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Determining the Views of Service Responsible Nurses on Postgraduate Education: A Qualitative Study

Servis Sorumlusu Hemşirelerin Lisansüstü Eğitime İlişkin Görüşlerinin Belirlenmesi: Nitel Bir Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The increasing population and changing demographic structure, scientific advancements, and the growing expectations and need for healthcare specialists are enhancing the importance of higher education in the nursing profession. Understanding the perspectives of service-responsible nurses on postgraduate education is crucial for improving healthcare outcomes. This study aims to determine the views of service-responsible nurses on postgraduate education.

Materials and Methods: The research was designed as a phenomenological qualitative study and was conducted with 13 service charge nurses. Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews using a semi-structured interview form and were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-stage analysis.

Results: Four main themes with eight categories were identified as follows: (i) "necessity of postgraduate education," (ii) "effects of postgraduate education," (iii) "contributions of postgraduate education," and (iv) "barriers to continuing postgraduate education." It was found that service-responsible nurses generally consider postgraduate education necessary, believe that it enhances professionalism and specialization among nurses, increases professional respect, accelerates the integration of practice and academia, and provides quality patient care.

Conclusions: As a result, responsible nurses see not receiving support from senior management as an obstacle during their postgraduate education process. Based on these findings, it is recommended that upper management support nurses who wish to pursue postgraduate education, that responsible nurses collaborate with universities to facilitate postgraduate education and adopt encouraging policies, and that postgraduate education programs in nursing be integrated with clinical practice.

Keywords: Education, nursing responsibility, phenomenology, postgraduate

ÖZ

Amaç: Artan nüfus ve değişen demografik yapı, bilimsel gelişmeler ve sağlık uzmanlarına yönelik artan beklenti ve ihtiyaç, hemşirelik mesleğinde yükseköğretimin önemini artırmaktadır. Sorumlu hemşirelerin lisansüstü eğitime bakış açılarını anlamak, sağlık hizmeti çıktılarına iyileştirmek için çok önemlidir. Bu çalışma, sorumlu hemşirelerin lisansüstü eğitime ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Materyal ve Metot: Araştırma fenomenolojik niteliksel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmış ve 13 servis sorumlu hemşiresi ile yürütülmüştür. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak derinlemesine bireysel görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve Colaizzi'nin yedi aşamalı analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Sekiz kategoriden oluşan dört ana tema aşağıdaki gibi belirlenmiştir: (i) "lisansüstü eğitimin gerekliliği", (ii) "lisansüstü eğitimin etkileri", (iii) "lisansüstü eğitimin katkıları" ve (iv) "lisansüstü eğitime devam etmenin önündeki engeller". Sorumlusu hemşirelerin genel olarak lisansüstü eğitimi gerekli gördükleri, hemşireler arasında profesyonelliği ve uzmanlaşmayı geliştirdiğine, mesleki saygınlığı artırdığına, uygulama ve akademi entegrasyonunu hızlandırdığına ve kaliteli hasta bakımı sağladığına inanışları bulunmuştur.

Sonuç: Sonuç olarak, sorumlu hemşireler lisansüstü eğitim sürecinde üst yönetimden destek alamamayı bir engel olarak görmektedir. Bu bulgulara dayanarak, üst yönetimin lisansüstü eğitim almak isteyen hemşireleri desteklemesi, sorumlu hemşirelerin lisansüstü eğitimi kolaylaştırmak için üniversitelerle iş birliği yapması ve teşvik edici politikalar benimsemesi ve hemşirelikte lisansüstü eğitim programlarının klinik uygulama ile entegre edilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eğitim, fenomenoloji, mezuniyet sonrası, sorumlu hemşire

