

The Clinical Learning Experiences of Male Nursing Students in Maternity Wards at Training Hospitals in Khomas Region, Namibia.

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Abstract

Background: Clinical learning in nursing is very important because this when students get to practice what they learn theoretically and actually put in to action. Many males are now starting to join the nursing field, and with this they tend to have a more different experience than that a female nursing student would experience, especially in the maternity wards. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the clinical learning experiences of second, third and fourth year male degree nursing students regarding their clinical learning experiences in the maternity wards at training hospitals in Khomas region.

Methods: The researcher collected data by conducting one-one interviews with male nursing students from the fourth, third and second year. The data was analyzed according to the two objectives of this study based on Teschs method of qualitative data analysis.

Results: The study revealed that the male nursing students endured many challenges such as rejection from patients due to their cultural beliefs, with that it had an impact on their self- esteem and self-worthiness as student nurses. The participants also mentioned that they experienced a poor interpersonal relationship with the registered nurses and that the clinical instructors were not very present with them during their clinical practice.

Conclusion: With the above mentioned, the researcher recommends that the training institutes put more effort in preparing male students about the challenges they might face when they do enter the clinical setting, this will help male students be better prepared and deal better with the challenges they might face. The training hospitals and the training institutions can set up a program where male nursing students are placed or delegated at least once with another male registered nurse so that the male nursing student may have a role model and not feel like his alone. All of this is critical for the professional growth of the male nursing students.

Keywords: Clinical Learning, Experience, Nursing students

Introduction

Clinical education is the heart of professional education in nursing. The perspective of nursing students and clinical nursing educators as the main owners of teaching-learning process are of determinants affecting clinical education process [1]. Clinical learning is a main and very important aspect of nursing education. With the increase of more males wanting to study nursing, male nurses are considered to be a minority group in the profession [2]. Nursing students are evaluated in clinical learning environments where skills and knowledge are applied to patient care. These environments affect achievement of learning outcomes, and have an impact on preparation for practice and student satisfaction with the nursing profession [3].

Literature shows that students acquire clinical competencies most effectively in the clinical environments where they participate in the provision of care and work alongside healthcare staff that support and encourage learning. Male nursing students do not go through the same challenges as female nursing students and this is because society has seen nursing as more of a profession for females. Although with the times changing, more and more males are enrolling in nursing schools. Clinical experiences will differ from student to student but difficulties are more evident in male students especially when it comes to the maternity wards. The maternity ward is one of the main educational environments in which learners can gain childbirth management

experience and ensure the health of mothers and newborns in the future. This is where most male students face difficulties because many women are not always very comfortable when a male, who they do not know that well are present during their childbirth. This study will focus on the clinical learning experiences of male nursing students especially in their allocations in the maternity wards.

Background of the study

During clinical placements this is when nursing students learn a lot about their profession and how to put it in practice. This is the period when nursing students get to interact with patients, learn critical learning skills and learn a lot from the current nurses working in their specific departments. At the University of Western Cape, the intake of nursing students has increased from 120 to 300 in 2004. In Qatar, due to the social and cultural norms in the predominately Muslim country, male nursing students are prohibited from practicing with mothers and babies instead they had a fully simulated maternity clinical [4]. In South Africa, many male nursing students face stereotypes and encounter challenges such as questions about their masculinity and sexuality and do face discrimination because of their gender [5]. This challenges effects male students in such a way that they feel insecure, feelings of isolation due to the fact that they already have the absence of suitable role models with there not being many male nurses in hospitals [5]. In the United States, the maternity clinical setting has been particularly cited as a source of stress and anxiety for male nursing students due to frequent experiences of discrimination. Male students often report being excluded from patient care experiences and that their presence was questioned by mothers and nursing staff [6].

Aim

The aim of the study was to explore and describe the clinical learning experiences of second, third- and fourth-year male nursing students in the maternity wards at the public training hospitals in the Khomas region.

Method

For this study the researcher selected a qualitative, explorative and descriptive design to explore and describe the clinical learning experiences of the male nursing degree students on the maternity wards the public training hospitals in the Khomas region.

