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PROFILING THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ON EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT AMONG NURSES

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Abstract:

This study aims to understand the influence of emotional work, organizational cultural support, and effective emotional management on the involvement and commitment of nurses in a public teaching hospital in Malaysia. Through interviews with five nurses, this study identified four main themes that affect their well-being and commitment: Emotional Stress and Fatigue, Organizational Support and Appreciation, Commitment and Motivation, and the Effects of Burnout and Despair. High emotional stress and the absence of a supportive organizational culture were reported to reduce motivation and increase the intention to quit among nurses. This study recommends that hospital management strengthen emotional support and improve organizational culture to reduce the risk of burnout and increase nurse engagement. These findings contribute to the existing literature in the field of emotional labor and human resource management in the healthcare sector, particularly in understanding the unique needs of nurses in Malaysia.

Keywords:

Emotional Work, Organizational Culture, Nurse Involvement, Burnout, Teaching Hospital

Introduction

The nursing profession plays a vital role in the health care system worldwide, including in Malaysia. The nurse's role not only includes physical care but also involves emotional support

given to patients and their families. This task is often challenging since nurses have to manage their own emotions while dealing with pressures at work that come from patients, patients' families, and colleagues (Lartey et al., 2020). In this context, the concept of emotional labor or emotional work becomes very important since it refers to the ability of nurses to control and coordinate their emotions with the needs of professionalism and the demands of daily tasks. Hochschild (2012) introduced this concept by emphasizing that emotional work involves individuals' efforts to control their personal emotions in order to meet the expectations of the work role. However, the constant pressure faced by nurses, especially in a very challenging work environment, can lead to job dissatisfaction and an increased risk of burnout (Vévoda & Vévodová, 2020). Moreover, the absence of adequate support from the organization exacerbates this situation, leaving nurses increasingly isolated and less motivated in their daily tasks.

The lack of organizational cultural support also contributes to the issue of employee engagement among nurses. An organizational culture that does not pay due attention to the emotional well-being of employees can lead to a decrease in the level of engagement and ultimately encourage employees to leave their profession. Low employee engagement is often closely related to high attrition rates, especially in fields that require patience and empathy, such as nursing (Bhardwaj, 2022; Moscelli et al., 2022). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) highlighted that an organizational culture that supports employee well-being can increase their engagement, while organizations that fail to provide a supportive work environment face increased turnover intentions. In the health care context, organizations that pay less attention to the emotional and cultural aspects of work may face adverse effects, not only on nurses but also on the quality of health services as a whole.

This study focuses on some of the main problems that hinder employee engagement among nurses in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia. The first problem is the lack of an organizational culture that supports the emotional needs of employees, leading to a decrease in employee engagement and increasing the risk of layoffs. The second problem is inadequate management of emotional labor among nurses, causing burnout and job dissatisfaction and prompting them to consider termination. The third problem includes the issue of low employee engagement due to an organizational culture that is less responsive to the emotional needs of employees. This, in turn, exacerbates the turnover problem in the nursing profession. With that, this study was conducted to investigate the factors influencing employee engagement among nurses, focusing on the role of emotional work and organizational culture.

Accordingly, this study sets two main objectives. First, this study aims to identify factors that influence the role of emotional work and organizational culture on employee engagement among nurses. This objective focuses on identifying the key elements that influence emotional work and how organizational culture is essential in fostering or hindering employee engagement. Second, this study aims to analyze the impact of the lack of organizational cultural support and emotional work management on the level of employee engagement as well as its implications on the intention to quit among nurses. By analyzing these factors, this study aims to provide an in-depth insight into the influence of organizational culture and emotional labor on the increasing issue of employee layoffs.

