Understanding the Experiences of Veterans Enrolled in Prelicensure Nursing Programs in the United States

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After attending this session the learner will be able to:

- describe four themes that emerged from the hermeneutic phenomenological study exploring the experiences of veterans enrolled in US prelicensure nursing programs.

- make recommendations that may assist nursing students who are veterans.

Teresa Shellenbarger (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) and Julie Decker (Penn State University) have no conflict of interest.
Introduction and Background

Factors leading to enrollment in prelicensure nursing programs by veterans.
Literature Review
Methods

IRB approval

Recruitment of participants
Data Collection Procedures

Informed Consent

In-depth semi-structured audiotaped interviews
Sampling

Purposive sampling of eight prelicensure nursing students who were veterans in associate degree and baccalaureate degree programs in the US.
Demographics

Age 18-60 years, both genders

Military services 2 years to more than 10 years

All branches of the military

AD and BS programs
  ◦ completed fewer than 30 credits to more than 120

Diverse ethnicity
Data Analysis

Hermeneutic phenomenology with 5-step data analysis process.
Steps to Ensure Quality

Peer debriefing
Data triangulation
Member checking
Results

Themes emerging from the data

- Maneuvering through the mental mind shift
- Battling conflicting forces
- Avoiding the landmines
- Accepting support
Maneuvering Through the Mental Mind Shift

Transition from regimented life and collective community to college freedom, feeling alone and adrift

“When I first got out of the Army, I definitely felt lost in a lot of ways. I wasn’t sure how to even act.”
Battling Conflicting Forces

Classmates seen as provincial, uninformed and immature. Veterans feel confident, worldly, and mature.
“I can’t relate to the young kids...there’s a generational and professional gap...they’ve had no experiences and they think they are going to go out there and save the world...they think everybody is going to be rainbows and sunshine and everyone is going to thank them...they’ve never seen what we’ve seen.”
Avoiding the Landmines

Facing financial, academic, family, and personal struggles (anxiety, stress, sleep difficulties, PTSD)
“I have a plethora of bills and financial responsibilities and being in the nursing program full time leaves very little time for work and have employment.”

“Weekends I have drill. I don’t get a lot of studying done. You’re busy. It takes up some time...we have other commitments.”

“ I relive the war..some things that happened over there and that bothers me...it all came back to haunt me...it stirs it all back up again.”

“There are times when I just can’t go to sleep.”

“When I first came home..I always had to be on the go, go, go, go...and drinking a lot.”
Accepting Support

Supportive faculty, connect with resources, communication

“My advisors and professors were a big support system. They helped me to find different resources”
They “noticed my behaviors and the way that they approached you and you know spoke to me about it was very supportive instead of just like judgmental and it make me feel even more isolated and weird but they just spoke to me about it and were very supportive. Anything that I needed...they were willing to work with me. ... They totally respected me.. They were willing to go and do anything as long as I communicated with them and told them I was having some concerns.”
Implications and Recommendations

Veterans continue to face many challenges but need understanding faculty, open communication, flexibility, supportive interventions, and focus on strengths.

Encourage campus engagement and refer for use of resources/support

Further research
References


Methodology References