Job Stress, Mentoring, Psychological Empowerment, and Job Satisfaction Among Nursing Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The National League for Nursing endorses mentoring throughout nursing faculty's careers as the method to recruit nurses into academia and improve retention of nursing faculty within the academy. A nationwide sample of 959 full-time nursing faculty completed a descriptive survey comprising a researcher-created demographic questionnaire plus Dreher's mentoring scale, Gmelch's faculty stress index, Spreitzer's psychological empowerment scale, and the National Survey for Postsecondary Faculty's job satisfaction scale. Results showed that 40% of the sample had a current work mentor. Variables showed significant relationships to job satisfaction ($p < 0.01$): mentoring quality (0.229), job stress (–0.568), and psychological empowerment (0.482). Multiple regression results indicated job satisfaction was significantly influenced ($p < 0.01$) by the presence of a mentoring relationship, salary, tenure status, psychological empowerment, and job stress. The regression model explained 47% of the variance in job satisfaction for the sample.

The nursing faculty shortage has resulted in a 7.7% full-time faculty vacancy rate—1,088 vacant positions in the United States. Schools of nursing reported to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2011) that a key reason that 54,686 entry-level bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) applicants, 1,452 RN-to-BSN applicants, 10,223 master’s applicants, and 1,202 doctoral applicants are denied admission is a lack of qualified faculty. The resulting intersection of the nursing faculty shortage, sweeping education changes advocated by the National League for Nursing (NLN) and Quality & Safety Education for Nurses, and faculty salaries that are inadequate compensation for the educational preparation is increased stress and decreased job satisfaction of practicing faculty (Disch, Edwardson, & Adwan, 2004; Shirey, 2006). Decreased job satisfaction has been linked to decreased retention among nursing faculty (Baker, 2010; Disch et al., 2004; Kaufman, 2007a). Retaining faculty is essential in nursing education today.

Mentoring has been proposed as a solution to the nursing faculty shortage by both the NLN (2006) and the AACN (2005). Mentoring improves faculty socialization (McDonald, 2010), facilitates faculty role development (Jacelon, Zucker, Staccarini, & Henneman, 2003), increases scholarly production (Records & Emerson, 2003), decreases novice faculty stress (Lewallen, Crane, Letvak, Jones, & Hu, 2003), and assists with recruitment and retention (Sawatzky & Enns, 2009). Benefits of mentoring are stated in the literature, but large-scale studies regarding mentoring and its outcomes are few.

The purpose of this research study was to examine mentoring relationships among nursing faculty to understand their possible influence on job stress and psychological empowerment and whether these variables ultimately affect job satisfaction. Demographic variables were also investigated for their possible explanation of job satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nursing is a discipline whose practice is rapidly changing, and producing knowledgeable and skillful graduates through classroom instruction is a challenge (Lewallen et al., 2003).
Clinical coursework is unlike many other academic disciplines: long hours at the clinical site are required where the support of faculty colleagues is not readily available. The workload calculation for clinical experience often does not account for the actual number of hours faculty are required to expend at the clinical site to fulfill the course requirements (Brady, 2010; Campbell & Filer, 2008). The role demands of nurse educators are performed for significantly less pay than earned by master’s-educated nurse practitioner counterparts (Allen, 2008).

The multiple benefits of mentoring are stated in the literature, but large-scale studies about the outcomes of mentoring among nurse educators are few. Personal accounts and small-scale studies about mentoring in nursing academia are common in the literature. These publications often focus on the process or experience of mentoring novice faculty and the positive results for those involved, especially the mentees (Smith & Zsohar, 2007; Supplee & Gardner, 2009; Wrotten & Waite, 2009).

