



Examination of socio-demographics and job satisfaction in Australian registered nurses

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Abstract

Background: The results of the few studies found investigating relationships between socio-demographic variables and job satisfaction in nurses are mixed. Nevertheless some evidence exists which indicates that some socio-demographic variables are related to nurses' job satisfaction. Moreover reports indicate that job satisfaction is linked to the retention of nurses. Relationships between socio-demographics and job satisfaction of Australian nurses are examined in the current study.

Aim: To examine relationships between socio-demographic factors and job satisfaction and identify if these factors predicted job satisfaction levels in Australian nurses.

Methods: A cross sectional survey was conducted of 2000 Australian registered nurses who were at the time members of an industrial and professional organisation. The nurses were randomised and stratified according to gender and were asked to answer questions on a socio-demographic questionnaire developed by the researcher.

Results: The majority of respondents showed positive job satisfaction scores. Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) found the covariates age, years of experience and years in current job were all moderately to highly positively correlated with each other (all $r > 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), however there were no significant interactions between these covariates and Job Satisfaction. Multivariable analysis found significant positive relationships existed between job satisfaction, specialty area and health sector.

Conclusions: Specialty area and health sector showed significant associations with job satisfaction in nurses. These variables should be considered by governments, nursing, organisational leaders and policy makers when developing future policies and strategies aimed at retention. These variables should be investigated further in relation to nursing job satisfaction.

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Introduction

There is currently a global nursing shortage, which is compromising the future goals of improving health and well-being (International Council of Nurses {ICN}, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2007; WHO, 2006). Moreover, the effects of demographic factors in Australia such as the aging workforce (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare {AIHW}, 2010; Schofield, 2007) and other socio-demographic factors such as retirement; an increase in mobility of nurses between occupations; a slowing in the labour market; a decline in undergraduate commencements; increased average age of new nursing graduates and difficulties with retention will continue to have an effect upon this shortage in Australia. Meanwhile, a careful balance of both policy initiatives and recruitment of new nurses is required to improve nursing retention in order to support the aging population (Schofield, 2007).

Reports suggest improving nurses' job satisfaction may improve the quality of nursing care to patients (Aiken, Clarke, & Sloane, 2000; Oulton, 2006; Shorr, 2000). Moreover it has been found that job satisfaction is linked to workforce participation and retention (Boykin, Schoenhofer, Smith, St. Jean, & Aleman, 2003). In Australia it is reported that there are 30,000 qualified nurses no longer working in the healthcare system (New South Wales Nurses Association, 2007), while Oulton (2006) reported that current nursing shortages vary as a result of certain socio-demographic variables including type of nurse, geographic, location, sector, service and organisation. This report revealed that there is not only a real shortage but also a pseudo-shortage (i.e., enough nurses may be available, but not enough are willing to work in nursing) (Oulton, 2006).

To date only a few studies have reported relationships between some socio-demographic variables, and job satisfaction in Australian registered nurses. Furthermore there is limited information available on the perceived levels of job satisfaction of registered nurses in Australia. This current study aimed to identify levels of job satisfaction in Australian registered nurses and also whether specific socio-demographic variables affect job satisfaction as measured by the Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985) in this population.

Literature review

A key challenge for policy makers in health services is the staff shortages within the health workforce (ICN, 2007). A recent Health Workforce Australia (HWA) report in 2012 has confirmed that there is going to be an expected shortfall of almost 110,000 nurses by 2025. Similarly there is also a nursing shortage projected in the United States of America (USA) of between 300,000 and 1,000,000 registered nurses by 2020 (Juraschek, Zhang, Ranganathan, & Lin, 2012). The main socio-demographic factors identified as significantly relating to this shortage is the aging population and aging workforce (Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Lake, & Cheney, 2008; Juraschek et al., 2012). These reports indicate an urgent need to identify and develop policy measures and strategies by governments, employers, the health sector, and the higher education and training sector to summon

appropriate actions raised by these reports (HWA, 2012; Juraschek et al., 2012) to improve nursing recruitment and retention. The HWA report also insists that reform is needed in how nurses are trained along with reform that improves retention in the workplace such as providing nurses with the support necessary to be able to perform the range of responsibilities for which they are trained (HWA, 2012).

Furthermore it has been found that reform interventions offering good professional development opportunities and better pay which are reflected in the career structure to younger, well-educated nurses, may reduce turnover. It is recognised that these nurses are otherwise likely to change their employer or even, leave the profession. Additionally policies that attract older nurses back to work such as retraining and flexibility in rostering may offer workforce stability. Location of work, e.g. working in rural areas can be exigent in relation to travelling, social restrictions and accommodation, etc., which can affect where nursing staff choose to work (ICN, 2007). The challenge for health systems is to identify and implement strategies that meet the needs of the workers and to understand that it is unlikely that one package will be suitable for all organisations and contexts (ICN, 2007).

An early United States study found relationships exist between work satisfaction, employee performance and client outcomes in human services (Spector, 1985), whilst other studies investigating job satisfaction have found dissatisfaction among nurses is a major factor contributing to the nursing shortage (Aiken, Clarke, & Sloane, 2002; Porter, 2010). Furthermore job satisfaction has been found to be linked to workforce participation and retention (Boykin et al., 2003).

Job dissatisfaction is occurring at a time when nurse labour market reports also indicate that recruitment of nurses are insufficient to meet future health care requirements (Aiken et al., 2008; HWA, 2012). The current nursing shortage has also meant there are inadequate staffing levels required for the provision of safe and effective care in hospitals. Ultimately this effects nursing outcomes and patient mortality (Aiken et al., 2008; Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, & Silber, 2002). Meanwhile other studies have found nurses' relationships with patients can be compromised if they are dissatisfied with their work and this may result in them distancing themselves from patients thus affecting patient care (Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, et al., 2002; Begat, Ellefsen, & Severinsson, 2005).

A small number of Australian and international studies have identified that relationships exist between some socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, years of experience, years in current job, specialty area, marital status, education qualifications, geographical location and job satisfaction (Aiken, Clarke, & Sloane, 2002; Al-Hussami, 2008; Hegney, McCarthy, Rogers-Clark, & Gorman, 2002; Li & Lambert, 2008; Shader, Broome, Broome, West, & Nash, 2001; Shields & Ward, 2001; Wade et al., 2008). More recently a meta-analysis investigating nurses' job satisfaction was performed (Zangaro & Soeken, 2007). Their results found nurses working in specialty areas tended to have clearer role expectations and sought "more challenging jobs". It was reported nurses with more years of experience have higher education levels and became authorities

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