



PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH LCHS7001

Component 2 Written Report

Lecturer: Dr Diola Bijlhout

Student name : Aashiya Soebbbhai
Vhora

Student id : 2236984

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Introduction

professional behaviour can be defined as the appropriateness of an individual's intentional or unintentional actions or reactions in response to changes in the environment, conditions, or situations (Sakr et al ,2022). This conduct is reflective of qualities associated with their responsibilities, essentially serving as an embodiment of professionalism (Yusoff, 2009).

In the health and social care professions, the concept of 'professionalism' is increasingly scrutinized, with behaviours beyond technical competence coming under the spotlight. Cases heard by regulators often involve issues such as inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour, which may not be captured by competency testing alone. These behaviours, ranging from substance abuse to sexual assault, often emerge later in one's career but may have roots in training (HCPC, UK, 2014). Public health professionals are expected to exhibit a higher degree of professionalism in their conduct. The UK's National Health Service (NHS) identifies some of the skills and qualities that public health practitioners should possess, including well-being developed people skills, value difference and diversity, creativity and adaptability, and the ability to analyse and interpret information (NHS).

Research consistently reveals that disciplinary actions at the practitioner level are often associated with a combination of factors, including a lack of responsibility, unreliability, insufficient self-awareness, and a diminished capacity for self-improvement. These empirical studies offer strong support for key domains of medical professionalism. (Rogers, and Ballantyne, 2010)

Overview

In the subsequent sections of this text, we will delve into a comprehensive analysis of the literature surrounding professional behaviour in higher education, specifically focusing on postgraduate PHSC students. The research methodology, utilizing focus group discussions, will be explained in detail, providing a transparent overview of the chosen approach. Following this, the findings of the study will be presented and discussed, shedding light on the key factors influencing the professional behaviour of postgraduate PHSC students. The recommendations of these findings for academia,

practice, and future research will also be explored, aiming to contribute to the ongoing discourse on professional development in higher education.

Research Aim and Questions

Aim: To investigate the factors influencing the professional behaviour of postgraduate Public Health and Social Care (PHSC) students in a public university through a focus group discussion.

Question

What factors significantly influence the professional behaviour of postgraduate PHSC students in a public university setting?

Objectives

1. To understand the perceptions of postgraduate PHSC students regarding the key factors that influence their professional behaviour within academic and professional contexts.
2. To identify external factors, including institutional policies, faculty guidance, and industry expectations, that contribute to shaping the professional behaviour of postgraduate PHSC students.
3. To examine the personal and intrinsic factors, such as motivation, ethical considerations, and self-regulation, that play a role in shaping the professional behaviour of postgraduate PHSC students.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODS

QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUP STUDY

Qualitative methods are primarily designed to attain a comprehensive understanding and depth of insight. Qualitative research primarily focuses on small cohorts or individual investigations characterized by in-depth exploration. The data collection methods employed in this approach encompass focus group interviews, unstructured or semi-structured in-depth interviews, and observational techniques (Kankam, 2020). Thematic analysis (TA) is a way of finding and understanding themes or patterns in qualitative data. What makes TA unique is that it's a method—a tool for analysis—rather than a strict set of rules tied to a specific theory. It gives flexibility to

explore and interpret data without being limited to a predefined research framework (Clarke, and Braun 2017).

Choosing a sample that accurately reflects the broader population is a crucial aspect of research (Omar, 2014). Sampling methods can be classified as either probability or non-probability methods. (Berndt, 2020). Here, in this study, I have chosen the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling, a non-probability method commonly employed in qualitative research, frequently involves selecting available clinical cases or participants near a specific location (Stratton, 2021).

Recruitment, Sampling, And Study Participants

Recruiting postgraduate students for a focus group discussion at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, specifically from the Health and Social Care program. All students were term 2 students. 7 postgraduate students were included in this study, which involves identifying eligible participants, communicating the opportunity, confirming interest, and conducting the discussion with a focus on collecting valuable insights. The process includes ensuring clarity and handling data confidentially.

Ethical consideration

In qualitative research, ethical considerations take on heightened significance because of the detailed and immersive nature of the study process. The attention to ethical issues becomes more pronounced, especially when conducting focus group discussions of participants (Arifin, 2018.) In research involving human participants, obtaining consent stands out as a fundamental ethical consideration (Sim, and Waterfield, 2019).

