

Abstract

Introduction: Spiritual care is considered as a significant element of holistic care. Student nurses are expected to provide spiritual care for patients and enhance their overall health since they are future nurses.

Objective: To examine the spiritual care awareness, perception of spiritual care, competency in providing spiritual care and barriers in providing spiritual care among student nurses attached to Colleges of Nursing in Western Province, Sri Lanka

Methods: A descriptive correlational study was conducted using a sample of 333 second-year student nurses from Colombo, Kandana, and Kalutara Colleges of Nursing in Western Province, Sri Lanka. A researcher-developed, content validated 14-item instrument was used to measure spiritual awareness. A 35-item spiritual care perception scale was used to measure the perception of spiritual care, a 27-item spiritual care competency scale was used to measure the competency in providing spiritual care and nine itemed barrier identifying tool was used to identify the prominent barriers encounter in spiritual care by student nurses, after confirming reliability and validity. The study was registered under ERC/2023/023 of the Ethics Review Committee of the Open University of Sri Lanka. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis, which was conducted using SPSS version 21.

Results: Most of the sample comprised female students ($n=302$, 90.7%), with a mean age of 25.02 ± 1.06 years. The observed spiritual care awareness score was 10.65 ± 1.797 (moderate spiritual awareness), with similar means for both genders. Majority of the student nurses identified “feeling of loss of hope” as a symptom of spiritual care distress (97%) and the least identified symptom was, “excessive sweating” (39%). The spiritual care perception score (SCPS) of the sample was 163.42 ± 21.371 (4.7 ± 0.6), indicating a moderate level. Males ($n=31$) had a lower score (161.35) than female students ($n=301$, 163.63). Among the five attributes, “spirituality perspectives, spiritual care values, defining spiritual care,

spiritual care attitudes and, attributes of spiritual care” of the SCPS, "perceived spirituality" earned the highest mean score of 4.896 ± 0.9 , while "spiritual care values" had the lowest mean score of 4.491 ± 1.1 . The overall spiritual care competency score was 102.41 ± 14.8 (moderate level). The highest competencies were reported for the sub-domain, "Communication 4.14 ± 0.80 and competencies on referrals 3.57 ± 0.79 reported for the lowest competencies". The most reported barrier for student nurses was, "lack of time, 65.2%" and least reported was, "do not consider spiritual care necessary, 31.5%". Significant associations were identified for the spiritual care perception for "being followed a diploma associated to counseling $r = -0.186$ and $p = 0.002$ ", racial background ($p = 0.031$) and religion ($p = 0.000$). Spiritual care competency score has a significant relationship with religion ($p = 0.002$). It was identified that there is a significant strong positive correlation between spiritual care perception and the spiritual care competency ($r = 0.633$, $p = 0.000$). The regression analysis shows that 40.1% of spiritual care perception can be predicated from the spiritual care competency level.

Conclusions: The study results showed that the student nurses' spiritual care awareness, perception, and competency in its provision were moderate. Several clinical settings related barriers were highlighted in the study. Further studies required be conducted related to provision of spiritual care in the field of nursing, and more educational interventions should be implemented to improve student nurses' spiritual awareness. Administrative support will be important to mitigate clinical setting-related barriers and self-reported barriers related to spiritual care

Keywords: spiritual care awareness, perception of spiritual care, competency, barriers, student nurses