

Effects of Personality and Coping Strategies on the Work Motivation of Nurses

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that motivate nurses. Data were collected from 373 nurses employed at 4 general hospitals located in Seoul, Korea. Nine research instruments were used in the formulation of a questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 18.0. The mean score of motivation was 3.49. The major influential background factors for motivation among the hospital nurses were growth needs ($\beta=0.31$, $p<0.001$), auto-suggesting strategies ($\beta=0.20$, $p<0.001$), optimism ($\beta=0.18$, $p<0.001$), problem solving and cognitive restructuring strategies ($\beta=0.11$, $p=0.035$), extroversion ($\beta=0.10$, $p=0.027$), and support-seeking strategies ($\beta=0.09$, $p=0.036$). These factors accounted for 40% of the motivation for nurses. Identifying the major factors would therefore serve as predictors to motivate nurses, and we further discuss how these findings might benefit an employer.

Key words: Coping, Motivation, Nurse, Personality, Work.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, large general hospitals have emphasized efficiency as one of the main parts of their philosophy, and the necessity for reasonable management has become an important topic of conversation in the medical field [1]. As a consequence, various management techniques have been introduced in medical organizations. In particular, human resource management, an essential part of hospital competitiveness, is directly linked with hospitals' revenue and has become an important part of medical management [2]. In addition, hospitals are part of the service industry, just like hotels, airlines, and travel agencies, and as such involve frequent human interaction. Especially in service industries, it is important to understand the behavior of staff members and satisfy their needs, as human interaction commonly takes place between an organization's members and its customers [3]. Meeting the needs of staff members, who are the internal customers of an organization, can affect external customers through the services provided by staff [4]. Thus, understanding the behaviors and motivation of organization members ultimately helps the organization achieve its goal of satisfying external customers [5]. Especially in hospitals, increasing nurses' work motivation, who have the most frequent interactions with customers, becomes one of the most important strategies for the hospital survival [2].

Motivation is a method of tunneling that makes humans set the direction of their behavior in order to pursue a certain goal. This is an important concept, as motivation is regarded as

the source of behavior [6]. Especially in modern society, it is important for organizations to maximize the utilization of their human resources potential. Therefore, promoting motivation is the most important aspect of management, and the function of managers is directly related to motivation. For an organization to achieve its goals, it is essential to secure members with high skill levels. However, it appears to be much more important for an organization to motivate its members to use high quality techniques in order to achieve its goals [7]. Especially in typical service industries such as hotels, airlines, the food service industry, and travel agencies, the personality and coping strategies for emotional regulation of staff are significantly related to the service quality perceived by customers. Therefore, service industries are interested in motivation in relation with the personality of their staff [8]. However, few studies have been conducted with regard to the motivation of nurses in hospitals, where the importance of human resources is emphasized.

As a dynamic and organized characteristic, personality affects a person's cognition, motivation, and behavior in various situations [9]. Mitchell and Daniels [10] reported that personality is an important element in motivating an organization's members. Based on Korean and international studies, the personality factors affecting the motivation of an organization's members have been identified as self-esteem, extroversion, optimism, and growth needs [8], [11], [12]. A previous study on the relationship between the personality of organization members and their motivation [13] showed that self-esteem was an important factor affecting members' motivation. This means that a member with higher self-esteem may be more proactive in all areas, and their goals might be more achievable. Hart [14] reported that organization members with higher extroversion levels had higher job satisfaction and

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motivation levels, suggesting that members' extroversion has a strong, direct, and positive effect on the current environment. A study by Luthans and Jensen [15] with salespersons found that optimism also affected motivation. Luthans and Jensen [15] reported that an optimistic tendency in organization members significantly affected the completion of assignments, suggesting that optimism is related to problem-solving abilities. In a study of hotel employees [16], it was reported that individuals' high levels of growth needs significantly affected motivation, suggesting that growth needs might include the desire of an individual to grow and develop in an organization. However, few studies have been conducted on the relationship between personality and the motivation of nurses. Additionally, most of the previous studies investigating nurses' personality have focused on a specific type of personality using ordinary personality assessment tools [17], [18].

