



Mental Health in Nursing

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Abstract

This narrative review aims to highlight the crucial significance of mental health within the nursing profession, examining its profound impact on both nurse well-being and patient care outcomes. The review identifies and analyzes signs of burnout among nurses, emphasizing the urgent need for effective mental health support. Additionally, it evaluates the availability and effectiveness of current mental health resources for nursing professionals, revealing gaps that must be addressed to enhance care quality and staff retention. Recent trends in nursing mental health are explored, including the integration of mind-body modalities, the evolving roles of mental health nurses, and the emphasis on evidence-based practice. To support mental health in nursing, five key recommendations are proposed: implementing comprehensive mental health training programs, establishing peer support networks, integrating mind-body practices into daily routines, advocating for policy changes that prioritize mental health resources, and fostering an environment of open communication to reduce stigma. By adopting these strategies, healthcare organizations can create a supportive atmosphere that promotes the mental well-being of nursing professionals. This review underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach to mental health in nursing, aiming to improve both nurse well-being and patient outcomes through sustained organizational

commitment and innovative practices. Ultimately, addressing mental health proactively is essential for cultivating a resilient nursing workforce capable of delivering high-quality patient care.

Keywords: Nursing, Mental Health, Burnout, Patient Care, Well-being, Support Strategies.

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Introduction

Mental health is a crucial component of overall well-being, significantly influencing the quality of care provided in healthcare settings. In nursing, where the demands of the profession can lead to heightened stress and emotional strain, the mental health of nurses is paramount not only for their own well-being but also for the safe and effective care of patients (Jung et al., 2021).

The nursing profession is characterized by high levels of occupational stress, often resulting from the emotional and physical demands placed on nurses (Mark & Smith, 2012). Factors such as long working hours, exposure to traumatic situations, and the responsibility of patient care contribute to an environment where mental health can easily deteriorate. Research indicates that the prevalence of mental health issues among nurses is alarmingly high, with studies highlighting significant levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout within this demographic (Perry et al., 2015). For instance, Dal’Bosco et al. (2020) found that nurses working in hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced elevated levels of stress and anxiety, underscoring the urgent need for mental health support in the profession.

Understanding the unique stressors that nurses face is essential for developing effective coping strategies and support systems. Occupational stress in nursing can be categorized into various dimensions, including workload, job characteristics, and organizational factors. Kipping (2000) emphasizes that the nature of mental health nursing, which often involves dealing with vulnerable populations, adds an additional layer of emotional strain. Furthermore, Ward (2011) discusses the importance of maintaining a balance between professional demands and personal well-being, suggesting that proactive measures must be taken to ensure the mental health of nurses is prioritized within healthcare settings.

Resilience is a critical factor in managing stress and promoting mental health among nurses. Foster et al. (2019) conducted an integrative review and highlighted the significance of resilience-building strategies, which can empower nurses to cope more effectively with the challenges they face. This resilience not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to improved patient care outcomes. Similarly, Karaca et al. (2019) explored the relationship between mental health, coping mechanisms, and social support among nursing students, indicating that fostering resilience from the educational stage can have lasting benefits in professional practice.

The impact of mental health on patient care cannot be overstated. Nurses who are experiencing mental health challenges may be less able to provide optimal care, potentially leading to adverse patient outcomes. Research by Perry et al. (2015) supports this notion, demonstrating that nurses’ mental health is directly correlated with their ability to perform clinical tasks effectively. Moreover, the consequences of mental health issues in nursing extend beyond individual practitioners; they can influence team dynamics, workplace culture, and overall healthcare delivery systems (Fortinash & Worret, 2011).

In light of these challenges, it is imperative for healthcare organizations to implement comprehensive mental health policies that address the needs of nursing staff. Effective strategies may include providing access to mental health resources, promoting a culture of openness regarding mental health issues, and encouraging self-care practices among nurses. Shives (2007) emphasizes the role of educational institutions in preparing nursing students to recognize and address their mental health needs, which is crucial for ensuring a resilient workforce.

As the field of nursing continues to evolve, addressing mental health will remain a critical focus. The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have illuminated the urgent need for mental health support in nursing, highlighting the importance of ongoing research and policy development in this area (Dal’Bosco et

al., 2020). By fostering a culture of mental well-being and resilience, healthcare organizations can enhance the quality of care provided to patients while ensuring the health and satisfaction of nursing staff.

Mental health in nursing is a multifaceted issue that requires attention at both individual and organizational levels. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by nurses and implementing supportive measures, the healthcare profession can cultivate a healthier workforce, ultimately benefiting both nurses and the patients they serve. As research continues to shed light on the complexities of mental health in nursing, it is essential for stakeholders to prioritize this critical aspect of healthcare, ensuring that nurses are equipped with the tools and support necessary to thrive in their roles.

