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The Relationship Between Stressors and Intent to Leave Nursing Homes Among Directors of Nursing

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According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, some nursing homes have been ranked worst in the nation when rating the quality of resident care. The purpose of this study was to determine the relative strength of workplace stress, job satisfaction, organizational support, and personal data (number of years employed, age, highest education level) in predicting director of nursing (DON) intentions to leave the position. This information contributes to social change because it is important to know that DONs need to experience general satisfaction in order to maintain stable leadership that positively contributes to the quality of care in Tennessee nursing homes and ensures that the factors decreasing the stability in the DON position in nursing homes can be addressed.

Keywords: *turnover, stressors, directors of nursing, nursing, intent to leave*

Introduction

The nursing home industry is the most regulated industry in operations management requirements in the United States, except for nuclear power (Cutler & Kane, 2007). According to the American Health Care Association, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) require that a nursing home administrator (NHA) and a director of nursing (DON) be present in each facility (American Health Care Association, 2014). The NHA is required to have a license to practice in nursing homes, and the DON is required to be a licensed registered nurse (RN). However, there is a nursing shortage across the United States. The Association of Colleges of Nursing reported enrollment in nursing schools is not sufficient to meet the expected demand for nurses over the next 10 years (Spetz, 2015). This nursing shortage has negatively affected the availability of RNs to fill DON positions. This study will impact social change by using self-reported information about the DON experience to inform and influence decision-makers and experts to take steps to make improvements in this position.

Stults (2008) found that the CMS reported problems with staffing to be common in Tennessee nursing homes. Stults pointed out that a nursing home's quality rating is based upon three components: health inspections, patient care scores for 10 quality measures, and staffing. According to CMS quality measures, Tennessee nursing homes ranked as the third worst in the nation (Stults, 2008).

According to Cohen (2006), nurses leave employment due to lack of adequate educational training, poor relationships with management and other workers, unsatisfactory quality of life relative to work schedule, poorly distributed job responsibilities, and an absence of clear communication from the administrator and the corporate supervisors. Failure of the nursing home administration to

monitor DON job satisfaction, workplace stress, and organizational resources in relation to intent to leave the position can have negative consequences for nursing home residents such as weight loss, decubitus ulcers, increased falls, lack of adequate staff, and more (Cohen, 2006). Also, Tennessee nursing homes, as a whole, are subject to costly state penalties ($1,500 to $7,500), federal penalties ($3,050 to $10,000), suspension of residents being accepted in the nursing home, a precursor to lawsuits, and even closure of the facility (Morris, 2009). No studies have been identified that determine whether DONs leave employment due to inadequacies and dissatisfaction in the position in Tennessee. This study is important because it could identify significant issues relative to employment inadequacies and dissatisfaction in the position.

Background of the Study

The DON is an administrative role that consists of major responsibilities needed to manage the nursing department of a nursing home. The usual responsibilities of a DON are to coordinate the services provided to residents with medical needs, organize and guide a diversified nursing staff, and maintain regulatory compliance with the required agencies (Klein, 2014). Klein found that DONs characterize their roles and responsibilities as focused on ensuring compliance with policies and procedures of all regulatory agencies, while developing a positive work environment for their nursing colleagues. Hudspeth (2013) examined evaluations of DON functions. The DON and administrator leadership positions both agreed that human resource skills were extremely important to the success of the DON position. These findings are also significant because they shows that human resource management should be a major part of the general nursing education–training program, because staffing management is a major DON responsibility.

The majority of DONs have an associate's degree or a diploma in nursing. Ideally, a master's degree in nursing management/administration with a concentration in long-term care nursing administration would better prepare a DON to meet the clinical and managerial demands of the position (Hudspeth, 2013), along with the multiple roles that are not part of the general nursing education training (Hudspeth, 2013). It may be important to examine the academic preparation of long-term care DONs and determine if advanced nursing education is indeed needed for DONs to be successful in their positions.

