

Staff perception of the ED working environment: Integrating literature to support ED specific workplace interventions for clinical staff

Amy N.B. Johnston^{A,B}, Louisa Abraham^{C,D}, Jaimi H. Greenslade^{E,F,G}, Ogilvie Thom^{D,E}, Eric Carlström^H, Marianne Wallis^{B,I}, Julia Crilly^{A,B}

A. Gold Coast University Hospital ED, Hospital Blvd, QLD 4215 Australia. a.johnston@griffith.edu.au

B. Centre for Health Practice Innovation, Menzies Health Institute Queensland, Griffith University Gold Coast campus QLD 4222

C. Department of Emergency Medicine, Caloundra Hospital. West Terrace, Caloundra, QLD 4551

D. Department of Emergency Medicine, Nambour General Hospital; Hospital Road, Nambour QLD 4560

E. Department of Emergency Medicine, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Herston, QLD 4029

F. School of Medicine, University of Queensland, Herston, QLD 4006

G. School of Public Health, Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove QLD 4059

H. Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

I. School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of the Sunshine Coast, Locked bag 4, Maroochydore DC, QLD 4558

Background: Clinical staff in Emergency Departments (EDs) report role overload due to critical staff shortages, budgetary cuts, increased patient numbers and acuity. Such overload increases staff stress and undermines staff satisfaction with their working environment.

Aims: This integrative review identifies, synthesises and evaluates current research around staff perceptions of working in EDs. The review aimed to provide an understanding of how ED staff perceive their working environment and whether perceptions were specifically influenced by gender and/or clinical role. It also sought to establish whether staff perceptions of the ED working environment were different to those of other specialist clinical areas and what, if any, recommendations could be drawn from the literature to guide improvements in satisfaction with ED working environment.

Methods: A systematic search of 7 relevant databases, from 1993 to Jan 2015, using MeSH descriptors ED/EDs, Emergency department/s, Emergency room/s, ER/s OR A&E coupled with (AND) working environment, working condition/s, staff perception/s, as well as reference chaining was conducted. Of the 10,071 articles initially identified, over 9,000 could be excluded using criteria such as whether the paper contained original research data published in English in peer-reviewed journals and content was specific to staff perception and the ED. Initial thematic analysis of the remaining papers identified key intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and enabled a narrowing of the review focus to exclude research around violence against staff, staff currently being trained, staff retention, personality type, burn out and the effects of extrinsic factors such as shift work. Three independent data extractors and a median consensus process using a mixed methods assessment tool (MMAT) ensured thorough aggregation of study components and outcomes.

Results: We identified 31 pertinent studies. These comprised 24 quantitative-descriptive studies, 4 mixed descriptive/comparative (non-RCT) studies and 3 qualitative studies. Studies varied widely in quality with MMAT scores ranging from 0 to 100%. A key finding was that perceptions of working environment varied across clinical staff and study location, but that high levels of autonomy and teamwork offset stress around high pressure, high volume workloads. Staff stress was more apparent in relation to perceived time pressures rather than actual workload. Gender, clinical role, seniority and experience all impacted on self-reported measures of stress. The large range of tools used to assess staff perception of working environment limits the comparability of studies. A dearth of intervention studies around enhancing working environments in EDs limits the capacity to recommend evidence-based interventions to improve staff morale.

Conclusions: Where positive perceptions of ED were documented, staff often cited teamwork, collegiality, respect for multidisciplinary expertise and positive social and professional support as key to the positivity. This would suggest that a collective process, involving interprofessional collaboration between staff, would be the ideal 'unit' for investigation and trial interventions to foster staff morale and enhance staff perception of EDs. There is clearly a need for quality research using consistent tools to evaluate theoretically underpinned interventions to enhance staff perception of working environment as generally staff reported high stress levels in ED.