Original Article

Correlation between burnout and professional value in Chinese oncology nurses: A questionnaire survey

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: To investigate the relationship between job burnout and professional value in oncology nurses.
Methods: The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Nurse Professional Values Scale (NPVS) were administered to nurses ($n = 328$) at the Cancer Hospital of Jiangsu Province, China, and the correlation between job burnout and professional value was calculated.
Results: The scores (mean ± standard deviation) of emotional exhaustion (25.32 ± 12.37), depersonalization (6.93 ± 5.28), and personal accomplishment (30.25 ± 8.96) were measured, indicating a high level of burnout among oncology nurses. Also measured, were the four domains of professional value: caring (36.39 ± 5.73), actionist (21.17 ± 4.85), responsibility freedom and safety (17.95 ± 2.96), and reliability (11.44 ± 1.98). Job burnout and caring were positively correlated ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that caring was the number one concern of oncology nurses.
Clinical implication: The prevalence of job burnout in oncology nurses is high, and this could be improved by increasing perception of professional value. It is urgent for managers to strengthen professional value education and to take strategies that reduce job burnout, which is important for the overall quality and safety of nursing.

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1.   Background

The concept of job burnout, a prolonged psychosomatic response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at work, was introduced in 1974 by US psychologist Herbert Freudenberger [1]. The three core dimensions of job burnout are emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (D), and feelings of decreased personal accomplishment (PA) [2]. Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of fatigue and weakness at work; depersonalization is the loss of personal identity; and personal accomplishment is feeling productive and adequate and coping successfully [3].

Nurses are affected both mentally and physically at work, and they are particularly vulnerable to job burnout. Nurse burnout can be further differentiated based on clinical duties or specialty [4,5]. Health care staff working in an oncology clinic, especially oncology nurses, are under high risk of job burnout [6], but currently there are few studies available regarding job burnout in these nurses.

There are a number of studies detailing factors related to job burnout. These factors can be categorized into professional traits, social organization traits, and personal traits [7—9]. Although job burnout among nurses is well-documented, few studies have investigated the relationship between professional belief (such as professional value) and job burnout. Altun et al. showed that professional value, the principle that guides decisions and action in a career, is an important factors influencing job burnout [10]. Professional values are a collection of beliefs and attitudes that consist of recognition, feelings, and actions. It is a reflection of ones' profession value. At the core of effective nurse' disposition are a positive professional attitude and professional values. Cancer nurses are more likely than other nurses to be confronted with stressors at work [11—13]. Sources of stress include complications of advanced cancer patients, gaps between technology advances and nursing skills, and frequency of death. Taken together, these factors make oncology nurses susceptible to job burnout.

Here, we investigated the level of job burnout and professional value in oncology nurses and explored the correlation between job burnout and professional values.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Nurses directly involved in the clinical care of cancer patients at the Cancer Hospital of Jiangsu Province, China who volunteered to participate in this study were recruited to complete the questionnaire survey. In total, 352 nurses met the inclusion criteria, and 328 responded, yielding a response rate of 93.1%.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Maslach burnout inventory (MBI)
The MBI was designed to measure three aspects of job burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment [14]. The 22 items of the MBI measured the frequency and intensity of feelings associated with nursing services. Responses for each item ranged from 0 to 6. Aggregated sample scores were coded as low, moderate, or high according to predetermined cutoff points (Maslach norms). In this way, the pooled level of job burnout was calculated, and the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83. The Chinese version of the MBI is a reliable and valid scale for measuring burnout.

2.2.2. Nurse professional values scale (NPVS)
The NPVS is an established instrument for the measurement of nurses' professional values. The Chinese version of NPVS used in this study was previously translated and verified by Chen Tian-yan [15]. The Chinese version of this scale consisted of 26 items that covered the following domains: caring, actionist, responsibility freedom and safety, and reliability. The score of each item ranged from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). High scores indicated a high level of professional values. Overall, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90, and thus, the Chinese version of the NPVS can be considered a reliable and valid scale.

2.2.3. Social-demographic information
A social-demographic questionnaire was used to collect information about participant gender, age, marital status, level of education, work experience, duty, professional title, and the way to hold a post.

2.3. Procedure

The study was approved by the Nursing Department and the Ethics Committee of our hospital. A descriptive, correlation study design was used, and respondents were evaluated utilizing anonymous self-reported questionnaires. The questionnaires were delivered to nurses by researchers and collected 1 week later.

2.4. Data analysis

Data was analyzed using Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) software (Chicago, IL, USA). A p value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

3.1. Sample statistics

Of the 328 respondents, 326 were female, and two were male. About one third of the respondents ranged in age from 21 to 25 years ($n = 128$). Overall, 163 respondents had less than 5 years of experience nursing cancer patients, and 97 respondents had between 6 and 15 years of experience. Eighteen were head nurses, and 173 were working in a contractual system. Of the respondents, 169 were married and most of them had completed college ($n = 316$).

3.2. Job burnout

Aggregate responses of the job burnout scales are summarized in Table 1, and the mean and standard deviation (SD) for each subscale of MBI are shown. Job burnout between Maslach norms and oncology nurses are shown in Table 2. The data suggested that job burnout in oncology nurses is moderate to high relative to norms.

3.3. Nurse professional value

The scores of the four domains in nurse professional value are shown in Table 3. The score for the 26 items of professional value are shown in Table 4. The top 5 scoring items were 25,