| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Phenomenologizing The Life After Nursing Practice of Registered Nurses: A Transcendental Approach

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| ABSTRACT

The nursing profession has always played a key role in promoting health and preventing illness. However, they are not immune to facing issues in their everyday lives. These issues have played a vital role in the decision of professional nurses to leave the profession and seek work in other industries to satisfy their needs. Professional nurses stop nursing practice and opt to stay in non-healthcare professions. Hence, this study aims to provide empirical insights on the lives of registered nurses after nursing practice. The researchers utilized a qualitative research design, specifically transcendental phenomenology by Clark Moustakas (1994). The data were gathered using a self-made questionnaire with eight participants from San Pablo City, Laguna, who were selected through the non-probability purposive sampling technique. The transcripts were analysed thematically using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and NVivo application, and six major themes were derived, namely Transition and Personal Growth, Advancing Career and Cultivating Values, Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships in Career Transition, Evolution of Interpersonal Skills and Strategies, Adaptation to New Environment and Challenges, and Reflection on Career Path and Identity. The results suggest that changing careers offers opportunities for enhancing professional abilities as individuals adapt to their new environments, leveraging skills acquired from previous roles.

1. Introduction

The nursing profession is a vital part of the healthcare system, involved in "advancing health, averting illnesses, and providing care to individuals of all ages who are physically and mentally ill or disabled" (ANA, 1980). However, nurses are increasingly facing issues like excessive workload (Thapa et al., 2021), lack of support from top management (Samur & Seren Intepeler, 2019), staff shortages affecting nurses' workload (B. Siwicki, 2022), chronic understaffing, low wages, and unsafe conditions, leading many to leave their jobs (Alibudbud, 2022). These problems drive nurses to leave the profession and work in other industries outside the nursing profession, leading to the phenomenon of "life after nursing," which the researchers defined as the career phase where registered nurses transition away from active nursing practice to non-healthcare occupations.

The importance of this research is highlighted by alarming statistics. According to Commissioner Erwin Enad of Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as of March 24, 2023, there are 951,105 registered nurses in the Philippines, but only 53.55% are active, leaving a significant number inactive or working in non-healthcare roles. Additionally, over 200,000 nursing graduates have chosen to work outside the nursing profession due to low compensation and benefits according to Jocelyn Andamo, the secretary general of the Filipino Nurses United, in 2021. This trend is further evidenced by data showing that half of

the graduates that require a PRC license are in jobs that are not in line with their finished degree, with only 52.8% of nursing graduates practicing in the field (Philippine Institution for Development Studies, 2022).

With high rates of nurses working outside the nursing profession and a shortage of nurses in the Philippines, this study explores the lived experiences of registered nurses working outside healthcare, including their positive and negative experiences. The study identifies urgent issues leading to nurses leaving the profession and provides insights to address these issues. The results can help formulate programs to increase nurse retention and reduce the number leaving the profession.

This research also aims to contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality). It addresses SDG 8 by fostering discussions on ensuring proper work environments, professional stability, and economic security in nursing. For SDG 10, it highlights workplace inequalities and issues, prompting better policies and systems for nursing professionals.

The study focuses on registered nurses in San Pablo City, Laguna, working in non-healthcare professions, filling knowledge gaps and providing new empirical insights into the lives of nurses after leaving the nursing practice. By focusing on a specific locale and population, it aims to significantly contribute to the literature on the challenges and experiences of nurses transitioning out of their professional roles.

2. Literature Review
The nursing profession comprises all registered nurses, who have completed their education, and earned their professional titles, and currently holds a valid nursing license. In order to prioritize the safety of both the government and the clients, nurses are guided by the Scope of Nursing Practice. In the Philippines, nursing involves providing services across the lifespan, from conception to old age, which focuses on health promotion and illness prevention (Philippine Nursing Act of 2002 or RA No. 9173). Nurses are also expected to collaborate with other members of the healthcare profession. The duties of nurses include delivering nursing care, utilizing the nursing process, administering medications, providing health education, and guiding student nurses in different healthcare settings (Section 28, Republic Act No. 9173).