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INTRODUCTION

The development and growth of a country in terms of science and technology and the training of an educated workforce to achieve this growth significantly depend on higher education institutions. Higher education institutions play an active role in education, science, art, management, research, health service design, and economic development globally.¹ In particular, for professions that involve serving people, such as nursing, individual and professional development can only be achieved through higher education. Formal education is required to obtain the nursing title. Nursing titles vary in different countries, and the criteria for granting these titles also differ. For example, in Turkey, titles include nurse and clinical nurse specialist; in the United States, titles such as RN (Registered Nurse), LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse), and BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) exist, each with different educational requirements.²⁻³ The literature indicates that an increase in educational level is associated with improved patient care quality and satisfaction. Aiken et al. found that higher education levels were associated with reductions in patient fall rates, infection rates, and pressure ulcer formation rates.³ Additionally, Şendir et al. emphasized in their study that a higher educational level contributes to providing high-quality services in clinical settings and developing skilled human resources.⁴

Recent factors such as changing population demographics, scientific advancements, and increased expectations in healthcare have led to a growing need for specialists worldwide, which suggests that there should be an increase in both undergraduate and postgraduate formal education programs in nursing.⁵ Furthermore, global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, wars, and economic crises have intensified the need for trained human resources, particularly experts with specialized knowledge in healthcare and nursing.⁶ In this context, institutions and managers need to create the necessary infrastructure and conditions for nurses working in clinical settings to pursue postgraduate education¹⁰. Mainly, the supportive tendencies of those in managerial positions within institutions are crucial for the quality and reliability of the services provided.⁷⁻⁸⁻⁹ Therefore, the perspectives of managers towards postgraduate education are considered to be of significant importance.¹²⁻¹³

Although there are studies investigating the views of nurses working in clinical settings on postgraduate education¹⁰⁻¹¹⁻¹²⁻¹³, no study has explicitly focused on service manager nurses, who play a key role in management and contribute to the management of education in clinical settings.

Understanding the opinions of service-responsible

nurses on postgraduate education will facilitate collaboration with these key figures and help develop strategies to illuminate new educational models. This research aims to determine the views of service-responsible nurses on postgraduate education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethical approval for the study was obtained before its commencement from the Non-Interventional Ethics Committee of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University (Date: 11/12/2020, decision No: 10). Additionally, approval was obtained from the institution where the study was to be conducted (Number: 14096738-108.99) and from the service-responsible nurses who agreed to participate in the study. They were provided with information about the study's purpose and how the results would be used, and their verbal and written consents (informed consent principle) were obtained. The Good Clinical Practice and Reporting Standards of Qualitative Studies of the Declaration of Helsinki conducted this study.

Study Design: The research was designed as a phenomenological qualitative study.

Limitations of Study: The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of 13 service charge nurses, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. The phenomenological qualitative design relies heavily on subjective data from in-depth interviews, which can introduce bias based on personal experiences and perceptions of the participants.

The research questions based on the aim of the study are as follows:

Q1: What are your views on service-responsible nurses pursuing postgraduate education?

Q2: Do you believe there are advantages or disadvantages to service-responsible nurses obtaining postgraduate education? Why?

Research Design and Participants: The sample of the study consisted of 13 nurses working as service-responsible nurses in a public hospital in Turkey's Mediterranean Region between January 10 and March 20, 2021. As a phenomenological qualitative study, there is no fixed rule regarding sample size; qualitative studies with in-depth interviews typically involve 5 to 25 participants. However, the data collection process is usually terminated when participant responses begin to become repetitive, indicating data saturation.¹⁴ In this study, interviews were concluded after reaching data saturation with 13 individual interviews. The inclusion criteria for the study were: (a) having worked as a service-responsible nurse for at least 1 year and (b) consenting to participate in the study.

Data Collection: Data were collected using a semi-

structured interview form (Table 1) and a descriptive information form, both prepared by the researchers based on relevant literature.¹⁴⁻¹⁵⁻¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁻¹⁸ The interview form included 10 questions about the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and 6 open-ended non-directive questions (Table 1) to gather opinions on postgraduate education.

