

IMAGE OF NURSING PROFESSION AS VIEWED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILALA DISTRICT, DAR ES SALAAM

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ABSTRACT

Objectives:

The Broad objective: To assess knowledge and attitudes of secondary school students in Ilala district towards the nursing profession

Specific objectives: To determine the awareness of nursing as a profession by secondary school students in Ilala district, explore factors that promote aspiration to enroll in nursing schools and to explore factors that deter aspiration to enroll in nursing schools.

Methods: The study was exploratory cross sectional using both qualitative and quantitative methods and was conducted in Azania and Jangwani secondary schools in Ilala district. The sample size included 50 male and 50 female students who were opting for Physics, Chemistry and Biology from form III to form VI in the above mentioned schools.

Results: Awareness above 50% for males was 79.2% (95%CI: 66.6, 91.8) while that of females was 76.9 % (95% CI: 65.4, 88.4). Awareness below 50% was 31.4% (95%CI: 8.4, 54.4) for the males while that for females was 31.1% (95% CI: 11.3, 50.9). Non awareness was mostly about nurses being capable of independent practice, making decisions for themselves, working with high technology, following physician's orders without questioning and feeling good about what they do.

Factors that were pointed out included: social, economical, educational and individual perceptions of different students. Although students were aware of nursing, they did not want to opt to join the profession.

Conclusion: This study has shown that students are at least aware of the profession but they do not want to opt for it due to the image they have of it from the public. The factors that have been addressed in this research have to be put in consideration if at all we are to increase the nurse patient ratio in Tanzania.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is as old as human life itself; however the shortage of nurses is not a recent phenomenon, nor one restricted to a specific geographical location. The profession is said to have long suffered from public stereotyping and from being closely associated with femininity and powerlessness. The time has never been better for nurses to reach out to the public to change certain perceptions about nursing. Various people have different understandings of the nursing profession based on prior events in their lives since perceptions are subjective.

Perceptions of advanced secondary school students of nursing are important because they offer strategic clues towards successful recruitment of the next generation of nurses. To attract more individuals to the profession, a positive image of nursing needs to be engendered by nurse education and the general community. Attitudes, beliefs, and values are highly subjective areas, usually based upon perception and not fact. Perceptions held by the public about the nursing profession greatly influence the personal and public image of nursing.

The perception of nurses being not as professional as the other professions should be highly fought by all members of the profession with the aim of establishing professional uniqueness. The role of gender in the choice of a career is an extremely important concept, because men constitute nearly half of the potential recruitment pool. Noticing a male nurse being ridiculed would deter boys to think of a nursing career.

Nursing schools have to recruit and retain qualified applicants in order to confront the current challenge to nursing resources. Although academic excellence should be recognized and is important, recognition is needed of the student who demonstrates potential and who can bring much contribution to nursing education and the health care system in the form of critical thinking, creativity, responsibility and accountability.

Many strategies are needed by nursing organizations, administrators and the government to address the critical issues of this profession with the goal of reducing the nursing shortage through increased recruitment and retention of practicing nursing.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

The study was exploratory cross-sectional among secondary students of Azania and Jangwani secondary schools in Ilala district Dar es Salaam using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

SAMPLING

Convenience sampling was used at the first stage. Here the secondary schools for the study were chosen which included; Azania and Jangwani secondary schools. Secondly, multistage sampling was used. From a list of classes in each school i.e. form 3 to form 6; the researcher randomly selected two classes. One randomly selected class was in ordinary level i.e. form 3 or form 4 while the other class was in the advanced level i.e. form 5 or form 6. Finally, all students in the sampled classes who were present at the time of study and consented filled self administered questions.

Sample size: 50 male and 50 female students were chosen from the school whereby 25 males and 25 females were from ordinary level i.e. form 4; and 25 males and 25 females were from advanced level i.e. form 5.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Pretesting of the questionnaire was done before the study. Questionnaire consisted of a 1-5 likert scale to measure the students' awareness of nursing as a profession where 1 represented strongly agree, 2 represented agree, 3 represented not sure, 4 represented disagree while 5 represented strongly disagree. Explorative factors were assessed using open

ended questions. All students who consented to participate in writing filled in a self administered questionnaire in the presence of the researcher.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative part of the research was analysed using Microsoft Excel software to determine the averages. For the qualitative section, grounded theory was used to explore the factors that promoted aspiration and those that deterred aspiration to enrol in nursing schools.

