

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT WITH INTENTION TO LEAVE, AND PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG PSYCHIATRIC NURSES

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND:

Nurses working in psychiatric wards face unique challenges compared to other departments, such as job dissatisfaction and turnover, which require special attention from management. A positive professional self-concept can play a crucial role in enhancing adaptability in the high-stress nursing environment.

OBJECTIVE:

The research team aimed to investigate the relationship between professional self-concept and the tendency to leave the profession and professional quality of life among psychiatric nurses.

DESIGN:

This was a descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study.

SETTING:

The study was conducted on 219 nurses employed at Razi Educational and Treatment Center in Tehran, Iran in 2023. The sample was selected using a census method.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES:

Data collection tools included a demographic information questionnaire, Kevin's Professional Self-Concept Questionnaire, Hinshaw's Turnover Intention Questionnaire, and Stamm's Professional Quality of Life Questionnaire. The results were analyzed using SPSS software version 25.

RESULTS:

The average professional self-concept score of the nurses was 25.37 ± 69.22 . The tendency to leave the job, compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary trauma stress were at moderate levels. Professional self-concept and satisfaction with received salary were predictors of the tendency to leave the job. Professional self-concept was the only predictor of compassion satisfaction and secondary trauma stress. Burnout was predicted by both professional self-concept and satisfaction with salary.

CONCLUSIONS:

It is recommended that managers and policymakers develop programs to enhance professional self-concept and increase the salary of nurses working in psychiatric departments to reduce their tendency to leave the profession and improve their professional quality of life.

KEYWORDS

Professional self-concept, Intention to Leave, Quality of professional life, Psychiatric nurse, Psychiatric hospital.

INTRODUCTION

Among various professions, some require higher levels of self-concept, and the nursing profession holds a special position in this regard [1-4]. A positive professional self-concept can play a crucial role in increasing adaptability in the high-stress nursing environment, especially in psychiatric wards, which are highly stressful for nurses due to continuous and exhausting stimulation [5, 6]. Additionally, a positive professional self-conception enhances nurses' empowerment, clinical performance, and problem-solving abilities, consequently improving the quality of care provided. In contrast, nurses with a low professional self-concept have lower clinical competency and job satisfaction and a higher tendency to leave the profession [7-10].

Since professional self-concept is a complex phenomenon, all related variables need to be studied [11, 12]. According to the study by Cowin and colleagues, nurses' professional self-concept has a stronger correlation with their decision to stay in the profession compared to job satisfaction [13]. Results from Owolabi's study indicate that nurses have the highest tendency to leave their positions compared to other healthcare system staff [14]. The shortage of nurses in Iran is highlighted in a statement by the Iranian Ministry of Health, which declared that even if 20,000 new nurses are recruited annually, it will take until 2026 to reach the global standard [15]. Besides the increased burnout rates and the average age of employed nurses, their intention to leave the profession may lead to reduced care quality and even higher patient mortality rates [16]. To assess job turnover intention, various models of the turnover process should be considered, including individuals' perceptions of their current job and organization, with motivations also being evaluated as immediate determining factors [17]. An individual's perception of their current job may reflect their professional self-concept, and given the importance of turnover intention among nurses, examining the relationship between these two variables is highly relevant and is one of the objectives of this study.

Due to the challenging and high-risk working conditions, psychiatric nurses experience more work-related stress compared to nurses in other departments, which can impact their professional quality of life [18]. Studies focusing on the professional quality of life of nurses report high levels of compassion fatigue and burnout among psychiatric nurses [19, 20]. The professional quality of life of healthcare system employees affects patient safety and care quality [21]. Therefore, a decrease in nurses' professional quality of life may reduce patient care quality and safety, highlighting the importance of this concept. Professional quality of life is a multidimensional concept influenced by employees' perceptions of their work and organization [22]. Thus, it can be envisioned that professional self-concept could be one of the factors affecting nurses' professional quality of life.

Nurses' professional self-concept is an evolving process that begins when an individual is accepted as a nursing student at university and continues and develops as they are allowed to work as a graduate nurse in the clinical field [23]. Understanding the impact of various dimensions of professional self-concept on professional quality of life and turnover intention can facilitate the design of relevant interventions and promote longer retention of nurses in healthcare systems. Given that no study has yet investigated the relationship between professional self-concept, professional quality of life, and turnover intention among nurses in Iran, this research appears to be necessary.

