

Original Article

Perspectives of Final Year Nursing Students Taking Psychiatric Nursing Course on Working as a Psychiatric Nurse and Influencing Factors

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study was to evaluate the perspectives of senior nursing students taking psychiatric nursing courses on working as psychiatric nurses and the factors affecting them using a qualitative phenomenological approach.

Material-Method: In this study, phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative research design, was used. This qualitative research was conducted with 67 volunteer nursing students. Interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method.

Findings: In the analysis of the data, three categories (emotions experienced during practice, difficulties experienced during practice, thoughts about psychiatric nursing) and eight sub-themes (positive emotions, negative emotions, communication, knowledge, stigma, time, characteristics of a nurse and characteristics of the profession) were identified.

Conclusion: It was determined that although nursing students stated that psychiatric nursing is a difficult profession, they consider it as a profession with high professional satisfaction when it is performed in accordance with nursing care standards.

Keywords: Psychiatric nursing, clinical practice, nursing student, qualitative study

Introduction

As a biopsychosocial being, it is important that these three building blocks work in harmony with each other in order to maintain a healthy life. Disruption of this balance can lead to physical and mental problems. Disruption of this balance can lead to the emergence of physical and mental problems. An individual with mental problems is generally a person who experiences varying degrees of inconsistency, inappropriateness and inadequacy in emotions, thoughts and behaviors (Bilge et al., 2016; Onol & Donmez, 2021; Sener, 2022). Theoretical education on mental illnesses helps to develop

positive attitudes among students towards individuals with mental illness (Happell, 2009). In previous studies, experience with patients was found to be the most important determinant of student attitudes (Chadwick & Porter, 2014; Granados-Gámez et al., 2016), Hung et al. (2009) reported that after working with psychiatric patients, student nurses quickly lost the stereotypical attitudes they previously held and most of the students experienced a change in their attitudes towards a more positive direction (Hung et al., 2009). Although clinics and community mental health centers with psychiatric patients are a stressor for nursing students, there are very few studies on students' first psychiatric

clinical experiences (Hung et al., 2009; Galvin et al., 2015; Kookan et al., 2014; Alshowkan & Fouad Kamel 2016; Demir & Ercan, 2018).

Psychiatric nursing course in undergraduate education is very important for the acquisition of psychiatric nursing skills. Nursing students' therapeutic communication skills and attitudes towards psychiatric patients are shaped in practices in psychiatric clinics and community mental health centers. It is stated that only acquiring knowledge about mental health and diseases is not sufficient to develop positive attitudes towards individuals with mental illness. Nursing students, who are the health professionals of the future, need to practice and have one-to-one contact with psychiatric patients within the scope of the course. It is very important to determine the difficulties and motivating factors experienced during the practices (Bilge & Palabiyik, 2017; Demir & Ercan, 2018; Wedgeworth et al., 2020).

Examining the perspectives of senior nursing students on working as psychiatric nurses and the factors affecting them will guide educators and nurses in the creation of training programs, as well as help students develop positive attitudes towards psychiatric patients and reduce stigma. In this context, this study aims to evaluate the perspectives of senior nursing students taking psychiatric nursing courses on working as psychiatric nurses and the factors affecting them by using a qualitative phenomenological approach.

Materials and Methods

Study Design: A Phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative research design, was used to examine the perspectives of senior nursing students on working as a psychiatric nurse and the factors affecting them. This design was chosen because it offers a high degree of freedom in describing a new phenomenon (event or experience) from the participants' perspective, providing rich data and detailing their experiences (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). This approach is about uncovering the essence of the phenomenon under investigation and

presenting the experience 'exactly as it presents itself, neither adding to nor subtracting from it' (Morrow et al., 2015; Willing, 2013; Merriam, 2019).

Study group: The study was conducted between January 15 and February 15, 2023 at a University in a province in northern Turkey. Criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to determine the study group of the research. Criterion sampling is the creation of a sample from people, events, objects or situations that have the specified qualities related to the problem (Altunay et al., 2014; Baskaya & Demir, 2023). The sample of the study consisted of senior undergraduate nursing students taking psychiatric nursing courses who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria were taking psychiatric nursing courses and nursing students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria were not being an undergraduate student, not accepting to participate in the study, and not being a fourth-year nursing student. Participants were undergraduate nursing students at a university in northern Turkey. The nursing program is a four-year undergraduate program. In the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, a total of 117 fourth-year students enrolled in the researcher's Psychiatric nursing course. The theoretical part of the course lasted for a total of thirteen weeks, 3 days a week for 6 hours for the first four weeks and 6 hours a day for the next nine weeks. Practices lasted 2 days a week for 8 hours a day for nine weeks. Each student was able to go to the psychiatric nursing practice for a total of eight days. All students who met the criteria were invited to the interview. Data saturation is very important in a study and in our study, a total of 67 participants were interviewed and when the data were repeated, the interviews were terminated considering the saturation (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). In addition, the study was reported in accordance with the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) guidelines (Tong et al., 2007; Baskaya & Demir, 2023).

