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Nurses' Work Motivation Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the Inpatient Wards of a Psychiatric Hospital: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

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Background: Nurses working in psychiatric inpatient settings provide continuous care in environments characterized by complex patient needs, safety concerns, emotional demands, and shift-based work. Work motivation is therefore important for sustaining nursing performance and service quality. Maslow's hierarchy of needs offers a multidimensional framework for examining whether nurses' physiological, safety, affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization needs are being met. *Objective:* To describe nurses' work motivation according to the five domains of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the inpatient wards of a psychiatric hospital in Surabaya, Indonesia. *Methods:* This descriptive cross-sectional study included 79 inpatient staff nurses selected from a population of 98 nurses using purposive sampling. Eligible participants were civil-service or public-service-agency staff nurses, had worked for more than one year, and held a diploma or professional nursing qualification. Data were collected using a Likert-type questionnaire adapted from a previous work-motivation instrument. Domain scores were classified as good (76%–100%), moderate (56%–75%), or poor (<56%). Data were summarized using frequencies and percentages. *Results:* The sample was almost evenly divided by sex (50.6% women), and 40.5% were aged 41–50 years. Most nurses held a diploma in nursing (81.0%), and 39.2% had worked for more than 10 years. The proportion classified as having good motivation was 62.0% for physiological needs, 64.6% for safety and security needs, 87.3% for affiliation and acceptance needs, 91.1% for esteem and status needs, and 68.4% for self-actualization needs. Esteem and status represented the strongest domain, whereas physiological needs had the lowest proportion in the good category. *Conclusion:* Most inpatient psychiatric nurses reported good motivation across all five Maslow domains, particularly in esteem and affiliation. Nevertheless, approximately one-third of nurses did not reach the good category for physiological, safety, or self-actualization needs. Hospital managers should maintain recognition and supportive relationships while strengthening compensation adequacy, workplace safety, career development, and opportunities for professional growth.

Keywords: Maslow hierarchy of needs; nurse motivation; psychiatric nursing; inpatient nursing; nursing management; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Nurses constitute the largest professional group providing continuous direct care in hospitals. Their responsibilities require clinical competence, emotional stability, communication skills, and the capacity to maintain safe and compassionate care across rotating shifts. These demands may be intensified in psychiatric inpatient wards, where nurses simultaneously manage therapeutic relationships, behavioral risks, medication administration, documentation, and coordination with multidisciplinary teams.

Work motivation refers to the forces that initiate, direct, and sustain work-related behavior. In nursing services, motivation is not merely an individual psychological attribute; it can influence attendance, engagement, adherence to professional standards, willingness to learn, and the quality of patient care. Indonesian evidence has demonstrated a strong positive relationship between nurses' work motivation and performance, supporting the importance of managerial strategies that address both internal and external sources of motivation (Priyantini & Ayatulloh, 2023).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs organizes human needs into five domains: physiological needs, safety and security, affiliation or belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Within the workplace, these domains can be interpreted as adequate income and basic welfare, physical and psychological safety, collegial acceptance, recognition and status, and opportunities to use and develop one's abilities. Although the hierarchy should not be treated as a rigid universal sequence, it provides a practical framework for assessing whether the work environment addresses multiple levels of employee needs.

The quality of nurses' work life is also related to the extent to which personal and professional needs can be fulfilled within the organization. Recent research has emphasized that a supportive work-life environment is associated with positive nursing behavior, including clinical documentation practices (Ahmadi et al., 2026). In addition, organizational and leadership factors have been identified as important contributors to the quality of nurse performance, indicating that motivation should be considered within the broader context of management, leadership, and workplace resources (Twistiandayani et al., 2025).

At the study hospital, administrative attendance records for October–December 2017 documented repeated lateness, authorized absences, unauthorized

absences, and early departures among nurses. These indicators raised concern regarding work motivation, although attendance behavior alone could not identify which needs required managerial attention. Therefore, this study aimed to describe inpatient psychiatric nurses' work motivation according to the five domains of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The findings were expected to provide baseline information for nursing managers seeking to strengthen motivation and service quality.

METHODS

Study design and setting

A descriptive cross-sectional design was used. The study was conducted in the inpatient wards of Menur Psychiatric Hospital, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. Data were collected from 5 to 11 February 2018. The hospital functions as a referral center for psychiatric services in eastern Indonesia and provides inpatient, outpatient, emergency, and substance-use-related services.

