Tianjin Daxue Xuebao (Ziran Kexue yu Gongcheng Jishu Ban)/
Journal of Tianjin University Science and Technology
ISSN (Online):0493-2137
E-Publication: Online Open Access
Vol: 58 Issue: 08:2025
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17083418

HEALTHCARE QUALITY AND PATIENT SAFETY OUTCOMES IN RELATION TO HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS AND IMPACTS

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Abstract

Background: Burnout among healthcare professionals is a widespread concern that threatens both workforce wellbeing and the quality of patient care. Increasing evidence links burnout to negative outcomes including medical errors, patient dissatisfaction, and reduced safety. However, the mechanisms underlying this association remain unclear. This systematic review aimed to explore the relationship between healthcare providers' burnout and the quality of care delivered, including patient safety outcomes. Methods: Following PRISMA guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted in MEDLINE, Embase, Web of Science, and Google Scholar for studies published between 2012 and 2021. Eligible studies included original research assessing burnout in healthcare professionals and its association with patient care quality. Data on study design, burnout assessment tools, and quality metrics were extracted and synthesized. Results: Six studies met the inclusion criteria. Findings consistently demonstrated associations between burnout and adverse patient outcomes. Nurse burnout was linked to higher healthcare-associated infections and lower patient satisfaction. Burnout was also associated with increased medical errors among physicians, residents, and pharmacists. Work environment factors such as understaffing, poor leadership, and work-life imbalance were significant contributors to burnout, which in turn negatively influenced job satisfaction and care quality. Additionally, burnout was associated with safety-compromising behaviors among emergency medical staff and increased intention to leave among nurses. Conclusion: The evidence highlights a clear connection between healthcare provider burnout and reduced quality of care. Interventions that address organizational factors—such as adequate staffing, supportive leadership, and structured disclosure systems—may reduce burnout and enhance both provider wellbeing and patient outcomes.

Keywords: Burnout, Healthcare Quality, Patient Safety, Nurses, Physicians, Medical Errors, Systematic Review.

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INTRODUCTION

Burnout is a critical occupational hazard in modern healthcare, affecting providers across disciplines and care settings. Characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, burnout not only undermines the wellbeing of healthcare professionals but also compromises the quality and safety of patient care.

Global estimates suggest that more than half of healthcare workers will experience symptoms of burnout during their careers, highlighting the scale of this crisis. Beyond its toll on individual health and professional satisfaction, burnout has been associated with medical errors, lapses in communication, reduced adherence to clinical guidelines, and increased staff turnover, all of which contribute to declining standards of care and patient dissatisfaction (1,2).

The relationship between healthcare providers burnout and lower quality of care has received more attention recently. A growing body of literature has found links between burnout and safety metrics, patient outcomes, medical errors, communication, and adherence to guidelines (3). The majority of research in this area use observational designs and investigate a variety of outcomes among heterogeneous patient groups using a broad range of burnout evaluations and analytical approaches (4).

Patient safety events are the result of the interaction of several latent and active, systemic and individual elements. Human factors have a significant role, and recent studies suggest that they are crucial for employee wellbeing (5). A continuum representing heightened sadness, anxiety, and low wellbeing at one end and thriving, happiness, and high wellbeing at the other can be used to conceptualize wellbeing. The Hospital Depression and Anxiety Scale (6), the General Health Questionnaire, stress measurements like the Perceived Stress Scale, and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (7) are a few examples of wellbeing assessments. Burnout affects patient safety in addition to wellbeing; the two are fundamentally distinct variables.

There may be a connection between burnout and healthcare quality. There has been conflicting evidence in the research looking into the relationship between the quality of care and burnout. Although a number of research have found a correlation, these findings have not always been confirmed (5). Burnout has frequently been used as a stand-in for wellbeing; however, it is unclear which is more consistently linked to patient safety given the antecedents, symptoms, and outcomes of burnout and wellbeing are different (8). It is unknown what processes underlie the correlation between these factors and patient safety. To find out how burnout is related to patient safety and quality of treatment, we carried out a systematic study.

METHOD

This systematic review was carried out in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. A search of MEDLINE, Embase, Web of Science, and Google Scholar was conducted to identify studies

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published between 2012 and 2021. The search strategy combined medical subject headings and free-text terms related to burnout, healthcare providers, patient safety, and quality of care. No language restrictions were applied in order to maximize the scope of the review.

Studies were considered eligible if they reported original research involving healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, pharmacists, or allied health staff, and if burnout was assessed using a validated measurement tool such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory or an equivalent instrument. In addition, studies had to examine outcomes related to patient care quality, including medical errors, patient satisfaction, safety incidents, healthcare-associated infections, or workforce outcomes such as turnover and job dissatisfaction. Articles were excluded if they were reviews, editorials, commentaries, or conference abstracts without primary data.

Study selection was conducted in two stages. Initially, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by a full-text review of potentially eligible articles. Any disagreements during the screening and selection process were resolved through consensus among the reviewers. Data were then extracted using a standardized form, which captured study characteristics, sample size, design, burnout assessment tools, and reported associations with quality-of-care outcomes. To ensure accuracy, two reviewers independently extracted the data, and inconsistencies were resolved through discussion.