Coping strategies refer to emotional, cognitive, and behavioral regulation strategies that are used by an individual in order to overcome stress [19]. Most service organizations today require their members to display positive emotion [20]. On the other hand, organization members may not always have positive feelings; therefore, they need coping strategies to reduce the tension and stress arising at work [21]. The coping strategies that affect the motivation of members working in service industries include problem solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, avoidance strategies, support-seeking strategies, and auto-suggesting strategies [8], [22]. A previous study on the relationship between coping strategies and motivation [12] demonstrated that members' problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies involved the process of changing their behavior in order to convert negative feelings into positive ones; the stronger those strategies were, the more they impacted job satisfaction and motivation. Studies of nurses [22] and hotel employees [8] showed that avoidance strategies also affected motivation and job satisfaction, with avoidance of negative situations enhancing motivation. Additionally, support-seeking strategies have been shown to enhance individuals' motivation by maintaining self-esteem through communication with those around them. A study of employees working in luxury hotels [8], [23] found that auto-suggesting strategies involved employees trying to understand the position of customers rather than focusing on their own feelings, and was an important factor affecting employees' motivation. Compared to workers in other fields, hospital nurses experience negative feelings of various severity levels due to the stresses they face in their job dealing directly with patients and their caregivers, sometimes leading to burnout [24]. Studies have rarely been conducted on coping strategies measured against the regulation of negative emotion in nurses.

This study, accordingly, aims to investigate the level of motivation among nurses and the associated factors, focusing on nurses' personality and coping strategies. Furthermore, it attempts to provide basic data to develop programs and improvement plans to promote nurses' motivation.

2. METHOD

2.1 Design of study

This study is a descriptive study using a self-reported questionnaire to examine the factors affecting the motivation of nurses.

2.2 Participants of study

The Participants of this study included 400 nurses employed at 4 general hospitals in Seoul with greater capacity than 300 beds, and who agreed to participate in the study. The appropriateness of the number of subjects was verified using Statistics Calculations version 3.0 (Heinrich Heine University), which showed a minimum sample size of 160, considering a power of 0.95 with the adjusted R^2 (0.40) and influential factors (8) obtained from the study.

2.3 Measurements

The study tools used in this study were as follows. Firstly, motivation was measured with the tool developed by Seo et al. (5 items, $\alpha=0.84$) [25], with questions scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Secondly, personality was considered to be composed of self-esteem, extroversion, optimism, and growth needs, based on previous studies of service encounter employees [8], [11], [12], although there are various opinions on personality. Self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg tool (4 items, $\alpha=0.84$) [26], extroversion was measured using the tool developed by Pearlin, Leonard and Schooler (6 items, $\alpha=0.88$) [27], optimism was assessed using the tool developed by Scheier and Carver (3 items, $\alpha=0.80$) [11], and growth needs were measured using the tool developed by Hackman and Oldham (4 items, $\alpha=0.80$) [28]. All of these tools use 5-point Likert scales. Thirdly, the coping strategies analyzed in this study included problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, avoidance strategies, support-seeking strategies, and auto-suggesting strategies, which were shown to affect the motivation levels of service encounter employees in previous studies [8], [12], [22], [29], despite a diversity of opinions among scholars. Based on the tools developed by Carver et al. [29], coping strategies include problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies (5 items, $\alpha=0.84$), avoidance strategies (5 items, $\alpha=0.83$), and support-seeking strategies (5 items, $\alpha=0.85$). Auto-suggesting strategies were measured using a separate tool developed by Seo and Kim (4 items, $\alpha=0.83$) [12]. All the coping strategies tools use 5-point Likert scales.

2.4 Data analysis

In the present study, a total of 400 self-report questionnaires were distributed to nurses from December 1 to December 30, 2010. A total of 380 questionnaires were returned (response rate of 95%), and 373 questionnaires were used in the final analysis, after excluding 7 questionnaires that had incomplete responses. Collected data were analyzed with SPSS WIN 18.0 (SPSS Inc.). Differences in nurses' motivation by general participant characteristics were identified using *t* tests and ANOVA, and mean comparison after ANOVA was conducted using a post-hoc Scheffe's test. The construct validity of the tools was tested using exploratory factor analysis with the Quart max method, and their reliability was tested

using Cronbach's alpha. The relationship between the motivation of nurses and the other study variables was examined using Pearson correlation analysis, and influential factors were analyzed using a stepwise multiple regression analysis.

2.5 Ethical considerations

An explanation of this study, including aims, methods, anticipated benefits, and potential hazards, was provided to the nursing director of each study hospital, from whom formal permission was gained after their review. The questionnaires were then administered to those nurses who were willing to participate in the study. The respondents' anonymity was assured.

