



Received: 21-06-2026
Accepted: 01-08-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Psychological Hazards in the Hospital Setting Among Nurses: Types of Psychological Hazards, Challenges, Impact, and Preventive Strategies

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2026.6.4.6726>

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Abstract

Nurses are exposed to various occupational hazards while delivering healthcare services, with psychological hazards being among the most significant yet often overlooked. Continuous exposure to stressful work environments, heavy workloads, workplace violence, emotional demands, and shift work can adversely affect nurses' mental health and professional performance. Psychological hazards contribute to burnout, anxiety, depression, compassion fatigue, reduced job satisfaction, absenteeism, and increased medical errors,

ultimately compromising patient safety and healthcare quality. This review explores the major psychological hazards experienced by nurses in hospital settings, their effects on individuals and healthcare organizations, and evidence-based strategies for prevention and management. Creating psychologically safe workplaces through supportive leadership, adequate staffing, mental health services, and organizational interventions is essential for sustaining a healthy nursing workforce.

Keywords: Psychological Hazards, Nurses, Occupational Stress, Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, Workplace Violence, Mental Health, Hospital Setting

Introduction

Around 50 to 60% nurses are suffering from psychological hazards in that workload, duty shift, emotional labour from patient suffering, and exposure to workplace violence these are the main causes of psychological hazard. Due to these nurse are facing significant levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, and depression. Recently we are able notice that our health care system facing the tremendous workload due to condition of pandemic like COVID-19, some epidemic conditions or any other causes. Some time these kind of condition act as a ephialtes for the nurses. As we know that hospitals are places of treatment and healing for patients, however, they may present a significant number of hazards to the health care workers, which could negatively impact on their health and safety. Health care workers or nurses are exposed to one of the most hazardous occupational settings.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychological hazards arise from poor work design, organizational culture, and social factors that have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm. When these hazards are not adequately addressed, they can result in stress-related illnesses, reduced productivity, and compromised patient care.

This review article aims to discuss psychological hazards affecting nurses in hospital settings, their consequences, associated risk factors, and strategies for prevention and management.

Definition of Psychological hazard

Psychosocial hazards are work-related hazards, just like physical hazards. They are not about an individual's personal mental health history or resilience. Instead, they focus on risks that originate from work and can reasonably be controlled by the organisation.

Psychological Hazards in Nursing

Psychological hazards refer to workplace conditions that negatively affect employees' mental, emotional, and social well-being. Unlike physical hazards, psychological hazards may not be immediately visible but can have profound long-term consequences on both healthcare professionals and patient outcomes.

Major Psychological Hazards among Nurses

1. Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is one of the most prevalent psychological hazards among nurses. It results from excessive workload, staff shortages, time pressure, inadequate resources, and increasing patient expectations.

Common causes include

According to the Indian Nursing Council guidelines, the general ward nurse-patient ratio is 1:3 in a teaching/medical college hospital setting and 1:5 in a non-teaching hospital but sometimes these guidelines are not implemented due to shortage of the staff or epidemic or endemic situation. In addition in the emergency department or casualty nurses are always facing some emergency situation this also main reason of occupational stress among the nurses. In some hospital setting senior nurses also have admin responsibility with documentation this also main cause of occupational stress.

2. Burnout Syndrome

Burnout is a work-related psychological syndrome characterized by: Some hospital setting has 12 hours shift policies due to that nurse are suffering from emotional exhaustion state and their psychological status goes towards the depersonalization state. Reduced the personal accomplishment is a core dimension of burnout syndrome among the nurses it shows some negative features among the nurses like self-doubt, feelings of ineffectiveness and a negative evaluation as well.

Burnout decreases nurses' motivation, productivity, and quality of patient care while increasing turnover intentions.

3. Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue develops due to prolonged exposure to patients' suffering, trauma, and death. It reduces nurses' emotional capacity to empathize with patients and families. In this type psychological hazards include so many symptoms like emotional numbness which means nurses brain wants to shut down or they are unable to express feelings like joy, sadness or anger and they act like a blunt person in front of any emotional state. Nurses are also lacking the empathy in compassion fatigue psychological hazard and they facing the difficulty in concentration in their professional and social work as well.

4. Workplace Violence and Bullying

When we envisage about the psychological hazards among the nurses violence and bullying this type hazard is most common. Sometime in the hospital setting code violate is happen which means some hard words are exchanging among the patients relatives to nursing staff or other medics just due to misunderstanding. In the initial stage of grief patient also loss his/her control and try to use some harsh words towards nurses these are natural things if we are talking on the basis of grief stage but sometimes its cause the negative psychological impact on the nursing staff. In addition bullying is also most common psychological hazard in the nursing profession. It sometime base on the caste discrimination or on skin colour also.

