



The Role of Employee Engagement in the Relationship between Staff Morale and Employee Wellbeing of Nurses in the South African Public Hospitals

Lulama Mabe; Mphoreng Magdeline Mmako; Ilze Swarts

Department of People Management and Development, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

E-mail: MabeFL@tut.ac.za; MmakoMM@tut.ac.za; SwartsI@tut.ac.za

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Abstract

Employee engagement is essential for corporate success and is a requirement for gaining and retaining a competitive edge in public hospitals. This study assesses the role of employee engagement on the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing of nurses in public hospitals. A quantitative approach using self-administered questionnaires was applied to 461 nurses in the public hospitals of six provinces in South Africa for data collection. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) application was used to analyse the data obtained in the research. Ethical considerations were applied throughout the research process. Employee engagement was significantly and partially related to staff morale and employee wellbeing, and staff morale and employee wellbeing were significantly and related to employee engagement. Furthermore, the study determined that employee engagement has a mediating and moderating role in the relationship between staff morale and employee engagement. The study concluded that is that management needs managers should bring teamwork, motivation, trust, engagement, growth, and development to their employees, to identify their believes, hope, values, interests, and needs and know to what extent it matches with the hospital values, believes and goals.

Keywords: *Employee Engagement; Employee Well-being; Nurses; Public Hospitals; South Africa*

Introduction

Employee engagement is essential for corporate success and is a requirement for gaining and retaining a competitive edge (Autry 2019). Rameshkumar (2020), defines it as “a state of mind that is positive, fulfilling and characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Moreover, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) feel that highly engaged employees typically experience less work-related stress and sadness than non-engaged employees. Prior research suggested that a few factors, including possibilities for professional advancement, relationships with coworkers, leadership and management, the work environment, and work-life balance could increase employee engagement (Men, Neil & Yue 2020;

Saurombe & Barkhuizen 2020; Wood, Oh, Park & Kim 2020). This also occurs in public hospitals, where people's health and wellbeing are crucial for enhancing society's and the country's overall health. The skills gap has recently shown (Sheehan, Tham, Holland & Cooper 2019), long working hours (AllandeCussó, García-Iglesias, Ruiz-Frutos, Domínguez-Salas, RodríguezDomínguez & Gómez-Salgado 2021), and psychological distress symptoms associated with depression and anxiety, stress prevention (Williams Jacob, Rakovac, Scotter & Wismar 2020) maintenance of service quality (Hu, Kong, Li, Han, Zhang Zhu & Zhu 2020), exponential growth in quantity and quality demands (De Simone, Planta & Cicotto 2018) is challenging in this field. To produce the best possible medical results, every healthcare facility needs to boost the element of engagement and promote it throughout nursing units (García-Sierra, Fernández-Castro 2018). Nurses are the key component for creating high-quality health services in any healthcare system, not overcoming these difficulties (Cao, Liu, Liu, Yang & Liu 2019; Ronnie 2019). This means that nurses are an asset in the health care system. Staff morale is a variable that employers should consider while improving nurses' performance in the workplace. Previous research has shown that employee engagement has an impact on employee wellbeing and work-life quality (Mabindisa & Legoabe 2021). In this setting, organisations' duty in increasing employee engagement should be to implement policies that promote employee wellbeing and staff morale.

The current survey also mentions staff morale and wellbeing. Staff morale is the sum of an employee's emotions, passion, style, and humour, which results in positive work behaviour and promotes organisational success (Khumalo 2022). Whiteoak (2021) states that it is a constructive idea that combines enthusiastic enthusiasm for the accomplishment of visible duties. Setyawati, Mayanto, Sugangga, Widyanto and Rahma (2023) believe that high staff morale promotes the positivity of employees' attitudes and behaviours towards achieving work outcomes. Employees with high staff morale are more enthusiastic about doing job tasks, which pushes them to work better and more productively in the organisation (Mphono 2018), this means that this concept is critical to the effectiveness of public health and the quality of service (Mphono 2018) and should be adopted in various organisations (Mahmoud, Reisel, Grigoriou, Fuxman & Mohr 2020). Previous study has shown that when supervisors create a positive attitude and passion for work in individuals and groups, employees have higher levels of energy, spirit, and motivation to work (they are more engaged with their job and workplace) (Pattnaik & Jena 2021). This indicates the importance of staff morale in improving different aspects of employee engagement.