This study holds significant implications for government, community, industry, and academia. For the government, its findings offer a foundation for policies aimed at enhancing nurses' emotional well-being, potentially reducing attrition rates and improving the quality of public healthcare services. For the community, the study raises awareness of the importance of emotional support for nurses facing high emotional demands, fostering empathy that contributes to a more supportive work environment (Chang & Cho, 2021). In the healthcare industry, the study provides insights for developing effective workforce management strategies in the public sector, emphasizing how organizational culture can support nurses' emotional needs to reduce attrition and retain committed staff (Hwang et al., 2022). Academically, it expands existing knowledge on emotional labor, organizational culture, and employee engagement, particularly in nursing, and encourages further research into emotional demands and work culture in healthcare. The study focuses on nurses in Malaysian public teaching hospitals, where challenging work conditions are common. These hospitals serve as both treatment centers and training grounds for nursing trainees, placing unique emotional demands on nurses (Nurumal et al., 2017). By examining this environment, the study sheds light on the specific challenges and support needs faced by nurses in teaching hospitals.

Literature Review

Emotional Labor in the Nursing Profession

The concept of emotional labor was introduced by A. Hochschild et al. (1983) and refers to the need to manage emotions when dealing with work situations that require direct contact with clients or patients. Emotional labor in the context of nursing involves the control and expression of emotions by nurses when dealing with patients, the patient's family, and other staff at the hospital. According to Brotheridge and Lee (2002), emotional labor is a critical aspect of nurses' work since they are faced with various situations that require efficient emotional management. Chen et al. (2019) research revealed that nurses who have to hold back negative emotions in their jobs have the potential to experience high emotional stress, which ultimately leads to burnout and job dissatisfaction.

Burnout caused by emotional labor has become a significant issue in the nursing sector worldwide, including in Malaysia Permarupan et al. (2020). This burnout not only affects work performance but also contributes to the intention to quit among nurses. A study by Leiter and Maslach (2016) supported the view that emotional labor that is not well managed can increase work stress and subsequently affect the mental health of employees. This situation becomes more critical in public teaching hospitals with a more challenging work environment and higher workload, making emotional labor a more significant issue.

Organizational Culture in the Healthcare Sector

Organizational culture refers to the values, norms, and beliefs that exist in an organization that influence employee attitudes and behaviors (Schein, 2010). In the healthcare sector, a supportive organizational culture can play an important role in increasing employee engagement and reducing turnover intentions. A study by Kowitlawkul et al. (2019) discovered that a conducive organizational culture, such as support for work-life balance, can help nurses manage high emotional burdens. An unsupportive organizational culture is also associated with increased work stress and dissatisfaction among nurses, which ultimately increases the intention to quit (Lee & Jang, 2019).

There is strong evidence that an organizational culture that supports employees' emotional well-being can improve employee engagement and reduce the intention to quit Olakunle, (2021). However, many health organizations do not provide a conducive work culture, causing nurses to feel stressed and undervalued. In Malaysia, there is an urgent need for health organizations, especially public teaching hospitals, to create a culture that supports the mental and emotional well-being of nurses to address the growing attrition problem.

Employee Engagement in the Nursing Profession

Employee engagement is an important element that contributes to commitment and better work performance among employees. W. B. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined employee engagement as a positive state related to work, where employees show dedication, enthusiasm, and focus on their tasks. Employee engagement in the healthcare sector is extremely important since nurses who are fully engaged in their work tend to provide better quality services and have a low rate of intention to quit (W. Schaufeli, 2021). A study by Leiter and Maslach (2016) asserted that nurses who are not engaged in their work often experience job dissatisfaction and tend to consider quitting.

In Malaysia, employee engagement among nurses is still a major challenge. High workload and lack of organizational support make nurses less enthusiastic and less committed to their jobs (Hashim et al., 2023). This leads to high quit intentions among nurses, which in turn has a negative impact on health services. Therefore, it is crucial for health organizations to strengthen employee engagement as a strategic step in addressing the issue of attrition.

The Relationship between Emotional Labor, Organizational Culture, and Employee Engagement

Several empirical studies have shown the relationship between emotional labor and employee engagement, particularly in the healthcare sector. Brotheridge and Lee's (2008) study emphasized that emotional labor that is not well managed can reduce employee engagement since nurses who constantly hold negative emotions have the potential to feel dissatisfied with their jobs. On the other hand, supportive organizational culture can be an improvement factor in emotional labor, where the support provided by the organization can help employees overcome emotional stress.

