

Athlone Institute of Technology

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Course: BSc Dental Practice Management with Oral Health Promotion

Title: Occupational Stress among Dental Nurses

For my dissertation I've carried out a study among dental nurses (DNs) in general private dental practices in a rural Irish town to investigate and to evaluate occupational stress degree, and to determine main factors (stressors), which may have an impact on it.

According to studies stress has been recognised as a major issue of the 21st century which can lead to a serious health problem and also cause a threat to the individuals overall quality of life. Healthcare providers are exposed to various occupational health hazards and DNs are no different.

DNs as any other healthcare profession appear to be at a higher risk of occupational stress and burnout due to the specification of work, workload, demand, pressure and many other factors that has a major contribution towards occupational distress.

According to literature sources, many researchers have analysed healthcare professionals including dentist occupation related stress, however, no research has been done to indicate the relationship among DN's and work-related negative stressors, which may cause their psychological and physical health disturbance.

My aim was to highlight the issue and to determine the organisational and work-related factors that may impact on DNs wellbeing. I felt that creating and raising awareness about occupational stress among DNs is extremely important, as it has been greatly overlooked in Ireland.

Caring profession such as DNs often are so focused on 'caring' for others that they frequently leave themselves out and this often results in burnout and distress. I think that concentrating solely on patient care we are forgetting about healthcare workers who are delivering care, and that their health and well-being should be as equally important.

I believe that it is extremely important for Irish clinicians and policymakers to take responsibility and a proactive approach to develop programs aimed at preventing and reducing stress for DNs across the country. Workplace should encourage and help employees get training and improve their skills, also support education and open channels of communication and support services.

For my study I've used a mixed research method, including a systematic literature review, followed by a paper survey among DNs working in private dental practices in a rural Irish town. In addition, I have conducted one-to-one email correspondence with dental practice behavioural therapy expert Dr. Philip Christie.

My study sample indicated high levels (82%) experiencing stress during work. Participants highlighted major areas causing occupational distress, such as dealing with difficult patients (72%), poor communication at work (45%) and high workload (36%).

My recommendation would be to investigate further into the occupational stress among DNs on a national level and with all the evidence present to take a proactive approach to develop mindfulness-based CBT intervention programs aimed at preventing and reducing stress for DNs working in dental practices across the country.

Those programs are likely to increase the overall wellbeing and quality of professional life among DNs not only in general private dental practices but also in specialised and government-funded clinics in whole Ireland