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Qualitative Research on Research Anxiety among Geriatric Clinical Nurse Specialists

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Research Article

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the genuine experiences of research anxiety among geriatric clinical nurse specialists (GCNSs), establishing a foundation for improving their research capabilities and developing targeted training and management strategies.

Methods: A total of 12 GCNSs from various regions and hospitals of different tiers were selected for semi-structured interviews. Content analysis was used to systematically organize and analyze the interview data to identify the key themes.

Results: Research anxiety among GCNSs was primarily manifested in four areas: inadequate research knowledge and skills, challenges with time and energy allocation, lack of support from research teams, and uncertainty about future career planning.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that challenges in time and energy allocation, insufficient research proficiency, lack of research support, and uncertainty in career development planning are the primary contributors to research anxiety among GCNSs. Addressing these issues requires hospitals and nursing administrators to strengthen research capacity, cultivate a supportive research environment, and prioritize the professional development of specialist nurses. These initiatives aim to reduce research anxiety, increase research motivation and initiative, establish a comprehensive research management framework, advance geriatric nursing research, and elevate nurses' research capabilities.

Introduction

Advancements in medical technology and rising living standards have led to increased life expectancy and an accelerated rate of population aging. In China, individuals aged ≥ 65 years number approximately 190 million, representing 13.5%[1] of the total population. As the elderly care sector continues to develop, the importance of scientific research in improving the quality and professional standards of elderly care has become increasingly apparent. Nursing research is essential for advancing the nursing discipline and enhancing nurses' professional value, ultimately addressing patients' health needs and improving nursing care quality. [2] Research anxiety refers to the tension, unease, and worry that individuals experience during scientific research. [3] A Geriatric Clinical Nurse Specialist (GCNS) is a registered nurse who provides long-term care to elderly hospitalized patients after systematic training in geriatric nursing theory and practice. [4, 5] The research proficiency of specialized nurses is essential for advancing innovation in the nursing field. However, GCNSs often face significant challenges and pressures in conducting research, and the resulting research anxiety can diminish their enthusiasm and productivity, thereby hindering the advancement of the elderly nursing discipline. Therefore, investigating the fundamental nature of research anxiety among GCNSs is essential for developing effective intervention strategies.

1. Objects and Methods

1.1. Research objects: Purposive sampling was used to recruit 12 GCNSs from hospitals of various levels and regions. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) GCNS trained and certified by Zhejiang Province; (2) currently employed with at least three years of clinical nursing experience in geriatrics; (3) effective communication skills and articulate speech; and (4) voluntary participation with signed informed consent. The exclusion criteria were as follows: (1) trainees, and (2) rotating staff. The sample size was determined based on information saturation from the interviews. The general information about the interviewees is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Characteristics of the participating nurses

No.	Years of Working Experience	Professional Title	Hospital Level	Academic Degree
P1	14	Primary nurse in charge	Grade III Class A	Undergraduate
P2	12	Primary nurse in charge	Grade III Class B	Junior College
P3	20	Primary nurse in charge	Grade II Class B	Junior College
P4	18	Primary nurse in charge	Grade II Class A	Junior College
P5	5	Nurse	Grade III Class A	Undergraduate
P6	12	Primary nurse in charge	Grade III Class A	Undergraduate
P7	8	Primary nurse	Grade II Class A	Junior College
P8	9	Primary nurse in charge	Grade III Class B	Junior College
P9	16	Primary nurse in charge	Grade III Class A	Junior College
P10	13	Primary nurse in charge	Grade III Class A	Undergraduate
P11	8	Primary nurse in charge	Grade II Class A	Junior College
P12	6	Primary nurse	Grade II Class A	Junior College

1.2. Methods

1.2.1. Data collection: Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video calls to collect data. During this process, a literature review was conducted in line with the research objectives, and recommendations from clinical nursing experts were used to develop an interview guide. The interview guide comprised the following questions: What research tasks do you undertake in your clinical nursing practice? Could you describe your feelings when confronted with research tasks or conducting nursing research? What impact has nursing research had on you? How do you cope with anxiety when research tasks are not completed on time? What factors do you believe contribute to anxiety regarding research tasks? Is there anything else you would like to share about nursing research? Each interview lasted approximately 20–40 minutes and was fully audio-recorded. Interview techniques were applied flexibly, and the participants' nonverbal behaviors were recorded promptly.

1.2.2. Data analysis: The interview recordings were transcribed into written form within 24 hours of completion. The data were then analyzed and organized using Colaizzi's 7-step analysis method [6]: read through the data; extract relevant information from the data; encode and categorize viewpoints; compile the viewpoints; elaborate on the viewpoints in detail; refine and elevate the themes; validate the themes.

