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TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF SIMULATION WHEN TEACHING NURSING STUDENTS TO ENCOUNTER A SUICIDAL PERSON

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Abstract

The suicide mortality rate in Finland, especially among young people, is still high compared to European standards. Suicidality often goes unrecognized in health care because the issue is not discussed due to lack of competence. Good education is essential to prevent suicide deaths. The paper presents a case study of simulation teaching as a method to educate nursing students on how to encounter a suicidal person. The study was conducted at Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland and involved Finnish-speaking (n=200) and English-speaking (n=40) third-year nursing students who participated in simulation teaching every year. The International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) standards were used to evaluate the experiences of the two teachers involved in the simulation teaching. The results showed that the simulation teaching made the theoretical material more realistic and understandable, and helped the students feel more comfortable talking about suicidal thoughts with patients. The simulation also helped students to practice their skills in a safe and controlled environment. Overall, simulation teaching has the potential to support the skills needed to help people with suicidal thoughts.

Keywords: Simulation, simulation pedagogy, teachers' experiences, suicidality.

1 INTRODUCTION

Suicide remains one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Globally, the suicide rate is decreasing (1). Although the number of suicides also in Finland has decreased relatively steadily since 1990, the suicide mortality rate, especially among young people, is still high compared to European standards. Suicides are a central cause of death for young people in Finland (2). Worldwide among young people, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death after road injury, tuberculosis and interpersonal violence. Every suicide is a tragedy that affects families and communities: every suicide has an impact at both the individual and societal level. Even a suicide attempt is a tragedy: for every suicide, there are many more people who attempt suicide. (1) The long-lasting effects particularly affect those people left behind (3).

There are several studies that show that people who commit suicide had visited health care services in the past month (e.g. 4, 5, 6) Suicidality often goes unrecognized in health care, because the issue is not discussed due to lack of competence (4). Healthcare professional may lack clinical experience, have poor knowledge of mental health state, or have underdeveloped communication skills (3). However, suicides are preventable with evidence-based interventions and education (1).

Nursing students should be trained in early identification, assessment, management and follow-up already during their studies. Good education is essential to prevent suicide deaths: suicide prevention work would become more systematic than it is now, if it was clearly reflected in health education curricula and more attention was paid to teaching methodologies (5). One teaching methodology could be simulation teaching, because people learn most effectively when training is interactive, immersive and replicates real life (6, 7). In education, simulation replicates a real-life scenario and offers students a standardized learning experience in a safe and controlled way. Simulation teaching requires purposeful and systematic planning. In order to achieve the objectives, certain criteria must be taken into account in the planning and development of simulations (6, 7).

Simulation as a teaching method has been used in two areas of mental health nursing teaching: to expand students' knowledge of diagnoses and psychopathology; and to teach advanced communication skills related to mental health nursing. Simulation is particularly useful in situations where acquiring attitudes or skills is more pertinent than that of knowledge. It can teach transferable skills, such as interviewing a patient professionally and taking into account their unique socio-cultural background. This promotes the student's ability to get the patient's personal narrative instead of a checklist. The simulation can help the student to consider the effect of the patient's, nurse's or co-worker's actions on their own emotional and behavioral response. It is also important how simulation teaching may affect students

attitudes and behavior. They learn to act respectfully towards patients, and colleagues at all times and to show a non-judgmental approach to psychiatric disorders (7).

2 METHODS

This study presents a case analysis of the utilization of simulation teaching methodology as a collaborative and problem-based learning approach in higher education in nursing education. The focus is on instructing nursing students on how to help individuals when experiencing suicidal thoughts. The implementation of this innovative approach took place at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences located in Vantaa, Finland. The development of simulation as a teaching methodology in the fields of mental health, substance abuse, and crisis care occurred over the course of 2019-2022, and was carried out by two nursing educators. During this time period, a total of approximately 200 Finnish-speaking and 40 English-speaking third-year nursing students participated in the simulation-based lessons each year.

A case study is a research method that involves a detailed examination of a single unit or entity, such as a person, group, organization, or event, over a period of time. This case study presents experiences of two Finnish teachers of simulation when teaching nursing students to encounter a suicidal person. The following steps were involved in conducting this case study: 1) the teachers' (n=2) experiences were chosen as a case, because they were available, represented the phenomenon under investigation and offered a wealth of information for analysis, 2) data was collected through interviews, ethnography and a theoretical framework, 3) it is common in case studies to use different analysis methods; in this study the ethnographic data were analysed deductively using a set of criteria, and interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, 4) conclusions were drawn from the data and observations, 5) findings were verified by triangulation by comparing them with The International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) standardized criteria for simulation design (The Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice), which serve as a framework for creating effective simulation experiences, and 6) the results of the case study were presented in this paper and in the INTED2023 conference presentation. (7)

The Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice include: 1) professional development, 2) prebriefing, 3) simulation design, 4) facilitation, 5) the debriefing process, 6) operations, 7) outcomes & objectives, 8) professional integrity, 9) Simulation-enhanced interprofessional education (Sim- IPE), and 10) Evaluation of Learning and Performance.

