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Nursing Student Perceptions of Study Abroad

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### **Review of Literature**

Studying abroad is an experience where a student travels to a different country to obtain more knowledge in a chosen field. It is an option available in many universities to further students' education and provide global perspective and knowledge. Experiences abroad assist nursing students in learning about and understanding ways in which health care in other countries is similar and different from their own. Therefore, when taking care of a patient of a different culture, the nurse has the ability to provide culturally relevant and respectful care. The purpose of this literature review is to analyze 15 different articles relating to student nurses and other pre-professional students who have studied abroad and synthesize findings from their experiences. Topics discussed in this paper include type of study, method of data collection, demographic information, shared themes, and limitations.

#### **Type of Study and Data Collection**

Of the 15 articles examined in this literature review, 11 are studies. Four of the studies are descriptive (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Kent-Wilkinson, Leurer, Luimes, Ferguson, & Murray, 2015; Zorn, 1996). Six are qualitative (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Gilliland, Attridge, Attridge, Maize, & McNeill, 2016; Goodman, 2016; Harrowing, Gregory, O'Sullivan, & Doolittle, 2012; Kruger et al., 2016; Long, 2016) and one is a cohort study (Frisch, 1990). The primary methods of data collection for these studies were surveys, interviews, and journal responses from the participants. Only one study was quasi-experimental, and used both qualitative and quantitative methods (Gilliland et al., 2016). The remaining articles analyzed were narrative accounts (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Levine, 2009; Martins de Olivera & Tuohy, 2015; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007), in which no data was collected. The narrative articles were structured as a story about the experience abroad. Four of the studies used tools for data

collection and interpretation (Frisch, 1990; Long, 2016; Zorn, 1996). The study by Frisch (1990) used the Measure of Epistemological Research (MER) tool, Long (2016) used the Cultural Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES), Gilliland et al. (2016) and Zorn (1996) used tools that were created by the researchers and specific to their respective studies.

### **Demographic Information**

Demographic information was provided in a majority of the articles used. The categories examined were age, gender, race, and ethnicity of participants. Of the researchers who provided demographic information, the majority of participants were female (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Frisch, 1990; Gilliland et al., 2016; Goodman, 2016; Harrowing et al., 2012; Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015; Kruger et al., 2016; Levine, 2009; Long, 2016; Martins de Olivera & Tuohy, 2015; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Wood & Atkins, 2006; Zorn, 1996). In fact, several studies (Frisch, 1990; Zorn, 1996) surveyed only female subjects.

A majority of the articles also reported on students in their undergraduate studies (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Frisch, 1990; Gilliland et al., 2016; Harrowing et al., 2012; Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015; Levine, 2009; Long, 2016; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Wood & Atkins, 2006). Eleven of the 15 articles' participants originated from the United States (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Frisch, 1990; Gilliland et al., 2016; Goodman, 2016; Kruger et al., 2016; Levine, 2009; Long, 2016; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Wood & Atkins, 2006; Zorn, 1996). The majority of the participating students were white.

Finally, five of the articles did not provide any or only supplied some of the demographic information that was compared in this review (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Goodman, 2016; Kruger et al., 2016; Levine, 2009; Wood & Atkins, 2006). Andrews & Moss (2013) and Wood & Atkins

(2006) did not report any demographic information whatsoever, while Kruger et al. (2016) and Levine (2009) reported race only and Goodman (2016) reported race and age.

### **Common Themes**

Several themes and findings were shared between the articles in this review. Nine of the researchers' conclusions mention improved cultural competence and cultural understanding as a result of the study abroad experience (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Gilliland et al., 2016; Harrowing et al., 2012; Kruger et al., 2016; Long, 2016; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Wood & Atkins, 2006). Several of the authors concluded that study abroad and immersion programs produced improved personal skills, nursing skills, and confidence in its participants (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Gilliland et al., 2016; Goodman, 2016; Levine, 2009; Long, 2016; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Zorn, 1996).

