



Latent profiles of ethical climate and nurses' service behavior

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Abstract

Background: Hospital ethical climate has important implications for clinical nurses

Keywords

hospital ethical climate, in-role service behavior, extra-role service behavior, meta-analysis, clinical nurses

Introduction

In the current fierce market competition environment, in addition to superb medical technology and good hardware facilities, hospitals have to maintain their competitive advantages through advanced management consciousness and the provision of all-round, high-quality services for patients. As patient-centered services are high in value and can improve patient satisfaction and safety, research on the factors influencing clinical nurses' service behavior plays a vital role in improving the efficiency and performance of clinical nursing work.

The service behavior of clinical nurses is defined as their nursing care or helpful behavior directed toward their patients. As the professional action of nursing care is process-like, skill-based, comprehensive, ethical, and participatory and has both personal and interpersonal aspects, clinical nurses' service behavior is a kind of patient-oriented ethical laden practice. However, previous studies have tended to ignore the morality of clinical nurses' service behavior. Furthermore, according to existing research, there are two kinds of clinical nurses' service behaviors: in-role and extra-role. In-role service behavior involves the extent to which clinical nurses understand patients' needs and desires and can thus provide help or solutions for patients. Extra-role service behavior involves the extent to which clinical nurses' compulsory and constructive behaviors may enable serving and helping patients. As they are discretionary and strongly linked to service orientation involving the satisfaction of clients with job-related issues, clinical nurses' service behavior is a kind of patient-oriented ethical behavior. Additionally, as the two types of service behavior may have different factors and results, it is critical to test both aspects when studying the antecedents, outcomes, and mechanisms of service behavior.

According to Lütgen et al.,¹⁰ a hospital's ethical climate is defined as the implicit and explicit values that drive healthcare delivery and shape the workplaces in which care is delivered. These deeply affect nurses' thoughts and feelings in clinical work, ultimately affecting their work behavior. Scholars such as Dalmolin et al.¹¹ have indicated that a positive ethical climate leads to happier workers, more balanced and healthier environments, and provision of quality and safe care. A positive ethical climate is thus an essential factor affecting nurses' service behavior and clinical practice. However, while both domestic and foreign studies in nursing ethics have tended to focus on the connection between ethical climate and nurses' satisfaction, moral distress, and turnover intentions, research on the effect of ethical climate on clinical nurses' ethical behavior remains limited.

In addition to the most studies conducted in the United States,¹³ previous research on ethical climate conducted in China,¹⁴ Australia,¹⁵ Israel,¹⁶ and Belgium¹⁷ has frequently employed the ethical climate questionnaire (ECQ) created by Victor and Cullen,¹⁸ who identified three ethical climate types: caring (a concern for the well-being of others); law and code (whether any laws are broken); rules (whether the organization's policies and procedures are being followed); instrumental (a focus on self-interest); and independence.¹⁹ Based on this conceptual framework,¹⁹ numerous theoretical and empirical studies completed over the past few decades have substantially increased our understanding of the factors and outcomes of ethical climate.^{11,20} However, most existing studies have adopted the variable-centered method, focusing on the relationship between ethical climate and other variables.²¹ Although this method can effectively verify the relationship between variables, it ignores the following points: (1) in different organizational environments, different categories of ethical climate may exist at the same time and (2) there may be significant differences between different types of ethical climate and other variables.¹³

Previous researchers have generally explored the relationship between ethical climate and service behavior in different domains by taking a variable-centered approach. In the variable-centered approach, a single set of averaged parameters can be estimated, but the unique and independent relationships of each type of ethical climate with other variables are neglected. Furthermore, the variable-centered method assumes that all individuals from a sample under the climate are drawn from a single population.²⁴ This cannot fully reflect the fact that nurses experience each ethical climate differently in practice.¹³ According to Gabriel et al.,²⁵ latent profile analysis (LPA) provides an innovative approach for answering a variety of substantive research questions that is frequently not possible with more traditional methods, such as analysis of variance (ANOVA), regression, cluster analysis, and factor analysis, and it can assist researchers in understanding multifaceted relationships, intricate patterns, and clusters of symptoms that are needed to help guide interventions.²⁶

Background

Person-centered LPA approach

The person-centered approach²⁷ helps us to identify how different subpopulations of clinical nurses engage with distinct combinations of five ethical climate types. LPA is a new person-centered statistical analysis method focusing on the heterogeneity between individuals and can ensure that the differences between profiles are the largest, while differences within profiles are the smallest.²⁸ LPA yields distinct groups recognizing that the quantity (level) differs from the quality (shape) in the indicators, while exploring their association with external, other, and auxiliary observed variables.²⁹ Each means the latent profiles in a profile solution can differ in a variety of ways, including differences in the unique pattern of high and low mean scores on the indicators (shape differences), and differences in the mean score across all indicators (level differences).^{27,30}

In the current study, the level difference across profiles suggests that one profile may indicate that clinical nurses within high levels of caring, law and code, rules, instrumental and independence climate, whilst another profile may contain individuals within low levels of caring, law and code, rules, instrumental and independence climate. The shape difference could suggest that one profile presents a high level of law and code and rules climate, but a low level of caring, instrumental and independence climate, whereas another profile represents a moderate level of caring climate, a low level of law and code and rules climate and a high level of instrumental and independence climate. Therefore, this study attempts to identify whether profiles show shape and level differences. Person-centered analyses are exploratory, selecting the optimal solution in a mainly exploratory manner.³¹ We use the person-centered approach to explore the structure and the function of distinct profiles of hospital ethical climate.

Ethical climate and service behavior

As a kind of the organizational climate, hospital ethical climate significantly affects the professional and ethical practice of clinical nurses, and as a result, it should be attached importance to in evaluating clinical nurses' service behaviors. However, the literature is largely silent on how ethical climate affects clinical nurses to imply service behaviors.³² According to the current literature, the ethical climate not only affects which issues organizational members consider to be ethics-related, but also plays a decisive role in the generation of moral standards that organization members can understand, weigh and solve these problems.³⁵ On one hand, the ethical climate works through formal culture. Formal culture refers to the aspects such as leadership, structures, reward systems, policies, decision-making processes and socialization mechanisms.³⁸ This therefore suggests that hospital ethical climate may play a role in facilitating employees' service

