



## IN EXIGENCY FOR SELFLESS SERVICE: GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL NURSES IN CONTEXT

Christine Lourdes T. Evalaroza <sup>1 2</sup> Blaise B. Nieve <sup>3 4 5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MA Nursing, BSc Nursing, RN

<sup>2</sup> Davao Regional Medical Center, Apokon, Tagum, City, Philippines

<sup>3</sup> PhD in Nursing, PhD in Education major in Educational Leadership, BSc Nursing, RN, CMSRN, NEA-BC

<sup>4</sup> Duke University Hospital, Durham, North Carolina, USA

<sup>5</sup> Graduate School – School of Nursing, San Pedro College, Davao City, Philippines

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13829884>

### ABSTRACT

In today's healthcare landscape, nurses across many countries face the challenges of being underappreciated, underpaid, and underestimated. Despite these adversities, some nurses remain steadfast in their commitment to the profession. This phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of government hospital nurses who navigate the demands of selfless service. Twelve nurses from a public regional hospital in Tagum City, each with at least two years of experience and assigned to general wards where the nurse-to-patient ratio exceeds 1:15, were purposively selected for a focus group discussion. Employing Colaizzi's method of data analysis, three central themes emerged: "Going the Extra Mile," "Bending but Never Breaking," and "Thrive, Not Just Survive." These themes encapsulate the reality of government hospital nurses who persist in providing compassionate care, exhibiting resilience despite the professional challenges they face. The study highlights the physical, emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of delivering care in a resource-limited government hospital setting. The findings underscore the role of altruism, reinforced by resilience and influenced by extrinsic motivators, in shaping the service and work attitude of these nurses. These insights hold significant implications for nursing practice and policy.

**Keywords:** *Social Sciences, Selfless Service, Government Hospital Nurses, Phenomenology, Tagum City*

## INTRODUCTION

Nursing has long been regarded as one of the noblest professions, providing care that spans the continuum of life—from welcoming new lives to offering comfort at the end of life. This role demands a unique blend of compassion, patience, and intelligence. Nurses play an integral part in the healthcare industry, yet they face numerous challenges that complicate their ability to provide care. According to several studies, nurses in the 21st century grapple with several significant challenges, including long working hours, inadequate compensation, workplace violence, lack of respect, exposure to hazardous materials and diseases, and a persistent shortage of nursing staff (Al-Omari, 2015; American Nurses Association, 2017; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Durkin et al., 2016; Gates et al., 2011; Lily & Aunguroch, 2017). These issues are even more pronounced for nurses working in state-run or government hospitals, where workforce shortages and disproportionately high nurse-to-patient ratios further exacerbate the pressures they face (Lily & Aunguroch, 2017; WA Governor's Office, 2017).

A key global issue that directly impacts nursing practice is the shortage of healthcare staff. The WA Governor's Office (2017) reported that the state struggles to compete with private sector compensation, and this problem is compounded by projections of a 7,000-nurse shortage by 2025. Similar trends are evident worldwide, and the Philippines faces an even more daunting situation. Despite a surplus of over 200,000 unemployed nurses (Badilla, 2015), government hospitals remain understaffed, with working conditions that are often inadequate. Public sector nurses, particularly in the Philippines, are overworked and underpaid, with many receiving salaries far below those mandated by the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002 (Republic Act No. 9173, 2002). As a result, many nurses are dissatisfied, seeking better opportunities abroad or leaving the profession entirely (Tamayo, 2015).

The disparity in nurse-to-patient ratios further complicates the situation in many healthcare facilities, particularly in developing countries. Globally, unequal nurse-to-patient ratios have been linked to adverse patient outcomes, including higher incidences of infections, falls, and mortality (Wise et al., 2015). The World Health Organization (2017) reported that nearly half of its member states have less than three nursing and midwifery personnel per 1,000 people. In the Philippines, the average nurse-to-patient ratio remains at 1:15 in government hospitals, significantly exceeding recommended standards (Tamayo, 2015). This disparity is particularly evident at a government regional hospital in Tagum City, where nurses often care for 30 to 40 patients in clinical wards and 6 to 18 patients in intensive care units. These ratios compromise both the quality of patient care and the well-being of the nurses.

Such working conditions profoundly affect the physical and mental health of nurses. In environments where staffing is insufficient, nurses frequently experience high levels of stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction (Moloney et al., 2018). Long working hours and mandatory overtime, often used to compensate for staffing shortages, further exacerbate these challenges. Research has shown that shifts lasting longer than 12 hours are linked to increased medical errors, fatigue, and burnout (Caruso, 2014). Consequently, these

conditions not only diminish the quality of care that nurses can provide but also lead to higher turnover rates, as nurses leave the profession due to dissatisfaction and burnout (Tamayo, 2015).

Efforts to address these challenges have been undertaken worldwide. Studies have shown that improving nurse staffing levels, reducing burnout, and fostering positive work environments can lead to better patient outcomes and higher job satisfaction among nurses (Lake et al., 2015; Cimiotti et al., 2012). Retention strategies such as shared governance, reducing overtime, and improving quality of life for nurses have been proposed as methods to reduce turnover rates (Budryk, 2015; Kerfoot, 2015). However, such measures are still in their early stages, particularly in the public healthcare sector in countries like the Philippines.

Despite these numerous challenges, many nurses remain deeply committed to their profession. They demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and dedication, continuing to provide compassionate care in the face of adversity. This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of government nurses at a government regional hospital at Tagum City, Philippines as they navigate the demands of selfless service within a resource-limited environment. The research aims to understand the essence of being a selfless government hospital nurse and the strategies nurses use to cope with the pressures and challenges of their profession. Additionally, the study provides a platform for these nurses to share insights that could inform both their peers and the broader nursing practice, with the hope of shedding light on how government nurses can maintain resilience in the face of overwhelming challenges.

