

Burnout and work engagement among psychiatric nurses – are work characteristics important?

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Summary

Aim: The aim of the study is evaluation of burnout and work engagement among psychiatric nurses, and determination of the relationship between these variables and the perceived demands of emotional display rules, emotional labour strategies, and of demands of interpersonal interactions.

Method: Sixty psychiatric nurses completed the Polish version of the Maslach-Burnout Inventory MBI, the Polish version of the UWES, the Emotional Labour Scale, Emotion Work Requirements Scale and the Frequency, Duration and Routineness of Interactions Scale.

Results: It was found that a greater burnout is associated with higher requirements of hiding negative emotions, surface acting, and routineness of interactions, whereas a lower burnout is connected with expression of naturally felt emotions and a high frequency of interpersonal interactions. Lower engagement in work is related with undertaking surface actions, while a greater dedication is associated with the duration of interaction.

Discussion: Work requirements are of great importance for burnout, but less important for work engagement. The perceived demands for the display of positive emotions are related with both higher emotional exhaustion, and a lower feeling of the lack of accomplishments at work, which suggests that this aspect of work may be of a negative as well as positive importance.

Conclusion: A relationship was found between work characteristics, and burnout and work engagement.

psychiatric nurses, burnout, engagement, emotional labour

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly assumed that professions involving ‘people work’ are emotionally exhausting [1]. This group of professions includes the occupation of a nurse, which additionally belongs to the group of professions of public trust. Professions of public trust involve the performance of tasks, the character of which is special from

the aspect of public tasks and implementation of public interest. Among nurses, psychiatric nurses are a special group. They provide specialist health services, such as nursing, prevention, diagnostic, treatment, rehabilitation services, as well as services within the scope of health promotion on behalf of mentally disabled patients and patients with psychiatric disorders. The skills of taking care of mentally ill persons are acquired through an adequate theoretical training and practical experience, and it is expected that these skills will be constantly improved [2]. In the course of the work of a nurse, contact with people lasts all the time, which in-

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creases the requirements posed to nurses, who are expected to be patient, understanding, and showing concern for others. The phenomenon of burnout, including also psychiatric nurses, has already been investigated many times. However, the novelty of this study is the simultaneous consideration, apart from occupational burnout, of the phenomenon of work engagement and analyzing them in a wide context of work characteristics, including work demands regarding the expression of emotions, requirements pertaining to interactions with the patients and their families (frequency, duration, routineness of interpersonal interactions), and the emotional labour strategies applied. To-date, in Polish conditions, these problems have not been examined in such a compilation and with respect to the professional group of psychiatric nurses.

Burnout and work engagement are among the aspects of the functioning of an employee in an organization which have recently been most frequently investigated. The syndrome of occupational burnout is defined as including three different psychological states: emotional exhaustion, associated with the feeling of an employee that he/she gave everything emotionally, depersonalization, i.e. distancing oneself from others, and lack of personal accomplishment at work [3]. In this study, work engagement is defined as a positive state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication to work and absorption, referring to work. Vigour expresses high levels of energy and high mental resistance at work, dedication to work expresses strong work engagement, experiencing the feeling of importance, enthusiasm and challenge, while absorption expresses being fully focused and joyfully absorbed in work, due to which time passes quickly and the employee has difficulties in getting away from work [4]. According to this approach, burnout and work engagement are considered as different constructs, and not the opposite ends of the same dimension, and should be measured by different instruments.

Different demands are associated with the work area. The most important of them are the requirements concerning the display of emotions, and those pertaining to the interaction with the client. The emotional display rules express the degree to which showing positive emotions or hiding negative emotions is per-

ceived by employees as an element of the functioning of a worker required in an organization [5]. In turn, the requirements concerning interpersonal interactions include their: frequency, duration, and routineness [6]. In the case of psychiatric nurses, frequency refers to how often nurses interact with patients and their families. Duration refers to how long typical interactions last. Routineness is the extent to which interactions with patients and their families are repetitive and scripted.

