

THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT ON WORK ENGAGEMENT OF NURSING INTERNS: A MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

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Abstract: This study examined how organizational support affects work engagement among nursing interns, as well as the mediating role of psychological capital in this relationship. Its goal was to provide practical guidance for clinical nursing preceptorship. A total of 375 nursing interns completed questionnaires assessing organizational support, psychological capital, and work engagement. Correlation analyses revealed that organizational support was positively associated with both work engagement ($r = 0.477$, $p < 0.01$) and psychological capital ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$). Work engagement was also positively correlated with psychological capital ($r = 0.752$, $p < 0.01$). Regression results showed that organizational support significantly predicted work engagement ($B = 0.450$, $p < 0.001$). When psychological capital was added to the model, however, the direct effect of organizational support became non-significant ($B = 0.057$, $p = 0.152$), whereas its indirect effect via psychological capital remained significant (Effect = 0.393, 95% CI [0.283, 0.508]). These results support a full mediation effect. Our findings suggest that clinical nursing education programs should focus on developing interns' psychological capital to improve their work motivation. Strategies such as psychological capital training, stress management, resilience building, and supportive feedback, empowerment, and recognition from preceptors can strengthen interns' self-efficacy and coping abilities. In turn, these efforts help organizational support more effectively promote work engagement among nursing interns.

Keywords: Nursing interns; Organizational support; Work engagement; Psychological capital; Clinical preceptorship

1 INTRODUCTION

Nursing ranks among the most psychologically and professionally taxing healthcare roles, which imposes heavier workloads and higher occupational pressure than the majority of mainstream professions. As indispensable participants in healthcare delivery, nurses' dedication and engagement at work directly decide the overall standard of medical care and the physical recovery status of patients. Nursing interns are the key backup talent for the future nursing team, whose positive workplace emotions and attitudes are essential to consolidating professional loyalty and reducing industry turnover. During early clinical placement, student nurses frequently struggle with adaptive problems in new clinical environments, deficient practical operational capabilities, and insufficient institutional support. Such prevalent predicaments easily induce intern anxiety, vague professional role cognition and diminished self-confidence in professional practice [1], which negatively affects their internship effectiveness and future career continuity. Organizational support is a core influential factor for employee retention and workplace performance. Sufficient institutional assistance can effectively help nursing staff stabilize their job willingness and proactively participate in work optimization and clinical improvement [2]. In view of the increasingly prominent nursing talent shortage and the growing phenomenon of job-hopping triggered by occupational burnout, this study establishes its theoretical basis based on resource conservation theory, social exchange theory and psychological capital theory. With nursing interns as the research population, this paper mainly analyzes the correlation mechanism among organizational support, psychological capital and work engagement. The research conclusions intend to provide reliable empirical evidence for improving nursing interns' professional identity and optimizing their workplace emotional states.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Relationship between Organizational Support and Work Engagement

Perceived organizational support reflects the overall degree of care, value affirmation and practical assistance that individuals subjectively obtain from their working institutions [2]. Modern healthcare settings are frequently confronted with strained doctor-patient relationships and uncertain clinical risks, leaving practicing nurses feeling undersupported in their professional roles [3]. When organizations fail to offer enough support, nursing interns will take less active part in routine clinical tasks, and they will feel weaker connection with the nursing career [4]; these negative influences affect nursing interns most heavily, because these learners are building their professional views and career values at this important stage. Good support from organizations can help interns develop practical nursing skills, and it helps interns build clear and stable professional identity. Social exchange theory describes how workers and organizations keep exchanging valuable resources in workplace interactions [5]; when hospitals give enough resources and care to nursing

interns in clinical training, the interns will produce better work results to return this support, and they show more willingness to complete their work well. Organizational support can activate people's positive psychological resources, so interns can deal with different clinical pressures, get recognition from hospital staff and other trainees [6], and keep better mental state and job satisfaction at work. Many earlier research works prove that continuous support from organizations can reduce the burnout feeling of medical workers [7]. Work engagement means one lasting positive mental condition, which includes personal feelings and mental efforts put into work; for nursing workers, higher work engagement means stronger career commitment and lower willingness to leave the job, and this condition helps nurses deliver standard care and keep patients safe [8]. When organizations provide support during clinical training, nursing interns can gain higher work engagement; this engagement lets students improve their clinical skills more quickly, and it helps students build strong career belonging and a serious sense of work duty. After reviewing the above theoretical analysis and previous study results, this research puts forward the research hypothesis H1: organizational support positively predicts the work engagement of nursing interns.

