The Relationship Between Career Plateau and Staff Nurses' Job Satisfaction

Eman Salman Taie¹, Amira Fathy Akeel² & Lamia El sayed Abdallh³

¹Professor of Nursing Administration, Faculty of Nursing, Helwan University,
²Lecturer of Nursing Administration, Faculty of Nursing, Modern University for Technology and Information (MTI),
³B.Sc. Nursing, Ain Shams University,

Abstract:

Background: Career plateauing is the situation in nurses’ career when there is a very low possibility of any additional hierarchical promotion. This could affect their job satisfaction which has an impact on nurses’ personal quality of life, and their ability to give quality nursing care. Aim: To investigate the relationship between career plateau and staff nurses’ job satisfaction. Design: Descriptive correlational research design was used. Setting: It was conducted at Saied Galal Hospital affiliated to Al-Azhar University Hospitals. Sample: All staff nurses (N=280). Tools: Two tools were used: Career Plateau Questionnaire and Job Satisfaction Questionnaire. Results: less than three quarters of studied sample had satisfactory career plateau level. Furthermore, less than three quarters of studied staff nurses had low level of job satisfaction, while, only of them had high job satisfaction level. Conclusion: There was highly statistically significant inverse correlation between career plateau and job satisfaction. Recommendations: Pay attention to the early signs of plateauing and take preventative measures like up skilling, diversifying nurses’ interests, and planning long-term career. Provide staff nurses with training and development programs about career plateau and job satisfaction to enhance their professional development. Further studies about the relationship between occupational stress and career plateau can be conducted.

Keywords: Career plateau, Job satisfaction, Staff nurses.

Introduction

The current healthcare environment has been characterized as turbulent, unpredictable and challenging due to several interconnected factors, including the volatile economy, advanced technology and a more diverse workplace. It is worth noting that the stages of human resource development involve intuition, inspiration, insight, attempt and continual learning. So that when this cycle is stopped, healthcare workers will be closer to plateauing (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023).

A nursing career is a sequence of experiences and activities that staff nurses gain related to their work throughout their lives, and it is essential to everyone since it has a long-term impact on the past, present, and future. In today's healthcare organizations, a nursing career is more like a "patchwork" of employment with little prospects for continuing advancement that are neither planned nor anticipated by the individual, which causes the plateau phenomenon which is considered the most uncomfortable and frustrating career experience (Backman et al., 2023).

Career plateauing is the point in a nurse's career when there is little chance of receiving subsequent hierarchical promotion. In other words, career plateauing occurs when a nurse has attained the highest position that he or she can obtain within an organization and has no prospect of being promoted. Career success is a persistent and impermanent discontinuation that triggers frustration and psychological distress. It is a condition where a staff nurse is restricted in the course of work and improves horizontal and vertical movement (Agu et al., 2023).
Job satisfaction is a critical component of nurse's career and the most essential measure of an organization's performance. Job satisfaction is a good feeling that occurs when professional desires or needs are met, as well as a favorable attitude toward the task completed. Nurses who value job satisfaction will feel confident and excited about every task they perform. Job satisfaction affects people both internally and externally. So that the development of an organization, nurses' personal quality of life, and their capacity to provide patients with high-quality treatment are all impacted by job satisfaction (Hu et al., 2022; Farivar et al., 2023).

Job satisfaction may be influenced by staff evaluations of the work environment, organizational support levels, and employment conditions. If a staff nurse is happy at work, he or she is more likely to be flexible, efficient, and committed to organizational goals, and they tend to do a better job. Nurses who are dissatisfied with their jobs are more likely to leave their jobs. So, staff nurses with career plateau has lower their productivity, lack of job satisfaction and job commitment. In addition, it increases their level of turnover intention, and decrease level of creativity inertia all of this have negative effect of all organization (Abideen et al., 2021).

Significance of the study:

Staff nurses are more likely to career plateau when their current career is not commensurate with nurse's age and length of service. Career plateau promotes the formation of negative attitudes such as decreased motivation for job performance, decreased job satisfaction, low morale, frequent absenteeism, and elevated turnover intention that affect on hospitals management and quality of patient care and performance attitude of staff nurses in workplace. Job satisfaction is seen as the enjoyment staff nurses derive from doing a particular type of work. The level of staff nurse's job satisfaction reflects how much they like or detest their work (Rahimi et al., 2023).