A study by Imran et al. (2020) supported the idea that a supportive organizational culture can increase employee engagement by providing the necessary emotional support. In the context of nursing, a conducive organizational culture can help nurses manage their emotional labor more effectively. Employees who feel valued and supported tend to be more engaged with their jobs and less likely to quit (Memon et al., 2021).

Research Gap

Although many studies have examined emotional work, organizational culture, and employee engagement (Kondić & Starc, 2023; Marenus et al., 2022; Parent & Lovelace, 2018) separately, there is a research gap in understanding how these three elements interact in the nursing context in Malaysia. Previous studies have focused more on studies in Western countries or in the general healthcare sector, where organizational cultural conditions may be different. However, specific research on nurses in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia is still lacking. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining in depth how emotional work

and organizational culture affect employee engagement and termination intentions among nurses in Malaysia.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of emotional labor and organizational culture on employee engagement among nurses. This qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to directly access the views and experiences of the participants, which is in line with the objectives of the study, which require detailed and contextual explanations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The design of this study, which is Basic Qualitative Inquiry, focuses on exploring the main themes in the participants' experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon being studied, suitable for achieving objectives that require open research without the need to measure quantitatively. Five participants were interviewed in this study, providing rich enough data to support in-depth analysis.

Data collection methods were conducted through semi-structured interviews and observations, each of which was chosen for its ability to reveal different dimensions of the participants' emotional and organizational cultural experiences. Semi-structured interviews, which involve open-ended questions, allow participants to share their in-depth experiences. At the same time, observations strengthen the researcher's understanding of the work context and social interactions that occur in the participants' workplace (Patton, 2015). Interviews were designed with guided questions in line with the objectives of the study to examine how nurses manage emotional work and their views on the existing organizational culture. Meanwhile, observations were made to confirm participants' perceptions as well as identify elements of organizational culture that may not have been expressed verbally.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants to ensure that each individual selected had experience relevant to the topic of this study. The target population consists of nurses working in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia, who are known to have high work stress and significant emotional demands. Five participants were selected as the study sample because this size is considered sufficient for a qualitative study that requires an in-depth analysis of each data obtained (Babchuk, 2016). The selection of purposive sampling aims to ensure that the data obtained can provide an accurate picture of the factors influencing employee engagement among nurses.

The data analysis is performed manually using coding and thematic analysis techniques, where the data is analyzed with the help of Microsoft Word software. Coding was conducted to identify key themes related to emotional work, organizational culture, and employee engagement. Through thematic analysis, these themes are categorized and organized systematically, allowing for more meaningful findings that are in line with the objectives of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This thematic analysis is suitable for qualitative research because it emphasizes in-depth interpretation based on rich and complex qualitative data.

This study adheres to strict ethical guidelines, including obtaining written consent from each participant prior to the interview session. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time and the guarantee of the confidentiality of their data. These steps are taken to ensure that the study is conducted with full integrity and respect for the rights and privacy of the participants (Orb, 2001). In order to increase the validity and

reliability of the data, triangulation was conducted by combining interview and observation data. This triangulation technique ensures that the data obtained reflects the actual experience of the participants, while member checking is done by giving participants the opportunity to check the researcher's interpretation to confirm the accuracy of the information given (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach helps strengthen the credibility of the data and increase trust in the results of this study.

In conclusion, the methodology of this study was carefully prepared to support the objectives of the study in deeply understanding the factors that influence the involvement of nurses in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia. The qualitative approach provides a solid foundation for obtaining rich and in-depth data. At the same time, the validity and ethical measures ensure that this study is carried out with integrity and responsibility.

Finding

The results of the interviews suggest that emotional work and organizational culture play a large role in influencing the engagement and emotional well-being of nurses. Each participant shared their experiences of emotional stress, lack of organizational support, and the direct impact on work commitment. Overall, four main themes were identified through relevant coding from the participants' answers, namely (1) Emotional Stress and Fatigue, (2) Organizational Support and Appreciation, (3) Commitment and Motivation, and (4) Effects of Burnout and Despair.

