Assessing the Attitudes and Perceptions towards Nursing Profession among Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

Nursing education is a challenge in a developing country like India. This cross-sectional study assessed the attitudes and perceptions of nursing professionals and their desired future practices. The study was conducted using a modified version of Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceived Practice questionnaire among 129 students who were undergoing undergraduate nursing programme at a selected college of nursing in Bangalore. Data was analysed and interpreted by using descriptive and inferential statistics. Forty-four (34.1%) of the subjects agreed that they were enrolled of their own interest; 43 (33.3%) of them reported that they enrolled in nursing out of their own interest and also to improve their financial situations. Only 4 (3.1%) stated that they have to protect the rights and dignity of the patients. 45 (34.9%) of the subjects indicated that the nurse-patient relationship should be both professional and a relation of sympathy. Upon graduation 69 (53.5%) of the subjects preferred to pursue the nursing career, 36 (27.9%) in academics, 12 (9.3%) wanted to change the profession. Nearly 63 (48.8%) of the subjects agreed that social prejudice has a great influence on nursing students in choosing nursing profession as their career. An urgent need is seen in the area of educating nursing students regarding patient’s rights. There is also a need to improve the image of nurses in the society to attract more number of students into this noble profession. Counselling and introduction to nursing course should be introduced by all the universities, to develop positive attitudes towards nursing profession.

Nursing is indeed one of the noblest professions in the world. However, availability of nursing professionals is below accepted norms per population. Nursing education is becoming more demanding each day. Future nurses have to consider theoretical, practical, ethical and legal aspects of their careers especially in the area of rights of the patients. They also need to cater to their professional skills to the large number of needy. They have to enhance their skills in the practical activity, complementing it with theoretical background and need to be updated in their knowledge in the era of information technology. Indeed, nursing is not only a job but a career, profession and also service to mankind (Kiger, 1993; Raatikainen, 1997; Spouse, 2000). As professional perception has a great influence on the development of nursing students and the future quality of nursing, exploring factors that influence this perception is very important. There are no studies available in India to know the contemporary generation’s attitude and perceptions towards the nursing profession. Hence, the present study explored student nurses’ perception of nursing and themselves as nurses and also explored their expectations of themselves as nurses and the nursing profession.

Objectives

This study sought to:
1. Explore nursing students’ attitudes and perceptions of nursing practice and their socio-demographic characteristics, and
2. Find out their expected future practices.

Methodology

This was a cross-sectional survey conducted among 129 undergraduate nursing students at a selected college of nursing in Bangalore. The researchers used the modified version of Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceived Practice questionnaire, which was developed by Manal Jrasat et al (2003). This questionnaire, modified to adapt to the Indian context, was composed of 33 items, which included demographic information and attitudinal questions. The initial pilot test done by the researchers on 13 (10%) of the students indicated that the content of the instrument was adequate to meet the objectives. SPSS (13th version) was
used for statistical analysis of the data. All the students received an explanation about the study before introduction of the questionnaire and only those who agreed to participate were included. Student’s names were not shown in the questionnaires and their confidentiality was maintained.

**Results**

**Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population**

Of the 129 students who responded, 119 (92.2%) were females and 10 (7.8%) were males. All the participants were unmarried and aged between 18-23 years. Majority of the study population came from upper middle income group. 104 (80%) of the participants were from urban and semi urban areas.

The participants indicated a somewhat greater preference for ultimately working in a hospital (n=64, 49.6%) or administrative setting (n=29, 22.5%) than in an Emergency room and others which included nursing educators and researchers. Majority of the participants (n=102, 79%) stated that there is no difference among male and female to take nursing as their career. 44 (34.1%) of the participants agreed that they enrolled in nursing out of their own interest, 43 (33.3%) of the participants joined nursing because of their own interest and to improve their financial situations. Only 4 (3.1%) stated that they have to protect the rights and dignity of the patients in the hospital; 45 (34.9%) of the participants felt that the nurse-patient relationship should be both professional and a relation of sympathy.

