

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Effectiveness of Assertive Training Program on Job Stress among Nurses Working in Critical Care Units

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ABSTRACT

The stress and pressure faced by nurses working in critical care units are a leading cause of physical and psychological problems. Nurses have to take care of all domestic duties along with their level of stress at the hospital. Often, they do not have enough time to talk about their stresses with family and friends; this causes non-assertiveness in their behavior. Instead of raising their voices against heavy workloads nurses start to perceive things wrongly and depress themselves. Non-assertive behavior caused frustration, hostility, sadness, and hopelessness. It can be possible only when nurses learn to protect their own rights and respect others' rights. It is very complex to handle stress which arises due to problems at home or at work, faulty relationships, and several other strained situations.

Aim: The primary aim of the present study is to improve the assertiveness of nurses working in critical care units to promote emotional intelligence, resilience coping abilities power to get rid of stress.

Methodology: Randomization controlled trial research design was followed in the present research study. The staff nurses working in critical care units at least for one year was considered as the target population of the study. The systematic random sampling technique was adopted to select 60 nurses working in critical care units of two private hospitals for experimental and control groups. Parker's Job Stress Scale was used to collect first-hand information from nurses working in critical care units.

Results: The paired t-test on mean of pre and post-interventional assessment of experimental group found ($t = -6.357^*$, $df = 29$, $p < 0.05$) negatively significant

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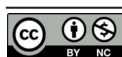
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difference, whereas in control group t-value ($t=3.730, df=29, p<0.05$) is found non-significant.

Conclusion: Conclusively, the study finding revealed that the assertive training program has significant effect on job stress among nurses working in critical care units.

KEYWORDS

• Assertive training programme • Job stress • Critical care units

INTRODUCTION

Nurses are important members of the health care team. Work place stress among health care professionals is a major concern in health care systems. Nurses are continuously bombarded with the workload, especially in the private sector, where they work for long hours and earn less, which may cause stress. Job stress in nurses is linked to high level of dissatisfaction, burnout, absenteeism, turnover, and stress-related illness, thus placing the job performance among nurses and patients' lives at risk. Assertiveness is the ability to express opinions, feelings without any stress in a way that doesn't infringe on the rights of others. Assertive training means teaching others assertive behavioral skills and how to express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate ways. Every nurse needs to gain a good understanding of self, as well as a strong belief in inherent value. Assertive behavior enables nurses to raise their voices for their needs and wants confidently without any hesitation. Assertiveness makes nurses confident to act in their own best interests, express honest feelings comfortably without denying the rights of others.

Johnathan Edelhelt (2022)¹ stated that many people face significant stress in the workplace that outweighs the possible benefits of the job and poses a threat to their health. Workplace stress affects the workers and company performance equally. The effects of job-related strain are evident in workers' physical health, mental health, and behavior. Chronic stress can result in anxiety, insomnia, and high blood pressure like ailments. People who experience excessive stress often deal with it in unhealthy ways, such as overeating, smoking cigarettes, or abusing drugs and alcohol. Workplace stress reduces employee productivity and more absenteeism increases the number of days taken off work for doctor visits which increases healthcare costs incurred by employers.

Scott Elizabeth (2020)² explored assertiveness as a core communication skill. She stated that some people seem to be naturally assertive, but others can learn. Assertive communication is one of the best strategies which have a major positive effect on a number of stressors in the workplace. It helps to express effectively and stand up for own point of view. Assertiveness boosts self-esteem and helps one to reduce stress in hard time when it is very difficult to say no. Assertive communication is an appropriately direct, open, and honest way to convey feelings and thoughts. Assertive communication displays authority and confidence and never revokes a threat response in others because it is based on the premise of providing transparent communication of information.

Ellis RJ & Love C (2015)³ stated that assertiveness is not something that is inherited. It is a skill that one can learn at any stage of life. Assertiveness is considered a part of social skills and adds to the individual's social competence. Assertiveness is an important communication skill, which significantly influences interpersonal relations. It is an accurate representation of feelings, opinions, or preferences expressed in a manner that promotes self-respect and respect for others. An assertive person assumes to deal with life situations in a positive way, which helps to boost confidence. Assertiveness enables one to withstand stress and resolves internal conflicts which develop a positive self-concept. Those suffering from stress need to have a high level of assertiveness to cope successfully.

