

Original Research

Understanding the issues and challenges in the implementation of nursing services in primary health care: A qualitative study in Garut, West Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Background: Primary healthcare centers provide a wide range of healthcare services, with nurses playing pivotal roles in maintaining the quality of care. To enhance nurse performance, it is essential to gain insights into their experiences regarding the implementation of nursing services in these institutions.

Objective: This study aimed to explore the issues and challenges related to nursing services in primary health care centers through the perspectives of Indonesian nurses.

Methods: Qualitative research using a phenomenological approach was conducted. Twelve nurses from primary health care centers were purposively selected as study participants. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews between January 2022 and March 2022. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis.

Results: The analysis yielded five main themes: 1) Working with additional roles and duties, 2) Uncertainty regarding nurses' roles and functions, 3) Nurses' concerns about the nursing profession, 4) Barriers to implementing nursing services, and 5) Nurses' expectations concerning nursing services.

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Conclusion: Nurses in primary health care centers face challenges in fully carrying out nursing services. Numerous issues and obstacles exist in the provision of nursing services at primary healthcare facilities. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the authority and autonomy of nurses working in primary health care settings.

Keywords

challenges; issues; nurse; nursing services; primary health care center; Indonesia

Background

In the global healthcare landscape, nursing leaders continuously strive to improve the quality of nursing services. As dedicated healthcare professionals, nurses play a crucial role in delivering top-notch healthcare ([Chiang & Chang, 2012](#)). Unfortunately, nursing services in primary healthcare settings often do not align with the intended roles and functions of nurses – this mismatch is a need to ground nursing practices firmly in the core values of professionalism. In public healthcare centers, nurses often face restrictions on their autonomy and decision-making power ([Finch, 2019](#)).

Professional autonomy stands out as a defining attribute of skilled nurses, evident in their level of service and the responsibility they assume in their independent activities. This autonomy empowers nurses, granting them the strength and capabilities necessary for their roles ([Rouhi-Balasi et al., 2020](#)). This autonomy allows nurses to conduct their work independently, without dependency on other professions and enables them to make decisions rooted in nursing science.

Primary healthcare centers serve as institutions offering a spectrum of healthcare services, including promotion, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care. In this context, nurses operating within the community take on indispensable roles as caregivers, educators, client advocates, counselors, change agents, leaders, managers, case managers, and researchers ([Barnes et al., 2018](#); [Pasthikarini et al., 2018](#)). They are expected to contribute to the development and expansion of nursing practices.

Despite the crucial role of nurses in primary healthcare, the implementation of nursing services in these centers has not been optimal. Healthcare practitioners frequently lack a comprehensive understanding of the scope of nursing services in primary healthcare ([Busca et al., 2021](#)). Studies have indicated that nurses in these settings spend a significant portion of their time on medication administration, contend with administrative work overload, and struggle to provide nursing care effectively ([Agustanti, 2016](#); [Anderson & St Hilaire, 2012](#);

[Barbiani et al., 2016](#); [Ferreira et al., 2018](#)). These challenges inhibit the delivery of comprehensive nursing services, resulting in suboptimal performance and dissatisfaction among healthcare professionals.

Innovative approaches are needed to address these issues and enhance nursing services globally, such as granting nurses greater autonomy in patient care delivery ([Hämel et al., 2020](#)). Exploring innovative solutions to implement nursing services effectively in primary healthcare settings is imperative.

In response to the challenges in nursing services, there is an immediate need for further development to strengthen the role of nurses in primary healthcare. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the current issues and challenges related to nursing services in primary health care centers by drawing insights from Indonesian nurses' experiences. By addressing these issues and promoting autonomy, we can work towards a future where nursing services in primary healthcare settings align more effectively with the core values and roles of the nursing profession.

Methods

Study Design

This study used a qualitative design with a phenomenology approach to explore the issues and challenges in implementing nursing services in primary healthcare centers. This method was chosen to understand better the personal experiences and unique aspects that are important in nursing science ([Gunawan et al., 2015](#)). The study focuses on discovering the meaning behind Indonesian nurses' experiences when they provide nursing services.

