

Job Satisfaction of Community Nurses During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Interview Study

Zadowolenie z pracy pielęgniarek środowiskowych podczas pandemii Covid-19: jakościowe badanie z wykorzystaniem techniki wywiadu

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A – Development of the concept and methodology of the study/Opracowanie koncepcji i metodologii badań; B – Query - a review and analysis of the literature/Kwerenda – przegląd i analiza literatury przedmiotu; C – Submission of the application to the appropriate Bioethics Committee/Złożenie wniosku do właściwej Komisji Biotycznej; D – Collection of research material/Gromadzenie materiału badawczego; E – Analysis of the research material/Analiza materiału badawczego; F – Preparation of draft version of manuscript/Przygotowanie roboczej wersji artykułu; G – Critical analysis of manuscript draft version/Analiza krytyczna roboczej wersji artykułu; H – Statistical analysis of the research material/Analiza statystyczna materiału badawczego; I – Interpretation of the performed statistical analysis/Interpretacja dokonanej analizy statystycznej; K – Technical preparation of manuscript in accordance with the journal regulations/Opracowanie techniczne artykułu zgodne z regulaminem czasopisma; L – Supervision of the research and preparation of the manuscript/Nadzór nad przebiegiem badań i przygotowaniem artykułu

STRESZCZENIE

ZADOWOLENIE Z PRACY PIELĘGNIAREK ŚRODOWISKOWYCH PODCZAS PANDEMII COVID-19: JAKOŚCIOWE BADANIE Z WYKORZYSTANIEM TECHNIKI WYWIADU

Cel pracy. Zbadanie satysfakcji z pracy pielęgniarek środowiskowych w kontekście pandemii Covid-19.

Materiał i metody. Zrealizowano jakościowe badanie opisowe z analizą tematyczną. Badanie polegało na przeprowadzeniu wywiadów indywidualnych z 20 czynnymi zawodowo pielęgniarkami środowiskowymi w Polsce. Wywiady jakościowe przeprowadzono telefonicznie od listopada 2020 r. do maja 2021 r.

Wyniki. W badaniu zidentyfikowano trzy główne tematy: (1) Powody satysfakcji z pracy; (2) Sytuacje trudne występujące w miejscu pracy; (3) Obszary zmian, które mogą zwiększyć satysfakcję z pracy.

Wnioski. Większa samodzielność zawodowa, wystarczająca kadra pielęgniarska oraz jasny podział zadań pomiędzy członków zespołu opieki zdrowotnej wydają się szczególnie istotne dla podniesienia poziomu satysfakcji z pracy pielęgniarek środowiskowych.

Słowa kluczowe:

opieka podstawowa, pielęgniarka środowiskowa, satysfakcja zawodowa, badanie jakościowe

ABSTRACT

JOB SATISFACTION OF COMMUNITY NURSES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW STUDY

Aim. This study aimed to investigate the job satisfaction of community nurses in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Material and methods. A qualitative descriptive study with thematic analysis was conducted.

The study involved individual interviews conducted with 20 professionally active community nurses in Poland. The qualitative interviews were conducted via phone from November 2020 to May 2021.

Results. Three primary themes were identified in the study: (1) Reasons for job satisfaction; (2) Difficult situations occurring at the workplace; (3) Areas of change that could increase job satisfaction.

Conclusions. Greater professional autonomy, sufficient nursing staff, and a clear division of tasks among the members of the health care team seem to be especially important for raising the level of job satisfaction of community nurses.

Key words:

primary care, community nurse, job satisfaction, qualitative study

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is an important component of humanitarian-oriented professions, such as nursing. Humanitarian characteristics of nurses include a compulsion to provide aid and care for others, a desire to help satisfy patient's basic needs, and a commitment to health security [1]. Job satisfaction in the nursing profession has been defined as "the feeling of pleasantness when occupational desires or needs have been fulfilled" [2, p. 89]. The following components of nurses' job satisfaction were identified as part of a systematic review published a decade ago: working conditions, organizational environment, job stress, role perception and role content, role conflict and ambiguity, organizational commitment, and professional commitment [3]. Both the atmosphere at the workplace and job satisfaction are aspects of crucial importance for retaining health care professionals and ensuring high quality of patient care [4].

