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Perceptions of high school students about nursing as a career

Afsar Jan, Shomail Sikander

Shifa College of Nursing, Islamabad, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

Objective

To evaluate high school students' perceptions about nursing and potential interests in nursing career.

Methods

In this descriptive cross sectional study data were collected from 570 students of 12 colleges from Rawalpindi and Islamabad by using a self-administered questionnaires and were analyzed using SPSS v 16.0

Results

In positive perception of nursing in career image, the mean score for males was 17.34 while for females it was 16.58 ($p=0.002$). For negative perceptions of nursing career preference, the mean score for males was 9.51 while for females it was 10.4 ($p=0.000$). In positive perceptions of

nursing career accessibility, the mean score for males was 9.51 while for females it was 10.41 ($p=0.000$). Despite higher scores in career image and career accessibility, only 5.5% students' responses are "definitely yes" to enter in nursing.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that campaign sessions regarding nursing and its scope need to be conducted by nursing schools before commencing the admissions. Nurse educators and nurse manager should perform as a role model. This will help to emphasize the positive field of work and prestige level involved in nursing. (Rawal Med J 2012;37:13-17).

Keywords

Nursing, Career image, career preference, career accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

Nurses have long been recognized as the backbone of the health care system.¹ Declining enrolments in schools of nursing have alerted to what has been identified as serious problem.² In Pakistan, there is no data available regarding students perception about nursing as career; however, it has been observed that only those students enter nursing that belong to particular race or sect and having financial issues to continue education. The students, who get higher marks in high school, do not prefer to enter in nursing. Such students prefer other degrees such as medicine and engineering and in Pakistan; medicine is widely sought after, and is considered as one of the most respectable of all professions.³

An important factor in the recruitment issue is the poor image of nursing.² In Pakistan, nurses are still in the early stage of gaining respect and professionalism, the poor public image of nursing in male-dominated Pakistan has not changed.⁴ Perceived unsafe working conditions and shift work are believed to be detrimental to personal and family life; and are not consistent with the image of profession.⁴ The professional image of nursing in the public sphere is affected by negative social concepts related to gender stereotypes, subservience to physicians, low academic demands, limited possibilities of promotion, and low wages.⁵ The career image has been proposed to counter the current negative image of nurses.⁶ Many female dominant positions, including nursing, have failed to attract male recruits which has been attributed to in part of issues such as status and pay, but it is also result of the gender role stereotyping of the profession.⁷ The perception of nursing as a gender-segregated profession, meant only for females, emerged when Florence Nightingale firmly established nursing as a women's occupation.⁸ Perceptions of nursing as a career are thought to be related to choices made by high school students when entering into the nursing profession.⁹ Noticing a male nurse being ridiculed would deter boys to think of a nursing career.¹⁰ The objective of this study was to evaluate perceptions about nursing and their potential interests in nursing career.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

In this study descriptive cross sectional study, a self administered questionnaire was used to determine opinion of students. Out of 69 colleges registered with Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad, 45 colleges are located in Rawalpindi and 24 in Islamabad. The sample includes both male and female students of intermediate level. Multi stage cluster sampling was used to gather data in two stages. In the first stage, 12 colleges (clusters) were randomly selected by simple lottery from list of colleges. In the second stage, 50 students

including both first and second year were selected randomly by using lottery method. The calculated sample was 600 considering 50 students per college. This was calculated by considering 95% confidence level with 5% confidence interval ($\alpha=0.05$) using sample size calculator.

The questionnaire has five categories and was used with permission.² (Appendix). The study was approved the IRB Shifa College of Medicine and Shifa College of Nursing Ethics Committee. An informed consent was taken from all study participants. All data were kept confidential as no name was written on questionnaire. We considered combined response of agree and strongly agree equal or more than 60%, combined response of disagree and strongly disagree equal or more than 60% and undecided response equal or more 30%.²

RESULTS

Out of 600 students, 570 returned the questionnaire. There were 347 males and 223 females. The ages ranged from 15-20 years. The students belonged to both first year and second year.

Table 1. Scores for Career Image, Preference and Accessibility.

Score		Possible Range	Range	Mean± SD
Image Score	Positive Perception of Nursing	5-25	7-25	17.04±2.85
	Negative Perception of Nursing	8-40	14-40	25.77±3.67
Preference Score	Positive Perception of Nursing	8-40	15-40	27.07 ±4.09
	Negative Perception of Nursing	6-30	3-15	9.86±2.87
Accessibility Score	Positive Perception of Nursing	3-15	3-15	9.86±2.87
	Negative Perception of Nursing	4-20	4-20	11.91±2.84

The possible range for questionnaire related to positive perception of career image was 5-25 and the scored range was 7-25. Similarly, for negative perception of career image, the possible range was 8-40, while score range was 14-40 (Table 1). The p value in positive perception of career image by both males and females was 0.002 while p value in negative perception of career image was 0.489 (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean, SD and P value of perceptions.