Population and participants

The source population comprised 98 staff nurses working in the inpatient wards. The required sample was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a target of 79 participants. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were: (1) employment as an inpatient staff nurse under civil-service or regional public-service-agency arrangements; (2) willingness to participate; (3) more than one year of work experience; and (4) a diploma, bachelor's degree, or professional nursing qualification. Nurses in structural or managerial positions, nurses assigned to the emergency department, outpatient department, or developmental clinic, newly appointed nurses in orientation, and head nurses were excluded.

Variables and instrument

The study assessed five domains of work motivation derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological needs; safety and security needs; affiliation or acceptance needs; esteem or status needs; and self-actualization. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire described in the source study as an adaptation of a previous work-motivation instrument. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with reverse scoring for negatively worded statements.

For each domain, the obtained score was divided by the maximum possible score and multiplied by 100. Scores were categorized as good (76%–100%), moderate (56%–75%), or poor (<56%). The source

document did not report the number of items per domain, content-validation procedures, construct validity, or internal-consistency estimates for the instrument used in this sample. These psychometric details should be verified from the original questionnaire and added before journal submission.

Data collection

After institutional permission was obtained, eligible nurses were identified in collaboration with ward leaders. Nurses received study information and provided written informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded, entered into a computerized database, scored, and tabulated.

Statistical analysis

Participant characteristics and motivation domains were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. No hypothesis testing or multivariable analysis was conducted because the study objective was descriptive.

Ethical considerations

The study applied the principles of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, beneficence, and non-maleficence. The source document states that an ethical review was completed at the hospital; however, the name of the reviewing committee and approval number were not reported. These details must be retrieved and inserted before submission. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could decline without penalty.

RESULTS

All 79 targeted nurses were included in the analysis. Women accounted for 50.6% of participants, while men accounted for 49.4%. The largest age group was 41–50 years (40.5%), followed by 31–40 years (38.0%). Most participants held a diploma in nursing (81.0%), and 39.2% had more than 10 years of work experience (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant characteristics (N = 79)

Characteristic	n	%
Sex		
Male	39	49.4
Female	40	50.6
Age, years		
20–30	17	21.5
31–40	30	38.0
41–50	32	40.5
Education		
Diploma in nursing	64	81.0
Bachelor's degree	6	7.6
Bachelor's degree	9	11.4

and professional nurse qualification		
Length of employment		
1–5 years	27	34.2
6–10 years	21	26.6
>10 years	31	39.2

Most participants were classified in the good category for every motivation domain. The highest proportion was observed for esteem or status needs (91.1%), followed by affiliation or acceptance needs (87.3%). Good self-actualization was reported by 68.4%, good safety and security by 64.6%, and good physiological needs by 62.0%. No participant was classified as poor in the affiliation or esteem domains. In contrast, poor motivation was present in 7.6% for physiological needs, 2.5% for safety and security, and 1.3% for self-actualization (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of work motivation across Maslow's hierarchy of needs (N = 79)

Maslow domain	Poor n	Poor %	Moderate n	Moderate %	Good n	Good %
Physiological needs	6	7.6	24	30.4	49	62.0
Safety and security needs	2	2.5	26	32.9	51	64.6
Affiliation or acceptance needs	0	0.0	10	12.7	69	87.3
Esteem or status needs	0	0.0	7	8.9	72	91.1
Self-actualization	1	1.3	24	30.4	54	68.4

DISCUSSION

This study found that most inpatient psychiatric nurses were classified as having good motivation in all five domains of Maslow's hierarchy. The strongest results were observed for esteem and affiliation, whereas physiological, safety, and self-actualization needs showed larger proportions in the moderate or poor categories. The pattern suggests that the social and recognition-related aspects of the work environment were comparatively strong, but a meaningful subgroup of nurses may still have experienced unmet material, safety, or developmental needs.

Almost two-thirds of nurses had good physiological-need motivation, but 38.0% remained in the moderate or poor categories. In a workplace

interpretation of Maslow's model, physiological needs include adequate income, rest, food, housing, and the capacity to meet basic family needs. Because nurses work rotating shifts and carry sustained clinical responsibilities, perceptions of compensation adequacy and opportunities for rest may influence energy, concentration, and willingness to maintain performance. The direct relationship reported by Priyantini and Ayatulloh (2023) between work motivation and nurse performance reinforces the managerial relevance of ensuring that basic employment needs are met. However, the present study did not measure salary adequacy, workload, sleep, or shift patterns separately, so the specific source of lower scores cannot be determined.