RESULTS

In this study, a total of 100 secondary school students (50 males and 50 females) from Azania and Jangwani secondary schools filled and completed questionnaires having both closed ended and open ended questions.

Demographic characteristics

All the participants were between the age group (17 - 23) years of age. However the mean age of boys was 21.7 years while that of girls was 18.7 years.

AWARENESS OF NURSING AS A PROFESSION

Context of definition of nursing

	QUESTION	AWARENESS (%)	
		Males	Females
1	Nurses are patient's advocates	38 (76)	41 (82)
2	Nurses protect patients in the health care system	48 (96)	47 (94)
3	Nurses participate in the development of health care policies	34 (68)	40 (80)
4	It takes intelligence to be a nurse	46 (92)	38 (76)
5	The service given by nurses is as important as that given by physicians	30 (60)	39 (78)
6	Research is vital to nursing as a profession	46 (92)	43 (86)
7	Nurses care for people	50 (100)	45 (90)
8	Nurses need good grades	40 (80)	41 (82)
9	Nurses always work in hospitals	40 (80)	26 (52)
	AVERAGE (%)	82.7	80.0

Context of social value

	QUESTION	AWARENESS (%)	
		Males	Females
1	Men make good nurses	34 (68)	46 (92)
2	Nurses would really rather become physicians than seek advanced degrees	38 (76)	25 (50)
3	Nurses with advanced degrees make important contributions to patient care	46 (92)	45 (90)
4	Nursing is a respected profession	42 (84)	34 (68)
5	Nursing is a feminine profession	32 (64)	29 (58)
6	Nurses work very hard	32 (64)	46 (92)
7	Nurses are appreciated	38 (76)	36 (72)
8	Nurses are respected	32 (64)	32 (64)
9	Nurses work with their hands a lot	46 (92)	39 (78)
	AVERAGE (%)	75.6	73.8

NON-AWARENESS OF NURSING AS A PROFESSION

	QUESTION	AWARENESS (%)	
		Males	Females
1	Nurses are capable of independent practice	12 (24)	15 (30)
2	Nurses make decisions for them selves	14 (28)	6 (12)
3	Anyone could be a nurse easy	22 (44)	20 (40)
4	Nurses work with high technology	10 (20)	15 (30)
5	Nurses follow the physician's orders without questions	14 (28)	24 (48)
6	Nurses make a lot of money	20 (40)	5 (10)
7	Nurses feel good about what they do	18 (36)	24 (48)
	AVERAGE (%)	31.4	31.1

DISCUSSION

Awareness and attitudes

This study found out that most of the students (males: 66.1%, females 65.5%) were aware of nursing as a profession. However, results of this study show a great difference from a similar study carried out in India where the students' knowledge of nursing field was poor (66% students had a knowledge score below 50% in spite of their positive attitude towards nursing (89.5% had positive attitude towards nursing)⁵. This knowledge might be influenced by the location of the schools being near Muhimbili National Hospital of Tanzania.

Among the issues that the students were not aware of concerning the profession include; nurses being capable of independent practice, making decisions for themselves, working with high technology, following physicians orders without question, making a lot of money and about feeling good about what they do. This might be influenced by the settings of nursing that they are used to seeing since they are understaffed and both under facilitated with equipment.

Regarding the students' choice of nursing as first choice career, 10% of the students said that they would opt for nursing as first choice career.

This finding is somehow similar to a similar study where only 3.9% rated nursing as a first priority.⁵

Factors that promote aspiration

Encouragement was seen as a very important issue. This was needed from friends, relatives, family members, nursing students and nurses who have been successful in the profession. Of all the students, 92% at least had a friend or relative who was is nurse; this seemingly means that the knowledge they have about the profession might have been acquired from them since only 70% said that being near Muhimbili National Hospital influenced their knowledge about nursing profession.

