

# Would hardiness training be beneficial to current associate degree nursing program directors? Part I<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** As noted in recently published studies, the position of the associate degree nursing (ADN) program director has become increasingly more stressful and subject to increasing turnover. Previous published studies have suggested that hardiness training was a positive and useful intervention for hospital nurse managers. Funded by the National Organization of Associate Degree Nurses Foundation, this study assessed hardiness levels of current ADN directors to determine whether offering hardiness training could be a useful intervention to assist with stress levels and turnover issues. The Dispositional Resilience Scale-15-Hardiness was used, and background data were also collected. Half of the directors exhibited high hardiness, and half exhibited low hardiness. Secretarial support and use of assistant directors in relation to hardiness is also reported. Intervention strategies are suggested.

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Stressors of associate degree nursing (ADN) program directors have surfaced simultaneously with increasing size of ADN programs, stagnating budgets, and lack of full-time faculty (Mintz-Binder, 2008; Mintz-Binder & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012). Excessive stress, decreasing job satisfaction, bullying, and decreasing health of directors have been reported (Mintz-Binder & Calkins, 2012; Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012). Structuring interventions to assist directors who are in these roles currently and adequately preparing prospective future program directors appears to be essential for the overall smooth functioning of nursing programs but also for the fiscal costs involved when

a seasoned director chooses to vacate their position. Without strength and continuity at the director level, nursing programs cannot flourish.

In 1979, Kobasa coined the concept of hardiness as a critical variable while assessing levels of stress and corresponding physical illness in male executives. Hardiness has three components: (a) commitment to one's current position and degree of proactiveness; (b) whether one reacts positively to challenges occurring while at work; and (c) one's view of personal control over events occurring and response to stress. Hardiness training that targets these three components has been reported to be an effective and positive educational experience for hospital nurse managers (Judkins & Furlow, 2003; Judkins, Reid, & Furlow, 2006). Furthermore, hardy individuals appear to handle stress and crises well, concomitant with reporting less physical and psychological responses to stress. Similarities drawn between hospital nurse managers and academic program directors have been noted (Mintz-Binder, 2013). Assessing whether hardiness training could be an equally positive experience for ADN program directors is worthy of

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this study have been presented as follows: Mintz-Binder, RD. 2012. What are the Critical Factors Affecting Hardy Functioning of Academic Program Directors? Southern Nursing Research Society Conference, New Orleans, LA. Poster Presentation; Mintz-Binder, RD. 2011. Calling All Directors and Assistant Directors! National Organization of Associate Degree Nursing 25th Conference, Chicago, IL. Oral Presentation.

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investigation. Current hardiness levels of ADN program directors and other demographic and work-related variables were assessed in the following study.

## 1. Review of literature: Comprehensive studies

Mintz-Binder and Sanders (2012) presented an extensive and recent review of literature of studies relevant to ADN directors, directors and deans of schools of nursing, and nurse faculty with administrative responsibilities. A work environment study ensued using the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (Pejtersen, Kristensen, Borg, & Bjorner, 2010). The return of 242 completed surveys represented a 41.2% response rate from the total number of ADN directors with viable e-mail addresses in the United States. Strong statistical relationships were reported between primary variables of workload (quantitative, emotional, and workplace), in relation to health and well-being factors (self-rated health, burnout stress, and sleep issues). The strongest correlations reported were between emotional work demands and stress (Spearman's  $\rho = .54, P < .01$ ) and emotional work demands and burnout (Spearman's  $\rho = .52, P < .01$ ). These findings appear to illustrate that when faced with emotional work demands, stress and burnout ensue. Vacancies at the director level continue to be prevalent, and finding a pool of interested, qualified prospective candidates has been few and far between. Mintz-Binder and Sanders (2012) summarized what the effect of a loss of a seasoned director can be on a program, including stability and strength of program. However, fiscally, it has been stated that changeover of a program director or department chair can cost up to 25 times that person's monthly salary in recruitment and marketing costs, interviewing candidates, and training someone new (Glick, 1992; Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012).

Hardiness training (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 1987; 2006) has been successfully used as an intervention for hospital nurse managers (Judkins, Reid, & Furlow, 2006; van Servellen, Topf, & Leake, 1994) and floor nurses (Simoni & Paterson, 1997; Sortet & Banks, 1996; Tierney & Lavelle, 1997). Judkins, Reid, and Furlow (2006) examined short- and long-term effects of a hardiness training program designed for a group of nurse managers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. A hardiness measure (Bartone, Ursano, Wright, & Ingraham, 1989) and a perceived stress scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) were collected as pretest, posttest, and 6 months following the training. Although there were no significant differences in stress levels reported, increases in all three areas of hardiness immediately after the training was reported ( $P < .05$ ), with sustained increases in two of the three hardiness areas (commitment and challenge) after 6 months. In addition, the relationship between hardiness, stress, and use of sick time by nurse managers was studied by Judkins, Massey, and Huff (2006) and confirmed that high hardy managers used less sick time than the low hardy managers.

Therefore, hardiness training may be predicted to be a useful intervention for ADN program directors experiencing problems reported in the literature.

## 2. The study

The purpose of this study was to assess ADN director's level of hardiness as a baseline for future intervention studies intended to decrease work environment issues and stress. Outcomes (findings) would provide insight into the critical issues to be addressed in designing and testing future intervention programs. Funding was granted by the National Organization of Associate Degree Nurses (NOADN) Foundation in October 2010 with the study ensuing in early 2011.

### 2.1. Design and instruments

A mixed methods approach was used in this study. The quantitative portion will be presented in this article. Institutional review board approval was granted by the University of Texas at Arlington, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study with the use of SurveyMonkey.

The Dispositional Resilience Scale-15-Hardiness (Bartone, 2007; Bartone et al., 1989) was sent through SurveyMonkey to current ADN program directors of National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission programs with valid e-mail addresses in the United States. Exclusion criteria included those directors inaccessible by e-mail because incorrect e-mail addresses or college firewalls. The 15-item instrument measures three facets of hardiness: commitment, control, and challenge. Cronbach's alphas calculated ranged from .7 to .77 for the subscales and .83 for the full scale with this sample of directors. Construct and content validity were addressed as the scale was created and when revised. Demographic information collected included age, time in position, size of program, secretarial assistance, and use of an assistant director. Reported separately, open-ended questions were asked to determine the most difficult aspects of this role, and thematic analysis was conducted (see Part II—submitted separately).

### 2.2. Sample

A final total of 182 directors out of 487 directors with viable e-mails returned completed and useable surveys delivered through SurveyMonkey. The return rate was 38.0%. Numerous e-mails were returned because of change of directors and college firewalls preventing unknown e-mails from being delivered.

## 3. Results

The majority of respondents were above the age of 50 ( $n = 146$ ), with the highest group between 51 and 60 years old ( $n = 102$ ) and female ( $n = 178$ ). When asked

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