

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL HEALTH NURSES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was primarily explored and described the lived experiences of culturally diverse mental health nurses working in Qatar. They were purposively selected using the following criteria: a) worked in a female unit of a psychiatric facility for at least three years, b) worked in at least two different countries and 3) consented to take part in the study. Data collection was done through series of interview utilizing open-ended guide questions. Data analysis was done utilizing Collaizi's phenomenological approach.

The study findings generated four central themes, namely: 1) The workplace environment, 2) Challenges and struggle, 3) Adaptation strategies and 4) Rewarding career. The findings revealed the following: 1) that aggression and violence from patients and families are the common sentiment among the participants which they attributed to noisy environment and small space; 2) that language barrier is one of the major challenges encountered by the participants in the workplace; 3) that the use of therapeutic interventions as well as vigilance are the most common means of handling the unpredictability of the patients' actions while teamwork is one of their aces in working in the acute unit, when dealing with their culturally diverse peers/ coworkers; and 4) that their job as psychiatric or mental health nurse to be fulfilling although risky, not only because of the monetary benefits but also the personal fulfillment and professional growth they derived from being a mental health nurse. With these results, the study concluded that professional and personal rewards outweigh the multitude of challenges and occupational risks of mental health nurses. The author recommended that psychiatric nurses should continuously learn and explore other therapeutic methods by attending mandatory course training since the knowledge they could acquire from these lectures could help in strengthening their skills in dealing with their patients.

Keywords: Live experiences, workplace environment, challenges and struggles, adaptation strategies, rewarding career.

INTRODUCTION

Psychiatric mental health nursing a specialty within nursing. Psychiatric mental health registered nurses worked with individuals, families, groups, and communities, assessing their mental health needs. Acute mental health nursing poses many challenges to psychiatric nurses. Unlike other professions, the primary tool for mental health nurses the strength of their personality and communication skills. They need to empathize with the people they are dealing with and shown warmth and care about them. Nurses, as a professional group at the crossroads of mental and physical health, have an important role to play in lifting the standards of physical care. Psychiatric nurses worked with a broad range of people with many types of problems, and these nurses handle different reaction to the stress that they encountered every day, and that resulted in precipitate on how the staff nurse dealt with the problem. There is no documented study regarding the life of female nurses working in mental health hospital and how they cope with the stress while they are away from there loved ones.

Listening to the experiences of female multinational nurses working in mental health care may provide us with greater insight into the cultural context of their work environment and provide an opportunity to promote inpatient mental health facilities as a useful place to work (Chang and Daly, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Mental Health Nurse

Nurses working in acute care psychiatry experience high rates of violence perpetrated by patients and their perspectives on these experiences are essential to understanding the phenomenon. Stevenson (2014) explored psychiatric nurses' experiences of patient violence in acute care inpatient psychiatric settings.

Dilemma and Challenges

Nurses working in mental health face same dilemma or challenges as what another mental health care provider receives.

Aggression and violence. According to Simon (2015), the risk of violence to the clinician increases when severely ill, psychotic patients are evaluated or treated while alone, especially during evenings or on weekends. The clinician should require the presence of a reliable third party for the initial evaluation of an unknown patient with the severe mental illness.

Noise. Maxwell (2015) remarks that noise has an impact on potential health outcome for patients and staff. It can trigger the hallucination and depression of one's patient and increases the stress level of the staff, and emotional exhaustions. According to Makopa (2014), any human activity that generates noise, it is considered as a risk factor for people's health. Researchers have dosed hormones of stress in individuals exposed to noise of different decibels. The rates of stress hormones found were significantly high in three liquids.

Safety issue. In the study conducted by Chapman (2016), over 90% of nurses experience violence or verbal abuse. A study has found that three out of four nurses have experienced violence while at work, and 9 out of 10 have suffered verbal abuse. "Many of the nurses who took part in his research said that they did not report incidents because they felt that workplace violence was just part of the job." According to Simon, (2015) safety management requires recognition of a patient's escalating violence, such as agitation, threats, and the crossing of the practitioner's personal space.

