Relationships between Job Dissatisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion among Nurses: Personality as a Moderator[*]

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This study examined whether two personality traits, agreeableness and neuroticism, would moderate the relationship between job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Self-report data of these variables was collected in two waves, one month apart, in a sample of 102 nurses. Two types of facets, intrinsic and extrinsic, were used for job dissatisfaction, and both had a weaker relationship with emotional exhaustion for nurses who were higher rather than lower on agreeableness. Extrinsic job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion were more strongly related for nurses who were higher rather than lower on neuroticism. The results indicate that effects of job dissatisfaction on emotional exhaustion can be contingent upon personality traits. Agreeableness may be a resource, but neuroticism may be an obstacle in dealing with dissatisfaction with job facets.

Key words : job dissatisfaction, burnout, agreeableness, neuroticism, moderation

Job burnout and job dissatisfaction are both psychological responses to one's job that have adverse consequences for organizations and their employees. Meta-analytic research has concluded that job (dis)satisfaction and burnout are distinct yet related constructs (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). It is unclear, however, under what conditions they are more and less strongly related. Meta-analyses have established direct relations between personality traits and both job dissatisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002) and burnout (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010), but personality is often posited as a moderator variable in research on organizational behavior and work-related stress. In fact, Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munez, and Carassca-Ortiz (2005) called for research examining whether personality interacts with other variables to predict burnout. We rely on cognitive appraisal theories of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to propose that the relationship between burnout and dissatisfaction varies because of the personality of the individual employee. The present study tests if personality moderates the relationship between job dissatisfaction and burnout in a sample of nurses. We use two facets of job dissatisfaction, intrinsic and extrinsic, and one core facet of burnout, emotional exhaustion. Dissatisfaction with job facets may not develop into emotional exhaustion if the job incumbents have resourceful personalities. We examine personality in relation to the development of emotional exhaustion

based on principles derived from the concept of secondary appraisal (Lazarus, 1991).

Burnout among Nurses

Burnout is a serious negative emotional response to chronic job stressors (Maslach, 2003) and is thought to be especially prominent in human services professions such as nurses (Halbesleben, 2010; Leliter, Gascón, & Martinez-Jarreta, 2010; Park, Nam & Yang, 2011; Shirom, 2002). Although burnout is not exclusive to people-oriented professions (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), as a concept, it originated from the examination of chronic stressors associated with interpersonal interactions in the helping professions (Maslach, 1998). When client service is important, clients' needs are often considered first, which can be stressful for the service-provider (Maslach, 1998). Nurses work with individuals suffering from illness and injury and interact with their families and friends (Kim, Park, & Seo, 2019). Therefore, they may deal with even more stressful situations than other human service professionals who work primarily with healthy people. Regarding problems with their health, patients and their friends and families can be very demanding and impatient. Providing them with good service can result in burnout of the provider, however.

Facets of burnout have been differently conceptualized among researchers (e.g., Demerouti

et al., 2001; Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988; Maslach, 1982). Nevertheless, emotional exhaustion is considered as its core element (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988; Maslach, 1982). Burnout, especially its core factor of emotional exhaustion, can be a major indicator of job stress.

Job Facets and Primary Appraisal

The sociocognitive or transactional model of stress (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) has had a major influence on occupational stress conceptualization and research (Griffin & Clarke, 2010). According to this model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, Lazarus, 1991), perception of unfavorable work situations is a prerequisite for developing strain, a negative emotional, behavioral, or physical reaction to stressors (Griffin & Clarke, 2010). That is, a negative appraisal of work situations can lead to the development of stress reactions.

Primary appraisal in the workplace includes evaluation of job facets, and job dissatisfaction also results from the appraisal of one's job (Lock, 1976); we therefore expect facet dissatisfaction to act as a form of primary appraisal. With regard to facets of job dissatisfaction, the appraisal is closely related with specific job characteristics such as task itself, interpersonal relationships, or other conditions. Intrinsic job dissatisfaction is the appraisal of the nature of the work or doing

the job's tasks (Beehr, 1996). Extrinsic job dissatisfaction is the evaluation of external factors (i.e., factors in the workplace that are not specifically part of doing the job itself) including coworkers, supervisor, pay, and promotion opportunity (Beehr, 1996). Both intrinsic and extrinsic dissatisfaction are composed in part of cognitive evaluations or appraisals; therefore, the present study uses facets of job dissatisfaction as measures primary appraisal. We examine dissatisfaction, because it is directly and positively related to emotional exhaustion, one type of strain.