2.2 The Relationship between Psychological Capital, Work Engagement, and Organizational Support

Psychological capital, as a core positive psychological resource at the individual level, is a positive psychological state manifested during personal growth and development, comprising mainly self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Nurses' psychological capital is a positive psychological state displayed in clinical work. Research has shown that higher psychological capital more readily activates individual agency, enabling nurses to perceive the value of their work and become immersed in it [9]. Conservation of resources theory suggests that nurses with higher psychological capital possess richer initial resources; to protect these resources, individuals are intrinsically motivated to expand them, thereby promoting their physical and mental development and giving themselves opportunities to experience more frequent positive work feelings—that is, work engagement [10]. As an important mediating variable linking external factors and individual mental health, psychological capital plays a key bridging role between environmental stimuli and subjective well-being [11]; it not only strengthens organizational commitment but also affects organizational citizenship behavior [12]. In this study, nursing interns, whose skill levels are lower than those of experienced nurses, are examined in terms of how their positive psychological resources are developed, which is meaningful for subsequently improving nursing quality and enhancing their work engagement. Accordingly, this study proposes Hypothesis H2: psychological capital positively predicts work engagement. Hypothesis H3: psychological capital mediates the relationship between organizational support and work engagement.

In summary, drawing on social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, and psychological capital theory, this study constructs a mediation model. This model seeks to provide an integrated answer to the following core question: the mediating role of psychological capital between organizational support and work engagement. To test the above hypotheses (H1–H3), this study adopts a cross-sectional questionnaire survey and conducts an empirical study among clinical nursing interns. The hypothesized model is presented in Figure 1.

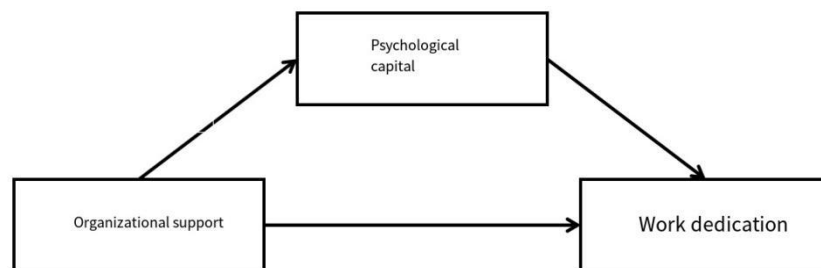


Figure 1 Assumed Model Diagram

3 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This study surveyed nursing interns, and 375 valid questionnaires were returned. Male respondents made up 21.6%, female 78.4%, and most were 20 years old (52.3%). We analyzed the data using SPSS 27.0 and the PROCESS macro to test mediation and to explore how the variables relate along the core pathways.

3.1 Common Method Bias Test

We checked for common method bias using Harman's single-factor test. An unrotated exploratory factor analysis of all items produced eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The first factor explained 18.375% of the variance, which is below the 40% cutoff. This suggests that common method bias was not a serious concern in our data.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all variables. The results showed that organizational support was significantly and positively correlated with work engagement ($r = 0.477$, $p < 0.01$) and

psychological capital ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$); work engagement was also significantly and positively correlated with psychological capital ($r = 0.752$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, all correlation coefficients were below the critical value of 0.80, which preliminarily indicated that there was no severe multicollinearity among the variables and provided a necessary prerequisite for subsequent regression analysis and mediation effect testing. These findings were largely consistent with the research hypotheses and preliminarily confirmed that organizational support has a positive effect on nurses' work engagement.

Table 1 Results of Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Organizational Support	Work engagement	Psychological Capital
Organizational Support	4.399	0.679	1		
Work engagement	3.680	0.641	0.477**	1	
Psychological Capital	3.994	0.451	0.581**	0.752**	1

Note: ** Significant correlation at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

3.3 Regression Analysis and Mediation Effect Testing

Drawing on the correlations among the study variables presented in Table 1, a mediation model was constructed (see Figure 1). Using Model 4 in the PROCESS v4.1 macro for SPSS 27.0, organizational support was entered as the independent variable, work engagement as the dependent variable, and psychological capital as the mediator. The mediation effect was then analyzed and tested for significance.

Table 2 Regression Analysis of Variable Relationships in the Parallel Mediation Model (N=375)

Dependent variable	Independent variable	R ²	F	B	β	t
Work engagement	Organizational Support	0.227	109.714***	0.450	0.477	10.474***
Psychological Capital	Organizational Support	0.565	485.321***	1.068	0.752	22.030***
Work engagement	Organizational Support	0.568	244.376***	0.057	0.060	1.434
	Psychological Capital			1.019	0.717	17.121***

Before the regression analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics were performed. The results showed a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.510 and tolerance values of 0.062, indicating no severe multicollinearity among the variables and thus suitability for subsequent regression analysis. The regression results are presented in Table 2. Organizational support significantly and positively predicted work engagement ($B = 0.450$, $t = 10.474$, $p < 0.001$), and the total effect was significant. Second, organizational support significantly and positively predicted psychological capital ($B = 1.068$, $t = 22.030$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, when organizational support and psychological capital were entered into the regression equation simultaneously, psychological capital significantly and positively predicted work engagement ($B = 1.019$, $t = 17.121$, $p < 0.001$); however, the direct predictive effect of organizational support on work engagement was no longer significant ($B = 0.057$, $t = 1.434$, $p = 0.152 > 0.05$). This model explained 56.8% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.568$, $F = 244.376$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3 Mediation Effect Size Analysis (N=375)

