

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB DEMANDS AND BURNOUT, JOB SATISFACTION AND INTENTION TO LEAVE AMONG NURSES: TESTING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF SKILL DISCRETION

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### **A statement of the problem**

Nursing has always been considered a stressful profession. It is also well-known how these workers are exposed at the risk of developing job burnout, tend to experience low job satisfaction, and are prone, more than other professions, to job abandonment. Reasons for these include the constant involvement in highly emotional demanding relationships with care recipients, dealing with critical or adverse events such as patient's illness complication or death, as well as being subjected to heavy physical demands and night shift. In this context, to understand which characteristics of the work environment can help lessen negative outcomes on nurses' health is crucial.

The role of some job resources in moderating the detrimental effect of job demands on workers' health are debatable (Haussens et al. 2010, Bakker et al. 2010). This is especially the case of skill discretion. As argued by De Jonge et al. (2010), skill discretion is controversial because it could be perceived as a demand rather than a protective factor. Indeed, skill discretion refers not only to the opportunity to use consolidated skills but also to the process to learn new things and to exercise creativity. Those latest aspects, although they could be considered positive characteristics of the job, require a mobilization of energy related to the learning process. In that sense, skill discretion could have a different nature from the other resources commonly considered (i.e., support from organization) that fully works as supporters and do not require depletion of energy. This argument is supported by some findings: a heterogeneous study among 1,739 employees showed that skill discretion was positively associated with psychosomatic health complaints and sickness absence (de Jonge et al. 2000).

In light of these considerations, the aim of the present study is to assess both the direct and the indirect effect of skill discretion (i.e., by moderating the effect of job demands) on job burnout, satisfaction with job and intention to leave.

### **Procedure**

Data were collected during a multi-centre intervention-research conducted in three hospitals in North-Western Italy in 2012. The sample consisted of 522 nurses. The majority were women (82.2%,  $n=429$ ), with an age ranging from 22 to 62 years ( $m=36.98$ ,  $sd=8.53$ ). 56.90% were married or living with partners, 34.70% were single, 7.3% were divorced and 4.0% were widowed.

The data were obtained by means of a self-reported questionnaire including two sections. The first is dedicated to collecting socio-demographic (i.e., gender, age and marital status) and professional (i.e., occupation, units and years in the health sector) data. The second section included scales aimed at measuring job demands (i.e., emotional, cognitive and quantitative), skill discretion and the outcomes of workers' well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion, affective well-being, job satisfaction, and intention to leave).

All the analyses were performed using SPSS 21. Moderated hierarchical regression analyses were employed.

### **Results**

Findings highlighted the direct effect of skill discretion in reducing emotional exhaustion, intention to leave, and in sustaining affective well-being and job satisfaction. As regards the interaction effect, the analyses indicated that skill discretion moderates the negative effect of disproportionate patient expectations on all psychological outcomes considered. On the contrary, unexpected results were found as regards the effect of skill discretion on the relationship between cognitive demands and turnover intention as well as between quantitative demands and emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, respectively. Indeed, in accordance with the slope test analyses, the relationship (positive with emotional exhaustion and negative with job satisfaction) was stronger in the case of high skill discretion rather than in the case of low skill discretion.

### **Discussion**

The study revealed some interesting findings, suggesting that skill discretion may also have a "demanding" nature, besides the already known "enhancing" nature.

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