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Referencing for nursing, health, and social care undergraduates; what do students understand and what do academics know?

Dija BAH¹ Dr Alan R WILLIAMS² Liam SOMERS²

1-BSc (Hons) Nursing (Year 2). 2-College of Health, Psychology & Social Care.

Introduction

Accurate referencing is a key tenet of academic work for all disciplines, though not all nursing, health and social care students consistently apply principles during their studies (Froste 2020; Lynch et al 2016).

This can hinder a student's academic achievement, with professional implications should practice fall far below expected standards (HCPC 2016; NMC 2023).

Universities produce resources and signpost guides for students on referencing, though despite this practice remains sub-optimal.

This project is designed to uncover what nursing, health and social care students **know** about referencing and what academic staff teaching these students, **think** students know about referencing.

Methodology

A qualitative investigation (focus group and survey) was designed to answer two research questions.

RQ1. What do nursing, health and social care students know about academic referencing practice?

RQ2. What do academics guiding nursing, health and social care students think students know about academic referencing practice?

Separate focus groups were held with students (n=5) and academics (n=2). The transcription was thematically analysed to understand issues and inform the survey (Smith 2015). Participants received a £10 voucher.

Separate surveys of students (n=47) and academics (n=41) gained broader data to confirm focus group results. Participants could opt to enter a draw for £10 vouchers.

Ethical approval granted by the College of Health, Psychology and Social Care Research Ethics Committee (ETH2223-4047) and permission to approach students and academics from Head of Schools (Nursing and Midwifery and Allied Health & Social Care).

Results

Focus Groups

All focus group participants recognised the importance of referencing in academic work, though clear concerns were expressed by students as to guidance provided by academics and the university.

Inconsistent advice and information overload, particularly soon after commencing studies was identified by students. Participants suggested regular sessions or workshops early on in their programme may enhance referencing practice. Students also suggested peer support could help students referencing abilities.

Survey

	Student n=47 (%)	Academic n=41 (%)
Age band	45 yrs. or less, n=39 (83.0)	36 yrs. or more, n=34 (82.9)
Gender - female	n=37 (78.7)	n=34 (82.9)
Ethnic background Eng/Wales/Scot/NI/Brit	n=31 (66.0) [African 9, Any other Black/African/Caribbean 1, Any other White background 1, Caribbean 1, Not given 1, Pakistani 1, White & Black African 1 White & Black Caribbean 1]	n=36 (87.8) [African 1, Any other Black/African/Caribbean 1, Any other White background 2, Indian 1]
Prog. Study/Teach	Nursing 15 (31.9) Occ. Ther. 30 (63.8) Not given 2 (4.3)	Nursing 30 (73.2) Occ. Ther. 4 (9.8) Other progs. 5 (12.2) Not given 2 (4.8)
Agree or strongly agree, with neutral responses considered missing data		
Students know how to accurately ref.	36 (78.8%) $p<.001$ Note 1	13 (31.7%)
Students know what Harvard ref. is.	43 (91.5%) $p<.001$ Note 2	20 (48.8%)
Students know how to locate Uni. ref. resources	30 (63.8%) ns	25 (61.0%)
Students know who to ask for ref. advice.	30 (63.8%) ns	25 (61.0%)

Note 1- $\chi^2(1, n=88) = .429, p=.001, \phi = -.429$
Note 2- $\chi^2(1, n=71) = .388, p=.001, \phi = -.429$

Discussion

This investigation identified despite resources being available and support from academics, referencing causes difficulties and distress for nursing, health and social care students.

Whilst all acknowledge the importance of referencing, there appears a degree of frustration among some students and academics because of a) student's lack of awareness of support and b) inconsistent advice from academics.

Conclusions

Schools consider designing one-side A4 referencing guidance. Programmes embed reference guidance and workshops early. Academics must ensure they provide consistent advice.

References

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