

ON JOB ROTATION: THROUGH THE LENS OF STAFF NURSES

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Abstract

Job rotation is a strategic response commonly used in the healthcare system to address the nursing shortage. This study explored and described the experiences of nurses who underwent job rotation in a Level I government hospital in Agusan del Sur. Using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological approach, data were collected from 17 purposively selected nurses through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. Highlights that the unstructured job rotations often resulted in recurring cycles of destabilization and re-stabilization, or "starting all over again." Results revealed that nurses' experiences during job rotation included Challenges in Job Rotation, Adjustment Difficulties, Dearth of mastery, and Emotional and Physical Adjustment Issues. Amidst these challenges, nurses developed coping strategies through Rebuilding Stability, Supportive and Collaborative Working Environment, Passion and Motivation to Serve, and Commitment to Patient Welfare. The insights that participants wanted to share with their peers and the nursing practice in general were encapsulated in the themes: Enhanced Perspective, Organizational and Systemic Enhancement, and Systemic and Policy Improvement. It underscores the need for standardized orientation programs, clear rotation policies, adequate staffing, and unit-specific training to support nurses' well-being, enhance competence, and improve healthcare delivery.

Keywords: *Job Rotation, Nurses, Descriptive-Phenomenology, Agusan del Sur*

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Introduction

Nurses in public hospitals often experience challenging working conditions, including staffing shortages, high patient acuity, and fast-paced clinical environments. To maintain service delivery, many hospitals frequently implement job rotations, maximizing workforce flexibility. While intended to address staffing gaps and broaden clinical exposure, a job rotation can create instability as nurses repeatedly adjust to new units, teams, policies, and expectations. This constant cycle of adaptation may affect

nurses' confidence, emotional well-being, and continuity of care, potentially increasing the risk of errors and compromising patient safety (Gou et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2023).

Globally, job rotations are recognized as a strategy to enhance nurses' skills and organizational adaptability (World Health Organization, 2023). However, when job rotation is poorly structured, it can cause stress, role confusion, and decreased job satisfaction among nurses (Jeong et al., 2023;

Chatterjee et al., 2023). International studies report that frequent rotations can weaken professional attachment, reduce performance, and contribute to emotional exhaustion when adequate preparation and support are lacking (De Simone et al., 2023).

In the Philippines, job rotation is widely practiced in public hospitals to address workforce shortages and expand clinical experience. Yet local studies indicate that insufficient orientation, inconsistent policies, and limited institutional support can result in uncertainty, reduced efficiency, and increased workload strain among nurses (Labrague et al., 2024). Hospitals with limited resources, such as some public hospitals in the Caraga region, are constantly facing understaffing and frequent reassignments, further intensifying these challenges (Baban & Magnaye, 2020).

Despite existing research, most studies focus on measurable outcomes such as job satisfaction, turnover, or performance, often overlooking the lived experiences of nurses who continuously transition between units. There remains a limited understanding of how repeated job rotation shapes nurses' psychological adjustment, professional development, and daily practice, particularly in low-resource public hospital settings. This study aims to explore and describe the lived experiences of staff nurses undergoing job rotation in a Level I government hospital in Agusan del Sur to fully understand the adaptation process and the impact on nurses' well-being and professional practice.

Methods

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological design aimed to explore the lived experiences of nurses undergoing job rotation in a Level I government hospital

in Agusan del Sur. Using Colaizzi's (1978) method guided data collection and analysis to capture the essence of participants' experiences. Seventeen registered staff nurses were selected based on their direct experience with multiple job rotations. Ten participated in in-depth interviews, and seven joined a focus group discussion. Eligible participants had at least two years of service and were actively involved in unit rotations, while those in managerial roles or without regular rotation experience were excluded from the study.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in private settings to encourage open sharing. Interviews lasted 30–40 minutes, and the focus group lasted about one hour. All sessions were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's systematic process of identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering them into themes. Member checking was conducted to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected participants' experiences.

All participants were fully informed that their participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Code names were used in place of real identities, and all data was securely stored to protect privacy. This study involved a small sample from a single hospital, which may limit the generalizability of findings. As

a qualitative phenomenological study, results reflect participants' subjective experiences and are intended to provide an in-depth

understanding rather than a statistical representation.

Results and Discussions

Presented in this chapter are the key findings of the study derived from data gathered from 17 nurses who experienced job rotation in a Level I hospital in Agusan del Sur. The findings capture the essence of

nurses' lived experiences during job rotation, including the challenges they faced, the coping strategies they used to overcome them, and the insights they gained for nursing practice.