Hypothesis 1: Intrinsic (H1a) and extrinsic (H1b) job dissatisfaction will be positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Personality and Secondary Appraisal

Transactional theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) argues that the appraisal of a negative situation can result in strain, but even when a situation is perceived to be negative (primary appraisal), it can be mitigated if there are appropriate resources to cope with it. Secondary appraisal plays a role here (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The job holder's secondary appraisal of the situation is an assessment of coping resources. After perceiving negative situations, employees evaluate coping tools they have. If they are deemed capable to handle the situation, harmful stress outcomes do not develop. On the

other hand, if employees conclude that they lack necessary resources to handle the situation, they develop strain.

As such, dissatisfaction with job facets may not lead to burnout if the individuals possess some resources to handle the situation. According to Hobfoll (1989), resources can be anything that is useful to the individual, including stress-resistant personality traits, and we therefore expect personality to act as a form of resource related to secondary appraisal.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is a trait in the Five Factor model of personality (Goldberg, 1990), and it consists of altruism, warmth, kindness, generosity, trust, cooperation, tolerance, amiability, altruism, and flexibility (Goldberg, 1990, 1992). Agreeable people tend to emphasize harmony over conflict and act positively to others. This tendency may drive positive reactions from the others with whom they interact in the workplace. Because of their flexibility and tolerance, agreeable people may make the secondary appraisal that they can resist the potential effects of stressful situations and handle the situations effectively.

Thus, agreeableness may be a good personal resource for coping with a stressful situation among nurses. If nurses are amiable, they may not develop negative emotions when they are dissatisfied with their pay or promotions, for example. When they have disagreements with their supervisors, coworkers, or patients, they will try to solve the conflict in a peaceful way. Even when they cannot solve the problem, they can simply tolerate the interpersonal situation better than others (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Due to this resourceful feature of the trait, it will prevent employees from developing stress reactions such as burnout even if they recognize unpleasant facets of their jobs in the form of job dissatisfaction. Bowling, Burns, Stewart, and Gruys (2011) showed a similar example in which agreeableness reduced the relationship between neuroticism and counterproductive work behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness will moderate the relationship between job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion in that it weakens the positive relationship of intrinsic (H2a) and extrinsic (H2b) dissatisfaction with emotional exhaustion.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism, another personality characteristic in the Five Factor model, is described as being emotional, insecure, unstable, anxious, and immature (Goldberg, 1990, 1992). Neurotic people will act and react based on their temporary emotion, which may cause a vicious cycle. When they encounter an unpleasant situation, they may comment more harshly than necessary, increasing the possibility of receiving another negative reaction. Because of this nature, neurotic employees may experience negative

feelings such as emotional exhaustion regardless of their external situation (Shirom, 2002).

Not only do neurotic people experience more emotional strain, they can also evaluate the same situation more negatively than their counterparts. Neurotic nurses can evaluate situations worse than they really are, leading to a negative secondary appraisal (Tong, 2010). That is, even if the situation is the same, they may think their situation is worse than others would. Therefore, the neurotic nurses may display a stronger negative relationship between job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion than others.

Hypothesis 3: Neuroticism will moderate the relationship between job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion in that it strengthens the positive relationship of intrinsic (H3a) and extrinsic (H3b) dissatisfaction with emotional exhaustion.

Overall, in occupational stress situations, job dissatisfaction has an evaluative component that acts similarly to primary appraisal of the work situation in sociocognitive or transactional models of stress (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This can make job dissatisfaction be positively related to strains such as emotional exhaustion. Personality, on the other hand, can act similarly to secondary appraisal, and therefore it can moderate the relationship between a stressful job appraisal and

strains.

