



CONCERNS OF NEWLY GRADUATED NURSES IN ABIA STATE TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Cite this article:

Anike C.T., Anieche J.E. (2023), Concerns of Newly Graduated Nurses in Abia State towards Professional Practice: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study. African Journal of Health, Nursing and Midwifery 6(2), 139-151. DOI: 10.52589/AJHNM-NHXDGGML

Manuscript History

Received: 7 April 2023

Accepted: 23 June 2023

Published: 12 July 2023

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ABSTRACT: *Newly graduated nurses are nurses who have not practised for more than one-year post-graduation, whether from a school of nursing or University. This period is usually associated with anxieties that could hinder the professional practice of the newly graduated nurse. The study aims to discover the concerns of newly graduated nurses in Abia state. A phenomenological qualitative research design was used for the study. A structured interview was used to collect data from 15 newly graduated nurses. Thematic analysis of the data generated from the interview was done. Findings from the study revealed that the newly graduated nurses in Abia State have many concerns. All the participants (100%) are concerned about taking up the role of a professional nurse, as they expressed concerns about whether they have enough skills, about workload, and about being able to meet expectations. 14 (93%) of the participants are concerned about remuneration. As they are worried about their salary being enough to take care of personal needs, not being able to save for future endeavours or take care of dependents. 10 (75%) of the participants are concerned about their interaction with senior colleagues and patients and their relationships. All the participants expressed concerns about career progression as they feared not having a future in the profession, especially in Nigeria. Therefore, the researchers recommend more understanding from older nurses towards the newly graduated nurses and a formal support structure that will help the newly graduated nurses navigate through the period. A better work environment and salaries for nurses in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Concerns, Newly graduated nurses, Professional Practice



INTRODUCTION

In the course of the academic programme, there is an expectation that one day graduates will emerge to pursue their life goals. These graduates, including nurses, usually have expectations which become a reality in the course of their early employment. A newly graduated nurse, as described by Wong et al. (2018), is a nurse who has completed this stipulated course of study in nursing and is licensed to practice but has not practised for more than one year. Newton and McKenna (2017) opined that newly graduated nurses make the transition from academic settings to employed healthcare practitioners and that this transition is a complex event. In this period of change, the new nurse is faced with many odds that need to be surmounted before he can engraft him/herself fully into the profession. The concern-based adoption model (CBAM) posited that change is a process, not an event, and each process of change is laced with many concerns that individuals face at their own pace (Hall and Hord 1978 in Nyazi, 2019). The newly graduated nurses are not exempted from this process.

Globally, studies have shown that the transition from a professional education program to professional practice is a very stressful period involving adaptation challenges (Yildiz and Ergun 2019). Wong et al. (2017) observed that several studies show that transitional challenges can make the newly graduated nurse quit his/her job. They also suggested that nurses need time to adapt to this change in role, and the amount of time varies among individuals. This transition process involves many concerns, which are a result of many issues listed by Chang and Daly (2016) as changes in the clinical working environment, issues related to recruitment, practice preparedness of graduated nurses and the fact that others ahead have seen that this transition period is stressful. The nurse needs a smooth transition into the practice of the profession for him to deliver the expected quality care. Azimian et al. (2014), in a study conducted in Iran, discovered the following as some of the factors that inhibit smooth transition of newly graduated nurses to professional practice, inadequate preparation as a result of ineffective university education, lack of qualified mentors and preceptors to guide them, ineffective internship program, workload due to staff shortage, lack of welfare package for nurses, lack of support from nurse managers among others. As a result of these problems, this period of transition seems to be filled with anxiety, tension, fear, panic, and burnout, which undermines the physical and emotional well-being of these newly graduated nurses. These factors may, in turn, affect the quality of care delivered to the patient by these new graduates (Azimian *et al.* 2014).

So much work has been done to fully understand the concerns of teachers as they develop professionally (Kwee, 2020). Still, little has been done in this aspect as regards how a nurse fares in the transition period, especially in Nigeria. Nigerian nurses face a lot of challenges which include lack of motivation, lack of equipment and facilities, shortage of nurses, low remunerations, hostile working environment, risk of infection, politics and favouritism, lack of periodic training and rural-urban migration (David, 2019).

