Original Article

Generational preferences in the nursing work environment: A dimensional concept analysis

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this dimensional concept analysis was to identify preferences for favourable nursing work environments by Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial nurses.

Background: Favourable nursing work environments have been associated with better nurse and patient outcomes. Researchers have reported differences among generations related to the work environment, but the extent to which there are differences in preferences, not just perceptions, is less certain.

Method: A dimensional concept analysis was performed, in which one concept was analysed from multiple points of view. Articles were obtained from PubMed, CINAHL and PsycINFO. Articles published in the last ten years were included if they reported preferences, desires or ideals for the nursing work environment and were categorized by generational cohort. Eight articles qualified for review.

Results: Four major themes were identified: nursing practice/unit characteristics, managers/leadership, team/professional interactions and pay/benefits. An additional theme of personal/self emerged among Millennials.

Conclusions: All generations reported preferences related to benefits/pay, manager/leadership, nursing practice/unit characteristics and team/interactions. Only Millennials reported aspects related to self.

Implications for nursing management: All generations desired the first four themes. To address each, nursing leaders should consider the following: (a) ensure adequate staffing and resources are in place for nursing staff; (b) obtain input from all generations about their level of satisfaction with benefits/pay and examine ways to provide better benefits or pay when possible; (c) encourage leadership self-development, such as educational opportunities and mentorship; and (d) determine opportunities to improve interactions among staff members. For Millennials, the only group who had expectations in the area of ‘self’, provide individualized attention and opportunities that allow them to create a better work-life balance, such as self-scheduling.

Keywords
generations, nurses, nursing work environment, preferences
Research has linked favourable nursing work environments to better nurse and patient outcomes internationally (Aiken et al., 2011, 2012; McHugh et al., 2016; Olds, Aiken, Cimiotti, & Lake, 2017). However, many nurses report dissatisfaction with their jobs for reasons that can be attributed to the work environment (Kutney-Lee, Wu, Sloane, & Aiken, 2013; Scott, Engelke, & Swanson, 2008). Currently, multiple generations are employed in the nursing workforce. Researchers have reported differences among the generations in work satisfaction (Apostolidis & Polifroni, 2006; Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley, & Tourangeau, 2008), ability to disconnect from work ( Ganey, 2018), preferred manager traits (Wieck, Dols, & Landrum, 2010) and desired incentives (Wieck, Dols, & Northam, 2009). This concept analysis investigates the meaning of a favourable work environment through the perspectives of the three major generational cohorts that are currently employed in the nursing workforce: Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. Specifically, the intention of this analysis was to identify preferences (not just perceptions) that define a favourable nursing work environment among these three generations. This article reports on the background and significance of this concept, explains the methods used in the analysis and discusses the results.

1.1 | Background and purpose

For many countries, the nursing workforce is ageing. In England, approximately a quarter of nurses are between 50 and 59 years old and almost 30% are between 40 and 49 years old (Nuffield Trust, 2019). Thirty-nine per cent of nurses in Australia are over 50 years old (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2016). In Canada, the average age of nurses is approximately 41 years old (Canadian Nurses Association, 2018). Furthermore, the nursing work environment, defined as ‘factors that enhance or attenuate a nurse’s ability to practice nursing skillfully and deliver high quality care’ (Swiger et al., 2017, p. 76), holds significant importance to nurses. Much of what is known about preferences for favourable nursing work environment were obtained from the original U.S. Magnet hospital studies in the early 1980s (McClure, Poulin, Sovie, & Wandelt, 1983). However, these favourable work environment preferences were based upon input from only older generations of nurses (Warshawsky, 2019). These factors for a favourable work environment may have changed based on societal, technological and historical changes and events that have occurred since the original Magnet hospital studies were completed almost 40 years ago.

