Reviewer's report

Title: Night nursing - a study of the working conditions and duties of the night staff

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Reviewer: Kelley Kilpatrick

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Review: Night nursing- a study of the working conditions and duties of the night staff.
K. Nillson, Campbell, A-M., & Anderson, E.P.

1) Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The study question is phrased differently in different sections of the text and needs to be clarified. In the title, the authors state that this is a study of the working conditions and duties of the night staff which may be better examined using a quantitative approach. In the abstract the authors talk about the “working experience of night nursing staff, with special focus on duties and conditions”. On page 2, the authors identify the study focus as “night nursing; how registered nurses and enrolled nurses experience their work at night”. On page 5 the authors identify the aim of the study is to “describe the working experiences of the night nursing staff”. Different methodologies are suggested by using different wordings for the question and the reader is left to wonder if the study will be a phenomenological study or qualitative descriptive study. Are RN and EN the only night nursing staff in Swedish hospital? If they are not the only night workers then this point needs to be clearly stated and an explanation of the exclusion of other workers need to be addressed in the context of a qualitative study.

2) Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods section is difficult to follow as it is presently structured and comments on the structure of the section are provided in the response to question 4.

In the first paragraph, the design is clearly identified and justification is provided. Are the interviews “thematic and open-ended” or semi-structured? A table including the sample interview questions would be helpful. What process was used to refine or adjust interview questions as the interviews unfolded? The authors discuss culturally inherent assumptions and to understand experiences, feelings, intentions and makes the reader wonder about the type of study that will be conducted (ethnography).

The type of sampling used in the study and the rationale need to be identified.

The analysis section is quite difficult to follow as it is presently written and it unclear how the authors would get from the raw data to the findings. The authors need to clarify 1) manifest content analysis and underlying meaning of the
interview; 2) comprehensive content of the meaning units; 3) units of a meaningful relation to the aim of the study; 4) similarities and differences in the codes were then compared and sorted into content categories; 5) how were the codes created, 6) did they emerge from the data, 7) how was data reduction done, 8) how were codes categorized, 9) what strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Clarifying these points may help the reader to understand the findings.

The following questions need to be clarified in the analysis section. Did the authors use content analysis, thematic analysis or qualitative description? Was a reference framework developed for the content analysis? Were there any modifications to the coding system as the analysis unfolded? Is there any numerical description of the data? A section on rigour needs to be developed. What role did reflection play in the analysis process? Depending on how the authors clarify the research question, the analysis strategy would need to be more closely aligned with that question.

The authors clearly identify that ethical approval was not necessary for this type of study and their adherence to international ethical standards. What steps have been taken by the authors to protect participants who participated in this type of research? (to protect their identity, confidentiality, and possible consequences on present or future employment status for refusing to participate or withdrawing).

3) Are the data sound?

The quotes appear to have a number of relevant codes that have not been identified using the analysis strategy. The coding scheme appears to be too coarse to identify important elements in the transcripts. It is unclear how the themes were identified and how close and relevant the themes are to the data. The results section appears to offer a superficial treatment of the data (although the authors identify the collection of rich data and the use of open ended questions which are consistent with rich data collection).

The demographic information should be in this section.

The results section needs an initial brief introduction of the findings and a description of the themes. If the aim of the study is to identify “how registered nurses and enrolled nurses experience their work at night” the data is not presented according to professional groupings and would not answer the research question. What is meant by “conceptions”? Whose conceptions are being considered? The perspective shifts from the worker to colleagues to patients. Conceptions of work include holding the fort, working at night gives days off, the staff also sleeps at night. Working conditions include working in silence, working in dim light, coping with fatigue, not being afraid of the dark, and cooperation. Duties include general care, specific care, service tasks. Teamwork is later identified as a key finding but it is not highlighted.

The following ideas are provided as examples.

On page 9, the authors talk about the lack of understanding of night work leads to the lack of understanding of the need to rest during the day. How is this related? The selected quote does not make the link or explain the statement.
Heading “The staff also sleeps at night”: The selected quote seems to exemplify other issues such as worker preference, choice, misunderstanding of the nursing staff’s role in night work. It is unclear why the authors discuss personal experience with shift work and organizational change in this section of the text. Are there data to support this?

A similar comment can be made for most of the headings. For example “working in dim light”, “coping with fatigue”. They do not seem to accurately represent the selected quotes. The quotes seem to be addressing issues of competence and assessment skills and personal characteristic strength and being a “special person”. How do participants express fatigue as creeping into the body?

