

Occupational Stress among Nurses

Sharadchandra Vinayak Dighe

Asst. Professor, College of Nursing, Pravara Institute of Medical Sciences (DU), Loni, Maharashtra

ABSTRACT

Nursing is considered as highly stressful profession. Occupational stress is regarded as a major occupational health problem for healthcare professionals especially nurses. Evidence shows that occupational stress decreases the quality of nursing care and increases the chances of making errors. This could have an adverse impact on patient care. Also research has shown that prolonged stress not only predisposes nurses to physical disorders of the musculoskeletal and cardiovascular system, but also increases the vulnerability to psychiatric illnesses such as depressive and anxiety disorders. Therefore, it can lead to poorer health in the nurses themselves. Apart from physical and psychological consequences occupational stress has been reported to affect productivity, job satisfaction and job performance of nurses. Studies also report that occupational stress results in considerable costs to organizations in terms of absenteeism, attrition rate, injury claims, infection rates, errors in treating patient, reduced productivity, and health care resources. Published research writings demonstrated numerous causes for occupational stress among nurses. These include shift duties, interpersonal conflicts with peers, seniors, patients, or doctors, performing tasks not related to nursing, dealing with life-threatening emergencies, unhealthy work environment, work overload, death of patient and so on.

It is a well-known fact that management of problem becomes easy if its root cause is identified. Therefore this review was undertaken to determine the most common occupational stressors and stress reduction strategies for nurses. Review found some significant sources of occupational stress such as excessive workload, dealing with death and dying, conflicts with other health team members, and insufficient resources. Stress reduction strategies

include leading healthy life to practicing relaxation techniques.

Key Words: Occupational stress, Nurse, Nursing

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a major psychosocial constraint that has been proposed to influence health and illness. Stress may be viewed as an individual's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response, which can be physical, mental or emotional. ^[1] In general terms stress occurs when people face demands which threaten their ability to adapt. ^[2] Stressor is defined as a biological, psychological, social or chemical factor that causes physical or emotional tension and may be a factor in the etiology of certain illnesses. ^[1]

Occupational stress, a common occurrence among various professions worldwide, is regarded as a major occupational health problem for healthcare professionals especially nurses. ^[3] According to the US Occupational Safety and Health Institute, nursing profession is ranked 27th among 130 studied professions regarding work-related mental health problems and nurses are under pressure and stress of their profession more than other medical professionals. ^[4]

In a study conducted in India, 87.4% of nurses reported occupational stress. ^[5] Occupational stress has been reported to affect job satisfaction and job performance among nurses, thus compromising nursing care and placing patients' lives at risk. ^[3] In addition, demands of various roles make nurses vulnerable to stress and psychological ill health. ^[6]

Several work related factors give rise to stress among nurses. These includes high work pressure and a high demand in the workplace, having to work on the night shift, facing threats and violence at workplace, having to adapt to new therapies and high expectations of patients and their relatives, having to stay on duty on holidays, facing life-threatening and acute emergencies and patients with unstable situation, low equipment and facilities, having occasional conflicts with doctors beside inadequate teamwork, little support of managers for the nurses and lack of reward and incentives, the ambiguity of nursing responsibilities, unacceptability of jobs in the community, etc.

This article describes significant causes of occupational stress among nurses and measures to handle and overcome them.

Causes of Occupational Stress among Nurses

1) Excessive Workload [7-12]

Overload results in stress when the requirement of social demands are perceived as exceeding the person's resources. Healthcare sector is facing shortage of nurses. In addition there is steady rise in bed occupancy rate in the hospitals. Apart from providing bedside care to the patients, nurses are expected to perform administrative and supervisory responsibilities. They are assigned too many non-nursing tasks, which they have to carry out in limited time. Hence clinical nurses are overburdened with work. Research studies have proved that heavy workload is the most significant contributor to job stress.

2) Dealing with death and dying [10-12]

Death is an inevitable event in every individual's life. Nurses provide care to patients at each stage of illness, viz. recovering from illness or dying of illness. Patients who are chronically ill and where death is inevitable, experiences helplessness, hopelessness and other psychological disturbances. They look at the nurse as the person who can be depended upon. Dealing with patient and relatives in

such situation is highly stressful for the nurses.

3) Problems with supervisors [6, 13,14]

Nurses are being supervised by number of supervisors, each having different expectations and demand from nurses. Nurses are expected to coordinate patients care to other health care team members. Sometime adverse situations arise in clinical areas over which nurses have no control, but for which they are held responsible. Such situations put immense strain on nurse's physical and psychological health.

