



Patient satisfaction, stress and burnout in nursing personnel in emergency departments: A cross-sectional study



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ABSTRACT

Background: Patient satisfaction is considered a measure of the status of the interaction between health-care professionals and service users. The level of this measure indicates the quality of the care received. Burnout is a common phenomenon in nursing professionals and it is a response to the chronic occupational stress. Different studies have shown a link between patient satisfaction and stress and burnout syndrome experienced by nursing personnel in various hospital units.

Objectives: The main objective of this study was to analyze the associations between patients' satisfaction with emergency services and perception of work stress and burnout by the nursing professionals who looked after these patients at a group level.

Design: The study followed a descriptive and cross-sectional design; the data were collected by means of questionnaires.

Setting: Emergency services at two general hospitals in Murcia (Spain).

Participants: Two samples, one formed of emergency service nursing professionals ($n = 148$) and the other formed by patients ($n = 390$), who were grouped in 48 units of analysis.

Methods: To evaluate perception of stress and burnout of the nursing personnel, we used the Spanish adaptation of the Nursing Stress Scale for hospital emergency nursing personnel, and the Spanish adaptation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, respectively. A Spanish adaptation of the La Mónica-Obsert Patient Satisfaction Scale was used to define the patients' feelings about their nursing care. Moreover, some socio-demographic variables and the length of stay in the emergency unit were included in the protocol. Before statistical analysis, the data were collated at a group level. The intraclass correlation coefficients and the Average Deviation Index support the aggregation of these data at a unit level.

Results: Neither perception of stress nor the various elements of burnout experienced by nursing staff were related to patients' levels of satisfaction. We observed a significant and positive association between stress perception among the nurses and two of the burnout dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion and cynicism. The length of stay of the patients in the emergency department was negatively related to the frequency of nurses experiencing perceived stress as well as the burnout dimension of cynicism.

Conclusions: No significant association was observed between experiences of stress and burnout dimensions by nursing professionals and the satisfaction with care received

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reported by their patients. These findings could be explained by the professional and organizational characteristics of the unit. Finally, the limitations and implications of the study are discussed, as well as future research questions related to research of the associations between occupational stress, burnout and patient satisfaction.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Different studies have shown a link between patient satisfaction and stress and burnout syndrome experienced by nursing personnel in various hospital units.
- The topic of emergency patients' satisfaction has hardly been addressed in connection with stress and burnout experienced by nursing personnel working in these healthcare units.

What this paper adds

- Neither the perception of stress nor various dimensions of burnout were linked to patient satisfaction in the hospital emergency unit setting.
- A significant, positive association between stress perception and two of the burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion and cynicism) was observed in the professionals.
- The duration of stay in the emergency room was linked to the frequency of stress and the cynicism dimension.
- These discoveries can be explained by the specific characteristics of the context and work in these units, which influence the duration of stay and the kind of interaction established between professionals and patients.

1. Introduction

The quality of the services offered by healthcare organizations can be estimated by two approaches: the patients' perspective and that of professionals (Donabedian, 1996). Patient satisfaction is considered a measure of the status of the interaction between healthcare professionals and service users. The level of this measure indicates the quality of the care received (Hendriks et al., 2001; Mira and Aranaz, 2000; Tejedor et al., 2013). This information is essential to the continuous improvement of services offered to the patients (Manary et al., 2013).

There are features of the nursing profession and psycho-social reactions of healthcare personnel that should be taken into account when describing the qualities of the service (Aiken et al., 2012; Laschinger and Leiter, 2006; Stalpers et al., 2015; Tummers et al., 2001; Van Bogaert et al., 2013; You et al., 2013). For this reason, there are studies that support the existence of organizational and professional conditions in the healthcare context that foster timely recognition of perception of occupational stress and burnout among nursing personnel (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Cañadas-De la Fuente et al., 2015; Garrosa et al., 2010).

Given that it has often been said that stress and burnout affect the health of professionals in a negative way and influence the results for patients in terms of the quality of their healthcare (Aiken et al., 2012; Vahey et al., 2004; Van Bogaert et al., 2013), it is surprising how scarce research on these associations is (Argentero et al., 2008; Leiter et al., 1998; Stimpfel et al., 2012; Vahey et al., 2004). It is even more surprising in the case of nursing personnel working at hospital emergency departments, since these units are the setting of an essential facet of the healthcare interactions that take place between citizens and the healthcare system (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Potter, 2006).

There are occupational conditions that may lead to stress among the nursing personnel of the hospital emergency department: interpersonal conflicts (conflicts with the physicians and other colleagues); lack of personal resources when facing daily tasks; lack of social support; excessive work burdens; witnessing death and suffering of patients (García-Izquierdo and Ríos-Risquez, 2012). Furthermore, these circumstances increase rates of burnout, encourage other counterproductive behaviors and affect the quality of the service offered (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Sundin et al., 2007; Van Bogaert et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2010).

Maslach et al. (2001) state that burnout is a common phenomenon in professionals who work with people ("human services") and it is a response to the chronic occupational stress caused by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and lack of personal effectiveness. In this definition, the three-dimensional characteristics of burnout are obvious, since they affect the personal level (emotional exhaustion: the feeling of not been able to cope with one's own emotions), the psycho-social level (cynicism: behavior that distances one from work, the people implicated in it and colleagues), and the professional level (lack of personal effectiveness: the feeling of not accomplishing tasks properly or being incompetent). The consequences of burnout can be negative for the effectiveness of the organization, e.g., by increasing rotations and absenteeism, by decreasing productivity and the quality of accomplished tasks, and by increasing the frequency of attempts to leave the profession (Ha et al., 2014; Heinen et al., 2013; Roch et al., 2014), as well as having negative effects upon the health of the individual (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Sorour and El-Maksoud, 2012; Stathopoulou et al., 2011).

There is only a small body of research attempting to relate stress and burnout among nurses to patient satisfaction, and the results of these studies are controversial. Thus, Argentero et al. (2008), Garman et al. (2002), Leiter et al., (1998) and Vahey et al. (2004) have all highlighted that patient satisfaction is negatively related

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