

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF REHABILITATION NURSES' INTERACTIONS WITH PATIENTS AT THE PROVINCIAL MENTAL HOSPITAL

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Abstracts

The interaction between psychosocial rehabilitation nurses and patients is an essential aspect of the recovery process for individuals with mental disorders and involves distinctive relational experiences in daily professional practice. This study aimed to explore and describe the meaning of rehabilitation nurses' experiences in interacting with patients at the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Unit of the Provincial Mental Hospital. This research employed a qualitative approach using transcendental descriptive phenomenology. Participants consisted of two rehabilitation nurses selected through purposive sampling based on their work experience and active involvement in psychosocial rehabilitation activities. Data were collected through three sessions of in-depth interviews with each participant and supported by non-participant observation. Data analysis was conducted through a stepwise coding process to identify essential experiential themes. The findings revealed three major themes: interaction with patients as a source of meaning in nurses' lives, discovering meaning through accompanying patients' suffering, and nurses' self-transformation through deep involvement with patients. Interactions with patients were understood not only as professional relationships but also as human experiences that shaped self-reflection and nurses' perspectives on life. The study concludes that these experiences reflect a process of meaning-making as explained in Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy. This study recommends the provision of reflective psychological spaces for rehabilitation nurses to support emotional well-being and strengthen work meaning in mental health services.

Keywords : nurse-patient interaction, psychosocial rehabilitation, phenomenology, meaning in life, logotherapy

1. Introduction

Mental disorders remain one of the major global health challenges that require serious attention not only from medical perspectives but also from psychosocial dimensions. In Indonesia, the prevalence of emotional mental disorders and severe mental illnesses remains relatively high, indicating the need for comprehensive rehabilitative mental health services. In this context, mental hospitals play an important role in supporting patients' recovery processes,

including through psychosocial rehabilitation services.

Psychosocial rehabilitation units focus on restoring patients' social, emotional, and functional abilities so they can adaptively reintegrate into society. In implementing psychosocial rehabilitation, rehabilitation nurses play a crucial role because they directly interact with patients through various daily activities such as group therapy, vocational training, sports, and recreational programs.

Interactions between rehabilitation nurses and patients are not merely technical but also involve intensive and continuous interpersonal relationships. In mental health services, these relationships often involve emotional dynamics, empathy, self-reflection, and profound relational experiences. Sharma and Gupta (2023) explained that therapeutic communication is central to healthcare provider–patient relationships because it helps establish trust, safety, and patient engagement in the recovery process.

Previous studies have shown that helping professions, including nursing, can become sources of meaning-making through involvement in other people’s lives. Rahimi and Sharif (2022) found that relationships with patients and moral responsibility in caregiving strengthen nurses’ professional identity and work meaning. Similarly, Susanti, Lestari, and Wahyuni (2021) reported that rehabilitation nurses’ experiences in psychiatric hospitals were associated with patience, empathy, emotional exhaustion, and professional pride.

However, most studies on mental health nurses still focus on work stress, burnout, and coping strategies. Research specifically describing rehabilitation nurses’ subjective experiences in daily interactions with patients remains limited. In fact, such experiences may influence how nurses perceive themselves, their profession, and life more broadly.

Based on the researcher’s preliminary observations during an internship at the West Java Provincial Mental Hospital, rehabilitation nurses were found not only to perform professional duties but also to demonstrate deep emotional involvement with patients. Several nurses reported that accompanying patients taught them about

patience, emotional regulation, and the meaning of life.

Therefore, this study is important to understand how rehabilitation nurses experience and interpret their interactions with patients within the context of psychosocial rehabilitation. A phenomenological approach was employed to understand these experiences as directly lived by the nurses themselves

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using transcendental descriptive phenomenology. The phenomenological approach was chosen because the study aimed to understand the lived experiences of rehabilitation nurses in interacting with patients as directly experienced by them.

The research was conducted at the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Unit of the West Java Provincial Mental Hospital. Participants consisted of two rehabilitation nurses selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) actively working in the psychosocial rehabilitation unit, (2) having direct interaction experience with patients in rehabilitation activities, and (3) willing to participate throughout the research process.

The first participant was a 49-year-old female nurse with 26 years of work experience in a psychiatric hospital. The second participant was a 25-year-old male nurse with five years of experience in the psychosocial rehabilitation unit.

Data were collected through three sessions of in-depth interviews with each participant and supported by non-participant observation during rehabilitation activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide participants with the freedom to explain their experiences and interpretations openly.

Data analysis was carried out through stepwise coding processes involving data reduction, identification of meaning units, categorization of experiences, and formulation of essential themes. Member checking and data triangulation were also conducted to ensure research credibility.

3. Result

Data analysis generated three major themes describing rehabilitation nurses' experiences in interacting with patients at the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Unit of the West Java Provincial Mental Hospital

3.1. Interaction with Patients as a Source of Meaning in Nurses' Lives

Both participants described interactions with patients as emotionally meaningful experiences in their lives. Witnessing patients' recovery processes evoked feelings of pride, gratitude, and belief that their work possessed important humanitarian value.

Participant E stated that seeing patients strive for recovery motivated her in both personal life and professional work. She perceived her work as meaningful because she could help others overcome adversity.

Meanwhile, Participant A described that interactions with patients taught him about emotions, patience, and more thoughtful ways of viewing life.

3.2. Discovering Meaning through Accompanying Patients' Suffering

The second theme revealed that accompanying patients experiencing psychological suffering generated profound reflection among nurses. Both participants realized that patients' suffering taught them about resilience, life acceptance, and gratitude.

Participant E explained that observing patients struggling with mental illness made her appreciate life more and become more

patient in dealing with family problems.

Participant A stated that dealing with patients experiencing severe emotional conditions taught him emotional regulation and deeper understanding of others.

