

# A Study of the Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Burnout among Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Staff

Reza Saeidi<sup>1</sup>, Azra Izanloo<sup>2</sup>, Sara Izanlou<sup>2\*</sup>

1. Neonatal Research Center, Faculty of Medicine, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran

2. Razavi Cancer Research Center, Razavi Hospital, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Considering the importance of job satisfaction and occupational burnout among nurses, the present study aimed to determine the prevalence of occupational burnout and the degree of job satisfaction among neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) nurses.

**Methods:** The current research was a cross-sectional study in which the Job Descriptive Index and Maslach Burnout Inventory were distributed among the NICU nurses. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software.

**Results:** A total of 30 NICU nurses working in two public and private hospitals participated in the present study. The mean age of the participants was measured at  $37.46 \pm 6.93$  years, most of them (73.3%) held a Bachelor's degree and more than 60% were married. No significant relationship between job satisfaction and burnout was observed among the nurses. Both variables were moderate among the NICU nurses as representatives of the staff working in special units.

**Conclusion:** It is widely believed that people who are exposed to extreme stress for a long time are more likely to suffer from occupational burnout. Moreover, considering the importance of this issue in healthcare environments for the provision of services that physically and mentally affect patients, it is recommended to pay greater attention to employee satisfaction and burnout process in hospital settings.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Job satisfaction, NICU

## Introduction

The goal of the health system is to provide the highest quality of life for most people. Occupational burnout is caused by chronic psychological stress arising from the imbalance between environmental demands and individuals' ability to cope with these requirements (1). With increased environmental demands and peoples' inability to manage such demands, the resultant psychological pressure gives rise to burnout. Occupational burnout reduces customers' satisfaction with provided services due to their low quality. Therefore, recognition and prevention of burnout improve people's mental health and the quality of the services (2).

Given that the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) staff spend most of their time in the hospital and in contact with infants, they are more likely to develop psychological complications

induced by environmental conditions (e.g., depression, isolation). Failure to identify behavioral parameters for proper personnel management can aggravate this condition and lead to job resigns, job dissatisfaction, and other relevant problems in organizations (3). A study of job satisfaction can help to predict and control the staff behavior, increase efficiency, improve the employees' relationship, as well as enhance staff-patient interaction.

Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the NICU hospital staff job satisfaction and its impact on occupational burnout, as well as the effect of factors, such as work, supervisor, colleagues, promotion, and payment on occupational burnout. It should be noted that burnout is not merely caused by absolute weakness or inability of staff, rather the lack of

\* Corresponding author: Sara Izanlou, Razavi Cancer Research Center, Razavi Hospital, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran. Tel: +985136002894; Email: izanlous2@yahoo.com

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coordination between inherent characteristics of individuals and the nature of their work is also responsible for this problem(4). Consequently, non-coordination between the abovementioned factors may result in occupational burnout leading to disregard for important values, weakness of will, and low morale (5). Burnout is associated not only with the mental health of individuals but also with their level of well-being. As a result, learning about effective methods of coping with psychological stress and overcoming burnout can help to improve mental health and increase the effectiveness of human resources (6). In the past, it was assumed that occupational burnout syndrome was more common in practitioners of social domains, such as doctors, teachers, nurses, social workers, counselors, and police officers. However, today it is believed that occupational burnout may affect people in a variety of jobs and there is growing evidence that this syndrome poses a major threat to people with different occupations (7). Therefore, the current study aimed to examine the extent of occupational burnout and its relationship with satisfaction among NICU nurses.

## Methods

The present study was a cross-sectional study that examined the degree of occupational burnout and job satisfaction of all the NICU nurses. All the nurses working in the NICU of the hospital were included in the current study. Nurses who were not willing to complete the questionnaire and nurses with a history of severe stress in the past 6 months were excluded. In the present study, the Maslach Burnout Inventory was used to investigate burnout. It consists of four factors including 1) emotional exhaustion 2) personal accomplishment 3) depersonalization and 4)

engagement.

From a total of 25 items, 9, 8, 5, and 3 items are related to emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, depersonalization, engagement, respectively. The reliability of this instrument was confirmed in a study conducted by Maslach. In addition, the Job Descriptive Index was used to assess job satisfaction (8). The reliability of this instrument has been confirmed in Iran in studies performed by Moghimi and Filian (9, 10).

After the completion of the questionnaires by the nurses, the collected data were encoded and subjected to statistical analysis by taking into account the confidentiality of data. Pearson correlation test was used to investigate the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction of the nurses. The ANOVA test was utilized to determine how these two variables were correlated with the education level.

## Results

In the present study, 30 NICU nurses working in two large state and private hospitals were recruited. The mean age of the subjects was measured at  $37.46 \pm 6.93$  years, most of whom (73.3%) held a Bachelor's degree and more than 60% were married. On average, the subjects had  $1.48 \pm 0.5$  years of work experience. The satisfaction of the nurses in different job areas is presented in Table 1. The highest satisfaction rate was related to the nature of the job ( $69.44 \pm 12.96$ ).

The results of occupational burnout are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, the frequency and severity of personal achievements are higher than the other three dimensions, and the extent of engagement with patients' problems and their conditions among the nurses was less than the depersonalization dimension.