According to Fukada (2018), nursing competencies involve essential skills that are crucial for professional nursing duties. In the Philippines, the Board of nursing, in compliance with regulations, employed a monitoring system in order to ensure the effective implementation of core competencies. The Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order, Number 15 (2017) has defined 14 competency standards for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program. The profession also emphasizes the use of technology and embodies caring, professionalism, and commitment to promote health and well-being (CHED Memorandum #15, 2017).

The nursing profession has always played a key role in promoting health and preventing illness. It can be seen as a noble job and as individuals embark on the journey to become nurses, there are different motivations that are considered in truly choosing the profession. Motivation helps nurses to become effective in their performance. A great motivation factor for individuals to pursue the nursing profession is caring. Some individuals can still view it as a vocation where they are able to care for the sick (Mbavai et. al, 2022).

According to both the studies of Mbavai et. al, (2022) and Das, S. et.al, (2021) individuals also perceive that the nursing profession can offer them financial security because of the assurance of job opportunities. Nurses who have longer experiences in the workplace have more motivation to continue the profession compared to nurses with less experience (Baljoon, et. al 2018). When nurses are motivated, they are able to improve the nursing care service and patient flow into their institution (Negussie & Oliksa, 2020).

Throughout the decades, the individuals who are known to provide quality health care are the registered nurses even if they are in difficult situations. They are able to carry the weight of care being given to people in the most professional and gracious way (Marzilli, 2021). With the field of work that they have, it is vital to make no errors even with the ratio of staff nurses to the number of admitted patients. This in turn takes a toll on them by putting them under constant pressure. This also leads to longer work shifts and lesser time for them to be able to rest (Sasangohar et.al, 2020). There are also some instances where nurses receive the fear and frustration of the patients and their family members.

Meanwhile, the Philippines currently faces a severe shortage of nurses, which is estimated between 120,000 to 350,000. Factors such as chronic understaffing, low compensation, and unsafe work conditions aggravate the shortage in the Philippines. In addition, over half of the professional licensed nurses have migrated to other countries. Filipino registered nurses have also started feeling underpaid and overworked, with a significant income disparity in comparison to opportunities available abroad.

Despite legislative attempts such as House Bill No. 4599 and the Nursing Act of 2002, enter-level nurses still receive lower salaries than promised, which hinder the efforts to address this problem.

Since nurses have experienced a lot in the duration of their nursing profession, there are factors that have pushed them to leave the profession. Despite the resilience and patience that nurses have, there are things that push them to the limit and can cause them to leave their profession. One of the strongest factors that contributed to their shift in profession is the sense of security. Nurses have felt that in order to feel secure and make ends meet, leaving nursing was the solution (Condes & Lachica, 2022).

According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), Carvalho & Maria Inês Monteiro (2019), and Condes & Lachica (2022), nurses have also stated that there were better pay and benefits from other jobs that are able to support them better. High amounts of workload were also a significant factor because it affected the quality of life and health of nurses (Holland et al., 2019). Increased workload also leads to nurses feeling a poor state of well-being and job satisfaction. According to the ANA, increased workload stems from the high influx of patients and the lack of staff. The work environment also played an important role in their decision, this pertains to communication with colleagues, appreciation from supervisors, and having equal workload with colleagues. In terms of the culture of the organization, the qualities that will increase the retention of nurses are having a well-cultivated workplace culture that has respect and mutuality as the foundation. Burnout was also evident, together with exhaustion and achievement was also a factor (Neeltje de Vries et al., 2023). Some nurses have also experienced a decline in passion and felt as if they do not love their vocation anymore. They have realized that their chosen profession does not suit them anymore (Kox et al., 2020).

All of the factors that have been mentioned all lead to nurse turnover which is a part of the process of employment. Today, this is one of the biggest problems that is faced by the profession for this affects those nurses who continue to stay since the amount of workload is given to them (Carvalho & Maria Inês Monteiro, 2019). Increases in the turnover rate over the years especially for newly registered nurses are also caused by sleep disturbances, being physically and emotionally exhausted, and an unhealthy work environment (Bae, 2023). This growing problem must be properly addressed for it significantly affects the quality of healthcare service delivery and the healthcare sector itself (Nagaya, 2018).