By examining these experiences, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on the difficulties faced by public sector nurses, offering insights that could inform both policy and practice. The lived experiences of these nurses provide invaluable lessons on how resilience, compassion, and professional commitment can persist even in the most challenging of circumstances. Moreover, it seeks to raise awareness about the urgent need for systemic changes in nurse staffing, compensation, and working conditions to ensure that the quality of care in government hospitals is maintained and that nurses are supported in their roles.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of government hospital nurses as they navigate the demands and challenges of selfless service in their profession. This study seeks to highlight their experiences, shedding light on the personal and professional sacrifices they make while addressing the complexities of providing care in resource-constrained settings. By exploring their stories, the study aims to bring attention to the concerns and challenges these nurses face, including the impact of workforce shortages, unequal nurse-to-patient ratios, and inadequate compensation on both their well-being and patient care.

Through this exploration, the study also endeavors to promote discussions around improving patient safety and the quality of healthcare services in government hospitals. Additionally, it aims to provide insights that can be shared with peers and the broader nursing community, contributing to a better understanding of the resilience and dedication required to continue providing compassionate care in such environments. Ultimately, this research aspires to inform policy and practice, advocating for systemic improvements that support nurses and enhance the quality of healthcare delivery.

## **Research Questions**

This phenomenological study sought to develop an understanding about the lived experiences of the government nurses as they face the exigencies of selfless service in their profession.

Specifically, the researcher answered the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be a selfless government hospital nurse?
2. How do participants cope with the exigencies of the job?
3. What insights can participants share with their peers and to the nursing practice in general?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a phenomenological research design, which involved conducting focus group discussions with government nurses working in the general wards of the research setting. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that explores the structures of consciousness and the ways in which individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences. It seeks to understand the essence of lived experiences by capturing the participants' descriptions of their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, the goal was to explore and describe the lived experiences of government nurses who face numerous challenges due to the high volume of patients they serve. The researcher aimed to gain insights into how these nurses interpret and make sense of their experiences within the context of their professional roles.

Through focus group discussions, participants were encouraged to share their thoughts, feelings, and reflections on their daily work experiences. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives, fostering a rich understanding of the challenges and coping strategies they employ. By examining the meanings these experiences hold for each participant, the study sought to highlight the complexities and nuances of nursing in a government hospital setting and to provide valuable insights into the personal and professional lives of these nurses.

## Setting

The study was conducted at a government-run tertiary training hospital located in Tagum City, Philippines. As a key healthcare institution in the region, this hospital serves primarily the local population and has an authorized bed capacity of 600. This capacity positions it as a major provider of healthcare services in the area, catering to a large and diverse patient population with a wide range of medical needs.

The hospital was an appropriate setting for this study due to its role as a significant healthcare provider in the region. Its status as a tertiary training center means it is equipped to handle complex medical cases and provides a range of services, making it a crucial part of the healthcare infrastructure in the region. Additionally, as a government hospital, it faces unique challenges related to resource allocation, staffing, and patient volume, which are central to the experiences of government-employed nurses.

The choice of this hospital as the research locale allowed the study to explore the lived experiences of nurses working in a high-pressure, resource-constrained environment. The insights gained from this setting are valuable in understanding the specific challenges faced by government nurses and the coping strategies they employ in such demanding contexts. By focusing on this type of institution, the study aimed to contribute to the broader understanding of nursing practice in government hospitals and inform policies and interventions to support these essential healthcare providers. The study was conducted from January 2018 to March 2018.

## Participants

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants, a technique chosen to ensure that the sample was representative of the population being studied and that the data collected would be rich and comprehensive. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to deliberately select individuals who could provide meaningful insights into the research topic due to their specific experiences and roles within the healthcare setting.

The study included 12 government nurses working in the general wards of the selected hospital. This number was determined to be sufficient for achieving data saturation, ensuring that the information gathered was thorough and that no new themes were likely to emerge from additional participants. The selection criteria focused on nurses who had been employed at the hospital for at least two years. This experience threshold was set to ensure that participants had a deep understanding of the institutional culture, and the challenges faced in their roles.

Additionally, the study focused on nurses working in general wards where the nurse-patient ratio exceeded the ideal 1:15 ratio recommended by the Revised Organizational Structure and Staffing Standards for Government Hospitals for 200 to 500 beds by the Department of Budget and Management (2013). This criterion was crucial as it targeted nurses who regularly experienced the pressures and demands associated with high

patient loads, making their insights particularly valuable for understanding the impacts of such conditions on nursing practice.

By selecting participants who met these specific criteria, the study aimed to gather detailed and relevant data on the lived experiences of government nurses in a challenging work environment. This approach ensured that the findings would be directly applicable to similar settings and contribute to a broader understanding of the issues faced by nurses in government hospitals.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection for this phenomenological study was conducted through focus group discussions with the selected participants. This qualitative approach was chosen to foster an open, interactive dialogue among the nurses, enabling them to share their experiences, insights, and reflections in a supportive group setting. Focus groups were particularly suited for this study as they encouraged participants to build on each other's thoughts, creating a dynamic exchange of perspectives that enriched the data.

Before the discussions, participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives and procedures, ensuring that they understood their role in the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, adhering to the highest ethical standards and ensuring that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Each session took place in a private, secure setting within the hospital to maintain confidentiality and create an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing candidly.

The discussions were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol, which allowed for flexibility while ensuring that key topics were covered. Open-ended questions were posed to explore the nurses' lived experiences, the challenges they face, and the coping strategies they employ in their roles. This approach allowed participants to speak freely, and the facilitator encouraged them to elaborate on their responses, prompting deeper insights. The focus groups lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, providing ample time for thoughtful discussion and interaction.

