**Research Article**

# Perceptions of Empowerment in Full-Time Faculty

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of empowerment among full-time nursing faculty using a descriptive, correlational study design. The attributes of empowerment provide essential components in building a satisfied and sustainable workplace academic environment. The Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire (CWEQ), adapted for college nurse educators was used with a convenience sample (n = 256/732) of full-time nursing faculty who teach in associate, baccalaureate, or graduate nursing programs. The overall empowerment score was moderate. The lowest subscale was access to resources, and the highest was access to opportunity. Job satisfaction and overall empowerment were significantly related. Both formal and informal powers were significant predictors of overall empowerment. Nurse educators who reported high levels of empowerment had high levels of job satisfaction and greater opportunities in the academic environment. Barriers to empowerment included information about salary and resources in their job. Cultivating an empowering workplace will enhance retention and recruitment of nursing faculty.

**Keywords:** Nursing faculty; Empowerment; Job Satisfaction; Shortage

## Abbreviations

NLN: National League for Nursing; AACN: American Association of Colleges of Nursing; CWEQ: Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire; JAS: Job Activities Scale; ORS: Organizational Relationship Scale; CNE: Certified Nursing Educators; CWEQ-NE: Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire for Nurse Educators; IRB: Institutional Review Board

## Challenges for the Nursing Profession

The nursing profession is facing a serious faculty shortage, which will reach significant proportions over the next decade [1-3]. The *NLN/Carnegie Foundation National Study of Nurse Educators* (2007) presented issues related to compensation, workload, and teaching practice of nursing educators, as well as information on faculty demographics and reasons behind the nursing faculty shortage. Moreover, assessing the faculty work environment especially attributes of faculty empowerment that include access to opportunity, resources, support, and information, is vital to impacting and improving job satisfaction, recruitment, and retention.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has identified faculty recruitment and retention as important strategies for addressing the shortage for almost a decade [4-7].Other considerations include declining number of faculty due to aging, younger faculty joining the ranks, obstacles to attaining doctoral degrees, salary differentials, tuition, loan burden for graduate study, and age of nurses returning to graduate school in preparation for educator roles [4-7].

Currently the mean age of doctorally prepared nursing faculty is 54.3 and 49.2 for master's prepared [7]. In the next decade, it is anticipated that large number of faculty will retire or leave the profession due to dissatisfaction with workload requirements, personal and family health, financial security, and requirements that doctoral degrees be attained to continue in faculty roles [8,9].

Lower salaries remain a major factor inhibiting recruitment of qualified professionals [8,10-12]. The ability to offer competitive salaries for teaching continues to be a struggle in academia because of market share and the need for equality between departments and across disciplines in colleges and universities. Nursing salaries in the service setting, have risen higher then faculty positions, and academic institutions cannot compete with nonacademic employers [4,13].

As a result, finding and keeping master's and doctorally prepared nurses in academia is challenging. The NLN/Carnegie Foundation (2007) surveyed nurse educators on their likelihood to leave their current job in the near future. 53% percent of respondents reported salary as a key motivator. If salary is not competitive, then to recruit and retain nursing faculty, it is critically important to have excellent workplace environments and tuition reimbursement [8,9,12,14].

Academic institutions must now assess and identify ways to increase satisfaction, autonomy, and organizational commitment in the workplace. Ultimately, if nursing faculty are satisfied and empowered, they will have greater commitment to and trust in the organization, and they will remain in the profession. Promoting empowerment in the workplace may foster increased work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and ultimately the retention of nursing faculty.

## Theoretical Perspectives

[15-17] Adaptations of this theory of empowerment provide the theoretical framework that underpins this research. Kanter, researched how organizations are structured and the effect the structure has on employees, and she is credited for developing the conceptual "power" model that has been widely used and applied to nursing administration.

According to [16] in order for organizations to provide an empowering work environment, four attributes must be present: (a) creation of opportunities, (b) effective information, (c) access to resources, and (d) increased support at each level of the organization. Institutions that provide these attributes foster an empowering workplace [15,18]. Empowering environments are important indicators in determining burnout, work satisfaction, and job performance in academic nursing faculty [19]. Work environments that satisfy employees may increase retention of current nursing faculty and provide incentive for new faculty to be recruited. Cultivating an empowering workplace environment for nursing faculty is one strategy in this process [20].

