

Organizational Support and Thriving at Work as Perceived by Nurses in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University, the People's Republic of China*

การสนับสนุนจากองค์กรและความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานตามการรับรู้ของพยาบาล
ในโรงพยาบาลในเครือของมหาวิทยาลัยต้าหลี่ สาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน*

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Abstract

Organizational support is an important factor that has been found to have an impact on thriving at work of employees in the People's Republic of China. The purposes of this study were to examine the level of organizational support and thriving at work as perceived by nurses, and to explore the relationship between organizational support and thriving at work of nurses in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University, the People's Republic of China. Study samples included 266 nurses who were selected from different departments of two Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University, the People's Republic of China by the proportional stratified random sampling method. Research instruments used in this study were a demographic data form, the Survey of Nurses' Perceived Organizational Support (SNPOS) and the measure of thriving at work. The reliability of the Survey of Nurses' Perceived Organizational Support (SNPOS) was 0.92 and the reliability of the measure of thriving at work was 0.81. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlation.

The results of the study showed that organizational support as perceived by nurses was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, $SD = 0.69$), thriving at work as perceived by nurses was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 5.29$, $SD = 0.81$) and there was a positive significant correlation between organizational support and thriving at work ($r = .61$, $p < .01$).

The findings of this study could be used by nursing administrators to develop strategies for improving organizational support in order to facilitate thriving at work for nurses in a complex healthcare environment.

Keywords: Organizational support, Thriving at work, Nurses, China

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บทคัดย่อ

การสนับสนุนจากองค์กรถือเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญที่พบว่ามีผลกระทบต่อความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานของบุคลากรในสาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน การวิจัยครั้งนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาระดับการสนับสนุนจากองค์กรและความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานตามการรับรู้ของพยาบาล รวมทั้งศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการรับรู้การสนับสนุนจากองค์กรกับความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานของพยาบาล ในโรงพยาบาลในเครือของมหาวิทยาลัยต้าหลี่ สาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน กลุ่มตัวอย่างของการศึกษา คือ พยาบาลที่ถูกคัดเลือกโดยวิธีสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบชั้นภูมิตามสัดส่วน จากแผนกต่าง ๆ ของโรงพยาบาลในเครือของมหาวิทยาลัยต้าหลี่ สาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน 2 แห่ง จำนวน 266 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยประกอบด้วยแบบบันทึกข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล แบบสำรวจการรับรู้การสนับสนุนจากองค์กร (SNPOS) และแบบวัดความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงาน ความเชื่อมั่นของแบบสำรวจการรับรู้การสนับสนุนจากองค์กรเท่ากับ 0.92 และแบบวัดความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานเท่ากับ 0.81 วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนาและการหาค่าสหสัมพันธ์แบบจัดอันดับของสเปียร์แมน

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การรับรู้การสนับสนุนจากองค์กรของพยาบาลอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง ($\bar{X} = 3.48, SD = 0.69$) การรับรู้ความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานของพยาบาลอยู่ในระดับสูง ($\bar{X} = 5.29, SD = 0.81$) และการรับรู้การสนับสนุนจากองค์กรและความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงาน มีความสัมพันธ์ทางบวกอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ($r = .61, p < .01$)

ผลการค้นพบนี้ ผู้บริหารการพยาบาลสามารถนำไปใช้เพื่อพัฒนากลยุทธ์ในการปรับปรุงการสนับสนุนจากองค์กรเพื่อเอื้ออำนวยให้เกิดความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงานของพยาบาลในสภาพแวดล้อมด้านการดูแลสุขภาพที่ซับซ้อน