Path	Indirect Effect Value	Bootstrap Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Path 1: Organizational Support → Work Engagement	0.056	0.039	-0.021	0.134
Path 2: Self-organizing support → Psychological capital → Work engagement	0.393	0.057	0.282	0.508
Total effect	0.449	0.042	0.365	0.534

The Bootstrap test results for the mediation effect are presented in Table 3. The indirect effect of psychological capital between organizational support and work engagement was significant (Effect = 0.393, BootSE = 0.057, 95% CI [0.282, 0.508]), as the confidence interval did not include zero. In contrast, the 95% confidence interval for the direct effect included zero (Effect = 0.056, 95% CI [-0.021, 0.134]), indicating that the direct effect was not significant. These results suggest that organizational support influenced work engagement mainly through the mediating pathway of psychological capital. Although the direct effect was not statistically significant, the indirect effect was significant, indicating that psychological capital played a significant mediating role between organizational support and work engagement.

4 CONCLUSION AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Research Findings and Mechanism Analysis

This research targeted clinical nursing interns to explore the intrinsic mechanism of organizational support affecting their work engagement during clinical placement, with a particular focus on verifying the mediating function of psychological capital in this correlation. The empirical results demonstrated that organizational support exerts a prominent positive

predictive effect on nursing interns' work engagement, and psychological capital fully and significantly mediates the association between the two variables.

The present study first identified a robust positive correlation between organizational support and interns' work engagement, which further evidences the critical value of external institutional support in real clinical environments. As novice practitioners transitioning from campus education to professional clinical scenarios, nursing interns are frequently confronted with complicated clinical work and frequent doctor-patient tensions, which easily trigger emotional anxiety and behavioral withdrawal tendencies. Such research findings can be reasonably interpreted through organizational support theory and social exchange theory. When interns perceive recognition, considerate care and practical assistance from hospital administrators, head nurses and clinical tutors, they will gradually develop a strong sense of professional belonging. Driven by the reciprocal social exchange principle, these interns tend to generate a subjective willingness to give back to the organization. To repay the supportive resources they obtain, they devote themselves more actively to clinical practice and professional learning, accompanied by higher levels of vitality, dedication and immersive engagement in work. The total effect derived from the mediation analysis ($B = 0.450$, $p < 0.001$) further validates that organizational support serves as a crucial external factor in stimulating interns' positive work attitudes.

This study finds that psychological capital fully mediates the relationship between organizational support and nursing interns' work engagement, and it clarifies the potential psychological mechanism between the two variables. After controlling for psychological capital in data analysis, organizational support showed no significant direct effect on interns' work engagement ($B = 0.057$, $p = 0.152$); the indirect effect remained statistically significant (Effect = 0.393, 95% CI [0.282, 0.508]). These data results indicate that organizational support cannot directly improve nursing interns' work initiative, and it affects work engagement mainly by stimulating and promoting individual psychological capital. The conservation of resources theory can explain this internal mechanism; clinical organizational support includes professional guidance from clinical instructors, emotional encouragement from nursing staff, and various practical resources provided by hospitals. These external supportive resources can reduce the clinical work pressure of nursing interns, and supplement their personal psychological resources at the same time. Nursing interns with rich psychological capital can finish complicated nursing work with more confidence, and cope with various clinical difficulties and setbacks more effectively; this will greatly improve their overall work engagement. Psychological capital acts as a crucial intermediate variable in this process, and it transforms external hospital support into stable internal work motivation for nursing interns.

4.2 Educational Implications

Variations in work engagement among nursing interns cannot be fully explained by their personal abilities and educational experience alone; nursing education has been improved with consistent policy support, yet individual differences in clinical work engagement are still common in nursing teaching and management. This study confirms that interns' work engagement is shaped by both personal capabilities and external clinical environmental factors. In the current medical industry that values professional qualifications, the improvement of interns' work engagement depends on organizational support, accumulated psychological capital, and their ability to internalize these resources.

This study also summarizes key factors hindering nursing interns' career development in clinical work, and proposes practical suggestions based on empirical findings. First, hospital nursing management should integrate psychological capital training into daily clinical teaching and intern management; medical institutions can set up courses on psychological adjustment and stress relief, and provide exclusive psychological counseling services for interns. These measures help interns build confidence, adjust their mindset, tackle clinical challenges, and complete the transition from students to clinical nurses smoothly. Second, clinical teachers and head nurses need to provide positive daily guidance for interns; regular communication, appropriate work authorization and timely recognition can help interns build professional confidence, and convert organizational support into sustained work engagement. Specifically, one-on-one communication helps teachers grasp interns' learning difficulties and offer targeted guidance; moderate participation in auxiliary nursing work strengthens interns' professional value and identity; timely praise for their progress can steadily enhance their self-efficacy.

In conclusion, improving nursing interns' work engagement requires more than professional skill training; it also needs greater social recognition for nursing education, better professional evaluation of interns in clinical teaching, sufficient industry resources and a positive clinical environment. A good supportive environment enables interns to transform organizational support into psychological capital, and further form stable work engagement. Optimizing interns' psychological quality and clinical teaching systems can effectively improve their work engagement, which is conducive to their long-term professional development.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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