Table 1. Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ).**Area 1: Study group and characteristics****Personal Characteristics**

Number	Item	Guiding questions	Explanations
1	Interviewer/facilitator	Which author/authors conducted the interview?	The second author conducted the interview.
2	Credentials	What were the credentials of the researcher?	First author PhD Second author License Third author: License
3	Profession	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	First author: Dr. Faculty Member, Psychiatric Nursing Second author: Undergraduate nursing student, Third author: Undergraduate nursing student,
4	Gender	Was the researcher a man or a woman?	Three researchers Female
5	Experience and training	What experience or training did the researcher have?	The first author has taken qualitative courses, has experience in qualitative research and has published qualitative studies in international journals.

Relationship with participants

6	Relationship status	Was a relationship Established before the training started?	No relationship was established before the start of the study.
7	Interviewer's participant knowledge	What did participants know about the researcher?	Students knew that the researcher was a student
8	Interviewer characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer?	At the beginning of each interview, students were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study.

Area 2. Study design**Theoretical framework**

9	Methodological orientation and Theory	What methodological orientation was indicated to support the study?	This was a phenomenological study.
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Participant selection

10	Sampling	How were the participants selected?	Criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used.
11	Approach method	How were the participants approached?	Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the students before starting the study. The timing of the interviews was determined by the students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

12	Sample size	How many participants were there in the study?	A total of 60 nursing students were included in the study.
13	Disagree	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	No student refused to participate in the study.
Data collection			
14	Data collection	Where was the data collected?	Detailed information is provided in the data collection section of the study.
15	Presence of non-participants	Was there anyone else present apart from the participants and the researchers?	Apart from the researchers, one student at the school where the research was conducted was an observer.
16	Description of the sample	What are the characteristics of the sample?	Undergraduate students who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study.
Data collection			
17	Interview guide	Were questions, prompts and guidelines provided by the authors? Has it been pilot tested?	Detailed information was given in the Methods section.
18	Repeated interview	Have there been re-interviews? If yes, how many	No.
19	Voice recording	Was audio or visual recording used to collect data in the study?	Interviews were recorded with a voice recorder
20	Notes	Were field notes taken during and/or after the interview?	All students' responses and researcher observations were recorded.
21	Duration	How long were the interviews?	Each interview lasted between 35 and 45 minutes.
22	Data saturation	Has data saturation been discussed?	Data saturation was discussed.
23	Return of data to participants	Have transcripts been returned to participants for comments and/or corrections?	No.
Area 3: Analysis and findings			
24	Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?	Two identified the codes.
25	Identification of codes	Did the interviewers define the codes?	Themes and sub-themes were identified.
6	Derivation of themes	Were the themes predetermined or derived from the data?	Themes were derived from the data.
27	Software	What software, if any, was used to manage the data?	Data were analyzed manually.

28	Participant control	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No.
Reporting			
29	Quotes provided	Are participant quotes presented to illustrate themes? Is each quote identified?	Source. Participant quotes are provided to illustrate themes/ findings. e.g. participant number.
30	Consistency	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes
31	Clarity of main themes	Are the main themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes
32	Clarity of small themes	Is there an explanation of the different cases or a discussion of minor issues?	Yes

Data Collection Tools: Final year undergraduate nursing students taking psychiatric nursing course were interviewed. In-depth individual interview method was used in the study. In the interviews with senior nursing students, a voice recorder was used in an appropriate environment. The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured interview form prepared by the qualitative research method, which was created by the researchers based on the literature and corrected in line with the opinions of three experts. The interviews in the study lasted between 35 and 45 minutes. Six main questions and sub-questions about students' clinical practice experiences were used in the interviews

Questions in the interview form;

1. How did you feel during psychiatric nursing practice? Which emotions did you experience?
2. What was your experience? Did you have communication problems? What did you do to establish a therapeutic relationship? What did you do for the therapeutic environment?
3. What were the problems/difficulties you experienced during the practice?
4. Would you like to be a psychiatric nurse? What are the reasons?

5. What is your perspective on psychiatric nursing?

6. What influences your willingness or unwillingness?

Analysing the data: In the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the 7-stage analysis method developed by Colaizzi (1978) for phenomenological studies was used (Morrow et al., 2015). In this context, the interview texts were first read independently by three researchers. Important statements in the interview texts were selected, rearranged, expressed in general terms and analysed. The researchers formulated and confirmed the meanings by discussing until they reached a consensus. The researchers then identified and organised the themes into main and sub-themes. In addition, the statements of the participants were included so that the reader could verify the interpretation and analysis of the data (Yildirim et al., 2021; Ulutasdemir et al., 2022).

