


RESEARCH ARTICLE (ORIGINAL) 

Job satisfaction of nursing professionals working in a hospital's medical and surgical units

Satisfação no trabalho de profissionais de enfermagem das clínicas médica e cirúrgica de uma unidade hospitalar

Satisfacción laboral de los profesionales de enfermería de la clínica médica y quirúrgica de una unidad hospitalaria

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Received: 15.02.22

Accepted: 22.09.22

Abstract

Background: Job satisfaction influences the intention to stay on the job and impacts the quality and safety of nursing care.

Objective: To analyze job satisfaction among nursing professionals working in a hospital's medical and surgical units.

Methodology: This cross-sectional and analytical study was conducted with 149 nursing professionals working in a private hospital. Data were obtained through a sociodemographic and work-related questionnaire and the Job Satisfaction Scale (*Escala de Satisfação no Trabalho* [EST])

Results: Nursing professionals express their satisfaction with coworkers and managers. However, the results regarding their satisfaction with salary and career advancement demonstrate the nursing professionals' dissatisfaction. Most nursing professionals are indifferent to the dimension of satisfaction with the nature of the work.

Conclusion: Job satisfaction is ensured by maintaining a good relationship with managers and coworkers. Also, the level of satisfaction seems to increase as the health professional's experience in the unit increases.

Keywords: nursing; occupational health; job satisfaction; mental health; health management

Resumo

Enquadramento: A satisfação profissional influencia a intenção de permanecer no trabalho e reflete-se na qualidade e segurança da assistência em enfermagem.

Objetivo: Analisar a satisfação no trabalho de profissionais de enfermagem que atuam em setores de clínica médica e cirúrgica de uma unidade hospitalar.

Metodologia: Estudo transversal e analítico realizado com 149 profissionais de enfermagem em um hospital privado. Os dados foram obtidos através de questionário de levantamento de dados sociodemográficos e laborais e a Escala de Satisfação no Trabalho.

Resultados: Foi identificado que, para os profissionais de enfermagem, a satisfação com os colegas e com a chefia foram satisfatórias, porém os resultados relativos à satisfação com o salário e com as promoções foram expressos como insatisfatórios. Além disso, a satisfação com a natureza do trabalho, foi classificada como indiferente pelos profissionais de enfermagem.

Conclusão: A satisfação no trabalho é garantida por meio do bom relacionamento com a chefia e os colegas, e considera-se que o nível de satisfação aumenta conforme o tempo de experiência do trabalhador dentro do serviço.

Palavras-chave: enfermagem; saúde do trabalhador; satisfação no emprego; saúde mental; gestão em saúde

Resumen

Marco contextual: La satisfacción profesional influye en la intención de permanecer en el trabajo y se refleja en la calidad y seguridad de los cuidados de enfermería.

Objetivo: Analizar la satisfacción laboral de los profesionales de enfermería que trabajan en la sección clínica médica y quirúrgica de una unidad hospitalaria.

Metodología: Estudio transversal y analítico realizado con 149 profesionales de enfermería de un hospital privado. Los datos se obtuvieron mediante un cuestionario de datos sociodemográficos y laborales, y la Escala de Satisfacción Laboral.

Resultados: Se identificó que, para los profesionales de enfermería, la satisfacción con los colegas y con la dirección fue satisfactoria, pero los resultados relacionados con la satisfacción con el salario y con las promociones se consideraron insatisfactorios. Además, la satisfacción con la naturaleza del trabajo se clasificó como indiferente por los profesionales de la enfermería.

Conclusión: La satisfacción en el trabajo se garantiza mediante una buena relación con la dirección y los compañeros, y se considera que el nivel de satisfacción aumenta con el tiempo que el trabajador lleva ejerciendo en el servicio.

