

### WORK-RELATED STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG STAFF NURSES

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#### ABSTRACT

Work-related stress among nurses is a significant global concern affecting both individual well-being and healthcare outcomes. Numerous studies indicate that nurses experience high levels of occupational stress due to factors such as heavy workload, long working hours, inadequate resources, emotional demands, and complex patient care situations. Elevated stress levels are strongly associated with burnout, fatigue, decreased job satisfaction, and increased turnover intention. Furthermore, stress negatively impacts nurses' physical and mental health, contributing to conditions such as depression, cardiovascular disorders, and reduced overall life satisfaction. Theoretical perspectives, including physiological and psychological models, emphasize the role of individual appraisal and coping mechanisms in stress experiences. Prolonged exposure to stressors can lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished professional performance, ultimately affecting the quality of patient care. However, effective coping strategies—such as building peer support networks, practicing mindfulness, prioritizing tasks, taking regular breaks, and seeking professional counselling—can help mitigate stress and enhance resilience. Addressing work-related stress through supportive organizational policies and individual coping mechanisms is essential to improve nurses' well-being, job satisfaction, and quality of care delivery.

**Keywords:** Work-related stress, Nurses, Burnout, Job satisfaction, Coping strategies, Mental health, Occupational stress, Quality of care.

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## INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have explored work stress among health care personnel in many different countries. Investigators have assessed work stress among professionals like medical technicians, radiation therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, physicians, and collections of health care staff across disciplines. Nurses' occupational stress in turn decreases job satisfaction, increases turnover rate, and reduces the quality of care provided. At different workplaces nurses are confronted with different job tasks, new working conditions and hence experience different sources of stress [Sharma P et al 2014 ].

The level of turnover intention was higher in nurses showing higher job stress, fatigue, and burnout and significantly higher in the group showing lower job satisfaction. The turnover intention of nurses showed a significant positive correlation with job stress, fatigue, and burnout but showed a negative correlation with job satisfaction. [Yeon-Hee L et al 2018]

Stress and its consequences on health has been a major research topic over the last decades. Psychological Stress is considered as a crucial factor in the onset, course and exacerbation of various diseases, e.g. depression, cardiovascular diseases, immune-related disorders, and it has been related to higher overall mortality [Nielsen NR,2008].

Overall, perceived stress is linked to reduced life satisfaction. While there is agreement on the substantial impact of stress on health, the conceptualization and assessment of stress, however, have not been consistent. In line with different definitions, the concept of stress has been assessed from environmental, biological, and psychological perspectives [Cohen S, 1995].

Besides the environmental and biological approach, the psychological approach has focused on the person's appraisal of the significance of the stressor (primary appraisal) and the individual coping abilities (secondary appraisal) within a person-environment transaction [Lazarus RS 1984].

Stress has been categorized as an antecedent or stimulus, as a consequence or response, and as an interaction. It has been studied from many different frameworks. For example, Selye proposed a physiological assessment that supports considering the association between stress and illness. Conversely, Lazarus and Folkman advocated a psychological view in which stress is "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing."

Stress is not inherently deleterious, however. Each individual's cognitive appraisal, their perceptions, and interpretations, gives meaning to events and determines whether events are viewed as threatening or positive.[ Lazarus RS, Folkman S. 1984] Personality traits also influence the stress equation because what may be overtaxing to one person may be exhilarating to another.[French JR, Caplan RD. 1972]

The nursing occupation has been documented as a stressful profession. In the modern environment, stress at work is a significant health issue for nurses. Stress at work may be damaging to a person's mental and physical health, and high levels of stress have been linked to low productivity and high rates of staff truancy. The American Institute of Stress states that up to 80% of work-related injuries and 40% of job turnover are directly related to stress [Sarafis P et al 2016].

Many people perceive nursing as a demanding profession with complex requirements. High job demands and a mix of excessive authority and responsibility have been determined to be some of the main causes of occupational stress in nursing personnel [Sveinsdottir H et al 2006].