The newly graduated nurse in Nigeria may be faced with many worries, so there is a need to understand the personal, professional, economic and career progression concerns of these newly graduated nurses. Therefore, an indebt study to discover these concerns is necessary, as discovering a problem is one step to solving it. As there has been a shortage of nursing workforce in the Nigerian health sector (Okeke, 2016), the newly graduated nurses need to be integrated smoothly into the profession as they have a lot to contribute in terms of patient care and professional development.



According to Fuller in Kwee (2020), there are three levels of concerns, viz-a-viz concern about self, concern about task and concerns about impact. Each of these concerns may pose a great challenge to the new graduate and should be addressed for a smooth transition to occur. These concerns, if not addressed, may frustrate newly graduated nurses and may lead many to leave the profession in the early years of practice, with a resultant shortage in the nursing workforce. It is generally observed that the transition from student nurse to staff nurse is challenging for the majority of newly graduated nurses. Hofler and Thomas (2016) posited that newly graduated nurses face a lot of challenges that may impact the successful transition to professional practice and that healthcare organisations need to understand how changes in the health sector impact new graduates.

Interaction between the researchers and the newly graduated nurses revealed that they seem to face undisclosed challenges in integrating themselves into professional practice, such as translating knowledge and skill gained during their training into clinical practice and expressing a lack of interest in client care. The researchers questioned whether adaptive to transition or such issues are affecting these newly graduated nurses or whether there are other undisclosed challenges they face. These and other observed actions prompted the researchers to embark on this study to determine the concerns of newly graduated nurses employed in Abia State as they transition from the academic arena to the professional practice arena. The transition theory by Afaf Ibrahim Meleise (2007) was used to support this theory.

Objectives of the study

1. Identify the concerns of newly graduated nurses in Abia State regarding professional practice
2. Identify the economic and career progression concerns of newly graduated nurses in Abia State
3. Identify the factors that influence the concerns of the newly graduated nurses in Abia State

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between the institutions of training and the level of concerns of the newly graduated nurses in Abia State
2. Age does not play any significant role in the level of concerns of newly graduated nurses in Abia State.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study involved qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. This approach helped to determine the participants' lived experiences in their concerns regarding professional practice and economic and professional progression. This design was employed by Kumaran and Carney (2014) in the study of role transition from student nurse to staff nurse: facilitating the transition period in one of Dublin's Academic Teaching Hospitals. The researchers, therefore, believed that this was suitable for this study.

Area of Study

The study was carried out in two randomly selected health institutions in Abia State, Nigeria (Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Umuahia and Abia Specialist Hospital (ASH), Amachara). Federal Medical Centre Umuahia is the first Federal Medical Centre in Nigeria. It is located at Aba Road Umuahia, with over five hundred nurses attending to the nursing needs of the clients in the hospital. Abia Specialist Hospital is a State government health facility situated between Umuahia and Obowo along Umuahia Anara Road. Both facilities are centrally located and draw clients from every part of the state and beyond, including Imo, Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi, Rivers and Anambra States.

Population for the Study

The population for the study included all newly graduated nurses employed in hospitals with less than one year of practice experience at the time of this study. Information from the Personnel units of the two hospitals showed that there were 95 newly employed nurses in these hospitals (75 in the Federal Medical Centre Umuahia and 20 in Abia Specialist Hospital).

Sample

The researcher interviewed 15 participants (10 from FMC and 5 from ASH), during which saturation was reached. According to Sigmond (2021), when the population is homogeneous in a qualitative study of this nature, a sample size of 10 should be targeted. Still, sampling should stop when saturation is reached, that is when the researcher starts to get the same information over and over. It was on this premise that 15 newly graduated nurses participated in the study.

Sampling Technique

The participants for the interview were randomly selected from the two institutions for the quantitative study. This technique enabled the researcher to select only the participants that met the inclusion criteria for the study.