คำสำคัญ การสนับสนุนจากองค์กร ความเจริญก้าวหน้าในงาน พยาบาล ประเทศจีน

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Background and Significance

Change is now a significant and consistent feature of healthcare organizations around the world (Newton, Teo, Pick, Yeung, & Salamonson, 2013). Changes in Chinese healthcare comprise mainly the aging population, the expansion of patients' rights, and Medicare system reform (Netease news, 2012). With healthcare system reform, healthcare operates in an increasingly complex competitive environment (Zhang, 2007). These changes that result in nurses working in a competitive environment will increase the job stress of nurses, and thereby job stress will heighten nurses' turnover intention (Labrague, Gloe, Mcenroe, Konstantinos, & Colet, 2018; Lo, Chien, Hwang, Huang, & Chiou, 2018; Yang, Lv, Zhou, Liu, & Mi, 2017). However, if nurses thrive at work, they will feel they are important or have meaning to their organization. Therefore, they will work vigorously and be willing to stay in the organization (Gao et al., 2017).

Thriving at work refers to a psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Thriving at work includes two dimensions: vitality and learning. Vitality refers to a feeling of aliveness and positivity, with energy to do work. Learning refers to acquiring and applying knowledge skills to develop individual abilities. Spreitzer et al., (2005) argued that thriving can promote individuals' health and personal development, thus minimizing their turnover intention. When individuals thrive at work, they will learn more and feel energetic, which will reduce their turnover intention (Abid, Zahra, &

Ahmed, 2015; Anjum, Marri, & Khan, 2016), job burnout (Porath, Spritzers, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012), and incivility in the workplace (Anjum et al., 2016). To date, research on thriving at work are rare, particularly in the nursing field in which only two studies have been found to examine thriving at work (Mortier, Vlerick, & Clays, 2016; Gao et al., 2017). The results of these studies showed that Belgian nurses perceived a high level of thriving at work (Mortier, Vlerick, & Clays, 2016); however, Chinese nurses were at a moderate level (Gao et al., 2017). The results were inconsistent, and little was known about China. Thus, it is necessary to reexamine thriving at work among nurses.

Regarding the literature review, there are several factors that affect individuals' thriving at work, including authentic leadership (Mortier et al., 2016), transformational leadership (Hildenbrand, Sacramento, & Binnewies, 2018), trust and connectivity (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009), decision-making discretion, broad information sharing and role enacting (Liu & Bernklug, 2013), psychological capital (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014), and perceived organizational support (POS) (Abid et al., 2015; Ma, 2014; Shi, Wan, & Cui, 2015). Among these factors, POS is prominent, and had a strong relationship with thriving at work. Several studies have explored the relationship between perceived organizational support and thriving at work among employees in enterprises from Pakistan and China (Abid et al., 2015; Ma, 2014; Shi et al., 2015). Although there were previous studies that have confirmed the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and thriving at work, no previous research identified

the relationship between these two variables among nurses, particularly Chinese nurses.

Organizational support was found as an important factor that was related to thriving at work. Organizational support of nurses refers to the nurses' comprehensive perception of the extent to which the department or hospital gives them support, values their contribution, and cares about their well-being (Wang, Zhang, & Qian, 2014). Organizational support would increase the employees' feelings of being respected, which would enhance motivation for learning new things and energize the nurses (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 2001). Meanwhile, recognition would create a positive mood so that nurses could recover from setbacks and negative emotions. Thus, they are more likely to thrive at work.

In China, most nurses think they are treated unfairly because nurses work with high overload but get low pay and low social recognition (Chen, Liu, Kuang, & Duan, 2010; Liu, Liu, Zhang, Guo, & Zhu, 2014). Compared with doctors, nurses received less pay, promotions and learning opportunities than doctors. Zhang and Cao's (2008) study showed that 70% of nurses and doctors believed that nurses get lower salaries; 53% of them deemed that doctors had more opportunities for promotion than nurses; and 73.5% of them reckoned doctors had more opportunities for learning than nurses. These situations may affect how nurses perceive support from their hospitals. However, in 2012, the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Yunnan Province launched a Hospital Accreditation project (MOH of Yunnan, 2012). The regulations

of Hospital Accreditation emphasize the safety of patients and medical personnel. According to these regulations, hospital infection control and the non-punishment of adverse events report system is vital to build a safe work environment for nurses. A safe environment promotes nurses' perception of support from hospitals which further makes nurses feel that they are thriving at work.

