

Nursing Assistants' Perspectives on Their Job Characteristics, Workload, and Wage: A Case Study of a Private Hospital in Bangkok

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาค้นคว้านี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาสาเหตุที่ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลหญิงในโรงพยาบาลเอกชน จังหวัดกรุงเทพมหานคร เลือกทำงานอาชีพผู้ช่วยพยาบาลที่มีรายได้ต่ำ 2) ศึกษาสาเหตุที่อยู่ในอาชีพปัจจุบันมาเป็นระยะเวลาหลายปี และ 3) เพื่อค้นหาแผนการในอนาคตของผู้ช่วยพยาบาลใน 5 ปีข้างหน้า งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ใช้การสัมภาษณ์ชนิดกึ่งโครงสร้างกับผู้ช่วยพยาบาลจำนวน 20 คน จากแผนกผู้ป่วยนอกของศูนย์โรคเบาหวานและศูนย์ตรวจโรคทั่วไป ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลส่วนใหญ่เลือกทำงานในอาชีพผู้ช่วยพยาบาลเนื่องจากมาจากการจำกัดทางการเงินของพ่อแม่ นอกจากนี้ ข้อจำกัดทางสถาบันจากระบบการศึกษาของประเทศไทยเป็นอุปสรรคที่ทำให้ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลไม่สามารถเข้าศึกษาต่อในระดับปริญญาตรีในมหาวิทยาลัยของรัฐ จากข้อจำกัดเหล่านี้ ทำให้ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลได้ลงเรียนหลักสูตรผู้ช่วยพยาบาลเป็นระยะเวลา 6 เดือน ซึ่งเป็นการลงทุนมนุษย์ต้นทุนต่ำ

นอกจากนี้ สาเหตุหลักที่ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลส่วนใหญ่ทำงานในอาชีพปัจจุบันมาเป็นระยะเวลาหลายปี เนื่องมาจากข้อจำกัดทางการเงินและสาเหตุอื่น ๆ เช่น ค่าทำงานล่วงเวลา ความมั่นคงของงานจากการขึ้นเงินเดือนทุกปี ความพึงพอใจทางสังคมในสถานที่ทำงานสวัสดิการของโรงพยาบาล และการพัฒนาสายความก้าวหน้าในงาน สำหรับแผนการอนาคตใน 5 ปีข้างหน้า ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลบางคนต้องการที่จะเป็นพยาบาลวิชาชีพที่ได้รับใบอนุญาตขณะที่ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลที่มีบุตรต้องการที่ย้ายกลับไปยังภูมิลำเนาของตนเพื่อดูแลบุตรและพ่อแม่ และต้องการทำธุรกิจเล็ก ๆ เช่น ร้านขายของชำ และร้านอาหาร

คำสำคัญ: กรุงเทพมหานคร, ผู้ช่วยพยาบาล, คุณลักษณะของงาน, รายได้, โรงพยาบาลเอกชน

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to 1) to study the rationales of female nursing assistants at a private hospital in Bangkok for choosing to work in low-paid nursing assistant jobs 2) to study their rationales for remaining in their current jobs for several years and 3) to find out their future plans in the next 5 years. This research adopted semi-structured interviews with 20 nursing assistants from the outpatient departments of the diabetes center and the medical check-up center. The research findings showed that a majority of nursing assistants chose to work in nursing assistant jobs mainly due to the financial constraints of their parents. Moreover, the institutional constraints from the Thai education system obstructed them to obtain bachelor's degrees from public universities. As a result of these constraints, they ended up studying a six-month nursing assistant course which was low human capital investment. Additionally, a majority of nursing assistants

remained in their current jobs mainly due to their financial constraints. Other rationales were overtime pay, job stability from annual salary increases, social satisfaction in the workplace, hospital fringe benefits and career development. Regarding their future plans in the next five years, some of the nursing assistants wanted to become licensed practical nurses while those with children wanted to move back to their hometowns to look after their children and parents and wanted to run small businesses such as a grocery shop and a restaurant.

