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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MEANING OF WORK, SATISFACTION WITH LIFE, HAPPINESS AND WORK ENGAGEMENT, AMONG NURSES AT SELECTED STATE HOSPITAL, WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

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Abstract

Background: Irrespective of the risk of stress and occupational hazards, health care practitioners, amongst them nurses, stay working in the health care system for years and some remain engaged with their work. Although there are many determinants of work engagement within organizations, the present study explored the association between meaning of work, satisfaction with life, happiness and work engagement.

Material and Method: The self-determination theory was adopted to extrapolate the relationship amongst variables. A self-administered questionnaire was used to measure meaning of work, satisfaction with life, happiness and work engagement. The study sample comprised of 142 nurses employed at public sector hospitals in Windhoek, Namibia. Pearson correlation coefficient and regression were used to analyze data.

Results: The results showed a negative relationship between meaning of work and subjective happiness; meaning of work had no significantly relationship to satisfaction with life; Satisfaction with life was statistically related to subjective happiness; and a negative significant relationship between meaning of work and work engagement. Happiness and meaning of work had a significant relationship; work engagement was related to subjective happiness. Employee engagement accounted for a 15% variation to the relationship.

Conclusion: Regular interactions with the nurses is necessary to have the opportunity to consider individual needs some nurses need extra training in certain procedures, job resources such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, and learning opportunities are advocated for.

Keywords: Work engagement, satisfaction with life, meaning of work, happiness, nurses, Windhoek, Namibia.

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INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession is known to be stressful due to the challenging work environment; nurses experience, suffering, grief and death of people.^{1,2} Nursing professionals do seek happiness to ensure they experience satisfaction, find meaning and remain engaged and productive. Consequently, nurses tend to give a lot of themselves in helping others, to add to this they work long hours in physically and mentally exhausting duties that may affect their own well-being.^{3,4} The number of qualified and unqualified nurses working as nurses has been declining over the years.⁵ Similar to,⁶ the study will explore whether a working environment increases happiness among nurses can be enhanced.

With limited resources, poor management and policy practices and quality care problems⁷ from the developed world context. The nursing profession has increasingly become vital internationally, and the local shortage of competent nurses could even be referred to as an: 'imminent crisis'.⁸ Currently qualified registered general nurses working in Namibia are emigrating to Europe, which generates a further crisis thus leaving the profession in peril.⁷ Within sub-Saharan Africa, the profession is known to be generally not kept up the pace of health care challenges.⁹

Irrespective of the risk of stress and other occupational hazards, many health care practitioners, including nurses, stay working in the health care system for years and some remain engaged with their work.¹⁰ Job-related stress might lead to burnout and low work engagement, which could result in high staff turnover.¹¹

It is evident that employees who experience higher levels of work engagement are likely to engage in job crafting in order to remain highly engaged in their work.¹² Arguably, engagement rests on a meaningful work experience. From this, organizations must thrive on the mental power of their employees by providing work that leads to employee engagement.¹³ If employees are engaged, they will become aware of the organizational context and will work with others to improve performance within their roles to benefit the organization.¹⁴ There

are assumptions in literature that jobs have important effects on life satisfaction in several ways.¹⁵ Satisfaction with life is an overall assessment of the quality of life related to self-selected criteria.¹⁶

Nursing is a noble profession known for its challenges among them; work overload, meagre resources, absence of promotion and development opportunities. These have a negative impact on the sustainability of the profession as turnover is known to be high, however, engaged employees experience high levels of energy and strong identification with their work especially in the developed world context in which public sector health institutions are under resourced and underfinanced and understaffed. Satisfaction with life and work among oncology nurses was found to be characterized by significant physical and mental strain.¹⁷ In order for a committed nursing workforce there is a need to implement a comprehensive program to improve the work conditions and life satisfaction.¹⁸ From the above discussion it can be the observed gap that it is important is to understand how nursing staff optimize their work experiences to better understand their engagement, using work meaningfulness and happiness. In the study context researchers developed hypothesis to fill the gap in literature on the global and sub-Saharan context on the absence of literature amongst health care professionals which assesses the moderating effect of work engagement. The study focus is amongst nurses in Windhoek, Namibia.

Theoretical background and hypothesis testing.