3 RESULTS

Results are presented 1) in a thematic format, where common themes from interviews that emerged from the data are identified and described, and 2) comparing the results of data with INACSL-standards. The results address how well the simulation teaching methodology aligns with The Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice (8).

The themes of the interviews were as follows:

1 Advantages and disadvantages of using simulation teaching method in nursing education

Overall, the utilization of simulation teaching method in nursing education entails both advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, when implemented appropriately, it has the potential to furnish students with valuable learning experiences and facilitate the development of crucial competencies. The simulation teaching method enables students to practice their abilities within a controlled setting, making it easier to learn and retain information. The design of simulated scenarios can be optimized to minimize the risk of harm to patients and students, thus providing a secure learning environment. By participating in these simulations, students can cultivate their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for their future careers in nursing. The simulation teaching method also provides a practical setting for assessment, enabling educators to accurately evaluate the knowledge and skills of students. However, it is important to consider that simulation teaching often requires specialized equipment, technology, and staffing, which may be costly for institutions and limit its widespread implementation. Additionally, it should be noted that simulation teaching can only offer a limited representation of real-life scenarios and may not fully capture the intricacies of real-life situations.

2 Challenges faced while implementing simulation teaching method in the study unit

The integration of simulation teaching method into the overall curriculum can bring numerous benefits to nursing education, but it requires careful planning and implementation to ensure that these benefits are realized. The simulation should be designed to meet the specific learning needs of each student and should be integrated into the curriculum in a way that optimizes its effectiveness and impact.

3 Effectiveness of the simulation teaching method in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students

Factors such as simulation design, student interaction and engagement, and debriefing quality affect its effectiveness. Simulation teaching allows students to apply knowledge and skills in a realistic, safe environment and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, its effectiveness depends on simulation design, facilitator experience, and debriefing quality. Poorly designed simulations or inadequate debriefing can hinder student engagement and skill development. Careful evaluation and adjustments are necessary to optimize the simulation's effectiveness in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

4 Perception of students towards the simulation teaching method

The perceptions of students towards simulation teaching method are important in determining its success. The level of engagement and interaction, the realism of the simulation, and the level of student control and autonomy can impact students' attitudes towards it. Gathering student feedback through surveys, focus groups or interviews can help educators understand students' perceptions and improve the method's effectiveness.

5 Reflection on the personal growth of the teachers as educators and their experience of using the simulation teaching method

Reflection on teacher personal growth and simulation experience is crucial for evaluating simulation teaching effectiveness. Reflective practice enables teachers to assess their teaching methods and identify areas for improvement. Through simulation teaching, teachers can develop their professional skills and deepen their understanding of the process. Reflection on simulation experiences can help teachers understand their teaching practices, evaluate successes and challenges, and make necessary adjustments for optimizing student critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Thus, reflection on teacher growth and experience is essential in evaluating simulation teaching effectiveness.

6 Future plans for developing and refining the simulation teaching method

The future of simulation teaching method involves ongoing refinement through research and improvement. This includes the use of new technology, interactive scenarios and new assessment methods. Regular evaluations and feedback from students and teachers will help identify areas for improvement. Collaboration with other institutions and organizations can enhance the development of simulation teaching. The future of simulation teaching method is promising with the potential to continue being an effective tool for education.

According to The Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice (INACSL) (8) teacher's experiences were as follows:

1 Professional development

Simulation-based experiences (SBE) were created by teacher specialists in simulation who have extensive knowledge of effective simulation education, teaching methods, and practical applications.

2 Prebriefing

The prior simulation teaching experience and training received by instructors are crucial factors that have been taken into account. Prior to participating in the simulation lesson, students were independently familiarized with the theory of crisis intervention and assessed through a knowledge evaluation. The simulation-based education session was initiated with a lecture on the assessment of self-harm and suicide risk, as well as the proper approach when encountering individuals with suicidal ideation. The students were then presented with the objectives and scenario of the simulation. A needs assessment was conducted to establish the evidence-based requirement for an optimized SBE. Previous research has demonstrated that healthcare professionals may exhibit deficiencies in clinical experience, inadequate mental health state knowledge, and inadequate communication skills, underscoring the significance of effective

education to prevent suicide mortality. It was developed a pre-briefing protocol that incorporates preparatory materials and instructions to enhance participant performance in the simulation-based experience.

3 Simulation design

A case that provided a contextual backdrop for the experience was created. Various degrees of simulation fidelity to enhance the perception of realism was Implemented. Students had the opportunity to choose a role for themselves within the simulation, with some being designated as observers. After preparation for the simulation, students engage in a simulated encounter with a patient who has attempted suicide. Observers, located in a separate room, view the simulation through a video link and evaluate the interview and assessment processes of the patient, as well as the effectiveness of the communication and dialogue between staff and patient.

