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Factors that influence nursing and midwifery students' intentions to study abroad: a qualitative study using the theory of planned behaviour

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Background: Future health care professionals need to be broadly-educated, adaptable individuals who have significant experience in the world beyond the classroom. Study abroad is an ideal means of developing some of the skills and attitudes that are not only valued among health professionals, but also have global applicability. Although internationalisation through studying abroad is widely publicised as a preferred means of developing globally competent third level graduates, very little is known about the factors that influence students' predisposition to study abroad, students decision making process and how various factors influence that process.

Objectives: The aim is to explore the motivating factors that influence nursing and midwifery student's intentions to study abroad.

Design: The design is a qualitative descriptive study.

Setting: A third level institution in Ireland is taken as a setting.

Participants: A purposive sample (n=25) of undergraduate nursing and midwifery students is considered.

Methods: Data were obtained individually and in a free response format by means of an open ended belief elicitation questionnaire. The theory of planned behaviour was used a theoretical framework to guide both the structure of the questionnaire and the content analysis.

Results: The study's findings support earlier works in identifying the main behavioural, normative and control factors that influence a student's decision to study abroad and is the first study to recognise enhanced professional identity as a potential benefit of studying abroad. Factors such as cultural sensitivity, employability, language and cost emerged as important issues in need of further investigation.

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