1.2 | Generational research

A generation is a group of people born within a certain year range (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generational cohorts are context-specific. This means that individuals experiencing the same historical or social events at the same point in the lifecycle may have their views and attitudes shaped differently than those who spent their formative years under different circumstances, which is the reason for generational variation (Mannheim as cited in Pilcher, 1994). Historical events, societal changes and technological advances may also be considerably different depending on the country in which one lives, making comparison of generations across countries difficult (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). In longitudinal studies, a shifting of values among different generations has been documented among several Western countries, but for impoverished or countries experiencing turmoil, these shifting values are not present (Inglehart, 2008). Therefore, examination of generational differences often needs to be limited to a particular country or culture.

In the United States, the current nursing workforce is comprised primarily of three generational cohorts: Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation Xers (born 1965–1980) and Millennials (born 1981–1996) (Pew Research Center, 2018a). While the birth years of the generations can vary, for the purposes of this analysis and to be comparable with other research studies, the Pew Research Center (2018a) birth years have been adopted. The Pew Research Center (2018a) also defines two other generations as the ‘Silent’ generation (born before 1945) and the youngest named generation, the Post-Millennials or Generation Z (born 1997 or after). Baby Boomers make up 25% of the U.S. workforce, Generation Xers 33% and Millennials 35% (Pew Research Center, 2018b). Based on the ages provided in the 2017 National Nursing Workforce Survey (Smiley et al., 2018), Baby Boomers comprise approximately 40% of the nursing workforce, followed by Generation Xers making up 31% of the workforce, with Millennials constituting the remaining 29% of the nursing workforce. Internationally, most countries have adopted these generational cohort definitions (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

Research on generational differences in both the general workforce and nursing workforce has had contradictory results. A meta-analysis of international studies published in the Journal of Business Psychology investigated a wide variety of occupations and found no significant difference in job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intent among generations (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012). A mixed-methods systematic review of international nursing studies by Stevanin, Palese, Bressan, Vehvilainen-Julkkunen, and Kvist (2018) found differences among generations in work-related attitudes, emotional aspects of nursing work, leadership preferences and practice. In the United States, Sparks (2012) found no significant difference in overall job satisfaction between Baby Boomer and Generation X nurses while a study of Canadian nurses reported Baby Boomers’ overall job satisfaction was higher than that of both Generation X and Millennials (Wilson et al., 2008). In another example of contradictory findings in the United States, Keepnews, Brewer, Kovner, and Shin (2010) found Millennials reported higher levels of organisational commitment than other generations while Brunetto et al.
(2013) found Baby Boomer nurses to have the highest levels of commitment.

1.3 | Purpose

The purpose of this analysis was to identify preferences for favourable nursing work environments by Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial nurses. Many articles about generational differences within the nursing workforce, such as those reported previously, are only concerned with the perceptions nurses have about various factors pertaining to the work of nursing (Brunetto et al., 2013; Costanza et al., 2012; Keepnews et al., 2010; Sparks, 2012; Stevanin et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2008). However, to determine if there are actual differences in preferences, not just perceptions, then only studies that allow nurses to qualitatively report preferences or rank different factors can be of use. For the purpose of this concept analysis, it is important to make a distinction between nurse perceptions and preferences. A perception is an awareness of a characteristic, whereas a preference is considered prioritizing a particular characteristic (Merriam Webster, n.d., a,b). Therefore, perceptions are unable to define a favourable work environment, because awareness of a particular aspect in the nursing work environment does not allow knowledge of its relative importance to nurses as a whole. Additionally, the analysis sought to answer the question: ‘What are the preferences described in the literature that constitute a favorable nursing work environment, as reported by Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial nurses?’ Therefore, this concept analysis synthesizes reported preferences from current literature to define a favourable work environment by generational cohort.

In this analysis, the concept of a favourable work environment was analysed by obtaining reported preferential elements from the three main generations in the nursing workforce today: Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. The vast majority of members in the Silent generation are no longer working and Generation Z is only now entering the workforce; therefore, neither of these generations are included in this analysis. This concept analysis identifies what preferences exist in the nursing work environment among the different generational cohorts. Understanding this information may better inform nurse managers and hospital administrators about methods to recruit and retain their respective nursing staffs.

