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Perceived Mental Challenges and Coping Strategies of Nursing Home Nurses in New York City, United States of America: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This research study, was qualitative in nature aimed at examining the perceived mental challenges and coping strategies of selected ten (10) nursing home nurses in New York City had broad implications. Results revealed that it affect both individual well-being and the quality of care provided to the aged. Emotional and mental exhaustion, stress was directly linked to the demanding nature of work. This was also characterized by overwhelming workloads, stress, compassion fatigue, sleep problems, emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout, moral distress, social isolation. Nursing home nurses suggested and adapted these coping mechanisms in their workplace; supporting management, stakeholders and colleagues, let them talk and learn how to listen, acknowledge the situation, set boundaries, social support, physical activity, engaging on learning and meaningful conversation, get regular exercise, engage in relaxing activity, set goals, be prepared and focused on positivity, prioritizing sleep and healthy eating, compassion fatigue, and fostering a workplace with culture that promote employees' health and mental well-being. Intervention programs were recommended to better combat Nursing home nurses perceived mental health problems, which could be used to draw up best practice guidelines for nurses to help them cope with it or prevent it from arising in the first place. The indication of these various conditions could be used in the future to craft policy, programs and intervention that target multiple areas, such as self-criticism, self-care, mission, work-life balance and skills necessary for helping professionals and leaders to better prevent, deal and overcome perceived mental health problems.

Keywords: Nursing home, nursing home nurses, Thematic analysis, mental health, perceived mental health problems

1.1 Background of the Study

Statistically, approximately two-thirds of Nurses experience burnout, impacting patient care quality and safety. Cultivating a positive organizational culture was essential for nursing workforce stability. Nursing had been a very stressful profession worldwide, with high rates of emotional, mental, and physical injury, and job dissatisfaction, and over 50% of nurses experience high stress levels at work, making it more stressful than other healthcare professions because of their direct involvement in patient care (Chang et al.,2024).

Added to this trend, a 2022 Mental Health Survey indicated that they are unlikely to seek support at work for mental health issues that could negatively impact their ability to do their job. Nurses were somewhat most likely to seek support outside of work, with 35% reporting that they had sought care from mental health professionals.

Moreover, stress was a pervasive occurrence within certain professions, including nurses working in emergency and intensive care unit environments. Nurses in these settings often confront various stress-inducing factors, such as unsupportive management and distressing events like patient mortality, and experience notably higher levels of stress. Nevertheless, information was scarce regarding the precise level of stress in Ethiopia, particularly within southern hospitals (Bolado et al.,2024).

In the field of Nurses, access to coping any mental issues reflects their job performance and well-being. Since, several challenges they had encountered on their day-to-day job, including physical, psychological and administrative challenges. There was a need for the Ministry of Health working with the Wellness Centre for health workers to design staff wellness programs aimed at mitigating work-related stress and challenges faced by mental health nurses. Added to this, the Ministry of Health and the NPRH administration should put in place safety measures at the NPRH and should devise a management strategy to tackle the administrative challenges raised by the nurses in this study (Zwane et al., 2022).

Given the chronic understaffing, low wages, unsafe working conditions, and deployment bans, Filipino nurses have expressed their exhaustion and dismay with statements such as they don't feel cared for and they feel exhausted, but they always keep in mind that they had to help their people because, no one else will. Eventually, some of them may leave the profession or try to go abroad since it was really not worth being a nurse at home. This seemed to be the sentiment of nurses and other health care worker groups who have announced their mass resignation from the Philippine health care system amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. While some were able to migrate, remaining nurses in the Philippines, as seen in private hospitals, may leave their profession to escape their seeming domestic captivity and socio-economic hardships amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, Filipino nurses may be free when they

no longer work as nurses (Alibudbud, 2022). More so, unaddressed mental health problems may impact the healthcare cost. The corresponding strategies could lessen stress, depression, anxiety and other factors.

Evidently, Bolado et al. (2024) that it was crucial to implement effective strategies such as optimizing staffing and workflow, improving communication and collaboration, providing adequate support and resources, leveraging technology and innovation, emphasizing patient-centered care, and implementing data-driven quality improvement to alleviate the burden.

With these aforementioned, the researcher probes on the title, " Perceived Mental Challenges and Coping Strategies of Nursing Home Nurses in New York City, United States of America: A Qualitative Study" to discover strategies employed by Nurses in coping mental challenges in Nursing home in USA, also to address mental health problems that may impact the healthcare cost, and adopt these strategies that could lessen depression, anxiety and other effect that may come along as Nurses.

