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# Exploring the Experiences of Female Doctoral Nursing Students Who Have Completed Research Focused Doctoral Degrees in Nursing

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ONLY COVER PAGES AND ABSTRACT ARE AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE DOCTORAL NURSING  
STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED RESEARCH  
FOCUSED DOCTORAL DEGREES IN NURSING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Despite the recent increase in both PhD nursing programs and student enrollments in these programs, graduation rates are not closing the gap on the lack of PhD prepared nurses, researchers and educators. Given the reported high attrition rates and the recent Institute of Medicine call to double the number of nurses with a doctorate by 2020, it is imperative to understand the collective experiences of nursing PhD students and the unique challenges they face. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of female nurses who have completed PhD degrees in nursing.

Charmaz's grounded theory methodology was used to gain insights into the experiences of ten nurses who graduated with PhD degrees in nursing. Through in-depth interviews and comprehensive data analysis, the theoretical framework of nursing doctoral student resilience was constructed. This theoretical framework suggests that various components (adversity, intrinsic resilience, and extrinsic resilience) interact as doctoral students choose to develop and utilize resilience. The resilience process was conceptualized by the presence of particular personality traits, characteristics, protective factors, and external support mechanisms that enabled PhD students to adapt to the rigors and challenges of doctoral study and ultimately complete the doctoral degree. Traits of intrinsic resilience exemplified in this study included being a person who is balanced, connected, optimistic, passionate, able to persevere, having purpose, being self-reliant,

and having strong internal drive. Traits of extrinsic resilience included accessing the support of cohort members, faculty, university resources, family, and friends when facing adversity.

Most profound, is the discovery that the completion of PhD degrees is a decision. Study participants tapped into their resilience and chose to complete the PhD. Study findings indicate that resilience can be learned and suggest the need for strategies that support the development and enhancement of resilience in PhD nursing students. This study has implications for doctoral students, PhD faculty and program administrators with specific strategies to tap into resilience or promote student success. Future research is needed to understand the experience of students who do not complete degrees and to further develop this explanatory theory.