To ensure accuracy in capturing the nuances of the discussions, each session was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. These recordings were later transcribed verbatim, preserving the richness and detail of the conversations. The transcriptions formed the foundation of the data analysis, allowing the researcher to work closely with the exact words and expressions used by the participants.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. The researcher first immersed themselves in the data, repeatedly reading through the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the discussions. Key concepts and ideas were then systematically coded, with attention given to recurring patterns and insights relevant to the research questions. From these initial codes, broader themes were identified, capturing the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

As the analysis progressed, the themes were refined and reviewed to ensure they were coherent, distinct, and accurately reflected the data. This involved cross-referencing the themes with both the coded segments and the entire data set, ensuring that no important details were overlooked. Each theme was clearly defined and named in a way that reflected its importance to the study's objectives.

The final themes were used to construct a narrative that addressed the research objectives, providing a comprehensive view of the lived experiences of government nurses. This process illuminated the challenges they face in delivering selfless service within a demanding healthcare environment, and the insights gained from their experiences contribute valuable perspectives to the broader nursing community.

By adopting this systematic and rigorous approach to data collection and analysis, the study ensures that the findings authentically represent the voices of the participants, offering meaningful insights into their experiences and the demands of their profession.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Ensuring the trustworthiness of this phenomenological study was essential to validate the findings and establish its rigor. The study adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to ensure the reliability and integrity of the research process.

To enhance credibility, several strategies were employed. The researcher engaged in prolonged engagement and persistent observation, spending sufficient time with the participants to build rapport and gain a deep understanding of their lived experiences. This immersive approach allowed for the collection of rich, detailed data. Triangulation was another key strategy, where multiple data sources—including focus group discussions and researcher observations—were used to corroborate the findings. This provided a more comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the phenomena under study. Additionally, member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review the transcripts and preliminary findings. This process ensured that the interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the data. Peer debriefing, in which colleagues and qualitative research experts reviewed and discussed the findings, further strengthened the credibility by offering external scrutiny of the research process and interpretations.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings. By offering detailed insights into the setting and the demographics of the participants, the study allowed readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts. The inclusion of comprehensive descriptions ensures that readers can determine whether the insights gained from this study can be transferred to similar settings or populations.

Dependability was established through careful documentation of the research process. An audit trail was maintained, providing a transparent and detailed record of the

procedures followed, including decisions made during data collection, coding, and analysis. This meticulous documentation enabled external reviewers to assess the consistency and reliability of the research. Reflexivity was also central to ensuring dependability, as the researcher kept a reflexive journal throughout the study to document personal reflections, biases, and decisions. This practice ensured that the research process remained transparent and that any potential influences on the findings were acknowledged and managed.

Confirmability was achieved by minimizing researcher bias through ongoing reflexive practices. The researcher used reflexive journaling to continuously record personal thoughts, biases, and assumptions, which helped maintain objectivity and ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's preconceptions. The use of triangulation and the audit trail further contributed to confirmability by demonstrating that the findings were derived directly from the data, thus providing an additional layer of transparency.

By rigorously applying these criteria, the study ensured that its findings were credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This thorough approach to trustworthiness reinforced the study's validity and reliability, providing confidence in the insights drawn from the lived experiences of government hospital nurses. Through this process, the study offers a robust and trustworthy contribution to understanding the realities faced by these nurses in their professional practice.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to stringent ethical principles to ensure the protection of the rights and well-being of all participants. Prior to its implementation, the ethical soundness of the study was thoroughly evaluated by the technical panel of the Master of Arts in Nursing Program at Davao Doctors College, Inc. Additionally, the study was reviewed by the legal counsel of the study locale, which confirmed that there were no legal impediments to its conduct. This dual evaluation process ensured that the research met established ethical standards and guidelines, providing an additional layer of oversight and accountability.

Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential impacts of the study before providing their informed consent. This process emphasized transparency, ensuring that participants clearly understood their rights, including their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. By securing voluntary and well-informed consent, the study upheld the ethical principles of autonomy and respect for the participants' rights.

Confidentiality was rigorously maintained throughout the research process. Participants' privacy was protected by anonymizing the data and removing all personal identifiers from the transcripts and any related materials. This ensured that participants' identities could not be linked to the information they provided. Furthermore, data security was prioritized, with all data stored in password-protected files, and access was restricted to the

researcher and authorized personnel. This secure approach safeguarded the sensitive information shared by participants, ensuring their privacy was respected at every stage.

Data management was a critical component of the study's ethical framework. All electronic data were stored on password-protected devices and backed up on secure servers to prevent loss or unauthorized access. The researcher was solely responsible for managing access to the data, reinforcing the confidentiality measures in place. Upon completion of the study, data disposal was conducted following ethical guidelines. Physical copies of transcripts and other materials were securely shredded, and digital files were permanently deleted using software designed to ensure irretrievability. These practices ensured that participant information remained confidential and secure throughout the entire research process and beyond.