Good safety and security motivation was reported by 64.6% of nurses, while one-third were in the moderate category. Safety in psychiatric wards includes protection from workplace violence, adequate staffing, appropriate facilities, clear procedures, infection prevention, job security, and psychological support after adverse events. The finding indicates that safety was generally perceived positively but was not optimal for all staff. Hospital management should therefore avoid interpreting the majority-good result as evidence that no safety intervention is needed. Routine risk assessments, violence-prevention training, accessible reporting systems, and post-incident support may strengthen both safety and motivation.

Affiliation and acceptance were rated good by 87.3% of participants, and no nurse was classified in the poor category. Psychiatric nursing depends heavily on teamwork, mutual trust, consistent communication, and coordinated responses to changes in patient behavior. A sense of belonging can support coping and make demanding clinical work more sustainable. Organizational and leadership research involving Priyantini has further emphasized that leadership and organizational conditions affect nurse performance (Twistiandayani et al., 2025). Maintaining respectful communication, shared decision-making, and reliable peer support may therefore preserve this strength.

Esteem and status represented the strongest domain, with 91.1% of nurses in the good category. Recognition, respect, professional identity, responsibility, and appreciation may contribute to this result. In psychiatric care, where nursing work may be emotionally difficult and less visible than some technical procedures, meaningful recognition from leaders and colleagues can affirm professional contribution. Nevertheless, recognition should be

linked to transparent and equitable systems rather than occasional praise alone. Structured feedback, fair promotion pathways, acknowledgment of clinical expertise, and opportunities to lead quality-improvement activities may sustain esteem-related motivation.

Although 68.4% of nurses were classified as good in self-actualization, nearly one-third remained moderate and one participant was classified as poor. Self-actualization concerns the opportunity to use abilities, develop expertise, undertake challenging responsibilities, and achieve professional growth. This domain may be particularly important for experienced nurses, as 39.2% of participants had worked for more than 10 years. Without continuing education, role development, clinical career ladders, research involvement, or leadership opportunities, long-serving nurses may perceive limited progression. Research on quality of nursing work life has similarly connected the fulfillment of nurses' needs with positive professional behavior (Ahmadi et al., 2026). Managers should therefore provide individualized development plans, competency-based advancement, mentoring, and access to specialist psychiatric-nursing education.

The findings support a balanced motivational strategy rather than a single intervention. Recognition and collegial relationships should be maintained because esteem and affiliation were strong. At the same time, management should assess whether compensation, scheduling, staffing, workplace safety, and career-development opportunities adequately address lower-scoring domains. Interventions should be based on confidential staff feedback and monitored using validated measures. Linking motivation initiatives with objective indicators—such as retention, attendance, patient safety, documentation quality, and performance appraisal—would provide stronger evidence of organizational impact.

The study provides a domain-specific profile of work motivation among nurses in an inpatient psychiatric setting and includes a high proportion of the eligible population. The use of Maslow's framework offers an accessible structure for translating findings into managerial actions. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted at one hospital, limiting generalizability. Second, purposive sampling may have introduced selection bias. Third, data were self-reported and may have been influenced by social-desirability bias. Fourth, the questionnaire's item structure and psychometric properties were not adequately documented in the source study. Fifth,

categorizing continuous scores into good, moderate, and poor groups may reduce information and does not establish clinically meaningful thresholds. Sixth, the descriptive design did not examine relationships between motivation, participant characteristics, work environment, performance, or patient outcomes. Finally, the data were collected in 2018; organizational conditions may have changed, and contemporary replication is required before using these estimates for current policy decisions.

CONCLUSION

Most inpatient psychiatric nurses reported good work motivation across the five domains of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Esteem or status and affiliation or acceptance were the strongest domains. Physiological, safety, and self-actualization needs were also predominantly good, although approximately one-third of participants remained below the good category in each of these areas. Nursing managers should preserve supportive relationships and recognition while strengthening basic welfare, workplace safety, and professional-development opportunities. Future multicenter studies should use validated instruments and examine how motivational domains relate to nurse performance, retention, safety outcomes, and quality of care.

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