METHODS

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted between February and April 2024. The participants in this study were nurses working at Razi Psychiatric Hospital affiliated to the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences in Tehran City, the capital of Iran. The reason for choosing this hospital was that Razi Psychiatric Hospital is the largest specialized center for providing psychiatric services and care in Iran. This hospital was established in 1918 and is known as one of the oldest hospitals in Iran. All the nurses working in this hospital (except for the nursing manager and supervisor) who have the inclusion criteria for entering the study were investigated by census sampling method. The inclusion criteria were a master's degree in psychiatry nursing or a nursing expert who has completed psychiatry courses and also has a one year experience. Finally, out of a total of 278 nurses, 260 of them met the inclusion criteria and were examined.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected using four questionnaires:

- 1) Demographic Information Questionnaire, including 11 questions related to age, gender, marital status, service history, type of employment, education, current position, work history in general and Razi hospital, satisfaction with salary and participation in psychiatric nursing courses.
- 2) Covin's Professional Self-Concept Questionnaire, this questionnaire has 36 items and six dimensions including: General Nursing, Care, Staff Relations, Communication, Knowledge, and Leadership. In total, each person's score ranges from 36 to 288, and the higher the score, the better the person's self-concept [24].
- 3) Hinshaw's Turnover Intention Questionnaire, this questionnaire has 12 items and a Likert scale of 1 to 5 points from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". [25]
- 4) Stamm's Professional Quality of Life Questionnaire. This questionnaire has three subscales of "compassion satisfaction", "job burnout" and "secondary trauma", totaling 25 questions [26, 27].

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The study was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Human Research at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences with code of ethics no: IR.USWR.REC.1402.158. Written informed consents were obtained from the participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was done using SPSS25 software. Normality of data distribution was examined by Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test ($P > 0.05$). Data was analyzed with descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics including independent t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation coefficient.

RESULTS

Among the 260 questionnaires distributed, 219 were correctly completed by the nurses and then analyzed. The mean and standard deviation of the age and work history of the nurses were 38.87(8.6), 14.01(8.43) respectively. Most of the nurses were female (58.4%), had a bachelor's degree in nursing (90%), were married (80.8%), and had a history of participating in psychiatric nursing courses (91.3%) (Table 1).

TABLE 1: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PSYCHIATRIC NURSES (N=219)

Variable		M(SD)	n (%)
Age		38.87(8.6)	
Gender	Female		128(58.4)
	Male		91(41.6)
Education	Bachelor's degree		197(90)
	Master's degree		22(10)
Marital status	Single		42(19.2)
	Married		177(80.8)
Type of employment	Formal		131(59.8)
	By contract		79(36.1)
	Compulsory service		9(4.1)
Current position	Nurse		199(90.9)
	Head nurse		20(9.1)
Work history in general	1 to 6 years	14.01 (8.43)	52(24.6)
	7 to 12 years		64(30.3)
	13 to 18 years		30(14.2)
	19 years and more		73(33.3)
Work history in Razi hospital	1 to 6 years		103(47)
	7 to 12 years		38(17.4)
	13 to 18 years		34(15.5)
	19 years and more		44(20.1)
Satisfaction with salary	Low		164(74.9)
	Moderate		55(25.1)
	High		0(0)
Participation in psychiatric nursing courses	Yes		200(91.3)
	No		19(8.7)

The mean and standard deviation of professional self-concept scores of nurses were 225.69 ± 37.2 . Among the dimensions of professional self-concept, the dimension of "care" had the highest score and the dimension of "general nursing self-esteem" had the lowest score. (Table 2). The mean and standard deviation of intention to leave was 2.87 ± 0.62 . Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of the professional quality of life scores and its dimensions among psychiatric nurses. According to this, the highest score is in the dimension of "compassion satisfaction".

TABLE 2: MEAN AND SD OF PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT AND ITS DIMENSIONS AMONG PSYCHIATRIC NURSES (N=219)

Variable	Mean	SD
Professional self-concept	225.69	37.25
General Nursing	35.19	9.24
Care	39.03	6.07
Staff Relations	38.8	6.32
Communication	39.38	5.81

Knowledge	37	6.87
Leadership	36.32	7.44

TABLE 3: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG PSYCHIATRIC NURSES (N=219)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Rang
Compassion satisfaction	39.17	6.66	16-50
Job burnout	14.86	4.76	5-25
Secondary trauma	26.07	7.28	11-45

The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there is an inverse and significant relationship between the intention to leave and professional self-concept and all its dimensions ($r=-0.348$, $p<0.001$), so that with the increase of professional self-concept and its dimensions, the intention to leave the job decreases (Table 4).

