

Forgotten or Overlooked? The Children of Nurses, The Second Victims of Nursing Work Conditions

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Abstract

The work environment of nurses is a critical factor that not only has substantial physical and psychological effects on the nurses themselves but can also have adverse consequences for their families, especially their children. The complex interplay between nurses' job duties and their ability to care for their families has significant social and emotional repercussions on their work-life balance, a topic that may have received less attention until now. Nurses often work in high-stress environments, which can lead to mental health issues. The nature of their work exposes them to challenging situations, life-saving decisions, and emotional interactions with patients and their families. The way they cope with such problems has consequences that extend beyond the workplace and can negatively impact the family dynamics of nurses. They constantly grapple with their emotional states at home and are never truly separate from their work lives. Psychologists emphasize that job-related stress in nurses may result in increased irritability, emotional unavailability, and difficulties in interacting with their children. Ultimately, it can be said that the families of nurses, particularly their children, are indirectly affected by the challenging working conditions of nursing, a topic that has perhaps received less attention until now. The environment in which nurses operate impacts not only their own health but also the emotional and psychological well-being of their children. Addressing these issues is essential not only for improving the lives of nurses but also for nurturing resilient and emotionally healthy children who thrive in supportive family systems.

Key Words: Children of Nurses, Nursing, Work Conditions.

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DEAR EDITOR

It is no secret today that the well-being of nurses significantly impacts their professional responsibilities and personal and family lives, particularly in their interactions with their children. The work environment of nurses is a critical factor that not only has substantial physical and psychological effects on the nurses themselves but can also have adverse consequences for their families, especially their children. The complex interplay between nurses' job duties and their ability to care for their families has significant social and emotional repercussions on their work-life balance, which may have received less attention until now (1).

Nurses often work in high-stress environments, which can lead to mental health issues. The nature of their work exposes them to challenging situations, life-saving decisions, and emotional interactions with patients and their families. The way they cope with such problems has consequences that extend beyond the workplace and can negatively impact the family dynamics of nurses, as they constantly grapple with their emotional states at home and are never truly separate from their work lives. Psychologists emphasize that job-related stress in nurses may result in increased irritability, emotional unavailability, and difficulties in interacting with their children. As a result, the children of these nurses may experience feelings of neglect or emotional instability, as their parents are overwhelmed by their work-related stress and pay less attention to their emotional needs (2).

In addition, studies show that high-workload environments can lead to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. These mental health issues can have multiple effects and impact family functioning and the emotional well-being of children. When parents struggle with mental health challenges, they

inadvertently transfer their distress to their children, resulting in children potentially exhibiting symptoms such as severe anxiety, behavioral problems, and even depression. This is often because children have a significant psychological dependence on their parents' emotional states, and their behavior reflects the reactions of their parents (3).

In a study comparing anxiety levels among the children of healthcare workers and non-healthcare workers, it was found that 57.1% of the children of nurses experienced anxiety, which is higher than the general population (4). The levels of stress and anxiety in children whose parents are nurses may vary based on their gender, as some studies indicate that the rate of depression is higher in girls than in boys (5). On the other hand, it is essential to note that the levels of stress and anxiety in children whose parents are nurses can differ based on the culture and norms present in society. In some cultures, especially in Eastern countries, the emotional dependence of children on their parents is greater, which can create a greater potential for depression and anxiety in children (6).

Burnout is another important aspect of the workplace that significantly affects nurses and their families. Defined as a psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged stress, Burnout can severely impact a nurse's performance and personal life (7).

It is a consequence of the stressful working conditions faced by nurses and can lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of motivation. Nurses experiencing burnout may withdraw from social and family interactions, resulting in a decreased interest in spending quality time with their children and families. This withdrawal can lead to feelings of alienation and emotional insecurity among children. Children, who need the presence and interaction of their

parents for their emotional and spiritual development, may have their mental health threatened when faced with emotional and psychological voids. This can potentially result in outcomes such as depression, avoidant personality, or anxiety (8).

One of the vital aspects of the nursing profession is the variable work shifts, which create unique challenges for maintaining routines and family connections. Nurses often face irregular schedules that can disrupt their circadian rhythms and make continuous interaction with their children difficult. The children of nurses who work rotating shifts may suffer from feelings of instability and anxiety due to the unpredictability of their parents' presence. This instability can hinder children's ability to maintain regular schedules that are essential for their developmental needs (9). Furthermore, the impact of shift work extends beyond physical presence and can also affect emotional availability. Parents who work night shifts may be emotionally present during the day when they are awake, leading to limited interaction and bonding time with their children. When their parents are unable to participate in daily activities, children may feel neglected or undervalued, which can negatively affect their sense of security and self-esteem (10).

However, it is also essential to note that the occupational impacts of nurses on their children are not solely negative. Nursing is a profession deeply rooted in dedication, discipline, and compassion. These qualities not only define the essence of nursing but also serve as exemplary traits that nurse's children can model in their own lives. Additionally, nurses demonstrate resilience in high-pressure situations, such as health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Their ability to lead and adapt under challenging conditions serves as a strong example for their children (11).

Strategies for Improvement

By recognizing the negative impact of stressful working conditions in nursing on the family life and children of nurses, healthcare systems can implement strategies to improve the situation for nurses and their families. Efforts to strengthen work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling, improving working conditions for nurses, and providing adequate organizational support, can significantly reduce the workload of nurses and, consequently, alleviate their physical and mental fatigue. This, in turn, increases their emotional and psychological availability for their children. Additionally, support for mental health in the workplace can help nurses cope with stress and burnout, ultimately contributing to the well-being of their families. Initiatives such as peer support programs and counseling services aimed at breaking the cycle of stress and problems can be effective (7).

Ultimately, the families of nurses, particularly their children, are indirectly affected by the challenging working conditions of nursing, a topic that has perhaps received less attention until now. The environment in which nurses operate impacts not only their own health but also the emotional and psychological well-being of their children. Addressing these issues is essential not only for improving the lives of nurses but also for nurturing resilient and emotionally healthy children who thrive in supportive family systems.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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