Nurse educators' workplace empowerment, burnout, and job satisfaction: testing Kanter's theory

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Background. Empowerment has become an increasingly important factor in determining college nurse educator burnout, work satisfaction and performance in current restructured college nursing programmes in Canada.

Aim. This paper reports a study to test a theoretical model specifying relationships among structural empowerment, burnout and work satisfaction.

Method. A descriptive correlational survey design was used to test the model in a sample of 89 Canadian full-time college nurse educators employed in Canadian community colleges. The instruments used were the Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire, Job Activities Scale, Organizational Relationship Scale, Maslach Burnout Inventory Educator Survey and Global Job Satisfaction Questionnaire.

Results. College nurse educators reported moderate levels of empowerment in their workplaces as well as moderate levels of burnout and job satisfaction. Empowerment was significantly related to all burnout dimensions, most strongly to emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.50$) and depersonalization ($r = -0.41$). Emotional exhaustion was strongly negatively related to access to resources ($r = -0.481$, $P = 0.0001$) and support ($r = -0.439$, $P = 0.0001$). Multiple regression analysis revealed that 60% of the variance in perceptions of job satisfaction was explained by high levels of empowerment and low levels of emotional exhaustion [$R^2 = 0.596$, $F(1, 86) = 25.01$, $P = 0.0001$]. While both were significant predictors of perceived job satisfaction, empowerment was the stronger of the two ($\beta = 0.49$).

Conclusions. The results provide support for Kanter's organizational empowerment theory in the Canadian college nurse educator population. Higher levels of empowerment were associated with lower levels of burnout and greater work satisfaction. These findings have important implications for nurse education administrators.

Keywords: empowerment, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, job satisfaction, nurse educators, burnout

Introduction

Nurse education in Canada is in the midst of rapid professional, social, and educational changes. Many educational programmes are facing considerable financial constraints due to government cutbacks in funding over the past decade. Decreasing enrollments, fewer educators, and increased class sizes, are placing increased demands on nurse educators (Leon & Zareski 1998, Brendtro & Hegge 2000). Lack of sufficient funding to support education programmes can be frustrating to educators, particularly when resources are not available to implement planned programmes. Furthermore, there is a looming shortage of qualified staff to deliver education programmes in the near future (DeYoung & Bliss 1995). In 1990, the National League of Nursing reported approximately 900 unfilled full-time nurse educators positions in the United States of America (USA) (Moody 1996). This shortage has been attributed to ageing of the present cohort, fewer recruits to academic nursing, inadequate work conditions, and poor job security (DeYoung & Bliss 1995). The average age of the current cohort of nurse educators is 49·4 years of age and many will retire within the next 10 years (Brendtro & Hegge 2000). Such shortages increase the workload for others, increasing the likelihood of stress and burnout.

Nurse educators carry great responsibility in their organizations, yet this high level of responsibility is often combined with low decision-making power (Bauder 1982). This, in turn, causes undue stress that may decrease job satisfaction and increase the risk of burnout. Burnout has been identified as an issue for nurse educators (Fong 1990). Too many tasks in too little time are frequent complaints among educators. Nurse educators must teach, counsel students, and work on committees, as well as engage in clinical practice with students (Brown 1991). With advancing medical technology, nurse educators' skills rapidly become obsolete and the pressure to keep abreast and to maintain effective skills cause distress. Finally, lack of respect and positive reinforcement from administrators create job dissatisfaction and the risk of burnout (Langemo 1988).

Nurse educators are at risk for burnout because they spend a considerable amount of time with students who need help acquiring knowledge, critical judgement, and psychomotor skills (Bourcier 1986). Burnout is a syndrome in which a previously committed, helping professional gradually disengages from full participation in a job in response to excessive job-related stressors. Burnout consists of three components (Maslach *et al.* 1996). *Emotional exhaustion* (EE) is the tired and fatigued feeling that develops as emotional energies are drained. When these feelings become chronic, educators often experience *depersonalization* (DP), that is, indifferent feelings about helping their students learn and grow. When educators no longer feel that they are contributing to students' development, they may experience a lack of *personal accomplishment* (PA). Burnout is a costly phenomenon because the physical and psychological manifestations result in decreased effectiveness and productivity (Pines & Maslach 1978).

