

Students Perception and Choice of Nursing Profession as a Career in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

A shortage of nurses has been reported worldwide and about 9 million new nurses will be needed to improve workforce in the profession globally by the year 2030. The sustainability of professional nurses depends on the ability to recruit and retain the upcoming generation in the professionals. This study assessed the perception of nursing profession as a career choice among secondary school students in Nigeria. This cross-sectional study involved 231 students selected through multi stage sampling in four senior secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria. Data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire and analysed with (SPSS) version 21. Majority of the respondents are within 16-19 years of age. A larger proportion of the students previewed, volunteered that the nursing profession is a noble one with humanitarian responsibilities. However, only about 46% of the students are willing to choose nursing as a career. High wages, personal desires, parental choice, media image, peer influence, work demand and role modelling, including nursing uniform, were identified as prospective driving forces for the choice of nursing as a career path for the students who opted for the profession. This study revealed a positive perception of the nursing profession engendered with its attractiveness and desirability as a career among students. However, the sustainability of recruiting young people into the profession depends on more advocacy, career counselling and positive imaging especially through the mass media.

Keywords: Perception; Nursing Profession; Career; Students.

Introduction

The healthcare sector is currently faced with a global shortage of health workers. This trend is alarming as the World Health Organization (WHO) as projected a 12.9 million shortage of healthcare professionals by 2035, if the trend is not abated (WHO, 2014). Healthcare comprise of multi-disciplinary professionals; however, nurses constitute major stakeholders in the health sector and, they constitute a larger percentage of the labour force in any healthcare setting (Hatamle and Sorio, 2017; Ogunyewo *et al.*, 2014; Price, McGillis Hall, Angusb and Peterb, 2013). The health system requires the availability of a sustainable nursing workforce because of the central role it plays in delivering and strengthening health care services (Glerean, Hupli, Talman, and Haavisto, 2017). A shortage of nurses has been reported worldwide and about 9 million new nurses will be required to improve health workforce globally, by the year 2030 (WHO, 2016). This noticeable shortage of nurses has been attributed to lots of factors, including low enrollment rates into the profession (American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2014). The sustainability of professional nurses depends on the ability to recruit and retain the upcoming generation into the profession (Price *et al.*, 2013). Retainment of nursing professionals requires the attraction of youths in the field. Adolescence period is a critical time in which career choices and decisions are deliberated on. Career choice often play a very fundamental and significant role in the life of the individual because it determines the pattern of his or her income, affects the individual's personality as well as the concept of life (Eremie and Okwulehie, 2018).

Career choice is therefore influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalisation, socialisation, role model, social support and available resources such as information and finance (Quinter and Edwards, 2011). Likewise, multi factorial issues have been reported to influence the choice of nursing as a career. Traditionally, the decision to enter the nursing profession is based on the understanding of nursing as a virtuous profession, which is altruistic, noble, caring and compassionate (Price, McGillis Hall, Angusb and Peterb, 2013). Nursing is viewed as a 'vocational calling', one which leads one to perform a virtuous role of kindness, compassion and caring (Gordon and Nelson, 2005 cited in Price *et al.*, 2013). Despite the nobility of nursing as a profession, it has not been perceived as a popular course of study by students among the healthcare courses. Thus, it faces a greater challenge and competition in attracting school leavers, who are interested in healthcare courses (Neilson and Jones, 2012). Nursing is perceived to be for students with less satisfactory academic results (Neilson and Lauder, 2008) and is unsuitable to warrant a university degree (Ogunyewo *et al.*, 2014). Nursing is also perceived as having lesser responsibilities and decision-making rights

(Duffield and O'Brien-Pallas, 2003). Moreover, a nurse's work within the health care delivery system is seen as undignified and dirty (Hadley *et al.*, 2007).