Evidence from previous literature highlighted that variables of staff morale alone might not be enough to persuade employees to work forever for a particular organisation (Chinomona & Mofokeng 2016). Therefore, managers must create a more positive organisational behaviour that can enhance positive staff morale (Paek, Schuckert, Kim & Lee 2015). The positive organisational behaviour is termed employee wellbeing. One of the individual-level consequences of employee engagement is its impact on employee wellbeing. Highly engaged employees have favourable impressions of their organisation and its associated organisational components (Steiner, Copley, Simonds & Heron 2020). Employees enhance their motivation, morale, and sense of responsibility at work, which has a positive impact on their wellbeing (Saleem, Shenbei & Hanif 2020).

In the study, the relationship between staff morale, employee wellbeing and employee engagement was examined and investigated whether this relationship changed according to the employee engagement level of the employees. In addition, no study examining the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between employee wellbeing and staff morale has been found in the literature. For this reason, it is thought that this study will be a valuable resource for future research. Within the scope of the research, the concepts of employee engagement, employee wellbeing, and staff morale were first explained. Subsequently, hypotheses were formed due to the literature review on the relationships between the concepts. Later, statistical methods were used to examine the data collected for

the nurses through the survey approach. The results were then analysed, and recommendations were made.

The primary aim of the study is to determine the role of employee engagement in the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing of nurses in public hospitals. To this effect, the following research objectives were formulated: (1) to establish the influence of staff morale on employee engagement; (2) to establish the influence of employee wellbeing on employee engagement; (3) to determine the mediating effect of employee engagement in the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing; and to establish if employee engagement moderates the significant relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing.

Literature Review

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has its roots in Kahn (1990) who first introduced the term employee engagement, referred to as a state where individuals express and employ themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically during role performance. For this study, employee engagement was approached from cognitive, emotional, and behavioural point of view (Naidoo, Abayaratne & Rugimbana 2019). They conceptualised it as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of employees. Emotional engagement entails connecting with colleagues and managers in a meaningful way (Jarrar 2022). Cognitive engagement is related to understanding an employee, why and how the provision of optimal continuous contribution can be made, and its influence on achieving company goals (Fachrunnisa, Gani, Nurhidayati & Adhiatma 2022). Levitats and Vigoda-Gadot (2020) behavioural engagement can be understood as the physical manifestation of the cognitive and emotional engagement combination and can be understood as increased levels of effort directed toward organisational goals. Shuck, Adelson and Reio (2017) argued that engagement is a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalised by maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural energy. This implies that engagement entails cognitively, bodily, and sensitively involving oneself with one's organisation and work role. Employee engagement is an outcome of a healthy work environment, thus highlighting the importance of granting employees the workplace they require to become and remain engaged (Bernik & Znidarsic 2021). Employee engagement has emerged from burnout research as an attempt to enfold the whole spectrum directing from individual unwell being (burnout) to their wellbeing (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leite 2001; Sarwar *et al.* 2020).

Staff Morale

On an individual level, morale is a state of psychological wellbeing based on a sense of confidence, usefulness, and overall purpose. On a group level, morale refers to the spirit of a group (Bowles & Cooper 2009). Unfavourable attitude would be an indication of low morale, resulting in inefficiency and unrest among employees (Matsaung 2014).

To be motivated, one must have a high level of morale while motivating employees to increase their morale (Ngwane 2010; Taillard & Giscoppa 2013). Vinothkumar (2018) believes nurturing and maintaining morale in an organisation is more about raising a strong entity constantly by its optimistic people who are excited to go to work always. Be more productive, giving better quality service, creating an attractive environment to the talented employees to appear as 'employees of choice'.

