Creating Safe Relational Space: A Constructivist Grounded Theory of How Public Health Nurses Work with Mothering Refugee Women

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Background

Public health nurses promote the health of complex populations within varying community contexts. However minimal inquiry has focused on the processes public health nurses use in providing care to these populations. Women who are refugees and mothering are one such rapidly growing yet underrepresented group who often enter the Canadian health system through public health nurses.

Aim of the study

This study aimed to explore how public health nurses provided community-based care to women who are refugees and mothering.

Methods

Constructivist grounded theory was employed using intersectionality as an analytical tool. Twelve public health nurses from four public health units in Western Canada participated in this study. Data collection and analysis was informed by intersectionality and occurred concurrently using constant comparison methods.

Results

Participants in this study described an overall process of creating safe relational space to address a basic social problem of establishing trust while managing structural forces. This overarching process was expressed through burning with passion, connecting while looking beyond, protecting from re-traumatization, and fostering independence.

Conclusions and implications

This study adds to an emerging body of knowledge on public health nurses work with complex populations. Findings reveal strategies public health nurses used to enhance health equity. Intersectionality is innovatively demonstrated as an effective approach to analyzing attention to how gender, race, culture and migration are impacted by ever-changing sociopolitical priorities. Implications include health leaders needing to structurally address moral ambiguity experienced by public health nurses. Trauma-and-violence-informed principles need structural integration to promote informed and flexible practice.