The Relation between Career Plateau and Job Embeddedness as Perceived by Staff Nurses at Menoufia University Hospitals

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Abstract: Background: Career plateau represents stressful experiences of employees' emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. Nursing staff who experience career plateau lose their moral to continue at the work in the same job over a long period of time, which may result in lowering nursing staff' productivity, job embeddedness, and level of creativity. **Purpose:** To assess the relation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by staff nurses at Menoufia University Hospitals. **Study design**: A descriptive correlational research design. **Study sample**: A convenient sample of 300 staff nurses. **Setting**: The study was conducted in critical care units and general departments at Menoufia University Hospitals. **Data collection instruments:** Two instruments were used in the study (Career plateau scale and Job embeddedness scale). **Results**: More than half of the studied sample at Menoufia University Hospitals had high perception level of career plateau. Moreover, more than two third of the studied sample had low level of job embeddedness, while nearly one third had high level of job embeddedness. **Conclusion:** There was a statistically significant negative correlation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by the studied sample at Menoufia University hospitals. **Recommendations**: Providing nursing staff with education programs about career plateau in their job description and road map for career advancement. Nurse managers could develop standards for placement nurses in appropriate position based on their competencies to raise their embeddedness.

Keywords: *Career plateau, Job embeddedness, Staff nurses.*

Introduction

Nursing staff is considered the main element of any healthcare organization that gives spirit and helps to accomplish its goals. Nurses are responsible for a wide range of duties and functions depending on their qualifications and hospital requirements. With the evolution of volatile organizational structures, unstable economic condition, and

downsizing policy; more nursing staff become working in the same position for extended period of time that make them liable for career plateau (Bai et al., 2023). Nursing career plateau can be defined as the feeling of frustration and psychological impairment that nursing staff tends to experience a temporary or permanent end in the advancement of their careers, where the possibility of vertical upgrade within the formal hierarchy becomes very low or completely absent. Moreover, it is a point in a career in which vertical and horizontal movement is restricted. Nursing staff feel they are being blocked from prolonged period they are experiencing in the same position which causes irritation and psychological anxiety (Obied et al., 2022).

Career plateau is classified into two types, structural (hierarchical) plateau and job content plateau. Job content plateau and structural (hierarchical) plateau can occur at one time causing double plateau. Structural or hieratical plateau is the point where nursing staff perceive a little opportunity for more vertical movement due to the flattened pyramid shape within the hospital. This occurs when hospital administration feels their nursing staff have insufficient managerial skills and don't have a suitable commitment for hospital development that will block nurses' movement to next position and delay their career advancement (Hu et al., 2022). Regarding job content plateau it is related to the absence of new, challenging, and varied tasks without possibilities of improvement. Nursing staff become unable to expand

their expertise in the job or job responsibilities as they become saturated with all available job-related information. Lack of job challenges means performing a routine and certain task for many years and knowing exactly what is expected from them every day and there's nothing new to teach (Kao et al., 2022).

Career plateau is regarded as one of the factors that influence nursing staff' job embeddedness and potential negative effects associated with career plateau can influence the amount of success that nursing staff experience particularly if they require upward career growth. In the workplace, a lack of promotion opportunities causes a hierarchical plateau for some nursing staff that can lead to decrease in job embeddedness and work engagement. Career plateau is considered one of the contributing factors that affect the organizations, nurse's self-efficacy and job embeddedness, particularly through hurriedly spreading of downsizing and layoffs which characterizes today's worldwide work (Yuan et al., 2022).

Perceived career plateau represents stressful experiences that prompt employees' emotional exhaustion, turnover intention, and counterproductive behavior, while reducing their job satisfaction, task performance, and work engagement (Hu et al., 2022). Contextual and personal factors that can reduce employees' perceived career plateau. For instance, workplace contextual factors, such as mentoring, coworker support, and respect received at work, can alleviate perceived career plateau. Personal factors relevant to one's

career effectiveness, such as career planning, job involvement, career adaptability, and learning self-efficacy, can also negatively predict perceived CP (Lin & Chen, 2021). In terms of outcomes, career plateau perceptions are associated with negative work attitudes, which is detrimental to both organizations and employees. Employees who see themselves as plateaued are less satisfied, wish to leave or to retire early, are more emotionally exhausted, perceive less internal and external employability and are less affectively committed and embedded to the organization (Lin & Chen, 2021).

