



ARAŞTIRMA / RESEARCH

Psychological empowerment and its relationship with assertiveness skill among nurses in neonatal wards

Yenidoğan servislerinde çalışan hemşirelerde psikolojik güçlendirme ve atılganlık becerisi ile ilişkisi

Mohammad Arshadi Bostanabad¹, Mohammad Hassan Sahebihagh², Maliheh Asadollahi¹, Masoumeh Zakernik³

¹Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Department of Pediatric Nursing, Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, ²Department of Community Health Nursing, ³Research Committee of Faculty of Nursing, Tabriz, Iran.

Cukurova Medical Journal 2018;43(4):828-834

Abstract

Purpose: The present study aimed to determine the relationship between psychological empowerment and assertiveness skill among nurses.

Materials and Methods: The present study was a cross-sectional study and the statistical population included all the nurses working in neonatal wards and neonatal intensive care unit in Children Hospital, Alzahra Hospital, Taleghani Hospital and 29 Bahman Hospital in Tabriz, Iran. Using random sampling method, 150 nurses were selected from neonatal wards. Data collection was performed using Spritzer's Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire as well as Gambrier and Ricci's Assertiveness Questionnaire.

Results: Results showed a significantly positive relationship between assertiveness and psychological empowerment with the correlation value of 0.368; meaning that, the more the psychological empowerment of the nurses, the higher the level of their assertiveness, and vice versa.

Conclusion: Increasing the efficiency of organizations requires improving the efficiency and empowerment of human resources. Meanwhile, increasing the efficiency of human resources entails education and development of knowledge and skills as well as creating desirable behaviors in order for successful working.

Key words: Psychological empowerment, assertiveness, nurses

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı hemşirelerde ki psikolojik güçlendirme ve atılganlık yeteneği arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemektir.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Bu çalışma, kesitsel bir çalışmadır ve istatistiksel popülasyon, İran Tebriz'de ki Çocuk Hastanesi, Alzahra Hastanesi, Taleghani Hastanesi ve 29 Bahman Hastanesi'nin yenidoğan servislerinde ve yenidoğan yoğun bakım ünitesinde çalışan tüm hemşireleri kapsar. Rastgele örnekleme yöntemiyle neonatal koşullardan 150 hemşire seçildi. Verilerin toplanması, Spritzer'in Psikolojik Güçlendirme Anketi ile Gambrier ve Ricci'nin Atılganlık Anketi kullanılarak gerçekleştirildi.

Bulgular: Sonuçlar, atılganlık ile psikolojik güçlendirme arasında 0.368 korelasyon değerinde anlamlı düzeyde pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu gösterdi; yani, hemşirelerin psikolojik güçlenmesi ne kadar artarsa, onların iddialı olma düzeyi de o kadar yüksek olur ve bunun tersi de geçerlidir.

Sonuç: Kuruluşların verimliliğinin artırılması, insan kaynaklarının verimliliğini ve güçlendirilmesini arttırmayı gerektirir. Bu arada, insan kaynaklarının verimliliğinin artırılması, başarılı bir çalışma için bilgi ve becerilerin geliştirilmesi ve arzu edilen davranışların yaratılmasının yanı sıra eğitim ve gelişim gerektirir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Psikolojik güçlendirme, atılganlık, hemşireler

INTRODUCTION

Nurses are at the forefront of treatment and communication with patients and their families, and

play a major role in maintaining and promoting health, preventing diseases and relieving patients' pains¹. Results of several studies have indicated that, due to the nature of their job, nurses are exposed to

Yazışma Adresi/Address for Correspondence: Dr. Masoumeh Zakernik, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Research Committee of Faculty of Nursing, Tabriz, Iran. E-mail: masoumehzakernik@gmail.com
Geliş tarihi/Received: 13.10.2017 Kabul tarihi/Accepted: 03.02.2018

the hazards of unhealthy lifestyle including stress, unhealthy sleep pattern and exposure to infectious diseases. If the health promotion plan is not prioritized in terms of executive commitment, they will probably be afflicted by the diseases resulted from unhealthy lifestyle². Since, in the current competitive environment, human resources determine the survival of an organization and are a key factor for achieving high organizational performance³, the demand for high-quality services has led organizations to empower their staff in order to get adapted to new management practices. In general, empowerment means giving “power” to employees⁴.