Table 1. Participants Profile

Code Name	Age in Years	Sex	Years in Service	Study Group
P1	36	F	6	IDI
P2	25	F	2	IDI
P3	37	F	8	IDI
P4	40	F	4	IDI
P5	38	F	5	IDI
P6	28	F	3	IDI
P7	36	M	5	IDI
P8	36	M	9	IDI
P9	27	F	5	IDI
P10	36	F	6	IDI
P11	32	F	5	FGD
P12	33	F	4	FGD
P13	36	F	5	FGD
P14	35	F	5	FGD
P15	44	F	5	FGD
P16	40	F	5	FGD
P 17	38	F	6	FGD

All participants were of legal age, ranging from 25 to 44 years old. 15 of these participants were female, and 2 were male. This data included the number of years of service at the level one hospital in Agusan del

Sur, ranging from 2 to 9 years. Presented in Table 1 is the profile of the participants in this study. To conceal the participants' identities and preserve their anonymity, code names were used.

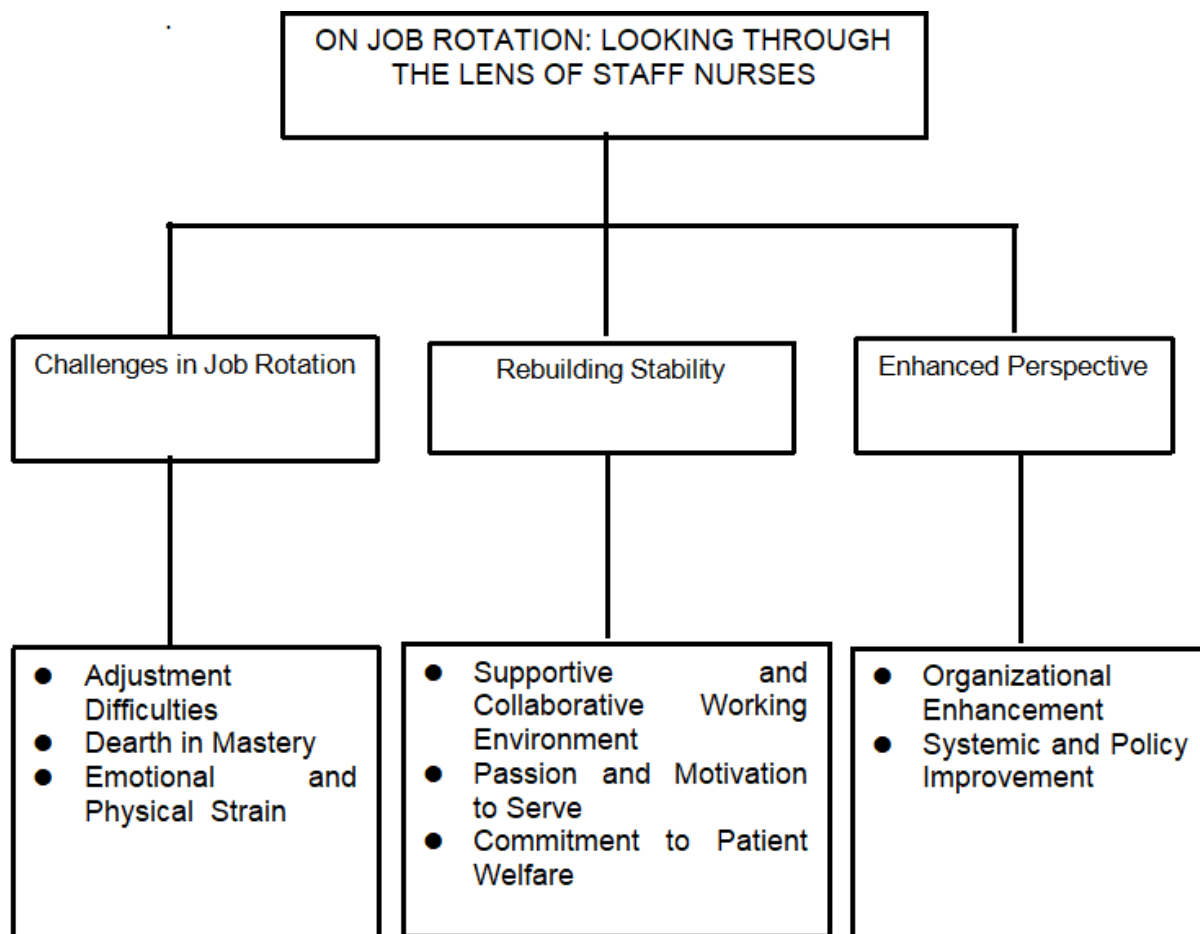


Figure 2. Thematic Map

This thematic map illustrates the lived experiences of nurses who have undergone job rotation. The first emergent theme, “Challenges in Job Rotation,” encapsulated the challenges encountered by the nurses during the earlier stage of job rotation. As nurses are required to rebuild familiarity with clinical routines, expectations, and interpersonal relationships in every rotation, this creates challenges and a sense of repeatedly restarting their professional adjustment, which contributes to nurses