It is difficult to determine the reasons behind a staff member's desire to leave an organization. In this regard, understanding the concept of job embeddedness, which focuses on the causes and processes underlying no turnover, is essential. It indicates the extent to which members are attached to their organizations, which has a greater impact on turnover than organizational immersion or job satisfaction. Job embeddedness includes a sense of fit, which is one's perception of how well-suited one is to one's organization or job, as well as the perceived sacrifice of loss of work, and degree of links with other personnel (Ha & Kim, 2020).

Job embeddedness implies the extent to which employees are enmeshed, connected, attached or tied to their job and community. Job embeddedness has twofold: organization and community components with three facets each including fit, link, and sacrifice. Though, both "organization" and

"community" are abstractions that are socially constructed to capture domains where people are potentially embedded. These facets of job embeddedness (fit, link, and sacrifice) connect nurses to their organization and community, determining how much they relate to their colleagues and individuals in that community and how to disconnect among such colleagues, organizations, and community members can cause anxiety, stress and job dissatisfaction (Ujoatuonu et al., 2024).

Job embeddedness is a construct that represents the degree to which employees are embedded in their job or organization. Individuals perceive their careers to be more successful when they are attached to the job, location, organization, people and issues at work. Job embeddedness refers to the combined forces that keep a person from leaving his or her job. It helps individuals to integrate themselves into the fabric of their jobs, firms and communities. Transformational leaders inspire followers to find meaning in their careers and to foresee the future prospects of their careers but this effect is dependent on one's level of job embeddedness because strong linkages incline individuals to stay where they are. Specifically, career adaptability constitutes a notable social influence on job embeddedness and promotes objective and subjective career success (Zhang et al., 2020).

However, job embeddedness is not always favorable for organizations. When job embeddedness is high, the negative relationship between favorable organizational contexts and

unfavorable outcomes is weaker. Employees who are high in job embeddedness may perceive that their freedom to leave is reduced. If employees are supported and trusted by the organization and deeply rooted in their work, they will not be able to leave their current job easily. As a result, embedded employees who lack autonomy and control tend to get involved in organizational deviance so as to compensate for their loss (Yi, 2021).

In Egypt, the problem is further worsening considering the high shortage (19.3 nurses/10,000 populations) more than the global range and high level of Egyptian nurse migration. This highlights the need to examine the levels of Job embeddedness and perception of career plateau among nurses, particularly in countries with high nursing shortages, such as Egypt. A better insight into the nurses' job embeddedness levels can help hospital administrators implement proactive measures to enhance them, preventing the potential harm resulting from inadequate nurses' job embeddedness (El-Gazar et al., 2022).

Significance of the study

A nurse's career, as well as other professionals, may arrive at a point where further hierarchical development is limited. Nurses may remain longer than expected in the same position within an organization and may be plateaued, resulting in career dissatisfaction, job dissatisfaction, and turnover (Abdelaliem & El-Sayed, 2022). Nursing is the cornerstone of healthcare organizations and the first contact point with the patients, suffers from an increasing turnover rate worldwide (Walpita & Arambepola, 2020). Losing nurses is costly and negatively affects productivity, patients' safety, nursing care quality, and nurse's satisfaction, so it is important for the organizations and managers to be aware of job embeddedness and career plateauing in a career path to manage it effectively, in order to improve quality of patient's care (Hashish & Ashour, 2020).

From clinical experience at Menoufia University Hospitals, it has observed that most of staff nurses complained from being in the same position for long period without any motive and hopes to advance in their job which made them feel anger and dissatisfied. There are only a few researchers in Egypt have focused on studying career plateau and job embeddedness among staff nurses. Thus the present study aims to assess the relation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by staff nurses at Menoufia University Hospitals.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the current study was to assess the relation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by staff nurses at Menoufia University Hospitals.

Research Questions

▪ What is the perception of staff nurses of their level of career plateau?

▪ What is the staff nurses level of job embeddedness?

▪ What is the relation between career plateau and job embeddedness among staff nurses?

Methods

Study design

A descriptive correlational research design was used in conducting this study.

Study Sample:

The sample size was determined by using the following formula to estimate the sample size of staff nurses (Yamane, 1976).

n = N/ 1+ N (e)²

N→ total number of staff nurses are (1200) nurse

n→ sample size

e→ error tolerance (.05)

1→aconstant value

Sample size of staff nurse = 1200 / (1+1200) × (.05) ²

= 300 staff nurses

The sampling technique:

A convenient sampling technique was used to select 300 staff nurses who were available at the time of the study, accepted to participate in this study, had at least one year of experience and worked at Menoufia University Hospitals.