The concept of psychological empowerment was first introduced in the 1980s. Empowerment is a continuous performance, which approximates staff's performance to the normal level besides empowering them and giving them the freedom of action⁵. Empowerment means converting physical labor force into intellectual force so that if it is properly understood and implemented, it will lead to the best use of the provided intellectual resources⁶. Spritzer has called the mental state of empowerment experience the psychological empowerment, for which he has assumed four components including sense, competence, autonomy and influence⁷. Different pieces of evidence have indicated that empowered employees are more productive, happier and more innovative, providing the products and services with higher quality than the non-empowered staff. The presence of an empowered workforce would help organizations be more efficient⁸. Psychological empowerment results in important behavioral outcomes; for example, psychological empowerment can increase the staff's self-esteem and adaptability^{9,10}. A review of the literature on the application of psychological empowerment in the field of health care revealed the relationship of this variable with quality of patient care among nurses and doctors¹¹. A research, entitled “Psychological empowerment of nurses and perceived independence”, was conducted in hospitals and clinics in Egypt, the results of which indicated a statistically significant relationship between psychological empowerment and perceived independence of the nurses. Besides, there was a significant correlation between the independence levels and working place of the nurses¹². Moreover, Azarali conducted a study on the role of psychological empowerment of the leaders in the staff's creativity and concluded that the leaders

could affect creativity of employees through empowerment. Also, the leaders' empowerment behaviors had a strong effect on the creativity of the staff with poor mental and psychological status¹³.

On the other hand, researchers believe that working environments and individuals' assessment about them are the major factors affecting the nurses' sense of empowerment, and the method selected for communicating with others is an important factor in social interactions. One of the major factors in healthy interpersonal relationships is assertiveness. Cajender et al. expressed that assertiveness ability is an important action for nursing students to achieve the competencies required in nursing education¹⁴. Since the mid-1970s, the subject of assertiveness in nursing has been highly regarded¹⁵. Assertiveness means that individuals communicate with others in a disciplined framework based on their particular goals, a communication that is based on trust, creativity, dutifulness and maintenance of professional characteristics¹⁶. The dynamic and variable conditions dominating nurses' working environment along with the uncertain and variable status of patients require them to be efficient decision makers who can make accurate and appropriate clinical judgments on the patients' health status by incorporating their own technical skills and professional knowledge. Meanwhile, they should be able to recognize and solve the patients' problems while working in a multidisciplinary team. Among various factors, nurses' ability to make clinical decisions is the one with maximum effect on the quality of care¹⁷.

In a research, entitled “Investigating role of leadership behaviors as a predictor of assertiveness levels”, Sari et al. found a significantly positive correlation between the subscale of leadership behaviors and assertiveness¹⁸. Furthermore, in another study, Warlend et al. investigated assertiveness training among midwifery students, the results of which indicated general improvement in the assertiveness scores after assertiveness training¹⁹.

Since nurses are the largest human resource in most of the health and medical organizations, play a major role in the quality of services and take a major part of responsibility for taking care of patients, it is of special importance to search for the variables affecting their empowerment and assertiveness skill. Today, the only sustainable competitive advantage of any organization (including medical centers) is its personnel and their role in the success of

organizations, which can be achieved through psychological empowerment and assertiveness skill of the employees. Since lack of assertiveness ability and adjudication has caused irreparable damage to the nursing profession and nurses have not great freedom for decision-making and expressing their opinions, they have to work for many hours and execute strict regulations, while they cannot spend a large amount of time to meet their personal needs²⁰. With assertiveness ability, patients' rights can be supported through appropriate communication without damaging professional relationships²¹; besides, with the help of such an ability, many of the confusions in nursing profession can be resolved successfully²².

