Mental Health Status of the Psychiatric Nurses at Zare Teaching Hospital

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ABSTRACT It is important to pay heed to mental well-being across all life domains such individual, social and occupational aspects. Nursing is a stressful job that may induce physical and mental disorders in the practitioners. The present study was conducted to examine mental health status in the psychiatric nurses at Zare Teaching Hospital. The study is an applied research adopting a survey design and descriptive method. The population of the study consisted of all nurses working at psychiatric departments of Zare Teaching Hospital in Sari in 2013 (N=48). The data was collected using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28). The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The results revealed that 89.6% of the nurses enjoyed mental health while 10.4% were vulnerable. Moreover, 18.8%, 20.8%, 43.8% and 2.1% were vulnerable to mental disorders in terms of somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social functioning and depression, respectively. Besides, 2.1% had anxiety disorders and 4.2% suffered social functioning disorders. Overall, the psychiatric nurses had satisfactory levels of mental health.

KEYWORDS Nurse, Mental Health, Physical Health, Stress, Anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Health entails a broad domain of empowering people, which contributes to not only the realization of hopes, wishes and fulfillment of needs but also dealing with the environment. According to the above definition, it seems that health is a resource for daily life but not a means for life. Health is an applied, positive concept that emphasizes both physical strength and its individual and social resources. As defined by Encyclopedia of Psychiatry (Bahrami, 1991), mental health refers to the mental status where the individual feels comfortable, functions in their society without difficulties and enjoys their personal traits in the society. The term ‘mental health’ is used to refer to the mental status of the individuals who have a high level of behavioral and emotional conformity but not a merely lack of mental disorders (Reber, 2011). Some psychologists believe that mental health is having a humane goal in life, intention to solve problems logically, adaptation to the social milieu based on scientific and ethical norms, belief in work and responsibility and following the principles of righteousness and benevolence (Shafiabadi, 1992). Various occupations may expose people to stressful mental and social factors that are sometimes dangerous and can threaten their health and life. Nursing is a stressful job.
Considering the importance of nursing in healthcare system and high social expectations of nurses in dealing with patients’ problems, it is necessary for the nurses to have ideal mental and physical health status (Stanley, 2003). Nursing profession is vulnerable to many occupational stressors such as shift work, workload, conflict with colleagues, continuous contact with patients’ death and suffering and uncertain professional responsibilities. Moreover, workplace stress causes serious harms to both the employees and organizations. Stress threatens employees’ health as the main elements affecting work (Roberts & Golding, 1999). Thus, considering the importance of nursing, the nurses’ mental and physical health is directly related to the quality of their performance in taking care of patients (Kilfedder et al., 2001). Cole and Nelson (2001) contend that 93% of nurses are continuously exposed to workplace stressors that can affect their mental and physical health. In Iran, nurses constitute a considerable percent of healthcare employees. Nursing is considered as a difficult job with shift work. The National Association of Safety Professionals of America has identified nursing as the first in rank from among a number of 40 jobs with high prevalence of stress-induced diseases. It is generally held that nursing is the most stressful job among healthcare jobs (Wegman, 2000). World Health Organization (WHO) has studied stressful jobs and reported that, from among 130 jobs, nurses ranked 27 in consulting doctors for mental health disorders (Roustazadeh et al., 2000). Mardani Hamuleh et al (2011) studied mental health status of the nurses at Fatemeh Zahra Hospital of Najaf Abad. They found that 81.1% of the nurses enjoyed mental health while 18.9% were suffering mental disorders such as somatic complaints (7.3%), paranoid thoughts (5.8%) and anxiety (5%). Sepehrmanesh et al (2010) studied mental health status in psychiatric and dialysis nurses at Kashan University of Medical Sciences Akhavan Hospital. They reported that 38.3% of the nurses did have good mental health. Psychiatric nurses suffered higher levels of depression and frustration than dialysis nurses. Rahmani et al (2010) studied occupational stress, burnout and general health and their relationships in the nurses working at special wards of teaching hospitals affiliated with Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. They reported that 62.7% of the nurses suffered high levels of anxiety. Shahrakivahed et al (2010) studied the relationship between mental health and occupational stress in the patients working at teaching hospitals affiliated with Zabol University of Medical Sciences. They concluded that 57.3% of the nurses enjoyed mental health while 42.7% were vulnerable to mental disorders. Hojati et al (2010) investigated mental and physical health status in the nurses working at night shifts at hospitals affiliated with Golestan University of Medical Sciences. They found that 52% of the nurses had good mental health and 48% had somewhat good mental health. Asdizandy et al (2009) studied mental health status in military nurses and reported that 26% of the nurses suffered different degrees of mental health disorders. Zamanian et al (2007) conducted a study to investigate mental health status in the nurses working at public and private hospitals in Shiraz. They reported that 28.7% of shift-work nurses were suspected of mental disorders. Khaghani Zadeh et al (2006) studied mental health status in the nurses working at teaching hospitals affiliated with Tehran University of Medical Sciences. The results showed that 43% of the nurses had symptoms of mental disorders while 57% had no symptoms. Oates et al (2008) conducted a study to compare work conditions, sources of stress and occupational relations between a group of nurses working at neonatal intensive care unit and the nurses working at department of Pediatrics at teaching hospitals in Sydney. The results showed that 40% of the nurses working at general pediatrics department and 32% of the neonatal nurses had considerably higher levels of mental disorders comparing with
other nurses. Mihashi et al (2006) conducted a research to analyze the risk factors of mental disorders in nurses. They found that nurses experienced high levels of workplace stress and mental pressure that can affect their temperament and cause depression in them. In a study on mental health among the nurses in Tasmania, Farrell (1998) used a 12-item GHQ and reported that psychiatric and surgery nurses had lower levels of mental health comparing with the nurses at other wards. Wong et al (2001) studied mental health, the role of nursing stress and coping methods in the Chinese nurses in Hong Kong. They reported that over one-third of the nurses suffered mental disorders. In fact, 37.5% of the nurses were vulnerable to mental disorders. Considering the above discussion, the present study aims to address the question ‘what is the mental health status of the psychiatric nurses working at Zare Hospital?’