METHOD

2. 1 Study Design

A qualitative descriptive study was employed. This naturalistic methodology allowed the researcher to use a theoretical lens shaped by a comprehensive literature review. This approach enabled researchers to use interview questions specific to a largely unknown area of analysis based on their theory and literature (Wu et al., 2023). In this study, the literature review helped the researchers explore the experiences of Nursing Home Nurses in New York City in USA. Specifically, the researcher employed a Phenomenological approach, for such the researcher delved on the recorded/encoded experiences of selected nurses, revealing their actual experience in the nursing home, primarily through answering the open-ended questionnaire which was then recorded/encoded the unfolding events and the meaning credit by the participants, adhered to the open-ended research questions.

Findings

Experiences of Nursing Home Nurses

Nursing home nurses in New York City had the following theme presentation of experiences. The results of the first research question were shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Presentation of Nursing Home Nurses Experiences in New York City

Themes

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1. Overwhelming workloads

2. Stress

3. Compassion fatigue

4. Sleep problems

Interpretation

Three of the nurses revealed that overworking would lead them more likely to make mistakes in giving medications, and difficulty in handling patients. Evidently, *"I caught myself giving a different medication just in time due to sleepless nights", "As nurse, double checking the medications given to the patients is very important"," I cannot avoid mistake, since I'm in a rush and overworked."*

Stress was stated evidently;

   "I experience stress of thinking about the things I need to do or things that happened during my shifts''. (Nurse 5)

"I am exhausted because I just can seem to get enough sleep". (Nurse 8)

"I've experience stress because I had limited outdoor activities, since most of the times I need to overtime to be compensated additionally".

Compassion fatigue

"I witness everyday the sufferings of my patients in nursing home, with this I felt exhausted." (Nurse 9)

"Nursing is physically and emotionally demanding, of which I expose myself every day to varied infections, illnesses, and various patients. I am exhausted because of this". (Nurse 7)

"*As a Nurse, this constant exposure to suffering and loss is one causes of my emotional exhaustion*". (Nurse 1)

, "*I feel pressured because I need to work long hours, handle multiple patients simultaneously, and sometime compromise the quality of care they supposedly experienced.*" (Nurse 3)

"*I always feel stress because of constant exposure to aged who are dying*". (Nurse 4)

"*I witness my patients' slowly weakening and in the next day died*". (Nurse 10)

Sleep problem

Seven nurses mentioned that they most of the time experience sleep problem due to work rotating shifts including nights, which disrupt their sleep-wake cycle, and their exposure to sufferings and dying of their aged patients also added to the harder rest and sleep, since they need to attend to these situations. Moreover, the administrator of the hospital also answered that most of the time he is constantly exposure to stress and anxiety leading him to sleep problems, including insomnia, and excessive daytime sleepiness.

Perceived mental challenges of Nursing Home Nurses

These were the perceived mental challenges of Nursing Home Nurses.

Table 2

Perceived mental challenges of Nursing Home Nurses

Themes

1. *Emotional exhaustion*

2. *Stress*

3. *Burnout*

4. *Moral distress*

5. *Social isolation*

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Interpretation

Unlike any other healthcare setting, nursing homes provided long-term care for individuals with complex and often deteriorating conditions. Five of the ten participants made mentioned that they were emotionally exhausted, because of the constant exposure to sufferings and loss, which means they witness the gradual decline, and dying of their aged patients. This is evident in the statement,

"*As a Nurse, this constant exposure to suffering and loss is one causes of my emotional exhaustion*", "*I always feel stress because of constant exposure to aged who are dying*", "*I feel pressured because I need to work long hours, handle multiple patients simultaneously, and sometime compromise the quality of care they supposedly experienced.*"

Additionally, the demanding nature of work as Nurses was coupled with exposure to high level of stress. This is evident in the participants responses such as,

"*I always feel stress because of the workloads, and in duty during graveyard hours*", I need to listen to my patients' clamor and pain, and give them proper care and attention in as much as I can."

Burnout

"*Nursing home here has a higher number of patients per nurse compared to hospital, so I feel overwhelmed and unable to provide adequate care to each resident, led to feeling of frustration and exhaustion*". (Nurse 10)

"*I experience constant pressure to provide high-quality care in the challenging environment*".