Scholars are anticipated to maintain an open-minded approach and freely exchange information and ideas without apprehension or coercion, all while recognizing the importance of safeguarding intellectual property. Anonymity means keeping things confidential by not revealing the ethnic or cultural background of participants. It involves not using their names or sharing any other private details about them. This represents a key ethical concern in research, signifying that an individual willingly, knowingly, and provides consent voluntarily and intelligently. (Akaranga, and Makau, 2016) Special codes to protect people's identities, and only authorized individuals can access the important database. (Clarke et al ,2001)

Participants received information about the research's purpose, design, and the intended strategy for sharing findings. They were reassured about the privacy measures in place for collecting, storing, and managing data. The assurance was given that only the researcher would have access to the audiotapes. Participants were guaranteed that, although the data would be stored in computer files with password protection until the study's conclusion, it would be securely destroyed at the end of the research.

Verbal informed consent was sought from each study participant before the commencement of the focus group discussion. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and strict measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality of participant data. This commitment to voluntary participation and confidentiality underscores the ethical considerations and safeguards implemented throughout the research process.

Chapter 3

Data Collection Methods/Materials

Focus group discussion:

Focus group discussion is a qualitative data collection method involving direct communication between the researcher and participants (Peters, and Halcomb, 2015; Breen, 2006).

The data collection for this study employed focus group discussion, with responses recorded with smartphone voice recorders. The interviews followed a fully structured format, with a designated student acting as the chairperson, posing questions, and facilitating the discussion, while other students provided their answers. The entire interview session lasted for 49 minutes. The setting for the interviews was a quiet room allocated in the university's Salisbury building, ensuring a conducive environment for thoughtful and focused discussions. This methodological approach allows for a systematic and comprehensive exploration of the research topic, capturing the perspectives of participants in a controlled and organized manner.

Following the discussion sessions, the recorded responses were diligently transcribed and compiled into a single Word document. To ensure the confidentiality and security of the gathered data, this document has been safeguarded with a

password and stored on my laptop. This precautionary measure aims to maintain the privacy and integrity of the participants' input, reflecting a commitment to ethical research practices and responsible data handling.

To uphold confidentiality and anonymize participant identities, each individual involved in the study was assigned a unique code, such as "Participant 1," instead of using their actual names. This coding system serves as an additional layer of protection, ensuring that the responses and insights shared during the discussion remain anonymous and detached from personal identifiers. This practice aligns with ethical considerations, prioritizing participant privacy and contributing to the overall integrity of the research process (Lippe, Johnson, and Carter, 2019).

The collected data, including the transcribed interviews with participants using assigned codes, will be permanently deleted in February. This meticulous approach to data management aligns with ethical standards and ensures the complete removal of any sensitive information from the researcher's records, thereby respecting participant confidentiality and privacy. This commitment to data deletion reflects a responsible and secure handling of research information.

Chapter 4

Data analysis technique

The chosen method for analysing the collected data is thematic analysis. This approach involves a systematic examination of the qualitative data to identify and interpret recurring patterns or themes (Braun et al, 2017 p.19-20). In the context of this research, the transcribed interviews will be carefully reviewed, and key themes relevant to the research objectives will be identified. These themes will be coded and organized to unveil meaningful insights and patterns within the participants' responses. The thematic analysis provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for extracting rich, nuanced information, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the data collected through interviews. (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018.)

For data analysis, the primary tools and materials utilized included audio recordings and detailed notes. The focus group discussion was recorded using a smartphone's

voice recorder application, capturing participants' responses in their own words. These audio recordings serve as valuable resources for transcribing and thoroughly understanding the nuances of the participants' perspectives. Simultaneously, meticulous notes were taken during the transcription period to document key points. These notes supplement the audio recordings, providing additional insights and aiding in the thematic analysis process.

Limitations of the study

Small sample size: One of the primary limitations of this study is the small sample size, consisting of only six participants. The findings and themes identified may not be fully representative of the broader population of postgraduate Public Health and Social Care (PHSC) students. The limited number of participants in a single focus group can restrict the generalizability of the results to a wider context (Carlsen, and Glenton, 2011).

Single focus group: Conducting only one focus group discussion may limit the diversity of perspectives and experiences captured. Different cohorts of students may have varying insights into professional behavior, and a single focus group might not encompass the full range of viewpoints within the postgraduate PHSC student community (Carlsen, and Glenton, 2011).

Chapter 5

Result

Theme: integrity as the foundation of professional behavior:

participants collectively emphasize integrity as the central theme defining professional behaviour. Integrity involves being honest, adhering to ethical standards, and maintaining a sense of moral soundness. Participant 1 and Participant 4 specifically highlight honesty and integrity as crucial elements in both the workplace and academic settings.