2 | METHODS

This study used the dimensional concept analysis method to determine preferences for a favourable work environment from U.S. literature presenting findings from Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials (Caron & Bowers, 2000). Caron and Bowers (2000) explained that dimensional concept analysis provides a valuable way to explore concepts that may have different meanings depending on the context from which they are viewed. Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials may have divergent opinions on desires for their work environment. Thus, the need to examine the concept from three separate points of view supports dimensional concept analysis as the most appropriate method of analysis (Caron & Bowers, 2000).

2.1 | Literature search

A literature search was conducted in May 2019 using three databases: PubMed, CINAHL and PsycINFO. Limits were applied to find articles published within the last ten years (2009–2019). Two searches in each of the databases were performed. The first search used the terms nurse AND generation* ‘work environment’. The second search used the terms: (“job satisfaction” OR “work satisfaction”) AND (“nurse” OR “nurses” OR “nursing”) AND (generation* OR multigenerational OR intergenerational). The first search resulted in 107 articles from all three databases and the second search resulted in 172 results, making a total of 279 citations for review (Figure 1). After duplicates were removed, 200 articles remained.

Criteria for inclusion in the final analysis were as follows: (a) the publication was an empirical research article published in the last ten years, (b) the research was performed in the United States using information gathered from hospital-based nurses, and (c) the study examined work environment preferences related to Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and/or Millennials. Although many articles contained information about differences among the generations, the results could not define a favourable work environment. For example, an article may report that Millennials experienced less job satisfaction than Baby Boomers, but this does not define what is a favourable work environment to Millennial nurses. In order to determine preferences, each included study had to include a way to rank different factors of the work environment or had to ask open-ended questions of some kind. Otherwise, all that would be ascertained is the perception different cohorts held of certain work environment traits, rather than actual preferences.

The first author performed the literature search and extracted the data under the supervision of the second author. A research librarian was consulted for assistance with the search. The criteria for inclusion in this analysis were strict. This is because of the aim of the analysis. Because this was a concept analysis and not a systematic review, a specific search format was not used.

Each title and, if appropriate, abstract was screened for relevance to the topic. Twenty-two articles remained after this screen based on the inclusion criteria and manual removal of additional duplicate articles was applied. A scan of the text was conducted for the remaining 22 articles, which eliminated an additional 14 articles. Therefore, this dimensional analysis is based on eight empirical studies that obtained data from U.S. hospital-based nurses regarding generational preferences for the nursing work environment. All three databases were searched again in December 2019 to find any additional articles that may have been released since May, but no new articles meeting the inclusion criteria were obtained. An ascendency and descendancy search of the included
articles and a systematic review (Sevanin et al., 2018) revealed no additional articles for analysis based on the inclusion criteria.

The decision to limit the articles to those published within the last ten years resulted from the need to include recent literature, and moving beyond this ten-year mark limited the amount of material that included the Millennial cohort. In order to ensure the inclusion of only published, peer-reviewed research articles, grey literature and dissertations were excluded from the search. Because of the context-specific nature of generational research, only studies in the United States were included. Article quality was assessed for each paper on the basis of measurements used in the study and applicability for this analysis.