Statement of the Problem

 There is a lack of research that investigates the relationship between workplace stress, job satisfaction, organizational support, and intent to leave Tennessee nursing homes by the DON. A focus was placed in this study on the situational causes of stress in the workplace, in order to provide information that could be useful to long-term care managers of Tennessee nursing homes. The problem addressed in this study was the need to facilitate stable employment, in persons who hold the leadership position of DON in a nursing home. This research study collected data that could be used by nursing home organizations, as awareness to making decisions to improve the problem of nursing shortages, specifically pertaining to the DON position in Tennessee nursing homes, and increase the quality of care for residents.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). This model has often been utilized as a method to analyze how specific job characteristics affect job outcomes, including job satisfaction (Ayandele & Nnamseh, 2014; Debnath, Tandan, & Pointer, 2007). The model was used while analyzing how the job characteristics of the DON position influenced the potential job outcomes, when measuring intent to leave the position. The Job

Diagnostic Survey (JDS) was used to measure job satisfaction and organizational support of the DON position, the reactions of the participants to the position, and the growth need strength of the participants.

Literature Review

Job Satisfaction

Employee dissatisfaction is one of the leading factors that causes nurse turnover (Cabigao, 2009). MacNeil and Way (2006) and Jacobs and Roodt (2008) found that dissatisfaction was the most consistent factor related to stressful organizational demands, inability to control the workplace, and unavailable support. Studies have also shown a significant increase in turnover, as a result of the nursing shortage (Martin, 2003; Jones & Sachs, 2014). However, instability of the nursing workforce has been identified as the most powerful predictor of nurses, actually opting to leave their job (Stoil, 2005).

Cohen and Golan (2007) conducted a study that analyzed the effect of previous absenteeism, demographic variables, and job satisfaction relative to absenteeism and intent to leave employment. The findings of this study showed that there was a positive relationship between absenteeism and job satisfaction. Ekvall, Sellgren, and Tomson (2007) conducted a study that examined the relationship between leadership behavior of nurse managers and employee turnover relative to the work environment and job satisfaction. The findings showed a positive relationship between leadership behavior, workplace environment, and job satisfaction.

Organizational Support

The level of organizational support is considered a work environment characteristic that has an important effect on employee's success on the job. Organizational support can be defined as the helpful social involvement that an employee has with coworkers and supervisors (Eisenberger & Shanock, 2006). The nurses shared that they had a need to terminate from the position, but not from the nursing profession, which suggests that additional organizational involvement and support could improve retention of DONs. Cabigao (2009) made it clear that a lack of resources of charge nurses and direct care staff nurses affect their intentions to leave the nursing home. So, a strong DON is needed in the nursing home to ensure that the described resources are available at all times and extremely important in helping the DON to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of that position (Eisenberger & Shanock, 2006).

Workplace Stress

Workplace stress can be characteristic of the organization, the workplace, and the individual (Sellgren, 2011). Hinshaw, Smeltzer, and Atwood (1987) and Abepuoring, Atondanbila, Portia, and Rita (2013) stated that practicing nursing in spite of their workplace environment could result in workplace stress and burnout (Sellgren, 2011; Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, & Silber, 2002). Bell, Eisen, and Parker (2012) did a study about potential work-related, organizational, and individual stress risks to inform all employees, managers, and professionals, resulting in findings that workplace stress in general showed a definite rise in all workplace environments. The worldwide cost of workplace stress has reached approximately 3.75 billion dollars each year (Cooper, Palmer, & Thomas, 2004). Resident and family demands are the underlying origins and top stressors for NHAs and could also be seen as a stressor for DONs (Becht & Bleier, 2006). Meredith (2007) analyzed the workplace and the degree to which stress and job satisfaction affect intent to leave the

nursing position. The study found that nurses were stressed when they did not have a clear understanding of their role.

