

The Correlation of Character Traits with Job Burnout among Beheshti Hospital Nurses in Kashan during 2015

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Abstract

Introduction: Occupational burnout is one of the complications of work and a psychological syndrome including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feeling of inadequacy. Furthermore, personality traits such as openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism can affect the degree of occupational burnout. This study is to investigate the relationship between these two factors. **Materials and Methods:** This descriptive study was performed on 87 nurses from Kashan Beheshti Hospital. We used Neo and Maslach questionnaires to investigate the personality traits and occupational burnout. Sampling was performed by a simple random sampling method, and the data were collected by Neo and Maslach questionnaires. Statistical analysis was performed using Chi-square, Fisher exact test, independent *t*-test, and Pearson correlation coefficient. **Results:** In general, there is a significant relationship between different aspects of occupational burnout with personality traits. There was no significant relationship between occupational burnout and age ($P < 0.262$), while there was a relationship between occupational desirability and age. There was no significant relationship between the frequency and severity of occupational burnout in the various aspects of age, sex, and marital status of nurses. There is also no relationship between personality traits and these three factors. **Conclusion:** The study showed that the personality traits of nurses are effective in their occupational burnout. Furthermore, compare to depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and feeling of inadequacy in nurses is more related to personality traits and the modification of work environment and reduction of work stress are recommended for these employees.

Keywords: Burnout, nurses, personality trait

INTRODUCTION

In the process of adaptation to his social environment, the modern man inevitably suffers constraints and pressures. Therefore, the occupation may cause dissatisfaction and inadaptability and as a result, keep the individual out of his natural and normal form and makes him exhausted.^[1] Occupational burnout is one of the work-related problems that have been considered in recent years.^[2] It is a psychological syndrome that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feeling of inadequacy.^[3,4]

Emotional exhaustion is affected by psychological stress, emotional stress, and loss of emotional resources in an individual. Depersonalization is a negative and wild response to people who are usually service recipients of the same person and also includes feeling of inadequacy, lower feeling of competence in performing tasks, and negative self-assessment in work.^[5] According to studies conducted

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by the US Department of Intelligence, according to studies conducted by the US Department of Intelligence, among the existing workforce, the highest rate of occupational injuries, including occupational burnout, is related to the health-care services.^[6] This syndrome is also associated with physical symptoms such as fatigue, anorexia, headache, and disordered sleep pattern. In addition, nonspecific pain, decreased attention, senselessness, and lack of emotion and attachment to work have been reported.^[7] Furthermore, the individual feels unable to do his tasks, low sense of competence, low interest, reluctance to start work, and inability to keep balanced, to the extent that symptoms of depression, mood disturbances, and insomnia can be created in him.^[8] Studies show that nurses are more likely to be exposed to occupational burnout than other occupations.^[9] In the hospitals affiliated with Babol University of Medical Sciences, occupational burnout was reported in 68.8% of nurses.^[10] In a study conducted in private hospitals in Tehran, about 87% of nurses reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion.^[11] Contrary to the studies that report factors such as economic ones and occupational support in the occurrence of occupational burnout, other studies also consider individual factors such as the personality of employees as an effective phenomenon.^[12-14] In the last two decades, various studies have shown that personality has played an important role in the development of occupational burnout.^[15] Personality is a collection of psychological traits and relatively stable internal organizational mechanisms that influence the interactions of the individual and his adaptation to the social, physical, and psychological environment.^[16] The five factors of personality traits include openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.^[17] In a meta-analysis, Ahola *et al.* examined the relationship between personality traits and occupational burnout. The results showed that conscientiousness, desirability, positive mood, negative mood, optimism, and hardiness have a negative relationship with the occupational burnout and the type A positively is positively related to the occupational burnout.^[18] The results of the studies of Abdi Masouleh *et al.*, who aimed at investigating the relationship between occupational burnout and mental health in 200 nurses, indicated that the majority of research units had a low level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a high level of the reduction of individual success.^[19] At present, one of the common methods for measuring the dimensions of occupational burnout is Maslach questionnaire. According to the studies, this questionnaire has been introduced as a reliable tool for measurement of the dimensions of occupational burnout.^[20,21] Since the human being is the basic unit of the work of nurses, especially human being with physical and mental sufferings who needs sympathetic care, the physical-mental health of nurses is very important, and so far, no research has been performed in this regard. This research investigates the possible relationship between personality traits and occupational burnout among nurses in Kashan Beheshti Hospital.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive, correlation study. The sample size was determined by referring to each ward of hospitals and obtaining the list of nurses by using the random numbers table. Thereafter, a brief explanation was given to the nurses about the design and objectives of the study. If they agreed to participate in the study, the NEO and Maslach questionnaire was provided for them to be completed. After completion, the questionnaire was reviewed by the researchers. If the answers were incomplete, they were asked to complete them.