Setting:

This study was conducted in critical care units and general departments at Menoufia University Hospitals in Shebin El-Kom, Menoufia Governorate. The bed capacity of the University Hospital is 1000 beds. This hospital is divided into four building. Three of these buildings are interlinked (General Hospital, Emergency Hospital and Specialized Hospital) and one separate building namely Oncology.

Instruments of data collection

Two instruments were used for data collection:

Instrument one: Career plateau scale :

It was divided into two parts as follows:
- **Part one :**Personal characteristics: It included self-reported information form. It was designed to collect nurses' personal characteristics such as: age, gender, marital status, qualification, work unit, and years of nursing experience in the hospital.
- **Part two**: Career plateau scale was developed by Milliman (1992). The instrument was used to assess staff nurses' perception level of career plateau. It consisted of 12 items which were divided into two subscales; measuring hierarchical plateau (6 items) and measuring job content plateau (6 items).

Scoring system:

The scoring system of career plateau scale was assessed by using 3 points likert scale with 1- disagree, 2- neutral and 3- agree. The total perception level of career plateau was determined as the following; high perception level if the percent ≥ 75% of total score, moderate perception level from 60%- 74% and low perception level< 60% (Abd-Elrhaman et al., 2020).

Instrument two: Job embeddedness scale :

This instrument was developed by Mitchell et al., (2001) to assess staff nurses' level regarding job

embeddedness. It consisted of 18 items which were divided into three subscales; measuring fit to organization (6 items), links to organization (6 items), and sacrifice to organization (6 items).

Scoring system:

The scoring system of each subscale was assessed by using 3 points likert scale with 1- disagree, 2- neutral and 3- agree (Mitchell et al., 2001). By statistical analysis the level of nurses' job embeddedness was considered low if the score is 18-31 score. The level of nurses' job embeddedness was considered high if the score is 32-54 score.

Validity and Reliability of instruments:

Validity:

The questionnaires tested for its validity through a bilingual group of five experts from Faculties of Nursing at Menoufia University (two professors), Tanta University (one assistant professor) and Benha University (two assistant professor) was selected to test the content and face validity of the instruments. Necessary modifications were made. The instruments were considered valid from the experts' perspective.

Reliability

These instruments were tested for reliability to estimate the consistency of measurement performed using Chronbach alpha coefficient test. Internal consistency of the first instrument (Career Plateau Scale) was

0.82 and the second instrument (Job Embeddedness Scale) was 0.89.

Pilot study:

After reviewing of the instruments by the experts, the investigator conducted a pilot study before administering the final questionnaire. The purpose of the pilot study was to ascertain clarity, relevance, feasibility and applicability of the study instruments and to determine obstacles that may be encountered during data collection. It also helped to estimate the time needed to fill the questionnaire. The pilot study was carried on 30 staff nurses who presented 10% of sample size. There was no required modifications done.

Ethical considerations:

Approval of the Ethical Research Committee Faculty of Nursing ethical standards of research and rights of the participants and represented to Ethical and research committee N (938);
Before any attempt to collect data, an official approval letter was submitted to the Dean of the Nursing College to collect data from the pr-mentioned study setting, also a written approval letters were submitted to the director of Menoufia University Hospitals to collect data from the pr-mentioned study sample. The letter contained the title, aim of the study and methods of data collection. Data collection procedures, analysis and reporting of the findings were undertaken in a manner designed to protect confidentiality of sample.
The respondents' rights was protected by ensuring voluntary participation; so that informed consent was obtained by

explaining the purpose, nature, time of conducting the study, potential benefits of the study and how data was collected. The respondents were assured that the data was treated as strictly confidential; furthermore, the respondents' anonymity was maintained as they weren't required to mention their names.

Data collection procedure:

Data was collected in the morning; afternoon and night shifts and staff nurses fill in the questionnaire in the presence of the investigator to ascertain all questions were answered. The investigator was available for help to avoid any misinterpretation of questions. The investigator collected the data from staff nurses who were working at closed units in cold days to avoid work overload and ensure their full concentration during filling the questionnaire also collecting the data from staff nurses working in morning, afternoon and night shifts who were working at general units according to type of work and workload of each departments. The time required for each staff nurse to fill the questionnaire was estimated to be 15-30 minutes. Data was collected upon 2 months started from 1st of July 2023 to 1st of September 2023.

