

## Nursing Students' Perception Regarding Nursing Program: A Descriptive Study Of Four Cohorts

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### Abstract:

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to identify the nursing students' perception of nursing as a profession and factors influencing this perception.

**Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional design was used to achieve the study aim. A convenient sample of 120 nursing students enrolled in the nursing program at the college of Nursing, King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh were participated in this study and classified equally to Pre-professional program years and professional program years. Self-Administered Questionnaire used for data collection. It consists of two parts: Part I include questions related to sociodemographic characteristics of the study subjects and Part II used to explore nursing students' perceptions of nursing as a profession with total scores ranging from 18 to 36, the greatest the score the more positive the perception.

**Results:** The mean age of study subjects were  $20.33 \pm 1.3$  S.D. and the majority of them were single. The majority of students' families allowed them to join nursing college (72.5%). Around half of the participants were self-motivated to join nursing (40.8%). Regarding the perception of nursing as a profession there was a difference in mean score between the Pre-professional and professional program years ( $29.3 \pm 1.87$  S.D. and  $30.22 \pm 2.1$  S.D. Respectively). The study results revealed a positive significance correlation between the level of education and perception ( $r = 0.212^*$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ).

**Conclusion:** The nursing students' perceptions of nursing as a profession are positive among the majority of the study group and higher in professional program years than Pre-professional program year.

**Key words:** Perception, Nursing Profession

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### I. Introduction

Nurses are health professionals who are the cornerstone of the health care structure. Efficient health services cannot be provided in health centers and hospitals without the nurse professionals. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of nurses worldwide above which posed a serious risk for patient safety, quality of care and public health as a whole [1]. Nursing as a 'profession' is not just a definition, it is combination of a framework of communication and language of a group and this reflects who nurses are and this meaning carries an individual's perception [2].

Nursing is defined as the optimal utilization of clinical decision to provide care to help people in improvement, maintenance, or recovery of health, in order to adjust with different health problems, and to attain the most excellent quality of life, especially in case of diseases and disabilities, and even death [3]. And also defined as the profession working to maintain, promote, and optimize health and abilities of individuals, prevention of diseases and harm, lessening of suffer through the proper diagnosis and accurate treatment of human problems, and engagement in the providing care and help for individual, family, community, and population [4].

Nursing is broadly regarding a dignified career in the community for the reason of the foundation significance in the life not only of the individuals but also of the community. Widely the nurse identified as a person who is the core stone of the health care system and the link between all the disciplines. Therefore nursing as a profession has the same importance to the different health care system[5].

Shortage of nursing has been a fact from the 70's to 90's century. This shortage was increased until reach a critical and difficult stage when compared to other jobs or carriers [6]. Therefore there is a high need to increase the nursing recruitment in the different health care institutions and use of different strategy to retain them in the field of nursing. This is the main challenge nowadays in health care institutions worldwide. [7]

Perceiving nursing as a profession and the choice to select nursing as a career for students is extremely affected by individual's past experience and ideas about the career. The community and media have a major role in the influence of the perception and thoughts the nursing student has regarding their career [8].

Students enrolled into the nursing colleges with intrinsic values of nursing that modify over time of education, allow them to be professional into the nursing career [9]. Several elements, namely educators, program, clinical teachers, nurses, friends, families, institutions and the environmental changes from the hospital to the different community settings form significant input to the progression of nursing students' professional acknowledgment [10].

The image of nursing as a profession is crucial in successful enrollment and retention of staff in the health-care organizations [11]. The perception of nursing students affecting their performance, image, resection to themselves, enrollment and retention in their nursing field. A very limited number of research studies addressed the perceptions of nursing students on nursing were found [12]. Student of nursing Who have perception about nursing and truths affecting which we fine searched in the Western region, lesser than investigated in the Arab Islamic countries[13].

In studies of nursing students 'perception of nursing as a profession, researchers investigated perception of students at different levels in an educational nursing program. Studies included assessment of student nurses' values and conceptions at entrance to nursing programs [14], after clinical practice [15] and before their graduation [16].

There are a huge number of literatures investigating the perceptions of nursing students all over the world, while there was a very little research from the gulf region. The literature emphasized that the students have a wide range of different entrance perceptions on nursing which have a high impact on their decision for continuation in nursing colleges. [17].

In ancient time, nursing perception was negative. Ms. Florence Nightingale the, a well-educated woman from a wealthy class family became a nurse and improved the profession radically in nineteenth century that people gradually start to accept nursing as a respectable profession in the society[18]. For helping to enrollments to the nursing carrier, a positive image of nurses and nursing has to be initiated though nursing education, nursing researches and the overall society [19].