Inclusion criteria

The participants for the study were newly employed nurses who had not worked in the hospital for more than twelve (12) months and those that do not have the intent to leave the hospital during the period the study lasted. These nurses were willing to participate in the study irrespective of the type of nursing academic institution attended (College or University).



Exclusion criteria

Nurses who have worked for more than six months post-graduation, including nurses who were processing their registration with the UK, USA or any other country's Nursing Board with the intention of leaving the country.

Instrument for Data Collection

A researchers'-structured interview guide, which was validated by experts and strengthened through focus group discussion, was conducted by the researchers with a medical researcher, a nurse with more than 10 years of practice experience, a nurse with less than one year of experience and a newly graduated nurse. These professionals critiqued the instrument, and adjustments in the contents were made by the researchers before the final version of the interview guide was produced.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee of Federal Medical Centre Umuahia (Ref no: FMC/QEH/G596/VOL.10/605). The anonymity of participants was maintained, and information from the participants was treated with the utmost confidentiality.

The selection of the participants was made without bias, and consideration was given to their willingness to participate. Finally, data collection was done only on the ground that each participant consented to the researcher.

Procedure for Data Collection

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with each participant. The individual interview was done within the hospital premises and lasted for an average of 45 minutes per participant. The researchers recorded each interview with a voice recorder and also with pen and paper.

Method of Data Analysis

The recorded information was transcribed verbatim, after which familiarisation with the transcript thematic framework was formed. Deductive semantic thematic analysis was used in analysing the data with the research objectives and hypotheses as a guide. The transcript was crosschecked against the original recording, and notes were taken to ensure accuracy. The researchers familiarised themselves with the data by going through them repeatedly. Coding of the data was done by categorising statements and phrases from participant view of their concerns as the move from student to a registered practising nurse, subthemes and emerging themes was identified.

The transcripts were reviewed until all possible themes were identified and a thematic framework formed. Analysis was concluded when the themes rhymed.



RESULTS

Table 4.1: Demographic data of the Participants

| Gender | Responses | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| | Of respondents | 5 | |
| | Male | 10 | 25 |
| | Female | 9 | 75 |
| Age (Years) | 21-25 | 4 | 60 |
| | 26-30 | 2 | 30 |
| | 31-35 | 10 | 10 |
| Training institution | University | 5 | 75 |
| | College/School of Nursing | | 25 |

The table 1 shows that 10(75%) of the participants are female 9(60%) of them are between 21 and 25 years old even, a 10 (75%) of the participants are university graduates.

Professional concerns of the newly graduated nurses in Abia State

Team 1: Working Condition; the newly graduated nurses think that their physical working conditions are not good. Three teams emerged from this.

Sub team1: workload: Regardless of gender, age, training institution and area of redeployment, the newly graduated nurses are concerned about the heavy workload they had to deal with, except two female nurses who think the workload is within what they can deal with. Below is an excerpt of one of them.

“The workload is not too heavy, and neither is it too light. It is heavy on an intern nurse, but we need to find a balance.

When I was coming, I didn’t know it would be this heavy, but I know it wasn’t going to be easy; the workload exceeded my expectations slightly.”

Sub team 2: Understaffing: All the newly graduated nurses interviewed complained of fatigue as a result of increased workload as a result of understaffing. This can be seen in the comments of the newly graduated nurses highlighted below.

“The workload is too much; they are understaffed”. “I feel like they should employ more nurses”. “In female medical wards, we usually have 20-22 patients, and it will only be two nurses and one intern”. “One person will do vital signs for 22 patients”. You will do vital signs till your waist start paining you”. “If I finish night duty, I will not be useful to myself”. “I will use the days off to rest. “I used to wonder how nurses with their families cope with this amount of workload.”

Sub team 3: Lack of equipment: the newly graduated nurses think that they lack the necessary equipment that will make work easier. Below is the response of some of the newly graduated nurses that participated in the study. “I was expecting some equipment and more hands, there



are some types of equipment that we read in textbooks to be available, but they are not” “The workload is too much; it's worse because of lack of equipment”

Team 3: Anxiety: All the new graduate interviewed were of the opinion that they felt different forms of anxiety in the first few months of practice. Five sub-teams that emerged from these anxieties will be discussed.

