

A mural of a nurse in blue scrubs and a face mask, with a globe at the bottom and a person in the background.

EXPERIENCES OF NEW GRADUATE NURSES DURING COVID-19: A Qualitative Study

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INTRODUCTION

- COVID-19 has affected millions of people globally
- Nurses have been left exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally
 - Previous pandemics and epidemics have indicated a need for psychological support for nurses
- New graduate nurses (NGNs) are an especially vulnerable group
 - "Reality shock" upon entering their first job
 - Higher risk for emotional exhaustion and burnout

RESEARCH QUESTION



- What is the lived experience of new graduate bedside nurses who were employed to practice on medical-surgical, telemetry, or step-down units during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Study Aim:

- The study aimed to gain understanding of ways to enhance support for NGNs



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Benner's From Novice to Expert Model

- 5 stages of competency
 - Novice
 - Advanced beginner
 - Competent
 - Proficient
 - Expert
- NGNs are considered advanced beginners
 - Lacking “aspect recognition”
 - Not yet able to consider the patient as a whole
- NGNs need adequate guidance and support from experienced RNs

LITERATURE REVIEW:

New Graduate Nurse Experience

Nurses with less than 2 years of experience accounted for 47.5% of all nurse turnovers in 2019

NGNs reported lowest level of comfort and confidence at the 6 to 12 month period

- Descriptive comparative study that utilized the Casey-Fink Graduate Nurse Experience Survey (n=270)
- Feeling inadequate and incompetent, anxious about making patient care decisions

Many organizations have established new graduate residency programs

- Promote NGN growth and confidence → improve new nurse satisfaction and retention

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Nurse Experience During COVID-19 and Previous Pandemics



Nurse physical and mental exhaustion

- Fear and apprehension
- Frustration and anger due to lack of preparedness for a pandemic

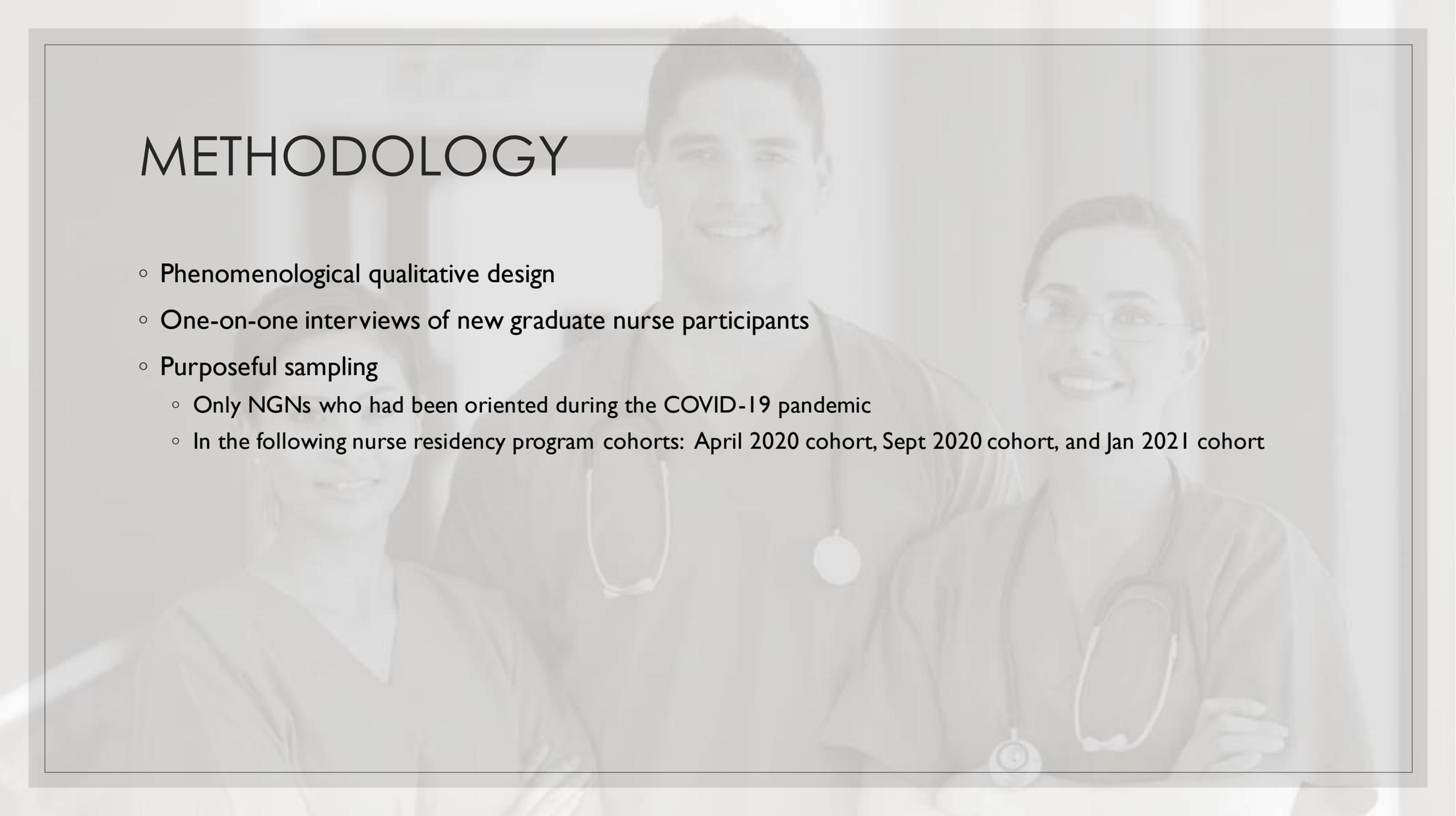
Nurses reported coming out of the experience stronger than before