Participants

Twelve nurses from various primary healthcare centers were selected to ensure representative samples and to gather sufficient data until saturation was achieved. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, specifically targeting nurses with more than three years of experience working in primary healthcare centers within Garut Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia.

Data Collection

Data were collected from January 2022 to March 2022, involving face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with participants. Each interview, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, was audio-recorded and conducted in the participant's workplace. To uncover the challenges and issues in implementing nursing services, we employed a set of interview questions: 1) Can you describe the typical responsibilities or services of nurses in primary healthcare? 2) How has the role

of nurses been implemented so far? 3) What are your perceptions of nursing services in primary healthcare? 4) Why is nursing service considered important in primary healthcare centers? 5) What obstacles do you encounter when implementing nursing services? 6) What are your expectations for the future of nursing services? Data collection concluded when we reached a saturation point, meaning no new conceptual information emerged during the interviews. Data saturation was achieved after interviewing 12 participants.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the text was analyzed in alignment with the research objectives. The data analysis process followed the Colaizzi method (Colaizzi, 1978) and was guided by the approach outlined by Polit and Beck (2018). The analysis involved the following steps: 1) Developing a deep understanding of each transcript by reading it multiple times to obtain the message's meaning, 2) Identifying critical statements from the verbatim interviews and compiling them into a list of significant statements, 3) Formulating meanings based on the collection of significant statements, 4) Organizing the formulated meanings into clusters of themes, 5) Providing a comprehensive explanation of observed phenomena, 6) Describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and 7) Returning to the participants for confirmation of the analysis, which was conveyed to them via WhatsApp messages. Gunawan et al. (2022) noted that when conducting research with participants based in Indonesia, using WhatsApp for qualitative data collection or online chat interviews is preferred.

Rigor

In order to ensure the rigor of this qualitative study, several key steps were taken, drawing from the recommendations of Guba and Lincoln (1989). These steps are vital for upholding the validity of data in qualitative research and include the following aspects: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. 1) Credibility was done through member checking, where participants were invited to review and validate the study's findings. Triangulation was employed to cross-verify the obtained data, enhancing the study's overall credibility; 2) Dependability was established through a thorough audit process conducted by the research team, including research supervisors. This audit included all stages of the research, ensuring consistency and reliability. Moreover, the use of interview guidelines contributed to the dependability of the data collection process; 3) Confirmability was demonstrated by transparently explaining how conclusions and interpretations were derived from the data. The researchers

provided examples to illustrate that the findings were directly derived from the collected data; 4) To assess transferability, the researchers compiled a detailed, clear, systematic, and trustworthy report. This approach ensures that the study's findings can be applied to similar contexts and situations beyond the immediate research setting, enhancing the transferability of the results.

Ethical Considerations

This study obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the Universitas of Indonesia (Approval code: No. 13/UN2.F12.D1.2.1/PPM.00.02/2021). Participants were informed about the study's purpose and gave consent to record the interviews. We maintained full confidentiality for the participants by using codes (P1 to P12) instead of displaying their names.

Results

Characteristics of the Participants

In this study, the participants' characteristics included three males and nine females. Their ages ranged from 29 to 54 years, and their length of service varied from 6 to 28 years (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1 Characteristics of the participants

Participants	Gender	Age (Years)	Period of Service (Years)
P1	Female	45	18
P2	Male	51	24
P3	Female	52	26
P4	Female	54	28
P5	Female	43	16
P6	Male	50	24
P7	Female	44	16
P8	Female	29	6
P9	Female	50	24
P10	Male	45	20
P11	Female	46	18
P12	Female	37	12

Thematic Findings

The data analysis resulted in five main themes ([Figure 1](#)):

Theme 1: Working with Additional Roles and Duties

Working as a nurse in the primary healthcare center did not allow for the optimal display and demonstration of the nursing profession's existence. This theme consists of two sub-themes: Additional duty and non-nursing duties.

