

Original Article

## Nursing Students' Perspectives on Psychosocial Care and their Knowledge Levels

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This research was conducted to determine the nursing students' perspectives on psychosocial care and their knowledge levels.

**Materials and Methods:** This descriptive study was carried out with a total of 130 students from 3rd and 4th grades of Nursing Department of Artvin Çoruh University. All of the 3rd and 4th year students participated in the study. The data of the study were collected by "Personal Information Form", "Perspectives on Psychosocial Care Form" and "Psychosocial Care Information Form". In order to determine the psychosocial care knowledge level, scores obtained from the form was evaluated on "5 points". Percentage distribution, variance analysis and student t test were used for statistical analysis.

**Results:** It was determined that 47.7% of the nursing students in the study were undecided that psychosocial care was primary role of the nurses, 63.1% were undecided about evaluating their patients psychosocially, and 50% did not consider themselves adequate to evaluate their patients psychosocially during their internship. It was determined that 55.4% of the student nurses questioned psychosocial problems only in patient admission. It was found that 58.5% of the student nurses had low knowledge level about psychosocial care and the psychosocial care knowledge score averages were  $2.33 \pm 1.10$ . 79.2% of the student nurses stated that the lack of knowledge about psychosocial care and 73.1% of them stated that patients being high in number were obstacles to psychosocial care.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** The psychosocial care knowledge levels of student nurses were low. In this regard, it is recommended to give trainings to improve the knowledge and skills of student nurses about psychosocial care.

**Key Words:** Psychosocial care, nursing students

### Introduction and Objective

Psychosocial care is the culturally sensitive provision of psychological, social, and spiritual care through therapeutic communication (Chen et al., 2017; Hodgkinson 2008). Psychosocial care is a holistic intervention that meets the physical, psychological and social needs of patients (Kenny and Allenby 2013). The purpose of these interventions is to increase the self-esteem of individuals, to strengthen their ability to cope with the disease, and to improve the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of

individuals, including communication, social functioning and interpersonal relations (Carlson and Bultz 2003; Ellis et al., 2006; Legg 2011; Watts, Botti and Hunter 2010).

Nurses who have direct and long-term contact with patients in providing psychosocial care have a unique importance (Legg 2011). With the knowledge and skills they have, nurses help individuals to use their rational coping behaviors, to remember their strengths and to adapt to their diseases. Nurses can provide both verbal and non-verbal communication skills to patients and their

families in accordance with their physical, mental, social and spiritual needs (Kocaman 2005; Watts, Botti and Hunter 2010; Yildirim and Gurkan 2010; Legg 2011). Nurses may strengthen the psychological conditions and well-being of patients and their families by providing training and counseling in cases of chronic diseases (Young and Unachukwu 2012; Aksoy et al., 2015). The adequacy of nurses is very important in all these applications which are within the scope of psychosocial care (Legg, 2011). Studies show that effective psychosocial care increases the quality of life of patients, decreases their physical and mental problems, and helps them to strengthen their coping skills (Carlson and Bultz 2003; Ellis et al., 2006). At the same time, it is known that psychosocial care reduces the cost of care in the institutions, increases the patient satisfaction, and increases the satisfaction levels of the employees (Gorman and Sultan, 2014; Ramiraz and Allan, 1997). Despite this, psychosocial care has been a frequently overlooked part of the nursing care (Legg, 2011; O’Gara and Pattison, 2015). Studies have shown that lack of time, workload (Botti et al., 2006), lack of knowledge and skills, feelings of inadequacy (Morita et al., 2004), lack of supportive institution policies (Kenny et al., 2007) prevent nurses from providing psychosocial care. However, in the literature, it is stated that nurses should be encouraged about psychosocial care and measures should be taken regarding obstacles to psychosocial care in order to improve health outcomes (Legg, 2011; Chen et al., 2017).

As a result, nurses are in the best position in providing psychosocial care to patients. However, in the studies, it was stated that although nurses had a lot of experience and training in physical health interventions, they did not have the training and experience to identify the psychosocial symptoms and psychosocial needs and to make appropriate interventions (Alaca, 2008; Nakaguchivd et al., 2013; Aksoy et al., 2015). At this point, it is necessary for nurses to examine the psychosocial care services in detail, to develop their psychosocial care awareness and to strengthen their psychosocial care skills. This research was carried out to investigate the psychosocial care related perspectives and knowledge levels of the student nurses who will perform their professions soon, and to determine the obstacles to the provision of this care.