Palabras clave: enfermería; salud laboral; satisfacción en el trabajo; salud mental; gestión en salud



How to cite this article: Zaidan, J. L., Aquino, J. M., Lima, A. G., Barros, A. C., & Silva, E. R. (2022). Job satisfaction of nursing professionals working in a hospital's medical and surgical units. *Revista de Enfermagem Referência*, 6(1), e22017. <https://doi.org/10.12707/RV122017>



Introduction

The study of workers' health aims to understand the health/disease process considering the relationship between individuals and work. Humanity's productive development and advancing preventive medicine have allowed a new understanding of the work-health relationship. This relationship is based on the concept of the *work process* as an analysis tool that reframes previously simplified conceptions to fit a complex reality and consider the social and historical dimensions of work and the health/disease binomial. This way, it is possible to intervene in the world of work through healthcare practices designed for workers (Gomes et al., 2018).

Work directly relates to the situations individuals experience during the working day. While performing their work activity, human beings need to exercise their creativity and find meaning in it. Thus, the organizational structures of jobs must not impose rigid and inflexible rules on workers because when institutional rules are too strict, they block workers or promote their paralysis. The conflicts, tensions, stress, and suffering caused in the long run due to strict institutional rules lead to workers' dissatisfaction and the development of mental illnesses (Dejours & Abdoucheli, 2011; Trevisan et al., 2010).

Job satisfaction results from workers' assessment of the value or equity of their work experiences. It is a complex phenomenon involving multiple work-related factors, such as work environment, supervision, and management, that interact to satisfy workers' needs and working conditions (Liu et al., 2016).

Work experience accounts for workers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the work environment. Nursing professionals also experience job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as Cordeiro et al. (2019) demonstrate in their study. The authors show that nursing professionals are satisfied with their job performance and feel helpful to others. However, when it comes to physical and emotional "wear and tear," these professionals express their dissatisfaction.

Studying job satisfaction seeks to meet the need to adopt strategies and measures that reduce stressful agents in the work environment. The everyday confrontation with human suffering marks nursing practice and is a risk factor for nursing professionals' health. Understanding the factors related to satisfaction/dissatisfaction at work can minimize illness, reduce absenteeism, and promote care quality.

Thus, this study explores nursing professionals' job satisfaction in a hospital's medical and surgical units.

Background

Professional performance can be experienced in a way in which work is a source of pleasure or suffering. The well-being of healthcare workers is relevant because it influences the quality of care delivery through the described association between workers' psychological well-being and job performance (de Simone et al., 2018).

Job satisfaction among nursing professionals must become

an issue due to its potential impact on the quality and safety of patient care (Dejours & Abdoucheli, 2011; Lu et al., 2019).

This issue's relevance must be highlighted as the intention to stay on the job is directly proportional to job satisfaction (Yarbrough et al., 2017), as, on the other hand, job dissatisfaction increases institutional turnover rates (Lu et al., 2019; Masum et al., 2016).

Dejours and Abdoucheli (2011) also demonstrate that when workers are dissatisfied with one of the work variables, such as the work environment, supervision, and management, there may be implications for workers' physical and mental health and work-related stress. Corroborating this understanding, Dorigan and Guirardello (2017) point out that job satisfaction influences the intention to stay on the job and impacts the quality and safety of nursing care (Farman et al., 2017).

Therefore, job satisfaction is a crucial indicator of care quality, as well as an active process responsible for influencing the organization of work and the social life of workers (de Simone et al., 2018).

Given the complexity of nursing practice, reflection on the origins of dissatisfaction is needed, as the profession requires workers to handle the challenge of dealing with the suffering of others. Nevertheless, when nursing professionals can alleviate their patient's suffering, feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction arise. Thus, the manifestations of these feelings have repercussions on the quality of the care provided and the professionals' health. Moreover, they may strongly influence job satisfaction (Dejours & Abdoucheli, 2011).

Hence, it is vital to explore the satisfaction of nursing professionals with their work environment, as the results of the study can assist managers and workers in designing actions aimed at the team's professional satisfaction, which, in turn, can positively influence the quality of care (Vannuchi et al., 2016).

Research question

What is the job satisfaction level of nurses and nursing technicians working in a hospital's medical and surgical units?

Methodology

This quantitative, cross-sectional, and analytical study assessed 149 nursing professionals (23 nurses and 126 nursing technicians) from the clinical and surgical units of a private hospital in Recife, capital of the State of Pernambuco, Brazil. The data were collected between April and May 2019.

