

*Original Article***The relationship of personality characteristics and burnout among nurses**

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: People's personality and psychological factors usually affects job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction and so level of burnout. In this study the role of personality characteristics in nurses' burnout is examined.

METHODS: It is a correlation study. The statistic population is consisted of all nurses in a state hospital of Shahr-e Kord who've been working there during 2007. One hundred of them were selected by simple random method and then Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment) and NEO personality characteristic (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience) questionnaires were distributed among them. Out of 100, 75 questionnaires were completed and returned. Also multiple regression method was used to statistically examine the relation between personality characteristics and burnout.

RESULTS: The study findings showed that neuroticism has positive relation with emotional exhaustion and extraversion has negative relation with emotional exhaustion ($p < 0.05$). Neuroticism has a positive relation with depersonalization and agreeableness has a negative relation with depersonalization ($p < 0.05$). Extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness have negative relation with reduced personal accomplishment ($p < 0.05$). All of these relationships were meaningful.

CONCLUSION: Since nurses' health plays as an important role in effectiveness of their health care for patients, it is important to consider their personality characteristics, because incongruity between personality and work place increases their burnout.

KEY WORDS: Job stress, burnout, personality characteristics.

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Burnout is a kind of stress syndrome. It first was noticed in the United States in middle 1970s and different definitions were offered based on which various etiologic theories formed. The most common definition was offered by Maslach and Jackson. They believed burnout was a psychological symptom in response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressful factors in job.¹ Stress and burnout affects physical and psychological health and causes organizational outcomes such as opposition or absence. Burnout is consisted of three elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to lack of energy

and feeling that emotional sources have been lost due to too much spiritual desire. Depersonalization is known as behaving others as objects and pessimistic and cruel views. Reduced personal accomplishment is the tendency to negatively assess oneself due to the failure in gaining outburst.² These symptoms mostly exist in the jobs in which human plays a vital. Also when people do not have authority to make decisions and do not receive social support from others in or out of work environment are simply pulled toward the feeling of burnout.³

Other studies and theories show that viewpoint and personality can affect person's action and reaction in response to environment pres-

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asures (like society or work environment). People's personality and psychological factors usually affects job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction and so level of burnout. Naturally, those who put more pressure on themselves physically and psychologically due to their beliefs and attitudes and feel tired, will be soon affectedly burnout. This fact is specially approved by the studies done on type A sample members' acts and their physical and psychological state.⁴ Other studies on burnout in servicing jobs show a meaningful relation between job stress and personality characteristics.⁵⁻⁸

Different nature of jobs makes each one have its own condition which affects people's fatigue and burnout feeling. A study titled as "effects of cognitive adaptation on the expectation-burnout relationship among nurses" explored the impact of cognitive adaptation disposition, including mastery, optimism, and self-esteem, on the expectations-burnout relationship. Also cognitive adaptation predicted fewer unmet expectations of control, which in turn predicted lower burnout. In addition, optimism and self-esteem predicted lower burnout, regardless of perceived initial expectations; whereas mastery lessened the negative consequences of initially high expectations on burnout.⁹ Another study titled as "burnout in a surgical ICU (Intensive Care Units)" showed that psychologically stressful situations, a physically demanding workload and a high requirement for technological skills can lead ICU caregivers to burnout. Also, it was shown that 28% of nursing team members had high level of burnout and 49% had high level of stress.¹⁰

Personality classification as B5 or 5 factors pattern is well known and in recent years has been especially effective in industrial and organizational psychology.¹¹