Meaning of work and happiness

Such positive psychology variables are valuable to employees and organizations, there is likely to be desirable consequences for both parties.¹⁹ There is support from literature which notes that organizations that emphasize happiness and meaning are found to create environments of positive reciprocal relationships where employees are offered opportunities for growth, perform optimally and have a work/life balance.²⁰ Meaning at work has a positive and significant relationship with job happiness.²¹ Indicating happiness and meaning (well-being), are important elements of individual and organizational functioning

and effectiveness. Happiness and meaning comprises a process that addresses the sum of personal needs, intrinsic motivations, growth and balance which results in optimal performance. Their findings indicated that the personal search for purpose can be lost to organizations as this is not extrinsically evident in daily organizational life, yet is fundamental for well-being and aligned personal and organizational performance. There are positive results on teachers' sense of meaning at work as it may affect work outcomes and attitudes.¹⁹

Meaning of work and work engagement

When employees do not experience meaning at work, it has negative links to outcomes such as employee cynicism;²² and associated with the retention of key employees.²³ The majority of nursing staff view their work as either a job or a calling, the stronger a person's view of their work as a calling, the more engaged they will be in their work.²⁴ The meaning of work predicts 58% of the variance in work engagement.²⁵ Literature affirms that, there is a positive relationship between psychological meaningfulness and work engagement, furthermore, psychological meaningfulness predicts work engagement.²⁶

Work engagement and happiness

That highly engaged employees are more likely to satisfy their psychological needs.²⁷ A relationship between happiness, and work engagement²⁸ is known to exist. Positive psychology variables are key as they enhance productivity cost free as they require the job incumbent to harness their desirable positive traits. In addition, there are suggestions that factors like work engagement, lead to happiness in the workplace.²⁹ There is support that employees with positive perceptions about their organizational virtuousness are high on happiness.³⁰ Arguably such employees will be engaged in their work

Work engagement has moderating effect on the relationship between meaning of work and happiness and satisfaction with life.

The moderating variable was adopted to assess the role of work engagement in the relationship between meaning of work and happiness among nurses. A moderator can be qualitative (e.g., sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward)

variables which affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable.³⁰ In the study context, there is little to no research on work engagement as a moderating variable especially meaning of work and happiness. However, work engagement fully mediates the relationship between meaning of work and happiness.³¹ There is support which agrees that the relationship between work engagement and hedonic well-being, measured two weeks apart, was mediated by eudaimonic well-being.³² Among employees in South Korean reported that work engagement was related to the perceived happiness in work and subjective well-being.³³

Regardless of the challenges nurses face in the workplace, happiness remains a state of wellbeing which they seek to achieve. Meaningful work does not make one miserable. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was adopted as it tries to understand factors that facilitate intrinsic motivation, autonomous motivation and psychological wellness.^{34,35} Self-determination theory is a broad theory of human development and wellness and places emphasis on individual's inherent motivational tendencies for learning and growing and they are supported.³⁴ SDT suggests that people are inherently prone towards psychological growth and integration, moreover, towards learning mastery and connection with others.^{34,35} This particular theory argues that for healthy development to evolve, individuals need supports for basic psychological needs and they include: autonomy, competence and relatedness.³⁵

When an employee experiences a caring and trustworthy environment with interest and support in the workplace, there will be a rise in intrinsic motivation levels.³⁶ Supportive co-workers motivate each other to be more productive and be more engaged to produce enhance satisfying outcomes. Staff members need to feel in control of their own behaviours and goals, therefore organisational leaders should offer responsibilities to members that allow them to be authentic and speak up for what they believe is right and what they think will contribute towards organisational success. If employees are autonomous, they are whole-heartedly behind the task they are doing.

METHODOLOGY

Research aim

The research aim was to investigate whether work engagement, moderates the relationship between meaning of work, happiness and satisfaction with life, among nurses at selected state hospital, Windhoek. The study was based on quantitative approach and used the systematic approach objectively using numerical data from the group of nurses being studied.

Hypothesis

H_1 There is a statistically significant relationship between meaning of work and happiness.

H_2 There is a statistically significant relationship between meaning of work and work engagement.

H_3 There is a statistically significant relationship between work engagement and happiness.

H_4 Work engagement is a moderating effect on the relationship between meaning of work and happiness and satisfaction with life.