Review of the nursing literature shows that research on job satisfaction of community nurses is scarce, and the studies, which have been published, are highly variable. The diversity of instruments applied in the different studies makes it difficult to obtain a clear and comprehensive view of job satisfaction, and the studies' wide temporal frame in a rapidly evolving nursing sector may limit their relevance for today's experience [5]. A recent quantitative study carried out among 220 community nurses in Poland showed that the respondents were moderately satisfied with their jobs. Higher job satisfaction was declared by nurses who had longer professional experience, worked in rural areas, were owners or co-owners of primary health care (PHC) facilities, and who had good remuneration [6].

Although there have been studies of job satisfaction among nurses, our understanding of this issue is still incomplete and requires more in-depth research, especially as the professional circle of nurses is changing, for example as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nurses have an important place in the health care system; indeed, they comprise its largest component. Therefore, their high job satisfaction is of key importance, both for health care professionals and for patients. Since nurses' job satisfaction is directly connected with satisfying the health and security needs of patients, it is necessary to learn the factors that contribute to it.

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the job satisfaction of community nurses in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research question was: "How do Polish community nurses perceive their current professional situation?"

METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative design [7], because it takes into consideration the subjective character of the problem and the varied experiences and views of its participants, presenting the results in a way that directly reflects the initial research question. Consent of the Bioethics Committee of Medical University of Białystok, Poland (R-I-002/8/2019 and APK.002.292.2020) was obtained for the study.

The study participants were community nurses (also called a primary care nurses or a family nurses) who were professionally active in Podlaskie Province at the time of the study, varying in terms of age and work experience. In accordance with the principles of qualitative research, we used purposive sampling.

Telephone interviews were conducted (from November 2020 to May 2021) with community nurses individually. The interview guide was prepared based on previous quantitative research concerning job satisfaction of Polish family nurses [6]. The respondents were asked the following questions: "What gives you the greatest satisfaction at work?", "What difficult situations do you have at work?", "What would you like to change in your professional life to make it more satisfying for you?" All interviews were conducted by the first author (PK), adhering to the ethical standards applicable in qualitative research. Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed in full.

Braun and Clarke's [8] method of thematic analysis was employed. All interviews were analyzed by two authors, using a combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Tab. 1. Characteristics of the study participants

Characteristics	n=20
Sex	
Female	20
Age (years)	
<30	3
31-50	4
51-60	7
>60	6
Work experience as a nurse (years)	
<20	5
20-29	3
30-39	5
>40	7
Work experience in PHC (years)	
<10	13
10-19	4
20-29	1
30-39	1
>40	1
Place of work	
Large town	7
Medium-sized town	4
Small town	9

The study participants were 20 community nurses, all women. Five participants had been working as nurses for up to 20 years, three for 20-29 years, five for 30-39 years, and seven for over 40 years. Thirteen participants had been working in PHC for up to 10 years, four for 10-19 years,

one for 20-29 years, one for 30-39 years, and one for more than 40 years. Seven study participants worked in a large town, four worked in a medium-sized town, and nine in a small town.

Three primary themes were identified in the study: (1) Reasons for job satisfaction; (2) Difficult situations occurring at the workplace; (3) Areas of change that could increase job satisfaction.

■ Tab. 2. Reasons for job satisfaction

Theme	Subtheme
Personal satisfaction	Desire to provide help
	Patients' satisfaction
	Performing nursing activities
	Financial aspect
Professional autonomy	Providing information, explaining, and advising patients
	Influence on the treatment process

Two main thematic categories of reasons for job satisfaction were determined: (1) personal satisfaction, and (2) professional autonomy.

Personal satisfaction

The following subthemes were determined in the 'personal satisfaction' theme: the desire to provide help, patients' satisfaction, performing nursing activities, and the level of remuneration.

The desire to provide help to other people was both a source of job satisfaction and the reason for choosing nursing as a profession. The participants stressed that this was a prime attraction of their job.