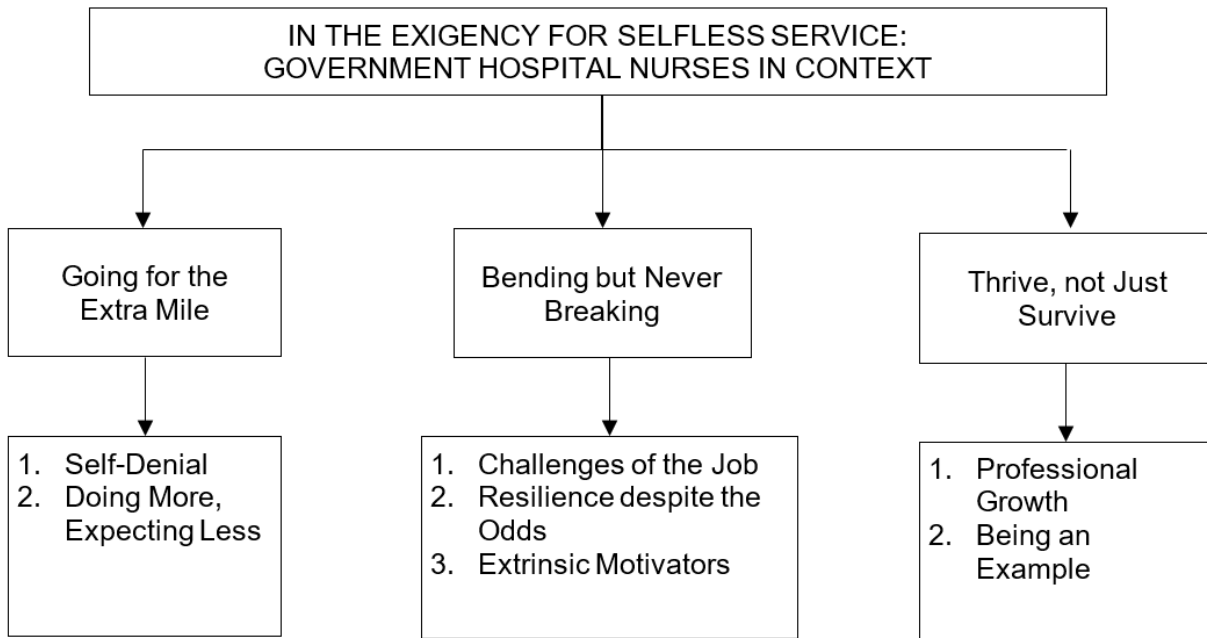
The study was also guided by the ethical principle of beneficence, focusing on maximizing potential benefits for the participants and the broader nursing community. By exploring the lived experiences of government nurses, the research aimed to contribute valuable insights that could inform policies and support systems designed to improve working conditions and healthcare delivery. This focus on beneficence ensured that the study was not only ethically sound but also meaningful and impactful, with the potential to bring about positive changes for both the participants and the wider nursing profession.

## **RESULTS**

### **Profile of the Informants**

The participants in this phenomenological study were 12 government hospital nurses aged between 35 and 45 years old, representing a crucial segment of experienced healthcare professionals within the research setting. The sample was composed of an equal distribution of male and female participants, ensuring balanced gender representation and enabling a diverse range of perspectives in exploring the lived experiences of government nurses. Each of these nurses had been employed at the chosen government hospital for a minimum of two years, ensuring that they possessed sufficient professional experience to provide meaningful insights into the challenges and realities of nursing in a government-run healthcare facility.

The participants voluntarily chose to be part of the study, demonstrating their willingness to share their experiences, challenges, and reflections on selfless service in the nursing profession. Their participation was driven by a desire to contribute to a deeper understanding of the demands and rewards of working in a resource-limited healthcare environment, offering valuable insights into both the personal and professional aspects of their roles. This group of respondents, with their diverse yet complementary experiences, provided a rich foundation for exploring the core themes of the study, highlighting the resilience and dedication of government nurses.



**Figure 1.** *Thematic map*

### **Emergent Theme 1: Going for the Extra Mile**

The first emergent theme, Going for the Extra Mile, captures the deep sense of selflessness embodied by government nurses in their daily work. For these nurses, selflessness transcends the mere performance of nursing duties—it involves losing themselves in the service of others. As the participants expressed, selflessness means prioritizing the needs of patients above their own, often to the detriment of their own well-being. While nursing as a profession inherently requires a high level of care and dedication, not every nurse delivers care with this level of sacrifice. This theme is further delineated through two subthemes: Self-denial and Doing More, Expecting Less, which together provide a nuanced understanding of the personal sacrifices nurses make in their commitment to their patients.

#### **Cluster Theme 1: Self-denial**

The subtheme of Self-denial highlights the extent to which government nurses renounce their own physiological and psychological needs to fulfill their responsibilities to patients. Participants described the frequent forfeiture of basic needs such as eating, resting, and spending time with loved ones due to their overwhelming workload. At the government regional hospital in Tagum City, Philippines, where nurse-to-patient ratios can reach as high as 1:30–40 in clinical wards and 1:6–18 in intensive care units, nurses often find themselves working long hours beyond their scheduled shifts, without additional compensation. Despite the physical and mental toll this takes, they continue to prioritize patient care over their own well-being.

The participants’ voices powerfully illustrate the reality of Self-denial:

*“On physical health and well-being, I think I lost weight due to exhaustion because of the workload, neglecting to eat on time or properly... Unfortunately, even our off days are used for training or seminars. So, you really don’t have that quality time for a self-time or me-time.” (Participant 1)*

*“Working as a government nurse is not an easy task. You’re not just sitting pretty. More often, you deny yourself your own physiological needs such as voiding, eating, and even drinking water because of the very busy duty, just to cater to the needs of the patients.” (Participant 2)*

*“Your supposed-to-be time for your family will be spent instead on sleeping. Then, by the time you wake up, you must prepare for duty. There’s little time left for family.” (Participant 4)*

*“Aside from what they mentioned on extending duty hours, it [selfless service] is also about being available 24/7 to go on duty despite being off your schedule. You agree to go on duty and sacrifice for the sake that there will be a nurse available. For me, work-life balance is not balanced at all, because your time for work and family cannot be balanced in a government hospital.” (Participant 6)*

*“Selfless? It is when you prioritize work. It is when you give most of your time to your patient rather than to your family. Even if our family needs us, we often cannot provide time for them because we prioritize our patients.” (Participant 7)*

*“This [extending duty hours] makes it hard for me to spend more time with my husband or with my family because almost every day, my work eats up most of my time.” (Participant 8)*

*“Being a selfless public servant means you should be passionate about your work to the extent of denying your own comfort and pleasure.” (Participant 12)*

*“Patients come first before our very own family. It’s difficult, yes, but I chose this job.” (Participant 4)*

These narratives illustrate the emotional and physical toll that comes with the role of being a nurse in a government hospital, where the demands of the job often require nurses to go far beyond their expected duties. Self-denial, as described by the participants, is not merely about skipping meals or working long hours—it is about prioritizing the needs of patients over one’s own comfort, family, and well-being.

Working in a government hospital entails more than performing clinical duties; it involves a deep commitment to selfless service, where nurses routinely sacrifice their own needs for the sake of their patients. While this sense of duty and compassion defines their work, it also comes at a personal cost, as they struggle to balance their responsibilities to patients with their own physical and emotional well-being.

