

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ABSENTEEISM AMONGST NURSES:
A MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

by

N'wamakuvele Maria Nyathi

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the
Department of Health Studies

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Supervisor: Prof K Jooste
Joint supervisor: Dr L de Villiers

February 2005

Student number: 631-861-4

DECLARATION

I declare that *Factor Contributing to Absenteeism Amongst Nurses: A Management Perspective*, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree at any other institution.

.....

SIGNATURE

Miss N'wamakhuve Maria Nyathi

2005-02-23

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the following persons for their respective contributions to this dissertation:

- Professor K Jooste and Dr L de Villiers, my supervisors at Unisa, for their guidance.
- Ms T Burger, the Unisa librarian, for compiling a bibliography.
- Mr DNR Levey for editing the manuscript.
- My family and friends for their love, support and encouragement.
- Dr R Ramos, who assisted me, with the typing of my dissertation.
- The health authorities in the Limpopo Province for allowing me to conduct this study at one of the district hospitals.
- The statistician at Rau who helped me with the interpreting the statistics.
- To you all, my sincere thanks and love, and wishing you strength in your endeavours. May people be as caring and helpful to you as you've been to me.

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ABSENTEEISM AMONGST NURSES:
A MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

STUDENT NUMBER: 631 861-4
STUDENT: N'WAMAKHUELE MARIA NYATHI
DEGREE: MASTER OF ARTS IN NURSING SIENCE
DEPARTMENT: HEALTH STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
SUPERVISOR: PROF K JOOSTE
JOINT SUPERVISOR: DR L DE VILLIERS

Abstract

Quantitative, descriptive research was conducted to determine which factors contribute to absenteeism among nurses. A structured self-administered questionnaire was administered to the entire population of nurses who worked at a district hospital in the Limpopo Province. Statistical data analysis, involving factor analysis, frequencies and Chi-squares was performed. The findings revealed that various factors related to the characteristics of the nurse, characteristics of the manager, characteristics of the work and characteristics of the organisation contribute to absenteeism. Professional nurses and sub-professional nurses, as well as nurses younger than 40 and nurses who are 40 years and older, appeared to disagree on the extent to which various factors contribute to absenteeism in the workplace. This study was aimed at assisting organisations and managers in reducing absenteeism in the workplace, and by doing so, improving the quality of care.

KEY CONCEPTS

Absenteeism; nurse manager; professional nurse; registered nurse; sub-professional nurse.

Chapter 1**Orientation to the research study**

1.1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2	BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM.....	3
1.3	RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	6
1.4	THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	7
1.5	DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	8
1.5.1	Nursing.....	8
1.5.2	Nurse.....	8
1.5.3	Manager.....	8
1.5.4	Absenteeism	9
1.5.5	Strategies	9
1.5.6	Factors	9
1.6	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY.....	9
1.7	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD.....	12
1.8	LAYOUT OF THE FINAL REPORT.....	13
1.9	CONCLUSION.....	13

CHAPTER 2
Literature review

2.1	INTRODUCTION	14
2.2	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NURSE	14
2.2.1	Marital status of nurses	14
2.2.2	Age and gender of nurses	15
2.2.3	Qualifications	16
2.2.4	Health status of nurses	17
2.2.5	Family responsibility	19
2.2.6	Transport problems	20
2.2.7	Work commitment	21
2.2.8	Opportunities outside the workplace and income	22
2.3	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANAGER	23
2.3.1	Leadership style of nurse managers	23
2.4	CHARACTERISTICS OF WORK	26
2.4.1	Autonomy of nurses	27
2.4.2	Routinisation	28
2.4.3	Group cohesion	30

Table of contents	page
2.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORGANISATION	31
2.5.1 Decentralisation	31
2.5.1.1 Absence management policy	31
2.5.2 Promotion opportunities	32
2.5.3 Career development opportunities	33
2.5.4 Incentives	34
2.5.5 Remuneration	35
2.5.6 Facilities	36
2.5.7 Manpower	36
2.6 SUMMARY	37

CHAPTER 3

Research design and method

3.1	INTRODUCTION	38
3.2	RESEARCH DESIGN	38
3.3	RESEARCH SETTING	39
3.4	RESEARCH METHOD	39
3.4.1	Population	39
3.4.2	Sampling	40
3.4.3	Data collection	41
3.4.3.1	Data collection approach and method	41
3.4.3.2	Characteristics of the instrument	42
3.4.3.3	Pre-testing of the questionnaire	43
3.4.3.4	Pilot study	44
3.4.3.5	Data collection process	44
3.4.4	Data analysis	45
3.5	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY.....	46
3.5.1	Validity and reliability of the questionnaire	46
3.5.2	External validity	47
3.6	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	47
3.6.1	Protecting the rights of the respondents	47
3.6.2	Rights of the institution	48
3.6.3	Scientific integrity	48
3.7	SUMMARY	48