Maslach (1982) suggests that burnout stems from social interactions between helpers and recipients in which helpers become overly emotionally involved and overextend themselves. Over time this results in EE. Nurse educators are responsible for many roles and tasks in their organization and often work an average of 59 hours per week (Fong 1990). Time pressures and increasing job demands further increase their risk of burnout. Given the link between burnout and physical and emotional health problems (Stout & Williams 1983), identifying dissatisfying workplace factors that contribute to stress and burnout in nurse educators is important.

The consequences of burnout have serious implications for nurse educators, students, educational institutions, and ultimately the profession. During a time when the profession is facing a world-wide shortage of practicing nurses, highly qualified nurse educators are essential for ensuring that the supply of nurses in the future is sufficient to sustain the professional workforce. Thus, it is important to study factors that create negative work environments for nurse educators and to find ways to make these settings satisfying.

Theoretical framework

According to Kanter (1977, 1993), workplace behaviours and attitudes are determined by social structures in the workplace, not personal predispositions. She claims that workers are empowered when they perceive that their work environments provide opportunity for growth and access to power needed to carry out job demands. When these conditions are lacking, employees feel powerlessness. This threatens organizational productivity since powerless individuals are more susceptible to burnout and reduced job satisfaction (Kanter 1979).

Kanter defines power as the capacity to mobilize resources to accomplish work, and identifies structural characteristics within an organization that influence an individual's ability to access and mobilize the resources of job-related empowerment: (1) power, that is, access to resources, support and information and (2) opportunity, that is, access to challenge, growth and development (see Figure 1). Access to these organizational structures is influenced by the degree of formal and informal power an individual has in the organization.

Theoretical framework

Relationship of concepts in Rosabeth Kanter's (1979) structural theory of power in organizations
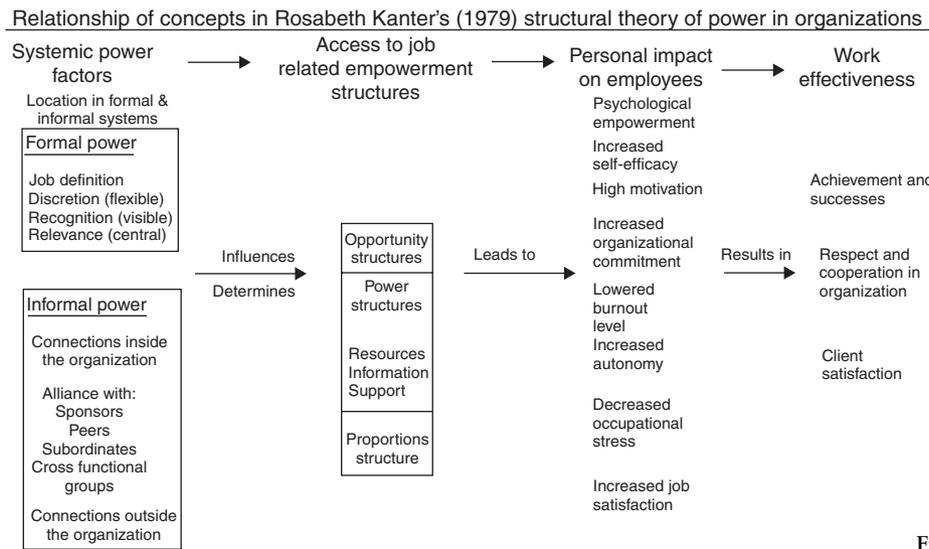

Figure 1 Theoretical framework.

Formal power is acquired by excellent performance of job-related activities that are extraordinary, visible or attract the attention of others, and are relevant to the solution of pressing organizational problems (Brown & Kanter 1982). Informal power results from political and social alliances with sponsors, peers, and subordinates in the organization. Sponsors include mentors, coaches, and teachers with higher-level positions in the organization who provide approval, prestige, or support to individuals that can lead to sponsored mobility within the hierarchy. Alliances with peers are necessary for any power base, as a peer 1 day could become an individual's boss the next.

