Are We Teaching Bias? How Nursing Curriculum Can Perpetuate Racial Disparities in Maternal Health Outcomes

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Purpose and Background:
The United States has persistent racial inequities in maternal health, with Black women experiencing the highest maternal mortality and morbidity. Limited research has been done about nursing curricular preparedness to address implicit bias and racism. There is also a lack of research examining nursing students' perspectives on racial disparities and maternal health outcomes. This study aimed to investigate undergraduate nursing students' perceptions and understanding of how racial disparities, racism, and bias affect maternal health outcomes in the United States. The research question is stated: *How do undergraduate nursing students perceive racial disparities, racism, and bias affecting maternal health outcomes in the United States?*

Methods:
The Critical Race Theory (CRT) guided this qualitative research study. Interpretive Description (ID) was utilized for methodology. A total of 16 undergraduate nursing students were recruited by theoretical, purposeful, and snowballing sampling. This study used one-on-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews via WebEx video conferencing. The constant comparative method (CCM) was used for data analysis. The study authors (MC, MG, LC), experienced antiracist researchers, used the lens of the CRT and explored many possibilities before drawing interpretive conclusions.

Results:
The study's most significant finding was the lack of participants' understanding of systemic racism and its impact on racial disparities. They reported that their faculty did not seem comfortable lecturing about racial issues, their education about bias, social justice, and health disparities was fragmented, and the practical nursing implication piece was missing.

Discussion/Conclusion:
The Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education emphasize preparing nurses who can address systemic racism and pervasive inequities in health care. Nursing students must understand how their perceptions and personal biases impact patient outcomes. Nurse educators should guide nursing students to look beyond individual behavioral and risk factors. Traditional explanations for maternal health disparities such as obesity and hypertension, focus on comorbidities more prevalent in the Black population. Students must learn to consider systemic issues contributing to health disparities.

Nursing Implications:
Nursing faculty can adopt CRT and antiracism pedagogies into their curriculum to prepare nurses to provide patient care that is free from bias and discrimination. More research is needed on curricular preparedness to address racial disparities in healthcare.