



The association of Chinese hospital work environment with nurse burnout, job satisfaction, and intention to leave

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe nurse burnout, job satisfaction, and intention to leave and to explore the relationship of work environment to nursing outcomes in a sample of 9,698 nurses from 181 hospitals in China. Nurses reported moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and high levels of reduced personal accomplishment. Nearly one-fifth of the nurses reported high levels of burnout on all three dimensions. Forty-five percent of the nurses were dissatisfied with their current job; these nurses were most dissatisfied with their salary. Five percent of nurses reported an intention to leave. Nurses reporting mixed and good work environments were less likely to report high burnout, job dissatisfaction, and intention to leave compared with those in poor work environments. The results suggest that high burnout and low job satisfaction are prominent problems for Chinese nurses, and improving work environment might be an effective strategy for better nursing outcomes in Chinese hospitals.

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Nurses in all countries are at high risk for burnout, low job satisfaction, and intention to leave (Aiken et al., 2001; Nantsupawat et al., 2011), all of which are regarded as important nursing outcomes (Aiken, Clarke,

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Sloane, Lake, & Cheney, 2008). These outcomes have received increasing attention because of the widespread shortage of nurses (Hudspeth, 2013), and the hospital work environment has been regarded as an important factor related to nursing outcomes (Aiken, Clarke, & Sloane, 2002).

China is in the midst of a health care reform, and nurses in China are required to provide high-quality care to serve the needs of the patients who expect excellent service (Maxime, Xue, & Emmanuel, 2009). However, hospital managers often hire fewer nurses when possible to cut costs, and Chinese hospitals are experiencing serious nursing shortages (Hu, Shen, & Jiang, 2010). The number of registered nurses has increased steadily since 2005 in China, but the increase in nurses was much lower than the increase in outpatient visits and inpatient numbers (Gu, 2011). On the other hand, more and more contract nurses are employed in hospitals. Contract nurses are employed by the hospital to solve the problem of the nursing shortage but with lower salaries and fewer opportunities for promotion compared with *bianzhi* nurses, whose positions are allocated by the government (State Council of China, 2007; Hu et al., 2010). All these factors contribute to increasing burnout, job dissatisfaction, and nurses' intention to leave Chinese hospitals.

Although a large number of researchers have focused on nursing job outcomes and have shown how nursing job outcomes are associated with a supportive work environment in Western countries (Aiken et al., 2008; Aiken et al., 2011), the evidence from China is limited. There is no study on nursing job outcomes and work environment with a large sample from across China. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to present a description of nursing job outcomes, including burnout, job satisfaction, and intention to leave, and to identify the relationship of work environment and nursing job outcomes in level 2 and level 3 hospitals in China.

Nurse Burnout, Job Satisfaction, and Intention to Leave

Nurse Burnout

Burnout is conceptualized as the feeling of emotional exhaustion, distancing from clients, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Burnout among nurses is receiving more attention because of its high incidence among nurses (Lee, Song, Cho, & Lee, 2003; Poghosyan, Clarke, Finlayson, & Aiken, 2010; Tourigny, Baba, & Wang, 2010). Aiken et al. (2011), in a study of nurses from nine countries, reported that 33% to 60% of nurses reported high levels of burnout in eight of the nine countries. Nantsupawat et al. (2011) reported that 41% of nurses had high burnout scores in Thailand. Several previous researchers found that nurses in China experienced high

levels of burnout (Liu et al., 2012; Wu, Zhu, Wang, Wang, & Lan, 2007; Xie, Wang, & Chen, 2011). A study of 527 nurses from 41 hospitals in Shanghai, China, showed that nurses reported high emotional exhaustion, moderate depersonalization, and low reduced personal accomplishment (Xie et al., 2011). Although burnout is a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and reduced personal accomplishment (PA) (Maslach et al., 1996), most studies have been about nurses' EE; few researchers have studied nurse burnout comprehensively with a large sample from different regions in China. The purpose of this study was to study all three dimensions of nurse burnout and to explore the relationship between nurse burnout and work environment in China.

Nurse Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the extent to which employees like their work and have a positive or negative attitude toward their jobs (Stamps, 1997). There have been a large number of studies on nurse job satisfaction. Nantsupawat et al. (2011) reported that 28% of nurses in Thailand were dissatisfied with their job. Aiken et al. (2011) reported that the job dissatisfaction of nurses in the nine countries studied varied from 17% in Germany to about one-third in most countries and up to 60% in Japan. A study with a sample of 496 registered nurses in Korea showed a higher job satisfaction rate, and 68.8% of nurses were satisfied with their current jobs (Kwak, Chung, Xu, & Eun-Jung, 2010). In terms of factors associated with job satisfaction, a consistent picture did not emerge in the literature, but work environment significantly contributed to nurse job satisfaction in most studies (Nantsupawat et al., 2011; Aiken et al., 2011). Low job satisfaction of nurses has been reported in China. Lu, While, and Barriball (2007) studied 512 nurses in Beijing and found that poor salary was the major reason for nurse job dissatisfaction; only 53.7% of nurses expressed satisfaction with their jobs, and 79.2% of nurses were dissatisfied with their salary. In a study of 2,250 nurses from 19 general hospitals in Shanghai, Liu et al. (2011) reported that 50.2% of nurses were dissatisfied with their job; positive work relationships with their coworkers led to the most satisfaction, and extrinsic rewards such as annual leave entitlements, salary level, and nonsalary benefits led to the most dissatisfaction. In another study of 650 nurses from six hospitals in Harbin, China, nurses were most dissatisfied with workload and compensation (Sun, He, Wang, & Li, 2009). Liu et al. (2012) reported that more than 50% of nurses were dissatisfied with their jobs in the Guangdong province.

The results from these studies in China are varied because of the different sites and the use of different measurement instruments. In addition, studies of the relationship between nurse job satisfaction and work environment have been limited. The purpose of this study was to examine nurses' job satisfaction levels

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