



## Original article

## Correlates of structural empowerment, psychological empowerment and emotional exhaustion among registered nurses: A meta-analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To conduct a meta-analysis on the relationship between structural empowerment, psychological empowerment and burnout for registered nurses.

**Methods:** Cross-sectional studies that focused on the correlation between burnout, structural empowerment and psychological empowerment of nurses from 1990 to date were searched in Cochrane Library, Web of Science, BMJ, Elsevier, PubMed and CNKI databases. Two reviewers conducted critical appraisal, and extracted correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) values. Tests of heterogeneity (Q-statistic) were performed to investigate the effect sizes.

**Result:** Twenty-four studies met the inclusion criteria. For registered nurses, the results of the meta-analysis indicated that there were weak relationship between structural empowerment and emotional exhaustion ( $r = -0.2450$ ). In addition, there was a low correlation between structural empowerment and emotional exhaustion ( $r = -0.4301$ ). However, a moderate relationship was seen between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment ( $r = 0.5717$ ).

**Conclusion:** These results are considered useful guides for hospital managers and nursing professionals in formulating policies and regulations aimed at decreasing emotional exhaustion among nurses.

## 1. Introduction

The health and wellbeing of nurses are decreased by factors such as complicated nursing practice, demanding patient contacts, workloads, time pressure, and workplace conditions, all of which result in internal frustration and lead to burnout, especially emotional exhaustion (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2000; Spence Laschinger & Fida, 2014). Burnout can result in chronic emotional exhaustion which is overburdened and stewed by workloads (Lindblom, Linton, Fedeli, & Bryngelsson, 2006). In view of the psychological and physical health problems of nurses which lead to emotional exhaustion, it is important to identify factors that cause dissatisfaction in the external and internal environments (Sarmiento, Laschinger, & Iwasiw, 2004). A number of studies have identified some degree of association between employee empowerment and emotional exhaustion (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2000; Laschinger, Almost, Purdy, & Kim, 2004). Empowerment is defined as capacity in terms of giving power to energize and enable employees to attain superior achievements. It covers two aspects: structural empowerment proposed by Kanter, and psychological empowerment proposed by Spreitzer (O'Brien, 2011a; Royer, 2011).

Kanter's theory of power and its structure support the fundamental frameworks of work empowerment (Kanter, 1993). When the work

environments are structured, nurses feel empowered by getting uttermost rights to implement their duties. Therefore, nurses show enthusiasm, confidence, high level of decision-making right and autonomous rights (Sarmiento et al., 2004). As Kanter emphasized, providing employees with access to opportunities, information, support, formal and informal power system, and necessary resources enables them to make great achievements. The empowerment of nurses is beneficial for improving their attitudes and increasing organizational effectiveness (Kanter, 1998). This assertion has been testified by direct evidence of a relationship between structural empowerment and burnout (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015).

Instead of focusing on the structural empowerment, Spreitzer (Spreitzer, 1995a; Spreitzer, 1995b) turned to nurses' psychological empowerment in the workplace which is believed to be one of factors that prevent emotional exhaustion. Psychological empowerment is an emotional state which makes employees have confidence in achieving targets successfully. This sort of empowerment has four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. The four core components enable employees to show harmony in work, values, beliefs and behaviors, meeting demands of work, and influencing crucial decisions within the organization (Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997).

