

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Newly Hired Nurses on Onboarding Challenges: Basis For Onboarding Program Development

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of newly hired nurses as they navigated onboarding challenges in a government-owned secondary hospital in Southeastern Mindanao, Philippines. Using a descriptive qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 newly hired nurses and analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Findings revealed challenges related to role ambiguity, workload pressure, and the lack of structured orientation. Nurses adapted through peer support, guidance from senior staff, and self-directed learning, which contributed to improved competence and confidence. The study concluded that structured orientation, mentorship, and gradual exposure to workload were essential for successful nurse integration and retention.

Keywords: *Adaptation, mentorship, Nurse onboarding, Professional competence, Transition experiences*

INTRODUCTION

The transition from nursing education to clinical practice was recognized as a challenging period for newly hired nurses. Many experienced stress, uncertainty, heavy workloads, and difficulty adapting to workplace expectations, which affected their confidence and performance. Previous studies highlighted the importance of mentorship, organizational support, and structured onboarding programs in facilitating successful transitions. Therefore, this study examined the onboarding experiences of newly hired nurses to identify challenges, coping strategies, and areas for program improvement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study sought to determine the lived experiences of newly hired nurses during onboarding in a government-owned hospital. Specifically, it explored the challenges they encountered, their coping and adaptation strategies, factors affecting workplace integration, and recommendations for program improvement.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study focused on newly hired registered nurses employed for six months to one year in a government-owned secondary hospital in Southeastern Mindanao. It examined their onboarding experiences, coping strategies, and integration into clinical practice. Findings were limited to a single hospital setting and relied on self-reported experiences, which may have affected transferability and introduced recall bias.

REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE

The reviewed literature and studies indicate that newly hired nurses commonly experience challenges during their transition to clinical practice, including stress, role ambiguity, emotional difficulties, and adjustment issues (Padagas et al., 2021; Labrague et al., 2019; Ubas Sumagasyay & Oducado, 2020). Research consistently emphasizes that structured onboarding programs, mentorship, preceptorship, social support, and organizational guidance play important roles in improving confidence, competence, adaptation, and retention among novice nurses (Varghese et al., 2023; Smith Miller et al., 2023; Yarbrough & Ramos Salazar, 2023). Studies also highlight that organizational culture and support systems significantly influence nurses' integration and professional development (McInerney, 2025; Pena et al., 2023; Warshawsky et al., 2020). However, limited research has explored the lived experiences of newly hired nurses within Philippine hospital settings, particularly regarding their coping strategies and the interaction between personal and organizational factors during onboarding (Rojo, 2025; Labrague et al., 2019). Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by exploring nurses' experiences and generating recommendations for developing a more responsive and effective onboarding program.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on three complementary nursing theories: Patricia Benner's Novice to Expert Theory (1984), Sister Callista Roy's Adaptation Model (2009), and Martha Rogers's Science of Unitary Human Beings (1970, revised 1992), which collectively provide a framework for understanding the lived experiences of newly hired nurses during onboarding and transition to clinical practice. Benner's theory explains how nurses gradually develop competence, confidence, and clinical judgment through experience and guided learning during the onboarding process. Roy's Adaptation Model emphasizes how newly hired nurses cope with stressors and adapt to changes in workload, professional roles, and workplace relationships. Rogers' theory highlights the dynamic interaction between nurses and their environment, emphasizing the importance of organizational support and a positive clinical setting in facilitating integration and growth. Together, these theories provide a multidimensional perspective that explains professional development, adaptation, and environmental influences, guiding the study in understanding onboarding experiences and improving onboarding programs.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of newly hired nurses during onboarding. This method allowed an in-depth understanding of their challenges, coping mechanisms, and workplace integration. Data were gathered through interviews and analyzed systematically to identify common themes.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive qualitative research design was utilized to obtain detailed accounts of nurses' onboarding experiences. The design enabled the exploration of perceptions, challenges, and adaptation strategies within their natural work environment. It provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

RESEARCH STEPS

The research process began with securing ethical approval and institutional permission before recruiting eligible participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Findings were validated through member checking to ensure credibility and accuracy.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

Data were collected from 30 newly hired registered nurses through purposive sampling. Participants met specific criteria, including completion of orientation and six months to one year of employment in clinical units. Interviews, audio recordings, and field notes were used to gather detailed information.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Colaizzi's phenomenological method was employed to analyze interview transcripts. Significant statements were extracted, meanings were formulated, and themes were developed to represent shared experiences. Member checking further enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS AND VALIDATION

The study assumed that participants provided honest and accurate descriptions of their onboarding experiences. To ensure validity, ethical standards, informed consent, confidentiality, and member checking procedures were implemented. These measures strengthened the credibility and reliability of the findings.

STUDY LIMITATION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was limited to one government-owned hospital and may not represent the experiences of nurses in other settings. Self-reported data may also have been influenced by personal perceptions and recall bias. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1. How did newly hired nurses experience onboarding challenges within a government-owned secondary hospital, particularly in terms of the challenges they encountered, coping and adaptation strategies, organizational and environmental influences, effects on their competence and confidence, and their recommendations for improving the onboarding program?

The findings indicated that newly hired nurses experienced role ambiguity, workload pressure, and inadequate orientation during onboarding. They adapted through peer support, guidance from senior nurses, and self-directed learning, which helped improve competence and confidence. Organizational support, team dynamics, and resource availability significantly influenced their overall integration and professional growth.

SUMMARY

The study found that newly hired nurses encountered significant onboarding challenges but gradually adapted through various coping strategies and support systems. Organizational and interpersonal factors strongly influenced their transition experiences. Over time, these experiences contributed to improved competence, independence, and professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that onboarding challenges initially hindered nurses' confidence and adjustment to clinical practice. However, resilience, peer support, mentorship, and organizational assistance facilitated successful adaptation and growth. Effective onboarding was found to depend on both individual coping efforts and strong institutional support systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hospitals should implement structured onboarding programs with clear orientation guidelines to support newly hired nurses. Formal mentorship systems and gradual workload exposure should also be established to improve competence, confidence, and workplace integration. Future studies should evaluate onboarding interventions across different healthcare settings.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI tools were used only for grammar refinement, formatting, and manuscript organization. The data, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

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