TABLE 4) CORRELATION BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT AND ITS DIMENSIONS WITH THE INTENTION TO LEAVE THE PROFESSION.

Variables	General Nursing	Care	Staff Relations	Communication	Knowledge	Leadership	Professional self-concept
Intention to leave	$r = -0.463$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.271$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.290$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.247$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.242$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.281$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.348$ $p<0.001$

The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient showed that there is a direct and significant relationship between satisfaction with compassion and professional self-concept and all its dimensions ($r=0.800$, $p<0.001$) in such a way that with the increase of professional self-concept and its dimensions are increased by the satisfaction of compassion. Also, there is an inverse and significant relationship between burnout and secondary trauma stress dimensions with professional self-concept and its dimensions (respectively $r=-0.411$, $p<0.001$ and $r=-0.331$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, with the increase of professional self-concept and its dimensions, burnout and secondary trauma stress are reduced (Table 5).

TABLE5) CORRELATION BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT AND ITS DIMENSIONS AND DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE.

Variables	General Nursing	Care	Staff Relations	Communication	Knowledge	Leadership	Professional self-concept
Compassion satisfaction	$r = 0.732$ $p<0.001$	$r = 0.725$ $p<0.001$	$r = 0.683$ $p<0.001$	$r = 0.736$ $p<0.001$	$r = 0.737$ $p<0.001$	$r = 0.676$ $p<0.001$	$r = 0.8$ $p<0.001$
Job burnout	$r = -0.438$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.334$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.314$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.294$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.411$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.335$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.411$ $p<0.001$
Secondary trauma	$r = -0.306$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.287$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.266$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.236$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.303$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.263$ $p<0.001$	$r = -0.331$ $p<0.001$

Among the demographic variables, satisfaction with the salary received had a significant relationship with the intention to leave ($p=0.006$, $t=2.8$). Also, satisfaction with the salary received had a significant relationship with the burnout dimension of the quality of professional life, so that people with a low level of satisfaction with the received salary had more scores in the burnout dimension ($p=0.025$, $t=2.262$).

Among other demographic variables, the experience of participating in psychiatric nursing courses had a significant relationship with the "care"($p=0.03$, $t=-2.09$), and "communication" ($p=0.05$, $t=-1.96$) dimensions of professional self-concept, so that nurses who participated in psychiatric nursing courses obtained higher scores in these dimensions.

The gender variable only had a significant relationship with the "compassion satisfaction" dimension of nurses' professional life quality, so that women had obtained higher scores in this dimension ($p=0.03$, $t= 2.182$). Also, the results of Pearson's correlation coefficient showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between age and the dimension of "Compassion satisfaction" of nurses' professional life quality ($r=0.171$, $p=0.011$). In addition, the age variable with the dimension "Staff Relations" had a positive and significant relationship. ($r=0.136$, $p=0.044$).

Based on the results from Table 6, multiple linear regression analysis showed that the intention to leave is significantly explained by the model ($p<0.001$). This model predicts about 14% of the variance in the intention to leave the job. Among the variables in the model, satisfaction with received salary ($p=0.012$) and professional self-concept ($p<0.001$) significantly predict the intention to leave the job. Specifically, lower satisfaction with salary increases the intention to leave by 0.234 units, while an increase of one unit in professional self-concept decreases the intention to leave the job by -0.006 units.

TABLE 6) MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION FOR PREDICTING THE INTENTION TO LEAVE THE JOB USING THE ENTER METHOD

predictor variables	b	β	t	p
Fixed value	4.016	-	12.914	<0.001
Gender (Male)	0.106	0.083	1.315	0.190
Satisfaction with salary(Low)	0.234	0.162	2.520	0.012
Age	-0.003	-0.041	-.0640	0.523
Professional self-concept	-0.006	-0.328	-5.168	<0.001
F (10/089), p value= <0/001, R ² =0/159 Adj R ² =0/143				
Regression equation: 4.016+ Gender*0.106+ Satisfaction with salary*0.234+Age*-.003+professional self-concept*-0.006				

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the relationship between professional self-concept and the intention to leave the profession, as well as the quality of professional life among psychiatric nurses in 2024 in Tehran. First, we measured professional self-concept, defined as each nurse's perception of their own competence, role clarity and professional identity. Second, we assessed their intention to leave the profession. Third, we evaluated their quality of professional life, including "compassion satisfaction", "job burnout" and "secondary trauma".

