

# RESILIENCY AMONG FILIPINO NURSES IN THE FACE OF NURSE-TO-PATIENT RATIO

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## Abstract

**Background:** With increasing rates of migration and the complex challenges inherent in the Philippine healthcare system, there is a pressing need to comprehend strategies for retaining Filipino nurses within the healthcare industry.

**Purpose:** The objective of this study was to explore the extent of resilience demonstrated by Filipino nurses amidst the demanding nurse-to-patient ratios prevalent in their profession in the Philippines. The outcomes of this study hold the potential to augment existing literature on the challenges encountered by nursing professionals, particularly in terms of resilience dynamics.

**Methods:** Employing a descriptive-phenomenological approach, ten registered nurses from Bulacan Medical Center were selected as participants. The summary of findings underscores the resilience exhibited by Filipino nurses despite encountering obstacles such as nurse-to-patient ratio disparities, long working hours, and equipment shortages. This resilience, coupled with an unwavering dedication to patient care, exemplifies the indispensable contributions to the healthcare sector.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the study emphasizes the vital role of Filipino nurses in healthcare and the need to improve working conditions. Despite challenges, Filipino nurses demonstrate perseverance and commitment, contributing significantly to patient care and local healthcare development. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the recommendations aim for the betterment of the Filipino nurses, nursing service, nursing education, government hospitals, patients, and lastly, future researchers.

**Keywords:** Filipino Nurses, Resiliency, Nurse-To-Patient Ratio.

## Introduction

The Philippines exhibits a notable discrepancy in the nurse-to-patient ratio, hence elucidating the challenges encountered by Filipino nurses within the healthcare setting. Filipino nurses demonstrate resilience and adaptability in overcoming the obstacles and adversities presented by the prevailing circumstances in their country, owing to the magnitude of the crisis. As nurses are the largest occupational group in the medical health field, as reported by Kim and Chang (2022), nurses constitute the most prominent occupational cohort within the medical health sector constituting around 59% of the whole worldwide medical health workforce (WHO, 2020). In the Philippines, an estimated 80,000 individuals successfully complete their nursing education annually (Ortiga, 2018). As added by Danny (2019), 19,000 Filipino nurses migrate abroad every year.

The global scarcity of nurses has emerged as a significant issue, prompting nations in the developed regions of the world to adopt deliberate measures in the past few decades to address this challenge (Dahl et al., 2021). The nurse-to-patient ratio in the Philippines typically adheres to a standard of 1:20, reaching as high as 1:50, which significantly exceeds the mandated ratio of 1:12 set by the Philippine Department of Health (Tamayo et al.,

2022). The extended duration of shifts, ranging from 12 to 16 hours, without additional remuneration, can be attributed to the elevated nurse-to-patient ratio (Villanueva, 2023).

Consequently, the working conditions and employment agreements of Filipino nurses might be characterized as highly challenging, spanning from subpar to exploitative (Alibudbud, 2023). The increasing demands and complexities of the nursing profession have placed Filipino nurses in a conflicted position, leading to decisions to either leave their profession or seek employment opportunities overseas. The focus has been on the resilience of Filipino nurses in their ability to overcome the nurse-to-patient ratio in the country (Cooper et al., 2020). As mentioned by Wei et al. (2019); Guo et al. (2018); and Kelly, Gee, and Butler (2021), resilience has been posited as a potential remedy for burnout that is commonly experienced by nurses.

There is a need to fill the gap about utilizing resources that can help address the structural factors of burnout among nurses (Alibudbud, 2023) that lead to doubts about the nurse's resiliency. Resilience has been demonstrated to possess a conditioning effect, which can serve as a protective mechanism for nurses against external factors beyond their control, contributing to the creation of a work environment that is more conducive to effective management (Alameddine et al., 2021). Furthermore, Hofmeyer and Taylor (2021) identified a research gap in the future research requirements and investigation of nurses' long-term enduring job satisfaction. In this study, the intended scope of respondents was initially set to include individuals with a minimum of five years of working experience to identify the staff nurses' long-term experiences. However, the researchers might anticipate potential challenges in identifying respondents meeting this criterion. As a result, the study will attempt to fulfill the evaluation of Filipino nurses' resiliency with only at least three years of working experience.