4) Conflict with patients relatives, hostility by patients relatives, non-compliant visitors [10,13,14]

Conflict with patient's relatives centers around restrictions regarding visiting time or about patient care. Sometime it happens that patient's condition suddenly deteriorates, patient does not improve in spite of providing aggressive management or shows poor response to treatment which makes relatives frustrated. This may end into hostility and aggression towards nurse.

5) Conflict with other nurses [13,14]

Interpersonal conflict is quite common and can be a potent source of frustration. Nurses are bound to face many conflicts as they work closely with people from varied backgrounds. Decisions regarding patient care may lead to conflict among nurses. This makes the working environment stressful.

6) Conflict with physician [13,14]

Often physician expects nurse to carry out some particular work which may not be a part of nurse's job responsibility. When nurses are not able to perform duties as per the expectations of the physician, they criticize nurses. Further conflict may occur between nurse and physician due to faulty communication. Conflict with physician proved to be a major factor causing stress among nurse's.

7) Uncertainty concerning treatment [10-12]

Sometimes physician may not be available in a medical emergency, then nurses faces dilemma whether to initiate treatment or not

because each and every minute is important in saving the life of the patient. Some other times nurses may feel inadequately trained for what they have to do, or they are uncertain about operating or functioning of equipments such as ventilators, infusion pump etc. Improper taking and giving over lead to uncertainty concerning treatment. These situations put immense stress on nurses.

8) Inadequate emotional preparation

Insufficient resources while providing care to the patients poses threat to the emotional integrity of the nurse. ^[13,14] Current outbreak of COVID 19 is a typical example, where nurses are facing scarcity of resources like personal protective equipments (PPE). Other factors which cause stress among nurses include being incharge with inadequate experience, unprepared to help patient with emotional needs and being exposed to health and safety hazards. Nursing population is at high risk for contracting communicable and infectious diseases.

Measures to Overcome Occupational Stress

1) Talk about Stressor ^[15]

Talking about stressors helps to recognize them - which, later on, can help address and hopefully resolve them. Talking about stressors also help the nurse identify what the actual issues are. For example, a nurse may have a hectic duty shift because inadequate staffing in the ward. In speaking about it later, he or she may recognize that the extra work isn't necessarily the problem, it's that the manager isn't hearing the nurse's concerns about patient safety. To resolve the issue, the nurse would need to address the communication between the staff and the manager.

2) Engage in exercise ^[15-17]

Exercise has been proven as an effective stress reducer. Exercise helps reduce adrenaline and cortisol as well as boost endorphins. It also helps boost energy. One of the best exercises for stress-relief is yoga. Yoga has been proven to improve

cardio and circulatory health, manage weight and boost energy levels.

3) Meditation ^[17]

According to the Mayo Clinic, meditation provides many benefits. Emotionally, it helps person to manage stress, get rid of negativity and increases self-awareness. Physically, it allows to manage anxiety, pain, depression and heart disease, among other issues. The best part of meditation is that it can be done at work or at home. If nurse is having a stressful day at work, she can find a quiet place and take five minutes to close her eyes and clear her mind.

4) Do an activity you love ^[15-17]

Making time for an activity you enjoy, whether it be gardening, painting, reading or playing a sport, can reduce stress.

5) Spend time with friends ^[15,17]

Spending time with friends can help brighten person's mood. Studies have shown that spending time with family and friends reduces risk of depression and high blood pressure.

6) Eat healthy ^[17]

Changing diet to incorporate healthier foods can have a long-term impact on your overall mood and energy levels. Diets rich in processed foods and high in refined sugars are linked to an increase in mood disorders such as depression.

7) Get more sleep ^[17]

Research suggests sleep deprivation is linked to a lowered immune system, increased risk of obesity and heart disease. Getting seven to eight hours of sleep each night will help to feel energized and refreshed.

8) Learn breathing exercises ^[15,17]

According to stress.org, deep breathing helps to bring oxygen to the brain and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps to reduce stress. Heart rate and blood pressure decrease and muscles relax.

Deep breathing is a quick and easy way to reduce stress; it can even be done at work in the midst of chaos. Slipping away to the break or supply room for a minute or two can help. At home, deep breathing in the

form of yoga or meditation is a more in-depth method for stress relief. Yoga is especially focused on breathing patterns so practitioners can become aware of the mind-body relationship.