## Empowerment in Nursing Education

The literature is sparse on studies pertaining to empowerment and nursing education [19] conducted one study that looked specifically at the nurse educator's workplace empowerment and the relationship to burnout and job satisfaction. That descriptive, correlational research used the Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire (CWEQ), Job Activities Scale (JAS), Organizational Relationship Scale (ORS), the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educatory Survey, and the Global Job Satisfaction questionnaire. A total of 146 full- and part-time community college nurse educators were recruited, with a response rate of 61% (89), and findings revealed that limited access to opportunity and lack of resources were significantly related to low levels of empowerment. Nurse educators who had high levels of empowerment and low burnout also reported high levels of job satisfaction. Faculty empowerment and job satisfaction were related to the number of students in the classroom and the number of hours worked in a week [20], also utilized a descriptive, correlational study design to examine organizational culture and empowerment within associate degree faculty. A total of 407 faculty teaching in 70 associate degree nursing programs in the southeastern United States were surveyed, with a response rate of 34.8% (142). This study used surveys including a demographic questionnaire, an organizational culture assessment instrument by [21,22] an instrument to measure psychological empowerment by [20,22] used regression analysis to explore the relationship between demographic factors, organizational culture, and empowerment. She found that personal demographic variables were not statistically significant contributors to organizational culture or empowerment. She did find, however, that rank and years employed as associate degree nursing faculty were significant contributors to faculty empowerment [23], used a descriptive, correlational survey to test psychological empowerment in a sample of 592 full-time associate degree educators employed in 74 public California community colleges. They used the CWEQ, a job diagnostic survey, and a demographic questionnaire, with a response rate of 23.4% (139) from 36 of the 74 colleges. Results indicated that associate degree nurse educators' perceived overall high levels of job satisfaction and moderate levels of empowerment in their workplaces. Having opportunity, formal and informal power, global empowerment, and information in their job significantly correlated with higher levels of empowerment. However, having limited resources to do their job was significantly related to low levels of empowerment.

Ultimately the assessment of the attributes associated with empowerment is an important concept to research in nursing educators because it can provide information regarding what faculty need to feel satisfied in their work environments. More information on this concept and its relationship between variables such as program type, education preparation, and presence of certification are important to determining and understanding the aspects that provide or impede an empowering workplace environment.

## Methods

This study utilized a descriptive, correlational survey to measure full-time nursing faculty's perception of empowerment in their workplace. There were 256 responses (34.7%); to solicitation for participation, these, 219 (85.5%) were from full-time teachers in associate, baccalaureate, or pre-licensure master's degree nursing programs; and the other 37 (14.4%) respondents identified themselves as teaching full time in other types of academic programs. A power analysis completed prior to the data collection indicated a minimum total sample of 252 was needed to achieve 80% power to detect a moderate effect size; therefore this was satisfied. Figure 1 illustrates the entire sampling method.

As is typical of the average nurse educator in the United States today, the sample of nursing faculty was homogeneous in several socio-demographic variables: female (96.9%), Caucasian (97.3%), and age >50 years (80.2%). Respondents were predominantly master's (60.2%) and doctorally (37.5%) prepared and had greater than 11 years of clinical practice experience. Educator experience was 0–10 years (46.8%), 11–20 years (22.7%), 21–30 years (20.3%), and 31+ years (9.4%). Lastly, 10.9% were recognized through the NLN CNE Program as Certified Nursing Educators (NLN, 2005).