2. Results

2.1. Topic 1: Difficulty in Allocating Time and Energy

2.1.1. Heavy clinical workload

The high demands of clinical nursing practice often prevent nursing professionals from dedicating sufficient time to research, as their primary focus is on patient care and related clinical duties. P1: "After a full day of work, I feel completely drained. Once I finish dinner at home, I just want to lie in bed without moving a muscle." P3: "I believe our grassroots hospitals are far busier than large hospitals. After a day's work, my calves are sore and swollen, and I lack the motivation to even turn on my computer." P5: "In our geriatric department, we handle a large volume of saline infusions. After running around all day, my legs are about to give out, and I have no desire to do anything else."

2.1.2. Limited personal energy

A rapid pace and numerous concurrent obligations mark modern life. Individuals frequently manage work, education, family, and additional responsibilities, often reporting that their energy is depleted. P2: "As the supervising teacher in the department, I'm responsible for handling various materials for interns. I also aspire to pursue my own projects, but time is a scarce commodity (with a wry smile)." P5: "Our child isn't even a year old yet. Upon returning home, I'm fully occupied with taking care of his basic needs, leaving me with no energy for anything else." P8: "I just completed my specialist nursing qualification last year and had hoped to further my studies with a graduate degree, but I've been so swamped that I haven't had the chance yet."

2.2. Topic 2: Insufficient Research Capability

2.2.1. Weak scientific research knowledge

GCNSs commonly report a lack of proficiency in scientific research. P12: "I had no prior exposure to scientific research before. It was only during my specialist nursing studies that I began to delve into this field, and qualitative research was a completely new concept to me." P11: "In grassroots hospitals, we rarely encounter scientific research knowledge. It was only through our specialist nursing training that we learned about evidence-based nursing and randomized controlled trials." P4: "Having worked for so many years, I've had minimal exposure to scientific research knowledge."

2.2.2. Inadequate research skills

GCNSs demonstrate not only a lack of scientific research knowledge but also significant deficiencies in their research skills. P8: "Besides searching for articles on CNKI, I find it quite challenging to utilize other websites for article searches. I often fail to locate the articles I need." P7: "Although my instructor covered SPSS software during my specialist nursing studies, I still find it extremely difficult to grasp."

2.3. Lack of scientific research support

2.3.1. Hospital management

Many GCNSs have identified deficiencies in hospital scientific research management and raised concerns regarding insufficient support for nurses' research activities. P10: "I acquire all my scientific research knowledge online. Ideally, the hospital should organize annual training sessions on this subject for us." P7: "I've heard that some hospitals have established dedicated research teams for nursing, whereas our hospital lacks such a setup. We're left to figure things out on our own."

2.3.2. Team collaboration

Teamwork is essential in the scientific research process. However, some GCNSs have observed that the research atmosphere within their departments is often characterized by limited communication and insufficient collaboration among colleagues. P9: "The majority of nurses in our department have adopted a laid-back attitude and show no interest in these activities. I undertake these tasks alone and occasionally find myself at a loss regarding whom to seek guidance from." P10: "I believe that tackling a research project single-handedly is unfeasible. It necessitates collective effort, which poses a significant challenge for me since everyone tends to work independently."

2.4. Confusion regarding future career planning

2.4.1. Promotion pressure

Scientific research achievements play a critical role in advancing nurses' professional titles. GCNSs express concern that an inability to attain specific research results may hinder their promotion and subsequent career development. As a result, these individuals frequently experience significant psychological pressure while conducting research. P1: "The promotion criteria are becoming increasingly stringent. Nowadays, securing a provincial-level project as the principal investigator is a

prerequisite for promotion, which is extremely challenging." P6: "Although there's no explicit requirement for a research project, we still need to publish several high-quality papers at the very least. However, getting papers published is tough these days!"

2.4.2. Uncertainty about career prospects

Many specialist nurses have expressed concerns about the trajectory of their careers after completing their specialist training. P3: "Now that I've completed my specialist nurse training, I'm at a loss about what to do next. I just continue with my regular duties at work." P4: "I'm really unsure about the career prospects for GCNSs. We've learned so much, but I have no idea which direction our future development will take."

3. Discussion

3.1. The impact of research pressure on GCNSs

The findings of this study indicate that substantial research workloads and limited time are significant factors contributing to research anxiety among GCNSs. Prolonged exposure to high-pressure research environments adversely affects nurses' physical and mental health and may lead to resistance to research, thereby reducing their enthusiasm and active participation. Therefore, it is essential for hospitals and nursing administrators to recognize the seriousness of this issue, allocate nurses' work responsibilities appropriately, and provide sufficient time and resources for research activities.

