

“The Lived Experiences of Nurses: Mental Health Challenges Working In The Clinical Practice”

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ABSTRACT

Nursing is a profession that requires not only physical strength but also emotional resilience. This study explored how nurses experience and make sense of the mental health challenges they encounter in their daily clinical practice. The findings revealed that nurses frequently experience stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and mental fatigue due to heavy workloads, long working hours, staffing shortages, and the constant pressure of caring for patients while meeting the expectations of families, physicians, and management. Many nurses described these struggles as a normal part of the profession, often choosing to hide their emotions and continue working despite feeling overwhelmed. To cope, they rely on self-care activities, hobbies, exercise, work-life balance, and support from family and colleagues. However, many participants felt that the support provided by their hospitals was limited or difficult to access, leaving them to manage their challenges largely on their own. Over time, these unresolved mental health concerns were perceived to affect their motivation, job satisfaction, career growth, and desire to remain in the nursing profession. The study highlights the importance of creating supportive work environments and strengthening mental health programs to promote nurses' well-being, resilience, and retention.

Keywords: Mental health challenges, nurses, burnout, organizational support, nurse retention.

INTRODUCTION

Nurses in clinical settings frequently experience mental health challenges due to heavy workloads, long working hours, staffing shortages, and continuous exposure to emotionally demanding situations, which can lead to stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and moral distress. In the Philippine healthcare setting, many nurses manage these challenges through personal resilience and support from colleagues and family despite limited resources and ongoing workplace pressures. This study seeks to explore nurses' lived experiences of mental health challenges, identify the coping strategies and support systems they rely on, and provide insights that can help foster more compassionate and supportive healthcare environments.

Statement of the Problem

For the Research Questions (Qualitative). How do nurses describe the emotional and psychological impacts of their work on their personal and professional well-being? What coping strategies do nurses use to manage mental health challenges in their clinical practice? How do nurses describe organizational support related to their mental health needs? How do

nurses perceive the long-term effects of mental health challenges on their career development, job satisfaction, and intention to remain in the nursing profession

Scope and Delimitations

This study explores the lived experiences of nurses facing mental health challenges in clinical practice, focusing on how they understand, cope with, and navigate these experiences in their daily work. The findings are limited to the perspectives of nurses from selected clinical settings and are based on their personal narratives, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences rather than produce results that can be generalized to all nurses.

Review of Related Literature

According to the World Health Organization (2024), Li et al. (2024), Yi et al. (2024), Yu et al. (2024), and Castillo-González et al. (2024), nurses worldwide continue to experience mental health challenges such as stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue due to demanding workloads and emotionally taxing clinical environments, while resilience has been identified as a key factor in protecting their psychological well-being. Furthermore, Ung et al. (2024) and Badawy et al. (2026) emphasized that supportive work environments, effective leadership, and organizational interventions are essential in reducing burnout, improving nurse retention, and promoting a sustainable nursing workforce.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Sister Callista Roy's Adaptation Model, which explains how nurses adapt to workplace stressors, emotional demands, and clinical responsibilities while maintaining their well-being and professional identity, emphasizing the vital role of support from colleagues, leaders, family, and peers in fostering resilience, balance, and personal growth.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, using in-depth interviews to understand and give meaning to nurses' lived experiences of mental health challenges encountered in clinical practice.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA), to explore and understand how nurses experience and make sense of mental health challenges encountered in their daily clinical practice. Through in-depth conversations with a small group of nurses, the study captured their personal stories of stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and coping, providing a deeper and more human understanding of their lived experiences while ensuring their voices remained at the center of the findings.

Research Step

The researcher will obtain the necessary permissions and use purposive sampling to recruit approximately 15 nurses from selected clinical settings who have firsthand experiences with mental health challenges in their nursing practice. Data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews, with audio recordings and field notes used to capture participants' experiences, emotions, coping strategies, and workplace challenges in a safe, respectful, and confidential environment. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the interview guide will be reviewed by experts and pilot-tested, while strategies such as member checking, thorough documentation, and ongoing reflection on researcher bias will be applied throughout the research process.

Data Collection and Sample Collection

After securing the necessary ethical approvals and informed consent, data will be collected through in-depth interviews with nurses, giving them a safe, private, and supportive space to openly share their experiences, emotions, and challenges related to mental health in clinical practice. With the participants' permission, interviews will be audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes to ensure that their stories are captured accurately and respectfully. The collected data will then be transcribed and carefully analyzed to identify significant experiences, recurring patterns, and meaningful themes that reflect both the individual journeys of nurses and the shared realities of their profession.

Data Analysis Method

The collected interview data will be transcribed and reviewed several times to gain a deep understanding of the nurses' experiences, emotions, coping strategies, and workplace challenges. Significant statements will be grouped into meaningful themes that reflect shared experiences, ensuring that the findings authentically represent both the individual voices of the participants and the common realities of nursing practice.

Research Hypothesis and Validation

This study assumes that nurses can openly share their lived experiences of mental health challenges and that these experiences are influenced by personal, interpersonal, and workplace factors that shape their well-being and coping strategies. By understanding these experiences, the study aims to provide meaningful insights that can support the development of more compassionate nursing practices, supportive work environments, educational programs, and policies that promote nurses' mental health and overall quality of patient care.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval and informed consent will be obtained to ensure that participation is voluntary and that nurses fully understand the purpose of the study. Participants' privacy, confidentiality, and emotional well-being will be protected by creating a safe and respectful environment where they can share their experiences freely.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1:

How do nurses experience and make sense of mental health challenges

Mental Health Challenges as an Expected Reality of Nursing

Despite experiencing overwhelming demands from patients, families, physicians, and organizational systems, nurses often continue providing compassionate care while suppressing their own emotional struggles. Their experiences reveal a continuous balancing act between professional responsibility and personal well-being, with resilience fostered through self-care practices, social support, and a strong sense of purpose in nursing.

Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of nurses facing mental health challenges in clinical practice, revealing how workplace demands, emotional pressures, and staffing issues affect their well-being. It also highlighted the coping strategies nurses use and the important role of personal, social, and organizational support in helping them navigate these challenges.

Conclusion

The findings show that mental health challenges are a significant part of many nurses' professional lives and can influence their emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and career decisions. Supporting nurses through accessible mental health resources, positive work environments, and strong interpersonal relationships is essential for sustaining a healthy and resilient nursing workforce.

Recommendations

Healthcare institutions should strengthen mental health support programs by providing regular wellness check-ins, counseling services, stress-management initiatives, and supportive leadership practices that address nurses' actual needs. Future efforts should also focus on improving staffing levels, fostering a culture where seeking help is encouraged, and developing workplace policies that promote nurses' well-being and professional growth.

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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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