## Cluster Theme 2: Doing More, Expecting Less

Beyond the self-denial of their own basic needs, government nurses are also confronted with the challenge of doing more while expecting less in return. This subtheme reflects the reality that nurses in government hospitals often assume roles far beyond those outlined in their job descriptions. These nurses serve not just as healthcare providers but as all-around personnel—liaison officers, patient advocates, and even social workers—driven by a desire to help their patients and their families without any expectation of compensation or recognition.

In a profession where the core is centered on caring for others, nurses naturally extend their responsibilities when needed. Government nurses, in particular, frequently find themselves performing tasks that go far beyond their formal duties. They coordinate care, assist with the procurement of medication, and even provide emotional support and financial assistance to patients and their families. This reflects their deep commitment to selfless service, as they prioritize the well-being of those under their care, often without expecting gratitude or rewards in return.

The participants in this study shared personal accounts of how they consistently went beyond their expected duties:

*"Above and beyond is also thinking about the welfare of your workmate and of the team. Beyond our written job descriptions, nurses become liaison officers or patient advocates who do tasks that should have been done by the patient's significant other, such as facilitating requests, procuring medicines, and even addressing hospital bills. Nurses do everything in our power to help as much as we can." (Participant 1)*

*"If the nurse won't actively seek out ways to help the patient, the patient will just be left there. Healthcare services won't reach the patient immediately. Nurses play a big role in the patient's recovery. We do more than what is written in our job descriptions." (Participant 2)*

*"You do things that aren't supposed to be part of your work, such as becoming a liaison officer for your patients. You deal with different people from all walks of life, especially those who are financially challenged." (Participant 3)*

*"I had an experience with a census of 250 patients, including PICU cases, and there were only four of us on duty. The watchers were demanding. If it were possible to cut ourselves in half to do more at once, we would have done so just to meet the patients' needs." (Participant 5)*

*"Working in a government hospital does not mean that if you are a nurse, you are only a nurse. Sometimes, you become a charity worker or a social worker. There were times when I even used my personal money to help a patient and their family. You go beyond what is expected of you as a nurse." (Participant 12)*

*“You function as more than just a nurse. Especially in problematic situations like contact tracing, where you do the investigation because the patient won’t talk or cannot understand. You are responsible for referring them to the appropriate agencies. You become a liaison officer for them. This requires a lot of patience, and you must keep your cool.” (Participant 10)*

The participants’ accounts paint a vivid picture of the reality that government nurses constantly face. In an environment where resources are limited and the demands are high, they do more than what is required, taking on multiple roles to ensure that their patients receive the care they need. This theme of Doing More, Expecting Less highlights not just the professional, but also the personal sacrifices these nurses make to serve their patients and communities.

What drives these nurses to give so much of themselves, often without expecting any form of compensation or acknowledgment, is a deep sense of altruism and empathy. Many of the patients they serve come from marginalized and underprivileged backgrounds, and this knowledge propels government nurses to go above and beyond. Their service is fueled not by the hope of recognition but by the understanding that their actions can make a critical difference in the lives of those who need it most.

## **Emergent Theme 2: Bending but Never Breaking**

The second emergent theme, *Bending but Never Breaking*, illustrates the resilience of government nurses who, despite the formidable challenges they face, continue to remain steadfast in their profession. This theme captures the strength and adaptability of these nurses, who manage to endure the pressures of their work while maintaining their commitment to patient care. Although the demands of their jobs stretch them to their limits, they do not break; rather, they adapt and persist. This resilience is fueled not only by their inner strength but also by external motivators that help them navigate the difficulties of their profession. The theme is further elaborated through three subthemes: *Challenges of the Job*, *Resiliency Despite the Odds*, and *Extrinsic Motivators*.

### **Cluster Theme 1: Challenges of the Job**

The first subtheme, *Challenges of the Job*, highlights the numerous obstacles government nurses encounter in their work. Participants revealed that working in a government hospital comes with specific difficulties, such as long working hours, language barriers with indigenous patients, an excessive workload due to an inappropriate nurse-to-patient ratio, and poor staffing. These challenges are compounded by the limited resources and high patient demand typical of government hospitals.

The following statements from participants underscore the gravity of these challenges: *“...extending your time on duty. We are not being paid for that, right?” (Participant 1)*

*“Our duty hours that are supposed to be 8 hours often extend to 16 hours just to finish our work and render the best service we can provide to our patients.” (Participant 2)*

*“Rendering service to lumads and indigenous people is quite challenging because of the language barrier and their literacy level.” (Participant 3)*

*“I had an experience with a census of 250 patients, and there were only four of us on duty. If it were possible to cut ourselves in half, we would have done so just to meet the needs of the patients.” (Participant 5)*

*“It’s very difficult to leave your post while on duty because there would be no one to relieve you.” (Participant 4)*

These experiences reflect the reality that government nurses face daily—a reality characterized by long hours, overwhelming patient loads, and the added complexity of language barriers. The high nurse-to-patient ratios and limited staffing often force nurses to stretch themselves beyond what is reasonable. Yet, despite these overwhelming pressures, they continue to provide care, embodying the essence of resilience.

## **Cluster Theme 2: Resiliency Despite the Odds**

The second subtheme, *Resiliency Despite the Odds*, speaks to the efforts of government nurses to remain resilient and adaptive in the face of the many challenges they encounter. Resilience in nursing is the ability to bounce back and continue providing high-quality care despite stressful or adverse conditions. For government nurses, this resilience is not only crucial for their own well-being but also directly impacts the quality of care they provide to their patients.

