

## THE IMPACT OF WORKING CONDITIONS ON THE INTRINSIC JOB SATISFACTION OF NURSES

*Milena Zlatanović<sup>1,2</sup>, Marko Slavković<sup>3</sup>, Ardea Milidrag<sup>2</sup>, Despotović Mile<sup>1</sup>,  
Brajsovac Milica<sup>4</sup>, Ljiljana Savić<sup>4</sup>, Ljubiša Kucurski<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>The Academy of Applied Preschool Teaching and Health Studies,  
Department of Medical Studies, St. Lole Ribara, Cuprija, Republic of Serbia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Kragujevac, Svetozara  
Markovića 69, Kragujevac, Republic of Serbia

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac, Liceja Knezevine Srbije 3,  
Kragujevac, Republic of Serbia

<sup>4</sup>PI College of Health Sciences Prijedor, Nikole Pašića 4a, Republic of  
Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Abstract.** *In contemporary healthcare systems, nurse job satisfaction represents a crucial factor in the quality of medical services. Intrinsic aspects of satisfaction such as personal fulfillment, autonomy at work, and opportunities for professional development are gaining increasing attention from healthcare management. Nursing is not merely a technical role; it involves a high degree of professional autonomy and emotional engagement. The importance of nurse satisfaction is underscored by their direct interaction with patients, where their subjective experience of work often reflects the overall quality of care. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of working conditions on the intrinsic job satisfaction of nurses. The research was conducted in three healthcare institutions in central Serbia, with a sample of 362 participants. A standardized questionnaire was used, and data were analyzed using SPSS software through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, as well as correlation and regression analysis. The results indicated that contextual job characteristics received the highest ratings ( $M=4.08$ ), while indicators of intrinsic satisfaction were also rated highly (e.g., satisfaction with personal fulfillment  $M=4.09$ , use of abilities  $M=3.99$ ). Spearman's correlation analysis confirmed a positive and statistically significant relationship between working conditions and intrinsic satisfaction ( $\rho=0.495$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Furthermore, regression analysis showed that social and motivational job characteristics play a significant role in predicting satisfaction, particularly among younger respondents. It was concluded that improving motivational and contextual job characteristics can directly enhance the intrinsic satisfaction of nurses, which holds important implications for workforce retention, prevention of professional burnout, and overall quality improvement in healthcare services.*

**Key words:** *intrinsic satisfaction, nurses, working conditions, job characteristics, healthcare quality*

## **Introduction**

Nurses constitute the largest professional group in healthcare institutions and play an essential role in the functioning of the healthcare system [1]. Their work is multilayered, it involves direct patient contact, the implementation of clinical procedures, and a high degree of emotional engagement and professional responsibility [2]. Nurses' job satisfaction substantially influences the quality of healthcare and patient safety [3,4].

Intrinsic factors of satisfaction occupy a central place because they relate to the inner experience of work. Autonomy allows nurses greater control over tasks and decision-making, which enhances their sense of professional fulfilment [5]. Task variety and significance further shape satisfaction, since work that demands a broad knowledge base and has a direct impact on patient outcomes provides a deeper sense of meaning and motivation [1,6].

Task identity seeing the care process from start to finish strengthens the sense of continuity and personal contribution to health outcomes [7]. Feedback on results also matters: it enables nurses to evaluate their performance and continuously improve care quality [1,8].

Cognitive aspects of work task complexity and information processing affect intrinsic satisfaction as well. When the job requires problem-solving and the application of competencies, nurses experience greater professional development and progress [7,9]. Specialisation and upskilling further reinforce competence and professional pride [9]. Social characteristics including collegial relationships and team collaboration foster belonging and have a strong motivational effect [3,6]. Opportunities for continuing education likewise bolster self-worth and add broader meaning to professional engagement [1,9]. Intrinsic factors also protect against burnout, a growing concern in modern healthcare settings [5].

Research suggests that intrinsic factors play a decisive role in retaining nurses in the health system over the long term [7,10]. Satisfaction rooted in professional purpose and in contributing to patients' wellbeing cannot be replaced by material rewards [1,6]. This inner motivation links individual commitment to care quality and forms the foundation for the profession's sustainable development [1,6].

The aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of working conditions on intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction among primary care nurses in Serbia, with particular attention to personal fulfilment, autonomy, and professional development. We hypothesised that working conditions would exert a positive and significant effect on intrinsic job satisfaction.

## **Methods**

The study was carried out in three healthcare institutions in central Serbia on a sample of 362 participants. Data were collected using a purpose-designed structured questionnaire and analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics 23. We applied descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation and regression analysis, and Cronbach's alpha. The questionnaire comprised 28 items in two segments. The first assessed

working conditions and was organised by job characteristic categories, including motivational, social, and contextual factors. Respondents rated statements on a 1–5 scale. The second segment measured job satisfaction with a focus on intrinsic aspects using a standardised job satisfaction instrument [11], covering ability utilisation, achievement, opportunities for advancement, autonomy, creativity, responsibility, independence, and other intrinsic factors. A third segment captured demographics (sex, age, tenure, and education).