“adjustment difficulties”. This cyclical disruption interrupted the natural progression of competence, as nurses constantly relearn new responsibilities while still being accountable for patient outcomes. One participant described this challenge by stating,

“For me, in frequent job rotation, you have a lot to watch out for... you will also need to check the work of your new colleague” (P1, T1, L37–38)

This illustrates how attention is divided between adaptation and performance, which suppresses the progress of building confidence and increases the risk of developing uncertainty in nursing practice. This is further supported by recent evidence indicating that job rotation can trigger negative emotional responses such as anxiety, frustration, and fear as nurses adjust to unfamiliar environments, which may subsequently reduce job satisfaction and the quality of care delivered (Alfuqaha et al., 2021).

As nurses experienced job rotation-related stress, they often developed emotional instability and reduced work performance (Jeong et al., 2023). Another participant emphasized the potential risk involved in patient care, stating:

“It compromises patient safety, because you're in the process of becoming competent, yet you need to start again” (P7, T33, L1137–1138).

These experiences aligned with studies showing that frequent job rotation leads to workflow interruptions, reduced work performance, and increased psychological workload (Shan et al., 2023; Lee & Park, 2022), compromising care delivery and patient safety.

Although rotation exposes them to various skills and helps to develop mastery among nurses, rotation often limits specialization and competence, as one nurse stated:

“You can acquire different skills in job rotation, but in terms of mastery and specialization, it is difficult to achieve, especially in a rapid transition” (P1, T1, L23).

Another participant expressed frustration with short rotations, saying:

“Six months? You don't have enough knowledge... even if you return, you are still lost” (P4, T16, L551–:552).

These experiences reflect a pattern of superficial learning where familiarity fades once nurses are reassigned. These findings by Chatterjee et al. (2023) and Caraiso (2024) noted that frequent or poorly supported rotations hinder nurses' progression toward developing expertise.

Further narratives revealed that rapid transitions create a cycle of “starting over,” reinforcing the dearth of mastery and slowing professional growth. One participant explained:

“In a short span of time, I learn but when you put me back in that area in present I don't know anymore” (P3, T11, L398–399).

This underscores how limited practice weakens skill retention. In Metro Manila, nurses struggled to develop specialized competencies under fast-paced rotation (Baldueza, 2023). These studies were further echoed internationally; specifically, Chang and Cho (2023) described “cycling novices,” and O'Rourke et al. (2023) reported reduced opportunities for specialization. Together, these participant accounts and supporting literature affirm that although job rotation broadens exposure, it often compromises the continuity and stability needed for true mastery.

The continual process of adjustment also often generates emotional and physical strain. Nurses reported feelings of fatigue,

anxiety, and pressure associated with entering unfamiliar environments and new expectations. As one participant expressed,

“My experiences in the first day. I feel emotionally and physically drained” (P1, T1, L26–27).

These experiences are supported by Narbona-Gálvez et al. (2024) and Jeong et al. (2023), who found that unfamiliar routines, new team dynamics, and increased cognitive demands contribute to emotional overload and physical fatigue during transitions, affirming that such strain is a common and expected response to continuous job rotation.

Second, **Rebuilding Stability** showed how nurses adapt in their new environment due to the frequent job rotation. Despite these challenges, nurses demonstrated strong resilience and adaptability. Rebuilding stability was often restored through having a strong supportive and collaborative working environment. Colleagues, supervisors, and team members were key players in easing transitions through their guidance, reassurance, and shared learning. One nurse highlighted this by saying,

“My colleagues are helpful and supportive” (P9, T40, L1339)

while another emphasized leadership support, stating:

“The supervisor... guide and lead us in the things we need to do” (P4, T21, L717–718).

These collaborative relationships provided psychological safety, allowing nurses to ask questions, clarify expectations,

and gradually regain confidence (Ogata, Y., et al., 2021; Gualarte-Rinaldo et al., 2022; Labrague, 2021). These results highlight the importance of teamwork and mentorship as informal yet powerful mechanisms for coping with organizational change.

Despite the challenges nurses encountered during their job rotations, they relied heavily on intrinsic factors in addition to external support. Many viewed nursing not simply as employment but as a vocation grounded in passion and motivation to serve. Expressions such as

“But I love being a nurse” (P1, T3, L92), *“Maybe nursing is my calling”* (P2, T8, L295) and *“I have an extreme commitment to this profession. Perhaps it is a calling”* (P3, T12, L467)

As nurses perceived nursing as a “calling,” this strengthened their resilience and commitment to learning amid challenging situations (Han et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Uzunbacak et al., 2022). In addition, a strong internal passion toward the profession often leads to mindfulness and conscientiousness in nursing practice. One participant shared:

“I was mindful of my work” (P2, T7, L224)

Mindfulness helped develop a strong professional identity and ethical responsibility toward patient safety, serving as internal anchors that help them remain focused and grounded even when emotionally and physically strained (Wang et al., 2023; Sulosaari et al., 2022). Ethical commitment, especially in securing patient safety, was another strong intrinsic motivator.