Personal Data

Duffy, Kavanaugh, and Lilly (2006) examined the relationship between job satisfaction and demographic variables (number of years the participant was in the profession, age, gender, race, and education). The findings showed that the more experience the employee had, the more job satisfaction they experienced. Cohen and Golan (2007) examined the effects of age on intent to leave a job. The findings suggested that younger employees have an increased likelihood of intent to leave a position because they are less committed to the organization than older employees. Older employees are more invested in the organization and have a bigger loss from a voluntary termination, due to pensions and other benefits. Employees, especially women with children under 18 years of age, show indications of intent to leave a position because of greater responsibilities in providing for the family. Employees, who were married, were also more likely to have intentions to leave the position because of an increased role as wife and mother, which places increased responsibilities on the employee (Cohen & Golan, 2007).

The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations reported that substandard orientation and training of nurses was a leading component in 58% of serious nursing errors that occurred in nursing homes. Previous research has shown that RNs' intent to leave a position is reduced with higher levels of education (Boyer, Palumbo, & Rambur, 2012; McIntosh, Mongeon, Palumbo, & Rambur, 2003). Age was found to have a negative relationship with turnover intentions (Andrucci-Armstrong, 2001), which could be a factor in preventing newer employees from entering that particular profession. These findings could also show the same results with DON turnover intentions. Thrall (2005) found that the nurses 50 years of age and older were the major contributors to the largest increase in working nurses in 2001 and 2003. Additional data has shown that as age increases, turnover intentions decrease (Finegold, Mohrman, & Spreitzer, 2002), which makes older nurses an ideal source of hiring to reduce the nursing shortage.

Method

Research Design and Approach

This research study was designed to investigate DON intent to leave a position based upon the effects of job satisfaction, workplace stress, organizational support, and personal data. This nonexperimental correlational study used a multiple regression analysis to evaluate the predictive power of several predictor variables on the criterion variable, DON intent to leave. Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Walden University. The predictor variables were job satisfaction, workplace stress, organizational support, and personal data (number of years employed, age, highest level of education).

The predictor variables and criterion variable were measured by using three surveys and a personal data questionnaire: the Anticipated Turnover Scale (ATS; Atwood & Hinshaw, 1982), Expanded Nursing Stress Scale (ENSS; French, Lenton, Walters, & Eyles, 2000), JDS (Hackman & Oldham, 1974), and a personal data questionnaire (years employed as a DON, age of DON, and highest education level of DON). The questions presented in this correlational study were used to address 319 DONs across the state of Tennessee. There were 97 participants in this study.

The results of this study provided data that attempted to fill a gap in the literature by determining what type of relationship existed between DON intent to leave the position and workplace stress, job

satisfaction, organizational support, and personal data (years employed as a DON, age of DON, and highest education level of DON). The criterion variable in this study was DON intent to leave the position as measured by the ATS. The predictor variables in this study were DON workplace stress (as measured by the ENSS Total Stress score), job satisfaction (as measured by several subscales of the JDS–Short Form), organizational support (as measured by several subscales of the JDS–Short Form), and personal data (years employed as a DON, age of DON, and highest education level of DON).

Data Collection and Analysis

Completed surveys were then collected and participant data entered into the statistical analysis tool for the 97 participants. The researcher calculated the survey instruments returned via e-mail and transferred the data to the SPSS software program for statistical analysis. The study's sample was analyzed with descriptive statistics, by utilizing mean comparisons and percentages. Internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the three instruments was reviewed (ATS, JDS, ENSS). Discriminant validity was reviewed, in order to determine if there were significant correlations among the variables. Multiple regression analysis was utilized to determine the relative strength of each predictor variable (workplace stress–ordinal measure, job satisfaction–ordinal measure, organizational support–ordinal measure, personal data–ratio measure) in predicting the criterion variable (intent to leave DON job–ordinal measure).

