



Positive benefits of caring on nurses' motivation and well-being: A diary study about the role of emotional regulation abilities at work



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ABSTRACT

Background: Recent research reveals that not all job demands have negative effects on workers' well-being and suggests that the negative or positive effects of specific job demands depend on the occupational sector. Specifically, emotional job demands form the heart of the work for nurses and for this reason they can be interpreted by nurses as a challenge that promotes motivation and well-being among these professionals, especially if personal and job resources become available.

Objectives: The study had two objectives. First, to examine whether daily emotional demands within a nursing work context have a positive effect on nurses' daily motivation at work (vigour) and well-being at home (vitality and positive affect). Second, to explore whether this positive effect could be enhanced by nurses' emotional regulation abilities.

Design: This research used a diary design to explore daily experiences and to analyze how variations in specific job or personal characteristics can affect levels of motivation and well-being across days.

Participants: Fifty-three nurses working in different Spanish hospitals and primary health care centres completed a general questionnaire and a diary booklet over 5 consecutive working days in two different moments, after work and at night ($N = 53$ participants and $N = 265$ observations).

Results: In line with our hypotheses, multi-level analyses revealed that, on the one hand, day-level emotional demands at work had a positive effect on vigour at work and on vitality at home. On the other hand, analyses showed that nurses with higher emotional regulation abilities have more motivation at work and well-being at home when they have to face high emotional demands at work, showing a *spill over* effect after work.

Conclusions: These findings support the idea that emotional demands from the nursing profession can act as challenges which promote motivation and well-being, especially if internal emotional resources become available.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Several studies show that job demands are positively associated with emotional exhaustion, while personal and job resources are positively related with engagement at work.
- Recent research shows that specific job demands (e.g. emotional demands) may be interpreted as positive challenges depending on the occupational sector. Moreover, positive effects from job demands may be attributed to the presence of personal and job resources.
- Job demands effects spill over into the non-work domain and continue their influence on the individual after the end of the working day.

What this paper adds

- This study highlights the importance of emotional job demands within a nursing context to promote nurses' daily motivation and well-being. Specifically, emotional job demands were positively associated with vigour at work and vitality at night.
- This positive effect is enhanced by nurses' emotional regulation abilities. Specifically, lower levels of emotional interference promote a higher positive association between emotional demand and vigour at work. Moreover, emotional clarity and emotional control allow nurses to achieve higher levels of vitality and positive affect at home at night when they have to face emotional demands at work.
- Findings draw the attention to the importance of considering emotional aspects from nursing profession and workers to explain their motivation and well-being.

1. Introduction

Nursing is considered to be a stressful profession because it requires coping with high emotional, cognitive and physical demands (McVicar, 2003). Continued exposure to these demands is associated with stress, burnout and fatigue (Garrosa et al., 2008; Winwood et al., 2006), among other mental and physical problems. Nevertheless, helping others and working closely with people in need is a great source of motivation for nurses, which can also have many benefits (McCabe et al., 2005; McQueen, 2004). The desire to care for others and offering compassion are often motives to choose nursing profession and form part of the “ideal of nurse” that usually focuses on caring. Caring is perceived by nurses like a competence to be developed and like a source of challenge, motivation and satisfaction (Morgan and Lynn, 2009).

In this respect, little is known about how caring for patients is related motivation and well-being of nurses. For example, a recent study of Bakker and Sanz-Vergel (2013) shows how nurses' self-efficacy and optimism predict work engagement only in weeks when emotional demands were higher. This was not the case for work pressure that was perceived as a hindrance by nurses in order to fulfil their work (Janssen et al., 1999). Similar results were reported by De Jonge et al. (2008) in a study with nurses and other health employees, who found that

high emotional demands predict creativity and work motivation when there are job resources available. These studies suggest that emotional demands could be interpreted by nurses as a challenge, leading to work engagement and positive experiences, whereas other demands (e.g. physical demands) could be interpreted as serious hindrances that lead to emotional exhaustion and lack of well-being (Crawford et al., 2010). Thus, it seems that emotional demands can have favourable effects on well-being among nurses. Therefore, the first objective of this study is to explore the daily role of emotional demands in the nursing profession when predicting high levels of daily vigour at work, and vitality and well-being at home.

One factor that could explain that emotional demands bring forth well-being and motivation among nurses is the availability of personal and job resources to deal with them (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013; De Jonge et al., 2008). In this sense, emotional abilities to manage emotional aspects related to work could be also a significant predictor of professional and personal well-being (Augusto Landa et al., 2008). Previous studies suggest that emotional regulation at work is an important factor to predict health indices, such as workers' mental and psychical health (Donaldson-Feilder and Bond, 2004), their positive affectivity (Liu et al., 2010), emotional exhaustion (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2012) and work engagement (Bond et al., 2013). We will examine how emotional regulation can promote or inhibit the positive effect of these emotional demands. Because nursing work has a high emotional component, we expect that nurses' available emotional abilities will be a significant element to achieve optimal levels of personal and professional functioning (Cadman and Brewer, 2001). Thus, the second objective in this study is to explore how emotional regulation abilities can promote the positive effect of emotional demands on the daily motivation and well-being of nurses (*boosting effects*).

This study contributes to research in various ways. First, we add to the limited number of daily studies examining the positive impact of emotional demands on motivation and well-being among nurses on a daily level. Second, we analyze the way in which different emotional regulation abilities can enhance this relationship, so that it is possible to find out the specific role of each one. Finally, to achieve a more complete picture of the emotional regulation between emotional job demands and well-being, the present study examines on the one hand a job-related outcome (i.e. vigour at work) and on the other hand well-being outcomes at home (i.e. vitality and positive affect). In this way, we can see how the effects of emotional job demands are maintained from work to home (*spill over effect*).

1.1. Emotional demands, motivation and well-being in nursing profession

For over a decade, in the nursing profession there has been a more holistic view in relation to care offered to patients, which involves closer relationships with them (Williams, 2001). Caring is an essential characteristic of

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