As aforementioned, thriving at work provides significant benefits for nursing personnel and organizations. However, few studies have identified this concept among nurses, and no study has identified the relationship between perceived organizational support and thriving at work among nurses. Therefore, knowledge needs to be expanded regarding perceived organizational support and thriving at work, as well as the relationship between them, under the nursing context in the P.R. China, especially in university hospitals in Dali. The results benefit nurse managers to improve support to increase and/or maintain thriving at work among nurses in their nursing units and hospitals. Meanwhile, the results of the present study will contribute to the body of knowledge on perceived organizational support and thriving at work in order to provide baseline data for future research.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to explore the levels of perceived organizational support and thriving at work as well as the relationship between these two variables for nurses in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University, the People's Republic of China.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on two main concepts: the Perceived Organizational Support Theory by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) and the Social Embedded Model of Thriving at Work by Spreitzer et al. (2005). Perceived organizational support for nurses is defined as the nurses' comprehensive perception of the extent to which the department or hospital gives them support, values their contribution, and cares about their well-being (Wang et al., 2014). Thriving at work is defined as a psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work, and consists of two dimensions: vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). According to the literature review, individuals who perceived support from hospitals felt obligated to be absorbed in their work and to learn new knowledge and skills to contribute to the organizational objectives (Eisenberger, et al., 1986).

Methodology

Population and Sample

The descriptive correlational design was used to study a population of 861 nurses who had worked for at least one year and had provided bedside nursing care to patients in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University.

The sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1973) formula, with a level of .05. Considering the possible loss of samples, 20% of the sample size was added (Naing, Winn, & Rusli, 2006). The final sample size was 329 nurses. Proportional stratified random sampling method was used to determine the number of nurses

from eight clinical departments of the First Affiliated Hospital of Dali University and the Second Affiliated Hospital of Dali University.

Research Instruments

The instrument was a questionnaire consisting of three parts: 1) the demographic data form; 2) the Survey of Nurse Perceived Organizational Support (SNPOS) in Chinese language by Wang et al., (2014) which was contained 15 items, with a 5-point, unidimensional scale, with ratings from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*); mean score 1.00-2.33 was at a low level, mean score 2.34-3.66 was at a moderate level, and mean score 3.67-5.00 was at a high level. 3) The Measure of Thriving at Work included two dimensions, learning and validity (Porath et al. 2012). It was a 10-item, 7-point scale with ratings from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*). Each dimension included 5 items. This measure was translated into Chinese by the researcher using the back-translation process. Both instruments were used without any modification; thus, the researcher did not test their validity. The internal consistency reliability of SNPOS and the Measure of Thriving at work were tested with 30 nurses who worked in the Second Affiliated Hospital of Dali University. The Cronbach's alpha of SNPOS and the Measure of Thriving at Work reached .96 and .83, respectively.

Ethical Considerations

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University approved this study, and approvals were submitted to the directors of the nursing departments of the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University, the People's Republic of China. Before data collection, the package of question-

naires, including an information sheet, an informed consent form, and questionnaires, was handed to each participant, and was requested to be returned within two weeks. They were notified that they had rights to refuse, stop, or withdraw at any time from this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of individual responses were guaranteed.

Data Collection

The researcher and one research coordinator distributed 329 questionnaires, and 301 were returned. Only 250 (75.99%) questionnaires were complete. The overall response rate did not reach 80%. Therefore, the researcher redistributed 16 questionnaires, applying the proportional stratified random sampling method, to staff nurses who were not sampled for the first round. Ultimately, a total of 266 (80.85%) returned questionnaires were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. The significance level was set at .05. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing the demographic data of nurses. The level of perceived organizational support and thriving at work were

analyzed by using mean, standard deviation, and range. As the data for perceived organizational support was not normally distributed, Spearman's rank-order correlations were used to examine the relationship between the two variables.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants. In the present study, the majority of samples were female (97.37%). The average age of samples was 31.49 years old (SD = 6.95). The largest group of them (59.40%) ranged from 25 to 35 years old and 74.44% were married. With respect to educational level, the majority held a bachelor's degree (60.53%). About half of the samples were senior nurses (50.38%). Most have worked for less than six years (36.46%). Approximately 40% of the samples worked in the medical department.