Emotional Stress and Fatigue

Based on the answers to the first question, coding related to "patient pressure," "colleague support," "workload," and "stress" indicate that emotional stress plays a vital role in nurses' well-being. All participants stated that interactions with patients, especially those who were impatient or fussy, provided significant emotional stress. For example, Participant 1 stated, *"Mmm... I think my emotions are affected a lot when the patient is fierce or impatient, sometimes making work a little difficult."* This illustrates how pressure from patients can cause emotional exhaustion among nurses. The theme "Emotional Stress and Fatigue" indicates that stress factors from interaction with patients, lack of support from colleagues, and high workload are the main causes of emotional fatigue among nurses. Constant emotional stress without adequate support increases the risk of burnout and reduces work motivation, as several participants emphasized. This theme is closely related to the need to understand the impact of emotions on productivity and well-being among nurses.

Organizational Support and Appreciation

Based on the second question, the coding obtained included "appreciation," "superior support," "positive culture," and "opportunity to think." Overall, participants felt that a supportive organizational culture had a significant influence on their engagement and motivation. Participant 2, for example, stated that the lack of support caused them to be *"rushed"* and *"restless"* in performing tasks, which ultimately affected their engagement. This theme of "Organizational Support and Appreciation" shows the importance of an organizational culture that appreciates the efforts of nurses and provides moral and emotional support. The absence of a positive culture results in feeling neglected and lowers work morale. Some participants stated that when support and opportunities to give opinions were unavailable, they felt less involved in the organization, and their commitment to work decreased. Therefore, a culture

that values employees and provides strong support plays an important role in increasing engagement and reducing turnover intentions.

Commitment and Motivation

From the analysis of the answers to the third question, the identified coding included "feeling neglected," "desire to quit work," "feelings of hopelessness," and "low work motivation." Participants stated that an organizational culture that did not support their emotional needs caused their commitment to work to decrease. Participant 4, for example, mentioned, *"If there is no emotional support from the organizational culture, we feel like giving up. Mmm... it's hard to control my emotions because there is no place to express my feelings."* This shows that low emotional support from the organizational culture affects the level of commitment to work. This theme of "Commitment and Motivation" shows that the absence of strong cultural support reduces nurses' desire to remain committed to their profession. The lack of channels to express emotional stress and feelings of neglect causes nurses to be less motivated and tend to consider quitting their jobs. Overall responses reflect the importance of emotional support provided by organizations to maintain nurses' commitment to work.

Effects of Burnout and Despair

From the fourth question, several codings such as "burnout," "mental fatigue," "lack of commitment," and "losing direction" emerged as the main signs that lack of effective emotional work management caused burnout and despair. Participant 3 stated that when emotional work is not managed well, they feel like *"giving up"* and that unstable emotions make it difficult to stay committed. Similarly, Participant 5 admitted that the lack of support caused them to feel *"tired of work,"* which resulted in emotional and mental exhaustion. The theme "Effects of Burnout and Despair" emphasizes that ineffective emotional management in organizations can lead to burnout, directly affecting employee commitment. Burnout causes physical and mental fatigue that reduces the ability of nurses to perform their duties effectively. This theme suggests that good emotional work management is necessary to prevent burnout and keep nurses motivated in their work.

Discussions

This study found that emotional challenges and lack of organizational support play a major role in influencing the well-being and commitment of nurses in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia. Interviews with five nurses revealed the significant impact of emotional work on their engagement, especially when faced with pressure from fussy or impatient patients. For example, one of the participants stated, *"Mmm... I think my emotions are affected a lot when the patient is fierce or impatient; sometimes the work is a little difficult,"* which illustrates how interacting with patients can be a source of high emotional stress. Similarly, another participant shared that the lack of emotional support from the organization made them feel hopeless and increased their intention to quit.