NEO questionnaire

NEO questionnaire is one of the most recent questionnaires on the assessment of personality based on factor analysis approach. The questionnaire also has a shortened form called NEO-FFI, which is a 60-item questionnaire and is used to assess the five main factors in the personality.^[22] The five factors of personality traits include openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.^[17] Neuroticism refers to the tendency of the individual to experience anxiety, tension, seeking sympathy, hostility, impulsivity, depression, and low self-esteem. While extroversion indicates the individual's desire for being positive, daring, energetic and intimate, openness reflects the individual's desire for curiosity, love for the art, flexibility, and reasoning, and it refers to the tendency of the individual for generosity, kindness, empathy, altruism, and trust. Ultimately, conscientiousness refers to the individual's desire for being disciplined, efficiency, reliability, self-discipline, promotion seeking, rationality, and being calm.^[23] If the time of the test is short and the general information is sufficient, the shortened form of the questionnaire will be used. On the other hand, the implementation of this test is cost effective and time saving, its choices are highly reliably and have a high correlation. The most important point is that this test has received the lowest criticism compared to other tests. The response sheet to this questionnaire is based on the Likert scale (totally disagree, disagree, indifferent, agree, and totally agree). Scoring of the shortened form of this questionnaire, NEO-FFI, is not the same for all cases; that is, in some cases of scoring in the shortened form of questionnaire, totally disagree obtains a score of 5, disagree a score of 4, indifferent 3, agree 2, and totally agree 1. Meanwhile, in some other cases, the reverse scoring approach is used for this shortened form. The validity and reliability of the Persian version of this questionnaire have been shown in previous studies [Table 1].^[22]

Maslach questionnaire

Maslach questionnaire is the most common tool for measuring occupational burnout. This questionnaire is a golden standard for measuring occupational burnout and consists of three independent measuring scales created by 22 separate items on feelings and attitudes which measure various aspects of the occupational burnout syndrome. Nine items are related to the emotional exhaustion, 5 to depersonalization, and 8 to personal accomplishment. The frequency of these emotions is measured

Table 1: Scoring and interpretation of NEO test results

Personality traits	Score from 12 to 24 (low)	Score from 24 to 48 (medium)	Score from 48 to 60 (high)
Neuroticism	You have stable emotions	Sometimes your emotions are stable and sometimes not	You are an anxious person
Extraversion-introversion	You are introverted and you like loneliness more	You are neither completely introverted nor completely extroverted	You are extroverted and you like to be together
Agreeableness	Others are not very important to you	In some cases, you prefer to consider others and in some cases not	You are a people person and others are very important to you, very much
Openness	You have nothing to do with art and traveling and experiencing new things	You are not completely conservative and do not hate to experience new things	You love travel and new things
Conscientiousness	You are irresponsible and ignorant	The higher your score, the more responsible you are	You are conscientious, conscientious, and responsible

by scores from zero (never) to six (every day). To score this questionnaire, the total scores related to the statements of each aspect of the occupational burnout are calculated separately. In terms of emotional exhaustion, scores of 27 or higher indicate a higher level, in terms of depersonalization, scores of 13 or higher indicate a higher level, and in terms of personal accomplishment, scores of 31 or lower indicate a lower level. If the level of emotional exhaustion of a depersonalization is high, or the level of personal accomplishment is low, the concept of occupational burnout applies to the individual. The validity and reliability of the Persian version of this questionnaire have been shown in previous studies [Table 2].^[20,24]

RESULTS

This study was performed on 87 nurses, two-third (82.8%) of whom were women and a third (17.2%) were men, with the mean of 28.72 and a standard deviation of 5.9 years of age. In terms of working shifts, 89.7% had revolving shifts and 10.3% had a fixed morning shifts. Results from this study are shown in Tables 2-6.

In general, there was a significant relationship between different aspects of occupational burnout with personality traits. There was no significant relationship between the frequency and severity of occupational burnout in different aspects of age, sex, and marital status of nurses. There is also no correlation between personality traits and these three factors.

Table 3 shows that the highest linear correlation is between emotional exhaustion ($P < 0.001$, $R = 0.422$) and depersonalization ($P < 0.004$, $R = 0.303$) with the personality traits related to neuroticism. There is also high correlation between feeling of inadequacy with flexibility and accountability. Other correlations are also specified in Table 3.

In general, there was no significant relationship between different aspects of occupational burnout with age in nurses ($P < 0.262$) [Table 4].