### **I.1. Significance of the Study:**

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been dependent mainly to expatriate nurses and this affecting the development of an indigenous nursing profession. Little information is known about Saudi nursing students' perception regarding nursing as a profession and selected career. Clarification of the student's perception will help the educators and the authorized personnel for curriculum development to identify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their program as well as highlighting the factors that can affect this perception positively or negatively. The aim of this study was to identify the nursing students' perception of nursing as a profession and factors influencing this perception.

Research Question:

- 1- How the nursing students' perceive nursing as a profession?
- 2- Is there a change in nursing students' perception of nursing as a profession over the 4 years of the program?
- 3- What are the factors influencing perception of nursing as a profession?

## **II. Material and Methods**

### **2.1. Design**

The current study used a descriptive cross-sectional design in order to answer the research questions.

### **2.2. Sample and sampling method:**

A convenient sample of 120 female nursing students enrolled in the nursing program at the college of Nursing, King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for health sciences, Riyadh, from the female campus, were participated in this study. The sample was selected equally in each cohort 30 students each, from the 4 years of the program, each cohort represented 2 levels. 1<sup>st</sup> cohort included level 1 &2 and 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort included level 3& 4; the 1<sup>st</sup> two cohorts represented students in pre-professional program. While the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort included level 5 &6 and the 4<sup>th</sup> cohort included level 7& 8; the 2<sup>nd</sup> two cohorts represented students in professional nursing program. All willing students from the 4 cohorts and studying in the annual academic year 2014-2015 were eligible to participate in the study.

### **2.3. Ethical issues:**

The research proposal was submitted to the research unit of college of Nursing, king Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for health sciences in Riyadh for approval. Written informed consent was obtained from the students who agreed to participate in the study. Each participant was informed about the

purpose of the study. The students' participation was emphasized to be voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were kept and students informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any affection of their grades.

**2.4. Data collection tool:**

After reviewing related literature and to fulfill the aim of the study, one tool with two different parts was designed by the research team and revised by the consultants. The study tool was constructed, tested and piloted by the investigators to examine its applicability, clarity, reliability and feasibility for data collection, then revised by a panel of experts. Also content validity and expert's opinion were taken into consideration and the needed modifications were carried out and Face Validity of the tool was examined through a jury of three experts. The two parts are:

Part I

This part included questions related to sociodemographic characteristics of the study subjects such as sex, age, nationality, marital status, reasons for enrollment to the faculty of nursing, and family's opinion to students' enrollment.

Part II

It was used to explore nursing students' perceptions of nursing. It was scale format answered on yes or no responses: different nursing profession perceived concepts were used, the scoring of the positive perception was 2 if yes and 1 if no, while in negative perception, the 1 score for yes and 2 for the no response. The total scores of this questionnaire ranging from 18 to 38, the greatest the mark the more positive the perception. The cut off point for this scale was 27, if the total mark was 27 and above means positive perception, while if less than 27 indicated the negative perception.

**2.5. Procedure for data collection:**

Research proposal submitted to the research unit, college of Nursing, King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh and approval to start the current study were obtained. The data collected from the 4 equal cohorts (30 students each) at the same time during the period from October to December 2014. Official permission from the research unit obtained again to start the data collection, all the willing students were signed the consent, included all the ethical considerations for the current study, arrangement with teachers of each class were made to allow the researchers to take 15 minutes from the class for data collection. Each student spent around 10 minutes to fill her questionnaire. The researchers collected the data from the 4 cohorts at the same time and from each cohort until reaching 30 students.

**2.6. Statistical analysis:**

Data was fed, coded, edited and analyzing using PC with statistical packages for social science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used numbers, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient.

**III. Results**

**Table 1:** Socio- Demographic data analysis

Socio- Demographic data	Total Nursing students (4 Cohort from Year 1 to4 ) No = 120	
	No	%
<i>Age</i> mean + S.D. = 20.33+ 1.3		
<b>Marital status</b>		
• Single	110	91.7
• Married	8	6.7
• Divorced	0	0
• Widowed	2	1.7
• Separated	0	0
<b>Level of nursing study</b>		
• Year 1 (Level 1 or 2)	30	25.0
• Year 2 (Level 3 or 4)	30	25.0
• Year 3 (Level 5 or 6)	30	25.0
• Year 4 (Level 7 or 8)	30	25.0
<b>Reason to join Nursing</b>		
• Secondary school GPA	39	32.5
• Advice from others	17	14.2
• Self-motivated	49	40.8
• Forced by parents	4	3.3

