

The Lived Experiences of Operating and Delivery Room Generation Z Nurses

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Abstract

Generation Z nurses are increasingly entering specialized healthcare settings that demand clinical competence, emotional resilience, and adaptability. This study explored the lived experiences of Generation Z nurses assigned to the Operating Room (OR) and Delivery Room (DR) units in selected hospitals in Davao del Norte. A descriptive phenomenological design was utilized, involving twelve Generation Z nurses who participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed four major themes: navigating high-pressure clinical environments, learning and adaptation in specialized units, coping through support and self-care, and factors influencing effective performance. Participants described their work as both meaningful and demanding, characterized by emergency situations, heavy workloads, and continuous learning. Mentorship, teamwork, clear protocols, and technological competence emerged as significant factors that enhanced adaptation and professional growth. Despite workplace pressures, Generation Z nurses demonstrated resilience, commitment to patient care, and a strong willingness to learn. The study highlights the importance of supportive institutional environments in fostering competence, confidence, and retention among early-career nurses working in high-acuity clinical settings.

Keywords: Generation Z nurses, operating room, delivery room, lived experiences, resilience, mentorship, adaptation

Introduction

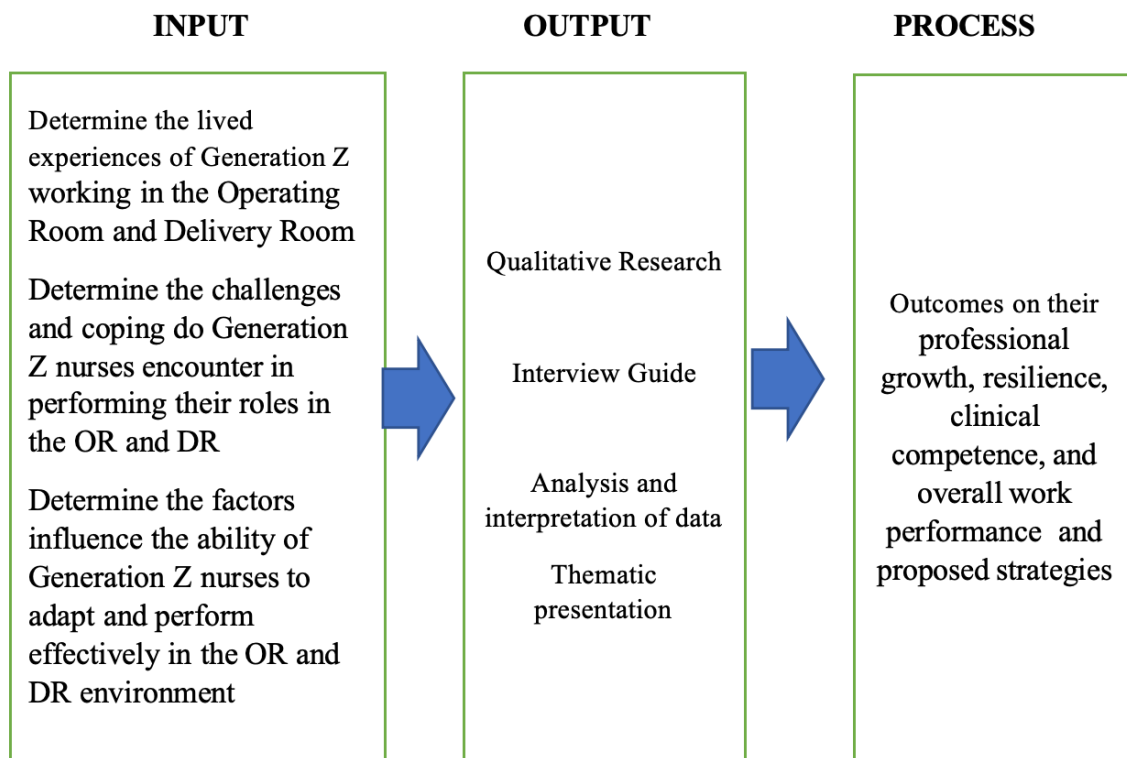
Generation Z nurses, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, are becoming a significant component of the healthcare workforce. Their professional values are shaped by technological advancement, increased awareness of mental health, and a preference for collaborative and supportive work environments. As newly licensed nurses enter specialized clinical areas such as the Operating Room (OR) and Delivery Room (DR), they encounter unique challenges that require rapid decision-making, technical competence, and emotional resilience.