The objective of this study was to examine the extent of resilience exhibited by Filipino nurses in the face of a challenging nurse-to-patient ratio. Thus, this study will also contribute to mitigating the emigration of Filipino nurses by providing a working environment where they can work effectively, provide outstanding patient care, and maintain their resilience. After comprehension of other related studies, the majority of which only focus on the reasons why Filipino nurses leave, led the researchers to focus on the reasons why Filipino nurses stay despite the existing Philippine healthcare system. The outcomes of this study may contribute to or supplement existing literature on

the resiliency imposed by nursing professionals. Due to the significant number of individuals receiving treatment in a government hospital, there are numerous immediate challenges that healthcare providers, as well as patients, are encountering. This offers an opportunity to alter and improve the techniques by which Filipino nurses maintain their resilience in the face of the aforementioned difficulties. The nurse-to-patient ratio plays an important role in patient safety, healthcare quality, nurse well-being, and the efficiency of healthcare delivery as a whole. It is a crucial factor to consider for policymakers and healthcare practitioners.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual paradigm of this study aimed to explore the phenomenon of resiliency among Filipino nurses in the face of the nurse-to-patient ratio. The study sought to understand how Filipino nurses could cope and thrive despite the challenges posed by an imbalanced nurse-to-patient ratio.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, data gathering was conducted through interviews and surveys with Filipino nurses. To achieve this, a self-made, semi-structured interview was employed as the research instrument which was developed in response to the participants' need for adaptability and flexibility in capturing their experiences and perspectives. These participants were asked about their experiences and perceptions regarding the nurse-to-patient ratio and how they managed to remain resilient in such circumstances. The collected data were then analyzed using Colaizzi's method which involved identifying common themes, patterns, and trends in the participants' responses. By examining these findings, the researchers aimed to gain insights into the factors that contributed to resiliency among Filipino nurses facing a high nurse-to-patient ratio.

Addressing this phenomenon involved drawing insights from the findings of the study and developing strategies and interventions that could enhance resiliency among Filipino nurses. These might have included providing additional support systems, implementing workload management techniques, or advocating for policy changes that prioritized patient safety and nurse well-being.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The objective of this study was to assess the resilience of Filipino nurses in response to the nurse-to-patient ratio challenges encountered in the Philippines. Specifically, this study aimed to address the following research inquiries:

### **Central Question**

What are the experiences of Filipino nurses regarding the nurse-to-patient ratio in the Philippines?

### **Probing Questions**

1. How do Filipino nurses effectively manage the substantial nurse-to-patient ratio?
2. How do Filipino nurses enhance their resilience in response to a significant nurse-to-patient ratio?
3. What insights can be drawn from the findings of the study?

### **Scope and Delimitation**

The focus of the study was to examine the extent of resilience among Filipino nurses in the face of a challenging nurse-to-patient ratio. It covered the only tertiary government hospital in Bulacan within the reach of the researchers and included Filipino nurses as the participants of the study. The participants were selected from the list, which was provided by the hospital's chief nurse according to the set criteria by the researchers. The participants underwent a one-on-one discussion with the researchers with strict compliance with data privacy that took fifteen (15) minutes of their time.

Thus, the study had inclusion criteria of currently employed registered staff nurses, male or female, working at a Tertiary Government Hospital at Malolos, Bulacan, particularly assigned at the General Ward Department—as this was considered the most occupied department available in the locale, and with a minimum of three (3) years of working experience. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria encompassed those who expressed an intention to relocate to a different ward or transfer to another healthcare facility, who had plans to migrate overseas, or who had a pending application for international relocation.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological approach. Participants in semi-structured interviews were able to openly communicate their lived experiences, revealing how they perceived and dealt with the challenges presented by nurse-to-patient ratios.

#### **Participants/Respondents of the Study**

The researcher utilized purposive and snowball sampling in identifying the key informants of this study. The individuals who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were accepted to be part of the study. An initial ten (10) participants were contacted and interviewed individually. The primary focus of the study was on the staff nurses who were currently employed at a tertiary government hospital in

Malolos, Bulacan, most frequently assigned to the General Ward Department.

### **Instrument/s of the Study**

The researchers used self-made, semi-structured interview questions which were checked by the research advisers, all licensed and capable of checking appropriate interview guide questions. Open-ended questions were utilized to conduct these interviews, encouraging participants to discuss their personal experiences and resilience-related coping mechanisms.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

As the study utilized a descriptive phenomenological technique, it was specifically guided by Colaizzi's method. The process of data analysis commenced after the transcription of the initial interview. The findings were deliberated upon with a panel of professionals to ensure a thorough investigation and accurate interpretation of the data.

### **Ethical Consideration/s**

The data collection was commended upon receiving the full approval and ethical clearance from the Research Committee of the University. The researcher adhered to the strict compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). The key informant's data was kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents.

