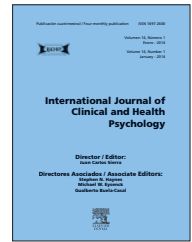




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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Which occupational risk factors are associated with burnout in nursing? A meta-analytic study

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KEYWORDS

Occupational factors;
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Abstract Numerous empirical studies have suggested a link between occupational factors and the burnout syndrome. The effect sizes of the association reported vary widely in nursing professionals. The objective of this research was to assess the influence of five occupational factors (job seniority, professional experience, job satisfaction, specialization and work shift) on the three burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) in nursing. We conducted a meta-analysis with a total of 81 studies met to our inclusion criteria: 31 on job seniority; 29 on professional experience; 37 on job satisfaction; 4 on specialization; and 6 on work shift. The mean effect sizes found suggest that job satisfaction and, to a lesser extent, specialization were important factors influencing the burnout syndrome. The heterogeneity analysis showed that there was a great variability in all the estimates of the mean effect size. Various moderators were found to be significant in explaining the association between occupational factors and burnout. In conclusion, it is important to prevent the substantive moderators that are influencing these associations. The improved methodological variables explain most of the contradictory results found in previous research on this field.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Factores
ocupacionales;
Enfermería;
Burnout;
Meta-análisis

Resumen Numerosos estudios sugieren la relación entre el síndrome de *burnout* y algunas variables ocupacionales e informan de diversos tamaños del efecto en sus asociaciones, en profesionales de Enfermería. El objetivo de este trabajo es estudiar la influencia de cinco variables ocupacionales (antigüedad en el puesto, antigüedad en la profesión, satisfacción laboral, especialización y turno laboral) y las tres dimensiones del síndrome (cansancio emocional, despersonalización y realización personal) en enfermeros. En este trabajo se realizó un meta-análisis de 81 estudios que cumplían los criterios de inclusión establecidos: 31 sobre antigüedad en el pue-

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to, 29 en experiencia profesional, 37 relacionados con satisfacción laboral, 4 con especialización y 6 con turno laboral. Los tamaños del efecto medio indican que la satisfacción laboral y, en menor medida, la especialización eran factores importantes que influye en el *burnout*. La heterogeneidad encontrada en las estimaciones de los tamaños del efecto hace necesario realizar el análisis de variables moderadoras, obteniéndose que algunos moderadores son de gran interés en la explicación de las asociaciones. En conclusión, sería importante prevenir las variables moderadoras sustantivas que median estas asociaciones. Los aspectos metodológicos deberían ser mejorados pues parecen explicar algunos de los resultados contradictorios que se encuentran en las investigaciones en este ámbito.

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The rising interest in the burnout syndrome is due to the fact that it is a condition that affects more and more people working in a wide variety of professions. Epidemiological data concerning this syndrome reflect the seriousness of the problem and the negative impact of its effects both at home and at work. This in itself explains why the quantity of burnout research has soared over the last forty years (Epp, 2012).

More specifically, the burnout syndrome is beginning to be regarded as an occupational illness of high prevalence among health professionals in Spain (Paris & Hoge, 2010; Prins et al., 2007). This disorder has serious repercussions on staff as well as on the institutions where they work. It also takes a toll on the users of medical facilities since health professionals suffering from burnout syndrome are unable to provide high-quality service (Ortega & López, 2004).

Burnout is generally conceived as having three dimensions: (i) emotional exhaustion (EE) refers to sensations of physical overexertion and mental weariness stemming from continuous interactions with other workers and clients; (ii) depersonalization (D) is the development of negative and cynical attitudes about one's clients; (iii) reduced personal accomplishment (PA) reflects the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly with regard to work with clients. Workers feel unhappy about themselves and dissatisfied with their professional achievements. There are different tools to measure the burnout syndrome (e. g., De la Fuente et al., 2013) but the most frequently used is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

The specialized literature on the topic discusses sociodemographic, vocational, and psychological variables, which precede or co-vary with the burnout syndrome. Important research questions include the relevance of these variables and their relation to the syndrome. This means studying whether they are risk factors or protective factors, or if their partial juxtaposition is conducive to the formulation of models for burnout. However, certain aspects have been analyzed in greater depth than others. Especially worth studying are those variables related to the job itself, which have been previously mentioned as occupational risk factors. The importance of this group of variables is unanimously acknowledged by researchers, but at the same time, these variables are the ones that produce the most contradictory results.

Meta-analysis is a technique to quantitatively synthesize research findings (Sánchez-Meca & Botella, 2010). To our

knowledge, few meta-analyses of burnout variables have ever targeted nursing professionals. The only study that we have been able to find on this topic (Melchior, Bours, Schmitz, & Wittich, 1997) is over 15 years old and is restricted to psychiatric nurses. Consequently, it does not afford sufficient data for an accurate assessment of the work-related factors leading to the development of this disorder in nursing professionals in general. This in itself justifies the need for further research that can provide a better understanding of the contradictory results that have been obtained in previous works. The objective of this research study was to perform a systematic revision and meta-analysis (Fernández-Rios & Buéla-Casal, 2009; Hartley, 2012) of the influence of five occupational factors on the three burnout dimensions, where the MBI has been used to measure burnout, in nursing professionals.

Method

Literature review and inclusion criteria

Various search strategies were used to identify the primary studies (Perestelo-Pérez, 2013). We first searched the following electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, Proquest, OVID, CINAHL, Psycodoc, Dialnet, and Cochrane. The key words used were "Maslach Burnout Inventory" or "MBI" combined with "nurs*", without any field restrictions. Secondly, references of meta-analytical studies, systematic reviews, and narrative reviews on the topic were consulted. Thirdly, the grey literature was consulted in Google Scholar, Proquest Dissertations and Theses, and TESEO databases. Finally, the Science Citation Index was accessed to find studies that cited the works thus identified. References of the selected research were also retrieved and selected. The literature search was conducted in May 2012, without imposing any time restriction.

The inclusion criteria were the following: (a) empirical nature of the study; (b) use of MBI to measure burnout; (c) sample population of nursing professionals; (d) sufficient statistical information in the study to calculate the effect size between one of the MBI dimensions and at least one of the occupational risk factors. All studies not published in Spanish, English, French, Italian, or Portuguese were excluded. The initial search produced 3,386 studies that were potentially of interest. However, this number decreased to 466 after reading the title and the abstract.

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