"*I feel undervalued and underappreciated*".(Nurse 4)

Moral distress

"*I experience the feeling that I unable to provide the best possible care to my*

patient due to limited resources, and hectic schedule given to each patient". (Nurse 8)

"*I witness unethical practices among patients*". (Nurse 6)

Social Isolation

"I experience the feeling of being isolated because I do not have 'free-time' to any outdoor activities". (Nurse 6)

"I have limited time to interact with others". (Nurse 9)

"I seldom interact socially, because I need to prioritize my patient". (Nurse 10)

Mental health coping strategies of Nursing Home Nurses

The following were the mental health coping strategies of Nursing Home Nurses

Table 3

Mental health coping strategies of Nursing Home Nurses

Themes

1. Supporting Management group and colleagues

2. Let them talk and learn how to listen

3. Acknowledge the situation

4. Set boundaries

5. Social support, physical activity

6. Engaging on learning and meaningful conversation

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Interpretation

Support from the management group and registered nurses was mentioned by all nursing assistants as a strategy to help them cope with challenges and stress:

"Our head and colleagues were approachable here. We could always discuss with

them how to solve a problem. When faced with difficult problems, I told the head

nurse and gained help from her." (Nurse 5)

"We can cope by collaborative teamwork between management and nurses, creating a strong support system for mental health". (Nurse 3)

"The management is supportive, and this fosters a positive work environment". (Nurse 2)

Let them talk and learn how to listen

"I knew how to deal with them to avoid stress. I paid more attention to just listen to them, let them talk, because anyways they will just stop talking soon." (Nurse 2)

Acknowledge the situation

"Being a Nurse, is incredibly a challenging job, so to cope with these, I need to accept that this is the nature of my work." (Nurse 3)

"I cope this by doing the best I can with my patient and acknowledge the situation and mine too!" (Nurse 7)

Social support and physical activity

Nurse 4: "As nurse, I need to join on various physical activity like Zumba, jogging, etc."

Engaging on learning and meaningful conversation

Nurse 4 and 9 also answered that engaging on learning will be of great help to cope these mentioned mental challenges.

These were the best plan as recommended by Nurses

Table 4

Best plan as recommended by Nurses

Themes

1. Get regular exercise

2. Engage in relaxing activity

3. Set goals

4. Be prepared and focused on positivity

5. Prioritizing sleep and healthy eating

6. Fostering a workplace with culture that promote employees' health and mental well-being

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Interpretation

Get regular exercise

Three Nursing home nurses answered that indulging to regular exercise could the best thing to do to cope stress and emotional exhaustion.

Engage in relaxing activity

To temporarily go out of the zone, two nurses mentioned in their response that engaging in some of relaxing activities would be beneficial to Nurses to address sleep problem, and burnout.

Set goals

Eight of ten nurses suggested that setting goals could at least erase burdens on facing difficult and same scenario of problematic patients, affecting their mental health.

Be resilient and focused on positivity

Nurses also recommended that staying focused on positivity and resilient, since working in a nursing home presented unique challenges will be crucial both in their mental health and well-being. A positive attitude could lead to deal patients with compassion and quality care, and cultivate positive outlooks both to nurses and patients.

Prioritizing sleep and healthy eating

"Prioritizing sleep for nursing home nurses in the US impacts patient's safety and overall healthcare quality. Due to demanding schedules and high-stress environment, this could lead to medical errors, emotional burnout, and could affect

the quality of care given among patients". (Nurse 2)

"Maybe if the Nursing Home will hire additional staff and nurses, there will be an equal ratio of nurses and patient, that could lessen workloads, and the sleep problem will be solved." (Nurse 1)

Fostering a workplace with culture that promote employees' health and mental well-being

"If the management will sponsor staff-initiatives, stress will not be a problem anymore, since nurses will be mentally fit, which resulted to providing a quality of care among patients". (Nurse 5)

Policy to be adapted to foster a culture of a stress-free and mental health among nursing home management

Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the perceived mental challenges and coping strategies of ten (10) Nursing Home Nurses in New York City, United States of America, have broad implications, affecting both individual well-being and the quality of care provided to the aged. Emotional and mental exhaustion, stress, were directly linked to the demanding nature of work. These were characterized by overwhelming workloads, stress, compassion fatigue, sleep problems, emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout, moral distress, social isolation.

