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“The thing with non-physical fatigue is that you can’t get rid of it with rest”: Psychosocial nursing students reflect on their emotions while in clinical placement, Gauteng, South Africa

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Psychosocial nursing students in their final year were asked to reflect on their emotional experiences and feelings during clinical placement with severely traumatised children. Despite 4 years of theoretical and clinical training in general, midwifery, community and psychiatric nursing, the students were found to be in a state of personal, emotional and ethical conflict with themselves and society and left a placement with the residue of unsolved issues and traumatic experiences. Rape, child neglect, abuse, environmental accidents and violence are only a few of the risk factors to the country’s health problems, resulting in children suffering severe developmental, and intellectual, psychological and physical disabilities. Attitudes in the community shift between disregard, stigmatization, rejection, sympathy and sadness. The question was asked: Are students emotionally protected and prepared for the reality of coming face to face with severely emotionally, intellectually or physically traumatized children in the community? A purposive sample of written and marked narratives from psychosocial reflective journals of (16) final year students were used. Qualitative analysis of the narratives highlighted an emotional rollercoaster of feelings, ethical and professional conflict between the abused and being the abuser as well as admiration for those caring for them. Information gained was applied towards continuous improvement of professional and clinical training and emotional support for students in practice.

Biography

Anna E Van den Heever obtained a MCur Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing (Cum Laude) in 2012 from the University of Johannesburg. She is presently an undergraduate psychosocial Lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. She published 2 articles in reputed journals and has Post-graduate diplomas and experience in psychosocial nursing and working with addictive and personality disorders.

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