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A MODEL FOR RETENTION OF NURSING STUDENTS IN THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE SOUTH AFRICA

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the session the learner will be able to:

- 1) Describe factors associated with student nurse drop-out, retention and graduation in the undergraduate nursing programmes in selected universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.
- 2) Develop a model for retention of undergraduate nursing students in universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.
- 3) Determine and describe guidelines for the implementation of the model for retention and success of undergraduate nursing students in universities in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Whilst South Africa grapples with the quadruple burden of diseases on the health care system, there is a need for Nursing Education Institutions (NEIs) to pull up all the stops in producing increased quality caring nursing professionals.

However, there are serious concerns that need to be addressed by the NEIs, amongst which is a problem of dropout and ineffective retention strategies of nursing students in the undergraduate programmes.

Research regarding attrition and models for retention and graduation of nursing students in South African universities are very scanty, even though a lot has been done to assist the students towards graduation.

Researchers have unanimously agreed that the disturbing shortage of nurses could be answered through effective retention and timeous graduation (Alden, 2008; Bowden, 2008; Crombie, Brindley, Harris, Marks-Maran, and Thompson, 2013; Jeffreys 2012; Jeffreys, 2007).

Despite the high students' annual enrolment into universities, only few graduate on time, while others delayed or dropout, (Roos et al, 2016; South African Nursing Council, 2011: Figure 1).

According to the National Development Plan, a 25% increase in enrolments is anticipated by 2030 and a 20% graduation rate is anticipated from now on (Department of Higher Education and Training's 2010/11-2014/15 strategic plan).

It is worrisome that only 48% of students in residential universities graduate within 5 years whilst the country is in dire need of human resources for health now.

Thus, the need to address retention and graduation rates will remain an issue of on-going interest.

As such, this paper seeks to share results related to dropout, retention and graduation rates of nursing students in the undergraduate programme in the selected universities in South Africa in order to develop a retention model for undergraduate

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study is work in progress whose aim is:

To develop a model for retention of nursing students in the undergraduate programme in selected universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa in order to increase numbers of newly registered nurses and midwives with the South African Nursing Council.

METHODOLOGY:

The setting was in the two universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

Design: A quantitative research paradigm which is descriptive in nature was used. This study adapted Jeffreys Nursing Undergraduate Retention and Success (NURS) model in order to develop a questionnaire for this study.

Population was nursing students in the undergraduate programme.

A multistage, clustered stratified random sampling was conducted from first to fourth year level of study.

Sample size: 352 students.

Inclusion criteria: nursing students 18 to 50 years of age; males and females; full time students in the undergraduate nursing programme; irrespective of ethnicity.

Exclusion: Universities not having a nursing programme degree in the Eastern Cape Province; Distance learning students.

Testing of instrument was done with experts in the department. Piloting of this instrument to ensure validity and accuracy was done.

Ethical Clearance was obtained from the three universities and the Department of Health in the Eastern Cape Province.

However due to the strike by students (#fees must fall)" only two universities continued with the study and the other one fell off.

Data collection from all respondents took 30-45 minutes.

RESULTS

Undergraduate nursing student retention could not be fully understood without tackling the issue of dropout in universities.

The factors for dropout were multidimensional and complex in nature.

These factors had to be grouped into 3 distinct contexts as the macro relating to the Higher Education, the meso relating to the institution (policies and procedures) and the micro relating to the individual student.

Table 1. Biographical information of participating students in universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (n=352)

| Variables | Frequency number (n=352) | Percentage | Total |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Age (years) | | | |
| Under 25 | 269 | 76.42 | |
| 25-30 | 62 | 17.61 | |
| Over 30 | 21 | 65.97 | 352 |
| Racial Groups | | % | |
| Blacks | 340 | 96.59 | |
| Non- Blacks | 12 | 3.41 | 352 |
| Gender | | % | |
| Female | 251 | 71.31 | |
| Male | 101 | 28.69 | 352 |
| Mother tongue | | | |
| English | 17 | 4.83 | |
| IsiXhosa | 335 | 95.17 | 352 |
| Marital status | | | |
| Single | 334 | 94.89 | |
| Married | 18 | 5.11 | 352 |

268 (76.5%) stayed in university accommodation on campus.