The researchers explained the process of the interview to the participants to build trust and rapport. The documentation and transcribing of the information were done through utilizing pen and paper accompanied by mobile devices' audio recording as agreed upon by the researchers and key informants. In preservation for confidentiality, the researchers considered the use of code names for participants that were utilized for the whole extent of the study. They could expect that the information and transcriptions acquired during the interview remained safe and kept under the researcher's care during the span that it was needed.

Upon signing the consent form, the key informants were expected to understand that their participation was voluntary and would not be forced to participate. As they read and understand the information and terms mentioned, the participants developed trust towards the researchers and the process of the study. It is mentioned that the researchers had no hold and could not use the information and responses in anything outside the study. In case of sudden withdrawal, it is certain the reason won't be interrogated, there would be no risks or consequences to be given, and their decision will not affect them and their job. It was assured that everything was professional and the researchers

respected their decision. The participant's withdrawal or termination of involvement in the study at any time of the study would be equivalent to returning or destroying the data collected from the key informants.

## Results and Discussion

The research delves into enhancing resilience among Filipino nurses amidst the evolving healthcare landscape, acknowledging their renowned adaptability amidst challenges like migration and systemic inequality. It underscores factors influencing their intent to stay in healthcare, encompassing both positive and negative resilience, familial motivations, and unwavering dedication. Adequate compensation and supportive work environments are crucial for retention. The first theme comprises sub-themes regarding resilience application in the nursing profession, dealing with work exhaustion, and patient influence on nurses' service. Strategies for bolstering resilience include mental health support, professional development, and peer companionship. Filipino nurses demonstrate exceptional flexibility, adjusting to new environments while utilizing an inherent motivation to accomplish their professional obligations. Their relentless commitment enhances their capacity to overcome obstacles and deliver exceptional care. Work exhaustion, though common, requires attention, with coping mechanisms varying from personal activities to ethical conduct. Establishing distinct boundaries between nurses' personal lives and work is imperative in preventing the convergence of concerns and mitigating work fatigue. Nurturing strong interpersonal connections establishes a supportive network that mitigates stress, fostering holistic well-being in the face of professional obstacles and exhaustion. Patient interactions significantly shape nurses' wisdom and experiences, with positive encounters fostering resilience and comfort and negative ones potentially leading to burnout or professionally managing a range of behaviors. Every interaction with a patient serves as an opportunity for nurses to learn and adapt, enhancing their capacity to deliver empathetic care in diverse situations.

The second theme comprises sub-themes regarding the challenges Filipino nurses confront in their work environment, such as existent nurse-to-patient ratios, longer working hours, and uncompensated salaries. In confronting the challenges posed by an existent nurse-to-patient ratio, the implementation of efficient task distribution, strategic time management, and adaptive approaches are vital. While categorizing patients based on urgency helps streamline care, the pressing issue of high patient ratios must be addressed to ensure nurses can deliver quality care without risking exhaustion or compromising patient well-being. Given the

frequent need for nurses to prolong their shifts as a result of inadequate staffing, it is crucial to acknowledge the detrimental effect this has on their ability to obtain adequate rest, leading to exhaustion and burnout. Nevertheless, in the middle of these challenges, prolonged working hours can also have a favorable result by merging off-duty days, providing chances for replenishment, and personal fulfillment. Despite receiving insufficient compensation for their work, nurses persistently exhibit a resolute commitment to their occupation, motivated by their passion for providing care. Nevertheless, the burden of handling substantial workloads without sufficient compensation highlights the necessity for adequate compensation to support their vital contributions to healthcare.

The third theme comprises sub-themes regarding cohesiveness collaboration, resourcefulness on equipment insufficiency, and strategies for dealing with work dilemmas. By cultivating a culture characterized by cohesiveness and collaboration, nurses go beyond their responsibilities to assist colleagues who are dealing with obligations or emergencies. The outcome encompasses not only high-quality nursing care but also the cultivation of strong and positive relations, which are crucial for guaranteeing patient welfare and professional satisfaction within healthcare teams. When faced with a lack of equipment, nurses demonstrate their creativity in utilizing alternative options by adapting to the situation while upholding strict standards of sterility to guarantee patient safety. This sometimes includes providing personal supplies as needed and demonstrating their constant commitment to giving high-quality care despite resource constraints. When facing work dilemmas, the act of collaborating with colleagues is extremely valuable as it promotes support and validation during challenging situations. Nurses uphold professional boundaries and prioritize patient care by emphasizing positive features, professionally managing patient negativity, and immediately resolving conflicts. By implementing measures to achieve work-life balance and acknowledging the contributions of colleagues, teamwork may be strengthened, and disagreements can be resolved, leading to a harmonious and productive work environment.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the study emphasizes the value of recognizing and assisting Filipino nurses, valuing their essential contribution to healthcare locally. There is a need to address workforce deficiencies and improve working conditions within the Philippine health care system as it stresses the importance of creating a patient-centric environment that not only enhances a nurse's well being but also improves the quality of patient care.