After discovering B5 pattern (including neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience) it became a reliable pattern in other cultures. Neuroticism refers to people's differences in stress, depression, anger, shyness, anxiety, and insecurity. Allen and Mellor found out that neuroticism has had meaningful relation with

emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment in cross studies on a group of nurses.⁵ Strong evidence has been found on the importance of neuroticism in relation to burnout in a linear research by Goddard et al.⁶ Extraversion shows personal traits such as sociability and activity. In jobs that require social skills (like nursing) extraversion has key role in job performance.¹² Agreeableness shows personal differences in being warm, kind, intimate and sympathetic in social interactions with other people which help avoiding interpersonal oppositions. Conscientiousness is defined as reliability (cautious, exactness and responsibility), volition (hard working and progression). Conscientiousness has been considered as the most important feature in job performance. The last trait is openness to experience which shows personal differences in intelligence, interests and creativity. This trait has been related to burnout in Ross study. This study reported openness as a meaningful determination in burnout in health care industry.¹³ Therefore, as said before, probability of burnout in human servicing jobs and the jobs that require compressed working hours is higher. Nursing is one of these jobs. Most of the researchers try to assess hospital staff's burnout by focusing on work environment and condition. Also the previous studies have not examined the role of all personality characteristics together on the burnout but they have studied the role of extroversion and introversion or two or three personality characteristics. So, regarding the importance nursing, researchers want to assess the role of NEO personality characteristics in predicting burnout aspects in nurses. The hypotheses are: there is a relationship between personality characteristics and emotional exhaustion, there is a relationship between personality characteristics and depersonalization and there is a relationship between personality characteristics and reduced personal accomplishment.

Methods

In this correlation study, statistical population was consisted of all nurses working in a hospi-

tal in Shahr-e Kord during 2007. One hundred of them were selected by simple random method considering distributed Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) and NEO (Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness) personality characteristics. From all, 75 questionnaires were completed and returned. NEO questionnaire was designed by Costa and McCrae in 1992. Five basic personality traits to be assessed in this test are: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. This questionnaire has two long and short forms. The long form has 240 items and the short form has 120 items that has been used in this research. To assess the reliability of the test, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient has been used and the results for each of the variables respectively have been: 0.82, 0.71, 0.67, 0.75 and 0.79, and for total scale it was 0.78.

Burnout Inventory was first made by Maslach and Jackson in 1985. It has 22 items which examine threefold aspects of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach and Jackson reported internal reliability for each subscale of this test as following: internal reliability for emotional exhaustion 0.90, depersonalization 0.79, and reduced personal accomplishment 0.71. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each subscale in this study was respectively calculated as: 0.82, 0.79 and 0.67, and 0.83 for total scale. Generally, the reliability coefficients for NEO personality questionnaire characteristics and Maslach's Burnout Inventory were more than 0.7 which is ideal. SPSS software, version 15, was used to analyze findings of the study and for examining the hypothesis of the study descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Multiple Regression Analysis) were used.

Results

Of all the participants, 54 were female and 21 were male. The descriptive findings of the research show that among subscales of predicting, conscientiousness has the highest and neuroticism has the lowest mean and SD (standard deviation). Also, among subscales of criterion, re-

duced personal accomplishment has the highest mean and the lowest SD and depersonalization has the lowest mean and the highest SD (Table 1). Inferential findings of the research show that among personality characteristics only neuroticism and extraversion has a meaningful relationship with emotional exhaustion, respectively positive and negative. Also, neuroticism has a positive and meaningful relation with depersonalization and agreeableness has a negative and meaningful relation with depersonalization. Also, findings show that extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness have negative and meaningful relation with reduced personal accomplishment ($p < 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 1. The descriptive statistical of predicting and criterion variables

Variables	Mean	SD
Neuroticism	5.35	1.2
Extraversion	7.7	1.68
Openness to experience	10.24	3.1
Agreeableness	9.73	2.51
Conscientiousness	10.77	3.25
Emotional exhaustion	3.72	0.96
Depersonalization	2.7	0.99
Reduced personal accomplishment	7.46	0.57