Method

Participants and Procedures

In order to examine the relationships between dissatisfaction and burnout, a longitudinal study was designed with data collection at two different times, one month apart. Data were collected from registered nurses in Alaska, using a mailing list retrieved through the official Alaskan government website. Among 9768 registered nurses on the list, 807 randomly selected U.S. nurses were mailed the first questionnaire. Twenty-five were returned because the addresses were not correct. Five people returned the questionnaires stating that they were either retired or not working anymore. In the first survey, we asked nurses to create their own personal identification code so that we could match their data from one survey with the other. We also asked for their email address. To those who had provided their email addresses, we sent the survey online in Time 2.

Overall, 102 nurses completed both questionnaires (13.13％); however the actual response rate of eligible people was probably slightly higher than that, considering that there were an unknown total number of people who did not respond because they were retired, had left nursing, or did not receive the first

questionnaire. The majority of the nurses were female (86.3％) and Caucasian (90.2％), and about 64.7% were between 46 and 65 years old.

Measures

Table 1 contains means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations for the study variables in each time period. Internal consistency reliabilities were all judged to be adequate for research purposes (α = .70 to .93). Also, test-retest reliabilities indicated an adequate level of stability over time (r_{t1t2} = .66 to .85).

Job Dissatisfaction

Job dissatisfaction was measured using 25 items that Beehr et al. (2006) developed for their study. Facets included one intrinsic facet (work itself) and four extrinsic facet dissatisfactions (supervisor, coworkers, promotion opportunities, and pay) that were averaged to form a single extrinsic dissatisfaction measure. Each facet was measured by five items, three positively worded items and two negatively worded items. An example item is "Overall, I am very satisfied with the things I do at work (work itself; reverse-coded to be dissatisfaction)," and "All in all, I would rather have some other kind of duties in my work (work itself)." Positively worded items were reverse-coded so that higher scores would indicate higher dissatisfaction. The original developers used five

facets separately, and the internal consistencies were .93 for supervisor, .93 for coworkes, .92 for pay, .93 for promotions, and .83 for the work itself (Beehr et al., 2006).

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was measured using nine items from the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Sample items include "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel burned out from my work." These items were rated on a frequency dimension. Maslach and Jackson (1981) reported the alpha value of .89 for this particular subscale.

Personality

Agreeableness and neuroticism were each rated by ten items from the *International Personality Item Pool* (Goldberg et al., 2006). Each scale consists of five positively worded items and five negatively worded items answered on a five-point scale. Sample items for agreeableness include "I accept people as they are," and "I have a sharp tongue (reverse-coded)." Sample items for neuroticism include "I dislike myself," and "I rarely get irritated (reverse-coded)." The reported internal consistencies in the website were .77 for agreeableness and .86 for neuroticism (Goldberg et al., 2006).

Analyses

We analyzed data using SPSS software.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations of Study Variables

	Range	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. T1 AGR	1.00 – 5.00	4.12	0.36	.70									
2. T1 NEU	1.00 – 5.00	2.14	0.63	.87	-.37**								
3. T1 IJD	1.00 – 7.00	2.93	1.25	.88	-.25*	.40**							
4. T1 EJD	1.00 – 7.00	3.27	0.88	.87	-.45**	.36**	.50**						
5. T1 EE	1.00 – 6.00	2.35	0.98	.92	-.23*	.63**	.65**	.47**					
6. T2 AGR	1.00 – 5.00	4.04	0.38	.70	.66**	-.36**	-.17	-.38**	-.25*				
7. T2 NEU	1.00 – 5.00	2.23	0.57	.82	-.24*	.75**	.25*	.25*	.52**	-.38**			
8. T2 IJD	1.00 – 7.00	2.90	1.18	.87	-.28**	.46**	.68**	.54**	.64**	-.26**	.38**		
9. T2 EJD	1.00 – 7.00	3.33	0.88	.86	-.39**	.28**	.25**	.77**	.30**	-.33**	.19	.47**	
10. T2 EE	1.00 – 6.00	2.30	0.94	.93	-.23*	.58**	.54**	.44**	.85**	-.31**	.54**	.70**	.41**

Note. N = 102; * p < .05, ** p < .01; AGR = agreeableness; NEU = neuroticism; IJD = intrinsic job dissatisfaction; EJD = extrinsic job dissatisfaction; EE = emotional exhaustion.