Employee Wellbeing

Day and Nielsen (2017) define wellbeing as “the satisfaction that an individual has from life, including work or job-related satisfaction and general health”. Employee wellbeing is associated with a happy and healthy workforce (Sarwar *et al.* 2020). Wellbeing is considered an adapting consequence of self-improvement and self-fulfilment (Yang, Feng, Meng & Qiu 2019). Thus, employee engagement enhances employees' wellbeing (Matz-Costa *et al.* 2014; Robertson, Birch & Cooper 2012). The wellbeing of employees is affected by various work-related factors that can be defined as requirements and resources. If there is a balance between the demands and resources, the employee's wellbeing is positively affected and promoted, if there are too high demands and low resources, is the health negatively affected (Tummers & Bakker 2021). Stefanovska – Petkovska, Petrovska, Bojadziev and Schaeffer (2019) are of the opinion that the wellbeing of employees is perceived as better in the workplace if they feel that the organisation promotes the wellbeing of the employees by getting to know the employees and their needs.

Hypotheses

Staff Morale and Employee Engagement

The extant literature widely associates staff morale with organisational success and employee engagement (Pattnaik & Jena 2020). Employee engagement confirm that the talented nursing workforce is undoubtedly very important for firms, but an engaged workforce is essential (Badi, Cherian, Farouk & Nahyan 2023). Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Fletcher, Robinson, Buzzeo and Currie (2015) discover the empirical support for the positive relationship of employee engagement dimensions with staff morale. Additionally, growing empirical evidence has established a positive association between staff morale and employee engagement (Dash & Mohanty 2019; Mabindisa & Legoabe 2021; Whiteoak 2021). Based on the previous work the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 1: *Staff morale has a positive influence on employee engagement.*

Employee Wellbeing and Employee Engagement

The positive impact of work engagement on employee wellbeing has been reported in previous studies (Kaplan, DeShon & Tetrick 2017; Salanova, Del Líbano, Llorens & Schaufeli 2014; Salas-Vallina, Alegre & López-Cabrales 2021; Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kamiyama & Kawakami 2015). Engaged employees tend to be happier, reflecting positively on their wellbeing (Knight, Patterson & Dawson 2017; MatzCosta, Besen, Boone James & Pitt-Catsouphes 2014; Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin & Ahmed 2020).

Hypothesis 2: *Employee wellbeing has a positive effect on employee engagement.*

Mediating Role of Employee Engagement on The Relationship between Staff Morale and Employee Wellbeing

From the foregoing discussion, employee engagement is the point of entry of the proposed relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing. It also argues that employee engagement mediates the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing. To fully understand how employee wellbeing relates to staff morale of employees, we believed employee engagement would play a role as a mediator. That is, the more engaged in their job, the high morale they experience, the less stress they have, and resultantly, the more wellbeing employees would experience in their life. However, to date, no study has attempted to investigate the effect of employee engagement in the relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing. Based on the previous discussion, we proposed a partial

mediation model of employee engagement along with a direct relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing. On the other hand, based on the above-recorded studies that examine the relationship between the three variables separately, it is considered that employee who is more engaged in their jobs can have high staff morale and more employee wellbeing.

Hypothesis 3: *Employee engagement mediates the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing.*

The Moderating Role of Employee Engagement on the Significant Relationship between Staff Morale and Employee Wellbeing

This study postulates that employee engagement may strengthen the link between staff morale and employee engagement. Garg and Singh (2020) reported that employee wellbeing plays an integral role in enhancing employee engagement. Vaishnavi and Ramkumar (2018) asserted employees who have a high engagement level have more value in an organisation than the employee with less engagement level. Rich findings on employee engagement role as mediator and moderator have been reported in prior literature that link to employee wellbeing studies (Garg & Singh 2020; Sulistyono & Suhartini 2019). Sharma and Kumra (2020) reported that employee wellbeing tends to be higher among highly engaged employees. Measuring moderation based on the direct relationship between the dependent and independent variables is insufficient since moderation might be significant even when there is no direct association.

Hypothesis 4: *Employee engagement moderates the significant relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing.*

Research Design

Research Paradigm and Approach

This study followed the positivistic research paradigm and conclusions were drawn through logical reasoning, which involved building hypotheses from existing literature relating to the variables in the hypothesised model. The study involved validation, hypothesis testing and describing relationships between the independent variables (staff morale and employee wellbeing) and the dependent variable (employee engagement), the quantitative was most appropriate (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010).