The results of this study indicated a significant inverse relationship between professional self-concept and its dimensions and the intention to leave the nursing profession. Specifically, as professional self-concept and its dimensions increase, the intention to leave the job decreases. Additionally, multiple regression results showed that professional self-concept significantly predicts the intention to leave the job.

The findings of Hu et al. (2022) indicated that professional identity and the intention to leave the job have a significant inverse relationship, aligning with the current study's results[28]. Similarly, Beta et al. (2023) found a direct and significant

relationship between the professional self-concept of nurses and its dimensions and the intention to remain in the nursing profession, which is consistent with the current findings[29]. These results suggest that professional self-concept plays a crucial role in enhancing the self-esteem of nurses and their planning regarding their career future. When nurses have a positive view of their profession, they invest more energy into it and show greater enthusiasm. A strong identity and self-concept may help nurses overcome challenges that reduce job satisfaction, thereby decreasing their intention to leave. Conversely, if nurses have a weak self-concept, their likelihood of leaving the job increases when favorable opportunities arise[28]. The professional self-concept of nurses is a developing process that begins as soon as an individual is accepted as a nursing student at university and continues to evolve until they are allowed to work clinically as a graduate nurse [23]. Given the shortage of nurses and psychiatric nurses, designing educational programs throughout the study and service periods to enhance their professional self-concept and increase their income could be a priority for managers and policymakers to reduce nurses' intention to leave their jobs.

The results of this study indicated a direct and significant relationship between compassion satisfaction and professional self-concept, along with its dimensions, among nurses. Specifically, as professional self-concept increases, compassion satisfaction also rises. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis revealed that professional self-concept significantly predicts compassion satisfaction. In the study by Kyun et al. (2020) involving nurses at four general hospitals in Korea, a significant direct relationship between compassion satisfaction and professional self-concept was observed [30]. Similarly, Hong et al. (2019) found a significant direct relationship between compassion satisfaction and professional self-concept among nurses in specialized wards [31].

Despite the differing research environments, the findings of these studies align with those of the current study. Compassion satisfaction is a positive outcome wherein nurses enjoy their profession by providing quality care to patients[32]. Professional self-concept affects thinking patterns, role development, as well as professional behavior and performance. Thus, it can be inferred that higher professional self-concept among nurses leads to greater satisfaction with their profession, prompting them to deliver higher quality services to patients and ultimately achieve greater satisfaction with their work [13]. This relationship can explain the direct connection between professional self-concept and compassion satisfaction among nurses.

The study also revealed an inverse and significant relationship between dimensions of compassion fatigue, namely burnout and secondary traumatic stress, and professional self-concept. As professional self-concept increases, burnout and secondary traumatic stress decrease. Multiple regression analysis further indicated that professional self-concept significantly predicts burnout and secondary traumatic stress. In the study by Durmaz et al. (2024), a significant negative relationship was found between the average scores of compassion fatigue and the scores of professional satisfaction, competence, and professional self-concept among psychiatric nurses[33]. Gholi Roshan et al. (2021) also observed an inverse and significant relationship between professional self-concept and burnout among nurses in hospitals supervised by Babol University of Medical Sciences[34]. The findings of Saberi et al. (2022) confirmed a significant inverse relationship between burnout and professional self-concept as well [35].

The current findings, along with previous studies, confirm that enhancing professional self-concept can reduce the incidence of burnout and secondary traumatic stress in nurses. In fact, professional self-concept plays a crucial role in improving nurses' effectiveness by reinforcing their sense of competence and success in their specialized field. Overall, this research demonstrates that professional self-concept has a direct relationship with compassion satisfaction and an inverse relationship with burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Therefore, strategies focused on enhancing nurses' professional self-concept could lead to increased compassion satisfaction and reduced compassion fatigue, such as burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Approaches like improving nursing knowledge and skills, communication and collaboration abilities, confidence, and leadership are essential for enhancing nurses' self-concept. Healthcare managers and policymakers, particularly in nursing and psychiatric nursing, can create conditions for improving nurses' status and elevating the nursing profession by focusing on these strategies and enhancing professional self-concept among nurses [23, 36].

