

SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF NURSING STUDENTS TOWARD CARING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING EDUCATION

Pickles D¹, King L¹, de Lacey S¹

¹School of Nursing & Midwifery, Flinders University of South Australia

Background: This study aimed to explore socio-cultural influences on undergraduate nursing students towards providing nursing care to people living with HIV/AIDS. The students originated from nine countries and were studying at an Australian university. Since HIV and AIDS were first identified, studies have consistently found some nursing students have negative perceptions towards people living with HIV/AIDS, leading to reluctance to provide nursing care and the delivery of poorer quality nursing care.

Methods: The qualitative descriptive research design was underpinned by stigma theory. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 international and Australian undergraduate nursing students. Manual thematic analysis was performed on the transcribed interview data.

Results: Three major themes were revealed: blame; othering and values. People living with HIV/AIDS were perceived by some as being outside mainstream society and labelled 'bad people' due to the assumption they were homosexual, drug user, or promiscuous. These culturally construed perceptions of blame and othering contrasted with the compassion demonstrated by many participants. Conflict was noted between the personal values of some participants and the professional values expected of a Registered Nurse, with varying degrees of willingness to reconcile these differences.

Conclusion: There is a need for an increased focus in nursing curricula on the social impact of living with HIV/AIDS, of what it means to be part of a stigmatised and marginalised group in society. However, it is essential to understand that providing information alone may not change stigmatising perceptions and lead to enhanced patient care. To foster greater acceptance of diversity, educators must encourage nursing students to challenge their own perceptions and values before embarking on their professional role as a registered nurse. Nursing curricula have a major role to play in enhancing the health and wellbeing of people living with HIV/AIDS, regardless of their context.

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