

Staff satisfaction and organisational performance: evidence from a longitudinal secondary analysis of the NHS staff survey and outcome data

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Plain English summary

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It has long been debated how people management practices link to organisational performance. Much research has been conducted, but mostly away from health care. This project aimed to fill some of this gap by testing links between staff experiences, absenteeism and turnover, and NHS trust performance.

We used secondary data from a 3-year period (2009–12) to test the model. In particular, we used extensive data from the national survey of NHS staff, absenteeism and turnover records, patient satisfaction, hospital mortality rates and infection rates. We used various statistical methods to examine links between these variables and to establish whether or not a change in one variable could be said to cause a change in another.

Overall, there was a clear pattern that better staff experiences are associated with better outcomes for employees and patients. In particular, negative experiences such as aggression, discrimination or perceiving unequal opportunities were harmful to staff, increased absence and were also linked to lower patient satisfaction. Several positive staff experiences, reflecting the quality of jobs and positive attitudes about organisations, were associated with higher patient satisfaction and lower absenteeism. Although there were some relationships between staff experience and turnover, patient mortality and infection rates, these were not found consistently. Apart from absenteeism, there was little clear evidence for causal relationships between staff experience and outcomes.

Two Action Learning Sets, comprising managers, and patient and public representatives, broadly supported the emerging findings indicating which staff factors were the most important predictors of staff satisfaction and organisational outcomes.

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