Poor collegial relationship. A harmonious relationship is vital for nurses working together as a team, and poor collegial relations can cause communication breakdown, staff attrition and difficulties attracting new nursing staff.

Language barrier. The instances above correlate with Farooq's (2014) emphasis on language as the principal investigative and therapeutic tool in psychiatry. Interference with communication impairs our ability to assess our patient comprehensively. Barriers in communication can impair our ability to assess, engage and treat a patient. This problem becomes more obvious in situations where the patient and professional come from different cultural and linguistic background.

Cultural Differences. According to Taylor & Francis, 2015, each health care profession has a different culture which includes values, beliefs, attitudes, customs and behaviors. Increasing specialization has led to even further immersion of the learners into the knowledge and culture of their own professional group. These professional cultures contribute to the challenges of effective interprofessional teamwork.

Coping Strategies

Henderson (2015) highlighted that nurses employ various coping mechanisms to cope. The primary coping skill that nurses used at work once they experienced either verbal or physical abuse can be characterized as consciously being more careful and mindful of their safety, both emotional and physical. This overall goal was achieved through a variety of strategies that included such things as: consciously working towards becoming more assertive, being more careful about physical positioning in relation to a patient, the deliberate cultivation of inner strength, being firm, and, one which several nurses reported as their primary response, avoiding the individual concerned as much as possible.

Below are some of the coping strategies that mental health nurses employ:

Communication. The primary tool as a mental health nurse will be the strength of the nurse's personality and communication skills. There need to empathize with the people they are dealing with and show warmth and care about them. Combating the stigma attached to mental illness and helping the individuals and their families deal with it an essential part of the job. The danger of violence is often associated with the branch of nursing, and one of the unique skills required spotting a build-up of tension and being able to defuse it is thru communication. Therapeutic relationships between the mental health nurses, those with mental ill health, and their families are critical to successful mental health nursing. Helping people back to mental health also every bit as valuable and satisfying as caring for those with a physical illness (Spiro, 2015). Hamrin, Iennaco and Olsen (2015) highlighted that inpatient psychiatric staff could decrease the potential for violence by using therapeutic relationship strategies such as using good communication skills, advocating for clients, being available, having strong clinical assessment skills, providing patient education, and collaborating with patients in treatment planning. Cultural improvements include providing meaningful patient activities and appropriate levels of stimulation and unit staffing.

Vigilance. Henderson (2015) highlighted that nurses employ various coping mechanisms like being calm, alert and vigilant to cope. The unpredictability of the patient's actions and the feeling of being unsafe in the work environment are all threats to the safety by the psychiatric nurses and by the psychiatric nurses are being coped through their vigilance, alert and cautious of their patients. Henderson pointed that nurses must achieve a variety of strategies that included such things as consciously working towards becoming more assertive, being more careful about physical positioning in relation to a patient, consciously cultivation of inner strength, and being firm.

Teamwork. Taylor (2015) mentioned that Teamwork is highly valued by the psychiatric nurses especially when confronted with violent behaviors while providing therapeutic care to psychiatric patients. A study designed to examine factors that contribute to effective team functioning in inpatient psychiatric facilities showed that most respondents, who were all members of such teams, agreed that teamwork helped to improve treatment plans for individual clients (Francis, 2014).

Language skills. Farooq (2014) emphasizes on language as the principal investigative and therapeutic tool in psychiatry. Interference with communication impairs our ability to assess our patient comprehensively. According to Farooq's barriers in communication can impair the ability to assess, engage and treat a patient. The problem becomes more obvious in situations where the patient and professional come from different cultural and linguistic background. The language problems are only considered when we are working abroad but we tend to overlook the language barriers in our daily practice when we are faced with patients from a different province or the region in large countries. It also crucial that the postgraduate

training programs adequately address the issues related to linguistics and translation. The cultural and linguistic diversity should be an integral component of the training.

Support system. According to Adamson (2015), work is the most stressful factor in peoples lives, but often people don't feel awkward or difficult if positive support from organization and family comes their way. Adamson, mentioned that an organization performs better when their staff is motivated and focused. This includes the support coming from the organization, employee, friends, and family.

