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CONTENTS

WORKPLACE STRESSORS AND THE WORK-LIFE-BALANCE OF NURSING STAFF

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Abstract: *This scientific paper aimed to examine workplace stressors and factors influencing the Work-Life-Balance of nursing staff to understand potential risk factors and challenges. The Covid-19-pandemic has only again demonstrated the importance of sufficient and well-educated nursing staff. To ensure this, it is also important to consider the well-being of the nurses, because this influences their job performance, the turnover rate and the number of sick employees. To examine the workplace stressors and the Work-Life-Balance of nursing staff, different theoretical approaches and study findings are taken under consideration to determine their influence on the perceived stress of employees in general and nurses in particular and also the importance of a healthy Work-Life-Balance. The study was conducted by the Declaration of Helsinki and Tokyo. Many different factors make the job as a nurse potentially more stressful than for example administrative occupations. Moreover, there are plenty of difficulties for a healthy Work-Life-Balance for nursing staff and also potential negative effects resulting from a poor Work-Life-Balance or a high amount of workplace stressors. It can be concluded that a solution approach for the workplace stressors and a better Work-Life-Balance can only be reached if the employer and the employees work together to decrease the amount of stress, to offer and learn better mechanisms to cope with stress and to incorporate ways to ensure a better Work-Life-Balance.*

Keywords*: Workplace Stressors; Work-Life-Balance; Stress; Nursing Staff*

> *Summary Statement*
> *What is already known about this topic?*
> • *The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of nursing staff and due to this pandemic, the problem of the shortage of nursing staff gained a lot of attention.*
> • *To make the job as attractive as possible, it is important to understand stressful factors and factors decreasing the Work-Life-Balance.*

> *Research Findings / Key New Information*
> • *The workplace stressors are very diverse and depend very much on the character and the mental condition of the nursing staff.*
> • *There are many potentially negative effects of the job as a nurse on the Work-Life-Balance, which have to be handled differently to ensure a great Work-Life-Balance.*

> *The Implications of this Paper*
> *The research findings of this paper can help to improve the daily work of nursing staff and might therefore decrease the amount of sick leave/employee turnover.*

1. Introduction

To create a workplace and a job that motivates employees and enables them to develop their potential, it is not only essential to think about motivational factors but also about potentially stressful factors and to consider the overall happiness and well-being of well-being because these aspects will also influence their performance. In this article workplace stressors,

as well as the Work-Life-Balance and the Burnout disease will be taken under consideration with regards to their overall influence on an employee's job satisfaction.

Workplace Stressors

If a person is continuously put under pressure and stressed at their workplace, this can lead to various negative consequences. First of all, the overall job performance of the person can be expected to deteriorate. Furthermore, stress can also influence the employee's health - not only psychologically, but also physiologically. The initiative for health and work (IGA) found out that physiological and psychological stress cannot only lead to depressions and anxiety disorders but can also cause muscular and cardiac diseases (Wirtschaftswoche, 2016). However, it cannot be generalised how long a person can be put under pressure until he becomes sick because it depends on the length of the stress, the intensity of the stress and also on the stress competencies and the overall resilience of a person, if and when he will become sick due to too much stress (Wirtschaftswoche, 2016).

Psychosocial Workplace Stressors

Many different aspects can be perceived as stressful factors by employees. The German health insurance company AOK has identified fourteen stress-triggers, which appear most often at the workplace (AOK, 2019):

First of all, too much work, which has to be done in a short period, is often perceived as very stressful by the employees.

Secondly, employers who criticize their employees very much produce stress for them. Furthermore, problems with colleagues and permanent disturbances can cause stress. If employees feel over-challenged or are often annoyed by the circumstances at their workplace, it can also lead to stress. Employers who do not set clear goals or do not provide sufficient information about the work that needs to be done for their employees can lead to stress for their employees as well.

Another stressful situation is if the employees do not receive enough appreciation or recognition or do not receive enough comprehension of their employer and/ or colleagues for potential private or professional problems. Moreover, a lack of communication or unexpected changes without previous preparation or agreement can produce stress for the employees. The fourteenth stress-causing factor is if the employee perceives himself as being snowed under tasks and pressure, without having the possibility of setting priorities on his own. (AOK, 2019).

