

Commentary on “The Process of Empowerment: A Parish Nurse Perspective”

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Summary of the Research

In the preceding article, researchers Weis, Schank, and Matheus used a qualitative, focus group research method to uncover the perceptions (or, as they say, the perspectives) of parish nurses related to the concept of empowerment. The research design is considered exploratory research and is appropriate when researchers are trying to learn about phenomena that are not well understood. The researchers tell us, the readers, that they want to know what empowers parish nurses in their work as parish nurses and what parish nurses think they do to empower clients. What better way to answer these research questions than to ask the parish nurses themselves! The research is considered qualitative because the researchers do not want to quantify the concepts of interest, that is, they do not want to quantify *empowerment* on a numbered scale of 1 to 10 or to evaluate client empowerment by counting observed behaviors. Rather, the researchers want to describe fully something of interest to them and to us as holistic nurses.

The focus group research method is one that brings people together to talk with the researchers about a topic. It is important that the researchers find the right people (experts on the topic) to tell them about the concepts they want to learn about. Given that all 28 focus group participants were practicing parish nurses, we and the researchers can assume they got it right and the people in the focus groups knew what they thought empowered themselves and their clients. The fact that the participants had varied experiences as parish nurses indicates that the nurses were not a homogeneous group and we can consider them a representative sample of parish nurses.

In a focus group, the researchers ask open-ended, broad questions to facilitate discussion and reflection. They are also interested in being sure everyone is heard and that all statements are recorded. A focus group will produce volumes of data that need to be analyzed, and the researchers used common tech-

niques to tape-record group sessions, keep field notes, and independently review the narratives to begin data analysis. The researchers report several strategies to keep the data true to the participants' intentions and these include careful interviewing, accurate transcribing, confirmation of accuracy with the participants, and review by at least two members of the research team. The researchers used the transcriptions to review content and to find themes that represent the consensus of perceptions of the parish nurses in the focus groups.

The findings are presented according to themes that were expressed. For each theme, the researcher gave us direct quotes of something the participants said that indicated the theme. These direct quotes are used in qualitative research as they help us to understand the idea being expressed and they provide a description of the theme as well.

Implications and Application to Holistic Nursing

Nurse theorist Jean Watson often states that professional nursing practice is reflective practice. I think she means that we need to “do nursing” and to step back from what we do to seriously consider why, how, and the effect it has on us. A research article that provides us with nurses' perceptions of empowerment gives each of us many reflective questions to better understand ourselves and to gain professionalism and depth to our own practices. In my view, the application of this research is to stimulate nurse reflection. Consider the following.

Those who are parish nurses will read this article and look for themselves in the ideas and attitudes expressed. They will be asking, “Am I alike or different from the parish nurses who served as participants?” Others can look at the themes and reflect on what *empowerment* really means and how it contributes to work satisfaction and other aspects of our lives and work.

The nurses in the study reported that they feel empowered if they feel valued by others (clients, pastors, members of the health care team). Reflect on this idea in relation to your own work. Are you feeling valued by others? How do you know that others value you? What do you desire from others? We know that some areas of practice provide more direct feedback than others to the nurse in terms of “being valued.” Are you in the “right” setting? The study findings seem to imply that at least a part of nurse empowerment has to do with the feedback from others in the work setting and may indicate that nurses need certain behaviors from others to empower themselves. Ask to what degree this is true for yourself.

Second, a set of themes emerged having to do with roles, education, and experience. Nurses see nursing roles and their ability to carry out their roles capably as empowering. Roles of teaching, referring, counseling, and nurturing are mentioned specifically as helping the nurses to achieve a sense of empowerment. Keeping up with knowledge, gaining experience, and maturing to be a good nurse are all empowering as well. Ask yourself how you carry out your roles and which nursing roles seem most important to you. Then, examine the effects these roles have on you. Do we all feel empowered when we can reflect on a job well done?

It is not surprising that a group of parish nurses discussed the presence of a Higher Power as a source of empowerment. Focus group nurses described recognizing that God empowered them and that God assisted/helped them to do the right thing. This theme describes an aspect of empowerment in which one recognizes that a source of power higher than the nurse gives power to the nurse. Is that true for you? In what ways do you receive power from understanding and relating to a Higher Power?

Last, the study findings indicate that relationships in the form of interactions and mentoring are empowering. When nurses believed that their clients had been empowered, the nurses felt more empowered themselves. Also, the nurses believed that knowing they had someone to call, to teach them, and to guide them was also empowering. Thus, nurses described being empowered through interacting positively with others. Reflect on this notion in relation to your own work interactions.

Empowerment of Clients

Nurses described nursing activities that empowered clients. These themes were as follows: putting the client in control of the situation, presence and listening, client education, establishing trust, relating to God, and linking the client with needed resources. It is clear that letting the client establish goals and make decisions about care would be empowering for clients. The practices of establishing trust, presence, and therapeutic listening would seem a precondition for establishing a relationship with the client to provide teaching, support, and referrals for the client. Once again, the linkage to relating to God emerged as empowering within the context of parish nursing. Each holistic nurse could take these ideas and reflect on how we establish nurse-client relationships, the nature of what it means to put the client in control of his or her situation, and the meaning of relating to a Higher Power within nursing practice.

Summary

A focus group study of nurses’ perceptions gives us a reflection on who we are—much like looking into a mirror and seeing ourselves. This study on nurses’ perceptions of empowerment gives us valuable descriptions of the concept and ability to consider personally the factors that may contribute to it.

Reference

Weis, D., Schank, M. J., & Matheus, R. (2006). The process of empowerment: A parish nurse perspective. *Journal of Holistic Nursing, 24*, 17-24.

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