

Empowering futures: Exploring the role of school nurses and youth wellbeing in Aotearoa-New Zealand (NZ)

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Background:

Youth learn more effectively when healthy, and educated youth foster healthier families, leading to more productive future generations. Approximately 283,000 students attend Aotearoa-NZ secondary schools, where school nurses provide accessible, targeted healthcare in a safe environment. This study explored the role of school nurses by identifying secondary school students' health needs and the multifaceted role of school nurses in Aotearoa-NZ.

Methods:

A mixed methods approach was used, combining qualitative interviews with school nurses and quantitative analysis of a nationwide survey on Aotearoa-NZ school-based health services (SBHS) and workforce. The interviews were thematically analysed, while survey data were analysed using factor analysis, then multivariate analysis and tested against themes from the interviews.

Results:

The qualitative analysis identified four main themes: passions and purpose within school nursing, reasons for youth engagement with school nurses, barriers within SBHS, and school nurses' pursuit of change for SBHS. The survey received 674 responses from SBHS staff, with 157 complete responses from school nurses specifically. Statistical analysis of the quantitative findings identified that school nurse job satisfaction (0.873) is derived from the self-perceived sense of student value (0.760) and the most common health reasons students are interacting with school nurses is for: Acute injury/illness (0.738), sexual health (0.518) and mental health (0.569) according to the component matrix.

Conclusions:

There is limited research on the role of school nurses and their impact on youth health. The interviews provided valuable insights, identifying four main themes, while the nationwide SBHS survey offered statistical data to complement the qualitative findings. This research offers new insights into the role of school nurses and the health needs of youth, contributing to academic discourse and informing practice, policy, and future research. Understanding the multifaceted role of school nurses can enhance support for them, ultimately improving wellbeing outcomes for students.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The researchers and the University of Waikato recognise the contribution of Pinnacle Midlands Health Network New Zealand, Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora and school nurses across Aotearoa-New Zealand have made towards this research. We also recognise the need for

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