Discussion

Nursing is one of the important jobs should be seriously paid attention to by human resource managers in hospitals. Ignoring these jobs' requirements has dangerous outcomes for both nurses and society.³ Most of the researchers try to assess hospital staff's burnout by focusing on work environment and condition. But this study has examined the role of personality characteristics it has in predicting nurses' burnout. One interesting finding in this study is the meaningful relation of agreeableness and three components of burnout. This finding can be helpful in selecting nurses who can have a sympathetic and friendly relation with patients. This trait is defined as ideal personality components and people who have high agreeableness highly care about others' mind health and needs.¹⁴ Findings showed that it has a negative relation with depersonalization. These findings are compatible with Zellars et al research.⁸

Table 2. The results of regression analysis for the relationship between personality characteristics and three aspects of burnout

Predicting variables	Criterion variables	β	T	Sig
Neuroticism	Emotional exhaustion	0.38	2.48	0.02
	Depersonalization	0.35	0.29	0.03
	Reduced personal accomplishment	-0.02	-1.46	0.15
Extraversion	Emotional exhaustion	-0.26	-1.69	0.03
	Depersonalization	-0.14	-0.78	0.55
	Reduced personal accomplishment	-0.21	-2.85	0.04
Openness to experience	Emotional exhaustion	-0.07	-0.5	0.61
	Depersonalization	0.01	0.71	0.48
	Reduced personal accomplishment	-0.05	-0.33	0.75
Agreeableness	Emotional exhaustion	-0.37	-2.58	0.05
	Depersonalization	-0.23	4.02	0.004
	Reduced personal accomplishment	-0.28	-1.92	0.04
Conscientiousness	Emotional exhaustion	0.15	1.04	0.3
	Depersonalization	-0.21	-1.23	0.22
	Reduced personal accomplishment	-0.34	-3.26	0.002

Nurses with high agreeableness are the best ones to answer patients' needs. They are highly content with their performance after complying their patients' needs and therefore, their personal accomplishment increases. According to similarities between the results of this study and those done in other countries it can be concluded that this feature is influential in decreasing the possibility of burnout and is not affected by cultural differences.

Conscientiousness has negative relation just with one of the aspects of burnout (reduced personal accomplishment). In fact the relation of conscientiousness with reduced personal accomplishment is more perceptible than any other traits. Organizational skills and high stability which are signs of conscientiousness are influential in this meaningful relation. It means nurses who have high conscientiousness try to fulfill their responsibilities as good as possible, and it increases their personal accomplishment. Neuroticism is highly related to job stress and is less controversial among researchers. This is extraversion which has an important role in sentiment. Generally the findings of this study

about extraversion are compatible with previously reported findings indicating that these two variables are meaningful predictions for emotional exhaustion (which is often considered as the main aspect of burnout).^{1,5} So based on these findings one can predict that nurses with low neuroticism and high extraversion have higher job satisfaction and stay at their job longer. Also nurses with these two characteristics are less prone to burnout. Generally the results show that it is less possible for nurses with high agreeableness to be affected by burnout. Then, the nurses with high conscientiousness because of fulfilling their duties feel more successful and less affected by burnout. Also high extraversion can overcome burnout and stress because of influential role of this feature in increasing positive attitude. But the nurses with high neuroticism are more prone to burnout, so they should eliminate confronting stressful factors that is avoiding stressful wards, being supported by coworkers, teaching individual and organizational anti-stress methods for better protection against stress and burnout. According to the very important role of nurses in heal-

ing patients, it is recommended that authorities consider personality tests when employing nurses to identify susceptible people and provide the requirements to avoid burnout. Also it is suggested that managers of human resources consider agreeableness while choosing nurses as they consider extraversion to avoid outcomes of inappropriate selection. It is suggested to empower psychological services in hospitals to

help nurses confronting stress and burnout for more adaptation. Also considering that this study was done in a state hospital it is suggested that the same study be done in a private hospital and findings be compared for a more accurate examination.

The Authors declare that have no conflict of interest in this study and ethical committee approved the study.

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