Sub team 1: Anxiety over the possibility of harming a patient: As they work under minimal supervision, unlike during student life, all the newly graduated nurses interviewed expressed anxiety over the possibility of their actions causing harm or even death to the patient. One of the new nurses expressed her anxiety as follows

“I was afraid that life is involved, and knowing that any mistake I make could take a life was nerve-racking for me.”

Sub team 2: Anxiety over losing of license: Some of the newly graduated nurses expressed fear over the possibility of losing their licence as a result of mistakes. This new graduate expressed fear of both harming the patients and also losing their licence in the following comments. “I was afraid of making mistakes that could hurt a patient or put your license at risk.”

Sub team 3: Anxiety of possible hazard: Some newly graduated nurses were afraid of contacting communicable diseases. The excerpt of one with such concern is shown below

“I was afraid of the hazardous aspect of nursing. Interacting with patients with infectious diseases, I encountered a patient with Hepatitis B virus infections and another with genital warts I was afraid of being infected.”

Sub team 4: Anxiety of being seen as incompetent

“I was scared because I was not perfect with the skills a nurse should have. Like if am asked to give an injection of paracetamol to break that ample, there are some nurses that are so good at it one time they will break it. But I had to start learning how to break it. There was a particular day I was told to give an intramuscular paracetamol injection, and the relations were there. I started fidgeting because the ample refused to open; I was like a god; I felt how I was going to the nurse to ask for help; I was like they are going to shout hee, even to break injection ample, she cannot. So my fears were basically embarrassing myself before the patients and before my senior colleagues.”

Sub team 5: Reality anxiety: most of the newly graduated nurses expressed that they came into the practice thinking they were prepared, only to meet the shock that the things they thought they knew they couldn't practice them. While others had a notion of what the workload will be like, only to meet something completely different. Below is the response of a male newly graduated nurse about how he felt during the first few weeks of practice.

“I thought life would be easy working as a nurse, but now I understand that it's not easy; you can stand for 8 hours. Sometimes you can do wound dressing for hours. The work is bigger than the expectation and bigger than the pay.”



Below is the thought of a male nurse.

“I really thought I was prepared, but when I got there, I noticed that the preparations I made were not all that helpful”. “I started with accident and emergency and as a student, the experience I had was of less responsibility, so I thought it will be like that, but it was not like that, I was given more responsibilities. I was preparing myself with that mindset, but n coming here, I noticed it was not like that.”

Team 2: Concerns on economic and life progression

The participants expressed various concerns about remuneration, and two sub-teams were generated from this.

Sub team 1: Salary not adequate for daily needs: all the participants except one were of the opinion that the salary is not enough to meet their personal needs and responsibilities. But the male nurses expressed more concern in this area. This was the response of one of the male newly graduated nurses “Expectations in school, especially when they introduced internship, gave us high hopes we were going to work in a big hospital and we will be paid hugely. The pay was okay, but it was not enough to take care of my need. Now we get to know the value of money. The things I pictured are not how it is, so If I see a better-paying job, I will leave the profession.”

Another male nurse also commented on the poor salary but coped differently. Below is his response.

“The pay is not enough, but it doesn’t affect my practice. I didn’t have financial problems because I had other side jobs as an artist. I may leave nursing for another job if I get a full-time job as an artist if it pays more.”

Another participant, a female, expressed how the poor remuneration affects her practice

“Before I got this job, I communicated with others from other hospitals, I thought it would be the same, but it was less, but it is ok”. The workload is too much they should increase the remuneration, it makes me grumble while working.”

Below are the responses of some of the participants.

“The salary is nothing to write home about; look at the number of nurses leaving the country, the only reason is for greener pasture. I have never considered nursing, I was born to be a nurse, but I can have side hustles, my fear is if we don’t improve the welfare of nurses in the profession more nurses will leave, and the workload will be more.” “I am bothered about working for so many years and earning so little.”

