



Volume 4	Issue 2	November (2024)	DOI: 10.47540/ijqr.v4i2.1506	Page: 156 – 161
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Men in White: A Narrative Inquiry of Male Nurse Stereotype in Nursing

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Experiences, Gender Bias, Narrative Inquiry, Nursing, Stereotyping.

Received : 30 June 2024

Revised : 01 August 2024

Accepted : 12 November 2024

ABSTRACT

Nurses have been traditionally all seen as a predominantly female profession in the healthcare industry resulting in men remaining a minority and gender stereotypes in their workplace. Thus, this narrative inquiry aims to explore the men's experiences, the challenges they faced, and the coping strategies they used in the field of nursing. A semi-structured questionnaire was used for in-depth interviews with the four participants; ages 32 to 37 years old, who were selected through snowball sampling. The data were further understood through the application of thematic analysis. The recorded interview was transcribed and coded. Categories were clustered; then, emerging themes were derived. Based on the findings, there are still some male nurses who are facing challenges in hospital settings due to these stereotypes that limit the practice of male nurses. However, despite these challenges, some male nurses still managed to pursue nursing due to their passion and job opportunities, and having coping strategies such as peer and family support and balancing work and life. In conclusion, despite the stereotyping that male nurses may face, their passion for nursing, job opportunities, and effective coping strategies enable them to succeed in the nursing profession.

INTRODUCTION

A preconceived notion of the traits and behaviors that a group of people shares is called a stereotype a cultural construct that gives specific traits to men and women due to their sexual differences. Stereotypes are closely related to gender (Teresa-Morales et al., 2022). For instance, in the healthcare industry, nurses have been traditionally all seen as a predominantly female profession.

According to the study of Tang et al. (2018), with presumptions like caring is more of a feminine role, nursing is frequently perceived as a profession geared toward women. In the historically female field of nursing, men remain a minority. To support the previous study of how men continue to be underrepresented in the healthcare industry, a study by Elmaco (2022) explored that ninety percent (90%) of nurses globally are women. 25.9% of nurses in the Philippines are men, and 74.1% of nurses are women. With the given data, Cottingham (2014) explored some personalities and skills that a

caring professional must have like placing a strong emphasis on empathy, emotional engagement, and helping others skills and behaviors that are often seen as in opposition to hegemonic ideas of a tough, detached, and independent masculine self. Although the special issue of men in female-dominated vocations is frequently recognized as a crucial component of men's identity, this subject has received relatively little research attention to date (Shen-Miller & Smiler, 2015).

Aside from facing discrimination and isolation at work, male nurses also expressed dissatisfaction with their practice environment. Working in specialized or technical wards to adapt to the nursing profession are some of the active strategies male nurses adopted (Zhang & Tu, 2020). Additionally, a study by Adeyemi-Adelanwa et al. (2015) stated that because of the dominant values and belief systems in society, men who choose this career are typically stereotyped as “He-Man”, troublemakers, effeminate, or gay. Male-oriented teaching methods in nursing schools and a lack of

positive role models in the field are obstacles for men interested in pursuing careers in nursing. It is ironic that because nursing faculties are frequently predominantly composed of women, this gender bias stereotyping also takes place in nursing educational programs. In the workplace, nursing employment is expected to grow by 16 percent by 2024, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, which is significantly faster than average job growth. The need for and acceptance of male nurses in the nursing profession is increasing (Gunawan, 2017).

Contrary to gender role stereotyping, male nurses in society doubt that people of a particular gender can hold a particular position in society. Many of the challenges male nurses face in trying to perform in a field that is conventionally thought of as a “woman's profession” can be attributed to stereotypes. As a practical solution to the future nursing crisis and to encourage gender diversity in nursing to reflect the culture that nurses care for, it should be considered to delve into strategies to attract and keep men in the nursing profession (Kronsberg et al., 2017). Negative outcomes may arise from cultural standards and biases towards male nurses. In addition, a few male nurses disclosed that they were uncertain about their future as hospital nurses, encountered conflicts over gender roles at work, and as a result, were considering shifting careers (Chang & Jeong, 2021).

Additionally, a study by Zeb et al. (2019) explored that negative experiences were primarily reported by student and professional nurses, who also mentioned concerns and uncertainties about their professional roles, as well as rejection, discrimination, and accusations from patients and their families. They also mentioned a lack of male mentors, inadequate learning needs, and a lack of support from female colleagues, nurse managers, and educators, careers, identities, and the amount of time needed to pursue nursing careers. The term gender discrimination refers to any action that prevents an individual from fully exercising their human rights due to socially constructed gender roles and norms (Gauci et al., 2023). Thus, this motivates the researchers to seek to explore the men's experiences, the challenges they faced, and the coping strategies they used in the predominantly women-dominated profession nursing workplace in the Philippines.