Ethical Aspects of the Research: This research was approved by Gumushane University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (E-95674917-108.99-149388). Informed consent was obtained from the participants before starting the interview. Recordings and transcripts were

stored on a password-protected device. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical standards of the National Research Committee.

Results

Forty-eight of the participants were female and seven of them had a mental illness. The mean age of the nursing students was calculated as 21.00±3.98 (min 21, max 26).

As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews, categories, themes and sub-themes were determined (Table 2).

Table 2. Final year nursing students' perspectives on working as a psychiatric nurse and factors affecting them

Categories	Themes	Subthemes
1. Emotions experienced during implementation	A. Positive emotions B. Negative emotions	A1. Happiness A2. Joy A3. Bewilderment A4. Excitement. A5. Feeling special B1. Fear. B2. Anxiety B3. Sadness B4. Worry.
2. Difficulties experienced during implementation	A. Communication B. Information C. Stigma D. Duration	A1. Communication problems A2. Not wanting to communicate due to fear A3. Patients are reluctant to communicate B1. Insufficient theoretical knowledge B2. Insufficient teaching staff B3. Simulation method is not used C1. Being prejudiced C2. Inability to break the stigma D1. Short duration
3. Thoughts about psychiatric nursing	A. Characteristics of a nurse B. Characteristics of the profession	A1. Patience A2. Having empathy skills A3. Being tolerant A4. Having communication skills A5. Being a leader A6. Having a calm personality A7. Requiring compassion B1. Corrosive B2. Difficult B3. Self-sacrificing B4. Requiring psychological resilience

		B5. The most difficult branch of nursing B6. High professional satisfaction B7. Requiring managerial and leadership skills
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Category 1. Emotions experienced during the implementation

Theme 1. Positive emotions

According to the data obtained from the interviews, the students stated that they experienced happiness, joy, surprise and excitement during the psychiatric nursing course practices.

"I felt anxiety and excitement, I had prejudices. Later, I started to empathise with the patients and these feelings passed." (P18).

"We did what we could because the opportunities were a little limited in practice. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to be able to help them in some issues." (P25).

Theme 2. Negative emotions

According to the data obtained from the interviews with nursing students, it was determined that students experienced anxiety, fear and sadness during the practice.

"I felt fear and uneasiness during the practice. I was very worried that I could not establish a good re

"I was anxious during the practice. I had fear and excitement (P22).

Category 2. Difficulties experienced during the practice

Theme 1. Communication

As a result of the interviews with nursing students, it was determined that there were communication problems with patients in psychiatric nursing course practices.

"In my experience, I saw a psychiatric patient for the first time and experienced how I should approach. I had communication problems at first, but then we eliminated the communication problem with the trainings we received. I offered to participate in activities that patients liked

together in order to establish a good relationship with them (P38).

"Since some patients were closed to communication, it was very difficult to see and hear their problems and communicate effectively with them. In the following hours, we tried to overcome the distance by doing activities with patients (P47).lationship with the patients (P17).

Theme 2. Knowledge

According to the data obtained from the interviews with nursing students, it was determined that the students experienced deficiencies in terms of knowledge and gained awareness on this issue with the practice. In addition, it was determined that the students also obtained information about psychiatric nursing from the nurses in the community mental health centre.

"During the practices, I gained awareness both emotionally and professionally. I started to look more positively towards patient profiles that I used to be uneasy about. Professionally, I gained knowledge about how I should deal with such patients and how I should behave." (P27).

"I realised that I was inadequate in terms of knowledge and maybe it was explained to me on a course basis, but I realised that I was not working effectively..... (P50).

Theme 3. Stigma

According to the data obtained from the interviews, it was determined that nursing students were prejudiced and afraid of patients.

"First I felt fear and I already had a prejudice against them, they were feared people...Then I overcame my fear. We played games with them. After all these things, my fear was replaced by fun and love." (P31).

"Before going to TRSM, I had prejudices such as whether they were aggressive, but

after going there, I realised that they were not much different from patients with physiological disorders." (P61).

Theme 4. Duration

According to the data obtained from the interviews, nursing students stated that they had difficulty in transforming theoretical knowledge into practice due to the short duration of clinical education.

"The time for practices is very limited, unfortunately, unfortunately, our conditions do not allow this and I don't think I do enough practice (P33).

"I wish the duration was longer and I would like to spend more time with patients... (P12).

Category 3. Thoughts on psychiatric nursing

Theme 1. Characteristics of a nurse

According to the data obtained from the interviews, nursing students stated that a psychiatric nurse should be patient, self-sacrificing, empathetic, tolerant, have communication skills and leadership qualities, and have a calm personality.

"Psychiatric nursing is a profession that requires great patience and compassion. It is a department that requires constant observation of patients and dealing with more patients than other nursing departments (P21).