- “like soldiers united to defeat an enemy” (Bahramnezhad & Asgari, 2020, p. 5)

Long-term psychological effects

- Study that surveyed healthcare workers (n=769) in Toronto who provided care during the SARS outbreak
- Reported significantly higher levels of burnout, psychological distress, and posttraumatic distress

METHODOLOGY



- Phenomenological qualitative design
- One-on-one interviews of new graduate nurse participants
- Purposeful sampling
 - Only NGNs who had been oriented during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - In the following nurse residency program cohorts: April 2020 cohort, Sept 2020 cohort, and Jan 2021 cohort

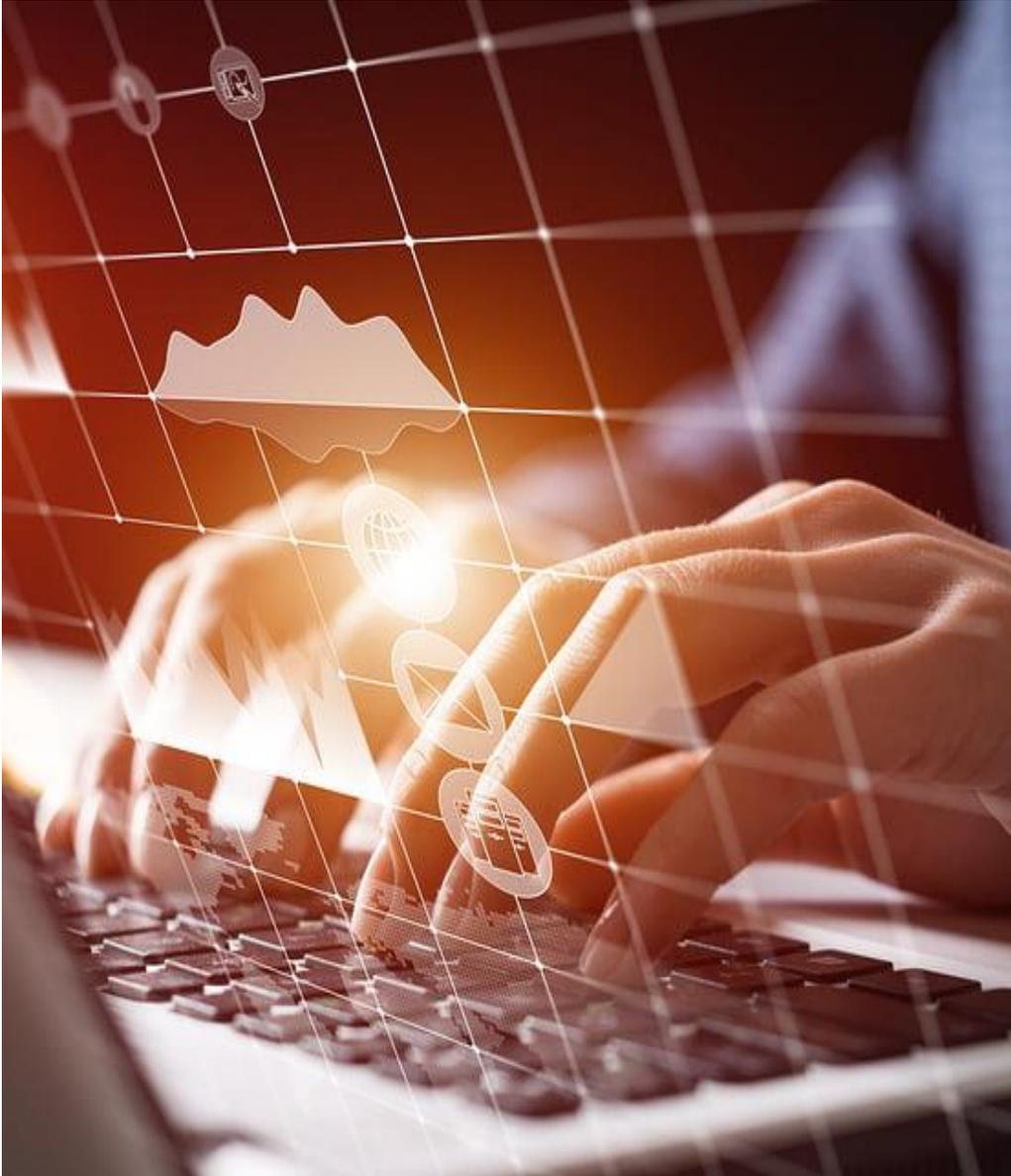
DATA COLLECTION

Demographic data

- Gender
- Nurse residency program cohort
- Assigned unit
- Marital status
- Highest nursing degree
- Age
- Length of orientation period
- Children in household

Semi-structured interview

- Some discussion questions included:
 - Tell me about your experience transitioning as a new graduate nurse during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - Can you describe some of the struggles you encountered in your transition process?
 - What helped you cope with the stressors you faced?



DATA ANALYSIS

- Demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics
- Interview recordings were transcribed
- Transcriptions were analyzed using in vivo coding
- Codes were categorized into common themes

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received
- Participants have been informed of risk of some emotional distress during the interview
- Participant letter explained a brief background and significance of the study
 - Assured all information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- Informed consent
- Cost incurred by the researcher was minimal



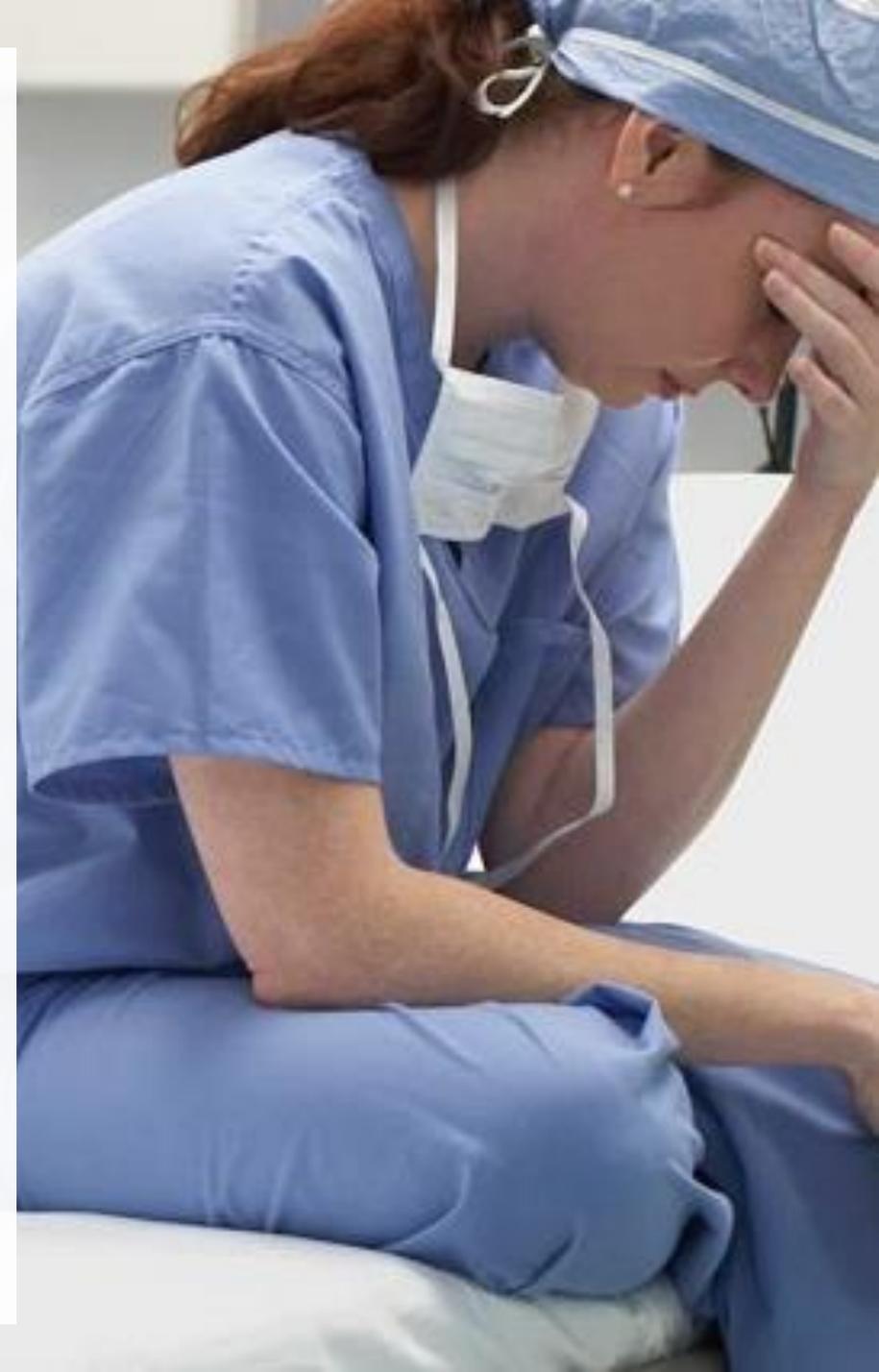
Descriptive Statistics of New Graduate Nurse Demographics (N = 12)

