

Qualitative Study on the Attitude of Nurses Towards Self-Harming Clients

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Abstract

Nurses encounter self-harm very frequently in various healthcare settings, yet the issue is rarely highlighted in psychiatric contexts. This study aimed to assess the attitudes of nurses towards self-harming clients at Teerthanker Mahaveer Hospital & Research Centre. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight staff nurses. Thematic content analysis revealed several key themes: attention-seeking behaviour, caring attitudes towards clients, optimism and partnership working, feelings of acceptance and readiness, challenging nurse-patient relationships, need for training, and viewing patients as a burden. Findings indicated that nurses are generally concerned about clients' health and emotional stability but often feel incompetent in managing self-harming behaviour. Experience with such clients contributed to nurses' learning and professional growth. Overall, most nurses expressed a positive and caring attitude towards clients.

Keywords: Qualitative study, Self-harming clients, Deliberate self-harm

1. Introduction

An individual event of self-harm might be an attempt to end life. However, many acts of self-harm are not directly linked to suicidal intent. Instead, they may represent attempts to communicate distress, gain attention or care, or relieve overwhelming emotions (Hjelmeland et al., 2002). Nurses play a vital role in caring for self-harming clients, given their close and consistent contact. Their professional attitudes greatly influence the quality of care delivered. Positive attitudes can be enhanced through reflective education, training, and peer support.

2. Purpose and Objectives

Purpose: To explore the existing attitudes of staff nurses towards self-harming clients.

Objective: To assess the attitudes of staff nurses toward self-harming clients using semi-structured interviews.

3. Assumptions and Delimitations

Assumptions: Participants hold certain attitudes towards self-harming clients, and identifying these attitudes can help improve care.

Delimitations: The study was limited to registered staff nurses with prior experience caring for self-harming clients.

4. Research Methodology

A qualitative descriptive and exploratory design was used. Purposive sampling selected eight registered staff nurses from Teerthanker Mahaveer Hospital & Research Centre, Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions. Thematic content analysis was applied to derive major themes from the responses.

5. Results

Result 1: Demographic Findings

The majority of participants were male (87%) and aged between 20–25 years (50%). Most belonged to the Hindu religion (50%) and held GNM qualifications (90%). Equal proportions of participants had 0–2 and 3–4 years of experience. All participants reported no formal training in handling self-harming clients.

Result 2: Attitudinal Findings

Themes that emerged include: attention-seeking behaviour, caring attitudes, optimism and partnership working, acceptance and readiness, challenging nurse-patient relationships, lack of training, and perceiving patients as a burden. Nurses recognized both positive and negative feelings, acknowledging frustration and fear but also a willingness to provide care. Many expressed the need for formal training and valued interpersonal relationships in managing such clients.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that while nurses demonstrated concern and caring attitudes towards self-harming clients, they also reported challenges such as lack of training and emotional strain. Practical experience contributed to skill development, but structured education and training are necessary to strengthen professional competence and ensure high-quality care for this vulnerable population.

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