In Iran's collectivist, high power-distance culture, nurses often see themselves primarily as members of a caring community and family network, emphasizing altruism, patient advocacy and spiritual service in their professional identity. This contrasts with Western nursing cultures, which tend to prioritize individual autonomy and personal achievement. For example, Iranian nurses frequently describe "altruism" and spiritual fulfillment as core to their job satisfaction [37] while facing a public image that still views nursing as a "feminine, physician-subordinate" vocation. Such gendered and hierarchical stereotypes undermine Iranian nurses' self-concept and sense of empowerment, contributing to feelings of frustration and impacting quality of work life. These cultural forces also shape turnover intent: recent evidence suggests Iranian nurses' turnover intention is only moderate overall, perhaps due to strong family/community ties that discourage leaving despite dissatisfaction under rigid hierarchy [38].

Among the demographic variables, a significant relationship was observed between the intention to leave the job and satisfaction with received salary. Specifically, nurses who reported low satisfaction with their salary had a higher intention to leave their jobs. Additionally, the results of multiple regression analysis indicated that satisfaction with salary, along with professional self-concept, significantly predicts the intention to leave the job. In the study by Liu et al. (2022) involving nurses working in 15 hospitals in China, it was found that nurses with low satisfaction regarding their salary had a greater intention to leave their positions [39]. Similarly, the study by Wang et al. (2022) among psychiatric nurses showed that those with higher earnings had a greater intention to leave their jobs [40]. Increasing the income of psychiatric nurses could enhance their job satisfaction and consequently reduce their intention to leave the profession [41].

The results also indicated that nurses with low satisfaction regarding their salary experienced higher levels of burnout, and satisfaction with salary, alongside professional self-concept, significantly predicts burnout. In the study by Qu et al. (2015), a significant difference was observed in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among nurses based on monthly income, with those earning less showing higher levels of burnout in these dimensions. Low income can lead to decreased job satisfaction, which in turn can contribute to burnout [42]. No significant relationships were found between other demographic variables and burnout. In the study by Babaei et al. (2020), no significant correlation was observed between age, education level, years of service, monthly mandatory hours, and burnout or secondary traumatic stress, aligning with the current study's findings [43]. Similarly, in the study by Dehghan et al. (2023), no significant relationships were found between age, gender, marital status, education, employment status, years of service, and having a second job in relation to burnout [44], which was consistent with the current results. However, a significant relationship was noted between age, education, years of service in specialized units, and having a second job with burnout, which contradicted the current study's findings.

In the study by Sukut et al. (2022), a significant relationship was observed between education and gender with compassion fatigue, while no significant correlations were found between age, work department, position, years of service in psychiatric settings, or shift work with compassion fatigue [45]. These variables also did not show significant relationships with burnout. The discrepancies in study results may be attributed to differences in the demographic characteristics of participants, the working conditions in various departments, and the specific duties of nurses.

One of the limitations of this study was the reliance on data obtained through questionnaires and self-reporting from nurses. Additionally, the emotional and mental states of the nurses could have influenced their responses, and controlling for this factor was not feasible for the researchers.

CONCLUSION

The intention to leave the job, compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress among nurses were at a moderate level. Professional self-concept and satisfaction with salary were identified as predictors of the intention to leave the job. Professional self-concept was the sole predictor of compassion satisfaction and secondary traumatic stress. Burnout was predicted by both professional self-concept and satisfaction with salary. Therefore, it is recommended that managers and policymakers develop programs aimed at enhancing professional self-concept and increasing the income

of nurses working in psychiatric departments. Such initiatives could help reduce their intention to leave the profession and improve their quality of professional life. Additionally, considering that the intention to leave the nursing profession is recognized as an important and multifaceted phenomenon, it is suggested that qualitative studies be designed and conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the variables examined in this study.

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COMPETING INTERESTS:

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. SJ, MP, MS, ZT, RAJ, MS, & MH-F: writing the first draft; SJ, MS, & RAJ: data collection; SJ & MH-F: initial design and final version; MP & MH-F: data interpretation; & MS & ZT: data analysis. All authors have agreed with the results and conclusions.

DATA AVAILABILITY:

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to confidentiality but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

ETHICS APPROVAL:

The study was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Human Research at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences with code of ethics no: IR.USWR.REC.1402.158. Written informed consents were obtained from the participants.

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