The complementary theories of Kanter and Spreitzer suggest that the

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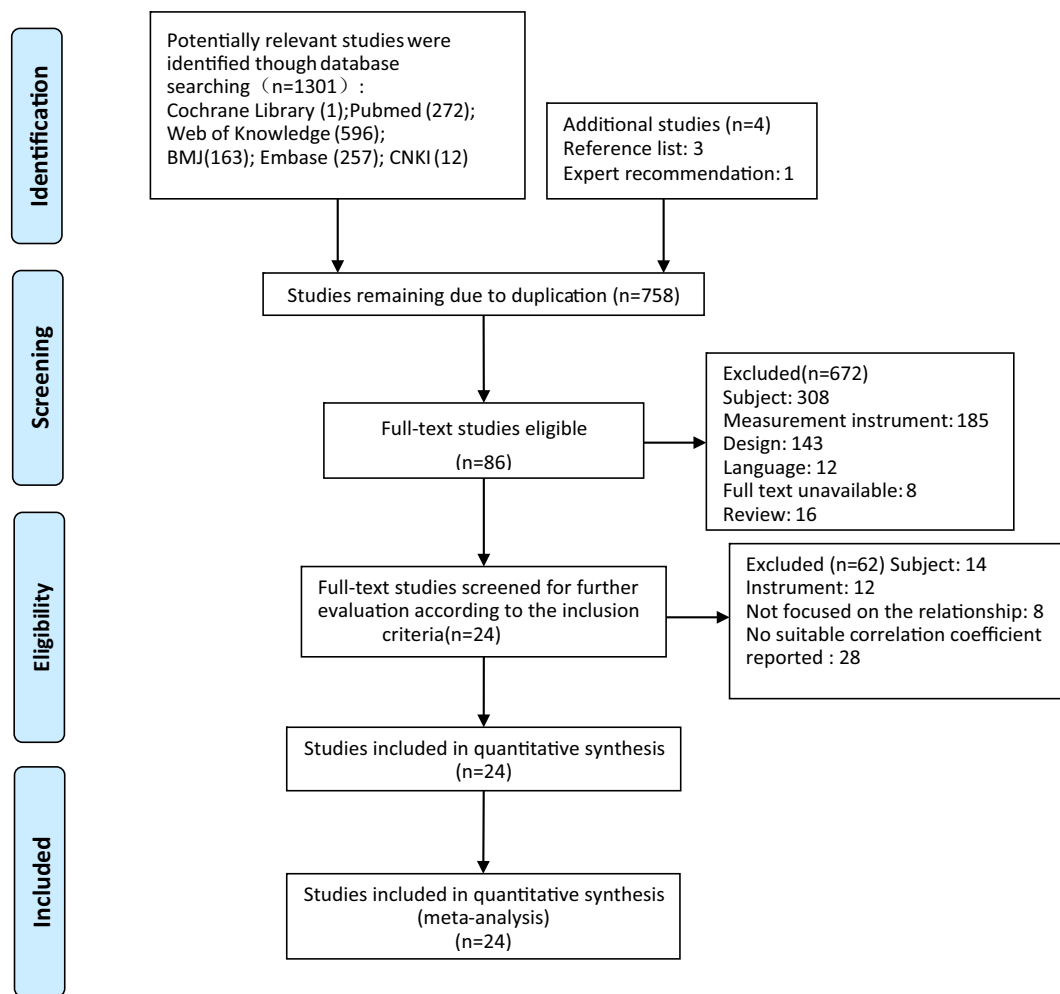


Fig. 1. Flow chart of article selection process.

association between nurses' emotional exhaustion and empowerment (structural empowerment and psychological empowerment) is significant. Indeed, some studies have confirmed a degree of correlation between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment in nurses' work environment (DiNapoli, O'Flaherty, Musil, Clavelle, & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Li, Chen, & Kuo, 2008; Tourangeau, Cranley, Laschinger, & Pachis, 2010).

Previous studies have investigated the independent relationship between emotional exhaustion and empowerment. However, the degree of associations have different outcomes with regard to variables such as age, region and economic factors. Some studies reported moderate correlation between structural empowerment and emotional exhaustion, whereas other studies reported little association between these variables. In some studies, the association was reversed. In view of these disparities, the present study used meta-analysis of correlates relating emotional exhaustion, structural empowerment and psychological empowerment of registered nurses to investigate the overall statistical correlation. The findings are expected to guide nursing managers and healthcare professionals in decreasing burnout, and promoting nurses' health.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Search strategy

Cochrane Library, Pubmed, Web of science, BMJ, Embase and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) databases were searched

independently by two people. The combinations of keywords and terms used in the search were "emotional exhaustion/fatigue" and "structural empowerment; work empowerment/job empowerment/Kanter' theory/social conformity", as well as "psychological empowerment/emotional empowerment/Spreitzer theory/social conformity" and "nurse/nursing" Additional papers were retrieved from reference lists of selected full-text studies for checking potential eligible articles. The search was limited to publications written in English or Chinese.

### 2.2. Eligibility criteria

Studies that met the following criteria were included in the meta-analysis: (a) investigation of the correlation between emotional exhaustion, structural empowerment and psychological empowerment; (b) studies on registered nurses working in hospitals; (c) investigations on emotional exhaustion, psychological empowerment and structural empowerment measured by internationally accepted questionnaire scales with high level of validity and reliability; (d) all relevant studies containing statistical values calculated with Pearson or Spearman correlation coefficients; (e) all relevant full text publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals published either in English or Chinese.

### 2.3. Instruments

Emotional exhaustion was measured by Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) containing three sub-scales: emotional exhaustion (EE), de-personalization (DP) and personal

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