

# Exploring and measuring spirituality and spiritual care competencies of undergraduate nursing students to advance the curriculum development in Austria



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## Background

In German-language literature developing spirituality and spiritual care competencies in nursing students is perceived as an important task. The lack of empirical findings hinders the acceptance of spiritual care both in teaching and practice. As nurses are present and responsible for the continuum of care, the interest is shifting towards understanding the role of nurses in providing spiritual care<sup>1</sup>.

## Aim

The objective of this study was to explore and measure nursing students' perceptions of spirituality and spiritual care as well as review German-language literature regarding spiritual care competencies in nursing.

## Method

A mixed method study was conducted in an Austrian nursing school using validated scales to measure students' spiritual well-being (JAREL<sup>2</sup>), spiritual care attitudes (SAIL<sup>3</sup>) and competencies (SSCRS<sup>4</sup>, SCCS<sup>5</sup>). Reliability analysis was calculated for each scale to compare it with existing data<sup>6</sup>. These self-assessment tools were integrated in a specially designed lesson plan. The participants were third year undergraduate nursing students. At the end of the lecture, students were asked to finish an open-ended question regarding the relevance of integrating spirituality and spiritual care into nursing practice. Data was gathered and maintained following the confidentiality principles. Ethical consent was obtained by virtue of completion. Simultaneously a literature review of studies on spiritual care competencies in nursing was conducted.

TOPIC	METHOD	TIME	RESSOURCES
Introduction	mentimeter voting	15 min	pc/mobile
	lecture	30 min	
Self-assessment: spirituality, attitudes and competencies	mentimeter voting	15 min	pc/mobile
	self-assessment scales	1 hour	handout
	lecture	30 min	.ppt
Spirituality in different healthcare settings (theory and practice)	small group work	2.5 hours	pc/mobile
	preparing wikis		moodle
	peer feedback		
Assessment of EPICC competencies	voting	15 min	moodle
Conclusion	lecture	30 min	.ppt
	mentimeter openend	15 min	pc/mobile

Table 1. Lesson plan: Spirituality and Spiritual Care in Nursing

## Results I

Of the 107 students who attended the lecture, 101 returned the questionnaire (response rate 94%) but only 77 (76%) filled out the self-assessment scale fully. 91% n=70 of those were female, 87% n=67 between 21-25 years, 58% n=45 with working experience in healthcare setting and 83% n=64 of Christian faith. The majority never prays (75% n=58) or visits religious meetings (77% n=59), instead 77% n=59 seek rest in nature.

## Results II

Based on the JAREL Scale, students reported a medium (56% n=43) or a high (44% n=34) level of spiritual well-being (mean scale score 4.0). The SAIL resulted in mean score 4.1. The SCCS mean score was 3.5. The SSCRS mean score reached 3.7. Students (n=41) argued that spirituality and spiritual care are "part of professional nursing". The overall analytical value of identified literature (4) is poor and needs further investigation.

Students (n=41) commented on five different dimensions regarding the integration of spirituality and spiritual care into nursing practice (open-ended question):

- personal growth
- uniqueness of each individual
- support in healing
- part of holistic care
- part of professional nursing



What is Spirituality?

## Conclusion

Students' self-estimated spiritual care competencies resemble international data<sup>4,6,7</sup>. Despite high scores in self-assessment, the majority of students as well as healthcare professionals have difficulties with spotting and interpreting patients' spiritual needs<sup>7,8</sup>. Further experiences - practicing and providing care; integrating spiritual screenings, assessments and bed-side interventions - are of essence.

There is a serious lack of empirical studies in German in this field. Only four studies were eligible for the analysis. The results, although very poor in their analytical value, derived from these writings are compatible with the international spiritual care competency matrix for undergraduate nurses (EPICC).

## References:

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