The structure of power is derived from three sources: access to support, information and resources. Support refers to feedback and guidance received from superiors, peers, and subordinates. Information refers to the data, technical knowledge, and expertise required to function effectively in one's position (Chandler 1986). Resources are the materials, money, supplies, equipment, and time necessary to accomplish organizational goals. Individuals who perceive themselves as having power tend to foster higher group morale and cooperation, delegate more control and latitude to subordinates, provide opportunities to subordinates and are viewed by others as helping rather than hindering (Kanter 1979, 1993).

The structure of opportunity refers to the individual's prospects of growth and mobility within the organization (Kanter 1993) and includes autonomy, growth, a sense of challenge and the chance to learn and develop. Those who perceive themselves as having access to opportunity invest in

work and seek ways to learn, contributing to personal growth and development. Individuals in low opportunity positions exhibit low self-esteem, disengage themselves from work, and lower their aspirations.

Kanter (1993) maintains that individuals with access to power and opportunity structures can accomplish the tasks required to achieve organizational goals. Because they have these tools, they are highly motivated and able to motivate and empower others (Brown & Kanter 1982). Individuals without access to power structures perceive themselves to be powerless and become more rules-minded and less committed to organizational goals.

Related research

There is considerable support for Kanter's theory in nursing (Laschinger 1996). Empowerment has been linked to important organizational outcomes, such as, job satisfaction (Whyte 1995, Kutzscher *et al.* 1996, Laschinger & Havens 1996a, Laschinger *et al.* 2001), perceived control over nursing practice (Laschinger & Havens 1996b), and lower levels of job stress (Laschinger & Havens 1996a, Laschinger *et al.* 2001). Empowerment has also been linked to burnout and job satisfaction. Hatcher and Laschinger (1996) found that staff nurse access to empowerment structures was significantly related to all aspects of burnout: DP ($r = -0.28$), EE ($r = -0.34$), and PA ($r = 0.36$). These nurses reported only moderate levels of empowerment ($M = 10.66$, SD $= 2.22$) on a scale ranging from 4 to 20. O'Brien (1997) found similar results.

Empowerment in nurse education

Few studies were found of nurse educator empowerment. Erwin (1999) found that college nurse educators perceived their work setting to be only moderately empowering ($M = 11.71$, SD = 2.49). Empowerment was significantly related to perceived organizational climate for caring ($r = 0.49$) and to their use of empowering teaching behaviours ($r = 0.31$). Nurse educators in Catalano (1994) study reported infrequent use of empowering teaching behaviours.

Burnout in nurse educators

Several researchers have investigated nurse educator burnout. In Bourcier's (1986) study, nurse educators reported average burnout on the EE ($M = 17.19$, SD = 9.08) and DP dimensions ($M = 3.84$, SD = 3.83) and low burnout on the PA dimension ($M = 37.40$, SD = 7.16) according to Maslach's normative data for postsecondary educators (Maslach *et al.* 1996) (Table 1). High scores on the EE and DP subscales and low scores on PA represent burnout. Emotional exhaustion was significantly related to behavioural stress manifestations, such as, drug use, gastrointestinal symptoms, hypertension, and fatigue. Inadequate participation in important decisions, unfair treatment by supervisors, and workload were cited as major causes of EE. Staurovsky (1992) observed similar levels of burnout in a study of 82 university nurse educators EE ($M = 16.99$, SD = 9.32), DP ($M = 3.16$, SD = 2.90) and PA ($M = 38.39$, SD = 4.82). Educators reported low job satisfaction and limited opportunities for promotion. Emotional exhaustion was most strongly related to work on present job ($r = -0.64$, $P < 0.05$) and overall job satisfaction ($r = -0.61$, $P < 0.05$). Educators identified heavy assignments, administrative attitudes, multiple job dimensions and pay as sources of stress in qualitative comments. In Fong's (1993) study of 84 university nurse educators' burnout, EE was significantly ($P < 0.01$) related to high job demands ($r = 0.53$), time pressures ($r = 0.33$), hours worked ($r = 0.36$), and feelings of job inadequacy ($r = 0.31$), and negatively related to social support from one's supervisors ($r = -0.32$) and peers ($r = -0.48$). Lack of peer support

was most strongly related to both DP ($r = 0.38$) and PA ($r = -0.28$).