In short violence and bullying may originate from patients, relatives, visitors, colleagues, or supervisors, leading to fear, anxiety, decreased confidence, and poor job satisfaction.

5. Shift Work and Sleep Disturbance

Rotating shifts, night duties, overtime, and prolonged working hours disrupt circadian rhythms and reduce sleep quality. It shows the reduced the alertness among the nurses and poor decision making ability due to these nurses are do clinical errors also in some cases. Due to poor sleep irritable behaviour is able to seen in nurses.

6. Moral Distress

Moral distress occurs when nurses know the ethically appropriate action but cannot perform it because of institutional constraints, inadequate staffing, or limited resources. Repeated moral distress contributes to emotional exhaustion and professional dissatisfaction. Due to some organizational ethics nurse are unable to take right decision or she/he feels lack of autonomy in hospital setting.

7. Secondary Traumatic Stress

Repeated exposure to critically ill patients, emergencies, disasters, and patient deaths may result in symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

8. Job Insecurity and Organizational Changes

Frequent policy changes, restructuring, increased workload, lack of promotion opportunities, and job uncertainty create chronic psychological stress.

Challenges

Several factors increase nurses' vulnerability to psychological hazards:

- Staff shortages
- Heavy workload
- Inadequate organizational support
- Poor communication
- Long working hours
- Lack of recognition
- Workplace conflicts
- High emotional demands
- Limited coping skills
- Poor work-life balance

Impact on Nurses

Psychological hazards affect nurses physically, emotionally, socially, and professionally.

Physical Effects

- Headache
- Hypertension
- Fatigue
- Sleep disorders
- Gastrointestinal disturbances

Psychological Effects

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Burnout
- Emotional exhaustion
- Low self-esteem

Professional Effects

- Reduced job satisfaction
- Poor concentration
- Increased absenteeism

- Medication errors
- Reduced productivity
- Increased turnover

Impact on Patient Care

Psychological distress among nurses significantly influences healthcare quality.

Negative outcomes include

- Reduced patient safety
- Increased medication errors
- Poor communication
- Delayed interventions
- Lower patient satisfaction
- Reduced quality of nursing care

Prevention and Management Strategies

Hospitals should adopt comprehensive interventions to reduce psychological hazards.

Organizational Strategies

- **Adequate staffing:** As per the Indian Nursing Council protocol organization tries to distribute their staff as per the requirement. It will be helpful for control the workload on nursing staff.
- **Fair workload distribution:** During the workload distribution senior nurse should be non-bias and workload distribution should be as per the seniority.
- **Employee assistance programs:** For getting positive output from the staff few organization works on performance appraisal on the yearly basis so its need to implement this criteria for all organization.
- **Counselling services:** Counselling is the best way to cope-up different types of psychological hazards. Organization should arrange the at least one counselling session per year for their employee or nursing staff.
- **Stress management workshops:** Arrange the stress management workshop for nursing staff with the use of these kinds of workshop nurses able to implement yoga, meditation and various kinds of coping strategies in their regular life.
- **Anti-bullying policies:** These type of policies are very essential for stop bullying in a hospital, key strategies include clear zero-tolerance policies, rapid incident reporting, and leadership training. Creating a safe workplace protects staff and improves patient nursing care.
- **Safe reporting systems:** Self-reporting in healthcare is when a healthcare provider voluntarily reports medical mistakes through a system provided by their employer. Whether the self-reporting takes place on paper, by phone, or digitally, the purpose is to create a record and prevent similar errors from happening again. This is done through root cause analysis and comprehensive reviews of the collected data.
- **Flexible scheduling:** Flexible scheduling in hospital nursing staff is vital because it reduces burnout, improves nurse retention, and enhances patient care quality. Providing options like self-scheduling or shift swaps gives nurses greater control over their personal lives.

Individual Strategies

- Mindfulness and meditation

- Regular physical exercise
- Healthy sleep habits
- Time management
- Peer support
- Professional counselling
- Relaxation techniques
- Continuous professional education

Discussion

Psychological hazards among nurses have become increasingly important because of growing patient demands, technological advancements, and workforce shortages. Research consistently demonstrates that supportive leadership, adequate staffing, organizational justice, and accessible mental health resources reduce stress and burnout while improving job satisfaction and patient outcomes. Developing resilient healthcare systems requires prioritizing nurses' psychological health alongside patient safety initiatives.

Conclusion

Psychological hazards represent a significant occupational challenge for nurses in hospital settings. Occupational stress, burnout, workplace violence, compassion fatigue, and moral distress adversely affect nurses' health, job satisfaction, and quality of patient care. Healthcare organizations must implement evidence-based interventions that promote mental well-being, improve working conditions, and foster psychologically safe environments. Investing in nurses' mental health benefits both healthcare professionals and the patients they serve.

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