Student nurse perceptions of risk during international placements

Aims of the study: To investigate student nurse exposure to and perceptions of risk during international placement.

Research Methodology: A phenomenological methodology were applied to uncover the 'lived experiences' of students. 10 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students after international placement. Destinations visited included developed EU & non-EU countries & developing countries around the world. Length of placement ranged from 4 to 12 weeks. 'Bracketing' of researcher experience & reflexivity were employed to enhance trustworthiness. Banonis' method of data analysis was applied which required immersion in the raw data through reading and re-reading.

Findings: Themes that emerged

1. Types of Risk

   - Physical
     eg. Transport, weather, other people (assault risk)

   - Clinical-professional
     eg. Litigation, learning bad practice

   - Socio-cultural
     eg. viewed as 'risky other' and treat with suspicion = isolation risk

   "If you said something they didn’t agree with it was you are English and are trying to exert your power."

2. Perceptions of Risk and Risk Management

   - Feeling like the outsider or 'risky other' & viewing locals as 'the other' heightened feelings of risk
   - Fitting in to become a friendly stranger and reliance on others reduced risk
   - Use of Intuition & Heuristics – comparing with home to assess risk and applying the same rules as at home to keep safe.

   "at home you don't go out dead late at night, so I applied the same principles and asked someone else's expertise about where and where not to go."

3. Risk and Learning

   - Being 'at risk' is a learning opportunity
   - Managing risk successfully enables professional and personal growth
   - It enables students to move towards self-actualisation

   "I gained a lot more confidence, you learn so much about yourself 'cause you are put out there."

Conclusion & recommendations: 3 types of risk were experienced & a key factor that influenced perceptions of risk was 'otherness'. In addition to the sociological/anthropological themes, a psychological perspective also emerged as students used intuition and heuristics. Therefore students make their own cognitive judgements regarding risk, however this is influenced by social and cultural experiences. The presence of risk can prove to be a learning opportunity as being at risk enabled students to move towards self actualisation. When preparing students for placement the concept of 'otherness' should be discussed so they will be more prepared to manage these risks & students will also be able to reduce any preconceptions they may hold about an 'other' culture.