



## The psychological effects of nursing work

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### Abstract:

Nursing is a multifaceted profession that goes beyond clinical tasks, involving profound emotional experiences that significantly impact caregivers. This paper explores the psychological effects of nursing work, encompassing factors such as workplace stressors, challenges faced historically and currently, coping mechanisms, and support systems. Drawing on transactional theory, it examines individual and organizational factors contributing to nurses' psychological well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these challenges, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support systems for nurses. Strategies for self-care, seeking support, setting boundaries, and technological adaptation are discussed. Additionally, organizational support systems, including supportive leadership, effective communication channels, and policies prioritizing employee well-being, are highlighted as crucial for fostering a positive work environment and mitigating burnout.

## Introduction:

In the intricate web of healthcare, nurses serve as the linchpin, bridging medical expertise with compassionate care. Beyond the clinical tasks and medical procedures lies a realm often overlooked—the profound psychological impact of nursing work. Each day, nurses navigate through a spectrum of emotions, from joyous triumphs to heart-wrenching losses, all while maintaining an unwavering dedication to their patients' well-being. From the relentless demands of high-stakes situations to the tender moments of connection with patients and families, nursing encompasses a tapestry of emotions that profoundly impact caregivers (Flaubert, et al.2021).

The psychological effects of nursing work encompass a spectrum of experiences, ranging from profound fulfillment to debilitating stress and burnout. Inadequate support from supervisors and partners, workplace violence, contact with suffering or death, irregular hours, and excessive responsibilities are all risk factors to which nurses are exposed. The physical and mental well-being of these professionals may be significantly impacted by these factors, which could result in decreased motivation, hypertension, asthma, concentration difficulties, insomnia, depression, and anxiety, as well as impaired performance on the job (Martínez-Zaragoza, et al.2020).

A moderate degree of fatigue and inadequate recuperation time between shifts are indicators that nurses are susceptible to critical errors, accidents, and significant attention deficits, all of which pose a threat to the safety of patients and staff. Furthermore, the Demand/Control Work Stress Model firmly establishes that nurses who experience a confluence of high psychological demands and limited autonomy in their professional lives are more susceptible to the development of both physical and psychological issues (Martínez-Zaragoza, et al.2020). Additionally, the Effort-Reward Imbalance Model has been utilized to elucidate the emergence of chronic stress within the workplace. Work-related stress, according to this paradigm, results from a disparity between the remuneration received and the level of effort exerted by the employee. Consequently, an asymmetry between exertion and compensation would increase susceptibility to sickness, such as cardiovascular or gastrointestinal ailments, psychological issues, and hypertension, during the short to medium term. Such an imbalance appears to be associated with persistent work-home

conflicts, burnout, emotional exhaustion, low perceived health, frequent short episodes of sick leave, intention to abandon the profession, job turnover, depression, and anxiety among nurses.

#### **✚ Stressors and challenges faced by nurses:**

Challenges in nursing have existed since the profession's inception. Social disparities encountered by the earliest nurses persist in contemporary times, while personnel shortages in the field of nursing pose ongoing challenges. Presently, nurses have attained the highest ethical standard in the United States and are regarded as the most dependable profession in society. Despite its challenges, nursing is a rewarding profession that has a profound impact on innumerable lives.

#### **☒ Challenges in Nursing in the Beginning:**

In the nascent stages of nursing, challenges were deeply rooted in societal perceptions and lack of formal education. During this period, nursing was often regarded as a menial task, primarily relegated to women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Nurses faced significant societal stigma and were perceived as subservient to physicians, lacking autonomy and professional recognition. Moreover, the absence of standardized training and educational programs left nurses ill-equipped to meet the evolving healthcare needs of their communities. They grappled with inadequate resources, minimal access to medical knowledge, and the absence of professional frameworks to guide their practice. Despite these challenges, early nurses displayed remarkable resilience and dedication, laying the foundation for the noble profession of nursing we recognize today (Mohammed, 2019).

#### **☒ Challenges in Nursing 20th Century:**

The 20th century ushered in a period of significant transformation and advancement in nursing, accompanied by its own set of challenges. With the emergence of modern healthcare systems, nurses began to gain recognition as integral members of interdisciplinary care teams. However, challenges persisted, including gender biases within the profession, limited career opportunities for women, and unequal pay compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, rapid technological advancements and medical breakthroughs posed challenges in keeping pace with



evolving healthcare practices. Nurses face the daunting task of adapting to new technologies while maintaining the core values of patient-centered care. Furthermore, the growing complexity of healthcare delivery systems and increasing patient acuity levels placed additional strain on nursing workloads, exacerbating issues such as burnout and workforce shortages (Silva, & Ferreira, 2021).

### ☒ **Challenges in Nursing Today:**

There are different problems in nursing now than there were in the past, but the job is still satisfying for people who want to help others. Today, nursing is a very broad field with many job possibilities for people who want to make it their career. Online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) programs and other advanced degree programs have given nurses more options and the skills they need to deal with new obstacles (Martínez-Zaragoza, et al.2020).