3.2. Self-Transformation through Deep Involvement with Patients

The third theme described personal transformation experienced by nurses as a result of intensive and continuous interaction with patients. These experiences influenced not only their professional lives but also their personal relationships outside work.

Participant E felt she became more patient with her family after becoming accustomed to handling various patient conditions in the rehabilitation unit. Meanwhile, Participant A reported that accompanying patients helped him become calmer and more reflective as a person.

These three themes indicate that rehabilitation nurses' interactions with patients are not merely professional working relationships but also human experiences that shape meaning-making and self-transformation.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that interactions between rehabilitation nurses and patients generate profound experiences of meaning in life and personal transformation. These findings support Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which explains that individuals are able to discover meaning through relationships with others, attitudes toward suffering, and self-transcendence. In the context of psychosocial rehabilitation, interactions with patients become more than professional obligations; they evolve into emotionally meaningful human encounters that influence nurses' psychological perspectives and personal development.

The first theme, interaction with patients



as a source of meaning in nurses' lives, indicates that nurses experience their work as personally valuable and emotionally rewarding. Through daily interactions with patients, participants perceived themselves as contributing to patients' recovery and well-being. This finding aligns with Frankl's concept of experiential values, which emphasizes that meaning can emerge through deep interpersonal encounters and emotional connectedness with others. Nurses who witness patients' improvement often develop feelings of pride, gratitude, and purpose because their work is perceived as having humanitarian significance.

This finding is consistent with Rahimi and Sharif (2022), who found that caring relationships with patients strengthen nurses' professional identity and enhance work meaning. Similarly, Hupkens et al. (2020) reported that mental health nurses often develop meaningful emotional attunement with patients, allowing them to perceive their work as morally and existentially significant. Such emotional involvement may function as a protective psychological resource that helps nurses maintain motivation despite demanding work conditions.

The second theme, discovering meaning through accompanying patients' suffering, reflects the existential process through which nurses reinterpret human suffering and develop greater psychological maturity. Participants described that observing patients' struggles with mental illness increased their gratitude, patience, and emotional understanding. This finding corresponds with Frankl's attitudinal values, which suggest that meaning can still be found in difficult situations through one's attitude toward suffering.

In helping professions, repeated exposure to suffering often produces emotional strain; however, it may also encourage existential reflection and growth. Rushton (2016)

explained that healthcare workers who are able to reflect meaningfully on emotionally difficult experiences tend to develop moral resilience, empathy, and psychological endurance. In this study, participants did not merely endure emotional challenges but transformed them into opportunities for personal learning and self-reflection.

This process may also be understood through the meaning-making theory proposed by Park (2013), which explains that individuals attempt to interpret stressful experiences in ways that restore psychological coherence and purpose. Through interactions with patients experiencing severe emotional difficulties, participants reconstructed their understanding of life, emotional control, and interpersonal relationships. As a result, suffering was not perceived solely as a burden but also as a source of psychological insight.

The third theme, self-transformation through deep involvement with patients, demonstrates that sustained therapeutic interactions influenced participants' personalities, emotional regulation, and interpersonal attitudes. Participants reported becoming calmer, more patient, and more reflective in their personal lives after working intensively with psychiatric patients. This finding reflects Frankl's concept of self-transcendence, in which individuals move beyond self-interest and become oriented toward the welfare and experiences of others.

Within psychosocial rehabilitation settings, nurses are consistently exposed to patients' emotional vulnerabilities, behavioral difficulties, and recovery processes. Such repeated interactions may foster emotional sensitivity and perspective-taking abilities. According to Schnell (2021), individuals who experience meaningful engagement with others often develop

stronger self-awareness and deeper existential understanding. In this study, the participants' professional experiences contributed not only to occupational competence but also to personal psychological growth.

The findings may also be interpreted through Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory. Participant E, who was in middle adulthood, demonstrated characteristics of generativity by perceiving caregiving as a meaningful contribution to others' lives. Meanwhile, Participant A, who was in early adulthood, interpreted his experiences more as opportunities for identity formation, emotional maturity, and interpersonal development. These developmental differences suggest that nurses' interpretations of their experiences may vary according to their psychosocial stage.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of emotional and psychological support systems for rehabilitation nurses. Although meaningful interactions may strengthen resilience and work satisfaction, prolonged emotional involvement with psychiatric patients may also increase vulnerability to compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Research by Susanti et al. (2021) showed that psychiatric rehabilitation nurses often experience emotional burdens alongside professional pride and empathy. Therefore, institutional support such as reflective supervision, peer support groups, and psychological counseling may help nurses maintain emotional well-being while preserving the meaningful aspects of their work.

Overall, this study demonstrates that rehabilitation nurses' interactions with patients are not limited to professional caregiving activities. Rather, these interactions become existential experiences that shape meaning-making, emotional

growth, and self-transformation. The study contributes to the understanding of mental health nursing by emphasizing the psychological and existential dimensions of rehabilitation nurses' lived experiences.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that interactions between rehabilitation nurses and patients at the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Unit of the West Java Provincial Mental Hospital create meaningful personal and professional experiences. Three major themes were identified: interaction with patients as a source of meaning in life, discovering meaning through accompanying patients' suffering, and self-transformation through deep involvement with patients.

These experiences indicate that nurse-patient relationships are understood not merely as professional relationships but also as human experiences that shape self-reflection, personal growth, and nurses' perspectives on life. These findings support Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy regarding meaning-making through interpersonal relationships, attitudes toward suffering, and self-transcendence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hospitals are expected to provide reflective spaces or psychological support for rehabilitation nurses to help them manage emotional experiences.

while accompanying patients. Furthermore, future studies may involve more participants or explore the experiences of other mental health professionals within psychosocial rehabilitation settings.

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