CHAPTER 4

Presentation and discussion of findings

4.1	INTRODUCTION	50
4.2	PRESENTATION OF DATA	50
4.3	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS	51
4.3.1	Categories of respondents.....	51
4.3.2	Age distribution	53
4.3.3	Gender distribution	53
4.3.4	Marital status	54
4.3.5	South African Nursing Council registration	54
4.3.6	Years of experience	55
4.3.7	The clinical ward/unit in which respondents were working	56
4.4	SECTION B: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NURSE	57
4.4.1	Lack of work commitment	58
4.4.1.1	Frequency distributions of responses on the lack of work commitment ...	59
4.4.1.2	Significant differences on the lack of work commitment.....	60
4.4.2	Stress-related factors	63
4.4.2.1	Frequency distributions of responses on stress-related factors.....	63
4.4.2.2	Significant differences on stress-related factors	64
4.4.3	External factors influencing absenteeism	67

Table of contents		page
4.4.3.1	Frequency distributions of responses on the external factors influencing absenteeism	68
4.4.3.2	Significant differences in responses on external factors that contribute towards absenteeism	69
4.4.4	Conflict situations	70
4.4.4.1	Frequency distributions of responses on conflict situations	70
4.4.4.2	Significant differences in the responses on conflict situations	71
4.5	SECTION C : CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NURSE MANAGER	74
4.5.1	Negative communication between the nurse manager and nurses	75
4.5.1.1	Frequency distributions of responses on negative communication between the nurse manager and nurses	76
4.5.2	Autocratic leadership style	79
4.5.2.1	Frequency distributions of responses on autocratic leadership style....	79
4.5.2.2	Significant differences on the nurse manager's autocratic leadership style	81
4.5.3	Need for a supportive environment	83
4.5.3.1	Frequency distributions of responses on need for a supportive environment.....	84

Table of contents	page
4.5.3.2 Significant differences in responses on a need for a supportive environment.....	85
4.6 SECTION D: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORK.....	87
4.6.1 Inadequate group cohesion.....	89
4.6.1.1 Frequency distributions of responses on inadequate group cohesion	89
4.6.1.2 Significant differences that resulted from the items on inadequate group cohesion.....	91
4.6.2 Delegation of autonomy	93
4.6.2.1 Frequency distributions of responses on delegation of autonomy	94
4.6.2.2 Significant differences in responses to delegation of autonomy	96
4.6.3 Role ambiguity.....	97
4.6.3.1 Frequency distributions of responses on role ambiguity	98
4.6.3.2 Significant differences in responses on role ambiguity	99
4.6.4 Ineffective routinisation.....	102
4.6.4.1 Frequency distributions of responses on the items that dealt with ineffective routinisation	102
4.6.5 Effect of workload in the workplace	103
4.6.5.1 Frequency distributions of responses on the effect of workload in the workplace.....	103

Table of contents		page
4.7	SECTION E: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORGANISATION	104
4.7.1	Ineffective organisational structure.....	105
4.7.1.1	Frequency distributions of responses on ineffective organisational structure	106
4.7.1.2	Significant differences in responses on ineffective organisational structure	109
4.7.2	Inadequate career development	110
4.7.2.1	Frequency distributions of responses on inadequate career development	111
4.7.3	Inadequate/unfair treatment of staff	112
4.7.3.1	Frequency distributions of responses on inadequate/unfair treatment of staff	112
4.7.3.2	Significant differences in responses on inadequate/unfair treatment of staff.....	113
4.7.4	Lack of resources.....	115
4.7.4.1	Frequency distributions of responses on lack of resources	116
4.8	CONCLUSION	117

Table of contents		Page
CHAPTER 5		
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS		
5.1	INTRODUCTION	118
5.2	PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS	118
5.3	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	119
5.3.1	Characteristics of the nurse that contribute to absenteeism among nurses	119
5.3.2	Characteristics of the nurse manager that contribute to absenteeism among nurses.....	123
5.3.3	Characteristics of the work that contribute to absenteeism among nurses.....	126
5.3.4	Characteristics of the organisation that contribute to absenteeism among nurses.....	131
5.3.5	Summary of the research findings.....	135
5.4	Conclusions	137
5.5	RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH	138
5.5.1	Recommendations on the general management of absenteeism	138
5.5.2	Recommendations on eliminating the main reasons for absenteeism.....	140
5.5.3	Recommendations on further exploring the reasons for absenteeism.....	142
5.6	CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY.....	143
5.5	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	143
5.8	CONCLUSION	143