Demographic Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%
Age (years)	28.25	11.12	-	-
Range = 23-43				
Gender				
Female			9	75
Marital Status				
Single			10	83.3
Children in Household				
Yes			1	8.3
Highest Nursing Degree				
Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)			12	100
New Graduate Nurse Residency Cohort				
April 2020			2	16.7
September 2020			5	41.7
January 2021			5	41.7
Care Unit				
Medical Surgical Telemetry			5	41.7
Medical Surgical Telemetry & Stepdown			6	50
Length of Orientation (weeks)				
Range = 10-14	11.58	1.31	-	-

RESULTS:
Demographic Data

Theme: *Staffing*

- Floating
 - “Floating in general even now is a little stressful. But as a new grad when you’re depending on the people you’re familiar with and comfortable asking questions, they’re not there anymore.”
- Unsafe Patient Assignments
 - “I always thought it was risky because what if I mess up, I just started out? I can’t lose my license.”
 - “I hope it’s not going to be me today. I hope I’m not going to get the seven [patients].”





Theme: *Orientation*

- Preceptorship
 - “I think everyone comes in with a lot of anxiety and just feeling super incapable [...] I felt so overwhelmed and fearful that I was going to miss something really crucial or forget something.”
- New Graduate Nurse Residency
 - “Talking to others in the cohort was helpful because we all understood what we were going through.”
- **Comfort Level Caring for Patients with COVID vs. without COVID**
 - “I only knew COVID, so that was strange. It was like I started right over again [...] It took me a long time to get settled in and comfortable.”

Theme: *Caring for Patients with COVID-19*

- Nurse Moral Injury
 - “[grew] numb to it because at one point, it felt like every single shift, I had at least one comfort care patient.”
 - “It was that extra stress and you know, while you’re at work, you’re so busy you can’t talk about it. So all those feelings are pent in.”
- Fear of Transmission and Supply Levels
- Coping with Stress during COVID-19
 - “I don’t think I really ever learned to cope. I just try to go to sleep.”
 - “My mom is a nurse and she knew what was going on and always asked me how I was.”