Correlations were used to test Hypothesis 1. Moderated regressions were used for testing Hypotheses 2 and 3. All the variables were mean-centered. In the first step, Time 1 personality and Time 1 job dissatisfaction were entered into the model, and in the second step, their interaction term was entered. The criterion was emotional exhaustion measured at Time 2. Significant interaction effects were plotted using the method of Aiken and West (1991).

Results

Intrinsic job dissatisfaction at Time 1 was significantly related with emotional exhaustion at Time 2, $r = .54$, $p < .01$. Thus, H1a was supported. Extrinsic job dissatisfaction at Time 1 was also significantly related to emotional exhaustion at Time 2, $r = .44$, $p < .01$. Therefore, H1b was supported as well.

H2a and H2b were supported, because significant interaction effects for agreeableness and both facets of job dissatisfactions predicting emotional exhaustion were found (explaining 7.0% and 5.0% additional variance, Table 2). Intrinsic and extrinsic dissatisfactions were both less strongly related to emotional exhaustion for nurses who were higher rather than lower on agreeableness (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 1,

Table 2. Interaction between Time 1 Personality and Facet Job Dissatisfactions Predicting Time 2 Emotional Exhaustion

Criterion	Step	Predictors	R^2	$\triangle R^2$	β
Time 2 Emotional Exhaustion	1	Time 1 Agreeableness	.30**		-.15
		Time 1 Intrinsic Job Dissatisfaction			.49**
	2	Agreeableness × Intrinsic Job Dissatisfaction	.37**	.07**	-.27**
Time 2 Emotional Exhaustion	1	Time 1 Agreeableness	.19**		.01
		Time 1 Extrinsic Job Dissatisfaction			.49**
	2	Agreeableness × Extrinsic Job Dissatisfaction	.24**	.05*	-.23*
Time 2 Emotional Exhaustion	1	Time 1 Neuroticism	.45**		.43**
		Time 1 Intrinsic Job Dissatisfaction			.34**
	2	Neuroticism × Intrinsic Job Dissatisfaction	.46**	.01	.10
Time 2 Emotional Exhaustion	1	Time 1 Neuroticism	.39**		.46**
		Time 1 Extrinsic Job Dissatisfaction			.28**
	2	Neuroticism × Extrinsic Job Dissatisfaction	.42**	.03*	.17*

Note. $N = 102$; *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$; β = Standardized regression coefficient in the full mode
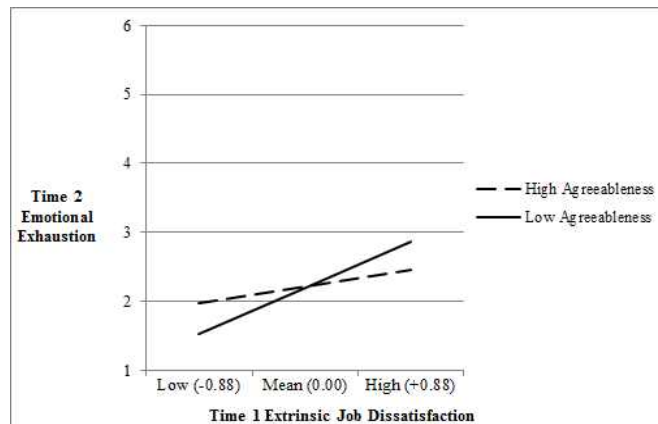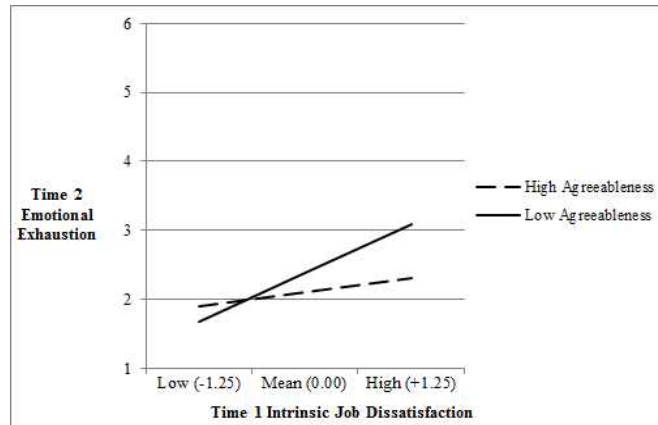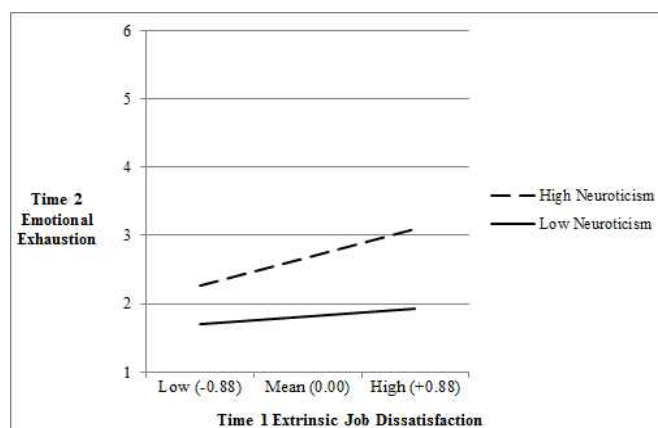
Figure 1. Moderating Effects of Agreeableness