In the Philippines, nursing professionals are drawn to jobs in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry primarily due to the higher salaries it offers compared to hospital positions (Carlos, 2018). Carlos also highlighted the physical and mental demands of nursing, which is one of the major reasons for the change in the profession of nurses, with the participants stating that they no longer have the intention to return to the nursing profession. Nurses who are currently working outside the healthcare profession have also emphasized the feeling of contentment with their present jobs, finding fulfillment and enough support for their families (Condes & Lachica, 2022).

3. Methodology
3.1 Research Design
The research design utilized in this study is qualitative design, employing Clark Moustakas' Transcendental Phenomenology. Through this process, the researchers aim to explore the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. Consequently, this design was considered appropriate for examining the lived experiences of registered nurses who have transitioned to non healthcare professions, capturing both their challenges and adaptations.

3.2 Participants
The participants of the study were eight registered nurses who met the inclusion criteria set by the researchers. Specifically, (a) registered nurses; (b) previously worked in the nursing profession; (c) currently working in a non-healthcare-related profession. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their qualifications and relevance to the study's objectives.

3.3 Research Locale
The study was conducted in the city of San Pablo in the southern portion of Laguna province. This is considered to be one of the oldest cities in the Philippines and the largest in the province. It is also well-known for its seven lakes namely, Sampaloc, Palakpakin, Yambo, Bunot, Pandin, Mohikap, and Calibato (San Pablo City Government, 2024). The researchers selected this place of interview to make the participants comfortable and to ensure their privacy in answering the given questions. The researchers chose San Pablo City Laguna as their vicinity in conducting the research study to make it convenient for both the researchers and the participant.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The researchers strictly complied with the ethical guidelines during the preliminary process of conducting the research study. An approval from their research advisor, as well as the Dean of the College of Nursing in Canossa College San Pablo Inc., to conduct the research study outside the said institution was also obtained.

The Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012, fortifies all kinds of information, particularly personal and sensitive personal information, that was safe and guarded. More importantly, the researchers provided a letter of consent for the participants to seek approval from them to be a part of the study voluntarily as well as for the audio and video recording during the interview proper during a time that is most convenient for them, and ensured that they have fully understood the aim of the research study. The researchers have also made certain that the participants of the study were subjected to any harm and the data collected remain private and confidential.

3.5 Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which uses 2 cycle coding in order to come up with the themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the study. The first cycle of coding, called Descriptive Coding, involves the process of assigning labels or codes to segments of qualitative data that describe the content or meaning of those segments. These codes are typically short phrases or keywords that capture the essence of the data (Alase, 2017). The second cycle of coding, called Pattern Coding, this condenses large amounts of data or codes into smaller number of analytic units, this process reduces extensive data or codes into a more manageable number of analytical units, and it involves the researcher in analysis while collecting data, leading to a more focused approach in subsequent fieldwork (Sage Publications, 2020).

In addition, Axial Coding was also utilized. Axial coding is a methodical analysis stage that seeks to uncover relationships between categories and subcategories identified in open coding. It connects concepts, showing their interrelatedness and contribution to the overall study focus. Using visual aids like diagrams, axial coding reorganizes codes based on relationships to reveal key themes, subthemes, and the data's underlying structure (Siegle, 2023).

The researchers also used NVivo application, according to Kent State University, NVivo is a software tool designed for qualitative and mixed-methods research, primarily utilized for analyzing unstructured data such as text, audio, video, and images. It facilitates deep-level analysis of both small and large data sets. The software enables users to categorize, organize, and sort information, explore data relationships, and integrate analysis with linking, shaping, searching, and modeling functionalities. With its search engine and query capabilities, NVivo can identify trends and conduct cross-examinations of information in diverse ways.