The investigators planned to conduct a census-type study in the institution with a nursing population of 561 workers. However, the sample was formed with a total population of 211 individuals considering only the nursing professionals working in the medical and surgical units of the hospital participating in the study, the inclusion criteria, and the possibility of losses. The calculation

considered a 50% proportion of job satisfaction, as in the literature, there was no proportion of this dependent variable to use as a baseline. A sampling error of 5% and a 95% confidence interval ($p = 0.05$) were also considered. This calculation identified the need for 137 individuals to have a significant sample. Thus, data collection was increased by 10% to prevent the sample from becoming insufficient for inferential analysis in case of losses.

Nurses and nursing technicians who had worked in the medical and surgical units for more than 6 months were included in the study. Nursing professionals on vacation, leave, or other benefits and those about to leave the job were excluded.

Two data collection instruments were used: a questionnaire surveying sociodemographic and work-related data and the Job Satisfaction Scale (*Escala de Satisfação no Trabalho* [EST]), created by Siqueira (2008) and validated by Barbosa et al. (2016).

The sociodemographic and work-related data questionnaire was applied to characterize the study participants and address some aspects influencing job satisfaction.

The EST was created by Siqueira (2008) and consisted of 25 items. The scale was validated in 2016 by Barbosa et al., who verified the scale's psychometric properties and performed the internal consistency analysis and exploratory factor analysis. The final version of the EST consists of 20 items, organized into five related dimensions: Satisfaction with coworkers; Satisfaction with salary; Satisfaction with managers; Satisfaction with the nature of the work; and Satisfaction with career advancement.

The EST can be administered individually or collectively. It uses a 7-point Likert-type answer scale, in which: 1 = *totally dissatisfied*; 2 = *very dissatisfied*; 3 = *dissatisfied*; 4 = *indifferent*; 5 = *satisfied*; 6 = *very satisfied*; 7 = *totally satisfied*. The scale results are analyzed considering each dimension's mean value (the sum of the scores attributed by participants in each item divided by the number of items in each of the five dimensions). Each dimension's scores are added to obtain the global EST score, and the result is divided by five - the result must be between 1 and 7 (Siqueira, 2008).

In terms of interpretation, higher mean values correspond to greater contentment or satisfaction with that dimension. Values between 5 - 7 suggest satisfaction, values between 1 - 3.9 show dissatisfaction, and those between 4 - 4.9 reveal an attitude of indifference - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Siqueira, 2008).

The participants were invited into a private room to answer the instruments to avoid bias in the data collection. The participants first answered the sociodemographic and work-related questionnaire, followed by the EST, taking a mean of 20 minutes to answer the questionnaires.

A database was created using Excel software and validated with double data entry. Then, the database was exported to the IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 19.0, where the analysis was conducted.

The sociodemographic and work-related variables were submitted to simple descriptive statistics with each variable's absolute and percentage values in the questionnaire. Contingency tables were designed, and the chi-square (χ^2)

test of independence was applied to describe job satisfaction according to the sociodemographic and work-related characteristics. The significance level considered was 5% ($p = 0.05$). Before applying the data collection instruments, the participants were informed about the study's objectives, reasons, benefits, and risks. They signed the Free and Informed Consent Forms, and the investigators ensured the confidentiality of the data collected. This study received authorization from the institution where the research was conducted and was approved by the Brazilian Research Ethics Committee under CAAE 02854318.4.0000.5192 and opinion number 3.075.791.

Results

Most nursing professionals in this study are women, totaling 82.2% ($n = 120$) of the sample. Regarding marital status, 59.3% ($n = 89$) are married, and 28.7% ($n = 43$) are single. Most nurses (47.8%, $n = 11$) have no children, and most nursing technicians (35.2%, $n = 44$) have only one child.

Considering the nursing professionals' monthly income based on the minimum wage value at the time, 45.5% ($n = 10$) of the nurses receive 2 to 3 minimum wages, and 55.2% ($n = 69$) of the nursing technicians have an income between 1 and 2 minimum wages.

Concerning the professional category, 84.6% ($n = 126$) of the participants are nursing technicians. As for specialization, 85.2% of the nursing technicians ($n = 104$) state that they have no specialization. Nevertheless, 82.6% ($n = 19$) of the nurses are specialized.