Factors	Gender	Number	Mean±SD	P Value
Positive perception of career image	Male	346	17.34±2.81	0.002
	Female	223	16.58±2.86	
Negative perception of career image	Male	347	25.69±3.74	0.489
	Female	220	25.91±3.55	
Positive perception of Career Preference	Male	347	27.22±4.27	0.258
	Female	222	26.82±3.80	
Negative perception of Career Preference	Male	347	9.51±2.29	0.000
	Female	223	10.41±3.53	
Positive perception of Career Accessibility	Male	347	9.51±2.29	0.000
	Female	223	10.41±3.53	
Negative perception of Career Accessibility	Male	347	12.04±2.83	0.158
	Female	223	11.70±2.85	

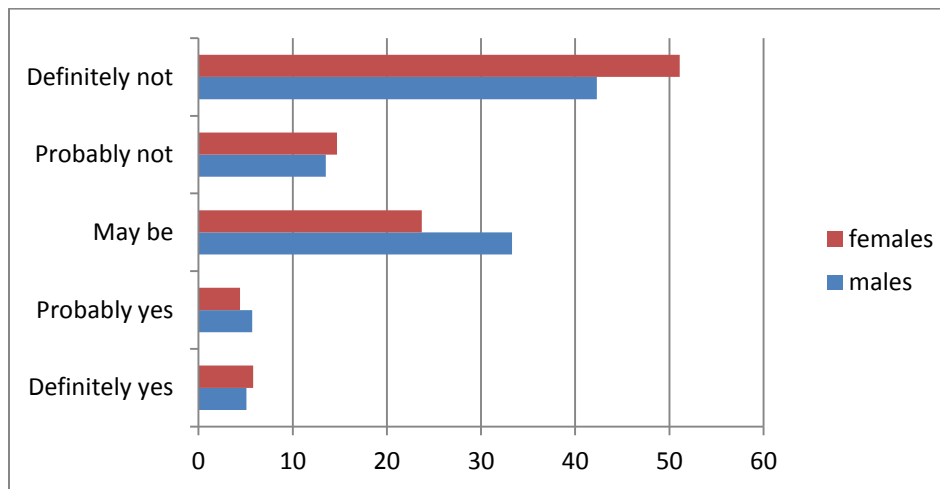
The range, possible range and mean for both negative and positive perceptions of career preference is shown in Table 1. The p value for males and females in positive perception of career preference was 0.258 and that in negative perception of career preference was 0.000 (Table 2).

Table 3. Sources from which views about nursing were perceived.

Watching TV	Yes	40.9%	No	59.1%
Reading Books Magazine or news paper	Yes	29.8%	No	70.2%
Knowing from some who is a nurse	Yes	40.9%	No	59.1%
Observing nurses at work	Yes	77.5%	No	22.5%

The range, possible range and mean for both negative and positive perceptions have also been shown in table 1.

Fig 1. Percentages of responses to “considering nursing as career choice”



The maximum percentage of yes response was for observing nurses at work which is approximately 78% (Table 3). Nearly 50% subjects did not want to consider nursing as a career (Fig 1).

DISCUSSION

In the sub category of positive career image, there were higher percentages given to “nursing is a profession”, “nursing is a well respected occupation” and “nurses are kind and compassionate people”. These all are related to prestige level of nursing career. The students perceived nursing as a profession than a technical occupation. Students also perceived nursing is a well respected occupation because at the same time they perceive nurses are kind and compassionate.

In Pakistan, nurses have to take care of many patients. The nurse-to-physician ratio is 1:2.66.

There is 1 nurse for every 2,973 people and 1 physician for every 1,287 people and issue has worsened because of nurse immigration to other countries.⁴ Many nurses don't work in Pakistan; they travel to other countries to earn more. The result is shortage of nurses and over workload. In this sample it seems that students' perceptions were limited to bedside nurses. They had probably not seen nurses working as a manager, researcher and educator etc.

In positive perception of career preference, the overwhelming majority of students expressed that “nursing is a stimulating and challenging work” and “nurses have to take responsibility for the people they take care of”. In the negative perception of career preference, “nurses have to work too hard”, “nurses only do what doctors tell them”, and “nurses have to normally work at night and weekends” had remarkable responses. In the first question, “nurses have to work too hard”, students might have seen nurses busy unit and even not able to take tea break. In the second question, “nurses only do what doctors tell them”, is a misconception. This is not necessary all the time that nurses always do what doctors tell them. In reality, nurses and doctors work in collaboration. In the third question, “nurses have to normally work at night and weekends”, students perceived to only duties of bed side nurses. There are many other places where a nurse

is not required to do shifting duties. These include nursing schools, nursing education services, OPDs and community health nurses etc. The noteworthy response of undecided in this section was 31% for “nurses have many opportunities for advancement”. This shows the knowledge deficit.

