nurses. In the

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United States, the turnover rate significantly increased from 13.5% in 2011 to 17.2% in 2015 (Colosi, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, the turnover rate reached 50% among Saudi registered nurses (Abu Zinadah, 2010).

These alarming numbers render it essential to investigate the strategies that can be implemented to maintain an adequate number of nurses, and consequently provide safe and high-quality care to patients (Moore, 2014). More attention must be paid to palliative care nurses as they are at a higher risk for work stress and turnover intention. Palliative care professionals do not prioritize the act of grieving over their losses. Indeed, in some cases, they may not grieve at all (Jones, 2005). The assimilation of “ungrieved” losses may become a burden that is too heavy to carry constant exposure to grief and death may lead to a “grief overload” (Rokach, 2005). Few studies have examined the association between work stress and turnover intention among palliative care nurses. In a recent study that Yang et al. (2017) conducted among palliative care nurses, work stress was found to influence nurses’ turnover intentions. They concluded that, in addition to factors such as age, gender, and societal and organizational issues, work stress is positively associated with nurses’ turnover intentions (Yang et al., 2017).

The existing literature on palliative care nurses in Saudi Arabia is limited. In a recent study that was conducted in Saudi Arabia, turnover intention was found to be higher among palliative care nurses who worked in oncology departments than other departments. In this study, job satisfaction was found to be an indicator of nurses’ turnover intentions (Dagameh, and Haddad, 2016). Therefore, further research is needed to examine the relationship between work stress and turnover intention among palliative care nurses.

Despite the importance of conducting research on work stress among nurses, there is limited information about the work stress and turnover intentions of palliative care nurses. Consequently, little is known about whether their levels of work stress and turnover intentions are higher than those of nurses who work in the other departments. Furthermore, there is no published study that has examined these variables among palliative care nurses in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study aimed to evaluate the levels of work stress and turnover intentions of palliative care nurses in one of the main hospitals in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the study also aimed to assess the impact of work stress on turnover intentions among palliative care nurses.

2. Methodology

Methodology: The study will be conducted at King Abdul-Aziz Medical City (KAMC) in Riyadh, KSA. KAMC is a tertiary care medical city that has three main hospitals which are King Fahad hospital (KFH), King Abdullah Specialist Children Hospital (KASCH), and King Abdul-Aziz Cardiac Centre (KACC). This study will be conducted mainly in palliative care units.

Study Design: This study utilizes a descriptive correlation design to examine the work stress and turnover intention among nurses in palliative care. Using a convenience sampling, pen and paper self-report questionnaires will be used to gather the data.

Sample: Sample size calculation software (Raosoft) was used to determine the sample size for this study. Using a total population of 185 palliative care nurses at the site of this study, a confidence interval of 95%, and an alpha of .05, the target sample size will be 126 nurse.

Instruments: For this study two scales with a total of 21 items will be used along with demographic questions. The time required to complete the survey is estimated to be 10-15 minutes. The two scales included in this survey are Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) and Work Related Strain Inventory(WRSI):

Demographic Variables: No identifying information will be gathered to maintain participant privacy. Demographic variables includes age, marital status, having children, level of education, and experience in palliative care unit, hours of working.

Turnover Intention Scale (TIS): Turnover Intention Scale developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, &Klesh (1983) will be used to measure nurses’ turnover intention. This Scale is a 3-item inventory scale with one reversed item. The scale had an established validity and had a reliability of .80.

Work Related Strain Inventory(WRSI): the WRSI developed by (Revicki,May, Whitley 1991) will be used to measure nurses’ turnover intention. This scale is an 18 items scale with 6 reversed items. This scale had an established validity and internal consistency reliability ranged from .85 to .90.

Data Analysis: All data were processed and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 20). Descriptive statistics, namely, means, standard deviations, frequencies, frequency distributions, and percentages were computed to describe and summarize the sample characteristics. Pearson's correlation coefficients

(r) were used to examine the relationship between variables. The p-value was used to examine the significance of the emergent correlation coefficient.

3. Results:

Descriptive analysis: A majority (> 50%) of the nurses had three or less years of work experience. Less than 2% of the sample was constituted by Saudi nationals; the remaining 98% were non-Saudi nurses. Only 11% of the nurses were men; the others were women. In term of age, 51% of the nurses were between the ages of 21 and 30 years. Only 2% of the nurses were above the age of 51 years. This information indicates that the palliative care nursing population is a young group with relatively few years of experience.