Table 1. Motivation by participants' demographic and general characteristics

(N=373)

Variables	Category	n	%	M(SD)	t or F	p	Scheffe
Gender	Female	356	95.4	3.48(0.47)	-2.06	0.040	
	Male	17	4.6	3.72(0.43)			
Age (yr)	≤25	74	19.8	3.28(0.45)	7.97	<0.001	A
	26-30	119	31.9	3.48(0.50)			B
	31-35	89	23.9	3.50(0.51)			B
	≥36	91	24.4	3.64(0.35)			B
Education	College (3yr)	118	31.6	3.33(0.45)	9.11	<0.001	A
	Bachelor (4yr)	104	27.9	3.45(0.47)			AB
	Undergraduate Transfer	105	28.2	3.63(0.50)			B
	Graduate school	46	12.3	3.63(0.35)			B
Religious activity	Yes	193	51.7	3.54(0.50)	2.21	0.028	
	No & other	180	48.3	3.43(0.44)			
Marital status	Single	207	55.5	3.39(0.47)	-4.57	<0.001	
	Married & other	166	44.5	3.60(0.45)			
Nursing experience (years)	> 4	107	28.7	3.33(0.46)	7.33	<0.001	A
	4-<8	80	21.4	3.48(0.49)			AB
	8-<12	89	23.9	3.53(0.52)			B
	≥12	97	26.0	3.62(0.36)			B
Employment period on current ward (years)	> 2	161	43.2	3.35	5.53	0.004	A
	2-<5	124	33.2	3.53			B
	≥5	88	23.6	3.55			B
Transfer experiences	Yes	195	52.3	3.55(0.39)	2.54	0.011	
	No	178	47.7	3.42(0.55)			
Interoffice position	Acting nurse	315	84.5	3.45(0.48)	-3.34	0.001	
	Charge nurse & other	58	15.5	3.68(0.37)			

*Scheffe's test: Different letters indicate a significant difference.

3. RESULTS

3.1 General characteristics of participants

Table 1 shows the general characteristics of the subjects and the differences in the degree of motivation by these characteristics. The participants' general characteristics were as follows: 95.4% were female, 31.9% were between 26 and 30 years old, 31.6% graduated from 3-year nursing college, 51.7% were religious, 55.5% were not married, 28.7% had less than 4 years nursing experience, 43.2% had been employed for less than 2 years on the current ward (ward experience), 52.3% had experience of transfer (transfer experience), and 84.5% were staff nurses (position). As for motivation differences by general characteristics, males showed higher motivation levels than did females ($t=-2.06$, $p=0.040$), and those over 26 years old had significantly higher motivation levels than those 25 years old or under ($F=7.97$, $p<0.001$). With respect to education, those with

more than a bachelor's degree after an undergraduate transfer or graduate school presented significantly higher motivation levels than 3-year nursing college graduates ($F=9.11$, $p<0.001$). In terms of religion, motivation levels were significantly higher among religious nurses ($t=2.21$, $p=0.028$). Additionally, nurses in the married and "other" groups ranked significantly higher than those in the unmarried group in terms of motivation ($t=-4.57$, $p<0.001$).

Concerning total nursing experience, those with more than 8 years of experience presented higher levels of motivation than those with less than 4 years ($F=7.33$, $p<0.001$). Regarding the years employed on the current ward, those employed for 2 years or more showed higher motivation levels than those employed for less than 2 years ($F=5.53$, $p=0.004$). As for transfer experience between wards, the group with experience ranked significantly higher in motivation than the group without any experience ($t=2.54$, $p=0.011$). Regarding position, motivation levels were significantly higher among senior nurses than staff nurses ($t=-3.34$, $p=0.001$).

3.2 Mean scores of motivation and related factors

As shown in Table 2, the mean score of motivation was 3.49. As for the motivation-related factors, mean scores were as follows: self-esteem 3.80, extroversion 3.10, optimism 3.57, growth needs 3.72, problem-solving and cognitive restructuring coping 3.67, avoidance strategies 2.90, support-seeking strategies 3.53, and auto-suggesting strategies 3.50.

Table 2. Mean scores of motivation and related factors

Variable	M \pm SD	Minimum - Maximum
Motivation	3.49 \pm 0.48	2.20 - 5.00
Self-esteem	3.80 \pm 0.42	2.20 - 5.00
Extroversion	3.10 \pm 0.51	1.89 - 5.00
Optimism	3.57 \pm 0.56	1.33 - 5.00
Growth needs	3.72 \pm 0.50	2.25 - 5.00
Problem solving & cognitive restructuring strategies	3.67 \pm 0.48	2.00 - 5.00
Avoidance strategies	2.90 \pm 0.53	1.40 - 5.00
Support-seeking strategies	3.53 \pm 0.58	1.20 - 5.00
Auto-suggesting strategies	3.50 \pm 0.52	2.00 - 5.00

3.3 Correlation between motivation and related factors

The results of the correlation analysis between motivation and related factors are presented in Table 3. In terms of the personality factors, self-esteem ($r=0.33$, $p<0.01$), extroversion ($r=0.30$, $p<0.01$), optimism ($r=0.47$, $p<0.01$), and growth needs ($r=0.51$, $p<0.01$) had a significant relationship with motivation. As for coping strategies, problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies ($r=0.40$, $p<0.01$), avoidance strategies ($r=0.14$, $p<0.01$), support-seeking strategies ($r=0.17$, $p<0.01$), and auto-suggesting strategies ($r=0.45$, $p<0.01$) were significantly correlated with motivation.