Participants in this study shared how they cope with the difficulties of their work:

*“One must try to strike a balance between personal life and work considering that about 22 days are spent here in the hospital for work and the remaining days of the month are your rest days.” (Participant 1)*

*“What makes me stay is my mindset. I take every difficulty as a challenge that I should overcome. In this line of work, we view every experience as an opportunity to learn.” (Participant 4)*

*“To cope, you really must extend your patience... I have learned to love the job. Your body and mind will long for the kind of work you do here despite the toxicity.” (Participant 8)*

*“You need to have the attitude to pursue, the mindset to survive. That will help you overcome the challenges that come to you.” (Participant 6)*

These narratives reveal that resilience is not just a personal trait but a learned behavior. By maintaining a positive mindset and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth, these nurses can cope with the intense demands of their profession. Their resilience

enables them to continue delivering compassionate care, even in the most difficult circumstances.

### **Cluster Theme 3: Extrinsic Motivators**

The third subtheme, *Extrinsic Motivators*, highlights the external factors that influence nurses to remain in their positions despite the challenges. While the desire to provide care is a significant internal motivator, government nurses also need financial security and benefits to support their families and sustain their livelihoods. The compensation and benefits provided by government hospitals, although not ideal, are seen as superior to those offered by private hospitals or other opportunities abroad.

Participants shared their thoughts on why they choose to remain in government hospitals: *“I stayed because of the benefits, such as easy loan plans and security of tenure. The compensation enables me to provide more for my family.” (Participant 1)*

*“I stayed in the government because, first and foremost, your job is secure. There’s good compensation and a lot of benefits.” (Participant 2)*

*“The compensation is enough to support my family. Aside from the compensation, the benefits are great too.” (Participant 6)*

*“It is the compensation that really made me stay. Working in a private hospital offers fewer benefits, and for someone like me who has no plans to go abroad, working in a government hospital is the best choice.” (Participant 8)*

These statements reveal that, for many nurses, the financial benefits and job security provided by government hospitals are crucial factors in their decision to stay. Although they face immense challenges in their daily work, the promise of stability, benefits, and financial support for their families outweighs the difficulties they encounter.

The challenges faced by government nurses are substantial, including high workloads, language barriers, and a lack of staffing, yet these nurses exhibit remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. Through their ability to adapt and remain steadfast in their roles, they continue to provide essential care to vulnerable populations. Their resilience is bolstered by the external motivators of job security, benefits, and financial stability, which help them persevere despite the odds. Together, these factors contribute to the overarching theme of *Bending but Never Breaking*, illustrating the strength, adaptability, and commitment of government nurses in even the most challenging work environments.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Thrive, Not Just Survive**

The third emergent theme, *Thrive, Not Just Survive*, encapsulates the mindset of government nurses who, despite the numerous challenges they face, choose to progress and grow. This theme reflects the ability of these nurses not only to endure their day-to-day struggles but also to find ways to flourish within the constraints of their environment.

For these nurses, thriving means looking beyond the immediate difficulties and seeking opportunities for professional and personal growth, making the best of their circumstances. The idea of "blooming where they are planted" is vividly expressed through the cluster themes of *Professional Growth* and *Being an Example*.

### **Cluster Theme 1: Professional Growth**

Professional growth emerged as a key aspect of what motivates government nurses to stay and excel in their roles. The participants described how working in a government hospital provides them with opportunities for training, seminars, and continuous learning—opportunities that are often not readily available in private hospitals. Unlike nurses in the private sector, who frequently must pay out of pocket for professional development, government nurses benefit from a range of educational opportunities at no personal cost. This, coupled with the diversity of cases they encounter in government hospitals, contributes to their professional growth and satisfaction.

Government hospitals serve a diverse population, offering nurses a rich learning environment. The daily exposure to a variety of health conditions and patient demographics enables nurses to sharpen their skills and expand their knowledge. This continuous learning fosters a sense of fulfillment and pride in their work, as they see their professional abilities evolve over time.

The participants expressed these sentiments:

*"Yes, it is satisfying because of the learnings that you will acquire." (Participant 11)*

*"Professional growth is apparent when working in a public hospital because of the learnings you will get while working." (Participant 6)*

*"Every day is a learning experience. This makes government hospitals better." (Participant 7)*

*"Trainings made me stay. Second is the compensation, and third, the learning experience that I could acquire because of the variety of cases being encountered." (Participant 9)*

*"On a professional level, I believe working in a government hospital is a better experience. The compensation is bigger, there are more chances for trainings and seminars, and there are a lot of opportunities for learning. Yes, I think it is satisfying because you experience self-growth, your knowledge and skills improve, and you get used to the work demands." (Participant 5)*

For these nurses, thriving is not simply about surviving the day-to-day demands of their job but about growing from their experiences. The opportunities for professional development, paired with the fulfillment of helping diverse patient populations, allow these nurses to find meaning and satisfaction in their work.

## Cluster Theme 2: Being an Example

The second subtheme, *Being an Example*, reflects the participants' role as models of resilience and growth within their work environment. Thriving in their roles goes beyond coping with stress and adversity; it involves a proactive effort to inspire others and foster a positive work culture. These nurses embody the qualities of leadership and altruism, demonstrating that despite the overwhelming challenges, they can maintain a positive attitude and contribute to the well-being of their patients and colleagues.

To thrive in the often-chaotic environment of a government hospital, these nurses not only focus on their own growth but also support their peers by encouraging teamwork, collaboration, and a sense of camaraderie. They understand that thriving in nursing is a collective effort, where the success of one nurse contributes to the success of the entire team. By modeling resilience, they inspire other nurses to adopt a similar mindset, creating a culture of support and mutual assistance.

The participants' experiences reflect this attitude:

*"We try that no one will be left behind to finish work. So, we really help each other to finish our work as early as possible so we can go home together." (Participant 1)*

*"Above and beyond is also thinking about the welfare of your workmate and of the team. We work as fast as we can with our individual tasks so that we may be able to help a co-worker in need. The reality is nurses do everything in our power to help as much as we can." (Participant 1)*

*"Nursing is really a calling. A calling and a passion to work beyond what is expected of you as a nurse." (Participant 2)*

*"Yes, I have thought of quitting, but when I think about it, I ask myself: if others were able to survive and thrive in this work environment, why can't I?" (Participant 9)*

*"We have to accept that this is our reality and try to see things in a more positive way." (Participant 11)*

*"Make your profession your passion and make your passion your profession." (Participant 10)*

These accounts underscore the power of a positive work environment and the contagious nature of resilience. The participants in this study demonstrated that despite the many adversities they face, they can maintain a sense of optimism and purpose, serving as examples for their colleagues.

