What do nursing students know about the homeless and their care experiences?
A qualitative study

KIM SCHAFER ASTROTH, PHD, RN, CYNTHIA KERBER, PHD, PMHCNS, BC
SHERYL HENRY JENKINS, PHD, APN, ACNP-BC &
WENDY MANN WOITH, PHD, RN, FAAN
We have no conflicts to report.

Kim Schafer Astroth, PhD, RN¹
Cindy H. Kerber, PhD, PMHCNS, BC¹
Sheryl Henry Jenkins, PhD, APN, ACNP-BC, RN¹
Wendy M. Woith, PhD, RN, FAAN¹

(1)Mennonite College of Nursing, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA
Session Objectives

- Describe beginning nursing students’ experiences with the homeless
- Describe beginning nursing students’ perceptions of care of the homeless
- Discuss possible strategies for teaching students about homelessness based on participant recommendations
Homeless people at risk for incivility from nurses

Homeless people experience:
- Sub-standard care
- Lack of compassion

Despite limited research on students’ attitudes, educators have developed strategies to
- Increase awareness of issues associated with homelessness
- Describe challenges faced by the homeless
- Facilitate identification with the poor
- Identify personal attitudes and beliefs about the homeless
Purposes

- Explore attitudes and knowledge of nursing students regarding the homeless
- Describe nursing students’ experiences with the homeless
- Examine nursing students’ perceptions of nursing care of the homeless
- Identify possible strategies for teaching about care of the homeless
Theoretical Framework

- Leininger’s Culture Care Diversity and Universality Theory and Sunrise Model guided this study and data analysis
Methodology

- **Design**
  - Qualitative, content analysis of themes

- **Setting**
  - Baccalaureate nursing program in the Midwestern U.S.

- **Subjects**
  - Beginning nursing students (n = 19)
  - Age: 20-21 years
  - Race: Caucasian
  - Size of hometown: varied
Methodology

Procedure:

• Recruitment
  ○ Students in health assessment class invited to join the study.

• Interview
  ○ Researcher-developed tool
  ○ Broad, open-ended questions with specific prompts
  ○ Audiotaped interviews conducted in researchers’ offices

• Incentive
  ○ $15 gift card
Methodology

Data Analysis:
- Audiotapes and field notes transcribed verbatim
- Coding categories generated from the data
- Consensus achieved through iterative process
- Data saturation reached
- Themes examined for congruency with literature
- Trustworthiness
  - Audit trail
  - Triangulation
  - Member checking
Findings: 4 Major Themes

- Student experiences with the homeless
- Student perceptions of homelessness in general
- Student perceptions of healthcare for the homeless
- Student views of how best to teach about homelessness
Student experiences with the homeless

- Only 1 had cared for a homeless person

- Superficial experiences with the homeless
  - Giving spare change or leftover food
  - Working in a soup kitchen “in the back”

- Deep experiences with the homeless
  - Working with homeless ministries
  - Serving food to homeless people
  - Talking one on one to homeless people
Student perceptions of homelessness in general

- Definitions of homelessness
  - Descriptions of homeless people
  - Reasons for being homeless

- Living rough
  - Typical day for the homeless
    - Looking for resources: food, shelter, money, jobs
  - Typical night for the homeless
    - Frightening
    - Endangered by other people
    - Endangered by the elements
Student perceptions of healthcare for the homeless

• Who cares for the homeless?
  o They care for themselves
  o Clinics and hospitals
  o Friends, family and strangers

• Barriers to care
  o Money
  o Transportation

• Nursing care
  o Ideal
  o Actual
Best methods for teaching about homelessness

- Incorporate into a traditional course
  - Personal testimony
  - Lecture
- Role play and simulation
- Cultural immersion
- Clinical experiences where the homeless are served
  - Observation
  - Interviews
  - Provision of “hands on” care
Conclusions

- Nurses responsible to advocate for the homeless
- Nurses must understand issues concerning homelessness
- Students had varying amounts of experience
- Many perceptions based on stereotypes
- Students need more comprehensive education
- Few education interventions based on research, making this study a valuable contribution
Questions
Selected References