Information about the purpose and content of the study was provided to the nurses. The interviews were conducted in meeting rooms in the service areas, ensuring that they did not interfere with the working hours of the service-responsible nurses. Each interview was conducted individually and lasted approximately 30-35 minutes. The nurses' consent was obtained during the interviews, and their responses were recorded using a voice recorder. Notes were taken where necessary. Afterwards, the written interview reports recorded by the researchers were reviewed to verify the accuracy of the responses provided by the nurses. The data collection process was terminated if no additional information was provided by the next nurse during the interview.

Validity and Reliability Studies: Various validity and reliability studies were conducted regarding data analysis. To ensure reliability in qualitative research, participants were asked to read the transcripts of the interviews and confirm that their views were accurately represented. This approach, referred to by Lincoln and Guba as member checking, aims to ensure internal validity and reliability. Additionally, two academics experienced in qualitative research were asked to analyze the data transcribed by the researchers (coding and theme assignment). This peer deb-

riefing process, as described by Miles and Huberman, was also conducted to enhance reliability.²¹

Statistical Analysis: Colaizzi's seven-stage descriptive phenomenological method was used to ensure a systematic analysis of the quantitative data obtained from face-to-face interviews with participants²⁰. In the first stage of data analysis, audio recordings were listened to individually by the researchers, transferred to a computer, and transcribed verbatim. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, the original audio recordings were reviewed again and compared with the transcriptions to finalize them. Each transcription was then imported into the MAXQDA 11 software and read again by the researchers. In the second stage, significant and relevant statements were highlighted. In the third stage, the highlighted statements were reviewed to explore their true meanings. In the fourth stage, these meanings were classified under specific theme clusters. In the fifth stage, the findings were consolidated to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena and a detailed explanation of the findings and real-life experiences was written. In the sixth stage, the researchers condensed the detailed explanations into concise statements that they believed captured the essential aspects. In the final stage, the researchers revisited the participants to validate whether the written statements reflected their actual experiences and collected their feedback. As a result of the research, 3 themes and 8 sub-themes were identified.

RESULTS

Descriptive results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of nurses.

Code	Age	Gender	Unit Worked	Total Years of Work	Years Worked as Responsible	Education Level
1	35	F	Internal Unit	16	10	Bachelor's
2	38	F	Surgical Unit	14	8	Bachelor's
3	40	F	Surgical Unit	17	7	Bachelor's
4	33	F	Internal Unit	12	6	Bachelor's
5	33	M	Surgical Unit	11	6	Bachelor's
6	38	M	Surgical Unit	14	2	Bachelor's
7	31	M	Internal Unit	8	3	Bachelor's
8	37	F	Internal Unit	14	3	Master's
9	35	F	Surgical Unit	10	4	Bachelor's
10	30	M	Surgical Unit	8	1	Master's
11	39	F	Internal Unit	16	9	Bachelor's
12	40	F	Surgical Unit	15	9	Bachelor's
13	45	F	Internal Unit	20	12	Bachelor's

Table 2. Themes, sub-themes, and frequencies.

Theme	Sub-Themes/Frequencies
The Necessity of Postgraduate Education	
Effects of Postgraduate Education	- Positive Effects - Negative Effects
Contributions to Postgraduate Education	- Individual Contributions - Professional Contributions - Institutional Contributions
Barriers to Continuing Postgraduate Education	- Individual Barriers - Professional Barriers - Institutional Barriers

As a result, four main themes with eight categories were identified as follows: (i) "The Necessity of Postgraduate Education", (ii) "Effects of Postgraduate Education", (iii) "Contributions of Postgraduate Education", and (iv) "Barriers to Continuing Postgraduate Education" Table 2.

Theme 1: The Necessity of Postgraduate Education

Most service-responsible nurses expressed that postgraduate education is necessary. Those who do not see it as necessary justify their view by believing that education does not contribute to practical application. On the other hand, those who see it as necessary stated that it would contribute to professionalization, increase knowledge level and quality, and bring prestige to the profession.

