Factors affecting success in nursing school: Experiences of African American BSN Students

Purpose
- Successful strategies to recruit, retain, and graduate African American (AA) nursing students are needed.
- To identify African American students’ perspectives of factors that facilitate successful completion of nursing school.

Methods
Setting
- A private, Christian university with a nationally accredited nursing program
- Descriptive qualitative study
- 15 AA students (sophomores, juniors, seniors)
- 43% of respondents have previous college degree

Procedures
- Face-to-face focus group session
- Three subsequent e-questionnaires
- 2-week data collection period

Findings
Data analysis revealed five themes:

Being invisible
- Perceptions of being overlooked by instructors and classmates during class activities

Sense of belonging vs. isolation
- Significant feelings of isolation at different times during the program, particularly in the clinical setting when there was only one AA in the clinical group.

Working twice as hard
- Perception of having to “prove themselves” and having to demonstrate that they worked significantly “harder than their White classmates”

Focus on school
- Having no meaningful connections with faculty and no commonality with classmates
- Not being comfortable with going to faculty for help

Being misunderstood
- One informant stated, “I’ve been told by classmates I pronounce medication [ghetto] before”.
- Another shared that “I also ask a lot of questions as a student for better understanding, but it is viewed as challenging the professor and as being unprofessional”.

Implications for Nursing Education
- Nursing faculty attention to the perceptions and expectations of AA students may improve retention and completion rates.
- Identification of strategies for graduation success may lead to a more inclusive learning environment.
- Diverse nursing workforce enhances communication.
- Diverse nursing workforce increases likelihood of high quality, culturally sensitive health care.

Background
- Increasingly diverse United States population
- Lack of diversity in nursing workforce
- Ethnic minority enrollment in pre-licensure programs has remained relatively constant for the past 15 years.
- Minority attrition rates, particularly AA, are significantly higher than the majority population
- AAs accounted for <10% of recent RN graduates

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