Research Method

Research Participants

The target population of the study was nursing staff working in six provinces in public hospitals in South Africa. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, and 461 questionnaires were returned.

Most of the responses were from professional nurses 63% (293), staff nurses comprised 24% (108), and auxiliary nurses comprised 13% (59). The highest level of education achieved by the nurses who participated was an honours degree or BTech (34%). Only few nursing employees had junior certificate (Standard 8 or Grade 10) and Senior certificate (Standard 10 or Grade 12). Most of the participants (43%) had 1-10 years' experience in their current employment.

Measuring Instrument

The measuring instrument had four sections. The first section was a biographical questionnaire. The other sections comprised adapted scales, namely the Gallup Employee Engagement Scale (2006), (Section C) Staff Morale, (Section D), and Employee Wellbeing (Section E).

Employee engagement was measured using the Gallup Engagement Scale (2006). The scale is made up of 12 items. In the present study, an acceptable internal consistency was observed for the three subscales: physical engagement ($\alpha = 0.000$), cognitive engagement ($\alpha = 0.000$), and emotional engagement ($\alpha = 0.000$).

The Nolan, Grant, Brown and Nolan (1998) Staff morale Scale was used to measure the nurses' morale. In this study, an acceptable internal consistency score of 0.965 was obtained.

The Employee Wellbeing Scale developed by Parkinson, Tennant, Hiller, Fishwick, Platt, Joseph, Weich, Parkinson, Secker and Stewart-Brown (2008) to test the wellbeing of the nursing staff in South African public hospitals. All items of all three constructs were scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was in accordance with the Tshwane University of Technology. After being granted permission, the researchers were responsible for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. The partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) method is applied to examine and test the hypotheses and data in this research (Ha 2022; Ha, Nguyen & Nguyen 2023). Moreover, PLS-SEM can be seen as a tool for researchers to discover relationships between factors and results that can be applied to theoretical and practical implications.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise data in an organised manner by describing the relationship between variables in a sample or population. The Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal validity and overall scale reliability of the measuring instruments. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) through the assessment of the goodness of fit statistics (CFI, RMSEA and SRMR) was used to determine the psychometric properties of the measuring instruments. PLS-SEM was used to examine and confirm hypotheses described motives (Garson 2016). It is a multivariate method that enables the quick approximation of several calculations. PLS-SEM may successfully combine regression analysis with factor analysis in a single phase of analysis (Hamoudah, Othman, Abdul Rahman, Mohd Noor & Alamoudi 2021). Smart PLS was used to test the direct and indirect links between staff morale, employee wellbeing, and employee engagement. The structural equation model enables the representation of complex interactions between several variables (Sarstedt & Cheah 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Tshwane University of Technology: REF #: REC/2019/07/010.

Results

Reliability and Confirmatory Results of the Scales

Confirmatory factor analysis through the goodness of fit statistics confirmed the distinctive validity of staff morale, occupational stress, and employee engagement. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, factor loadings and composite reliability was used to assess the reliability of the measuring instruments. Cronbach's alpha coefficient typically reveals item consistency.

The staff morale scored 0.965 Cronbach’s alpha with two dimensions (support factor = 0.964, and organisation factor = 0.921), employee wellbeing (unidimensional) scored 0.938 Cronbach’s alpha, which is regarded as good (Babbie, Halley & Zaino 2007). The internal consistency of the employee engagement scale (measured by Gallup (EE) consisting of two dimensions was good, ranging from 0.851 for job related factor to 0.931 for personal related factor. The reliability scores associated with occupational stress dimensions may be regarded as good (death = 0.858, relationship factor = 0.940, intrinsic = 0.898). Table 1 met the criteria of internal consistency.

Table 1. Reliability of the scales

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Staff morale	35	0.965
Support factor	23	0.964
Organisation factor	12	0.921
Employee engagement	12	0.913
Personal related factor	7	0.931
Job related factor	5	0.851
Employee wellbeing	15	0.942

Table 2 presents the goodness of fit statistics related to all the scales. The fit indices of the CFA model related to staff morale were reported as follows: CFI (0.906), RMSEA (0.069), and SRMR (0.049). The model fitted the data well as two (CFI and SRMR) of the four fit statistics were acceptable. Goodness of fit results for employee well-being was found as follows: CFI = 0.923, RMSEA = 0.080, SRMR = 0.043. Employee engagement observed the following goodness of fit indices: CFI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.097, SRMR = 0.042. The model was well fitting given that two of the four fit statistics (CFI and SRMR) were acceptable.