The instruments used for data collection included a demographics questionnaire and the Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire for nursing educators (CWEQ-NE). CWEQ-NE was adapted from the original CWEQ by Laschinger for use in the [24], CWEQ-NE to
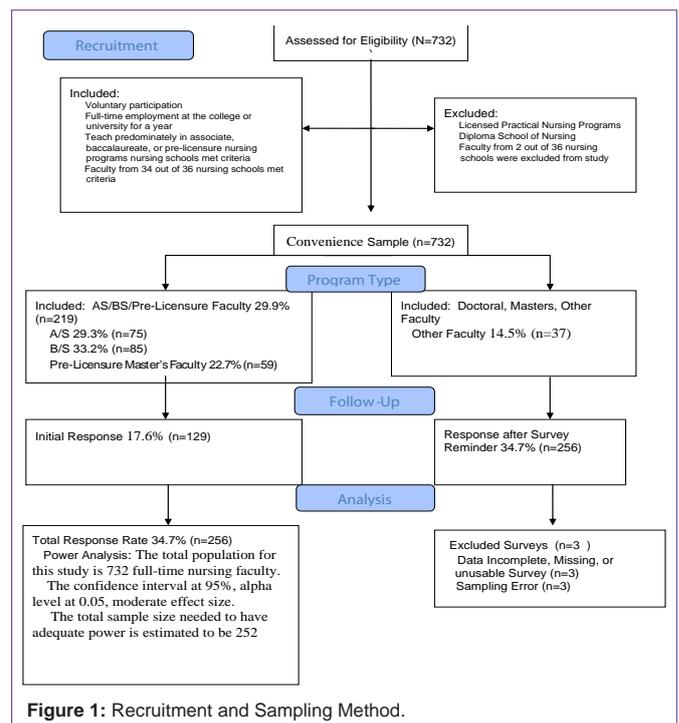


**Figure 1:** Recruitment and Sampling Method.

test the relationship between perceptions of workplace empowerment of college nurse educators and an organizational climate for caring in the workplace. The original CWEQ was first derived from the items from Kanter's study of occupational stress among healthcare workers in testing job demands [16]. Content validity for the original CWEQ was established through pilot testing of the instrument [17], with a convenience sample of 92 registered nurses [17], also established construct validity for the original CWEQ, and a factor analysis was performed to construct the items for the tool. The CWEQ contains four subscales: (a) access to opportunity, (b) information, (c) support, and (d) resources. To calculate overall empowerment, the mean scores from the four subscales were added together. Scores ranged from 4–20, with those from 4–9 constituting low levels of empowerment, 10–14 moderate, and 16–20 high. Reliability coefficients for each subscale in the original CWEQ ranged from 0.76 to 0.94 [16]. The CWEQ-NE has only been used in the [24] and in this study. The reliability coefficients of the three studies are listed on Table 1. Formal and informal power is calculated separately.

The CWEQ-NE is a 35-item questionnaire across four subscales. Each item is rated on a 1–5 Likert-type scale. Based on the fact that this scale is ordinal, both parametric and nonparametric testing were initially performed and found to be equivalent. Ultimately, parametric testing was therefore chosen because it replicated the design of previous research studies that used this instrument [23,24]. Descriptive and inferential statistics, using the Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) version 18.0 for Windows, were used to analyze the research questions.

## Procedure

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, 732 potential participants, who taught full-time in pre-licensure nursing programs, were mailed the CWEQ-NE, a demographic questionnaire, and cover letter. Consent was implied when surveys were returned. After 4 weeks, a reminder e-mail was sent to all the participants' school accounts. At the end of 6 weeks, the sample size (n = 256/732) was 34.7% (Figure 1).

## Results

The CWEQ-NE has four subscales and an overall empowerment score. The subscales are: *access to opportunity, access to resources, access to support,* and *access to information.* The overall empowerment

**Table 1:** Cronbach Alpha Results.

|  | Chandler (1987) | Erwin (1999) | Silver (2011) |
|---|---|---|---|
| CWEQ-Educators |  |  | .97 |
| Opportunity Scale | .76 | .88 | .87 |
| Information Scale | .81 | .87 | .90 |
| Resources Scale | .69 | .93 | .93 |
| Support Scale | .88 | .84 | .91 |
| JAS |  | .80 | .79 |
| ORS |  | .93 | .95 |

**Table 2:** Means and Standard Deviations for CWEQ subscales.

| Empowerment Subscale | # Items in Scale | M (*Range* 1-5) | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| CWEQ |  |  |  |
| Access to Opportunity | 8 | 3.73 | 0.78 |
| Access to Information | 9 | 3.62 | 0.83 |
| Access to Support | 9 | 3.32 | 0.92 |
| Access to Resources | 9 | 2.91 | 0.87 |
| Overall Empowerment | 35 | 13.59 | 3.03 |

score for these participants was 13.59 (SD 3.03). *Access to opportunity* was the most important factor in overall empowerment and *access to resources* was the lowest subscale, as shown in Table 2.

