

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue in Emergency Care Nurses

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AIM

ON a daily basis emergency care nurses are exposed to high levels of trauma. They care for patients who have been involved in road traffic accidents, patients who have attempted death by suicide, psychiatric patients and also victims of assaults including shootings, stabbings, domestic violence and rape. According to Coetzee and Klopper (2010) compassion fatigue, if not treated in the beginning stages, can permanently alter a nurse's ability to give compassionate care to their patients. Furthermore, nurses showing symptoms of compassion fatigue may eventually become ineffective in their line of duty. By further exploring the areas of burnout and CF, prevention of negative outcomes may be highlighted, which will prove beneficial for both emergency nurses and their patients.

METHOD

This study was questionnaire based. A non experimental correlational design was employed to investigate relationships between variables. Participants (N=70) ranged in age from 23 to 50, with a mean age of 32 (SD= 6.21). Of the respondents, 61 were female (87%) and 9 were male (13%). Participants completed an on-line survey which was comprised of demographic questions and three questionnaires (ProQOL-V, Toronto Empathy Questionnaire and Coping Self Efficacy Scale). Data was then analysed using SPSS 22.

ABSTRACT

THE aim of this study was to examine burnout and compassion fatigue in Irish emergency care nurses and the role of possible risk factors. A single method correlational design was employed comprising of quantitative data. Purposive sampling acquired a sample (N= 70) of 61 females and 9 males. Findings indicate that Irish

emergency care nurses are exposed to the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue. Exposure to secondary traumatic stress posed as a high risk factor in the development of burnout and compassion fatigue while empathy, compassion satisfaction and coping self-efficacy were found to act as protectors against burnout and compassion fatigue (CF).



+ Hypothesis 1 Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout

Pearson's correlation coefficients found a strong significant positive relationship between secondary traumatic stress and burnout; $r(60) = .529, p < .001$.

+ Hypothesis 2 Empathy and Burnout

Pearson's correlation coefficients found no significant relationship between empathy and burnout; $r(60) = -.216, p = .072$. This result shows that higher empathy levels do not indicate a higher rate of burnout.

+ Hypothesis 3 Night Shifts and Compassion Fatigue

Pearson's correlations coefficients found a significant relationship between the amount of night shifts worked per month and compassion fatigue; $r(60) = .244, p = .042$. Indicating that, an increase in night shifts leads to an increase in risk of CF.

+ Hypothesis 4 Exposure to Physical / Verbal Aggression and Empathy

Kendall's correlations coefficients found no significant relationship between exposure to physical/ verbal violence and empathy; $r(60) = .01, p = .911$. Indicating that exposure to workplace violence does not decrease empathy levels.

+ Hypothesis 5 Length of Service and Compassion Satisfaction

Pearson's correlations coefficients found no significant relationship between length of service and compassion satisfaction; $r(60) = .170, p = .080$. Length of service as an emergency nurse was not related to compassion satisfaction levels.

+ Hypothesis 6 Age and Burnout

Pearson's correlations found a negative statistically significant relationship between age and burnout; $r(60) = -.268, p = .012$. This suggests that as age increases the level of burnout also increases.

RESULTS

+ DISCUSSION

THE results of this research have shown that emergency care nurses in this sample are at risk of suffering from burnout and compassion fatigue; with results indicating low levels of compassion satisfaction, mode rate levels of burnout and average levels of secondary traumatic stress.

In contrast to previous research, a significant relationship was not found between empathy and burnout. However, there is recent evidence to support the findings of this result. Clinical empathy may be used as a protective factor against burnout (Picard et al. 2016).

+ FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research would be beneficial in directing its exploration into nurses coping strategies. By identifying strategies that are helpful, self-care protocols for nursing staff could be developed and implemented in emergency departments. The findings suggest that there is a great need for continued research into the area of burnout and compassion fatigue in Irish emergency departments.

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