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# **THE CASUAL NURSE: AN ENIGMA?**

## **A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF REGISTERED NURSES EMPLOYED ON CASUAL CONTRACTS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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at Massey University

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a research study in which the methodology of grounded theory has been used to explore the particular way employment on a casual contract forms and constitutes the work experiences of registered nurses. Eleven participants were asked to share their personal experiences during interviews, the intent being to describe, understand, and finally encapsulate in a model the personal and professional impact of casual employment.

Casual nurses, as they have become known, have been utilised within acute, hospital based nursing services for some time, but health reforms and employment legislation changes have resulted in a greater utilisation of these nurses in many areas. While literature documenting the detrimental effects of the inappropriate utilisation of casual nurses on the health services and patient care is abundant, published research is scant, as is any literature exploring the experiences of the casual nurses themselves.

Data analysis in this study has shown the experience of casual nursing to be constituted by interwoven processes of discontinuity, and marginality. Always being on call with no guarantee of work had the potential to be problematic, especially when many nurses desired regular, full or part-time work rather than casual employment. A basic social process and core variable of "compromise for balance" emerged during data analysis, encompassing the way in which casual nurses are involved in an ongoing, changing, and challenging compromise both within and between the domains of their personal lives and nursing practice.

The implications of employing nurses on casual contracts are broad, including direct effects on the individual nurse, colleagues with whom she works, and the nursing profession as a whole. It is imperative that nurses and nursing debate and collectively decide on the relevance, appropriateness and long term impact of this form of employment. Ways of best utilising these nurses need to be agreed upon, taking into account the special demands of casual nursing practice and the individual characteristics and work requirements of nurses.

## PREFACE

This thesis has been written using the first person; firstly, to provide congruence with the verbatim extracts included from participants' stories; secondly, to remain true to the epistemology underlying qualitative research; and thirdly, to integrate my own dual roles of sole researcher and author. Webb (1992) has argued successfully for the use of the first person in some academic writing within nursing literature, stating:

As we grow and mature as academics and researchers, we should be able to have greater confidence in expressing ourselves and in giving a reasoned opinion that is grounded in firm evidence. It is perfectly justifiable and appropriate to do this in the first person, and once again it would be deceptive to disguise such a personal evaluation of evidence by using the apparently neutral and objective third-person form (p. 752).

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