The negative perception of the nursing profession as a career is influenced by the public image of nursing/nurses and the perception has been well recognised as an ongoing barrier to recruiting and retaining nurses (Milisen *et al.*, 2010). Negative perception of nursing/nurses has a number of consequences as it has impacted on the quality and quantity of persons who choose nursing as a profession (Mahran and Nagshabandi, 2012). The manners in which nurses are depicted in the media in particular has added to the uncomplimentary image of nursing/nurses. Most popular media today reflect the opposite of what the nursing profession is all about; nurses are portrayed in a stereotypical and negative way, presenting nursing as being inferior to medicine and surgery (Price *et al.*, 2013). The fact that senior secondary school students are influenced by the society's negative image of nurses, coupled with an inadequate knowledge about the profession, have helped in influencing their willingness to enter the nursing profession, thus, the number and quality of students are not commensurable (Neilson and McNally, 2013). In view of this, an assessment the students' perception of nursing profession as a career choice was conducted in selected senior secondary schools in Ilorin East, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The state is located within the north central geopolitical zone in Nigeria with Ilorin as the state capital. Nigeria operates a 6-3-3-4 system of education, which implies that pupils spend six years in primary school, three years in junior secondary school, three years in senior secondary school, and four years in a tertiary institution. This study was conducted among senior secondary science students in four selected schools (two public and two private) in Ilorin East. The schools are Okelele Secondary School, Kwara State Polytechnic Secondary School, Sheba International College, and Christ Redeemer's Secondary School. The total population of all science students in the schools was five hundred and eighty-one (581). A sample of 240 students recruited via multi stage sampling technique participated in the study. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire, which consists of four sections: socio-demographic data, perception of nursing as a career, choice of nursing as a career, and the factors influencing students' perception of nursing profession as a career choice. Four research assistants were employed to assist in the administration of questionnaires. The face and content validity of instruments was ensured and the reliability evaluated through a pretest at Community High School, Okeose, Ilorin, and a reliability value of 0.825 was obtained. Only 231 completed questionnaires were computed and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Kwara State Ministry of Education, Ilorin and the heads of selected schools. Detailed information about the study was given to participants and written consent was obtained. There was no associated harm to the participants involved and the right to withdraw at any stage of the study was maintained.

Results

Socio demographic data showed that more than 50% (121) of the respondents are within 16-19 years of age; most of the students 138 (59.7%) practice Islamic religion which lay credence to the assumption of Ilorin as a predominantly Muslim society. A larger number of the participants 191 (82.7%) are of Yoruba ancestry with few other ethnic groups represented. About (89.6%) of the respondents have heard about the nursing profession before the study, with the major source of information being from the mass media. Table 1 gives details of the socio demographic information.

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Profile

Variables	Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	12-15 years	96	41.6
	16-19 years	121	52.4
	20-23 years	14	6.1
	Total	231	100.0
Sex	Male	93	40.3
	Female	144	62.3
	Total	231	100.0
Religion	Christianity	84	36.4
	Islam	138	59.7
	Traditional	9	3.9
	Total	231	100.0
Ethnicity	Yoruba	191	82.7
	Hausa	16	6.9
	Igbo	6	2.6
	Others	18	7.8
	Total	231	100.0

Nursing as a Career

Findings on career choice revealed that most of the students are already considering career options. More than 166 (71.9 %) of the students consider nursing as a prospective career but only 107 (46.3) may likely enroll in the nursing programme. Other most preferred health care courses are medicine and pharmacy. See Table 2.

Table 2: Nursing as a Career

Variables	Yes	No
Have you made a career choice	193 (83.5)	38 (16.5)
Do you consider nursing a career?	166(71.9)	65 (28.1)
Would you like to study nursing	107 (46.3)	124 (53.7)
If No, what's your future career?		
Pharmacy	29	
Medicine	71	
Engineering	24	

Students' Perception of Nursing as a Career

Majority of the participants in this study agree that nursing is a noble profession 199 (86.1) involving caring and that nurses have respected value within the society 203 (87.8%). The students also confirm that prospective nursing students require academic intelligence, 205 (88.7%); legal certification to practice, 176 (76.2%); and nursing can guarantee opportunity for employment, 195 (84.4). Nursing is also perceived as a profession predominantly for women 143 (61.9), and somewhat inferior to other health courses like medicine as more than 74.5% (172) of the students perceived that nurses follow only doctor's order without questioning. Most of the students 145 (62.8%) perceived nurses' role in the health care delivery system as mere administration of injections to the sick based on images seen in many movies, and also think that the choice of nursing for someone might affect social decisions like marriage in later life. See Table 3.

Table 3: Students' Perception of Nursing as a Career

Variables	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Nursing profession is a career	222 (96.1%)	-	9 (3.9%)
Nursing is a noble profession	199(86.1)	22(9.6%)	10 (4.3%)
Nursing profession gives 100 percent job guarantee.	195(84.4)	22(9.6)	14(6.0)
Nursing profession is majorly for women.	143(61.9)	76(32.9%)	12(5.2%)
Nurses are respected and valued in the society	203(87.8%)	14(6.1%)	14(6.1%)
Nursing is interesting and challenging	194(84%)	19(8.2%)	18(7.8%)
Nurses make decision for Patients' care	185(80%)	30(13%)	16(7%)
A legal certificate is required to practice as a nurse	176(76.2%)	45(19.5%)	10(4.3%)
Nurses follow only doctor's order without questioning	172(74.5%)	51(22.1%)	8(3.4%)
Nursing is a caring and helpful profession	188(81.4%)	25(10.8%)	18(7.8%)
It takes intelligence to be a nurse	205(88.7%)	14(6.1%)	12(5.2%)
Practicing nursing may affect social decisions like marriage	137(59.3%)	82(35.5%)	12(5.2%)
Nurse work is only to give injections to the sick as seen in home videos	145(62.8%)	68(29.4%)	18(7.8%)

