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Student nurse's stigmatizing attitudes towards persons with a mental disorder in a selected school of nursing and midwifery in Rwanda

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Mental disorders affect hundreds of millions globally, impacting on communities and individuals and their families and can result in disability and economic loss. Because of the impact of the genocide on the mental health of the population, Rwanda faces great challenges in meeting the mental health care needs of its citizens. Furthermore, these mental health care needs are to be met within the context of limited material and human resources, specifically mental health care nurses. The Rwandan Ministry of Health has taken cognizance of the WHO recommendation of integration of mental health into primary health care settings as an affordable and accessible option for offering mental health care services. This means that mental health care is offered at different levels, including district hospitals and health centers, where health care providers of these services are predominantly trained general nurses. Current literature reports that nurses displaying stigmatizing behavior towards a person with a mental disorder are a barrier to the implementation of effective mental health care services within main stream health care settings. Only one research regarding the attitudes of nurses to MHCUs within the Rwandan context has been conducted. At this time when the ministry is rolling out the inclusion of mental health services at the different levels within the main health care services, it is suggested as pertinent to establish if negative attitudes amongst nurses could pose a potential barrier. The purpose of this study is to describe stigmatizing attitudes towards a person with MD amongst student nurses as future nurses who will be allocated in different level of health care in Rwanda which integrating mental health care services to inform anti stigma initiatives to reduce stigma in health care professionals. A quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among student nurses in a selected School of Nursing and Midwifery in Rwanda. A self-report questionnaire that included one section for demographic variables and two sections such as level of contact and the community attitudes towards mental illness-Swedish version has been used. The self-report questionnaire was distributed to available students (N=158). These student nurses were not sampled and were all included in the audit. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the hospital rotation of students during their clinical placement and full integration of mental services within the hospital meant that all student nurses allocated at the hospital had an equal chance of caring for MHCUs. Secondly, the researcher aimed to obtain sufficient numbers for statistical power in the data analysis, which necessitated at least 100 participants. The next step was data analysis where SPSS version 20 was used. This study revealed that participants held negative stereotypes towards persons with MD. However, the findings revealed contradictions that are suggested to be the effect of social desirability bias. Association test revealed less negatives stereotypes towards MD amongst year 4 students and students with scientific background than year 1, 2 and 3 students and students with social sciences background. Also, correlation test revealed that increases in level of contact with MD correlates with decrease of negative stereotypes towards persons with MD.

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