Employees cope with work demands in many ways. In order to achieve the expression of emotions required in an organization the workers undertake *emotional labour*. This concept was introduced by Arlie Hochschild [7] to define the process of managing own emotions by an employee, in accordance with the rules of displaying emotions in effect in the organization. Emotional labour is performed for earnings and may take various forms. The employee may undertake surface acting or deep acting [8]. Surface acting consists in the pretence of emotions by the employee, which he/she does not really feel, or the suppression of actually experienced emotions. In the case of deep acting, an employee controls and modifies own internal thoughts and feelings in order that the emotions displayed outside were authentic. Deep acting most frequently concerns attempting to experience positive emotions, due to which their external manifestations occur in a natural way, resulting in internally experienced and externally displayed emotions being compatible. Surface and deep acting are considered as compensatory strategies, used by employees in situations when they are not able to spontaneously show the emotions desired in the organization. The subsequent strategy consists in displaying naturally felt emotions. In this case, an employee undertakes a conscious effort in order to make certain that the expression of emotions is compatible with the requirements of the organization [6].

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the study is evaluation of burnout and work engagement among psychiatric nurses, and study of the relationships between these

variables and the perceived emotional display rule demands, the applied strategies of emotional labour, as well as the requirements with respect to interpersonal interactions (frequency, duration, routineness of interactions). In addition, the objective of the study is determination of the intensity of individual aspects of burnout and work engagement of psychiatric nurses, emotional demands imposed on them by work, and the requirements pertaining to interactions with patients.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study included 60 psychiatric nurses with the period of employment from 1-40 years ($M = 25.23$; $SD = 9.53$). The respondents were aged 25 – 61 years ($M = 47.52$; $SD = 7.46$). The majority of them work in a multi-shift working system (81.7%), while the remainder in a single-shift system (18.3%). In a typical week, the working time remains within the interval from 36 – 72 hours ($M = 42.5$; $SD = 7.08$). The majority of respondents had higher education (61.7%), followed by secondary school education (38.3%). Slightly more than half of nurses lived in large cities, with a population of over 100,000 (53.3%), whereas the remainder – in smaller towns (26.6%) or in a rural area (20.0%). The majority of respondents remained in stable relationships – marital or partnership (76.7%). The remaining nurses (23.3%) were single (unmarried, widows, divorced). Nearly all the respondents (95.5%) rear at least one child.

Occupational burnout was measured using the Polish version of the Maslach-Burnout Inventory MBI [8]. The questionnaire consists of 22 items examining 3 aspects of the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (5 items) and the feeling of lack of personal accomplishments (8 items). The respondents assess each statement according to a 7-degree scale: within the range from 0 ('never') to 6 ('everyday'). A higher result according to the scale means, respectively, a greater: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of the lack of personal accomplishment at work. The reliability of the scale was assessed in this study by means of the Cronbach α coefficient: for the scale of emotional exhaustion $\alpha = 0.92$;

for the scale of depersonalization (after removal of the statement 10) $\alpha = 0.70$; and for the scale of the lack of personal accomplishments $\alpha = 0.80$.

Work engagement was investigated using the Polish version of the UWES questionnaire [9]. The questionnaire allows measurement of 3 aspects of engagement: vigour (6 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (6 items). The respondent defines, according to a 7-degree scale (from never to always), how often he/she feels in a specified way at work. The reliability of the scale assessed in this study using the Cronbach α coefficient is for the particular scales: $\alpha = 0.85$; $\alpha = 0.90$; $\alpha = 0.87$, respectively.

Emotional labour strategies were measured using the Polish version of the *Emotional Labor Scale* [6]. The method was translated with the consent of the authors of the scale [10]. The scale consists of 14 items. The examined person responds to each statement by reporting to what extent it fits the description of this person's situation, and provides the reply according to a 5-degree scale, where 1 means definitely disagree, and 5 – definitely agree. A higher result means that the person uses a given strategy more frequently: surface acting, deep acting, expression of naturally felt emotions. The reliability of the scale assessed using the Cronbach α coefficient for the scale of surface acting – $\alpha = 0.87$; for the scale of deep acting – $\alpha = 0.71$; and for the scale of expression of naturally felt emotions – $\alpha = 0.83$.

Perceived emotion display rule demands were assessed by means of the Polish version of the Emotion Work Requirements Scale [11]. This scale allows measurement of the size of requirement to display positive emotions (4 items), and the requirement to hide negative emotions (3 items). The respondents specify with respect to each statement, according to a 5-degree scale (from 'not required at all' to 'always required'), how often a specified behaviour is required at the respondent's work. The reliability of the scale is assessed in this study by means of the Cronbach α coefficient: for the scale of the requirement to display positive emotions – $\alpha = 0.88$; and for the scale of hiding negative emotions – $\alpha = 0.86$.