## Results

Sample structure (N = 362). Women constituted the majority (83.15%), with men at 16.85%. The most represented age group was 31–40 years (35.08%); the smallest was 61+ (7.46%). By tenure, those with >21 years made up the largest share (35.08%), while <5 years was the smallest (11.33%). Education was dominated by secondary school (71.55%); university degrees were least common (5.80%).

Reliability Cronbach's alpha for the intrinsic satisfaction scale was  $\alpha = 0.793$ , exceeding the usual 0.70 threshold and indicating good internal consistency that supports composite scoring and further analyses.

Descriptive findings. The highest means were observed for ZZ7 "opportunity to do something for others" (M = 4.1105; SD = 0.97841) and ZZ2 "the job fulfils me" (M = 4.0994; SD = 0.95381), underscoring the prosocial and experiential components of intrinsic satisfaction. The lowest were ZZ8 "being 'somebody' in society" (M = 3.5276; SD = 1.02087) and ZZ4 "doing the job in my own way" (M = 3.5967; SD = 1.01118). The mean range was moderate (3.53–4.11), and variability was generally around one standard deviation, with the exception of ZZ6 (value congruence), which showed higher dispersion (SD = 1.89283), signalling heterogeneity on that dimension (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of intrinsic satisfaction

<b>Intrinsic satisfaction</b>			
*ZZ 1	I'm doing a job where my skills are used.	3.9972	1.00552
ZZ 2	The work I do fulfills me.	4.0994	0.95381
ZZ 3	This job gives me the opportunity to advance.	3.7044	1.26904
ZZ 4	I have the opportunity to do the job my own way.	3.5967	1.01118
ZZ 5	I have the ability to work independently.	3.6381	0.96129
ZZ 6	I can do things that are consistent with my beliefs.	3.6188	1.89283
ZZ 7	I have the opportunity to do something for other people.	4.1105	0.97841
ZZ 8	I have the opportunity to be "someone" in society.	3.5276	1.02087

\* Employee satisfaction

Working conditions covering autonomy in planning and decision-making; job influence beyond the organisation; requirements for simultaneous focus and novel problem-solving; skill variety and complexity; social ties and team interdependence; and the physical environment and equipment significantly and positively predicted intrinsic satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.484$ ;  $t = 10.481$ ;  $F = 109.860$ ;  $R^2 = 0.234$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The model explained 23.4% of the variance, an effect of moderate size that confirms better working conditions accompany higher levels of intrinsic satisfaction (Table 2).

Table 2. Simple regression results (dependent variable: intrinsic satisfaction)

Dependent variable	R <sup>2</sup>	F	$\beta$	T
Intrinsic satisfaction	0.234	109.860***	0.484	10.481***

\*\*\*The value is significant at the level  $p < 0.01$ .

Descriptive results indicate that prosocial meaning (helping others) and the sense of fulfilment primarily drive intrinsic satisfaction, whereas needs for social status and greater work autonomy were less pronounced. In line with this pattern, overall working conditions had a positive, statistically significant effect on intrinsic satisfaction. Although explained variance was partial ( $R^2 = 0.234$ ), the effect size is practically meaningful, supporting the proposition that improvements in working conditions go hand in hand with stronger inner motivation and a greater sense of purpose.

## Discussion

These findings point to a recognisable profile of intrinsic motives, interpreted here in light of prior literature. The highest scores relate to meaning at work, contribution to others, and personal growth consistent with models that position intrinsic motivation and satisfaction as principal drivers of engagement and wellbeing, while extrinsic motivation often has limited impact on engagement [12]. Our evidence that social characteristics of work contribute most to intrinsic satisfaction aligns with the concept of “engaging” leadership: via job resources and intrinsic motivation it raises engagement and reduces burnout; its components (empowerment, strengthening, inspiration, connectedness) support autonomy, competence, meaning, and belonging [13]. At the individual level, cognitive control and flexibility meaningfully explain intrinsic satisfaction, with social isolation mediating the relationship [14]. In adult inpatient units, higher workload lowers satisfaction; dissatisfaction is most pronounced in organisational aspects, whereas relations with direct supervisors and colleagues are most positive; intrinsic satisfaction can be lower than extrinsic [15]. In Moroccan primary care, overall satisfaction is low, intrinsic scores lower, and extrinsic moderate [16]. A systematic review in mental health confirms that interpersonal relations and supportive teams are key positive factors, with recognition an important intrinsic driver; poor conditions and overload reduce satisfaction [17]. Findings from Brazil indicate that higher intrinsic satisfaction correlates with less burnout, while satisfaction with hierarchical relations is closely linked to mental health outcomes [18]. More broadly, social and environmental factors often escape standard metrics: prediction models for readmissions rarely quantify social

determinants, and overall discrimination remains moderate [19]. Taken together, when the environment provides autonomy, recognition, and meaningful contribution under supportive leadership and cohesive teams intrinsic satisfaction rises; under overload and bureaucratized organisation, intrinsic motives weaken [20]. Within this frame, our result on the strong impact of social job characteristics suggests a clear line of action: develop engaging leadership, strengthen team cohesion, and enrich job content that activates competence and accountability [12,13].