2.2 | Data analysis

Caron and Bowers (2000) present five questions that should be asked when performing a dimensional analysis. These questions are presented in Table 1 and guided this dimensional concept analysis. All selected articles were read thoroughly several times and each article was entered into a literature matrix. For each article, themes from qualitative articles or survey items from quantitative studies that ranked the importance of work-related factors were recorded. These themes and items were then grouped into similar categories to provide the findings for this dimensional concept analysis.
### Table 2: Literature review matrix of studies included in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation (APA)</th>
<th>Sample, setting, design</th>
<th>Measure/scales</th>
<th>Baby boomer findings</th>
<th>Generation X findings</th>
<th>Millennial findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anselmo-Witzel et al. (2017)</td>
<td>10 Mil nurses in a Magnet hospital system; qualitative interviews</td>
<td>No scales or instruments; no interview questions included in the article</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Want to make difference, want to feel valued, desire close relationships (with other staff, families and patients) and connections among disciplines and have choices (scheduling, different positions or different organisations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dols et al. (2019)              | 95 clinical nurses in a south Texas hospital; included BB, Gen X and Mil; cross-sectional, non-experimental, observational survey | 1. Career Survey for Nurses  
2. Nursing Leadership Preferences Survey  
3. NWI-R                            | Leaders to have good reasoning skills, to be empowering, be a team player, be trustworthy and have integrity | Leaders to have good reasoning skills, be a mentor, be a team player, be trustworthy and have integrity | Leaders to be clinically competent, empowering, ‘dependable, dedicated, motivated, understanding, nonjudgmental’ (p. 205)                                                                                                           |
| Dols et al. (2010)              | 25 BB, Gen X and Mil nurses from the southern United States; qualitative; focus groups | A single discussion question: ‘What would it take to keep you here another 5 years?’ (p. 70). | None specific to Baby Boomers                                                        | Fairness                                                                             | Support from managers and other nurses as they transition to practice, individual attention from leadership, recognition, appreciation, fairness,                                                                                                                   |
| Gordon (2017)                   | 15 nurses (5 from each of the three generational cohorts) in a south Florida hospital that has Pathway to Excellence designation; qualitative interviews | Interview questions developed from the Index of Work Satisfaction              | Pay (as recognition for their time and career), autonomy, cohesive interactions       | Pay, autonomy, task requirements, team mentality, cohesive interactions              | Pay, task requirements, cohesive interactions                                                                                                                                                                               |
### TABLE 2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation (APA)</th>
<th>Sample, setting, design</th>
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<th>Millennial findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lipscomb (2010)</td>
<td>77 surveys from nurses recently hired in a hospital in the Gulf South region of the United States; all 3 generational cohorts; cross-sectional, non-experimental, observational survey</td>
<td>5 items of the Index of Work Satisfaction ranked in order of priority</td>
<td>Autonomy, interaction, pay</td>
<td>Autonomy, interaction, task requirements</td>
<td>Pay, professional status, autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitmer et al. (2009)</td>
<td>10 Gen X and 5 Mil critical care nurses from a hospital in the southwest United States; qualitative interviews</td>
<td>Questions: 1. ‘How do you describe the following three words in relation to your work in the ICU? The words are: commitment, control and challenge.’ 2. ‘What do you think are the attributes of a healthy work environment?’ (p. 217).</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Communication as highest priority, others include 1) teamwork, 2) high level of accountability, 3) positive nurse/physician relationships, 4) commitment to coworkers, 5) availability of continuing education and committee involvement, 6) physician/nurse collaboration in plan of care, 7) nurses not “eating their young” (p. 218).</td>
<td>Desire control, ‘good relationships with coworkers, supportive management team, and the appropriate amount and type of supplies’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wieck et al. (2010)</td>
<td>1,773 usable surveys from RNs in hospitals in the southern United States; included BB, Gen X and Mil; cross-sectional, non-experimental, observational survey</td>
<td>Nursing Work Index-Revised; nurse manager desired traits; single-item measure</td>
<td>Desired manager traits: 1. supportive 2. trustworthy 3. professional</td>
<td>Desired manager traits: 1. dependable 2. team player 3. 3) dependable</td>
<td>Desired manager traits: 1. dependable 2. team player 3. 3) supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the eight empirical studies reviewed, four were qualitative (Anselmo-Witzel, Orshan, Heitner, & Bachand, 2017; Dols, Landrum, & Wieck, 2010; Gordon, 2017; Whitmer, Hurst, & Prins, 2009). The other four studies were quantitative, cross-sectional studies that used questionnaires to gather responses. One study examined only Millennial nurses (Anselmo-Witzel et al., 2017) and one examined only Generation X and Millennial nurses (Whitmer et al., 2009). The number of subjects in each study varied widely. In one phenomenological qualitative study by Anselmo-Witzel et al. (2017), only ten registered nurses (RNs) were included. In contrast, Wieck et al. (2010) used data collected from 1,773 nurse surveys. Table 2 provides more information about the individual studies reviewed.