Organizational support as perceived by nurses was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, SD = 0.69). Nurses' thriving at work was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 5.29$, SD = 0.81). Organizational support was significantly strongly related to thriving at work ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) (Table 1).

Table 1 Relationship among Perceived Organizational Support and Thriving at Work of the Samples (n = 266)

	Perceived Organizational Support
Overall thriving at work	.61**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

Perceived Organizational Support

The results indicated that organizational support as perceived by nurses working at the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, $SD = 0.69$).

Superior support and a safe work environment might be the reasons for samples' perception of organizational support. Firstly, supervisor support may be a reasonable explanation of the results. Leader-member exchange was one of the methods that assesses supervisors' support (Wayne, Shore, & Liden 1997). A good leader-member exchange was found in a tertiary hospital in Yunnan (Zhang, 2016). That implies that head nurses had a good relationship with staff nurses. Therefore, staff nurses could get sufficient support from their head nurses when they encountered trouble. Additionally, highly perceived organizational support can be attributed to the construction of a safe work environment. A safe workplace was one of the determinants of well-being for individuals (Schulte et al. 2015). In 2012, the Ministry of Health of Yunnan Province launched the Hospital Accreditation (HA) project, which focused on the safety of patients and medical personnel. The implementation of the non-punishment of adverse nursing events report system and medical occupational protection system guaranteed nurses' safety which promoted the perception of organizational support. At the same time, to guarantee nurses' safety, the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University provided effective measures to protect nurses from occupational exposure to infections, such as the orientation of hospital infection control

for new staff, use of personal protective equipment, use of safer devices, and periodical training and post-exposure management. These effective measures ensured that nurses worked in a relatively safe work environment. Hence, nurses felt they received support from their hospitals.

A number of reasons may have prevented nurses from perceiving support from their hospitals in this study. This will be discussed in detail as follows. Firstly, dissatisfaction with payment and rewards might be a possible explanation. Previous studies revealed that nurses were not satisfied with payment and rewards in tertiary hospitals in Yunnan province (Duan, 2016; Bai, 2012). This finding was consistent with another study in Dali, which showed that nurses in Dali were dissatisfied with their pay (Liu, Yang, Zhang, Yang, & Ar, 2016). When nurses felt that there was imbalance between effort and reward, they would feel that their work was not meaningful for the hospital and that the hospital did not recognize or appreciate them. Thus, this will inhibit nurses from perceiving high support from hospitals. Additionally, the result may be attributed to career planning. At present, nurses with the same educational level, professional title and position do the same work and share the same responsibilities in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University. The hospitals seldom provide opportunities for nurses to become clinical nursing specialists or clinical nurse experts. The only possible developmental path for nurses is to become nurse administrators. However, administrator positions were limited. Therefore, most nurses were not clear about the future direction of their career development

which could hinder the nurses in perceiving organizational support.

In short, superior support, a safe work environment, and hospitals' concern about nurses' well-being may facilitate nurses' perceived organizational support. On the other hand, nurses' dissatisfaction with pay and rewards, and a lack of nursing career planning may weaken their perception of support from hospitals. Therefore, in this study, nurses perceived a moderate level of organizational support. The result was consistent with a previous study in Yunnan, China which might be because nurses in Yunnan are subject to the same policies and the same benefits.

Thriving at Work

The results revealed that thriving at work of samples working in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 5.29$, $SD = 0.81$).

