



Adversity quotients, environmental variables and career adaptability in student nurses



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ABSTRACT

The cross-sectional study aimed to investigate the career adaptability and its associated factors among 431 student nurses. Participants completed questionnaires on demographics, career adaptability, adversity quotient, clinical learning environment and social support. Findings revealed that student nurses' adversity quotients, individualized clinical learning environment, and family social support associated positively with their degree of career adaptability, even after multiple adjustments. Additionally, career adaptability scores were higher among associate degree student nurses and those who had served as student leaders. These findings may provide referable evidence for schools and educators to improve student nurses' career adaptability.

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1. Introduction

Career adaptability is an important psychosocial meta-capacity for successful adaptation in various spheres of life, including the realm of careers (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). As a psychosocial construct, career adaptability denotes an individual's self-regulation strengths or capacities for solving unfamiliar, complex, and ill-defined problems presented by developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas. Career adaptability has a strong association with individuals' general and professional well-being (Maggiore, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013). Moreover, career adaptability resources may increase graduates' chances of finding a fitting job as well as facilitate a successful school-to-work transition (Koen, Klehe, Vianen, & Annelies, 2012).

For students in some majors, the school-to-work transition is extensive. For example, when nursing students enter the later stages of their program, a prolonged period of transition begins. In their final year, student nurses are required to experience consolidated clinical practice to prepare them for their transition to graduate nurses (Liaw et al., 2014). So it may be useful to identify how factors of career adaptability may relate to their career development. The present study was to examine the career adaptability of student nurses; and according to Albert Bandura's reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1986), to explore personal and environmental variables may impact student nurses' career adaptability.

1.1. Career adaptability

Savickas (1997) proposed the concept of career adaptability, which refers to the "readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions" (p. 254). Career adaptability consists of four factors: concern, control, curiosity and confidence. A four-dimensional scale

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of career adaptability has been developed and its structural validity was supported by empirical study conducted in 13 countries (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The four dimensions related positively with university graduates' job search self-efficacy and their employment status (Guan et al., 2013). And training career adaptability can raise graduates' chances of finding a good job, and facilitate a successful transition from school to work (Koen et al., 2012). Moreover, career adaptability has an effect on individual's career satisfaction and self-rated career performance above and beyond employees' personality and core self-evaluation (Zacher, 2014). Thus, career adaptability is of great importance to individual's career and social development.

Given the importance of career adaptability, the present study aimed to further examine its nomological network by examining its relation to adversity, clinical learning environment and social support in a sample of student nurses.

1.2. Adversity quotient

Adversity refers to an unfortunate event or circumstance or the state of serious and continued difficulty. Many students meet various hardships or adversities at school or in society. This seems particularly true for students of medicine and nursing. Previous studies have reported that a large percentage of nursing students experience psychological distress and poor adjustment during their training (Warbah et al., 2007). The most powerful stressors experienced by nursing students in clinical setting were lack of competence, harmful and unmanageable relationship with patients, difficult relationships with tutors or companions, emotional involvement, contact with suffering, and overload (Zupiria Gorostidi et al., 2007).

Thus, nursing may be required to adapt to a variety of adversities. In the present study, we examined the relation between career adaptability and adversity. We used the construct of adversity quotient, which was first described by Stoltz (1997), who conceptualized the *adversity quotient* as an index of how well an individual may respond when misfortune occurs. Individuals with a high adversity quotient are better able to cope with setbacks and choose constructive responses that turn obstacles into opportunities. In short, the adversity quotient (AQ) indexes how well a person can withstand adversity and his/her ability to surmount it (Phoolka & Kaur, 2012). The quotient is composed of four major dimensions, referred to as CORE (control, ownership, reach, and endurance). Control refers to degree of perceived ability to alter the situation possible, ownership means degree of willingness to take responsibility for improving the situation, reach refers how far the difficulty extends into other life domains, and endurance means the perceived length of time the adversity will last (Stoltz, 2004).

1.3. Clinical learning environment

A clinical learning environment consists of all that surrounds student nurses, including the staff, the patients, the settings, the nurse mentors, and the nurse teachers (Papp, Markkanen, & von Bonsdorff, 2003). These factors interact, either positively or negatively, to influence students' learning outcomes. They also combine to shape a sense of belonging (Sedgwick & Rougeau, 2010).

1.4. Social support

Social support is a multi-faceted concept (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997) that predicts individuals' health and well-being and relates negatively to stress (Glozah & Pevalin, 2014). Hirschi, Niles, and Akos (2011) concluded that more perceived social support predicted more active engagement in career preparation. And employees' perceived support for competency development was positively associated with their perceived employability and career success (i.e. career satisfaction and perceived marketability) (De Vos, De Hauw, der Heijden, & Beatrice, 2011). Obviously, social support is also an environmental variable of student nurses' career development.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

A total of 450 full-time student nurses in three first-class hospitals came from six public universities in Shandong Province, China. The participants complete a clinical practice in hospitals during the last year of their program. The study was conducted at the fifth month after students entered clinical settings.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographic characteristics

A questionnaire was used to obtain the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender (1 = male and 2 = female); age; education (1 = *baccalaureate* and 2 = *associate degree*); social practice experience (1 = *experience related to nursing profession*, 2 = *experience not related to nursing profession*, 3 = *no social practice experience*); and student leader experience (1 = yes and 2 = no). Social practice experience refers to various activities that students participate in their spare time such as tutoring, odd jobs, volunteer service, charity activities, social surveys and professional internships. These experiences may or may not relate to the nursing profession.

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