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A study the general evaluation of the COVID-19 pandemic experiences of Saudi nurse intern

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Abstract

Background: The COVID-19 epidemic likely increased the difficulty & stress level of the nursing internship program since it disrupted the normal flow of nursing education. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate what COVID-19 was like for nursing interns.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to investigate the field experiences of Saudi nursing interns during the epidemic.

Methods: A theme analysis & descriptive phenomenological research were employed in the study's design. Method: The study, which took place in Saudi Arabia, involved 18 nursing interns in all. Internships were available to participants in five cities across Saudi Arabia at various public hospitals. Data collection from the participants was carried out through unstructured individual interviews.

Results: Five overarching themes emerged from the data: a lack of knowledge and abilities, a strong sense of family, extreme caution, & lack of orientation.

Conclusion: The study's results show that COVID-19 nurse interns' knowledge gaps, familial issues, & workplace all contributed to their difficulties throughout their internship programs.

Keywords: COVID-19, internship, Nurse, Saudi, university

1. Introduction

With the COVID-19 pandemic posing unprecedented challenges to healthcare systems around the world, frontline healthcare workers are fighting a global health crisis like never before. This group includes the hardworking nurse interns who, on top of dealing with all the challenges inherent in their early years of professional practice, were suddenly forced into the middle of the epidemic. This study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic experiences of Saudi Arabian nurse interns, illuminating their distinct viewpoints, difficulties, & contributions throughout this crucial time.

As members of the healthcare industry's next generation of frontline caregivers, nursing interns are indispensable. We can learn about the pandemic's effects on their careers & healthcare system as a whole by looking at their experiences first hand. Like their colleagues around the world, Saudi Arabian nursing trainees dealt with the emotional toll of caring for seriously ill patients in an unpredictable and ever-changing environment, increased patient loads, or changing clinical protocols as the pandemic progressed. The purpose of this study is to investigate and record the many facets of the COVID-19 pandemic experiences of Saudi Arabian nursing interns. Gaining unique insights into healthcare professionals' perspectives, coping methods, & thoughts on problems encountered can influence strategies for supporting and increasing their resilience. This is particularly important for those in the early phases of their professions. In addition to safeguarding the safety & efficacy of healthcare workers in Saudi Arabia and abroad, learning about the unique experiences of nursing interns can help improve healthcare crisis planning and response processes.

This setting has had a significant effect on nurses all across the globe ^[1-2]. Nurses face new clinical obstacles in caring for patients with the coronavirus, which impacts their ability to provide high-quality treatment ^[3]. Statistically significant themes have been identified from the many papers that have detailed the experiences of frontline nurses during the pandemic, particularly during its initial stages ^[4-5]. Despite the fact that within the same setting, first-line nurses or nurse managers may have diverse experiences owing to their distinct tasks, the majority of investigations centered on first-line nurses who directly cared for patients, while

nurse managers received less attention. Suspending classes & internship programs during the pandemic was necessary to reduce the danger of students and patients contracting COVID-19^[8], which had a negative impact on student nurses' learning^[9]. Despite the availability of online classes, students were unable to participate in internships, which prevented them from obtaining valuable practical experience. The Saudi Arabian internship program was revived in the beginning of 2021. But the intern nurses' sense of safety and actual safety were called into doubt. During the epidemic, nursing interns were more concerned about questions related to safety. According to Eweida *et al.*^[10], nursing students faced a difficult choice: prioritize patient care or ensure their personal safety. The decision to treat COVID-19 patients or to quit one's internship was up to nursing students in the UK^[11]. While most nursing interns report feeling comfortable and prepared for their clinical rotations because to their training^[12], this might change if their experiences prove to be too taxing and cause them to lose focus and energy. Most nurse interns worry about fatigue and stress at work^[13]. Difficult experiences can cause these problems. Building self-esteem, receiving positive reinforcement, and working on one's own personal growth might mitigate these effects, albeit^[14]. As a result of participating in the internship program, student nurses are able to hone their analytical abilities, creative capacities, and capacity for work-related adaptation^[6]. Internships help aspiring nurses develop their skills and passion for their career, as well as their professional and personal lives^[7]. The research question, "What was the experience of nurse interns during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia?" was developed to address the lack of studies in Saudi Arabia regarding the experience of nurse interns during the pandemic, as there have been several studies on this topic elsewhere.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design

A conceptual method & descriptive phenomenology qualitative research were used in the study to investigate the experiences of nursing interns during the pandemic^[15].