Sarmiento, Spence Laschinger, and Iwasiw (2004) conducted a descriptive correlational study to examine nurse educators working at community colleges in Ontario, Canada. Eighty-nine full-time nurse educators were surveyed to measure their empowerment, burnout, and job satisfaction levels. Nurse educators surveyed perceived their work environment as only “somewhat empowering (M = 12.18, SD = 2.27)” (Sarmiento et al., 2004, p. 139). The results showed empowerment was significantly inversely related to all burnout dimensions (p < 0.01), and significantly correlated with job satisfaction. Although a small group of participants was used, the relationships demonstrate the importance of empowerment to nurse educators.

Nursing faculty have been shown to have a deep sense of meaning and commitment to the discipline of nursing and the faculty members’ contributions to the future of the discipline (Disch et al., 2004). Yet the complexities of the faculty role, the salaries, and the workload have led many nursing faculty to experience lower job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has an inverse relationship to job stress in the nursing literature. A large-scale study administered by the NLN in conjunction with the Carnegie Foundation (Kauffman, 2007) resulted in the participation of 8,498 nursing faculty in a Web-based survey (25% return rate). Excessive workload was reported by 44% of the participants. Even during school breaks and vacations, educators reported working 24 hours per week. The study also linked overwork to decreased retention.

The data are mixed regarding mentoring and job satisfaction among nurses. Mariani (2011) surveyed nurses in clinical practice, education, and administration (N = 173) using demographic questions and the Mariani Career Satisfaction Scale (alpha = 0.94). Results indicated no statistically significant difference between the mentored and nonmentored group of nurses on career satisfaction.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework used four theories to provide understanding of the relationships among the study concepts. This eclectic conceptual framework draws on Gmelch’s stress theory (1993), the mentoring theory of Dreher and Ash (1990), Spreitzer’s psychological empowerment theory (1995b), and Herzberg’s job satisfaction theory (1966) as applied to nursing faculty. If an individual is unable to cope with workplace stressors, which are individually interpreted, he or she becomes unable to withstand further stressors (Gmelch, 1993). The result is illness, ineffectiveness, or burnout—negative effects that extend beyond the individual to influence the economy at large (Nash, 2010). The mentoring relationship can model positive coping strategies and give social support to assist with stress reduction (Kram, 1983; Kram & Hall, 1989). Modeled positive coping strategies give the mentee a feeling of increased competence, which also increases psychological empowerment and job satisfaction (Luna & Cullen, 1995). Therefore, the end result of participating in a mentoring relationship may be increased job satisfaction and retention. The conceptual model is pictured in Figure 1.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions provided direction for the study:

- What percentage of nursing faculty is being mentored? (Question 1)
- What is the quality of nursing faculty mentoring relationships? (Question 2)
- How do mentored versus nonmentored nursing faculty differ by levels of job stress, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction? (Question 3)
- What is the relationship among the dimensions of mentoring quality, job stress, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction among nursing faculty? (Question 4)
- Do demographic characteristics, mentoring status, job stress, and psychological empowerment explain job satisfaction among nursing faculty? (Question 5)

**Study Design**

Using a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative study design, an online survey was used to collect data from full-time nursing faculty members regarding the status of their current mentoring relationship and the quality of that relationship, job stress, psychological empowerment at work, and job satisfaction. A pilot study was used preceding the research study to assess the use of the online survey and to validate the clarity and understandability of the survey questions.

**Participants**

The target population for the research study is full-time nursing faculty in the United States working for nursing programs accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The researcher compiled a list of 6,762 individual faculty members from the 660 CCNE-accredited programs in the United States. The list of CCNE-accredited programs was obtained from CCNE’s Web site (http://www.aacn.nche.edu/ccne-accreditation/accredited-programs). This was a convenience sample, as all faculty members on the list were e-mailed the participation invitation. Recruitment of the sample was via e-mail invitation, which included the inclusion criteria, a request to participate, and a link to the online survey. This method was used to obtain data from the largest sample possible.
Procedure and Setting

The procedures for the research study began with e-mails to the potential participants that described the purpose of the study, a statement regarding benefits of the research to the nursing profession, and a hyperlink to access the online questionnaire on SurveyMonkey™ (http://www.surveymonkey.com), a commercial Internet survey tool. The e-mail also noted that the study had been approved by the institutional review board of a medium-sized research university in the southwest United States. No material or financial rewards were offered in exchange for participation.