For government nurses, thriving means not only growing professionally but also helping others to do the same. By embracing the challenges of their work with resilience and positivity, they create a supportive environment where both they and their colleagues can

flourish. This subtheme highlights the importance of collective resilience in nursing, where individual efforts to thrive contribute to the overall success of the team.

Government nurses, despite the difficulties inherent in their work environment, embody the concept of *Thrive, Not Just Survive*. They seek out opportunities for professional growth, continuously improving their skills and knowledge through the diverse experiences they encounter. In doing so, they also become examples of resilience and dedication, inspiring their colleagues to adopt a similar mindset. For these nurses, thriving is not merely about surviving the challenges of their profession—it is about growing, learning, and finding fulfillment in their work, while fostering a positive and supportive environment for others to do the same.

## DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of government hospital nurses as they navigate the challenges and demands of selfless service in their profession. Through thematic analysis, three key themes emerged: *Going for the Extra Mile*, *Bending but Never Breaking*, and *Thrive, Not Just Survive*. These themes collectively highlight the unique combination of selflessness, resilience, and personal growth that characterize the experiences of government nurses. The study reveals both the personal sacrifices and professional fulfillment these nurses experience as they perform their roles.

The study found that government nurses frequently engage in acts of self-denial, often performing duties far beyond their formal job descriptions. Despite inadequate staffing, long working hours, and other institutional challenges, these nurses continue to prioritize patient care above their own needs. Their resilience is apparent in their ability to endure the pressures of their work without breaking, while consistently seeking opportunities for professional growth. This resilience is driven by both intrinsic factors, such as their dedication to patient care, and extrinsic motivators, such as job security and financial benefits.

These findings align with existing research on the global challenges faced by nurses, particularly those working in resource-limited environments like government hospitals. As Spencer (2013) noted, nurses face numerous difficulties such as long hours, insufficient compensation, workplace violence, and nursing shortages. For government nurses, these challenges are amplified by the high demand for healthcare services, which intensifies their workload and exacerbates the stress they experience. These hardships either fortify their resolve or, in some cases, lead to burnout and departure from the profession.

The theme *Going for the Extra Mile* reflects the selflessness of government nurses, who often sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their patients. This is consistent with Gruber's (2014) observation that nurses are ordinary individuals performing extraordinary acts of service for their fellow humans. In this study, participants reported taking on tasks beyond their job descriptions, advocating for their patients, and performing additional roles to ensure that patient care is not compromised. Such dedication highlights their

deep commitment to their profession, which is driven not only by technical skills but also by compassion and altruism.

The findings are further echoed in the work of Umansky and Rantanen (2016), who found that imbalanced nurse-to-patient ratios in clinical settings often lead to a decline in the quality of care due to nurse exhaustion. In this study, government nurses described similarly overwhelming workloads. In extreme cases, participants reported attending to as many as 30 to 40 patients per nurse. This heavy workload not only impacts the nurses' physical well-being but also compromises patient care. Milazzo's (2014) survey of nurses in the U.S. similarly found that long shifts and unpredictable hours lead to poor sleep and nutrition, which directly correlates with increased stress and burnout. These findings resonate with the experiences of government nurses in the Philippines, highlighting the universal nature of the nursing profession's challenges.

The theme *Bending but Never Breaking* showcases the remarkable resilience of these nurses in the face of such adversity. As Chesak et al. (2015) and Hart et al. (2014) have emphasized, resilience is crucial for maintaining high performance, ensuring quality patient care, and supporting nurses' emotional well-being. Government nurses in this study displayed emotional flexibility, adaptability, and a positive outlook, qualities that allowed them to persevere despite overwhelming circumstances. This resilience is not only a personal trait but also a survival strategy, enabling them to continue delivering care under high-stress conditions.

Finally, *Thrive, Not Just Survive* highlights the desire of government nurses to grow professionally, even within challenging circumstances. Participants expressed appreciation for the learning opportunities provided by government hospitals, such as training sessions and seminars, which they felt were less accessible in private practice. Price and Reichert (2017) highlighted the connection between continuous professional development and career satisfaction. The participants' experiences reinforce this idea, as they viewed their daily challenges as learning opportunities that contributed to their growth and fulfillment.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study have several implications for nursing practice and healthcare management. First, the overwhelming workload caused by inadequate nurse-to-patient ratios is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. As noted by Umansky and Rantanen (2016), such imbalances not only reduce the quality of patient care but also contribute to nurse burnout. Healthcare policymakers and administrators must prioritize improving staffing levels and ensuring more equitable nurse-to-patient ratios in government hospitals. Doing so could alleviate the burden on nurses and improve patient outcomes.

Second, this study underscores the importance of providing continuous professional development opportunities for nurses. Participants frequently mentioned that the availability of training and seminars contributed to their professional growth and job satisfaction. As Price and Reichert (2017) emphasized, lifelong learning is essential to

maintaining competency and advancing careers. Investing in such opportunities not only enhances nurses' skills but also boosts morale and retention, ultimately benefiting patient care.

Additionally, fostering a positive and supportive work environment is essential for helping nurses manage the challenges they face. As Roberts and Strauss (2015) noted, positive workplace attitudes contribute to higher productivity, better teamwork, and improved morale. The participants in this study reported that mutual support among colleagues helped them cope with the demands of their job. Healthcare institutions should focus on building a culture of collaboration and support, as this can help reduce stress and improve job satisfaction.