#### ○ **Long hours:**

Long hours are one problem that nurses have always had to deal with. Because nursing is a job that never ends, they usually have busy schedules. Some people who work these long hours have to work extra hours, 12-hour shifts back to back, or be on call all the time. Because nurses have busy schedules, many of them work more than 40 hours a week. In the long run, this can make nurses tired. Mental and physical tiredness and stress can be extra problems in nursing, which can lead to mistakes that cost a lot of money.

#### ○ **Physicality:**

Most of the time, nurses are on their feet. As a nurse, you might have to help a patient get from a wheelchair to a bed or from the bed to the bathroom, which can be very hard on the body. They do have access to tools like slide sheets and motorized lifts that can make these physical tasks easier. But nurses get hurt at work a lot. Back injuries are one of the most common and long-lasting ones. People also often get shoulder injuries and leg pain (Mohammed, 2019).

#### ○ **Workplace Safety:**

In a hospital or professional setting, nurses have to deal with extra problems because of risks at work. Nurses are much more likely to be exposed to someone with a dangerous disease than the average person. This is because nurses work with sick people. One of the hardest things about



being a nurse is the chance of getting deadly diseases or being exposed to them. To deal with this problem, nurses need to take care of themselves and do things that keep them from getting sick.

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- **Violence at Work:**

Bullying and violence at work are big problems that affect a lot of people, and nurses aren't exempt. Bullying is "repeated, unwanted, harmful actions meant to embarrass, offend, and cause distress in the recipient." This is one of the most dangerous problems nurses have to deal with, and it's a big issue.

- **Not enough:**

A constant lack of nurses is a problem that never goes away. This makes nurses even busier and more stressed than they need to be. It can be stressful for a nurse who cares about her patients not to have enough time to spend with each one individually or with their families in a kind way (Silva, & Ferreira, 2021).

- **Improvements in technology:**

New technologies have had some great effects on the healthcare field, but they have also brought about one of the biggest problems nurses have ever had to deal with. As technology changes quickly, it can have an instant effect on how nurses do their jobs. This means that nurses have to keep learning new skills. If you're not naturally good with technology, new apps or hardware can be hard to get used to (Stoumpos, et al.2023).

- **The patient's death:**

Because of their job, nurses in some clinical situations may have to deal with patients who are dying. Anger, sadness, and helplessness are just some of the feelings that can come up after someone dies. When a patient die, nurses need to learn healthy ways to deal with their feelings so that sympathy fatigue doesn't take over. By doing this, they can focus on giving each customer the same care every time (Mohammed, 2019).

- **Healthcare Policy and Regulation:**



Nurses navigate complex healthcare policies, regulations, and reimbursement systems that impact patient care delivery, documentation requirements, and scope of practice, requiring ongoing advocacy and adaptation.

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### **☒ Dealing with Challenges in Nursing:**

- **Self-care:** Prioritize their own physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This includes getting enough sleep, eating healthily, exercising regularly, and engaging in activities you enjoy outside of work (Hossain, & Clatty, 2021).
- **Seek support:** Build a network of supportive colleagues, friends, and family members whom they can turn to for advice, encouragement, and emotional support. It's important to have people who understand the unique challenges of nursing (Shah, M. 2021).
- **Develop coping strategies:** Find healthy ways to manage stress and cope with difficult situations. This could include deep breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, journaling, or engaging in hobbies that help to relax and unwind.
- **Set boundaries:** Learn to recognize the limits and set boundaries to protect your physical and emotional health. This may involve saying no to additional shifts or responsibilities when nurses feel overwhelmed, and learning to delegate tasks when possible.
- **Practice self-compassion:** Nurses should be kind to themselves and recognize that it's okay to make mistakes or feel overwhelmed at times. They should treat themselves with the same compassion and understanding that they would offer to a colleague or patient-facing similar challenges.
- **Maintain good hygiene:** Good hygiene practices, including frequent and thorough hand cleansing, covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding direct facial contact, are all straightforward yet unexpectedly effective measures that nurses can implement to safeguard themselves against illness. Nurses can ensure that patients are donning personal protective equipment (PPE) while in a hospital environment. This includes donning goggles to



protect their eyes, gloves to safeguard their hands, masks to protect their noses and mouths, gowns to encase their epidermis, and additional articles of clothing (Magdi, 2022).

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- **Consider Staff Shortages:** When confronted with staffing shortages at their place of employment, nurses may attempt to negotiate with their supervisors so that their work schedules do not interfere with their ability to perform effectively. When an excessively demanding schedule cannot be avoided, nurses ought to proactively investigate alternative nursing modalities. It is of utmost importance to bear in mind that endangering one's health or the health of one's patients is counterproductive (Peters, 2023).
- **Develop Technology Abilities:** Nursing professionals ought to acknowledge that although the primary objective is patient care, the integration of technology can notably enhance operational effectiveness. Maintaining current knowledge of nursing technology is critical, given its purpose of streamlining duties. Nurses ought to recognize that the period of adjustment to technological advancements is valuable. To remain abreast of the dynamic advancements in technology, nurses may choose to proactively acquire new technological skills. Moreover, by providing more tools than the competition, upskilling may improve long-term career prospects in the nursing field, thereby potentially increasing possibilities for advancement (Altmiller, & Pepe, 2022).