Inferential analysis: The Turnover Intention Scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.849$). However, the Work-Related Strain Inventory (WRSI), which consists of 6 reverse-scored items, demonstrated only acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.71$). Deleting one of the items marginally improved the internal consistency of this scale ($\alpha = 0.77$). This item was not deleted for the main analyses; therefore, the internal consistency coefficient of this scale was considered to be 0.71

Correlational analysis There was a significant correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).between the turnover intention and work related strains ($r=.288$, $P < .01$, 2-tailed) (Table 1)

Table 1: Correlations between turnover intention and work-related stress

	WS	TI
Pearson Correlation	1	.288**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
Pearson Correlation	.288**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	

There was a negative correlation between years of experience and turnover intention($r=-.213$, $P = .054$) indicating that as the number of experience years increased, the nurses turnover intention decreased (table 2).

Table 2: Correlations between turnover intention and years of experience:

	years of experience	TI
Pearson Correlation	1	-.213
Sig. (2-tailed)		.05*
N	101	101

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

In this study, 98% of the participants were non-Saudi nurses. Further, 11% of the nurses were men, and the rest were women. Their ages ranged from 21 to 30 years. Approximately 42% of the participants had 2 to 3 years of work experience. Additionally, 74.3% and 18.8% of the palliative care nurses reported that they had “moderate” and “high” levels of work stress, respectively; these results are consistent with past findings (Hackett et al., 2009). Specifically, it has been found that the organizational environment itself is a key stressor for palliative care and hospice nurses. Specific factors like inadequate resources, unrealistic job expectations, and high workloads were major contributors to stress. (Peters et al. 2012) attributed the significant relationship between stress and demographic characteristics to palliative care nurses’ continuous exposure to death and family grief.” This finding is consistent with the results of a study (Alomar, 2003) that was conducted among the Ministry of Health hospital staff in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The results showed that the level of work stress was not influenced by educational level, marital status, gender, or language. These findings contradict (Al-Makhaita, Sabra & Hafez’s 2014) finding that age and years of experience are negatively correlated with stress. However, the current study showed that there is no significant relationship between the demographic characteristics and level of work stress, In the present study, 63% of nurses reported high and moderate levels of turnover intentions; only 38% reported low levels of turnover intention. These results support the relationship that emerged between turnover intention and the level of work stress among palliative care nurses in the present study ($r = 0.288$, $p \leq 0.01$).

These findings are also consistent with our predictions. We observed that the stress that nurses experienced was attributable to the following: long working hours, job insecurity, lack of recognition, and working with terminally ill patients. Furthermore, there were no significant associations between demographic characteristics, turnover intention, and work stress among nurses in the present study. This finding contradicts (Flinkman, Isopahkala-Bouret & Salantera's 2013) observation that the young nurses are the most willing to leave their jobs. On the other hand, (Beecroft, Dorey & Wenten 2008) found that older nurses may be more likely to leave their jobs than younger nurses because they may have firmly established career goals and may consequently resign from jobs that do not facilitate the approximation of these goals.

In the present study, there was a negative correlation between the nurses' years of experience and turnover intention. Older nurses may prefer to continue working in their organizations because they are afforded fewer job opportunities than their younger counterparts. (Cortese 2012) found a weak and negative correlation between the intention to leave and age; in other words, older nurses reported lower intentions to leave the hospital than their younger counterparts. Similar results have been observed in many studies, whereby younger nurses have reported stronger intentions to leave their profession than older nurses.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Working with dying patients can increase the stressors that are experienced by palliative care nurses. The findings of this study can be used by nursing administrators to make informed decisions about policy development and practices. Nurses who are likely to leave the workplace due to stress must be targeted and provided with support in order to prevent their turnover. The results of this study also suggest that the factors that are associated with the specific departments to which nurses belong have implications for their levels of stress (e.g., palliative care nurses). Therefore, it is important for healthcare organizations and managers to provide support and training programs to palliative care nurses in order to help them cope with stress and reduce their vulnerability to many consequences of stress.

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