"Working with people. I definitely have the greatest satisfaction when I work with people. This was why I chose the job, this and my inner urge to help others. It's always been a source of huge satisfaction for me. My earlier professional experience, when I could really see that what I was doing had a positive impact on patients, is something really beautiful, and I think it's a beautiful job." (Participant 2).

Another component of nurses' personal satisfaction was the satisfaction of their patients. The nurses stated they felt satisfied when patients thanked them, expressed their gratitude, and appreciated their work.

"Biggest satisfaction from work is when the patient is happy with the care and he or she expresses that. I would say I then feel appreciated for devoting time to the patient." (Participant 4).

Professional autonomy

Nurses derive satisfaction from the fact that they can give patients some advice and help them address their health problems, and that the patients are happy to use such assistance.

"We can talk to patients, give them advice, and they want to listen to us. They turn to us with problems about which they wouldn't talk to other medical professionals. I have the impression they don't feel so much distance between themselves and us." (Participant 1).

Moreover, thanks to professional autonomy, nurses can have an influence on the treatment process. All the activities they are permitted to do autonomously also contribute to their feeling of job satisfaction. The interviewed nurses emphasized that working at a PHC clinic gives them greater autonomy than working at a hospital.

"A nurse is authorized to make a prescription and examine the patient on her own. There are a lot more autonomous activities, and this is satisfying. I feel I really am a member of a therapeutic team, not like in the hospital, where I was just a person who had to carry out physicians' orders." (Participant 9).

■ Tab. 3. Difficult situations at the workplace

Theme	Subtheme
Organization of work at the clinic	Remote work, teleconsultations, and new computer software
	Introduction of COVID-19 vaccinations
	Changes in clinic equipment
Care for patients	Emergency situations or deaths
	Lack of family care for patients
Nurse-patient relations	Patients' dissatisfaction
	Patients' improper perception of nurse's job

Analysis of the content of participants' responses concerning difficult situations occurring at the workplace led to three identified thematic categories: (1) organization of work at the clinic; (2) patient care; (3) nurse-patient relations.

Organization of work

Participants' responses showed that the Covid-19 pandemic forced the reorganization of work in PHC. Teleconsultations and limited access to family doctors, combined with the necessity to learn new skills, generated many difficult situations that nurses experienced. All those factors resulted in patient dissatisfaction.

"Many things have changed since the beginning of the pandemic. We all had to adapt to the new reality. Patients were very unhappy at the beginning because they couldn't come to the clinic in person and many visits were in the form of teleconsultations. Especially elderly people." (Participant 9).

However, some changes in the organization of work proved to be beneficial for nurses. In the long run, some of them found out that gaining new skills connected with telework and electronic documentation was extremely helpful.

"This year, there's been a great emphasis on remote, electronic work. We've changed from pen-and-paper to electronic documentation. Now, for example, regarding this pandemic, our situation is perfect, because we already use the computer and medical records are in the electronic form. We can send electronic sick-leave notes and electronic prescriptions. We also have a program to issue electronic referrals to other specialists. It's very convenient." (Participant 5).

Care for patients

Caring for patients during the pandemic was also a source of many difficult situations. Events such as death or a sudden deterioration of a patient's condition were very difficult for nurses and caused them a lot of stress.

"Deaths. It's hard, because we know our patients, in many cases we meet them very often, visit them at home, so it's difficult." (Participant 6).

The pandemic also revealed, or showed clearly, the deficit of care for patients in dysfunctional families, where family members were unable to provide sufficient care. This was yet another source of stress for nurses.

"Difficult situations are the ones in which the family members are unable to provide care, are physically or mentally disabled, or are incompetent. We can't help them, because they don't accept any help. We nurses call it a stalemate." (Participant 18).

Nurse-patient relations

During the pandemic, the relations between nurses and patients deteriorated. Patients' frustration resulting from the new organization of work in PHC generated difficult situations, both for nurses and for patients.

"Especially now, difficult situations are connected with the pandemic, of course, because many patients are frustrated. Lots of patients are verbally aggressive toward us. This makes us stressed and we often think that maybe we should change the place of work, because we can't see any other solution at the moment." (Participant 4).