Subtheme 1.1: Additional Duty

All participants said that they were undertaking roles that nurses should not do. This is a common complaint among nurses in primary health care centers,

leading to discrepancies in the implementation of nursing services. The exemplars of participants' quotes are as follows:

"...there were additional tasks to be carried out, such as the delegation of authority when we did medical procedures that have been delegated by the doctor" (P1)

"In here, the nurse made a medical diagnosis and prescribed medicine for patients..." (P3)

".. I feel a nurse has a double job, even a triple job; we handle more than two programs of services" (P6)

Subtheme 1.2: Non-Nursing Duties

Participants also stated that nurses, while on duty, perform non-nursing tasks. The exemplars of participants' quotes are as follows:

"There are also nurses who handle the procurement of goods and services..." (P3)

"I have had an experience where a nurse was appointed as the treasurer..." (P5)

"Sometimes, a nurse was placed at the pharmacy or registration of the patient..." (P7)

"...I did many administration tasks..." (P10)

"Nurses also serve as replacements for environmental health workers..." (P11)

"...when there is no driver of the ambulance, it will be handled by the nurse" (P12)

Theme 2: Uncertainty Regarding Nurses' Roles and Functions

This theme consists of two sub-themes: unclear roles of the nurse and the quality of the job.

Subtheme 2.1: Unclear Role of Nurse

The exemplars of participants' quotes are as follows:

"I feel that the responsibilities of the nurse are overlapping" (P1)

"I have to go first to the office to solve everything and do daily activities with additional jobs." (P7)

"The tasks performed by nurses are not in accordance with the nursing service" (P9)

"I performed the other professions' tasks" (P12)

Subtheme 2.2: Quality of Job

The participants' quotes are as follows:

"I am unable to fulfill my role and duties as a nurse optimally" (P6)

"Additional tasks sometimes even dominate. Nurses are too busy with them, which sometimes results in neglecting their primary duties." (P8)

"I think that the nursing service is not yet comprehensive..." (P10)

Theme 3: Nurses' Concerns about the Nursing Profession

Nurses realized their role as nurses. Although nurses had inappropriate roles and tasks when working in primary health care centers, they knew they had the authority and autonomy in the nursing profession to carry out professional duties. The exemplars of participants' quotes are as follows:

"...I think that our scope of work at the primary health care center encompasses nursing care for individuals, families, and the community" (P2)

"...ideally, we should do promotion and preventive care, not curative..." (P3)

"The nurses must stand on their own profession in nursing" (P8)
"I think we did the other profession's role..." (P9)
"We have to demonstrate the existence of nurses." (P11)

Theme 4: Barriers to Implementing Nursing Services

This theme consists of two themes: personnel healthcare shortage and high workload of nurses.

Subtheme 4.1: Personnel Healthcare Shortage

The participants' quotes are as follows:

"The lack of doctors also results in nurses having to perform a mixed variety of professional tasks..." (P1)
"I feel that the number of nursing staff is insufficient..." (P7)

Subtheme 4.2: High Workload of Nurses

The exemplars of participants' quotes are as follows:

"I do not work only with patient care, but also with administrative jobs, do examinations, and give medical prescriptions under my responsibility; that takes a lot of my time" (P4)
"Nurses are assigned to outpatient and inpatient care." (P9)

Theme 5: Nurses' Expectations Concerning Nursing Services

Various situations and conditions concerning nursing services within the primary health care center have not received sufficient support for the implementation of nursing services. Each participant hopes for a better arrangement to optimize nursing services. This theme consists of two themes: expecting guidance of nursing services and capacity building for nurses.

Subtheme 5.1: Expecting Guidance of Nursing Services

The exemplars of participants' quotes are as follows:

"...there was no standard of nursing services clearly, overlapping among the job, and this situation makes nurses work without any direction; automatically, we will not know what our work is like..." (P2)
"...I also hope the stakeholder can conduct a regulation. The regulation that arranges what nurses should do and which one should not do by a nurse in a primary health care center." (P1)
"...If there is an available nursing service guideline, it will greatly assist the nurses..." (P6)
"I think an arrangement for nursing services in a primary health care center is needed" (P11)

Subtheme 5.2: Capacity Building for Nurses

The participants' quotes can be seen as follows:

"...the roles and functions of the nurse must be more empowered..." (P5)
"...Skills and knowledge must be enhanced, further education to a higher level should be pursued, and additional training should be provided." (P2)
"...Leadership and Management Skills are important points that need to be improved..." (P10)