In order to determine the demands of interpersonal interactions (frequency, duration, routineness) a Polish version of the scale Frequency, Duration and Routineness of Interactions was used [6]. This scale allows measurement

of the frequency of interactions (2 items), their duration (2 items), and routineness of interactions (3 items). The reliability of the scale is assessed in this study by means of the Cronbach α coefficient and is for individual scale: $\alpha = 0.74$; $\alpha = 0.74$; $\alpha = 0.77$, respectively.

RESULTS

From among the symptoms of occupational burnout, the examined psychiatric nurses most strongly experienced emotional exhaustion ($M = 2.24$; $SD = 1.39$), followed by the lack of personal accomplishments at work ($M = 2.25$; $SD = 1.19$). Their intensity was significantly higher than that of depersonalization (respectively: $t(59) = 8.117$; $p < 0.001$; $t(59) = 6.115$; $p < 0.001$). Depersonalization in the examined group was relatively low – $M = 1.07$ ($SD = 1.14$), according to the scale assuming values from 0 – 6 (Fig. 1). Emotional exhaustion was strongly positively related with depersonalization ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$), and moderately positively related with the feeling of lack of personal accomplishments ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$), whereas the relationship between lack of personal accomplishments and depersonalization was statistically insignificant.

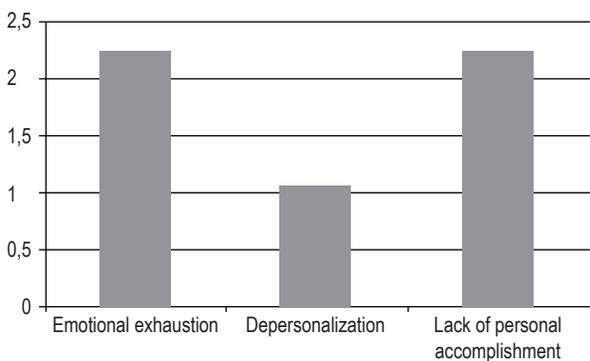


Figure 1. Dimensions of occupational burnout among psychiatric nurses (N = 60).

From among the manifestations of work engagement, the highest value was obtained for dedication to work ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.15$), significantly higher than vigour ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.03$), and absorption ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.07$) (respectively: $t(59) = 3.935$; $p < 0.001$; $t(59) = 5.169$; $p < 0.001$) (Fig. 2). No statistically significant differences

were observed between vigour and absorption. All dimensions of work engagement were strongly positively related (the Cronbach α coefficient assumes values from 0.67 – 0.71; $p < 0.001$).

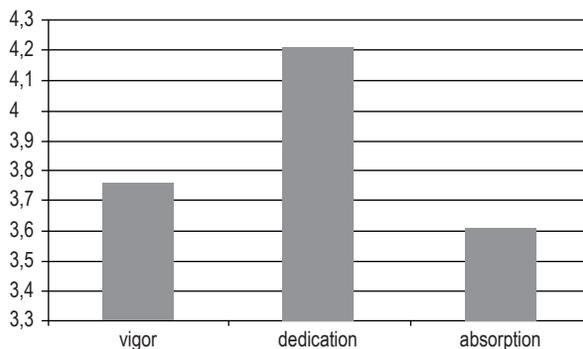


Figure 2. Dimensions of work engagement among psychiatric nurses (N = 60).

The most frequently applied emotional labour strategy was the expression of naturally felt emotions ($M = 4.34$; $SD = 0.77$). This strategy was applied significantly more often than deep acting ($M = 2.68$; $SD = 0.99$; $t(59) = 8.930$; $p < 0.001$) and surface acting ($M = 1.72$; $SD = 0.73$; $t(59) = 15.418$; $p < 0.001$), with surface acting being significantly less often undertaken than deep acting ($t(59) = 8.579$; $p < 0.001$) (Fig. 3). Expression of naturally felt emotions was negatively related with surface acting ($r = -0.54$; $p < 0.001$) and deep acting ($r = -0.31$; $p < 0.001$). Nevertheless, surface and deep acting were positively correlated ($r = 0.53$; $p < 0.001$).

