

IMPACT OF WORK RELATIONS AND THE QUALITY OF SERVICES RENDERED TO PATIENTS BY SOCIAL WORKERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR TEACHING HOSPITAL UCTH

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Abstract: This paper explores the impact of work relations on the quality of services rendered to patients by social workers at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH). Work relations, encompassing the relationships between social workers, their colleagues, and the broader healthcare team, play a significant role in determining the quality of services provided to patients. The construct of healthcare service quality and its assessment have mostly been done from the standpoint of the patient; however, the provider's perspective of the healthcare service quality has not been considered. A cross sectional survey was adopted using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative research technique) to collect data. The quantitative data was collected through questionnaire distributed among 15 social workers in UCTH. The qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews with 5 informants such as chief nurse, doctors, supervisors, and other healthcare professionals, to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives on work relations and the impact on quality of service rendered to patients by social workers. This study is anchored on social exchange theory due to its significance in understanding and explaining work relations and quality of services of social workers. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents (92%) agreed that supportive work environment, collaboration, effective communication, and interdisciplinary teamwork significantly contribute to improved patient outcomes and overall satisfaction. This article recommended that healthcare organizations should implement strategies to enhance work relations, thereby improving patient care outcomes and ensuring the provision of high-quality services by social workers.

Keywords: Patients, Service, Social Worker, Work Relation

Introduction

The provision of healthcare is fundamentally interrelated and ever more complicated. No one person can guarantee that a patient obtains the highest standard of care or shield the patient from all potential side effects brought on by increasingly sophisticated and potent medications (Rosen *et al.*, 2018). An effective collaboration and positive work relations within healthcare settings play a crucial role in ensuring the provision of high-quality services to patients.

Working relationships between employees have long been found to be essential to their general welfare and performance reviews at work (Tran *et al.*, 2018). Work relations encompass the interactions, dynamics, and

communication patterns among social workers and their colleagues, supervisors, and other healthcare professionals (Kieny, et al., 2018) Johnson et al. (2020) posit that effective teamwork and supportive work relations contribute to enhanced patient safety, reduced medical errors, and better overall healthcare quality. Furthermore, Stevens et al. (2021) highlighted the positive association between supportive work relations and patient well-being. Brown and Williamson (2022) emphasized the significance of leadership in nurturing positive work relations and recommended the implementation of supportive leadership practices within healthcare organizations.

Effective collaboration and positive work relations among healthcare professionals have been linked to improved patient care outcomes (Hall et al., 2018). A harmonious work environment fosters teamwork, communication, and mutual respect, leading to enhanced patient satisfaction, reduced medical errors, and improved overall patient outcomes. Understanding this relationship is crucial, as it can inform strategies to improve work environments and enhance the delivery of services within healthcare organizations (Burrows, et al., 2020).

Social workers are essential members of the healthcare team, specializing in addressing the psychosocial needs of patients (Duan, & Zhu, 2020). They provide emotional support, counseling, and assistance with resource acquisition, contributing to holistic patient care (Du et al., 2019). It is crucially essential for social workers to satisfy patients as they are the core stakeholder in the health-care sector. The quality of services provided to patients in the healthcare sector is essential for ensuring optimal patient outcomes and satisfaction (Asnawi, et al., 2019). Within this context, social workers play a crucial role in addressing the psychosocial needs of patients, coordinating care, and advocating for their well-being. However, the quality of services rendered by social workers can be influenced by various factors, one of which is their work relations within the healthcare setting.

According to Mbotto, Akah, & Bukie (2021). Strong work relations contribute significantly to a positive work environment, which, in turn, affects the quality of services delivered to patients. According to Wong and Cummings (2018), positive work relations foster effective teamwork, collaboration, and information sharing, leading to improved patient outcomes. Similarly, Smith et al. (2019) emphasize that supportive work relations positively impact staff morale, job satisfaction, and productivity, ultimately influencing patient care quality. A supportive work environment promotes job satisfaction, reduces burnout, and enhances productivity among social workers (Albizu-García et al., 2020). Conversely, negative work relations, such as conflict and poor communication, can lead to decreased job satisfaction and compromised patient care.

Fostering strong work relations within UCTH is crucial to ensure high-quality services, patient satisfaction, and improved healthcare outcomes. By implementing strategies to enhance work relations and promoting a supportive work environment, UCTH can optimize patient care and contribute to the overall well-being of individuals in need of social work services. Social workers play a crucial role in healthcare settings, especially in addressing the psychosocial needs of patients Akah and Uzoh (2019). The quality of services rendered by social workers is contingent upon various factors, including their work relations with colleagues and the broader healthcare team. By examining the role of work relations in shaping the provision of services, this research seeks to enhance our understanding of the factors that contribute to effective patient care in the field of social work within healthcare settings.