In positive career accessibility, the only noteworthy response was that 72% agreed or strongly agreed that “nurses have to know a lot about different things”. While in negative career accessibility, the notable response was that 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed that “only women should be nurses”. In both the cases career accessibility was seen positively. Finally, when these students were asked to consider nursing as a career choice, despite more positive perceptions towards career image and career accessibility, only 5.4% students had definitely yes response while 46% students had definitely not to consider nursing as a career choice. Thus, the highest numbers of students were not willing to choose nursing as a career. This is similar to earlier reports.² One of the reasons that these students were not willing to enter nursing is the career preference, where majority students saw it negatively. Mostly students’ views about nursing were perceived after observing nurses working at place. Limitations of the Study include that it only surveyed two cities of Pakistan, proportionate sample selection gender wise was not considered due to unavailability of registrations of students and the validity of tool for Pakistani context was not established.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results show an overall positive perception in career image and career accessibility; however, this was negative in career preference and only 5.5% students were willing to enter in

nursing. The students were not well aware of the benefits of nursing. Nurse educators should organize career days, where there should be interaction between students and nurse educator so that they should be better informed about nursing and its opportunities for further advancement. Nurse educators should also be involved during health education sessions conducted for students. In addition, the salary of nurses especially in government sector should be increased in order to attract more intelligent students. Nursing schools should also organize admission campaign session with parents as well so that they would understand the benefits and opportunities in nursing. They would also know the flexible duties and role of nurse other than a bed side nurse. This will enable students and their parents to perceive more positive concepts about nursing.

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Correspondence: Afsar Jan. Email: shaniuz12@hotmail.com

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APPENDIX [Questionnaire]

a. Gender: 1. Male 2. Female **b. Age:** _____

c. Directions: *For questions number 1-34 choose ONE response using the following scale.*
(Nurse refers to a registered nurse)

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=undecided 4=agree 5=strongly agree

S.#	Content	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	It costs a lot of money to nursing school	5	4	3	2	1
2	It takes too long to learn to be nurse	5	4	3	2	1
3	Nurses have to take hard courses in school.	5	4	3	2	1
4	All nurses must have a university degree to practice nursing	5	4	3	2	1
5	Nursing is a technical occupation	5	4	3	2	1
6	Nursing is a profession	5	4	3	2	1
7	Nurses have to know a lot about different things	5	4	3	2	1
8	It doesn't take very long to learn to be a nurse	5	4	3	2	1
9	Anyone can afford to go to nursing school	5	4	3	2	1
10	Nursing is stimulating and challenging work.	5	4	3	2	1
11	Nurses have to do unpleasant things.	5	4	3	2	1
12	Nurses don't get pay well	5	4	3	2	1
13	Nurses only do what doctors tell them	5	4	3	2	1
14	Nurses have to take responsibility for the people they take care of.	5	4	3	2	1
15	Nurses have to work too hard	5	4	3	2	1
16	Nursing is a low level skill occupation.	5	4	3	2	1
17	Nurses work under a lot of stress	5	4	3	2	1
18	Nurses have to normally work at night and weekends	5	4	3	2	1
19	Nurses make high salaries	5	4	3	2	1
20	Nurses have a lot of people to take care of.	5	4	3	2	1
21	Nurses make many important decisions.	5	4	3	2	1

22	Pharmacists have a higher social standing than do nurses.	5	4	3	2	1
23	Nurses make more money than teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
24	Nurses have the same social standing as secretaries.	5	4	3	2	1
25	Nurses spend most of their time socializing with doctors.	5	4	3	2	1
26	Nursing requires a high degree of skill.	5	4	3	2	1
27	Only women should be nurses.	5	4	3	2	1
28	Nursing is a low status occupation.	5	4	3	2	1
29	Nurses can always find a job.	5	4	3	2	1
30	Nursing is a well respected occupation.	5	4	3	2	1
31	Nurses have high standard behavior.	5	4	3	2	1
32	Nurses have many opportunities for advancement	5	4	3	2	1
33	Nurses are kind and compassionate people.	5	4	3	2	1
34	Nurses are equal to physician	5	4	3	2	1

Please choose only one response.

d. Are you considering nursing as your career choice?

1. Definitely yes
2. Probably yes
3. May be
4. Probably not
5. Definitely not

Tick yes or no for the options given below

e. Your views about nursing mainly come from;

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Watching TV | Yes | No |
| 2. Reading books, Magazine or news paper | Yes | No |
| 3. Knowing from some who is a nurse | Yes | No |
| 4. Observing nurses at work | Yes | No |