• Others	11	9.2
<b>Family monthly income</b>		
• < 2500 SR	5	4.2
• 2500-5000 SR	20	16.7
• > 5000-10000 SR	43	35.8
• > 10000 SR	52	43.3
<b>Family's opinion about the enrolment in the College of Nursing</b>		
• Agree	87	72.5
• Disagree	3	2.5
• Neutral	30	25.0
<b>Habitation</b>		
• North Region	17	14.2
• Central Region	55	45.8
• Western Region	12	10.0
• Eastern Region	14	11.7
• South Region	22	18.3
<b>Family member or relative in Nursing</b>		
• Yes	53	44.2
• No	67	55.8

**Table 2:** perceptions on nursing as a profession

Nursing as a profession	Pre-professional program years (Year 1 & 2) Number = 60		professional program years (Year 3 & 4) Number = 60		Total Students Number = 120		Missed data
	Yes %	No%	Yes %	No%	Yes %	No%	
1. Helping others	100	0	100	0	100	0	-
2. An opportunity to serve the Humanity	93.3	6.7	100	0	96.7	3.3	-
3. An occupation not a profession	31.7	66.7	16.7	83.3	24.2	75	0.8
4. Enhancing personal growth	85	15	88.3	11.7	86.7	13.3	-
5. An appreciated profession in our society	45	55	58.3	41.7	51.7	48.3	-
6. A way to have a chance to travel abroad	53.3	46.7	66.7	33.3	60	40	-
7. A way to enjoy economic security	61.7	38.3	63.3	36.7	62.5	37.5	-
8. A dangerous and risky /dangerous profession	78.3	21.7	61.7	38.3	70	30	-
9. Caring profession with high ethical standards	90	10	96.7	3.3	93.3	6.7	-
10. An extremely hard profession	76.7	23.3	66.7	33.3	71.7	28.3	-
11. A respectful profession	88.3	11.7	63.3	36.7	75.8	24.2	-
12. Nurses just obey doctors' orders	45	55	20	80	32.5	67.5	-
13. Actually equal to other professions	53.3	46.7	50	50	51.7	48.3	-
14. An opportunity to get better marriage offers	50	50	25	75	37.5	62.5	-
15. Financially Rewarding profession	66.7	33.3	56.7	43.3	61.7	38.3	-
16. Helping health promotion and diseases prevention	90	10	91.7	8.3	90.8	9.2	-
17. Subordination to doctors	61.7	38.3	53.3	46.7	57.5	42.5	-
18. low academic standards	48.3	51.7	20	80	34.2	65.8	-
Total (Mean ± Standard Deviation)	29.3 ± 1.87		30.22 ± 2.1		29.76 ± 2.03		-

**Table 3:** Comparison between the different reasons to join Nursing and mean total score of perception

Reasons to join Nursing	Mean total score of perception
• Secondary school GPA	29.7179
• Advice from others	28.8824
• Self-motivated	30.1224
• Forced by parents	29.5000
• Others	29.7273
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.7583</b>

**Table 4:** Correlation Coefficient for age and Level of education in relation to the total score of perception among the all subjects (n=120).

Variables	r value	P - value
• Age	0.133	0.148
• Level of study	0.212*	0.02*

\*Correlation is significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  level

### **Demographics**

**Table 1** revealed that; The mean age of study subjects were  $20.33 \pm 1.3$  S.D. and the majority of them were single (91.7 %). regarding the Level of nursing study the students were equal in the 4 cohort (years) 25% each. Around half of the participants were self-motivated to join nursing (40.8%). The majority of students' families allowed them to join nursing college (72.5%). Family monthly income for around half of the students (43.3 %) was more than 10000 SR. as regards the family's opinion about the enrolment in the College of Nursing, the majority of them were agree (72.5 %). the highest percentage (45.8 %) of the students came from central region, Riyadh. more than half of the students didn't have Family member or relative in Nursing (55.8%).

### **Perceptions on nursing as a profession**

**Table 2** denoted that, the highest percentages of the students perceive the nursing as helping others (100%), an opportunity to serve the Humanity (96.7%), caring profession with high ethical standards (93.3%), helping health promotion and diseases prevention (90.8%) and enhancing personal growth (86.7%)

The mean score of perception was higher in professional program than pre-professional program years ( $30.22 \pm SD = 2.1$  &  $29.3 \pm SD = 1.87$  respectively). Moreover the total mean score for all the students was ( $29.76 \pm SD = 2.03$ ).