American Psychological Association (2014)⁴ explored that stressful work environments can contribute to physical, psychological, and emotional problems, and suggested some coping strategies to overcome job stress. First employees should identify the stressors means trying to be aware of the situations

which can cause stress. Secondly, try to avoid that particular situation or enlist a number of responses to get rid of stress. Thirdly, talk to the senior or supervisor regarding stressors at the job and ask for help. Most importantly find learn to be relaxed and adopt one or more relaxing strategies such as exercise, yoga, play, hobby. Take sleep for adequate time and enjoy a little free time daily. Finally one should set work-life boundaries to reduce the potential for work-life conflict and to get rid of stress.

Mrs. Shakuntala S. Muragod (2019)⁷ conducted a true experimental study to assess effectiveness of assertiveness training programme on assertive behaviour and self-esteem. The multi-stage random sampling technique was followed to assign 30 adolescents to experimental group and 30 adolescents to control group. Self-administered modified Rathus assertiveness schedule was applied to assess the assertive behaviour and Rosenberg's self-esteem inventory scale to assess the self-esteem of adolescents. Assertiveness training was administered 45 minutes for 7 consecutive school days for experimental group. Findings revealed that, a statistically significant difference was found between post-test assertive behaviour scores of experimental group and control group subjects [$t=10.78$, $p<0.05$]. Similarly there was a statistically significant difference found between post-test self-esteem scores of experiment group and control group subjects [$t= 9.25$, $p<0.05$]. The study proved that Assertiveness training programme on assertive behaviour and self-esteem among adolescents was effective.

NEED OF STUDY

The investigator reviewed significant literature and realized that one who can manage emotions appropriately has more chances to recollect the strength for the next attempt. In the same way, it is also highlighted in the research literature that assertive people have a low figure to get anxious and stressed in life. The need for assertiveness is widely acknowledged in different work settings to manage the stress of working place, because stress decreases attention, concentration, decision-making, and judgment skills of employees.

Ahmad Ali Eslami et al. (2016)⁹ determined the effectiveness of assertive training on the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression of high school students. A total of 126 second-grade

high school students were selected into two groups: An experimental with 63 participants and a control with the same number. Assertiveness training was carried out on the experimental group in 8 sessions; after 8 weeks, a post-test was carried out on both groups. Repeated measures ANOVA found a significant difference between the mean score for assertiveness in the experimental group before (1.6 ± 9.1), immediately after (96.47 ± 10.84), and 2 months after (95.41 ± 8.37) implementing the training program ($P = 0.002$). The results of the current study show that conducting assertive training in high school students decreases their anxiety, stress, and depression.

Butt Aqsa & Zahid Mahmood (2015)¹⁰ investigated the effect of assertiveness skills on job burnout. The random sampling technique was employed to gather data from 100 respondents with help of a self-structured questionnaire. The advanced econometric technique SPSS 22 was employed as a tool for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that assertiveness skills have a negative effect on job burnout. The increase in the level of assertiveness skills, increase consistency and confidence and reduce conflict and stress leads to decrease burnout. Researchers also emphasized that professionals need to become more aware of how-to assertiveness effectively in their workplaces to manage the challenges of job stressors.

During interaction with staff nurses, the investigators found that the majority of nurses are facing challenges in their daily life. They try to cope with the emotional strains caused by tough competition in every aspect of life. The greatest barrier to their success is a lack of confidence and non-assertive behavior and when someone fails to achieve the target, he or she loses hope and gives up. Nurses working in private hospitals also remain under stress with fear to lose their job if they say no to employers and they accept double shifts with less salary. The investigator found that it is significant to have supportive working environments that encourage collaboration and empower nurses to provide excellent care and reduce work related stressors. Hence, the investigator felt the dire need to do something for nurses to improve assertiveness to get rid of stress.

Hypothesis: There will be no significant effect of assertive training on the level of job stress

as assessed by Parker's Job Stress Scale among nurses working in critical care units in the experimental group at $P < 0.05$ as compared to the control group.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

An experimental quantitative approach was adopted for the present study.

Research Design

Randomization controlled trial research design was followed in the present research study.

