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Occupational stress, compassion fatigue and burnout among Canadian nurses: Examination of the moderator role of emotional intelligence

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Nurses often suffer from high levels of occupational stress, partly due to work environment characteristics and conditions in which they work. To this end, the tridimensional model of occupational stress posits that the combination of psychological distress, lack of decisional latitude and lack of social support can lead to a variety of psychological problems, such as compassion fatigue and burnout. Compassion fatigue can be conceptualized as the emotional, moral and physical distress, which occurs as a consequence of caring and bearing witness to the suffering of others. It manifests itself through a gradual erosion of empathy, optimism and compassion. Compassion fatigue can then have repercussions on nurses' professional life and consequently, progress into burnout. Burnout can be defined as a psychological syndrome involving chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors that individuals' experience at work and their subsequent responses to their tasks, organizations, coworkers, clients and themselves. Maslach and Jackson (1981) argued that burnout is a multidimensional construct consisting of three separate, albeit related, dimensions: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. However, it is possible that individual dispositions, such as emotional intelligence, may moderate the relationship between occupational stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. Emotional intelligence is a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others, relate with them and cope with daily demands. However, few research studies have examined the role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between the previous variables. The aim of this research study is therefore to fill this empirical gap by examining the moderator role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between occupational stress, compassion fatigue and burnout.

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