High-acuity environments expose novice nurses to emergency situations, heavy workloads, and complex patient care responsibilities. Previous studies have reported that young nurses often experience stress, anxiety, and performance pressure during the transition from academic preparation to professional practice. Although nurse burnout and workplace adaptation have been widely studied, limited research has specifically examined the experiences of Generation Z nurses assigned to OR and DR settings.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Generation Z nurses working in OR and DR units, identify the challenges they encounter, examine the coping strategies they employ, and determine the factors that influence their adaptation and performance in high-acuity clinical environments.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design to explore the experiences of Generation Z nurses assigned in Operating Room and Delivery Room settings. Purposive sampling was used to select twelve registered nurses from three hospitals in Davao del Norte. Participants belonged to the Generation Z age group, had at least six months of work experience, and were currently assigned in either OR or DR units.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Ethical principles were observed through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection of participant identities throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Navigating High-Pressure Clinical Environments

Participants described their work as both meaningful and challenging. Daily responsibilities involved exposure to emergency situations, high-risk procedures, and critical patient care scenarios that required rapid decision-making and emotional control. Handling emergency cesarean sections, preterm deliveries, and surgical complications often generated anxiety but also contributed to professional growth and confidence.

The findings suggest that exposure to high-acuity situations serves as an important learning experience for novice nurses. While these encounters may initially create stress and uncertainty, they also promote resilience, critical thinking, and clinical competence when accompanied by appropriate support and supervision.

Theme 2: Learning and Adaptation in Specialized Units

A common experience among participants involved adjusting from academic preparation to real-world clinical practice. Learning unit protocols, adapting to different physician preferences, locating equipment during emergencies, and managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously were frequently identified challenges.

Many participants acknowledged that limited clinical exposure during the pandemic affected their confidence upon entering practice. Nevertheless, they demonstrated adaptability and a willingness to learn through observation, experience, and continuous skill development. Structured orientation programs and guided supervision were viewed as essential in facilitating successful adaptation to specialized clinical environments.

Theme 3: Coping Through Support and Self-Care

Participants relied on various coping mechanisms to manage emotional, social, and professional demands. Support from mentors, colleagues, family members, and friends was consistently identified as an important source of encouragement and reassurance. Teamwork and positive workplace relationships helped reduce stress and improve confidence when handling difficult cases.

In addition, participants emphasized the importance of self-care practices such as maintaining personal routines, taking breaks, resting during days off, and establishing healthy work-life boundaries. These strategies helped them maintain emotional well-being, prevent burnout, and sustain professional performance.

Theme 4: Factors Influencing Effective Performance

Several factors influenced the ability of Generation Z nurses to adapt and perform effectively in OR and DR settings. Mentorship and guidance from experienced nurses enhanced confidence, clinical judgment, and familiarity with unit protocols. Teamwork and collaborative workplace cultures promoted effective communication and reduced stress during emergencies.

Participants also highlighted the importance of clear policies, accessible resources, and adequate equipment in supporting safe and efficient patient care. Furthermore, technological competence and adaptability emerged as strengths among Generation Z nurses, enabling them to learn new systems, manage digital documentation, and respond effectively to evolving clinical demands.

The findings indicate that both organizational support and personal attributes contribute significantly to successful adaptation in high-acuity healthcare environments.

CONCLUSIONS

Generation Z nurses working in the Operating Room and Delivery Room settings experience a combination of professional fulfillment and workplace challenges. Their experiences are characterized by exposure to high-pressure clinical situations, continuous learning opportunities, and the need to adapt to demanding healthcare environments. Despite challenges related to workload, emergency situations, and limited experience, participants demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to quality patient care.

Effective adaptation and performance are influenced by mentorship, teamwork, institutional support, access to resources, and technological competence. Supportive work environments play a critical role in enhancing confidence, professional growth, and long-term retention among Generation Z nurses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Healthcare institutions should strengthen mentorship programs and orientation systems for newly assigned nurses in specialized units. Continuous professional development activities, simulation-based training, and technology-enhanced learning opportunities should be provided to improve preparedness and clinical competence.

Hospitals should also foster collaborative workplace cultures, maintain clear clinical protocols, ensure adequate resources, and promote wellness initiatives that support work-life balance and emotional well-being. Future studies may explore generational differences in nursing practice and investigate long-term adaptation strategies among nurses working in high-acuity clinical settings.

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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