### **Conclusion**

The study shows convincingly that the quality of working conditions directly strengthens nurses' intrinsic job satisfaction. The work thus meets its aim, offering a clear and well-supported explanation of how motivational, social, and contextual job features shape meaning, autonomy, and competence. Findings are consistent across institutions and indicate that satisfaction is most evident in a sense of purpose and the opportunity to help others, while status benefits and freedom in work methods are less prominent. Well-designed work enables nurses to act with greater meaning and independence, fosters professional commitment, and supports retention. Leadership should cultivate engaging practices and team cohesion, expand real autonomy in planning, task allocation, and decision-making, and invest in continuous professional development and mentorship, alongside improvements to the physical environment and equipment and routine monitoring of satisfaction indicators. Particular attention should go to younger nurses and high-workload units, where targeted, incremental changes yield the largest gains.

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## UTICAJ USLOVA RADA NA INTRINZIČNO ZADOVOLJSTVO MEDICINSKIH SESTARA

**Milena Zlatanović<sup>1,2</sup>, Marko Slavković<sup>3</sup>, Ardea Milidrag<sup>2</sup>, Despotović Mile<sup>1</sup>,  
Brajsovac Milica<sup>4</sup>, Ljiljana Savić<sup>4</sup>, Ljubiša Kucurski<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Akademija vaspitačko-medicinskih strukovnih studija, Odsek medicinskih studija  
Čuprija, ul. Lole Ribara, Čuprija, Republika Srbija

<sup>2</sup>Fakultet medicinskih nauka, Univerzitet u Kragujevcu, Svetozara Markovića 69,  
Kragujevac, Republika Srbija

<sup>3</sup>Ekonomski fakultet, Univerzitet u Kragujevcu, Liceja Kneževine Srbije 3,  
Kragujevac, Republika Srbija

<sup>4</sup>JU Visoka medicinska škola Prijedor, Nikole Pašića 4a, Republika Srpska, Bosna i  
Hercegovina

**Sazetak.** U savremenim uslovima rada, zadovoljstvo medicinskih sestara predstavlja ključni faktor kvaliteta zdravstvene zaštite. Intrinzični aspekti zadovoljstva, koji se odnose na ličnu ispunjenost, samostalnost u radu i mogućnost profesionalnog razvoja, sve više dolaze u fokus menadžmenta u zdravstvu. Rad medicinske sestre nije samo tehnički zadatak već podrazumeva visok nivo profesionalne autonomije i emocionalne angažovanosti. Značaj zadovoljstva ovih radnika leži i u njihovoj direktnoj povezanosti sa pacijentima, gde subjektivna percepcija rada često reflektuje kvalitet zdravstvenih usluga u celini. Cilj ovog rada bio je da se ispita uticaj uslova rada na intrinzične aspekte zadovoljstva medicinskih sestara. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u tri zdravstvene ustanove u centralnoj Srbiji, na uzorku od 362 ispitanika. Primenjen je standardizovani upitnik, a obrada podataka izvršena je putem SPSS softvera korišćenjem deskriptivne statistike, analize pouzdanosti, korelacione i regresione analize. Rezultati su pokazali da su kontekstualne karakteristike posla najviše ocenjene ( $M=4.08$ ), dok su indikatori intrinzičnog zadovoljstva takođe visoko ocenjeni (npr. zadovoljstvo ličnom ispunjenošću  $M=4.09$ , iskorišćenost sposobnosti  $M=3.99$ ). Spearmanova korelaciona analiza potvrdila je postojanje pozitivne i statistički značajne veze između uslova rada i intrinzičnog zadovoljstva ( $\rho=0.495$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Dodatno, regresiona analiza je pokazala da socijalne i motivacione karakteristike imaju poseban značaj za predikciju zadovoljstva, posebno kod mlađih ispitanica. Zaključeno je da se unapređenjem motivacionih i kontekstualnih karakteristika posla može direktno uticati na povećanje intrinzičnog zadovoljstva medicinskih sestara, što ima važnu implikaciju za politiku zadržavanja kadra, prevenciju profesionalnog sagorevanja i unapređenje kvaliteta zdravstvenih usluga.

**Ključne reči:** intrinzično zadovoljstvo, medicinske sestre, uslovi rada, karakteristike radnog mesta, zdravstvena zaštita