Survey

The researcher used one one-one interviews as the research instrument. Interviews are particularly useful in uncovering the story behind a participant's experience. Researchers can follow a line of questions to gain information about a topic or further explore responses or findings. The audio recorder was introduced to the participants as a tool that would assist the researcher with recording the information discussed by participants without omitting any information. Field notes were taken to capture non-communication such as facial expressions and emotions of the participant.

Interview schedule

Ethical approval

Ethical clearance was obtained through the structures of the University of Namibia. Therefore, the following ethical considerations were written, informed consent was obtained from each

participant after the procedure was explained and risks were pointed out after adequate information were conveyed, possible risks were pointed out. Voluntary participation without penalty for withdrawal was pointed out.

Data collection

Face to face individual interviews were conducted with each participant until data saturation was reached per each year group. The researcher conducted each individual interview face to face with the male nursing students in the second, third- and fourth-year students of the undergraduate Bachelors of nursing students. Prior to these, verbal consent was obtained from the participants. All second, third- and fourth-year male nursing degree students were approached during the period they were attending their practical allocations at Windhoek Central Hospital, Intermediate Katutura Hospital and at UNAM during their period of attending classes were invited to participate in this study voluntarily. The entire process of data collection was explained to the students in detail by the researcher. Participants were given numbers for identification and direct quoting. The researcher prepared the room to encourage the participant to be open and feel free to express themselves during the interview. Field notes were taken to capture the non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and emotions of the participant. Data collection was done with audio recording with the permission of the participants.

Data analysis Results

Qualitative data analysis often involves an inductive exploration of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories. Qualitative analysis will be employed to analyze the data [7]. This required the researcher to listen to the audios repeatedly and read through the transcripts several times with the purpose of gaining a general impression of their context. Important phrases during the interviews have been highlighted [5]. Themes have come about during data analysis from descriptions of recurrent experiences, as well as experiences that participants emphasized as being particularly important or influential on their clinical learning experience [5]. The data collected has been transcribed verbatim, organized, analyzed and interpreted by the researcher by means of Teschs eight methods data analysis. Field notes have been triangulated with the recorded data. The researcher has listened repeatedly to the recorded data and has identified the main ideas and has assigned codes to similar ideas. The related codes have been grouped together and themes and subthemes have been identified and supported by verbatim quotes from participants.

Results

The researcher had enough time to immerse herself into the data collection process, the researcher has reflected over it over a period of time and looked over all the interviews conducted. Thereafter the researcher manually coded and analyzed the data by collecting all the similar ideas and experiences into themes and this theme have been elaborated into sub-themes supported by quotes from the participants and the findings are compared with related literatures and studies

Demographic Data

The researcher collected and recorded the primary data from 9

male nursing degree students, the researcher collected information on the clinical learning experiences of the male students in the maternity wards. The number of participants who were involved in the interviews are summarized below in table 4.1

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants
Male Degree Nursing students from UNAM Main Campus

Year of study	Participant Identifier	Age
4th year students	P1	32
	P2	22
	P3	24
	P4	23
3rd year students	P5	26
	P6	24
2nd year students	P7	20
	P8	22

During the process of data analysis, the researcher has identified four main themes and six sub-themes as indicated in Table below

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Culture	Influence of cultural beliefs
Impact on students' self-esteem	Influence on self-esteem Decreased sense of self worth
Unknown role of clinical instructors	Limited clinical supervision from clinical instructors
Poor interpersonal relationship with registered nurses	Preference of female nursing students Negative attitudes of registered nurses to male nursing students

Theme 1: Culture

Many of the participants in this research felt that many of the patients which are females refused to let them do any procedures on them or even witness any procedures being done on them by a female nurse due to cultural beliefs and not being comfortable with a male present in the room. Cultural beliefs influence a lot of the patients especially when it comes to them undressing and being naked in front of male they do not even know and just met for the first time. Due to this the male students are usually excused out of the rooms and this makes them lose an opportunity to witness a procedure and learn from it, putting them behind in their clinical learning.