2.2. Sample

The study's 18 participants were drawn from three different Riyadh University campuses: Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Prince Sultan University, & King Abdul-Aziz University Hospital. Their internship program had been running for six to twelve months before these participants joined. Using the purposive sample technique, we selected participants according to their availability & desire to take part. New nurse interns were not eligible since participants had to have been in the program for at least three months. After 18 individuals were interviewed, data saturation was reached. Data saturation is reached when no new data emerges (p. 587), according to Lincoln and Guba^[16], and is 'the most commonly invoked guarantee of qualitative rigor,' according to Morse^[17]. Based on their findings, Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi^[18] conclude that 16–24 interviews are sufficient to reach saturation.

2.3. Data Collection

In order to collect data from the participants, researchers used unstructured individual interviews that took place between December 2021 – February 2022. As part of the unstructured

approach, we asked participants fundamental questions that prompted them to open up about their experiences as nursing interns during the epidemic. The interviews took place in person, at the participant's convenience, at their chosen time & place. To minimize interruptions, most of the interviews took place on campus, in a quiet corner of a coffee shop, or in an otherwise empty coffee shop. After asking participants to recount their internship experiences during the pandemic, we followed up with questions designed to delve deeper into their stories. The interview duration for each participant was forty to sixty minutes. Researchers listened to audio recordings, annotated them with data, coded them, manually extracted phrases, & generated themes after data collection was complete. To ensure the data was accurate, an outside qualitative researcher checked it.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted ethically and written agreement was obtained before it was carried out, according to the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of Riyadh University in Saudi Arabia (Ethics Approval No. ERC_SU_20210044, dated 2 November 2021). Everyone who took part in the study did so voluntarily. In order to maintain their anonymity, the nursing interns were assigned code names. In order to maintain the interns' anonymity, the researchers avoided using any terms that could link the interns' identities to their internship or employer. Additionally, for privacy reasons, the data was stored on a password-protected computer and not shared with anyone. Lastly, the researcher made sure to get the agreement of every nursing intern who took part in the study before recording their interview. In order to ensure the data was accurate, an external assessor was granted permission to listen to the recording. Then, once the study was over, the recording was erased.

2.5. Analysis of Data

Investigators used the following steps for evaluating the data using the thematic approach: (1) getting to know the data, (2) coding it, (3) finding patterns in the codes & developing initial themes, (4) examining the themes by comparing them to the data or reading the dataset again, (5) giving each theme a name and defining it, and (6) writing up the outcomes of the thematic analysis^[19]. Every researcher went over the transcript files and coded them by hand after data transcription. After reducing the 80 codes retrieved from the data to 10, themes were formed. Reflecting the experiences of nursing interns during the COVID-19 epidemic, five themes were discovered in this study.

2.6. Continuity and reliability

In order to make sure the study was thorough and trustworthy, we followed standards for credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, & reflexivity^[16]. In order to verify the accuracy of the data, the researcher meticulously reviewed each transcript to identify commonalities & trends across the nursing interns' accounts. In addition, the study's findings or each participant's transcript files were reviewed by an outside reviewer. In order to further illustrate their experiences, participants were also requested to go over the extracted codes & themes. While analyzing the data, the researchers used techniques such as reflexivity, member verification, peer assessment, & peer debriefing. In order to eliminate bias and guarantee that the researchers' own views

would not impact the study's findings, the external evaluator also assisted them in expressing their sentiments about the internship program during the epidemic.

3. Results

The majority of the participants were men, and their ages

ranged from 22 to 27^[20]. Clinical rotations for students were mostly in the following areas: outpatient departments (OPDs), emergency rooms (ERs), renal units, surgical units, intensive care units (ICUs), obstetric and pediatric units, & medical and surgical wards (see Table 1).

Table 1: Illustrate the Participant Profile.

