

Phenomenological Study of Occupational Stress among Nurses in the Perinatology Unit at RSUD Dr. Iskak Tulungagung

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ABSTRACT

Background: of this study is that the researcher found an indication of a problem that triggers the onset of stress that occurs in nurses in the Perinatology Room of RSUD dr. Iskak Tulungagung which comes from internal and external factors at work.

Purpose: This study aims to specifically explore work stress in nurses in the Perinatology Room. The method used in this research is qualitative method. Where the population consists of all nurses in the Perinatology Room. The sample are 8 nurses in the perinatology room.

Methods: Researchers used a phenomenological approach. The sampling technique is Purposive sampling technique. While the instrument used is by collecting data through interviews and documentation methods. While the data analysis method used is an interactive analysis model and uses a triangulation system to test the validity of the data that has been obtained.

Results: of this study resulted in 4 major themes, including: internal and external factors causing work stress in nurses, stressor signs and symptoms of nurses work stress, the impact of nurses work stress and nurses effective coping.

Conclusion: Factors that cause onset of work stress are dominated by various factors both internal and external which are very diverse ranging from heavy workloads, less solid work team factors, the number of patients who exceed the number of nurses, hospital management issues, the condition of the patient's family that cannot be conducive, critical patients that increase so that it has an impact on the performance of nurses who must be extra to the personal problems of each nurse which are factors that trigger the onset of stress. Overcoming work stress in nurses can be done with social support from people around, coworkers and superiors are very important; building a strong social network at work can provide a sense of mutual support and reduce feelings of isolation.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Occupational Stress, Perinatology Nursing

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BACKGROUND

Nursing is one of the most essential health professions in Indonesia, as nurses play a central role in delivering health services to the community. In line with globalization and rapid societal changes, the demand for quality health care services continues to increase (Aurellia & Prihastuty, 2022). The establishment of new hospitals and health clinics reflects efforts to meet this growing demand. Nurses, as frontline providers of care, hold substantial responsibilities and are expected to maintain professional conduct in all interactions with patients.

RSUD dr. Iskak Tulungagung has been designated as a regional referral hospital since 2015, serving as the primary health institution in Tulungagung Regency. With a large workforce and comprehensive facilities (Rizki Amalya et al., 2020), the hospital includes a specialized Perinatology Unit dedicated to the management of newborns requiring intensive and specialized care. The unit provides services for neonates from birth up to 28 days, particularly those classified as high-risk (Aeni et al., 2024).

Caring for critically ill newborns requires specific competencies and a higher level of attention compared to adult patient care, which may contribute to elevated occupational stress among nurses. Work-related stress in nursing may arise from the interaction between individual characteristics and workplace demands, encompassing both physical and psychological responses to environmental pressures (Hasbi, Fatmawati, & Alfira, 2019). Previous studies have indicated that work stress can reduce job performance, impair well-being, and negatively affect the quality of patient care (Hangewa, Bawotong, & Katuuk, 2020; Sulistyawati et al., 2019).

Occupational stress not only affects individual health but also has organizational and societal consequences. Research indicates that prolonged stress can lead to physical and psychological disorders, reduced productivity, burnout, depression, and in extreme cases, suicidal ideation (National Library of Medicine, 2024). A survey by the Indonesian National Nurses Association (PPNI) reported that 50.9% of nurses experience work stress, fatigue, irritability, and inadequate rest due to excessive workload. Similarly, the Indonesian Ministry of Health has highlighted that the prevalence of work-related stress among nurses remains alarmingly high (Indonesian Health Profile).

Preliminary interviews with nurses in the Perinatology Unit at RSUD dr. Iskak Tulungagung revealed several contributing factors to work stress, such as adjustment difficulties among newly assigned staff, high patient acuity, demanding family interactions, heavy night-shift schedules, and managerial expectations. These challenges are often exacerbated by prolonged tenure in the unit, which may lead to cumulative stress and fatigue.

Although numerous studies have examined occupational stress among nurses, several important gaps remain. Previous research has primarily focused on general nursing populations and has largely employed quantitative approaches to measure stress levels and their effects on performance and well-being (Hangewa et al., 2020; Sulistyawati et al., 2019). However, these studies tend to overlook the context-specific experiences of nurses working in highly specialized units, such as perinatology, where patient conditions are more critical and emotionally demanding.

Furthermore, existing literature has emphasized the relationship between workload and stress but has provided limited exploration of the complex interaction between individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors that contribute to occupational stress, particularly in neonatal intensive care settings. The unique challenges faced by nurses in perinatology units such as managing critically ill neonates, dealing with anxious family members, and adapting to high-intensity clinical environments are still underexplored.

In the Indonesian context, although national reports indicate a high prevalence of work-related stress among nurses (Persatuan Perawat Nasional Indonesia [PPNI], 2022; Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023), there is a lack of in-depth qualitative studies that capture nurses' lived experiences, especially at regional referral hospitals like RSUD dr. Iskak Tulungagung. Most available data are descriptive and survey-based, which limits the understanding of how stress is perceived, experienced, and managed in real clinical settings.

Additionally, limited attention has been given to the coping strategies employed by nurses in specialized units and how social support systems (colleagues, supervisors, and family) influence stress management. Understanding these aspects is crucial for developing effective, context-based interventions.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by using a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of nurses in the Perinatology Unit at RSUD dr. Iskak Tulungagung, providing a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of occupational stress, its contributing factors, impacts, and coping mechanisms.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of nurses regarding occupational stress. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants who met the nurses who have worked for more than 2 years. Data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews and documentation.