Instrumentation

Four instruments plus a researcher-created demographic instrument were compiled to form one survey on SurveyMonkey. The researcher created 15 demographic and profile characteristics that included questions regarding the participant’s age, gender, race, marital status, number of dependent children, highest degree earned, number of years as a faculty member, and number of years in the current position; whether the participant is enrolled in a terminal degree program; the participant’s faculty rank, tenure status, and salary; whether the participant holds paid employment outside of his or her faculty position; and whether the participant has a current mentor in his or her faculty job.

Gmelch’s faculty stress index is composed of 45 items rated on a five-point scale. The index examines five dimensions of faculty stress: reward and recognition, time constraints, departmental influence, professional and identity, and student interaction (Gmelch, Wilke, & Lovrich, 1986). Reliability, or Cronbach’s alpha, was reported as 0.83; content validity was not quantified (Gmelch et al., 1986).

The mentoring scale was developed by Dreher and Ash (1990) and is based on the work of Kram (1985). Kram’s work in the areas of career and psychosocial functions of mentoring formed the foundation for Dreher and Ash to develop this global measure of mentoring experiences. Their mentoring scale consists of 18 items rated on a five-point scale. The authors reported a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.95 (Dreher & Ash, 1990). Garbee (2006) used Dreher’s and Ash’s instrument in a dissertation study and had an expert panel of seven doctorally prepared nursing faculty review the instrument for content validity. The panel had a favorable review of the scale.

In our study, only respondents who answered that they do have a current faculty mentor participated in this portion of the study. The respondents also self-assessed their mentoring relationship quality via a researcher-created question. The question asked: What do you feel is the quality of the mentoring relationship you have now? The response choices for those with mentors were (a) good, (b) fair, or (c) poor.

Psychological empowerment was evaluated with a scale developed by Spreitzer (1995b) to assess psychological empowerment of individuals in a work context. The scale addresses the four dimensions of psychological empowerment: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The four dimensions interact in a multiplicative manner; therefore, for psychological empowerment to be maximized, all four dimensions must be present to a significant degree (Spreitzer, 1995b). The scale contains 12 items scored on a seven-point scale. The instrument has shown Cronbach’s alpha results of 0.87 to 0.92 for the four dimensions (Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian, 2001).

Job satisfaction was assessed via the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) instrument, which consists of eight items rated on a four-point scale. The participant is asked to rate his or her level of job satisfaction on eight items, including salary, authority to make decisions about content and methods in instructional activities, and overall job satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.85 for this scale (Hoyt, Howell, & Eggett, 2007).

RESULTS

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software, version 19.0. The margin of error was calculated for the research study using an online calculator (http://americanresearchgroup.com/moe.html). The population size and sample size were input, and the result was a margin of error of 2.93%. This result indicates that this study is highly generalizable to the target population of CCNE-accredited full-time nursing faculty.

Instrument Reliability

The instruments used in the study had been found to be valid and reliable in previous studies. Verification of reliability of the instruments was analyzed with the data in this study. The Cronbach’s alpha scores of the instruments in this study were: Gmelch’s faculty stress index = 0.93, Dreher’s and Ash’s mentoring scale = 0.94, Spreitzer’s psychological empowerment scale = 0.90, and NSOPF job satisfaction scale = 0.81.

Sample Demographics

Demographic variables of the research study sample (N = 959) indicated that the average participant was female, 53 years old,
Caucasian, married, and not presently supporting dependent children. Professionally, the average participant was doctorally prepared and did not hold additional employment to their full-time faculty job. In addition, the following were the most commonly occurring career characteristics of the sample: less than 10 years of experience as a full-time faculty member, less than 10 years of employment at the current institution, rank of assistant professor or clinical assistant professor, untenured, and an annual salary of $70,000 to $79,999.

