

Beyond the Machine: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Family Members of Admitted Patients in the Intensive Care Unit in a Private Hospital in Antipolo City

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ABSTRACT

*The admission of a family member to the Intensive Care Unit is often a tough time that affects the family in many ways. It can be very emotional and stressful for them. They have to deal with not knowing what is going to happen to their loved one; they cannot visit them all the time. They have to take on new responsibilities. This can be very hard for the family. This study was conducted to understand what family members experience when their loved one is in the Intensive Care Unit at a hospital in Antipolo City. The study examined what they experienced, the problems they faced, how they coped, and what they thought about their experience. The study used a research approach to gain a deep understanding of what the family members went through. The people who took part in the study were selected because they met the eligibility criteria. They were interviewed in person, and the conversation was recorded. Here are the four main themes: (1) **Emotional Distress and Psychological Burden During ICU Admission**; (2) **Strengthening Family Relationship Through Shared Responsibility and Support**; (3) **Financial and Practical Challenges of ICU Hospitalization**; (4) **Faith, Resilience, and Meaning-Making Amid Critical Illness**. This research shows that when nurses and doctors understand what families are going through, they can provide care that considers the family's emotional and informational needs. This can help prevent severe mental health problems for the family. The intensive care unit can be a tough place for families, and this study highlights the importance of family-centered care.*

Keywords: *Intensive Care Unit, Phenomenological Study, Family Member Experience, Family-Centered Care, Qualitative Method.*

INTRODUCTION

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is a specialized hospital department that provides advanced care for critically ill patients with life-threatening conditions. The admission of a loved one to the ICU is often a stressful and challenging experience for family members, who may face uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and emotional distress while coping with the patient's condition. In addition to supporting the patient, family members are often involved in decision-making, communication with healthcare providers, and managing financial and personal responsibilities. These experiences can significantly affect their emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Despite the crucial role that family members play in the care process, their experiences and needs are often overlooked in healthcare settings; therefore, understanding the lived experiences of family members of ICU patients is essential for identifying their challenges, coping mechanisms, and support needs. The findings of this study may inform the development of family-centered interventions and strategies to help healthcare professionals provide more holistic, compassionate, and effective care for patients and their families.

PURPOSE OF STATEMENT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a selected hospital in Antipolo City. Specifically, this study aims to explore the emotional, psychological, social, and financial challenges encountered by family members while their loved ones are confined to the ICU. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the coping mechanisms, support systems, and perceptions of care and communication that healthcare professionals provide during the patient's hospitalization.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

This study focused on understanding the lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). It explores their emotional, psychological, social, and practical experiences, including their coping strategies, support systems, communication with healthcare providers, and the impact of ICU hospitalization on their daily lives. The study will employ a qualitative phenomenological research design using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with selected family members of ICU patients in a selected hospital in Antipolo City.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) highlight several contributing factors and outcomes. ICU admission and the critical condition of patients have been identified as primary causes of emotional distress among family members, leading to anxiety, fear, and uncertainty (Digby et al., 2023; Wiley, 2025). The quality of communication between healthcare providers and families significantly affects their experiences: poor communication can lead to confusion and dissatisfaction, whereas clear and consistent communication improves understanding and emotional stability (Liyew et al., 2024; Tadros, 2025). Additionally, the level of information provided to family members is crucial, as limited access to medical information increases stress and impairs decision-making (Fu et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2025).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the nursing theories of Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring, Betty Neuman's System Model, and Roy's Adaptation Model. These theories provide a holistic framework for understanding the lived experiences, coping strategies, and support needs of family members of ICU patients.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a selected private hospital in Antipolo City. Participants will be selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using open-ended questions and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and meanings from the participants' experiences.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit in a selected private hospital in Antipolo City.

RESEARCH STEPS

This study will obtain the necessary approvals before recruiting eligible family members of ICU patients through purposive sampling. After obtaining informed consent, semi-structured interviews will be conducted, the data will be transcribed, and the findings will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the participants' lived experiences.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

Fifteen (15) family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) who met the inclusion criteria were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting 30–60 minutes and were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. These themes are consistent with **Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis**, which identifies recurring patterns of meaning across participants' narratives.

STUDY LIMITATION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This study was limited to the lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a private hospital in Antipolo City. The findings are based on participants' personal experiences and are not intended to be generalized to other settings or populations. Ethical approval will be obtained before data collection. Participation will be voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty will be ensured throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that family members of ICU patients experienced significant emotional, social, financial, and spiritual challenges throughout their loved one's hospitalization. Four major themes emerged from the thematic analysis.

SUMMARY

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of family members of patients admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a private hospital in Antipolo City. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study will examine their emotional, psychological, social, and practical experiences, as well as their coping strategies and support needs. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights that can help healthcare professionals deliver more compassionate, family-centered care and serve as a basis for improving nursing practice and future research.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, family members of ICU patients undergo profound emotional, psychological, financial, and practical challenges during hospitalization. Despite these

difficulties, they demonstrate resilience through strong family support, effective communication, assistance from healthcare providers, and faith in God. The ICU experience also promotes personal growth by encouraging greater appreciation for health, financial preparedness, and family relationships. Overall, lived experiences reflect both the burdens and the strengths developed while caring for a critically ill loved one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, healthcare institutions are encouraged to strengthen family-centered care by improving communication, providing emotional and psychological support, and facilitating access to financial and spiritual assistance for families of ICU patients. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies across different healthcare settings with larger, more diverse populations to further enhance understanding of the lived experiences of family members of ICU patients.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used only to assist with language editing and formatting. All ideas, data collection, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this study are my original work, and I take full responsibility for its content and accuracy.

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