On the other hand, results of some studies conducted in Iranian hospitals have shown that the psychological empowerment status is not at a good level in autonomy, influence and assertiveness components²³, and only few studies have been conducted so far to overcome this problem. Therefore, the present study was aimed to recognize the psychological empowerment status of the nurses in psychological aspects as well as its relationship with assertiveness skill in neonatal wards of the hospitals in Tabriz.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Statistical population of the present study included all the nurses working in neonatal wards and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) of Al-Zahra Children's Hospital and 29 Bahman Hospital, Tabriz. All the 150 nurses of the neonatal wards, who had the inclusion criteria, were included in the study through census method. In the present descriptive-correlational research, the required data were collected through field data collection method so that the researcher initiated the project after obtaining the permission from Vice Chancellor for Research and Technology, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, and providing a presentation letter from Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, to the head of the studied educational and medical centers and obtaining their agreement. Then, after coordination with the nursing office of the given hospitals and performing the sampling through census, the nurses having the inclusion criteria were selected. After referring to the samples during the working shift, explaining the research objectives and obtaining the

informed consent, they were asked to complete the questionnaires accurately.

Research tools

Data collection was performed using three questionnaires, including Modified Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire²⁴, Assertiveness Questionnaire²⁵ and Demographic Characteristics and Sociological Information of Nurses, which were returned on the next shift.

Modified Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire²⁴

This scale contained 20 questions and measured sense of empowerment in 5 aspects of significance (4 questions), competence (4 questions), autonomy (4 questions), influence (4 questions) and trust (4 questions), which were scored based on the 5-point Likert scale. Accordingly, the statements Totally Disagree, Disagree, Partly, Agree and Totally Agree were scored by 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 points, so that the total score ranged from 20 to 100. Reliability of the psychological empowerment questionnaire was estimated as 91% using Cronbach's alpha method²⁶; besides, validity of the Spritzer's questionnaire was assessed using a survey among 10 professors of psychology and nursing. Cronbach's alpha obtained in this study was 83%.

The Nurses' Assertiveness Questionnaire²⁵

This questionnaire included the components of protest, decision-making, denial, opposition, approval, situation control and expression of feelings. This questionnaire included 40 questions, each of which indicated a situation, so that the respondent should specify the possibility of performing such behaviors using the statements of Always (5 scores), Often (4 scores), Usually (3 scores), Sometimes (2 scores) and Never (1 score). On this basis, the total score of the questionnaire would range between 40 and 200.

Reliability of the questionnaire was estimated as 0.82% using retest method in²⁵, while it was estimated equal to 0.85% using Cronbach's alpha method in Piri's research²⁷. Furthermore, validity of Gambrier and Ricci's Questionnaire was assessed through a survey among 10 professors of psychology and nursing. Cronbach's alpha obtained in this study was 87%. Nurses' demographic characteristics questionnaire contained the

information including age, marital status, gender and working background.

Statistical analysis

Using the Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) model, the association between the status of nurses' expressing skills and some of their demographic characteristics was investigated based on the adjusting of confounding variables and examined at a significant level of 0.05.

RESULTS

Based on the obtained results, the mean age of the studied nurses was $33.12 \pm$ years old with the standard deviation of 5.91 so that the youngest and oldest ones were 23 and 5 years old, respectively. As for the educational level, 84% of the nurses had Bachelor's degree and most of them (71.2%) were married. In total, 58.4% of the nurses had children and 35.2% had no children (Table-1).

