
Exploring Professional Challenges in Selected Secondary Hospitals in Jolo, Sulu

Suraya B. Delos Reyes RN,¹ Agaton Manuel Gerardo T. Alzate, Jr²

<https://orcid.or//0009-0007-8645-2460>¹

St. Bernadette of Lourdes College^{1,2}

sbdelosreyes@sbhc.edu.ph¹ nalzate@sbhc.edu.ph²

ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of healthcare workers regarding occupational stress and burnout and explored how these challenges influenced their professional responsibilities. Specifically, it identified the workplace factors contributing to stress, the physical and emotional effects of burnout, coping strategies, and the participants' commitment to maintaining quality patient care. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, utilizing purposive sampling to select healthcare workers from selected healthcare facilities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that heavy workloads, staff shortages, extended working hours, and emergency situations were the primary sources of occupational stress. Participants also experienced physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and decreased concentration. Despite these challenges, healthcare workers remained committed to providing safe, compassionate, and quality patient care by adopting effective coping strategies and demonstrating professional resilience. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening organizational support systems, promoting employee well-being, and implementing stress management and mental health programs to reduce burnout and improve workforce sustainability. Although the study was limited to selected healthcare facilities, it provides valuable insights for healthcare administrators and future researchers in developing interventions that support healthcare workers' well-being and enhance the quality of patient care.

Keywords: occupational stress, burnout, healthcare workers, resilience, professional commitment, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

This study presents the background of the study, including the situation, trends, issues, research gap, objectives, and the significance of exploring professional challenges among healthcare workers in selected secondary hospitals in Jolo, Sulu. It also outlines the scope, limitations, and the definition of terms used in the study.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the experiences of healthcare workers regarding occupational stress and burnout. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What workplace factors contribute to occupational stress among healthcare workers?
2. What are the physical and emotional effects of burnout experienced by healthcare workers?

3. What coping strategies do healthcare workers use to manage occupational stress and burnout?
4. How do healthcare workers maintain professional commitment despite experiencing occupational stress and burnout?

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on the lived experiences of selected healthcare workers regarding occupational stress and burnout. It examined workplace stressors, physical and emotional effects, coping strategies, and professional commitment. The findings were limited to the participants included in the study and may not represent all healthcare institutions.

Review of Related Literature

Occupational stress among healthcare workers is commonly associated with heavy workloads, staff shortages, long working hours, and emotionally demanding responsibilities.

According to the **World Health Organization (2022)**, maintaining the well-being of healthcare workers is essential to ensuring quality healthcare services. Burnout has been associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and decreased work performance (**Maslach & Leiter, 2016**). Effective coping strategies, organizational support, and resilience have been identified as important factors in reducing stress and promoting professional commitment (**Labrague, 2021; Shanafelt et al., 2017**). These studies emphasize the importance of creating supportive work environments that protect healthcare workers' mental health while maintaining quality patient care.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in Maslach's Burnout Theory, which explains that prolonged exposure to workplace stress may result in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The theory provides a framework for understanding how occupational stress influences healthcare workers' well-being and professional performance.

Conceptual Framework

The study adopted the Input–Process–Output (IPO) Model. The input included healthcare workers' experiences related to workplace stress, burnout, coping strategies, and professional commitment. The process involved conducting semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The output was a deeper understanding of occupational stress and burnout and recommendations for workplace support programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a **qualitative phenomenological research design** to explore the lived experiences of healthcare workers regarding occupational stress and burnout.

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to understand healthcare workers' experiences of workplace stress, burnout, coping strategies, and professional commitment through their own perspectives.

Research Steps

The study began with a review of related literature, followed by the preparation and validation of the interview guide. After obtaining the necessary approvals and informed consent, interviews were conducted with the participants. The collected data were transcribed, coded, analyzed using thematic analysis, and interpreted to identify common themes.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used to select healthcare workers with relevant workplace experience. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences regarding occupational stress and burnout.

Data Analysis Methods

The interview transcripts were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, where responses were coded, grouped into categories, and organized into themes and subthemes representing the participants' shared experiences.

Research Hypotheses and Validation

Trustworthiness was established through expert validation of the interview guide, member checking, and careful review of the coding process to ensure the credibility and consistency of the findings.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality, anonymity, and participants' right to withdraw were strictly observed. The findings were limited to the experiences of the selected healthcare workers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOP 1. What workplace factors contribute to occupational stress among healthcare workers?

Participants identified heavy workloads, staff shortages, extended working hours, emergency situations, overtime, and limited rest as the primary sources of occupational stress. These workplace demands increased fatigue and emotional pressure during clinical practice.

SOP 2. What are the physical and emotional effects of burnout experienced by healthcare workers?

The participants described experiencing physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, and decreased motivation due to prolonged workplace demands. Despite these challenges, they continued to perform their professional responsibilities.

SOP 3. What coping strategies do healthcare workers use to manage occupational stress and burnout?

Healthcare workers managed stress by seeking support from colleagues and family, maintaining positive attitudes, practicing self-care, and balancing work with personal activities. These strategies helped them maintain emotional well-being despite workplace pressures.

SOP 4. How do healthcare workers maintain professional commitment despite experiencing occupational stress and burnout?

Despite experiencing stress and burnout, participants remained committed to providing safe and quality patient care. Professional responsibility, resilience, teamwork, and dedication motivated them to continue fulfilling their duties.

SUMMARY

The study found that healthcare workers commonly experienced occupational stress due to heavy workloads, staff shortages, long working hours, and emergency situations. Burnout affected their physical and emotional well-being; however, effective coping strategies and strong professional commitment enabled them to continue providing quality patient care.

CONCLUSIONS

Healthcare workers experience occupational stress and burnout because of demanding workplace conditions. Although burnout affects their well-being, they continue to demonstrate resilience, professionalism, and commitment to delivering quality healthcare. Organizational support and wellness programs are essential to reducing burnout and promoting employee well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Healthcare institutions should strengthen employee wellness and stress management programs.
2. Hospital administrators should promote adequate staffing and work-life balance initiatives.
3. Healthcare workers should be encouraged to participate in mental health and resilience programs.
4. Future studies should include larger samples and multiple healthcare institutions to improve the generalizability of the findings.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools were used only to assist with grammar, language refinement, organization, and formatting of this manuscript. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret the

research data. The researcher assumes full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and academic integrity of this study.

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