ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Descriptive Study of Nursing Students' Motives to choose nursing as a Career

Diomidous M[1], Mpizopoulou Z[2], Kalokairinou A[3], Mprokalaki I[3], Zikos D[4], Katostaras Th[5]

1. Assistant Professor, faculty of Nursing, University of Athens, **2.** RN, MSc, PhD candidate, faculty of Nursing, University of Athens, **3.** Professor, faculty of Nursing, University of Athens, **4.** Associate Researcher, PhD, MSc, RN, faculty of Nursing, University of Athens, **5.** Emeritus Professor, faculty of Nursing, University of Athens

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Job selection is one of the most important decisions in peoples' lives. According to recent studies there is not much interest in pursuing the nursing profession, despite the fact that there is a shortage of nurses not only in Greece, but also in other countries worldwide.

Objective: Aim of this study is to investigate the motives of students who study nursing, towards their decision to choose nursing as a main profession. In this research are investigated a series of items regarding social, personal and employment aspects related to nursing.

Methods: The study was conducted in the faculty of Nursing, University of Athens. The data was used included 348 questionnaires, completed by under graduate nursing students. Data collection took place between January and March 2011, using a pilot questionnaire. Questions investigated potential motives including willingness to take care of people, suitability with one's own personality, excitement for the nursing profession, influence by family, existence of health problems in one's own family, easy employment upon graduation, recognition of the importance of nursing, and finally expectations for a potentially good salary.

Results: 16.9% and 46.5% of the students selected nursing and medicine as their first choice, respectively. For most students (90.3%) the main reason they choose to study nursing is the provision of care. At a rate of 84.8%, students selected to study nursing, based on their belief that they would be easily employed. Once graduated, a rate of 43.4% would be willing to further continue their studies taking an MSc course. The 29.5% would further continue their studies in another department. A percentage of 23.4% answered that they were willing to find a nursing job upon completion of their studies, while 3.8% would find a job in another sector.

Conclusions: Most nursing students are willing to work as nurses upon graduation, but there has been recognised the need for further professional development, since many participants would be willing to continue their studies, taking a masters' degree.

Keywords: nursing profession, students choice, criteria

INTRODUCTION

Nurses are health professionals who are the corner stones of the health care system in each country. Efficient health services cannot be provided in health centers and hospitals without the daily work of nurse professionals. Unfortunately, based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) data, there is a shortage of nurses in European countries and worldwide. The above posed a serious risk for patient safety, quality of care and public health as a whole (World Health Organization, 2011). As a result there is a considerable necessity to cover the needs in nursing staff, since there is a shortage in recruiting young nurses, in diverse health care systems around the globe. According to recent studies there is not much interest in pursuing the nursing profession. Studies in Hong-Kong indicated that only the 28% of students would choose to become nurses and solely the 8.9% expressed a keen interest in pursuing the nursing profession (Law et al, 2003). In England, other studies proved that last year high school students decided to study nursing in a percentage of 8%, meanwhile 71.1% stated that would never follow the nursing profession even if they did not receive good grades (Neilson et al, 2011). Meanwhile, in Taiwan, the 19.1% of students selected to follow the nursing profession as their first choice (Lai et al, 2008). The same happened in a similar study in the Technological Institution of Ioannina, in which 4.2% of students have selected to study nursing as their first choice (Damoliates et at, 1991). Additionally, there is a quite high percentage of nursing students who abandon the nursing profession to pursue a medical career or any other profession (Kiriakopoulos et al, 1994). In society, usually, there are negative feelings for the nursing profession, but in reality, nursing is socially embedded, with high quality in its daily functioning, highly beneficial for the health of population. The nursing profession is created to serve the people on bio-psycho-social basis, being a creative science and a useful social profession (Ragia, 2011). Based on many studies (Dal et al, 2009), (Grossman et al, 1993) (Doureka, 1999) the most important reasons motivating young students to study nursing are provision of care and assistance to people.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was conducted at the faculty of nursing, University of Athens, by imparting 348 questionnaires to be completed by nursing students. Data collection took place between January and March 2011. Questions investigated potential motivators including willingness to take care of people, concurrency with personality, being fond of nursing profession, influence by family, existing health problems in family, easy employment upon graduation, recognition of the importance of nursing and finally expectations for a potentially good salary. The participants were asked to select one or more of the above motivators so as to investigate strong motivators towards the selection of nursing as a career. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program version 18 was used for data entry and descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

The majority of the sample consisted of females, in a percentage of 84.2%. A relatively small percentage (16.9%) of students had selected to study nursing as their first choice, whereas almost half of the students (46.5%) decided to study medicine as their first choice. Male participants decided to study medicine as their first choice at a ratio of 2.419 times more than females ($p<0.05$). The participants were asked to answer numerous close ended questions specifying reasons motivating them to study nursing.