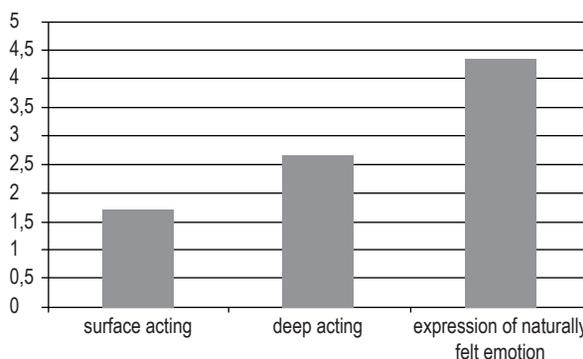


Figure 3. Emotional labour strategies in the group of psychiatric nurses.

Psychiatric nurses report that in their work they experience significantly higher require-

ments with respect to display of positive emotions ($M = 4.13$; $SD = 0.89$) than hiding negative emotions ($M = 3.78$; $SD = 1.13$; $t(59) = 4.030$; $p < 0.001$). However, the occurrence of these two types of requirements was strongly positively correlated ($r = 0.81$; $p < 0.001$). Considering the range of the scale of replies (from 1 – 5), it may be presumed that the intensity of these 2 types of requirements assumes values beyond the mean value on the scale, and closer to the end of the scale informing that these requirements always occur at work.

Frequency and duration of interpersonal interactions were weakly negatively correlated with their routineness (respectively: ($r = -0.27$; $p < 0.05$; $r = -0.28$; $p < 0.05$). Evaluation of the

routineness of tasks remained on an average level (reaching the value of $M = 2.39$ according to the 5-degree scale of replies; $SD = 0.89$). Frequency and duration of interpersonal interactions were not correlated ($r = 0.06$, insignificant.). Assessment of the frequency of interactions obtained high results according to the 5-degree scale of replies ($M = 4.82$; $SD = 0.37$), whereas the duration of interactions was assessed at a relatively high level, beyond the average ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 0.54$).

In order to recognize the relationships between burnout and work engagement, and work characteristics, a number of bivariate correlations were calculated. Table 1 presents the results of these analyses.

Table 1. Values of correlation coefficients between emotional display rule demands, frequency, duration and routineness of interactions, emotional labour strategies, and burnout and work engagement among psychiatric nurses ($N=60$).

Variables:	EDR	PDR	NDR	F	D	R	SA	DA	NF
Burnout :	.20	.11	.28**	-.28**	.01	.35**	.32*	-.05	-.26*
Emotional exhaustion	.37**	.30**	.41***	-.26**	.01	.23 t	.35**	.06	-.13
Depersonalization	.27*	.13	.24 t	-.41***	-.05	.26*	.34**	.09	-.21
Lack of personal accomplishment	-.20	-.27*	.09	-.09	.19	.32*	.06	-.24 t	-.28*
Engagement :	-.04	-.01	-.08	.19	.18	-.24 t	-.31*	-.19	.18
Vigor	-.14	-.09	-.18	.18	.10	-.25 t	-.39**	-.20	.21
Dedication	.07	.14	-.02	.22 t	.29*	-.24 t	-.18	-.06	.07
Absorption	-.03	-.05	-.01	.11	.09	-.15	-.25 t	-.25 t	.18

Source: own research

EDR Perceived Emotion Display Rule Demands; PDR Requirements to Display Positive Emotions; NDR Requirements to Hide Negative Emotions; F Frequency; D Duration, R Routineness; SA Surface Acting; DA Deep Acting; NF expression of Naturally Felt Emotions

As a result of the analyses, no statistically significant relationships were found between work engagement and the perceived emotional display rules demands. However, a relationship was observed between the perceived emotional display rules demands and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Both the requirement to display positive emotions ($r = 0.30$; $p < 0.05$), and hiding negative emotions ($r = 0.41$; $p = 0.001$) were related with emotional exhaustion. In turn, the requirement to display positive emotions was related with a lower feeling of the lack of personal accomplishments ($r = -0.27$; $p < 0.05$).