Based on the analysis, five major themes emerged from the literature (Table 3). Themes from the articles fell into five major categories: nursing practice/unit characteristics, managers/leadership, team/professional interactions, pay/benefits and personal/self. Nursing practice/unit characteristics included those that had a direct impact on the ability of nurses to practice professionally. Some of these characteristics included autonomy, adequate supplies and tasks. The managers/leadership category included actions or traits nurses desired in their supervisors such as experience (in nursing, rather than business, for example), support (i.e., backing or assistance) and individualized attention. Team/professional interactions were concerned with intra- and interprofessional relationships at work that nurses have among nursing colleagues and other health care professionals, respectively. Pay/benefits involved both wages and other benefits, like paid time off and retirement. Lastly, a category was developed to encompass preferences that primarily benefitted the individual nurse, such as praise, recognition and work–life balance. This fifth category only applied to Millennial nurses, as the ideas presented in this category were not reported findings in the articles for the Baby Boomer or Generation X nurses. The results of this analysis are organised based on findings for each generation. Therefore, this section reveals what the articles posit as important values, priorities and/or preferences related to favourable work environments among the three generational cohorts.

### 3.1 Baby boomers

Five of the eight articles (63%) reported preferences for the Baby Boomer generation. Two studies reported Baby Boomer nurses find autonomy important to their nursing practice (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010). For managers/leadership, Baby Boomers preferred leaders who were supportive, professional (Wieck et al., 2010), trustworthy (Dols, chargualaf, & Martinez, 2019; Wieck et al., 2010) and empowering, had integrity and had ‘good reasoning skills’ (Dols et al., 2019, p. 205). Gordon (2017) reports that all generations, including Baby Boomers, prefer senior leadership at a hospital to have a background in medicine or nursing rather than business. Two studies reported the importance the Baby Boomer generation places...
TABLE 3 Preferences of generational cohorts identified in the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Baby Boomer</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Millennial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits/pay</td>
<td>Pay, paid time off, pension, retirement (Lipscomb, 2010; Wieck et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Pay, overtime pay, premium pay (Gordon, 2017; Wieck et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Pay, overtime pay/premium pay, paid time off (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010; Wieck et al., 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager/leadership</td>
<td>Supportive, trustworthy, professional, reasoning skills, empowering, senior leadership to have medical or nursing experience (Dols et al., 2019; Gordon, 2017; Wieck et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Supportive, team player, dependable, reasoning skills, with senior leadership to have medical or nursing experience (Dols et al., 2019; Gordon, 2017; Wieck et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Support, attention, dependable, team player, 'clinical competence', 'empowering', 'dedicated, motivated, understanding, nonjudgmental' (Dols et al., 2010, 2019; Whitmer et al., 2009; Wieck et al., 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing practice/unit</td>
<td>Autonomy, fairness (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010; Wieck et al., 2010)</td>
<td>Fairness, autonomy, tasks, communication, etc. (Dols et al., 2010; Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010; Whitmer et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Fairness, professionalism, autonomy, adequate supplies (Dols et al., 2010; Lipscomb, 2010; Whitmer et al., 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team/interactions</td>
<td>Interaction, team mentality (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010)</td>
<td>Team mentality, interaction (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010)</td>
<td>Teamwork, good interactions among RNs and other members of the health care team (Anselmo-Witzel et al., 2017; Gordon, 2017; Whitmer et al., 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Altruism, work–life balance, choices, recognition, build professional status (usually by education), control (different than autonomy) (Anselmo-Witzel, et al.; Dols et al., 2010; Gordon, 2017; Whitmer et al., 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

on teamwork and cohesiveness (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010). Lipscomb (2010) found that pay was ranked third in importance for Baby Boomers (behind autonomy and interactions). Wieck et al. (2009) reported that paid time off, pension and retirement benefits were important incentives to Baby Boomers for retention. Nursing practice, specifically the attribute of autonomy; teamwork; and pay/benefits were the most frequently reported priorities for Baby Boomer nurses. Nothing that fit into the category of ‘self’ was mentioned for this generation.

