

NURSES' PERCEPTIONS OF WORKPLACE SAFETY AND ITS EFFECT ON JOB PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Workplace safety is a critical concern in the healthcare sector, where nurses face numerous physical, emotional, and psychological challenges. The perception of workplace safety directly influences nurses' job satisfaction, mental health, and overall job performance. Unsafe working conditions not only affect nurses but also compromise patient care quality. This article examines the relationship between nurses' perceptions of workplace safety and its impact on their job performance. Drawing on evidence from multiple studies, the article explores factors such as safety climate, organizational trust, workload, and job satisfaction. Recommendations for fostering a safe and supportive work environment to improve nurses' performance and retention are also discussed.

Introduction

Nurses play a vital role in healthcare systems, serving as the backbone of patient care delivery. However, their performance is heavily influenced by workplace conditions, particularly their perception of safety. Workplace safety encompasses physical, psychological, and emotional aspects, including protection against occupational hazards, mental health support, and a culture of trust within organizations. Research consistently demonstrates that workplace safety perceptions directly impact job satisfaction, mental well-being, and job performance (Nixon et al., 2015; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011).

This article investigates how nurses perceive workplace safety and how these perceptions influence job performance. It also explores factors that contribute to a safe work environment and highlights strategies to improve safety culture for nurses.

Nurses' Perceptions of Workplace Safety

Nurses' perceptions of workplace safety play a critical role in determining their overall job satisfaction, mental health, and performance. Workplace safety is a broad concept that encompasses physical safety, such as protection from workplace violence, needle-stick injuries, and ergonomic hazards, as well as psychological safety, which relates to emotional well-being, trust in the organization, and a supportive work environment. When nurses perceive their workplace as unsafe, it not only affects their performance but also increases the likelihood of burnout, turnover, and poor patient outcomes (Nixon et al., 2015; BagheriHosseiniabadi et al., 2019).

Physical Safety Concerns

Physical safety is one of the most immediate and visible aspects of workplace safety for nurses. Nurses are exposed to several occupational risks, including infectious diseases, hazardous materials, and injuries related to lifting patients or handling medical equipment (BagheriHosseiniabadi et al., 2019). Inadequate protective equipment, poor safety protocols, and high patient-to-nurse ratios exacerbate these risks, leading to an increased perception of unsafe working conditions. In a study by Tengilimoğlu et al. (2019), healthcare workers identified physical hazards, such as lack of safety equipment and understaffing, as key contributors to a negative workplace safety climate.

Psychological Safety and Organizational Trust

Beyond physical safety, nurses' perceptions of psychological safety are equally significant. Psychological safety includes feeling valued, respected, and supported by colleagues and management. Nurses working in environments where their concerns are dismissed or where they face bullying and harassment often feel unsafe. This lack of psychological safety erodes organizational trust and diminishes job satisfaction (Avram et al., 2015). For example, Dorigan and Guirardello (2017) found that nurses who perceived supportive and respectful workplace cultures reported higher levels of safety and satisfaction.

Safety Climate

The safety climate of an organization refers to how employees perceive the organization's commitment to safety. A positive safety climate is characterized by open communication, accessible resources, and clear safety protocols, which collectively foster a sense of security among nurses. When safety measures are visibly prioritized, nurses feel more confident in their work environment. Nixon et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of leadership in shaping safety climate, noting that managers who actively engage in safety practices encourage trust and reinforce a culture of safety.

The Impact of Unsafe Perceptions

When nurses perceive their workplace as unsafe, it has detrimental effects not only on their health but also on their performance. Unsafe work environments contribute to stress, fatigue, and burnout, which impair decision-making and increase the likelihood of errors (Nahrgang et al., 2011). Furthermore, unsafe perceptions increase turnover intentions, reducing workforce stability and burdening healthcare organizations with recruitment and training costs (Simone et al., 2018).

The Impact of Workplace Safety on Job Performance

Workplace safety plays a crucial role in shaping nurses' job performance, as their ability to provide high-quality patient care is directly tied to their perceptions of safety. A safe work environment not only enhances nurses' efficiency and effectiveness but also reduces stress, burnout, and turnover intentions. Conversely, unsafe working conditions negatively impact nurses' mental health, job satisfaction, and overall performance, compromising both individual and organizational outcomes (Nixon et al., 2015; Nahrgang et al., 2011).