The participants felt that in nursing one has to make sense of their practice through the application of theory, feedback and reflection on their clinical practice experience. In this study participants indicated that they experienced inadequate clinical learning opportunities due to the cultures of the patients as evident by the following sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Influence of cultural beliefs

Culture still plays a major role in our country Namibia and may people be still very much influenced by their cultural beliefs even when it comes to health. Participants cited a number of incidences where they weren't allowed to perform any duties due to the fact that the female patients did not want to be touched or

let a male be present during procedures due to their culture and this caused the male students to miss out on an essential learning opportunities. This was evident by per following quotations:

"There was a case we had with a patient whose culture was Muslim, she did not want to be touched by any male healthcare worker and this included any male doctors as well, and the patient really needed procedures to be done on her by the doctor who was also a male, it was very difficult for us to manage her condition, she only wanted to be touched by the female nurse in charge (P2)

"...you get to interact with more people from different cultures, you learn about people's taboos which will let you not attend deliveries of certain people of certain cultures cause in their cultures it's a taboo for a male to witness a female give birth" (P5)

"We all have different cultures and certain cultures don't allow certain things, this could be stuff like a man looking at a woman deliver or maybe you are doing a certain examination that require you to touch ladies at which some of this examination can be uncomfortable, in most cases the woman will tell you she feels uncomfortable (P6)

According to Eswi & El Sayed, male students experienced high restrictions when dealing with mothers, they were being rejected as male care givers and faced lack of patients' cooperation. Similar studies were reported by Wang et al., patients didn't trust male students when receiving care from them and they prefer female nurses to give them procedures. In Egypt, in which majority are Muslims women patients considered male obstetrician doctors as trusted and having more experience while male student nurses are still young, not mature enough and might have inner feelings that could affect care provided by them.

Theme 2: Impact on students' self-esteem

The participants of this study felt like their experiences in the maternity wards has affected their self-esteem. Many participants indicated that due to the fact that some patients did not feel comfortable in letting them do certain procedures or even witness some procedures made them feel bad and this has impacted their self-esteem. The following sub-themes are:

Sub-theme 2: Influence on self-esteem

Participants verbalized that they experienced rejection, particularly from the female patients. Participants felt that female patients did not trust them to provide nursing care in the same way as female nurses can do. This might have been an emotional situation that students were faced with, because being rejected and not being trusted because of being a male made them feel that they are not being accepted by patients [5]. For this study many of the participants expressed how their experience and rejection has affected their self-esteem, participants stated that:

"My self-esteem has lowered, I do not feel comfortable working in the maternity ward, I don't feel equipped, I don't feel knowledgeable enough to work in the maternity ward, my self-esteem is really low, I do not feel comfortable and have enough knowledge" (P2)

"...made me feel left out, but later with time I got used to it and I just began to face it when female patients are not allowing us to touch them" (P8)

"I felt scared, because in my culture it is disrespectful to be do-

ing certain things to an elder, you start feeling like what if I do something wrong, this made me feel down (P7)

“Some women will tell you they do not feel comfortable being examined by a male and this kind of works on your self-esteem and sometimes affects us on how we treat women in general, cause now your perception on these women begin to change cause now when you walk into a room the first thing you think of is what is this woman going to say” (P5)

The distrust and rejection by female patients do not only affect the self, but also limits opportunities for male students to practice nursing skills and to become competent nurses [5].

Sub-theme 3: Decreased sense of self-worth

Students experienced nursing as a profession which was dominated by females because they did see many males working in the clinical setting [5]. In the maternity wards they are not many males registered and enrolled nurses, so when a male nursing student is placed in the maternity ward for their clinical practice there are times when it just one male nursing student with many other female nursing students. Many of the participants reported that they felt left out and even wondered if this was the right career choice for them, this is what most participants had to say:

“You feel uncomfortable or sometimes that it’s not fair, there are some moms that allow us to be present so that is a good experience, but still challenging for us males” (P4)

“...made me feel bad and fear that maybe I should not be in field” (P3)

“Makes me feel like there are places I can’t always be, it’s sad because sometimes you are in a position of being the only person that can help, but due cases that women do not allow you to witness, so you don’t as much as you think you could or wish too. It brings you down and all depends on how you carry yourself around the maternity ward, because you never know what is going to happen, cause the next thing you hear a mother yelling she does not want you in the room, you don’t really get to do what you have to do which is assist and help the mother (P5)