Keywords: Bangkok, Nursing Assistants, Job Characteristics, Wage, Private Hospital

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, Thailand's female labor force participation rate has been approximate at 60 percent (Asian Development Bank, 2020). This implies that Thai women have played a strong economic role in contributing to family incomes. Since the late 1950s, employment opportunities for Thai women have become more accessible due to the transformation of Thailand's labor market structure from a purely agricultural economy into a more industrialized economy (Thi Bui & Permpoonwiwat, 2015). As a result of industrialization, Thai women have been able to progress economically and their potentials and competences have been recognized in the labor market (Thi Bui & Permpoonwiwat, 2015).

Despite having more accessible employment opportunities, the capabilities to progress in the workforce and the improvement in education attainment, Thai women receive lower incomes than Thai men due to gender discrimination in the Thai labor market, especially in the group aged 15-24 and 25-54 years old (Khorpetch & Kulkolkarn, 2011). According to Hakim (2000), high status and high-paying careers attract men more than women and become male-dominated because men are likely to chase money, status and power harder than women whereas low status and low-paying jobs become female-dominated. Consequently, men and women work in different kinds of jobs. For instance, nursing and social work are predominantly female professions whereas jobs in the engineering, science and technology fields are mostly held by men. Furthermore, high levels of low-paid female employment are associated with greater segregation of women into service sector jobs which involve nurturing, caring and service activities (Fagan & Burchell, 2002). For instance, two-thirds of secretaries, customer service officers, sales workers, shop assistants, receptionists, housekeepers and waitresses are women (Anker, 1998). Nevertheless, the female-dominated profession is best represented by nursing (Kemp, 1994) due to their supposed abilities such as helpful natures, less decision-making authority and greater willingness to take orders (Anker, 1998). Although nursing personnel are important keys to patient care, their hard work and long working hours do not come with high earnings and high status for them. Studies also confirm that women have still occupied the lowest paid and the lowest positions in the labor market despite the promotion of equal

opportunities (Hakim, 1995; Kirton & Greene, 2005). In addition to low pay, nursing personnel often suffer stress from heavy workloads making them feel undervalued and underappreciated (Kemp, 1994). Likewise, nurses and nursing assistants in Thailand experience high stress due to heavy workloads and long working hours (Aoki et al., 2011).

Several theories or concepts attempt to explain occupational segregation. In this research, the researcher will explore whether human capital theory, feminist/gender theory, preference theory, and constraints and contextual influences explain the rationales of women for performing and remaining in low-paid nursing assistant jobs.

1. Human Capital Theory

Human capital includes education, training, experience and personality attributes embodied in the ability that affect the economic welfare of individual (Gregory & Windebank, 2000). Human capital theory put emphasis on formal education because it is a productive investment that provides returns in the form of individual economic success and achievement (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). For instance, to become a certified nurse assistant in Thailand, a person must complete high school education (Matthayom Suksa 6) and enroll in a nursing assistant course for 6 months (Bangkok Inter Care School, 2021). Another form of human capital comprises knowledge and skills that improve employee productivity in one setting which can be acquired from tenure with their current employers (Mayo, 2016). Employees who have long tenure with their current employers are less likely to search for new jobs since they have obtained

work-relevant skills and abilities that can offer them job stability and career advancement whereas workers with low levels of education are less likely to search for new jobs because they believe that there are few opportunities to obtain better jobs (Mayo, 2016).

Furthermore, higher levels of education or training raise the future incomes of workers; hence increasing their lifetime earnings (Xiao, 2001). For instance, higher levels of education or training is necessary for workers in the secondary sector (jobs with low incomes, little chance of advancement, high labor turnover, poor working condition and job instability) to advance themselves into the primary sector which provides jobs with high incomes, career advancement, good working conditions and job stability (Xiao, 2001). Without investing in higher levels of education or training, it is very difficult for secondary sector workers to have upward mobility.