4. Results / Findings

The result yielded six (6) major themes with fifteen (15) sub-themes. The first theme is '***Transition and Personal Growth,'*** which includes three (3) sub-themes : (1) Factors Influencing Transition, (2) Opportunities and Stability, (3) Personal Growth Strategy. The second theme is, ***'Advancing Career and Cultivating*** Values' which includes two sub-themes : (1) Transferable Skills and Competencies, and (2) Values and Perspectives. The third theme, ***'Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationship in Career Transition,'*** with two sub-themes, (1) Connection and Belongingness and (2) Challenges and Opportunities in Relationship Building. The fourth theme, ***'Evolution of Interpersonal Skills and Strategies,'*** with two (2) sub-themes, (1) Adaptation in Communication and Collaboration and (2) Mentorship and Leadership. The fifth theme being,***' Adaptation to New Environments and Challenges,'*** with three (3) sub-themes : (1) Skills and Knowledge Transfer, (2) Past Experience and Upbringing, Satisfaction and (3) Commitment in the Current Path. The last theme***, 'Reflection on Career Path and Identity,'*** with three (3) sub-themes : (1) Personal Values and Aspirations, (2) Future Plans, and (3) Returning to Nursing Profession.

4.1 Theme 1 : Transition and Personal Growth

The first major theme, Transition and Personal Growth, explores the transitional period experienced by registered nurses as they navigate their journey beyond nursing practice, focusing on personal growth and development. It encompasses the various factors influencing this transition and the strategies employed to foster personal growth. The first sub-theme, Factors Influencing Transition, examines external and internal influences such as changing job roles, dissatisfaction with the nursing profession, or personal life circumstances that prompt individuals to seek alternative career paths. Second, the Career Opportunities and Stability, focuses investigates the availability of diverse career paths, potential for advancement, and the perceived security of non-nursing roles compared to the nursing profession. For the last sub-theme, Desire for Personal Growth Strategies, this is centered on the deliberate strategies employed by the individuals to forster personal growth and development in their post-nursing career endeavors.

4.2 Theme 2 : Advancing Career and Cultivating Values

The second major theme, Advancing Career and Cultivating Values, focuses on the advancement of individuals' careers beyond nursing practice, emphasizing the cultivation of values and perspectives that shape their professional journeys. For its two

sub-themes, the Transfeable Skills and Competencies explores how skills such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving acquired in nursing can be applied to advance careers in diverse fields, while the Values and Perspectives investigates how personal values, ethics, and beliefs influence career decisions and shape professional identities outside of the nursing profession. Additionally, it explores how individuals reconcile their values and perspectives with the demands and expectations of their new career paths.

4.3 Theme 3 : Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationship in Career Transition

The third major theme, Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships in Career Transition, explores how individuals navigate the challenges and opportunities in building and maintaining relationships in their new professional environments. Under this major theme, the first sub-theme, Importance of Connection and Belongingness, examines the role of social support networks, camaraderie among colleagues, and feelings of inclusion in contributing to individuals' overall well-being and satisfaction in their new careers. And for the second sub-theme, Challenges and Opportunities in Relationship Building, xplores obstacles such as unfamiliarity with new colleagues, cultural differences, or communication barriers, as well as opportunities for personal growth and professional development through relationship building

4.4 Theme 4 : Evolution of Interpersonal Skills and Strategies

The fourth theme, Evolution of Interpersonal Skills and Strategies, encompasses the evolution of individuals' interpersonal skills and strategies as they adapt to new professional environments beyond nursing practice. It investigates how individuals refine their communication, collaboration, and leadership skills to thrive in their new roles. The first sub-theme, Adaptation in Communication and Collaboration, discussed how individuals adapt their communication and collaboration strategies to effectively. For the second theme, Mentorship and Leadership Dynamics, explores the importance of mentorship relationships in providing guidance, support, and career advancement opportunities, as well as individuals' experiences in assuming leadership roles and responsibilities in their new professional contexts.