Table-1. Quantitative descriptive data

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age (year)	33.21	5.91	23	50
History of working (month)	103.00	72.29	2	336
History of working in NICU (month)	68.57	58.69	0	264

Table-2: Qualitative descriptive data

Variables	Categories of Variables	Frequency	Present (%)
Educational level	Associate degree	2	1.7
	Bachelor's degree	105	89.7
	Master's degree and PhD	10	8.5
Marital Status	Single	28	23.9
	Married	89	76.1
Children	Yes	73	62.4
	No	44	37.6
Field of Study	Nursing	95	81.2
	NICU	12	10.3
	Others	10	8.5
Employment Status	Official	40	34.2
	Contractual	47	40.2
	Formal	4	3.4
	Corporative	12	10.3
Hospital	Children Hospital	22	18.8
	Taleghani Hospital	27	23.1
	Alzahra Hospital	44	37.6
	29 Bahman Hospital	24	20.5
Ward	NICU	53	45.3
	Neonatal	64	54.7

In terms of the field of study, 81.2% of the participants were majoring nursing, 10.3% NICU and 8.5% other fields. Furthermore, the employment status of 34.2% was official, 40.2% contractual, 3.4% formal and 10.3% corporative. Besides, 45.3% were working in NICU and 54.7% in neonatal wards (Table-2). The mean assertiveness score of the nurses was 128.76 ± 18.63 and the

mean score of psychological empowerment of the nurses in the present study was 77.75 ± 9.79 . The highest mean score was related to the component of significance with the mean of 17.07 and standard deviation of 20.2, while the lowest mean score was related to the component of trust with mean of 13.26 and standard deviation of 3.17 (Table-3).

Table-3. Descriptive data of psychological empowerment and assertiveness

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Significance	17.07	2.20	10	20
Competence	16.83	2.22	10	20
Autonomy	15.53	2.56	9	20
Influence	14.53	2.44	8	20
Trust	13.26	3.17	4	20
Psychological Empowerment	77.25	9.79	54	100
Assertiveness	128.76	18.63	75	188

The variables of psychological empowerment, assertiveness, autonomy and trust did not follow a normal distribution; thus, the relationship between these variables was investigated using Spearman's

rank correlation coefficient. Furthermore, for other variables (significance, competence and influence), which followed a normal distribution, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed (Table-4).

Table 4. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to evaluate normality of data distribution

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	P-Value
Psychological Empowerment	0.500	0.964
Assertiveness	0.613	0.847
Significance	1.467	0.028
Competence	1.367	0.048
Autonomy	1.004	0.265
Influence	1.412	0.037
Trust	1.147	0.144

Regarding the value of r (correlation) at $\alpha=0.05$, there was a significantly positive relationship between assertiveness and psychological empowerment with the correlation of 0.336. Accordingly, the more the psychological empowerment, the higher the level of assertiveness

would be, and vice versa. Furthermore, all of the psychological empowerment components had a significantly positive relationship with assertiveness so that the highest correlation was related to the component of significance with the correlation of 0.366 (Table-5).

Table 5. The association between psychological empowerment and assertiveness

Benchmark Variable	Predictor Variables	Pearson's Correlation (r)	P-Value
Assertiveness	Significance	0.366	0.000
	Competence	0.301	0.001
	Influence	0.191	0.039
	Predictive Variables	Pearson's Correlation (r)	Significance Level
	Autonomy	0.303	0.001
	Trust	0.255	0.055
	Psychological Empowerment	0.368	0.000

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted in order to determine the relationship between psychological empowerment and assertiveness among nurses. The obtained results indicated that all the aspects of

psychological empowerment were positively and significantly related to assertiveness. In this work, the score of significance aspect was higher than other aspects of empowerment; besides, the highest level of correlation was related to the significance component, which depends on the value of a job or

duty in relation to ideas, beliefs and personal standards. Accordingly, the more consistent a duty with the individual's value system, the stronger the belief in performing that duty would be.