Objectives

The review aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To examine the significance of mental health in the nursing profession and its impact on both nurse well-being and patient care outcomes.
2. To identify and analyze the signs of burnout among nurses.
3. To evaluate the availability and effectiveness of mental health resources for nurses.
4. To explore and recommend strategies for supporting mental health among nurses.

Methodology

Mental health within the nursing profession is a critical area of study, as it directly impacts not only the well-being of nurses but also the quality of care provided to patients. This narrative review aims to synthesize existing literature on the mental health challenges faced by nurses, the implications of mental health on nursing practice, and the strategies for promoting mental well-being in the workplace. By exploring these dimensions, the review seeks to highlight the need for systemic changes in healthcare organizations to support nurses effectively.

The significance of this narrative review lies in its potential to inform healthcare organizations, policymakers, and nursing educators about the critical need for mental health support in nursing. With increasing reports of stress, anxiety, and burnout among nurses, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this review will provide a timely examination of the challenges and solutions related to mental health in the profession. By synthesizing current research, the review aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the mental health landscape in nursing and advocate for necessary changes in policy and practice.

Importance of Mental Health in Nursing

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, influencing not only individual health outcomes but also the quality of care provided within healthcare systems (Dal’Bosco et al., 2020). In the nursing profession, mental health plays a crucial role, as nurses are often on the front lines of patient care, facing a myriad of challenges that can affect their psychological well-being. The importance of mental health in nursing extends beyond the individual nurse; it encompasses the entire healthcare environment, impacting patient safety, care quality, and organizational efficiency (Jung et al., 2021).

The nursing profession is inherently demanding, characterized by long hours, emotional labor, and high-stakes decision-making. These factors contribute to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout among nurses. According to Kim et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing mental health issues, highlighting the vulnerability of nursing staff in crisis situations. The emotional toll of caring for critically ill patients, coupled with the fear of infection and the loss of colleagues, has led to a significant decline in mental health among nurses. Similarly, Park et al. (2018) found that nurses working in high-stress environments, such as government-designated hospitals during the MERS-CoV outbreak, experienced considerable psychological distress. These studies illustrate the urgent need to address mental health within the nursing profession, recognizing that the well-being of nurses is critical to the effective delivery of healthcare services.

Nurses' mental health is directly linked to the quality of care they provide. When nurses experience mental health challenges, their ability to perform clinical tasks can be compromised, potentially leading to negative patient outcomes. Mårtensson, Jacobsson, and Engström (2014) emphasize that mental health nursing staff's attitudes toward mental illness influence their interactions with patients, which can affect therapeutic relationships and care effectiveness. Furthermore, Halter (2014) highlights that nurses who are mentally healthy are more likely to engage positively with their patients, demonstrating empathy and understanding, which are essential for quality care. Conversely, when mental health issues prevail, nurses may exhibit decreased motivation and engagement, resulting in a decline in care standards. Therefore, fostering mental health among nursing staff is not only beneficial for the nurses themselves but is also a fundamental requirement for ensuring high-quality patient care.

To mitigate mental health challenges in nursing, it is essential to implement robust support systems and resources. Ameling and Povilonis (2001) discuss the significance of spirituality and meaning in mental health, suggesting that incorporating holistic approaches can improve nurses' psychological well-being. Educational institutions and healthcare organizations must prioritize mental health training and resources, creating environments where nurses feel supported and valued. Clinton and Hazelton (2000) emphasize the importance of scoping mental health nursing education to ensure that nursing curricula address mental health adequately. By fostering a culture of openness regarding mental health, organizations can encourage nurses to seek help without fear of stigma, ultimately enhancing their well-being and job satisfaction (Melrose and Shapiro, 1999).

Recognizing Signs of Burnout in Nurses

Burnout is a prevalent issue within the nursing profession, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. This phenomenon can significantly impact nurses' mental health and, consequently, patient care. Zhang, Punnett, and Nannini (2017) found that work-family conflict and inadequate sleep among nursing assistants contributed to higher levels of burnout and poorer mental health outcomes. Recognizing the signs of burnout is crucial for early intervention and support. According to Greasley, Chiu, and Gartland (2001), effective recognition and management of burnout not only improve nurses' mental health but also enhance the overall work environment, fostering a culture of care and support. Addressing burnout through targeted interventions can lead to better retention rates among nursing staff and a more stable healthcare workforce.

