

The Mediating Role of Professional Self-Concept Between Emotional Resilience and Perceived Professional Benefits Among Associate Degree Nursing Interns

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Abstract

Objective: To investigate the mediating role of professional self-concept between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits among junior college nursing interns.

Methods: A survey was conducted among 239 junior college nursing interns using a general information questionnaire, the Adolescent Emotional Resilience Scale, the Nurses' Perceived Professional Benefits Questionnaire, and the Nurses' Professional Self-Concept Scale to analyze the mediating effect of professional self-concept between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits.

Results: The scores for emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits among the 239 junior college nursing interns were (45.79 ± 8.33) , (92.80 ± 10.93) , and (140.73 ± 17.32) , respectively. The total effect coefficient of emotional resilience on perceived professional benefits was 0.507, the indirect effect coefficient was 0.322 (95%CI: 0.208~0.458), and the direct effect coefficient was 0.185 (95%CI: 0.047~0.404). Professional self-concept demonstrated a partial mediating effect between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits, with the mediating effect accounting for 63.51% of the total effect.

Conclusion: Emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits among junior college nursing interns are all at above-average levels. Professional self-concept mediates the relationship between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits. Future teaching practices may adopt corresponding measures to enhance the emotional resilience of junior college nursing interns, thereby strengthening their professional self-concept and promoting improved perceived professional benefits.

Full Text

The Mediating Role of Professional Self-Concept Between Emotional Resilience and Perceived Professional Benefits in Vocational Nursing Interns

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Abstract

Objective To explore the mediating effect of professional self-concept between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits in vocational nursing interns.

Methods A total of 239 vocational nursing interns were surveyed using a general information questionnaire, the Adolescent Emotional Resilience Scale, the Nurses' Perceived Professional Benefits Questionnaire, and the Nurse Professional Self-Concept Scale. The mediating role of professional self-concept between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits was analyzed.

Results The mean scores for emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits among the 239 vocational nursing interns were (45.79 ± 8.33) , (92.80 ± 10.93) , and (140.73 ± 17.32) , respectively. The total effect coefficient of emotional resilience on perceived professional benefits was 0.507, with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.322 (95% CI: 0.208–0.458) and a direct effect coefficient of 0.185 (95% CI: 0.047–0.404). Professional self-concept demonstrated a partial mediating effect between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits, accounting for 63.51% of the total effect.

Conclusion Vocational nursing interns exhibited moderately high levels of emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits. Professional self-concept plays a mediating role between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits. Future teaching practices should implement targeted measures to enhance vocational nursing interns' emotional resilience, thereby strengthening their professional self-concept and promoting their perceived professional benefits.

Keywords: Emotional resilience; Professional self-concept; Perceived professional benefits; Vocational nursing interns

Perceived professional benefits in nursing refer to the practical advantages and professional value that nurses experience from their work, along with the emotional state of recognizing that nursing promotes personal growth. Research has confirmed that enhanced perceived professional benefits help maintain nurses' mental health, reduce burnout, decrease turnover intention, stimulate innovative behavior, optimize career planning, and strengthen professional identity, thereby increasing work engagement and improving efficiency and quality. Vo-

cational nursing interns represent the future backbone of nursing professional development in China, and the clinical internship period is a critical time for their professional cognition formation. Their perceived professional benefits during this period directly influence subsequent career choices and development. However, the busy clinical environment, complex interpersonal relationships, and role transition pressures can easily shake interns' professional beliefs. How to help them enhance their perceived professional benefits and strengthen their professional commitment requires further consideration from nursing educators.

Emotional resilience, as a crucial component of psychological resilience, is the ability to quickly eliminate negative emotions and form positive emotions when adapting to environmental changes. Research suggests that interns with better psychological resilience tend to approach internship-related stress more positively, actively seek positive aspects in stressful situations, and thereby enhance their perceived professional benefits. Professional self-concept in nursing refers to a relatively enduring perception of one's professional identity that develops during the process of becoming a professional nurse and is a key factor in improving job satisfaction. Studies indicate that interns with high emotional resilience can effectively overcome negative emotions, maintain a positive emotional state, and promote the development of professional self-concept. Conversely, nurses with positive professional self-concept have stronger professional identity, positive perceptions of nursing work, can flexibly handle various situations, and genuinely experience their professional value and growth, resulting in higher perceived professional benefits. Currently, most research on the relationships among perceived professional benefits, emotional resilience, and professional self-concept only examines pairwise correlations, with few scholars further analyzing the relationships and pathways among all three variables. Therefore, this study hypothesized that professional self-concept mediates the relationship between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits in vocational nursing interns and empirically tested this hypothesis.

