

The Effect of Stress and Fatigue in the Workplace on the Performance of Nurses

By:

Abdullah Adel Al Jaber

Habeeb Hussain ALMousa

Sami Hussain AlHanfoosh

Maryam Hussain ALFadeal

Emad Ayesh ALSalem

Abdullah Ibrahim Al wabari

Mohammed jassim bou seha

Mohammed Khalid Al Romaih

Abdullah Ibrahim alobud

Mohammed Hassan Alkhamis

AHMED SHEHAB ALJAZIRI

Ghufran Abdualmohsen Aljumaiah

Introduction

In the ever-changing field of healthcare delivery, nurses are responsible for providing excellent patient care while also handling the complexities of human contact, making important decisions, and meeting the intense demands of a high-pressure atmosphere. Nevertheless, while engaged in the honorable endeavor of healing, nurses frequently encounter the unyielding burdens of stress and the incapacitating consequences of tiredness, both of which can greatly hinder their capacity to function at their best.

Among individuals who are more likely to suffer from stress and fatigue on the job, staff nurses are particularly vulnerable. Care for patients, administration of hospital departments, and other clerical and administrative duties are all within the purview of staff nurses. As a result of dealing with unhealthy working conditions, such as task overload and repeated activities, nurses are among the professions most likely to experience stress while working in a hospital setting.

The nursing profession is often stressful and emotionally taxing, and nurses often face situations that could harm their physical and mental well-being. Nurses are constantly putting themselves and their patients at risk of potentially deadly diseases and injuries. Caring for the sick, handling crises, navigating a complex power system, assisting the dying, and operating complicated equipment are all responsibilities of nurses (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

Stress, which refers to the physiological and psychological reactions to perceived dangers or challenges, can originate from various causes in the healthcare industry (Bhui et al., 2016). Nurses often face several challenges that challenge their resilience and adaptation, such as managing high patient caseloads, negotiating intricate care standards, and dealing with the emotional impact of witnessing suffering. In the same vein, exhaustion resulting from extended physical or mental effort, exacerbated by irregular work shifts and disturbances in sleep, presents a substantial risk to the health and effectiveness of nurses.

In the nursing profession, fatigue and stress are not just theoretical ideas, but actual experiences that significantly impact the everyday lives and overall health of nurses. These are the inconspicuous opponents that hide behind every bedside, presenting nurses with the task of managing the requirements of their occupation while also prioritizing their personal well-being and contentment.

All healthcare organisations have a major concern when it comes to the job performance of nurses. Care quality, patient outcomes, and organisational success are all indicators of nursing performance and healthcare system level. A nurse's capacity to carry out their duties in relation to patient care, both directly and indirectly, which can be categorized into tasks that are directly related to patients and those that are not, is a measure of their job performance. According to Samiei et al. (2016), there are various factors that contribute to this phenomenon, including patients' high expectations, job stress, modern technology, quality control, and onerous duties and obligations.

The ramifications of uncontrolled stress and exhaustion have a wide-reaching impact that goes beyond the individual nurse, resonating throughout the healthcare system and affecting the results of patient care. Studies (Smith-Miller et al., 2014; Kinman et al., 2020) indicate that increased levels of stress and fatigue can undermine cognitive performance and reduce attention to detail, both of which are crucial aspects of safe and efficient nursing practice. In addition, the mental and physical depletion linked to persistent stress and weariness can diminish job contentment, escalate the likelihood of burnout, and lead to elevated rates of turnover among nurses.

Healthcare organisations and governments are becoming more aware of the seriousness of these problems and are focusing on methods to tackle the underlying causes of stress and exhaustion in the workplace. By cultivating conducive work environments, adopting treatments grounded in empirical data, and prioritizing the welfare of nurses, it is feasible to alleviate the adverse effects of stress and fatigue on nurse performance. Consequently, this can enhance the quality of patient care and yield better outcomes.

1. Factors Contributing to Stress and Fatigue

In the fast-paced and demanding healthcare setting, nurses face numerous factors that contribute to the widespread occurrence of stress and weariness. The profession of nursing is significantly influenced by several aspects that are closely connected to it. These factors have a significant impact on the daily experiences and overall well-being of nurses. They also play a crucial role in determining their capacity to deliver high-quality care and sustain personal resilience over the long term.

