

Construction of Operational Definition of Nurses' Occupational Well-Being Based on the Theory of Work Engagement

Jiang Li¹, Xiaoshan Li^{1,*}, Deming Kong¹, Xuelian Kong², Jiaying Fu¹, Jianshen Yang¹

¹Kunming Children's Hospital, Yunnan Province, Kunming, 650103, China

²Chinese People's Liberation Army Joint Logistic Support Force No. 920 Hospital, Yunnan Province, Kunming, 650032, China

*Corresponding author

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the operational definition of nurses' occupational well-being and proposes key factors affecting it based on the theory of work engagement. The article first reviews the multidimensional concept of well-being, emphasizing the subjectivity of individual perceptions of well-being, and points out that occupational well-being is a positive psychological state experienced by individuals in their work, which promotes personal potential and career development. According to Walker and Avant's^[1] eight-stage concept analysis method, this paper proposes four core attributes of nurses' occupational well-being: job satisfaction, work-life balance, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and workplace resources. These attributes together constitute the operational definition of nurses' occupational well-being and provide nursing leaders with effective intervention points to address the challenges commonly faced by nurses. The paper further demonstrates the application of these attributes in actual work through typical and contrasting cases, as well as their specific impact on nurses' occupational well-being. Etiological analysis points out that with the development of the healthcare system and the increasing importance of the role of nurses, their well-being is often neglected, leading to widespread burnout and stress symptoms among nurses. Consequence analysis examines the positive impact of occupational well-being on nurses' work enthusiasm, efficiency, job satisfaction, and the direct impact on the quality of nursing services. Finally, the paper discusses empirical referents, including previous measurement methods for work-related well-being and well-being indices, and their application in assessing nurses' occupational well-being. The conclusion emphasizes that nurses' occupational well-being is of great significance to the health of nurses themselves, patient recovery, and the overall efficiency and quality of the healthcare team. Therefore, medical institutions and society should pay attention to and improve nurses' occupational well-being from multiple aspects to promote the overall quality of the healthcare profession.

Keywords: Occupational Well-Being; Job Satisfaction; Work-Family Balance; Workplace Resources; Workplace Interpersonal Relationships; Work Engagement Theory

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving healthcare environment, the occupational well-being of nurses has become a crucial factor influencing the quality of care and retention of nursing staff. With increasing work pressures and the complexity of care demands, issues related to burnout and mental health among nurses are increasingly drawing attention. Based on the theory of work engagement, this study aims to construct an operational definition of nurses' occupational well-being and explore the key factors that affect it. By conducting an in-depth analysis of core attributes such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, workplace interpersonal relationships, and workplace resources, this paper provides targeted intervention strategies for nursing managers to enhance nurses' occupational well-being and, in turn, promote the overall development of the healthcare industry.

2. Defining Attributes

Since ancient times, happiness has been the ultimate goal that humans pursue, a beautiful ideal full

of longing. However, the concept of happiness itself is vague and unclear^[2], and each person has a different definition of happiness in their hearts. Cognitive differences lead to diverse emotional experiences, resulting in a wide variety of well-being^[3]. The Collins Dictionary^[4] interprets happiness as health, comfort, and pleasure, involving a lasting sense of peace and joy on emotional, physical, and psychological levels. Hoopert^[5] views happiness as a positive mental state, including capabilities, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotions, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality^[6]. So, what exactly is happiness? The American Psychiatric Association's definition of happiness is more concise: a state of happiness and satisfaction with low levels of suffering and complete physical and mental health^[3].

In the occupational field, the construction of well-being is also diverse. Occupational well-being refers to the pleasant psychological state experienced at work, which helps to stimulate individual potential and promote work development^[7]. It is also a positive emotional experience, nurtured by constructive conditions inside and outside of work, allowing employees to grow and realize their potential^[8]. Well-being related to work is a comprehensive concept that covers multiple dimensions^[9].

This paper aims to elucidate the concept of nurses' occupational well-being and explore its connection with work engagement. According to Han^[2], nurses' occupational well-being is significantly affected by work engagement, which is positively correlated with engaging in meaningful work, a point supported by studies from Fitzpatrick and McCarthy^[10]. Although research on work well-being in the nursing industry has always lacked a solid theoretical foundation, nurses' occupational well-being is considered a complex indicator influenced by various factors^[6]. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to provide an accurate and in-depth definition and explanation to help nursing leaders effectively address the common challenges faced by nurses today. To achieve this goal, this paper employs the eight-stage concept analysis method proposed by Walker and Avant^[11].

