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COMPARISON OF FACTORS INFLUENCING NURSES' JOB SATISFACTION IN DIFFERENT PRACTICE SETTINGS IN AUSTRALIA – A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this systematic literature review was to examine associations between selected themes related to nurses' job satisfactions in different nursing practice settings in Australia. **Method:** A systematic literature review based on the PRISMA Statement was conducted. Research articles published between the years 2013 until 2016 were screened in relation to prior selected themes and practice settings of interest. No distinction among the nursing workforce was applied in relation to the variables age, gender, contract type, and demographic location. The practice settings analysed were hospital, aged care, and community health care. The themes of interest included (1) absenteeism, (2) turnover, (3) rural and urban areas, and (4) organisational commitment. **Primary Argument:** The shortage in the nursing workforce is a crucial fact that needs to be addressed. Job satisfaction has a high influence on turnover, organisational commitment, and absenteeism. As the demand for professional registered nurses and midwives is increasing immensely in the near future, a better understanding about nurses' needs is fundamental for the application of new methods and strategies to achieve higher retaining rates. Especially, as Australia is experiencing high turnover rates among the younger nursing generation. **Conclusion:** The systematic literature review demonstrated that there is available research in the practice settings of 'aged care' and 'community health care'. A comparison of the examined practice settings, the selected themes and their correlation to job satisfaction was not feasible as the scope of findings were not equal among the practice settings. No study was found that conducted a comparison of the selected themes of interest, job satisfaction, and health care practice settings.

KEYWORDS

Nurses, Nursing, Absenteeism, Turnover, Organisational commitment, Hospital, Aged care and Community health care.

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INTRODUCTION

The profession nurse represents the biggest occupational group in the health care sector in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016a)¹. Staff shortage in the nursing workforce is apparent since years (Health Workforce Australia 2014)². According to Health Workforce Australia,

the demand for registered nurses and midwives is projected to rise to 85,000 by 2025 (Health Workforce Australia 2014)². This trend is expected to dramatically increase over the next decades. The country is experiencing both an ageing society as well as a demographic change in the population nurse (Health Workforce Australia 2014)². A high proportion of the baby boomer generation nursing workforce will retire over the next years. Recent studies have revealed that turnover is common among nurses, especially among the younger nursing generation (Brunero *et al*, 2017)³. Statistics demonstrate that a high rate of newly graduated nurses' intent to turnover and leaving their profession after being employed for a year (Blair 2014)⁴. Nurses further express that they have become less satisfied with their work conditions. A better understanding and more insight knowledge about the contributors responsible for nurses' decision and intention to leave their profession is needed for the development of sustainable retaining strategies and improvements of their work conditions.

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to identify associations between prior selected themes that are correlated with nurses' job satisfaction among different practice settings. The review further aimed to establish whether there are differences or similarities between the selected themes, job satisfaction, and the nursing practice settings. The selected themes of interest were (1) absenteeism, (2) turnover, (3) organisational commitment, and (4) rural and urban areas. Nurses practice settings that were compared included (1) hospital, (2) aged care, and (3) community health care.

The research questions, the systematic literature review intended to reveal were,

- Are there significant correlations between the selected themes, the practice settings, and nurses' job satisfaction in Australia?
- Are there any differences or similarities among the selected themes, job satisfaction, and practice settings?

METHODS

This systematic literature review was elaborated based on the 'Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) - Statement' and encompassed studies and reviews that were published between the years 2013 and 2016 in Australia. Eligible studies were identified by searching several electronic databases. One search stream was constructed for the searching process. The search stream used to identify eligible studies was 'nurses, nursing, job satisfaction, work satisfaction, and Australia'. The literature data bases CINAHL, PubMed, MEDLINE, and the Griffith University were screened, and articles classified as reviews and written in English were included. In total, the number of 153 journal articles were identified to be significant for the research project after the first screening process. Twelve articles were included into the systematic literature review after the second screening process. The exclusion of the 141 articles occurred based on prior defined criteria.

Findings

The findings of the systematic literature review demonstrated in relation to the selected themes that most of the studies and reviews focused on the interrelation of nurses' intention to turnover, their organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. No study or review were found that investigated differences in nurses' job satisfaction and rural and urban areas. Furthermore, only one study was found that examined the theme absenteeism. The findings of the systematic literature review revealed that there are research studies available that examined the interrelation between organisational commitment, turnover, and job satisfaction. Most of the studies concentrated predominantly on the practice setting hospital. One study was established that compared two practice settings including 'aged care' and 'community health care'. However, there was no study that conducted a comparison of nurses practice settings and the selected themes related to job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The review further identified a paucity of research in the practice settings 'aged care' and 'community

health care' compared to the practice setting 'hospital'. The screening process of the systematic literature review identified a scarcity of studies that examined the upfront selected themes absenteeism, and differences between rural and urban areas and its correlation to nurses' job satisfaction. Furthermore, only one study was found that provided a comparison of different practice settings (Duffield *et al*, 2014)⁵. However, this study focused on measuring overall job satisfaction among nurses. The study did not investigate any themes that are related to nurses' job satisfaction and further provided a comparison.

Job satisfaction and the theme 'absenteeism'

The examined studies revealed that the theme 'absenteeism' had a weak to moderate impact on nurses' job satisfaction and individual work attitude. Duffield *et al*, (2014)⁵ found that an increased absenteeism rate was linked to high nurse-patient-ratio, available budget to fulfil staff demand, and further the quality of supervisors and management (Duffield *et al* 2014)⁵. Their study further showed that overall work conditions were correlated to job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The theme absenteeism demonstrated an interrelationship to and expression of intense workloads in the practice setting hospital. A higher and intense workload was interrelated to nurses' job satisfaction (Duffield *et al*, 2014)⁵.