Recent research proved that only about 1% of staff nurses reach the top-level job hierarchy, a position at the decision-making level resulted in a low job satisfaction level that could affect quality and productivity (Backman et al., 2023; Sukirman et al., 2023). Career plateau research published between 1977 and 2023 and includes 82 empirical sources revealed that career plateaued nurses generally report poorer satisfaction and well-being. Considerable evidence indicates that reaching a career plateau may result in negative consequences, such as decreased job satisfaction and increased intention to quit. Across-study showed that in nurse turnover rate of hospitals, 4.9% of nurses had a very strong turnover intention related to career plateau (Bai et al., 2023; Afolashade et al., 2024). Therefore, career plateau was used as an antecedent for unwanted work outcomes, such as low job satisfaction, low career motivation, low self-efficacy, and high turnover intentions (Agu et al., 2023; Ezemenahi et al., 2024).

Aim of the study:

To investigate the relationship between career plateau and staff nurses' job satisfaction through:

1. Assess level of career plateau among staff nurses.
2. Determine the level of job satisfaction among staff nurses.
3. Find out the relationship between career plateau and staff nurses' job satisfaction.

Subjects and Methods

Research design:

A descriptive correlational research design was used in this study.

Setting:

The study was conducted at Saied Galal Hospital affiliated to Al-Azhar University Hospitals.
Subjects:

Sampling: All staff nurses both genders with different levels in nursing education (nursing technical secondary schools, nursing technical institute, bachelor degree of nursing, and post graduate nursing education) who were working in the hospital at the time of the study and agreed to participate in the study (N=280). The researcher excluded those who attended previous training about career plateau or those who had less than one year of experience in current hospital.

Tools for data collection:

Two tools were used for collecting data included:

First tool: Career Plateau Questionnaire. It consisted of two parts:

Part I: Personal data of staff nurses. It included items as; age, gender, years of experience and level of education in nursing…. etc.

Part II: career plateau questionnaire: This tool was developed by (Milliman, 1992) and modified by (Jolie, 2014). It was modified by researcher after reviewing the relevant literature (Hu et al., 2022 ; Darling & Cunningham, 2023 ; Huo & Jiang, 2023), and consulting experts in nursing administration to assess career plateau level among staff nurses. It is composed of (12) items.

Scoring system:

Staff nurses’ responses were measured on a 3-points Likert scale ranging from 1=disagree, 2= neutral, 3=agree, the total score was (36). From those items , (32) were positively scored, and only (4) items (7, 9, 11 & 12) were negatively scored so inversely scored.

The score was perceived as:

- Satisfactory ≥75% ≥ 27 points
- Unsatisfactory <75% < 27 points

Second tool: Job Satisfaction Questionnaire: Job satisfaction questionnaire aimed to determine the level of job satisfaction among studied staff nurses at the study setting, it was developed by (Herzberg, 1950) and modified by (El-naggar, 2019). The questionnaire covered ten dimensions of job satisfaction and composed of (64) items as followed: hospital administrative policy (10 items), salary and incentives (7 items), interpersonal hospital relations(7 items), working environment(5 items), work itself (4 items), job appreciation (6 items), job responsibility(6 items), job advancement (6 items), supervision (7 items) and job achievement” (6 items).

Scoring system:

The responses of study participants were “yes, sometimes and no”. These were scored respectively as 2,1and zero. The scores of each group of items were summed-up and the total was divided by the number of the items in this group, giving a mean ±SD for each domain of job satisfaction. The scores were converted into a percent score.

- High level > 80% > 102 points
- Moderate level 70% < 80% 89 - 102 points
- Low level < 70% < 89 points
Validity:
Face and content validity for the study tools were done. Tools were translated into Arabic and were tested by a jury group of three experts specialized in nursing administration through an opinionnaire sheet.

Reliability:
Tools were tested by Cronbach's alpha:

- **First tool**: The staff nurses' questionnaire yield cronbach's alpha showed (0.70).
- **Second tool**: The staff nurses' questionnaire yield cronbach's alpha showed (0.89).

Ethical considerations:
Prior study conduction, approval was obtained from the scientific research ethical committee at Faculty of Nursing Helwan University. In addition, an approval was obtained from the nursing director of Saied Galal hospital. Written consent was obtained from the staff nurses before inclusion in the study. Staff nurses were informed that they were allowed to participate or not in the study and that, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Field work:
The actual field work started at the beginning of August 2022 to the end of September 2022. The researcher met the general manager of Saied Galal hospital affiliated to Al-Azhar University Hospitals asked for cooperation and permission to conduct the study and explained the aim of the study. The researcher went to the selected hospital (6 days / week) for (12 hours / day) from (8 AM to 8 PM). The researcher met each hospital nursing staff member individually, and explained the aim of the study, and methods of data collection and obtained informed consent from them. The researcher was present all the time during fulfilling the study tools to answer any questions.

