Research Paper

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Is Burnout Syndrome in Nurses and Warders Influenced by the Level of Remuneration?

Healthcare

KEYWORDS : burnout; nurses; remuneration; warders

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to evaluate the correlation between nurses' and warders' levels of remuneration and the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal achievement. This was a descriptive, non-experimental study, with a cross-sectional design, with focus on the net remuneration and burnout syndrome. Primary information was collected using voluntary, anonymous inquiry. The study covered 201 warders and 214 nurses.

The results shown that the levels on all three scales of burnout depend, although slightly, on the net remuneration. Respondents receiving lower net remuneration had higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared to those receiving higher net wages. As concerns depersonalization and personal achievement, the correlation is direct, i.e. respondents' dehumanization and level of personal satisfaction with work increased with the level of remuneration.

INTRODUCTION

Nurses and warders work under potentially dangerous conditions and they are exposed to unexpected situations that often lead to emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

Emotional exhaustion is a specific, stress related reaction that is considered as a key component of burnout syndrome (Maslach, 1982). The term 'burnout' was coined by Freudenberger in 1974 and was further developed by Maslach. The most widely used definition of burnout is that of Maslach and Jackson: "Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment". Emotional exhaustion relates to exhaustion of emotional resources caused by interpersonal requirements. Depersonalization points out to the development of a negative, heartless and cynical attitude towards services recipients. Failure to attain the desired personal accomplishment generates the trend of evaluating work with recipients as negative. Thus, in burned-out employees the feeling of unattained objectives is accompanied by low professional self-esteem.

Generally, it could be said that burnout concerns people who are responsible for the faith, health and life of others and it is associated with stressful jobs like those of nurses and warders. The main factors that cause its development are physical and mental overload, lack of support and adequate remuneration, and poor working conditions.

On the basis of extensive research for more than 20 years, Tzenova (2005) came to this conclusion: "Burnout is closely related to job dissatisfaction but the direction of correlation has not been explained, namely: whether it is burnout that makes people feel frustrated with their work or job dissatisfaction that causes the development of burnout. Or maybe both burnout and job dissatisfaction are caused by other factors such as poor working conditions and low remuneration".

The dragging social and economic transition in Bulgaria and the economic crisis over the last few years have led to significant pauperisation of the population and stagnation of the income of working people at relatively low levels. In some professions, where the nature of labour involves emotional loads, low remuneration increases the risk of additional tension and stress in doing such jobs.

A study conducted among medical specialists in Bulgaria by Nenova et al. (2008) has shown that the primary sources of stress are:

1. Lack of adequate remuneration for the work done – 64.9%
2. Safety at work (risk of infections) – 45.5%
3. Lack of recognition for a work well-done - 40.3%

The primary sources of tension could be reduced by increasing employees' wages and improving their working conditions. In the field of management theories this is known as the theory of Frederick W. Taylor of the so-called 'economic man' according to which most people find their jobs primarily unpleasant and therefore the money that they make is more important than the nature of their labour. According to Taylor, reward is a key factor for job satisfaction (Baba, 2006).

On the other hand, as mentioned above number of studies has demonstrated a strong positive correlation between job satisfaction and low levels of development of burnout.

Methodology

Aim

The objective of this study was to evaluate the correlation between the level of remuneration of nurses and warders and the three dimensions of burnout as indicators of job satisfaction.

Design

This was a descriptive, non-experimental study, with a cross-sectional design, with focus on the remuneration and burnout of nurses and warders.

Study area and duration

The study was conducted in two randomly selected correctional facilities and two hospitals in the south of Bulgaria during the period between November 2012 and March 2013.

Participants

Objects of the study were nurses and warders without consideration to their gender, age or level of education. Criteria for exclusion were either an explicit refusal to participate to the study or a long absence of respondents for sickness or long leave.

The study covered 415 employees of which 201 warders and 214 nurses. All subjects from the target groups within the studied institutions volunteered for the study.

Data collection tools

Primary information was collected through a voluntary and anonymous inquiry among respondents administered at their respective work place.

The Bulgarian version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) performed by B. Tzenova (1992) was used. The MBI is a self-administered instrument, to be answered by means of a six-point frequency scale that goes from one (never) to six (every day). The inventory is composed of 22 items that evaluate the three dimensions independently of one another, which are: emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (5 items) and personal accomplishment (8 items). The items of personal accomplishment are reversed (lack of professional efficiency) – low value means good capability. High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores on personal accomplishment were indicative of burnout.