Data Analysis:

The collected data were organized, tabulated and statistically analyzed using SPSS software statistical computer package version 21. For quantitative data, mean and standard deviation were calculated. For qualitative data, comparison was done using Chi-square test (χ2). Correlation between variables was evaluated using Pearson correlation coefficient r. A significance was adopted at P<0.05 for interpretation of results of tests of significance (*). Also, a highly significance was adopted at P<0.001 for interpretation of results of tests of significance (**).

Results:

<u>Table 1</u> represents percentage distribution of studied sample according to their personal characteristics. Above half of the studied sample (52%) were between 30-<40 years old and nearly two third of them (69%) were female nurses. Also, more than half of the studied sample (53%) had associate technical degree in nursing and 47.3% were <10 years of nursing experience. Regarding marital status, more than two thirds of the studied sample (76.3%) was married and more than half of the studied sample (58.7%) were working at critical units.

<u>Figure 1</u> reflects perception level of career plateau among studied sample. It indicated that (53.3%) of the studied sample had high perception level of career plateau at Menoufia University Hospitals while (25%) had moderate perception level of career plateau. Finally, (21.7%) of the studied sample had low perception level of career plateau.

<u>Table 2</u> clarifies associative relation between levels of career plateau and job embeddedness among the studied sample. There was a highly statistically significant relation between nurses' level of career plateau and their level of job embeddedness at Menoufia

University Hospitals as p-value (<0.001).

Figure 2 shows job embeddedness among the studied sample. It indicated that (32.7%) of the studied sample had high level of job embeddedness. While (67.3%) of the studied sample had low level of job embeddedness.

Table (1): Distribution of Studied Sample according to Their Personal Characteristics (n=300).

Personal Characteristics	The Studied sample (n=300)	
	No	%
Age		
<30	98	32.7
30-<40	156	**52.0**
≥ 40	46	15.3
Min- Max Mean ±SD	23-51 32.83±5.99	
Sex		
Male	93	31.0
Female	207	**69.0**
Educational qualifications in nursing		
Secondary school diploma	61	20.3
Associate degree in nursing	159	**53.0**
Bachelor degree in nursing	75	25.0
Post studies	5	1.7
Marital status		
Married	229	**76.3**
Unmarried	71	23.7
Years of nursing experience		
<10	142	**47.3**
10-<20	118	39.4
≥20	40	13.3
Min- Max Mean ±SD	2-30 11.44±6.47	
Work Units		
General departments	124	41.3
Critical units	176	**58.7**

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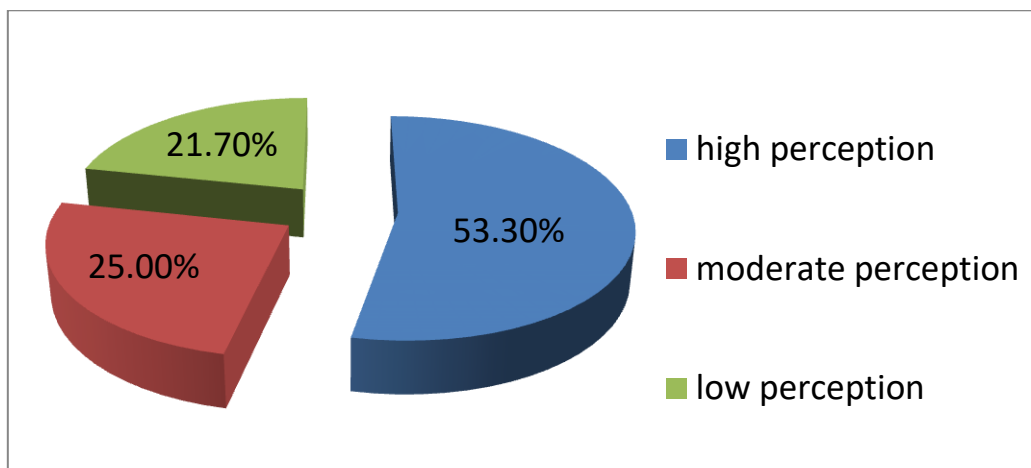**Figure (1): Level of Perception of Career Plateau among Studied Sample (n=300).**

