

# Comparison of Nurses in Two Different Cultures: Who Experiences More Burnout

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**Purpose:** *Although burnout occurs in almost all occupational groups, it is mostly observed in professions requiring face-to-face relationships with people, especially among health care workers who deal constantly with problems and expectations of people.*

**Design:** *The objective of this study was to determine the burnout levels of nurses working in surgical clinics in two countries.*

**Methods:** *This descriptive study was conducted between June and September 2013. The study's population consisted of 179 nurses working in the surgical clinics of Atatürk University Research Hospital and Iran Urmiyeli Shabidmotabari University Hospital. A questionnaire involving descriptive characteristics of nurses and the Maslach Burnout Inventory were used to collect the data.*

**Findings:** *Nurses working in Turkey had higher mean scores of "emotional exhaustion" and "depersonalization," and a higher mean composite score. Nurses working in Iran had higher mean scores of the subscale "personal accomplishment." Although there was a statistically significant difference between both countries in terms of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment ( $P < .05$ ), there was no statistically significant difference between them in terms of mean score of depersonalization and total mean composite score of the inventory ( $P > .05$ ).*

**Conclusions:** *Nurses working in Turkey experienced more emotional exhaustion and less personal accomplishment compared with nurses working in Iran. In line with this result, improvements in their work environment and conditions are recommended to provide organizational support by fostering job satisfaction, preventing exhaustion by arranging shifts based on workload, and offering psychological counseling services to employees.*

**Keywords:** *burnout, nurses, surgical clinics, research.*

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**INDIVIDUALS ENCOUNTER NUMEROUS STRESSORS** in their work life.<sup>1,2</sup> Nurses are also exposed to stress because of their heavy workload.

Prolonged stress causes burnout.<sup>1,2</sup> Maslach, the pioneer of studies related to burnout, defines burnout as a "physical, emotional and mental

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exhaustion syndrome characterized by negative attitudes of individuals, who experience physical exhaustion, chronic fatigue, helplessness, and hopelessness, towards work life and other people as a result of development of a negative self-concept.”<sup>3-5</sup> Although burnout occurs in almost all occupational groups, it is mostly observed in professions requiring face-to-face relationships with people, especially among health care workers who constantly deal with people’s problems and expectations.<sup>1,2,6-12</sup> Health care workers experience stress and tension because of several reasons, such as handling an intense workload, providing care for seriously and terminally ill patients, and offering emotional support to patients and relatives when required.<sup>13</sup> When health care workers face intense emotional expectations in the workplace, they eventually lose sensitivity toward the people they serve and develop negative feelings against themselves and the people they serve. These negative emotions reduce their efficiency, job satisfaction, and quality of service.<sup>14-16</sup>

Surgical units have high technological complexity. Owing to the presence of infection, injury, and life-threatening situations; the requirement for long-term physical intimacy with the team; and the necessity for fast decision-making, the surgical unit is a high-risk and stressful environment.<sup>17</sup> This stressful environment may lead to more burnout, affecting nurses adversely in terms of physical, psychological, and social aspects. Surgical clinics are required mostly for nursing care because patients are dependent on nurses to meet their personal needs.<sup>18,19</sup> Nursing care is needed most in surgical clinics because they both have a large number of patients and depend on nurses to meet patients’ personal needs. In Turkey, the lack of a clear and distinct job definition of nurses, performance of the same work by nurses with different levels of education, the work system (working in shifts), inadequate financial resources, low wages, the lack of equipment, excessive weekly work hours, and the large number of patients negatively affect the work life and mental health of nurses, causing burnout.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, nursing practices in Iran are affected by traditional, sociopolitical, and cultural factors.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, nurses working in Iran have similar problems as their counterparts in other countries. Among these problems are

insufficient time and resources, heavy workload, long work hours, overtime, minimal vacation, shift work, low wages, failure in meeting the physical needs of nurses, and poor work conditions, resulting in decreased job satisfaction and burnout.<sup>21</sup> The most important problems of the nurses working in Iran include deficiencies in administration of human resources dealing with all processes from employment of nurses in the health system to adaptation education, wage adjustment, their legal relation with their working place, efficiency, performance evaluation, meeting of financial and social needs, and job retention. Therefore, nurses working in Iran also experience physical and mental stress, leading to burnout.<sup>22-24</sup> Studies conducted in Iran have also demonstrated that burnout is an important problem among nurses.<sup>25-27</sup>

This study was conducted in consideration of the efficient use of time and labor force and the reduction of economic losses in the two countries by diagnosing, preventing, and properly coping with the burnout observed in the service professions, especially among nurses. Other concerns included the recognition and thorough assessment of culture in society, collection of cultural data with more systematic and standardized methods, and usefulness of increasing background information in the field of transcultural nursing.

The study aimed to determine and compare the burnout levels of nurses working in the surgical clinics in Turkey and Iran.

## Materials and Methods

This descriptive study was conducted between June 1 and September 1, 2013, in the surgical clinics of Ataturk University Research Hospital and Iran Urmiyili Shahidmotahari Hospital. Of the total population of 193 nurses working in the surgical clinics of these two hospitals during the research period, the sample group comprised 179 nurses (87 from Turkey and 92 from Iran) who agreed to participate and were not on leave during the inclusive dates of the study. The data were collected by using a questionnaire and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and with face-to-face interviews conducted with the nurses. Surgical clinics include general surgery, thoracic

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