Factors Influencing Student's Choice of Nursing as a Career

Several factors have been reported to influence the choice of nursing as a career. The prospective driving forces for the choice of nursing among the study participants include: high wages, 109 (47.2%); personal desires, 174 (75.3%); parents' choice, 124 (53.7%); media image, 188(81.4%); peer influence, 111 (48.1%); work demand, 191 (82.7%); role modelling, 151 (65.4%), and nursing uniform, 177 (76.6%). The details on factors influencing student's choice of nursing as a career in Table 4.

Table 4: Factors Influencing Student's Choice of Nursing as a Career

Variables	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Nursing is a highly paid profession	109(47.2%)	110(47.6%)	12(5.2%)
I have a personal desire for Nursing profession	174(75.3%)	45(19.5%)	12(5.2%)
Nursing is highly valued in the society	195(84.4%)	20(8.7%)	16(6.9%)
My role model is a nurse	151(65.4%)	66(28.8%)	14(6.1%)
My parents want me to study nursing	124(53.7%)	81(35%)	26(11.3%)
My parent(s) is/are in the same profession	109(47.2%)	106(45.9%)	16(6.9%)
I like Nurses white uniform as it makes them look like angels	177(76.6%)	38(16.5%)	16(6.9%)
Nursing is a stressful and demanding profession	191(82.7%)	26(11.2%)	14(6.1%)
I love the way Nurses are portrayed in home videos	188(81.4%)	27(11.7%)	16(6.9%)
I'd like to be a Nurse because my friend(s) is/are in the same profession	111(48.1%)	100(43.2%)	20(8.7%)

Discussion

The study revealed that most of the students have positive perception about the nursing profession. Most of the participants also viewed nursing as a prospective career choice; however, less than average are likely to enroll into nursing programme. This confirms the assumption that nursing faces greater competition in attracting school leavers, who are interested in healthcare courses in general etc (Ogunyewo *et al.*, 2014. Neilson and Jones, 2012, Alasweda, Manasra, Shaher and Alsoufi, 2009). The students in this study preview nursing as a noble profession which is based on humanitarianism involving caring for others especially the sick and vulnerable, and the profession equally has respected value in the society. This conclusion could be related to the reported altruistic desire to help others which is one the one the core principles that drives to the nursing profession (Law and Arthur 2003; Mackintosh 2006; McLaughlin, Moutray and Moore 2010).

As against previous research reports which portray nursing as a profession meant for students with less satisfactory academic results, who are unable to gain admissions into the universities (Ogunyewo *et al.*, 2014, Neilson and Lauder, 2008), participants in this study perceive that nursing requires high intellect, strong academic standing and legal certificate to practice. They also opined nursing to be a guarantee for employment opportunities.

Nursing is also perceived by some of the study participants as a profession predominantly for women and somewhat inferior to other health courses like medicine. This perception was documented in previous studies which reported nurses having lesser responsibilities, often having to do 'dirty' work involving stressful tasks on handling distressed patients and their family member with less decision-making rights (Hadley *et al.*, 2007; Duffield and O'Brien-Pallas, 2003). Several factors have been reported to influence the choice of nursing as a career. This study identified high wages, personal desires, parents' choice, media image, peer influence, work demand and role modelling including nursing uniform as prospective driving forces for the choice of nursing as a career. Karabacak, Uslusoy, Alpar and Bahçecik (2012); Tan-kuick and Ng (2010) highlighted similar factors that influence the choice of the profession and it is seen that the society's perceptions influence student's decision to become nurses. Gavin (2008) identified factors such as media, public image, social prestige, having a family member, relative or a friend who is a nurse, to affect students' consideration of nursing.

Conclusions

This study assessed the perception of nursing profession as a career choice among students in selected senior secondary schools. Findings revealed a positive perception of the nursing as engendered professional career among students. However, enrolment into nursing is still low as asserted in previous research findings. The sustainability of recruiting young people into the profession depends on more advocacy, career counselling and positive imaging especially through the mass media.

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