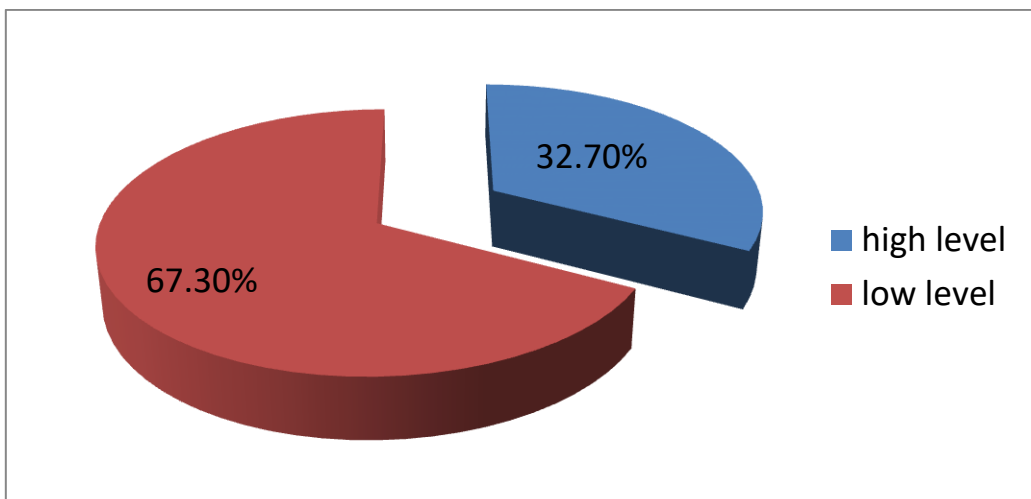**Figure (2): Level of Job Embeddedness among The Studied Sample (n=300).**

Table (2): Associative Relation between Levels of Career Plateau and Job Embeddedness among The Studied Sample (n=300).

Total Career Plateau Levels							X^2	p-value
Total Job Embeddedness Levels	**Low (n=65)**		**Moderate (n=75)**		**High (n=160)**			
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**		
Low (n=202)	46	70.8	36	48.0	120	75.0	17.369	.001**
High (n=98)	19	29.2	39	52.0	40	25.0		

** Highly significant at level P < 0.001.

Discussion

Nowadays, in health care organizations nurses are increasingly faced with the practical problems of a single development channel, narrow space for growth, and low mobility. These difficulties and obstacles in the path of career development make the phenomenon of a career plateau more prominent for nurses. It is detrimental to the career development of nurses to stay in the same position for a long time and engage in repetitive tasks. If nurses believe that the organization cannot give them the proper position and treatment or even development space (hierarchical plateau), their work performance will decline. Nurses who have been stuck in a single work position for a long time tend to feel burned out by the familiar and repetitive work content (content plateau) (Chang et al., 2024).

Moreover, job embeddedness is one of the most important concepts in management that could enhance the ability of the organization to achieve continuous and long-term success, and it ensures that all healthcare organizational systems are compatible and working together. Nurses' job embeddedness is a major factor that influences on quality of nursing care offers. The rapid changes in the healthcare service increased the demands on nurses, which further highlights the importance for organizations to keep their nurses embedded and satisfied (Cai et al., 2023).

Thus, the present study was conducted to assess the relation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by staff nurses at Menoufia University Hospitals through answering the following questions : What is the perception level of career plateau among staff nurses?, What is the level of job embeddedness among staff nurses? And what is the relation between career plateau and job embeddedness among staff nurses? Discussion of the study results is presented in the following sequence: first part concerning personal characteristics, second part concerning career plateau, third part concerning job embeddedness and fourth part concerning correlation between career plateau and job embeddedness.

Concerning the level of perception of studied sample of career plateau, the present study findings revealed that more than half of studied sample at Menoufia University Hospitals had high perception level of career plateau. From investigator point of view, the perception level of career plateau among nurses at Menoufia University Hospital was high it may be due to that nurses had feeling restricted in role, the position involves repetitive and routine tasks, lack of challenging duties or autonomy in the workload, lack of learning opportunities or motivation to learn (no available days off for the study), there is no clear plan for promotions after obtaining high graduated studies and relaying on promotion opportunities more on seniority than higher qualifications. Moreover, the number of supervisory jobs remains constant as a result of the lack of expansion. Indeed, they are full

in number, so it is difficult to create new supervisory jobs.

