

Spiritual Care Competency and Barriers to Spiritual Caregiving among Student Nurses at Colleges of Nursing in the Western Province of Sri Lanka

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Student nurses engaged in clinical practice should be able to provide spiritual care for patients and enhance holistic health. The objective of the study was to determine the level of competency in providing spiritual care and barriers among student nurses for providing spiritual care at colleges of nursing in the Western Province, Sri Lanka. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted by recruiting a systematic random sample of 333 second-year student nurses from Colombo, Kandana, and Kalutara Colleges of Nursing. A pre-tested (n=80) and self-administered, 27-item spiritual care competency scale was used to measure the competency in spiritual care, and a 09-item barrier identifying tool was used to identify the barriers encountered by student nurses, utilized after confirming reliability and content validity. The study was registered under Ethics Review Committee of the Open University of Sri Lanka (ERC/2023/23). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis using SPSS version 21. The majority of the sample comprised female students (n=302, 90.7%), with a mean age of 25.02 ± 1.06 years. The overall spiritual care competency score (SCCS) was 3.795 (moderate level) where males reported lower competency (3.743) than females (3.798). Highest competencies were reported for Sub-domains; “communication” (4.09) and “attitudes towards patient spirituality” (4.14). The lowest competencies reported were “referrals” (3.57). Significant associations were noted with religion and SCCS (p=0.002). The most reported barrier for student nurses was, “Lack of time, 65.2%” and the least reported was, “do not consider spiritual care necessary, 31.5%”. The study results showed that the student spiritual care competency was at moderate levels. Several clinical settings-related barriers and self-perceived barriers were highlighted in the study.

Keywords: *spiritual care competency, student nurses, barriers, spiritual caregiving*