

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Home Care Nurses in the Philippines: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of home care nurses in General Santos City as they addressed social isolation and supported the mental health of older adults. Using a qualitative research design grounded in Colaizzi's seven-step method of analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted to capture participants' firsthand experiences in delivering geriatric care within home settings. Findings revealed key themes related to emotional connection, challenges in managing loneliness among older adults, limited family involvement, resource constraints, and the development of adaptive coping strategies among nurses. Participants described their roles as extending beyond clinical responsibilities to include emotional support, companionship, and mental health advocacy. Despite constraints such as heavy workloads and limited institutional support, nurses demonstrated resilience, empathy, and a commitment to holistic care. The study underscores the importance of strengthening home-based geriatric services and integrating mental health support into community nursing practice. The findings may serve as a basis for developing supportive programs and policies that enhance the well-being of both older adults and home care nurses. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of community-based geriatric nursing care in the Philippine context.

Keywords: Geriatric care, Home care nurses, Mental health, Phenomenology, Social isolation

INTRODUCTION

The growing population of older adults is a global concern, and in the Philippines, they already make up about 8.5% of the population. One major issue affecting this group is social isolation, which can lead to depression and cognitive decline. Home care nurses play an important role by providing not only clinical care but also emotional support and companionship.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the central research question: What are the lived experiences, roles, strategies, challenges, and insights of home care nurses in General Santos City, Philippines, in supporting mental health and reducing social isolation among older adults, and how can these experiences inform the improvement of geriatric care services?

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study focused on the lived experiences and challenges of home care nurses in General Santos City, Philippines, particularly their efforts to support the mental health of older adults and address social isolation. It used a qualitative phenomenological design involving twenty-one (21) home care nurses who provide direct care to elderly patients. The study was limited to nurses in home care settings during the academic years 2025–2026 and excluded those in hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutional facilities.

REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature presents previous studies and scholarly works that support the current research on the role of home care nurses in addressing social isolation and promoting the mental health of older adults. It highlights various strategies and interventions such as home visiting programs, social prescribing, adult day services, digital communication tools, and befriending initiatives that have been shown to reduce loneliness and improve psychosocial well-being among the elderly (Chica-Pérez et al., 2023; Paquet et al., 2023; Sadarangani et al., 2024; Grey et al., 2024). In addition, several studies emphasize how home care nurses perceive their roles as extending beyond clinical duties to include emotional support, companionship, and psychosocial monitoring, although challenges such as limited training, role ambiguity, and evolving responsibilities—especially with telemedicine—remain evident (Shahriari et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023; Chua, 2024).

Furthermore, the literature identifies significant workforce strains and systemic challenges, including burnout, staffing shortages, inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, and safety concerns, all of which hinder the ability of nurses to consistently provide holistic care (Lapane et al., 2023; Shahriari et al., 2024). Despite these barriers, scholars recommend strengthening policies, improving training and compensation, expanding community-based programs, and enhancing support systems to improve geriatric care services (Alibudbud, 2023; Chica-Pérez et al., 2023). Inclusive, the reviewed literature underscores the importance of integrated psychosocial interventions and highlights existing gaps, particularly in the Philippine context, which justify the need for the present study on the lived experiences of home care nurses in General Santos City.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Rosemarie Rizzo Parse's Human Becoming Theory (1992), Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring (1979), and Hildegard Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory (1952), which together provide a holistic framework for understanding the lived experiences of home care nurses in supporting older adults. Parse's theory emphasizes that health is a dynamic process of meaning-making and becoming, highlighting how nurses interpret and give meaning to their caregiving experiences (Parse, 1992). Watson's theory underscores the importance of caring relationships, emotional presence, and holistic nursing actions that promote dignity and well-being, which are essential in addressing social isolation among elderly patients (Watson, 1979). Meanwhile, Peplau's theory focuses on the therapeutic nurse-patient relationship, emphasizing communication, trust, and the structured phases of interaction that support psychosocial development (Peplau, 1952). Together, these theories

provide a comprehensive lens for exploring how home care nurses understand their roles, build meaningful relationships, and implement caring strategies to enhance the mental health and social well-being of older adults in the Philippine context.

