



Job Satisfaction and Intent to Leave Among Psychiatric Nurses: Closed Versus Open Wards



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study was to investigate: (a) the association between socio-demographic variables, job satisfaction and intent to leave among hospital psychiatric nurses, and (b) the differences in the above between psychiatric nurses working on closed and open wards.

Procedures: After receiving ethical approval, a convenience sample of 52 (70% of total nursing staff) was drawn from psychiatric nurses in a large Israeli psychiatric hospital (95% response rate). The sample completed anonymously a self-administered structured questionnaire.

Main findings: A negative correlation was found between job satisfaction and intent to leave and between age, all categories of seniority, and intent to leave. Closed-ward nurses reported a higher intent to leave psychiatric nursing. Nurses under 35 reported a significantly higher intent to leave psychiatric nursing than nurses over 35. Job satisfaction was significantly higher among full-time nurses than part-time.

Principal conclusions: Psychiatric hospitals need to pay attention to all factors associated with workers' readiness to leave. Given the widespread shortage of nurses, it is especially important that they address the relatively low job satisfaction of both younger and part-time nurses, and the particular stresses that closed-ward nurses work under.

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Job satisfaction is a key factor in human resources management in nursing, and in a nurse's decision to leave a workplace or stay. Satisfied workers perform better, have lower absenteeism and display higher motivation and organizational commitment. Israel has been experiencing in recent years a general shortage of nurses, and of psychiatric nurses in particular, which, if not amended, is likely to impinge on patient care. According to Herzberg (1968) job satisfaction is a positive attitude that a worker has for their place of work and which expresses itself in their desire to remain working there. Tett and Meyr (1993) define it as an emotional attachment, and Price (2001) as an emotional orientation, to one's work, while Spector (1997) terms it the extent to which a worker is happy or unhappy with their work.

FACTORS INFLUENCING JOB SATISFACTION AMONG NURSES

The published literature divides these factors into the environmental (organizational) and the personal. The former is associated with conditions at the workplace and organizational processes while the latter

relates to the individual worker's character traits and other personal variables (Irvine & Evans, 1995; Baron & Byrne, 1997). A worker's age, for instance, correlates positively with higher job satisfaction (Avigdor, 2010; Hwang et al., 2009). Brinder (1993) and Bjork, Samdal, Hansen, Torstad, and Hamilton (2007) add the contribution of workplace seniority and level of education to job satisfaction. However, there have also appeared contrary findings. Bar (2003), for instance, found no association between age and job satisfaction. Nor did Friedman (2004) find an association with seniority. Yitzhaki (2006), studying Israeli nurses, even found the opposite association, namely that nurses with more than 9 years' seniority reported less job satisfaction than less experienced nurses. Gender differences also complicate the picture. Avigdor (2010) found women, overall, reporting higher levels of job satisfaction than men, a phenomenon which Gasser, Flint, and Tan (2000) explain by women having lower reward expectations from their employment than men. Additional sources of individual job satisfaction among hospital nurses such as ethnicity, individual morale, motivation and others, are mentioned and analyzed in the Lu et al. literature review (2011).

As for the systemic-organizational factors in job satisfaction, Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Almost (2001) for example, report that workload and workplace stress drag job satisfaction down while sending up rates of absenteeism, burn-out and workers' leaving. Bar-Cohen, Rotem-Ficker, and Adami (2000) found that support from and good communications with bosses correlated positively with job satisfaction, which Cortese, Colombo, and Ghisliyri (2010) confirm. In their

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study of general hospital nurses Adams and Bond (2000) concluded that a sense of solidarity and togetherness among nurses contributed both to better working relations and to job satisfaction. Lu, While, and Barriball (2005) confirm that good working relations raise job satisfaction, and add that external rewards also do so. Further organizational sources of job satisfaction are ward climate, organizational culture, level of professional practice, good relationships and cooperation with colleagues, and more (Lu, Barriball, Zhang, Alison, & While, 2012).

In addition to the variation in job satisfaction at the personal or local level, international differences have been noted too. Aiken et al. (2001), for instance, found significant differences in job satisfaction between nurses in United States, Scotland, England, Canada and Germany.

JOB SATISFACTION AMONG PSYCHIATRIC NURSES

Roche and Duffield (2010) compared the job satisfaction of psychiatric nurses with that of general hospital nurses. While the former reported better doctor–nurse working relations the latter felt more involved in the running of the hospital, that the hospital offered them more leadership potential and a wider range of personal development options. Happell, Martin, and Pinikahana (2003) compared psychiatric nurses working on regular wards with those on forensic secure wards and were surprised that it was the latter, whose work is thought to be more stressful, hazardous and unpredictable, who reported higher job satisfaction levels. A literature review by Kagan and Guy (2004) which compared psychiatric nurses in hospitals with those in community care, concluded similarly that although the community care nurses faced the higher workloads and stress levels it was they who displayed the more job satisfaction. The present authors have located no studies comparing psychiatric nurses on open and closed hospital wards.