**Research Question Results**

**Question 1:** What percentage of nursing faculty is being mentored? Research question one was answered by providing respondents with the definition of a mentor used in this study. Of the sample ($N = 959$), 40.5% ($n = 388$) have a current mentor, 59.1% ($n = 567$) do not have a current mentor, and 0.4% ($n = 4$) did not respond.

**Question 2:** What is the quality of nursing faculty mentoring relationships? The sample answered this question via two approaches: first, the demographic question asking “what do you feel is the quality of the mentoring relationship you have now?” was answered on a three-point scale of good, fair, or poor. This response was compared with the descriptive statistics from Dreher’s and Ash’s mentoring scale. The demographic question, “what do you feel is the quality of the mentoring relationship you have now,” was answered by a subsample of 375. This question was administered only to respondents who had previously answered that they have a current work mentor. The largest portion of sample, 75.7% ($n = 284$), answered the mentoring quality was good, 19.5% ($n = 73$) answered the mentoring quality was fair, and 4.8% ($n = 18$) answered poor.

Participants self-identifying as having a mentoring relationship answered Dreher’s and Ash’s mentoring scale regarding their experience as mentee and the quality of their relationship with their mentors. The scale mean score was 3.41 ($SD = 0.89$). A scale response of three represented **to some extent**. The researcher-created question regarding mentoring quality correlated substantially with the mentoring scale at 0.619. The sample had the highest rated levels of mentoring relationship quality for the following two items: “To what extent has your mentor conveyed feelings of respect for you as an individual?” ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.03$), and “To what extent has your mentor served as a role model?” ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.11$). The sample had the lowest rated levels of mentoring relationship quality for the following two items: “To what extent has your mentor given or recommended you for assignments that increased your contact with higher level administrators?” ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.33$) and “To what extent has your mentor given or recommended you for assignments that required personal contact with administrators in different parts of the school of nursing?” ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.28$).

**Question 3:** How do mentored versus nonmentored nursing faculty differ by levels of job stress, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction? This research question was analyzed using a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to ascertain whether significant differences exist between mentored and nonmentored nursing faculty’s levels of psychological empowerment, job stress, and job satisfaction. The data for job stress, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction were tested for normal distribution, and the results showed that job stress and job satisfaction data were not normally distributed. Job stress had Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) = 0.046 ($p < 0.0005$) and job satisfaction K-S = 0.073 ($p < 0.0005$). This is not largely problematic for this study because large sample sizes often have data that are not normally distributed and one-way MANOVA is robust toward the violation with respect to type I error (Stevens, 2002).

Mean scores for the mentored and nonmentored faculty groups on each of the scales were calculated. Wilk’s lambda was interpreted because the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices assumption was met (Box’s $M > 0.01$). The multivariate results demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences among the groups on the linear combination of dependent variables, Wilk’s lambda = 0.965, multivariate $F(3, 945) = 11.52$, $p < 0.0005$, $\chi^2 = 0.04$, power 1.00, with a modest strength of association. Univariate results were interpreted following the significant multivariate findings.

Although the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated for the job stress and job satisfaction variables, the analyses are robust due to the large sample size. The univariate results were all statistically significant (all $p$ values < 0.01). To correct for the inflation of familywise type I error rate, the alpha was reduced to 0.016 using the Bonferroni adjustment. The results of Spreitzer’s psychological empowerment scale were significant, $F(1, 947) = 13.00$, $p < 0.0005$, $\chi^2 = 0.01$, with the mentored group ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 0.81$) demonstrating a higher mean score than the nonmentored group ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 0.89$); the power to detect the effect was 0.95. The results for Gmelch’s faculty stress index were also significant, $F(1, 947) = 11.23$, $p = 0.001$, $\chi^2 = 0.01$, power = 0.92, with the mentored group ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.67$) reporting less overall job-related stress than the nonmentored group ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.73$). Finally, the results of the NSOPF job satisfaction scale reached significance as well, $F(1, 947) = 33.64$, $p < 0.0005$, $\chi^2 = 0.03$, power 1.00, again with the mentored group ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.52$) demonstrating higher satisfaction than the nonmentored group ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.60$).

