

Nursing Students' Stigma on Mental Hospital Exposure: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Exposure to mentally ill clients is challenging because of the fear attached to it. Oftentimes, the mentally ill are viewed as dangerous, unpredictable, and bizarre, which brings fear to other individuals, including health professionals. Professional care providers suffer from common fears and apprehension upon contact with the patient. Professional stigma, which refers to the nursing students' fears towards exposure to mentally ill patients, was explored in this study. The study utilized a phenomenological research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among ten nursing students from a university in Cavite and triangulation of the data using interviews with clinical instructors and blockmates was employed. Thematic analysis was done using Colaizzi's approach. Findings showed that mental illness was considered as a poor coping mechanism that results in mental dysfunction, disturbance of a normal pattern of thinking, and a point of struggle to adjust to the society for acceptance. Themes that emerged regarding fear before mental health exposure were fear of physical harm or violence, transference, and inadequacy in delivery of care. However, after exposure, the fears were observed to be minimal. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that schools of nursing which expose their students in the psychiatric ward must include briefing and debriefing of students. Clinical instructors should orient nursing students prior to exposure to the mental ward to desensitize them. In addition, emphasis on the importance of increasing awareness on how stigma affects society and the mentally ill must be given importance in order to provide efficient nursing care.

Keywords: *mentally ill, transference, nursing care*