1.1 Participants

Using convenience sampling, vocational nursing interns from a tertiary Grade A hospital in Jiangsu Province were selected as participants in March 2022. Inclusion criteria: (1) internship duration ≥ 8 months and familiarity with nursing work; (2) informed consent and voluntary participation. Exclusion criteria: (1) leave of absence ≥ 1 month during internship; (2) violation of hospital regulations or failing assessment during internship.

1.2.1 Research Instruments

1.2.1.1 General Information Questionnaire

Self-designed, covering age, gender, only-child status, presence of medical professionals in the family, voluntary choice of nursing major, and type of internship hospital.

1.2.1.2 Adolescent Emotional Resilience Scale

Developed by Zhang Min et al., this scale contains 11 items across two dimensions: positive emotional capacity (5 items) and emotional recovery ability (6 items). It uses a 6-point scoring system from “1=completely uncharacteristic” to “6=completely characteristic.” The scale demonstrates good reliability and validity with an internal consistency coefficient of 0.80 and stability coefficient of 0.83.

1.2.1.3 Nurses’ Perceived Professional Benefits Questionnaire

Developed by Hu Jing et al., this questionnaire includes five dimensions: positive career perception, family/friend recognition, team belonging, harmonious nurse-patient relationships, and personal growth, with 33 items total. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1–5), higher scores indicate greater perceived professional benefits. In this study, the overall Cronbach’s α coefficient was 0.904.

1.2.1.4 Nurse Professional Self-Concept Scale

Developed by Arthur, this scale comprises five dimensions: flexibility, satisfaction, skills, communication, and leadership, with 30 items total. Using a 4-point scoring system (1–4), higher scores indicate stronger professional self-concept; a total score >75 and mean score >2.5 indicate positive professional attitudes. In this study, the overall Cronbach’s α coefficient was 0.825.

1.2.2 Survey Method

The survey was conducted in late August of the clinical internship (the 8th month). After thorough communication with the hospital’s nursing department, questionnaires were distributed following a nursing intern work meeting. One investigator explained the study’s purpose, significance, and completion instructions, distributed gifts, and then distributed 260 questionnaires. After excluding invalid questionnaires, 239 valid questionnaires were collected, yielding a response rate of 91.92%.

1.2.3 Statistical Methods

Data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0. Measurement data (scores for emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits) were expressed as $(\bar{x}\pm s)$. Pearson correlation analysis was used for correlation analysis. AMOS 26.0 was used to establish a structural equation model, with maximum likelihood estimation for parameter testing and model optimization based on modification indices. The significance level was set at $\alpha=0.05$.

2.1 Scores of Emotional Resilience, Professional Self-Concept, and Perceived Professional Benefits

Table 1 presents the scores of vocational nursing interns on emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits ($n=239$). The mean total scores were 45.79 ± 8.33 for emotional resilience, 92.80 ± 10.93 for professional self-

concept, and 140.73 ± 17.32 for perceived professional benefits. Dimension-level scores are detailed in Table 1.

2.2 Correlations Among Emotional Resilience, Professional Self-Concept, and Perceived Professional Benefits

Emotional resilience (total and dimension scores) was positively correlated with professional self-concept (total and dimension scores) ($r=0.271-0.504$, $P<0.01$) and with perceived professional benefits (total and positive emotional capacity dimension scores) ($r=0.152-0.335$, $P<0.05$). Professional self-concept (total and dimension scores) was positively correlated with perceived professional benefits (total and dimension scores) ($r=0.413-0.608$, $P<0.01$). Detailed correlation coefficients are presented in Table 2 .

2.3 Mediating Effect of Professional Self-Concept Between Emotional Resilience and Perceived Professional Benefits

A structural equation model was constructed with emotional resilience as the independent variable (X), professional self-concept as the mediating variable (M), and perceived professional benefits as the dependent variable (Y). Using AMOS 26.0 with maximum likelihood estimation and 5,000 Bootstrap iterations, the model demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2/df=2.422$, RMSEA=0.077, GFI=0.934, CFI=0.962, IFI=0.962, NFI=0.938. Model pathways and parameters are shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. As Table 3 indicates, the standardized path coefficient for the direct effect of emotional resilience on professional self-concept was 0.508 ($P<0.01$), for professional self-concept on perceived professional benefits was 0.633 ($P<0.01$), and for emotional resilience on perceived professional benefits was 0.185 ($P<0.05$). The 95% confidence interval for the mediating effect of professional self-concept did not contain zero, confirming a partial mediating effect that accounted for 63.51% of the total effect. Bootstrap mediation test results are presented in Table 4 .