2.1 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a key indicator in assessing occupational well-being, covering satisfaction with various dimensions such as job content, work environment, and compensation. Nurses who are passionate about their profession and feel satisfied with their work tend to exhibit higher levels of work engagement^[12], and there is a close positive correlation between high work engagement and strong occupational well-being^[13]. The emergence of occupational well-being typically goes through a process from professional identification to job satisfaction, ultimately forming well-being. Few nurses can experience occupational well-being when they are dissatisfied with their work. There is a close interrelationship between job satisfaction and occupational well-being, with job satisfaction being defined as a positive evaluation of work or its components^[14]. When nurses feel satisfied with their work and perceive personal achievements, their intention to leave their jobs tends to decrease^[15]. Lu, Barribal, Zhang, and While^[16] pointed out that job satisfaction is influenced by the nature of work and individual expectations of work^[17]. Since the nature of work has an objective aspect, while work expectations are subjective, measuring nurses' job satisfaction requires considering certain subjective factors and combining other attribute characteristics for a more precise definition.

2.2 Work-life balance

Work-life balance has a significant impact on nurses' job satisfaction^[18], which in turn can enhance the quality of nursing services and occupational well-being. Nurses who feel satisfied in their personal lives tend to exhibit a more positive attitude at work. Life satisfaction can accumulate psychological capital, stimulate self-motivation, thereby generating a stronger sense of well-being at the individual level, which often surpasses the impact at the organizational level^[19]. A discourse analysis study in Spain indicates that work-family conflict is one of the factors affecting nurses' professional engagement and experiences of occupational well-being. A survey by the American Nurses Association^[20] points out that nurses face significant psychological and physical stress, which is exacerbated by moral responsibilities. Many nurses go home with worries and anxiety after work^[21], indicating that it is difficult for people to completely separate emotions from work and personal life. Work engagement does not conflict with a harmonious family life; individuals can find a balance point based on their own circumstances. Work-life balance is a key factor affecting nurses' occupational well-being, and failure to achieve this balance may lead to a decrease in work well-being^[22].

2.3 Relationships in the workplace

The concept of interpersonal relationships in the workplace is closely linked to job satisfaction, and can even be considered synonymous^[22], and it has a positive association with well-being^[23]. In the nursing industry, interpersonal skills are crucial for nurses to perceive occupational well-being^[6]. Since nursing work is essentially team-based, especially with the increasing trend of interdisciplinary collaboration, teamwork has become even more important, making workplace interpersonal relationships particularly significant in team development models. Relationships among colleagues are an important source of nurses' occupational well-being^[6]. Establishing positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues and leaders not only enhances team atmosphere and work engagement but also strengthens the positive experience of occupational well-being.

2.4 Workplace resources

Work resources refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational elements that help achieve work goals, reduce the physiological and psychological costs associated with work demands, and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development^[15,24]. It covers aspects such as career development opportunities, work environment, and working conditions. Numerous studies have closely linked personal resources and work resources with work engagement^[10]. Work resources can alleviate the stress brought by work demands, help achieve goals, and promote personal and professional development, thereby enhancing occupational well-being^[25]. When nurses face work demands, they use work resources to balance these demands, thereby improving work efficiency and work engagement^[26]. Work resources are also seen as buffers that mitigate work demands that can lead to job burnout^[10]. In healthcare organizations, those that enable employees to feel occupational well-being often provide abundant career development and work environment resources^[15]. Abundant career development resources can enhance work capabilities and increase work engagement^[15,26], and ongoing professional development is the cornerstone of nurses' professionalism^[15,24]. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory proposed by Demerouti and others, work resources can balance work demands and make work more meaningful^[15]. A lack of work resources or personal resources can lead to disengagement, reduce nurses' occupational well-being, and even cause job burnout^[15]. The resource theory indicates that employees' well-being varies with the abundance of resources^[13]. Schaufeli's work engagement theory emphasizes vigor, dedication, and absorption, showing that personal resources have a significant impact on nurses' work engagement^[27]. Maslach and Leiter's work engagement theory emphasizes the gain spiral relationship between work resources and work engagement, with work resources significantly affecting the level of work engagement. The resource conservation theory points out that the more resources an individual has, the more they can accumulate and create more resources, thus better engaging in work^[10]. The broaden-and-build theory emphasizes that the positive emotions generated by personal and work resources help cope with work stress and engage in work with a better state. Work engagement is an objective manifestation of occupational well-being, and when nurses perceive occupational well-being, they can also make fuller use of workplace resources and engage in work.

2.5 Operational definition

The occupational well-being of nurses is defined as job satisfaction influenced by workplace relationships, work resources, and work-life balance (The specific structural relationships are shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1: Schematic diagram of four attribute relationships.

3. Model Case

Xiaoli is passionate about her job. She believes that choosing the nursing profession was a very correct decision because she can help others and contribute to society. She is confident in her ability to do her job well, and she believes that her professional knowledge and skills can help patients recover their health. At the same time, she is very grateful for the training and development opportunities provided by the hospital, which allow her to continuously improve herself (career development). She manages her time wisely, ensuring both high-quality work and sufficient rest and leisure time for herself (work-life balance). Moreover, she maintains close contact with her family and friends, sharing the ups and downs of life, which makes her life more colorful.

The hospital provides nurses with advanced medical equipment, a comfortable working environment, and abundant professional knowledge training (workplace resources). These resources enable Xiaoli to perform her job better and also make her feel the dignity and value of her profession. In her team, everyone respects and supports each other (workplace interpersonal relationships), working together for the recovery of patients. In addition, she actively participates in various team activities, such as dinners and birthday celebrations, which make her feel the cohesion and warmth of the team.