According to Jonung (1998), higher earnings achieved by men compared to women are fair because men offer more attributes which are valued and rewarded by employers, and these attributes are formal qualifications and long years of work experience. By contrast, women perform mothering and household duties which are their contributions to the human capital of others such as husband and children: therefore, women earn less than men (Pujol, 1995).

2. Feminist/Gender Theory

Feminist theory argues that the patriarchal structure of society is a significant determining factor for women's subordinate position in the labor market (Kirton & Greene, 2005). Women's subordinate position in the labor market is embedded within the domestic mode of production and it is through marriage that women's unpaid domestic labor such as housework and child-rearing is appropriated by men (Gregory & Windebank, 2000). As a result of their unpaid domestic labor, women are secondary earners when entering the paid labor force. In other words, patriarchal structures and attitudes reflect the gender roles distinguishing men as breadwinners and women as homemakers and as workers with domestic responsibilities in the public sphere (Dex & Joshi, 1999). However, Presser (1994) argues that the gender roles within the family have become less segregated. For instance, men take on more household tasks and women participate more in paid work, thereby resulting in dual earner couples.

3. Preference Theory

Preference theory argues that women performing low-skilled and low-paid jobs are their rational choices. Women are heterogeneous in tastes and preferences because employment and other roles in the public sphere can be chosen by women and preferences are important determinants of their lifestyle choices and behaviors in modern societies (Hakim, 2000). Women's subordinate position in the labor market is not a consequence of the structural and institutional disadvantages they suffer but the outcome of their varying choices (Hakim, 1996). In other words, women are not

helpless victims who have little or no control over their own circumstances regarding their employment preferences (Hakim, 1995) but they are autonomous actors who can make pragmatic decisions on the basis of their calculation of risk and opportunity (Glover, 2002).

According to Hakim (1995; 2000), women determine their lifestyle choices and they choose 3 different lifestyles: 1) home-centered women, 2) adaptive-centered women and 3) work-centered women. The most diverse and largest group of women is adaptive-centered women who combine employment and family without either taking priority. By contrast, home-centered women give priority to family life and choose not to invest in education and training, and they are often in low-skilled, part-time and temporary jobs. The most committed women are work-centered women who have long-term career plans and choose to invest seriously in their human capital. They are often in better-paid and higher-status jobs than both home-centered and adaptive-centered women. If they have children, childcare is often delegated to nurseries and schools.

Occupations offer not only earnings, fringe benefits, social status or work tasks that are attractive according to personal taste, but also convenience factors such as less stressful jobs, flexible hours and short journeys to work (Hakim, 1991). The convenience factors offer women job satisfaction, especially female workers who work to supplement their husbands' incomes or who choose leisure activities and personal fulfillments rather than material possessions (Hakim, 1991).

4. Constraints and Contextual Influences

Warren et al (2009) argue that Hakim's preference theory overlooks the influences of social, institutional and economic factors in understanding the employment decisions of low-paid women. Women in high-paid, high-status jobs work long hours to get on whereas women in low-paid jobs are financially constrained and they have to work long hours just to get by (Warren & Walters, 1998). Additionally, low-paid women with children are constrained in their choices by the labor market structure (e.g. full-time employment) that disallows them to make flexible working time arrangements to help them combine jobs and childcare (Gregory & Milner, 2009). Therefore, 'constraints are part of the context within which people make work decisions, and decisions cannot be understood as individual choices outside their material context' (Warren et al., 2009: 127).

Women have been able to achieve less than men professionally and financially because they mainly lack of resources and power. Race, gender, age, disability and sexual orientation are also major factors influencing employment patterns and outcomes, and these factors are also main sources of employment discrimination and inequalities that still exist within organizations (Kirton & Greene, 2005). Therefore, women are not always capable of exercising free choices regarding their employment decisions due to contextual and structural constraints (Crompton & Harris, 1998).