Burnout was first conceptualized by Herbert Freudenberger in the 1970s as a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress. In the context of nursing, burnout can arise from various factors, including high patient-to-nurse ratios, emotional demands of patient care, and inadequate organizational support. According to Kim et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated burnout among nurses, highlighting the urgent need for effective recognition and intervention strategies. The emotional toll of witnessing patient suffering and death, coupled with the stress of working in a rapidly changing healthcare environment, has led to increased rates of burnout among nursing professionals.

The prevalence of burnout in nursing is alarmingly high. Studies indicate that a significant proportion of nurses experience symptoms of burnout at some point in their careers. For instance, Park et al. (2018) found that nurses working in high-stress environments, such as during the MERS-CoV outbreak, reported high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Similarly, a survey conducted by Kim et al. (2021) revealed that nearly two-thirds of nurses reported experiencing burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings underscore the critical need for healthcare organizations to prioritize the mental health of their nursing staff and implement strategies to recognize and address burnout effectively.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of burnout is essential for early intervention and support. Burnout manifests in various ways, including physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms. Common signs include chronic fatigue, irritability, reduced job satisfaction, and a sense of helplessness. Mårtensson, Jacobsson, and Engström (2014) emphasize that nurses may also exhibit changes in their attitudes toward patients and colleagues, leading to depersonalization and a lack of empathy. Additionally, Halter (2014) notes that

burnout can result in decreased productivity and increased absenteeism, further impacting the quality of care provided to patients. Understanding these signs is crucial for nurses, managers, and healthcare organizations to foster a supportive work environment.

The consequences of burnout extend beyond the individual nurse, affecting patient care and safety. Nurses experiencing burnout may struggle to provide high-quality care, leading to negative patient outcomes. Zhang, Punnett, and Nannini (2017) found that burnout among nursing assistants was associated with increased errors and decreased patient satisfaction. Furthermore, Greasley, Chiu, and Gartland (2001) highlight that burnout can lead to a breakdown in the nurse-patient relationship, resulting in diminished trust and communication. As such, recognizing and addressing burnout is not only vital for the well-being of nurses but also for ensuring the safety and satisfaction of patients.

To effectively combat burnout, healthcare organizations must implement strategies for recognizing and addressing its signs. This includes fostering a culture of open communication where nurses feel comfortable discussing their mental health challenges. Ameling and Povilonis (2001) suggest that providing mental health resources, such as counseling and support groups, can help nurses cope with stress and prevent burnout. Additionally, Clinton and Hazelton (2000) emphasize the importance of training programs that equip nurses with the skills to recognize burnout in themselves and their colleagues. By prioritizing mental health and well-being, healthcare organizations can create a supportive environment that mitigates the risk of burnout (Kneisl & Trigoboff, 2004).

Mental Health Resources for Nurses

Mental health issues among nurses have gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated existing stressors in the profession. According to Kim et al. (2021), many nurses reported experiencing heightened levels of anxiety and depression during the pandemic, driven by factors such as increased workloads, fear of infection, and emotional strain from caring for critically ill patients. This situation underscores the urgent need for effective mental health resources tailored specifically for nurses. Furthermore, Park et al. (2018) found that nurses working in high-stress environments, such as during the MERS-CoV outbreak, experienced significant psychological distress, highlighting the ongoing mental health challenges faced by nursing professionals.

Access to mental health resources is essential for nurses to manage stress and maintain their well-being. Mental health resources can take various forms, including counseling services, peer support programs, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting mental health awareness. Mårtensson, Jacobsson, and Engström (2014) emphasize that providing mental health resources can help nurses develop coping strategies, reduce stigma associated with seeking help, and ultimately improve their overall mental health. Additionally, Halter (2014) highlights that organizations that prioritize mental health resources for their nursing staff can foster a supportive work environment, leading to increased job satisfaction and retention rates.

Mental health resources for nurses can be categorized into several types, each addressing different aspects of mental health and well-being. These resources include (Hurley et al., 2022):

- **Crisis Hotlines and Support Services:** Immediate support is crucial for nurses experiencing mental health crises. Services such as the 988 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line provide 24/7 support for individuals in distress, offering a safe space for nurses to seek help when needed.
- **Counseling and Therapy Services:** Access to professional counseling and therapy is vital for nurses dealing with stress, anxiety, and burnout. Organizations like the Therapy Aid Coalition offer free or low-cost therapy sessions for healthcare professionals, ensuring that nurses can receive the support they need without financial barriers.
- **Peer Support Programs:** Peer support initiatives allow nurses to connect with colleagues who understand the unique challenges of the profession. Programs such as the Emotional PPE Project provide a platform for nurses to share their experiences and receive support from fellow healthcare workers, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

- **Educational Resources and Training:** Mental health education is essential for equipping nurses with the knowledge and skills to recognize and address their mental health needs. Training programs that focus on stress management, resilience building, and self-care strategies can empower nurses to take proactive steps toward maintaining their mental well-being.
- **Wellness Apps and Online Resources:** Technology has made mental health resources more accessible than ever. Apps like Moodfit and Happy provide tools for stress reduction, mindfulness, and emotional regulation, allowing nurses to engage in self-care practices conveniently.