Because of the heterogeneity in study designs, populations, and outcome measures, a meta-analysis was not feasible. Instead, a qualitative synthesis was undertaken, emphasizing recurring patterns, methodological rigor, and the implications of the findings for healthcare practice and policy.

RESULTS

In this systematic review study, we included 6 articles (Fig 1). Studies main findings and characteristics were presented in (table 1). Health care-associated infections are linked to morbidity, mortality, and significant expenditures for healthcare institutions, according to a 2012 study by Cimiotti et al. Compared to costs associated with diseases linked to healthcare, health care facilities can reduce job-related burnout in nurses and enhance other aspects of the care environment. Managers can enhance the wellbeing of nurses and raise the standard of patient care by lowering nurse burnout.

At least in part, the high rate of nurse burnout linked to larger patient caseloads appears to be connected to the higher infection rates in hospitals where nurses care for more patients. The general standard of patient care and work discontent have been related to nurse burnout (9) but not "nursing-sensitive" clinical outcomes.

Self-reported medical mistakes by surgeons (10) and internal medicine residents (11) have been linked to burnout. Holden et al. (12) found that burnout and the risk of perceived medication-dispensing mistakes in pharmacists are related to external mental pressures, such as interruptions, split attention, and feeling hurried.

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Cimiotti et al. speculate that among registered nurses, the cognitive detachment linked to high levels of burnout may lead to subpar hand hygiene habits and errors in other infection control protocols.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this review indicate the impact of burnout on both healthcare providers and the quality of care delivered. In the included studies, consistent associations emerged between higher levels of burnout and adverse outcomes such as medical errors, compromised patient safety, reduced satisfaction, and increased turnover intentions. These results indicate that burnout is not merely an individual concern but a systemic challenge that undermines organizational performance and patient wellbeing.

The evidence suggests that burnout develops within complex work environments characterized by staffing shortages, high workloads, and insufficient support, which collectively erode provider resilience and ultimately compromise care quality In order to help RNs engaged in adverse occurrences, both official and informal methods should be put in place, according to a 2015 research by Lewis et al. (13) Patients prefer that avoidable adverse occurrences be communicated, regardless of the link between disclosure and RN burnout (14).

Moreover, systematic measures are needed to encourage disclosure, which is a fundamental component of a patient safety culture. Patients were to be notified when accidental clinical consequences occur, according to a 2001 Joint Commission mandate; however, the mandate lacked precision, and there are significant differences in the ways that institutions have complied with the mandate (15). The National Quality Forum (NQF) adopted disclosure standards that stipulate the necessity of a formal procedure that includes informing patients about the incident and educating staff on how to report it (13).

The 2017 study by Boamah et al. confirmed the correlations that were postulated between burnout, structural empowerment, interference with work-life balance, and short staffing. The study revealed several novel findings: empowerment was inversely correlated with short staffing and work-life interference, and that both of these work-life characteristics were linked to higher levels of burnout after a year.

Additionally, there was a clear and substantial negative relationship between burnout and job satisfaction as well as a direct relationship between job satisfaction and quality of care (16). The results of a 2016 study by Basar et al. among nurses showed a positive correlation between burnout and intention to leave, meaning that burnout is one of the factors that precedes desire to quit.

This result validates earlier research. Basar et al. also discovered that nurses who experience burnout tend to disregard their jobs. Finding the link between burnout and job neglect is essential because of the possible, unacceptable, and unjustified effects on patient care. Nurses who experience burnout and are unhappy with their demanding work environment may choose to resign. If, on the other hand, they are unwilling to leave, they must continue working there (17).

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Health care providers' burnout is viewed as a significant problem that affects patient care. Medical mistakes and failures can have deadly results, particularly when related to disorders that pose a threat to health (18). Health care workers' burnout may endanger the wellbeing and safety of their patients.

According to Baier et al.'s 2018 study, the proportion of individuals who had a high level of burnout in one of the burnout dimensions ranged from 19.9 to 40%, with the depersonalization dimension having the greatest number of participants. Baier et al.'s 2018 depersonalization results were greater than the introduction's data on the prevalence of burnout among nurses and surgeons. One possible explanation for this might be because, at 86%, men made up the bulk of participants in their study, and men are more susceptible to depersonalization than women (19).

