

Nurses driven mainly by a desire to help others are more likely to burn out

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Nurses who are motivated primarily by the desire to help others, rather than by enjoyment of the work itself or the lifestyle it makes possible, are more likely to burn out on the job, University of Akron researchers say.

Nursing is still a female-dominated occupation, and being female is associated with being caring, nurturing, and altruistic. Therefore, the desire to help others is often assumed to be the "right" motivation for entering the field, the researchers say.

However, they found that [nurses](#) who pursue their career for reasons other than or in addition to the desire to help others find the job to be less stressful. That results in less burnout, better personal health, and high job commitment.

Study authors, Janette Dill, an assistant professor of sociology, Rebecca Erickson, a professor of sociology, and James Diefendorff, an associate professor of psychology, all at the University of Akron, based their findings on [survey data](#) from more than 700 [registered nurses](#) in Northeast Ohio. About 90 percent were white females.

Dill will present the paper at the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

According to Dill, those being served by workers in most occupations do not really care about the worker's motivation for choosing that career.

After all, as long as your car gets fixed properly, it doesn't much matter whether the mechanic loves cars, only cares about making money, or simply enjoys using power tools.

However, Dill says [health care](#) is different. "We expect women to go into these [jobs](#) because they love the people that they're caring for, and this is their primary motivator."

If that cultural assumption can be changed, she says, more men might be attracted to nursing and "might not necessarily feel that their whole self has to be devoted to their patients—that they can value their job for other reasons as well."

The researchers also found that nurses who are highly motivated by both the [lifestyle](#) the job provides and the ability to interact personally with patients are more satisfied with their employer and less inclined to leave their current job.

The study did not attempt to measure how well nurses with different motivations and care approaches performed their jobs. The authors suggest those relationships be explored in a future study of a broader sample of nurses.

More information: The paper, "Motivation and Care Dimensions in Caring Labor: Implications for Nurses' Well-Being and Employment Outcomes," will be presented on Tuesday, Aug. 19, at 2:30 p.m. PDT in San Francisco at the American Sociological Association's 109th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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