A Qualitative South African Study on Exploration of the Moral Identity of Nurses

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Abstract: Being a competent nurse requires clinical, general, and moral competencies. Moral competence is a culmination of moral perceptions, moral judgment, moral behaviour, and moral identity. Moral identity is the values, images, and fundamental principles held in the collective minds and memories of nurses about what it means to be a ‘good nurse’. It is important to explore and describe South African nurses’ moral identities and excavate the post-colonial counter-narrative to nurses moral identities as a better understanding of these identities will enable means to positively address nurses’ moral behaviours. This study explored the moral identity of nurses within the South African context. A qualitative approach was followed triangulating with phenomenological and narrative designs with the same purposively sampled group of professional nurses. In-depth interviews were conducted until saturation of data occurred about the sampled nurses lived experiences of being a nurse in South Africa. They were probed about their core personal-, social-, and professional values. Data were analysed based on the steps used by Colaizzi. These nurses were then asked to write a narrative telling a personal story that portrayed a significant time in their professional career that defines their identity as a nurse. This data were analysed using a critical narrative approach and findings of the two sets of data were merged. Ethical approval was obtained and approval from all relevant gatekeepers. In the findings, themes emerged related to personal, social and professional values, images and fundamental principles of being a nurse within the South African context. The findings of this study will inform a future national study including a representative sample of South African nurses.
Keywords: moral behaviour, moral identity, nurses, qualitative research
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