



# SUPPORTIVE NEEDS FOR RETENTION- TO- GRADUATION OF NURSING STUDENTS IN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES IN EASTERN CAPE.

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- Student retention is a key strategic concern for the Nursing Education Institutions (NEIs) which demands students' engagement with their studies.
- Their ultimate success and completion of a course enhances the University's reputation and contributes to its long term financial security.
- The retention-to-graduation strategy is therefore positioned alongside the university's strategic plan for Teaching and Learning and students' experience plan. It is, therefore, important that acknowledgement of retention –to- graduation of nursing students is enabled by a whole-of institution approach underpinned by quality learning and teaching and an excellent student experience both curricular and co-curricular (Higher Education Academy, 2012:3).
- However, the nursing students in the undergraduate programme are faced with challenges.
- Amongst the challenges they are overwhelmed by lack of support, fear for failure and lack of confidence in their route to academic and professional development in the undergraduate nursing programme.
- They find it difficult to cope with their learning programme and this impacts on their retention-to-graduation. They are also pressured by the fact that they are traditionally held to higher standards than many other disciplines (Harrison, 2009:3).
- At a number of institutions, nursing students are required to earn a minimum of 50% passing grade in all nursing courses to progress to the next semester of courses.
- Earning below a 40% cumulative mark for the second consecutive semester may result in dismissal from the programme (Jeffreys, 2012)
- Nursing education and training programmes should be harmonised with health service delivery needs while ensuring that qualifications obtained are commensurate with the scopes of practice and relevant legislation.
- With this background it has emerged that nursing students in the undergraduate nursing programme are faced with challenges: lack of support, feelings of fear for failure and lack of confidence in their route to academic and professional development.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES

The research objective of this study was to describe the supportive needs of nursing students in the undergraduate programme in order to develop a model for retention- to- graduation of nursing students in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

## AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to describe the supportive needs of nursing students in the undergraduate programme in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa in order to develop a model for retention- to- graduation of nursing students in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

## METHODOLOGY

- A quantitative, descriptive contextual research design for the study was used. The population of the study was nursing students in the undergraduate programme in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa.
- The target population was all the students in the universities that are accredited to offer a Baccalaureus Curatoris (B. Cur) degree programme by the South African Nursing Council under R425 of the Nursing Act No. 33 of 2005

### SAMPLING AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

- A stratified random sampling of nursing students in the undergraduate programme was conducted.
- A standard generating facility (MSEXCELL) was used to select respondents for the study.
- This method ensured that every respondent had an equal chance of being included in the study.

### INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Nursing Education Institutions (NEIs) within the Eastern Cape Province accredited to offer undergraduate nursing programme by the South African Nursing Council;
- All nursing students in the undergraduate nursing programme from 18 to 50 years of age in residential universities

### EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- Nursing Educational institutions offering distant learning courses; Nursing colleges offering a four year comprehensive Diploma programme; Nursing students above 50 years.

### DATA COLLECTION

- A questionnaire was designed for data collection using adapted Jeffreys NURS model (2012) with permission.
- The instrument had closed and open ended and Likert scale type of questions. The questionnaire took 30-35 minutes to complete.

### VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

- The validity and reliability of the data collecting instrument was ensured.
- A pilot study of the instrument was conducted.
- The respondents in the pilot study did not participate in the actual study.

### DATA ANALYSIS

- Statistical Analysis Systems (SAS) version 9.3 was used to analyze data.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Ethical clearance No. See0715Nku01 was obtained from the University of Fort Hare before data collection

## RESULTS

### SAMPLE REALIZATION

- The sample comprised 352 students, a number that was representative enough for the study. The sample in this study was recruited according to the distribution of student profile characteristics or demography in Figure 1. The sample distribution was as follows; 186 (52.8%) respondents at University 1 and 166 (47, 2%) at University 2.
- The respondents were almost equally distributed across the four levels of study with 291 (82.7%) being female students.
- The sample distribution showed that 330 (93.75%) were in both clinical and nonclinical settings.
- Age wise, 270 (76.7%) were younger than 25 years of age while race and ethnicity 340 (96.6%) were black, 281 (94.3%) were isiXhosa first language speakers respectively.
- Marital status, 334 (94.9%) were single, and 268 (76.1%) stayed in university residence on campus.

Characteristics	Category	Number	Frequency in %
Institution	University 1	186	52.8
	University 2	166	47.2
	Total	352	100
Gender	Female	291	82.7
	Male	61	17.3
	Total	352	100
Age group	Under 25 years	270	76.7
	25-30 years	61	17.3
	Over 30 years	21	6.0
Racial group	Blacks / African	340	96.6
	White	12	3.4
	Total	352	100
Mother tongue	isiXhosa	281	79.8
	Other	71	20.2
	Total	352	100
Marital Status	Single	334	94.9
	Married	18	5.1
	Total	352	100
Residence status	On Campus	268	76.1
	Off Campus	84	23.9
	Total	352	100

Figure 1 shows the demographical distribution of respondents of the 2 institutions labelled university1 and university 2 for confidentiality purposes, which were the settings for the study.