Studies on the component of significance of a job have revealed that when working in a favorable job, individuals are more committed and engaged in that job than the case with less inner interest. Moreover, the feeling of significance of the job makes individuals concentrate more force on it and exhibit more perseverance in following up their goals. Since a significant job is associated with individuals' sense of personal importance and self-worthiness, they would have more eagerness and enthusiasm towards their job. Also, those individuals who have been empowered by feeling of significant job are innovative, more influential, more efficient and at higher positions than those with lower level of job significance²⁸.

Results of the present study indicated a significantly positive relationship between psychological empowerment and assertiveness. In other words, giving authority and responsibility to the staff for making decisions in all the aspects is positively and significantly associated with their ability of explicit and direct self-assertiveness as well as respect to their own feelings and thoughts and understating their own strengths and weaknesses. These results are consistent with those of^{11,12,13,18,19,29,30}.

In explaining these results, working environments and individuals' evaluation thereof are the powerful factor affecting sense of empowerment and the method chosen for communicating with others is a major factor in social interactions. Poor communication might result in unhealthy relationships and increase mental pressure. By creating sense of trust and providing an open space for the staff, empowerment can provide the staff with an opportunity to improve their abilities and skills, and facilitate their effectiveness; furthermore, by nurturing motivated and capable staff, empowerment would provide the managers with an opportunity to exhibit the appropriate reaction to the dynamism of the competitive environment³¹.

The increased efficiency of organizations entails increasing the efficiency and empowerment of human resources. Besides, the increased efficiency of human resources requires training and developing the knowledge and skills as well as creating desirable behaviors for successful working.

Results of the present study indicated a significant relationship between all the aspects of psychological empowerment and assertiveness. In this research, score of the significance aspect was higher than that of other aspects of empowerment. Furthermore, the highest level of correlation was related to the significance component. Therefore, regarding the consistent results of the present study and other works in hospital environments, the assertiveness ability can be improved among nurses by paying attention to their competency and providing positive working conditions for giving value to the nursing profession. The present research had some limitations, including individual, social, cultural, etc. differences of the studied nurses, which could not be controlled by the researcher and psychological and mental status as well as family problems of the studied nurses, which were out of the control of the researcher.

According to the results of the present study, it is recommended to conduct a study at the level of medical universities across the country in order to compare and identify the level of the nurses' perception of empowerment and assertiveness as well as the factors affecting them.

REFERENCES

1. Aghdam A, Hasankhani H, Zamanzade V, Khamene S, Moghaam S. Code of ethics for nurses in the nursing of patients Care Research Center University of Medical Sciences. *Journal of Nursing*. 2010;26:1-11.
2. Cleary M, Walter G. Towards a healthier lifestyle for staff of a psychiatric hospital: description of a pilot program. *Int J Ment Health Nurs*. 2005;14:32-6.
3. Kebriaci A, Rakhshaninejad M, Afshari Z, Mohseni M. Psychological empowerment in hospital administrative staff predicts their organizational commitment. *International Journal of Hospital Research*. 2013;2:171-6.
4. Jalali Javaran M. The results of staff empowerment in our organization. *Management Era*. 2010;125:14.
5. Littrell RF. Influences on employee preferences for empowerment practices by the "ideal manager" in China. *Int J Intercult Relat*. 2007;31:87-110.
6. Lim H. An empirical study on the effects of employment relations characteristics on organizational commitment with respect to employment status in K Broadcasting's employees. *Journal of Korean Association of Human Resource Development*. 2007;9:97-122
7. Rogelberg S. *Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2007.