To ensure data validity, the study applied interactive data analysis techniques alongside triangulation methods. Interviews were conducted individually with eight participants, recorded, and supplemented with supporting documentation, including field notes and observational documentation of the workspace. Data reduction and thematic analysis were subsequently performed to generate valid and reliable conclusions.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Participants

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Code	Age (Years)	Education Level	Work Experience (Years)	Marital Status	Children	Ethnicity
P1	26	Diploma III Nursing	1	Married	Yes	Javanese
P2	29	Bachelor of Nursing	4	Married	Yes	Javanese
P3	32	Diploma III Nursing	7	Married	Yes	Javanese
P4	35	Bachelor of Nursing	10	Married	Yes	Javanese
P5	38	Diploma III Nursing	12	Married	Yes	Javanese
P6	41	Bachelor of Nursing	15	Married	Yes	Javanese
P7	45	Diploma III Nursing	20	Married	Yes	Javanese
P8	48	Bachelor of Nursing	24	Married	Yes	Javanese

Analysis of the interview data revealed four major themes:

Theme 1: Stressors (Internal and External Factors)

Narrative + Quote

The findings revealed that nurses experienced multiple stressors originating from both internal and external factors. The most dominant stressors included high workload, an increasing number of critically ill neonates requiring intensive care, lack of team cohesion, and complex interactions with patients' families. Additionally, organizational demands and personal life challenges contributed significantly to their stress levels. These stressors often occurred simultaneously, intensifying the pressure experienced by nurses in the NICU setting.

One participant explained:

“The workload is overwhelming, especially when many critical babies come at the same time, and sometimes teamwork is not as solid as expected.” (P2)

Another nurse highlighted family-related stressors:

“Dealing with anxious families can be emotionally exhausting, especially when we also have personal problems at home.” (P4)

Theme 2: Signs and Symptoms of Occupational Stress

Summary:

Participants reported a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms associated with occupational stress, including fatigue, headaches, eye strain, difficulty concentrating, gastrointestinal disturbances, and emotional tension. These symptoms tended to worsen during high patient loads or emergency situations.

Verbatim Quote:

“When the unit is full, I feel extremely tired, get headaches, and sometimes I can't focus on my tasks.” (P1)

Brief Analysis:

This statement reflects how acute workload pressures manifest in both physical and cognitive symptoms, potentially compromising patient care and nurse safety. The clustering of symptoms suggests cumulative stress rather than isolated incidents.

Theme 3: Impacts of Occupational Stress

Summary:

Occupational stress had predominantly negative effects on nurses' well-being, including emotional instability, sleep disturbances, and decreased resilience. These impacts also extended to reduced work performance and overall quality of life.

Verbatim Quote:

“I often feel emotionally drained and have trouble sleeping after a long shift, which affects my performance the next day.” (P3)

Brief Analysis:

This highlights the cyclical nature of stress, where inadequate recovery leads to ongoing fatigue and diminished performance. It underscores the need for institutional strategies to support mental health and rest.

Theme 4: Coping Strategies

Summary:

Nurses utilized both cognitive and behavioral coping strategies, such as time management, task prioritization, and seeking social support. Support from colleagues, supervisors, and family members played a crucial role in mitigating stress.

Verbatim Quote:

“I try to manage my time better and talk to my colleagues or family when I feel stressed it really helps.” (P5)

Brief Analysis:

This response demonstrates the importance of adaptive coping mechanisms and social support systems in maintaining psychological resilience. It also suggests that collaborative work environments can serve as protective factors against occupational stress.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multifactorial nature of occupational stress among nurses in the Perinatology Unit. Internal and external factors such as patient overload, inadequate staffing, interpersonal conflicts, and organizational issues were identified as key contributors. These stressors align with existing literature that emphasizes workload and emotional demands as predominant sources of stress in nursing practice (Sulistiyawati et al., 2019).

The signs and symptoms identified ranging from physical fatigue to psychological distress underscore the broad impact of occupational stress. Similar to previous studies, the participants' experiences demonstrate that unmanaged stress can lead to diminished concentration, health complaints, and reduced job satisfaction (Hangewa et al., 2020).

The negative consequences reported by participants reflect the dual burden of maintaining professional responsibilities while managing personal well-being. These findings support the argument that occupational stress has systemic implications, not only threatening individual health but also influencing patient safety and organizational performance (Hasbi et al., 2019).

Coping strategies were varied, with an emphasis on cognitive-behavioral approaches and reliance on social support. Institutional interventions, such as stress management programs, supportive supervision, and workload redistribution, are recommended to foster a healthier work environment.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study provides an in-depth exploration of occupational stress experienced by nurses in the Perinatology Unit at RSUD dr. Iskak Tulungagung. Four major themes emerged: stressors, signs and symptoms, impacts, and coping strategies.

Work-related stress was found to stem from both internal and external factors, manifesting in diverse physical and psychological symptoms, and leading to negative consequences for individual nurses and patient care outcomes. Effective coping strategies included time management, cognitive regulation, and strong social support systems.

The findings underscore the urgent need for institutional policies that prioritize nurses' mental health and well-being, including stress management training, supportive leadership, and adequate staffing. Strengthening these aspects will not only reduce occupational stress but also enhance the quality of neonatal care and patient satisfaction.

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