Job satisfaction in nurse educators

Krahn (2000) studied the lived experience of 10 college nurse educators who reported that continual budget cuts and increasing class sizes challenged their ability to meet role expectations. This was compounded by exhaustion from enlarged teaching assignments, perceived lack of support, and decreasing job satisfaction. Themes emerging from the participants' stories included feeling devalued, bowing to the 'status quo', and conflicting with others. These themes reflect Maslach's descriptions of the burnout experience.

The study

Hypotheses

Based on Kanter's theoretical framework and the previous review of the literature, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

I. College nurse educators' perceptions of formal and informal power in the workplace are positively related to their perceptions of workplace empowerment.

Rationale: Kanter (1993) asserts that the combination of formal job characteristics and informal alliances within the organization influences employees' access to sources of opportunity, information, support, and resources that enable them to effectively accomplish work tasks.

II. College nurse educators' perceived workplace empowerment are negatively related to their feelings of EE, DP and positively related to their feelings of PA.

Rationale: Kanter (1993) argues that power evolves from the availability of work empowerment structures that enable employees to accomplish their work. Empowered educators are more likely to work towards organizational goals and meet students' needs. Inadequate support, resources, increased workload and limited authority have been cited as causes of stress in educators. Limited access to these empowerment structures is likely to lead to EE, and feelings of frustration and failure that may result in DP or negative feelings towards students. Finally, access to empowerment structures enables employees to accomplish their work, leading to a sense of PA in their work (Maslach *et al.* 1996).

III. College nurse educators who perceive their workplace to be empowering and who have low levels of burnout have high levels of job satisfaction.

Rationale: Kanter (1993) believes that individuals feel empowered by access to empowerment structures that enable

Table 1 Normative Data of experienced burnout: Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual (MBI) (1996) for postsecondary educators ($n = 635$)

MBI subscales	Low	Average	High	Possible score range
Emotional exhaustion	≤13	14–23	≥24	0–63
Depersonalization	≤2	3–8	≥9	0–35
Personal accomplishment	≥43	42–36	≤35	0–56

them to mobilize the necessary resources to get things done. As a result, they are more productive and less likely to experience burnout, resulting in increased job satisfaction.

Design

A descriptive correlational survey design was used to collect data from nurse educators working in community colleges across the province of Ontario. The provincial registry provided a list of all full-time or part-time college nurse educators currently working in these institutions. Inclusion criteria required that participants must have worked in their institutions for at least 6 months.

Sample

A power analysis for multiple regression determined that a sample of 85 was required to achieve 80% power to detect a moderate effect size (0·15) (Cohen 1988). However, all available college nurse educators were surveyed to allow for the possibility of a low return rate commonly found with mail surveys, and for the possibility that many college nurse educators may no longer be in these roles due to recent downsizing. A total of 146 educators were asked to participate in the study. The final sample consisted of 89 useable surveys (61% response rate).

The majority of the respondents were female (98·9%) and married (68·5%), averaging 51 years of age, with 20 years teaching experience, and 16 years in their current work setting. The majority had a graduate degree (65·3%). Educators taught an average of five courses a year and most (74·2%) stated their present workload was higher than in the past.

Instruments

Workplace empowerment was measured by the Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire (CWEQ) (Laschinger 1996). This measures employee access to empowerment structures described by Kanter (opportunity, information, support and resources). Items are rated on a 5-point scale, then summed and averaged to yield four subscales. An overall empowerment scale is created by summing the four subscales (range: 4–20). Reported subscale reliability coefficients range from 0·76 to 0·94 (Sabiston & Laschinger 1995, Erwin 1999, Davies 2001), and were 0·79–0·93 in this study. An additional two-item scale measuring global perceptions of work empowerment is used as a validity check (Laschinger 1996). Cronbach alpha reliability has ranged from 0·85 to 0·91 (Cline 2001, Davies 2001), and was 0·88 in this study.

The CWEQ was strongly correlated with the global measure of empowerment ($r = 0.73$, $P = 0.01$), providing evidence for its construct validity.