The majority of the students (90.3%) answered that the main reasons they chose to study nursing is the provision of care and assistance to people. They stated clearly that since nursing belongs to health professions, it could provide them with this interesting opportunity (88.9%). A high percentage of students (84.8%) choose to study nursing based on their perception for easy nursing employment. At a rate of 74.4% nursing students believe that the nursing profession is concurrent with their personality. A relatively high percentage of 72.9% stated that nursing is a valuable profession for the society and beneficial for improving the health of the population. Most nursing students stated that they have positive approach for the nursing profession (66.9%). Other reasons for choosing nursing include the expectation for satisfactory salaries (41.1%), the family influence to choose the profession (35%) and finally the existence of health problems in their family (16.9%).

As for the intentions of students, upon graduation the highest percentage of students (43.4%) would be willing to continue their studies in post-graduate programs. At a rate of 29.5% they wound be willing to attend another faculty, whereas, the 23.4% would like to work as a nurse and 3.8% in another field other than nursing. Students who prefer to study in medical school (first choice in the high school examinations) were found to be 2.373 times more likely to further continue their studies, following a different discipline, once they graduate from the nursing school ($p<0,001$).

DISCUSSION

According to the literature, women choose to follow the nursing profession in higher frequency compared to men (Law et al, 2003), (Kikwilu et al, 2003). Despite the increasing number of men entering the nursing

Table 1
Criteria for Choosing Nursing as a Career

Criteria	Positive Replies	
	N	%
Like to take care of people	297	90.3%
Nursing is a Health Profession	296	88.9%
Easy employment	279	84.8%
Fits in personality	239	74%
Important job for society	234	72.9%
Fond of nursing profession	214	66.9%
Potentially good salary	132	41.1%
Influenced by family and friends	116	35.8%
Health problems in family	54	16.9%

* More than once answer allowed for each item

profession, males still remain a minority, for social reasons (Romem et al, 2005).

According to the results of this descriptive study, very few students selected to study nursing as their first choice, a fact that indicates a low interest for nursing profession. In the UK (Neilson et al, 2011), a relevant study showed that high school students would be willing to study nursing at a rate of 8%, while 71.1% would never pursue the nursing profession. In Taiwan (Lai et al, 2008) the 19.1% of students selected the nursing profession as their first choice. Similar were the results of a study conducted at the Technological Institution of Ioannina in Greece (Damoliates et al, 1991). There was found that only 4.2% of students selected to study nursing as their first choice.

According to the findings of the present study, about half of nursing students selected to study medicine as their first choice. According to international studies (Hemsley-Brown et al, 1999), (Beck, 2000) it is the medicine that is usually chosen as the first career choice. Those students who primarily wanted to study medicine, but actually studied nursing, usually seek to further continue their studies at another department. Especially, male participants were 2.419 times more likely to select medicine as their first choice compared to women. Consequently, regarding the occupational status and social prestige, nursing profession continues to be far behind Medicine, which is probably related with social stereotypes and misconceptions about the nursing profession. As a matter of fact, this point has further social implications, in relation with the role of women within the occupational spectrum.

Regarding the criteria that motivate students to choose nursing, most students (90.3%) chose to study nursing, since they would be happy to help and provide assistance to people. According to research studies care provision and help to other people is the first reason to choose the nursing profession. According to the current study results, people select to study nursing in their pursue for an employment in the healthcare sector. The third criterion for the selection of nursing was found to be the direct employment, without waiting for a long time to begin their career. The potentially easy employment and financial benefit provided by the nursing profession seems to be another important factor for choosing nursing. The above finding is also highlighted in other international research studies (Mooney et al, 2008), (Tomey et al, 1996).

A high percentage is willing to continue their studies in the post-graduate programs. Rongstad et al. (Rognstad et al, 2004) conducted a survey in Norway on nursing students. In this study it was found that over 70% of students believe that the nursing degree is the basis for further education. Therefore they consider post graduate studies highly dispensable. Most Norwegian students seem to be ambitious about their nursing studies and have low interest in the provision of health care.

It is evident that there is an imperative need to improve the social image of the nursing profession, by implementing methods to attract and highlight the importance of the nursing science and the nursing practice. Starting from school career guidance, there should be given to students the opportunity to learn about the nursing profession and the perspectives and opportunities offered. The improvement of the existing healthcare system and the orientation towards better working conditions is expected to draw many young people to nursing. Finally, the role of media is recognized as of great importance. Mass media can have a major role in highlighting the importance of the nursing profession. In this way, people, especially parents and high school teachers will have the

opportunity to get informed about prospects and potentials of nursing as a main career for their children and students.

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