Course Training. Studies demonstrate that attitudes of nurses influence their behavior regarding aggression and violence. Training programs can positively change nurses' attitudes. Halfens' (2016) study examined the effect of a training course on mental health nurses' attitudes on the reasons of patient aggression and its management. Needham (2016) studied the effect of a training course on mental health nurses' attitudes and it is concluded that training intending to influence nurse's attitudes regarding the reason for patient aggression should consider the impact of the pedagogical quality of the training course, organizational support, and the user's perception. According to Caple and Schub (2015), education and training are imperative to reduce the incidence of workplace violence through the application of the theory and evidence-based practice. Staff training instills confidence and skills and the ability to intervene appropriately, which may lead to the reduction of violence and injury.

Rewarding Career

Caple and Schub (2015) mentioned that a career in psychiatric nursing provides an opportunity for compassionate people to make a significant difference in the lives of those who suffer from mental illness. The authors also mentioned that education and training is vital to reduce the incidence of workplace violence through the application of the theory and evidence-based practice. Staff training instills confidence and skills and the ability to appropriately intervene, which may lead to the reduction of violence and injury. As a whole, most nurses find their job in psychiatry to be fulfilling although risky. All mentioned that the part of their experience which they found to be most fulfilling when they have been a part of the recovery of the patient. The attitudes of staff had a strong impact on the patient experience. Playing a significant part in the healing journey of the patients the best part of a psychiatric nurse's journey. The way they put the joy they experienced are very apparent in these lines: The care that these professionals provide help patients ward off disability, poverty, social isolation and other complications associated with these conditions. In many cases, psychiatric nurses see their patients recover enough to return to their homes, jobs, families and the comforts of their everyday lives (Chang and Daly, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive qualitative phenomenological method. A phenomenological study describes the several individuals of their lived experience which includes identification of shared experience, attempts to locate the essence of an experience, and explores what was experienced and how they experienced it. With the use of the method, the researcher discovered and described the elements that identify common themes and allow her to described the phenomenon being researched from the point of view and perception of the female nurses who work in a female unit of a mental hospital.

RESULTS

The transcript of the interviews conducted among the female psychiatric nurses mainly indicated (4) central themes, namely: 1. Workplace environment; 2. Challenges and struggles; 3. Adaptation strategies; 4. Rewarding career.

Theme 1. Workplace environment

Aggression and violence. Part of the nurses' experience in the acute unit is being exposed to danger and risks in their workplace. Nurses have experienced physical attack and verbal abuse from the patients due to the unpredictability of their actions. Aggression can be prevented if the nurse is vigilant or she is with someone if dealing with an aggressive patient. Patient has potential to attack the staff if she found that the staff is alone. Staff appeared stoically to accept that some potential for aggression and violence was a given, but strategies for reducing risk were widely seen as inadequate. Staff stipulated that sometime aggression and violence would aggravate due to a noisy environment. This makes the unit more vulnerable to depressed and hallucination patient.

Safety issue. One of the important aspects of the working environment is the safety of the staff because female visitors can freely enter and walk in the unit. Contraband items like breakables and sharp objects can enter the unit if unnoticed or unchecked by the staff. The female visitor can freely enter the patient bedroom and chat with other patients at the time they fight with the patient that added to the chaotic scenario of the unit. Hence, they can freely enter the patient's room there is a possibility that contraband like canned drinks, sharp objects, and breakables can enter if improperly checked by the nurse that can bring danger to other patients, staff and visitor. In the study conducted by Rose Chapman (2016), over 90% of nurses experience violence or verbal abuse. A study has found that three out of four nurses have experienced violence while at work, and 9 out of 10 have suffered verbal abuse. "Many of the nurses who took part in his research said that they did not report incidents because they felt that workplace violence was just part of the job."

Theme 2. Challenges and Struggle

Psychiatric female nurses working in female unit encountered a variety of challenges and struggles. It includes poor collegial relationship, language barrier, cultural differences and course training. The nurses described entering in an unsafe zone every time they are in the acute wards and dealing with language problem due to the multicultural work environment. The poor collegial relationship is one of the challenges that staff is facing in female psychiatry. Their working relationship is affected and at times lead to misunderstanding. For some female nurses' teamwork, a problem that they are facing especially if they are grouped with other nationality. A harmonious relationship is vital for nurses working together as a team, and poor collegial relations can cause communication breakdown, staff attrition and difficulties attracting new nursing staff.

