

PP 02**A Study on Gap between Theoretical Knowledge and Clinical Skills as Perceived by Student Nurses in a Private Nursing School in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka**

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Background: The gap between theory and clinical skills is a typical problem encountered by nursing students. In general, it could be defined as the discrepancies which occur during implementation of clinical skills, in complying with theoretical knowledge. Accordingly, it could reduce the quality of care provided. Thus, it is vital to address this ongoing issue to enhance the standard of nursing education.

Objectives: To identify the factors contributing to the gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical skills, as perceived by student nurses in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka.

Methods: Quantitative, cross-sectional research design was applied. A total of 115 nursing students from a private nursing school at Gampaha district, who had attended clinical placements for more than 6 months were included. Stratified sampling method was applied. A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The areas assessed in the questionnaire were nursing school, clinical setting and personality related factors. The questionnaire was developed by referring to evidence-based peer reviewed articles. A pilot study with ten participants was conducted to improve the validity. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software version 22.0.

Results: Of the total, 87 were females and 91.3% agreed to the existence of a theory-practice gap. Fifty-two participants had chosen that “lecturers provide inadequate knowledge on real life clinical situations” and simulation was the least frequently used teaching method. Among the participants, 62.6% stated that the allocated practicum time in nursing school was insufficient. Out of the participants, 90.4% concurred that the current curriculum should be upgraded. However, 53% of the participants were satisfied with the equipment available within the nursing school. Most frequent problem encountered in the clinical setting was “procedures not carried out in the standard way” (67%). Furthermore, 60.9% of the participants were dissatisfied with the support gained from clinical supervisors. Of the sample, 53% agreed that, being anxious affected their clinical performance negatively.

Conclusions: According to the perception of the nursing students, there is a gap between the theoretical knowledge and clinical skills. It is suggested to promote practical teaching methods, evaluate the standards of clinical settings and to conduct attitude development programs. Further studies are recommended to gain a more detailed insight to the issue and to overcome it.

Keywords: *Clinical education, Clinical placement, Curriculum, Nursing students, Theory-practice gap*