

THE OREGON NURSE RETENTION PROJECT:

Final Report to the Northwest Health Foundation

August 1, 2009

Supplemental Projects, Presentations, and Conclusions



Oregon Nurse Retention Project

The Oregon Nurse Retention Project: Contributors

Robert R. Sinclair, Ph.D.
Clemson University

Cynthia D. Mohr, Ph.D.
Portland State University

Sue Davidson, Ph.D., R.N., CNS
Oregon Nurses Association

Lindsay E. Sears, M.S.
Clemson University

Nicole Deese, M.S.
Clemson University

Robert R. Wright, B.A.
Portland State University

Melissa C. Waitsman, B.A.
Clemson University

Laurie Jacobs, M.S.
Portland State University

David Cadiz, M.S.
Portland State University

The Oregon Nurse Retention Project: Acknowledgements

The research presented in this report was supported by a grant from the Northwest Health Foundation (Proposal 14180) to Portland State University. We are grateful to the Northwest Health Foundation (NWHF) for supporting this work, particularly Judith Woodruff who helped focus the research on critical topics and who encouraged us to choose certain paths that ultimately led to some important discoveries. Our research team is now pursuing several lines of research that would not have been possible without NWHF support. Several staff members at both the Oregon Nurses' association and Portland State University have been extraordinarily helpful in managing the financial and logistical aspects of the study, particularly Anh Ly at Portland State and Pisith Kong at ONA. Finally, and most importantly, we deeply appreciate the help of all of the nurses who contributed to the research, including those who participated in focus groups that helped us develop and refine the survey instruments and the study participants, who took a great deal of time out of their busy lives to tell us about their work. We hope we can honor their contributions by using this research to help create a healthier workplace for nurses in the future.

Correspondence to the first author:

Robert R. Sinclair, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology
Clemson University
418 Brackett Hall
Clemson, SC
29634
(864) 656-3931
rsincla@clemson.edu

Recommended Citation:

Sinclair, R. R., Mohr, C. P., Davidson, S., Sears, L. E., Deese, M. N., Wright, R. R., Waitsman, M., Jacobs, L., Cadiz, D. (2009). *The Oregon Nurse Retention Project: Final Report to the Northwest Health Foundation*. Unpublished Technical Report.

Supplemental Projects

One of the strengths of our project team is that we were able to use NWHF funds to leverage other resources at Portland State University and Clemson University. For example, our proposal included support for one .50 FTE graduate student. However, by combining project funds with additional support from Portland State and later, from Clemson University, we were able to support six different graduate students, all of whom made essential contributions. The larger research team enabled us to pursue several research streams that went beyond the original aims of the project without affecting our ability to complete the core project activities. These research projects include studies of interpersonal conflict in health care work, aging and age discrimination, and the use of expressive writing interventions to improve nurses' occupational health.

Turnover Plans and Shocks

In the introduction, we described the importance of examining turnover plans and shocks as potential predictors of turnover/retention. We noted the need for researchers to investigate whether events that occur at work lead to changes in nurses' intentions to leave the organization. Although we did not explicitly address this issue in our research aims, we noted the need for studies addressing such issues in turnover research. As a preliminary step toward addressing some of these issues, we investigated how the relationship between turnover intentions and work experiences differed for nurses who reported plans to leave at some point in the future.

The turnover plans measures were two single item measures that asked nurses to indicate whether they had a plan to quit WHEN a particular occurred (i.e., a definite plan) or a plan to quit IF a particular event occurred (i.e., a conditional plan). Of the entire Wave 1 sample, 148 (36%) reported having a definite plan to leave and 127 (31%) reported that they had a conditional plan to leave at some point. Our future work will investigate how these nurses differ from their colleagues who do not have such plans with regard to their job attitudes, occupational health, and turnover-related behavior. For example, some preliminary analyses indicate that nurses with turnover plans react differently to positive and negative events than nurses who do not have such plans. Such findings have considerable potential to advance the literature on turnover and retention in nurses, as well as among employees more generally.

Age-related Perceptions

The nursing workforce is aging at a rapid pace and it is important to understand how age-related perceptions may contribute to retention concerns among nurses. Therefore, our research team has been investigating the possible relationship between age self-perceptions and experiences of age-related bias on intentions to transfer departments and retire. Our preliminary research has found that among older nurses, those who feel younger are less likely to intend to retire or to intend to leave their current departments. However, age issues are not limited to older nurses. In fact, we found that younger nurses also indicated that they face age discrimination. This finding could be one explanation for the high turnover observed for younger nurses. Our future research will examine perceptions of organizational acceptance of older and younger nurses. Preliminary findings from this research are promising: older nurses who perceive that their organization is less accepting of them are also more likely to be considering retirement.