2. Specific Aspects regarding the Work of Nursing Staff

2.1. Special Requirements of the Job as a Nurse

In general, it can be stated, that stress is very individual, and everyone perceives and handles stress differently. Aspects like the personal attitude and mindset thought patterns and expectations towards the own work can increase the perceived workload and burdens. Many people perceive work as very burdensome when they are unsure if they will be able to handle the workload and satisfy the expectations. (AOK, 2011) Due to the special requirements and workplace situation of hospitals, the stress-situation for nursing staff cannot be compared to the stress of employees working in an office or a factory (Thor and Siegfried 2021a: 12).

According to the German Institute for Operational Health Promotion (BGF-Institut), most of the nursing staff have a very demanding and stressful job, not only physiological but also psychological. This is not only due to the poor health conditions of the patients, who often need a lot of help, but also due to high morbidity in hospitals, which confronts nursing staff far more often with death than people in other jobs are confronted with it. (AOK, 2011).

Furthermore, social and caring jobs are special in comparison to industrial or administrative occupations because the job itself is people-related, which result in special occupational ethics, conflicts and a unique way to solve these conflicts. Since the job

concentrates on the patients, it requires special methodologies and skills of the worker. For many people working in social and caring jobs, the focus of the job on people and not on things, like done for example in administrative occupations, is the reason why they choose this job. This can then result in people perceiving their job not as a simple job, but rather as their calling. This strategy has the risk of developing too personal relationships with the patients, of caring too much about the patients' problems and suffering patients and - summing up - of too high burdens for the nursing staff, which can result in psychological and physiological problems, for example, depressions and burnout and might force them to give up their job. (Enzmann and Kleiber 1989: 15-16)

The article "Occupationtediumm in the social services" states that the worker uses himself as his own tool and that the unique characteristics, which lead to his interest in social and caring work and which qualify him for these jobs, are also the characteristics, which make him more sensitive regarding work-related emotional pressures (Pines and Kafry 1978: 500).

Alfred Kadushin, a professor of social work, declared that the individual necessity of social and caring jobs is to give away a part of you emotionally, which results in the risk of emotional exhaustion. Additionally, this characteristic of social and caring jobs can lead to failures being perceived more personal and might cause that the helper questions his competencies, not only professionally but also personally. Moreover, the separation of work and free time is often not as easy as it is in other jobs because the job is closely connected to personal life. (Kadushin 1974: 715-719).

2.2. Impacts on the Nursing Staff

In 1977 the German psychoanalyst Wolfgang Schmidbauer wrote a book called "Helpless Helper" in which he formed the term "Helpersyndrome", explaining it with the specific mental and psychological risks of helping jobs, especially about psychohygpsychogenic(Schmidbauer, 2016). This "Helpersyndrome" is also often understood as a too high willingness to help, which can be caused by the wish to be admired and liked (AOK, 2011). If this occurs, it can also lead to stress, especially if a person cannot meet his own requirements and if he does not receive enough appreciation for his help (AOK, 2011). The psychotherapist Thea Bauriedl says that the need to help other people is a normal human need but can become problematic if it becomes important for the person that other people depend on him (Zeit, 2006). These helpers might try to give other people, what they need on their own, which would then make them dependent on the recognition of the ones they are helping (Zeit, 2006).

Additionally, a survey revealed that many people working in psychosocial jobs have to handle several negative emotions and modes of behaviour, which result from work-related stress. Examples of these feelings are the wish to distance themselves from their patients, helplessness, decreasing engagement, depressions, decreasing motivation and exhaustion. (Schmidbauer 2016: 9) Moreover, the book "Helfer-Leiden" (Engl.: Helper-Suffering) states that the emotional burden is higher for nursing staff than for doctors because they spend more time with the patients, develop a more personal relationshipwitho with the patients and have to care for the patients, for example by listening to them when they are talking about their condition and their feelings, anxieties, etc., which makes it more difficult to remain impersonal and distanced (Schmidbauer 2016: 14).
A combination of stress triggers, which often appears for nursing staff, is a too high workload and at the same time a missing scope for decision-making and a missing influence on the workflows (AOK, 2011). The psychotherapist Gert Kaluza states that a disparity between an overspending at the workplace regarding the amount of work done and a not adequate reward for this work, for example by too low wages or not enough recognition, is also very likely to produce stress. He names this phenomenon the gratification crisis (AOK, 2011).