9) Spend time in nature. ^[16]

According to the University of Minnesota's Center for Spirituality & Healing, spending time in nature or even just viewing scenes of nature reduces fear, anger, and stress. It has measurable physiological benefits for nurse stress management, including lower blood pressure and heart rate, relieved muscle tension and reduction of stress hormone production

Nurse should try to spend at least an hour or so in nature every week. This may include spending time in a park, walking on a bitch or playing outdoor games.

10) Keep a journal ^[16]

Keeping a journal is a great way to express negative stress and work through difficult situations. The whole point of journaling is that person can express himself without being worried about how others might respond to his thoughts.

11) Seek Professional Help ^[15,16]

For some, the stress is too much to handle independently using the different techniques listed above. Nurses need to know that it's okay to seek professional help when necessary. When stressors at work become unbearable to the point that its manifests into physical symptoms, if interpersonal relationships are strained, or if work performance suffers and patient safety is at risk, nurses should seek professional help immediately. Counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist and psychiatric mental health nurse can help them in this regard.

REFERENCES

1. Mary Townsend. Psychiatric mental health nursing. 5th edi. F.A. Davis company, Philadelphia.2007. P.p. 3
2. David Koplov, Jack E. James, Jeannette Milgrom. Biopsychosocial factors in health and illness. In Jeannette Milgrom, Graham Burrows, psychology and psychiatry. John Wiley and son`s limited, U.K. 2001. p.p. 26-27
3. Chang EM et al. The relationship among workplace stressors, coping methods, demographic characteristics and health in Australian nurses. J profe nurs. 2006; jan-feb; 22 (1): 30-38
4. Ahangarzadeh Rezaei S, Shams Sh, Saghi Zadeh M. Survey of job stressors and coping strategies on nurses in psychiatric and general centers in Urmia. Journal of Urmia Nursing and Midwifery Faculty 2008; 6 (1): 50-67.
5. Bhatia N, Kishore J, Anand T, Jiloha, R. Occupational stress amongst nurses from two tertiary care hospitals in Delhi. AMJ 2001; 3 (11): 731-38.
6. Daniel Fu Keung Wong, Sharon Shui King Leung, Christopher Ko On So, Debbie Oi Bing Lam. Mental health of Chinese nurses in Hong Kong: The role of nursing stresses and coping strategies. Online journal of issues in nursing. vol. 6, 2001
7. Elizabeth M. Ditzel. Job stress among nurses: The implications for the health care profession. International journal of behavioral and health care research. 2009. vol. 1, No. 2, p.p. 125-142
8. Nagarajan et. al. Managing stress in the work place. Available from: http://www.indianmba.com/Faculty_column/FC1286/fc1286.html
9. Kane PP. Stress causing psychosomatic illness among nurses. Indian J Occup Environ Med 2009;13:28-32 Available from: <http://www.ijoem.com/text.asp?2009/13/1/28/50721>
10. Siddhartha D. Kashyap. TNN, May 26, 2007, For nurses, there's stress everywhere. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-05-26/pune/27880214_1_stress-nurses-study
11. Purvi Parikh, Atish Taukari Tanmay Bhattacharya. Occupational stress and coping among nurses. Journal of health management; October 2004, vol. 6, no. 2, P.p. 115 Available from: <http://jhm.sagepub.com/content/6/2/115.short>
12. Paul D Tysona, Rana Pongruengphantb. Five-year follow-up study of stress among nurses in public and private hospitals in Thailand. International journal of nursing studies. Volume 41, Issue 3, Pages 247-254 (March 2004)

13. Attridge, C. (1996). Analysis of powerlessness in nursing work. *Canadian journal of nursing research*, 9(2), 26-59
14. Farrington, A. (1995). Stress and nursing. *British journal of nursing*. 574-578
15. Anonymous, How to Manage Your Stress as a Nurse, Available from: <https://www.registerednursing.org/how-manage-stress-nurse/>
16. Anonymous, Nurse Stress and Burnout: How to Deal with it Effectively Everyday. Available from: <https://www.masmedicalstaffing.com/2017/08/08/nurse-stress/>
17. Anna Heinrich, RNs Reveal 9 Natural Remedies for Reducing Nursing Stress, Available from: <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/nursing/blog/reducing-nursing-stress/>

How to cite this article: Dighe SV. Occupational stress among nurses. *International Journal of Science & Healthcare Research*. 2020; 5(3): 25-29.