Healthcare organizations play a crucial role in promoting mental health resources for nurses. By creating a culture that prioritizes mental well-being, organizations can reduce stigma and encourage nurses to seek help when needed. Clinton and Hazelton (2000) emphasize the importance of integrating mental health education into nursing curricula, ensuring that future nurses are equipped with the knowledge to recognize and address mental health challenges. Additionally, organizations should implement policies that support mental health initiatives, such as providing access to counseling services and promoting work-life balance.

The mental health of nurses is directly linked to the quality of patient care. When nurses are mentally healthy, they are better equipped to provide compassionate and effective care to their patients. Zhang, Punnett, and Nannini (2017) found that burnout among nursing assistants was associated with increased errors and decreased patient satisfaction, highlighting the importance of addressing mental health to ensure safe and high-quality care. By investing in mental health resources for nurses, healthcare organizations can improve not only the well-being of their staff but also the overall patient experience.

Strategies for Supporting Mental Health in Nursing

To effectively support mental health in nursing, a multi-faceted approach is required. This approach should encompass individual, organizational, and systemic strategies that address the unique challenges faced by nurses. By implementing specific strategies at various levels, healthcare organizations can promote mental health and well-being among nursing professionals.

At the individual level, encouraging nurses to engage in self-care practices is essential for maintaining their mental health. Self-care can include activities such as regular exercise, mindfulness meditation, and ensuring adequate sleep. Research has demonstrated that such practices can significantly reduce stress and improve overall well-being among healthcare professionals (Ameling & Povilonis, 2001). Additionally, providing training on stress management techniques empowers nurses to cope with the demands of their profession. Techniques such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and effective time management skills can help nurses manage stress more effectively (Clinton & Hazelton, 2000). Furthermore, establishing peer support networks offers nurses a safe space to share their experiences and seek support from colleagues. These networks foster a sense of community and belonging, which is crucial for enhancing mental well-being (Zhang, Punnett, & Nannini, 2017).

On the organizational level, healthcare institutions should implement mental health training programs for nursing staff. These programs can educate nurses about the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, as well as strategies for seeking help and supporting colleagues in distress (Greasley, Chiu, & Gartland, 2001). Access to counseling services is also essential for supporting nurses' mental health. Organizations can provide Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that offer confidential counseling and support for mental health concerns (Halter, 2014). Moreover, fostering a supportive work environment is crucial for promoting mental health among nurses. This includes implementing policies that prioritize work-life balance, ensuring adequate staffing levels, and encouraging open communication about mental health issues (Mårtensson, Jacobsson, & Engström, 2014).

At the systemic level, advocating for mental health policies at both organizational and governmental levels is essential for creating lasting change. This advocacy can involve lobbying for increased funding for mental health resources and promoting policies that support the mental well-being of healthcare professionals (Kim et al., 2021). Additionally, ongoing research and evaluation of mental health initiatives

in nursing are crucial for understanding their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. Organizations should invest in research that explores the impact of mental health resources on nursing staff and patient care outcomes (Park et al., 2018). Finally, collaboration with mental health professionals can enhance the support available to nurses. This collaboration may involve integrating mental health services into healthcare settings and providing training for nursing staff on how to recognize and address mental health issues effectively (Ameling & Povilonis, 2001).

Recent trends in Nursing Mental Health

Recent trends in nursing mental health reflect a growing recognition of the importance of mental well-being among nursing professionals and the patients they serve. As the healthcare landscape evolves, several key trends have emerged that highlight the changing roles, practices, and educational approaches within psychiatric-mental health nursing.

One notable trend in nursing mental health is the increasing incorporation of mind-body modalities into clinical practice. Jung et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review that examined the effectiveness and safety of these modalities for improving the mental health of nurses in hospital settings. Their findings suggest that practices such as mindfulness, yoga, and meditation can significantly enhance nurses' mental well-being, reduce stress, and promote resilience. This trend reflects a broader shift towards holistic approaches in healthcare, recognizing that mental health is interconnected with physical health and overall well-being. The integration of mind-body practices into nursing curricula and clinical settings is becoming more common, equipping nurses with tools to manage their own mental health while also providing comprehensive care to patients.

