

**THE WORKING WORLD OF NURSING UNIT  
MANAGERS**

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## CERTIFICATE

I certify that I am the sole author and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and it is not currently being submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Penelope Susan Paliadelis

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nursing unit managers (NUMs) occupy a first-line management position in many healthcare services worldwide. In this role, they are responsible for the nursing and administrative operations of a ward. The literature suggests that while the position has evolved into a complex and multifaceted one, the scope and authority of the role are poorly understood. Few studies have explored the working world of NUMs or considered how the well-documented oppression of nurses might impact on them as managers. Using a feminist approach, and individual interviews, this qualitative study, which focused on the construct of power, explored the working world of twenty nursing unit managers employed in the public healthcare system of New South Wales, Australia.

Kanter's (1977) theory of organizational power was used as the theoretical framework to guide this study. Together with the feminist methodology, this framework assisted in uncovering and understanding issues of oppression and disempowerment within the participants' working lives.

The results showed a strong relationship between the traditional role and image of nurses and a lack of power experienced by the NUMs. In addition, tensions were exposed between the participants' strong nursing identity and the organizational expectations of them as managers. The duality of their role and their lack of preparation and support for managerial duties caused the NUMs to feel undervalued as managers and dissatisfied at work. Overall, the findings suggest that the participants experience a lack of organisational power commensurate with their role responsibilities. This was reflected in their limited access to adequate opportunities, support, information and resources within the healthcare organization.

This study has added to the body of knowledge regarding the working world of NUMs, by specifically focusing on the organizational power inequalities they experience. Based on the conclusions, suggestions have been made to facilitate the empowerment process and emancipation of NUMs. The strategies suggested for changes to the workplace culture, at the macro and

micro levels, have flowed from a feminist perspective and reflect the construct of organizational power.

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