Previous studies have recognized the significance of work relations on various aspects of job performance, including job satisfaction, burnout, and productivity (Leiter & Maslach, 2017; Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009). However, limited research has specifically focused on the relationship between work relations and the quality of services provided by social workers to patients. This article investigates the impact of work relations on the quality of services provided by social workers at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH) and provides recommendations for optimizing these relationships to improve patient care.

Statement of the problem

It is crucial to understand that the effectiveness of social work services is deeply influenced by the work relations within the hospital. Positive work relations can enhance collaboration, communication, and teamwork, ultimately leading to improved patient care and outcomes. On the other hand, strained or inadequate work relations can impede the delivery of quality services and hinder the overall effectiveness of social work interventions.

Despite the importance of positive work relations, several challenges can hinder their development within healthcare organizations. A study by Adams and Parker (2018) highlights issues such as organizational hierarchy, power dynamics, and limited interprofessional collaboration as barriers to building effective work relationships. These challenges can negatively impact the quality of services provided by social workers at UCTH.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is anchored on Social Exchange Theory (SET) proposed by Homans (1958) who was the key theorist that developed the original theory. It was further developed by Peter Blau and Richard Emerson. It is a major theory of social interaction which posits that individuals engage in social relationships based on the expectation of receiving rewards and avoiding costs. Social exchange theory is a concept based on the idea that social behavior is the result of an exchange process (Cherry, 2020). SET considers direct social interactions between actors through the elements of trust, commitment, reciprocity, and power (Benitez, Get al., 2022).

Social exchange theory can be applied to many situations including workplace behavior (Chernyak-Hai, & Rabenu, 2018). It highlights the significance of work relations in shaping the quality of services provided to patients by social workers. Understanding how someone views rewards vs. costs, as well as their expectations and preferences for relationships, can help social workers improve a client's personal relationships and outlook on life.

In the context of work relations among social workers, positive work relations, such as supportive communication, mutual trust, and cooperation, can create a conducive work environment (Chen & Sriphon, 2022). These positive exchanges can lead to increased job satisfaction, motivation, and a sense of belonging among social workers. Consequently, this can enhance the quality of services provided to patients.

Methodology

A cross sectional survey research was adopted using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative research technique) to collect data. The quantitative data collected through surveys distributed among 15 social workers working in UCTH. Additionally, the qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews (in-depth interviews) with 5 informants such as chief nurse, doctors, supervisors, and other healthcare

professionals, to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives on work relations and the impact on quality of service rendered to patients by social workers.

Result

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

We explored the impact of work relations on the quality of services provided by social workers at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH). The Table 1 below reveals the sex, level of education and years of experience of respondents. A close examination of table 1 indicates that among the social workers, 40.0% were males and the majority (60.0%) were females. The educational profile of the respondents as contained in the Table 1 shows that majority (53.3%) of the social workers were B.Sc holders; 33.3% into M.Sc Holders and Ph.D holders were 13.3%. The Table 1 also revealed that among the social workers, majority (60.0%) have working experience below 6 years and 40.00% have working experiences of 6 years and above. These variables are relevant to the study and were considered in the analysis.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	6	40.0
	Female	9	60.0
	Total	15	100
Level of education	B.Sc	8	53.3
	M.Sc	5	33.3
	Ph.D	2	13.4
	Total	15	100
Years of working experience	Below 6 years	9	60.0
	6 years and above	6	40.0
Total		15	100

Source: *Field survey, 2023*

Importance of Work Relations in Healthcare

The Table 2 below contains the percentage distribution of social workers' responses to the importance of work relations in healthcare. Among the social workers, the result revealed that majority (66.5%) agreed that work relations is important in healthcare. Therefore, there was need to build on it.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of responses on importance of work relations in healthcare

Importance of Work Relations in Healthcare	Frequency	Percentage
It fosters communication between workers and patients	1	6.7
It leads to improved outcomes for patients.	1	6.7
A supportive work culture promotes job satisfaction	1	6.7
It enhances service quality and patient satisfaction	1	6.7
It improves coordination and cooperation among workers	1	6.7
All of the above	10	66.5

Total	15	100
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Source: *Field survey, 2023*

Impact of Work Relations on Quality of Service

The Table 3 below reveals the responses of the social workers on the impart of work relations on quality of service in UCTH. The Table shows that among those who indicated positive work relations, majority of the respondents (60.0%) rated the quality of services to be fair while those who indicated negative work relation, majority (60.0%) rated quality of service to be low. This result implies that majority of the respondents reported influence of work relations on quality of service. Therefore, the chi square tests result: $\chi^2=7.543a$, $df=1$; $P<.023$ revealed a statistically significant relationship between work relations and quality of services.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of respondents' responses on impact of work relation on quality of service

