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## Examining the Relationship Between Work Engagement and Career Adaptability Among Health Professionals

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### Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between work engagement and career adaptability among health professionals. The study, which was conducted in a cross-sectional research design, comprised 351 health professionals, including 55 specialist medical doctors, 93 practitioners, 119 nurses and 84 midwives working in various public health institutions. The data were collected by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and the Career Adaptability Scale, and regression analysis and ANOVA methods were used for analysis. The results indicate a significantly positive relationship between work engagement and career adaptability for all occupational groups, while there were no differences between occupational groups in terms of work engagement. The career adaptability levels were found to be lower among nurses compared to specialists and practitioners. In conclusion, career adaptability can be used as a tool to enhance the work engagement of health professionals. Further research in this area will boost the career adaptability of nurses, in particular.

Keywords: Work engagement, career adaptability, health professionals.

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## **1.Introduction**

People can realise themselves in a number of areas. One of those areas is career or work, whereby people exert their talents and capacities [1]. There are many factors correlated with one's productivity and happiness at work. Work engagement is among those factors.

Work engagement conceptually refers to one's well-being in professional life [2]; in other words, being engrossed in and feeling integrated with a work role in cognitive, physical and emotional ways while performing that role [3]. There are some indicators of work engagement: one's continuity, dedication, alacrity, vigour, attention and elation while doing his/her work [4].

According to Bakker et al. [5], work engagement comprises three important aspects: vigour, dedication and absorption. Absorption means that time passes quickly while working and one hardly detaches himself/herself from work. Dedication refers to experiencing a sense of significance, *enthusiasm* and challenge while being involved in work. Vigour connotes having high levels of energy and motivation while working [6]. There is a positive relationship between work engagement and one's psychological health, organisational commitment, job satisfaction and performance [6–8]. Higher levels of work engagement conduce to better physical and mental health in health professionals as well [9]. These studies point out the functionality of further research on possible individual and environmental factors affecting the work engagement of health professionals.

One of the factors affecting the work engagement of health professionals may be their career adaptability. Career development is a lifelong process in which career adaptability constitutes one of the crucial psycho-social aspects [10]. It is defined as one's readiness and capability to cope with the changes in professional life and working conditions [11]. Rottinghaus et al. [12] describe the term career adaptability as one's ability to cope with the probable changes and work-related responsibilities as well as self-perceptions for coping with unexpected career changes. Career adaptability can be seen as a multi-dimensional framework [13]. There stand out two important aspects: career exploration and planning. Career exploration refers to one's knowing his/her interests, abilities, idiosyncrasies, needs, values and collecting information about the career environment. Career planning simply means one's figuring on probable conditions related to his/her career [13, 14].

Several studies of career adaptability of health professionals are available. These studies mainly deal with environmental factors and career adaptability of nursing students [15]. Career development is considered to be important for both health professionals and patients [16]. We could not come across any research on the relationships between work engagement and career adaptability among nurses, midwives, practitioners and specialists together.

Health professionals have been the subject of numerous research works, e.g., studies on the relationship between job satisfaction, self-esteem, burnout, depression and anxiety [17]. It is argued that health professionals that get involved in a role conflict fail to control their work, to balance between their work and family life, and to help their patients if they get into high levels of stress [18]. It is necessary to conduct further research in order to increase the physical and mental endurance of health professionals [19]. Work engagement is an important factor in invigorating health professionals both mentally and organisationally [20]. Examining what variables affect the physical and mental health of these professionals can contribute to the literature, which we aim at by studying the relationship between work engagement and career adaptability among health professionals.

## **2.Method**

### **2.1.Research Design**

This study aims to examine the relationship between work engagement and career adaptability among health professionals. The participant health professionals include specialist medical doctors, practising medical doctors, nurses and midwives.

The study has two important sub-aims:

- a) Does the career adaptability of health professionals significantly explain their work engagement?
- b) Is there any significant difference between health professionals in terms of career adaptability and work engagement?

The study involves a relational screening model. The relations between the variables were examined through multiple regression analysis and one-way analysis of variance. The sample is composed of health professionals working in state-run hospitals in two provinces of Central Anatolia region. The data were collected at the same time. Necessary permissions were obtained and ethical rules were observed throughout the study.

## **2.2. Sample Group**

The study was conducted on health professionals working in various public health institutions in two Central Anatolian provinces. Three groups of health professionals participated in the study. The groups are medical doctors (specialist and practitioner), nurses–midwives and other health professionals. The first group comprised 148 medical doctors (55 specialists, 93 practitioners) aged 24–60 (average age = 41.04, standard deviation = 8.06), 54 of whom were male and 94 were female. In addition, 119 nurses and 84 midwives aged 20–54 (average age = 35.78, standard deviation = 6.63) participated in the study.