"I think it is the most difficult and demanding department in the field of nursing. It is a profession that requires dedication, patience and a lot of empathy. It is a profession that can be mentally exhausting at first and then wear out after a while." (P28).

Theme 2. Characteristics of the profession

According to the data obtained from the interviews, nursing students stated that psychiatric nursing is an abrasive, difficult, self-sacrificing profession that requires management and leadership skills and psychological resilience. At the same time, students defined psychiatric nursing as the most difficult branch of nursing and expressed

it as a branch with high professional satisfaction when done in the best way.

"It is definitely a very difficult department. It is a nursing department that will be more difficult if it is not done with love and care. (K2)

"It is a different and difficult department from other departments because of the patients here. It is an area that requires compassion and patience. (P16)

"I think psychiatric nursing is a branch that involves spiritual feelings and a psychologically strong person can easily work in this field." (P29).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to evaluate the perspectives of senior nursing students who took psychiatric nursing courses on working as psychiatric nurses and the factors affecting them. The perspectives of senior nursing students on working as psychiatric nurses and the factors affecting them were analysed in three categories.

Emotions experienced during the practice

The fact that theory and practice do not fully complement each other in nursing education is a major problem (Papathanasiou et al, 2014). Students may often experience uncertainty when they go to the clinic for practice. In the studies in the literature, it has been found that students generally experience difficulties in psychiatric nursing practice due to situations such as communication with patients, providing a relationship of trust, fear of hurting the feelings of patients, and not knowing how to respond (Alshowkan & Kamel, 2016; Demir & Ercan, 2018). It is reported that these difficulties may cause students to experience fear and anxiety and decrease their self-confidence (Cam et al., 2020).

In addition, nursing students experience increased pressure during psychiatric nursing clinical practice due to prejudice, fear and anxiety against mental illnesses and experience problems in establishing satisfaction or relationship with clinical practices in psychiatric nursing (Alshowkan & Kamel, 2016; Wedgeworth et al., 2020). (2020) determined that nursing students experienced emotional fluctuation and

burnout at the beginning of the practice during the first psychiatric clinical practice (Cha et al., 2020). In this study, nursing students stated that they experienced both positive and negative emotions during the practice.

Difficulties experienced during the practice

Nursing students may have difficulty in establishing effective relationships with patients due to the gap between theory and practice. In addition, feelings of anxiety and fear caused by the absence of role models may cause them to experience problems in terms of professionalism (Alshowkan & Kamel, 2016; Demir & Ercan, 2018). It is known that the type of clinical environment and the duration of training are important factors affecting student satisfaction with mental health clinical practice (Happell, 2009). In their study, Gunaydin and Arguvanli Coban (2021) stated that students had difficulties in issues such as insufficient theoretical knowledge and duration of practice (Gunaydin & Arguvanli Coban, 2021). In this study, nursing students stated that they had difficulties in practice due to lack of time. These results emphasise the need to re-evaluate the duration of clinical education for students, as students need longer periods of time to provide patient care. In addition, it is thought that the issues of stigma, prejudice and lack of theoretical knowledge experienced by students should be reviewed in educational planning.

Thoughts about psychiatric nursing

Happel and Gaskin (2013) reported that nursing students considered psychiatric nursing as the least preferred career option (Happel & Gaskin, 2013). Studies conducted in Australia, England and Croatia show that psychiatric nursing is generally less preferred as a career (Bingham & O'Brien., 2018). In a study conducted by Uzun and Demir (2020), it was determined that senior nursing students evaluated psychiatric nursing as a patience-requiring, exhausting and difficult field; on the other hand, more than half of the students participating in the study saw psychiatric nursing as a special, satisfying field (Uzun & Demir, 2020). In the study, nursing students made similar statements with the literature and stated that psychiatric nursing is a difficult profession, but they also stated that they see it as a profession with high

professional satisfaction when it is done properly.

Conclusion: In conclusion, this study provides preliminary evidence about the perspective of senior nursing students on psychiatric nursing. Nursing students experience problems during practice due to reasons such as problems arising from themselves, insufficient theoretical knowledge, and limited practice time. It is thought that these situations may affect nursing students' thoughts about the perception of psychiatric nursing. Nursing students stated that psychiatric nursing is a difficult profession, but they also stated that they see it as a profession with high professional satisfaction when it is done properly. Nursing students suggested that the duration of clinical practice should be longer, there should be enough instructors, and readiness for practice should be increased by roll play or simulation method. Students should be prepared more effectively for mental health practices, should be evaluated in terms of cognitive and emotional readiness as well as theoretical education before starting clinical practice and should be supported.

Limitations: One of the limitations of the study is that all participants were selected as last-class nursing students at a university in a city in northern Turkey. The results depend on the participants and the environment in which the research was conducted. The small group of participants does not represent the fourth-grade student population of nursing.

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