**Table 1.** Job satisfaction average based on the Job Descriptive Index

Variable	Mean	SD
Satisfaction with the nature of the job	69.44	12.62
Satisfaction with the direct supervisor	51.4	9.79
Satisfaction with colleagues	37.08	7.11
Satisfaction with promotion	14.24	7.77
Satisfaction with salary and benefits	23.56	7.28
Satisfaction with working conditions in the current setting	22.08	7.65
Overall satisfaction	219.32	43.81

**Table 2.** Average occupational burnout in four dimensions of Maslach burnout inventory

Dimension	Frequency		Severity	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Emotional exhaustion	20.42	14.96	24.35	15.09
Personal achievement	30.51	12.01	30.51	12.01
Depersonalization	7.20	8.85	7.20	8.85
Engagement with patients' conditions	4.44	4.87	5.55	5.53

**Table 3.** Correlation between job satisfaction and occupational burnout dimensions

	Emotional exhaustion	Personal achievements	Depersonalization	Engagement with patients' conditions
Job satisfaction (p-value)	0.426	0.087	0.093	0.786

Pearson correlation test was used to determine the difference between age and occupational burnout. The obtained results indicated that although emotional exhaustion was inversely correlated with burnout, the relationship was not significant ( $r=-0.46$ ,  $P=0.108$ ). As for the personal achievement dimension, the relationship was positive and insignificant ( $r=0.405$ ,  $P=0.107$ ), while for depersonalization dimension, the relationship was not significant ( $r=-0.415$ ,  $P=0.159$ ). The same also held true for engagement dimension ( $r=-0.23$ ,  $P=0.494$ ). The emotional exhaustion dimension was not related to the level of education ( $P=0.686$ ). Furthermore, personal achievements, depersonalization, and engagement were not correlated with the level of education, ( $P=0.454$ ,  $P=0.693$ ,  $P=0.211$ ), respectively.

Analysis of the relationship between age and job satisfaction suggested that they were not significantly related ( $r=0.29$ ,  $P=0.331$ ). Moreover, there was no significant difference between job satisfaction at different education levels ( $P=0.643$ ).

Table 3 shows the results of the Pearson correlation test for job satisfaction and occupational burnout among NICU nurses. As can be seen, these two are not significantly related.

In addition, there was no significant difference between occupational burnout and job satisfaction among nurses in public and private hospitals ( $P>0.05$ ).

## Discussion

In the present study, the NICU nurses had moderate job satisfaction and it was not significantly correlated with age and educational level. On the other hand, occupational burnout was not high in four dimensions of emotional exhaustion, personal achievement, depersonalization, and engagement in this group of nurses. Moreover, no association was found between job satisfaction and occupational burnout. Talaei et al. in a study on employees of University of Medical Sciences indicated a significant relationship between three dimensions of Maslach Burnout Inventory and variables of age and education (11). This discrepancy could be due to the small sample size of the current study or the heterogeneity of the subjects of the mentioned study performed by Talaei et al.

In the current research, the emotional exhaustion was moderate, which is consistent with the findings of the study carried out by Kilfedder (12) on 510 nurses in Scotland, and the study performed by Keller on American physicians (13). This can be attributed to long and consecutive night and evening work shifts of the nurses. As such, several researchers in different countries have suggested reducing work hours and consecutive shifts, as well as the promotion of entertainment programs to raise the employees' morale (14).

In a study conducted by Talaei (11), the mean score of depersonalization was calculated at 7.7 which can be regarded as moderate, according to the standard cut-off of Maslach Inventory. This finding is also in line with the results of our study, in which an average score of 7.20 was achieved. In the present study, although this dimension had no significant relationship with age, other studies have reported contradictory results. For example, Talaei (11) concluded that emotional exhaustion decreases with age. Whereas, Sharma (15) reported no correlation between age and occupational burnout among cosmetic surgeons.

With this background in mind, burnout seems to be a potential problem in all occupations, especially educational and service businesses, including universities and hospitals, where the staff has to deal with students and patients. Another important point about occupational burnout is its direct and indirect expenses. Occupational burnout, absenteeism, reduced work quality, interpersonal conflicts with colleagues, physical-psychological problems, job change, and eventually desertion, incur exorbitant costs for relevant organizations. Therefore, implementing measures to manage occupational burnout help to improve mental health, interpersonal relationships, and the quality of service provision while reducing the costs of absenteeism, early retirement, and desertion.

One of the major advantages of understanding job satisfaction and its relationship with occupational burnout is controlling employee behavior under different circumstances (7). The way the staff treats each other in the hospital environment and their behavior with patients is of particular importance. A high level of job satisfaction among hospital staff contributes

to hospital development and improves staff efficiency.

One of the limitations of the present study was its small sample size. Accordingly, it is suggested to undertake similar studies with larger sample size, as well as taking into account confounding factors, such as the level of depression and anxiety of nurses and their work shifts.

## Conclusion

It is widely believed that people who are exposed to extreme stress for a long period of time are more likely to suffer from occupational burnout. Moreover, considering the importance of this issue in healthcare environments for the provision of services that physically and mentally affect patients, it is recommended to pay greater attention to employee satisfaction and occupational burnout process in hospital settings.

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## Conflicts of interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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