There was one multiple regression analysis run on the entire data set. That single analysis addressed each research question and all hypotheses. The research questions addressed in this study and the specific hypotheses related to each included the following:

1. Is self-reported workplace stress among DONs a significant predictor of DON intent to leave?

   Hypothesis 1_1: Workplace stress, as assessed by the ENSS Total Stress score, will significantly predict the DONs intent to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

   Hypothesis 1_0: Workplace stress, as assessed by the ENSS Scale, will not significantly predict DONs intent to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

2. Is self-reported job satisfaction among DONs a significant predictor of DON intent to leave?

   Hypothesis 2_1: Job satisfaction, as assessed by various subscales of the JDS, will significantly predict DON's intent to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

   Hypothesis 2_0: Job satisfaction, as assessed by various subscales of the JDS, will not significantly predict DON intent to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

3. Is self-reported organizational support among DONs a significant predictor of DON intent to leave?

Hypothesis 3₁: Organizational support, as assessed by various subscales of the JDS, will significantly predict DON intent to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

Hypothesis 3₀: Organizational support, as assessed by various subscales of the JDS, will not significantly predict DON intent to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

4. Are self-reported personal data (age, years of employment, and highest level of education) among DONs a significant predictor of DON intent to leave?

Hypothesis 4₁: DON personal data (number of years employed, age, highest education level), as assessed by the personal data questionnaire, will significantly predict DON intention to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS total score.

Hypothesis 4₀: DON personal data (number of years employed, age, highest education level), as assessed by the personal data questionnaire, will not significantly predict DON intention to leave employment, as assessed by the ATS.

Results

The purpose of this quantitative research was to investigate whether job satisfaction, workplace stress, organizational support, and personal data variables could predict intent to leave by DONs in Tennessee nursing homes. Multiple regression was the method of analysis used in this study of predictors of intent to leave the DON position. This analysis was used to identify the relative strength of those variables in predicting DON intent to leave. Specifically, the analysis was performed to determine if job satisfaction (measured by the JDS), workplace stress (measured by the ENSS), organizational support (measured by subscales of the JDS), and personal data including age, highest level of education, and years employed as a DON (measured by a personal data questionnaire) were significant predictors of intent for DONs to leave the position (measured by the ATS) in Tennessee nursing homes. The results indicated that increased general satisfaction leads to decreased DON intent to leave the position. This offers partial support of Hypothesis 2₁, but there was no support for Hypothesis 1₁, Hypothesis 3₁, or Hypothesis 4₁ despite the literature reviewed that supported a relationship between workplace stress, organizational support, and personal data with DON intent to leave their position.

Implications for Social Change

A Tennessee nursing home is a social organization influenced by many factors. According to CMS, poor quality measures and staffing shortages are contributing factors to being ranked as third worst in the nation for resident care. As a Tennessee NHA, the researcher has a professional, moral, and ethical obligation to seek social change. This could be the first step in positively improving resident care and staffing, which affect the economic impact on the industry as a whole. These significant factors yield profound consequences and need resolution of significance, which will contribute to social change. A major staffing issue in Tennessee nursing homes relates to a shortage of RNs to fill DON positions. As a NHA, past experiences will support that a nursing home that lacks a DON is against Tennessee state regulation and negatively impacts the overall operations of that nursing home. Consequently, when there is DON turnover, there is a potential for quality measures in that nursing home to decrease. There is existing literature that shows a number of variables that cause