3.2. The significance of improving scientific research competence

Inadequate scientific research competence is a significant barrier for GCNSs in conducting research. Although scientific research competence is essential for GCNSs, many nurses currently lack adequate research skills. This deficiency restricts individual advancement in scientific research and career development and limits the broader progress of geriatric nursing research. Therefore, enhancing the scientific research training for GCNSs is imperative. Hospitals should take responsibility for establishing comprehensive scientific research training systems. Tailored training plans should be formulated based on nurses' actual needs and research backgrounds, recognizing that they possess diverse research foundations and requirements.

The training curriculum should be comprehensive, covering fundamental knowledge and methodologies in scientific research, literature retrieval, data analysis, manuscript writing, and other relevant fields. Emphasis should be placed on integrating theory with practice to enable nurses to apply their knowledge in practical settings, thereby strengthening their research capabilities. Furthermore, inviting scientific research experts to provide direct guidance may be beneficial. Drawing on their extensive experience and expertise, these experts can offer valuable advice and solutions to nurses, thereby supporting the development of scientific research competence.

3.3. The necessity of establishing a favorable research support environment

A lack of research support is a significant factor contributing to research anxiety among GCNSs. These professionals require substantial resources and robust institutional support to conduct effective scientific research. Inadequate support often leads to increased challenges and heightened anxieties. Hospitals, as the primary setting for nursing research, should cultivate an environment that provides ample resources and comprehensive assistance to researchers. Hospital administrators must prioritize investments in scientific research, including the continual updating and enhancement of research equipment, to meet evolving demands. The quality of experimental sites is also critical, requiring comfortable, safe, and fully-equipped venues for students. Additionally, scientific research resources should be allocated judiciously based on the specific requirements of departments and projects to facilitate the smooth progression of research activities. To promote effective team collaboration, hospitals should encourage the formation of research teams comprising nurses with diverse backgrounds and expertise. This approach enhances communication, fosters mutual support, and strengthens teamwork and innovation. By sharing their experiences and collaboratively addressing challenges, nurses can improve research efficiency.

Furthermore, hospitals could establish a research reward mechanism to formally recognize and reward nurses with outstanding research achievements. This approach would enhance their sense of recognition and reward, thereby fostering a culture of research enthusiasm, promoting a positive research environment, and encouraging greater involvement in scientific research among nurses.

3.4. The importance of focusing on the career development of GCNSs

Career development concerns among GCNSs are a significant factor contributing to research anxiety. Nurses play a pivotal role within the medical team, and their career progression is essential for individual advancement and the broader development of the nursing profession. This progression influences skill enhancement, career fulfillment, industry standards, and service quality. Therefore, hospitals and nursing administrators should prioritize the career development needs of GCNSs, providing sufficient advancement opportunities and clear promotion pathways. Currently, professional title promotions primarily focus on research achievements, which places considerable pressure on nurses. In addition to research accomplishments, the evaluation criteria should include clinical nursing proficiency and nursing management capabilities. Clinical nursing skills directly impact patient outcomes and quality of life, whereas management abilities are crucial for optimizing processes and improving efficiency. Furthermore, expanding career development opportunities will support nurses in developing their skills across diverse roles, thereby enabling them to achieve their full professional potential.

4. Conclusions

This study utilized qualitative research methods to examine the current state and underlying causes of research anxiety among GCNSs. To address these challenges, hospitals and nursing administrators are encouraged to implement appropriate strategies, such as rational task allocation, strengthening research capabilities, fostering a supportive research environment, and promoting nurses' career advancement. These measures may reduce research anxiety among GCNSs, increase their research motivation, and advance geriatric nursing research. Future research should involve intervention studies to assess the effectiveness of these strategies in alleviating research anxiety among GCNSs, thereby strengthening the theoretical and practical basis for improving research standards.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This qualitative study was conducted in accordance with the .principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (2024 revision, 75th World Medical Association General Assembly) and relevant national ethical guidelines forbiomedical research involving human subjects.The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Biomedical Ethics Committee of Hangzhou Third People's Hospital (Approval No.: 2025KA210). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Consent for publication

All participants provided written consent for the publication of the data in this study.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' contributions

[Hongzhang] contributed to the study conception and design. Data collection, analysis and interpretation were performed by [Hongzhang]. The first draft of the manuscript was written by [Hongzhang] and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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