

# **Change in Nurses' Reactions to Psychosocial Work Environment Factors During the Accreditation Period**

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*In the modern healthcare system, significant focus is given to ensuring the quality of services, leading to the necessity of selecting the most suitable quality improvement measure for healthcare organizations. However, it has not been clear which quality improvement measure is the most appropriate for the healthcare services sector, as quality is understood and assessed differently in this field compared to other sectors. Various regulatory methods for healthcare service organizations are used worldwide, including licensing, accreditation, and certification. The application of quality assurance standards in healthcare organizations is based on the fact that these organizations seek to change their current practices to improve outcomes. Implementing each quality measure elicits certain reactions from healthcare professionals, which are not always favorable to the organization. This article examines the impact of accreditation on the changes in psychosocial work environment factors experienced by nurses during each accreditation phase.*

*Keywords: accreditation, psychosocial risk factors, nurses, quality, healthcare*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The accreditation problem in healthcare organizations is conceptualized from the minimal standards applied to inpatient healthcare facilities for organizational process management, encompassing all processes related to the organization's activities: operations management, personnel and risk management, resource management, and quality assessment of services. Understanding the complexity of this phenomenon, the accreditation processes in healthcare organizations are examined in the context of management and the context of disciplines such as sociology, healthcare, and psychology.

Since accreditation in healthcare organizations inevitably affects the personnel, it is important to ensure the training of employees involved in this process. Without these actions, employees will inevitably experience uncertainty, fear, a lack of knowledge in their work, a slowing of their work pace, which may lead to peer pressure. Moreover, informal groups opposing accreditation may form. As a result, instead of focusing on the accreditation process, leaders will have to manage the psychosocial work environment, stabilizing the organization's operational processes, and addressing personnel management-related issues. Considering potential problems, this study aims to assess nurses' reactions to changes in psychosocial work environment factors during the accreditation period.

Measures aimed at improving the quality of healthcare services can vary and are most often associated with service safety and satisfaction (Corsia, et.al., 2023). To ensure the quality of services, it is important to comprehensively implement quality improvement activities, from proper planning to evaluating the obtained results (Rochaa, et.al., 2023). For these reasons, professionals in various healthcare fields face issues related to the implementation of quality (Reis, et.al., 2023). Scientific literature often highlights problems related to quality implementation, including measurement and definition (Mosadeghrad, 2014), the selection of appropriate quality assurance measures (Nadziakiewicz, Mikolajczyk, 2019), the interaction of quality dimensions (Pilgrimienė, Bučiūnienė, 2008), regional and economic disparities (Darimont, Margraf, 2018), the perception of innovations (Aggarwala, et.al., 2019), the involvement of stakeholders (Dixon-Woods, et.al., 2019), and others.

Accreditation is an appropriate tool for meeting the needs of stakeholders, ensuring the safety, effectiveness, and timeliness of services provided (Araujo, et.al., 2020). It is a voluntary method of quality assurance chosen by healthcare organizations, based on predefined requirements and carried out by an independent assessor (Avia, Hariyati, 2019). In other scientific sources, accreditation is defined as a tool for driving organizational change and patient safety (Hussein, et.al., 2021), a strategic quality improvement measure (Bretaña, Álvarez, 2017), but it can also be a cause of unintended outcomes, such as ambiguities (Robbins, et.al., 2022) or the manifestation of psychosocial work environment factors during the accreditation process (Alshamsi, et.al., 2020).

Psychosocial work environment factors in healthcare professionals' work environments are described as a combination of elements that negatively impacts the workers (Kirilmaz, Santas, 2016), or it can be described as a general concept reflecting factors related to work that, due to their excessive influence, absence, or interaction with each other, pose risks to the worker's psychological well-being and/or physical health (Pujol-Colsa, Lazzaro-Salazar, 2021).