As cited by Rachel & Francesco (2018), studies from across the globe suggest that burnout is prevalent amongst staff working in nursing and residential homes caring for elderly people, with implications for the patients, staff and homecare providers. Factors associated with burnout appear to include perceptions of job stress and occupational aspects, as well as the types of coping mechanisms staff employ. Managing grief associated with death of patients at work, as well as staff perceptions of both clients and their illnesses also appear related to burnout as well as the specific type of healthcare setting.

Recently, job stress had become a common and costly problem in the workplace and, according to the World Health Organization, a pervasive issue. It also overshadowed the performance of care and reduce such behaviors in nurses, which may be one of the factors affecting the outcome of patients. Stress was determined as a major cause of 80% of all occupational injuries and 40% of the financial burden in the workplace according to the

American Institute of Stress. Nursing was known as a stressful job since it was associated with complex job demands and needs, and high expectations, excessive responsibility, and minimal authority had been identified as the main stressors (Babapour et al., 2022).

Moreover, nurses suggested and adapted these coping mechanisms in their workplace; supporting management, stakeholders and colleagues, let them talk and learn how to listen, acknowledge the situation, set boundaries, social support, physical activity, engaging on learning and meaningful conversation, get regular exercise, engage in relaxing activity, set goals, be prepared and focused on positivity, prioritizing sleep and healthy eating, compassion fatigue, and fostering a workplace with culture that promote employees' health and mental well-being.

Fostering an environment that perpetuates open communication between staff and leadership lays the foundation for a healthy work environment. Conversations regarding staff perceptions of their workloads and needed education related to the care of residents. Nurses Staff's ability to communicate with those with cognitively impaired residents was fundamental. Added to this, implementing interventions to address and support staff's stress was vital for the mental health of the valuable caregivers who have had to step up and take on multiple roles in providing care to help prevent social isolation. (Woods et al., 2022).

In addition, the results summarized a variety of coping mechanisms employed by Nursing Home Nurses in New York, USA, against several mental health challenges. These experiences and challenges included emotional and mental exhaustion, stress, overwhelming workloads, stress, compassion fatigue, sleep problems, emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout, moral distress, social isolation, these discovered experiences and mental health challenges.

These perceived mental health problems faced by Nursing Home Nurses in New York, USA were directly linked to the demanding nature of their work. Yet, Nurses themselves were resilient enough to cope these aforementioned challenges. These coping mechanisms and best plan suggestions for such; supporting management, stakeholders and colleagues, let them talk and learn how to listen, acknowledge the situation, set boundaries, social support, physical activity, engaging on learning and meaningful conversation, get regular exercise, engage in relaxing activity, set goals, be prepared and focused on positivity, prioritizing sleep and healthy eating, compassion fatigue, and fostering a workplace with culture that promote employees' health and mental well-being.

These findings could also be incorporated into intervention programs to better combat Nursing home nurses perceived mental health problems, which could be used to draw up best practice guidelines for nurses to help them cope with it or prevent it from arising in the first place. The indication of these various conditions could be used in the future to craft policy, programs and intervention that target multiple areas, such as self-

criticism, self-care, mission, work-life balance and skills necessary for helping professionals and leaders to better prevent, deal and overcome perceived mental health problems.

Recommendation

This study aimed at examining the perceived mental challenges and coping strategies of Nursing Home Nurses in New York City, United States of America, had a broad implication, affecting both individual well-being and the quality of care provided to the aged. Emotional and mental exhaustion, stress, were directly linked to the demanding nature of work. These were characterized by overwhelming workloads, stress, compassion fatigue, sleep problems, emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout, moral distress, social isolation. Addressing these mentioned challenges require one's ability to listen attentively, effective verbal and nonverbal communication, setting boundaries among patients/ aged, acceptance of the nature of profession, supportive management group and colleagues, social support, physical activity, engaging on learning and meaningful conversation.

This research will serve as the basis of Nursing Home Management Plan and interventions among nurses. Indulging this research able the healthcare worker open opportunities against mental challenges, develop coping mechanisms that allow them to find and shape their own meaning and purpose of their work despite the challenges they faced.

Moreover, the process and outcome of the study may provide insights, opportunities, and a legacy to the community as a whole through establishing future basis of building strong relationship with the management and colleagues, fostering support from other stakeholders and well-being initiatives, and evidence-based practiced perform through research findings, and may be used as a reference to conduct further studies with of strategies and innovations among other nursing homes.

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