There was no significant relationship between the different aspects of personality traits with the gender of nurses ($P < 0.463$) [Table 5].

In terms of job desirability, 13.7% of under 30-year-old nurses thought that they had a desirable job, while the number is

Table 2: Classification of Maslach Burnout test scores

	Frequency	Intensity
Emotional exhaustion		
High	30 and above	40 and above
Medium	18-29	26-39
Low	<17	<25
Depersonalization		
High	12 and above	15 and above
Medium	7-11	7-14
Low	<6	<6
Personal accomplishment		
High	40 and above	44 and above
Medium	34-39	37-43
Low	<33	<36

0% for above 30-year-old ones. Hence, there is a significant correlation between age and job desirability ($P < 0.02$). There was no statistically significant relationship between other aspects of personality traits and the age of nurses [Table 6].

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between personality factors and occupational burnout. The results indicate that there is a significant and direct correlation between neuroticism and occupational burnout, i.e. nurses who have a high score in neuroticism have also a high in occupational burnout. The highest linear correlation was found between emotional exhaustion ($R = 0.422$, $P < 0.001$) and personality trait ($R = 0.303$, $P < 0.004$) with the neuroticism-related personality traits. Other researchers also believe that neuroticism is far more related to occupational burnout than other personality traits. Anxiety, fear, petulance, worry, jealousy, disappointment, hot-bloodedness, and loneliness are attributed to neuroticism.^[25] The classified traits of neuroticism are fear, irritability, low self-esteem, social anxiety, weakness in controlling impulses, and a greater sense of helplessness. In general, individuals who set very high goals and tend to underestimate their performance would obtain high scores in neuroticism.^[26] These findings are consistent with the results of previous studies.^[27,28] In the results of Goddard *et al.* on the aspects of the 5-factor model of personality, it is only neuroticism that significantly predicts emotional exhaustion.

Table 3: Linear correlation coefficient between burnout with personality traits

Variable	Neuroticism	Extroversion (introversion)	Agreeableness	Openness	Conscientiousness
Emotional exhaustion	0.422*	0.167	0.215*	0.331*	0.189
Depersonalization	0.303*	0.081	0.265	0.2	0.216*
Personal accomplishment	0.066	0.287*	0.413*	0.156	0.381*

* $P < 0.05$ **Table 4: Distribution of intensity of burnout in different dimensions based on age of nurses**

The intensity of burnout by age				
Intensity of burnout	Condition	Under 29	Above 30	P
Emotional exhaustion	High	37 (72.5)	24 (66.7)	0.654
	Medium	10 (19.6)	7 (19.4)	
	Low	4 (7.8)	5 (13.9)	
Depersonalization	High	23 (45.1)	21 (58.3)	0.473
	Medium	20 (39.2)	11 (30.6)	
	Low	8 (15.7)	4 (11.1)	
Personal accomplishment	High	31 (60.8)	16 (44.4)	0.262
	Medium	9 (17.6)	11 (30.6)	
	Low	51 (100)	36 (100)	

Table 5: Distribution of personality traits by gender

Personality features by gender				
Personality traits	Condition	Male	Female	P
Neuroticism	High	1 (6.7)	5 (6.9)	0.463
	Medium	13 (86.7)	66 (91.7)	
	Low	1 (6.7)	1 (1.4)	
Extroversion	High	1 (6.7)	5 (6.9)	0.899
	Medium	14 (93.3)	66 (91.7)	
	Low	0	1 (1.4)	
Agreeableness	High	0	2 (2.8)	0.804
	Medium	13 (86.7)	60 (83.3)	
	Low	2 (13.30)	10 (13.9)	
Openness	High	0	2 (2.8)	0.587
	Medium	13 (86.7)	65 (90.3)	
	Low	2 (13.3)	5 (6.9)	
Conscientiousness	High	0	1 (1.4)	0.735
	Medium	10 (66.7)	53 (73.6)	
	Low	5 (33.3)	18 (25)	