Another significant trend is the evolving roles and identities of mental health nurses. Hurley et al. (2022) conducted a scoping review that explored the clinical roles and identities of mental health nursing professionals. Their research highlights the diverse functions that mental health nurses fulfill, ranging from direct patient care to advocacy and education. As the demand for mental health services continues to rise, nurses are increasingly taking on leadership roles within interdisciplinary teams, contributing to policy development, and engaging in community mental health initiatives. This evolution reflects a recognition of the critical role that mental health nurses play in addressing the mental health crisis and underscores the need for ongoing professional development and support.

The emphasis on evidence-based practice in mental health nursing is another trend that has gained traction in recent years. Kneisl and Trigoboff (2004) emphasize the importance of grounding nursing interventions in research and clinical evidence to ensure effective patient care. This trend is evident in the growing focus on utilizing standardized assessment tools, treatment protocols, and outcome measures to guide clinical decision-making. By integrating evidence-based practices into their work, mental health nurses can enhance the quality of care they provide, improve patient outcomes, and contribute to the overall advancement of the nursing profession.

Finally, there is an increasing focus on mental health awareness and stigma reduction within the nursing profession. Norman (2013) highlights the importance of addressing mental health stigma among healthcare providers, as it can hinder the willingness of nurses to seek help for their own mental health issues. Initiatives aimed at promoting mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and encouraging open discussions about mental health challenges are becoming more prevalent in nursing organizations and educational institutions. By fostering a culture of acceptance and support, the nursing profession can create an environment where mental health is prioritized, ultimately benefiting both nurses and their patients.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The importance of mental health in nursing cannot be overstated. As frontline caregivers, nurses face unique challenges that can adversely affect their mental well-being, which in turn impacts patient care quality and safety. Addressing mental health issues in the nursing profession requires a multi-faceted approach that includes recognizing the signs of burnout, implementing effective support systems, and fostering a culture of well-being. Recognizing the signs of burnout in nurses is essential for promoting their

mental health and ensuring the quality of patient care. The prevalence of burnout in nursing is a pressing issue that requires immediate attention from healthcare organizations.

A comprehensive approach to supporting mental health in nursing involves strategies that address individual needs, organizational structures, and systemic policies. By prioritizing mental health and implementing effective support systems, healthcare organizations can foster a healthier work environment for nurses, ultimately improving both nurse well-being and patient care outcomes.

Recent trends in nursing mental health reflect a multifaceted approach to addressing the mental well-being of nursing professionals and the patients they serve. The integration of mind-body modalities, the evolving roles of mental health nurses, the emphasis on evidence-based practice, educational innovations, and efforts to reduce stigma are all shaping the future of psychiatric-mental health nursing. As these trends continue to develop, they hold the potential to enhance the quality of care provided in mental health settings and improve the overall mental health of nursing professionals.

To effectively enhance mental health in nursing, healthcare organizations should adopt a multifaceted approach that includes comprehensive training, peer support, mind-body practices, advocacy for policy changes, and fostering open communication.

First, implementing comprehensive mental health training programs tailored for nursing staff is essential. These programs should cover topics such as recognizing mental health issues, stress management strategies, and available support resources. By equipping nurses with the necessary knowledge and skills, organizations can foster a proactive approach to mental well-being, ultimately enhancing resilience and promoting a supportive workplace culture.

Second, establishing peer support networks can provide vital emotional and professional support for nurses. These networks facilitate open discussions about mental health challenges, allowing nurses to share experiences and coping strategies in a safe environment. By encouraging the formation of these networks, organizations can help reduce feelings of isolation and burnout, fostering a sense of community that enhances overall mental health.

Third, integrating mind-body practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and yoga into nursing care routines can significantly benefit nurses' mental health. Providing training and resources for nurses to incorporate these techniques into their daily practice empowers them to manage stress effectively and promotes wellness. This holistic approach not only supports nurses but also encourages them to share these practices with their patients, fostering a culture of wellness throughout the healthcare setting.

Fourth, advocacy for policy changes that support mental health resources is crucial. This includes lobbying for increased funding, establishing clear protocols for mental health support, and promoting policies that prioritize well-being in the workplace. By engaging in advocacy efforts, nursing leaders can help create an environment where mental health is recognized as a critical component of healthcare delivery, enhancing outcomes for both nurses and patients.

Finally, fostering an environment of open communication about mental health issues is vital for reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking behaviors. Organizations should implement campaigns to raise awareness of mental health challenges and encourage discussions among nursing staff. By normalizing these conversations and providing platforms for nurses to voice their concerns, healthcare organizations can cultivate a culture of acceptance and support, ultimately improving the mental health of their workforce.

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