## Materials and Methods

**Design:** This research is descriptive type.

**Population and Sample:** The population of the study consisted of 360 nursing students studying at Artvin Coruh University in 2016. The sample consisted of 130 third and fourth grade nursing students at Artvin Coruh University who accepted to participate in the study.

**Data Collection Tools:** The data were collected using face-to-face interview method by “Personal Information Form”, “Perspectives on Psychosocial Care and Obstacles Form” and “Psychosocial Care Information Form” by the researchers.

**Personal Information Form:** It consists of 7 questions including socio-demographic information prepared by the researchers.

**Perspectives on Psychosocial Care and Obstacles Form:** It consists of 6 closed-ended questions which indicate opinions and obstacles related to psychosocial care prepared by the researchers as a result of the literature review.

**Psychosocial Care Information Form:** This form consists of 5 multiple choice questions which were formed by the researchers as a result of literature review to determine their level of knowledge about psychosocial care. Each question has only 1 correct answer. Each “correct” answer was scored “1”, “wrong” answer was scored “0” and the highest possible score from the form was “5” and the lowest score was “0”. When the answers were evaluated, the knowledge level of those who got “0-2” were categorized as low, the knowledge level of those who got “3-4” were categorized as moderate and those who got “5” were categorized as high.

**Ethical Aspects:** Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Artvin Coruh University Ethics Committee by the decision dated 12/05/2016 and numbered 2016-5/05. Verbal and written permissions were obtained from the dean of Artvin Coruh University Faculty of Health Sciences and from the nursing students who participated in the study as the participation into the study was voluntary.

**Evaluation of the Data:** Research data were evaluated in SPSS 18.0 program. Percentage distribution, variance analysis and student t test were used for statistical analysis. The error level was taken as 0.05.

## Results

Table 1 presents the characteristics of student nurses. It was found that 80% of the students nurses in the study were aged 21 and over, 63.1% were women, 99.2% were single, 61.5% had equal income and expenses, 51.5% were in the fourth grade and 58.5% were partially satisfied from being a nursing student.

Table 2 shows the opinions and knowledge levels of student nurses about psychosocial care. It was found that 47.7% of the student nurses were undecided that psychosocial care was primary role

of the nurses, 63.1% were undecided about evaluating their patients psychosocially, and 50% did not consider themselves adequate to evaluate their patients psychosocially, 57.7% of them stated that psychosocial care was given partially in the clinic where they worked and 55.4% questioned psychosocial problems at the patient admission. It was determined that 58.5% of the student nurses' knowledge level about psychosocial care was low. The mean score of psychosocial care of the student nurses was found to be  $2.33 \pm 1.10$ .

**Table 1. Characteristics of Student Nurses**

Characteristics	n (%)
<b>Age</b>	
20 and below	26 (20)
21 and above	104 (80)
Mean age:	
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	82 (63.1)
Male	48 (36.9)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	1 (0.8)
Single	129 (99.2)
<b>Ekonomic Status</b>	
Income less than expense	42 (32.3)
Equal income and expense	80 (61.5)
Income more than expense	8 (6.2)
<b>Period of Education</b>	
Fourth grade	67 (51.5)
Third grade	63 (48.5)
<b>Satisfaction with being student of nursing department</b>	
Not satisfied	18 (13.8)
Partly satisfied	76 (58.5)
Satisfied	36 (27.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>130 (100)</b>

**Table 2. Student Nurses' Perspectives on Psychosocial Care and Their Knowledge Levels**

<b>Perspectives of Student Nurses</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
<b>Thinking that psychosocial care is primary role of nurses</b>	
No	12 (9.3)
Undecided	62 (47.7)
Yes	56 (43.1)
<b>Being able to evaluate patients psychosocially</b>	
No	33 (25.4)
Undecided	82 (63.1)
Yes	15 (11.5)
<b>Adequacy in diagnosing the patient's psychosocial symptoms</b>	
Inadequate	65 (50.0)
Partly adequate	56 (43.1)
Adequate	9 (6.9)
<b>Being able to provide psychosocial care in the clinic</b>	
No	50 (38.5)
Partially	75 (57.7)
Yes	5 (3.8)
<b>The frequency of questioning psychosocial problems of the patient</b>	
Always	14 (10.8)
In every shift	10 (7.7)
In patient admission	72 (55.4)
Never	34 (26.2)
<b>The average knowledge level about psychosocial care</b>	
Low	76 (58.5)
Moderate	51 (39.2)
High	3 (2.8)
Average Knowledge Level:	2.33 ±1.10
<b>Total</b>	130 (100)

