



Prevalence and predictors of compassion fatigue, burnout and compassion satisfaction among oncology nurses: A cross-sectional survey



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 September 2015

Received in revised form 23 January 2016

Accepted 27 January 2016

Keywords:

Burnout

Compassion fatigue

Compassion satisfaction

Cross-sectional survey

Oncology nurses

Predictors

ABSTRACT

Background: Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide. Given the complexity of caring work, recent studies have focused on the professional quality of life of oncology nurses. China, the world's largest developing country, faces heavy burdens of care for cancer patients. Chinese oncology nurses may be encountering the negative side of their professional life. However, studies in this field are scarce, and little is known about the prevalence and predictors of oncology nurses' professional quality of life.

Objectives: To describe and explore the prevalence of predictors of professional quality of life (compassion fatigue, burnout and compassion satisfaction) among Chinese oncology nurses under the guidance of two theoretical models.

Design: A cross-sectional design with a survey.

Settings: Ten tertiary hospitals and five secondary hospitals in Shanghai, China.

Participants: A convenience and cluster sample of 669 oncology nurses was used. All of the nurses worked in oncology departments and had over 1 year of oncology nursing experience. Of the selected nurses, 650 returned valid questionnaires that were used for statistical analyses.

Methods: The participants completed the demographic and work-related questionnaire, the Chinese version of the Professional Quality of Life Scale for Nurses, the Chinese version of the Jefferson Scales of Empathy, the Simplified Coping Style Questionnaire, the Perceived Social Support Scale, and the Chinese Big Five Personality Inventory brief version. Descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, one-way analysis of variance, simple and multiple linear regressions were used to determine the predictors of the main research variables.

Results: Higher compassion fatigue and burnout were found among oncology nurses who had more years of nursing experience, worked in secondary hospitals and adopted passive coping styles. Cognitive empathy, training and support from organizations were identified as significant protectors, and 'perspective taking' was the strongest predictor of compassion satisfaction, explaining 23.0% of the variance. Personality traits of openness and conscientiousness were positively associated with compassion satisfaction, while neuroticism was a negative predictor, accounting for 24.2% and 19.8% of the variance in compassion fatigue and burnout, respectively.

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Conclusions: Oncology care has unique features, and oncology nurses may suffer from more work-related stressors compared with other types of nurses. Various predictors can influence the professional quality of life, and some of these should be considered in the Chinese nursing context. The results may provide clues to help nurse administrators identify oncology nurses' vulnerability to compassion fatigue and burnout and develop comprehensive strategies to improve their professional quality of life.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Owing to increased cancer incidence and a growing staff shortage, Chinese oncology nurses may be vulnerable to work-related stresses and face challenges to keep their professional quality of life.
- Extant models and literatures have demonstrated that diverse demographic and work-related factors, the variables of empathy, personality, coping style, and social support might act as potential predictors to the three constructs of professional quality of life (compassion fatigue, burnout and compassion satisfaction).
- There is a paucity of literatures exploring the prevalence and predictors of professional quality of life among Chinese oncology nurses.

What this paper adds

- Chinese oncology nurses with more years of clinical nursing experience, those worked in secondary hospitals, and those adopted passive coping were found to have higher level of compassion fatigue and burnout.
- Cognitive empathy, relevant training and support from organizations were identified as significant protectors to increase compassion satisfaction and decrease burnout.
- Nurses with personality traits of openness and conscientiousness reported more compassion satisfaction, while neurotic nurses showed lower level of compassion satisfaction and higher level of burnout and compassion fatigue.

1. Introduction

Cancer is a leading cause of death around the globe, accounting for 22% of all non-communicable disease deaths in 2012 (World Health Organization, 2013). In China, approximately 3.5 million people are diagnosed with cancer every year (Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). The increased incidence clearly requires a greater number of experienced oncology nurses, but a growing staff shortage is a serious problem in Chinese nursing (Yun et al., 2010).

Cancer patients experience long-term suffering and manifest diverse symptoms (Quinal et al., 2009). The deterioration of their health and repeated hospital admissions usually cause physical and psychological agony for the patients (Bush, 2009). Therefore, it is inevitable that oncology nurses witness all of this suffering and offer necessary nursing care and psychological supports. Moreover, the loss of a patient may be an emotional shock for the nurses, because a mutual caring relationship is

gradually established (Fetter, 2012). All these factors can greatly affect incumbent oncology nurses.

The term “professional quality of life” refers to “the quality one feels in relation to their work as a helper” (Stamm, 2010) and covers both positive and negative aspects. It can reflect the comprehensive quality of caring work that oncology nurses experience. However, most studies in China have focused on the subjects of burnout, turnover rate, and similar issues among oncology nurses, and few studies have examined the professional quality of life in this population. Given the significance of this topic, the aim of this study is to investigate the prevalence and potential predictors of the three aspects of professional quality of life among Chinese oncology nurses to deepen our knowledge of work-related stress and help nursing administrators focus on the well-being of the individuals within this special group.

2. Literature review

2.1. Current situation of oncology nursing in China

Chinese cancer patients and their relatives usually try their best to seek positive treatments upon receiving a cancer diagnosis. Because of the current medical system and less-developed hospice care situation in China, many cancer patients in terminal stages choose tertiary or secondary hospitals for medical services. Both choices lead to a high demand for oncology nursing care. In this context, institutions have begun to train oncology clinical nurse specialists; however, there is still a scarcity of these professionals (Xu and Wang, 2015). Most Chinese oncology nurses start working in this specialty after only a short-term orientation training. Their relatively lower average age and higher turnover rate could further increase the instability of the current oncology nursing system (Yun et al., 2010). Moreover, in mainland China, death education for oncology nurses is insufficient, which explains why many oncology nurses have reported difficulty in managing the deaths of their patients (Cui et al., 2011).

2.2. Three constructs of professional quality of life

Professional quality of life has three constructs: compassion fatigue and burnout are considered negative aspects, and compassion satisfaction is considered positive. The professional quality of life of nurses has attracted attention from nursing scholars, and related studies have covered a wide range of topics, such as exploring predictors, and developing instruments and interventions (Flarity et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2015).

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