



# The effects of authentic leadership, six areas of worklife, and occupational coping self-efficacy on new graduate nurses' burnout and mental health: A cross-sectional study



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** New nurse burnout has personal and organizational costs. The combined effect of authentic leadership, person-job fit within areas of worklife, and occupational coping self-efficacy on new nurses' burnout and emotional wellbeing has not been investigated.

**Objectives:** This study tested a model linking authentic leadership, areas of worklife, occupational coping self-efficacy, burnout, and mental health among new graduate nurses. We also tested the validity of the concept of interpersonal strain at work as a facet of burnout.

**Design:** A cross-sectional national survey of Canadian new graduate nurses was conducted.

**Participants:** Registered nurses working in direct patient care in acute care settings with less than 3 years of experience were selected from provincial registry databases of 10 Canadian provinces. A total of 1009 of 3743 surveyed new graduate nurses were included in the final sample (useable response rate 27%).

**Methods:** Participants received a mail survey package that included a letter of information, study questionnaire, and a \$2 coffee voucher. To optimize response rates non-responders received a reminder letter four weeks after the initial mailing, followed by a second survey package four weeks after that. Ethics approval was obtained from the university ethics board prior to starting the study. Descriptive statistics and scale reliabilities were analyzed. Structural equation modelling with maximum likelihood estimation was used to test the fit between the data and the hypothesized model and to assess the factor structure of the expanded burnout measure.

**Results:** The hypothesized model was an acceptable fit for the data ( $\chi^2(164) = 1221.38$ ;  $\chi^2$  ratio = 7.447; CFI = .921; IFI = .921; RMSEA = .08). All hypothesized paths were significant. Authentic leadership had a positive effect on areas of worklife, which in turn had a positive effect on occupational coping self-efficacy, resulting in lower burnout, which was associated with poor mental health.

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**Conclusions:** Authentic leaders may play an important role in creating positive working conditions and strengthening new nurses' confidence that help them cope with job demands, thereby protecting them from developing burnout and poor mental health. Leadership training to develop supervisors' authentic leadership skills may promote the development of person-job fit, thereby increasing occupational self-efficacy and new nurses' wellbeing.

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### What is already known about the topic?

- The new graduate nurse transition to professional practice can be stressful for newcomers to the profession, leading to early career burnout and decreased emotional well-being.
- Nurse managers' authentic leadership behaviours have been associated with healthy work environments and positive work and health outcomes among new graduate nurses.

### What this paper adds

- Our findings suggest that authentic leaders play an important role in creating working conditions that optimize the match between new graduate nurses' expectations and the reality of the work environment (AWL match) and strengthen new nurses' confidence in their ability to cope with the demands of their jobs, thereby protecting them from burnout development and poor mental health.
- Our results suggest that an expanded model of burnout recently proposed by Borgogni and colleagues (2012) incorporating interpersonal strain at work in addition to emotional exhaustion and cynicism provides a more comprehensive description of new graduate burnout.

## 1. Introduction

The demographic profile of the nursing workforce is shifting as a greater number of nurses approach retirement and increasing numbers of new graduates enter the workforce to take their place ([Canadian Institute of Health Information, 2013](#)). The transition process from student to practicing nurse can be stressful for newcomers to the profession and many struggle to build confidence in meeting job demands, often leading to burnout, a sustained response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at work ([Maslach and Leiter, 1997](#)), and, subsequently, poor mental health ([Laschinger and Grau, 2012](#); [Laschinger et al., 2010](#); [Peterson et al., 2008](#); [Rudman and Gustavsson, 2011](#)). In addition to the personal toll of burnout on nurses' health, there is also evidence to suggest that early career burnout in the first two years of practice influences new nurses' desire to leave the profession ([Beecroft et al., 2008](#)). Job and career turnover are costly for the healthcare system, resulting in lost productivity and per nurse replacement costs that have been estimated to be \$21,514 CAD ([O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2006](#)) which adjusted for inflation would be ~\$25,340 in

2014 ([US Department of Labor, 2014](#)). Given the personal and organizational costs of burnout, it is essential to provide new nurses with the support needed to develop confidence in their professional skills during this crucial transition period to prevent burnout and its negative consequences.

Leaders can make a difference in facilitating new graduate nurse transitions by creating environments that promote self-confidence and decrease stress and potential burnout. Past research has shown that empowering leadership styles such as authentic leadership can help new graduate nurses feel engaged and supported in their jobs ([Giallonardo et al., 2010](#); [Laschinger et al., 2013](#)) and are associated with lower levels of burnout ([Laschinger et al., 2012](#)). By developing positive, honest relationships with new nurses, leaders provide a supportive workplace that optimizes the fit between new graduate nurses' workplace expectations and their experience at work as a place where learning can occur and self-confidence can grow, thereby strengthening their intrapersonal resources. One such resource is occupational coping self-efficacy which refers to employees' appraisal and confidence that they can handle the demands of their job ([Pisanti et al., 2008](#)). Higher levels of occupational coping self-efficacy have been shown to be related to lower levels of burnout among nurses ([Pisanti et al., 2008](#)). To our knowledge no studies have examined how authentic leadership may directly or indirectly influence new graduate nurses' occupational coping self-efficacy, and how these factors together influence burnout and mental health. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to test a model linking supervisor authentic leadership behaviours with new graduate nurses' person-job fit, occupational coping self-efficacy, burnout, and mental health in the first three years of practice.

In this study we used an expanded model of burnout described by [Borgogni et al. \(2012\)](#) that incorporates interpersonal strain at work as a component of burnout, in addition to the two core components (emotional exhaustion and cynicism) originally described by [Maslach and Jackson \(1981\)](#). Interpersonal strain at work is defined as psychological disengagement from colleagues at work in response to overwhelming social and emotional demands. This expanded model may capture a more comprehensive description of new graduate nurses' burnout than studies to date, given research suggesting that positive workplace relationships are important to new graduate nurses' transition to the workplace ([Bowles and Candela, 2005](#)). Therefore a second aim of this study was to examine the validity of this model in a previously unstudied population – new graduate nurses.

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