4 Facilitation

It was implemented a learner-centered facilitating strategy that is guided by the learning objectives, the prior knowledge and level of experience of the learners, and the intended outcomes. However, it is important to be cognizant of the potential ethical and emotional challenges posed by the use of simulation, such as addressing students' personal experiences and creating a safe and supportive learning environment within the simulation.

5 The debriefing process

A post-simulation debriefing included opportunities for participants to reflect and share their experiences, insights, and observations in a structured feedback session. This included a discussion of what went well, areas for improvement, and lessons learned. The students were solicited for feedback after the simulation scenario during the debriefing process. Post-simulation, participants reported an increased willingness to engage in discussions on suicide with patients and a deeper understanding of healthcare practices, facilitated by the realistic depiction of the subject matter. The integration of practical and theoretical aspects of the subject material enhances the overall comprehension and understanding.

6 Operations

Simulation activities cover the infrastructure, people and processes required for effective implementation. There were enough human resources and working simulation facilities, including modern technology.

7 Outcomes & objectives

Conduct a needs assessment to identify the need for an optimized simulation-based experience. Clear, measurable objectives based on the learners' existing knowledge should be set. The simulation should aim to help students: 1) simulate patient interactions, including those who have attempted suicide, 2) assess patients' mental health and make informed referrals to appropriate care, 3) consider patients' relatives in decision-making, and 4) display increased confidence in challenging interpersonal situations. Design the SBE to align with the established objectives.

8 Professional integrity

The demonstration and maintenance of professional integrity was deemed essential by all parties involved in SBE. Professional integrity was defined as the ethical behaviors and conduct expected of facilitators, learners, and participants during SBE. It was regarded as an individual's internal set of principles, which encompasses values such as compassion, honesty, commitment, collaboration, mutual respect, and engagement in the learning process. In order to enhance the growth of simulation teaching, it is advisable to establish networks and exchange experiences with other mental health educators.

9 Simulation-enhanced interprofessional education

Teachers were undergoing simulation training to facilitate simulation-enhanced education for learners from various healthcare professions. This method aimed to provide a simulation-based experience for learners to meet linked or shared objectives and outcomes.

10 Evaluation of Learning and Performance

A feedback plan and conduct a structured evaluation of both the learner and the simulation-based experience were developed. SBEs provided students with a safe and controlled environment to practice challenging subject matter before encountering real-life scenarios, thereby enhancing

their preparedness. Evidence from prior research indicates that simulation-based education can enhance the self-perceived competence of nursing students in the area of suicide prevention.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the case study suggest that the utilization of simulation teaching method in nursing education has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include providing students with valuable learning experiences, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and offering a practical setting for assessment. On the other hand, the simulation teaching method can be costly, may not fully capture real-life intricacies, and requires careful planning and implementation. The challenges faced during implementation, effectiveness in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and student perception are crucial factors that need to be considered. The study aligns well with the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) standards, which emphasize the importance of well-designed simulation experiences, assessment of learning needs, measurable objectives, and alignment of modality with objectives.

Based on the results, the simulation appears to have been successful in achieving its goals. The simulation-enhanced education was facilitated by teacher specialists with a strong background in simulation education and teaching methods. The prebriefing process was thorough, including a lecture on the assessment of self-harm and suicide risk, a needs assessment, and a pre-briefing protocol. The simulation design was well thought out, including a case scenario with varying degrees of simulation fidelity and opportunities for students to choose roles and engage in a simulated encounter with a patient. The facilitation was learner-centered and aimed to address ethical and emotional challenges. The debriefing process provided opportunities for reflection and feedback. The simulation was designed to meet clear, measurable objectives, and professional integrity was emphasized. The simulation-based experience was evaluated for both learner performance and the simulation itself, and evidence suggests that simulation-based education can enhance students' preparedness and self-perceived competence.

In the future, it would be important to simulate the encounter of a suicidal person in a multiprofessional team. The complexity of healthcare needs in society has increased due to factors such as an aging population, chronic diseases, and the need for specialized care. This has led to a situation where it is no longer possible for healthcare professionals to work in isolation, but instead they need to work together as a team to provide safe, quality health care. Working together as a team allows healthcare professionals to share skills and knowledge, improve communication and cooperation, and better coordinate care for patients with complex needs. This collaborative approach ensures that patients receive the best possible care and that their health outcomes are optimized.

The teachers' experiences and future plans for development and refinement are also important in evaluating the simulation teaching method's effectiveness. Case studies are often conducted as qualitative research, and their results are not generalizable to other populations or settings. However, they provide rich insights into a specific phenomenon and can lead to further research.

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