

Exploring the experiences of Western Australian public sector secondary school nurses who encounter young people with mental health problems.

Presenter: Anita Moyes ([Anita.Moyes@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:Anita.Moyes@health.wa.gov.au) )

Supervisors: Professor Dianne Wynaden, Curtin University, Bentley, Western Australia

Dr. Shirley McGough, Curtin University, Bentley, Western Australia

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Mental health problems in young people are common. In the international literature school nurses have been identified as key sources of support for this cohort of young people, but there is a scarcity of research in the Western Australian context.

**Aim:** The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of Western Australian public sector secondary school nurses who encounter young people with mental health problems.

**Methods:** The study used grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thirty one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with secondary school nurses working in metropolitan and regional state secondary schools for the Department of Health in Western Australia.

**Results:** Nurses reported that young people with mental health problems had a high utilisation of school nursing services, regardless of the level of engagement they had with specialist mental health service providers. Young people frequently sought support from school nurses for highly complex social and mental health problems that were not easily resolved. These experiences had significant implications for the professional practice and personal wellbeing of school nurses.

**Conclusion:** School nurses perceived that supporting young people experiencing mental health problems was a very important aspect of their work. When they received optimal clinical, professional and case support, they reported high confidence in caring for young people experiencing mental health problems. The study findings have important implications for efforts to enhance the capacity of secondary school nurses to provide appropriate support to this cohort.