Several studies have shown that depressions, the Burnout-syndrome as well as a suicidal tendency is higher for caring jobs amongst other due to the high-stress level in these

jobs. Regarding stress-provoking factors, the riskiest ones are a too high workload, missing support and too many responsibilities, in addition,n to shift working and conflicts with colleagues and employers. (Naumovska 2015: 73).

Since peoples' reactions to stress depend on their character, but also their ing mechanisms, companies can help their employees - not only to reduce stress but also to cope with existing stress, for example by learning meditation techniques or offering yoga, other sports and conversational therapies.

3. Work-Life-Balance

Work-Life-Balance is "the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). If the proportion between these two is not balanced, a Work-Family or Work-Life-Conflict can develop. The role conflict models are based on the scarcity theory of Goode "which assumes that personal resources, such as time and energy, are finite and that the devotion of greater resources to one role necessitates the devotion of lesser resources to other roles" (Goode, 1960).

Work-Family-Conflicts occur "when the pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible, and as a result, participation in the family role is made more difficult by participation in the work role" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Work-Family-Conflicts are more likely to be experienced by women because they have a role overload more often. This difference is because women spend more time on non-work actions like caring for children, elderly people or housework (Meenakshi et al. 2013: 33).

According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), a Work-Family-Conflict "is a form of conflict that occurs when the energy, time, or behavioural demands of the work role conflicts with those of the family role. It has the underlying assumption, that the requirements and expectations of the workplace often do not fit the requirements of family life, which will then cause conflicts (Kahn et al., 1964). The Work-Family-Conflict is "an extension of Work-Family-conflict reflecting that the work role may interfere with individual's other personal life roles and interests. Besides the family role, these can range from time for friends, exercise, military service, education, having time for self and recovery, volunteering or being active in religious organisations" (Kossek, 2016).

3.1. Current Situation in Germany

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a survey in 2010, which shows that the Work-Life-Balance impaired over the last years. In 2010, Germany reached a score of 2.62, while this score had increased to 2.74 in 2010 (Zeit, 2014). The Initiative for Health and Work (IGA) found out that permanent availability can cause health problems (Zeit, 2014). Furthermore, they found out that two-thirds of the working population continuously work overtime, 25% state that they often have to cancel activities with their family or friends because they need the time for relaxation, 22% of the interviewed people state that they have to be reachable in their free time for their employer and 20% feel pressured by their employer to achieve more (Zeit, 2014).

On the other hand, the Work-Life-Balance becomes more and more important to employees. According to a survey published in 2019, 55% of the interviewed persons would rather like to work four days a week and would also accept less money if they would get more time off in exchange. In 2018, this score was only 49%. Employees working in a four-workday-model are more productive and also more content with their job. (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2019)

3.2. Importance of the Work-Life-Balance

A lack of Work-Life-Balance can have various negative effects: Impaired health, higher consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, weight problems and psychological diseases like

Burnout. On the other hand, a great Work-Life-Balance can lead to decreasing rates of Burnout, fewer health problems and also higher productivity because the person can concentrate on the work he is currently working on and not focus on other things at the same time (Australian Institute of Business, 2019). These aspects can then result in higher motivation due to better job satisfaction.

3.3. Organisational Influence on the Work-Life-Balance

The Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth of Germany (BMFSFJ) analysed the economic effects of actions supporting the Work-Life-Balance. According to the BMFSFJ, a requirement to ensure employee loyalty, motivation and readiness for action is a great Work-Life-Balance (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2005: 14). Furthermore, employee engagement and trust in the company influence how far an employee uses his whole potential, which can then have an important influence on the organisational success. Actions taken by companies can be divided into single instruments and extensive concepts and have the aim to create a balance between the companies' interests and demands and the employees' interests and demands (Ibid: 14).

