



Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

**AN EXPLORATION OF UNIMAS FINAL-YEAR NURSING STUDENTS'
EXPERIENCES IN MENTAL HEALTH CLINICAL PRACTICUM**

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EXPERIENCES IN MENTAL HEALTH

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
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ABSTRACT

Background: The prominence of mental disorders is a critical focal point in current global health discourse. In nursing education, integrating mental health clinical practicum is essential for fostering learning, skill development, and experiential involvement with individuals impacted by mental health challenges. However, existing research reveals that nursing students often possess unfavourable attitudes toward mental health nursing and express insufficient readiness to effectively engage with individuals experiencing mental health challenges. This study aims to explore the experiences of final-year nursing students during their mental health clinical practicum. **Methods:** This descriptive qualitative study utilised a semi structured; face-to-face interviews (n=13) in exploring the experiences of UNIMAS final-year nursing students during their mental health clinical practicum. In this context, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify themes and subthemes during data analyzation. **Findings:** Results showed that the nursing students' preliminary perspectives towards individuals affected by mental health illness were mixed between positive and negative perceptions. However, by the end of the practicum, the nursing students experienced self-transformation and development. The mental health clinical practicum also serves as a prospect for knowledge acquisition, despite facing challenges ranging from pedagogic complexities, professional impediments, and personal hardships. In order to cope with the range of challenges, the nursing students revealed the coping strategies that were employed. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study indicate that the mental health clinical practicum yields both favourable outcomes and numerous challenges to nursing students. Consequently, this research offers valuable insights for educators in terms of designing and implementing clinical education programs that foster a constructive learning milieu, thereby optimizing the educational experience. **Keywords:** Nursing students, mental health clinical practicum, experiences, challenges, coping strategies

ABSTRAK

Latar belakang: Penonjolan penyakit mental adalah titik fokus kritikal dalam wacana kesihatan global semasa. Dalam pendidikan kejururawatan, pengintegrasian latihan praktikum klinikal kesihatan mental adalah penting untuk menggalakkan pembelajaran, perkembangan kemahiran, dan penglibatan secara eksperimental dengan individu yang mempunyai kesihatan mental yang terjejas. Walau bagaimanapun, penyelidikan sedia ada mendedahkan bahawa pelajar kejururawatan sering mempunyai sikap yang kurang menyenangkan terhadap kejururawatan psikiatrik dan menyatakan kesediaan yang tidak mencukupi untuk melibatkan diri secara berkesan dengan individu yang mengalami cabaran kesihatan mental. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka pengalaman pelajar kejururawatan tahun akhir semasa menjalani praktikum klinikal kesihatan mental. **Kaedah:** Kajian kualitatif deskriptif ini menggunakan kaedah separa berstruktur; temu bual bersemuka (n=13) dalam meneroka pengalaman pelajar kejururawatan tahun akhir UNIMAS semasa menjalani praktikum klinikal kesihatan mental. Dalam konteks ini, analisis tematik (Braun & Clarke, 2006) digunakan untuk mengenalpasti tema dan subtema semasa analisis data. **Dapatan:** Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa perspektif awal pelajar kejururawatan terhadap individu yang terjejas oleh penyakit mental adalah bercampur antara persepsi positif dan negatif. Walau bagaimanapun, pada akhir praktikum, pelajar kejururawatan mengalami transformasi dan perkembangan diri. Praktikum klinikal kesihatan mental juga berfungsi sebagai prospek untuk pemerolehan pengetahuan, walaupun menghadapi cabaran daripada kerumitan pedagogi, halangan profesional dan kesukaran peribadi. Untuk menghadapi pelbagai cabaran, pelajar kejururawatan mendedahkan strategi daya tindak yang digunakan. **Kesimpulan:** Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa praktikum klinikal kesihatan mental membuahkan hasil yang menggalakkan dan memberi penerangan terhadap pelbagai cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pelajar kejururawatan. Akibatnya, penyelidikan ini menawarkan pandangan yang berharga untuk pendidik dari segi mereka bentuk dan melaksanakan program pendidikan klinikal yang memupuk persekitaran pembelajaran yang konstruktif di samping mengoptimumkan pengalaman pendidikan. **Kata kunci:** Pelajar kejururawatan, praktikum klinikal kesihatan mental, pengalaman, cabaran, strategi daya tindak

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

Keys or symbols	Meaning(s)
Name	Pseudonyms were used for all the participants to maintain confidentiality throughout the study.
Ellipses (...)	This symbol appears in excerpts to indicate when the participant is trailing off or has a pause in a sentence.
Brackets []	This symbol indicates words added to the transcription that the interviewee did not mention, to explain certain abbreviations, or translate a word in another language into English.
Slashes (...//...)	This symbol appears in excerpts to represent breaks in the interview. The selected phrases by the participants highlight important points expressed by the participants.