Demands of interpersonal interactions (frequency, duration, routineness) were rarely re-

lated with work engagement, and significantly more often with burnout. In the case of work engagement, a significantly significant positive correlation was found only between dedication to work and duration of interactions ($r = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$). In turn, with respect to occupational burnout, the frequency of interactions was negatively related with depersonalization ($r = -0.41$; $p = 0.001$), and emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.26$; $p < 0.05$), whereas routineness was positively related with depersonalization ($r = 0.27$; $p < 0.05$) and the feeling of lack of personal accomplishments ($r = 0.32$; $p < 0.05$).

Emotional labour strategies rarely show any relationship with work engagement. A negative correlation was only found between surface act-

ing and vigour ($r = -0.39$; $p < 0.01$). The relationships between emotional labour and occupational burnout were considerably more frequent. A positive correlation was observed between surface acting, and emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.35$; $p < 0.01$) and depersonalization ($r = 0.34$; $p < 0.01$), as well as a negative correlation between expression of naturally felt emotions and a lower feeling of the lack of accomplishments ($r = -0.28$; $p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the presented study, it was found that few from among the work characteristics of psychiatric nurses showed a statistically significant relationship with work engagement of the nurses. A negative relationship was only confirmed between engagement (including only one of its dimensions – vigour) and surface acting, and a positive relationship between dedication and duration of interactions with patients and their families. Nevertheless, it was confirmed that occupational burnout was statistically significantly related with many of the analyzed work characteristics. It was found that a greater emotional exhaustion co-occurs with higher emotional demands (both of hiding negative emotions and display of positive emotions) and with surface acting, while a lower emotional exhaustion co-occurred with a higher frequency of interpersonal relationships. Higher depersonalization was associated with higher requirements of emotional labour and with surface acting, with a greater routineness of interpersonal interactions and their lower frequency. In turn, higher demands for display of positive emotions and expression of naturally felt emotions were combined with the feeling of the lack of personal accomplishments at work. Routineness of interactions, apart from depersonalization, was related with a higher feeling of the lack of personal accomplishments.

The relationship between surface acting, and a higher emotional exhaustion, greater depersonalization and lower vigour is fully justified theoretically. The relationship is also justified between higher emotional labour requirements (display of positive emotions and hiding negative emotions) and emotional exhaustion. The de-

mands of emotional labour and surface acting consume the energy and emotional resources of an employee, which in accordance with the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) by Hobfoll [12], is the source of stress. The relationship is also justified between the expression of naturally felt emotions and a lower feeling of the lack of accomplishments. An expression of naturally felt emotions does not require the expenditure of energy and resources, while it may lead to the acquisition of resources at work. According to the results of research to-date, these resources are greater satisfaction with work, lower distress, and the feeling of personal accomplishments [13, 14].

Considering the demands concerning interpersonal relationships undertaken by psychiatric nurses at work, their routineness is associated with a higher feeling of the lack of accomplishments and a greater depersonalization, as well as with a lower devotion to work. In turn, the undertaking of many interactions is connected with lower emotional exhaustion and a lower depersonalization, and the duration of interactions co-occurs with a higher devotion to work. However, a surprising result is that the requirement of emotional labour consisting in displaying by nurses of positive emotions co-occurs with a lower feeling of the lack of accomplishments at work. This study demonstrates that this requirement is related with lower exhaustion, which is understandable considering that it consumes the employee's energy and resources. At the same time, this requirement is connected with a lower feeling of the lack of accomplishments at work. A similar result was obtained by Brotheridge and Grandey [15], who stated that perceiving the demand to display positive emotions is associated with a heightened sense of personal accomplishment. According to these researchers, this suggests that this aspect of work may provide benefits.

The results obtained may be of practical importance. The results of analyses suggest that in order to decrease occupational burnout among psychiatric nurses it is justified to seek factors which would facilitate them to express naturally felt emotions, factors limiting the undertaking of surface acting, and allowing the avoidance of the routineness of interactions with patients and their families. It also seems important to provide

assistance with constructive coping with negative emotions occurring at work, considering the fact that emotional labour undertaken in order to hide them is an important source of emotional exhaustion. In turn, with respect to the requirement of displaying by psychiatric nurses of positive emotions, although this requirement uses up their energy and resources, but simultaneously reduced the lack of accomplishments at work.

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