A Pearson correlation statistic was performed ($\alpha$ = 0.05) to describe the relationship between the demographic variables and empowerment. Job satisfaction ($r$ = 0.365, p<.001, M=7.29), was significantly correlated to overall empowerment. Faculty rated their level of job satisfaction on a Likert type scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) and 10 (very satisfied). 58.6% ranked their job satisfaction as equal to or greater than 8.0, which indicates that the majority were highly satisfied.

Other variables including educational preparation, program type, and the recognition as a Certified Nursing Education (CNE) educator (NLN< 2005) were further explored. The ANOVA test showed no significant difference between overall empowerment between educators who are masters or doctorally prepared and those who worked in associate, baccalaureate, masters, or other program types. Lastly, CNE nurse educators described themselves as moderately empowered (13.30). However an independent group t-test was performed (t256 = .600, p<0.5) and showed no significant difference in their level of empowerment between those faculty who were recognized as CNE educators and those who were not.

The study sample had a mean score of 3.22 (SD 0.64) for formal power (JAS) and participants had a mean score of 3.56 (SD 1.13) for informal power (ORS). The JAS and the ORS subscales were further analyzed and the Pearson's correlation was performed to report the relationship between the JAS and ORS (r = 0.759, p = 0.000) and between ORS and overall empowerment (r = 0.827, p = 0.000).

Multiple regressions were performed to understand precisely the relationships between the perceived formal power, informal power, and overall empowerment. The multiple correlation coefficient for informal power (ORS) was $R^2$ = 0.861, p = 0.000 and formal power (JAS) was $R^2$ 0.742, p = 0.000. This suggests that formal power (JAS) and informal power (ORS) are significantly correlated with overall empowerment scores and that the magnitude of the relationship is strong. The beta was also calculated, which confirmed that informal power better predicts overall empowerment, because the beta weight for the informal power (ORS) was higher ($\beta$ = 0.582, p = 0.000) compared to the formal power (JAS; $\beta$ = 0.343, $p$ = 0.000).

## Discussion

The CWEQ-NE measured overall empowerment, which is derived from the four subscales: *access to opportunity, access to resources, access to support,* and *access to information.* This sample of nursing faculty from a northeast state, perceived themselves to be moderately empowered (M = 13.59, SD 3.03). Of the four empowerment subscales, participants ranked having *access to opportunity* in their job the highest. Examples of this include opportunities for continuing education and attendance at professional conferences, where they can attain the most current information in teaching and practice, develop new knowledge, and network with other nursing educators outside their organization [19,25-27].

Gaining *access to information* had the next highest mean score of the empowerment subscales. However, the one item that ranked low on this subscale was information about salary. Faculty clearly

indicated that they do not have the power to make decisions about, or have information related to, how decisions about salary and low compensation are made. Salary has been identified in previous studies as a barrier to job satisfaction [8,10-12]. Issues regarding salary also remain a major inhibitor to recruitment and retention of qualified educators.

*Access to resources* and *support* had the lowest mean scores in the empowerment subscales. Examples of these include the availability of temporary relief or a substitute teacher to cover absences and teaching assistance for large classes. Because nursing faculty workload includes specific teaching, research and service expectations, workload allocation and support continue to be a consistent barrier to faculty satisfaction and empowerment [8,28,29], Support for faculty also includes performance feedback and resources for improvement for growth and development in the faculty role. *Access to support* and *access to resources* are two of Kanter's attributes that build an empowering work environment [30]. These findings are also consistent with other studies on empowerment in nursing education [19,23,30,31].

In this study, job satisfaction and empowerment were significantly related concepts. The data confirmed those faculties who perceive their work environment as empowering also perceive their job as satisfying. Multiple studies conducted by the NLN [1-3,32], and the AACN [4,5,8] support this finding. Work dynamics have been shown to demonstrate that environment is an important indicator in determining burnout, satisfaction, and job performance in academic nursing faculty [19]. Other variables addressed include program type, age, level of education, and attainment of CNE status; however, presence of job satisfaction was the only variable that correlated with level of empowerment.