Adapted from Peraza (2019)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, and objectives of the research followed by the significance of the study, definition of terms used in the study and a summary of the chapter.

1.1 Background of the study

The prevalence of mental disorders is at the forefront of current global health concerns. It became an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda to transform the world by 2030 (World Health Organization, 2022). The global prevalence of mental health disorders is 970 million in 2019, with an estimated one billion people suffering from mental health issues by 2022 (World Health Organization, 2022). Hence, to summarize, in the span of 3 years, there has been an increase of 30 million people in the world living with mental health challenges. Furthermore, the 2022 World Mental Health Report reported that due to poor access to care, particularly in low-income countries, up to 71 percent of people with psychosis are currently not receiving any mental health treatment (World Health Organization, 2022). Another alarming statistic that was published addresses the mental health of children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19, whose mental health conditions are largely undiagnosed and untreated (World Health Organization, 2022). These following data statistics demonstrates the pressing need to improve the provision of care towards the society suffering from mental health challenges.

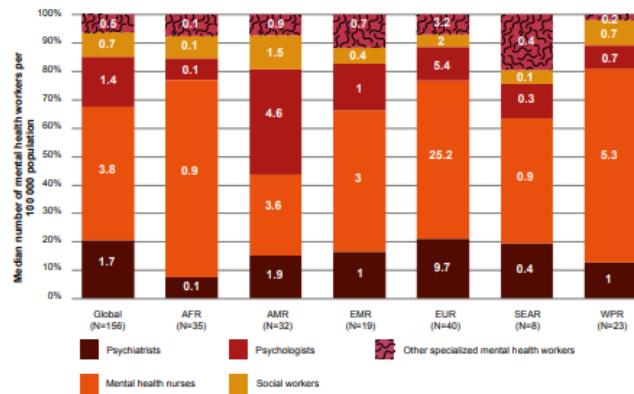


Figure 1.1. Breakdown of mental health workforce (median number per 100 000 population) by WHO region (Mental Health Atlas, 2020, p.64)

As published in the Mental Health Atlas 2020, globally nurses represent 44 percent of the mental health workforce while up to 68 percent in the Western Pacific Region (WPR) where Malaysia is located. This shows how crucial nurses are in the provision of care towards people with mental health challenges. Hence, preparing, and gearing nursing students to deal and provide care to people with mental health challenges is extremely important.

A majority of nursing students experience their first encounter in caring for psychiatric patients during mental health practicum (Furr, 2014). Despite theoretical education, nursing students frequently held onto their stereotypes, assuming that psychiatric patients are violent, aggressive, and inclined to use violence (Demir & Ercan, 2018). As according to Julia-Sanchis et al. (2019), addressing nursing students' negative attitudes regarding mental health are crucial since this can later affect the quality of care rendered to patients with mental health challenges as therapeutic relationships may be difficult to establish. Hence, nursing school offers mental health clinical practicum as an important setting for nursing students to learn, develop, and gain experience working with people who have mental illnesses (Slemon, 2017).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to Samari et al. (2018), regardless of whether nursing students choose to work in mental health nursing or in another field of nursing in the future, they will almost certainly come across patients with mental health challenges. Research suggests that nursing students may still have negative views on mental health nursing and may not feel sufficiently competent to work with individuals suffering from mental illnesses despite completing their mental health clinical practicum (Slemon, 2017; Bennett, 2021). In a study done by Hunter et al. (2015), only 34% of nursing students felt prepared to nurse patients with mental health challenges after their mental health practicum. Additionally, studies have shown that students consistently characterize the mental health clinical practicum as a major source of stress, including worries about their own safety in the clinical setting and fears of violent patients (Slemon et al., 2018). Therefore, the ability to cope is the most important skill to have and cultivate in nursing students in order to help them adjust and control their stress (Hamaideh et al., 2016). Through understanding how student nurses can better manage their stress in the clinical settings will help to produce more competent nurses in the future (Chin et al., 2020). Nursing students need a supportive environment to develop their knowledge and skill competencies during clinical practice (Chin et al., 2020).