Participant1 said:” Professional behavior in my opinion professional behavior means being on time and being honest and doing your work on time being respectful to others, being respectful to lecturers.”

Participant 4 said: “I will stand with these 2 guys, integrity and respect, honesty on the workplace, in university students, it’s more about following rules. ”

Participant 6 extends this by emphasizing ethical standards in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of maintaining integrity to promote a positive collaborative environment.

Participant 6 : “Professional behavior involves integrity respect and ethical standards in the workplace promoting a positive collaborative environment.’

This theme suggests a shared understanding that professional behavior is fundamentally rooted in the principles of honesty, ethical conduct, and a commitment to maintaining one's integrity across various contexts.

Theme: code of conduct as the guiding principle of professional behaviour

Within the university setting, both participants, Participant 1 and Participant 3, emphasize the code of conduct as the cornerstone of professional behaviour. The code of conduct encapsulates a set of expectations and guidelines that individuals are expected to follow.

Participant 3 introduces the idea of caring for each other within the university community, indicating a collective responsibility and a sense of community well-being, in line with the principles of the code of conduct.

As participant 3 stated” I think when it comes to university, I think the code of conduct is professional behavior is like always you need to be on time, respect for one others respecting the university respecting the community care for each other respect the university environment so all are part of professional behaviour when it comes to university.”

Theme: fostering professional behaviour

In the quest to foster professional behaviour, P6 suggests a multifaceted approach.

Participant 6: "Leading by example, by open communication highlights the benefits, providing feedback and sharing resources promoting collaboration setting expectations and celebrating success."

First and foremost, leading by example emerges as a powerful strategy, setting a standard for others to follow. This approach implies that individuals who embody professional conduct become influential role models, shaping the behavior of their peers. Additionally, open communication is highlighted as a key element in cultivating professionalism. By fostering an environment of transparent and open communication, collaboration is encouraged, and potential issues can be addressed proactively. This aligns with the idea that a culture of openness enhances the overall professionalism of individuals, creating a conducive atmosphere for growth and development.

Theme: recognizing unprofessional behaviour and its consequences.

Participant 3 and Participant 4 illuminate the identification of unprofessional behavior, defining it as a failure to meet established codes of conduct and a clear indication of breaking rules and guidelines. Both participants stress the pivotal role of respect, asserting that disrespectful actions toward tutors or peers fall under the umbrella of unprofessional behaviour. Participant 3 further exemplifies this with a specific instance, citing distractions like using phones during lectures as unprofessional conduct that disrupts the learning environment. This theme underscores the imperative to recognize and address actions deviating from established professional norms, emphasizing the importance of upholding standards for maintaining a conducive and respectful atmosphere in academic or workplace settings.

Participant 3: "Another behaviour for my other classmate is not to use the phone in class when the lecturer is speaking, make sure always pay attention to the lecturer"

when lecturer trying to explain. the reason why we are all in class is to learn, so I think that's what I can be able to add."

Discussion

The themes extracted from the participant statements provide valuable insights into the perceived foundations and principles of professional behaviour.

Integrity As the Foundation Of Professional Behaviour:

The emphasis on integrity, honesty, and ethical standards aligns with existing literature highlighting the significance of these principles in defining professional behaviour. Various studies stress the role of integrity in building trust, maintaining credibility, and fostering a positive work environment, code of conduct (Noelliste, 2013; Pritchard, 2006). The participants' recognition of integrity as a fundamental aspect suggests a shared understanding consistent with the scholarly perspective that ethical behavior is at the core of professionalism.

Code Of Conduct as The Guiding Principle:

The participants' acknowledgment of the code of conduct as a guiding principle resonates with literature emphasizing the importance of organizational guidelines and standards in shaping professional behavior . (Kazmi, 2023). The code of conduct is recognized as a tool to define expectations, provide clarity, and establish a framework for ethical decision-making. The participants' focus on respecting others, community care, and adherence to rules aligns with the broader understanding of how codes of conduct contribute to a positive and ethical organizational culture.

Fostering Professional Behaviour:

The theme of fostering professional behaviour through leading by example, open communication, and collaboration corresponds with literature emphasizing the role of leadership and organizational culture in promoting professionalism (Kapur, 2021. pp145-154.). Studies suggest that a positive work culture, characterized by effective

leadership and open communication, influences employees to adopt professional behaviours. The participants' recognition of the need for continuous learning and adaptability is consistent with the evolving nature of professionalism in dynamic work environments.