In the section about cooperation the authors seem to define the concept as “being dependent”. How consistent is this with definitions that are in the literature? Greater depth would be needed when analyzing the theme as it seems the quote reflects elements of knowing each other, what does it mean to “depend on each other” in the work setting. The authors also link cooperation to clear boundaries and one component of nursing work (medication).

Are the care priorities identified by the authors such as patient anxiety that is more pronounced at night, ensuring sound sleep and patient fear about toileting activities at night part of data or the discussion? The authors discuss the role of the RN and EN but the data are not analyzed accordingly and cannot support these statements.

It is unclear how the organizational change (page 14) fits into the section of specific care and what makes it relevant. The service tasks section seems to be about the addition of non-nursing tasks and the night nursing staff reactions to this. Is the issue about being replaced or feeling diminished because a trained health care professional could be replaced by an untrained worker?

4) Does the manuscript adhere to relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The authors make use of headings to help structure the text. The background section is difficult to follow as it is presently structured. The section would need to identify for the reader the main issues that need to be addressed or the state of the literature. There are studies that have examined the experience of nurses and shiftwork (rotating or permanent) and they may help situate the need for this type of study.

It is difficult for the reader to identify the main concepts in the study after reading the background section. Organizational change seems to be a criterion to determine the selection of units and the individuals to be recruited into the study and there is no mention of this concept or its relevance in the background. This would need to be identified earlier to help the reader understand. The second paragraph is quite long and the main idea expressed by the authors is unclear. The content of this paragraph shifts and changes which make it difficult for the reader to follow.

It would be useful for the authors to add headings in the methods sections. For example, the methods section would be if the text was structured around design,
sample, sampling methods, data collection and data analysis and a brief overview of the procedure that was used for the research project.

5) Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

There are relevant points in the opening paragraph but they would need to be in the appropriate sections. The authors identify their insider view and the collections of rich data which are important in this type of research. They also identify a study limitation in the opening paragraph. This idea should be developed in the section just before the conclusion. The authors state steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data. This should be in another section.

The discussion is not closely aligned with the findings and some new ideas are introduced in the opening sentences. The authors talk about night work as invisible work and surrounded by myths. It is unclear how this links to the data and the findings since they introduce the idea while discussing the results of the study. There is discussion of EN and RN roles, EN/RN appreciation of teamwork.

The data do not clearly represent this and were not analyzed (or presented) according to professional groups and teamwork was not identified in the “conceptions” of night work. The discussion examines issues related to delivering safe patient care, the nurse-physician relationship, and the medical assessment of patients. The relevance of these topics to the discussion is not easy for the reader to follow. Within the medical assessment are the authors alluding to the nursing assessment of patients and monitoring of signs and symptoms? This needs to be made clear.

The final paragraph of the section introduces new ideas related to research, development and preventive work. Their relevance need to be pointed out earlier.

6) Are the limitations of the work clearly stated?

See response to question 5. This section needs to be developed.

7) Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

There are citations that need to be more clearly referenced in the text and they need to reflect the original work. For example, reference 47 on page 17.

On page 19, are the authors discussing the findings of one study in the final paragraph before the conclusion?

8) Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The abstract conveys much of the article. It would need to be re-worked as the same issues that were identified in the manuscript are in the abstract. The title explores the working conditions of night staff while the manuscript looks at nursing staff or RN and EN. The title does not clearly reflect the study since the authors want to describe the working experiences of night nursing staff (page 2).

9) Is the writing acceptable?

The sentence structure is choppy and wording is often unclear (e.g. p. 19 efficient organizations require time to recover from tier daily activities). The link between sentences is unclear in many places. The language used may not
always be easily understood (e.g. torch, sluice, ambition to create). Some paragraphs are too long and the content shifts within the sections.

Revisions
Discretionary revisions
Minor essential revisions
Please see comments in review. Grammar, sentence structure and language need to be checked prior to publication. Examples provided in review.

Major compulsory revisions:
The authors address a relevant issue in nursing if the focus is on the experience of night nursing staff. However, the quality and scientific rigour of the manuscript need to be improved before its relevance can be assessed. The paper adds little new insights if the focus is on working conditions, as the title states. There are a number of major methodological issues that have been identified in the manuscript that need to be addressed before the manuscript should be considered for publication. There is no clear link between the question, data collection, data analysis, the findings and the discussion. The coding and overall analysis will not answer the research question as it is presently written. A section on methodological rigour needs to be developed.

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.