Attitudes toward alcoholism: Analysis among Colombian nurses

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Harmful alcohol use has increased in the population in the last few decades and has become an area of great interest to health care.

Approaches in most Latin American countries are based on the hygienist training of their health care professionals, focused on a moral, judging conception toward substance use.

causing an obstacle to this population's access to health care for fear of being judged by the professionals offering the service, which negatively affects user adherence to the treatment programs offered.

Colombia, in 2013, around 2.6 million individuals aged between 12 and 65 abuse alcohol, meaning that 31% of the Colombian population use alcoholic drinks.

It is noteworthy that, in relation to alcohol abuse, the difference between sexes is much smaller, compared with levels for low risk use in the population.
The aim of this study is to identify the attitudes of Colombian nurses toward alcohol, alcoholism and individuals with alcohol-related disorders.

In South America, health care professionals, nurses in particular, manifested more ambivalent attitudes than nurses in other parts of the world, showing more positive attitudes toward use and more negative attitudes to providing care to individuals with alcohol-related disorders. 

(Navarrete & Villar, 2004; Villar, 2008).

The majority of studies approaching this topic were conducted in Brazil and there is an observable lack of studied from other countries, specifically from Colombia, there are no publications referring to nurses' attitudes toward alcohol and associated issues.

(Santos, Pillar, 2006; Soares, Vargas, & Oliveira, 2011; Divane, Vargas, 2014; Oliveira, Vargas, 2013).
The sample consisted of 605 nurses who met the inclusion criteria: being speaking Spanish as the native language, linked to the health care institutions in question and working there, exercising their profession, at the time the SAAA was applied. Of these, 303 (50%) returned the completed questionnaire.

95% carried out their professional activities in hospital health care (Accident and Emergency, intensive care, hospitalization, Gynecology, Pediatrics, Oncology) of these and 5% in services specializing in mental health care.

The respondents were:
- Predominantly female nurses (77.9)
- with a mean age of 32 (SD=9.9)
- without professional experience of individuals with alcohol related disorders (56%)
- with postgraduate level of education (46.7%)
The Spanish version of the Scale of Attitudes to Alcohol, Alcoholism and Alcoholics - SAAA was used.

This version contains 48 items divided into four factors:

1. Work and interpersonal relationships with the alcoholic;
2. The individual with disorders related to alcohol use;
3. Alcoholism (Etiology)
4. Alcoholic drinks and their use

(León, Vargas, & Díaz, 2017)

The results obtained from the scores for the Spanish version of the SAAA indicate that the nurses’ attitudes tended to be negative (56.8%) with a mean response of 3.0 for women and 3.1 for men.

Negative attitudes were more predominant in relation to the nurse’s attitude to interpersonal relationships with the user at work (μ=2.9) they had more positive attitudes toward alcoholism (μ=3.0). There were statistically significant associations between attitudes and frequency of delivering care, and with the factor of having previous professional experience in that area.
This fact may be related to the low visibility and recognition of the role of the nurse in this area in Colombia, which leads to a series of questions regarding the legitimacy of the health care professionals themselves, indirectly reinforcing their own stigma and negative attitudes toward those with alcohol and psychoactive substance related disorders.

The study was conducted in a specific region of Colombia and in public institutions, meaning we cannot extrapolate the results for the whole population of the country’s nurses.
This study is relevant for nursing in Latin America as there few studies on the attitudes of nurses toward alcohol and associated issues are being conducted here.

This being the first specific one carried out in Colombia. It also represents a guide for constructing an updated reading of the attitudes of workers in this category of health care professional toward alcohol and associated issues.

As well as providing an opening to think about including and improving the content on caring for users with substance-related problems in nursing course curricula so as to increase frequency nursing students’ contact with this population from their studies onwards.