Stress, in the context of nursing, refers to the physiological and psychological reactions that occur in response to the various pressures that come with the job. It includes the emotional stress of taking care of people in distress, the mental load of handling complicated medical scenarios, and the physical exhaustion caused by working long hours and having heavy workloads. Stress is a constant presence for nurses, affecting their experiences and impacting their performance. It ranges from the quick rush of adrenaline during emergencies to the ongoing burden of responsibility in daily care.

Fatigue, however, is caused by long-lasting physical and mental effort, sometimes worsened by the erratic and demanding schedules that are typical in nursing. It includes the fatigue that occurs after spending long hours standing, the cognitive impairment that affects decision-making after a night without sleep, and the emotional depletion that arises from fully dedicating oneself to patients in need. Exhaustion gradually erodes nurses' ability to bounce back from difficulties, reducing their capacity to handle the demands of their job and undermining their capability to provide the best possible care.

The sheer magnitude and intricacy of patient care obligations are major factors that contribute to stress and exhaustion among nurses. Nurses frequently have the challenge of managing a variety of patients with different requirements, coordinating complex treatment plans, and addressing urgent circumstances with limited resources (Karam et al., 2021). The unyielding speed of providing medical attention, along with

the demand for upholding exceptional levels of quality, can generate a continuous undercurrent of tension and strain.

According to (Farokhzadian et al., 2018), insufficient staffing levels, an enduring obstacle in numerous healthcare environments, necessitate that nurses work extended shifts without adequate breaks in order to attend to the requirements of patients. Staff shortages not only result in an increased burden and reduced downtime, but also contribute to a heightened risk of errors and compromised patient safety, thereby exacerbating the strain on an already demanding environment.

In addition, the emotional requirements of nursing job can have a significant impact on the well-being of nurses, leading to increased levels of stress and exhaustion. Nurses often encounter emotionally intense situations, regularly facing illness, pain, and mortality. The empathic bond established with patients and their families, although highly fulfilling, can also render nurses susceptible to compassion fatigue and burnout, hence intensifying their levels of stress and exhaustion.

2. Physical and Mental Health Effects of Stress and Fatigue on Nurses

Extended periods of time spent under stress and fatigue conditions at work can result in substantial physical and mental health issues for nurses, causing a variety of detrimental outcomes that affect not only the well-being of individuals but also the resilience of the workforce as a whole. Prolonged tension and fatigue have far-reaching consequences for the nursing profession, encompassing mental health disorders, burnout, and the gradual deterioration of physical and mental well-being. These issues present significant obstacles to the health and longevity of nurses.

Burnout is a widespread problem that involves emotional weariness, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal achievement. Nurses may experience burnout as a result of the unrelenting demands of their profession and the ongoing expectation to perform at a high standard. This can lead to feelings of exhaustion, disillusionment, and detachment from their work (Waddill-Goad, 2023).

Aside from the psychological impact, extended exposure to stress and exhaustion can also have a detrimental effect on the physical well-being of nurses, elevating their susceptibility to injuries, diseases, and chronic health disorders. Nurses frequently experience musculoskeletal diseases, such as back pain and repetitive strain injuries, as a result of the physical exertion required for patient care and the ergonomic difficulties posed by the healthcare setting.

Moreover, the profound impact on mental well-being caused by long-term exposure to stress and tiredness cannot be emphasized enough. Nurses face a heightened susceptibility to mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), due to their exposure to demanding work settings and traumatic encounters (Christodoulou-Fella et al., 2017). If not treated, these illnesses can severely impair nurses' capacity to operate effectively in their responsibilities, resulting in increased absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced job performance.

3. The Effect of Stress and Fatigue on Performance of Nurses

The influence of fatigue and stress on nurse performance is significant and extensive, impacting every facet of their professional position and obligations. Stress and fatigue can greatly hinder nurses' performance in various aspects, including decision-making, communication, patient care, and personal well-being.

According to (Bong et al., 2016), cognitive impairment is a significant consequence of stress and fatigue that directly impacts nursing performance. Extended exposure to stress chemicals, such as cortisol, can disturb cognitive function, leading to a decline in memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. This might be seen through a reduction in accuracy when evaluating patient requirements, challenges in prioritizing duties, and a higher probability of errors in administering medication or arranging therapy.

Nurses may experience a decrease in their ability to effectively communicate, actively listen, or provide compassionate support to patients due to fatigue-induced irritation or emotional weariness. Communication breakdowns can result in misunderstandings, disagreements, and ultimately, reduced quality of care and patient satisfaction (Norouzinia et al., 2016).