### **Limitations**

In addition to sharing positive outcomes, the articles also shared common limitations. The most common limitation listed was the small sample size (Bohman & Borgman, 2014; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Frisch, 1990; Gilliland et al., 2016; Goodman, 2016; Kruger et al., 2016; Levine, 2009; Long, 2016; Martins de Olivera & Tuohy, 2015; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Wood & Atkins, 2006; Zorn, 1996). The smallest sample size was one person (Martins de Olivera & Tuohy, 2015), while the largest sample was 70 persons (Carpenter & Garcia, 2012). One study (Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015) had a sample of 131 students, but not all of them traveled; however, they did participate in a survey. All of the articles examined included some form of subjective data (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Bohman & Borglin, 2014, Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Frisch, 1990; Gilliland et al., 2016; Goodman, 2016; Harrowing et al., 2012; Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015; Kruger et al., 2016; Levine, 2009; Long, 2016; Martins de Olivera &

Tuohy, 2015; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007; Wood & Atkins, 2006; Zorn, 1996), with most of those articles reporting only that subjective data.

Another limitation mentioned by the authors is the language barrier, which was mentioned as a significant hindrance to the students' learning in almost half of the articles (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Goodman, 2016; Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015; Long, 2016; Martins de Olivera & Tuoy, 2015; Wood & Atkins, 2006). The length of each study abroad experience can also be seen as a limitation. The study by Bohman and Borglin (2014) was the longest, with the potential for 12 weeks of immersion abroad. The study by Frisch (1990) was also significantly longer than the others with 6 weeks of experience. However, the majority of the studies that listed the length of time were limited to either one week, such as Goodman (2006) and Wood and Atkins (2006) or two weeks (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Long, 2016; Zorn, 1996). Finally, this literature review includes four articles that are not studies (Andrews & Moss, 2013; Levine, 2009; Martins de Olivera & Tuohy, 2015; Ruddock & de Sales, 2007).

### **Discussion of Findings**

Based on the findings in this literature review, study abroad experiences for students in the health profession, especially nursing students, are clearly beneficial. Providing care that is culturally sensitive is a very important part of nursing. Culturally sensitive care demonstrates that the nurse is well educated and also respectful and aware of cultures that are not his or her own. This literature review demonstrates that nursing students who have the opportunity to study in other countries return to their home with increased knowledge of other cultures as well as an increase in their own self-confidence. According to Milne and Cowie (2013), nursing students who have studied abroad report more confidence when providing care that is culturally

competent. A nurse who is more self-aware and also aware of other cultures is a more desirable employee and a better-rounded person. Because of how beneficial time abroad can be, it would be well advised to encourage more university nursing programs to offer educational programs in other countries.

### **Personal Experience**

In April and May of 2017, this author was fortunate to have her own study abroad experience. She spent ten days in Cusco, Peru, and five of those days volunteering in a local clinic. She was able to help with charting, triage patients, assist dentists with procedures, perform well-child visits, and administer medication. This author absolutely feels as though the experience abroad will make her a better nurse. Her time in Peru exposed her to how advanced the medical care in the United States really is compared to other countries, and humbled her when she became aware of how little was available to this clinic. After returning home, the author truly felt that she has a better understanding of Peruvian culture and how that might change the care given if she ever were to care for a patient from that country. She would be sure to be sensitive to the language barrier, include family members who are present in the plan of care, and ask about potential homeopathic practices. The experience also reinforced the concept that health care in the United States is very different from that in developing countries. Thus caring for a foreign patient may require a different technique. The author's experience abroad was positive, and she would encourage any nursing student to consider studying in another country.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on the limitations shared in each article of this literature review, more research is needed. All of the studies had primarily female students as their participants, therefore, it would

be beneficial to study male students to assess if their perspectives differ. Additionally, many of the studies had very small sample sizes. More data could be collected if the number of participants in each study increased. Finally, because the majority of the studies examined in this literature review were between one and two weeks long, conducting more studies with a longer time abroad would be necessary to see if the duration influenced the experience in any way.

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