Experimental group	R	O ₁ X	O ₂
Control group	R	O	O ₂

R stands for Randomization, O₁ stands for pre-test, X for intervention, and O₂ for post-test.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at selected private hospitals in Amritsar, Punjab. Atlantis, the heart care unit hospital, GT Road, Amritsar, was selected as experimental group and Navpreet Multispeciality Hospital, Chherata, Amritsar, was selected as control group.

Target Population

The staff nurses working in critical care units at least for one year was considered as the target population of the study.

Sample size and Sampling technique

The systematic random sampling technique was adopted to select 30 nurses working in critical care units of two private hospitals which were selected for experimental and control groups. Matching was done by setting the same criteria such as duty timings, shifts, number of days off per week, etc for the selection of participants from both the control and experimental group.

Development of tool

Part A: Socio-demographic profile - Age, Gender, Current living place, Qualification, Clinical experience, employment status, Salary per month, Marital status.

Part B: Parker's Job Stress Scale was used to assess job stress among nurses. The scale contains 13 items, 8 items to check (2, 4, 6, 8, 10 - 13) time stress and other 5 items (1, 3, 5, 7, and 9) to assess job anxiety with five options range from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly

Agree. The minimum total score on the scale is 13 and the maximum is 65. The Standardized criterion measure will be followed to mark the level of stress as 13 - 26 Normal stress, 27 - 39 Mild stress, 40 - 52 Moderate stress, and 53 - 65 Severe stress.

Inclusion Criteria

- Nurses with a minimum of one year of working experience in critical care units such as ICU, ICCU, NICU, OT recovery, and emergency ward were included in the study as participants.
- Nurses who were working for the same number of hours per week.

Exclusion Criteria

- Nurses showed no stress in the pre-interventional assessment was excluded.
- Nurses on part-time jobs or who work overtime were excluded.
- Nurses who were absent on the day of sample selection were not considered as study participants.
- Nurses who were not willing to participate.

Data Collection Procedure

- A systematic process was followed to collect data. At first step the systematic random sampling technique was followed to select 30 nurses as study participants from each hospital. Secondly, the research tools were administered to study participants to assess pre-interventional levels of job stress among both groups. At the third step Assertive training program was delivered to participants of the experimental group with help of power point projector, and hand-outs were distributed during the program. As the literature suggests that a significant time is required to check skill development, therefore, after a month post-interventional levels of job stress among nurses in both groups was checked in both control and experimental groups. Being ethically right, at last an assertive training program was organized for participants of the control group.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to nurses who were working in critical care units of selected private hospitals in Amritsar, Punjab only.

Ethical consideration

1. Permission was taken from the authorities of the selected hospitals to conduct the pilot study.
2. Written consent was taken from each study subjects individually.

Content validity

The standardized tools were used to collect data regarding emotional intelligence, resilience, job stress, and coping strategies among nurses working in critical care units.

Reliability

The chronbach alpha was applied and it was found highly reliable (0.84) to assess job stress among nurses working critical care units.

RESULTS

Table 1: Comparison of the pre-and post-interventional levels of job stress among nurses working in critical care units in experimental and control groups

Intervention	Experimental Group (n=30)		Control Group (n=30)		df	T
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Pre-interventional score	47.60	7.829	51.20	10.521	58	0.614
Post-interventional score	29.80	4.712	75.20	21.580	58	4.569*
	df	t	df	t		
	29	6.357*	29	3.730		

