NURSING DOCTORAL STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY SUPPORT

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PURPOSE

To explore nursing doctoral students perceived support from their faculty.

BACKGROUND

Studies show graduate school can be overwhelming and stressful for students (Price, Forgeron, & MacConnell, 2008; Stillwell, Vermeesch, & Scott, 2017). Doctoral students often have numerous responsibilities, both professionally and personally, thus creating challenges while pursuing their degrees (Price, Forgeron, & MacConnell, 2008; Volkert, 2016). One of the challenges nursing students face is faculty support, or lack thereof. Many studies have shown the impact faculty support has on undergraduate nursing students such as increased retention of students (Shelton, 2003; Ujváriné et. al, 2011) and success academically (Ingraham, Davidson, & Yonge, 2018). Recent studies also show the relationships between doctoral faculty and students and the impact on the attrition (Litalien & Guay, 2015; Volkert, Candela, & Bernacki, 2018). In a literature review conducted by Ingraham, Davidson, & Yonge (2018) findings showed faculty caring and support correlated with improved academic outcomes while incivility was a barrier to the student-faculty relationship leading to increased attrition rates. Clark, Nguyen, & Barbosa-Leiker (2014) study also found that faculty incivility increases student stress levels and can negatively impact the learning environment. However, there still remains limited studies that show the impact of faculty support for doctoral nursing students.

METHODS

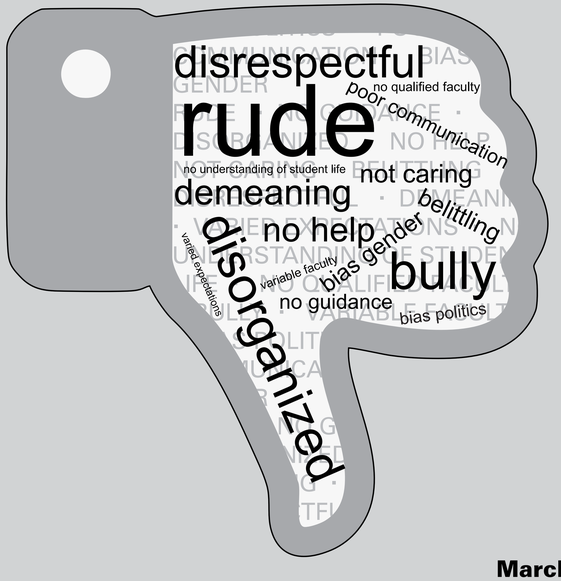
Qualtrics survey links were emailed to Deans of Graduate Schools of Nursing across the US. The deans were requested to forward the link and study information to graduate nursing students in their institution who were working toward a PhD, DNP, or EdD in nursing. An open-ended question at the end of the survey asked about the student's experience with faculty within their doctoral program. Qualitative content analysis was the data analysis methodology used to identify themes.

RESULTS

A total 517 participants returned completed questionnaires. Of those, 216 responded to the open-ended question. Student experiences with faculty included positive and negative perceptions. Positive perceptions of faculty support showed faculty were engaged, encouraging, and compassionate. The most frequent experiences with faculty were perceived as negative and related to no guidance, uncaring attitudes, incivility towards students and poor communication.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight how nursing doctoral students perceive support from their faculty. Efforts to reduce negative perceptions of faculty and provide positive support to the doctoral student will be critical in promoting student success and in increasing attrition rates.



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