Participants	Age	Gender	Months as Nurse Intern	Area of Clinical Assignment
Nurse intern (NI)1	22	Female	8	ER, Renal Unit, Obstetric and Paediatric Ward
Nurse intern (NI)2	23	Female	8	ER, Renal Unit, Surgical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)3	23	Female	8	ICU, Medical Ward, Obstetric and Paediatric Ward
Nurse intern (NI)4	23	Male	7	ER, Renal Unit, Medical Ward, Surgical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)5	23	Male	8	ER, Surgical Ward, ICU, Medical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)6	22	Male	8	ER, Renal Unit, Medical Ward, ICU
Nurse intern (NI)7	23	Male	7	ER, Renal Unit, Surgical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)8	25	Male	8	ER, Surgical Ward, ICU, Medical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)9	23	Male	8	ER, Surgical Ward, ICU, Medical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)10	23	Female	8	ER, Renal Unit, Obstetric and Paediatric Ward, ICU
Nurse intern (NI)11	23	Female	8	ER, Renal Unit, Surgical Ward, Obstetric and Paediatric Ward
Nurse intern (NI)12	23	Female	8	ER, Surgical Ward, ICU, Obstetric and Paediatric Ward
Nurse intern (NI)13	25	Female	8	ER, Renal Unit, Surgical Ward, Obstetric and Paediatric Ward
Nurse intern (NI)14	24	Male	9	ER, Surgical Ward, ICU, Medical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)15	25	Male	6	ER, Renal Unit, Surgical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)16	25	Male	9	ER, Surgical Ward, ICU, Medical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)17	26	Male	9	ER, Renal Centre, Surgical Ward
Nurse intern (NI)18	27	Male	12	ER, Renal Unit, Surgical Ward, Medical Ward, ICU, OPD

The purpose of this research was to examine how nursing interns fared during the COVID-19 outbreak. The data was extracted by hand by the researchers. This research reflected the experiences of nursing interns during the COVID-19 epidemic and found five overarching themes. These characteristics include a lack of information & expertise, a strong sense of family loyalty, extreme caution, and a general sense of disorientation.

3.1. Being Enthusiastic

It doesn't matter the patient's state or the type of sickness; what matters is that the participants are committed about giving exceptional nursing care. In addition, the participants' great devotion to their future nursing roles and responsibilities was fueled by their belief that caring for others was a divine calling: "It makes my desire, really & honestly, stronger, especially to be a nurse." As I gain a better understanding of the present crisis through reading, I am moved to action by a sense of urgency to aid those in need and by the conviction that my 'Allah' has commanded me to do so. The suffering of others touches me deeply. NI 12

"My ambition to become a nurse remained unchanged; in fact, it inspired me to grow a better nurse to help COVID patients or patients get the greatest assistance possible." This sentiment echoes throughout the nursing interns' responses, who generally expressed that the pandemic had no impact on their aspirations to enter the nursing profession. NI 14

As a result, they are better able to educate patients and their families or communicate effectively with them. While caring for patients and their families, they appeared to understand the importance of such communication & education. "I became the teacher of the family," one student said. Their well-being is my responsibility. Sanitation is something I instruct them on. NI 15.

3.2. Skill and knowledge gaps

The intern nurses in this study came to terms with the fact that they needed to educate themselves on the fundamentals of nursing after realizing that they were unprepared for their roles as healthcare providers. They brought up the fact that, when it comes to handling patients' illnesses, especially this new one, nursing knowledge is essential. To better handle any infectious disease that may arise in the future, it is critical to have knowledge about how to handle infectious diseases. In addition, for their personal well-being, they make sure to consistently follow infection control protocols:

"I realized the importance of nursing knowledge during this pandemic because, to be honest, I have no idea what I'm doing in the hospital. My confidence is low because I know I didn't take my university lectures seriously." (N) I8

"The significance of cleanliness & personal protection equipment (PPE) has only recently been brought to our attention. When it came to personal hygiene and safety, we used to not give a hoot. NI 15

Due to a lack of knowledge & skills impacted by the online classes delivered during the pandemic, some of the nurse interns in this study had difficulty providing nursing care to their patients. The students had to demonstrate their ability to autonomously perform nursing operations while honing their nursing knowledge & abilities, which meant drawing on the skills they had learnt in university:

