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AN EXPLORATION OF SCHOOL NURSE ROLE IN SECONDARY GIRLS SCHOOLS IN BAHRAIN

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Abstract

The main role of the school nurse is to promote the health and wellbeing of students. Good health, in turn, fosters better academic outcomes. However, many schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain do not have school nurses. The few that have lack clear guidelines on their roles and responsibilities. The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the roles of school nurses in Bahrain and the barriers they encounter in their work. The study recruited 10 secondary school nurses and gathered their responses using semi-structured interviews. The responses were analysed using Burnard's four-stage thematic analysis framework. The study found the main roles of school nurses are providing direct health care to students and staff, organising health promotion programs and surveillance of infectious diseases. The main barriers to school nurses are role conflict, the lack of professional autonomy and collaboration, and high student-nurse ratio. The study concluded that professional nursing programs and structured coordination between the Ministries of Health and Education are important to ensure school nurses clearly understand their roles and to improve their service delivery.

Keywords

School Nurse, School Nursing, School Health Program, Bahraini Secondary School Nurses, Nursing Professional Program, Professional Autonomy, Collaboration

1. Introduction

In developed countries, the role of school nurses has become more comprehensive. They ensure students are healthy, safe and ready to learn (National Association of School Nurses [NASN], 2017). They achieve this by intervening on health problems, providing health education, ensuring a healthy learning environment and managing chronic illnesses (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2016).

In Bahrain, many schools do not have nurses. The few that have lack clear guidelines on their roles and responsibilities (Faten, 2013). This is despite a strategic plan for school nursing program jointly implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Al-Hajeri et al., 2009). Many factors could be affecting a successful implementation of the school nursing program. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To explore the roles of secondary school nurses in Bahrain.
- To identify barriers encountered by nurses in secondary schools in Bahrain.

The present study intended to understand the roles of the school nurse in Bahrain and the factors that hinder them from performing their roles. The study used two theories to underpin research. The first theory was the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). The model was helpful to identify and describe the roles school nurses perceived as important to their job. The second theory was the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1995). The theory was helpful to understand barriers to the roles of nurses. Barriers were the needs that nurses perceived their jobs have not satisfied.

2. Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research method. The target population was 13 school nurses in secondary girls' schools in Bahrain. All had enrolled in Bahraini's Health School Program. Ten participated, which Polit et al. (2001) indicate is sufficient to gather in-depth and diverse views. The study received approval from ethics committees in the Medical University of Bahrain, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and the Ministries of Education and Health. Prior to the study, a pilot test with one school nurse was done to assess the appropriateness and completeness of the questions as suggested by Gerrish and Lacey (2010). All participants signed informed consent form before participating in a semi-structured interview. Their responses was

analysed using Burnard's (2004) four-stage thematic analysis framework: coding, identifying themes, refining themes and mapping thematic relationships.

3. Findings and Discussion of Findings

Two major themes and four subthemes emerged from the analysis of interview responses.

Theme 1: The role of Bahraini school nurse.

- The need for nursing professional programs.
- Improve organisation structure.

Theme 2: Role conflicts of Bahraini school nurse.

- Lack of professional autonomy and collaboration.
- Ratio of students to Bahraini secondary school nurses.

3.1 The Role of Bahraini Secondary School Nurse

The role of the school nurse has become comprehensive. It is no longer restricted to the provision of healthcare. It is more about advancing the well-being and educational achievement of students (Adams, 2009; NASN, 2017). However, in Bahraini secondary schools, the main roles of the school nurse is predominantly meeting the healthcare needs of students and staff. They provide direct healthcare to students and staff, especially managing medications and keeping medical records. They also organise health programs and coordinate surveillance of infectious diseases. *"...maintaining the required medications... students', teachers', and workers' medical history... providing medical treatment and health education"* (Participant 9).

To understand their roles and to improve service delivery, nurses indicated they need professional nursing programs. They find the current training is less helpful when they transition from a hospital to a school setting. *"...We have taken the school health course but it's not enough. I think we need further physical examination skills"* (Participant 9). *"I'm asking for the BS and other courses in order to improve myself and learn more in order to provide better services"* (Participant 8). Nurses also pointed out that a supportive organisation structure would help define their roles. They cite the lack of coordination between the Ministries of Health and Education increases their workload. *There is no coordination between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education whatsoever...* (Participant 5). *"...I also have to complete the reports for both ministries"* (Participant 2).

3.2 Role Conflicts in Bahraini Secondary School Nurses

Role conflict is common where there are no clear guidelines on nurses' roles and responsibilities (Clausson et al., 2003; Lineberry & Ikes, 2015). It is a significant barrier to nurses in Bahraini secondary schools. Nurses are assigned extra roles that conflict with their official roles. "...we have more duties to do, which is overloading us, like the administrative work... being a member of a lot of committees," (Participant 8). Nurses also identified the lack of professional autonomy and collaboration as another significant barrier. "There is no support from the school..." (Participant 3). "The social workers refuse to help when I send a student to them" (Participant 9). High student-nurse ratio was another significant barrier. "If the ratio of social health worker is 2:1,000 and the ratio of the school nurse is 1:1,000, it's unfair." (Participant 2). "For 1,060 students, there are four social workers and only one nurse" (Participant 8).

4. Conclusion

The main role of the school nurses in Bahraini secondary schools is to meet healthcare needs of students and staff. They provide medication, manage medical records, promote health programs and survey infectious disease. However, role conflict, the lack of professional autonomy and collaboration, and high student-nurse ratio affect the execution of their roles. Nurses would improve their service if they had professional nursing programs and better coordination between the Ministries of Education and Health.

5. Further Research

The main limitation of this study was the omission of nurses in primary and intermediate public schools. Their inclusion would have provided a holistic understanding of the roles and barriers to school nursing. A future study could be a cross-section empirical research using a sample of school nurses from both primary and secondary schools to assess whether the present findings could be generalised to all Bahraini schools. Alternatively, a future study could also examine the impact of professional autonomy and collaboration on job satisfaction of school nurses in Bahraini.

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