Overall, four main themes were found in this study, namely emotional stress and exhaustion, organizational support and appreciation, commitment and motivation, and the effects of burnout and hopelessness. Emotional stress and burnout were identified as key themes, where nurses who are often faced with challenging patients and lack of support from colleagues experience constant emotional stress. This is in line with the findings of a study by Idress (2015), which found that prolonged emotional stress can cause burnout among nurses. In the theme of organizational support and appreciation, a culture that supports emotional needs and

values nurses' contributions was found to increase their engagement. This finding aligns with Nurcholis and Budi's (2020) study, which revealed that a supportive organizational culture can increase employee morale and commitment.

Commitment and motivation are also identified as important factors, where emotional support from the organization is able to maintain nurses' morale. This support allows nurses to feel confident and remain committed, as emphasized by the study of W. B. Schaufeli and Bakker, who found organizational support important in maintaining employee motivation. The effects of burnout and despair show how the lack of effective emotional management results in burnout, directly affecting nurses' commitment. This theme coincides with Leiter and Maslach's (2016) findings that link burnout with increased quit intentions.

However, there are some unexpected findings in this study. An interesting finding is the nurses' dependence on the support of colleagues as the main source of emotional support, compared to formal support from the organization. Participants acknowledged that the cooperation of colleagues immensely helped them manage emotional stress, even more than formal support from hospital management. For example, one participant stated, *"If colleagues don't cooperate, we become more tired,"* showing the dependence on the support of colleagues in reducing work stress. These findings highlight the importance of supportive relationships between colleagues, which have rarely been emphasized in previous studies but are important among nurses.

In addition, there are nurses who demonstrate a high commitment to their profession despite being faced with emotional stress. Participants stated that their responsibility to patients and values of professionalism motivated them to remain committed despite the stress. A participant's statement, *"Despite stress, we have to do it because patients need us,"* reflects professional dedication that may reduce the intention to quit work despite high stress. This is slightly contrary to the burnout theory, which links excessive emotional stress with the desire to quit work and shows that dedication to patients can be an additional motivational factor for nurses.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of emotional work, organizational support, and effective emotional management in influencing nurse engagement and well-being in public teaching hospitals. Emotional stress and a lack of supportive culture reduce motivation and increase quitting intentions. While these findings align with past studies, the support of colleagues and commitment to professionalism also play key roles in boosting engagement. This study suggests that hospital management should enhance emotional support and foster a positive culture to reduce burnout risks and improve nurse engagement, ultimately benefiting nurse well-being and healthcare quality.

Conclusion

This study shows that emotional work, organizational cultural support, and effective emotional management are the main factors that influence the involvement and commitment of nurses in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia. Through interviews with five nurses, four main themes were identified: Emotional Stress and Fatigue, Organizational Support and Appreciation, Commitment and Motivation, and Effects of Burnout and Despair. Emotional stress arising from interaction with patients and a high workload indicate an urgent need for better emotional support. The lack of a supportive organizational culture also contributes to a decrease in motivation and an increase in nurses' intention to quit.

This study is in line with the main objective of identifying and analyzing the factors that influence the role of emotional work and organizational culture in the involvement of nurses. The results of this study also emphasize the importance of an organizational culture that values and allows nurses to communicate openly, which can increase their motivation and involvement in work. Although formal support from the organization is sometimes insufficient, the support of colleagues turns out to play an important role in reducing emotional stress and additional motivation. These findings reflect the importance of good working relationships for nurses' well-being and commitment, even under high pressure.

The contribution of this study to the field of emotional work and human resource management in health care is very meaningful, especially in understanding the unique needs of nurses in Malaysia. This study adds to the knowledge in the existing literature and provides a basis for designing intervention programs to increase emotional support in organizations. In conclusion, this study emphasizes that comprehensive support from the organization is needed to reduce burnout and increase nurses' commitment, thereby ensuring better healthcare quality.

The limitation of this study lies in its focus on nurses in public teaching hospitals in Malaysia, who may have different work contexts compared to other hospitals. In addition, the small sample size limits the applicability of the results of this study to the general nursing population. Further studies with a wider sample and encompassing different types of hospitals are needed to strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

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