**Table 3. Expressions of Student Nurses About Obstacles Related to Psychosocial Care**

<b>Obstacles</b>	<b>n* (%)</b>
Lack of information about psychosocial care	103 (79.2)
The high number of patients	95 (73.1)
Not having time for psychosocial care due to workload	93 (71.5)
The absence of structure supporting psychosocial care in the system	74 (56.9)
Thinking that psychosocial care is the work of the psychiatric nurse	59 (45.4)
Not believing in the necessity of psychosocial care	48 (36.9)
Having no expectation from psychosocial care in the health system	52 (40.0)

\*n: more than one option marked

Table 3 presents the obstacles to psychosocial care of student nurses. 79.2% of the student nurses indicated lack of information about psychosocial care, 73.1% indicated the high number of patients, 71.5% indicated not having time for psychosocial care because of workload, 56.9% indicated the absence of structure supporting psychosocial care in the system, 45.4% indicated the thought that this is the work of the psychiatric nurse, 36.9% indicated not believing that psychosocial care should be performed, and 40.0% indicated that there is no expectation from psychosocial care in the health system as obstacles to psychosocial care.

### Discussion

Psychosocial care is needed to improve health care outcomes. Nurses' knowledge, skills and awareness are extremely important in meeting this need. The research findings are discussed below.

The majority of the student nurses in our study (47.7%) stated that psychosocial care was the

primary role of nurses and that they were undecided about evaluating their patients psychosocially (63.1%). Pehlivan (2013) found that most of the nurses (98.7%) thought that patients should be evaluated psychosocially and more than half (51.6%) thought that they could evaluate patients psychosocially. Aksoy et al. (2015) found that 40.8% of nurses thought that psychosocial care was a primary role of nurses, and 27.8% of them could evaluate their patients psychosocially.

In our study, half of the nurses (50.0%) considered themselves inadequate in diagnosing the psychosocial symptoms of their patients. Aksoy et al. (2015) found that more than half of the nurses (55.5%) considered themselves partially adequate in diagnosing the psychosocial symptoms of their patients. Pehlivan (2013) found that more than half of the nurses considered themselves partially adequate or adequate in diagnosing psychosocial needs.

More than half of the student nurses (57.7%) stated that psychosocial care was given partially

in the clinic where they worked. The study of Aksoy et al. (2015) is similar to our findings. On the contrary, in the study of Perihan (2013), more than half of the nurses stated that there was not a health professional who evaluated the patients psychosocially and provided psychological support.

More than half of the student nurses (55.4%) stated that they questioned psychosocial problems in patient admission. Perihan (2013) found that the majority of nurses addressed the psychosocial problems of their patients whenever needed. Mishra et al. (2010) stated that physicians and nurses did not want to investigate the psychological impact of cancer diagnosis and treatment. Kenny et al. (2007) reported that 60% of the patients diagnosed with cancer stated that specialists had problems in dealing with patients' psychological problems, they did not see psychosocial support as part of their care and they could not handle the psychological problems adequately.

In our study, it was found that more than half of the student nurses' (58.5%) level of knowledge about psychosocial care was low. Nakaguchi et al. (2013) stated that nurses' awareness of psychosocial needs of their patients was low and nurses could not diagnose psychosocial symptoms and psychosocial needs adequately. Aksoy et al. (2015) found that nurses' level of knowledge about psychosocial care was low. Frost (1997) stated that nurses had moderate level skills to intervene in psychosocial problems. In their study conducted with 26 nurses, Chen and Raingruber (2014) found that some of the nurses had information about when and where to guide their patients if they needed psychological care (n:10).

In our study, the low number of nurses, workload, lack of information and the high number of patients were identified as obstacles to psychosocial care. There are many studies in the literature supporting our findings (Pehlivan 2013; Aksoy et al., 2016; Botti et al., 2006). Legg (2011) stated that nurses' lack of time, heavy workload and inadequacy prevent psychosocial care especially in acute care settings. In some studies, the lack of information, education and support of nurses were found to be obstacles to psychosocial care and therefore prioritized physical care (Noble and Jones, 2010; Reed and Fitzgerald 2005). Chen and Raingruber (2014) reported that

nurses' inadequate emotional energy was an obstacle to psychosocial care.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The psychosocial care knowledge levels of student nurses were low. In this regard, it is recommended to give trainings to improve the knowledge and skills of student nurses about psychosocial care and to make effective arrangements regarding the obstacles to psychosocial care.

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