METHODOLOGY

It focuses on a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and challenges of home care nurses in General Santos City. The methodology is designed to capture rich, in-depth narratives that reflect the participants' perspectives on geriatric care. Overall, it ensures that the study remains grounded in the real experiences of nurses in home care settings.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design following Creswell (2018), which is appropriate for exploring lived experiences. The design allows the researcher to identify common themes related to social isolation, mental health support, and caregiving challenges. Ultimately, it gives voice to participants and provides deeper insights into their professional experiences.

RESEARCH STEPS

The research followed a systematic process beginning with the identification of the problem and review of related literature. This was followed by the selection of participants, development of research instruments, and ethical approval. Data was then collected through interviews and organized for analysis. Finally, findings were interpreted, validated, and presented in thematic form.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

The study involved twenty-one (21) licensed home care nurses in General Santos City who met the inclusion criteria. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had relevant experience in providing home-based elderly care. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face or online, depending on availability. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and verified through member checking to ensure accuracy.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological method. This involved reading transcripts repeatedly, extracting significant statements, and formulating meanings from the data. These meanings were then grouped into themes and subthemes that reflected the lived experiences of participants. The process ensured that findings remained closely aligned with the nurses' actual narratives.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS AND VALIDATION

The study assumes that home care nurses have valuable insights into the psychosocial needs of older adults based on their daily experiences. It also assumes that participants provided honest and accurate accounts during interviews. To ensure validity, member checking was

used, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the findings. This strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

STUDY LIMITATION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was limited to twenty-one home care nurses in General Santos City and did not include nurses from hospitals or institutional settings. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Measures were also taken to minimize emotional discomfort and protect participant identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1. What are the lived experiences, roles, strategies, challenges, and insights of home care nurses in General Santos City, Philippines in supporting mental health and reducing social isolation among older adults, and how can these experiences inform the improvement of geriatric care services?

The lived experiences of home care nurses in General Santos City reveal that their role extends beyond physical care to include emotional companionship, psychological monitoring, and holistic support for older adults. Nurses consistently emphasized that simple actions such as listening, talking, and providing presence help reduce loneliness and improve the mental well-being of elderly patients. They also implemented strategies such as encouraging family interaction, facilitating social activities, and using therapeutic communication to strengthen social connections and reduce isolation. However, they faced significant challenges including limited family support, lack of resources, and emotional burden, which often made care delivery more difficult and mentally draining. Despite these difficulties, nurses provided valuable insights and recommended strengthening community programs, improving family awareness, and enhancing training for home care nurses to improve geriatric care services. Overall, the findings highlight that effective elderly care requires a collaborative approach involving families, communities, and well-trained nurses to address both social isolation and mental health needs.

SUMMARY

The study explored the lived experiences of 21 home care nurses in General Santos City, focusing on their roles in supporting the mental health of older adults. Findings revealed that nurses perceive emotional companionship, psychological monitoring, and holistic care as central to their responsibilities. They commonly use strategies such as encouraging family involvement, facilitating social activities, and applying therapeutic communication to reduce social isolation. However, they also face challenges including limited family support, inadequate resources, and emotional burden from caregiving. Overall, the study highlights that home care nurses play a crucial and multidimensional role in promoting geriatric mental health and social well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Home care nurses play an essential role in supporting the mental health and emotional needs of older adults through companionship, observation, and holistic care. Their strategies, including strengthening family engagement and promoting social interaction, are effective in reducing social isolation. Despite these efforts, they continue to experience significant challenges such as resource limitations, weak family involvement, and emotional stress. These difficulties highlight the need for stronger institutional and community support systems to sustain quality care. Overall, the findings show that effective geriatric home care requires a balanced integration of emotional, social, and structural support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Home care nurses are encouraged to continue practicing emotional companionship, therapeutic communication, and holistic care while also prioritizing self-care and emotional resilience. Families of older adults may strengthen their involvement through regular communication, visits, and emotional support to reduce loneliness. Healthcare institutions and agencies are encouraged to provide training, mental health support programs for nurses, and stronger community-based services for older adults. Policymakers may consider developing programs that improve resource allocation and support systems for home care services. Future researchers are recommended to explore intervention-based studies and broader regional comparisons to further improve geriatric home care practices.

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