Organisational actions to improve the Work-Life-Balance can be divided into three different types: First of all actions to prove the integration of work into the employee's life and a result-oriented service provision, for example, part-time jobs or sabbaticals (Ibid:.15-16). Secondly, actions to make the location and the time when and where an employee is working more flexible, for example, job-sharing, mobile work and flextime (Ibid: 16-17). And the last aspect is to increase employee loyalty, for example by offering support for childcare, mentoring and employee benefits like health check-ups and gym-memberships (Ibid:17-19).

Several studies have shown the positive effects of actions supporting the Work-Life-Balance. To begin with, they have a positive effect on companies, as they increase employee loyalty and motivation and can lead to a better organisational culture. Moreover, they can also influence the customer relationships, investor relationships and the perception of the society of the company positively (Ibid: 26). In addition to that, they influence the employee positively, for example by increasing his learning achievement, improving his social and family relationships and causing more participation in the society, for example by voluntary work (Ibid: 28-29).

Furthermore, a better Work-Life-Balance can make it easier for women to accommodate a job and a family, which will then produce a higher household income and this can then positively influence the economic situation of the country because the household is spending more money (Ibid: 29-30). The last positive aspect of organisational actions improving the Work-Life-Balance of their employees is the stabilisation of the society (Ibid: 30). An example for this is that a better Work-Life-Balance offers the employee a better scope of action, in which the employee has more opportunities regarding the structuring of his free time and can participate more in the societal life (Ibid: 30-31).

4. Work-Life-Balance for Nursing Staff

Several aspects make it much more difficult for nursing staff to maintain a Work-Life-Balance. Shiftwork and working on the weekends are aspects, which many people do not have to cope with in their professional life, but nursing staff in hospitals always has to.

Sleep Disorders

The German Society for Sleep Research and Sleep Medicine (DGSM) found out that shift workers have to handle several problems: First of all, their shift times often lead to sleep disorders because the people do not have regular sleep patterns like people with a nine to five job (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schlafforschung und Schlafmedizin 2011: 3). The average value

of people having sleep disorders in terman society is 33%, while 80% of people working in shifts have sleep disorders (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2011).

Health Problems

In addition to that, shift workers have a general higher predisposition to get sick than people, who do not work in shifts (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schlafforschung und Schlafmedizin 2011: 3). Even the risk to get cancer is higher, due to the unsteady day and night rhythms. Furthermore, the gular mealtimes often cause gastro-intestinal diseases and cardiovascular diseases. (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2011)

Social Problems

Moreover, shift work also causes problems in the social and family life because the person, who works in shifts, has to sleep in the daytime, is tired or sick due to the shift work and it is often more difficult for people, who work in shifts, to care for their family and spend time with their friends than for people, who have a normal job rhythm. (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schlafforschung und Schlafmedizin 2011: 3)

Performance Problems

According to Sulley and his model of "Circadian Rhythm of Biological Functions", the error frequency is very high during the nighttime. The often-occurring sleep disorders lead to an impaired regeneration of the body, which results in a lower performance capability caused by the sleep disorders on the one hand and the other hand, a general higher error frequency caused by the night time. (Ärzteblatt, 2006) These factors can increase the number of mistakes, which a nurse does and can therefore not only be considered important for the nursing staff but also the patients and the hospital because it potentially endangers the patients. Additionally, it can be considered important for the Work-Life-Balance because it can be expected to influence job satisfaction and self-esteem negatively, if a person makes more mistakes due to the above-mentioned effects of shift work and working during the nighttime (Thor and Siegfried 2021b: 7).

It can be summarized that the effects of shift work influence the Work-Life-Balance negatively: Not only does shift work lead to sleep disorders and health problems, it also causes social and family problems and can lead to decreasing job satisfaction and self-esteem, but also a potential endangerment of patients. All of these factors influence the overall feeling of a person having a balanced professional and personal life. Therefore, nursing staff has to cope with many difficulties, which can lead to an imbalanced personal and professional life.

Summing up, companies have many possibilities to support their employees' Work-Life-Balance. These opportunities do not only potentially influence the employee positively but can also have a positive impact on the organisational success and external factors like the perception of the society towards a company. Even though many actions supporting the employee Work-Life-Balance are costly, they can be considered an important and great approach to increase the success of the company.

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