In addition, included issues related to the age of the respondents and their net remuneration.

Statistical analysis

Results were analysed by descriptive statistics of the data (mean, standard deviation, number and percentage), and presented in the form of tables, using the SPSS 17.0 program.

To compare the variables the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis Test was applied, and for this a level of significance of 5% probability ($P < 0.05$) was adopted. To measure the strength of relationship was used Spearman's correlations.

RESULTS

The average age of respondents was 41.3 ±9.293 years, with 41.32±7.686 for warders and 41.28 ±10.601 for nurses.

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR NET REMUNERATION.

		Profession		Total
		Correctional officer (%, N)	Nurse (%, N)	(%, N)
Net salary in Euro	to 150.00	0.5% (1)	3.3% (7)	1.9% (8)
	from 150.01 to 200.00	2.0% (4)	14.0% (30)	8.2% (34)
	from 200.01 to 250.00	6.0% (12)	33.6% (72)	20.2% (84)
	from 250.01 to 300.00	10.9% (22)	21.5% (46)	16.4% (68)
	from 300.01 to 350.00	15.9% (32)	7.5% (16)	11.6% (48)
	from 350.01 to 450.00	54.7% (110)	10.3% (22)	31.8% (132)
	from 450.01 to 550.00	8.0% (16)	6.5% (14)	7.2% (30)
	over 550.01	2.0% (4)	3.3% (7)	2.7% (11)

Table 2: Relationship between the level of net salary and the dimensions of burnout syndrome.

Variable	χ^2	P
Emotional Exhaustion	8.614	0.013
Depersonalization	10.400	0.006
Personal achievement	8.824	0.012

Table 3: Correlation between the variables.

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Level of net remuneration	1.00			
2. Emotional Exhaustion	-0.105*	1.00		
3. Depersonalization	0.153**	0.309**	1.00	
4. Personal achievement	0.137**	0.081	0.330**	1.00

Note: *Correlation is significant at P< 0.05, **Correlation is significant at P< 0.01.

The results have shown that the levels on the three subscales of burnout syndrome depend on the level of net remuneration (see table 2) although the correlation was not that strong (see table 3).

Discussion

The results reveal that people receiving lower net remuneration have higher level of emotional exhaustion compared to those receiving higher net remuneration. As concerns depersonalization and personal achievement, the correlation is straight, i.e. with increasing wages the levels of dehumanization and personal job satisfaction in respondents also increased. Similar conclusions have been made in other studies. Erkal and Şahin (2012) have conducted a study among the personnel of accommodation facilities and came to the conclusion that low (inadequate) income increases the levels of burnout.

In a study conducted among physical therapists in Nigeria it was found that better paid people had higher PA levels. The results of this study reveal a very strong positive correlation between poor compensation and PA whereas the correlations between low remuneration and the first two dimensions of burnout are very weak and with a negative sign (Ibikunle, Umeadi & Ummunah, 2012). To a large extent this overlaps with our results but the difference is that we have found a straight correlation between low remuneration and DP.

Ogresta et al. (2008) have measured the relation between burnout syndrome and job satisfaction using factor analysis. They came to the conclusion that job satisfaction depended in the first place on job and rewards satisfaction ($\lambda_1 = 7.34$), followed by the satisfaction with the superior and colleagues ($\lambda_2 = 2.80$), advancement and benefits satisfaction ($\lambda_3 = 1.96$), and work climate satisfaction ($\lambda_4 = 1.84$). Their results demonstrated a high degree of correlation between emotional exhaustion and satisfaction with remuneration. According to them, workers who were less satisfied with their pay have shown higher levels of emotional exhaustion and the pay rate as and external motivator can intensify stress.

Despite the small number of studies focused on relationship between remuneration and burnout syndrome, researchers come to the conclusion that low pay is a stressful factor and influences the development of burnout syndrome.

Conclusion

It was the first time a study was conducted among warders and nurses to evaluate the correlation between burnout and the level of remuneration in Bulgaria.

We have found high levels of emotional exhaustion in employees receiving low compensations.

The levels of depersonalization and personal job satisfaction increase with higher levels of remuneration of respondents.

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