The Job Activities Scale (JAS) (Laschinger 1996) contains nine items rated on a 5-point Likert scale that measure formal power. Reported alpha reliability ranges from 0·71 to 0·86 in previous research (Laschinger 1996), and was 0·80 in this study. The Organizational Relationship Scale (ORS) (Laschinger 1996) contains 18-item items that measure informal power. Alpha reliability ranged from 0·85 to 0·90 (Laschinger 1996), 0·89 in this study.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory Educator Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach *et al.* 1996) measures perceived frequency of: EE, DP and PA. The EE subscale consists of nine items, the DP subscale five items and the PA subscale eight items. Items are rated on a 7-point scale and summed to create subscales. High scores on the EE and DP subscales and low scores on PA represent burnout. These scores are then categorized into low, average and high burnout according to normative data for postsecondary educators (Maslach *et al.* 1996). Maslach and Jackson (1981) report acceptable reliability for all subscales (EE = 0·90, DP = 0·79, and PA = 0·72). In this study, the alpha reliability coefficients were 0·91, 0·74 and 0·71, for the EE, DP and PA subscales, respectively. The DP and PA reliability coefficients are slightly lower than those reported by Maslach and Jackson (1981) for general postsecondary educators. It is possible that the more specific focus of nursing education accounts for this variation.

The Global Job Satisfaction Questionnaire is a 4-item global measure adapted from Hackman and Oldham's (1975) Job Diagnostic Survey (Laschinger 1996). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. This measure has good internal consistency reliability 0·83 (Laschinger & Havens 1996a, 1996b, Laschinger *et al.* 2001); in our study this was 0·82.

Data collection

Following ethical approval, questionnaires were mailed to participants along with a researcher-addressed, stamped envelope. Dillman's (1978) techniques for increasing mail survey response rate were used. A reminder letter was sent at 2 weeks. Those who did not respond by 4 weeks were sent another questionnaire package. As a token of appreciation for participating in the study, a coffee shop voucher was included.

Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences

Program Version 10·0 (SPSS Incorporated 1999). Multiple regression analysis and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis were used to test the study hypotheses.

Results

Descriptive results

The mean values and the SD for major study variables are shown in Table 3. Nurse educators perceived their work environment to be only somewhat empowering ($M = 12·18$, $SD = 2·27$). Global empowerment was also moderate ($M = 3·23$, $SD = 0·98$). Consistent with previous research, access to opportunity was the most empowering aspect in educators' work environments ($M = 3·56$, $SD = 0·61$), access to resources the least empowering ($M = 2·58$, $SD = 0·66$). Nurse educators also reported only moderate levels of formal and informal power ($M = 3·12$, $SD = 0·51$ and $M = 3·13$, $SD = 0·60$, respectively), similar to those of college nurse educators in Erwin's (1999) study but higher than those reported by staff nurses (Whyte 1995, Hatcher & Laschinger 1996, Laschinger & Havens 1996, 1997).

According to Maslach's norms, nurse educators' levels of EE, DP and PA were moderate ($M = 21·02$, $SD = 10·89$; $M = 5·03$, $SD = 4·21$; $M = 38·65$, $SD = 5·57$; respectively) (see Table 2). These results are similar to other nurse educators (Bourcier 1986, Staurovsky 1992). However, their EE scores were higher and their DP and PA scores were lower than Maslach's norms for postsecondary educators. Finally, educators in this study were only somewhat satisfied with their job ($M = 3·33$, $SD = 0·85$). These findings are similar to those of clinical nurse educators in Davies's (2001) study.

Table 2 Observed mean values and SD for instrument scales and subscales

Instrument	n	Mean	SD
Overall empowerment (total CWEQ)**	89	12·18	2·27
Subscales: opportunity*	89	3·56	0·61
Information*	89	3·16	0·75
Support*	89	2·88	0·83
Resources*	89	2·58	0·66
Job Activities Scale (formal power)*	89	3·12	0·51
Organizational Relationship Scale (informal power)*	89	3·13	0·60
Global empowerment*	89	3·23	0·98
Burnout subscales: emotional exhaustion (EE)	89	21·02	10·89
Depersonalization (DP)	89	5·03	4·21
Personal accomplishment (PA)	89	38·65	5·57
Global job satisfaction*	89	3·33	0·85

Score range: *1–5, **4–20; EE, 0–63; DP, 0–35; PA, 0–56.