Interpersonal Conflict in Health Care

Both our qualitative and quantitative findings indicated that interpersonal conflict was an important stressor. Our research team has been investigating interpersonal conflict in nursing work. These studies have included both empirical research examining how incivility at work influences nurses' health and retention outcomes and qualitative research examining the nature of interpersonal conflicts. We have found eight general themes concerning the nature of interpersonal conflict: feeling unfairly treated, feelings of dislike or animosity, others' irresponsibility, insufficient or lack of communication, others' incompetence, work structure conflicts, work disagreement, and unnecessary instruction or advice. We anticipate that understanding these themes will help to guide to future research investigating interpersonal conflict, especially among nurses as well as developing occupational health interventions. In particular, the results suggest that interventions aimed at reducing stress caused by interpersonal conflicts should target both organizational-level (e.g., policy change) and individual-level (e.g., coping skills training) factors.

Expressive Writing and the Perceived Benefits of Research Participation

The expressive writing research concerns an idea suggested by some members of the research team as we progressed through the grant. We developed the weekly work experience survey with the goal of learning more about nurses' work experiences from nurses in their own voices. However, as the project progressed, we became aware of a recent body of research that highlights the health benefits of expressive writing for people who have the opportunity to write about their own experiences. Although the weekly work experience survey was not set up with this in mind, our research design did give us the opportunity to compare nurses who participated in the weekly research with those who did not (among nurses who participated in any of our research. As a preliminary step in investigating these issues, we added

a scale to the Wave 2 survey concerning the perceived benefits of research participation. Table 20 shows the results of two sets of comparisons. The top half of the table compares people who completed 8-12 weekly surveys with the entire rest of the sample, and shows that people who participated in the weekly survey reported greater perceived benefits of participation. The lower half of the Table presents the perceived benefits of participating in the weekly surveys among those who initially volunteered to participate in the weekly survey. Once again, these findings establish that participants who completed more of the weekly surveys reported greater benefits of participation than those who did not. Finally, it is important to note that the overall pattern of findings suggests that participants had moderate to strong positive perceptions about participating in the research. This suggests an unanticipated benefit of conducting the study that we expect to explore in future research.

Table 20. Benefits of participation in overall and weekly work experience study.

	Benefits of Overall Research	Benefits of Weekly Research Participation		
	All ¹	All Weekly ²	1 – 7 Weekly Surveys ³	8 – 12 Weekly Surveys ⁴
I gained insight about my experiences from participation.	3.55	3.82	3.41	3.90
I gained something positive from participating.	3.73	3.88	3.52	3.96
I found participating beneficial to me.	3.66	3.82	3.41	3.92
I found participating in this study personally meaningful.	3.66	3.83	3.41	3.93
Total Score (Mean of 4 items)	3.65	3.83	3.43	3.93

Note. People who completed more weekly surveys reported significantly higher benefits for all items shown in the table (i.e., comparing the figure in the middle column to the figure in the right column for each row).

¹N = 343-346; ²N = 128-130; ³N = 21-22; ⁴N = 100-101.

Deliverables, Reports, and Presentations

This technical report was our primary deliverable. We also created a project website to disseminate the results of our research (www.onrp.webnode.com). The website describes the research program related to this project, provides additional nurse retention resources, and will eventually be used as a site to disseminate full-text versions of ONRP publications and presentations. As Table 21 shows, we already have made several professional presentations related to ONRP research.

The Principal Investigator also gave a keynote address on positive work experiences in nursing in October at an international conference on organizational psychology and health care (<http://enop2009.com/>). Finally, we have submitted three follow-up grant proposals, one of which was funded. The funded grant was from Clemson University and will support writing one paper based on ONRP findings and conducting additional research in support of a larger grant application.

Table 21. Academic presentations, Masters thesis projects, and funded grants using ONRP data.

