

The impact of workload intensity on mental health among NHS nurses working in acute care wards in the UK.

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Introduction

The mental health and well-being of nurses within the UK National Health Service (NHS) have become a growing concern due to rising workload pressures and staffing shortages. Nurses working in acute care wards often manage high patient acuity, long shifts, emotional demands, and administrative responsibilities within fast-paced environments. Research suggests that excessive workload is strongly linked to stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction among nurses (Hall et al., 2016).

The NHS workforce crisis, characterised by high vacancy rates and increased patient demand, has intensified these challenges (Royal College of Nursing, 2023). Studies indicate that burnout among nurses can negatively affect both staff retention and patient safety (West et al., 2020). Despite well-being initiatives introduced by the NHS, workload intensity remains a major organisational issue requiring further investigation.



Discussions

The findings show that workload intensity significantly affects the mental health of acute care nurses. Participants' experiences support existing research linking burnout to systemic workplace pressures. While nurses used personal coping strategies, they emphasised the need for organisational improvements, including better staffing levels and stronger managerial support, rather than relying only on well-being programmes.



Conclusion

- Workload intensity significantly affects nurses' mental health and job satisfaction.
- Staffing shortages and extended working hours are central causes of stress.
- Organisational and managerial changes are needed to support nurse well-being.
- Improving working conditions can enhance both staff retention and patient care quality.



Aim

To explore how workload intensity affects the mental health of NHS nurses working in acute care wards.



Findings

High patient-to-nurse ratios increased workload pressure and stress.

Long shifts and frequent overtime contributed to fatigue and emotional exhaustion.

Nurses reported taking on additional responsibilities during staff shortages. .

Many participants linked workload intensity to declining mental well-being.

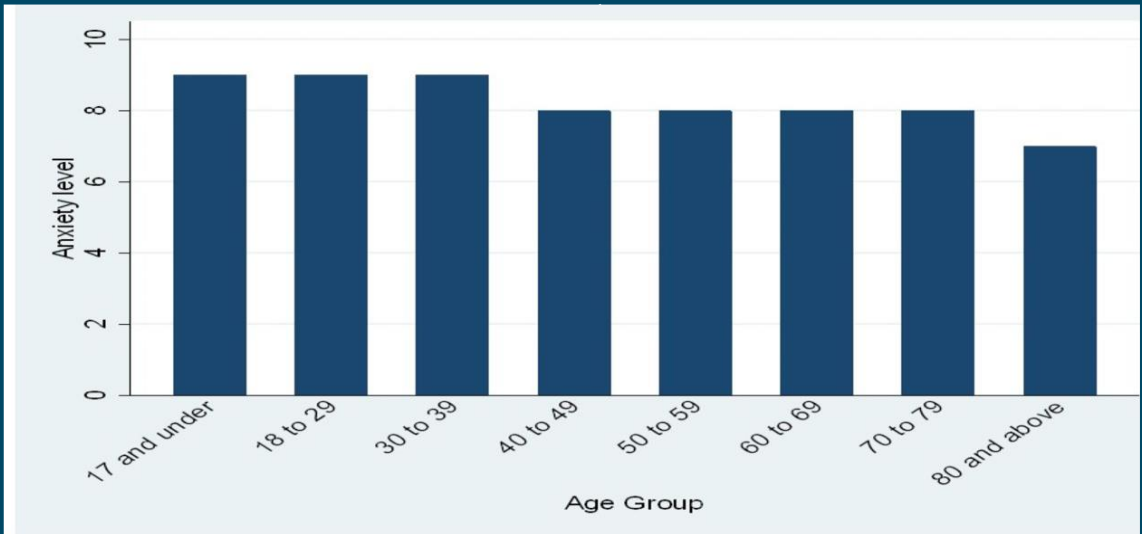


Methodology

This study used a **primary qualitative research approach**. Data was collected through **semi-structured interviews with seven NHS nurses** working in acute care wards. Participants were recruited voluntarily, and interviews were conducted online or via telephone. Open-ended questions allowed nurses to discuss their experiences of workload, workplace relationships, and the impact of their roles on mental health.

Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and analysed thematically to identify key patterns and shared experiences.

Ethical principles, including confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, were maintained throughout the study.



References

Hall, LH,et al. (2016)

Royal College of Nursing (2023)

West, M, Bailey, S., and Williams, E (2020)