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Occupational well-being and mental workload of health care educators in relation to professional competence

Background: Health care educators face many challenges in terms of their occupational well-being, such as excessive workload, mental strain at work, digitalisation and labour shortages (WHO, 2021; Howard et al., 2022; Jarosinski, 2022). Professional competence can be seen as one aspect of occupational well-being, yet there is little research on the topic creating a research gap. The results of two research project are presented: European New Nurse Educator project, 2020-2023, and Social and Health Care Teachers' Occupational Well-being in Finland project, 2020-2023.

Aim: To describe occupational well-being and balance of the mental workload among health care educators in relation to professional competence.

Methods: Cross-sectional data collection occurred at two stages between 2020–2022. Finnish data (n=489) were collected from Finnish health care educators in September 2020 electronically using the Occupational well-being of social and health care teachers—index questionnaire. European data (n=302) were collected electronically between May 2021 and February 2022 from Finnish, Spanish, Slovakian and Maltese nurse educators using the Health and Social Care Educator's Competence instrument along with items from the occupational well-being index questionnaire. Data were analysed by descriptive and multivariate methods.

Results: Overall personal occupational well-being (mean 2.63–3.68, scale 0–5) and balance of the mental workload (mean 2.63–3.41, Likert scale 1–5) were evaluated as moderate by health educators in both research projects but varied between the countries. Finnish educators evaluated their balance of the mental workload lower in the year 2020 than the year 2021. The multiple regression modelling revealed positive relation between professional competence, balance of the mental workload and personal occupational well-being. Further analysis showed connections between competence areas and occupational well-being. The Finnish 2020 data indicates professional competence and training such as sufficient education and clinical competence, continuing education opportunities, and efficient use of own competence are strongly related to personal occupational well-being. In the European data, administrative and curriculum competence such as management of own work and competence regarding curriculum, responsibilities, legislation and financial tasks are strongly related to personal occupational well-being.

Conclusion: Competence and mental workload of health care educators have a connection to occupational well-being. Notwithstanding the moderate level of occupational well-being which prevailed amongst the educators, the mental workload on health care educators requires further attention. Occupational well-being development activities and education and continuous professional development initiatives geared towards health care educators are to be planned accordingly.

Keywords: competence; nurse educator; occupational; well-being; workload

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