

RESEARCH CONNECTION

‘Racism is a subtle, sly, slippery thing’: A need for anti-racism praxis in nursing education

By Madeleine Kruth, MSc, & Candice Waddell, PhD(c)

BE THE CHANGE



Why this research is important

Systemic racism is a real and present problem at all strata of our society, and racialized minorities bear a disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality. As we continue to grapple with it, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted health inequalities extant in Canadian society and how devastating their impacts can be on BIPOC populations. Addressing these inequalities requires an honest look at behavioural and structural changes that can be made in healthcare education, informed by students currently engaged with the system.

What you need to know

Racism in health care is an ongoing issue. Nursing and psychiatric nursing students hold a unique role in the health care field and are poised as new practitioners to change the system in favor of equitable service delivery.

The experiences and insights shared by nursing students from Brandon University indicated that:

1. Racism continues to exist in healthcare and nursing education, in both blatant and subtle forms, despite the implementation of cultural competency training.
2. Students felt underequipped to deal with racism they experienced or witnessed.
3. There is currently a lack of anti-racism praxis in nursing education.
4. More needs to be done to incorporate anti-racism praxis into nursing education.

How the research was conducted

This two-phase qualitative study included an anonymous survey of 24 participants and a structured interview of 11 participants. Nursing and psychiatric nursing students were asked to explore experienced or witnessed racism in health care and educational settings. Responses were transcribed and coded by the researchers, both individually and as a team.

What the researchers found

Participants shared instances of racism, both experienced and witnessed, during their time as students in class and their practicums. One of the most salient problems expressed was a lack of preparedness for dealing with racism in concrete and practical ways, both when experiencing and witnessing. Students expressed how current training, such as cultural competency modules, is insufficient in implementing true anti-racism praxis. They expressed a desire for a better approach to anti-racist nursing education, including behavioural and structural changes. The students that participated in this research shared that anti-racism is a necessary part of their education, going so far as to say that it would make them better health care providers.

How this research can be used

Nursing educators must re-evaluate how cultural competency training is delivered in order to support genuine anti-racism practice. Listening to the experiences of students currently engaging with the healthcare system can inform anti-racism action plans in educational institutions, contributing to a cultural change and addressing the systemic inequalities experienced by racialized individuals

here in Canada. The themes that emerged were used to structure both an academic research article and support developing a student-led anti-racism action plan for the Faculty of Health Studies (ongoing).

About the researchers

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