However, women can have multi-stranded work orientations since they may desire both extrinsic rewards (e.g. pay raises, bonuses and fringe

benefits) and intrinsic rewards (e.g. feeling of achievement, meaningful work, a sense of belonging, and social satisfaction) from their work (Crompton & Harris, 1998). Additionally, women's work commitment varies over the life cycle since the majority of women want to combine employment with family life goals without maximizing either (Crompton & Harris, 1998).

Anker (1998) claims that women remain in low-paid jobs because of fringe benefits such as work injury compensation insurance and healthcare benefits for themselves and their family members, and their low incomes are supplemented by some pay being taken in non-wage labor costs such as healthcare benefits. Fringe benefits, such as dental benefits, health insurance, paid holidays, tuition reimbursement, accommodation services and childcare allowance, are used by a great number of hospitals in Thailand to attract and retain nursing personnel (Boonyoung, 2010).

OBJECTIVES

Over the past decades, most research on low-paid workers has focused on male workers since the risks of falling into low-paying jobs have increased for them (Kim, 2000). Moreover, few studies have been conducted on low-paid Thai nursing assistants. Most research on low-paid workers in western countries, such as the UK and the USA, is associated with women working in part-time jobs that are perceived as dead-end and poorly paid jobs with little or no opportunity for career advancement (Barnett & Garies, 2002). However, this research is different from previous studies since this

research aims to study low-paid, permanent, full-time nursing assistants in the private healthcare sector.

Hence, the objectives of this research are to find out the rationales of nursing assistants for working and remaining in low-paid nursing assistant jobs and their future plans. This research will address the following three main research questions:

1. Why do female nursing assistants choose to work in low-paid nursing assistant jobs?
2. Why have they remained in their current jobs for several years?
3. What are their future plans in the next 5 years?

METHODOLOGY

1. Sample Selection

Using purposive sampling method, this study included 20 Thai nursing assistants working in a private hospital in Bangkok (Fullerton Hospital: the name has been changed due to the purpose of confidentiality). All participants were chosen on a voluntary basis. A medium sample size between 20-30 interviews is suitable for semi-structured interviews and it helps the researchers not to be burdened by endless data collection (Cresswell, 2007; Bryman, 2012). All participants were introduced to the researcher by friends who had worked at Fullerton Hospital for several years.

All research participants were from the outpatient departments of 2 centers in the hospital. One was the diabetes center and the other one

was the medical check-up center. Ten nursing assistants were from diabetes center and the remaining 10 nursing assistants were from medical check-up center. Both diabetes and medical check-up centers were selected on the access being granted. All research participants were permanent, full-time nursing assistants who had worked at Fullerton Hospital for at least 7 years. According to the policy of this private hospital, permanent, full-time nursing assistants receive fringe benefits such as free medical check-up and dental benefits and are entitled to overtime pay depending on their workloads.

2. Data Collection

This research adopted semi-structured interviews because this type of interview allows participants to put their perspectives forward (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Semi-structured interviews also allow the flexibility to probe and “probing can be very important when open-ended questions are being asked” (Bryman, 2001: 130). With open-ended questions, this allows the flexibility of understanding the concept from the participants’ perspectives by providing openness to the experiences of individuals (May, 1997). In addition, documentary data were adopted, and hence the researcher was involved in a combination of methods which aims to increase the validity and credibility of the results (Bryman, 2001).

Due to the covid-19 pandemic and the researcher’s financial constraints, the researcher was not able to travel to Bangkok to interview research participants in person. Therefore, all 20 interviews with nursing assistants were conducted via a smartphone voice recorder. The dates and time for the interviews were selected as per their convenience. The duration

of each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher was able to accomplish the interviews with 20 research participants approximately within 3 weeks.

3. Research Tools

In this study, the researcher adopted interview questions as research tools because interview questions helped the researcher to provide descriptions in order to answer research questions. Using interview questions, the researchers are free to explore the topics as they occur naturally in the flow of the interview and have the flexibility to adjust the order of interview questions (Patton, 2002).