Recognizing Unprofessional Behaviour and Consequences:

The participants' identification of unprofessional behaviour and its consequences aligns with literature highlighting the importance of addressing misconduct to maintain a healthy work or academic environment (Hughes, and McCabe, 2006). Recognition of disrespectful actions and rule breaking as unprofessional reinforces the notion that clear expectations and consequences contribute to shaping behaviour.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the investigation into factors influencing the professional behaviour of postgraduate Public Health and Social Care (PHSC) students reveals key themes that resonate with existing literature. Integrity, as a foundation of professional behaviour, emerges prominently, emphasizing the importance of honesty, adherence to ethical standards, and maintaining moral soundness. Recognition of the code of conduct as a guiding principle aligns with organizational guidelines, providing clarity and a framework for ethical decision-making. Fostering professional behaviour through leadership, open communication, and collaboration underscores the role of positive work culture and effective leadership in promoting professionalism. Moreover, the identification of unprofessional behavior and its consequences highlights the importance of clear expectations and consequences in shaping behaviour.

Recommendations

Leadership Training: Provide leadership training for faculty and staff to foster a culture of leading by example. This includes promoting positive behaviours, effective

communication, and collaborative approaches. Leadership workshops can contribute to creating influential role models within the academic community (Evans, 2014).

Integrity And Education Programs: Implement education programs focusing on integrity, ethical conduct, and the significance of maintaining one's moral soundness. These programs can include workshops, seminars, and online resources to enhance students' understanding of professional behaviour (Wong, Lim and Quinlan, 2016).

Peer Mentorship Programs: Establish peer mentorship programs where experienced students guide and mentor newcomers on professional behavior expectations. Peer support can be a valuable resource in reinforcing positive conduct within the student community (DuBois, et al 2011).

Practical Implication

The findings hold practical implications for academia by emphasizing the importance of fostering positive and ethical environments through leadership, open communication, and collaboration. Insights into recognizing unprofessional behavior and its consequences provide a foundation for proactive measures to maintain conducive learning and working atmospheres.

The research matters for enhanced student development, contributing to the preparation of graduates who are not only technically competent but also ethically equipped for professional challenges. Insights inform strategies for positive learning environments, preventive measures for unprofessional conduct, and contribute to academic discourse on professionalism in higher education. In essence, the study expands our understanding and provides actionable insights that positively impact the learning experiences and professional trajectories of future healthcare and social care professional.

Appendix

FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE

Greet the study participants and introduce the study that it is aimed to explore and understand the factors that influence professional behaviour among postgraduate students in a public university. Please ensure you obtain informed consent from the study participants to interview them and to record the interview before starting the interview. Make sure there is a chair selected to guide the focus group.

(a) Introduction and Welcome : Chair (in real life often the researcher) Outline the meeting will be recorded (individually) anonymity will be followed with the analysis and publication of the data. Ask for consent of participants. Inform participants about the time scheduled for the focus group (between 45-60 minutes).

(b) Instructions regarding the focus group: At the beginning you will introduce yourself. You will each tell your name and describe which programme you are studying, the amount of time you have been studying. You can also tell what you enjoy the most of your studies.

(c) Questioning: Chair reads each question separately out loud and clearly, if needed repeat it. Allow participants the time to respond to each question. Also allow participants to respond to each other and/or ask each other questions. Make sure all participants take part in the focus group discussion. Ensure to manage time and balanced contributions. Guide participants back to the listed question.

(d) Open the focus group by asking the first question.

- How would you define professional behaviour?
- What does professional behaviour look and feels like in practice?
- When you think about professional behaviour, which core characteristics you think about? Which ones are represented at university? Which ones are represented in working practice?
- Do you think professional behaviour is displayed similarly or differently between younger and older workers and why (not)?
- Would you classify yourself as behaving professionally at the university or the workplace?
- How would you encourage classmates/peers to engage in professional behaviour? • How do you define unprofessional behaviour and what can be reasons for this behaviour?
- Do you engage in unprofessional behaviour and why yes or no?
- How can you discourage unprofessional behaviour in the university?
- How can you discourage unprofessional behaviour in the workplace?
- How can PHSCiP students acquire professional behaviour?
- What kind of information do you need to learn more about professional behaviour?
- Where would you look for information about acquiring professional behaviour?
- What can your university do to promote professional behaviour?

(e) Chair: Close the focus group by thanking the participants for their contributions and inform them what time the research findings will be ready and published. Answer all other queries participants might have.

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