Sample and Data Collection

The study adopted ready-made questionnaires which are well validated internationally and cited thus deemed accurate to measure the selected constructs; the work engagement survey instrument to measure work engagement. The work engagement questionnaire has 13 items.³⁷ The work engagement survey (WES) has been found to have acceptable reliability coefficients in the study the instrument obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.83 The Work-Life Questionnaire (WLQ), measured individual's orientation to work (meaning of work).³⁸ The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the study 0.70. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS),³⁹ and the subjective happiness scale (SHS) was developed by.⁴⁰ The SWLS had a high alpha coefficient of 0.74. The happiness scale had an alpha of 0.71.

The respondents selected for the study were employed as nurses at public sector/ government institutions namely Katutura state hospital and Central state hospital in Windhoek. A total of 200 paper to pencil survey questionnaires were distributed and the participants returned ($n=142$) usable questionnaires for the study, resulting in a response rate of 71%. There were $n=25$, males; $n=11$, female: The age ranges were; below 25, $n=75$; 26-30 years, $n=34$; 31-35 years, $n=19$; 36-40 years, $n=7$; and above 41 years, $n=7$: Educational qualification, School certificate $n=65$; Nursing certificate, $n=12$, Diploma $n=27$, Bachelor's degree $n=35$, Master's degree $n=3$: Years of experience were; below 5 years, $n=115$; 5-10 years, $n=15$; 11-15 years, $n=4$; 16-20 years, $n=4$; 21 or more years $n=4$; Single, $n=124$; Married $n=14$; Divorced $n=2$; Widowed $n=2$.

RESULTS

Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics, correlations and all variables. All correlations in the study were below 0.70, indicating that all measures were appropriate for use and that the likelihood of multicollinearity in a regression is low. Prior to further analyses, variance inflation factor (VIF) in the regression analysis was also examined, and all variables were found to have VIF values below 2. As such, the possibility of multicollinearity in this study is minimal.

This study used person correlation to test H_1 , H_2 and H_3 . The results show a negative relationship between meaning of work and subjective happiness ($r=-0.072$; $p=0.394$). Results indicate that meaning of work has no significantly relationship to satisfaction with life ($r=-0.052$; $p=<.544$). Satisfaction with life is statistically related to subjective happiness ($r=0.309^{**}$; $p=<.0000$). The results indicate that there is a negative significant relationship between meaning of work and work engagement ($r=-.193^{*}$; $p=0.022$). Findings indicate a statistically significant relationship between Happiness and meaning of work ($r=0.289^{**}$; $p=<.0000$). From the study work engagement is significantly positively related to subjective happiness ($r=0.240^{**}$; $p=<.0000$). Thus a high level of work engagement is also associated with a high level of life satisfaction and vice-versa.

A linear regression analysis on the moderating effect of work engagement to the relationship between meaning of work and happiness was carried. The linear regression model yielded a significant level of F statistics ($F = 8.195$; $DF = 3$; $P = 0.000$).

According to the R square ($R=0.15$), therefore, the prediction of work engagement as a moderating effect is almost non-existent as shown in table 2. Employee engagement in the study context can be considered as a moderator as the effect on the relationship between meaning of work and happiness was only 15%.

Figure 1 above shows a histogram with a normal distribution or symmetric bell-shaped curve distribution. This postulate that the distribution is evenly spread around the zero and indicates that the normality assumption has been achieved. Furthermore, the highest frequency of about 19 is obtained.

Figure 2 is a scatterplot which illustrated that the regression standardized predicted value is on the x-axis and the regression standardized residual is on the y-axis. On the y-axis, the positive value for regression standardized residual indicates that the prediction of work engagement on meaning of work and happiness is low, however, the negative value indicates high prediction of work engagement on meaning of work and happiness. The 0 value infers that the prediction was correct. In simple term, the further the values are far from 0, the worse the prediction for work engagement on meaning of work and happiness. Concluding based on the results, half of the values are positive and others are negative

DISCUSSION

The study sought to identify key factors in creating a committed nursing workforce, in line with literature.¹⁸ The study sought to explore the moderating effect of employee engagement to the relationship between meaning of work, satisfaction with life and happiness among nurses employed at public sector hospitals in Windhoek Namibia. Results of the study revealed that when added employee engagement only results in a 15 % variation in the study variables. Satisfaction with life was statistically related to subjective happiness; work engagement reported a significant positive related to subjective happiness; meaning of work had no significantly relationship to satisfaction with life. Happiness and meaning of work were significantly related and meaning of work was negatively related to work

engagement. Justification of study findings is through the self-determination theory.