8. Whetten, DA, Woods, M. *Effective Empowerment and Delegation (Developing Management Skills)* New York, Pearson Higher Education, 1997.
9. Nasiripour AA, Nave Ebrahim A, Tabibi SJ, Ebrazee A, Izadi A. Study of psychological empowerment in hospitals of Qom Province, Iran. *Qom University of Medical Sciences Journal*. 2013;7:56-62.
10. Khateri N, Sabbaghiyan Z, Arefi M, Azarghashb E, Izadi A. Investigating the visions of administrators and employees in Shaheed Beheshti Medical University towards the rate of the employees' possessing the components of empowerment. *Pajoohandeh Journal*. 2007;12:161-7.
11. Fathi G, Javanak M, Taheri M, Shohoudi M. Modeling the relations of ethical leadership and clinical governance with psychological empowerment in nurses. *Journal of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences*. 2014;18:204-12.
12. Ibrahim MM, El-Magd MHA, Sayed HY. Nurse's psychological empowerment and perceived autonomy in university and teaching hospitals at Menofia Governorate, Egypt. *J Nurs Educ Pract*. 2014;4:59-68.
13. Özarallia, N. Linking empowering leader to creativity: the moderating role of psychological (felt) empowerment. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2015;181:366-76.
14. Kajander US, Salminen L, Saarikoski M, Suhonen R, Leino-Kilpi H. Competence areas of nursing students in Europe. *Nurse Educ Today*. 2013;33:525-632.
15. Kilkus S. Adding assertiveness to the nursing profession. *Nurs Success Today*. 1986;3:17-20.
16. Stanhope, M, Lancaster, J. *Community Health Nursing*, 5th ed. St. Louis, Mosby, 1998.
17. White AH. Clinical decision making among fourth-year nursing students: an interpretive study. *J Nurs Educ*. 2003;42:113-20.
18. San İ, Gülle M. The role of perceived leadership behaviors as predictor of assertiveness levels in individual sport athletes. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2014;152:446-50.
19. Warland J, McKellar L, Diaz M. Assertiveness training for undergraduate midwifery students. *Nurse Educ Pract*. 2014;14:752-6.
20. Moghimian M, Amini R. Comparison of the effect of gestalt therapy and Ellis cognitive-behavioral therapy on assertiveness of nursing students. *Iran Journal of Nursing*. 2014;27(89):1-11.
21. Gaddis S. Assertive pushback for nurses. *Iowa Nurse Reporter*. 2007;20:17-9.
22. Deltsidou A. Undergraduate nursing students' level of assertiveness in Greece: A questionnaire survey. *Nurse Educ Pract*. 2009;9:322-30.
23. Aghaie BP, Yazdi FV, Rasuli ME. Relationships between organizational climate and organizational silence with psychological empowerment of employees in hospitals affiliated with Birjand University of Medical Sciences, 2015. *Journal of Birjand University of Medical Sciences*. 2016;22:274-285.
24. Spreitzer MG. Psychological empowerment in the workplace: dimensions measurement and validation. *Acad Manage J*. 1995;38:1442-65.
25. Gambrill ED, Richey CA. An assertion inventory for use in assessment and research. *Behav Ther*. 1975;6:550-61.
26. Nori A. Investigate the relationship between information technology and the empowerment of hospital nurses (Master's thesis). Zahedan, Iran, Zahedan University, 2013.
27. Piri L. The relationship between identity styles and life skills (expression ability and coping with stress) in pre-university students in Tehran (Master's thesis). Tehran, Tehran Tarbiat Moalm University, 2004.
28. Yazdani U. *Attitude and Empowerment*. Tehran, Business Studies, 2002.
29. Lana M, Ying Chongb W. The mediating role of psychological empowerment between transformational leadership and employee work attitudes. *Global Conference on Business & Social Science-2014, GCBSS-2014, 15th & 16th December*.
30. Eskandari F, Pazargadi M, Zaghari Tafreshi M, Siahkali SH, Shoghli AR. Relationship between psychological empowerment with affective commitment among nurses in Zanjan, 2010. *Preventive Care in Nursing and Midwifery Journal*. 2014;3:47-60.
31. Nazari MA. The role of advertising in changing students' attitudes toward addiction District 16 of Tehran (Master's thesis). Evin, Iran, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences., 2009.