## **2.3. Assessment Instruments**

Two scales for work engagement and career adaptability were employed as assessment instruments in the study. Psychometric features of these instruments are expounded below.

**The Work Engagement Scale:** This scale was developed by Schaufeli et al. [6] in order to measure the work engagement of employees. It has three dimensions: vigour, dedication and absorption. It was adapted to Turkish by Eryilmaz and Dogan [21]. The three-factor structure of the scale was confirmed in a sample of Turkish employees according to the fit indices and confirmatory factor analysis conducted in the context of the mentioned adaptation. The scale was found to demonstrate high levels of reliability.

**The Career Adaptability Scale:** This scale was developed by Eryilmaz and Kara [22]. It has two dimensions: career exploration and career planning. In terms of internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was at 0.85. Its test–retest reliability was found high and the results of confirmatory factor analysis were at a satisfying level as well.

## **3. Findings**

### **3.1. Descriptive Statistics**

The above-mentioned scales for work engagement and career adaptability were applied to the participants. The scores they got on the scales were calculated. The values of standard deviation and arithmetic mean are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

H. Professional	Scales	M	SD	N
Specialist MD	Work engagement	60.00	10.88	55
	Planning	14.20	2.62	55
	Exploration	22.27	3.90	55
Practitioner MD	C. Adaptability	36.47	5.97	55
	Work engagement	57.17	14.85	93
	Planning	12.93	3.93	93
Nurse	Exploration	22.30	5.40	93
	C. Adaptability	35.23	8.40	93
	Work engagement	56.02	14.89	119
Midwife	Planning	12.34	3.69	119
	Exploration	19.68	5.70	119
	C. Adaptability	32.02	8.88	119
Midwife	Work engagement	60.51	13.92	84
	Planning	12.80	3.98	84
	Exploration	21.16	5.52	84
	C. Adaptability	33.97	8.52	84

### 3.2. Results of Regression Analysis

The relationships between work engagement and career adaptability of health professionals were examined through a multiple regression analysis. Work engagement was taken as a dependent variable, while career exploration and planning constituted the independent variables of the research. The analysis results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Results of regression analysis**

H. Professional	Aspects	B	SEB	Beta	T-value
Specialist MD	Plan	0.20	0.45	0.05	0.45
	Exploration	2.16	0.30	0.77	7.08**
Practitioner MD	Plan	1.50	0.32	0.39	4.58**
	Exploration	1.22	0.23	0.44	5.12**
Nurse	Plan	1.44	0.34	0.35	4.15**
	Exploration	1.31	0.22	0.50	5.84**
Midwife	Plan	0.89	0.39	0.25	2.27*
	Exploration	1.43	0.28	0.57	5.06**

According to the results of regression analysis, career exploration ( $\beta = 2.16$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) as a sub-dimension of career adaptability significantly explains the work engagement of specialist physicians ( $R = 0.81$ ;  $R_2 = 0.65$ ;  $F = 49.24$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). On the other hand, career planning does not predict the career adaptability of specialists to a significant extent. It is seen that career exploration ( $\beta = 0.40$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and career planning ( $\beta = 0.44$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly explain the work engagement of practising physicians/practitioners ( $R = 0.76$ ;  $R_2 = 0.57$ ;  $F = 60.08$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In the same way, career exploration ( $\beta = 0.50$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and career planning ( $\beta = 0.36$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly explain the work engagement of nurses ( $R = 0.81$ ;  $R_2 = 0.66$ ;  $F = 111.75$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The results of the regression analysis invariably indicate that career exploration ( $\beta = 0.57$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and career planning ( $\beta = 0.26$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly explain the work engagement of midwives ( $R = 0.79$ ;  $R_2 = 0.62$ ;  $F = 66.59$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

### 3.3. Results of ANOVA

A one-way analysis of variance was carried out to examine whether career adaptability and work engagement significantly differ or not among health professionals, according to occupational groups. We could not find any significant difference between specialists, practitioners, nurses and midwives in terms of work engagement ( $F = 2.142$ ;  $SD = 3.347$ ;  $p = 0.095$ ). Significant differences were observed, on the other hand, between those occupational groups in terms of career adaptability ( $F = 4.449$ ;  $SD = 3.347$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ). The results of Tukey's test conducted to determine the direction of the difference show that specialists (36.47) and practitioners (35.23) scored higher than nurses (32.02) in terms of career adaptability.