THE TENDENCY TO LEAVE

The tendency of nurses to leave general hospitals has been widely researched. For, example, Aiken et al. (2001) in their study in five countries report that a third of nurses in England and Scotland and more than a fifth in the United States planned to leave their job and that, across the whole international sample, 27–54% of nurses under 30 years of age planned to leave within 12 months of data collection (Aiken et al., 2001). This tendency has been connected to different variables but a central variable is nurses' job satisfaction. Irvine and Evans (1995) argue that job satisfaction plays a large role in a worker's decision to stay or go and that the higher is job satisfaction the less likely is a worker to leave. Correspondingly, say Crampton and Wagner (1994), low job satisfaction is associated with high worker turnover. Numerous studies from many countries confirm this (e.g. Letvak & Buck, 2008; Zurmehly, Martin, & Fitzpatrick, 2009). As for the sociodemographic factors acting on workers' tendency to leave, researchers have found a negative correlation between the age and level of schooling of general hospital nurses and their intent to leave (Bjork et al. 2007; Zurmehly et al., 2009). Larrabee et al. (2003) found that nurses with less than 5 years' seniority reported a higher intent to leave than nurses with higher seniority.

In sum, this brief review of the published literature shows that while job satisfaction is clearly a strong influence on worker turnover the precise nature of this association among psychiatric nurses, and in particular whether it operates differently among nurses on open and closed wards has been little researched.

In light of the above, this study is aimed to:

- (a) Investigate the association between the socio-demographic variables of psychiatric nurses, their job satisfaction and intent to leave the nursing profession itself and psychiatric nursing.
- (b) To investigate the differences in the above between psychiatric nurses working on closed and open hospital wards.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this cross-sectional quantitative design study, a convenience sample of 52 nurses was drawn from psychiatric nurses working on closed and open wards in a large psychiatric hospital in central Israel. The 52 represented some 70% of the hospital's total nursing staff. Ninety-two percent of the sample were registered nurses, the remainder practical nurses. Fifty-eight percent of the sample had an academic B.A. or M.A. degree in nursing. Men and women were represented more or less evenly and the nurses ranged in age from 25 to 65, with a mean age of 45 (SD = 10.91). Nurses working on closed wards were on average younger than those on open wards ($M = 39$ vs. $M = 49$ respectively). Fifty-six percent of the sample were born in Israel, 40% in the former Soviet Union and 4% in North Africa.

TOOLS

The sample completed a self-administered structured questionnaire which comprised the following sections:

- (1) *Personal data*: age, gender, religion and extent of religious practice, marital status, country of birth, generic and post-basic nurse training, type of ward currently employed on, job description, seniority (a) in nursing, (b) in hospital nursing, (c) in the current ward, and (d) in the current job; full or part-time working.
- (2) *Job satisfaction*: The Toren, Kerzman, and Kagan (2010) was used. This instrument comprises nine statements that respondents have to state their level of agreement/disagreement with on a five-point Likert scale from 'Totally disagree' to 'Very much agree'. Sample statements are: 'I am happy in my work as a nurse'; 'I would recommend my children to take up the same sort of nursing as me'; 'I feel that my work is meaningful and important'; 'I am satisfied with the level of my wages'. The internal validity of the instrument was measured by its authors at Cronbach alpha = 0.81.
- (3) *Intent to leave*: This concept was measured by the responses to two statements: 'There is a chance that I shall leave my current sphere of nursing in the next two years' and 'There is a chance I shall leave nursing in the next two years'. Respondents expressed their agreement/disagreement as above.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Data collection began after the hospital's nursing management and its ethical (Helsinki) committee had given the study their approval. All potential respondents were explained the aims of the study and their rights as respondents to confidentiality and anonymity, that participation was completely voluntary, and that the data would be used for research purposes only. The researchers distributed the instruments personally to each respondent and the response rate was 95%. The data were analyzed by SPSS version 21.

RESULTS

Overall, the level of job satisfaction reported was quite high, a mean of 3.8 out of a maximum 5. Sixty-six percent of respondents reported high or very high satisfaction and no more than 4% reported low job satisfaction. A quite strong negative correlation emerged between job satisfaction and intent to leave, both psychiatric nursing ($r = -.38$, $p < .001$) and the nursing profession itself ($r = -.33$, $p < .05$).

Quite strong negative correlations were found between age and all categories of seniority on the one hand, and on the other, intent to leave nursing itself and psychiatric nursing in particular (see Table 1). No other sociodemographic variable was found to correlate significantly with job satisfaction.

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