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What Are the Life Experiences of Health Care Professionals Working During the COVID
Pandemic?

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Introduction

Since the end of December 2019, a virus named Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has spread rapidly worldwide. First originated in Wuhan China, COVID-19 was declared an international public health emergency by the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020. On March 11, 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic. Approximately, there were 792,000 deaths attributed to COVID 19 as of August 21, 2020.

Photovoice is a highly recommended participatory research method first introduced by Wang and Burris in the early 90s. The main purpose of photovoice was to give people a way to reflect, talk, learn, share, and make a difference for themselves and others through photography.

Health care professionals are vital resources all around the world. Their health and safety are urgently important for outbreak control in addition to continuous patient safety. Since research participants know more about their lives than anyone else, qualitative research becomes more based in themes that are significant to the individuals it relates to. Photovoice was used to give participants the opportunity to be directly involved in the research process.

Although a few studies have examined the experiences of health care providers during the COVID pandemic, very few have used photovoice to show these experiences. To our knowledge, no qualitative photovoice studies have been conducted or published. Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to understand the life experiences of health care professionals working during the COVID pandemic using the photovoice method.

Limitations

The nature of this project lent itself to several limitations. Due to the limited time to collect data, this study was limited in the number of health care professional participants. The

method of sampling was also a limitation in this project. The use of purposive sampling in selecting the participants limited a wider representation of working health care professionals.

Delimitations

This study only included health care professionals. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other populations.

Assumptions

The participants of this project have a sincere interest in participating in this research project and do not have any other motives.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms is used to explain any questions regarding the meaning of a word that may not be frequently defined:

Photovoice: Wang and Burris (1997) define photovoice as a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a photogenic technique (p. 369).

Purposive sampling: The Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods define purposive sampling as a judgmental or expert sample that is a type of nonprobability sample. The main objective is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population (Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods, 2008).

Qualitative research: Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Scribbr, 2020).

Literature Review

In order to better understand the lives of health care professionals working during the COVID pandemic, it was necessary to review literature of different aspects that played a role in exploring the life experiences of health care professionals working during the COVID pandemic.

It has been shown in research that critical situations can have a significantly positive or negative impact on health care professionals' lives. Lai et al. (2020) examined mental health outcomes among health care workers in 34 hospitals from January 29, 2020 to February 3, 2020. The study was qualitative in that it used cross sectional surveys as a means for data collection among the 1257 participants. According to the study, a significant proportion of participants experienced anxiety, depression, and insomnia symptoms, and more than 70% reported psychological distress (Lai et al., 2020). The results of the study are significant as they show the impact that working through the COVID pandemic can have on the lives of health care professionals.

Liu et al. (2020) aimed to describe the experiences of health care providers in the early stages of the outbreak. The study was qualitative in that it used telephone interviews as a means for data collection among the 13 participants. The study found that even though the participants felt dutiful and resilient while working through the COVID pandemic, they also felt that it was challenging. The results of the study are significant as they suggest, with multiple support systems, health care workers can overcome difficulties and exceed from their experience.

Sterling et al. (2020) examines the experiences of home health care workers working during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was qualitative in that it used 1-to1 semi structured interviews as a means for data collection among the 33 participants. There was evidence found that workers were forced to make difficult trade-offs in their work and personal lives (Sterling et

al., 2020). The results of the study are significant as they show how health care professionals' life outside of work can alter their work life and vice versa.

While literature exists about experiences of health care professionals working during the pandemic, unfortunately very few focused on showing the life experiences of health care professionals working during the COVID pandemic. Reviewing the literature leads back to the question: What Are the Life Experiences of Health Care Professionals Working During the COVID Pandemic? Analyzing health care professionals' life experiences through photovoice are essential to furthering qualitative photovoice research studies.

Methods

This qualitative study was conducted using a method called photovoice. Photovoice is a notably participatory action research (PAR) method that is community based. By using the photovoice method, participants were involved in the research process directly. This method also allowed the participants to express their life experiences through photographs. For this project, the photovoice method, developed by Wang and Burris, was utilized.