"No, even if you get a master's degree, the practices in the field remain the same; it will not make a difference." (H6)

"To provide more professional care, postgraduate education and specialization are necessary. Additionally, I believe that as the number of specialists increases, the quality of the profession will improve." (H10)

"I think it is essential for the professionalization of the field and that it increases prestige. Therefore, it is necessary to pursue it." (H11)

Theme 2: Effects of Postgraduate Education

The analysis revealed that some service-responsible nurses believe in the positive effects of postgraduate education, while others pointed out its negative effects.

Theme 2.1. Positive Effects

Service-responsible nurses reported that postgraduate education helps in following research and developments in the field, provides specialization in the profession, increases professional productivity, and boosts personal confidence. Additionally, participants mentioned that postgraduate education contributes to the profession's prestige, offers an opportunity for career advancement, allows for scientific contributions to the development of the profession, and benefits the development of the institution.

"It initially adds prestige to your profession and also allows you to more easily follow professional

developments." (H3)

"It provides a professional perspective to your field, develops you and your institution, and helps you view the profession from a broader perspective." (H5)

"It increases your professional capacity, allows you to view diseases and care approaches from a different perspective, and most importantly, I believe that someone who has received postgraduate education gains increased self-confidence." (H7)

"It enhances your knowledge and helps you closely follow current information. If you meet the required conditions, you can also transition to an academic position and find relief." (H11)

Theme 2.2. Negative Effects

Service-responsible nurses indicated that while there are no inherent negative aspects of postgraduate education, negative perceptions from others and experiences of mobbing were mentioned. Additionally, they pointed out that continuing education alongside work causes difficulties in time management, is economically burdensome, and that merely pursuing education can lead to a disconnect from the profession. They also noted that applying the knowledge gained from postgraduate education may depend on the institution's perspective.

"I believe that when you pursue a master's degree, you face mobbing from your manager and colleagues." (H9)

"Managing time becomes difficult because work and study life are separate. It can sometimes cause negative impacts on your work life." (H10)

"Sometimes you may not be accepted by the nurses in the field. They might exclude you because they do not want you to be a postgraduate, but the number of such nurses has decreased." (H13)

Theme 3: Contributions to Postgraduate Education

Service responsible nurses expressed that postgraduate education has contributions on professional, individual, and institutional levels.

Theme 3.1. Individual Contributions

According to service-responsible nurses, the contributions of postgraduate education include enhancing knowledge and vision, providing prestige, increasing

self-confidence, achieving professional satisfaction, contributing to career development, aiding in making appropriate decisions during crises, and offering individual economic benefits.

"It adds prestige, increases your knowledge, and also adds vision." (H2)

"Firstly, it will increase professional satisfaction. Additionally, I think that increasing your professional knowledge will add more prestige to you." (H3)

"It helps you behave more healthily in professional crisis situations and make a difference with a different perspective." (H7)

"I believe it increases self-confidence on an individual level and that a higher education level always brings benefits. I also think it develops you personally." (H13)

Theme 3.2. Professional Contributions

According to service-responsible nurses, the professional contributions of postgraduate education include the integration of practice and research, professionalization or specialization in the field, increasing professional respect or prestige, supporting continuous professional development, and contributing to the scientific advancement of the profession.

"It can contribute to the professionalization of the field. Additionally, since you learn to conduct research during postgraduate education, you also contribute to the scientific aspect of the profession." (H2)

"It contributes to the provision of continuous professional development." (H9)

"An increase in the number of nurses with postgraduate education enhances the scientific knowledge of the profession. It will ensure the rapid adoption of current practices in the field through those with postgraduate education and provide professional expertise." (H13)

Theme 3.3. Institutional Contributions

According to the participants, the institutional contributions of postgraduate education include the use of the knowledge gained in postgraduate education for the benefit of the institution. This, in turn, leads to increased quality in patient care, enhanced quality standards, and even surpassing them. Additionally, it provides the institution with different perspectives through the acquired knowledge.