3.2 | Generation X

Seven of the eight articles (88%) reported preferences for Generation X. By far, the most important theme to this generation was nursing practice/unit characteristics. Autonomy (Dols et al., 2010; Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010), number of tasks (Gordon, 2017) and communication (Whitmer et al., 2009) were all reported values of Generation X. Generation Xers want a manager who is supportive, a team player and dependable (Wieck et al., 2010), can reason well, is trustworthy, has integrity and serves as a mentor (Dols et al., 2019). They also have a favourable opinion of senior leadership having a background in medicine or nursing (Gordon, 2017). Pay and specifically overtime or premium pay were also mentioned as a priority (Gordon, 2017; Wieck et al., 2009). Gordon (2017) and Lipscomb (2010) identified teamwork and interactions with other hospital professionals, though neither study found these to be the most important aspects of the work environment for Generation Xers. Of the identified overarching themes, Generation X seems to define a favourable work environment in terms of factors related to the practice of nursing and unit characteristics, such as autonomy and task requirements. No priorities that could fit within the ‘self’ theme were identified for this cohort.

3.3 | Millennials

Each of the eight articles (100%) included in this concept analysis provided a result from the Millennial generation on preferences for their workplace, and this was the only cohort that had two qualitative studies using exclusively a Millennial sample. In the area of nursing practice/unit characteristics, autonomy was only mentioned once for this cohort and ranked third in priority behind pay and professional status (Lipscomb, 2010). One study prioritized professionalism (Lipscomb, 2010), one mentioned fairness in co-worker and manager interactions (Dols et al., 2010), and one identified having an adequate amount and type of supplies (Whitmer et al., 2009). Millennials have high expectations for their managers and leaders to give them personal attention (Dols et al., 2010). Millennials prefer their managers to be a team player, supportive (Wieck et al., 2010), dependable (Dols et al., 2019; Wieck et al., 2010), clinically competent, empowering, ‘dedicated, motivated, understanding, and nonjudgmental’ (Dols et al., 2019, p. 205). They also see value in the senior leadership having medical or nursing backgrounds (Gordon, 2017). Three studies supported the importance of teamwork (Anselmo-Witzel et al., 2017; Gordon, 2017; Whitmer et al., 2009). Pay and benefits were a
consistent preference (Gordon, 2017; Lipscomb, 2010; Wieck et al., 2009).

A theme related to ‘self’ emerged in this group that did not have similar themes in the previous two generational cohorts. Millennials have an altruistic desire to help, value work-life balance, want to make choices about their work schedules and have freedom to move to different positions within the organisation or to different facilities (Anselmo-Witzel et al., 2017). They want to feel valued, recognized and appreciated (Dols et al., 2010; Gordon, 2017). The results from this concept analysis suggest Millennials place more importance than previous generations on areas such as pay, time off, personal work interactions, self-benefits of work and support of their managers/leaders. They want personal attention from leaders, receive what they feel to be adequate pay and have flexibility in their job in order to balance home and work.

4 | DISCUSSION

In this concept analysis of studies conducted in the United States, a favourable work environment indicates there are strong similarities among the generations in certain areas such as nursing practice, managers and leadership, teamwork and pay. These findings are similar to what were reported by staff nurses in the original Magnet hospital studies, such as a desire for supportive leadership and adequate staffing (McClure et al., 1983). An additional theme emerged among the studies that focused on Millennials. Their concern with matters related to ‘self’ may not be exclusive to only the Millennial cohort, but in the analysed studies, similar preferences were not reported for the Baby Boomers and Generation X groups.