Language barrier. Language barrier another challenge for the psychiatric nurses due to a variety of languages spoken by the patients they are dealing with. Since the nurse-participants are working with multicultural patients, communicating with them was a problem.

Cultural differences. Tradition and cultural diversity also pose challenges to the nurse-participants specially dealing with the patient's family and relatives. According to Cross (2012), immigrants may experience stress due to culture shock - the need to adjust to a society with different social structures, values, expectations, beliefs, and practices. To meet

the needs of culturally diverse groups, health care providers must engage in the process of becoming culturally competent.

Course Training. Most of the nurses working in the female unit are married and staying with their family in Doha. Most of them find difficulty in updating their CNE point that needed in yearly appraisal evaluation. According to the participants, they find it tough to adhere in the mandatory lectures that the hospital is provided. They know the benefit of its course but finding a suitable time to attend is the tough one.

Theme 3. Adaptation Strategies

The third theme that emerged is adaptation strategy, which refers to the coping and interventions by the nurse-participants against the threat in the work environment. The most common strategies are the use of therapeutic relationship, vigilance towards safety, language skill, teamwork, and external support extended by family and friends as among their coping.

Therapeutic use of self. The participants most often use therapeutic use of self as interventions not only in dealing with the patients but also as their coping. They explained that being empathic and offering your help without thinking in return entails a caring approach towards the patient.

Vigilance. The volatility in the female unit, the unpredictability of the patient's actions and the feeling of being unsafe in the work environment which are all threats to safety are being coped by the psychiatric nurses through their vigilance. The major coping skill that nurses used at work once they experienced either verbal or physical abuse can be characterized as consciously being more careful and mindful of their safety, both emotional and physical.

Teamwork. The participants identified teamwork as one of their aces in working in acute wards, which serves as their coping. Nurses rely on each other for support whenever a crisis occurs in the ward. Teamwork as one of their aces in working in the female unit serves as their coping. They valued teamwork especially if they are confronting manipulative and highly aggressive patient.

Language skill is the coping skill in which the nurses deal with multicultural patients and to their fellow health care provider. According to the nurse- participants, to thrive in the acute setting and this kind of profession requires language skill. In working with multicultural patients, learning their language is one of the best strategies. Communication in the native tongue of the patient is an effective way of addressing their needs because they can express what they want to convey to the medical staff.

Support system. Support system refers to external support accorded by family and friends to the nurse-participants as a way of coping especially in warding off stress from work. Challenges and struggle encompass the poor collegial relationship, language barrier, cultural differences, and hurdle in completing the annual mandatory course training as required in staff annual appraisal evaluation. Most of the female nurses are married and brought their family in Qatar, so attending the mandatory lectures during off days are tough for them. Majority of the participants expressed their coping by going out with family and friends and this statement supported by the study of Adamson (2015) who mentioned that an organization performs better when their staff is motivated and focused. This includes the support coming from the organization, employee, friends, and family.

Theme 4. Rewarding career

Fulfillment is a common theme that came out of the study, which refers to professional and personal growth and financial gains. Despite the challenges in the work environment, the majority of the participants expressed their fulfillment in pursuing psychiatric nursing as their profession as they described it as a rewarding experience regarding being able to help-out patients achieve a better functioning life, having developed their virtues and making them better persons. Most of the participants thought that at the end of the day all the stresses that they encountered are part of their work and plus they are learning. They just take it in a positive way. It developed positive attitudes in them such as patience, compassion, and love for work. It gave them a deeper understanding of human behavior and knowing self-better. Majority of the participants expressed their desire to stay in mental health nursing despite the challenges associated with violence, risking environment and struggle in completing the mandatory education. Their choice to work in the female unit is great because they can ambulate in the facility with less fear; not thinking that someone will harass them while walking in the hallway compared in a male unit.