"When you pursue postgraduate education, you can offer the institution different perspectives and help the institution view patient care from various angles." (H3)

"If the managers are open to innovations, I believe it will contribute significantly. Patient stay durations might decrease, infection rates could drop, in short, developments beneficial to the hospital will occur." (H4)

"Institutionally, it ensures that current knowledge is utilized within the institution and can significantly

contribute as a change agent. Furthermore, it promotes the increase of professional approaches within the institution." (H13)

Theme 4: Barriers to Continuing Postgraduate Education

Theme 4.1. Individual Barriers

According to the service charge nurses, individual barriers to continuing postgraduate education include lack of sufficient time to pursue further studies, difficulties in studying due to advanced age, lack of motivation, economic challenges, family responsibilities, and the lack of relevance of exams such as ALES (Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam) to the profession.

"Time and advanced age make it difficult to pass exams like ALES. The fact that these exams are not related to the profession is another factor that complicates things." (H1)

"Financial difficulties and family life can be barriers. Age is also one of these barriers." (H8)

"I think it's more beneficial for younger people to pursue it; the biggest barrier for me is my age. I can't imagine being able to allocate time. Such tasks require time, and of course, there are financial reasons too." (H13)

Theme 4.2. Professional Barriers

According to the service charge nurses, professional barriers to continuing postgraduate education include the lack of widespread availability of postgraduate programs, the disconnect between education and work life, and the lack of professional recognition for postgraduate education.

"The separation between the educational process and the working process in the profession, and the lack of widespread availability of master's programs at universities." (H2)

"In our country, there aren't enough master's programs in nursing. If universities don't offer these programs, you can't pursue them." (H7)

"To pursue a master's degree, I need to go out of town. The program I want to pursue is not available here. I want to specialize in surgery, but unfortunately, surgical nursing master's programs are not widespread." (H13)

Theme 4.3. Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers to postgraduate education include difficulties in obtaining leave from the institution due to overlapping class and work hours, the absence of supportive policies from the institution regarding adjustments in work life, and the lack of contribution from postgraduate education to the institution.

"Doing a master's degree has neither financial nor moral value in the institution. In fact, the institution provides no support in this regard." (H3)

"Issues with staff numbers in the institution, policies that do not support the educational process, and

pressures from colleagues in administrative roles.” (H8)

“Upper management’s lack of understanding and support regarding working hours and education.” (H10)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Postgraduate education is increasingly important in the field of nursing, facilitating the integration of scientific knowledge into practical application for high-quality healthcare. The need for scientifically knowledgeable specialists is growing worldwide. Literature reviews indicate that Breimaier et al. emphasized the necessity of scientific education in nursing, as highlighted by new graduate nurses.¹⁵ Another qualitative study found that responsible nurses deemed postgraduate education necessary and supported new graduates in pursuing further education.¹⁶ Devey Burry et al. reported similar findings, underscoring the necessity of postgraduate education in nursing and noting that nurses with postgraduate education provided better mentorship to new graduates.¹⁷ In this study, most of the responsible nurses also consider postgraduate education to be necessary and emphasize its importance in the nursing profession. The study findings are consistent with the existing literature.

