

Safety of the Older Nurse  
Susan Letvak PhD, RN  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Box 26170 Greensboro, NC 27402  
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Purpose: An acute nursing shortage and organizational restructuring have contributed to increased workloads and higher rates of job dissatisfaction, yet we have no information on the actual effects of these trends on the safety of our aging workforce. The purposes of this study were to (1) determine the job related injuries and to (2) determine if demographic variables and job attributes (job satisfaction, control over practice, and job demands) influence job related injuries of older RNs.

Method: A survey tool was developed to measure demographic variables, job attributes (job satisfaction, control over practice, and job demands), and job related injuries and health problems of older RNs. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of older RNs over the age of 50 in two southeastern states. Nquery Advisor determined that sample sizes of 120 (N=240) per state would achieve 80% power at  $\alpha = .05$ . To ensure an adequate number of responses, given an anticipated response rate of 40%, surveys were sent to 300 nurses in each state.

Findings: A response rate of 53% was achieved. The average age of the respondents was 57.2 (range 50-80), most were female (96%) and 88% were Caucasian. Almost one in four (23.4%) of the respondents had a job related injury within the past five years. The majority of injuries were needle sticks ( $n = 31$ ) and back injuries ( $n = 18$ ). More than one in three (35.5%) reported job related health problems, with back pain being the most frequently reported problem. Logistic regression analysis determined job demands ( $p = .05$ ), race ( $p = .041$ ), and employer ( $p = .004$ ) influenced job related injuries in older RNs.

Discussion: The RN workforce is expected to continue to age. While much attention has been directed to increasing the available supply of RNs, more focus must be given to redesigning jobs for older RNs and improving the workforce environment. Turbulence in the healthcare system is not expected to lessen (IOM, 2003), thus requiring action by health care organizations and nursing leaders. Increased support of the nursing workforce, particularly older RNs, is imperative if we are to maximize RN and patient safety. Further research is warranted on the safety of the older RN. Attention must also be given to potential racial disparities in occupational safety of the RN workforce.