There is limited data in scientific literature analyzing the relationships between accreditation and the psychosocial work environment factors of healthcare organization employees. In one study, information was provided that accreditation positively impacts healthcare professionals' health (Alshamsi, et.al., 2022). During the accreditation process, healthcare professionals experience longer working hours, increased work pace, conflicting information received (Alshamsi, et.al., 2020), improved communication processes (Freire, et.al., 2019), an effect on team organization (Kawczak, et.al., 2023), and interpersonal relationships (Druică, et.al., 2020).

The analysis of scientific literature sources revealed that healthcare organizations choose accreditation to improve the quality of services provided, but there is insufficient data on how the accreditation process affects the employees' psychosocial environment and what consequences it may have.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The qualitative research, a semi-structured interview, was conducted using a pre-prepared questionnaire. Experts assessed the questionnaire's suitability for this study, and the interview questions were designed to ensure a consistent analysis of the leaders' perspective on the impact of accreditation on the psychosocial work environment of nurses throughout the accreditation period, from the decision to accredit the organization to the end of the accreditation procedures and the assessment of the benefits of the accreditation after a certain period following accreditation.

The interviews were conducted directly with the research participants, who were leaders of accredited healthcare organizations. When forming the research sample, the following principles were followed: written requests were sent to the leaders of accredited healthcare institutions; interviews were conducted in November and December 2021 at a location convenient for the respondents; each research participant was given a code to eliminate the possibility of identifying their identity; the interview process was terminated after the 8th interview (no new information was obtained from the conducted interviews).

The interview data were transcribed, and a qualitative content analysis was performed based on the transcriptions. Information was categorized and subcategorized, and statements supporting subcategories were identified. Data were interpreted, and conclusions were drawn for all categories.

The following ethical principles were observed during the research: the participant's independence was acknowledged and respected, and their freedom to participate or refuse participation in the study was upheld. Participants were informed about the research, and the anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy of the participants were safeguarded. Ensuring the safety of the participants, they were protected from moral harm.

## RESULTS

During the research, healthcare organization leaders identified external (legal requirements, competitive environment, expectations regarding service quality, founder's requirements) and internal factors (the need for improvement, enhancing service quality, organizational development needs, members' expectations, leadership ambitions) as the main factors influencing the development of their organizations.

The participants in the study stated that information about the planned accreditation in organizations was communicated through direct and indirect means, including public meetings, conversations with stakeholders, qualification enhancement events, written information dissemination, emails, phone calls, and internal communication systems.

The evaluation of the participants' opinions on innovations is closely related to their perception of accreditation, the processes involved in its implementation within the organization, and the factors that led to the organization's accreditation. Based on the collected data, the research participants considered accreditation as an innovation that triggered various employee reactions, such as dissatisfaction and anger:

*"...confusion, a lack of clarity, and extensive planning were prevalent in this situation..."*

*"...expressed a certain dissatisfaction, fearing additional work in the future..."*

*"...questions arising from not knowing what this process is and how it will proceed..."*

*"...anger due to extra tasks and not knowing how to perform all the assignments..."*

Analyzing the collected research data, one can make the assumption that employees' reactions to the upcoming accreditation are related to a lack of information, changes in the processes within the organization, and the resulting dissatisfaction.

In the study, changes in the work environment affected by accreditation were analyzed. Based on the research data analysis, the following work environment changes were most frequently mentioned: stricter work regulations, clearly defined employee duties, reduced ambiguity in performing work-related tasks, an increased need for the development of written internal procedures, and a heavier workload. After evaluating the opinions of the study participants regarding the reactions of their subordinates to these changes, positive and negative employee responses were identified: the positive ones were related to increased work clarity, the application of a team-based work model, and compensation for work, while the negative ones were associated with tension and resistance to changes (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
**EMPLOYEE REACTIONS TO CHANGES IN WORKING CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ACCREDITATION**

Category	Sub-category	Research participants' information
Employees' Reactions to Changes in the Work Environment During Accreditation	Positive reactions	“Clear work instructions, clear responsibilities, clear sources of information, clear job evaluation criteria...”
		“Teamwork improved interpersonal communication...”
		“...employee frustration increased...”
	Negative reactions	“...employees seemed unwilling to acknowledge the changes...”
		“...I observed avoidance in performing assigned tasks...”