Among the specialized professionals, 66.4% ($n = 93$) say they work in their specialization area. Regarding the sector they work in, most professionals are from the medical unit, 77.2% ($n = 115$) of the sample studied. Regarding the work shift, most nurses work at night (56.5%; $n = 13$), while most nursing technicians work during the day (58.1%; $n = 72$). Considering absences from work due to illness, 70% ($n = 105$) report that they have never missed work due to illness. When asked about their choice of professional area, 97.3% ($n = 146$) confirmed that they work by choice.

As for work relationships, most participants (33.3%; $n = 50$) report that they always have autonomy in their work activities. This autonomy is demanded in the work environment (29.9%; $n = 44$) when they deal with unforeseen events. Participants also report that often or always (58.6%; $n = 88$) they suffer the pressure of accomplishing their tasks within the imposed deadline. Most also note that standards are always rigid (47.3%; $n = 71$).

According to Table 1, most nursing professionals (nurses and nursing technicians) express their satisfaction with the dimensions of Satisfaction with coworkers (65.3%; $n = 98$) and Satisfaction with managers (65.3%; $n = 98$). However, 89.2% ($n = 132$) are dissatisfied with the dimension of Satisfaction with salary and 61.2% ($n = 82$) with the dimension of Satisfaction with career advancement. Regarding the dimension of "Satisfaction with the nature of the work," 35.4% ($n = 52$) of the participants are indifferent.

Table 1

Risk Assessment of EST dimensions by nursing professionals working in a private hospital's medical and surgical units in 2020

EST dimensions	Risk Assessment					
	Dissatisfaction		Indifference		Satisfaction	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Satisfaction with coworkers	13	8.7	39	26.0	98	65.3
Satisfaction with salary	132	89.2	12	8.1	4	2.7
Satisfaction with managers	39	26.2	29	19.5	81	54.4
Satisfaction with the nature of the work	47	32.0	52	35.4	48	32.7
Satisfaction with career advancement	82	61.2	37	27.6	15	11.2

Table 2 shows that 67% ($n = 99$) of nursing professionals are indifferent or dissatisfied with the nature of their work. Of these, most are between 30 and 40 years old.

Table 2

Association between job satisfaction and age groups of nursing professionals working in the medical and surgical units of a private hospital in 2020

Dimension	Age groups (%)				<i>p</i>
	20 - 30 years	30 - 40 years	40 - 50 years	> 50 years	
Coworkers					
Dissatisfaction ($n = 13$)	23.08	38.46	15.38	23.08	0.301
Indifference ($n = 39$)	28.21	53.85	10.26	7.69	
Satisfaction ($n = 98$)	26.53	44.90	22.45	6.12	
Salary					
Dissatisfaction ($n = 132$)	28.03	47.73	16.67	7.58	0.523
Indifference ($n = 12$)	16.67	41.67	33.33	8.33	
Satisfaction ($n = 4$)	25.00	25.00	50.00	0.00	
Managers					
Dissatisfaction ($n = 39$)	41.03	38.46	12.82	7.69	0.253
Indifference ($n = 29$)	20.69	58.62	17.24	3.45	
Satisfaction ($n = 81$)	22.22	45.68	22.22	9.88	
Nature					
Dissatisfaction ($n = 47$)	42.55	44.68	4.26	8.51	0.001
Indifference ($n = 52$)	21.15	55.77	15.38	7.69	
Satisfaction ($n = 48$)	18.75	35.42	37.50	8.33	
Career Advancement					
Dissatisfaction ($n = 82$)	32.93	46.34	15.85	4.88	0.064
Indifference ($n = 37$)	24.32	37.84	21.62	16.22	
Satisfaction ($n = 15$)	13.33	46.67	40.00	0.00	

Considering the relation between the sociodemographic variables and the EST dimensions, a significant association is found in the Satisfaction with managers dimension and the nursing professionals' length of professional experience

on the job. It is also noted that 54% ($n = 75$) of nursing professionals are satisfied with the Satisfaction with managers dimension. Of this percentage, most nursing

professionals work at the hospital unit for between 5 and 10 years. Table 3 associates the EST dimensions with the professionals' length of service.

