

Module code: LCHS4007

Module: Digital skills and research methods

Component 2 research report task 2

Lecture's; Anika Tahsin Ahmed

Fatou Mbaye student ID:2432001

The challenges faced by childcare nurses in the UK

Introduction

This report examines the challenges faced by childcare nurses within the UK health and social care sector. Childcare nurses play a vital role in supporting children's physical, emotional, and developmental health in hospitals, schools, and community settings. They are responsible for providing safe and effective care to children with a range of health needs, including acute illnesses, chronic conditions, and developmental or mental health concerns. Their work requires not only clinical knowledge and technical skills but also emotional intelligence, patience, and the ability to respond effectively under pressure. Despite their essential role, childcare nurses face numerous challenges that impact both their wellbeing and the quality of care they provide. Workforce shortages, high workloads, low pay, and inadequate resources are persistent issues in the sector. In addition, the increasing complexity of patient needs, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, has placed additional demands on childcare nurses. These challenges can contribute to stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, which in turn may affect patient outcomes and service quality. This report aims to explore these challenges in depth and evaluate suitable research methods and data collection strategies to investigate the issues effectively. By analysing both quantitative data, such as workforce statistics and patient ratios, and qualitative insights from childcare nurses' experiences, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sector's current difficulties. Furthermore, the report highlights potential opportunities for improvement, including enhanced provider alliances, structured career development pathways, and outcome-focused commissioning, which could contribute to more sustainable and effective childcare services. Ultimately, this research aims to inform strategies that support childcare nurses, improve service delivery, and ensure the highest standards of care for children in the UK.

Figure 1. Nursery (the cottage day nurseries, n.d.)



The challenges faced by childcare nurses in providing quality care in the UK

One of the main problems facing children nursing in the UK is the shortage of qualified nurses. The NHS workforce report (2024) the number of children in need of healthcare keeps growing, the nurses often have more patients they expected and that leads them into stress and fatigue. Most of childcare nurses handle patients with particular needs which can make it hard to look after each child with the attention the care they need and deserve. The Royal College of nursing (RCN ,2023) has reported that a lot of the nurses have experience emotional exhaustion and felt unappreciated because of the lack of support and overly work. The emotional strain also faced physical and mental demands. Their work is to support children, performing medical tasks and stay alert for long shifts. Going through terminally ill can be devastating and traumatic, leading to stress-related health issues (British Journal of nursing,2022). Another issue is the lack of resources and training available in the childcare nurses. There is few of funding across the NHS and local authorities most hospitals and care struggle to provide enough resources that are up to date medical equipment. Without the correct training and resources, nurses find it more difficult to use new practices and technologies, which would affect the quality of care the children receive.

WHO IT AFFECTS

The challenges faced by childcare affects children receiving care what happens when the nurses are undertrained the quality of care is lower children will not receive the emotional support and care they need mostly the ones with long term health conditions. Also, it affects they families because the families rely on the nurses to look after they children when the nurses are undertrained families feel worried and disappointed with the service, they children receives. Lastly it affects the wider healthcare system and the healthcare industry because the pressures and responsibility of childcare nurses is on the doctor's healthcare assistants. When one part of the healthcare system is not getting looked after it affects the whole team which in long term it will affect the NHS and the care organisations that keeps a stable service.

WHY THIS TOPIC NEEDS RESEARCH

This topic needs research because it is expanding requirement for the challenges within the UK healthcare system. The incidence of long-term illness in children such as asthma, diabetes has increased making the nurse have more pressure. The NHS staff shortage has become a national problem the NHS workforce Plan (2024) evidence that nursing vacancies and children's nursing are the areas most affected from this. Lastly there is increasing of mental health and developmental needs following to the Covid-19 pandemic, many more children require more attention mental health and physical health which increases responsibility to the children nurses. The research is needed to understand each issue to find a solution to support the nurses and make sure high quality care for the children.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

There are two types of research, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative focused on obtaining measurable data for statistics evaluation it used to figure out patterns, trends, or relationships between variables. In health care quantitative includes nurse-to-patient ratios or the incidence of burnout among childcare nurses. Maintains objectivity while enabling across large groups, yielding data that underpins evidence-based policies and actions. Qualitative research is about research beliefs, methods like interviews observations etc. It focuses into complex issues that cannot be quantified like emotional stress anxiety challenges that is in the childcare nurses in the daily lives. Qualitative research helps researchers to understand the reasons behind these behaviours. This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative methods such as workshop statistics, patient ratios from NHS reports. Using a mixed-methods approach helps a comprehensive understanding of the issues by linking quantifiable workforce challenges with the lived experiences of nurses. This method is particularly useful for exploring the benefits factors influencing childcare nurses and ensures that both practical and emotional development are considered.

Data collection

Data collection in research shapes the quality of the findings. The two main factors of data: primary data secondary data. Primary data is when you collect information directly from the interviewer, observations. The data provides participants, experiences attitudes and behaviour. Interviews with childcare nurses focus on the experience of stress overwork challenges and impact of limited resources to the patients in care. Primary data is useful when exploring complex, situational details that are not visible through statistics itself. Secondary data in the other hand, is the information that has already been collected from organisations or researchers, including government publications, previewed journals, and NHS workforce data. The secondary data is usually used to provide context, highlight patterns and strengthen the interpretation of primary data. For example, the NHS Workforce Report (2024) and the Royal College of nursing (2023) give useful information about nurse shortages, patient ratios, and staff wellbeing. This helps set the context for the research and compare it with what participants reported. For this study both primary and secondary data, consistent with mix methods design. Interviews or surveys with childcare nurses will generate primary data on their challenges, while secondary data will supplement this by offering statistical evidence on workforce shortages and workload pressures, helping to contextualise the primary findings. This combination enables a comprehensive understanding of the issues by connecting quantitative workforce data with the lived

experience of childcare nurses, supporting more informed and evidence-based recommendations for improving childcare nursing services.

Conclusion

This report has investigated the key challenges affecting childcare nurses in the UK health and social care sector, identifying persistent workforce shortages, increased workloads, significant emotional and physical demands, restricted access to resources and professional development. These problems do not just affect the childcare nurses; they also impact the children they look after, the families who depend on reliable support, and the overall healthcare system. When nurses are overworked or not properly trained, it becomes harder to provide consistent, high-quality care, which puts extra pressure on services and creates challenges for everyone involved. These challenges extend far beyond the nurses themselves, affecting multiple layers of the healthcare system. Childcare nurses experience high workloads, emotional and physical strain, and limited resources are likely to face reduced job satisfaction and increased stress, which can impact their ability to provide high-quality care to the children. Consequently, children may receive inconsistent or lower-quality care, which can affect their development, wellbeing, and safety. Families of these children also feel the effects, as they rely on nurses for support, reassurance, and guidance in managing their child's health and social care needs. At the same time, the wider healthcare system bears the burden of staff shortages, increased pressure on remaining personnel, and challenges in maintaining continuity of care, all of which can compromise service delivery and exacerbate existing workforce and resources issues. Addressing these interconnected problems is therefore critical not only for nurses' welfare but also for the quality of care, family support, and the overall efficiency and sustainability of the healthcare system. This report examines the challenges faced by childcare nurses within the UK health and social care sector. Childcare nurses play a vital role in supporting children's physical, emotional, and developmental health in hospitals, schools, and community settings. They are responsible for providing safe and effective care to children with a range of health needs, including acute illnesses, chronic conditions, and developmental or mental health concerns. Their work requires not only clinical

knowledge and technical skills but also emotional intelligence, patience, and the ability to respond effectively under pressure.

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