Anxiety as burnout predictor among nurses

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1. Background

Nursing is considered as a stressful job, eliciting physical and psychological diseases among professionals (Nantsupawat et al., 2016), since they are exposed to psychosocial risks at work when they deal with patients’ death or aggressions, disease contagion or they witness patients’ trauma and suffering. Some personal attributes contribute to burnout, such as anxiety traits (Meekyung el al., 2012).

2. Aims

To know anxiety and burnout levels among nurses, to identify anxiety as burnout predictor, and to verify their variations according socio-demographic and professional characteristics.

3. Method

Data were collected after formal institutions’ authorization, using an anonymous questionnaire composed by sociodemographic questions, and Portuguese versions of STAI ( Spielberger, 1983; Silva & Campos, 1999) and MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1997; Marques-Pinto & Picado, 2011). Participated voluntary 347 Portuguese nurses, 72% female, 50% married and 42% having children. We verified that 67% work in hospitals (25% work in health units and 8% in other health contexts such as private clinics and elderly care units), 82% are graduated (18% have a master degree), 62% work by shifts and 68% have a definitive job contract. Age varies between 22 and 60 years (M= 34.5, SD=8.42) and job experience varies between 1 and 37 years (M=11.5, SD=8.26).

4. Results

Burnout presents a moderate level, with moderated emotional exhaustion, low depersonalization and high personal accomplishment, while anxiety is moderated, with anxiety state higher than anxiety trait (Table 1). Anxiety, both state and trait, correlates positively with burnout negative dimensions, and anxiety trait correlates negatively with job experience (Table 1), suggesting adaptation skills. This argument is reinforced by the decrease on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization with more job experience, and by the decrease on depersonalization with more age. Using cut-off points for burnout levels (Maroco et al., 2016), high levels were found (Table 2) on 41% of the sample for emotional exhaustion, 7% for depersonalization and 94% for personal accomplishment, while low levels were found on 33% of the sample for emotional exhaustion, 81% for depersonalization and 1% for personal accomplishment, reinforcing that emotional exhaustion is the most visible negative symptom of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1997).

Regarding comparative analysis according individual and professional characteristics of the sample, only working by shifts and work place influences burnout and anxiety. Nurses working by shifts present more emotional exhaustion (M=2.89 vs M=2.42 t=3.124 p=0.002) and more depersonalization (M=1.25 vs M=0.72 t=4.685 p=0.000), while nurses working in health units present lower depersonalization (compared with hospitals or other health contexts, respectively M=0.73 vs M=1.17 and M=1.18 F=5.280 p=0.006). Anxiety levels were higher for nurses working on other health contexts than for those working on hospitals or health units, despite the difference is lower for anxiety state than for anxiety trait (respectively M=2.26 vs M=1.98 and M=1.99 F=3.256 p=0.040; and M=2.17 vs M=1.90 and M=1.82 F=5.922 p=0.003). Regression analysis (Table 3) reveals that anxiety predicts 28% of emotional exhaustion, 8% of depersonalization and 13% of personal accomplishment, while individual and professional characteristics only predict nearby 5% of depersonalization. Stepwise regression analyses (Table 4) revealed that anxiety trait predicts burnout dimensions stronger than anxiety state, with a positive correlation with negative burnout dimensions.

5. Conclusions

Anxiety plays an important role to burnout vulnerability, suggesting the need to prepare nurses with better self-knowledge about their individual traits and reactions to cope with stressful events at work. Research about nurses’ burnout, such as the INT-SO project does on Portugal, Spain and Brazil can be useful to understand burnout vulnerability or to develop stress management programs such as Smith (2016) developed with mindfulness.

References