

Abstract

Over the years, the constant shortage of nurses working on psychiatric wards has been a problem. It has affected the patients' treatment, been costly for the organisation and put increased strain on the nurses still employed. I, as a psychiatric nurse, have been very interested in gaining insight into how other psychiatric nurses experience their work. Therefore, the aim of this research was to study how nurses experience their work situations in psychiatric wards, both empowering and disempowering factors. I carried out the study according to the Vancouver School of Doing Phenomenology because the goal of this type of methodology is to understand individuals' lived experience. I used dialogues as a data collection method since within the Vancouver School research participants are seen as dialogue partners and co-researchers, rather than merely interviewees. Seven carefully chosen co-researchers, all women, with at least two years of psychiatric work experience, participated in the study, providing a total of fourteen dialogues.

Four main themes were constructed in the study and each is divided into three sub-themes. The first theme that was constructed was the importance of a good charge nurse and the leadership style she uses. Her importance was also revealed in how she influences other nurses both as a person and as a professional. My co-researchers felt that psychiatric nursing has a unique quality, as was revealed in the second theme, and that working in psychiatric nursing strengthens them as individuals in general. Good co-operation is important to my co-researchers, and so they deplore the prejudices that they and their patients encounter from other health care staff, as well as society at large. The third theme revealed that my co-researchers felt that psychiatric nursing was in crisis, due to all the changes and cut-backs that have been taking place in the health care system in general, along with lack of respect for their own profession that they thought was striking and regrettable. The final theme concerns the job-related stress that can arise from emotional distress, the feeling of powerlessness and from the sheer magnitude of the work load.

It seems to me that the psychiatric nurses' experience can be divided mainly into internal factors, related to their own profession and themselves as human beings, and external factors such as lack of financial and human resources that seem to affect them in many ways. My hope is that these findings will prove helpful when further organisation of psychiatric wards continues.