Attitude Towards Nursing Profession

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A study to determine the knowledge and attitude towards the nursing profession among male and female students in selected higher secondary schools.

Nursing is as old as human life itself. The sick and the infirm had always been tended by family and friends. But nursing had grown into a vacation only a few decades ago.

Nursing as a branch of health care system has made great strides. It has attained a dignity that it has been missing hitherto. There is a sea change in the quality of nursing practice and nursing education today.

However, surveys show that even today students do not join nursing education as eagerly as they join other educational courses.

In a society where people are status conscious, many a time their choices are also influenced by this factor. Most of those who opt for the science stream first prefer to be doctors or engineers. In health care system a doctor is seen as the ultimate. Then comes dentists, homeopathists, physiotherapists etc. There was a time when nursing used to be opted as a last resort.

Nursing profession has largely been patronized by Christians in India, though India is a Hindu majority country. It is possible the association of nursing with Christianity on the part of non-Christians, according to traditional ideas relating caste with profession has prevented mem-

bers of other religions to volunteer for this profession.

It is a well-known fact that nursing is a female dominated area. This condition is again dictated by a perception that women have special attributes like gentleness, tolerance, compassion, sympathy, commitment etc. But one should remember that one can find outstanding examples of men in the service of the sick and the ailing throughout history: Jesus Christ, Fr. Damien, Dr. Albert Schweitzer and in the present times Baba Amte etc. And study after study demonstrates that men come to nursing profession for the same reasons as women do.

Since attitude is a critical factor in the choice of professions it would be worthwhile to examine in detail how attitudes are formed and whether they can be changed for the better. Are we born with attitudes or do we develop them as we mature? What are the factors that determine our attitudes? Most of our attitudes are shaped during our formative years. There are primarily three factors that determine our attitude. These are: environment, experience, and education.

If attitude is such a critical factor, why shouldn’t we examine students’ attitude towards nursing profession?

Baldwin’s Illusion theory

Bladwin’s Illusion

(Oxford Psychology Dictionary) can best explain attitude. In the above figures two pairs of squares, one big and the other small, are joined by two horizontal lines of equal length. However the line that connects the bigger squares looks shorter. This is just an illusion. In the same way, attitude towards nursing profession can also be called an illusion caused by certain stigma attached to it. Attitude is what one feels or the individual belief one holds. Many a time, attitudes are formed by direct instruction and knowledge (Fernald & Frenald, 1999)

Objectives of the study

* To determine knowledge of the male and female school students about the nursing profession.
* To determine the attitude of male and female school students towards the profession.
* To compare the knowledge and attitude of male and female students towards the nursing profession.
* To find association between selected variables
such as educational grades, income, religion and the attitude to the profession of nursing.

Method
A total of 200 - two hundred (100 male and 100 female) students who opted Biology, Physics, and Chemistry option in their 12th science stream in the year 2003-04 of Pune city, filled out an anonymous questionnaire at their class room in presence of the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of demographic data, 28 statements on nursing profession adopted to a 4- Likert scale, and 12 multiple choice test questions on knowledge of nursing field.

A probability cluster sampling was used for the selection of the high schools of Pune city. Again convenience-sampling technique was used for the selection of the students from the selected high schools. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyse the data.

Results
The students’ knowledge of nursing field was poor (86% students had a knowledge score below 50% in spite of their positive attitude towards nursing (89.5% had positive attitude towards nursing). With regards to choice of nursing as a first priority of choice as a career out of 10 various courses, only 3.9% rated nursing as a first priority. There was significant difference in knowledge of male and female students ($Z^2 = 2.20 > 1.96$) at p < .05, female students had better knowledge about nursing than male.

There was no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students towards nursing ($t^* = 55 < 1.96$) at p < .05. There was no association between religion and attitude towards nursing (Chi-square $X^2 = 4.30 < 7.8$) at p < .05, and the Chi-square value of educational grade of students and their attitude towards nursing suggested no association ($X^2 = 1.28 < 4.0$) at P < .05.

There was strong association between monthly family income students and their attitude towards nursing (Chi-square $X^2 = 8.82 > 4.0$) at P < .05. The students from high monthly income families were less positive towards nursing compared to medium and low income families’ students.

The relationship between nursing knowledge of the students and their attitude towards nursing was established by Karl Pearson Coefficient correlation $r^*$. The value of $r^*$ was -0.56. This suggests that there was a fair negative relationship between knowledge and attitude towards nursing. Students’ knowledge was poor though their attitude was positive.

Conclusion
The knowledge about nursing among students was low. Female students showed slightly better knowledge than male. There was positive attitude towards nursing among students. However, the positive attitude was not transmitted into desire to join nursing. Both male and female students had positive attitude towards nursing. There was no significant difference in attitude among male and female students. The students from monthly high income group showed less positive attitude towards nursing compared to medium and low income group students. Thus the findings indicate that a career enhancement guide for nursing should be developed to improve the level of knowledge about nursing. This will help to improve the image of nursing. Male students and students with high educational grade should be encouraged to join nursing.

Recommendations
The present study reveals that 89.5% respondents have positive attitude towards nursing but this attitude is not translated into a desire for joining nursing. This may be due to some stigma attached to nursing. The investigator suggests the following recommendations:

- Students should be inspired and given information and knowledge about nursing through audio visual aids.
- Definite efforts should be made by the boards of education to bring nursing as a topic in the curriculum of high school classes.
- A career enhancement guide and pamphlets should be developed and distributed among the school students in urban and rural areas.
- Male students should be encouraged to join nursing and governments should give them equal status as female students in nursing.

Selected references
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