**Table 3** showed the comparison between the different reasons to join nursing and mean total score of perception and revealed the highest mean total score was between the self-motivated students as a reason to join the nursing (30.1224). as shown in **Table 4**, the correlation coefficient for age and level of education in relation to the total score of perception revealed a positive correlation between the level of education and the perception ( $r = 0.212^*$  at  $p = 0.02$ ), while there was no correlation the age and the perception ( $r = 0.133$  at  $p = 0.148$ ).

## **IV. Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to identify the nursing students' changing perception regarding nursing profession over 4 years of the nursing program and generates an understanding of the factors influencing this perception at the College of Nursing, King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh.

The study results indicated that, over the 4 years of the nursing program, nursing students generally have positive perceptions regarding the nursing profession, this finding is congruent with many studies in Egypt – 2006[20], Belgium-2010 [21], Bahrain, 2012 [22], in Pennsylvania-1994 [23] and USA- 1991[24].

The current study denoted that, the highest percentage of the students perceive the nursing as helping others, an opportunity to serve the humanity, caring profession with high ethical standards, helping health promotion and diseases prevention and enhancing personal growth, this is supported by another study which showed that the majority of nursing students choose to study nursing because it opened opportunities for further professional development [25]. This is consistent with the study done by Mkala (2013) and its results clarified that, from the student's point of view, nursing concerned caring behaviors and helping others and it was the most motive for the preference of nursing as a career as they mentioned[26].

In the same line a study done by Vanhanen and Janhonen (2000) added that, regarding the perception of the majority of nursing students towards nursing is a profession which offers opportunities to give care for people. These findings ensure that caring remains the chief spirit of nursing with a great value which cannot be ignored.

On the other side, the other researches were dissimilar to the current study results and revealed the following, Streubert, (1994) in Pennsylvania, mentioned that nursing carrier was attracting carrier because of job opportunities and availability. AbdIKarim, et.al.,(2004) in their study which done in Egypt and found that the majority of the students had selected nursing because of the good chance for job chance.

On the same line Buerhauset. al., (2005) in U.S.A reported that more than half of their study subjects enrolled to nursing colleges because of work availability. Matching with all of them Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer (2006) clarified that students almost choose nursing frequently because of the availability of job opportunities, financial security, proper salary, and motivation to join nursing [27].

As regard the students reasons to join nursing, the study results revealed that, around half of the participants were self-motivated to join nursing and in comparison between the different reasons to join nursing and mean total score of perception, the results denoted the highest mean total score was between the self-motivated students, in the same line [28] indicated that, It was expected to obtain students who select to study in nursing colleges as a primary choice and interest had more positive understanding of nursing profession than other . This also is congruent with Ahmad and Safadi (2009) in which their study findings revealed that, the decision for choosing nursing as a profession focus on favorite with awareness foresee of students who highly gratify with thought nursing with the other students who did not decide to be enrolled in nursing as a first choice for studying in the collage. Regarding the total mean score for all the students towards the perception of nursing as a profession, it was positive with higher score in professional program than the pre-professional

program years and there was a positive correlation between the level of education and the perception. Consistent with our results Gray and Smith ( 1999 ) mentioned which , Nursing students with past experience have the benefit of knowing imminent about the way of happening things in wards, justifying the fear of the unrecognized, and esteeming in the overall approach in comparison with students who have not any past experience of nursing[29].

In the current study, the majority of students' families allowed them to join nursing college and around half of the current study subjects have relatives or friends in nursing. this was matched with Lyckhage and Pilhammar (2008) who denoted that, the previous research showed that nursing students' images of nursing might be traced to relatives who work in health care and clarified that parents and friends were very powerful motivators for them to join nursing[30]. In congruent with the current study, Elsharkawy and Elhadad (1996) they did investigation for the factors affecting the students selection of nursing as their career and clarified that the presence of any of the student's family members, friends or relatives in nursing field had a major impact on the choice and motivation to enrol in nursing colleges and to select nursing as a career [31].

## V. Conclusion

The study concluded that, the nursing students generally have positive perceptions of nursing as a profession and it was higher in professional program years than Pre-professional program years. It means the perception is changing towards positive side. The study also concluded that. The majority of students' families allowed them to join nursing and around only half of the participants were self-motivated to join.

## VI. Recommendations

The current study recommends conducting further studies on the perception of the nursing students in other different regions in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to include the internship students. The factors that can affect the student's perception have to be considered during registration and admission.

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