N=60

Maximum score= 65

* significant at $p < 0.05$

Minimum score= 13

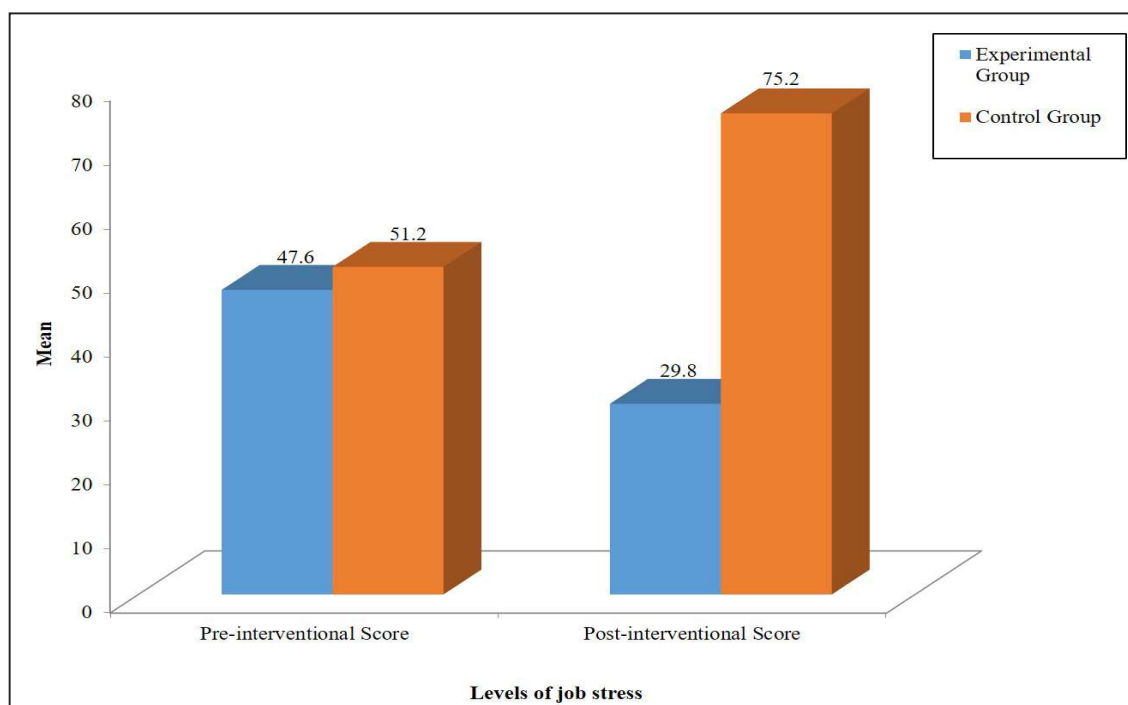


Figure 1: Comparison of Pre interventional and Post interventional level of emotional intelligence among nurses working in critical care units of control and experimental group

Table and figure 1 depict the comparison between pre and post interventional level of job stress among nurses working in critical care units of experimental and control group. The paired t-test was applied to mean values of experimental and control group calculated in pre and post-interventional assessment. The pre-interventional mean scores of experimental and control group found ($t = 0.614$, $df=58$, $p<0.05$) non-significant t-value and on other hand paired t-test proved ($t=4.569^*$, $df=58$, $p<0.05$) a significant difference in mean values of post-interventional assessment of experimental and control group. The paired t-test on mean of pre and post-interventional assessment of experimental group found ($t=6.357^*$, $df=4$, $p<0.05$) significant difference, whereas in control group t-value ($t=3.730$, $df=29$, $p<0.05$) is found non-significant.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the intervention of assertive training program do have a significant effect on the level of job stress among nurses working in critical care units. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

In the present study the findings of comparison of the pre-and post-interventional levels of job stress among nurses working in critical care units in experimental and control groups explored a highly significant difference ($t= -7.106^{***}$, $df = 49$, $p<0.001$) in post-interventional levels of job stress in experimental and control group. It also shows a high significance difference ($t= -11.108^{***}$, $df = 49$, $p<0.001$) in pre and post-interventional levels of job stress. These findings are matching with results of study conducted to assess effect of assertiveness skill training on the staffs' stress at the emergency medical center. The statistical results found significant difference between before and after interventional test ($p=0.001$ and $F=120.03^{***}$) and between the experimental and control group ($p=0.001$ and $F=38.26^{***}$) of experimental study⁸.

In the present study the findings of Comparison of the pre-and post-interventional levels of coping among nurses working in critical care units in experimental and control groups concluded a highly significant difference ($t= 6.074^{***}$, $df = 49$, $p<0.001$) in post-interventional levels of coping in experimental and control group. It also shows a high significance difference ($t= 8.151^{***}$, df

$= 49$, $p<0.001$) in pre and post-interventional levels of coping. These findings are supported by the results of the study conducted to assess the effect of assertive training techniques on improving coping skills of nurses in psychiatric set-up. The investigators found significant ($t= 3.510^{***}$, $df = 49$, $p<0.001$) difference in pre and post-test coping skills of nurses in one group research study design.⁹

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the study finding revealed that the assertive training program has significant effect on job stress among nurses working in critical care units. Therefore, hospital authorities should organize assertive training programs as in-service education to lessens the job stress among nurses.

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