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Challenges and Difficulties at Work and Work-Related Stress Among Newly Qualified Nurses

Alicja Kaminska
Jagiellonian University

Iwona Bodys-Cupak
Jagiellonian University

Aleksandra Cybulska
J. Dietl Specialist Hospital in Krakow

Katarzyna Wojtas
Jagiellonian University

Abstract: The nursing profession involves emotional strain, time pressure, responsibility and the need to recognise teamwork standards in specific conditions. These stress-inducing factors pose a particular challenge for young employees. *Objective:* The aim of the study was to determine the occurrence of difficulties and the level of stress at work among nurses entering the profession. *Material and methods:* The study was conducted in the form of an MSForms survey among 89 nurses using the Stress Perception Questionnaire and an original survey questionnaire. The results of the study were analysed using Excel and SPSS software. The result was considered statistically significant when $p < 0.05$. *Results:* In the area of exposure to stressors, 67.42% of respondents felt overworked at least once a week, and for 79.78%, a lack of resources and support made it difficult to perform their tasks. 56.18% of nurses worked overtime. Sixty-four point zero four per cent of all respondents indicated that their remuneration was inadequate for their workload, while 83.15% of respondents confirmed their satisfaction with the support of their superiors and colleagues. The respondents experienced a moderate level of general stress (KPS_WO: $M = 59.52$), with slightly elevated emotional tension (KPS_NE: $M = 22.40$). The frequency of excessive workload correlated significantly with the intensity of stress, with no significance for the control scale. *Conclusions:* Organisational and relational stressors in the work environment are related to the stress experienced by respondents starting their nursing careers. The occurrence of difficulties in the workplace points to the need for interventions that build a safe working environment and reduce the risk of stress escalation.

Keywords: Nurse, Profession, Stress, Work

Introduction

Professional competence and the ability to cope with emotional stress in the nursing profession are linked to adaptation within the medical team structure when starting work. Research confirms that nurses are particularly vulnerable to occupational stress in their first years of work (Kang, 2022) as a result of excessive workloads, staff shortages (Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2017), low pay, shift work and overtime (Woo et al., 2020), daily contact with patients in serious condition (Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2022; Woo et al., 2020), conflicts within the team and lack of support from superiors (Rees et al., 2020). Confronting the idea of nursing with the reality of working in healthcare facilities can contribute to feelings of confusion, lack of confidence and decision-making stress with limited clinical experience (Wolff et al., 2022). In view of these facts, it is important to consciously support

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young staff in practical skills and soft competences (Alshehry et al., 2023) based on mentoring programmes that facilitate professional adaptation (Zhang et al., 2022).

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to determine the occurrence of difficulties and stress levels at work among nurses entering the profession.

Material and Methods

The study was conducted using a diagnostic survey method with a proprietary questionnaire (questions about stress, sense of support from colleagues, workload and personal details) and the Stress Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) assessing subjective, generalised stress and its basic components (Głowińska & Słodki, 2023). Individuals who anonymously participated in the online survey on the MS Forms platform met the criteria for inclusion in the study (voluntary participation, legal age, 0 to 2 years of work experience). The Research Ethics Committee of the Jagiellonian University Medical College (No. 118.0043.1.230.2025) approved the study to be conducted between 18 June 2025 and 30 August 2025. The study results were compiled using Excel and SPSS software. The analysis included descriptive statistics, the Shapiro-Wilk test, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The result was considered statistically significant when $p < 0.05$.

Characteristics of the Study Group

The study involved 89 participants. The average age of the respondents was 24.92 years ($SD = 2.31$), and the most numerous groups were people aged up to 25 (76.40%). Women accounted for 97.75% of the total. 77.53% of the respondents had completed a bachelor's degree, and 22.47% had obtained a master's degree. The average length of service was 1.29 years ($SD = 0.53$ years). The most common places of employment of the respondents were internal medicine wards (50.56%), surgical wards (8.99%), hospices (7.87%), primary health care (6.74%), and neurology and stroke wards (5.62%).

