

JOB SATISFACTION OF NURSES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Job satisfaction of medical workers is an essential element of providing healthcare services. Ample empirical evidence supports the cause-and-effect relationship between employee job satisfaction and patient security and quality of care provided. This paper considers the job satisfaction of nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic with regard to their years of employment, age, professional education, job position, possibility of advancement, relationship with the superiors,

Issue 4/2021

and organization of work. A standardized survey with a job satisfaction scale was used for data collection. The survey was completed from 23 June to 13 July 2020 by 27 out of the 50 nurses working at the Covid-designated hospital in Leskovac, Serbia. The results showed that the employees with fewer years of employment were more satisfied than their more experienced co-workers. The results on the entire job satisfaction scale showed that 2.6% of the respondents were very dissatisfied, 28.3% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while only 9.3% were very satisfied with their job. One of the main reasons for such response distribution is the lack of career advancement options. This research found that organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and years of experience are significant predictors of successful work for the nurses.

Keywords: *hospital work; nurses; pandemic; satisfaction; work conditions.*

JEL Classification: I11, J28, M54

Introduction

According to recent studies, in today's world an average person changes 14 to 16 jobs during their lifetime [US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019]. American psychologist Amy Wrzesniewski [1997] states that people experience work in three ways: as a job, as a career, and as a calling. Those who regard it as a calling show the highest degree of satisfaction with their employment. Job in these terms is a common research topic, considering its existential significance for every individual. It is especially significant in times of extensive changes in the work structure and requirements, which is a result of modern-day dynamic development of social communities [Knežević, 2016].

With regard to job satisfaction, a review of the evidence-based literature suggests that there is no single, generally accepted, definition of the term. Vroom [1962] in his definition on job satisfaction focuses on the role of the employee in the workplace. Thus, he defines job satisfaction as affective orientations on the part of individuals toward work roles which they are presently occupying [Vroom, 1962]. Job satisfaction is the key ingredient that leads to recognition, income, promotion, and the achievement of other goals that lead to a feeling of fulfillment [Kaliski, 2007]. Some authors recognize it as highly complex [Habazin, 2013; Campbell, 2021]. In the field of healthcare, the job satisfaction of nurses is one of the main factors profoundly influencing the quality of the entire healthcare service.

Job satisfaction among the nursing population varies according to age, job position, years of employment, work environment, number of employees, employee interrelations, work conditions, two-way communication with the superiors, salary, and the possibility of career advancement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that work overload, dissatisfaction with the work conditions, poor interpersonal relationships, and bad communication are the chief factors of job dissatisfaction [Lučanin, 2010; Hawken, 2005]. Nurses work to improve their patients' health, which involves disease prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. They help the patients deal with the difficulties of their condition, participate in the implementation of diagnostic methods and interventions during treatment, and are essentially involved in the entire life of their patients during their stay in healthcare facilities at all levels. This is why their daily task performance is directly related to the degree of quality of provided healthcare service, as confirmed by Barać et al. [2015]. Other studies also indicate varying degrees of importance of job satisfaction, as well as a strong connection between job satisfaction and satisfaction with one's work environment.

Theoretical background and literature review

Numerous job satisfaction studies were also accompanied by the development of suitable theories. Both the empirical results and their theoretical interpretations attempted to answer which factors influence job satisfaction [Habazin, 2013; Lisa et al., 2021]. The global and the analytical approach are two thorough approaches that measure job satisfaction. The global approach defines job satisfaction as a general affective attitude towards work and the employing organization. It answers the clearly posed question, "How satisfied are you with your job"? The analytical approach examines job satisfaction through various aspects, such as salary, the degree of work independence, management style, and so on. These aspects are used to examine the structure of satisfaction, i.e. what makes employees satisfied or dissatisfied. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. They most commonly involve the use of a questionnaire or a survey asking the respondents to provide their subjective assessments. However, such investigations are limited by the fact that the respondents' statements do not necessarily reflect their honest opinions or feelings, as they are often prone to being dishonest or provide socially acceptable responses. Consequently, it is of paramount importance for the surveys to be anonymous [Conrad et al., 1985]. This paper examines the job satisfaction of nurses at the Covid-designated hospital in Leskovac, Serbia, in terms of years of employment, age, professional education, and job position.