A nurse's quality of life may be greatly impacted by occupational stress, which can also lower the standard of care provided. Friendly communication, the application of professional knowledge and abilities, close connections, skilled nursing, and compassion for others are all characteristics of the interpersonal practice known as caring [Finfgeld-Connett D 2008].

Work-related stress is a major issue for staff nurses, from factors like heavy workloads, limited resources, and emotional requirements. Common stressors include long hours, high patient ratios, and complex medical situations. This stress can lead to burnout and impact patient care.

Work related stress is associated with burnout, job satisfaction and physical as well as mental health outcomes [Kalliath T., Morris R.2002].

Stressors contributing to the experience of work related stress, including poor supervision, conflict with peers and patients, high job demands and overtime are all associated with one or more dimensions of burnout. The Maslach Burnout Model [Golembiewski R.T., Bordeau R.A., Muszenrider R.F., Luo H. 1966] states that prolonged exposure to environmental and situational stressors results in work related stress, leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a lack of personal development.

Similarly, work related stress resulting from stressors, such as higher workloads, as well as staff issues, including lack of resources, has been found to be associated with poor job satisfaction [Graham K., Davies B., Woodend K., Simpson J., Mantha S. 2011].

Spector attributes this to a mismatch between job expectations and actual working environments, which contributes to higher levels of work related stress and lower levels of job satisfaction [Spector P.E 1997].

Research confirms higher levels of job satisfaction within less stressful working environments. Stressors such as poor patient outcomes, conflict with peers, high workload and job demands as well as poor supervision and lack of support are all associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes [Piko B.F. 2003].

Cannon's stress theory [Cannon W.B.1939] explains this response as an imbalance in homeostasis, whereby prolonged exposure to stressors results in a breakdown of the biological system.

#### **Coping strategies that help include:**

- **Building a support network among colleagues:** Building a support network among colleagues is a key coping strategy for work-related stress among staff nurses. Sharing experiences and challenges with peers fosters emotional support, practical advice, and a sense of belonging. Regular team debriefs or social interactions can strengthen these bonds. Colleagues understand the job's demands, making them a valuable resource for venting, problem-solving, and stress relief.

- **Practicing mindfulness or relaxation techniques:** Practicing mindfulness or relaxation techniques helps staff nurses manage work-related stress. Techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or yoga reduce anxiety and improve focus. Even short mindfulness breaks during shifts can lower stress levels and boost emotional resilience. Regular practice enhances overall well-being and job performance (Sharma & Patel, 2024).

- **Setting boundaries and prioritizing tasks:** Setting boundaries and prioritizing tasks helps staff nurses manage work-related stress. By focusing on urgent tasks and delegating when possible, nurses can reduce overwhelm. Setting clear boundaries around work hours and breaks protects personal time and prevents burnout. Effective prioritization and limit-setting improve work-life balance and job satisfaction (Gupta & Chawla, 2023).

- **Taking regular breaks:** Taking regular breaks is a simple yet effective coping strategy for work-related stress among staff nurses. Short breaks during shifts help recharge energy, improve focus, and reduce burnout risk. Stepping away from patient care for a few minutes can lower stress levels and boost productivity. Nurses who prioritize breaks tend to have better mental health and job satisfaction (Jain & Desai, 2022).

- **Seeking professional counselling or support:** Seeking professional counselling or support is a proactive coping strategy for work-related stress among staff nurses. Talking to a therapist or counsellor helps process emotions, develop coping skills, and address burnout. Many hospitals offer employee assistance programs with confidential counselling services. Nurses who seek support tend to manage stress better and maintain their well-being (Patel & Mehta, 2021).

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Work-related stress among nurses is a critical issue that adversely affects their physical and mental health, job satisfaction, and the quality of patient care. High workload, emotional demands, and inadequate support systems contribute significantly to stress and burnout. However, the adoption of effective coping strategies and supportive work environments can help reduce stress levels and improve overall well-being. Therefore, it is essential for healthcare organizations to implement stress management interventions and promote a healthy work culture to enhance nurses' performance and patient care outcomes.

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