Analyzing the opinions of the managers regarding the employees' reactions to accreditation during the process, it was observed that employees' opinions were characterized by a decrease in satisfaction with the decision to accredit the organization and an increase in negative reactions to accreditation (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**  
**CHANGES IN EMPLOYEES' REACTIONS DURING ACCREDITATION**

Category	Sub-category	Research participants' information
The change in reactions during accreditation	Satisfaction with the decision to accredit the organization decreases	“At the beginning, those who initially didn't express reactions began to show disappointment.”
		“I would often hear dissatisfaction with the entire procedure.”
	Organization members 'split' into those who support accreditation and those who do not support it.	“...some employees readily accept the new requirements, while others resist them with a negative opinion...”
		“...they divided into groups through which they tried to influence colleagues...”
	Negative reactions become more frequent	“...when you don't know how everything is really done, you feel frustrated and tired. I think accreditation was no exception...”

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“...conflicts between employees became more frequent...”

“I often had to communicate and prove the benefits because there was always a negative attitude towards the assigned tasks...”

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When organizational leaders asked to detail negative employee reactions to processes related to accreditation, they mentioned not only employee frustration but also moral and physical fatigue, distraction, and so on.

*“Yes, during this process, we definitely felt more tired than usual...”*

*“There was physical fatigue and distraction...”*

*“You feel frustrated and tired. I think accreditation was no exception.”*

In evaluating the possible reasons for the deterioration of the work environment, it was determined that some employees expressed dissatisfaction with tasks that seemed additional, meaningless, and unimportant to them. In the accreditation process, these tasks were related to internal document preparation, patient surveys, and an increased workload. Increased workload can also be attributed as one of the reasons leading to negative reactions. Almost all participants in the study indicated that the workload for nurses had increased, which led to fatigue, lack of experience, and information, and an unwillingness to leave their comfort zone. According to their opinion, these factors affected the accreditation process:

*“...I would highlight the conflicts that arose precisely because of the distribution of tasks...”*

*“...lack of experience, impatience, and sometimes estrangement. I think that several factors contributed to this.”*

*“...when the workload increased, we had to change the comfortable situation, and interpersonal relationships worsened...”*

During the research, it was important to determine how employees' reactions changed after the accreditation process. The collected data revealed that the emotional tension, reaching its peak at the end of implementing accreditation requirements, gradually decreased. In other words, the research participants emphasized reduced tension, improved communication, relaxation, and joy at achieving the goal.

When organizational leaders asked for clarification about changes in reactions after accreditation was completed, they were inclined to mention dissatisfaction with the altered working conditions and the consequences of conflicts among colleagues:

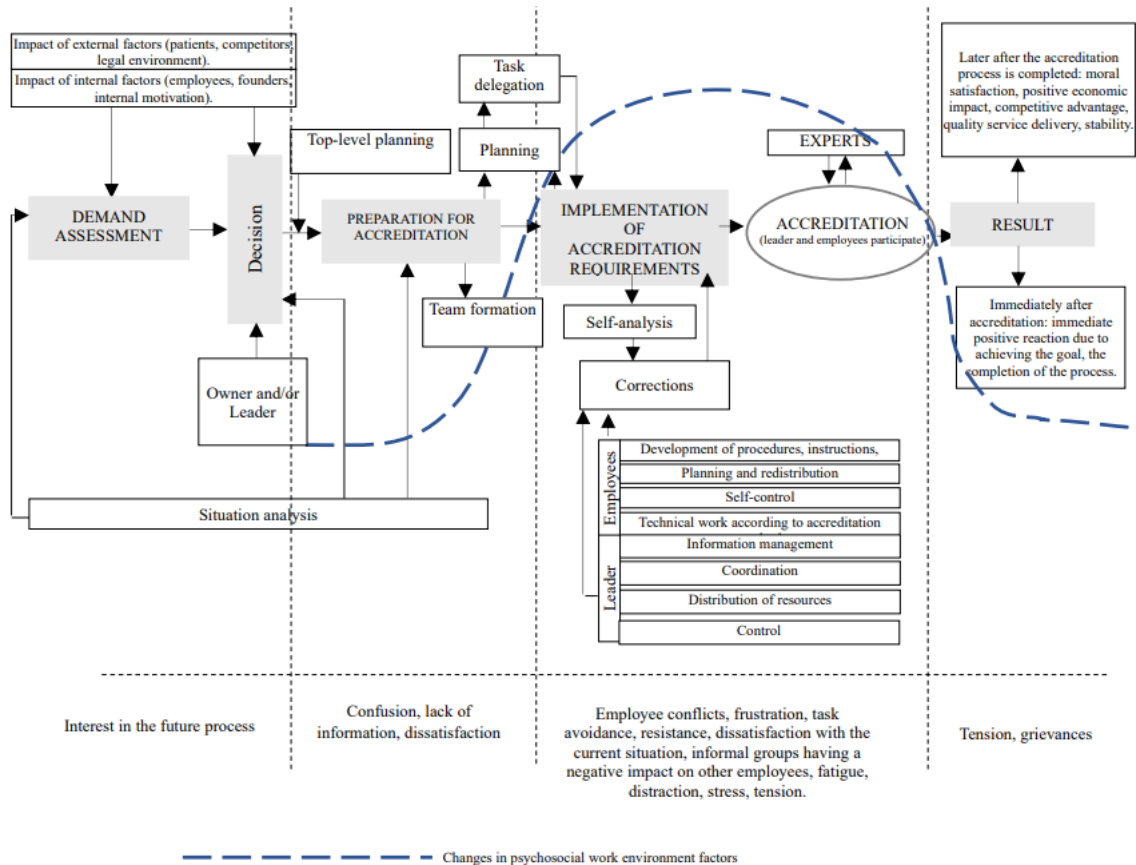
*“I notice that after conflicts among colleagues, there is a certain tension and distance, even though we used to be a strong team.”*

*“After the accreditation, I observe dissatisfaction with certain changes.”*

*“Although there is still dissatisfaction with the changes made...”*

The data collected during the study allowed for a general understanding of the changes in the psychosocial work environment of nurses. Analyzing the research data, it can be concluded that implementing the accreditation procedure in organizations involves six stages (1 fig.).

**FIGURE 1**  
**CHANGE IN PSYCHOSOCIAL WORK ENVIRONMENT FACTORS DURING THE ACCREDITATION PERIOD**



As seen in Figure 1, accreditation involves the following stages: needs assessment (this stage is related to the idea of accreditation, and the resulting psychosocial reactions involve an interest in the upcoming process); decision-making (with the decision to accredit the services, nurses are informed, and while presenting the decision to the organization, managers notice nurses' interest in the upcoming process, which, when presenting planning guidelines, turns into anger due to insufficient information); accreditation preparation (an accreditation plan is prepared, outlining activities and functions, the delegation of tasks is completed, the outlines of accreditation procedures become clearer, and the impact of psychosocial work factors intensifies, with increased physical workload and worsening emotional work environment); implementation of accreditation requirements (performance evaluation is carried out, activity processes are regulated, organizational practices are transferred to the document level, and adjustments are made if necessary, and the peak of psychosocial work environment factors is observed - increased physical and emotional fatigue, higher than usual irritability, conflicts arise); accreditation (internal processes are analyzed, their compliance with established standards is checked, and the level of influence of psychosocial work factors remains high, but improvement trends are noticeable: tasks are completed, new competencies and experience are gained); and the impact of the result (initially characterized by emotional and only later by tangible results, the psychosocial work environment returns to its initial position, emotions subside, a

clearer work regulation is felt, increased work control, etc., but lingering negative employee reactions are observed - feelings of pain and tension accompanying them from the previous accreditation stages).