III- Administrative Item
An official letter was obtained from of faculty of nursing at Helwan University to the general manager of Saied Galal hospital to obtain his permission and cooperation to conduct the study.

IV-Statistical Item
Upon completion of data collection, data was computed and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), version (24) for analysis. The P- value was used set at (0.05). For quantitative data the number and percent were calculated and chi square was used. For quantitative data the mean and standard deviation were calculated. Correlation between studied variables was done using Pearson correlation for parametric data. For all above mentioned statistical tests done, the threshold of significance is fixed at (5%) level (P-value). P-value of (≤ 0.05) indicates a significant result. While, p-value of (≤ 0.01) indicates a high significant result.

Results:
Table (1) illustrates that more than half (54.6%&58.6%) of studied staff nurses aged between 20 to less than 30 years old and were graduated from technical institute of nursing respectively; while, less than two third (65.4%) of them were female, while, more than two fifth (41.1%) had from one year to less than 6 years of experience in current hospital settings.

Table (2) and figure (1) clarify that less than three quarters (71.4%) of the studied sample had satisfactory career plateau level. On the other hand, more than one quarter (28.6%) had unsatisfactory level of career.
Table (3) and figure (2) illustrate that less than three quarters (74.3%) of studied staff nurses had low level of job satisfaction, less than one fifth (19.3%) of them had moderate level. Additionally, only (6.4%) of them had high level of job satisfaction.

Table (4) describes that less than three quarters of the total dimension level of job satisfaction was for the low level (74.3%), while only (6.4%) was for the high level with mean percentage (59.0%).

Table (5) and figure (3) indicate that there was highly statistical significant inverse correlation between career plateau and job satisfaction (P=0.01*), (R= - 0.15).

Table (1): Personal data of staff nurses (N=280)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal data</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 &lt; 30</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 &lt; 40</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 &lt; 50</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong> = 30.9 <strong>SD</strong> = 6.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of education in nursing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing technical secondary schools</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical institute of nursing</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree of nursing science</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 &lt; 6</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 &lt; 11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 &lt; 16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 &lt; 21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong> = 9.7 <strong>SD</strong> = 7.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2): Percentage distribution of level of career plateau among studied staff nurses (N=280).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of career plateau</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table (3):** Percentage distribution of level of job satisfaction among studied staff nurses (N=280)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of job satisfaction</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low level &lt;70%</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate level 70% -&lt;80%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level &gt;80%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure (1)** Distribution of the studied sample as regards their percent score level of career plateau.

**Figure (2)** Distribution of the studied sample according to the percent score of job satisfaction (N=280)
Table (4): Percentage distribution of dimensions of job satisfaction among studied staff nurses (N=280).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of job satisfaction</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Mean ±SD</th>
<th>Mean %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Hospital administrative policy</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Salaries and incentives</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interpersonal hospital relations</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Work environment</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work itself (work method)</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Job appreciation</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Job responsibility</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Job advancement</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Supervision</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Job achievement</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>208</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (5): correlation coefficient between career plateau and job satisfaction (N=280).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career plateau</th>
<th>Job satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at p-value < 0.05
Discussion

One of the key issues confronting future nurses is how to force them to stay at the same level and in the same job, which leads to their frustration, lack of desire, and a plateau that occurs earlier and earlier in their career. Regarding to level of career plateau, present study results revealed that more than one quarter of studied staff nurses had unsatisfactory level of career plateau and less than three quarters of staff nurses had satisfactory career plateau level. These results were supported by (Hasan et al., 2020) who found that there was more than one quarter had unsatisfactory level of career plateau and less than three quarters had satisfactory career plateau level of staff nurses.

On the other hand, the study conducted by (Abd-Elrhaman et al., 2020) found that the majority level of career plateau was high and less than one fifth was moderate and low career plateau level of study sample. In addition to the study conducted by (Abd-Elwareh et al., 2022) who found that the majority of staff nurses had unsatisfactory level of career plateau and less than one fifth had satisfactory career plateau level.

Meanwhile, as regard to job satisfaction the present study results indicated that the level of job satisfaction among studied staff nurses was less than three quarters of the studied nursing staff had low level of job satisfaction, less than one fifth of them had moderate level of job satisfaction. Only (6.4%) of them had a high level of job satisfaction. These results were on the same line with (Hasan et al., 2020) who reported that less than three quarters of them had low level of job satisfaction, less than one fifth of them had moderate level of job satisfaction and only (8%) of them reported high level of job satisfaction.