clinical nurse managers to leave their employment (Abepuoring et al., 2013; Bell et al., 2012; Cohen & Golan, 2007; Eisenberger & Shanock, 2006; Jacobs & Roodt, 2007; Duffy et al., 2006; Sellgren, 2011; Ekvall et al., 2007). However, no studies have determined whether similar patterns exist among DONs in the state of Tennessee. The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between workplace stress, organizational support, job satisfaction, and personal data of DONs and their intent to leave their positions in the state of Tennessee nursing homes. This research study did help to determine factors related to DON intent to leave their employment in Tennessee nursing homes. As demonstrated in the findings, DON intent to leave Tennessee nursing homes was significantly predicted by general satisfaction, which is consistent with the existing literature (Bell et al., 2012; Cabigao, 2009; Cohen & Golan, 2007; Jacobs & Roodt, 2008; Martin, 2003; Ekvall et al., 2007; Stoil, 2005; MacNeil & Way, 2006). As a result, DONs need to experience general satisfaction in order to maintain stable leadership that positively contributes to the quality of care in Tennessee nursing homes. Regardless of the lack of additional significant predictors, the results suggest future research that would add value to the existing literature. As a result, the researcher will continue to examine DON intent to leave in Tennessee nursing homes for other significant predictors of intent to leave the position.

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption was that DONs would answer the questions posed to them truthfully and that DONs experience stress in the nursing home. This study design consisted of other assumptions. The next assumption was that participants would provide their responses to the surveys because the study was voluntary and anonymous. Secondly, the assumption was that the inclusion of participants (DONs) from all Tennessee nursing homes would result in the necessary data to answer the research questions. The 97 DON participants did provide the data that was necessary to answer the research questions. The third assumption was that only participants who met the inclusion criteria would participate in completing the survey. This assumption was met based upon the number of DONs who participated. The DONs, who were potential participants of this survey received the introductory e-mail about the purpose of the study, a list of qualifications for participation, and completed the study if the requirements were met.

One limitation of this study was the use of data that were limited to Tennessee and the particular DONs who responded to the study. It was important to not generalize the findings to other areas of the country because of CMS findings that were specific to Tennessee nursing homes. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to generalize the findings of this study to areas of the country that do not experience the same staffing issues. Secondly, the findings cannot be generalized to other positions in the nursing home setting because the focus for this study was placed on the situational causes of stress in the workplace specifically for DONs so that more useful information can be provided to long-term care managers of Tennessee nursing homes. Thirdly, a limitation of this study was the standard multiple regression design, which was necessary, as an experimental design would not have provided the necessary findings for this study. Thus, a multiple regression design consists of the analysis of many variables for the purpose of identifying relationships among these variables and lacks the necessary criteria for making causal inferences (Boslaugh & Watters, 2008). A final limitation was related to the measures that have been chosen for this study. While the instruments have evidence of reliability and validity, they are indirect self-report measures and may not assess the constructs of stress and job satisfaction accurately. It is also important to recognize that organizational support was measured from the perspective of the DON, which may be different from the viewpoint of the organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze a set of variables based upon the literature to determine whether they were significant predictors of the criterion variable of interest, intent to leave the DON position in nursing homes in the state of Tennessee. This study assessed DON perceptions of job satisfaction, workplace stress, and organizational support and evaluated personal data including age, years employed as a DON, and highest level of education in an attempt to determine whether intent to leave could be significantly predicted by these variables. Although there are results in the literature reviewed in this study that show that intent to leave the position is influenced by many factors, general satisfaction was determined to be the only significant predictor of DON intent to leave Tennessee nursing homes in this study. Consequently, DONs who are generally satisfied with the work environment of the nursing home will have decreased intent to leave the position.

According to Sanchez (2010), the poor staffing in nursing homes still ranks Tennessee among the worst in the nation for quality of long-term care, as of the 2009 federal reporting from CMS. Therefore, nursing home managers and administrators should recognize general job satisfaction as important in creating a workplace setting that is conducive to motivation and inspiration that would result in DONs perceiving their work environment as satisfying. In a continual effort to impact social change, NHAs and other industry leaders need to recognize the obstacles within DON work environment and find supportive measures for DONs in Tennessee nursing homes. However, this study has provided a basis for future research, in an area that will continue to be a topic of concern for nursing home management companies and administrators. The results of this study could be considered when strategically planning for the future to guarantee satisfactory of the DON position in the approaching years, which would likely result in improved stability in that position.

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