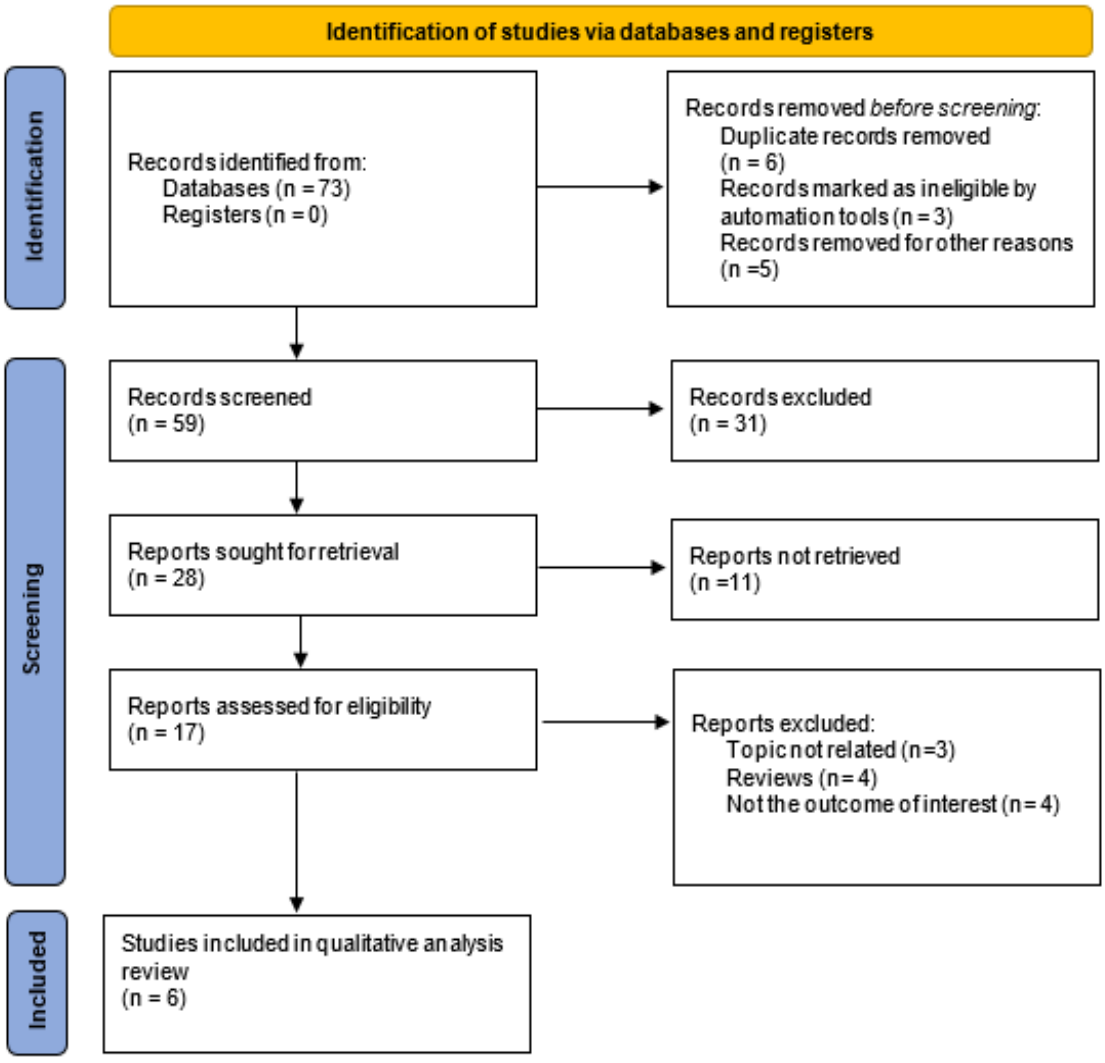

Figure 1: PRISMA consort chart of study selection

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Table 1: Characteristics and Main Findings of Included Studies

Citation	Method	Aim	Main Findings
Cimiotti et al., 2012	Survey data analysis (7,076 nurses, 161 hospitals)	Examine nurse burnout and correlation with hospital-acquired infections	Nurse burnout significantly associated with urinary tract & surgical site infections; reducing burnout could save $68M annually
Boamah et al., 2017	Time-lag study (new graduate nurses in Canada)	Test theory linking empowerment, staffing, leadership, burnout, job satisfaction, and quality of care	Understaffing & work-life conflict increased burnout; empowerment & leadership improved satisfaction & care quality
Lewis et al., 2015	Cross-sectional survey	Investigate RN involvement in adverse events, burnout, and support systems	Burnout (emotional exhaustion & depersonalization) linked to adverse events; support systems reduce burnout
Basar et al., 2016	Cross-sectional questionnaire study	Examine burnout, organizational politics, and outcomes like intention to leave/neglect	Burnout predicted intention to leave and neglect of duties; organizational politics strengthened effects
Baier et al., 2018	Online survey of EMS professionals (Germany)	Explore burnout, safety outcomes, and adverse events in EMS professionals	19.9–40% high burnout; burnout linked to safety-compromising behaviors, low satisfaction, and intent to leave
Aiken et al., 2012	Cross-sectional survey (nurses & patients in Europe/US)	Assess nurse staffing, work conditions, burnout, and quality of patient care	Better work environments & staffing linked to higher patient satisfaction, lower burnout, and improved care quality

CONCLUSION

This review highlights that burnout among healthcare professionals is not only a threat to provider wellbeing but also a critical determinant of patient safety and healthcare quality. Evidence from the included studies shows consistent associations between higher burnout levels and increased risks of healthcare-associated infections, medical errors, reduced patient satisfaction, and safety-compromising behaviors. Furthermore, burnout contributes to job dissatisfaction, staff turnover, and diminished organizational performance.

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