Critical Consciousness in Public Health Nurses: A Descriptive, Comparative Survey

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Background

Critical Consciousness is the awareness of oppressive systems in society, their sociopolitical context and the active engagement to change them\(^1\)

Public Health Nurses (PHNs) are a uniquely skilled nursing specialty that harnesses expertise to personalize interventions with consistent observed effectiveness\(^2\)-\(^5\)

There is limited research examining the perspectives of PHNs\(^6\)

Purpose

To describe critical consciousness of public health nurses

Methods

Design: Descriptive, comparative survey

Sample: PHNs were recruited from nation-wide listservs and known PHN agencies

Study data were collected and managed using REDCap electronic data capture tools

De-identified demographic, background information was collected

Instrument:

The Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS)\(^8\):

- 13 items in 3 subscales
  - Critical Reflection
  - Critical Motivation
  - Critical Action

Analysis:

Survey responses were analyzed in Excel and SPSS 23 using standard descriptive and inferential statistics

Results

Overall: PHNs (n = 173) scored highest in Critical Motivation subscale followed by Critical Reflection followed by Critical Action

Post-Hoc Analysis:

Approximately half of the participants (46.8%) had strong agreement about the impact of poverty (SAIP, strongly agree, for question: Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead)

SAIP participants were more likely to:

- Be under 30 years old (p = 0.039)
- Work in community setting (p = 0.003)
- Work as an educator/researcher (p = 0.001)
- Have ShoCCS scores higher all three subscales (p<.001 for all)

Discussion

PHNs had high levels of critical consciousness. Findings that PHN perspectives show acute awareness of health equity and poverty align with literature\(^2\),\(^9\)-\(^11\) A subgroup of the PHN sample with differential responses by age, work role and setting was identified. The Critical Action inherent in PHN work is likely broader in scope than the ShoCCS subscale definition.

Conclusions

This study examined critical consciousness of PHNs using the ShoCCS. Further research is needed to validate findings with additional PHN samples, and to understand the implications of these findings related to PHN health and wellbeing.

References


Figure 1: Critical Consciousness Subscale differences by SAIP

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