The students saw that the government ought to create better working conditions in order to attract students to the profession. Educating the public about the profession and purpose of nursing which might also increase the appreciation of the public. Educating the public can be done through strategic partnerships between nursing schools, hospitals, health care agencies, universities, and colleges.¹⁹

Economic factors also played a part in the students' choices to opt for the career. In comparison to other students in the health field

like medicine and dentistry, students opting for nursing are not given grants. Due to that reason, nursing students have to contribute a percentage of money for their well fare while in school. Students were able to say that there is little competition in the job market for the nursing profession although the salary was low⁶ which factor deterred their choices for the course. They also said that they would join the profession if at all they had assurance that they would get jobs outside the country since the salaries were favourable compared to the ones in their mother land.

Concerning the training science pointed out that there are few science teachers to train students who are going to become future nurses. They also wished that the number of years that nurses spend in school be decreased. During training, they also liked to have a peaceful environment and where by mechanised tools including modern information technology equipment to be used.

Factors that deter aspiration

The students noticed that there is discrimination, humiliation and suppression of nurses coupled with segregation between nurses and doctors⁶. This was a major concern for most of the students. Gender was another concern especially for the males whereby they seemed to have the old perception of nursing being a profession of females.

The lack of knowledge concerning nursing issues also deterred other students from opting for the profession whereby their minds were filled with negative perceptions of the profession that they had got from the public. Policy makers have a task of drafting laws that are critical to the profession as students were able to recognise that there is lack of attention from government and that health facilities are poor.

Students said that the salary earned by nurses is very low, just like a similar study where middle scholars said the same⁴. The government not

offering grants for nursing students was also another critical issue since the students claimed not to be able to afford to afford the tuition fees.

Lack of science teachers deterred students from opting for science subjects which later on affects their decisions since they cannot be enrolled in nursing schools since they did not offer science combinations. Inefficiency of nursing teachers was another point that was raised by some students since they were able to notice that some of the nurses are incompetent when doing their work.

Some students also had their own personal observations they had made about the profession which like nurses not having good skills, and not being tolerable the patients which is totally against the ethics of the profession. Professional regulating bodies of nursing should endeavour to see that such practices do not occur in society.

Others said that nurses work a lot and that they just follow orders without questions. This shows that such students do not have accurate information as regards the modern day to day nursing activities. Seminars, brochures and advertisements have to be made portraying the realistic image of nursing.

There are a few students who did not see any aspiration to encourage them to become nurses. One female student said that she would join the profession if at all she had failed her exams meaning that she saw the profession as one of failures

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out among students of an urban setting, although their socioeconomic status might be different, there is at least enough exposure in addition to being near Muhimbili National Hospital.

The funds were minimal and the time of data collection was quite limited. This might have led

to yielding of biased results. In addition, form six was the right class to issue the questionnaires since they were the ones who have the next opportunity to opt for the profession but they were not available at the time of study since they were preparing for their final exams.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research are important in terms of providing insights that may lead us towards a new direction in addressing nursing student recruitment.

This study has shown that students are at least aware of most of the issues regarding the profession but they do not want to opt for it due to the image they have of it from the public. The factors that have been addressed in this research have to be put in consideration if at all we are to increase the nurse patient ratio in Tanzania.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In the sphere of practice, nurses should have refresher courses after a given duration of time since the public can note their inefficiency and they should also be accountable for all their actions since individuals can notice that they are not tolerable to patients.
2. In education, nurses should prepare competent and devoted nurses who are ready to do the best of their abilities in this profession that is understaffed yet the salaries are not satisfying as the students were able to notice.
3. Concerning management, professional bodies and nurse managers need to device measures to audit the activities of the members of the profession over time because incompetence is one of the reasons students noted deters them from opting for this profession.
4. To the students, they should develop

adequate skills that will portray their competence at work. They should join the struggle of publicizing the benefits of the profession to the public. In addition, they should also join politics so that policies concerning the nursing profession are not negatively biased.

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