Sub team 2: Delay in commencement of payment of salary: All of the participants in the tertiary health institution said they had financial challenges as a result of a delay in payment of salaries in the first two months. The excerpt of their responses is as follows:

“I faced challenges when because I was not paid in the first three months and you need transport fare, house rent, etc. it made me come to work late angrily one day.” “I was ok with the salary but am still praying for the increment to be implemented. Though I had challenges when there was a delay in paying us, my family supported me in the time I was not paid”



“We had challenges with not being paid in the first two months. I had to live in a very far place. Sometimes it makes me come to work late.”

Sub team 3: Salary lower than other professionals in the health care: all the participants in the tertiary health institution expressed concern about the disparity between the salary of nurses and other professionals in the healthcare system. Their responses are as follows

“I bothered about working for so many years and earning so little. We are the heart of healthcare, but we don’t really know our worth. We are not giving the recognition we deserve. I hope our colleagues at the top can look into it. As it stands now we are the least paid among the five key professions in the health care system”

“My worry is that nurses are not properly in their salary scale, I don’t know why other interns will be paid more than us at least I know of Medical laboratory scientists. They are paid more than the nurses.”

Sub team 4: Search for greener pasture: most of the participants expressed the need to improve the welfare of nurses in Nigeria, as 93% of the participants wanted to leave the country to practice nursing elsewhere. Below is the response of one of the newly graduated nurses

“In the next ten years, I will not be in the country. I will either be in the UK or US because the future of nursing in Nigeria is hanging in the balance”

Another has this to say “I have considered leaving the profession at a point, but not again; the experience is worth it. But I will not practice in Nigeria; I see myself abroad in the next ten years”

Team 3: Factors that affect the concern of newly graduated nurses

Responses from the newly graduated nurses showed that some factors influence their level of concern and their sub-teams that emerged from the team.

Sub team 1: Attitude of the senior professional colleagues: all the participants commented on the attitude of their senior colleagues to influence positively or negatively the concern they have. A newly graduated nurse narrated how the attitude of senior colleagues affected her in the first few months of practice.

“For my first month actually, I was posted to a female medical ward, and it was very horrible at first, but then the nurses were cooperative; they put me through some things that first month. But the second month, I don’t know what happened, their attitude changed that time, they just welcomed you, yeah, intern welcome this is what you need to do this is how you do this, this is how you do that, but by the second month, it was now getting bad like I am taking charge of the whole ward, there are things that I don’t know if I go to them to ask they started changing in their attitude, the environment was no longer conducive for me to learn, everything was now so tough, there are things you will ask them, and they will be like all these graduate nurses they don’t know anything. As if being a graduate nurse is a crime, though they will still teach you, that will be after washing you from head to toe.

Another participant also narrated her experience



“I have an experience of trying to pass the NG tube, but I couldn’t. I told my senior colleague, and she started yelling at me, telling me we don’t learn anything in school, and I was embarrassed as there were other people there. And I felt really bad. The harsh relationship made me practice more so as not to allow it to happen; it also made me withdrawn.”

For some other participants, the attitude of their senior colleagues affected them positively, this participant narrated her experience in the first few months of practice.

“My senior professional colleagues were fantastic. Every nurse I met was a preceptor ready to teach.

Another participant has this to say. “There are no designated persons to guide, just the senior colleagues we work with. The nurse I worked with helped me to cope. When you have a procedure you are not comfortable with; they guide you. Some of them commended me, and that helped me to cope. Some of our colleagues will not want to carry you along, and it is difficult working with such people. I relate with them well and but some of them are not approachable; you may not really be able to ask them questions”.

Sub team 2: emotional readiness: all the newly graduated nurses interviewed said they were emotionally ready to take up the role of a professional nurse, except two nurses who described their concerns as follows.

“I wasn’t emotionally prepared as I was caring for my mom in the hospital when I was called to start work. At that point, I was not prepared. I was afraid of letting family issues get in the way of my job as I had a lot going on with me at the time.”

Some other newly graduated nurses said that they were emotionally ready and really determined to face whatever they saw. Still, on getting there, they discovered that they were not prepared at all.

