



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

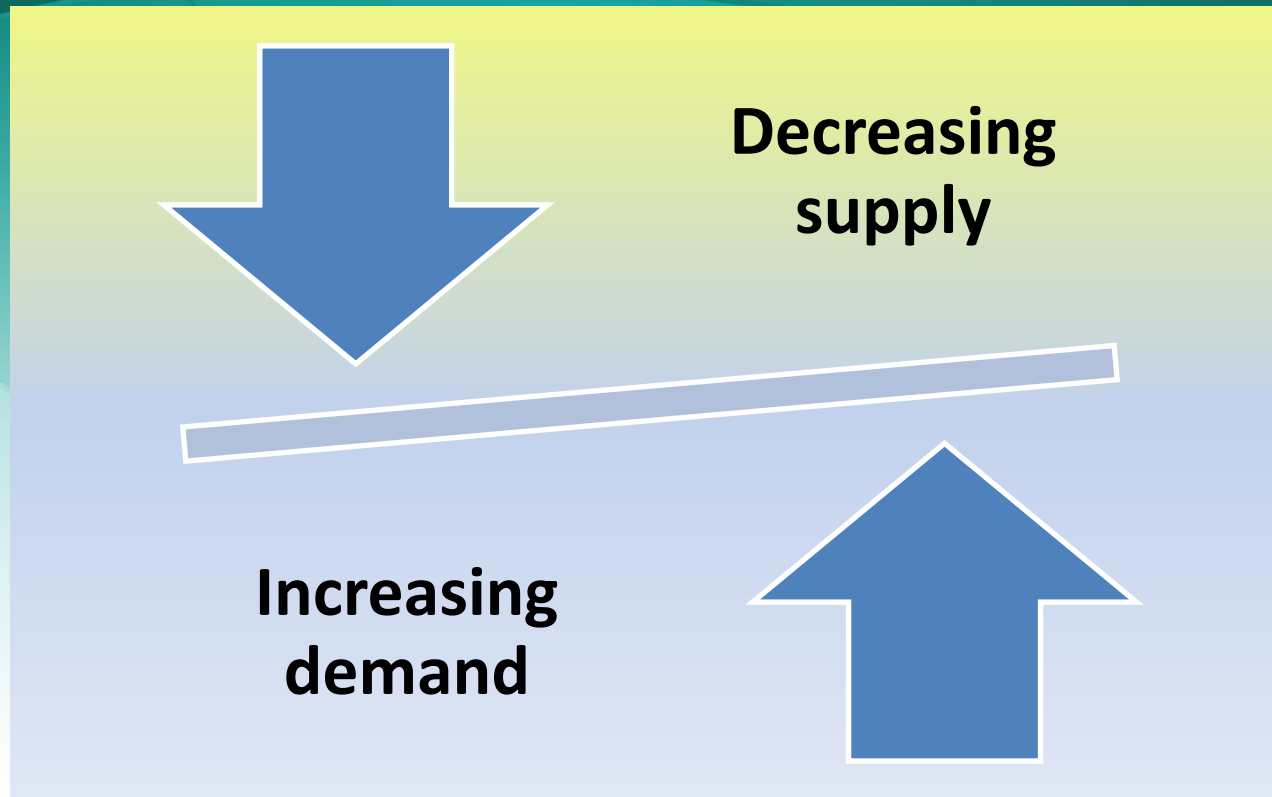
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# Background and Significance





# 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 pursuing advanced degree in nursing



# RESULTS

*Explore* —  *Engage* —  *Experience* —  *Excel™*





# 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

Alexander, R., Diefenbeck, C., & Brown, C. (2015). Career choice and longevity in U.S. psychiatric-mental health nurses. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 36, 447–454.