The researcher designed interview questions and divided interview questions into 2 sections. The first section consisted of the personal information of the respondents such as name, age, educational qualifications, marital status, the number of children, the age of children, and the occupations of their parents and their financial status. The second section was related to their jobs and future plans such as the rationales for choosing nursing assistant jobs and remaining in their current jobs, the duties of nursing assistants, the duration of employment with the hospital, monthly base salaries with and without overtime pay, the number of daily working hours, the number of overtime hours received per month, overtime pay, hospital fringe benefits, opportunities for career development provided by the hospital and their future plans in the next 5 years.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher made sure that interview questions were clear and understandable by sending interview questions to

all the respondents via emails as this helped facilitate the interviews. After sending emails, the researcher called them to find out if they needed further clarification on interview questions and all the respondents had a clear understanding of interview questions.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to analyze the data in this research. The aim of thematic analysis is to find similarities or divergences with the themes which emerge from the literature, and thematic analysis is compatible with semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview transcripts were used to help code the data. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the data because “subsequent re-reading of the data should allow the researcher to identify themes in the data” (Denscomebe, 2010: 283) and concepts in the literature review. The key themes that emerged under this study helped link the data obtained to the relevant literature and enabled the researcher to answer the research questions.

5. Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained the informed consent of all research participants verbally before the interview process began. With their informed consent, the participation of all nursing assistants was entirely voluntary. All research participants wished to remain anonymous so their real names were not mentioned due to the purpose of confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Nursing Assistants' Rationales for Working in Low-Paid Nursing Assistant Jobs

Based on the research findings, 15 out of 20 participants chose to work in low-paid nursing assistant jobs mainly due to the financial constraints of their families. After the completion of high school education, they decided to study a six-month nursing assistant course (Bangkok Inter Care School, 2021) to help reduce the financial burdens of their parents. The occupations of the parents of these 15 nursing assistants were mostly manual laborers and rice farmers who earned low incomes. The findings also showed that rice farmers in Thailand did not make much profits cultivating rice due to land rent and several years of droughts and other miscellaneous expenses such as fertilizer, rice strains and tractors. As a result, the nursing assistants whose parents were rice farmers decided to take a nursing assistant course in order to reduce their parents' financial burdens. In addition some, parents had to support the education of nursing assistants' siblings. Therefore, the six-month course enabled these nursing assistants to earn incomes immediately after completion of the course. In addition, some of nursing assistants had to borrowed loans to pay for their tuition fees due to their parents' financial difficulties. As such, they ended up choosing a short course in nursing assistant so that they would be able to make a living and support their parents financially.

In addition, there were 5 respondents who reported that they wanted to become registered nurses but they failed to pass the public

university entrance examination to enroll in a four-year nursing program. Moreover, studying at a private university was unaffordable for their parents. Consequently, they decided to study a nursing assistant course instead. The institutional constraints from the Thai education system ceased the opportunities of nursing assistants for having formal university education.

The influence of institutional and economic factors needs to be considered when it comes to understanding the employment decisions of women (Warren et al., 2009). With financial and institutional constraints, all respondents ended up becoming certified nursing assistants and their low human capital investments have led to low levels of economic achievement (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Obviously, all respondents did not choose this job purely out of their preferences. Their subordinate position in the labor market is not the outcome of their varying choices but a consequence of the financial and institutional disadvantages they have suffered. Therefore, constraints are part of the context within which nursing assistants made work decisions and decisions cannot be understood as individual choices outside their material context (Warren et al., 2009). As such, the findings disagree with Hakim's preference theory (2000) that preferences are important determinants of the lifestyle choices in modern societies.

2. Nursing Assistants' Rationales for Remaining in Their Current Jobs for Several Years

All respondents have remained in low-paid nursing assistant jobs for several years mainly due to their financial constraints. Other reasons were

overtime pay, job stability from annual pay increases, social satisfaction in the workplace, hospital fringe benefits, and career development such as a one-year practical nursing program paid by the hospital.