## **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of government nurses, it is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size, limited to a single hospital, may affect the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the data was collected in a specific cultural and institutional context, meaning that the experiences of nurses in other regions or healthcare settings may differ. Future research could expand on these findings by including a larger and more diverse sample of participants from different government hospitals.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data. Although participants provided detailed accounts of their experiences, there is always a risk of bias in self-reported data, as participants may have been influenced by social desirability or memory recall issues. Triangulating these findings with observational data or input from hospital administrators and patients could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by government nurses.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made. First, healthcare policymakers should prioritize improving staffing ratios and ensuring adequate resources for government hospitals. Addressing these systemic issues could reduce nurse burnout and improve the quality of care delivered to patients. Second, it is important to continue offering professional development opportunities for nurses, as this is a key factor in job satisfaction and retention. Lastly, fostering a positive and supportive work environment is crucial for helping nurses cope with the challenges they face. Encouraging teamwork and collaboration within healthcare settings can mitigate the effects of stress and workload.

Further research should explore the experiences of government nurses in different contexts, such as rural versus urban settings, and investigate how factors such as organizational culture and leadership styles influence nurse resilience and job satisfaction. Additionally, future studies could focus on developing and evaluating

interventions aimed at improving nurse well-being and reducing burnout, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

This study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully informed about the study's purpose, nature, and procedures. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. To protect their privacy, the anonymity of all informants was meticulously preserved by removing personal identifiers from the collected data. Additionally, careful measures were taken throughout the study to safeguard the well-being of the participants, ensuring that any potential discomfort or distress was minimized.

The study was free from any conflicts of interest. The researcher rigorously followed ethical guidelines to maintain the integrity of the research process, including the prevention of plagiarism by appropriately citing and crediting all sources. The data were analyzed objectively, without bias, to ensure an accurate and fair representation of the nurses' experiences. The results of this study were used purely for research purposes, contributing to the body of knowledge on the lived experiences of government hospital nurses in the Philippines.

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to the nurses who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights, serving as the key informants of this study. Their dedication to the profession and willingness to contribute to this research has provided invaluable perspectives that have shaped the findings of this work.

The authors would like to extend their sincere thanks to the chosen government hospital for allowing them to conduct this study within its premises, and to the administrative and legal bodies of the institution for their support and approval. The approval and guidance of the Master of Arts in Nursing Program of Davao Doctors College, Inc. have been instrumental in ensuring the ethical soundness of this research, for which the authors are truly grateful.

Without the contributions and support of these individuals and institutions, this study would not have been possible. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the betterment of nursing practice and healthcare.

### **REFERENCES**

- Al-Omari, H. (2015). Physical and verbal workplace violence against nurses in Jordan. *International Nursing Review*, 62(1), 111–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inr.12170>
- American Nurses Association. (2017). Executive summary: American Nurses Association Health Risk Appraisal.

- [https://www.nursingworld.org/~4aeceb/globalassets/practiceandpolicy/work-environment/health--safety/ana-healthriskappraisalsummary\\_2013-2016.pdf](https://www.nursingworld.org/~4aeceb/globalassets/practiceandpolicy/work-environment/health--safety/ana-healthriskappraisalsummary_2013-2016.pdf)
- Badilla, N. (2015). 200,000 registered nurses are jobless. *Manila Times*.  
<http://www.manilatimes.net/200000-registered-nurses-are-jobless/262211/>
- Budryk, Z. (2015). 3 ways hospital leaders can improve nurse retention. *Fierce Healthcare*. <http://www.fiercehealthcare.com/healthcare/3-ways-hospital-leaders-can-improve-nurse-retention>
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2017). National census of fatal occupational injuries publication # USDL-17-1667. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cfoi.pdf>
- Caruso, C. C. (2014). Negative impacts of shiftwork and long work hours. *Rehabilitation Nursing*, 39(1), 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rnj.107>
- Chesak, S. S., Bhagra, A., Schroeder, D. R., Foy, D. A., Cutshall, S. M., & Sood, A. (2015). Enhancing resilience among new nurses: feasibility and efficacy of a pilot intervention. *PubMed*, 15(1), 38–44. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25829879>
- Cimiotti, J. P., Aiken, L. H., Sloane, D. M., & Wu, E. S. (2012). Nurse staffing, burnout, and health care–associated infection. *American Journal of Infection Control*, 40(6), 486–490. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2012.02.029>
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Density of nursing and midwifery personnel (total number per 1000 population, latest available year). (2017). In *World Health Organization – Global Health Observatory (GHO) Data*.  
[http://www.who.int/gho/health\\_workforce/nursing\\_midwifery\\_density/en/](http://www.who.int/gho/health_workforce/nursing_midwifery_density/en/)
- Durkin, M., Beaumont, E., Martin, C. J. H., & Carson, J. (2016). A pilot study exploring the relationship between self-compassion, self-judgement, self-kindness, compassion, professional quality of life and wellbeing among UK community nurses. *Nurse Education Today*, 46, 109–114.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2016.08.030>
- Gates, D. M., Gillespie, G. L., & Succop, P. (2011). Violence against nurses and its impact on stress and productivity. *Nursing economic\$,* 29(2), 59–67.
- Gruber, M. (2014) Nurses going above and beyond the call of duty. WBFO-FM 88.7.  
<http://news.wbfo.org/post/commentary-nurses-going-above-and-beyond-call-duty>
- Hart, P.L., Brannan, J.D. & DeChesnay, M. (2014). Resilience in nurses: An integrative review. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 22, 720-734.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2834.2012.01485.x>
- Kerfoot, K. (2015). Four measures that are key to retaining nurses. *Hospital & Health Networks*. <http://www.hhnmag.com/articles/3253-four-measures-that-are-key-to-retaining-nurses>
- Lake, E. T., Germack, H. D., & Viscardi, M. K. (2015). Missed nursing care is linked to patient satisfaction: a cross-sectional study of US hospitals. *BMJ Quality & Safety*, 25(7), 535–543. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjqs-2015-003961>
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Milazzo, V. (2014). “Are you way too stressed out?” survey results. An assessment of the stress levels of nurses in the United States. CLNC Certification Institute |

