

From Protection of Sacrificial Self, to Critical Turning Points and Growth: Nurses' Experiences of Caring for Patients on the Frontline in Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract : Nurses were the most exposed of all frontline healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mainly female nurses working in the acute hospital sector formed the frontline defence in the Irish health service. They faced it with resilience and courage despite exposure to risk of burnout and threats to their mental health and wellbeing. Gaining an understanding of the nurses' journey in adapting to this harsh climate could inform positive psychology interventions and / or support staff such as senior hospital managers in an adverse work situation. Furthermore, it would strengthen our insight and theoretical understanding on the use of positive psychology interventions in adverse work conditions. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was carried out to gain insight into how nurses adapted to the changing work environment during the pandemic. Online semi-structured interviews were done with six experienced female nurses who were all redeployed to the frontline from their own roles. The three themes representing the nurses' journey were the Protection of Sacrificial Self, The Fortifying Effect of Us, and Critical Turning Points & Growth. Nurses revitalised themselves by creating a sense of 'us' to help them face a harsh climate against others, which enabled additional critical turning points. This study further enriches our understanding of personal growth and trauma in adverse work conditions by including an exploration of what sacrificial commitment adds to our understanding of physical and moral courage.

Keywords : COVID-19, nurses, positive psychology, resilience, sacrificial commitment, supports

Conference Title : ICPPW 2023 : International Conference on Positive Psychology and Wellbeing

Conference Location : Dublin, Ireland

Conference Dates : August 24-25, 2023