




Safety attitude profiles of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals in the South Australian health system

Mary Westbrook, Jeffrey Braithwaite, Sarah Michael, Maureen Robinson, Christy Pirone, Philip Robinson, Stephen Christley

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Background


- Prior research shows significant differences between the three major professional health groups in attitude towards health care^[1]
- Also holds for the reporting of adverse events^[3-5]











Background

- **Doctors**
- Least likely to attend safety improvement programs and more critical of them
- Least likely to report incidents
- Least engaged with practical aspects of reporting systems









Background

- **Nurses**
- Display the most favourable attitudes toward safety programs and reporting systems
- Most likely to report incidents

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Background

- **Allied health staff**
- Their attitudes resemble nurses' more than doctors'

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Aim

- Do observed differences in the three major health professionals' attitudes and behaviours regarding adverse incident reporting hold more broadly in the case of a major survey?
- Using the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire – a comprehensive survey tool examining staff attitudes to patient safety

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Method

- Administration of the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire^[2] to 16,619 participants in the South Australian health system
- Comparison of safety attitudes of main health professional groups
- Interrogated their factor scores across South Australian health system

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Six SAQ factors

Teamwork climate: Perceived quality of collaboration between personnel

eg: The staff in my work area work as a well coordinated team

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Six SAQ factors

Safety climate: Perceptions of a strong and proactive organisational commitment to safety

eg: I would feel safe being treated here as a patient

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Six SAQ factors

Job satisfaction: Positive feelings about work experience

eg: My health service is a good place to work

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Six SAQ factors

Stress recognition:
Acknowledgement of how performance is influenced by stressors

eg: I am more likely to make errors in tense or hostile situations

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Perceptions of management:
Approval of managerial action

eg: My management supports my daily efforts

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Working conditions: Perceived quality of the work environment and logistical support (staffing, equipment etc)

eg: All the necessary information for diagnostic and therapeutic decisions is routinely available to clinical staff

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Attitudes associated with the SAQ factor scores

- Responses on a five point Likert scale
- Disagree Strongly ↔ Agree Strongly
- Converted to a 100 point scale

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Attitudes associated with the SAQ factor scores

Positive attitudes ← ————— → Negative attitudes

Very positive Somewhat Slightly Slightly Somewhat Very negative

100 75 62.5 50 37.5 25 0

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Procedures

- Questionnaire survey of clinical and non-clinical staff conducted in 2008
- All staff (n=31,960) invited to participate
- Response rate 52%, survey participants n=16,619
- Three professional groups included in the present study

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Procedures

- Doctors n=1,069
- Nurses and midwives n=6,473
- Allied health staff n=1,602
- SAQ scores of the professional groups compared using ANOVAs
- If ANOVA showed significant difference, Duncan's Range test performed

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Results

- Significant differences found on three of the SAQ factors: **Safety climate**, **Stress recognition** and **Working conditions**
- **Safety climate**: Nurses, allied health staff had significantly more positive attitudes than did doctors

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Results

- **Stress recognition**: Doctors most aware of the detrimental affects of stressors on work performance. Nurses had higher Stress Recognition than did allied health staff
- **Perceptions of management**: Nurses and Allied health staff viewed management more positively than did doctors

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Results

- **All groups**: had somewhat positive attitudes on the **Safety climate** and **Stress recognition** scales
- **All groups**: has slightly positive views of management

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Results

SAQ scales	F	p	Professional group means Results of Duncan range tests*		
			Doctors	Allied health	Nurses
Safety climate	19.77	<0.000	70.3	73.3*	73.8*
Stress recognition	21.41	<0.000	67.1	68.7	72.3
Perception of management	11.21	<0.000	57.7	60.1*	61.1*

*These means do not differ significantly from each other but differ significantly from the unstarred mean

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Results

- **All groups**: no significant differences were found between the **Teamwork climate**, **Job satisfaction** or **Working conditions** scores of the professional groups
- **All groups**: all these scores were in the somewhat positive zone, but **Working conditions** scores were considerably lower

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Results

SAQ scales	F	p	Professional group means <i>Results of Duncan range tests*</i>		
			Doctors	Allied health	Nurses
Teamwork climate	1.14	<0.320	71.1	71.6	72.2
Job satisfaction	0.04	<0.958	72.9	73.1	73.2
Working conditions	0.74	<0.476	62.7	63.4	63.7

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Discussion and conclusion

- Doctors' less favourable appraisals of the **Safety climate** of their workplaces and their greater recognition of the effects of stressors on performance would suggest a more favourable disposition to safety education programs and incident reporting systems
- Yet the opposite is the case

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Discussion and conclusion

- It is other staff, particularly nurses, who endorse such initiatives
- Doctors' lower approval of management may contribute to distrust in such safety strategies
- There was only limited evidence of differences between nurses' and allied health staffs' safety attitudes though more have been found in past surveys

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Discussion and conclusion

- The groups' mean scores indicated close to strong agreement that they were satisfied with their jobs and considered the safety and teamwork of their workplaces good
- Comparison of the South Australian clinicians' SAQ scores with those of the UK and USA indicated this is a relatively well functioning health workforce^[2]

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Selected references

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