Issue 4/2021

Research aim

The aim of this research is to determine the degree of job satisfaction of the nurses employed at the Covid-hospital in Leskovac in relation to their years of employment, age, professional education, and job position. We can also point to some similar research which was conducted during the Covid 19 pandemic [Danesh, et al., 2021; Pniak et al., 2020; Babamiri et al., 2020].

Method

The respondents comprise 27 nurses employed at the Covid-hospital in Leskovac out of 50 employed nurses in total, which is more than a half, specifically 54% of all nurse employees. The data were collected from 23 June to 13 July 2020. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Covid-hospital in Leskovac by its decision no. 8155/2. The research was conducted anonymously, using a standardized measuring tool – the job satisfaction survey [Spector, 1985], intended for examining opinions pertaining to job satisfaction. All the respondents were acquainted with the research method and procedure prior to the survey. The first part of the survey contains questions regarding general socio-demographic information about the respondents, namely their gender, age, professional education, job position, and years of employment at their current job, while the second part contains 14 questions specifically focused on job satisfaction through the following indicators: possibility of career advancement, relationship with superiors and other co-workers, rewards, work activities, work organization, and communication. Each claim includes a five-point Likert scale of responses from *very dissatisfied – 1* to *very satisfied – 5*.

Results

Out of 27 nurses who participated in the survey, 44.4% were male and 55.6% female. According to age, 40.7% were aged 20 to 35, 44.4% were 36 to 50, and 14.8% were 51 or over. With regard to education, the majority of nurses received either a vocational nursing college or bachelor's degree in applied studies [63%], while 37% of the respondents only had a high school diploma. In terms of their total years of employment, 51.9% have been employed for 5 years or less, 18.5% from 6 to 15 years, 22.2% from 16 to 30 years, and 7.4% have been employed for 31 years or more.

Examination of nurses' job satisfaction during a pandemic posed an immense challenge, considering their work in uncommon or even emergency conditions. The increasing pressure on the employees is a result of the growing number of

hospitalized patients, hospitals operating over capacity, and the employees facing a new disease that elicits new kinds of fear and anxiety, one of the reasons being non-standardized protocols and frequent changes from the authorities. Therefore, this research is an attempt to identify specific predictors of job [dis]satisfaction of the nurses employed at the Leskovac General Hospital during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey results are presented in Table 1.

It is apparent that adequate equipment is one of the main prerequisites for successful work. Equipment plays a crucial role in nurses' job satisfaction, especially under the circumstances such as a pandemic, when its protective function is necessary for safe work performance. The results show that 25.9% or slightly over one quarter of the surveyed nurses were dissatisfied with the equipment that they were assigned or that they used at work.

The second examined predictor of job satisfaction is the available time for job performance. The results indicate that 70.4% of the surveyed nurses were satisfied with the available time for job performance. This also suggests that the respondents spent more time at their job than during normal circumstances, because the pandemic required a different working hours regime.

With regard to the available time for direct work with patients, the number of respondents who were satisfied with this aspect was much lower, specifically 40.7%. This is because nurses working in red Covid-19 zones had to follow special epidemiological protocols, which occupied a significant amount of time out of their effective performance.

Considering that the pandemic and the resulting difficult work conditions often require momentary decision making, particularly in situations when patients' lives are at stake, it is encouraging to learn that over a half of the respondents stated that they had the opportunity to make momentary decisions. Specifically, 51.9% of the nurses expressed satisfaction with their job autonomy.