Table 3. Correlation between motivation and the related factors

Variable	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9
X1	1								
X2	0.338*	1							
X3	0.308*	0.317*	1						
X4	0.479*	0.429*	0.257*	1					
X5	0.515*	0.480*	0.378*	0.386*	1				
X6	0.402*	0.359*	0.176*	0.369*	0.447*	1			
X7	0.141*	0.137*	0.136*	0.101*	0.146*	0.079*	1		
X8	0.179*	0.199*	0.228*	0.143*	0.304*	0.286*	0.224*	1	
X9	0.457*	0.254*	0.238*	0.389*	0.379*	0.535*	0.168*	0.307*	1

* $p<0.01$.

X1=Motivation; X2=Self-esteem; X3=Extroversion; X4=Optimism; X5=Growth needs; X6=Problem solving & cognitive restructuring strategies; X7=Avoidance strategies; X8=Support-seeking strategies; X9=Auto-suggesting strategies.

3.4 Influential factors of motivation

In order to identify the factors affecting motivation, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with personality factors (self-esteem, extroversion, optimism, and growth needs)

and coping strategies (problem-solving and cognitive strategies, avoidance strategies, support-seeking strategies, and auto-suggesting strategies) as the independent variables. The results are shown in Table 4. It was found that the regression model to predict the motivation of nurses was statistically significant ($F=31.04$, $p<0.05$). The adjusted R^2 , which represents the explanatory power of this model, was 0.40. The most important factors affecting the motivation of nurses were growth needs ($\beta=0.31$), optimism ($\beta=0.18$), and extroversion ($\beta=0.10$) in terms of personality, and auto-suggesting strategies ($\beta=0.20$), problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies ($\beta=0.11$), and support-seeking strategies ($\beta=0.09$) in terms of coping strategies. Of these factors, growth needs was found to be the most important predictor of nurses' motivation.

Table 4. Factors influencing nurses' motivation

Variables	B	S.E	β	t	Adj R^2	F
Constant	4.29	1.15		3.71		
Self-esteem	0.13	0.26	0.02	0.49		
Extroversion	0.45	0.20	0.10	2.22*		
Optimism	0.76	0.19	0.18	3.81*		
Growth needs	0.49	0.24	0.31	6.13*		
Problem solving & cognitive restructuring strategies`	0.53	0.25	.011	2.11*	0.40	31.04*
Avoidance strategies	-0.25	0.18	-0.06	-1.36		
Support-seeking strategies	0.37	<0.05	0.09	2.10*		
Auto suggesting strategies	0.88	0.22	0.20	3.98*		

* $p<0.05$. Adj R^2 =Adjusted R^2 .

4. DISCUSSION

This study identified and analyzed personality factors and coping strategies affecting nurses' motivation. It also provided basic data to investigate the possibility to design educational programs and improvement plans aimed at increasing nurses' motivation. Through reviews of the literature and previous studies, this study identified self-esteem, extroversion, optimism, and growth needs as relevant personality factors, and problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, avoidance strategies, support-seeking strategies, and auto-suggesting strategies as pertinent coping strategies factors to be examined in relation to motivation. In this study, however, only extroversion, optimism, and growth needs of all personality factors, and problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, support-seeking strategies, and auto-suggesting strategies among the coping strategies were found to be significant predictors. These factors were shown to explain 40% of nurses' motivation. The findings of these study regarding the differences in motivation by participants' characteristics and the factors affecting motivation will be discussed separately.