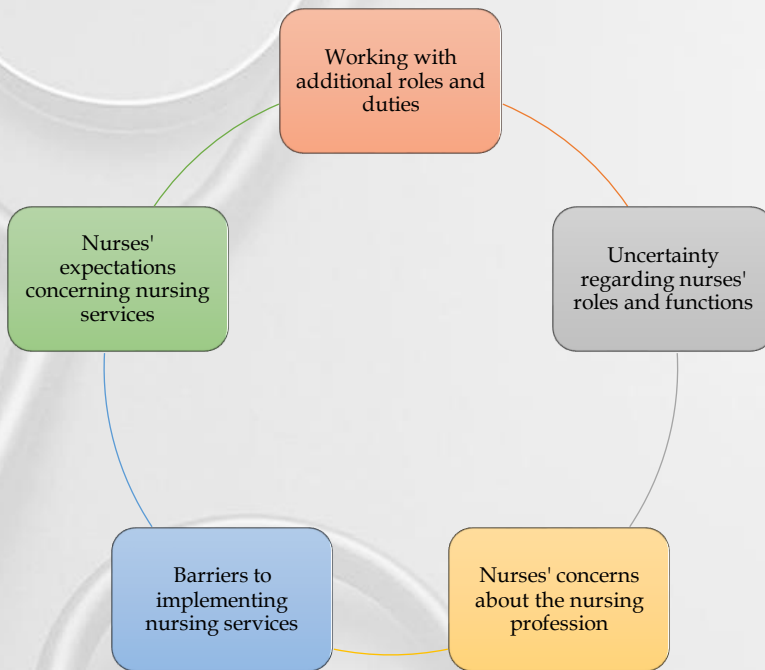


Figure 1 Thematic findings

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the issues and challenges in implementing nursing services within primary healthcare centers. The study's findings have revealed several issues and challenges delineated as research themes. The discussion below describes the five main themes.

The first theme highlights that nurses in primary health care centers in Indonesia take on multiple roles and duties. This can increase their workload and affect the quality of nursing services (Masriati et al., 2018). When there is a shortage of nurses, additional tasks are often assigned to those already working. This can blur professional boundaries and cause confusion about nurses' responsibilities (Moriel et al., 2017). Similar research findings have indicated an increased nurse workload, where one nurse may be expected to fulfill various obligations (Shihundla et al., 2016). It is crucial for nurses to be clear about their roles and scope of practice to maintain professionalism. Clearly defining these aspects is essential for successful nursing services based on nursing knowledge and authority (Weiland, 2015).

The second theme, "Uncertainty regarding nurses' roles and functions," highlights a significant issue with potential implications for the healthcare system and patient care. This theme points to a lack of clarity about nurses' responsibilities and tasks. One consequence of this uncertainty is the possibility of overlapping or conflicting roles among healthcare team members (DeLucia et al., 2009). In primary healthcare centers, nurses play a crucial role in providing

nursing services, including caring for individuals, families, groups, and the community as clients (Kusano & Ehrhardt, 2015). These services include assessing patients' health conditions, gathering health histories, conducting physical examinations to identify health issues, developing nursing diagnoses, and determining appropriate interventions. Professional autonomy in nursing services can have a positive impact on the quality of patient care (Rouhi-Balasi et al., 2020).

The third theme, "Nurses' concerns to the nursing profession," highlights nurses' strong awareness of their professional duties. Nurses play a significant role in healthcare facilities, and self-awareness is crucial for building effective nurse-patient relationships and delivering quality nursing care (Rasheed et al., 2019). Nurses should carry out nursing services autonomously, making clinical decisions and recognizing their individual needs for professional growth. Autonomy in nursing means applying professional nursing knowledge to patient care and clinical decision-making (Rouhi-Balasi et al., 2020). Nurses in primary healthcare centers also have responsibilities for organizing public health and first-level health efforts, focusing on health promotion and prevention (Spetz et al., 2017). Increasing awareness about the nursing profession's role is vital for acknowledging nurses' significant contributions to healthcare and society. This awareness can lead to greater support and investment in nursing education, research, and workforce planning. Ultimately, it can result in improved patient outcomes and a stronger healthcare system.