In addition to study conducted by (Heidari et al., 2022) who found that three quarters of nurses had a low level of job satisfaction, less than one fifth of them had a moderate level of job satisfaction, and only (11.6%) had a high level of job satisfaction. Furthermore, the study of (Oducado, 2020) who reported that there was one fifth of staff nurses’ level of job satisfaction was high, whereas more than half of them were moderate, and more than one quarter were low.

Job satisfaction is a global feeling or attitude toward various aspects of a job, and it is an affective orientation toward work that a staff perceives. Present study results describes distribution of ten dimensions of job satisfaction level of the studied staff nurses, which found that the majority of the total dimension level of job satisfaction was for the low level, while only (6.4%) was for the high level. These results were on the same line with (El-naggar, 2019) declared that less than three quarters of job satisfaction of studied nursing was low, while only (7.3%) reported high level. In addition to study of (Rashad et al., 2022) who reported that the majority of studied nurses revealed low level of job satisfaction, while only (13%) reported high level of job satisfaction.
Regarding the relationship between career plateau and job satisfaction among staff nurses and present study results revealed that there was highly statistical inverse significant association between career plateau and job satisfaction among studied staff nurses. These results agreed by (Shin Hee & Nam Ok, 2019) who reported that nurses’ career plateau have negative associated with their job satisfaction and nursing competency. In addition to study conducted by (Abd-Elwareth et al., 2022) who found that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between total nursing staff career plateau and their total job satisfaction. On the same line (Zhu & Li, 2023) found that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between career plateau and job satisfaction.

On the other hand, the study conducted by (kim & kimG, 2021) who found that predictors on job satisfaction at the individual level of nurses and career plateau which was positive effect. In addition, the study conducted by (Hoseini & Ashrafi, 2020), They found that overall nurses’ job satisfaction positively correlated to nurses’ performance and career plateau.

Additionally, present study results were inconsistent with the results of the study conducted by (Smith et al., 2023), which declared that there was a moderate significant positive correlation between job satisfaction with all five subscales of the career plateau. Also the study of (Backman et al., 2023) which reported that there was nursing home managers' leadership was positively related to job satisfaction and career plateau.

On the other hand, (Hassan et al., 2020) in the study they found that there was non- significant correlation between presence of career plateau situation and level of career and job satisfaction or presence of turnover-intension among the studied nurses. Also, the study conducted by (Mirzaei et al., 2022) who reported that there was a positive and significant impact of hierarchical plateau on turnover intention and job satisfaction.

On the same line, the study conducted by (Hu et al., 2022) who found that there was negative association between subjective career plateau and career satisfaction, extra role performance, in-role performance, job involvement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work engagement.

Furthermore, the study conducted by (Abideen et al., 2021), the study showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between career plateau on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In addition, the study (Abdelaliem et al., 2022) that found significant negative correlations between career plateau and determinant of nurses' job satisfaction and promotability.

This was supported by (Chavadi et al., 2021), who found that job satisfaction is having a negative relationship with turnover intention and career plateau. On the same line, the study conducted by (Baoguo & Mian, 2020), who reported that career plateau had negative correlation with employee job satisfaction. Also, the study conducted by (Song &Kim, 2020), who reported that the perception on education and training practices have a negative significant effect on job Satisfaction, turnover intention and career plateau and also have a negative effect on job satisfaction and career plateau.

Conclusion

In the light of the study findings, it can be concluded that (71.4%) of staff nurses had satisfactory career plateau level. Furthermore, (74.3%) of staff nurses had low level of job satisfaction and (6.4%) of them had high level of job satisfaction. Finally, the study finding revealed that there was highly statistical significant inverse correlation between career plateau and staff nurses’ job satisfaction.

Recommendations

Based on the current study findings, the following recommendations were proposed:

1- Healthcare organizations should:

- Provide staff nurses with training and development programs about career plateau and job satisfaction to enhance their professional development.
• Promote learning opportunities for nurses to improve their educational level, and provide financial support for their education.

2- Hospital administrators can:

• Ensure there is fairness, reasonableness, and consistency in promoting nurses to avoid feelings of unfairness affecting their work commitment.

• Give nurses independence and freedom of action by providing opportunities on the job for them to use their judgment and creativity.

• Provide nurses with opportunities to participate in hospital decision-making.

3- Staff nurses can:

• Determine their job descriptions, roles, and responsibilities early in their employment to reduce the risk of career stability.

• Participate in seminars, training programs and conferences on internal and external levels to update their competencies.

4- Educational organizations can:

• Introduce career plateau and job satisfaction into undergraduate nursing curricula.

5- Further studies:

• The relationship between occupational stress and career plateau.

References