There was no research study available that examined the phenomenon of absenteeism and its interrelation to nurses' job satisfaction in the settings 'aged care' or 'community health care'.

Job satisfaction and the theme 'turnover'

The screening of the articles outlined nurses' turnover intention differ among the practice settings. Nurses' causations to turnover in the practice setting 'community health care' differed from those who worked in a 'hospital'. Nurses that worked in community health care criticised a lower feeling of coherence to their team members as they mostly work independently and desired being more connected to their team members (Clarke 2015)⁶. Whereas nurses who worked in hospital settings mentioned turnover intentions because of a lower degree in autonomy on the one hand (Chok *et al*,

2016)⁷. The reasons for turnover were moreover stress-related or related to a deficiency of positive and supportive relationships to their supervisors, and excessive workloads on the other hand (Duffield *et al*, 2014)⁵.

Nurses who have been employed in aged care and community care settings criticised that their chances to enhance their career opportunities were lower (Eley *et al*, 2013)⁸. That was one significant reason that had an impact on nurses' intention to turnover. Furthermore, nurses mentioned that the reduced scope of work was another factor that had an influence on turnover intentions in community health care settings (Ashley and Halcomb 2016)⁹. Whereas nurses who were employed in a hospital setting criticised intense workloads. Brunetto *et al*, (2013)¹⁰ found in their hospital-based study that there was a linkage between absenteeism, turnover intentions and job satisfaction (Brunetto *et al*, 2013)¹⁰. Absenteeism was associated to an increase in the nurse-patient-ratio which affected the overall workload of the nursing staff (Brunetto *et al*, 2013)¹⁰.

However, most of the studies conducted in hospital settings demonstrated that nurses perceived interrelationship to their supervisors and managers was connected to job satisfaction and intention to turnover. In contrast, nurses are overall satisfied with their communication culture and relationship to supervisors and managers in both 'aged care' and 'community health care' settings (Clarke 2015)⁶.

Job satisfaction and the theme 'rural and urban areas'

The screening process for eligible studies did not identify any recent study or published report that investigated whether there are differences existent in nurses' work satisfaction between rural and urban areas. Australia still faces considerable differences between rural and urban health. Furthermore, the workforce is expected to decrease in rural areas in the future (National Rural Health Alliance Inc. 2010)¹¹. The investigation of determinants responsible for nurses' turnover and job satisfaction in rural areas is therefore requested. Additionally, the examination of differences among rural and urban areas may outline a different weight and importance

of themes related to job satisfaction. Furthermore, perceived job satisfaction may differ among the practice settings, too. More research may provide new incentives to re-define existent strategies or the implementation of new approaches in the examined practice settings.

Job satisfaction and the theme ‘organisational commitment’

Job satisfaction and the level of organisational commitment among nurses employed in hospitals are often linked with a positive and stable relationship to their supervisors and managers (Brunetto *et al*, 2013)¹⁰. Dimitrelis *et al*, (2016)¹² examined that nurses criticised if promises by their employers were not met appropriately. That had an impact on their overall sense of belonging to their organisation (Dimitrelis *et al*, 2016)¹².

A comparison of the findings in the different practice settings could not be achieved as the quantity of data for the practice settings differed. Additionally, some studies showed significant limitations of being eligible to become generalised, and further applied different methods for the measurement.

One important finding in relation to the theme ‘turnover’ has been established as the reasons for turnover between nurses employed in hospitals, and community health care differed.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the systematic literature review, a paucity of research in ‘aged care’ and ‘community health care’ practice settings were established over the set time-frame between 2013 and 2016 in Australia. The results clearly demonstrated that the research interest is more focused on hospital and acute care settings. A study that determined the level of job satisfaction, and further demonstrated a comparison of different practice settings is requested as some findings demonstrated differences regarding the causations for nurses’ turnover intentions. Additionally, there is less known about job satisfaction and its correlation to absenteeism. The examined theme ‘differences between the rural and urban areas’ and its correlation to job satisfaction is less researched and needs to receive more attention. Based on statistics computed

by Health Workforce Australia (2014)², the Australian Government is of great concern that the quantity of nurses working in rural and remote areas will decrease in the near future (Health Work Australia 2014)¹³. This is founded nursing workforce demography as a high proportion of the nursing workforce will retire in the near future. The current average age in the nursing workforce is higher among rural and remote territories compared to major cities. Aside the ageing structure, rural and remote territories struggle with retaining nurses (Department of Health 2014)¹⁴.

This systematic literature review showed a significant research gap as there is less research conducted in the practice settings ‘aged care’ and ‘community health care’, the selected themes and their correlation to nurses’ job satisfaction. Further research would help to determine whether factors responsible for nurses’ job satisfaction vary among the examined practice settings. The work environment, types of patients, and the scope of practice differ among health care practice settings. The occurrence of the themes might be weighted different among these settings. The results would provide new incentives, ideas for strategies to reduce job dissatisfaction, increase and foster nurses to retain in their current jobs, and decrease the intention to leave their profession or turnover. The results from the systematic literature review outlined some differences between the practice settings, the examined themes and nurses job satisfaction that strengthens the need for more research, too.

To conclude, a comparison of the different practice settings could not be realised as there were no fundamental data present that would have enabled a contrast of the prior selected nursing practice settings.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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