**Question 4:** What is the relationship among the dimensions of mentoring quality, job stress, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction among nursing faculty? The relationships among mentoring quality, psychological empowerment, job stress, and job satisfaction were assessed using the parametric test of Pearson product-moment correlations. Although the variables were not all normally distributed, parametric tests are acceptable for this study due to the large sample size; nonparametric tests are most useful when the sample is less than 100 (Stevens, 2002). Table 1 provides the correlation coefficients for each of the relationships. The strength of the relationship is interpreted as follows: very low (0.01 to 0.1), low (0.2 to 0.3), moderate (0.4 to 0.5), substantial (0.6 to 0.7), and very high (0.8 to 0.9) (Field, 2009). Relationships greater than 0.90 indicate multicollinearity; no multicollinear relationships were found in this study. All of the relationships were significant in either the positive or negative direction (all $p$ values < 0.01). The fact that all bivariate correlations were less than 0.90 suggests that the constructs under study demonstrated adequate divergent validity.
Essentially, the question results demonstrated a positive relationship among mentoring quality, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction and a negative relationship among job stress and mentoring quality, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction. Figure 2 demonstrates the relationships within the conceptual model.

**Question 5: Do demographic characteristics, mentoring status, job stress, and psychological empowerment explain job satisfaction among nursing faculty?** A standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine which variables were most influential on job satisfaction, the dependent variable.

Several of the demographic variables were dummy coded to allow for the regression analysis. Highest degree earned was dummy coded into two categories: 1 = terminal degree earned, 0 = other (master’s of science in nursing or master’s in a related field). Tenure status was dummy coded into two categories: 1 = tenured or on a tenure track, 0 = not on a tenure track or institution does not function on a tenure system. Marital status was dummy coded into two categories: 1 = married or living with partner or significant other, 0 = single, divorced, separated, or widowed. Race was dummy coded into the categories: White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander.

The results of the standard multiple regression model indicated that the following variables had a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction (p < 0.01): mentoring status, psychological empowerment, and salary. Job stress and tenure had a significant inverse relationship with job satisfaction. The model accounted for 47% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.468$). Table 2 presents the unstandardized coefficients, the standard error, the standardized coefficient, the t test value, the significance value for each variable in the model, $R^2$, and F statistic for the models.

## DISCUSSION

Results indicated that approximately 40% of the respondents were involved in mentoring relationships. No previous studies present the percentage of nurse educators with current mentors. Mentoring is recommended for new faculty across academic disciplines, yet mentoring best practices have not been established.

One of the major challenges to mentoring relationships among nursing faculty is the time required to establish a mentoring relationship. Current experienced faculty may not have the time to mentor to the level needed by novice faculty members (Monk, Irons, Carlson, & Walker, 2010). This inability to mentor new nursing faculty sufficiently may lead to “a self-perpetuating cycle of insufficient numbers of faculty with inadequate preparation for academia could lead to a profound decline in the nursing profession” (Records & Emerson, 2003, p. 553). These dire predictions, due to insufficiently prepared faculty, point to a discussion of mentoring quality, as mentoring has been indicated as a successful orientation method for new faculty (Morin & Ashton, 2004; Smith & Zsohar, 2007).

The results of this study indicated that three of four mentees felt their mentoring relationship quality was good (as opposed to fair or poor). However, the results of Dreher’s and Ash’s mentoring scale showed a somewhat less favorable picture, with the mean score being just over the mid-value, to some extent—reflecting fairly neutral feelings about the relationship. The correlation between the self-assessment of mentoring quality and the mentoring scale was significant at 0.629 ($p < 0.0005$), which is a substantial correlation. A higher correlation or even a multicollinear relationship was expected, as the mentoring quality question and Dreher’s and Ash’s mentoring scale were attempting to assess the same construct.

