

Intercultural sensitivity and medically unexplained symptoms – Research and educational development among healthcare students

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the examination of healthcare students and the development of higher education in two interconnected yet insufficiently explored areas: Medically Unexplained Symptoms (MUS) and Intercultural Sensitivity (IS). Cases of MUS pose considerable challenges for communication and patient care. Cultural factors substantially influence the manifestation and interpretation of such symptoms, highlighting the relevance of IS in MUS management.

The primary aim of this research was to identify educational needs and to introduce a targeted training program. A needs- and status-assessment conducted among Hungarian and international healthcare students (N=508) revealed deficiencies as well as characteristic attitudes. The study enabled a psychometric evaluation of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000), resulting in a more suitable, shortened Hungarian version. Using latent profile analysis, four distinct IS profiles were identified: Sensitive, Average, Uncertain, and Rejecting. Demographic variables and empathy dimensions exerted significant explanatory effects on profile membership, supporting a deeper understanding of students' experiential patterns and the identification of developmental priorities.

An e-learning program was designed to address these gaps, focusing on MUS-related care, empathy, and IS development. Evaluation of satisfaction and effectiveness (N=56) indicated improvements in students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills. While limitations must be acknowledged, participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

This doctoral dissertation promotes culturally responsive education; it contributes empirical findings, a new measurement tool, and a flexible e-learning program to better prepare future healthcare professionals for the intercultural management of MUS.