The motivation of nurses, the dependent variable in this study, differed depending on age, education, nursing experience, employment period on the current ward, transfer experience, and interoffice position. The finding that the nurses' adaptation period to clinical practice and their nursing

experience as well as their religious and marital status have a significant influence on motivation, suggests that psychological factors are related to motivation. Of the personality factors affecting motivation, the growth needs of nurses were found to have a significant positive relationship with and be a major predicting factor of their motivation ($\beta=0.31$). This result is consistent with the studies of employees of public and private organizations by Park [30] and hotel employees by Min and Chung [8]. This finding can be explained by the fact that growth needs have a tendency to be positively related to the feedback from the organization. Therefore, ward managers should consider enhancing the motivation of nurses by providing appropriate feedback through regular meetings. It was found that optimism, the second factor of personality, had a significant positive correlation with motivation and was a major factor affecting it ($\beta=0.18$). This is similar to the results of a study by Luthans and Jensen [15] conducted on production workers. This may be due to the fact that optimism provides a positive view on the problems arising at work. Therefore, it is important that hospitals consider presenting a vision to nurses as professionals, and that they provide continuous support through formal or informal meetings. As a third factor of personality, nurses' extroversion was confirmed to have a significant positive correlation with motivation ($\beta=0.10$), which is consistent with the results of Hart [14]. It is considered that this result could be due to extroversion helping to focus on problem-solving during a stressful event. Therefore, organizations should put a support system in place to increase social and sensory stimulation at regular events.

Of the coping strategies affecting motivation, auto-suggesting strategies were found to have a significant positive correlation with nurses' motivation, and to be a factor affecting it ($\beta=0.20$). This result is in agreement with the findings in a study of hotel employees by Min and Chung [8], and suggests that nurses should recognize the expectation from their organization and customers that they (the nurses) should put others before themselves. Therefore, auto-suggesting strategies, which affect the motivation of nurses, can also invigorate the customer satisfaction education that is currently provided in hospitals in an efficient and systematic manner. It was found in this study that problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies had a significant positive correlation with motivation, and were a major factor affecting it ($\beta=0.11$). This is consistent with previous studies of hotel employees [8] and nurses [22]. As the experience of nurses increases, their autonomy and responsibilities in their work also expand. This increase in autonomy and responsibilities might enhance their ability to change negative emotions arising at work and to solve problems. Therefore, in order to increase nurses' motivation, hospitals should consider expanding the work scope and autonomy of nurses based on their experience. As a third factor of emotional regulation, nurses' support-seeking strategies were a significant factor affecting their motivation ($\beta=0.09$). This is consistent with previous studies of hotel employees [8] and nurses [31], and suggests that negative emotions can be relieved by sharing them with others, which can affect motivation. It is believed that a systematic invigoration of preceptorship and mentorship to enhance support-seeking strategies would be important for increasing nurses' motivation.

In this study, self-esteem among the factors of personality, and avoidance strategies among the coping strategies, were found not to affect motivation. This is in contrast to studies of hotel employees [32] and office workers [13], which showed a significant relationship between self-esteem and motivation. This suggests that since hospital nurses interact with patients, unlike in other service industries, they cannot be motivated only by self-esteem, which involves their ability to view themselves as valuable. However, given that data on the relationship between self-esteem and motivation exclusively in nurses are not sufficient, a more accurate investigation is needed in future research. In addition, it was found that avoidance strategies did not have a significant effect on the motivation of nurses. This is a similar result to those of previous studies of hotel employees [8] and nurses [22]. In service sectors, a more proactive attitude to put the customers' interests first is needed, compared to other sectors. This indicates that an avoiding attitude toward negative situations might negatively affect the motivation of organization members. However, since studies on nurses' emotional regulation are rare, a comparative study on the effect of avoidance strategies on motivation is needed.

Since there were significant differences in the degree of motivation by gender, age, education, religion, marital status, nursing experience, ward experience, transfer experience, and position, it should be considered that nurses' sociodemographic characteristics can also affect motivation, and it is therefore necessary to investigate these factors further. In addition, a cross-sectional analysis based on a survey may be limited in that correctly identifying complicated psychological factors is difficult using such a design. It is required to check the degree of work motivation of the nurses targeting the nurses working in the local hospitals. A qualitative study is needed in the future to overcome these limitations.

5. CONCLUSION

A causality study using a self-report survey method was conducted attempting to analyze the factors affecting the motivation of nurses and to use its results as basic data for examining programs and improvement plans to increase nurses' motivation. The study found correlations between the motivation of nurses and their self-esteem, extroversion, optimism, growth needs, problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, avoidance strategies, support-seeking strategies, and auto-suggesting strategies. The factors influencing nurses' motivation were identified as growth needs, auto-suggesting strategies, optimism, problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, extroversion, and support-seeking strategies. Of these factors, the most influential was growth needs. It was found that 40% of the nurses' motivation could be explained by these factors. Therefore, considering the internal and external situation of organizations that employ nurses and the factors that affect nurses' motivation, these organizations, including the heads of nursing departments, need to develop education programs and systematically implement them. Through these efforts and research, they need to lay the

groundwork for nurses to achieve not only personal growth and development, but their organizational goals as well.

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