### GENDER

- The analysis revealed that 291 (82.7%) of the respondents were females and 61 (17. 3%) were males.
- Traditionally, the nursing profession is predominantly female career choice.
- However, nowadays more male nurses are joining the ranks of the profession and that changes the demographic makeup of nursing; despite the lower male numbers as seen in this study.
- Previously some researchers have found that male nursing students seldom complete the programme as compared to their female counterparts (Mulholland et al., 2008:49).
- To the contrary, Salamonson et al., (2009: 85) did not find any relationship between completion and gender and nursing experience.
- While majority of female nurses have traditionally made the profession their career choice males on the other hand were provided with greater freedom to pursue their studies, (O'Brien, Keogh, and Neenan, 2009:638).
- Majority 270 (76.7%) of the respondents were younger than 25 years of age.
- The respondents under 25 years of age need to be mentored in order to develop and continue to add value to the nursing profession.
- On the other hand, greater numbers of older students are entering the higher education institutions worldwide.
- Notable increase is being realized in countries such as United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia and Ireland (Jeffreys, 2012:25; O'Brien, Keogh, and Neenan, 2009:638).

### RACIAL DISTRIBUTION

- The study showed that, 340 (97, 4%) of the respondents were black students and 12 (3.4%) were white students.
- A study by Dapremont (2011:256) showed that black students valued peer support, and interaction with white students' study groups.
- Thus, intensive recruitment efforts of other racial groups are important to enhance diversity in the universities.

Year of study	Number	Percentage
First year	82	23.2
Second year	95	27.1
Third year	102	29.0
Fourth year	73	20.7
Total	352	100

Table 1. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS (n=352)

- The highest number of respondents 102 (29%) were in their third year of study, 95 (27%) in second year, 82 (23.2%) in first year and 73 (20.7%) in the fourth year.
- The respondents were almost equally distributed across the four levels of study.

TABLE 2 SUPPORTIVE NEEDS FOR RETENTION-TO-GRADUATION (N=352)

Supportive Needs	N	%	p. value	Cronbach alpha
Academic	170	48.30	0.58	0.72
Psychological	81	23.01	0.081	
Social	55	15.62	0.54	
Physical/Physiological	46	13.07	0.78	
Total	352	100		

- Majority 170 (48.30%) of the respondents in the first and second level of study reiterated their need for academic support in order to enhance retention-to-graduation from the undergraduate nursing programme.
- The next need was the psychological support need by 81 (23.01%) whilst the need for social support was 55 (15.62%).
- The physical or physiological supportive need accounted for 46 (13.07) of the respondents.

## DISCUSSIONS

### ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Academic support commences with the curriculum. In South Africa the SANC supports academic endeavours by approving all curricula pertaining to training of nursing students in all the different categories of nursing profession by prescribing minimum requirements.
- According to Tinto, (2012:4) the most important attribute of effective classrooms is involvement and engagement between the students, academic staff and peers.
- The more students are academically and socially engaged with academic staff and peers in the classroom activities, the more likelihood of retention-to-graduation from the programme.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

- According to Jeffreys (2012: 80) feelings of being lost to a strange environment raise fears, stress, closed to new ideas and experiences, undisciplined, unmotivated, insecure, uninformed, unrealistic expectations, and result to student-institution mismatch.
- Researchers concur with the lack of psychological support as manifesting itself in multiple ways including feelings of social isolation and loneliness, racism and discrimination (Loftin et al., 2012:1).

### SOCIAL SUPPORT

- According to Levitz (2011:6), problems of alienation and social isolation, subject to negative peer pressure, uninvolved in tertiary activities, little involvement with faculty members or advisors can be barriers to retention- to- graduation of nursing students.
- Participants in this study echoed feelings of being 'left behind' when they did not understand.
- They also felt that there is "no one to support them". Even their peers 'mind their own business'
- The need for social support of nursing students in the undergraduate programme becomes imperative to enhance retention- to- graduation.

### PHYSICAL / PHYSIOLOGICAL

- Amongst the reasons cited stress of the heavy workload on the programme, the degree of difficulty of the programme, lack of family support, the needs of dependants and lack of support impact on the physiological status of students (Dlungwane, 2017:113).
- On a very serious note the issues around the scourge of HIV and AIDS and TB in the workplace were other sub-factors that impact retention- to- graduation (Roos et al., 2016:7)
- Students are frightened of contracting the disease and develop attitudes towards the nursing of these clients or patients.
- Some even absent themselves and that is bad practice to enhance retention –to- graduation.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed that nursing students have varied support needs in the undergraduate nursing programme in order to realize their goals of retention-to-graduation.

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