4. Contrary Case

Lisa is an operating room nurse, and the heavy workload often makes her feel painful (job dissatisfaction). Due to the fatigue at work, Lisa is often under stress and even somewhat depressed. She loses interest in everything in life, her smile disappears, and she often loses her temper with her family, shouting and yelling (work-life imbalance). When her colleagues learned about Lisa's situation, they often gossiped in the department, commenting that Lisa had depression (lack of good workplace interpersonal relationships). Since then, the thing Lisa feared most every day was seeing her colleagues in the department, and the atmosphere in the department made her feel suffocated (lack of a comfortable workplace environment). Finally, one day, she mustered up the courage to resign.

5. Antecedents

As the healthcare system continues to evolve and transform, the role of nurses within it becomes increasingly important. Regrettably, despite the relentless dedication of nurses under immense pressure, their well-being is often overlooked in the current healthcare system. People expect empathy and care from nurses, but often neglect that nurses, too, need compassion and care to enhance their well-being^[6]. Issues such as the working environment, work stress, and the physical and mental health of nurses are becoming more prominent, and ensuring and improving the well-being of nurses has become an urgent issue to address. Studies have shown that the level of occupational well-being among nurses is moderate^[19], and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought higher levels of stress to healthcare workers, with some nursing staff exhibiting symptoms of burnout and stress^[28]. It is projected that there will be a shortage of nursing positions in the next 10 years^[28,29]. Faced with such a significant crisis, hospitals must pay attention to the occupational well-being of nurses to minimize staff turnover^[6]. Research from the Australia Institute has found that about one-fifth of the healthcare workforce is experiencing compassion fatigue, and 17% of the nursing workforce is in a state of anxiety, depression, and stress, which is an alarming statistic. Geographic differences do not affect the level of nurse well-being and their views on the professional practice environment^[30]. It can be seen that the current state of nurses is far from ideal, and it is imperative to change the negative state of nurses and improve their well-being^[31].

6. Consequences

Well-being is a positive emotional experience that stems from the fulfillment of constructive conditions in work and life, and it promotes individual growth and the full realization of potential^[8]. A high level of occupational well-being can significantly enhance nurses' work enthusiasm, efficiency, and satisfaction, while a low level of occupational well-being may lead to increased job burnout and conflicts with patients^[32]. Research indicates that individuals with higher well-being are more efficient both at work and at home^[33]. As a positive emotion, occupational well-being can enhance the performance of individuals and organizations, stimulate nurses' work enthusiasm and creativity, and

thereby increase work engagement^[34]. The well-being of nurses has a direct impact on the quality of nursing services^[31,35]. It is also central to the provision of healthcare services and the sustainable development of healthcare systems^[36].

7. Empirical Referents

Traditionally, work-related well-being has often been measured and defined solely by burnout, a limited perspective that restricts our comprehensive analysis of the relationship between leadership styles and work well-being^[37]. In the measurement of subjective well-being, methods include self-report scales, experimental manipulation, and memory measurement, among which self-report scales are the most commonly used. These scales primarily assess individuals' subjective well-being through cognitive and affective dimensions, as well as their combination^[38]. The Nurse Work Well-being Scale developed by Chen and Liu^[38] is an example of a scale specifically designed to assess subjective well-being in the context of nursing work^[6]. Additionally, the Well-Being Index (WBI) serves as an assessment tool that helps us measure work-life balance, the meaning of work, and job satisfaction^[11]. It is noteworthy that a higher WBI score reflects a lower degree of work-life integration and lower job satisfaction^[11]. The Nurse Workforce Well-being (NWB) scale is another valid and reliable tool specifically for measuring the work well-being of hospital nurses. It not only aligns with psychological characteristics and focuses on the concept of work well-being but also assesses key factors that promote work well-being in nursing work and hospital environments, in order to identify areas that need to be maintained, strengthened, or given additional attention, thereby enhancing nurses' work well-being^[17]. Work well-being in the workplace is a comprehensive concept that includes work life quality, requiring us to use effective and reliable measurement methods to accurately assess and enhance employee job satisfaction and overall well-being, thereby creating a healthier and more efficient work environment.

8. Summary

Nurses' occupational well-being refers to the job satisfaction experienced under the influence of workplace relationships, work resources, and work-life balance. The enhancement of these factors is crucial for improving the professional well-being of nurses, which in turn can elevate the overall quality of healthcare services. The occupational well-being of nurses is not only related to their own health and well-being but also directly affects the recovery process of patients and the efficiency and service quality of the medical team. Therefore, medical institutions and all sectors of society must pay attention to the occupational well-being of nurses and take comprehensive measures from multiple perspectives to enhance their job satisfaction and occupational well-being. This will not only strengthen the professional dignity and motivation of nurses but also promote the improvement of medical service quality, ultimately achieving the sustainable development of the medical service system.

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