Perceptions of Nursing Students from Two Northern Latitudes: Comparing Cultural Patterns and Norms

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ABSTRACT

Cultural norms were compared in students from two northern latitudes. Previous studies had identified similarities in the norms and beliefs of Icelanders and their decendents living...
in Canada and northern United States. Thirty-eight Icelandic nursing students and 49 nursing students from southeastern Minnesota responded to questionnaires eliciting demographics and amount of stress in everyday life and to Miller's Battery of International Patterns and Norms Scale. Numerous similarities in beliefs and perceptions were identified. Differences occurred in beliefs about family obligations, social acceptance, class consciousness, honesty in government officials and sense of personal and property security. Health habits and amount of everyday stress varied in these groups. Generalization of results beyond those studied is limited.

The notion that a population's health status is influenced by the beliefs commonly held in the culture is explored in this investigation. Research comparisons of elderly Minnesotans who are first generation Americans with their counterparts in the old Norse countries have revealed some striking similarities in health care beliefs. This study was undertaken to determine if successive and younger generations compared to their age cohort in an old Norse country retained their similarity of belief.

Participant observer and public health data was used to describe the health status of two related cultural groups (Minnesota residents of Scandinavian heritage and cohort residents of Iceland). The perceptions and the beliefs data were collected from baccalaureate nursing students in both cultural groups using Miller's Battery of International Patterns and Norms. The validity and reliability of this Battery have been established for various cultures by repeated measures methods. T-tests were used to analyze data from the demographic and belief inventories.

The nursing status and demographic data from both groups are similar. Significant differences in health beliefs related to everyday stress, family-life, and political aspects of health care were found between the baccalaureate nursing students of each country.

In Minnesota, America's "melting pot" still manifests readily identifiable segments of the population who strongly identify with old world cultures. The nurse who correctly identifies and utilizes these beliefs to plan health care interventions or to motivate clients will provide quality services.

Introduction

It is a challenge to provide nursing care for clients in another culture or for population groups in America who strongly identify with the norms and patterns of their old world heritage. Attempts have been made to describe or characterize health belief patterns, responses to pain, acceptance of health care providers, and political and economic factors influencing the health of various world populations (Thompson, Miller and Bigler, 1975).

An understanding of these factors can contribute to the nurse's interpretation of the client's and family's reactions to their health care problems, to the necessary interventions, and to the development of the therapeutic relationship (Branch and Paxton, 1976). Indeed the initiation and establishment of therapeutic interactions will be influenced by the nurses' knowledge of the cross-cultural differences between themselves and their clients (Miller, 1970). Empirical research that compares not only the important demographic but also the sociologic variables will allow careful comparison between cultures.

It is the comparison of your own cultural group to another, more than the description of the other alone, which highlights the subtle differences that may impede the