Considering the responses given regarding job autonomy, it was reasonable to expect that the nurses' responses regarding their satisfaction with the opportunities to utilize all their knowledge, capabilities, and skills would be similarly distributed. Indeed, 59.3% of the respondents were satisfied with how much they were able to utilize their personal capacities.

On the other hand, the results concerning the job satisfaction predictor pertaining to external acknowledgement and validation of the nurses' work show that 7.4% of the respondents were dissatisfied with this aspect. Since this is a small percent of the total number of respondents, such results may be linked to the average salary of nurses in Serbia, which is among the lowest in the region.

Issue 4/2021

Table 1. Survey results

Job satisfaction of nurses		Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Satisfaction with the adequacy of work equipment	F	1	7	13	6	-
	P	3.7	25.9	48.1	22.2	-
Satisfaction with the available time for job performance	F	-	3	-	19	5
	P	-	11.1	-	70.4	18.5
Satisfaction with the available time for direct work with patients	F	-	7	4	11	5
	P	-	28.9	14.8	40.7	18.5
Satisfaction with the job autonomy – opportunities to make decisions	F	-	2	2	14	9
	P	-	7.4	7.4	51.9	33.3
Satisfaction with the opportunities to utilize personal capacities [knowledge, capabilities, skills]	F	1	2	3	16	5
	P	3.7	7.4	11.1	59.3	18.5
Satisfaction with the external acknowledgement and validation of their work	F	1	2	3	16	5
	P	3.7	7.4	11.1	59.3	18.5
Satisfaction with direct cooperation with their co-workers	F	-	1	8	15	3
	P	-	3.7	29.6	55.6	11.1
Satisfaction with the direct cooperation with their superiors	F	1	2	11	10	3
	P	3.7	7.4	40.7	37.0	11.1
Satisfaction with the way patients treat them	F	-	-	5	20	2
	P	-	-	18.5	74.1	7.4
Satisfaction with the opportunities for professional development and continuous education	F	1	4	15	5	2
	P	3.7	14.8	55.6	18.5	7.4
Satisfaction with the financial compensation for their work	F	2	9	9	6	1
	P	7.4	33.3	33.3	22.2	3.7
Satisfaction with the management and work organization	F	1	5	16	4	1
	P	3.7	18.5	59.3	14.8	3.7
Satisfaction with the clarity of work instructions	F	1	5	10	10	1
	P	3.7	18.5	37.0	37.0	3.7
Satisfaction with the opportunities to share their ideas with their superiors	F	1	7	6	12	1
	P	3.7	25.9	22.2	44.4	3.7

Note: In the survey participated 27 nurses, F – frequency, P – percent

Source: Authors

In any work process that takes place during an emergency, such as a pandemic, it is crucial that all the employees act as a harmonious and well-coordinated unit. This is why good direct cooperation with the co-workers is a significant job satisfaction predictor for any employee. The presented results indicate that over a half of the respondents [55.6%] were satisfied with the direct cooperation with their co-workers.

Somewhat smaller percentage of the respondents [37%] expressed satisfaction with the direct cooperation with their superiors, which may indicate that the cooperation between co-workers with the same status and job roles is better than that between employees with a different status, such as nurses and their superiors.

Another important predictor of job satisfaction is how patients treat nurses. During the pandemic, all medical personnel faced an increased risk in their employee-patient relationships. Therefore, it is important to learn how the nurses felt about the way their patients treated them. The results show that 74.1% of the respondents were satisfied with this aspect of their job.

The opportunity for professional development and continuous education is an important job satisfaction predictor for any employee, including nurses. However, the fact that more than a half of the respondents [55.6%] were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, i.e. neutral, regarding this aspect can be concerning. Yet, the very fact that the respondents work in red Covid-19 zones and are constantly at risk of becoming infected is enough to explain why they are currently not concerned with professional education and nursing seminars, which are regularly organized when the healthcare system, as well as the entire country, operates in normal circumstances.