Further, in this study, formal was measured using the Job Activities Scale (JAS) and informal power was measured using the Organizational Relationship Scale (ORS). Both were significantly related to overall empowerment. Similar to the findings of nursing educators in previous studies, both formal and informal power were strongly related to educators' perceptions of workplace empowerment [19,23,30,31].

Informal power was perceived to have a stronger relationship to overall empowerment in full-time nursing faculty than formal power. This significant finding may be due to the opportunities nurse educators have to collaborate, network, and formalize relationships within and outside their organization. Faculty members engage in a variety of tasks in their role: teaching, service, scholarship, and research. These activities provide a multitude of opportunities to build collaborations and relationships to expand teaching strategies, explore research options and extend professional service.

Ultimately, academic institutions must realize how important it is to provide both formal and informal opportunities in the academic work place. Given the current nurse educator shortage, greater insight into how the academic environment can maximize faculty potential and cultivate powerful opportunities is essential. Academic institutions must identify ways to increase satisfaction, autonomy, and organizational commitment in the workplace. In this study, attributes of formal and informal power in the educational setting impacts overall empowerment, which ultimately increases job satisfaction.

## Implications for Nursing Education

There are many implications for nursing education from this study. Nursing faculty vacancy rates continue to rise in the United States [1,4,5]. This research provides academic administrators information about the areas that faculty have identified as empowering in their environment. Empowerment was highly correlated with job satisfaction, formal and informal power. Deans, directors, and chairs have an obligation to facilitate a collegial, collaborative work environment, to build relationships, and support teamwork. Furthermore, a satisfying work environment may encourage nursing faculty to participate in college-wide committees so that they become a more visible entity in the college. This will give faculty the opportunity to represent their department as well as communicate information from campus-wide committees back to their nursing sector.

Since faculty have identified themselves as having informal power in their roles, facilitating opportunities for them to seek responsibilities throughout the college and to be able to network outside the nursing department will increase their formal power and job satisfaction. Any opportunity nursing faculties have to collaborate and build relationships throughout the college or university should be encouraged. Further, maximizing the areas of informal power produces positive work attributes including job satisfaction, organizational trust and commitment, and low faculty burnout [18]. Data from this study can also be used to address the faculty vacancy issue. Nurses choose to become educators for multiple reasons. Based on the findings of this study, recruitment efforts should focus on creating environments that afford opportunities for growth and access to information and informal networking. This is particularly important when considering the recruitment of nurses in practice to fill clinical teaching roles. If clinical nurses enter the academic environment as instructors and they are not provided with essential support, like orientation, mentoring, and a positive work environment, they will not be sustained in their academic role. Furthermore, the transition from clinician to faculty can be overwhelming and may lead to dissatisfaction and attrition [26,33,34]. Strategies, which provide opportunities for networking, educational development, and research, will develop a more empowered workplace. These approaches provide novice educators with job satisfaction they desire through the opportunities they seek: information in their job, support as a new faculty member, and resources to perform their job well.

## Limitations of Study

There are several limitations to this study. Recruiting subjects from only one northeastern state in the United States may have limited the generalizability of the findings. This study also included only full-time nursing faculty who teach in associate, baccalaureate, or pre-licensure nursing programs. It did not include part-time or adjunct nursing faculty, or faculty who work in licensed practical nursing programs, diploma degree programs, and graduate programs. Another consideration is that although faculty identified themselves as predominately teaching in one area, the reality is that oftentimes they may teach in multiple levels within their nursing program. Therefore,

there may be inconsistency in how they identified themselves in the category. Finally, the CWEQ-NE has only been used twice previously until this study, its reliability has been reported only once in the 1999 study conducted by Erwin.

## Future Nursing Research

Further research is required to evaluate nursing faculty workload, work environment, job satisfaction, and empowerment. Quantative and qualitative research on nursing faculty and their perceived barriers to job satisfaction is limited Gathering specific information through interviews or focus groups could contribute to a better understanding of this issue. Research has been conducted on faculty dynamics and explanation of issues related to the current faculty workforce [1-5,7,32]. However, more information must be gathered to further understand what college and university administrators can do to focus on recruiting new nursing faculty and retaining existing nurse educators.

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