"I really need to brush up on my nursing knowledge and abilities, so I hope I studied up." NI 16 "a lack of motivation brought on by the pandemic & inadequate clinical skill development as a result of online classes." NI 12

Staff nurses' lack of trust & excessive expectations made their internship program difficult and unpleasant, as they discovered during their time there. Interns had a hard time doing various nursing operations (that they could have done on their own) because they had a hard time earning the trust of the staff nurses:

"In the beginning of my training, it was challenging because I

sensed and saw that nurses wouldn't let us perform the procedures that we were confident in performing on our own." "I am not confident because I do not know enough about the subject." (NI 4). The nurses expect us to start providing care right away, so I need to read up on what we will be covering in class. However, there are nurses who refuse to trust us and who refuse to let us perform surgeries on their patients because they do not believe in our abilities. The need to prove ourselves makes it difficult. Another adjustment I'm having to make is following the protocols & rules laid out by the Ministry of Health about the COVID-19 pandemic. NI 8.

3.3. Feeling Worried About Their Family

The mental toll that COVID-19 took on the interns' loved ones was difficult for them to bear. Their loved ones were concerned about their well-being & possibility of contracting the COVID-19 virus. Consequently, they were not allowed to participate in the internship program. "This pandemic makes a difference, & everyone has concerns about their health," the participant said. Concerned about the spread of infection, they share my family's aversion to my clinical training. I should probably clarify that the hospital has safeguards in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and that we have not been allocated to the COVID unit just yet. "I have to reassure my dad that my training is completely risk-free, and the hospital even gives us protective gear," NI 3.

As a group, nursing interns had a hard time convincing their loved ones that they were safe enough to participate in the program. The social media stigmatization of health care providers infected with COVID-19 while on the job likely impacted their families' decision to let them participate in the internship program. "My family is so worried... what I did was enable me to have my training because he was worried about my health. Consequently, explaining the nature and scope of their work and responsibilities during training helped ease and decrease the psychological struggle of their family members". During the training, he was concerned that I would contract an infection. Additionally, I could potentially bring the virus back home with me. NI 2

"I had to fill my mom in on the details of my trainee job at the hospital. I felt compelled to inform her that, although it was initially true that we were not allowed to treat COVID-19 patients in the intensive care unit (ICU), that changed once we were accustomed to our duties. Prior to my training, there were several clarifications. NI 1.

3.4. With Due Caution

Some nursing students were more careful with patients while they were interns. Careful management of environmental dangers & eradication of infection seemed to be their top priorities. Environmental health practices were followed by the nursing interns, who made sure to wash their hands often or disinfected surfaces that came into contact with patients who were suspected of having COVID-19. They also took precautions to avoid inhaling contaminated air by wearing face masks. In cases where I suspected a patient of having COVID-19, I took extra precautions by keeping my distance and wearing protective gear. As an additional precaution, I have always worn face masks. NI2.

When it comes to infection control, I make sure to wash my hands & use protective gear. It will keep me from becoming sick, I'm sure of it. Therefore, caring for a patient infected with COVID-19 does not frighten me. NI 17

As part of their training, nursing clinical interns became experts at preventing the spread of infection. "I am cautious about infection matters." This further highlights their increased understanding of the importance of putting patients' and employees' safety first. Because I don't want to spread the illness from patient to patient, I always wash my hands thoroughly prior to and after handling them. The responsibility for their infection will ultimately rest on my shoulders. To further safeguard both myself and other patients from potential infections, I make it a point not to touch any previously used equipment while interacting with patients. Even if they aren't known to be sick, I still take the usual measures. NI13

3.5. Experiencing Disorientation

The participants also faced the issue of inadequate orientation regarding their tasks & responsibilities during their internship program, which was caused by the understaffing of the hospitals. "I was confused about our role in the hospital because there wasn't enough staff to oversee us," one intern said, illustrating how staff nurses' workloads often got in the way of their students' education. The assignments were vague. An adequate orientation was not conducted. NI 15