Generally, adequate work compensation is directly associated with the degree of job satisfaction, which is also the case with the surveyed nurses, as expected. Cumulative percentage of the respondents who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their financial compensation and those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied amounts to 74%, which means that almost three-quarters of the respondents believe they are insufficiently financially compensated for their work.

The work process greatly depends on the management and task organization within the institution, which, as a rule, is an important predictor of job satisfaction. The majority of the respondents are neutral regarding the management and work organization in the Covid-19 work regime at the Leskovac General Hospital. A significant percentage of them [59.3%] were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with this aspect of the job.

Hospital work flow during a pandemic should proceed flawlessly, guided by specific protocols. This is why clear instructions are always preferable, especially

Issue 4/2021

in an emergency setting, which is the case with any pandemic. Unfortunately, a pandemic entails a variety of risks and minimizing them sometimes requires the hospital management to be able to make *ad hoc* decisions as well as to communicate them to the staff through clear and unequivocal instructions. The survey indicates that there are as many nurses who were satisfied with the clarity of work instructions as those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied [37% each].

Finally, the possibility of employees communicating freely and sharing ideas with their superiors has a considerable influence on their job satisfaction. The results show that a little over one-quarter of the respondents [25.9%] were dissatisfied with the opportunities they had to share their ideas with their superiors. This casts a shadow on the superior-subordinate relationship as an aspect of job satisfaction, especially during a pandemic, when the entire healthcare institution could benefit from any potentially problem-solving observation or idea.

Discussion

Among other things, the obtained results showed that the majority of surveyed nurses disagreed with the claim that their job offers the same career advancement opportunities as is the case with other professions, which is why they expressed dissatisfaction with this predictor of job satisfaction. In addition, the findings support the continuous efforts to amend healthcare work plans so as to give nurses more authority and responsibility in managing the patient treatment process.

Even though there have been numerous studies on the job satisfaction of nurses, what is lacking are those studies that would incorporate the ethical perspective of management and its influence on the work climate in healthcare institutions. The results of such studies would presumably help the improvement of the work atmosphere by prompting the managing personnel to show more respect, support, and candid care towards the nursing staff, who are the crucial link in the chain of everyday healthcare tasks [Nissanholtz-Gannot et al., 2017; Jang, 2017]. Likewise, there is a low positive correlation between the job satisfaction of nurses and their education and even a negative one in terms of the type of tasks they perform, indicating that the degree of job satisfaction increases or decreases depending on the level of education. One study found that the competences of managers in Slovenia [leadership style, personal traits] positively correlate with the job satisfaction of nurses [Lorber & Skela-Savič, 2012; Mueller & McCloskey, 1990]. In 2012, a Taiwanese hospital conducted a study on medical charting by the nursing staff and determined that the optimization of medical charting gave the

nurses more time to care for their patients directly, which generally increased their job satisfaction [Hsieh et al., 2016; Schermerhorn et al., 1991; Bjørk et al., 2007; Cowin, 2002; Aiken et al., 2001].

Implications for Occupational Health Nursing Practice

The investigation of the job satisfaction of nurses, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, is very significant, nevertheless extremely challenging. The immense pressure they face every day due to growing number of hospitalized patients and overloading of hospitals, as well as the fear from the unknown, have led to the changes of their daily activities and their overall job satisfaction. Hence, the intention of this study is to examine various predictors of job satisfaction of nurses in the Covid-designated hospital.

The findings of this study put additional value to the existing literature concerning occupational health and safety of nurses generally, and their job satisfaction specifically. The results have shown that overall organization of management and working practices should be improved, as well as the exchange of ideas and practices with the operative and executive management to increase the job satisfaction of nurses. Additionally, the results shed light on the importance of financial compensation for the nurses, so that they could direct their energy towards patients instead of own financial security. Therefore, the government and hospital management should put efforts towards the improvement of these aspects of nurses' job satisfaction.

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Issue 4/2021

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Issue 4/2021

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