Other nursing studies in the United States have reported that the generations have more similarities in work-related characteristics than differences. Jobe (2014) explored the concept of work ethic among Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. The results indicated that overall, there were more similarities among the generations than differences. However, the younger generations did place more value on leisure, which is similar to the findings here for the ‘self’ theme of the Millennials (Jobe, 2014). A study of rural hospital nurses in the United States found no significant different difference among the generations in work engagements levels (Havens, Warshawsky, & Vasey, 2013). In a U.S. study of high school seniors from 1976 to 2006, a change in work values was identified, with Millennials reporting that leisure values, which includes factors also contained the ‘self’ theme in this study (such as work-life balance), hold more importance than other work values, such as altruism (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

International studies have also reported similar findings as those synthesized in this concept analysis. Flinkman and Salanterä’s (2015) qualitative study of young nurses in Finland resulted in themes such as a problematic practice environment and inadequate support from management and co-workers as reasons for leaving the nursing profession. In focus groups with Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial Canadian nurses, work benefits, relationships with managers and colleagues, and the quality of the work environment (including staffing and physical resources) all emerged as themes related to retaining nurses within the hospital (Tourangeau, Cummings, Cranley, Ferron, & Harvey, 2010). This concept analysis similarly identified many of these components as necessary for a favourable work environment, suggesting that despite the context-dependent nature of generational research, certain nursing work environment characteristics may be important across the globe.

4.1 | Limitations

There are two major limitations associated with this concept analysis. First, grey literature, such as white papers or publications outside of peer-reviewed articles, was not used. These publications may have added a dimension to enrich the analysis. Second, only articles examining hospital nurses in the United States were utilized, which may limit generalizability of the findings to nursing workforces in some countries. However, due to the vast differences in health care systems and historical or national events that shape generational cohorts, exclusion of international results seemed necessary.

4.2 | Recommendations for leadership

With the findings of this analysis in mind, nurse leaders may want to consider three recommendations. First, in order to please all nurses on a patient care unit, regardless of generation, improving factors related to nursing practice is a priority. Avoiding overwhelming assignments or limited resources can foster satisfaction among all generations. Second, nurse leaders must be aware that Millennials seem to be expecting more from their job than the previous generations. If nurse leaders desire to retain Millennial nurses, retention plans may need to encompass a wide scope of attributes in multiple areas of the work environment. For example, nurse managers (a) may invite new and young nurses to sit on unit practice councils, so that they can raise concerns pertinent to them; (b) may provide innovative scheduling strategies (to enhance flexibility with work-life balance); and (c) work with individual employees to identify the employee’s personal career goals and provide steps to help them achieved these goals (individualized attention).

Lastly, leaders who were supportive of their staff were a desired commodity in many studies, regardless of the generation. A recent literature review points out that empowering leadership behaviour and administrative support have been shown to have a strong relationship with job satisfaction (Lu, Zhao, & While, 2019). Another recent study reports that supportive leadership accounts for up to 63% of variance in work satisfaction among Millennials (O’Hara, et al., 2019). However, nursing leadership should be cautioned that not all employees will identify with a generational cohort (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2016). Additionally, maintaining flexibility based on the needs and desires of the individual is imperative (Society for Human Resource Management Foundation, 2017; Stevanin et al., 2020).
Regardless of budgetary concerns that may prevent increased staffing and resources for bedside nurses, nurse managers are able to engage in leadership self-development. Taking classes, reading about leadership methods and finding a leadership mentor are all ways that nurse managers could improve their leadership skills without spending large amounts of money, but still impact the retention of all generations of nurses.

5 | CONCLUSION

This dimensional analysis examined the concept of a favourable work environment from the perspectives of the three most dominant generations in the U.S. nursing workforce. Although research concerning generational differences in the nursing workforce is inconclusive, the results of this concept analysis help to define the concept of a favourable work environment from the perspectives of Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial nurses. Health care organisations can use this information to create desirable work environments for their nurses. With Generation Z now entering the nursing workforce, future research should focus on this generation’s experiences and desires. Whether they will continue to have similarities to previous generations or will have an entirely different perspective awaits to be seen.

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