The findings support those of from previous scholars on the meaning of work having a positive and significant relationship with job happiness, in addition happiness and meaning (well-being), as important elements of individual and organizational functioning and effectiveness.²¹ Furthermore, the connections between satisfaction and daily activities, note that almost every person feels happier when they are with other people, people find other people meaningful at workplace which lead to happiness, meaning, satisfaction and daily activities gives meaning and purpose in life which lead to happiness, thus, there is a strong positive correlation between meaning of work and happiness. This statement can lead to better understanding of the concept of nurse's happiness as professionals, nurses require interactive, relational, and holistic processes that focus on protection, support, assistance, help, and intervention for the well-being and health of human beings.^{29,30} Close relationships with patients and colleagues are one of the most crucial factors that raise the happiness quotient of nurses.²⁸⁻³⁰

The results are contradicting literature in that work engagement and meaning of work as a job had a statistically and practically significant positive correlation.^{25,26} In the study there as a large negative relationship between the variables. The more people view their work as a job the less engaged they will be, the stronger a nurses view their work as a calling, and the more engaged they will be in their work.

The results are in alignment with previous research on the Self-determination theory as the underlying theoretical framework for this study, has consistently shown that people who engage also experience greater levels of well-being and happiness.³⁴ This finding strongly supports that work engagement has a statistically significant relationship with well-being and satisfaction with life (and well-being had a statistically and practically significant relationship with satisfaction with life.²⁸ This finding is constant with literature as it echoes it by noting that engaged employees often experience positive emotions, and this may be the reason why they are more productive.¹⁹⁻²¹ There-

fore, happy people are more sensitive to opportunities at work, more outgoing and helpful to others, and more confident, optimistic and happier.¹⁹

According to the results in the linear regression analysis on the moderating effect of work engagement to the relationship between meaning of work and happiness, a significant level of F statistics ($F = 8.195$; $DF = 3$; $P = 0.000$) was obtained. According to the R square change ($R=0.15$) it indicates that the prediction of work engagement as a moderating effect is low. Therefore, there is evidence providing that work engagement cannot be considered as a moderating effect on the relationship between meaning of work and happiness among nurses from selected hospitals.

However, the findings of this research contradict of those of other researchers; work engagement fully mediated the relationship between meaning of work and happiness.³¹ More support is reported and the relationship between work engagement and hedonic well-being, measured two weeks apart, was mediated by eudaimonic well-being.³² Among South Korean employees, reported that work engagement was related to the perceived happiness in work and subjective well-being (SWB). The study notes that employees' cognition of their work environment and cognitive engagement explained 50 percent of the variance in psychological well-being in a South Korean context.³³ While work engagement is believed to be related to work outcomes rather than life outcomes, attaining intrinsically valued goals turned out to affect subjective well-being or happiness.^{12, 13, 22}

Recommendations and managerial implications

This article discerns into the relationship into the relationship between meaning of work, satisfaction with life, happiness and work engagement in Windhoek Namibia. Within the sub-Saharan context, literature amongst the study variables somewhat exists; the study adds to the body of knowledge as understanding the main contributors to meaningful work, happiness, satisfaction with life and personal engagement which is particularly important at this point in time as medical person-

nel find themselves dealing with a pandemic which greatly affects the way work is done and adds pressure to their plate. This is key for public sector organizations as nurses are expected to perform even though they are underfunded and give insight into the positive psychology variables employers can invest in. Positive emotions take centre stage as they foster commitment and motivation, employees' wants to keep doing their job as long as it makes them feel good about themselves. In a positive job environment creativity will blossom and minds will remain open for new and innovative solutions.

To improve the work performance of nurses, an empowerment improvement program tailored to the clinical experience and educational level should be developed, and the working environment that can increase the nurse's happiness should be improved.⁶ Social support from supervisors is also an important factor for work engagement, and they argued that leaders can support nurses in several ways.^{27,35} Regular interactions with the employees is necessary to have the opportunity to consider individual needs and stated that some nurses need extra training in certain procedures, or that some nurses need further challenges.

The study aids in understanding organizational dynamics among nurses, helping them to rise to the challenge to transform organizations to accommodate different generations, with a specific focus on current-day work activities.