Figure 2. Moderating Effects of Neuroticism

for nurses who had high levels of agreeableness there was a weak relationship between job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion, while nurses who had low levels of agreeableness displayed a strong positive relationship between job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion.

Neuroticism did not interact with intrinsic job satisfaction. Thus, H3a was not supported. However, neuroticism did significantly interact with extrinsic job dissatisfaction to predict emotional exhaustion. The interaction between neuroticism and extrinsic job dissatisfaction accounted for an additional 3% of variance, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p < .05$, beyond the main effects in emotional exhaustion.

Extrinsic job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion had a stronger positive relationship among nurses with high neuroticism than low neuroticism (Figure 2). To sum, H3b was supported.

Discussion

The purposes of this study were (1) to examine the relationship between two facets of job dissatisfaction, taken as indicators of primary appraisal, and the core facet of job burnout, emotional exhaustion among nurses and (2) to examine the moderating effects of personality, taken as indicators of personal resources or secondary appraisal, on these relationships.

The results showed that both intrinsic and extrinsic job dissatisfactions at one point in time predicted subsequent emotional exhaustion. We interpret dissatisfaction with job facets as primary appraisals of the characteristics of the workplace, and consistent with that interpretation, they are antecedents of stress reactions (emotional exhaustion). According to transactional theory of stress, when the work situations were not appraised negatively, stress reactions are less likely to occur (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Nurses high in agreeableness or low in neuroticism were not aversively influenced very much by their perception of intrinsic or extrinsic job dissatisfaction. That is, compared to nurses low in agreeableness or high in neuroticism, they had less emotional exhaustion following aversive primary appraisals. This is consistent with the supposition that high agreeableness and low neuroticism are traits that act as coping or secondary appraisal factors; they are resources that allow employees to believe that they will be able to cope with potentially stressful job conditions. Overall, therefore, the results are consistent with the proposal that dissatisfaction with facets can act as primary appraisal and personality can act as secondary appraisal. Negative primary appraisal of the work situations tend to produce stress reactions like burnout, but stress reactions may not develop if there are abundant resources to deal with the negative situation.

As proposed by Swider and Zimmerman

(2010), the cognitive-affective personality system described by Mischel and Shoda (1995) may help to explain why personality is related to burnout. According to this theory, personality influences how individuals interpret their environment, and these interpretations, in turn, influence their beliefs and behaviors. The current research is consistent with this explanation and extends research evidence supporting it by examining how personality acts as a moderator of the relationship between job dissatisfaction and burnout. Job dissatisfaction represents a relatively consistent evaluation of one's job that is based on cognitive and affective information. Although there is ample evidence of direct relationships between personality and burnout, the current research suggests that agreeableness and neuroticism influence how individuals interpret dissatisfying jobs and subsequently influence how individuals cope with them.