4. Discussions

The purpose of this research was to examine the perspectives of Saudi Arabian nursing interns on the epidemic. Intern nurses in this study reported feeling unprepared for their clinical rotations. While a study out of Ireland found that the majority of nursing interns were ready to handle clinical duties, our results suggest that the pandemic had an impact on student nurses' ability to learn. The abrupt transition from traditional classroom instruction to online learning contributed to pupils' lack of background knowledge. Students reported having a hard time adjusting to and staying engaged in their online classes. This was mostly due to the fact that most of the practical lectures took place via online platforms like Google Meet, Zoom, or LMS, which the students felt were less conducive to learning since they could participate from anywhere—in their homes, cars, or even coffee shops—rather than in a dedicated classroom environment. Problems with focus and comprehension in class were a worldwide issue for nursing students [22]. Exercise caution; it is another important subject of this course. People were already worried about their health due to the stress and anxiety created by the uncontrollable spread of COVID-19, so they took even more precautions. The majority of participants felt that they gained more knowledge and enhanced their abilities in the area of infection control. Also, during the pandemic, the majority of Americans followed basic hygiene practices like washing their hands & sanitizing surfaces to avoid contracting the COVID-19 virus [23].

While caring for patients, nursing interns also helped stop the pandemic's spread by following the protocols set out by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO). To top it all off, the nursing interns' views on infection control measures shifted, and now they see them as crucial for stopping the epidemic in its tracks. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a research found that people were more likely to take precautions [32]. Thus, nursing students learned that Nightingale's theory of nursing supported the preventative actions implemented during the COVID-19 epidemic. Health care providers, according to

Florence Nightingale, should work to ensure their patients' continued good health and provide their most fundamental medical requirements by reducing the spread of illness [24]. Also, Nightingale said that the first line of defense against illness was the house [25]. So, by educating their families, nursing interns did their part. Understaffing during the epidemic was another consequence found in the study. During the epidemic, understaffing was a major problem for all organizations [26]. The shortage of experienced nurses to offer orientation & supervision made it difficult for nursing interns to learn and improve their abilities. Because mentorship is crucial in growing the knowledge & abilities of nursing students, this issue had a snowball effect on nurse interns, preventing them from learning enough to become competent future nurses [27]. Despite the risks to their health, the nurse interns were nevertheless determined to complete their internship program. The enthusiasm and commitment of the nurse interns to providing and maintaining high-quality care drives their work ethic. In a similar vein, an American study found that nursing students were eager to help out in hospitals when asked [28]. As a result, the eagerness and commitment of nursing interns contribute to their positive perception of their work. Because Muslims value their relationships with Allah, their family, and friends, this behavior is second nature to them [29].

5. Conclusions

The study's results show that nursing interns value their responsibilities as educators & communicators, know the necessity of infection control, and see nursing as their vocation and happiness. Intern nurses' difficulties during COVID-19 stemmed from a combination of factors, including familiarity with the disease, support from family or friends, and the nature of the workplace. Furthermore, online lessons had an effect on the knowledge & abilities of nursing interns, and the shame associated with social media posts that were seen by family members was another challenge. The impact of understaffing on their function as nursing interns was another issue they encountered, along with the staff nurses' lack of trust & high expectations. Nursing schools and other healthcare facilities should ensure that their students have a solid foundation in both theory and practice before letting them participate in clinical rotations, according to the study's results. It is the responsibility of the educational institution to guarantee that nursing interns have participated in suitable activities. Additionally, the hospital's mentorship programs might use some work to guarantee that each nursing intern has a designated nurse to check in with them, monitor their progress, & help them with any additional training they may require. In order to help their nursing interns learn as much as possible, training facilities should have a designated training officer on staff. Additionally, clinical coordinators should visit nursing interns at least once a month to oversee their progress, assess their needs, and coordinate their education, and nursing schools should keep tabs on student activities across all learning facilities. When it comes to clinical education, schools should make sure that online resources like videos and case studies provide students with the best possible information to apply in the real world. Note that future research should look at how mentorship affected the learning experience of the nursing interns or what kinds of leadership abilities mentors possessed, as these were not the primary foci of this study.

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7. Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest has been disclosed by the writers.

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