“Made me feel left out, but later with time I got used to it and I just began to face it when patients are not allowing you to touch them” (P8)

“Made me feel unwelcomed and made me not want to go to work at the maternity ward, it was like I just had to finish my book and get it over with for me it was like I was not learning anything I am just doing something that is required of me to do in my books and I have to finish, I just went there because it was what was required of me, because my first experience has turned me down” (P1)

With all the rejection and difficulties faced in the maternity wards, many male students wondered if it was all worth it. One of the consistent uncertainties was the future prospects after graduation and their identity as a male nurse. In most studies, students indicated that because of the poor nursing image and non-acceptance of male nurses their career prospects could be limited [8].

Theme 3: Unknown role of clinical instructors

The participants do not always feel supported during their clinical

placements, especially from their clinical instructors. Clinical preceptors are required to guide, support and help students during their clinical practice. The following subtheme is:

Sub-theme 4: Limited supervision from clinical instructors

The participants in this study feel that it is the responsibility of the clinical instructors to be present and provide them with guidance and assistance during their clinical placements. Many of the participants felt like the preceptors were not very present during their midwifery clinical placement and they were not very understanding regarding some of the difficulties they were experiencing. Few felt that some of the clinical instructors are unhelpful and discouraging. Participants stated that:

“The clinical instructors could be more present during our clinical placements, especially too guide us males during certain procedures like vaginal deliveries and vaginal examinations” (P6)

“The patients not allowing us to practice on them causes us to sometimes be behind with finishing our logbooks, like last week I entered a room and the patient asked why is this guy here, I do not want him here, the lectures and clinical preceptors are putting a lot of pressure on us to finishing the logbooks” (P8)

“Sometimes the clinical instructors are just nicer to the female nursing students and us male students feel left out” (P1)

“The clinical instructors do not even warn us about the challenges us male students might face, and when we do face this challenge we go through them alone and they do not understand (P7)

Male students faced gender bias in nursing school, being singled out by clinical instructors being told that nursing is not manly by others and having no role models to the fact that nursing is a female dominated profession [5]. Male students are not receiving the support they need from clinical instructors; the lectures are usually also not always around so they usually do not get the assistance they need.

Participants also indicated they experienced feeling excluded or being treated differently than female students when seeking additional assistance in the form of advisement, examination review or remediation. Additionally, another participant described how a meeting with an instructor negatively influenced his desire to gain assistance in the future: “Every question we went through, she would laugh like ‘Oh, this was so easy. I don’t know why you didn’t get it.’ I felt really belittled and almost to the point of why am I even in nursing?” The participant then stated he never again sought assistance with examinations throughout the rest of his time in the program [6].

Theme 4: Poor interpersonal relationship with registered nurses

The participants of this study feel that a good and positive interpersonal relationship with the registered nurses created a good working environment for the students when placed at their clinical placements. In this study the interpersonal relationship between the registered nurses and the male nursing students create a conducive environment for the male nursing student to learn new skills in the maternity wards. Participants in this study experienced a poor interpersonal relationship as evident by preference of female nursing students and negative attitudes of registered nurses towards male nursing students.

Sub-theme 5: Preference of working with female nursing students

The participants in this study feel that some of the registered nurse preferred working with just female nurses and this caused a negative clinical environment for some of the participants. Some of the registered nurses did want to work with male students because they did not want to make the patient feel uncomfortable and some registered nurses would only give demonstrations to the students they worked with which is often the female nursing students, making the male nursing students be behind with their logbooks. The following are what some of the participants experienced:

“The first days were very difficult because we were not orientated, we did not know things we were seen as if we were not valuable. Some patients did not want us while some procedures were being done, they would chase us out, I also felt neglected by the sisters at some point they just worked with female students” (P7)

“So far it has not been a good experience the nurses are not very welcoming especially to the male nursing students we have been left out, feeling neglected, lack of inclusivity during procedures and demonstrations. Nurses also showed lack of interest in teaching male students” (P2).