Agreeableness showed stronger evidence as a moderator than neuroticism. This might be because agreeableness is more important resource than emotional stability (opposite to neuroticism) to nurses, because they interact with patients. In other words, agreeableness might be a job-specific moderator for nurses, because it is specifically related to interacting with other people (King, George, & Hebl, 2005).

A practical implication of transactional stress theory is that employees can re-interpret or reappraise a situation to prevent the development of stress reactions such as burnout. One such

application is cognitive reframing. Cognitive reframing, a strategy of cognitive behavioral therapy, might help employees to restructure their situations, reducing strain (Quillian-Wolever & Wolever, 2003). Indeed, a coaching program with a cognitive-behavioral approach was found to be effective (Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009). Similarly, cognitive reframing techniques can be introduced in order to train nurses to reduce their stress reactions through altering primary appraisal (in this case, job dissatisfaction with facets). Changing the perception of a stressor, or primary appraisal, has been a target of occupational stress interventions (Heaney, 2011).

In addition, practitioners can coach employees and executives to strengthen their resilient personality traits in order to better deal with job dissatisfaction so that they may experience lower emotional exhaustion. It may take more time to change one's personality, but it is not impossible. Particularly when changing job is difficult, coaches can consider this option. That is, training employees to have more resilient personality traits is likely to facilitate to handle a stressful situation by enhancing individual coping ability (Cartwright & Cooper, 2005: Heaney, 2011; Liossis, Shochet, Millear, & Biggs, 2009; Waite & Richardson, 2004).

The sample of the present study was restricted to Alaskan nurses. Alaskan nurses might have unique characteristics that are distinguished from nurses in other areas or

people in other jobs. In particular, it was reported during the survey that many Alaskan nurses were traveling nurses who moved their workplace frequently. For example, even if they were not satisfied with their coworkers, they might endure the situation when they knew they would leave the place soon. Accordingly, extrinsic job dissatisfaction might weakly affect burnout in this sample. On the other hand, because of the travel that is characteristic of many Alaskan nurses' jobs, intrinsic job dissatisfaction might be more important to them than to nurses in the other areas. Thus, the results might not generalize well to the other jobs, even other nursing jobs, which is a potential limitation of this study.

Conclusion

This study longitudinally examined transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) in a sample of Alaskan nurses, utilizing facet job dissatisfactions as the primary appraisal and personality traits as the resource for secondary appraisal. It was found that two facets of job dissatisfaction explained emotional exhaustion even after one month. Agreeableness appeared helpful in dealing with job dissatisfaction, whereas neuroticism appeared to be harmful. It was suggested that cognitive restructuring could prevent the development of strain. Future research should expand the sample to include other states and nations to test how well the results generalize. We also expect that this study will encourage further research on the mental health of Korean nurses.

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간호사의 직무불만족과 정서적 소진 간 관계: 성격의 조절효과

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본 연구는 직무불만족과 정서적 소진 사이의 관계를 조절하는 변수로서 우호성과 신경증이라는 두 가지 성격 특성을 검정하였다. 미국 알라스카 주에 등록된 102명의 간호사들을 대상으로 한 달 간격으로 반복측정한 자기보고식 설문자료를 통해 가설을 검증하였고, 직무불만족은 두 가지 측면인 내재적 직무불만족과 외재적 직무불만족으로 측정하였다. 분석 결과, 내재적 직무불만족 및 외재적 직무불만족 모두와 정서적 소진과의 관계를 우호성이 조절하여, 우호성이 높은 간호사의 경우 직무불만족과 정서적 소진 사이의 관계가 약하게 나타났다. 신경증은 외재적 직무불만족과 정서적 소진의 관계만을 조절하여, 신경증이 높은 간호사의 경우 직무불만족과 정서적 소진 사이의 관계가 더 강하게 나타났다. 본 연구의 결과는 정서적 소진에 대한 직무불만족의 효과가 성격 특성에 의해 변할 수 있다는 것을 시사한다. 직무불만족에 대처하는 데 있어, 우호성은 자원으로 작용하고 신경증은 장애물로 작용할 수 있다.

주요어 : 직무불만족, 직무탈진, 우호성, 신경증, 조절효과