This project was conducted in a collaborative format with health care professionals that worked during the COVID pandemic. It consisted of three women and one man.

The focus group technique was used to give participants the opportunity to share their life experiences through photos. The focus group technique also gave participants the opportunity to think about the photographs they selected and stimulate discussion with others about the significance of the photographs.

Sampling and Participants

A purposive recruitment was used to obtain a maximum variation study group and as a result, attain variability in data. Inclusion criteria for subjects included being 18 years of age or

older, being a health care professional who worked during the COVID pandemic and giving informed consent.

Through a selective process, individuals who were contacted, had prior contact with the researcher. Four individuals agreed to participate in the project out of the six individuals that were contacted. To achieve the variation in characteristics, the four individuals differed in age, ethnicity, gender, and education level.

Data collection

Once participants agreed to participate in the project, an initial meeting on camera training and ethical considerations in the research process was provided. At this initial meeting, all participants provided their written informed consent. Participants were asked to think about their everyday lives and to take photos of different things they felt were purposeful to them whether it be positive or negative.

All participants were encouraged to use their mobile phone cameras. All 4 participants used the camera on their mobile phones to capture the photographs. Within a given time frame of 2 weeks, all 4 participants had taken all their photos. They were directed to take 6 photographs and select 3 photographs that they wanted to present at the focus group meeting. They were also directed to write captions for each selected photograph. Thus 12 photographs were used for the group discussion.

Focus groups

The focus group meeting was facilitated by the author (LM) as the moderator. The focus group meeting was performed in October 2020 using Zoom. Zoom is a visual video and audio-conferencing platform. The focus group meeting lasted about 2 hours.

Using photographs that were selected by the participants allowed them to create narratives focused on topics significant to them. The focus group meeting created an opportunity for participants to self-reflect and work together with the other group members to create meaning for each photograph. In photovoice, the focus of participants relies upon their own perception of photographs. To make participants feel more at ease, a smaller group was chosen. The group members contributed considerably to create a comfortable space for sharing openly and freely.

Since the group members were already familiar with one another, the group meeting began with participants introducing themselves freely. Then, each member was asked to choose four photographs to discuss, along with the captions they wrote for each photo (using the PHOTO technique as a guide; Table 1). The author asked each PHOTO question about each photograph. Each group member took turns discussing the photographs they chose, joined by the other members who shared their perceptions pertaining to the topic. To equalize the research process, participants were involved in the photo arranging process.

Table 1

The PHOTO technique and explanation

| | |
|----------|--|
| P | Describe your Photo ? |
| H | What is H appening in your picture? |
| O | Why did you take a picture O f this? |
| T | What does this picture T ell us about your life? |
| O | <u>How can this picture provide Opportunities for us to improve life?</u> |

Adapted from the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board at Mississippi University for Women approved this study. The participants received printed information that explained what the study entailed, their involvement and the research purpose. The researcher explained that the information provided by the participants would be securely stored, would be available to the research team members only, and protect their personal identity.

Data Analysis

As outlined by Wang and Burris, the participatory process of analysis took place at the focus group meeting through a process of selecting and contextualizing. The selection process involved giving participants time to look over their photos and select a few for the focus group discussion. The contextualizing process involved participants discussing the photograph and why they chose it, giving the photographs meaning. The researcher used the PHOTO method to give context to the photographs by asking participants: *Describe your Photo, what is Happening in your picture, why did you take a picture Of this, what does this picture Tell us about your life, and how can this picture provide Opportunities for us to improve life?*

Results

Four participants completed the project and described their life experiences working during the COVID pandemic. Due to the pandemic, adjusting to a change in the way they lived, had influenced their personal and professional lives. From the group discussion, three major themes emerged: health, safety, and helping others. Photographs are presented under each theme.

Health

Participants discussed how important it was to take care of themselves during the COVID pandemic. Their approach consisted of eating healthy, staying hydrated, the importance of annual check-ups and weekly COVID testing. Eating vegetables, drinking water, attending a

health check-up, and getting a weekly COVID test were a few examples of the effective approaches;

Taking steps to stay hydrated helps in all aspects of health (Participant #1).