Clinical placements are immensely valuable to the development of future nurses; however, there exists a challenge to establish more high-quality and enhanced opportunities that help supports student learning (Happell et al., 2015). Furthermore, the mental health clinical practicum is considered as a crucial process in which nursing students apply theoretical knowledge in real-life situations. (Alshowkan and Kamel, 2016; Demir and Ercan, 2018). There is a scarcity of research that explores nursing students' experiences with clinical practicum in mental health. This curtails the development of strategies for dealing with students' negative clinical experiences and inadequate preparation. In a broader context, these

gaps hinder strategies to encourage nurses' pursuit of a career in mental health nursing, contributing to a global shortage of mental health nurses. Therefore, to address gaps in understanding, a descriptive qualitative study will be conducted to explore UNIMAS final-year nursing students' experiences in mental health clinical practicum.

1.3 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of UNIMAS final-year nursing students during their mental health clinical practicum?
2. What challenges did UNIMAS final-year nursing students face during their mental health clinical practicum?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of UNIMAS final-year nursing students during their mental health clinical practicum?

1.4 Research Objectives

A research study designed to address the research questions has the following general and specific research objectives:

General Objective: To gain deep understanding of UNIMAS final-year nursing students' experiences in mental health clinical practicum.

Specific Objectives:

1. To explore the experiences of UNIMAS final-year nursing students during mental health clinical practicum.

2. To identify the challenges faced by UNIMAS final-year nursing students during mental health clinical practicum.
3. To explore the coping mechanisms of UNIMAS final-year nursing students during their mental health clinical practicum.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study on exploring nursing students' experiences during their mental health clinical practicum will contribute distinctive and original data to the body of nursing knowledge because no research on exploring nursing students' experiences during their mental health clinical practicum has been conducted in Sarawak, Malaysia.

The Department of Nursing (DoN), UNIMAS nursing lecturers and clinical instructors are the first group that can benefit from this study. The results of this study can be utilised to refine the focus of mental health education as well as enhance the quality of mental health education offered to students. Additionally, nursing students' performance in the mental health clinical practicum can be assessed using the findings to further evaluate the current curriculum that is implemented.

The UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students are the second group that stands to gain from this study. The results of this study may help students adopt a more understanding perspective on people who struggle with mental health conditions. The outcomes of this research can also further enhance the mental health education received by the students to assist them in their preparation to work with people who have mental health challenges as future nurses.

1.6 Definition of Terms

a) Experience

According to Cambridge Dictionary (2019), experience is defined as knowledge or skill gained from doing, seeing, or feeling things. In this study, experience is discussed in the context of UNIMAS final-year nursing students' attitudes, knowledge, and feelings about their mental health clinical practicum.

b) Clinical Practicum

Clinical practicum is defined as a supervised clinical experience for the purpose of on-site, in-person professional training (American Psychology Association, 2022). In this study, clinical practicum refers to the Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing practicum course undertaken during the third year of nursing studies in UNIMAS.

1.7 Summary

Throughout the chapter, the study will be focusing on the exploration of nursing students' experiences during their mental health clinical practicum. An exploration on this topic will provide answers to the research question, problem statements mentioned as well as objectives, hence fulfilling the significance of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale for this study, reviews related past research on the topic, and makes recommendations for future research on nursing students' experiences during their mental health clinical practicum. The information in this literature review was obtained from Google Scholar, Elsevier, PubMed, and Research Gate. The keywords used for this literature review comprises of "mental health clinical practicum," "nursing students," "experiences," "coping," and "Malaysia". The articles gathered range in date from 2014 to 2022. The outcomes of the literature review are divided into four main sections: (1) Malaysia: Provision of mental health service; (2) Experiences of nursing students with mental health clinical practicum; (3) Challenges faced by nursing students; (4) Coping mechanisms applied by nursing students.

2.1 Malaysia: Provision of mental health service

In Malaysia, there are four mental hospitals, two of which are in Peninsular Malaysia while the remaining two in Borneo (Midin et al., 2018). Each hospital serves a particular state's defined population region (Midin et al., 2018). Peninsular Malaysia is divided into two regions: Hospital Permai Johor Bahru is in the south of Peninsular Malaysia, and Padang Hospital Bahagia Ulu Kinta is in the north. In Borneo, there are two mental hospitals: Hospital Sentosa, in Sarawak, and Hospital Mesra Bukit Padang, in Sabah.

