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Cultural competence and its relationship with sex, education level and working area of student nurses in Sri Lanka

Shereen Senarathne^{1*}, Lalitha Meegoda²

¹School of Nursing, Kurunegala; ²Department of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

*Correspondence: shereensenarathne@gmail.com

Background: Nursing is a female dominant profession with few males. Student nurses are recruited from advance level results by the Ministry of Health and are posted to different working areas. As Sri Lanka is a multicultural society cultural competence is essential for nurses for the provision of culturally competent care because nurses should work in different areas.

Objectives: To determine the level of cultural competence and its relationship with sex, educational level and working area among third year student nurses of the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in randomly selected schools of nursing in Jaffna and Kurunegala. Random sampling technique was used to select the 171 participants according to the Rao soft online sample calculator. A self-administered questionnaire developed by the researcher and which was validated by experts was used. Components of the cultural competence considered were cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill, cultural encounter and cultural desire. The data were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences version 22. Ethical clearance was taken from the Ethical Review Committee of the International Institute of Health Sciences Sri Lanka.

Results: Response rate was 100%. All the participants (n=171) were in the 20-30 year age group. Most of the participants were female (n=156, 91%), Sinhala (n=154, 90.1%) and Buddhist (n=151, 88.3%). Of them 82% were educated up to advanced level. The mean score of Cultural Competence among the participants was 3.7 (SD± 0.4). There was no relationship among cultural competence and sex (p=0.44), educational level (p=0.12) and working area (p=0.79).

Conclusion and Recommendations: Participants had a moderate level cultural competence and there was no relationship with either their sex, education level or working area. Curriculum revisions may be required to upgrade the cultural competence of student nurses to a higher level.

Key words: *cultural competence, student nurse*