In a situation where a patient abuses a nurse, majority 74 (57.4%) of the participants responded that nurse has to approach the nurse-in-charge to take appropriate action. 26 (20.2%) of the participants expressed that they should be tolerant and forget those situations. Upon graduation, 69 (53.5%) of the participants would like to pursue the nursing career, 36 (27.9%) of them want to work in academics, 12 (9.3%) of them wanted to change the profession. 63 (48.8%) of the participants agreed that social prejudice has a great influence on nursing students in choosing nursing profession as their career.

**Discussion**

To our knowledge this is the first study in India to assess the challenges of nursing students. Majority, i.e. 64 (49.6%) of the students preferred to work as care givers at hospital and 29 (22.5%) favoured to work as nurse administrators. These results were almost similar to the study conducted by Manal Jrasat et al (2003). The curriculum of BSc nursing includes administration, but the clinical exposure to deal with practical problems were not enough to meet issues and challenges of student nurses in providing quality of care, and needs to be addressed in the review of curriculum in future. Majority (79%) of the participants felt that there was no gender difference to practice nursing as career. These results were contradicted in the study by Ozdemir (2008) where the participants perceived nursing as only female profession. Nursing schools, colleges, media and professional journals should emphasise nurses’ role and portray positive image of nursing profession and encourage men to take up nursing as their career.

Majority (n=44, 34.1%) of the participants enrolled in nursing out of their own interest, 15 (11.6%) of them entered into nursing because of their parental wish and 43 (33.3%) of them enrolled in nursing to improve their financial situation as well as with their own interest. These results were congruent with the studies done in other cultural context (Manal Jrasat, et al 2003; Law & Arthur, 2003). Contrary to the study conducted in Canada (Williams et al, 1997), only 2 (1.6%) of the students chose nursing because of job security, and got opportunity to study in government institution. Only 4 (3.1%) of the subjects stated they have to protect the rights and dignity of the patients. Hence, curriculum should include human rights issues especially regarding the rights of the patients. Nursing professionals, being primary health care providers, can protect and promote the human rights of the patients and prevent violation of human rights.

The majority (n=74, 57.4%) of the participants were aware that the nurse-patient relationship should be professional and the results were comparable to the earlier study in Cincinnati (Kelly, 1993). 45 (34.9%) of the students felt that the nurse-patient relationship should be both professional and a relation of sympathy. Nurse educators should make clear about the differences between sympathy and empathy, and instruct the students that they should empathise the patients in their therapeutic relationship. As for abuse of nurses by patients, 74 (57.4%) of the participants felt that the nurse-in-charge has to take appropriate action and 26 (20.2%) of them felt they should be tolerant and forget about such situations. These findings indicate certain strategies to be developed to deal with untoward situations. 36 (27.9%) of the participants desired to work in academics and 12 (9.3%) of them wanted to change the profession. Best part of the students (n=63, 48.8%) felt that social prejudice influences students in choosing nursing as their career. 37 (28.7%) of the subjects agreed and partly agreed to the statement that “Given a second choice, I would not choose the nursing pro-
fession”. Anna Maria Bosco et al (2003) suggested that by persuading the media to present a more realistic and balanced portrayal of nursing and by providing proper information to schools and presenting talks at schools by role models a fair and positive image of nursing would emerge. Nursing profession would then attract and retain future nursing students and qualified nurses, thus ensuring adequate provision of appropriate health care in a wide range of settings. Essie Dee Scott Cockrell (2002) indicated that pre-nursing students are unclear about the nursing as a profession. Majority of students are willing to enrol in an Introduction to nursing course even if no academic credit was given. Sureyya Karaoz (2004) found that Introduction to nursing course had a positive effect on students’ understanding of nursing as a profession. These kinds of practices need to be included in the Indian scenario to improve the social prejudice of the noble nursing professions.

Conclusion

Nursing education plays an important role in forming nursing student’s perceptions of the profession. Status of nursing profession needs to be improved by educating the community. Pre-nursing counselling and introduction to nursing course should be introduced by all the universities, to develop positive attitudes towards nursing profession. Human rights education should be included in curriculum and job opportunities with better payment may help to attract the younger generation to choose nursing as their career.

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