Debora et al., (2018) asserted that chronic stress is linked to various negative health consequences, such as high blood pressure, illnesses affecting the muscles and skeleton, and a compromised immune system. Fatigue, on the other hand, can worsen pre-existing health conditions, heighten vulnerability to sickness, and lengthen the time it takes to recover. When nurses are physically unwell or suffering discomfort, their ability to deliver good hands-on care is reduced. This can result in delays in treatment and impaired patient outcomes.

The effect of fatigue and stress on the performance of nurses is complex and interrelated, influencing both the experiences of nurses and the level of care they can deliver. Healthcare organisations may proactively support their nursing staff, build resilience, and cultivate a culture of wellness by acknowledging and addressing these consequences. This approach prioritizes the well-being of both nurses and the patients they care for.

4. Strategies for Nurses to Deal with Stress and Fatigue

To effectively deal with ongoing stress and fatigue, nurses should actively pursue coping mechanisms and support networks to protect their overall health and sustain their productivity. Although the demands of the nursing profession can be unceasing, nurses have access to a range of tools and strategies that they can use to reduce the effects of stress and tiredness and enhance their ability to withstand challenges.

An optimal coping mechanism for nurses involves the development of self-awareness and the implementation of self-care routines. This entails identifying and accepting one's personal limitations, boundaries, and triggers, and giving priority to activities that enhance physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Participating in consistent physical activity, adhering to a well-rounded nutritional plan,

obtaining sufficient rest, and implementing mindfulness or relaxation strategies can all assist nurses in effectively coping with stress and restoring their energy levels (White, 2020).

In times of stress and tiredness, it can be quite helpful to seek social support from colleagues, friends, and family members. Establishing connections with colleagues who comprehend the distinct difficulties encountered in the nursing profession can offer confirmation, compassion, and a feeling of comradeship. Peer support groups, whether structured or unstructured, provide a secure environment for nurses to exchange their experiences, solicit guidance, and attain a broader understanding of their challenges.

In addition, nurses can get advantages from utilizing professional support services, such as counselling or therapy, to effectively address underlying emotional concerns and cultivate adaptive coping strategies. Nurses can benefit from counselling as it offers them a private and secure space to address their emotions, develop techniques for coping with stress, and enhance their ability to adapt in challenging situations. Furthermore, Attridge (2019) asserted that healthcare organisations may offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) that grant nurses access to a variety of resources, such as counselling services, legal aid, and financial planning, in order to promote their overall well-being.

Furthermore, the provision of organisational support is of utmost importance in assisting nurses in managing stress and exhaustion within the workplace. Healthcare organisations have the ability to establish rules and procedures that encourage a work atmosphere that provides support, encourages open communication and collaboration, and acknowledges and rewards the valuable contributions made by nurses. This may involve facilitating options for adaptable scheduling, guaranteeing sufficient numbers of personnel, providing wellness programs and resources, and fostering a work environment that values work-life equilibrium.

5. The Effect of Nurse Well-being and Patient Outcomes

The correlation between the well-being of nurses and the results of patients is a key yet frequently disregarded part of healthcare delivery. Nurses, as primary carers at the forefront, have a crucial influence on the standard and security of patient care. Furthermore, their own welfare is closely connected to the experiences and results of people they are responsible for. When nurses experience stress and exhaustion, it can negatively affect their performance, which in turn has significant consequences for patient safety, satisfaction, and overall health outcomes.

An immediate consequence of nurse tension and fatigue is an elevated likelihood of errors and adverse events occurring, which negatively affects patient outcomes. Nurses who are burdened with an excessive caseload or suffer from cognitive decline caused by fatigue may exhibit an increased susceptibility to errors in patient evaluation, medication administration, and documentation. These errors may result in medication errors, accidents, infections, or other avoidable adverse events that compromise the standard of care and erode patient confidence, all of which are detrimental to patient safety.

When nurses experience stress, burnout, or emotional exhaustion, they may face difficulties in delivering compassionate, patient-centered care, which is crucial for building trust, involvement, and contentment. Patients may experience a dearth of empathy or awareness from their nurses, resulting in emotions of dissatisfaction, irritation, or mistrust in the healthcare system. In contrast, when nurses receive adequate support, are actively involved, and can deliver care of high calibre, patients are more likely to report favorable experiences and results.