Fifteen participants have worked at Fullerton Hospital from 7 to 10 years and the remaining 5 participants have worked at this hospital over 15 years. Regarding their financial constraints, all the nursing assistants needed to give their parents a certain amount of money every month. In addition, 4 out of 20 participants had additional financial responsibilities for their children less than 10 years of age to support and their parents living in other provinces had to look after their children. Their other financial constraints were saving up money to build a house for their parents, sending in monthly installments to pay for their houses and saving up money to pay for a bachelor's degree in public health at Ramkhamhang University, an open public university. After obtaining a degree in public health, this particular nurse wished to look for a new job that would offer her a higher salary.

Hence, women in low-paid jobs are financially constrained (Warren & Walter, 1998). Moreover, nursing assistants with children are constrained in their choices because full-time employment disallows them to make flexible working time arrangements to help them combine jobs and childcare (Gregory & Milner, 2009). With low levels of education, participant 18 is unlikely to search for new jobs at the moment, and by investing her human capital in higher levels of education, she will have a higher chance to obtain a better-paid job (Mayo, 2016). In other words, levels of education affect the economic welfare of individual (Gregory & Windebank, 2000).

Additionally, all the nursing assistants interviewed reported that they were willing to work more than 9 hours a day because they wished to obtain additional incomes from working overtime. Hence, low-paid women are financially constrained and have to work long hours just to get by (Warren & Walters, 1998). According to nursing assistants with 7 years of work experience, their starting salary was 8,000 baht. At present, their monthly salaries are approximately 13,000 baht. On the average, nursing assistants receive 50-60 hours overtime hours each month. With overtime pay, their monthly salaries range from 16,000 to 17,000 baht per month.

Further research findings showed that job stability from annual salary increases was important for 5 nursing assistants with 15 years of work experience. Despite the fact that private hospitals did not normally offer retirement pensions to retired employees, these 5 senior nursing assistants agreed that their current jobs were quite stable for them due to annual salary increases. As a result, they were willing to remain in their current jobs rather than look for new jobs at other private hospitals where they might receive lower salaries than their current salaries.

With long years of experience, these nursing assistants had been very familiar with the work system of the hospital so the workloads were not too heavy for them to handle. Moreover, these 5 senior nursing assistants got along with doctors, nurses and their colleagues well. All these 5 nursing assistants agreed that it would be difficult and challenging to establish good working relationships with new colleagues at new workplaces as they grew older. As such, they remained in their current jobs for so many years.

Therefore, employees with long tenure with their current employers are less likely to search for new jobs since they have obtained work-relevant skills and abilities that can offer them job stability (Mayo, 2016). Moreover, women can have multi-stranded work orientation because all 5 senior nursing assistants were satisfied with extrinsic rewards such as a salary increase and intrinsic rewards such as a sense of belonging and social satisfaction from her work (Crompton & Harris, 1998).

Another important rationale that influenced all 20 nursing assistants to stay in their jobs was hospital fringe benefits. Hospital fringe benefits included healthcare benefits and accommodation services. In terms of healthcare benefits, they basically received full medical coverage for both outpatient and inpatient departments (OPD and IPD). Furthermore, their healthcare benefits were extended to parents, children and spouses who received a 50% discount off their OPD bills and a 25% discount off their IPD bills. Nursing assistants were also entitled to a private room free of charge for 15 days when they were admitted to the hospital. For dental treatment services, they received a 10%-25% discount. Occasionally, the hospital offered them a 50% discount on facial treatment and cosmetic surgery. Overall, all 20 nursing assistants were satisfied with the healthcare benefits provided by the hospital. As for accommodation services, all 20 nursing assistants responded that the hospital provided affordable accommodation. They paid 1,500 baht for a single room per month but utilities were excluded from their accommodation fees. The accommodation was 10 minute walk from the hospital which was very near and convenient.