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is an applied research adopting a survey design and a descriptive method. The population of the study consisted of all nurses working at psychiatric departments of Zare Psychiatric Center in Sari in 2013 (N=48). The data was collected using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) that is the most well-known screening test that has considerably contributed to the development of research. The questionnaire consists of four subscales including somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia symptoms, social dysfunction and severe depression. The items were scored based on Likert scale that assigned zero to the alternative (A), 1 to (B), 2 to (C) and 3 to (D). As there were 28 items on the questionnaire, every item gained a score ranging from 0 to 3 and thus every subject’s score ranged from the minimum 0 to maximum 82. A higher score indicates the probability of mental disorder. The questionnaire screens individuals with mental disorders with the cut-off point of 22. The respondents should select the options that best represent their health status. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean and diagrams.

RESULTS

The data illustrated in table 1 shows that 89.6% of the psychiatric nurses enjoyed mental health while 10.4% were vulnerable to mental disorders. Besides, 18.8%, 20.8%, 43.8% and 2.1% of the nurses were vulnerable to disorders in terms of somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social functioning and depression, respectively. Moreover, 2.1% suffered anxiety disorders and 4.2% had social dysfunction disorders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Somatic symptoms</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Social functioning</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Mental health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering disorders</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Mental health status of the psychiatric nurses at Zare Hospital.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is highly important to pay attention to the level of stress employees experience in an organization. Long-term, persistent stress in nursing requires particular attention and special care. Nurses' general and particularly mental health is crucial due to the importance of nursing job in healthcare centers. Lack of attention to mental health is a key reason for decreased efficiency, loss of workforce and physical and mental disorders, especially in professional services. Within the broad scope of their practices, psychiatric nurses have to deal with the unreasonable expectations and behaviors of patients’ families as well as professional complexities and challenges. Aggression, violence, suicide and uncooperative patients are conspicuous instances of such challenges. Difficult working conditions, increasing number of patients and mismatch between the number of patients and nurses can also account for the vulnerability of psychiatric nurses. In the present study, different aspects of mental health were studied in psychiatric nurses using GHQ-28. The physical aspect of health includes good performance of body organs in perfect coordination. The mental aspect entails a state of balance between the individual and environment, compatibility with oneself and others and creating balance between the inner and outer realities. Physical disorders exert adverse effects on the mental aspect. In other words, body and mind are two aspects of human existence that exert persistent mutual effects so that the status of one can determine the status of another.

Many psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety exert adverse effects on physical health. Physical health is associated with mental health so that training and awareness raising can help nurses prevent physical and consequently mental diseases. Anxiety refers to an undesirable, indistinct emotion and apprehension of unknown origin. It appears in the individual when stressful conditions persist or recur often in life. Sleep is a physiological process that refreshes and increases physical strength. Shift work or working at night shifts may account for increased sleep disorders among nurses. Night shift can interfere with the sleep-wake cycle and bring about adverse physiological and psychological outcomes. Night work exerts adverse physical, mental and social effects on nurses' life and affects their work efficiency and performance. On the other hand, sleep is needed for the brain to function appropriately. Insomnia can be a side effect of anxiety, anger, depression or stress that face psychiatric nurses more often.

A key characteristic of mentally-healthy individuals is their social orientation and a sense of attachment to others. Human is a social being so that every individual tends to maintain minimal levels of social relations and group interactions. However, establishing such relations require membership in groups. Still, group membership requires commonalities with the members. Limited time for social relations with friends and relatives, unexpected situations, shift work, organizational and individual factors may deprive nurses of normal social interactions, hence the social functioning disorders in the nurses. One of the indicators of mental well-being is a sense of satisfaction, happiness and freshness. Depression is one of the main social problems. Nursing is a job associated with high levels of stress. Occupational stress, working conditions and assigned tasks exert an important effect on nurses' physical and mental health and can increase their problems. Nurses experience high levels of stress due to the nature of their job. On the other hand, due to more prevalent mental stress and pressures in psychiatric departments, nurses become more vulnerable to mood disorders such as depression.

Thus, it is recommended that all nurses be screened in terms of mental health during early recruitment stages by using psychological tests, which may help identify vulnerable individuals and refer them to consultation centers to monitor them. In order to decrease social-psychological disorders, it is recommended that nurses undergo periodic examinations. Identification of emotions and attitudes in psychiatric nurses can help them discover their own and their patients’ problems. Training nurses on stress-reduction techniques, in-service training, defensive training as well as reduction of psychophysiological pressures can also support psychiatric nurses.
REFERENCES