In the field of nursing, postgraduate education is known to have positive contributions, particularly in the workplace. According to the literature, Başlı and Metin proposed that postgraduate education and specialization in nursing have positive aspects, such as improving patient care quality, enhancing analytical thinking skills, and developing professional autonomy.¹⁸ Abu-Qamar et al. found that postgraduate education positively impacts patient outcomes.¹⁹ Additionally, Drennan et al. found that postgraduate education in nursing contributes positively to professionalization, knowledge accumulation, and professional respect.²⁰ Similar findings were observed in this study, indicating consistency with the literature. It is known that postgraduate education has not only positive aspects but also negative ones. Literature on this topic indicates that, according to Nayeri et al., individuals undergoing postgraduate education experience negative aspects such as workplace mobbing and difficulties in time management, which are considered drawbacks of postgraduate education.²¹ Drennan et al. found expressions from nurse managers in a qualitative study indicating that postgraduate education might lead to distancing from the profession.¹⁹ Jeffery et al. conducted another study with nurse managers, which suggested that nurses who undergo postgraduate education are not supported by their institutions and do not advance to any career level in the field.²² This study also found similar statements from nurse managers, aligning with the

literature. It is suggested that institutions need to be more supportive in this regard. Collaboration between managers and nurses who wish to pursue postgraduate education could expedite the development of the profession and the integration of scientific knowledge into practice. Upper management must provide the necessary support to responsible nurses in this matter.

Postgraduate education in nursing is known to provide individual, institutional, and professional contributions. A study conducted by Evrenol et al. examining the contributions of postgraduate education during the COVID-19 period found that education contributes to individuals' academic knowledge and technological skill development.²³ A study by Peloso et al. emphasized that higher education develops individuals professionally and is highly significant in terms of professional prestige.²⁴ The effort to utilize the knowledge gained during postgraduate education for institutional benefit was also higher. Based on these findings, it can be said that postgraduate education contributes to professionalization in the field, providing quality care, enhancing knowledge and professional vision, scientific development in the profession, and professional satisfaction. Similar results were obtained in this study, which aligns with the literature.

Barriers to postgraduate education in nursing, as reviewed in the literature, include several key factors. A study by Gorczyca identified barriers to postgraduate education among nurses as time management issues, challenges in balancing work and study, overlapping work and class schedules, lack of institutional support, and lack of motivation.²⁵ Katz et al. evaluated standardized tests such as GMAT and GRE, which are unrelated to the field of nursing, as barriers to transitioning into postgraduate education.²⁶ In this study, similar statements were found where nurse managers described these entrance exams as a barrier due to their lack of relevance to the profession. Another study showed that both pursuing postgraduate education and concurrently working in an institution were considered barriers. The same study also identified difficulties in time management and the high expectations of institutions, coupled with the constant demands of postgraduate education, as barriers.²⁷ Similar findings were obtained in this study. As postgraduate education becomes increasingly important, institutional managers and prospective postgraduate students must collaborate. Additionally, institutions should provide flexibility for nurses wishing to pursue postgraduate education and leverage this as an opportunity for institutional goals and vision.

In conclusion, it has been determined that service-responsible nurses find postgraduate education necessary and beneficial on individual, professional,

and institutional levels, but they face various barriers. Based on these results, it is recommended that senior managers support nurses who wish to pursue postgraduate education, collaborate with universities to facilitate the education of service-responsible nurses and implement encouraging policies. Additionally, it is suggested that time management and the application of acquired professional knowledge in institutions should be addressed. To ensure that professional and quality patient care is provided within the framework of scientific knowledge, it is recommended that postgraduate education programs in nursing be integrated with clinical practice, with both theoretical and practical training delivered simultaneously in the clinic. This integration will ensure that nurses can immediately apply what they have learned in real-world settings, thereby enhancing the practical skills and knowledge of nursing staff. Additionally, effective time management strategies must be implemented to enable nurses to balance their educational pursuits with their clinical responsibilities, ensuring that neither area is neglected. These measures will not only enhance the professional development of nurses but also improve patient care outcomes and institutional efficiency.

Ethics Committee Approval: The study was approved by Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (Date: 11/12/2020, decision No: 10).

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Author Contributions: Concept – BK, SŞ; Supervision – BK, SŞ; Materials – BK; Data Collection and/or Processing – SŞ, BK; Analysis and/or Interpretation – BK, SŞ; Writing – BK, SŞ.

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