Job Satisfaction and Performance

Job satisfaction is one of the key mediators between workplace safety and job performance. When nurses perceive their workplace as safe, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, which in turn leads to better performance. Studies have consistently shown a strong correlation between job satisfaction and job performance in the nursing profession. For example, Liu et al. (2016) emphasized that job satisfaction, which is influenced by workplace safety, motivates nurses to engage more actively in their roles and deliver higher-quality care.

In unsafe work environments, however, nurses often experience dissatisfaction due to inadequate safety measures, poor leadership, and high workloads. Ekici et al. (2017) found that nurses who perceived their workplace as unsafe reported lower job satisfaction, which directly impacted their motivation and productivity. This dissatisfaction translates into reduced engagement, higher absenteeism, and ultimately lower-quality patient care.

Mental Health and Burnout

Workplace safety also has a significant impact on nurses' mental health, which is closely linked to their job performance. Unsafe environments contribute to stress, anxiety, and burnout, which impair nurses' cognitive abilities and decision-making skills. BagheriHosseinabadi et al. (2019) identified that high workloads and unsafe conditions increase the likelihood of mental and physical exhaustion, resulting in decreased performance and increased errors in patient care.

Burnout, a common consequence of unsafe work environments, is particularly damaging to job performance. Nahrgang et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis that demonstrated how unsafe conditions, combined with high job demands, lead to emotional exhaustion and disengagement among nurses. These factors significantly hinder performance, as nurses struggle to maintain focus and energy in their demanding roles.

Turnover and Workforce Stability

Unsafe workplace conditions also have long-term effects on job performance by increasing turnover intentions. Nurses who perceive their work environment as unsafe are more likely to leave their positions, creating staffing shortages that further strain the remaining workforce. Simone et al. (2018) highlighted that high turnover rates caused by unsafe working conditions disrupt team dynamics and compromise the quality of care provided to patients.

Furthermore, frequent turnover forces healthcare organizations to invest in recruitment and training, diverting resources that could otherwise be used to improve safety measures. A stable workforce, supported by a safe environment, is essential for maintaining continuity of care and fostering collaborative team relationships that enhance performance.

Safety Climate and Leadership

The safety climate of an organization significantly influences how nurses perceive workplace safety and its impact on their performance. A positive safety climate, characterized by effective communication, accessible resources, and strong leadership, creates an environment that fosters trust and engagement. Nixon et al. (2015) noted that when nurses perceive safety as a priority within their organization, they feel more supported and are more likely to perform at their best.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in promoting workplace safety and ensuring its positive effects on performance. Leaders who actively advocate for safety protocols, address workplace hazards, and support their staff contribute to a culture of safety. Saygili and Celik (2011) emphasized that supportive leadership enhances nurses' confidence in their work environment, enabling them to focus on their responsibilities without fear of harm or neglect.

The Ripple Effect on Patient Care

The impact of workplace safety on nurses' job performance extends beyond the individual level to affect patient care outcomes. Nurses who feel safe and supported are better equipped to provide attentive, accurate, and compassionate care. In contrast, unsafe environments lead to increased errors, reduced patient satisfaction, and poorer overall care quality (Dorigan & Guirardello, 2017).

Factors Influencing Nurses' Perceptions of Workplace Safety

Nurses' perceptions of workplace safety are shaped by a variety of factors, including physical conditions, organizational policies, leadership, and psychological elements. These factors not only influence how safe nurses feel in their work environment but also affect their job satisfaction, mental health, and overall performance. Understanding these factors is critical for creating a safe and supportive workplace for nurses.

Workload and Staffing

One of the most significant factors influencing nurses' perception of workplace safety is their workload. Heavy workloads, often caused by inadequate staffing, lead to physical exhaustion,

stress, and a higher risk of occupational injuries. BagheriHosseinabadi et al. (2019) found that high workloads were directly associated with increased occupational hazards and injuries among nurses. When nurses are expected to handle a disproportionate number of patients or tasks, their ability to follow safety protocols diminishes, and their perception of workplace safety declines. Additionally, understaffing creates an environment where nurses feel unsupported, further eroding their sense of safety and well-being.