Table 2. Goodness of fit statistics

Variables	SM	EW	EE	P
Df	3.114	4.46	5.25	0.0000
CFI	0.906	0.923	0.951	0.0000
TLI	0.894	0.938	0.093	0.0000
RMSEA	0.069	0.080	0.097	0.0000
SRMR	0.049	0.043	0.042	0.0000

SM, staff morale; EW, employee wellbeing; EE, employee engagement; CFI, Comparative fit index, TLI, Tucker Lewis index; RMSEA, Root square error of approximation; SRMR, Standardised root mean square residual; Df, Degree of freedom.

The composite reliability was used to compute the internal consistency reliability. The composite reliability scores for the three variables were greater than 0.80. The recommended value of the composite reliability according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1999) is .7 or higher. Thus, the three variables observed satisfactory composite reliability scores: staff morale (0.942), employee wellbeing (0.938), and employee engagement (0.891). The convergent validity of each measurement instrument assesses the extent to which a specific construct converges and explains the variance of the items within the measurement instrument. The convergent validity and the measuring instruments in the measurement model assessed through the AVE score were also good (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle 2019). The AVE scores were above 0.5 (staff morale = 0.517, employee wellbeing = 0.599, employee engagement = 0.599). The current study's findings indicate that all measured AVE values are more than the permitted minimum value of 0.5. For all three dimensions, reliability and convergent validity was achieved, as the CR values were greater than the AVE values. (see Table 3), leading to the conclusion that convergent validity met all necessary criteria.

Table 3. Quality criteria

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance Extracted (AVE)
Staff morale	0.965	0.942	0.517
Employee wellbeing	0.942	0.938	0.528
Employee engagement	0.913	0.891	0.599

Table 4 shows the extent to which staff morale, and employee wellbeing influence employee engagement. It is reported that the variables in the theoretical model (staff morale, employee wellbeing) explain approximately 66.5% of the variance in employee engagement, which can be interpreted as moderate. It should be observed that all three variables have a significant association with employee engagement. The results provide support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

To determine whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing, the specific indirect effects (Table 4) should be consulted.

Interval biases corrected by 95% was used to test the mediating role of employee engagement. The analysis revealed that controlling the mediator (Employee Engagement), the coefficient was increased (from 0.764 to 0.818). The results of biases corrected 95% demonstrate that the upper and lower CI did not straddle a zero, thus confirming that employee engagement significantly mediated the impact of staff morale on employee wellbeing. This is confirmed by the indirect effect in the output, tested using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates. The indirect effect can be described as the amount of mediation that took place and can be described as $c-c'$. The indirect effect can be calculated by $a \times b$. The 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was obtained with 5000 bootstrap resamples. The table shows that employee engagement has a negative and significant mediating effect $-0.053, p = 0.003$) on the relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing. The results support Hypothesis 3.

Table 4. Mediating testing: bootstrap results Indirect and Total effects of EE on SM, EW

Variable	Effect	Se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI	c_ps	c_sc
SM.>EM.>EW	.764	.028	27.495	.000	.710	.819	1.138	.789
Mediating testing: bootstrap results for a direct effect of EE on SM, EW								
SM.>EM.>EW	.818	.036	22.599	.000	.747	.899	1.218	.844
Mediating testing: bootstrap results for indirect effect of EE on SM, EW								
SM.>EM.>EW		-.053		0.003	.028	-.107	Decision	
							Mediation	

SM, Staff morale; EE, Employee engagement; EW, Employee wellbeing

Moderation Analysis

Figure 1 reveals the interaction of staff morale and employee wellbeing on employee engagement was significant ($\beta = 0.330, p = .001$), which supports H4. The figure plots the interaction effect. The influence of employee wellbeing on employee engagement seems not to vary when individual staff morale is low. However, a high level of staff morale strengthens the positive relationships between employee wellbeing and employee engagement. In other words, employee engagement moderated the relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing respectively.