I try to take good care of myself, so I can be around for my grandbabies (Participant #3).

A.



B.



C.

D.

Fig 1. A. Vegetables: “Increasing my vegetable intake” B. My Bottled Joy: “I feel refreshed every time I finish a bottle” C. Prepped and waiting for a procedure: “I was nervous, but I knew

that I was safe” D. Giving coworker a COVID test: “Maintaining my health and well being is a high priority”.

Safety

When discussing their life experiences during the COVID pandemic, safety and safety practices came up often. Participants stressed the importance of staying safe while working and living during the pandemic. They presented several ways to staying safe which included using hand sanitizer, wearing masks, and social distancing;

Be mindful and stay safe because COVID is real (Participant #3).

Know that it does not matter where you are, you must be safe by social distancing and wearing masks (Participant #4).



A.



B.



C.



D.

Fig 2. A. Hand Sanitizer: “Hand sanitizer station at work” B. In the nurse’s station: “I’m sitting at the computer charting with my mask on” C. Visiting someone in the hospital: “I was showing that masks are essential while visiting others” D. Food delivery: “Having food delivered without contact, shows just how much times have changed”.

Helping others

Participants explained that by showing their experiences through photographs, it could help others stay healthy and safe. All the participants agreed that to better take care of patients, they had to first take care of themselves. Their approach to helping others consisted of wearing the proper PPE while working and taking care of others;

Being around COVID is not scary to me, as long as I prepare properly (Participant #1).

This picture reminds me to care for myself in order to care for others. It may generate a way to improve someone’s life (Participant #2).



Fig 3. A. Wearing PPE: “It makes me feel good that I can take care of people while also protecting myself and my family” B. Cleaning equipment: “Wiping down the equipment after checking patients’ vital signs C. A thank you sign for healthcare professionals: “Seeing this sign every day I come to work, puts a smile on my face” D. Suited up: “Go the extra mile during this pandemic. Wear all that is needed and do whatever it takes to keep the patient and yourself safe”.

Discussion

Photovoice provided an opportunity for the researcher to completely understand the life experiences of health care professionals that other methods of research such as interviews or surveys may not completely capture. Photovoice was able to capture the personal and work experiences of the participants. During this process, health, safety and helping others had been essential components. The participants had to adjust to their “new normal” due to the pandemic.

The findings of this project showed that the participants felt motivated to work and be of service to others despite the ongoing pandemic. From our participants’ photos, it was obvious that they understood that being healthy and safe was important along with providing help to others.

Photovoices of this project presented effective approaches in everyday situations that can be used to adjust to the COVID pandemic such as having food delivered with no contact. Participants who used the pandemic as a reminder to protect themselves showed their acceptance of the changes in their lives.

There were some strengths in this project. The use of photovoice proved to be an effective method for engaging individuals actively in topics about their life experiences while working during the COVID pandemic. Participants emphasized that this project provided them with the opportunity to think about subjects that were more purposeful to express about their life

experiences working during the pandemic. Participants also emphasized how discussing and sharing each other's photographs in the focus group meeting had been a beneficial experience. The participants had an appreciation for the focus group meeting format conducted via Zoom.

In this project, the photovoice method was a useful approach in seeing the daily life experience of the participants in a way that was clear and straightforward. Potential readers will probably recall, without difficulty, the central themes of the photographs selected by participants. The photographs contributed greatly to the focus group discussion.

There were also some limitations in this project. Compared to other qualitative research methods, photovoice requires more time and commitment. In the project, participants participated in an initial meeting that include camera training and ethics as well as a focus group discussion meeting.

Conclusions

This project contributed to our understanding of photovoice as a method for understanding the life experiences of health care professionals working during the COVID pandemic. All the participants of this project adjusted their daily lives to the changes made by the pandemic. This brought attention to what health care professionals experience during critical situations. Further, we suggest that future researchers consider using photovoice in other contexts to expand the literature and effectiveness of photovoice in examining health care professional's life experiences.

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