All of them entered the undergraduate nursing programme with a matric educational background (100%) and 122 (54.7%) take less than 15 minutes to get to campus.

Looking at the performance specific variables, 62 (17.6%) of the students had ever repeated a course.

281 (93.3%) of the repeating happened in the first two years of study.

The major reason for that being poor performance in specified subjects (67.8%).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for performance variables in nursing subjects (n=352) There were 13 (3,7%) students who admitted that they are still at risk of withdrawal.

| Variables | N | Mean | 95%CL | Mode | Median | Min | Q1 | Q3 | Max |
|-----------------|-----|------|-------------|------|--------|-----|----|----|-----|
| General nursing | 249 | 63.8 | 62.73-64.93 | 60 | 62 | 40 | 60 | 70 | 89 |
| Midwifery | 169 | 62.3 | 60.71-63.94 | 60 | 60 | 28 | 55 | 70 | 88 |
| Comm. nursing | 216 | 67.9 | 66.52-69.18 | 70 | 70 | 40 | 60 | 75 | 98 |
| Psych. nursing | 170 | 66.4 | 64.89-67.87 | 60 | 65 | 50 | 60 | 73 | 92 |

The performance of the students was measured using their marks in four subject areas, namely, general nursing sciences, midwifery, community nursing sciences and psychiatric nursing.

The average performance in these subject areas ranged between 62% (midwifery) and 67.9% (community nursing).

This is encouraging for this province to have a performance of above 60 average because the majority of the province is vast, rural and needs nurses who are well versed in Primary Health Care.

332 (94,9%) of the respondents in the study reported lack of funding for their education as an interference and an obstacle in them realizing their goals during training.

345 (98%) of the respondents in the study reported that there is too much content in their curriculum and that there is very little time to cover this.

The study also revealed that 85 (22,7%) of the respondents find some attitudes of staff unacceptable and they feel that they have made wrong career choices.

302 (85,7%) respondents in the study alluded to the fact that they found clinical settings overwhelming and they feel frightened and overworked because they do not have time to themselves.

85 (22,7%) reported that due to overwhelming clinical settings and overwork they resort to drinking and drug abuse.

DISCUSSIONS

This study provided an overview of the nursing research aimed at identification of factors which are perceived to be barriers to success, retention and graduation of undergraduate nursing students. The results indicate that the successful completion of an undergraduate nursing education programme is complicated and that it is fraught with numerous barriers to overcome for undergraduate nursing students.

The issue of support (economic/ financial support, academic support, emotional and moral support) in a supportive academic environment was a "theme" that kept coming up repeatedly from the respondents to avoid withdrawal from the programme and reduce poor academic performance (O'Holloran, 2009: online; Prymachuk, Easton & Littlewood 2008).

The issue of age being younger than 25 years of age 269 (76.46%) alludes to the fact that younger generation of students are sometimes regarded or expected not to have exceedingly many challenges in academe than the grown-ups who are already involved in many roles including family and child rearing (Bosch et al, 2012; Cameron et al, 2011; Dapremont, 2011; Dante et al, 2013; Eick et al, 2012; Hinsliff-Smith et al, 2012; Jeffreys, 2012;).

LIMITATION

The results came from a few selected universities in the Eastern Cape Province only. Therefore, they may not be generalized to the whole of South Africa

CONCLUSION

The research already covered around these issues clearly concurs with the notion that non-retention is a reality in universities and it will affect skill shortage because people that have dropped out cannot be replaced (Van Zyl, 2015). Retention of nursing students to completion is complex and will be an unending debate in institutions of higher learning as long as there are no effective retention strategies.

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