■ Tab. 4. Areas of change that could increase nurses' job satisfaction

Theme	Subtheme
Working conditions	Remuneration
	Nursing staff
Care for patients	Organization of work
	Patients' trust
Functioning of the clinic	Administrative activities
	Facility conditions

The respondents were asked what they would like to change in their professional life to make it more satisfying. Three thematic categories were determined in their answers: (1) working conditions; (2) care for the patient; and (3) functioning of the facility.

Working conditions

The proposed changes in working conditions referred to pay and the number of nursing personnel. Nurses felt their remuneration is inadequate for the work they do and they expect better pay, which would translate into higher appreciation of their efforts.

"Frankly speaking, money matters. It's not very bad, but the financial issues are the most important in many households, and nurses should be better appreciated in this regard." (Participant 5).

Care for patients

According to the participants, their job satisfaction would grow significantly if they could organize their own work. The interviewed nurses would like to devote more time to caring for patients. They point out that although professional autonomy has increased, it is still not widely known and recognized by patients and doctors alike.

"It's us who should plan and carry out the care for patients. We should have the freedom to carry out our responsibilities and decide when we want to do this. I don't like time limitations. Sometimes I need more time than the time I'm given to carry out my tasks on a certain day and I'd like to have this freedom to do it." (Participant 2).

Functioning of the clinic

To derive more satisfaction from the work they do, the respondents believed some changes were necessary in the functioning of the clinic. Some administrative activities performed by nurses in PHC lower their job satisfaction, and the participants mentioned an excess of responsibilities connected with administrative computer work or the tasks of a medical receptionist.

"Very often I'm overwhelmed with work at the reception. Because of this I can't fully perform my purely nursing responsibilities. Nowadays, front desk is not easy, because of course you need to answer the phone and also let the patients in the clinic. And running from the surgery to the front door, and then to the phone, is very tiresome. And in addition, it distracts my attention and it's very easy to make a medical mistake." (Participant 4).

DISCUSSION

Our research confirms that the job satisfaction of community nurses depends on many overlapping factors [3]. Many of the analyzed elements of community nurses' work appear in two major themes: (1) factors that contribute to job satisfaction, and (2) proposed changes that would lead to greater satisfaction. These elements concern financial aspects (higher pay) and professional autonomy. The problem of poor remuneration in nursing is widely known and reported not only in Poland [9] but in other countries as well. The latter study found that nearly 50% of nurses feel overworked, are dissatisfied with their wages, desire greater autonomy, and report ineffective communication with superiors [10]. In the present study, Polish community nurses emphasize professional autonomy as a source of their job satisfaction. Remote work, including teleconsultations, was difficult for many nurses, but in some cases it proved to be beneficial, because the nurses acquired new skills that ultimately made their work easier. The increasing use of telemedicine in daily clinical practice generates the need to provide nurses with more education in this regard. This aspect became especially important amid the Covid-19 pandemic, which our study also confirmed. Performing the job of a nurse often involves experiencing aggressive behaviors from patients, and the Covid-19 pandemic brought these problems into sharp focus. Nurses experienced aggression, especially verbal aggression, from patients. Therefore, it is neces-

sary to equip them with skills needed to cope with such situations. Our study shows that nurse–patient relations changed during the pandemic. Patients’ aggressive behaviors often affected nurses’ mental state and well-being. Studies by other authors also show that nurses actively working on Covid-19 wards experienced stigmatization, exhaustion, and burnout [11]. The reported experiences of PHC professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic in eight European countries show that nurses managed to adapt quickly to new ways of working, including telecare, and learned to cope with insecurity [12]. Indeed, while it is true that the pandemic caused many difficulties for community nurses, on the other hand it also pushed them to acquire new skills. This proves that nurses are able to adapt quickly to new conditions and challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

Greater occupational autonomy, sufficient nursing staff, and a clear division of tasks among the members of the medical team seem to be especially important for the job satisfaction of community nurses. Their expectations concerning job satisfaction were related to working conditions (remuneration and the number of nursing staff), organization of patient care, and the reduction of medical documentation. These aspects must be taken into consideration to obtain an efficient workforce in PHC.

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