Table 3 Correlations between overall empowerment, formal power, informal power and burnout

Empowerment variable	EE	DP	PA
Overall empowerment (total CWEQ)	−0·51*	−0·40*	0·38*
Subscales: opportunity	−0·32**	−0·31**	0·32*
Information	−0·37**	−0·38*	0·40*
Support	−0·44*	−0·30*	0·25*
Resources	−0·48*	−0·28*	0·24*
Job Activities Scale (formal power)	−0·37*	−0·24**	0·36*
Organizational Relationship Scale (informal power)	−0·30**	−0·28**	0·31*
Global empowerment	−0·53*	−0·47*	0·42*

*$P = 0·01$; **$P = 0·05$.
EE, emotional exhaustion; DP, depersonalization; PA, personal accomplishment; CWEQ, Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire.

Tests of hypotheses

College educators' perceptions of formal and informal power were positively related to their perceived access to empowerment structures. Fifty-one (51%) of the variance in empowerment was explained by formal and informal power [$F (2, 86) = 46·65$, $P = 0·0001$]. This is consistent with previous research (Laschinger 1996, Davies 2001). Both formal and informal power were significant predictors of empowerment ($\beta = 0·42$, $t = 4·26$, $P = 0·0001$ and $\beta = 0·37$, $t = 3·73$, $P = 0·001$). These results support Kanter's (1993) contention that greater access to both formal power and informal power influence access to workplace empowerment structures.

College educators' perceptions of workplace empowerment were significantly related to all components of burnout ($P < 0·01$) (see Table 3). Pearson correlation analyses revealed that work empowerment was significantly related to EE ($r = −0·51$), with access to resources having the greatest impact ($r = −0·48$), followed by access to support ($r = −0·44$), access to information ($r = −0·37$), and opportunity ($r = −0·32$). Similarly, empowerment was significantly negatively related to DP ($r = −0·40$), with access to information having the greatest impact on DP ($r = −0·38$). Finally, workplace empowerment was positively related to PA ($r = 0·38$), with access to information having the greatest impact on PA ($r = 0·40$), followed by access to opportunity ($r = 0·32$). These findings are consistent with Hatcher and Laschinger's (1996) findings with staff nurses and similar to those of Davies (2001), who linked clinical nurse educators' empowerment to job tension.

Finally, high levels of work empowerment in combination with low levels of burnout were significant predictors of college educators' job satisfaction. This was the case for all

components of burnout. As burnout is measured on three separate subscales (EE, DP and PA), three separate multiple regression analyses were performed. In all cases, both empowerment and burnout were significant predictors of job satisfaction; however, empowerment was the stronger of the two. Sixty percentage of the variance in job satisfaction was explained by the combination of empowerment and EE [F (1, 86) = 25·01; β = 0·489, t = 6·14, P = 0·0001 and β = −0·398, t = −5·00, P = 0·0001, for empowerment and EE, respectively]. Similarly, 55% of the variance in job satisfaction was explained by the combination of empowerment and DP [F (1, 86) = 13·12, P = 0·0001; β = 0·578, t = 7·32, and β = −0·287, t = −3·63, P = 0·0001, respectively]. Finally, the combination of empowerment and PA explained 51% of the variance in job satisfaction [F (1, 86) = 4·67, P = 0·033; β = 0·625, t = 7·62, P = 0·0001 and β = −0·177, t = −2·16, P = 0·033, respectively]. To determine the effects of individual components of burnout in combination with empowerment, an additional hierarchical multiple regression was conducted in which the three burnout components were entered as a block. In this analysis, although the three burnout scales added a significant change in explained variance in job satisfaction [R^2 change = 0·129, F change (3, 84) = 9·21], only EE was found to add unique explained variance beyond that explained by empowerment (β = −0·339, t = −3·5, P = 0·001). In this model, empowerment was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction (β = −0·46, t = 5·6, P = 0·0001). Neither DP nor PA was significant (β = −0·068, t = −0·685, P = 0·495 and β = 0·083, t = 1·003, P = 0·319, respectively). The total explained variance was 60·8% [R^2 = 0·608, F (4, 84) = 32·57, P = 0·0001].