Nurses demonstrating **Commitment to Patient Welfare** serves as an internal stabilizing force. This sense of duty enabled them to remain focused on delivering safe and ethical care despite feelings of uncertainty or exhaustion. As one participant stated:

“Your focus is the welfare of the patient, and most important is the safety of our patient.” (P4, T 18, L 625)

Their professional values functioned as a source of meaning that helped transform challenging transitions into purposeful service (Lee & Hwang, 2024). The strong culture of patient safety helps nurses prevent clinical errors and deliver safe and high-quality patient care during times of transition (Zaitoun et al., 2023).

Lastly, the theme **Enhanced Perspective** represents how nurses gained broader insights that enhanced professional flexibility, enabled quality patient care, and provided a deeper understanding of hospital operations across different units. This expanded perspective strengthened adaptability, critical thinking, and appreciation of the healthcare system as an interconnected whole. The findings therefore suggest that job rotations have the potential to foster growth and versatility, but only when accompanied by structured guidance, clear expectations, and adequate organizational support. **Organizational Enhancement** was suggested to ensure the delivery of safe and effective care during rotation. Participants also stressed the need for unit-specific training, strong teamwork, and supportive environments to ensure

delivery of safe and effective care during rotation. As one nurse shared,

“Provide focus training, it should not be limited to training here in the hospital” (P4, T19, L 648),

According to participants' reflections, systemic problems rather than personal constraints were the cause of many of the challenges related to job rotations. Concerns regarding inconsistent policies, insufficient staffing and a lack of a standardized orientation increased risks to patient safety (Falguera et al., 2023; Dantis et al., 2024). A Systemic and Policy Improvement, particularly on job rotations, are highly important, as they provide clearer, more consistent, and more standardized policies that support nursing practices. One participant voiced this need clearly:

“Can we have a generalized policy that cannot be broken, one that we can base everything on? Once it's published, it serves as a basis, so there is no confusion.” (P5, T26, L 878-880)

Others shared that:

“It was difficult... each department has different policies” (P5, T25, L865) and “You fumble with the system because their rules are different” (P8, T34, L1155)

These insights emphasize that effective job rotation requires deliberate coordination, including consistent protocols, targeted training, and resource allocation to ensure continuity of learning and care. These findings are supported by Dr. Mohammad

Haider Sadeq Mohailan (2024), who found that job rotation programs yield optimal outcomes when guided by clear organizational policies, structured training frameworks, and strong administrative support. In the absence of these elements, employees are more likely to encounter confusion, inefficiencies, and role ambiguity. Consequently, inconsistencies across departments may hinder learning continuity and performance, reinforcing participants' experiences of difficulty in adapting to varying procedural requirements across units.

Implication for Practice

In general, the study's findings showed the dynamic process of adjustment experienced by nurses undergoing job rotations, emphasizing the challenges encountered and how they coped with them, and the professional insights gained. It also stresses the significance of understanding the nurses' experiences with job rotations.

This study was conducted in a single government hospital with a small sample size, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other healthcare settings. As a qualitative phenomenological study, the results reflect participants' lived experiences and are not intended for statistical generalization. Variations in resources, staffing, and job rotation practices in other institutions may lead to different experiences.

The findings show that while job rotations challenge workflows and confidence if not properly organized, they may broaden a nurse's skills and adaptability. As such, healthcare organizations should

implement clear orientation programs, unit-specific training, and continuous mentorship to assist nurses during transitions. In this way, job rotations will become beneficial. Additionally, improving staffing levels, standardizing procedures, and strengthening institutional support are crucial to minimizing strain, building competence, and ensuring patient safety. These findings emphasize the importance of developing system-level policies for structured job rotation and encourage future research to examine approaches that balance workforce flexibility with nurse well-being and quality care.

Recommendation for Future Research

The findings of this study revealed that job rotations, while intended to promote learning and versatility, also bring challenges such as emotional and physical strain, skill discontinuity, and adjustment difficulties. Follow-up qualitative studies into assessing how job rotations affect nurse motivation and clinical competence over time may be something that future researchers can do.

Moreover, leadership styles, organizational climate, and support systems influence nurses' adaptation and well-being during job rotations may need to be examined. Lastly, future studies may propose and test intervention frameworks for structured job rotations and wellness integration to guide institutional implementation.

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