Table of contents **page**

LIST OF REFERENCES 144

List of tables		page
Table 1.1	Layout of the final report.....	13
Table 3.1	Total population of nurses in the regional hospital	39
Table 3.2	Questionnaire distribution and response rates	41
Table 4.1	Categories of nurses (n=233 responses).....	52
Table 4.2	Age distribution of respondents (n=227 responses).....	53
Table 4.3	Gender distribution of respondents (n=233 responses).....	53
Table 4.4	Marital status of respondents (n=233 responses).....	54
Table 4.5	Registration with the South African Nursing Council (n=233 responses)	55
Table 4.6	Years of experience (n=229 responses)	56
Table 4.7	Clinical ward/unit distribution (n=233 responses).....	57
Table 4.8	Factors on the characteristics of the nurses	58
Table 4.9	Frequencies of responses on a lack of work commitment	59
Table 4.10	Nurses are absent from work because they want to do what colleagues do in the workplace (n=227 responses).....	60
Table 4.11	Nurses are absent from work because they want to prolong their weekends (n=225 responses)	61
Table 4.12	Nurses are absent from work because they lack motivation to go to work (n=225 responses)	62
Table 4.13	Frequencies of responses on stress-related factors	63
Table 4.14	Nurses are absent from work because they suffer from minor physical ailments (n=226 responses)	65
Table 4.15	Nurses are absent from work because they suffer from stress-related illnesses (n=230 responses)	66
Table 4.16	Nurses are absent from work because they have to attend funerals of relatives (n=228 responses)	67
Table 4.17	Responses on external factors influencing absenteeism	68
Table 4.18	Nurses are absent from work because they have to attend funerals of friends (n=230 responses).....	69
Table 4.19	Responses on conflict situations	70

List of tables	page
Table 4.20 Nurses are absent from work because they have problems regarding the abuse of alcohol or drugs (n=226 responses).....	72
Table 4.21 Nurses are absent from work because they experience domestic conflict (n=230 responses)	73
Table 4.22 Nurses are absent from work because they suffer from work-related injuries (n=225 responses).....	74
Table 4.23 Factors on the characteristics of the nurse manager.....	75
Table 4.24 Responses on negative communication between the nurse manager and nurses	77
Table 4.25 Responses on autocratic leadership style	80
Table 4.26 Nurses are absent from work because the nurse manager exercises power with coercion in the daily management of nursing staff (n=229 responses)	82
Table 4.27 Nurses are absent from work because the nurse manager shouts at nurses who do not conform to his/her standards/expectations (n=225 responses).....	83
Table 4.28 Responses on the need for a supportive environment.....	84
Table 4.29 Nurses are absent from work because they have the need for two-way communication between the nurse manager and nurses (n=218 responses)....	86
Table 4.30 Factors on characteristics of the work	88
Table 4.31 Responses on inadequate group cohesion	90
Table 4.32 Nurses are absent from work because of tolerance for absenteeism in the case of some nurses in the unit (n=229 responses).....	92
Table 4.33 Nurses are absent from work because of the lack of a culture of work attendance among peers (n=230 responses).....	93
Table 4.34 Responses to delegation of autonomy	95
Table 4.35 Nurses are absent from work because they have to do a job that requires more skill than those which they have (n=230 responses)....	97

List of tables	page
Table 4.36 Responses on role ambiguity	98
Table 4.37 Nurses are absent from work because they have to work fluctuating shifts in the workplace (n=226 responses)	100
Table 4.38 Nurses are absent from work because they have to perform duties without a job description (n=226 responses)	101
Table 4.39 Responses on ineffective routinisation	102
Table 4.40 Responses on effect of workload in the workplace	103
Table 4.41 Factors on characteristics of the organisation	105
Table 4.42 Responses on ineffective organisational structure.....	107
Table 4.43 Nurses are absent from work because there is irregular feedback about work performance (n=226 responses).....	110
Table 4.44 Responses on inadequate career development	111
Table 4.45 Responses on inadequate/unfair treatment of staff	112
Table 4.46 Nurses are absent from work because of a lack of childcare facilities (a crèche) where health care personnel can keep their children during working hours (n=230 responses).....	114
Table 4.47 Nurses are absent from work because of unfair discipline imposed on some of the nursing staff (n=226 responses).....	115
Table 4.48 Responses on lack of resources	116

List of figures **page**

Fig 1.1	Conceptual framework	10
---------	----------------------------	----

List of annexures

Annexure A: Approval from the university of South Africa

Annexure B: Letter seeking consent to conduct research from the Department of Health
Northern Province

Annexure C: Letter of approval from the Department of Health Northern Province

Annexure D: Letter seeking consent to conduct research at Mopani District Regional
Hospital

Annexure E: Letter of approval from Mopani District Regional Hospital

Annexure F: Assessment of the data collection instrument

Annexure G: Questionnaire covering letter

Annexure H: Questionnaire