Additional correlational analyses were conducted to further examine the relationships between specific empowerment dimensions and burnout and job satisfaction. Overall empowerment and satisfaction were strongly related (r = 0·69, P = 0·01). Job satisfaction was most strongly related to access to support (r = 0·610, P = 0·0001), followed by access to resources (r = 0·57, P = 0·01), information (r = 0·52, P = 0·01), and opportunity (r = 0·493, P = 0·01) (see Table 4). These findings are similar to those of Whyte (1995), Laschinger and Havens (1996, 1997) and Casier (2000), who found that access to support had the strongest relationship with staff nurse job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was also significantly related to formal and informal power (r = 0·54, P = 0·01; r = 0·43, P = 0·01). Finally, all burnout subscales were strongly related to job satisfaction: EE (r = −0·65, P = 0·01), DP (r = −0·52, P = 0·01) and PA (r = 0·42, P = 0·01).

Educational level, years of teaching experience, length of employment, and amount of courses taught per year were not

Table 4 Correlations between job satisfaction, empowerment and burnout

Empowerment variable	Global job satisfaction
Overall empowerment (total CWEQ)	0·69*
Opportunity	0·49*
Information	0·52*
Support	0·61*
Resources	0·56*
Formal power (JAS)	0·54*
Informal power (ORS)	0·43*
Global empowerment	0·81*
Burnout (MBI)	
Emotional exhaustion	−0·65*
Depersonalization	−0·52*
Personal accomplishment	0·42*

*P = 0·01.
CWEQ, Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire; JAS, Job Activities Scale; ORS, Organizational Relationship Scale; MBI, Maslach Burnout Inventory.

significantly related to any of the major study variables. Empowerment was significantly (<0·05) related to the number of classroom students taught (r = −0·23), as was EE (r = 0·38), DP (r = 0·38), and job satisfaction (r = 0·30). EE and job satisfaction were also significantly related (P < 0·05) to hours worked per week (r = 0·30 and r = −0·22, respectively).

Discussion

The findings of this study support Kanter's theoretical contention that organizational factors within the workplace are important in shaping organizational behaviours and attitudes. Kanter's belief that employees' access to the information, opportunity, support and resources necessary for their work has positive effects on employees, such as lower degrees of burnout and greater amounts of job satisfaction was supported in the nurse educator population. College educators perceived themselves to be only moderately empowered, consistent with previous studies of college educators (Erwin 1999) and staff nurses (Whyte 1995, Hatcher & Laschinger 1996). Although more empowered than staff nurses, it is surprising that the difference was not greater, although the fact that both work in hierarchical organizations may account for this finding.

College educators felt they had more access to opportunity and the least access to resources. This is likely to be related to the nature of their roles. Educators are expected to attend professional conferences to remain up-to-date. These conferences provide them with opportunities to develop new knowledge and also to network with others within and

outside the organization who might be able to provide support. Empowerment strategies for nursing education administrators include adding new challenges, implementing training and development sessions, unblocking channels of communication, building trust by sharing information, providing timely feedback on performance, supporting collaboration and collegiality among staff, and assuring available resources to accomplish work. Kanter (1993) argues that placing employees in positions that highlight their relevance, value and visibility to the organization increases perceptions of power.

Similar to Erwin's findings, both formal and informal power were strongly related to educators' perceptions of workplace empowerment. Kanter maintains that power can be accumulated in two ways in organizations: through formal positions in the organization (job activities) and through informal networks (alliances with subordinates, peers, and sponsors). This finding supports Kanter's (1977, 1993) belief that position in the organizational hierarchy determines the ease with which access to opportunity, information, support and resources is gained. College educators reported higher formal power than staff nurses in other studies (Whyte 1995, O'Brien 1997), possibly reflecting the greater flexibility that educators have in the way their work gets done.

Perceptions of empowerment were significantly related to EE and DP. Lack of support and resources played an important role. These results are consistent with Fong's (1990) study linking collegial and chairperson support to nurse educator burnout. Nursing education administrators can provide support and resources for nurse educators in a variety of ways. Annual performance appraisals and opportunities to discuss concerns of educators with administrators can be important sources of support. Recent funding cutbacks to programmes have resulted in fewer resources for nurse education, making it difficult for nurse educators to carry out their work. Consequently, they experience frustration and dissatisfaction with their jobs. Study results demonstrate the potential negative effects of this situation on nurse educator's mental health. Educators' perceptions of empowerment were also significantly related to their feelings of PA. Most educators enter the profession to help students learn and grow. When educators feel they have access to resources needed to promote student learning, they experience a sense of accomplishment.