Results

The Working Environment in the Opinion of Respondents Based on A Proprietary Survey Questionnaire

Respondents felt overworked most often 'several times a week' (44.94%), less than once a week (32.58%) or every day (22.47%). For 79.78% of respondents, the lack of resources and support was a significant barrier to performing their professional duties. Slightly more than half of the respondents (50.56%) admitted to feeling stress related to making decisions in crisis situations less than once a week, while 20.22% of respondents faced such situations every day. Physical working conditions and emotional stress affected the well-being and professional performance of the respondents (64.04%). Interpersonal conflicts were experienced by 44.94% of respondents in the form of communication problems, avoidance of professional duties, gossip, mobbing, disrespect from doctors, division of labour, and discrimination from senior nurses. Emotional stress as a result of traumatic situations was experienced by 41.57% of respondents and was associated with the sudden death of a patient with a good prognosis, patients screaming, conversations with superiors, working under time pressure (resuscitation), and performing post-mortem toilet procedures on patients. The salary was considered too low in relation to the workload by 64.04% of respondents. Overtime work was performed daily by 1.12% of the total. Satisfaction with the level of support from superiors and colleagues was moderate for 77.53% of respondents. Respondents assessed the possibility of continuous improvement and development of professional skills. For 46.07% of respondents, this was difficult, and for 46.07%, it was easy.

Results Based on the Stress Perception Questionnaire (SPQ)

The results indicate a slightly elevated level of emotional tension ($M = 22.40$) among people starting their careers. External stress ($M = 19.20$) and intrapsychic stress ($M = 17.91$) were moderate. The overall result ($M = 59.52$) indicated an average level of stress in the study group. Details in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic descriptive statistics of the KPS questionnaire

Variable	M	SD	Me	Q1	Q3	min	max	A	K	n	test S-W
KPS_NE	22.40	5.86	23	20	28	7	35	-0.51	-0.15	89	W(89) = 0.96, p < 0.01
KPS_SZ	19.20	4.63	19	16	23	9	30	-0.10	-0.11	89	W(89) = 0.97, p = 0.066
KPS_SI	17.91	5.62	18	12	21	9	35	0.46	0.00	89	W(89) = 0.94, p < 0.001
KPS_SK	21.40	4.19	21	18	25	13	30	0.30	-0.78	89	W(89) = 0.96, p < 0.01
KPS_WO	59.52	14.02	60	50	69	32	100	-0.03	-0.22	89	W(89) = 0.98, p = 0.085

KPS_NE – emotional tension; KPS_SZ – external stress; KPS_SI – intrapsychic stress; KPS_SK – lie detection scale; KPS_WO – overall score; M – mean; SD – standard deviation; Me – median; Q1 and Q3 – quartiles 1 and 3; A – skewness; K – kurtosis; S-W test – Shapiro-Wilk test of normality of distribution (normal distribution when $p > 0.05$)

Workload and Stress Levels Based on the Stress Perception Questionnaire (SPQ)

Statistical analysis showed moderate, statistically significant negative correlations between the frequency of perceived workload and the levels of individual dimensions of stress and the overall score. The more often the respondents felt excessive workload, the higher their stress levels were. The KPS_SK variable did not show any significant correlations (Table 2).

Table 2. Workload and stress levels among respondents

Spearman's correlation coefficient	Frequency of feeling excessive daily workload
KPS_NE	$r = -0.43, p < 0.001$
KPS_SZ	$r = -0.51, p < 0.001$
KPS_SI	$r = -0.42, p < 0.001$
KPS_SK	$r = -0.19, p = 0.075$
KPS_WO	$r = -0.52, p < 0.001$

KPS_NE – emotional tension; KPS_SZ – external stress; KPS_SI – intrapsychic stress; KPS_SK – lie detection scale; KPS_WO – overall score

Conclusion

1. A lack of human resources and support, excessive workload, low pay, and communication difficulties and interpersonal conflicts within the team contribute to feelings of stress among the respondents.
2. More frequent experiences of excessive workload were associated with higher levels of emotional tension, external stress, intrapsychic stress and general stress in the study group.
3. There is a need to take professional measures in the workplace to minimise the risk of stress escalation among people starting their professional careers.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The Research Ethics Committee of the Jagiellonian University Medical College (No. 118.0043.1.230.2025) approved the study to be conducted between 18 June 2025 and 30 August 2025.

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Author(s) Information

Alicja Kaminska

Jagiellonian University Medical College, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing Theory and Fundamentals
Address: Michałowskiego 12; 31-126 Kraków, Poland

Iwona Bodys-Cupak

Jagiellonian University Medical College, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing Theory and Fundamentals
Address: Michałowskiego 12; 31-126 Kraków, Poland

Aleksandra Cybulska

J. Dietl Specialist Hospital in Kraków
Internal Medicine Department
Address: ul. Skarbową 1; 31-121 Kraków, Poland

Katarzyna Wojtas

Jagiellonian University Medical College, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Clinical Nursing
Address: Kopernika 25; 31-501 Kraków, Poland
Contact e-mail: katarzyna.wojtas@uj.edu.pl

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