The moderating role of employee engagement in the relationship between staff morale, and employee wellbeing was tested by looking at the significance of the interaction term. The moderation was supported. H4: Employee engagement moderates the significant relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing.

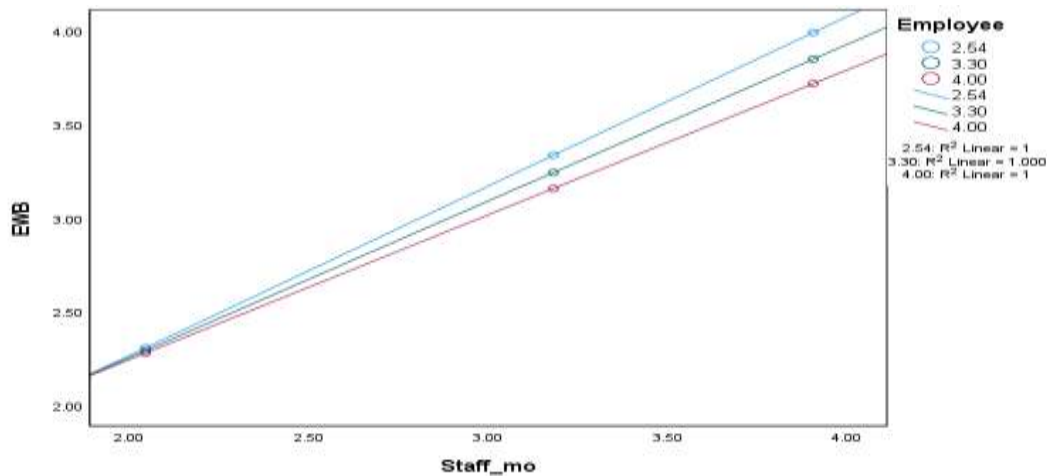


Figure 1. Staff morale with employee wellbeing by employee engagement

Multiple Regression

Multiple regression was used to examine the relationship between staff morale (independent variable), employee wellbeing (dependent variable) and employee engagement (mediator). The mediatory role of employee engagement in the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is also examined to determine its extent on the relationship.

Table 5 presents multiple regressions performed using employee engagement as a dependent variable and the total scores of employee wellbeing, and staff morale as independent variables. Confidence intervals for the parameters estimated were provided at 95% and the variance and the statistical significance of the relationships were examined by evaluating the path coefficients and the R squared value. R-squared values indicate the level of variance of each endogenous variable compared to the entire model (Chin 2010). Table 8 indicates that after removing eleven multivariate outliers, the assumptions of the homoscedastic, linearity, multicollinearity, independence of residuals and normality of residuals were met. The overall model was significant $F(3, 436) = 288.89, p < 0.001$. The combination of independent variables explained 66.5% of the variance in the dependent variable. The path coefficients were assessed by inspecting their direction, strength, and statistical significance. Table 7 displays that the inspection of the coefficients for staff morale ($B = 0.864, p < 0.001$) was the only significant predictor of employee engagement. A slight moderating effect of employee engagement was found on the relationship between employee wellbeing and staff morale to support Hypothesis 4 ($B = -0.046, p = 0.320$). As shown in Table 7, the moderating effect is positive but not significant enough to impact the strength of the relationship.

Table 5. Model summary (R-squared (R2))

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.816 ^a	0.665	0.663	0.39585	1.670

- a. Predictors: (Constant), staff morale, employee wellbeing
- b. Dependent variable: employee engagement

Table 6. ANOVA

Model	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	135.806	3	45.269	288.893 <.001 ^b
	Residual	68.320	436	0.157
	Total	204.126	439	

- a. Dependent variable: employee engagement
- b. Predictors: (Constant), staff morale, employee wellbeing

Table 7 Coefficients

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
		B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.592	0.145		4.068	0.000
	Employee wellbeing	-0.046	0.046	-0.044	-0.996	0.320
	Staff morale	0.864	0.044	0.850	19.496	0.000