It is possible that mentoring relationships among nursing faculty have not achieved the depth or longevity that exists in corporate business mentoring relationships. The literature states corporate mentoring relationships are commonly a minimum of 5 years in duration (Gibson, 2009; Kram, 1983). Our study did not ask how long the mentee had been involved in the cur-
rent mentoring relationship. This researcher questions whether nursing faculty mentoring relationships extend for a number of years—enough time for the mentoring relationship to truly allow the mentee’s growth—or if nursing faculty mentoring relationships tend to be shorter in duration and focused more on orientation to the institution rather than career growth.

Job satisfaction was found to be significantly higher in the mentored nursing faculty group. The importance of this finding cannot be underestimated in the climate of the current faculty shortage. Strategies for increasing job satisfaction among nursing faculty are being sought not only by individual institutions (Baker, 2010) but by national organizations as well (AACN, 2005; Institute of Medicine, 2011).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This research study both acknowledges and increases the evidence that nursing academia is in a precarious position of aging faculty, lack of supportive strategies for novice faculty, and high stress levels. Although the sample was largely a homogenous Caucasian female faculty, it does approximate nursing faculty in the United States today (AACN, 2011).

The current study verified the negative effect of job stress on job satisfaction among nursing faculty. Job stress showed the most statistically significant (inverse) link to job satisfaction. The literature concurs that job stress is a severe problem for workers across industries, including faculty across disciplines (Jahanzeb, 2010; Nash, 2010; Thomas, 2009).

Several implications may be drawn from this study to assist academic institutions and nursing faculty move toward improved job satisfaction. Given that mentored faculty had higher associations with job satisfaction and lower associations with job stress, it may be concluded that mentoring is a beneficial strategy for assisting nursing faculty. Only approximately 40% of nursing faculty in the sample had a mentor, and this is insufficient to support job satisfaction in the environment of the current nursing faculty shortage. The literature is inconclusive regarding statistical links between mentoring and job satisfaction. Although Mariani (2011) found no statistically significant link between mentoring in nursing and career satisfaction, there is a body of knowledge that supports mentoring as increasing job satisfaction in studies with community mental health workers (Lee & del Carmen Montiel, 2011) and U.S. Army Reserve nurses (Prevosto, 2001). The literature is supportive of mentoring to increase job satisfaction among nursing faculty and retention regardless of empirical evidence (Baker, 2010; Dunham-Taylor, Lynn, Moore, McDaniel, & Walker, 2008; Monk et al., 2010). The current study lends statistical evidence to the link between mentoring and job satisfaction among nursing faculty.

Mentoring was not the most statistically influential variable of those examined in this study. Increased psychological empowerment showed a higher correlation with increased job satisfaction among nursing faculty. The current study did not attempt to determine causality; therefore, it is unknown how high levels of psychological empowerment were obtained. The literature supports psychological empowerment as a means to develop organizations with highly productive, satisfied, innovative workforces (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001). Psychological empowerment has also been linked to increased innovative

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Note. SE = standard error.

*R2 = 0.684; F(19, 650) = 30.071; p < 0.0005.

*p < 0.01.
behaviors among academics (Ghani, Hussin, & Jusoff, 2009). Academia is an environment ripe for developing psychological empowerment and reaping the benefits—academia is largely autonomous, and faculty often feel deep meaning connected with their work (Disch et al., 2004). Although mentoring may assist in developing psychological empowerment, the organizational culture is important as well. Organizational culture significantly influences psychological empowerment among a variety of work organizations (Spreitzer, 1995a, 1995b), including nursing academia (Johnson, 2009). Organizational culture was not addressed in the current study.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Mentoring relationships among nursing academia are ripe for further research. Repeating this study with another target population, such as full-time NLN Accrediting Commission-accredited faculty, would be useful to confirm the results of the current study. A comparative study with an academic discipline known to use mentoring, such as business or law, could assist in the understanding of mentoring practices and outcomes as well. Nursing education needs to determine best practices for mentoring in the academy.

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