In this longitudinal study on nurses at the intensive care unit of the hospital, the results showed that individuals with high scores of neuroticism experience high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.^[29] Furthermore, the study by Celik and Oral showed a significant relationship between the neurotic personality and burnout, which is consistent with our study.^[30] There is also a negative and significant relationship between the neurotic personality and the level of personal accomplishment, such that the higher the neuroticism in nurses, the lower their neuroticism, which is in line with similar studies in this area.^[31-34] The results show that there is a significant negative correlation between the personality trait of extroversion and emotional exhaustion, and a significant

positive correlation with the personal accomplishment, i.e. the higher the level of extroversion in nurses, the lower the level of emotional exhaustion and the higher the level of personal accomplishment, which is in line with the results of other studies.^[35-39] Since the positive emotions are the core of the personality of the extroverts, this trait provides them with a more favorable working and social environment, and subsequently, individuals who think positively concerning the workplace and in the future of their jobs have more opportunities and advantages than others. Therefore, it can be concluded that nurses with higher extraversion traits have less emotional exhaustion due to appropriate responses to and adaptation with stressful situations, which can provide them with a higher job satisfaction. The research carried out in this area is in line with the above results. Cano-Garsia *et al.* showed that high scores in occupational burnout are accompanied with high scores of introversion.^[40] Francis *et al.* found that extroversion has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion and there is a significant relationship between extroversion and the aspects of occupational burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).^[41] The findings of this study are not consistent with the results of some studies,^[42-44] which can be due to different statistical populations, number of samples, traits of samples such as type of job, different tools of evaluation, and other factors involved in the study. Swider and Zimmerman also state that those with low scores of extraversion, desirability, and flexibility are more prone to occupational burnout.^[28] There is also such a finding in the previous research that describes the personality traits of occupational burnout.^[27,45-50] Desirability affects the nature of interpersonal relationships. A desirable individual is essentially altruistic, sympathetic toward and is willing to help others and believes that others are mutually helpful. Individuals with this personality trait are expected to be more socially desirable and more psychologically sound. Individuals with this trait are more likely to have a positive outlook on their future career and personal accomplishment. This knowledge and positive view prevent the creation of negative psychological conditions such as failure and emotional exhaustion. They also experience successful interpersonal relationships because they are intimate with others. Success in interpersonal relationships, coupled with a sense of sympathy and concern over others, leads to less depersonalization, which is consistent with the results of Alterman *et al.*^[51] In this study, there was a significant positive correlation between personality traits of accountability and personal accomplishment, i.e. the higher the level of accountability, the higher the level of personal accomplishment. According to the study by Costa and McCrae, individuals with

Table 6: Distribution of personality traits by age

Personality traits	Personality traits by age			P
	Condition	Under 29	Above 30	
Neuroticism	High	4 (7.8)	2 (5.6)	0.436
	Medium	45 (88.2)	34 (94.4)	
	Low	2 (3.9)	0	
Extroversion	High	6 (11.8)	0	0.068
	Medium	44 (86.3)	36 (100)	
	Low	1 (2)	0	
Agreeableness	High	2 (3.9)	0	0.384
	Medium	41 (80.4)	32 (88.9)	
	Low	8 (15.7)	4 (11.1)	
Openness	High	2 (3.9)	0	0.029
	Medium	42 (82.4)	36 (100)	
	Low	7 (13.7)	0	
Conscientiousness	High	1 (2)	0	0.14
	Medium	33 (64.7)	30 (83.3)	
	Low	17 (33.3)	6 (16.7)	

accountability act in responsible ways and exercise self-control over their behavior.^[52] To explain these results, it can be said that nurses with a personality trait of responsibility will have a higher level of personal accomplishment due to their higher commitment to behave responsibly in their duties, and this forces the person to act more carefully in his duties, and this higher pressure will lead to a sense of occupational burnout. As other researchers found in their research, the high pressure and sense of responsibility lead to emotional exhaustion in nurses.^[53,54] The findings of this study showed that there is no relationship between the aspects of occupational burnout and age among nurses. In the study of Esfandiari, aspects of occupational burnout were higher in the lower age group than the age group.^[55] In the study of Payami on nurses, there was no significant relationship between the occupational burnout and age.^[56] According to the study by Spooner Lane, there was a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and personality traits, and younger nurses reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization,^[57] which is consistent with our study. Findings of Maslach and Jackson also showed that older nurses had lower levels of occupational burnout in terms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of job satisfaction,^[58] which is consistent with our findings. According to some other studies, age of nurses did not have a significant relationship with occupational burnout.^[58-67]

There is a significant statistical relationship between desirability and age ($P < 0.02$). This correlation suggests that as the age increases, the desire of the individual for curiosity, love for art, flexibility, and wisdom decreases.

In general, the results of this and other studies on occupational burnout show that the more positive personality traits, i.e. flexibility and desirability, and the more the individual can adapt to the working environment and to help others, he/she will become exhausted later, but the negative traits (neuroticism) will make the individual exhausted sooner.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that the personality traits of nurses are effective in their occupational burnout. Furthermore, compare to depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and feeling of inadequacy in nurses is more related to personality traits and the modification of work environment and reduction of work stress are recommended for these employees.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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