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically narrative inquiry, to explore male nurses' experiences with stereotypes by gathering intimate, sensitive information through intentional engagement and relationship-building with participants (McCullough, 2023). The researchers obtained informed consent from participants and ensured their anonymity and confidentiality, thereby adhering to ethical norms.

The researchers gathered data using semi-structured questionnaires that included both pre-arranged and follow-up questions and conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with the participants. The interview questions are focused on exploring the motivations, the current experiences, and the future endeavors of the participant in the nursing workplace. After the interviews, transcripts were created and sent to the participants for approval. These transcripts were then subjected to thematic analysis to categorize codes or the important sections of the data and identify emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practicality and Opportunity in the Nursing Profession

The nursing profession offers fulfilling career opportunities with stable employment and a chance to make a positive impact on people's lives, despite its challenges (Fontanilla et al., 2023). Based on the findings, one of the participants stated that it is practical to choose to nurse because regardless of gender, it is a needed profession and an essential sector of healthcare.

Participant 1: “And based on what I have read back when I was in high school, there is a saying that nurses are the heart of healthcare. It was not said there that the heart of healthcare should be a female nurse or a male nurse”. Participant 2: “First of all, during my time in college, nursing was very much in demand”.

Nursing offers practical and fulfilling opportunities with high demand and impact in healthcare. In the study of Yi and Keogh (2016), male nurses are drawn by factors like pay, job stability, and educational prospects. This highlights the need to view nursing as a viable career choice and address shortages in healthcare professionals.

Inspiring students, regardless of gender, emphasizes the importance of capability in nursing.

Personal Choice Pushes Participants to Take Nursing

Men choose nursing due to their passion for serving others and convictions. This career aligns with their goals, creating a diverse and resilient workforce. Male nurses are valued for their strength-related jobs, indicating aptitude is more important than gender. Understanding career factors can help shape decisions early on, encouraging more individuals to pursue nursing education and creating positive impressions through age-appropriate activities. As stated by Maor and Cojocaru (2018), family influences are important when choosing a job, especially in nursing. Family members can serve as potent motivators when it comes to making career selections.

According to the testimonies of the participants. Participant 1: "It does not necessarily mean that if you're a nurse, you should be a woman, as long as you can perform and it's in your heart and it is your passion to give care to patients". Participant 4: "It's because my brother was also a nurse in the past. I always see him in white; that's the primary reason why I took nursing. That's also why I decided to take nursing".

This shows that roles in nursing that need strength, expertise, and stress tolerance are shifting to include more males. It also demonstrates that in nursing, ability, and enthusiasm are more important than gender norms. Ultimately, regardless of a nurse's gender, it's critical to recognize and value the variety of skills and accomplishments they have to offer (Shen et al., 2022). A nurse's gender does not matter, what defines a nurse is their caregiving skills. Nurses need to manage different clients and situations, be prepared for emergencies, and stay aware of their responsibilities during disasters, regardless of demographic differences (Pourvakhshoori et al., 2017).

The nursing profession is evolving towards individual preference over gender norms, with family influence shaping career choices. Recognition of male nurses in challenging roles challenges stereotypes, prioritizing skill and enthusiasm. A diverse nursing staff is crucial for healthcare needs.

Gender Stereotypes Limit Male Nurses in Hospital Practices

Gender stereotypes heavily affect male nurses at hospitals. These stereotypes create problems in how society views male nurses, in their job opportunities and career growth, in their experiences at work, and even in the kinds of nursing roles they're allowed to take on. Participant 1: "Patients with gynecological cases because when it is ob-gyne cases or pregnant women, usually you would just need to have an internal examination for you. It is indeed embarrassing that a male nurse would conduct that internal examination". Participant 2: "I think, most especially is to pregnant women, and we cannot operate the delivery room or at the OB ward. Because of course, even I would be uncomfortable to do the task there because women are breastfeeding some are minor those are the things that I did not want them to be misinterpreted". According to the study of Mao et al. (2021), women still dominate nursing, leading to doubts about male nurses' ability to provide compassionate care. Even causing some to not consider it at all.

Moving up the career ladder can be challenging for male nurses. Employers often overlook them or limit their roles due to gender stereotypes. This can restrict the types of nursing tasks male nurses are assigned, preventing them from diversifying their skills and advancing in their careers. Other barriers include lower skill levels, poor pay, low educational requirements, limited autonomy, and a predominantly female nurse population (Salvador & Alanazi, 2024).

Support System from Family and Friends

Having a support system from family and friends can greatly benefit mental and emotional health, especially during tough times at work. According to Ferreira et al. (2017), individuals need to develop effective coping strategies and rely on social support to manage work-related stress. As described in the testimonies: Participant 1: "When you see them relying on you and believing in your abilities, that's what makes you feel so good even despite many challenges". Participant 4: "In every workplace, there should be peer support. In a way that you would not focus on your exhaustion".