4.5 Theme 5 : Adaptation to New Environments and Challenges

The fifth theme, Adaptation to New Environments and Challenges, explores how registered nurses adapt to new professional environments and overcome challenges encountered during their transition away from nursing practice. It encompasses the influence of past experiences, the satisfaction and commitment experienced in their current roles, and the transfer of skills and knowledge to their new career paths. The first sub-theme, Influencing of Past Experience and Upbringing, examines how past experiences, both within and outside of the nursing profession, influence individuals' coping mechanisms, resilience, and ability to navigate challenges in their current career paths. The second sub-theme, Satisfaction and Commitment in the Current Path, explores the factors that contribute to job satisfaction, such as alignment with personal values, fulfillment of career aspirations, and opportunities for growth and development in their new professional endeavors. Lastly, Skills and Knowledge Transfer, investigates the transferability of skills and knowledge acquired during nursing practice to individuals' new career paths.

4.6 Theme 6 : Reflection on Career Path and Identity

The sixth theme, Reflection on Career Path and Identity, focuses on registered nurses' reflections on their career paths and professional identities following their transition away from nursing practice. The first sub-theme, Personal Values and Aspirations, delves into how registered nurses align their career choices with their values, pursue meaningful work, and strive to achieve personal and professional fulfillment outside of nursing. The second sub-theme, Considerations for Future Plans, investigates the factors that may influence their decisions, such as changes in personal circumstances, evolving career interests, or the perceived value of their nursing experience in their current roles. The last sub-theme, Consideration for Returning to the Nursing Profession, investigates individuals' contemplation and potential willingness to return to the nursing profession in the future. It examines the factors that may influence their decisions, such as changes in personal circumstances, evolving career interests, or the perceived value of their nursing experience in their current roles.

5. Conclusion

The research findings align closely with the initial assumptions made by the researchers, indicating that the data collected during the study supported their expectations. Specifically, participants reported improvements in various aspects of work relations such as communication, collaboration, and interpersonal skills after transitioning to new career paths. This suggests that changing careers offers opportunities for enhancing professional abilities, which individuals adapt to their new environments, leveraging skills acquired from previous roles.

The decision to switch careers was often influenced by negative workplace relationships, particularly among trainee and senior nurses experiencing tension or conflict. These unhealthy dynamics contributed to job dissatisfaction and prompted individuals to seek new opportunities. Heavy workloads were also identified as a significant factor leading nurses to transition into

leadership roles, suggesting that addressing workload concerns alone may not suffice to retain nursing staff. The study highlights the benefits registered nurses now enjoy in their current profession, including improved salaries, better work-life balance, enhanced belongingness, and expanded professional networks leading to career growth. These factors collectively contribute to their satisfaction and quality of life in ways not previously emphasized during their nursing careers.

6. Recommendations

The researchers recommend that registered nurses reflect on their personal motivation for working in the nursing profession to find fulfillment and satisfaction in their roles. This study helps registered nurses understand why some nursing professionals choose non-healthcare careers, the experiences they encounter, and how they adapt to their current jobs, shedding light on these issues and how to handle them. For the nursing profession, the research findings should be utilized to raise awareness of current issues and foster a more informed and attuned nursing community. Professional nursing organizations are advised to use the results to tailor support systems, provide adequate resources, and create initiatives that meet the needs of registered nurses, helping organizations remain supportive and understanding in the evolving professional landscape of nursing. In nursing education, the study's results should be used to enrich nursing school curriculums, highlighting the importance of preparing students for the realities of their careers. This will foster adaptability and help develop programs that build skills beyond nursing practice, creating a flexible and resilient workforce. The Professional Regulation Commission is encouraged to employ the study's findings to gain insights into the issues faced by professional nurses and align their goals to address these issues, ensuring that incentives are pertinent and beneficial. Similarly, the Department of Labor and Employment should use the results to develop better programs and policies that address employment regulation gaps and promote a workplace that recognizes employee needs, contributing to better nursing workforce management. Lastly, future researchers are recommended to delve deeper into the lived experiences of registered nurses post-nursing practice, improving the locale and number of respondents to provide additional findings that support the study's phenomenon.

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