



POLICY PERSPECTIVE

UNDERSTANDING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE JOB SATISFACTION OF NURSES IS CRITICAL TO HELPING ALLEVIATE THE INCREASING SHORTAGE OF NURSES. WITH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE FORCES DRIVING NURSE EMPLOYMENT, HOSPITALS CAN IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE JOB SATISFACTION OF NURSES AND REDUCE TURNOVER.

Background

The United States is facing a growing shortage of registered nurses (RNs). According to the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, the shortage is projected to intensify, if unaddressed, growing from 12 percent in 2010 to a projected 29 percent in 2020.¹ Coupled with this is evidence that job dissatisfaction is driving nurses to leave the profession. However, most studies on nurses' job satisfaction do not specifically examine attitudes and work life. Studies that do ask about work life are restricted to specific hospitals or groups of hospitals rather than national samples of nurses.

In their report *Acute Care Hospital Based Staff Nurses*,² Carol Brewer and Christine Kovner use survey methodology to investigate factors related to RN job satisfaction in a nationally representative sample of 553 staff RNs who work in hospitals. The authors test a model that they developed that attempts to explain which variables are related to nursing job satisfaction.³ The authors also discuss the work life of nurses. This report is based on a larger study entitled *Factors Associated with Work Satisfaction of Registered Nurses*.⁴

Key Findings

- **Most of the variability in job satisfaction was explained by working conditions.** Work setting attitude scales⁵ explained 38 percent of the variability in satisfaction. Demographic variables⁶ explained 9 percent of the variability in job satisfaction. Certain variables found to be significantly related to satisfaction appear in the table that follows. Wages and benefits were not associated with satisfaction in this study, although previous studies have found a relationship. However, the perception that rewards are tied to performance was significantly related to job satisfaction in this study.
- **The majority of nurses surveyed plan on staying in the same position in the next year and would prefer to work the same number of hours per week.** Within the coming year, three out of four (77%) plan on staying with their organization and slightly more than three out of four (78%) planned on staying in a similar position. Few (3%) planned to work outside of nursing. Although one out of three full-time RNs (33%) worked more hours than they were scheduled, slightly less than two out of three nurses (65%) reported that they preferred to work the same number of hours next year, while about one out of three nurses (30%) preferred to work fewer hours next year and few (5%) preferred to work more hours.
- **Nurses have access to many noncompensatory benefits and report that having these benefits is important to them.** Most nurses report having medical insurance (87%), retirement benefits (87%), paid time off (85%), other insurance (81%), unpaid family leave (75%) and formal education benefits (75%). Some nurses have paid family leave (63%), flexible workplace (52%) and child care benefits (24%). More than four-fifths (84%) of nurses surveyed reported that benefits were somewhat or very important to staying in their current position.

Variables Significantly Related to Job Satisfaction of Hospital Staff Nurses	
Variable	Relationship to Satisfaction
Health status	RNs who reported being in very good health were more satisfied than those who reported being in good health.
Race	Among RNs, white respondents reported being more satisfied than those who identified themselves as black.
Basic nursing program in the United States	RNs who were educated in the United States reported being more satisfied than those educated outside of the United States.
Career orientation	Career-oriented RNs were more satisfied with their job than those RNs who were not as career-oriented.
Supervisory support	RNs who felt supported and encouraged by their supervisors were more satisfied than those who did not believe their supervisors were supportive.
Work group cohesion	RNs who perceived their environment as more cohesive and a place where they have friends were more satisfied than those who did not have this perception.
Distributive justice	RNs who felt fairly rewarded for their work were more satisfied than those who did not feel this way
Organizational constraints	RNs who felt that organizational characteristics of their work setting did not interfere with their work were more satisfied than RNs who perceived their work setting as interfering.
Work-to-family conflict	RNs who felt that their job did not conflict with their family life were more satisfied than those who perceived that their job conflicted with family life.
Quantitative workload	RNs who reported that they have lighter workloads were more satisfied than those who reported having heavy workloads.

- Injury in the workplace is common for RNs who work in hospital settings.** About one-third of nurses (30%) reported at least one needle stick injury in the past year with slightly less than two-thirds reporting at least one strain or sprain. Nurses also reported bruises (63%) and cuts (32%) with few reporting head injuries (3%), broken bones (2%) or dislocated joints (1%).

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- Brewer CS, Nauenberg E, Grzankowski J and Lin HJ. "The Role of Job Perceptions, Attitudes, and Economic and Demographic Factors on RN Work Participation and Settings." Unpublished, 2004.
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- Work setting attitude variables include autonomy, variety, distributive justice, work group cohesion, supervisory support, mentor support, work-family conflict, family-work conflict, promotional opportunity, organizational constraints, qualitative workload, work motivation, career orientation and partner's career orientation.
- Demographic variables include age, sex, ethnicity, race, marital status, highest degree in nursing, living with children, years of experience, advanced certification, partner's income, health status, current educational enrollment and religious beliefs.