Finally, high levels of work-related empowerment in combination with low levels of burnout were strongly predictive of nurse educators' job satisfaction. This supports Kanter's (1993) argument that when empowerment structures are in place, employees experience less job stress and are more satisfied in their work. All components of burnout were important predictors of job satisfaction, although EE dimension was the strongest. Indeed, EE was the only burnout component that accounted for unique variance in job satisfaction when the three burnout components were considered simultaneously. That is, once EE was taken into account, the other burnout components provided no new information in understanding the impact of burnout on job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the view of many scholars that EE is the core component of burnout (Burke & Greenglass 1995, Cordes *et al.* 1997, Moore 2000). Most studies have shown it to be the most stable of the three components (Schaufeli & Enzmann 1998), and, it has been shown to be the most responsive to the nature and intensity of stress at work stress (Lee & Ashforth 1996, Schaufeli & Enzmann 1998). Thus, it is not surprising that EE was the most important burnout factor predicting nurse educators' job satisfaction in this study. Exhausted employees are not likely to be very satisfied with their jobs. While all empowerment factors were strongly related to job satisfaction, access to support was shown to have the strongest relationship. Support from administrators allows educators to perform their role effectively creating productive power and increased job satisfaction.

Informal power was also an important determinant of job satisfaction supporting Kanter's contention that positional power is not sufficient for effective performance in organizations. College educators in Krahn (2000) study identified the importance of informal working relationships as instrumental to effective performance. Kanter (1993) believes that work structures, such as teams, empower employees by fostering opportunities to learn and grow, providing access to information, support and resources, resulting in increased work satisfaction and effectiveness. Educators engage in many activities throughout the organization that allow them the opportunity to build valuable networks with co-workers outside of their immediate workgroup.

Educators' empowerment and job satisfaction were negatively related to the number of classroom students taught and hours worked per week. This is a resource issue. According to Kanter (1993), time is an essential empowerment resource. Barrett *et al.* (1992) observed that nurse educators' most enjoyable aspect of their job was student contact and felt they had insufficient time to do so due to unreasonable workloads. Addressing these issues would allow them to spend more time with students and to pursue other aspects of the nurse educator role, such as participating in continuing education activities. These opportunities can increase feelings of empowerment and job satisfaction.

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What is already known about this topic

- Nurse educator shortages have been attributed to the ageing of the present cohort, fewer recruits to academic nursing, inadequate or unhealthy work conditions, and lack of job security.
- These shortages may increase workload, stress and burnout.
- Nurse educators have multiple roles and responsibilities, and these broad expectations may increase the risk of burnout and job dissatisfaction.

What this paper adds

- Support for Kanter's theory of organizational empowerment in the nurse educator population.
- Increasing access to empowerment structures of information, support, resources and opportunities for college nurse educators may reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction.
- Access to resources and support have the greatest influence on college educators' levels of job satisfaction and burnout.

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Limitations

There are several methodological limitations of this study. Response bias is always a concern when self-report instruments are used. Another limitation is related to the process used to acquire the sample. It is possible that educators were missing from the sampling frame because they refused to release their name for research purposes. Finally, it is not possible to generalize the findings to university educators.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide support for the applicability of Kanter's organizational empowerment theory in nurse education environments. The findings support Kanter's proposition that workplace structures have positive effects on employees. The results must be viewed in relation to current financial constraints in nurse education. Insufficient funding for nurse education programmes and the impending shortage of nurse educators in the near future place nurse educators at risk of burnout and poor health. This study suggests that strategies to enhance work empowerment may prevent burnout in college educators and increase job satisfaction. Nurse educators who are more satisfied with their jobs will engage in their work with greater joy and accomplishment throughout their academic careers. Consequently, student learning will be enhanced and the nursing profession is more likely to gain highly qualified graduates who ensure that patients receive that quality of care they deserve.

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