Physical Environment and Safety Resources

The physical environment also plays a critical role in shaping nurses' perceptions of safety. Factors such as inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE), poorly maintained facilities, and insufficient safety protocols contribute to a negative safety climate. In their study, Tengilimoğlu et al. (2019) highlighted that healthcare workers who lacked access to essential safety resources reported lower levels of job satisfaction and perceived safety. For example, inadequate infection control measures, such as improper handling of hazardous materials or insufficient hand hygiene supplies, can increase the risk of exposure to infectious diseases, leaving nurses feeling vulnerable.

Psychological Safety and Workplace Culture

Psychological safety refers to a nurse's perception that they can voice concerns, make mistakes, or seek help without fear of criticism or punishment. A culture that promotes psychological safety fosters trust and openness, thereby improving nurses' overall perception of workplace safety. On the other hand, environments characterized by bullying, harassment, or dismissive attitudes from colleagues or management lead to feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction. Avram et al. (2015) emphasized the critical role of psychological safety in building organizational trust, which directly influences how safe nurses feel in their workplace.

Safety Training and Education

Safety training and education are essential for empowering nurses to handle workplace hazards effectively. Nurses who receive comprehensive training on infection control, equipment handling, conflict resolution, and emergency protocols are more likely to feel confident and safe in their roles. Incesu and Atasoy (2015) underscored the importance of a strong safety culture, noting that regular training programs improve nurses' awareness of occupational risks and enhance compliance with safety measures. Without proper training, nurses may feel ill-equipped to manage workplace hazards, leading to a diminished sense of safety.

Leadership and Organizational Support

Leadership is one of the most influential factors in shaping nurses' perceptions of workplace safety. Supportive and proactive leaders who prioritize safety initiatives and address nurses' concerns create a culture of trust and safety. Saygili and Celik (2011) found that nurses who worked under leaders who actively promoted safety protocols and addressed workplace hazards reported higher job satisfaction and a greater sense of safety. Conversely, a lack of leadership support often results in nurses feeling undervalued and unsafe in their work environment.

Organizational Policies and Safety Climate

Organizational policies and the overall safety climate of an institution play a critical role in shaping nurses' safety perceptions. A positive safety climate—characterized by clear safety protocols, open communication, and visible management commitment to safety—instills confidence in nurses and encourages them to perform their duties without fear of harm. Nixon et al. (2015) emphasized that when organizations value safety and prioritize it as a core aspect of their operations, nurses feel more secure and engaged in their work. By contrast, a weak safety climate, marked by inconsistent enforcement of safety protocols or a lack of resources, can create feelings of neglect and insecurity among nurses.

Workplace Relationships and Team Dynamics

The quality of relationships among colleagues and within teams also influences nurses' perceptions of safety. Collaborative and respectful workplace relationships foster a sense of mutual support and trust, which enhances nurses' confidence in their environment. However, conflict, poor communication, and lack of teamwork can lead to feelings of isolation and vulnerability, negatively affecting nurses' safety perceptions (Dorigan & Guirardello, 2017).

Patient Behavior and External Threats

Another factor influencing workplace safety is the behavior of patients and visitors. Nurses are often exposed to workplace violence, including verbal abuse, physical aggression, or threats from patients or their families. Such incidents not only endanger nurses physically but also create a persistent sense of danger, undermining their perception of safety. In a study by Nixon et al. (2015), workplace violence was identified as a significant factor in shaping nurses' safety concerns, particularly in high-stress environments such as emergency rooms or psychiatric wards.

Strategies to Improve Workplace Safety and Job Performance

Improving workplace safety is essential for promoting nurses' performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. Unsafe environments lead to stress, burnout, and reduced productivity, while a safe workplace fosters trust, engagement, and better patient care. Healthcare organizations must implement comprehensive strategies to address both physical and psychological safety concerns while creating a culture that prioritizes workplace safety. Below are key strategies to improve workplace safety and enhance job performance among nurses.

Enhancing the Safety Climate

A strong safety climate is crucial for improving nurses' perceptions of workplace safety. Organizations should visibly demonstrate their commitment to safety by establishing clear safety protocols, providing the necessary resources to protect nurses, and fostering open communication. Safety audits, regular assessments, and feedback mechanisms can help identify potential hazards and areas for improvement (Nixon et al., 2015). Employers should also encourage nurses to report safety concerns without fear of retaliation. A transparent and responsive approach to addressing safety issues builds trust and ensures that nurses feel secure and supported.