Citation
Invited Addresses
Sinclair, R. R. (October, 2009). Promoting positive work experiences in nursing: Models, outcomes, and interventions. <i>XIth European Conference on Organizational Psychology and Human Service Work</i> . ISCTE, Lisbon, Portugal.
Conference Presentations
Sinclair, R. R., et al. (April, 2010). A quasi-experimental study of expressive writing and nurses' job attitudes. <i>Poster to be presented at the 25th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology</i> . Atlanta, GA.
Cadiz, D., et al., Commitment as a mediator between morale age and withdrawal intentions. <i>Poster to be presented at the 25th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology</i> . Atlanta, GA.
Sears, L. E., et al. (April, 2010). Incivility and support in the workplace: Which matters more? <i>Poster to be presented at the 25th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology</i> . Atlanta, GA.
Wright, R. R., et al. (January, 2010). Evaluation of the interpersonal conflict construct: Implications for measurement. <i>Poster to be presented at the 11th Annual conference for the Society for Personality and Social Psychology</i> . Las Vegas, NV.
Jacobs, L.M., et al., (January 2010). Interpersonal conflicts on the job and nurses' alcohol consumption. <i>Poster to be presented at the 11th annual conference of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology</i> . Las Vegas, NV.
Cadiz, D., et al., (November, 2009). Subjective age, core self-evaluations, and retirement intentions among registered nurses. <i>Work, Stress, and Health 2009</i> . San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Deese, M. N., & Sinclair, R. R. (November, 2009). Personal resources as mediators of the resources-engagement relationship. <i>Work, Stress, and Health 2009</i> . San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Sinclair, R. R., et al., (November, 2009). Development and validation of a measure of work schedule justice. <i>Work, Stress, and Health 2009</i> . San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Waitsman, M. C., et al., (November, 2009). The moderating effects of staffing constraints on withdrawal from nursing. <i>Work, Stress, and Health 2009</i> . San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Wright, R. R., et al., (November, 2009). Evaluation and comparison of a typology and checklist of nurse workplace interpersonal conflict. <i>Work, Stress, and Health 2009</i> . San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Cadiz, D. M., et al., (April, 2009). Subjective age, core self-evaluations, and workplace outcomes among nurses. <i>24th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology</i> . New Orleans, LA.
Deese, M. N., et al., (April, 2009). <i>Bad vs. good: Do positive work events predict nurses' engagement?</i> <i>24th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology</i> . New Orleans, LA.
Grants Funded
Sinclair, R. R. (2009). Effects of expressive writing on nurses' occupational health during the socialization process. <i>Clemson University College of Business and Behavioral Sciences Summer Grant Program</i> . Amount funded \$9,506.
Masters Theses Supported
Wright, R. R. (2009). <i>Validation of a workplace interpersonal conflict typology</i> . Portland State University.
Deese, M. N. (2009). <i>Testing an extension of the job demands-resources model: The addition of personal resources to the resources – engagement relationship</i> . Clemson University.
Cadiz, D. (2009). <i>Subjective age in the workplace: Exploring the nomological network</i> . Portland State University.

General Conclusions

Our research had three aims. We sought to describe the nature of nurses' positive and negative work experiences, investigate the relationship between work experiences and retention-related outcomes, and develop a list of recommendations for interventions that would help hospitals create more favorable working conditions for nurses. Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative research we developed a model of these experiences that we believe strikes an appropriate balance between being empirically and theoretically supported and being clear and concise enough to be used in practice.

As we have hopefully illustrated with this report, this grant ultimately stimulated a multifaceted research program that we expect will make several important contributions to understanding nurses' occupational health and retention. We are excited about the future prospects for this research program and have an ambitious agenda of research that will capitalize on our current data and/or find ways to build upon this research with other future data collection efforts. Our main obstacle at this point will be finding the time to write research reports detailing all of these findings!

However, the study will only achieve its ultimate purpose if we are able to communicate the results to decision makers in hospitals as well as to other critical community stakeholders. Toward that end, the research team will be working to identify effective communication strategies to reach the different audiences involved. As a first step, we intend to create a short version of this report, reducing the essential findings down to perhaps 10 pages and with the text tailored toward a hospital management audience. We hope to work with ONA to create a multicolor glossy document that we could distribute for this purpose. We also ask all those who read this report to share what they have learned with their colleagues.

We conclude by mentioning two recurrent themes in this work. First, our findings highlight the importance of positive work experiences. Positive experiences are not simply the absence of bad experiences, but rather, contribute to nurses' occupational health and retention outcomes above and beyond the negative experiences. Nursing work can be incredibly rewarding, nurses have more good experiences than bad at work, nurses' interactions with their colleagues and patients are normally incredibly rewarding, and nurses care about their own professional growth as well as their efforts to deliver top quality patient care.

Second, and equally important, the stories relayed to us by our participants and the data they provided to our questionnaires, both highlight the occupational stressors that create challenges for nurses. Nursing work is demanding enough under optimal circumstances, but the challenges of nursing work can be compounded when nurses lack the material or human resources necessary to support them in their work. The participating nurses also provided many useful recommendations about how to solve some of their recurrent challenges and we hope that this report encourages decision makers to renew their efforts to improve working conditions in nursing care.

Parting Comments

We end this report by sharing some of the positive comments we had from nurses who completed the weekly surveys. Of course, other people provided suggestions for ways to improve our research in the future, but we wanted to end by highlighting some of the benefits people felt (or hope to feel in the future) from participating in this research.

- *It felt therapeutic to me. I felt valued for my opinions. I look forward to hearing results and how they will be utilized.*
- *If this study can help managers to realize the importance of adequate staffing it will be more than worthwhile. Thanks.*
- *"I just want to say that I've been telling other nurses about this survey, and explaining the questions you ask. They are all fascinated, several wish they could join. And I've realized that processing interactions through this survey has / been changing how I interact with people when there are conflicts and bad feelings. I am much more likely to go out of my comfort zone and approach people to resolve problems right away. Also have had a lot of insights both into what I can do to make things better and what organization can do. So thank you so much. This is a great / process. Very well-thought out questions."*
- *It was a great study that gave me insight into my own misery. I look forward to seeing some of the results (hopefully) in the future, to see how similar my experiences and dissatisfaction were.*
- *I really hope that the study helps the profession retain good nurses; these paragons help us all.*