- a. Dependent variable: employee engagement

Discussions

The primary objective of this study aimed to determine whether staff morale and employee wellbeing influence employee engagement. It was hypothesised that the two constructs positively influence employee engagement (directly or indirectly), and that staff morale lays the foundation for the effect of employee wellbeing on employee engagement. This was based on the idea that employees with high staff morale experience more of employee wellbeing. In the literature, numerous studies were found that separately examine the relationship between these variables (Dash & Mohanty 2019; Mabindisa & Legoabe 2021; Pattnaik & Jena 2020; Salas-Vallina, Alegre & López-Cabrales 2021; Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin & Ahmed 2020; Whiteoak 2021). However, there is no study handling the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing. Therefore, it is considered that the research will be an important resource for managerial decisions and future research. In this study, the independent variable staff morale directly affects the dependent variable employee engagement at 0.864. However, if the mediating variable employee engagement is added to the model, the independent variable employee wellbeing indirectly affects the dependent variable employee engagement at 0.046. As a result, it was revealed that employee engagement partially mediated between staff morale and employee wellbeing.

With the given background, the outcomes of the present study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The two independent variables, staff morale, and employee wellbeing had partial significant relations with employee engagement. Obbarius, Fischer, Liegl, Obbarius and Rose (2021) indicated that employees who are engaged are highly energetic, proactive, productive, focused, and affects their lives.

The results of a study conducted by Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kamiyama and Kawakami (2015) indicate that employee engagement has a significant effect on health and life satisfaction, which are elements of employee wellbeing. Radic, Arjona-Fuentes, Ariza-Montes, Han and Law (2020) find that employee engagement has a significant partial effect on employee wellbeing.

According to the research results, the increase in the level of employee engagement positively affects their wellbeing. In other words, if employees are engaged in their jobs, they contribute more to the organisation and their wellbeing. On the other hand, it is essential to raise employees' engagement, particularly in demanding the stressful organisation like the health sector. Since the nurses serve the human health, it is crucial to they concentrate on their work, keep morale high, and being happy while they are doing their work. Another study result is that engaged employee perceive staff morale positively and thus increase their wellbeing. Accordingly, it is possible to increase employees wellbeing by taking necessary measures for factors that increase their staff morale, such as excessive workload, lack of resources, poor working conditions, and stress.

This study findings show that employee engagement impacts positive employee behaviours and outcomes (i.e., staff morale, and employee wellbeing). Thus, it is unwise to ignore engagement at work. Neglecting it implies forgetting the fundamental aspects of what it means to be human, especially as most people spend a great deal of their life in the workplace.

Managers are advised to put more effort into understanding staff morale, its feature, and how it finds expression. They can actively work on creating an environment that helps employees to find fulfilment at work. Organisations should aim to implement diverse staff morale attributes in their organisation. It will enhance the staff morale of current employees and attract prospective employees, as suggested by Alozie (2020) that managers should bring teamwork, motivation, trust, engagement, growth, and development to their employees. Noor and Ampornstira (2019) add that organisations are less productive when employees lack morale, and with an increase in morale, engagement increases.

Management needs to discuss nurses' problems and their needs with administrators to overcome these problems to enhance their satisfaction level which can increase their commitment level, and ability to identify their believes, hope, values, interests, and needs and know to what extent it matches with the hospital values, believes and goals (Saad, Elsayed & Ibrahim 2019).

Conclusion

This research aimed at analysing the effect of employee engagement on staff morale and employee wellbeing of nurses in six public hospitals in South Africa. Besides, the study examined the moderating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing. The consistency of the results with previous studies confirmed that higher levels of engagement lead to higher staff morale. The moderating effect of employee engagement was partially significant to the relationship between staff morale and employee wellbeing. Before generalising the results to other industries this is very important to consider that the results taken from this study are based on samples composed of only one segment of the health sector. This research contributes to literary evidence based on empirical data in exploring the impact of employee engagement on staff morale and employee wellbeing in public hospitals in South Africa. The absence of contextual variables is one of the limitations of the study. The outcomes of the current study merit further research on this topic with the large example size and incorporation of some contextual variables utilising cluster sampling may lead to added validity of results for generalisation.

Acknowledgments

Competing Interest

The authors declare that this is original work and never been submitted to other journals for publication. This research has not been funded by any government or private institution. The authors have equal contribution in conducting this research. The authors declare not much competing interest.

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