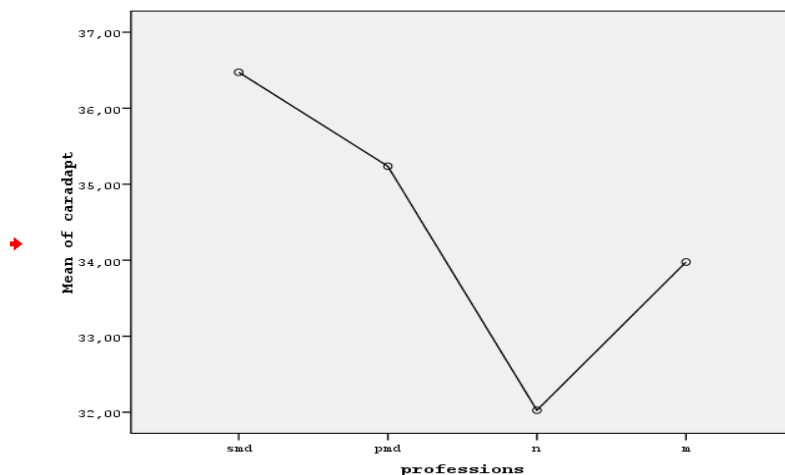


Figure 1. A comparison of career adaptability among health professionals. Note: SMD = specialist medical doctor; PMD = practitioner medical doctor; n = nurse; m = midwife

### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Health institutions are one of the places where both the physical and mental health of people is recuperated to a positive condition. It should be the case for not only patients but also health professionals. It is stated that those working in health institutions are exposed to high levels of stress and show indications of burnout, anxiety and depression [18, 19, 23]. Studies in the literature generally examine the causes of these problems [24]. It is therefore necessary to conduct studies to understand what factors positively affect the work engagement of health professionals. The present study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the mentioned factors.

When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that health professionals are treated as separate sample groups and their work engagement is examined over those groups. For example, Jenaro et al. [25] examined the factors affecting the work engagement among nurses. Spence Laschinger et al. [26] carried out a similar research. Several studies have been conducted also on student nurses [15]. There are some studies on health professionals from different occupational groups as well. For example, Mauno et al. [27] examined the factors affecting the work engagement of health professionals, such as physicians and nurses, in a comparative manner. In the same way, there are several studies examining the relationship between depression and work engagement of health personnel [20]. A limited number of studies examine the work engagement of health professionals comparatively, in terms of their career adaptability. The number of relevant studies is scarce, especially in Turkey. The present study is expected, therefore, to contribute to the literature as it puts forth some findings in a comparative way on such an understudied subject.

The results of the present study indicate that there are significantly positive relationships between work engagement and career adaptability for all health professionals. Career adaptability is a flair, reflecting one's aptitude for orientation. Occupational and individual resources are claimed to increase one's work engagement [5]. Our results show that career adaptability can be evaluated in the context of individual resources in enhancing work engagement.

The results do not show a significant difference between health professionals in terms of work engagement, which is possible to be reasoned with the gains one acquires when he/she is engaged in work. In other words, the higher one is engaged in work, the more vigorous and productive he/she is, and the better he/she feels [4, 5]. As for health professionals, it can be argued that work engagement contributes in the same way to physicians, nurses and midwives.

One of the remarkable findings of this study is that career adaptability is lower among nurses, compared to the other groups. This finding can be related to a number of factors, one of which may be the professional status of nurses in Turkey. Nurses are classified within the allied health personnel in Turkey. There are important differences among nurses in terms of educational status and specialisation [28]. For instance, not only bachelors but also high-school graduates were employed as nurses in Turkey until 2013. Working as a nurse while being a high-school graduate signals an incomplete process of identity exploration. Occupational identity is also a part of identity. Choosing nursing as a profession earlier, without making adequate exploration and planning, may result in a preference that is not suitable to one's interest and talents [13, 14]. Furthermore, Turkish people choose their profession mainly considering employment opportunities. Except for university hospitals, it is observed that nurses are employed in all services at hospitals in Turkey, as a wildcard, regardless of their specialisation, which indeed curtails the specialisation of nurses in a particular field [28]. The mentioned reasons may explain why nurses show lower levels of career adaptability than other health personnel.

Another remarkable finding of the study is that the relationship between work engagement and career adaptability among specialists differs from that of other health professionals. There is a positive relationship only between their career exploration and work engagement. Career planning is not related to work engagement among specialists, however. Career development phases of specialists may account for this finding. Career development, as Super [10] argues, continues within particular periods from birth till death. At this point, specialist physicians are positioned between career advancement and termination periods, which requires prioritising career exploration rather than planning. When viewed from an ethological perspective [29], prioritising career exploration over career planning may provide specialist physicians with a better orientation to life, given their current development periods.

In conclusion, this study examined the relationships between work engagement and career adaptability among health professionals. Career adaptability can be used as a tool to enhance the work engagement of health professionals. It is expedient to carry out further research in order to boost the career adaptability of nurses in particular.

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