Exploring the experiences of international nursing students, studying in South Australia, during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the process of co-creating a podcast. An Artefact-Exegesis.

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ABSTRACT

Background: International nursing students faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic which extended beyond their study and clinical placement. Nursing research has previously identified the difficulties that international nursing students experience not only in education, but also within their personal and social lives. The disruption caused by the pandemic highlighted the connection between educational and personal-social needs and provided an opportunity to explore students' challenges from a wholistic perspective.

Objective: This research aimed to discover knowledge which could lead to a more supportive educational experience for international nursing students and to prevent or manage complex needs in the event of future healthcare and other disasters.

Design: Participants included six international nursing students studying a Bachelor of Nursing in one South Australian university, during the COVID-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2023. Students came from different countries and were in different year levels of their degree. The podcast series is a result of edited recorded interviews identifying common themes. The podcast provides the examinable artefact for the PhD, along with an exegesis.

Methods: Consistent with the methodology of narrative inquiry, data consisted of field notes of conversations, observations, researcher reflections and transcripts from audio recordings. A set of data was collected from each participant. Three methods of analysis were applied to each data set. First, the participant's narrative was reconstructed using Connolly and Clandinin's (1990) three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place. Second, the reconstructed story retained verbatim dialogue, which was analysed using McCormack's lenses (2000a; 2000b). Third, data was examined using Gilligan's concept of 'Voice' in understanding story (Gilligan, 1982; 2003; 2015). Participants reviewed their own edits until they felt satisfied that a final podcast script reflected their true experience. Each podcast episode was recorded and edited for quality design, and suitable length.

Results: Along with sudden unemployment, students' temporary migrant status prohibited them from government support, leading to acute poverty. High rates of COVID-19 in home countries contributed to further loss of financial support as well as anxiety about loved ones. Most of the participants were of Asian descent and experienced Asian-related racism. University closure during lockdown contributed to social isolation and poor mental health. Online learning required significant adjustment. International nursing students also experienced the same hardships many nurses and domestic nursing students experienced working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion: The *Closed Borders* podcast not only describes pandemic related trauma, but it also highlights issues international nursing students face during their ordinary educational experience. Leaders in nursing education must reconsider their role and responsibility in addressing international nursing students' needs, and view these from a wholistic perspective. There is scope for the nursing faculty to take more responsibility and work in partnership with student leaders, and traditional student services to provide more nuanced support. Policy development can address emergency preparedness, food and housing needs, revisit approaches to racism and improve mental health and well-being. Education of teaching staff, clinical facilitators and clinical placement leaders will ensure this knowledge flows into classrooms and clinical placements.