Table 3

Association between job satisfaction and length of professional experience of nursing professionals working in the medical and surgical units of a private hospital in 2020

Dimension	Length of professional experience in the job (%)					p
	0 - 5 years	5 - 10 years	10 - 15 years	15 - 20 years	> 20 years	
Coworkers						
Dissatisfaction ($n = 11$)	36.36	27.27	9.09	18.18	9.09	0.899
Indifference ($n = 36$)	41.67	38.89	2.78	8.33	8.33	
Satisfaction ($n = 94$)	31.91	38.30	8.51	9.57	11.70	
Salary						
Dissatisfaction ($n = 124$)	35.48	36.29	7.26	10.48	10.48	0.913
Indifference ($n = 12$)	16.67	50.00	8.33	8.33	16.67	
Satisfaction ($n = 4$)	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Managers						
Dissatisfaction ($n = 36$)	55.56	22.22	0.00	16.67	5.56	0.021
Indifference ($n = 29$)	27.59	48.28	10.34	6.90	6.90	
Satisfaction ($n = 75$)	26.67	41.33	9.33	8.00	14.67	
Nature						
Dissatisfaction ($n = 43$)	51.16	34.88	4.65	4.65	4.65	0.028
Indifference ($n = 48$)	35.42	41.67	2.08	10.42	10.42	
Satisfaction ($n = 47$)	19.15	36.17	12.77	14.89	17.02	
Career Advancement						
Dissatisfaction ($n = 78$)	37.18	38.46	6.41	7.69	10.26	0.144
Indifference ($n = 34$)	26.47	38.24	0.00	20.59	14.71	
Satisfaction ($n = 15$)	33.33	33.33	20.00	6.67	6.67	

Discussion

Bearing in mind that job dissatisfaction can potentially harm workers' health, this study focuses on the (dis)satisfaction of nursing professionals in medical and surgical units. It also reflects on the factors influencing working conditions and interpersonal relationships in the work environment using the EST (de Simone et al., 2018; Wisniewski et al., 2015). The five dimensions of the EST were analyzed, namely: Satisfaction with coworkers; Satisfaction with salary; Satisfaction with managers; Satisfaction with the nature of the work; and Satisfaction with career advancement.

The dimension "Satisfaction with coworkers" echoes the contentment derived from collaboration, friendship, trust, and relationship with coworkers. This EST dimension receives a good evaluation, as the participants express satisfaction in all of its items. The most contributing items to this dimension are "how I relate to my colleagues" and "how many friends I have among my colleagues." These results align with Oliveira et al. (2019), who identify that the factor promoting

the highest job satisfaction among nursing team members relates to the good relationships among them.

The dimension "Satisfaction with salary" refers to how satisfied professionals are with their salaries compared to how much they work, their professional competencies, the cost of living, and the effort they put into their work performance. This dimension reveals the participants' dissatisfaction with their salaries. They evaluate the five items of this dimension as unsatisfactory. The items with the most negative scores are: "salary compared to the cost of living;" "salary compared to how much I work;" and "salary compared to my professional competencies." In Brazil and Saudi Arabia, Teruya et al. (2019) and Alharbi et al. (2016) observe that nursing professionals are dissatisfied with the rewards, compensation, benefits, working conditions, and promotions. In Turkey, dissatisfaction is also associated with rewards, compensation, and benefits (Masum et al., 2016).

Salary dissatisfaction can lead to these professionals' need for more than one job, which may imply physical and

emotional exhaustion and negatively impact their quality of life. In this sense, other studies point out that benefits and compensation are the factors that most influence nursing professionals' satisfaction (Brayer et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014).

It is worth noting that the salary dissatisfaction expressed by this study's participants can relate to the data collection period. In 2019, the institution where this study was conducted underwent a cultural change that impacted the staff's salaries due to a benefits package (health plan) offered to the professionals.