Upper-middle-income nations like Malaysia are expected to commit an average of 2.4% of their budgetary resources to mental health, according to the Mental Health Atlas 2017 (Chua,

2020). However, in 2017 and 2018, Malaysia's Ministry of Health allocated 1.3% of the total healthcare budget to mental health (Chua, 2020). As a result, maintaining the current model of care while developing and implementing evidence-based practises are challenging for Malaysia's mental health sector (Raaj et al., 2021).

Psychiatric care for children, adolescents, and the elderly is another specialised service offered in Malaysian hospitals, but it is still insufficient to meet the demands of the population (Midin et al., 2018). Malaysia's overall human resource levels for mental health are low compared to those of other countries, which makes it difficult to expand mental health services across the country (Midin et al., 2018)

2.2 Experiences of nursing students with mental health clinical practicum

This section explores five recurring findings in the research literatures for nursing students' experiences with mental health clinical practicum, including stigma and stereotypes, stress and anxiety, exposure to unsafe nursing practice, career prospect, and personal development.

2.2.1 Stigma and stereotypes

Research suggests that nursing students continue to harbour stigma and negative stereotypes towards people with mental health challenges despite receiving prior theoretical educating in class. In a research study conducted by Cha et al. (2020), on Korean nursing students' encounters with people with mental health challenges in the mental health unit during their first clinical placement, nursing students frequently perceive patients with mental health challenges as violent and uncontrollable. Additionally, nursing students' experiences in Saudi Arabia and Turkey during their respective mental health clinical practicum resulted in similar negative

perceptions of patients with mental health challenges (Alhamidi & Alyousef, 2021; Demir & Ercan, 2018). The literatures explored in this section suggests that the biggest factor contributing to stigma and stereotypes towards people with mental health challenges stems from societal stigma and social media (Cha et al., 2020; Alhamidi & Alyousef, 2021; Demir & Ercan, 2018).

2.2.2 Stress and anxiety

A qualitative study done by Cha et al. (2020), revealed that nursing students experience stress and anxiety due to not knowing what to expect during their mental health clinical practicum. Nursing students also experience stress and anxiety due to the burdensome of assignments and the exhaustion of continuing to maintain therapeutic relationships with people with mental health challenges during their mental health practicum (Cha et al., 2020). Another study on nursing students' anxiety in mental health practicums indicate students also experience anxiety due to the belief that patients with mental health issues may become more violent as their condition worsens (Demir & Ercan, 2018).

2.2.3 Exposure to unsafe nursing practice

Research conducted by Slemon (2017), showed that nursing students in Canada witnessed a number of harmful nursing practices during their mental health clinical practicum. In this literature, one of the practices that the nursing students were exposed to includes administering *pro re nata* (PRN) medications as a substitute for therapeutic patient engagement. This could affect the nursing student's quality of care rendered to people with mental health challenges in the future if they decide to adopt this practice as a future registered nurse.

2.2.4 Career prospect

In a research study by Alhamidi and Alyousef (2021), revealed that the students expressed no desire to work in mental health nursing due to the stressful environment of psychiatric nursing. However, in a study conducted by Cha et al. (2020), shows that the nursing students in Korea were motivated to pursue a career in mental health nursing after completing their mental health clinical practicum. These different findings in the research articles shows the different ways students navigate through their experiences during their respective mental health clinical practicum. A qualitative study done by Slemon et al. (2019) stated that negative practicum experiences had a significant impact on nursing students' decisions not to pursue careers as mental health nurses. Similar findings were reported in a qualitative study conducted by Rahmani et al. (2021) which showed that the lack of interest in pursuing a profession in mental health nursing was due to exposure to negative experiences working with psychiatric patients during the training.

2.2.5 Personal development

According to a study by Cha et al. (2020), Korean nursing students learned to value their mental health, while a study by Demir and Ercan (2018) found that Turkish nursing students, after completing their clinical practicum in mental health, have more patience when caring for patients due to their increased empathy for those who struggle with mental health issues. Another finding by Alhamidi and Alyousef (2020), suggests that the mental health clinical practicum aids the students in increasing their clinical competency and skills. These impacts on the personal development of nursing students after experiencing the mental health clinical practicum shows that mental health clinical practicum is an important aspect of psychiatric nursing which cannot be disregarded.