

LGBTQIA2+ Nursing Students Disproportionately Impacted Across the COVID-19 Pandemic Trajectory

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Topic: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Category: Research Project

Abstract

Background/Introduction

Sexual minority and gender-diverse nursing students are at higher risk for depression, suicidality, and substance use than their heterosexual/cis-gendered (HCG) counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified existing mental health vulnerabilities.

Purpose

The study's purpose was to explore the pandemic's impact on undergraduate nursing students' mental health and substance use, comparing nursing students identifying as HCG with those identifying as LGBTQIA2+.

Methods or Processes/Procedures

The nine-item depression module of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7), Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), Diener's Flourishing Scale (FS), and suicide measures were used to measure pre- (2019), peri (2020, 2021), and post-pandemic (2022) depressive symptoms and substance use in nursing students enrolled full-time in a U.S. prelicensure nursing program. Time series analyses using descriptive and inferential methods were used to identify differences between LGBTQIA2+ and HCG nursing students across the phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

Time-series analysis showed sharply demarcated and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differences across all measured scales between 2019 – 2022. PHQ-9 scores increased 59.3% in HCG and 89.3% in LGBTQIA2+ nursing students. AUDIT scores increased 45.2% in HCG and 69.7% in LGBTQ nursing students. LGBTQ identification moderated the relationship between depression, suicidality, and substance use ($\beta = 0.091$, 95% CI [0.032, 0.151], $p < 0.05$).

Limitations

This study did not measure subject-level longitudinal differences across the pandemic's trajectory and, therefore, does not support causal relationships.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice

Depressive symptoms, suicidality, and substance use increased dramatically across the pandemic's phases in all students. LGBTQ nursing students were disproportionately impacted. Academic nursing's ability to reimagine the future of academic nursing depends, in part, on identification of successful strategies to reverse negative mental health trends in U.S. nursing students.

Biography

Dr. Lisa Thomas completed her PhD at the University of California San Francisco and is currently an Associate Professor at the University of Nevada, Reno. Dr. Thomas' current research program examines the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized college students.

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