3.1 Current Status of Emotional Resilience, Professional Self-Concept, and Perceived Professional Benefits

This study found that vocational nursing interns' emotional resilience had a mean total score of 45.79 ± 8.33 and item mean of 4.16 ± 0.76 , indicating a relatively high overall level. However, the emotional recovery ability dimension scored lower, likely because interns lack work experience and have weak nurse-patient communication skills while frequently facing uncooperative patients and families, emergency rescues, and frequent theoretical and skill assessments. Combined with heavy workloads and pressures from employment and postgraduate entrance examinations, they easily accumulate negative emotions, resulting in relatively lower emotional recovery scores. This suggests that hospitals and schools should provide multiple channels for interns to access career planning information and teach them effective emotion management strategies to maintain mental health.

The results showed that professional self-concept had a mean total score of 92.80 ± 10.93 and item mean of 3.09 ± 0.36 , which is moderately high compared to the scale midpoint of 2.5, consistent with Ye Yansheng et al.'s findings. This may be attributed to recent national policies emphasizing healthcare workforce development, improving medical staff benefits, and vigorously promoting the “three teachings” reform and curriculum ideological-political education. Particularly during the pandemic, media coverage of healthcare workers’ advanced deeds and professional spirit enabled interns to perceive nursing’s value. Additionally, vocational nursing programs’ promotion of “three teachings” reform and implementation of curriculum ideological-political education have helped students establish correct professional values and develop positive professional self-concept.

Perceived professional benefits had a mean total score of 140.73 ± 17.32 and item mean of 4.26 ± 0.52 , exceeding 3.6 year pandemic, countless healthcare workers rushed to the frontlines, becoming the strongest guarantee for people family/friend recognition (4.47 ± 0.68), personal growth (4.29 ± 0.59), positive career perception (4.26 ± 0.68), team patient relationships (4.12 ± 0.57). Family/friend recognition scored highest, indicating it is a primary source of perceived benefits. Through internships, students accumulate clinical experience to support family and friends, fulfilling their need to feel needed. The 10–12 month clinical internship also promotes theoretical internalization and skill enhancement. The lowest score for harmonious nurse-patient relationships likely reflects interns’ limited communication skills compared to experienced nurses, leading to negative emotions that affect perceived benefits. Schools and hospitals should strengthen ideological-political education, help interns understand their mission, promote positive energy, and organize practical training in theory, skills, and nurse-patient communication to enhance competence and perceived professional benefits.

3.2 Mediating Effect of Professional Self-Concept Between Emotional Resilience and Perceived Professional Benefits

Table 2 shows positive correlations among emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits. Enhancing emotional resilience improves professional self-concept and subsequently increases perceived professional benefits. This may occur because interns with high emotional resilience view pressures from work, employment, or postgraduate examinations as challenges, effectively mobilize psychological resources, correctly attribute negative emotions, and adopt optimistic attitudes toward difficulties. They are better at discovering benefits from clinical practice and recover quickly from negative experiences, resulting in higher perceived professional benefits. Interns with high professional self-concept have more positive professional attitudes, greater self-affirmation, and actively learn new clinical knowledge and skills to adapt to challenges, thereby enhancing perceived professional benefits.

Structural equation modeling revealed that emotional resilience indirectly affects perceived professional benefits through professional self-concept (indirect effect = 0.322), accounting for 63.51% of the total effect. When facing pressure,

interns easily develop negative emotions that reduce self-regulation. Those with better emotional resilience use their strong adaptability to face pressures positively, recover quickly from negative emotions, and proactively utilize their strengths to find and implement solutions (such as attending training, learning new courses, skills, and methods), thereby enhancing professional self-concept and subsequently perceived professional benefits. Therefore, future teaching practices should focus on cultivating both emotional resilience and professional self-concept. First, schools and hospitals can conduct mental health lectures and psychodrama competitions to guide interns in facing difficulties correctly and improve emotional resilience. Second, introducing exemplary nursing deeds in daily work and learning can strengthen ideological-political cultivation, help establish professional responsibility, pride, and positive self-concept, thereby enhancing perceived professional benefits.

In conclusion, vocational nursing interns demonstrate moderately high levels of emotional resilience, professional self-concept, and perceived professional benefits, with positive correlations among all three variables. Professional self-concept partially mediates the relationship between emotional resilience and perceived professional benefits. However, this study has limitations in sample representativeness. Future research should expand sample sizes and include different educational levels to improve generalizability.

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