The possible explanations of high levels of thriving at work are discussed as follows. Firstly, job autonomy increases one's feeling of thriving at work. Individuals who perceived they have autonomy in completing their work are more likely to report they are thriving at work (Liu & Bern-Klu, 2013). Yang (2017) also found that job autonomy of nurses in tertiary hospitals of Yunnan was at a high level. That is, when nurses felt autonomous, they were more likely to feel a high level of thriving at work. Secondly, another reasonable attribution for this finding may be related to broad information sharing. With the creation of the Office Automation System (OAS) and online chat groups such as QQ and WeChat, information sharing was improved

in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University. When individuals have access to large amounts of information, they are able to deal with unfamiliar and urgent affairs (Bunderson & Sutcliff, 2002), and this can increase nurses' confidence and competence, which immediately enhances their sense of vitality. Thirdly, with the implementation of the quality care demonstration project in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University, a holistic nursing model was promoted to all wards. The holistic nursing model demands that nurses work as a team. Good teamwork indicates that nurses trust and cooperate with each other (Kalisch, Lee, & Salas, 2010). Trust will make nurses believe that they are a worthy and valued person for the hospitals. Accordingly, they are more willing to take risks to explore new treatments, new technology and new experiments. Finally, the level of thriving at work could be explained by the educational level demographic characteristics (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009). In this study, 61.28% of the samples who held a bachelor's degree or above held greater expectations for themselves and aspirations for their future career development. They are generally willing to put more energy into their work and spend more time and effort to learn. The results revealed that thriving at work for nurses working in the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University was at a high level which was different from nurses in Heilongjiang Province.

The Relationship between Organizational Support and Thriving at Work of Nurses

The results of this study showed that there was a strong positive relationship between perceived organizational support and thriving at work ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) (Table 1). This meant that

nurses were more likely to feel that they were thriving in their work when they perceived support from their organization. The results strengthened the established understanding that perceived organizational support has a positive impact on individual work attitude, such as thriving among employees at enterprises in Pakistan and China (Abid et al., 2015; Ma, 2014; Shi et al., 2015).

Perceived organizational support as a contextual enabler can increase an employees' sense of thriving at work in Chinese culture (Ma, 2014; Shi et al., 2015). The results of this study indicate when nurses perceive that hospitals care about their well-being, provide more opportunities for training and promotion, provide appropriate payment and rewards, and treat them equally, nurses are more likely to have a feeling of being respected and trusted. Subsequently, in order to reciprocate to the hospitals, nurses are more likely to actively learn and work hard. Moreover, a sense of being respected can facilitate nurses to explore new things, namely learning. Furthermore, as nurses explore in this manner, they are more likely to feel curious and energetic. At the same time, when nurses feel respected and trusted by their hospitals, they will produce positive moods (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), such as joy and contentment. With positive moods, nurses can be more resilient during adverse events and setbacks (Fredrickson, 1998). Positive moods could facilitate nurses to interact with their patients and their colleagues. Nurses feel energetic when they successfully help others to solve problems. In addition, with positive moods, nurses can build good relationships with their

colleagues, and they can learn more by talking about and observing their colleagues' work experience and skills. Thus, it can be seen that a climate of respect and positive moods respectively or jointly enhances the individuals' thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). To summarize, the results of this study strengthened the established understanding that POS had a positive impact on individual work attitude, such as thriving among employees in enterprises in Pakistan and China (Abid et al., 2015; Ma, 2014; Shi et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The results revealed that perceived organizational support of nurses working at the Affiliated Hospitals of Dali University was at a moderate level, while their thriving at work was at a high level. In addition, there was a significant strong positive relationship between perceived organizational support and thriving at work.

Application of Research Findings

Hospital administrators and nurse administrators can develop strategies for improving nurses and enhancing organizational support through increasing and maintaining supervisor support, and increasing organizational welfare and job conditions such as payment and rewards, career development, training and promotion opportunities. Moreover, hospital administrators and nurse administrators have to provide training programs to maintain or enhance thriving at work for nurses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future study is needed to replicate this study in other regions of China and other types of hospitals, and with nursing administrators.

Additionally, other factors that correlate to thriving at work, such as leadership, organizational trust, organizational justice, and demographic characteristics should be explored in future studies.

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