Work relations	Quality of services			Total
	High	Fair	Low	
Positive	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)	0 (00.0%)	10 100.0%
Negative	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	5 100.0%
Total	4 (33.3%)	7 (46.7%)	4 (20.0%)	15 100.0%

$\chi^2= 7.543a$; $df=1$, $p<.023$

Source: *Fieldwork 2017*

Strategies to improve work relations

Although positive work relations among healthcare professionals have been linked to improved patient care outcomes, conversely, negative work relations led to decreased job satisfaction and compromised patient care. Thus, the Table 3 below indicates the responses of the respondents on strategies to improve work relations among social workers in UCTH. The Table revealed that majority of the respondents (80.0%) indicated that fostering open and transparent communication, promotion of teamwork providing opportunities for professional development and training, creation of a supportive work culture implementation of feedback system, and building of regular forums and meetings to address conflicts and concerns are possible strategies to improve work relations.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of responses on strategies to improve work relations

Strategies to Improve Work Relations	Frequency	Percentage
Fostering open and transparent communication	2	13.3
Promotion of teamwork	1	6.7
Providing opportunities for professional development and training	0	0.0
Creation of a supportive work culture	0	0.0
Implementation of feedback system	0	0.0
Build regular forums and meetings to address conflicts and concerns	0	0.0
All of the above	12	80.0
Total	15	100

To improve work relations among social workers at UCTH, several strategies can be implemented. These include fostering open and transparent communication, promoting teamwork through regular interdisciplinary meetings, providing opportunities for professional development and training, recognizing and appreciating the contributions of team members, and creating a supportive work culture that values collaboration and mutual respect.

Discussion

Understanding work relations is crucial, as it informs strategies to improve work environments and enhance the delivery of quality services within healthcare organizations. The provision of high-quality healthcare services relies not only on the skills and competence of healthcare professionals but also on the dynamics of their work relationships (Zajac, et al., 2021). Therefore, this study examined the impact of work relations on the quality of services provided by social workers at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH).

Within the healthcare team, social workers play a crucial role in addressing the felt needs of patients. Work relations encompass the interactions, dynamics, and relationships among healthcare professionals within an organization (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021). These relationships impact the overall working environment, job satisfaction, and ultimately the quality of care provided to patients. Positive work relations, for instance, foster a supportive and collaborative atmosphere, enabling social workers to effectively coordinate services, share knowledge, and engage in interdisciplinary teamwork (Siegel, Smith, & Melucci, 2020).

A supportive work culture promotes job satisfaction, which in turn enhances service quality and patient satisfaction (Goh, Chan, Kuziemy, & Soh, 2019). Positive work relations promote effective communication and collaboration among team members, ensuring that patients' physical, emotional, and social needs are met. A study by Horsburgh, Lamdin, and Williamson (2016) found that better work relations among healthcare professionals lead to improved patient outcomes and increased satisfaction. Positive work relations contribute to social workers' job satisfaction, which, in turn, affects the quality of services provided. Job satisfaction is linked to increased productivity, reduced burnout, and better patient care (Khamisa, Peltzer, & Oldenburg, 2013). When social workers feel supported and valued within their work environment, they are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and committed to delivering high-quality care.

When the work relation is characterized by mutual respect, effective communication, and teamwork, social workers are better able to collaborate with other healthcare professionals, resulting in improved patient care outcomes (Weller, 2019). Conflict, poor communication, and lack of teamwork among healthcare professionals can lead to compromised patient care, increased medical errors, and decreased patient satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2018). Such work environments may also contribute to increased stress and burnout among social workers, leading to reduced job satisfaction and turnover.

Conclusion

It examines the importance of positive work relationships in enhancing the delivery of patient care, identifies potential strategies to improve work relations and ultimately enhance service quality. The impact of work relations on the quality of services rendered to patients by social workers at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital cannot be underestimated. By fostering positive work relations, UCTH can create an environment where social workers can thrive, collaborate effectively, and provide high-quality care. Emphasizing the importance of teamwork, communication, and respect will not only enhance the professional satisfaction of social workers but

also improve patient outcomes and overall hospital performance. Investing in strengthening work relations is a crucial step towards achieving excellence in social work services at UCTH and ensuring the well-being of patients in need of support and care.

Recommendations

From the finding of this study, it is therefore recommended that, addressing challenges and implementing strategies will enhance work relations and can lead to a more supportive and cohesive healthcare team, which will ultimately benefiting both the social workers and the patients they serve.

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