Within the dynamic field of nursing, Filipino nurses demonstrate remarkable perseverance, adaptation, and unwavering commitment. They exhibit an unwavering commitment to providing high-quality treatment, even in the face of challenges such as managing limited resources, handling enormous workloads, promoting effective teamwork, and navigating patient encounters. By employing efficient collaboration, strategic methods for distributing tasks, and prioritizing the welfare of patients, Filipino nurses maintain high levels of professionalism while cultivating positive relationships and promoting creativity under challenging circumstances. Filipino nurses demonstrate remarkable resilience as they continue to serve their communities and contribute to the development of local healthcare in the Philippines, despite the challenges posed by the nurse-to-patient ratio.

### **Recommendations**

**Filipino Nurses.** It is recommended for Filipino nurses to actively participate in professional development opportunities that improve their abilities, understanding, and ability to adapt to problems in the healthcare industry. Engaging in additional education courses, certificates, and specialized training programs can enhance the skills and abilities of Filipino nurses, enabling them to excel in various healthcare environments. In addition, establishing networks and support organizations for Filipino nurses, both within the local community and on a global scale, can offer significant peer support and mentorship prospects. Moreover, by actively supporting their rights and welfare through professional associations and unions, Filipino nurses can gain the ability to collaboratively address problems like exploitation and insufficient working conditions. This, in turn, will contribute to a fair and more enduring nursing profession.

**Nursing Service.** It is recommended to foster an environment where healthcare professionals from various disciplines collaborate seamlessly. By doing so, teams can maximize the utilization of available resources and support staff nurses in managing their workload more effectively. This interdisciplinary approach encourages open communication, shared responsibilities, and collective problem-solving, ultimately enhancing patient care outcomes and promoting a more cohesive and efficient healthcare delivery system.

**Nursing Education.** It is recommended to address disparities in nurse-to-patient ratios, staff nurses should participate in extended education and training programs focusing on communication, stress management, and critical thinking. It is also recommended to implement relevant programs for

better training and guidance towards professional development for aspirant nurses and educators by providing a preferable academic environment. Continuous training and support are vital to enhancing proficiency in teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution to navigate challenging situations more efficiently.

**Government Hospitals.** It is essential to enact extensive governmental laws and regulations that are expressly designed to protect the rights and welfare of Filipino nurses. It is recommended that these regulations should include provisions to prevent exploitation, such as establishing explicit criteria for equitable remuneration, suitable working hours, and sufficient intervals for rest. In addition, implementing support mechanisms, such as counseling services and cultural integration programs, can assist Filipino nurses in overcoming difficulties in their host countries. Effective implementation and enforcement of these policies need collaborative efforts between the Philippine government and healthcare authorities in destination countries. This collaboration is crucial in creating a supportive and dignified work environment for Filipino nurses globally.

**Patients.** It is recommended to give priority to patient-centered care initiatives in healthcare systems that employ Filipino nurses. Establishing transparent communication lines between Filipino nurses and patients helps promote trust and improve the efficient delivery of care. Furthermore, by acknowledging and attending to the distinct requirements of Filipino patients, healthcare organizations can improve the overall patient experience and results.

**Future Researchers.** It is recommended to carry out longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term efficacy of governmental programs targeting the enhancement of the work environment and quality of care for Filipino nurses. Collaborative studies with interdisciplinary teams can offer a comprehensive comprehension of the complex elements that impact the well-being and work quality of Filipino nurses. Moreover, the act of spreading research discoveries via academic publications, conferences, and policy briefs can accelerate advocacy endeavors and provide valuable information for policymaking based on evidence, thus promoting long-lasting transformation in the nursing field.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this manuscript. Results have been deduced objectively; nothing influenced this result by any individual, monetary, or institutional interests. In effect, utmost endeavors were in order

to conduct a bias-free operation of gathering and analyzing the data into interpretation and producing a study based on merit, away from research inconsistencies.

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