Recommendations for future research

Future research is needed to fully understand the impact of work engagement on all aspects of organizational functioning. In the workplace it is necessary in order to determine whether work engagement results from workers who are attracted to an organization or whether work engagement results are outcome of an organization providing a work environment fostering meaningful work.⁴¹ Research efforts should be enhanced and encouraged in order to address the paucity in studies on the phenomenon of engagement in the work context

Longitudinal studies need to be utilized in order to determine the causal factors and relationships between work engage-

ment, meaning of work and happiness. The sample size of 142 should be expanded to a larger sample size to enhance external validity and the involvement of both government and private hospitals could be obtained to see differences in environment. To enhance cultural appropriateness, equivalence studies can be conducted and the questionnaire could be translated into other applicable languages.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to explore the moderating effect of employee engagement on study variables among health care professionals in Windhoek Namibia. In adopting the study findings, the researchers are mindful that are correlational relationships do not necessarily confirm causality. In line with the study hypothesis although the relationship found was negative, we accept the null hypothesis as there was no significant relationship between meaning of work and happiness. The study concludes that the more employees are happy the more engaged they are; the higher levels of happiness the more engaged one is. The more one finds meaning from work, the greater the levels of engagement. As meaning of work decreases so does the level of engagement. Key findings in the study contradict literatures standpoint as employee engagement was found to only attribute 15% variance. This however is attributed to the negative relationship associated with how study participants derived their meaning of work. However, the social determination theory postulates for healthy development to evolve, individuals need supports for basic psychological needs. In relation to the study, there is less reliance to peers for validation and the nurses drove themselves in the pursuit of happiness within the work context. In the health care industry employee commitment remains a critical organizational issue.

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ANNEX

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---------------------------|-------|------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|--------|---------|------|--------|
| 1. Gender | 1.84 | .382 | - | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 1.85 | 1.14 | - | - | | | | | | | |
| 3. Education | 2.17 | 1.46 | .011 | .388** | | | | | | | |
| 4. Experience | 1.36 | .894 | | .549** | - | | | | | | |
| 5. Marital Status | 1.19 | .629 | .042 | .238** | .119 | .079 | | - | | | |
| 6. Employee Engagement | 51.22 | 7.95 | | .155 | .097 | .301 | -.074 | 1 | | | |
| 7. Meaning Of Work | 44.49 | 6.99 | .113 | .076 | .012 | | .160 | .265** | -.193* | 1 | |
| 8. Happiness | 21.61 | 4.63 | | .137 | - | - | -.001 | .289** | | | 1 |
| 9. Satisfaction With Life | 18.8 | 6.38 | .039 | .035 | -.100 | | .053 | .004 | | .072 | |
| | | | | | | .038 | | -.165* | ..240** | | .309** |
| | | | | | | | | | .052 | | |

Note. n = 142. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. Table 2. [\[RP1\]](#) Reflects Pearson correlation **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 2. Regression Model for work engagement as a moderating effect on the relationship between meaning of work and happiness.**Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | Sig. | F Change | df1 | df2 | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|---|------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | | | | | | |
| 1 | .390 ^a | .152 | .134 | .92776506 | .152 | 8.195 | 3 | .000 | | | 137 | 1.782 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Zscore(satisfaction_with_life), Zscore(meaning_of_work), Zscore(employee_engagement)

b. Dependent Variable: Zscore(happiness)

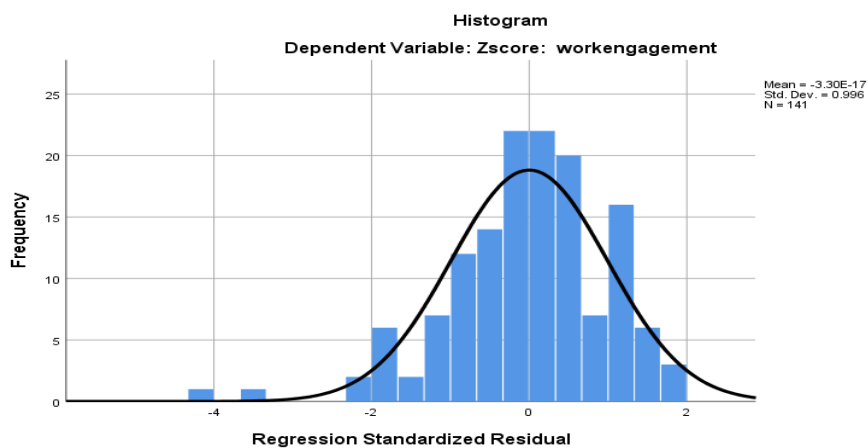
FIGURE 1: Frequency/Regression Standardised Residual

FIGURE 2. Regression Standardized Residual/Regression Standardised Predicted Value