Similarly, the result of the present study was consistent with Zhu et al. (2021) who conducted a study showed that nurses had high perception of career plateau, also, the study conducted by Hassan et al. (2020), it indicated that the more than half of studied nurses had career plateau. In addition, Abd-Elrhaman et al. (2020) study who found that nursing staff had high perception level of career plateau. Also, Elsayed and Khalaaf (2021) who reported that more than half of nurses' staff had a high level of experience with a total career plateau, and nearly one third of them had a moderate level.

In contrast with the findings of the present study, Elsayed et al. (2023a) study about; "Nursing Staff Perception regarding Career Plateau and its Relation to their Work Engagement" clarified that less than three quarters of studied nursing staff had low perception level regarding career plateau, while the lowest percentage of nursing staff had high perception level. Furthermore, the result of the present study is inconsistent with Gaturu and Njuguna (2020) who found that most studied sample didn't experience career plateauing.

For the level of staff nurses of job embeddedness, the present study findings revealed that; more than two third of the studied sample had low level of job embeddedness, while nearly one third had high level of job embeddedness. From investigator point of view, the lowest level of job embeddedness among nurses may be due to the staff nurses who had provide

inadequate support from nurse manager were not embedded in their jobs. Many factors can contribute to this finding as inadequate sources of income for nurses, particularly in light of price increases, unfavorable working conditions for nurses as restricted policy and system at university hospitals (such as inability to transfer to another work setting without replacement). Additionally, congested nursing rooms, work burdens, nursing shortage, conflict between work and life, and increased family pressure to leave the career. Because of these factors, nurses have no incentive to remain in the field and their tendency to leave the hospital rises.

This result is confirmed to the study that done by Mohamed and Ali (2020) who revealed that the majority percent of the nurses were responses to "low" for total job embeddedness. Also in the same line of the current study findings Abd- Elrhaman et al., (2020) who reported that the majority of the recruited staff nurses were not embedded in their job. In agreement with the present study results, Mahmoud and Obied (2022) who found that more than half of intensive care nurses had a low level and around one quarter had a moderate level of total job embeddedness. Also, El-Gazar et al. (2022) found that nurses reported a moderate level of job embeddedness.

Conversely, the result of present study disagreed with; El-Gazar et al. (2022) who revealed that nurses reported a moderate level of job embeddedness. In addition, the present study result is

opposed to a study conducted by Elsayed et al. (2023b) who clarified that less than two thirds of studied nurses reported that they embedded and about one third reported that they not embedded. In consistent with the findings of this study Goliroshan et al., (2021) found high levels of job embeddedness among nurses.

In relation to the correlation between career plateau and job embeddedness, the present study findings revealed that; there was a statistically significant negative correlation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by the studied sample at Menoufia University hospital as P-value (<0.05). From investigator point of view, the vast majority of nurses stated that because of volatile organizational structures, an unstable economic environment, and downsizing policy, more nurses were work in the same job for an extended period of time, they have limited lateral and upward mobility, and their careers represent a moratorium on promotion. These decrease their self-efficacy level and their commitment to organizational goals as symbolization of successful work and become not embedded. There are limited reviews regarding this study.

This result is confirmed to the study by Jain and Chhabra (2023) which identified that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between career plateau and job embeddedness. In agreement with the present study results, Abd-Elrhaman et al. (2020) who found that there were statistically significant negative

relation between career plateau and job embeddedness.

Conclusion

In the light of the current study results, it can be concluded that more than half of the studied sample had high perception level of career plateau, while one quarter had moderate perception level of career plateau and the minimal had low perception level of career plateau. Additionally, regarding career plateau dimensions; nearly half of the studied sample had high perception level of hierarchical plateau and more than one third of the studied sample had moderate perception level of job content plateau. Moreover, more than two third of the studied sample had low level of job embeddedness, while nearly one third had high level of job embeddedness. Also, the highest job embeddedness dimensions was fits to organization, while the lowest job embeddedness dimensions was sacrifice to organization. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between career plateau and job embeddedness as perceived by the studied sample at Menoufia University hospitals.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:
- Nurse Managers should have equity, fairness and consistency in the evaluation of staff nurses to avoid a feeling of career plateau, inequity and injustice, which might make the workers less embedded and more inclined to leave.

- Nurses can reignite their career growth and progress by engaging in self-assessment, setting new goals, seeking mentors, embracing new challenges, and evaluating job satisfaction to overcome career plateau.
- Nursing curricula for under graduate and post graduate should include topics like career plateau and Job embeddedness.

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