Hence, women remain in low-paid jobs because of fringe benefits for themselves and their family members, and their low incomes are supplemented by some pay being taken in non-wage labor costs such as healthcare benefits, dental benefits and accommodation services (Anker, 1998). As such, fringe benefits are used by hospitals in Thailand to retain nursing personnel (Boonyoung, 2010).

In terms of career development, 8 out of 20 participants were taking a practical nurse program which was a free one-year certificate program offered by the hospital. This program was on a voluntary basis. However, those taking this program must work for the hospital for 5 years after the completion of the program. With the certificate in practical nursing, they will be promoted to licensed practical nurses and their incomes will increase. The findings also showed that practical nurses can perform more advanced duties such as dressing wounds, giving injections and taking blood for testing. Therefore, higher levels of education or training raise the future incomes of nursing assistants; hence increasing their lifetime earnings (Xiao, 2001). Without investing in higher levels of education or training it is very difficult for nursing assistants to have upward mobility. By offering nursing assistants career development, Fullerton Hospital will have a sufficient supply of nursing personnel in the long run and reduce labor turnover.

3. Future Plans of Nursing Assistants

Regarding their future plans in the next 5 years, 8 nursing assistants taking a practical nurse program saw themselves still working at Fullerton Hospital as licensed practical nurses. Only 1 nursing assistant wished to

obtain a new job in the public sector after completing her bachelor's degree in public health at Ramkhamhang University. Two nursing assistants wanted to move back to their hometowns and look after their parents and children. Moreover, one of these 2 nursing assistants wanted to open a grocery shop and the other one wanted to open a small restaurant with her husband who was working as a cook assistant in Bangkok. Therefore, the gender roles within the family have become less segregated and resulted in dual couple earners (Presser, 1994). The remaining 9 nursing assistants wanted to continue to work at Fullerton Hospital in the next 5 years. From such findings, it can be seen that some women want to combine employment with family life goals without maximizing either: therefore, women's work commitment vary over the life cycle (Crompton & Harris, 1998).

CONCLUSION

To understand the rationales of nursing assistants for choosing and remaining in low-paid jobs, we have to take into account economic and institutional factors since they and their families were constrained financially and Thailand's education system hindered them from obtaining public university education. As such, they did not have genuine choices regarding their employment decisions. As evident, Hakim's concepts on the heterogeneity of female choice do not apply to low-paid Thai nursing assistants. Additionally, most nursing assistants in this research were not secondary earners but breadwinners and the married nursing assistants were dual earner couples. Therefore, they do not fit into the category of women

with primary responsibility for housework and child-rearing as described by feminist and gender role theory as well. For Thai nursing assistants to gain career advancement, they must invest in human capital development such as higher levels of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implications

Based on the research findings, we know that nursing assistants received low monthly base salaries and they could earn more incomes if they performed overtime hours. However, it is already known that Thailand has faced a severe shortage of nursing personnel which include both nurses and nursing assistants for the past decade and there has been intensive rivalry among private hospitals for nursing personnel. Hence, private hospitals should increase the starting salary of nursing assistants to attract new nursing assistants. To retain existing nursing assistants, private hospitals should offer them not only annual salary increases but also profit-based bonuses as well as sign-on bonuses so that private hospitals will be able to reduce employee turnover in the long run.

In addition, many private hospitals in Bangkok are international hospitals and they have the high number of foreign patients. Therefore, nursing assistants should develop their work-related skills and further their education by taking a one-year practical nursing program or a two-year technical nursing program as well as investing in English language learning which can be accomplished through financial assistance from the hospitals.

With learning and development, private hospitals will have high-quality nursing assistants.

2. Future Studies

One limitation of this study was a lack of generalizability because the researcher focused only on 20 nursing assistants working in the outpatient departments of 2 centers which were the diabetes center and the medical check-up center. Future research can explore women's perspectives on low-paid nursing assistant jobs with a larger size of samples with more departments and centers. Moreover, the scope of this study was limited to nursing assistants in one private hospital. Future research may want to include nursing assistants from different private hospitals or public hospitals.

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