Thus, institutions should promote salary plans as central strategies for valuing the nursing team and improving patient experience and population health. However, attention to health professionals is often relegated to the background before the urgency of providing care and responding to external needs (Appelbaum et al., 2019). The dimension Satisfaction with managers is considered acceptable, with all items being rated satisfactorily and the nursing professionals assessing their relationships with the managers as positive. In this dimension, the items contributing to the professional's job satisfaction in the studied institution are the understanding between the professionals and their managers, how the managers treat them, and the managers' professional competencies. The items with the highest means in this dimension that contributed positively to the nursing team's job satisfaction are the managers' professional competencies and the understanding between the professionals and their managers. The results show the nursing professionals' contentment with the organization and the managers' professional competencies and reveal the managers' interest and understanding regarding their employees.

This study produced similar results to the literature as workers express their satisfaction with the managers, the relationships between them, and the nature of the work. It is noted that a fair manager and a good relationship between peers and their supervisors in the work environment are a source of satisfaction. However, professionals are critical of the freedom of expression with the managers (Teruya et al., 2019).

Professionals show indifference toward the dimension of Satisfaction with the nature of the work. This construct reflects the interest aroused by the work activities, the ability of the job to engage the worker, and the variety of activities the worker performs. The items with positive scores are: "the variety of activities that I do;" "the degree of interest aroused by my work activities;" and "the opportunity to do the type of work I do." However, participants negatively score the item "the ability of my job to engage me."

Oliveira et al. (2019) observe that professionals are dissatisfied with their professional recognition, the structure and organization of their service, and the lack of materials. Although nursing professionals from the medical and surgical units express their satisfaction with most of the items, "the ability of my job to engage me" is scored as unsatisfactory. This negative scoring justifies their indifference toward the dimension of Satisfaction with the nature of the work. The items positively scoring for

indifference were: "the variety of the tasks I do;" "the degree of interest aroused by my work activities;" and "the opportunity to do the type of work I do."

Considering the association tests conducted between the sociodemographic variables and the EST dimensions, this study observes a significant association between job satisfaction with the nature of the work and the length of professional experience of nursing professionals. The results suggest that professionals working for less time express greater dissatisfaction regarding the managers, possibly because the interpersonal relationship has not been built yet and a form of coexistence has not been developed. The results regarding job satisfaction and length of professional experience diverge from Ferreira et al. (2017), who observe that nurses with less than 10 years of service are the most satisfied.

A significant association is also identified between job satisfaction with the nature of the work and the professionals' age group. It was observed that most professionals aged 30 - 40 are essentially dissatisfied or indifferent to the nature of the work. Nevertheless, most of those in the 40 - 50 age group express their Satisfaction with the nature of their work.

Bearing in mind the study conducted, it is evident that feelings of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction coexist. Salaries and career advancement cause dissatisfaction among nursing professionals in medical and surgical units. Nevertheless, the same professionals express their satisfaction with their managers and coworkers. Therefore, this study considers that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are elements of a phenomenon that does not occur isolated and whose meanings depend on the presence or absence of particular factors. Nursing professionals' job satisfaction has complexities associated with different settings, geographic regions, and cultural values that must be considered (Lu et al., 2019).

The instrument adopted limits this study as it is not explicitly directed to nursing. Nevertheless, no instrument was yet built and validated for this population in Brazil. This study is also limited by its cross-sectional design. Thus, this study recommends the development of longitudinal studies able to demonstrate more consistently the associations present in its results.

Conclusion

Job satisfaction is guaranteed by establishing a good relationship with managers and coworkers. Also, the level of satisfaction increases as the professionals' length of experience within the service increases.

The satisfaction of the nursing professionals who participated in this study is average. Thus, health service managers must promote strategies that consciously transform organizational policies and dynamics, considering the health professionals' needs, responsibilities, and duties. These strategies include identifying and building quality indicators that support nursing practice and foster the job satisfaction of nursing professionals. Internal policies promoting workers' health lead to satisfied professionals

that contribute to improving care quality. This study recommends conducting translation and validation studies that use specific instruments. Later, other studies can administer these instruments, and their results can be compared with those presented in this study. Thus, it will be possible to identify the specific needs of this professional category, optimize satisfaction indicators and consequently improve nursing care and reduce absenteeism.

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