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**Undergraduate Nursing Students: Attitudes Towards Mental Health Nursing**

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**Abstract**

Mental health does not appear to be viewed positively by nursing students and it is clearly located in the least popular career choice of nursing specialties. Negative attitudes towards mental health have historically created recruitment problems in mental health nursing. Therefore, this study sought to examine undergraduate student nurse attitudes towards mental health nursing. A quantitative survey research approach with a standardized instrument (Attitude towards Psychiatry questionnaire) which was administered to measure undergraduate students' attitudes towards mental health practice, mental health education, and theoretical aspects of mental health nursing before they undertake mental health placements. Results suggest that undergraduate students generally have more positive attitudes towards mental health nursing compared with previous research. Female students also display more favorite attitudes towards the role of mental health nurses. Surprisingly, no significant difference in attitudes prior in students who had mental health nursing working experience was found. The overall findings suggest that undergraduate nurse education, recruitment policies, career guidance and university marketing within schools on entering mental health nursing are needed to address in the future. Although several limitations have identified by the researcher, this study provides a number of implications and recommendations for future work.

**Keywords:** nursing students, attitudes, mental health.

**1. Introduction**

This study examines “Undergraduate nursing students: Attitudes towards mental health nursing”, which means that the study aims to examine the attitudes which exist within non-mental health group nursing students rather than whether examining these students may have negative attitudes or positive views towards mental health nursing. Therefore, the researcher tries to find out if these nursing students' attitudes impact upon mental health nursing, and to potentially explain why mental health nursing is not an attractive career option for nursing students.

A number of objectives guided the development of this study:

1. The measurement of undergraduate nursing student attitudes towards mental health nursing.
2. To examine relationships between personal/demographic characteristics and attitudes towards mental health nursing in non-mental health student nurses. Demographic

relationships which are considered include: age, gender, marital status and previous psychiatric nursing experience.

3. To examine correlation/relationships between the questionnaire categories of mental health nursing practice, mental health nursing education, and theoretical aspects of mental health nursing in undergraduate nursing students.

In order to achieve the specified aims of the study, the investigation used a quantitative survey research approach which incorporated a standardized instrument (Attitude towards Psychiatry questionnaire) which has 30 items scored on a Likert-type 5 point scale. The reliability and validity issues related to the ATP questionnaire have been discussed and validated by several authors (Burra et al., 1982; Alexander and Eagles, 1986; Creed and Goldberg, 1987; Chung and Prasher, 1995; Nolan and Chung, 1999). The data were analyzed through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for Windows. In addition, unstructured responses were analyzed using content analysis.

## **2. Literature Review**

The objectives of a literature review determines what is known about a subject; determines gaps, consistencies, and inconsistencies in the literature about a subject; and discovers unanswered questions about a subject (LoBiondo-Wood and Haber, 1998).

Literature is presented in the following format: This study looks views at what are the attitudes existed within undergraduate pre-registered nursing students. The reasons of nursing students' negative attitudes towards mental health nursing and not to choose this area as their career selection are the main focus of this literature review. Limitations of the review of previous studies are also noted.

Mental Health nursing is certainly unpopular among undergraduate nursing students. The problems of recruitment and retention in mental health nursing are urgent and endanger the continued survival of this specialism. To be a mental health nurse does not only require knowledge and skills, but most importantly the desire to work within this field. Without sufficient numbers of nursing graduates with the motivation and interest to work in this area, the future care of the mentally ill will deteriorate. In this study, the author will attempt to address some of these problems. If sufficient numbers of nursing graduates with the interest and motivation to work in the field of psychiatric nursing were available, the quality of future mental health care would improve (Happell, 1999b).

## **3. Research Methodology**

The data were analyzed through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for windows. All responses were categorized and coded numerically to make it amenable to statistical analysis. The researcher also looked at differences between demographic features of the sample and four categories of ATP questionnaire. In addition, correlation/relationships between four categories of ATP questionnaire were also examined.

In the study, quantitative content analysis was a procedure applied and was used to analyze the respondents' written communication in a systematic and objective fashion. The researcher

identified the different variables to be recorded and the unit of analysis to be used. After that, the unit was used to categorize the content into meaningful groupings. A theme such as a phrase, sentence or paragraph which was embodied ideas about some topic of the study. However, the risk of subjectivity and the amount of tedious work involved are the disadvantages of content analysis (Polit and Hungler, 1999).

#### **4. Results**

Both descriptive and inferential statistics are used to analyze the data gathered. In addition, the analysis of open-ended question feedback is included. The following framework is used to present these findings: response rate, demographic characteristics of the study population, attitudes to mental health nursing practice, attitudes to mental health nursing education, attitudes to theoretical aspects of mental health nursing and open-ended question responses.

There are several limitations when constructing this study. Firstly, the article by Nolan and Chung (1999), they actually analyse their findings on item-to-item based. However, the researcher have grouped the ATP questionnaire items together to four categories in this study, it is a practical difficulty for researcher to make a comparison with Nolan and Chung's (1999) study item by item. Technically, however it is not possible to examine the relationship between more than two variables. Therefore, relationships between demographic characteristics and four questionnaire categories are unable to be examined.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The results suggest that the general attitudes towards mental health nursing of students are positive. However, when students confront with issues that might impinge upon their daily life. Their attitudes towards mental health nursing are less positive. These findings appear to confirm the findings within the general literature that a negative stereotype of mental illness is a common circumstance among nursing students and this attitude would connect with public perception and their life experiences. Therefore, it is important to improve nursing students' attitudes towards mental health nursing through university education, recruitment policies, career guidance and university marketing within schools on entering mental health nursing.

Although the results of this study demonstrate that a significant number of students agreed with the importance of current university curriculum in mental health care, a number of students did not value their mental health nursing training. Concerns about the relevance of the CFP to non-mental health students in this course indicate this need to be continuously evaluated Therefore, ensuring quality in mental health placement programs and nurse education is an important strategy for universities in the future.

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