A strong support system provides security, love, and belonging, helping us navigate life's challenges with resilience. Support from family and

friends in the workplace can combat fatigue. According to Ernstmeier and Christman (2022), maintaining a healthy social support network is essential for resilience. Staying connected with loved ones helps mitigate loneliness. However, according to Namdari et al. (2019), nurses often face stress due to job demands and limited time with family, leading to unhappiness for both nurses and their families.

Despite that, family and friends are great sources of support. A strong support system can help to reduce stress levels. Spending time with loved ones can increase our mood and reduce anxiety. A support system can also improve our overall physical health throughout our lives. It also provides good emotional health and improved self-esteem (O'Shea, 2020).

Adherence to Professional Conduct and Personal Resilience

In the healthcare sector, nursing is a vital profession with specific duties, rules, and ethical considerations, especially when dealing with numerous patients daily. According to Haddad and Geiger (2023), nurses must prioritize patient needs, considering each patient's uniqueness and integrating their preferences into care procedures. To avoid compromising patient care, any conflicts of interest should be disclosed and resolved. As demonstrated by the study's testimonies: Participant 4: "There are times that you would encounter patients that would say a lot of things to you, like issues that they wanted to be accompanied first because something is wrong with them. So, you must have a lot of patience. You need to empathize with all the patients you are going to meet every day, because all of them have different concerns that serve as the purpose for why they come here, at the hospital". Participant 1: "The good thing about it is to continue your profession aside from the fact that, when you are going to continue, you are providing help. Because those 6, 8, or 12 hours of duty sound fulfilling because that means that we are able to prolong the life of a patient called continuing care. In this matter, we help each other in the clinical set-up that is one of the coping strategies that I did".

Nurses find fulfillment in their work by extending their patients' lives and providing care. Adhering to the nursing code of conduct can lead to benefits such as integrity, fulfillment, and

professional growth, as suggested by this study. A supporting study by Ernstmeier and Christman (2022) explored that to manage stress effectively, nurses should make a list of overwhelming commitments, prioritize essential tasks, and reduce non-essential work. They can also discuss responsibilities and priorities with supervisors and avoid taking on new tasks until stress levels are under control.

Nurses need to establish boundaries to provide care within their professional scope, respect patient autonomy and privacy, and avoid compromising relationships. Setting boundaries helps prevent burnout, maintain ethical standards, and create a supportive work environment. Prioritizing self-care is crucial for nurses to thrive in their demanding yet rewarding profession.

Balancing Work and Life

The study shows that nurses cope by making time for themselves to balance work and life. Balancing work and personal life allows individuals to meet work demands while maintaining a healthy personal and family life, reducing conflicts. This balance can be achieved by defining clear roles at work and in the family while minimizing potential conflicts (Fadillah et al., 2022). As described in the testimonies: Participant 1: "Sometimes you just need to breathe and take a rest, because resting is important and if it's fine now, make sure to come back and fight again". Participant 3: "When you're so tired, and you've been on duty for a long time, and it's tiring, you need to take a vacation, a few days of rest".

It is important to take a break and go on vacation when you feel tired because it helps maintain a good balance between work and personal life. Nurses must balance work and personal life for their well-being and family's welfare. Achieving this balance fosters efficiency, satisfaction, exceptional work ethic, and productivity. Neglecting personal work life can lead to reduced well-being and performance (Wulandari & Dirbawanto, 2022). Failing to balance work and personal life can lead to relationship strain, exhaustion, and declining mental health for nurses. This can result in decreased productivity, performance, and professional fulfillment (Tuttle, 2023).

To achieve a balance between work and personal life, nurses must take proactive measures

by reflecting on their priorities and taking decisive actions. Nurses can develop personalized techniques to enhance their wellness, work efficiently, and preserve their roles outside the hospital. Recognizing the need for change and committing to it are the first steps towards success (Mulen, 2015).

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study explored the motivations, challenges, and coping strategies of male nurses in terms of gender stereotyping in nursing through interviews and thematic analysis. The following conclusions are obtained.

1. Male nurses are motivated to pursue nursing a female-dominated profession, because of reasons such as (1) personal choice to pursue nursing, and (2) the practicality and opportunity in the nursing profession. Simply, male nurses are motivated to pursue nursing because of their passion and the wide horizon of job opportunities, as well as the high-paying wage nursing has in the Philippines.
2. Male nurses face challenges in tasks related to gynecologic care, pregnancy, and delivery rooms. They may feel uncomfortable in these roles due to concerns about potential misinterpretation of their actions as sexual abuse towards patients.
3. Male nurses employ coping strategies to navigate challenges in nursing, such as support from friends and family, maintaining professionalism and resilience, and balancing work-life commitments. With strong support networks, they handle stress better and effectively manage various job demands, stress, and worries in nursing as they are just doing their duties as a nurse. The same way for taking rests or breaks when times are getting tough in nursing due to a high workload or toxic environment.

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