The Effect of an Education Program on Moral Distress Among Registered Nurses

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Background/Purpose: This study tested the effectiveness of an educational intervention in reducing moral distress experienced by registered nurses (RN's). This study addressed the following research questions: Do RN's who participate in the educational intervention have decreased total moral distress, compared to RN's who do not participate in the program? Do RN's who participate in the educational intervention have decreased frequency of moral distress, compared to nurses who do not participate in the program? Do RN's who participate in the educational intervention have decreased intensity of moral distress, compared to RN's who do not participate in the program?

Theoretical Framework: This study tested hypotheses based on the theoretical relationships and empirical evidence found in the literature.

Methods: A convenience sample consisted of RN's from 4 hospitals in the mid-Atlantic region of the US. Using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design, the effectiveness of the intervention was tested. Both groups completed a demographic tool and the Moral Distress Scale. The intervention group completed the instruments prior to the intervention and 8 weeks after the intervention. The control group completed the instruments at similar times. Using SPSS Version 19.0, Pearson correlations, t-tests, and ANCOVA were used to test the research hypotheses.

Results: Independent t-tests compared the differences between the treatment and control groups’ pretest and posttest frequency, intensity, and total change scores. Analysis of data comparing the treatment and control groups revealed no statistically significant difference on change scores. Analysis of the ANCOVA revealed statistical significance (p= .001). Both frequency and intensity decreased among the treatment group after the intervention.

Conclusions and Implications: Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn: The majority of RN's in this study experienced moral distress at varying degrees of intensity and frequency. Frequency, intensity, and total moral distress decreased among the treatment group. The results of this study are important to nursing research and clinical practice, as the findings have the potential to influence the culture of nursing. Organizations that educate and employ nurses must develop and employ strategies to prevent the development of moral distress, as well as prepare nurses to recognize, and effectively respond to potentially morally distressing situations.

Learning Objectives: At the conclusion of this presentation the participants will be able to:

- Explain how to assess strategies aimed to minimize moral distress
- Summarize research findings