Sub-theme 6: Negative attitudes of registered nurses towards nursing students

The participants in this study indicate that the negative attitude of the registered nurses in the clinical setting made their experience unpleasant. The environment will be unfriendly, not welcoming and non-inclusive. Some of the participants revealed that due the negative attitude of the registered nurse it made them not want to attend their clinical practical's, lead to them feeling demoralized and the poor communication made them loose confidence in themselves. The participants' remarks regarding the attitudes of the registered nurses towards male students are as follows:

“It was quite hectic; the sisters are rude towards male students you won't feel comfortable at first they would expect you to know everything, sometimes you would want to quit, some would say why are you doing these things it's supposed to be for ladies” (P8)

“So far the experience has been bad, as a male student I have felt unwelcomed in the environment...and the sisters were also unwilling to teach the male students they have this misconception that we should know or that this environment is not meant for male students” (P1)

“It has been a difficult experience, we feel uncomfortable and the sisters do not make the situation easier I feel unwelcomed and most of the time I do not know what is happening” (P4)

Registered nurses tend to have negative attitude towards nursing student because they believe that they can work independently without any supervision and guidance which then promotes incompetency because they are not supported and guided during the practice of the clinical procedures [9].

Discussion

The findings obtained from this study demonstrated the influence of cultural beliefs of the patients in the maternity wards had on the male nursing students. The male students are most affected by a situation in the wards where there are no male patients, and here the clinical skills can only be performed on a

female patient [5]. Many patients refused to be touched or even let many of the male students' witness procedures being done on them due to the fact that many of the patients believed that men cannot be present while a woman is delivering, this led to many of the male students being left out on procedures and not being competent in some tasks.

Due to the rejection that they faced from some of the patients, this had an impact on their self-esteem. Participants mentioned that it made them feel useless sometimes knowing they are going to clinical practices and not knowing if they would be able to get anything done, many stated that this made them doubt if they even chose the right career path and this took a toll on their self-worthiness.

Objective 2: To describe the clinical learning experiences of male nursing students in the maternity wards at the training hospitals in Khomas region

In the same wavelength, the participants mentioned the limited supervision from the clinical instructors. Many felt that the clinical instructors were not really guiding them and helping them in the maternity wards and when faced with challenges such as rejection from the patients, the clinical instructors were not very understanding and still applied them with a lot of pressure when they would fall behind with their logbooks.

Lastly it was revealed from the study that the majority of the participants were not satisfied with the interpersonal relationship with the registered nurses during the clinical placements. The study further indicated that the attitudes of the registered nurses towards the male nursing students was unwelcoming, making them feel uncomfortable in the ward. Some of the registered nurses preferred working only with female nursing students which made the participants feel left out and fall behind in some of their procedures.

Limitations

The study was conducted and limited to only focus on Bachelors male nursing students at the main campus, University of Namibia placed in maternity wards at the training hospitals in Khomas region only and the findings might therefore not be generalized to other nursing students. Ideally the researcher could have included all male nursing students from other nursing institutions to get a broader view on the topic of the research.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore and describe the clinical learning experiences of male degree nursing students in the maternity wards at the training hospital in Khomas region, to identify the challenges they faced. Clinical practice is considered to be the experience at which nursing students practice patient care and where they transfer what they learned in theory into the clinical setting. Nursing is a profession that is normally very female dominated, although with times changing many men are beginning to enroll in the program, this study indicated the challenges that these male nursing students are facing, specifically in the maternity wards.

It is during the clinical setting that nursing students' confidence and preparedness for practice plays an important role and if the clinical setting is not conducive this may lead to nursing students not being competent enough to perform some tasks when completing their studies. Male nursing students experience different challenges than female nursing students [5].

This is evident by the experiences the participants of this study faced in the maternity wards at the training hospitals in Khomas region. The participants stated that they faced many challenges. The findings obtained from this study submerged into four themes which were the influence of cultural beliefs, impact on self-esteem, unknown role of clinical instructors and poor interpersonal relationship with registered nurses [10-17].

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Authors contribution

Doris Joao draft preparation, writing and analyzing; Galukeni Kadhila supervision and editing.

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Availability of data materials

The transcribed materials are available on request.

Declaration

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Namibia.

Competing interests

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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