Although nurses suffered from aggression and violence from the patients and family but still, they want to work in psychiatry. They felt that workplace violence was just part of their job, it cannot be prevented but through proper assessment and intervention, patient's violence ratio can be lessened. Despite the risks, participants recommended psychiatric nursing as a field of work not only because of the monetary benefits but also the personal fulfillment they derived from it. They considered it is rewarding primarily because one learns about a variety of human behavior and that one gains self-awareness.

As a whole, most nurses find their job in psychiatry to be fulfilling although risky. All mentioned that the part of their experience which they found to be most fulfilling when they have been a part of the recovery of the patient. Known for its dangerous environment, female nurses still choose to embark in the female unit as they wanted to widen their understanding and communication skills. Challenges are given in psychiatric facility especially in female unit, but proper management and acceptance can reduce the dilemma. They hoped to improve their language skill and pursue continuing education through a post graduate degree. Against this, most nurse-participants expressed their satisfaction both for financial and professional reasons. Most of the nurse-participants intended to remain in the psychiatric nursing and aspire to finish their postgraduate education.

Playing a significant part in the healing journey of the patients the best part of a psychiatric nurse's journey. The way they put the joy they experienced are very apparent in these lines: The care that these professionals provide help patients ward off disability, poverty, social isolation and other complications associated with these conditions. In many cases, psychiatric nurses see their patients recover enough to return to their homes, jobs, families and the comforts of their everyday lives (Chang and Daly, 2015). In addition, Caple and Schub (2015) cited that education and training vital to reduce the incidence of workplace violence through the application of the theory and evidence-based practice. Staff training instills confidence and skills and the ability to appropriately intervene, which may lead to the reduction of violence and injury.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Workplace environment. Aggression and violence towards patients and families are the common sentiment voiced out by the participants whom they attributed to a noisy environment and small space. Attack on the staff by the patient usually occurs when the staff is alone. One of the important aspects of the working environment is the safety of the staff because female visitors can freely enter and walk in the unit. Contraband items like breakables and sharp objects can enter the unit if unnoticed or unchecked by the staff.

Challenges and struggles. Language barrier is one of the major challenges of the participants due to variety of languages spoken by their patients. Next are traditions and cultural diversity of their colleagues, patients and patients' families and relatives. Another is adhering or participating/ attending the mandatory lectures/ seminars that the hospital's nursing service enforced.

Adaptation strategies. The participants most often use therapeutic use of self as one of the interventions when dealing with aggressive patients. Vigilance is utilized as a means of handling the unpredictability of the patient's actions. They also agreed that teamwork is one of their aces in working in the acute unit, when dealing with their culturally diverse peers/ coworkers. They valued teamwork especially if they are confronting manipulative and highly aggressive patient. Supports from families and friends are their way to cope with the stress.

Rewarding career. Most nurses find their job in psychiatric unit to be fulfilling although risky, not only because of the monetary benefits but also the personal fulfillment they derived from it. They feel rewarded even though the daily work is tough because their communication skills, especially in Arabic, has improved. With the benefit of training, they feel confident in handling the busy situation of the unit every day.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the result of the findings, the following are concluded:

1. Professional and personal rewards outweigh the multitude of challenges and occupational risks of mental health nurses.
2. Therapeutic relationship, acquisition of language skills and incorporation of vigilance are among their most practical tools in managing work-related stress in a psychiatric unit.
3. Communication is the first step on how to detect patient aggression that can lead to violence if left unattended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the salient findings and conclusions, the following are the recommendations:

1. Mental health nurses are encouraged to continue attend mandatory course training despite their strong opposition since the knowledge they could acquire from these lectures could help in strengthening their skills in dealing with their patients.
2. To address the challenges of poor collegial relationship, language barrier, and cultural diversity, mental health nurses are encouraged to enroll in a class offered by the organization especially the Arabic lesson since most of them currently deal with Arabic-speaking patients.
3. The psychiatric nurses should learn and explore other therapeutic methods like Therapeutic use of self for them to continuously contribute to patient's recovery.

4. For the future researcher to conduct follow-up or similar studies about inpatient aggression and violence interventions since most nurse-participants working in the female unit, have higher exposure to risk either physical or verbal.

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GOD BLESS US ALL!

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