DISCUSSION

Concerns of newly graduated nurses in Abia State towards the professional practice

Majority (75%) of the newly graduated are concerned about whether their academic preparation and practical experience are enough to prepare them to take up the role ahead in professional practice. One of the newly graduated nurses expressed this; “, I was really not prepared by my training institution as attention was not paid to our practical experience”. Going further, she said, “During practical demonstrations in the school, we used to be too many in the same demonstration room and during clinical posting, we were not supervised, so we come when we feel like it and go without proper guidance”. “Most times, and we were not allowed to do anything except vital signs”. This affirms the finding of Ebrahimi et al. (2016) that newly graduated nurses are faced with so many challenges as they start their careers, and they, most of the time, lack confidence capability and experience, which will manifest in doubtfulness about their level of performance and ethical distress. This concludes that newly graduated nurses are anxious about being able to fit into their professional roles.



Economic and career progression concerns of newly graduated nurses in Abia State

The findings from the study revealed that all the newly graduated nurses are concerned about remuneration, and whether the salary will be enough to meet their personal needs. This is the reason why so many newly graduated nurses want to leave the country to practice the profession or leave the profession for a more lucrative job. One of the newly graduated nurses expressed her concerns thus: “The salary is nothing to write home about, look at the number of nurses leaving the country, the only reason is for greener pasture.” Another stated: “My fear is that if we don’t improve the welfare of nurses in the profession, more nurses will leave and the workload will be more on those that will be left behind”. This is in line with the exertion of Tumba (2023) about health care in Nigeria, who posited that hardly a year passes without a major national strike by nurses, doctors, or health consultants because of poor remuneration. The finding from the study also revealed that the newly graduated nurses in Abia State are not exempted from the economic concern of nurses in the country.

Findings from the study also revealed that the major concern of the newly graduated nurse includes is the uncertainty of the future of their career as professional nurses in Nigeria. All except one (93%) of the participants are concerned about leaving the country as they are not confident of their future in the profession in Nigeria. One of the newly graduated nurses made this comment, “I have considered leaving the profession at a point, but not again, the experience is worth it. But I will not practice in Nigeria, I see myself abroad in the next ten years”. Another participant has this to say; “in the next ten years, I will not be in the country. I will either be in the UK or US because the future of nursing in Nigeria is hanging on a balance”. This finding is in line with Okeke (2016), who observed that there has been a shortage of nursing workforce in the country and that most newly graduated nurses either want to leave the workforce for a better job or travel outside the shores of the country to practice.

Factors that influence concerns of the newly graduated nurses in Abia State

Findings from the study showed that certain factors influence the concerns of the newly graduated nurses in Abia State. Such factors include: Attitude of senior professional colleagues, emotional readiness and mentorship. This agrees with Bisholt in Pennbrant *et al.* (2013) that interaction with colleagues and manager affect the transition of newly graduated nurses to professional practice. Also, Tembo, *et al.* (2019) observed that the negative attitude of others, especially older nurses constitutes a challenge to newly graduated nurses as older nurses are sometimes not willing to assist new graduates during this transition period. Azimian *et al.* (2014) also saw emotions like anxiety, fear, tension, panic and fear to affect the physical and mental well-being of the newly graduated nurse, and these can make the transition difficult.

CONCLUSION

The newly graduated nurses in Abia State are faced with lots of concerns as they enter into professional practice, which stem from feelings of incompetence to fear of interaction with senior colleagues, remuneration and dealing with excess workloads. The researchers concluded that newly graduated nurses in Abia State are concerned about their future in the profession which should be guided properly from the inception of the training programme to the exodus of nurses from the country.



Implication of the Study to Nursing

A profession that loses its young graduates will likely be left without a choice but to have older ones who may not be strong enough to render the expected quality care to the clients. The different concerns of the newly graduated nurses in Abia State are issues of second taught that require nursing stakeholders' deep-rooted concern and intervention.

Acknowledgements

The researchers acknowledge the efforts of the Management of FMC Umuahia and Abia Specialist Hospital, Amachara, and the newly graduated nurses who participated in the study. All the authors whose works were consulted in the course of this study are highly appreciated.

Conflict of Interest

The researchers hereby declare that there was no conflict of interest among them during this study.

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