In addition to these immediate effects, nursing stress and exhaustion can also have wider ramifications for patient health outcomes in the long run. Studies (Jun et al., 2021; Schlak et al., 2021) have demonstrated that elevated levels of nursing burnout and turnover are linked to adverse patient outcomes, such as increased mortality rates, hospital-acquired infections, and extended hospital stays. If nurses are grappling with stress and exhaustion, they are more prone to leaving the profession or experiencing reduced job satisfaction. This can result in instability in the nursing workforce and disruptions in the continuity of treatment, ultimately affecting patient outcomes in the long run.

6. Interventions to Mitigating Stress and Fatigue in the Workplace

To effectively address stress and fatigue in the workplace, a comprehensive approach is needed. This approach should include a combination of measures at both the individual and organisational levels. The goal is to enhance the well-being of nurses and improve their performance. By implementing interventions and solutions, healthcare organisations can proactively address the negative effects of stress and exhaustion on nurses. This includes creating a supportive work atmosphere and improving the quality of patient care.

A key strategy for mitigating stress and exhaustion among nurses is the adoption of workload management measures. This entails the optimization of staffing levels, the equitable distribution of patient assignments, and the simplification of operations to prevent nurses from becoming overwhelmed by excessive workloads. Healthcare organisations can mitigate the risk of burnout, eliminate errors, and enhance nurse satisfaction and performance by aligning staffing numbers with patient acuity and workload demands.

Furthermore, implementing scheduling changes can have a pivotal impact on reducing stress and weariness in the workplace. Granting nurses increased autonomy in scheduling, implementing flexible work options, and reducing overtime and required overtime obligations can effectively foster work-life equilibrium and mitigate fatigue (Nnko, 2022). Healthcare organisations can promote nurses' physical and mental well-being and improve staffing efficiency and continuity of treatment by adopting fair and open scheduling methods.

According to (Cusack et al., 2016), cultivating a conducive work atmosphere is another crucial element in tackling stress and exhaustion among nurses. This entails establishing a culture that values and acknowledges the contributions of nurses, while also offering avenues for their professional growth and

progression. Healthcare organisations can enhance nurses' performance, strengthen their ability to adapt, and better manage work-related stress by implementing continuous training, mentorship programs, and peer support initiatives.

Moreover, healthcare organisations have the ability to introduce focused measures to tackle particular causes of stress and exhaustion in the workplace. This may entail regularly evaluating the organisational climate and culture, gathering input from nurses regarding their work environment, and making necessary modifications based on identified areas for enhancement. Healthcare organisations can enhance worker morale and performance by actively integrating nurses in decision-making processes and proactively resolving their concerns. This approach fosters a sense of ownership, engagement, and dedication among nurses.

Conclusion

Fatigue and stress are common problems in the workplace, especially among nurses who frequently encounter high-stress situations and have demanding work schedules. The impact of these factors on the performance of nurses is substantial and complex.

Stress can hinder cognitive performance and affect decision-making abilities, all of which are essential for delivering high-quality patient care. When nurses experience stress, their ability to pay close attention to details may diminish, which can lead to an increased probability of errors in administering medication or assessing patients. This has the potential to jeopardize the safety of patients and result in negative consequences.

Additionally, the physical and mental well-being of nurses can be adversely affected by exhaustion caused by extended shifts and unpredictable work schedules. Nurses who are fatigued may encounter reduced vigilance and reactivity, which might hinder their ability to carry out their responsibilities successfully. In addition, persistent weariness can contribute to burnout, a syndrome characterized by emotional depletion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement. Nurses' performance, job satisfaction, and retention are all negatively impacted by burnout.

In addition, the presence of stress and weariness can exert pressure on interpersonal relationships within healthcare teams, resulting in breakdowns in communication and conflicts. Efficient collaboration is crucial for providing well-coordinated patient care, and under situations of elevated stress, teamwork may be compromised, impeding the delivery of the best possible treatment.

In order to counteract the negative impact of fatigue and stress on the performance of nurses, healthcare organisations should prioritise implementing initiatives that enhance the well-being of their workforce. This may involve enacting measures to guarantee sufficient intervals of rest, offering access to tools for managing stress and enhancing resilience, and cultivating a work environment that promotes a supportive culture valuing the equilibrium between work and personal life.

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