

Professional shortage among medical assistants: Which psychosocial working conditions predict turnover? A mixed methods study

Background:

Unfavorable psychosocial working conditions and turnover in health care are widespread, and the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues. Medical assistants (MA) represent one of the largest occupational groups in outpatient care in Germany. They report precarious working conditions, high need for work-related improvements and a high intention to leave. However, it is unknown whether or which psychosocial working conditions and work-related improvement needs predict turnover among MA.

Objectives:

The aim of the study is to examine for the first time, based on prospective data, psychosocial working conditions and work-related improvement needs that predict the actual turnover of medical assistants from their profession. In addition, the circumstances that contribute to actual turnover from the MA profession are explored in more depth using qualitative interviews.

Methods:

We will use data from 456 MA from a four-year prospective cohort study in Germany. At baseline (2016/2017), we assessed the following determinants: 1) psychosocial working conditions using the effort-reward imbalance questionnaire and a MA-specific questionnaire with seven subscales, and 2) desired work-related improvements among MA with three subscales. At follow-up, participants reported whether they still worked as a MA or were employed elsewhere but not as a MA. This information will be used to operationalize turnover (no/yes). Poisson regression models with a log-link function will be used to estimate the relative risks (RRs) for turnover and their 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Semi-structured qualitative interviews will be used to more deeply understand reasons and circumstances leading to actual turnover from the MA profession in order to identify potential starting points for preventive measures.

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