## **DISCUSSION**

The research results confirm that accreditation in organizations was carried out voluntarily, and all healthcare organizations chose accreditation due to internal and external factors influencing the organization. These results align with the concept and need for accreditation as indicated in the scientific literature. In other words, accreditation in healthcare organizations is a voluntarily chosen quality improvement measure, with the need being determined by various internal and external factors (Mosadeghrad, 2018; Alkhenizan, Shaw, 201; Greenfield, Braithwaite, 2008).

After analyzing the scientific literature, it was determined that any organizational changes, including accreditation, in healthcare organizations are associated with the well-being of the organization's members. Extensive organizational changes can hurt employees (increased frequency of work-related conflicts, more frequent perceptions of task ambiguity, and increased feelings of social support deficiency, job insecurity, and decreased trust in organizational leadership) (Fløvik, et.al., 2019). The results of the conducted research partially align with the provided data and complement them because they indicate that the frequency of conflicts increases during the accreditation process. After this process, feelings of pain are experienced.

The results of this study have shown that accreditation encourages nurses to commit to achieving service quality, improves organizational processes, and enhances opportunities for participation in the organization's life. The scientific literature mentions several advantages of accreditation, such as professional development, employee commitment to the organization, workforce planning, promotion of teamwork, and opportunities for employees to participate in the organization's life (Almasabi, Thomas, 2017; Yildiz, 2014; El-Jardali, et.al., 2008).

In the results of previous research, it is noted that accreditation can lead to negative employee reactions such as rushing, anger, anxiety, overtime work, and uneven distribution of responsibilities (Carrasco-Peralta, et.al., 2019; Melo, 2016; Pomey, et.al., 2010). The results of this study complement the findings of previous research and reveal the weak points of accreditation in organizations: it caused dissatisfaction, anger. It demanded additional efforts from some nurses while also highlighting communication issues.

The results of this study complement the findings of other research (Darmawan, Azizah, 2019; Aninkan, 2018; Jain, et.al., 2018), which emphasize the importance of managing negative reactions to organizational changes. Proper and planned communication, effective process management, planning skills, and motivational strategies are essential for addressing these issues.

The results of other researchers confirm the findings of this study, showing that the benefits of accreditation in an organization are felt immediately and over time. However, tension related to the need to continue implementing accreditation requirements persists even after the accreditation process has ended (Mansour, et.al., 2022; Robbins, et.al., 2022).

As evident from the provided data, the conducted research partially aligns with and complements the findings of other scientific studies. It can be inferred that accreditation, as a voluntarily chosen procedure for quality improvement, contributes to enhancing the quality of organizational activities. However, it poses a risk to the psychosocial work environment of nurses. Hence, proper management in this area is essential to prevent the possible failure of the accreditation process.

## **CONCLUSION**

Accreditation is a voluntary, continuous method healthcare organizations choose to improve service quality. It encompasses the assessment of employee competencies, enhancing service accessibility, increasing operational productivity, improving interpersonal relationships, and ensuring continuity and safety of services.

Before the accreditation processes, it is important to inform the organization's members about the upcoming accreditation procedure, involve all employees in these activities, demonstrate the importance of

accreditation, and plan the accreditation processes. Otherwise, the organization may face employee resistance, task avoidance, anger, and interpersonal conflicts.

When conducting accreditation procedures, it is important to focus on the communication program, the experience of responsible individuals, and the delegation of responsibilities. Improper implementation of these procedures may result in workplace stress, frustration, tension, moral and physical exhaustion, employee division, interpersonal conflicts, and the formation of negative opinions about accreditation.

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