Theme: *Silver Lining*

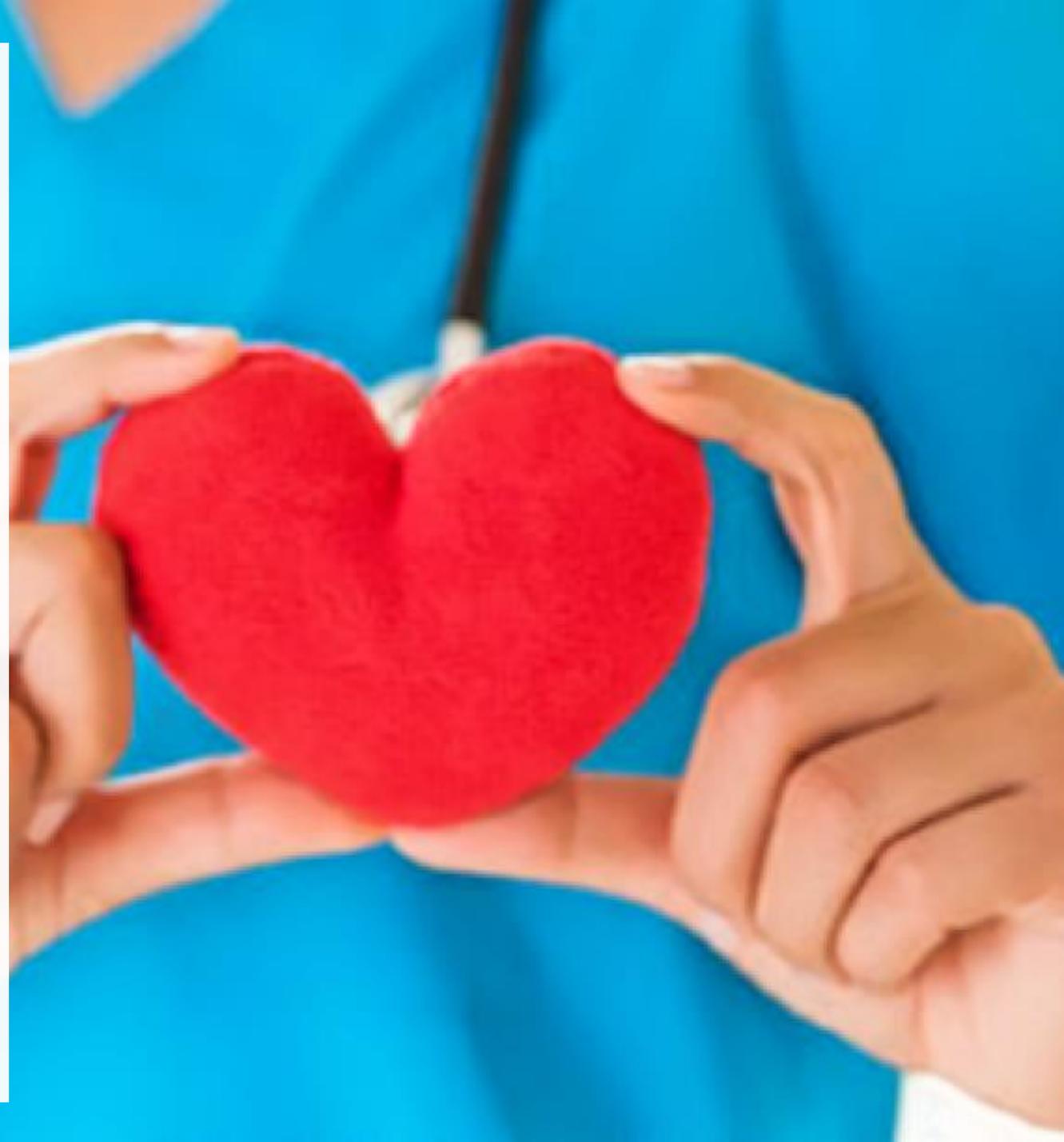
- “Being in the room with the patients, it felt kind of sacred. I’m the one that gets to be taking care of them. It was such a unique thing to be a part of.”
- “I don’t want to get sick but if I get sick because I’m taking care of somebody else, then that is a worthy reason to get sick.”

Implications for Nursing Practice and Education

- Preceptorship
- Topic suggestions for NGN classes included:
 - Postmortem care
 - Palliative care discussions
 - Speaking up in the case of an unsafe situation
 - Recognizing the need to ask for help
- NGN Self-Care and Well-being
- Unsafe Practice
 - Ensure adequate staffing and resources for patient and nurse safety

Recommendations for Further Research

- Effective self-care programs for nurses
- Some participants felt undervalued by management
 - Further research on ways hospital organizations could further support nurses
 - Enhance nurse satisfaction and retention



Strengths and Limitations

- Strengths
 - Participants' level of comfort with researcher
 - Opportunity for participants to personally reflect on their experiences during COVID-19
- Limitations
 - Homogenous sample
 - Sample included NGNs from only one hospital

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