The fourth theme highlights the barriers to implementing nursing services, specifically personnel healthcare shortage and the high workload of nurses. Healthcare personnel shortage refers to a situation where insufficient qualified healthcare professionals, including doctors and nurses, are available to provide adequate health services. This shortage has been discussed in several previous studies, and it is recognized as one of the barriers to delivering high-quality healthcare services (Mutshatshi & Munyai, 2022; Tamata & Mohammadnezhad, 2023). An insufficient nursing workforce can lead to stress and burnout among nurses, which in turn affects their performance. When there aren't enough nurses in a healthcare facility, existing nurses often have to take on additional assignments (Haddad et al., 2023). The primary challenge in providing effective primary healthcare services is often the shortage of nurses, which occurs when the demand for services exceeds the available nursing capacity. This situation increases the workload of nurses, causing them to handle significantly more tasks than their usual requirements (Shihundla et al., 2016).

The fifth theme, "Nurses' expectations concerning nursing services," indicates the crucial role of nurses' expectations in providing high-quality nursing services in primary healthcare settings and achieving better health outcomes for

individuals and communities. Nurses express a strong desire for guidelines in providing nursing services. Nursing service guidance includes a set of guidelines, protocols, or recommendations that offer direction and instructions to nurses in delivering healthcare services (Yoder-Wise et al., 2019). When these guidelines acknowledge the vital role of nurses in primary healthcare and provide a framework for their practice, it can lead to improved health outcomes and greater patient satisfaction. Previous study has discussed the importance of creating a positive environment, including implementing protocols, directives, and proficient nursing capabilities, to enhance the quality of care in primary healthcare centers (Rabie et al., 2016). These guidelines can be developed by healthcare organizations, nursing associations, government bodies, or other authoritative entities in the healthcare sector and are typically based on the latest research or clinical evidence.

Additionally, participants in this study expressed the expectation for capacity building among nurses. This includes enhancing their knowledge and skills in nursing. Nurses often seek opportunities for continuous professional development and expect support from their employers and healthcare organizations to improve their skills and knowledge. Self-improvement in capacity enables nurses to make appropriate choices for patient well-being and meet the expectations of professional conduct (Torabizadeh et al., 2019).

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several important implications: First, the roles of primary healthcare nurses are still overlapping, indicating the need for reorganization to align their duties with their nursing expertise. Second, nurse workloads may increase due to personnel shortages in healthcare delivery. This can lead to nurse burnout and decreased job satisfaction, affecting the quality of care. Empowering nursing staff to make decisions within their scope of practice can improve job satisfaction and help them take ownership of their roles. Third, nursing services in primary healthcare settings are crucial for health promotion and disease prevention. Challenges in implementation can result in missed opportunities to educate and empower individuals to adopt healthy behaviors and lifestyles. Fourth, healthcare stakeholders should prioritize the professional development of nursing staff through training and continuing education programs. In addition, these implications are valuable for integrative healthcare as they help address barriers to effective service delivery and pave the way for patient-centered, holistic healthcare approaches that enhance the quality of health services.

Limitations

This research has limitations. It only included participants from one district in West Java province. As a result, the findings might not apply to all Indonesian nurses in primary healthcare settings. Expanding the study to a broader range of locations and increasing the number of participants is recommended for future research.

Conclusion

The study's findings have uncovered issues and challenges in nursing services at primary healthcare centers. To enhance the quality of healthcare services, addressing these challenges is crucial. Solutions may involve tackling workforce shortages, improving resource access, investing in nursing education and training, fostering collaboration among healthcare professionals, and empowering nurses with more autonomy.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest in this research.

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Authors' Contributions

Authors (IW, JS, HH, DA) participated in the concept, study design, and analysis. The first author (IW) conducted the interviews, data collection, and writing. All authors approved the final version of the article to be published.

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Data Availability Statement

All datasets generated and analyzed during the study process are not made public but available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of the Use of AI in Scientific Writing

Nothing to declare.

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