Article review

Impact of nursing intervention on improving HIV, hepatitis knowledge and mental health among homeless young adults (Nyamathi *et al*. 2013)

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The subject article [1] reports on the results from a pilot study considering the impact of two interventions on improving homeless young adults' knowledge of HIV and hepatitis, and their mental health (n=156, n=100 at follow-up, respectively). It is an important area to explore, bearing in mind the risks of HIV, hepatitis and mental distress to the homeless population, particularly the young homeless [2].

Although this study was implemented in the US, it has considerable relevance for the UK as homeless young adults are a particularly difficult client group to reach [3], and services provided for young adults continue to need development [4]. It is therefore important that we consider ways of enhancing young adults' knowledge around HIV and hepatitis, and improving their mental health and wellbeing.

The study of Nyamathi et al. found that the participants' knowledge of HIV and hepatitis increased following the two culturally sensitive interventions: firstly, a 'nurse-led HIV/AIDS and hepatitis health promotion programme'; and secondly, an 'art messaging programme', with the first showing more promise. The participants' mental health also increased significantly, and yet, mental health is addressed minimally in this paper. It would have been useful for the impact of interventions on the participants' mental health to be explored in more depth, considering the important implications of a person's mental state on their engagement in programmes [5].

An interesting finding from this article was the positive impact on subjects of having significant others in their lives. Also, that the use of illicit substances had a particularly negative affect on outcomes; the authors pose that this may be due to increased risk-taking when intoxicated, which is similar to conclusions from previous studies [6].

Nyamathi and colleagues provide an interesting discussion on the positive influence of having a 'trusted individual' involved in the intervention, including the importance of using a calm and empathic approach. They found that having a group format that was flexible, engaging and interactive, and having a welcoming nurse, who was able to relate to them as peers, led to positive outcomes. It would have been interesting for this to be explored further.

The authors rightly highlight the limitations of the study to include a low follow-up rate; however, in addition to this article being of interest to healthcare professionals, it also enhances the knowledge base for other professionals working in this field. It is important for HIV nurse specialists to enhance their understanding of the impact of interventions for young adults, not only with regards to knowledge of HIV and hepatitis, but also mental health.

References

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