### ☒ The psychological impact and support needs of nurses during a pandemic (COVID-19):

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses experienced profound psychological impacts stemming from the unprecedented challenges they faced. The pandemic created immense stress, anxiety, and fear among nurses as they navigated increased workloads, exposure to the virus, and ethical dilemmas. Many nurses grappled with feelings of helplessness, grief, and moral distress as they witnessed the suffering and loss of patients, often while facing resource shortages and insufficient support systems. The relentless nature of the pandemic exacerbated existing mental health issues and led to heightened levels of burnout and compassion fatigue among nurses (Yao, et al.2023).

In response to these psychological challenges, nurses require comprehensive support systems to address their unique needs. initiatives promoting self-care and resilience-building strategies were crucial for nurses to maintain their well-being amidst the pandemic's demands. Providing opportunities for rest and relaxation, encouraging regular breaks, and offering wellness programs



tailored to nurses' needs were effective measures in mitigating burnout and fostering psychological resilience. Recognizing and validating nurses' experiences, accomplishments, and sacrifices were also essential for boosting morale and promoting a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among healthcare teams (Tomlin, et al.2020).

### ☒ Transactional theory and coping

Transactional theory and coping mechanisms are crucial elements to consider when exploring the psychological effects of nursing work. Beyond the inherent occupational attributes of nursing, individual variances significantly influence stress management strategies within the workplace. Transactional theories of stress emphasize subjective perceptions of stressors, coping mechanisms, problem-solving approaches, prior experience, and personality types. Nurses often engage in primary appraisals of environmental stressors, assessing their potential costs and threats, followed by secondary appraisals of coping strategies and prior experiences to manage stressors. Coping, defined as any cognitive or behavioral effort to minimize, control, or endure perceived threats to health, plays a pivotal role in nurses' psychological well-being. Coping strategies such as problem-solving, seeking support, or avoidance may influence how nurses navigate the challenges of their profession. Understanding these coping mechanisms within the context of transactional theory is essential for comprehending the individual and workplace factors contributing to the psychological effects of nursing work (Mark, & Smith, 2012).

### ☒ Support Systems and Resources for Nurses:

- **Supportive Leadership:** Supportive leadership is essential for creating a work environment where nurses feel valued, respected, and empowered. Leaders who prioritize the well-being of their team members demonstrate empathy, provide emotional support, and actively listen to their concerns. Supportive leaders advocate for resources to alleviate workload pressures, address staffing issues, and foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork. By promoting trust, transparency, and open dialogue, supportive leadership enhances nurses' sense of belonging and job satisfaction (Sihvola, et al.2022).



**Effective Communication Channels:** Effective communication is fundamental to a positive work environment and is essential for ensuring clarity, coordination, and mutual understanding

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- among healthcare team members. Nurses rely on communication channels to convey critical information, share concerns, and collaborate on patient care. Clear communication promotes teamwork, reduces errors, and enhances patient safety. Organizations that prioritize effective communication invest in training programs, utilize technology solutions, and establish regular forums for staff feedback and input. By fostering open communication channels, organizations can strengthen relationships among team members and create a supportive and cohesive work environment.
- **Policies that Prioritize Employee Well-being:** Policies that prioritize employee well-being are essential for promoting a healthy work-life balance and preventing burnout among nurses. Organizations can implement policies such as flexible scheduling, paid time off, and wellness programs to support nurses' physical, emotional, and mental health needs. Additionally, policies that address workload management, staffing ratios, and safety protocols contribute to a safer and less stressful work environment. By aligning policies with the needs and priorities of their workforce, organizations demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being and create conditions for nurses to thrive professionally and personally (Mark, & Smith, 2012).
  - **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Many healthcare organizations offer EAPs, which provide confidential counseling services and support for employees facing personal or work-related issues. EAPs typically offer a range of services, including counseling, referrals to mental health professionals, and assistance with stress management (Baskar, et al.2021).
  - **Peer Support Programs:** Peer support programs involve connecting nurses with trained peers who can offer empathetic listening, encouragement, and guidance. These programs provide a safe space for nurses to share experiences, discuss challenges, and receive support from colleagues who understand the unique demands of their profession.
  - **Mental Health Resources:** Nurses can access a variety of mental health resources, including hotlines, online forums, and educational materials, to learn more about mental health issues, coping strategies, and available support services. These resources can help nurses better understand their own mental health needs and access appropriate support when necessary.

### Conclusion:



Nursing remains a noble profession fraught with both intrinsic rewards and significant challenges. The psychological impact of nursing work is undeniable, with nurses facing a myriad of stressors

ranging from long hours and physical demands to workplace safety concerns and technological advancements. Despite these challenges, nurses continue to demonstrate resilience and dedication to patient care. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for robust support systems to address nurses' unique psychological needs. Organizational efforts must prioritize supportive leadership, effective communication, and policies that promote employee well-being to foster a positive work environment and mitigate burnout.

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