Career Choice and Longevity in U.S. Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses

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Background and Significance

Decreasing supply

Increasing demand
Purpose

• To explore how RNs came to choose and remain in Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing (PMHN) careers

• Research questions:
  – Career Choice
    • What factors are associated with PMHN career choice?
  – Longevity in PMHN
    • What factors are associated with longevity in PMHN?
Design and Methods

- Descriptive phenomenology
- Giorgi’s Existential Phenomenological Research Method
- Semi-structured Face-to-Face Interviews
Sample

- **Purposive sampling**
  - RNs who had worked in PMHN in acute care inpatient psychiatric settings for over 5 years.

- **Sample demographics**
  - 4 females, 4 males
  - 28-60 yr.
  - Six with undergrad degree prior to entering nursing; 2 with ADN
  - 4 with/or pursing advanced degree in nursing
RESULTS
Themes Related to PMHN Career Choice
—Interest developed while in or prior to entering nursing school

“Well, I guess I discovered psychiatry before nursing. I had a job as a mental health worker. Well, actually I was an aide.”
Themes Related to PMHN Career Choice

• Personal relevance

“I have a history of mental illness in my family. I have a comfort level with chaos … having a clinical setting in which I can kind of bring that around and manage the milieu and bring a little order and calm to it I think probably is me working out some issues from childhood.”
Themes Related to PMHN Career Choice

• Validation of potential

“But when I did my psych clinical, I had a good Professor, Dr. X and she really kind of took me under her wing and it just solidified it for me I think. I think it was probably her personal interest in me. She really validated my skills and … I remember that in particular. You get a sense of I could see myself doing this….She really validated my skills.”
Themes Related to PMHN Career Longevity

• Overcoming stereotypes to develop career pride

“They [nurses in other specialties] think psych nurses are lazy. They do. They think that it’s a cake job, that you’re not a real nurse...But they’re the first one to pick up the phone when the stuff hits the fan – ‘Come help us!’ You know what I mean?”
Themes Related to PMHN Career Longevity

• Positive team dynamics

“I’m very secure in our environment and our team. I know that “I might make a bad decision, but they’re going to be there to help me clean up the mess, if I make one.”
Themes Related to PMHN Career Longevity

• Remaining hopeful

“You know what keeps me there? … …Tells story of veteran with PTSD (and his family) who had a successful treatment experience…. So, to see that change, that keeps me engaged and that stays in my mind because I think as we go forward, there’s going to be more and more and more and more people and families like his….That’s what keeps me engaged in psych. That’s my story!”
Conclusions and Implications

Career choice = Recruitment to PMHN

• Interest in psych is seen early (often in the nursing program)
• Interest in psych may be related to familiarity with psychiatric careers or psychiatric illness
• Positive academic experiences: Faculty can pique and solidify interest in PMHN
Conclusions and Implications

Career longevity = Retention of PMHN

• Developed pride in the PMHN career
• Positive team dynamics buffers against burnout
• Adjusted expectations for patients and changed how they define success
Thank you!

Reference