Strengthening Leadership Support

Effective leadership is one of the most influential factors in creating a safe work environment. Leaders must actively advocate for workplace safety, address hazards promptly, and support nurses in their roles. Leadership training programs should emphasize the importance of safety as a priority and equip managers with the skills to foster a culture of safety and respect. Saygili and Celik (2011) highlighted that supportive leadership creates trust and confidence among nurses, leading to higher job satisfaction and better performance. Leaders should regularly engage with nurses, listen to their concerns, and involve them in decision-making processes related to workplace safety.

Providing Safety Training and Education

Regular training programs are essential for ensuring that nurses are equipped to handle workplace hazards effectively. Training should cover a range of topics, including infection control, safe handling of medical equipment, conflict resolution, and emergency protocols. Incesu and Atasoy (2015) emphasized that safety training improves nurses' awareness of risks, enhances compliance with safety measures, and reduces workplace injuries. Continuous education allows nurses to remain updated on best practices and fosters a sense of competence, which positively impacts their job performance.

Addressing Mental Health and Burnout

Mental health support is a critical component of workplace safety. Unsafe environments often lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, which impair nurses' performance and job satisfaction. Healthcare organizations should implement strategies to reduce workloads, ensure adequate staffing, and promote work-life balance. Providing access to mental health resources, such as counseling services, employee assistance programs, and peer support groups, can help nurses manage workplace stress. Studies, such as those by Sadeghi et al. (2019), have shown that improved mental health leads to higher job satisfaction and better performance.

Improving Staffing and Resource Allocation

Adequate staffing levels are essential for reducing physical and mental strain on nurses. Understaffing not only increases workloads but also compromises workplace safety by creating rushed and high-pressure environments where mistakes are more likely. BagheriHosseinabadi et al. (2019) found that high workloads contribute to occupational injuries and dissatisfaction among nurses. Healthcare organizations must prioritize appropriate nurse-to-patient ratios and allocate resources effectively to ensure that nurses can perform their duties safely and efficiently.

Fostering a Culture of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety, or the belief that employees can express their concerns without fear of criticism or punishment, is key to improving workplace safety. Organizations should cultivate a culture where nurses feel valued, respected, and empowered to speak up about safety concerns. Avram et al. (2015) emphasized that psychological safety fosters organizational trust, which

improves nurses' perceptions of safety and enhances their job performance. Encouraging teamwork, promoting respectful interactions, and addressing bullying or harassment are essential steps toward achieving psychological safety.

Implementing Workplace Violence Prevention Programs

Workplace violence is a significant safety concern for nurses, particularly in high-stress environments such as emergency departments and psychiatric units. Organizations should implement comprehensive workplace violence prevention programs, including training nurses to manage aggressive behavior and de-escalate conflicts. Providing security measures, such as panic buttons, surveillance systems, and trained security personnel, can also help reduce the risk of violence and improve nurses' sense of safety (Nixon et al., 2015).

Recognizing and Rewarding Safe Practices

Recognizing and rewarding safe work practices can encourage nurses to prioritize safety and adhere to protocols. Incentives, awards, or public recognition for maintaining safety standards can reinforce positive behaviors and promote a culture of safety. Additionally, acknowledging nurses' contributions to workplace safety fosters engagement and motivation, improving both safety outcomes and job performance.

Conclusion

Workplace safety is a critical determinant of nurses' job satisfaction, mental health, and job performance. Unsafe conditions, whether physical or psychological, have far-reaching consequences, including increased stress, burnout, turnover intentions, and reduced quality of patient care. This article highlights how factors such as workload, leadership, safety climate, organizational trust, and mental health shape nurses' perceptions of workplace safety and their subsequent performance.

To address these challenges, healthcare organizations must adopt comprehensive strategies to foster a safe and supportive work environment. Enhancing the safety climate, investing in leadership development, providing ongoing safety training, addressing mental health concerns, and ensuring adequate staffing are essential steps toward improving workplace safety. Additionally, fostering a culture of psychological safety and implementing workplace violence prevention programs can further enhance nurses' well-being and performance.

By prioritizing workplace safety, healthcare organizations can not only optimize nurses' job performance but also improve patient care outcomes and ensure long-term workforce stability. A safe and supportive workplace is essential for empowering nurses to thrive in their roles, reducing turnover, and fostering a culture of excellence in healthcare delivery.

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