Reintegration Experiences of Military Nurses Deployed in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

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Purpose

To describe common components of the reintegration experience of military nurses who served in Iraq and Afghanistan during the war years, 2003-2013
Institutional Review Board Approval

- Adelphi University
- Western Connecticut State University
Methodological Assumptions

• Volunteers who agree to be interviewed will be:

-- Able to recall their reintegration experience as a military nurse returning from Iraq or Afghanistan

-- Willing to share their reintegration experience as co-participants in this research, and that

-- Common human experiences have some like elements for individuals
Literature Review


Research Approach & Methodology

• Phenomenology
  – Husserl’s perspective
    • Describes the lived experience as told by those experiencing it
  • Includes the meaning the experience holds for the person
The Population

Men & women RNs who served in the Army, Navy or Air Force in Iraq or Afghanistan during the war years, 2003-2013
Sample and Study Setting

Sample selection
• Purposive sampling using ‘snowball’ technique
• Sample: 35 nurses

Study Setting
• Face-to-face & telephone interviews
Sample

35 Military Nurses

- Army  11
- Air Force  12
- Navy  12
Sample Area of Assignment

IRAQ

• 7 Army Nurses
• 7 Air Force Nurses
• 8 Navy Nurses

AFGHANISTAN

• 8 Army Nurses
• 9 Air Force Nurses
• 9 Navy Nurses

** Numbers = 48 because some nurses served 2 or more tours in Iraq or Afghanistan, or tours in both war theaters**
Data Collection:
Two Data-Generating Core Questions

• How would you describe your experience of reintegration after returning from the Iraq or Afghanistan war?

• What else would you like to share with me about your reintegration experience?
Data Analysis

• Procedures adapted from Colaizzi (1978)
Colaizzi’s (1978) Data Analysis Procedure

- Read all interviews to acquire a feeling for them
- Review each interview & extract significant statements
- Formulate/spell out meanings for each statement
- Organize formulated meanings into theme clusters
- Integrate results into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study
- Ask participants about the findings as a final validating step
Trustworthiness of Data

• **Rigor** was attained by attending to:
  
  • Credibility
  • Confirmability
  • Dependability
  • Transferability
9 Themes

1-Homecoming: A Mixed Reception
2-Renegotiating Roles: A Family Affair
3-Painful Memories of Wartime Deployment
4-Sorting It Out: Getting Help
5-Needing a Clinical Change of Scenery
6-Petty Complaints & Trivial Whining: No Tolerance Here
7-My Military Unit or My Civilian Job: Support vs. Lack of Support
8-Family and Social Networks: Support vs. Lack of Support
9-Reintegration: Creating a New Normal
Theme 1 - Homecoming: A Mixed Reception
Theme 2 - Renegotiating Roles: A Family Affair
Theme 3 - Painful Memories of Wartime Deployment
Theme 4 - Sorting It Out: Getting Help
Theme 5 - Needing a Clinical Change of Scenery
Theme 6 - Petty Complaints & Trivial Whining: No Tolerance Here
Theme 7 - My Military Unit or My Civilian Job: Support vs. Lack of Support
Theme 8 - Family and Social Networks: Support vs. Lack of Support
Theme 9 - Reintegration: Creating a New Normal
Discussion

- 1st to include RNs from all 3 Nurse Corps
- 1st to include active duty RNs & Reserve RNs
- 2 themes new to any research efforts
  - Needing a clinical change of scenery
  - Petty complaints & trivial whining: No tolerance here
- Captured the differences in reintegration of active duty vs. reserve components
- Supported findings of Rivers et al. & Hopkins-Chadwick re:
  - painful memories
  - feeling ‘changed’
  - family & workplace readjustment
  - feeling a lack of support or good support from family & employment networks
Study Conclusions

- Homecoming was more difficult than anticipated.
- Memories of war will be etched in the nurses’ minds forever.
- Nurses reported being ill-prepared for the psychological effects of providing care in a war zone.
- Reintegration was described as an open-ended process with some commonalities as well as individual differences.
- The military services can improve upon their homecoming & reintegration support by listening to the voices of returning personnel.
Study Conclusions

• Deployed nurses see an important role for themselves in preparing other military nurses for wartime deployment.

• The military services need to remove the ‘stigma’ of seeking mental health counseling so that returning personnel will be comfortable seeking such help.

• Everyone’s reintegration timetable is unique and personal.
General Conclusions

• This study is an initial look at the reintegration experience of nurses deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.

• This study extends the developing body of knowledge about nursing in wartime and also breaks new ground in examining the reintegration experiences of nurses who deployed in the two current wars.

• Phenomenology as method provided a fruitful framework to describe the experience of deployed nurses.
Recommendations

Further studies on various aspects of deployment need to be conducted specifically focusing on:

- The occurrence of PTSD symptoms in nurses
- A comparison of the experiences of nurses who served in Iraq vs. Afghanistan
- A comparison study of men vs. women nurses
Implications for Nursing

• It has been estimated that approximately 70% of returning veterans have some degree of PTSD.
  – It appears that nurses serving longer tours of duty in a war zone are at greater risk for PTSD.

• Nurses in Harm’s way are not readily identified in the global news.
  – More needs to be written & studied about the role of nurses in war.
Funding Sources

- Connecticut State University System
- Foundation of NY State Nurses
Our Other Related Research Studies & Publications

• Experiences of Nurses in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars 2003-2009

• Women Nurses Health and Hygiene Experiences During Deployment to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

• Nurse Parents: Parental Separation During Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
Our Books

NURSES IN WAR
Voices from Iraq and Afghanistan
Elizabeth Scannell-Desch • Mary Ellen Doherty

NURSES AFTER WAR
The Reintegration Experience of Nurses Returning from Iraq and Afghanistan
Mary Ellen Doherty
Elizabeth Scannell-Desch