
Exploring The Generational Gap: Lived Experiences of Generational Nurses In Providing Quality Patient Care

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Z nurses in delivering quality patient care in clinical settings. It sought to identify the unique perspectives, values, and clinical approaches inherent to each generational cohort to provide a clearer understanding of how generational diversity impacts the delivery of care. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to capture participants' lived experiences. Through purposive sampling, nine registered nurses were selected for the study, consisting of three representatives from each generational cohort. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a validated interview guide. The transcriptions were analyzed to identify significant statements, formulated meanings, and emergent themes, which were then organized into a Kelly Grid for clarity. The study revealed distinct generational themes. Generation X nurses define quality care through clinical judgment and the ability to anticipate clinical problems developed through years of extensive hands-on practice. Millennial nurses view quality as a delicate balance between clinical competence and emotional support. Generation Z nurses associate quality care primarily with accuracy and efficiency. The study was limited by its small sample size and specific clinical context, which may restrict the transferability of findings. This study provides insight into how generational experiences shape nurses' perceptions and delivery of quality patient care, contributing to a deeper understanding of workforce diversity in contemporary healthcare.

Keywords: *Generational Nurses, Quality Patient Care, Lived Experiences, Phenomenology, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, Intergenerational Collaboration, Clinical Competence, Nursing Workforce.*

INTRODUCTION

The modern healthcare landscape is defined by a multi-generational nursing workforce, creating an environment where professionals from Generation X, the Millennial Generation (Gen Y), and Generation Z must collaborate daily to deliver care (Anthony, 2024). This demographic composition fully represented at the selected hospital in Kalibo, Aklan—is characterized by distinct cohorts whose core values, professional expectations, and communication styles were profoundly shaped by unique socio-historical contexts (Tan & Chin, 2023; Alshahrani & D'Souza, 2022). This generational heterogeneity, while a potential source of resilience, often creates organizational complexity that directly impacts the consistency and quality of patient care (QPC). This study seeks to bridge this gap by

interpreting the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of nurses across these three cohorts regarding their professional practice and collaboration at the selected hospital.

Statement of the Problem

“In your experience as a nurse at your current hospital, how do you describe the lived experience of providing quality patient care and engaging in intraprofessional collaboration, particularly as it relates to working with colleagues from different generations (Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z)?”

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study is centered on how internal generational dynamics among Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z impact nursing practice. The research is conducted within a single private hospital in Kalibo, Aklan, involving nine (9) professional nurses (three from each cohort) who are currently employed and actively involved in direct patient care.

The study is delimited to direct care nurses in a private hospital setting, excluding those in nursing managerial positions and public institutions. The analysis focuses exclusively on generational identity within the X, Millennial, and Z cohorts, intentionally excluding the Baby Boomer generation or others. Furthermore, it does not account for variables like gender, ethnicity, or clinical specializations.

Review of Related Literature

The concurrent employment of multiple generations is a global phenomenon in nursing, with each cohort bringing a distinct set of values and expectations to the bedside. Generation X (born 1965–1980) is consistently characterized as the most compliant cohort, placing a high premium on work-life balance, and seeking flexibility as a core component of job satisfaction (Sharma & Singh, 2022). The Millennial Generation (born 1981–1996) is defined by its collaborative nature, value-driven work ethic, and tech-savviness, making them enthusiastic participants in education and process improvement (Sarmiento & Ramos, 2021). The newest cohort, Generation Z (born 1997–2012), enters the workforce as digital natives with heightened expectations for technology integration (Alshahrani & D'Souza, 2022).

The link between generational dynamics and quality patient care is evidenced in scholarly works focusing on nurse well-being and practice environments. A comprehensive scoping review by Sanches, Silva, and Baggio (2024), which analyzed thirty-two studies, confirmed that generational diversity is a critical factor influencing variables directly tied to quality care, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, stress, and burnout, all of which have downstream effects on team effectiveness and patient safety.

Theoretical Framework

Generational Theory explains that nurses from Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z have distinct values, communication styles, and approaches to care shaped by their life experiences. These differences influence how they perceive and deliver quality patient care.

Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring emphasizes holistic, compassionate, and patient-centered care, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships in nursing practice. This aligns with how different generations express caring behaviors.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes an Input–Process–Output (IPO) model. Input includes generational cohorts (Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z), their values, communication styles, caring perspectives, and the clinical environment. Process involves gathering lived experiences through semi-structured interviews and analyzing them using phenomenological thematic analysis. Output consists of emergent themes on quality patient care and intergenerational collaboration, as well as proposed strategies such as mentorship programs, adaptive leadership, and improved communication.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a Descriptive Phenomenological Research Design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of nurses in providing quality patient care within a multi-generational workforce.

Research Steps

After reviewing related literature, the research design was developed in alignment with the study objectives. The study utilized a semi-structured interview to gather in-depth data on nurses' experiences. The process involved collecting narratives, analyzing significant statements, and identifying themes to understand how generational differences influence patient care and collaboration.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine (9) nurses selected using purposive sampling. Participants included three nurses each from Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z who were actively involved in direct patient care. Interviews used open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses and were conducted until data saturation was achieved, ensuring no new themes emerged.

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis employed Colaizzi's phenomenological method, wherein interview transcripts were systematically reviewed to extract significant statements and formulate meanings. These meanings were organized into themes to capture the essence of nurses' lived experiences in providing quality patient care within a multi-generational context. The identified themes were further validated through member checking to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the findings.

Research Hypotheses and Validation / Assumption

The guiding assumption is that, while nurses from all cohorts share the universal professional commitment to quality patient care, their individual and collective narratives will reveal interpretable variations in their methods, values, and meaning-making processes due to their specific generational cultures.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical protocols by getting informed consent from all participants, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, and granting participants the freedom to withdraw from the research at any point. Furthermore, ethical issues encompassed the imperative to ensure the respectful portrayal of participants' views and viewpoints in the ultimate analysis and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study revealed significant differences and shared patterns in how nurses from different generations perceive and deliver quality patient care.

Generational Differences in Quality Patient Care: Generation X nurses describe quality care as “anticipatory and holistic” while millennial nurses define quality care as a balance between clinical accuracy and emotional support, Generation Z nurses associate quality care with efficiency, safety, and strict adherence to clinical protocols supported by technology.

Technology Utilization in Nursing Practice: Findings revealed a digital divide across generations. Generation X nurses view technology as supportive but secondary to patient interaction, Millennials use it to enhance efficiency and organization, while Generation Z nurses rely heavily on digital systems for clinical documentation and patient monitoring.

Intergenerational Collaboration: The study showed a complementary relationship among generations. Generation X provides clinical wisdom and mentorship, Millennials serve as mediators bridging traditional and modern practices, and Generation Z contributes innovation and technological proficiency.

Communication Differences: Differences in communication styles were evident. Generation X prefers face-to-face communication, Millennials demonstrate adaptability across communication modes, while Generation Z is still developing confidence in verbal communication within hierarchical clinical settings.

Professional Growth and Learning: All participants identified intergenerational collaboration as beneficial for professional development, with continuous learning emerging as a shared outcome across cohorts.

SUMMARY

The study revealed that nurses from different generations have varying but complementary perspectives on quality patient care. Generation X emphasizes experience-based and anticipatory care, Millennials focus on balanced and collaborative practice, while Generation Z prioritizes efficiency and technology-driven care. Despite differences in communication styles and work approaches, intergenerational collaboration enhances learning, teamwork, and overall quality of patient care.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that quality patient care in a multi-generational nursing workforce is strengthened through the integration of diverse generational strengths. The combination of clinical experience from Generation X, adaptability from Millennials, and technological competence from Generation Z creates a more comprehensive and effective care delivery system. Although generational differences in communication and practice exist, these do not

hinder care delivery when mutual respect and collaboration are present. However, the presence of hierarchical communication barriers, particularly among younger nurses, indicates the need for improved support systems to enhance confidence and participation in clinical decision-making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based from the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that the hospital implement a bidirectional mentorship program where Generation X nurses share clinical expertise while Generation Z nurses support technological needs. Use of structured communication tools such as SBAR is also recommended to improve clarity and confidence in reporting. An inclusive workplace culture should be strengthened to value all generational contributions. Nursing programs should integrate intergenerational competency training, focusing on communication, teamwork, and adaptability. Simulation activities reflecting multi-generational clinical settings are also recommended. Policies promoting lifelong learning and collaborative practice should be strengthened, ensuring a balance between traditional bedside care and modern technology-based nursing. Further studies using quantitative or mixed methods are recommended to validate findings in other settings and to explore the impact of intergenerational collaboration on patient outcomes.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT:

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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