



The Experiences of Indigenous Nursing Students: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Education and learning are central to all people and all communities across the world but may be inhibited for a variety of reasons. Historically, learning and education of Aboriginal people in Australia has been guided by the misperception that being part of a disadvantaged group affected Indigenous people's cognitive and linguistic ability (Tripcony, 2000). More recent studies suggest factors that impact on Indigenous students' achieving and learning are family support, financial hardships, health problems, racist attitudes and low levels of Indigenous students' academic readiness and aspirations (Pechenkina et al. 2011). Of concern is that tertiary attrition and completion rates for Australian Indigenous students is low at a time when there is minimal representation of Australian Indigenous health care workers and few students completing nursing degrees. Therefore, a phenomenological study was undertaken to explore the experiences of a group of Australian Indigenous nursing students undertaking tertiary studies. Phenomenology was employed to gain insight into the essence of encounters of individuals with the aim of identifying strategies to improve retention, attrition and completion rates. As such, the overall goal of this study was to determine methods to improve the education experiences of Indigenous nursing students to build an Indigenous workforce for the future. This study used purposive sampling to recruit 10 participants but due to a number of unpredictable challenges, only four Indigenous people agreed to participate in this study. Despite the small cohort, the findings are insightful and could value add to tertiary education of Indigenous students.

Key findings indicated a mismatch between commencement numbers of Indigenous nursing students and the completion of tertiary study by Indigenous nursing students. Findings revealed that there is limited, relevant strategies implemented to improve the educational experiences of the participants of this study. This study concluded that a common thread existed between the Indigenous nursing students involved in this study such as misperceptions, feeling different and internal conflict. However, there were many similarities in relation to the experiences of Indigenous nursing students and non-Indigenous nursing students.

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