

Career interest, self-efficacy, and perception in undecided and nursing undergraduate students: A quantitative study



Valentina M. Fillman *

Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, 511 NE Greenleaf, Peoria, IL 61603, United States

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SUMMARY

Career choice variables of career interest, self-efficacy, and perception were chosen based upon Social Cognitive Career Theory concepts for study between nursing and undecided undergraduate student groups. Components of the Career Search Questionnaire and Perceptions of Professional Nursing instruments were combined and adapted to form the Career Choice Survey for use in this research. This web-based survey totaling 40 questions was sent to 577 undergraduate students with a 12% response rate ($N = 68$). Due to the need to increase nursing recruitment and retention, hypotheses were developed that distinguish if any relationship existed between groups. Findings of this quantitative study resulted in statistically significant results on two of the three variable hypotheses ($p = .006$ for career interest, $p = .002$ for self-efficacy, $p = .395$ for perception), aligning with previous research and provide insight into the change in nursing perception. Overall, scores for each subscale were encouraging to current nurses and expected from undecided students. Implications for practice include increases in accurate nursing portrayal in the media and early career counseling to younger populations. Nurse educators can further research in career choice with focus on continuing education for current nurses and recruitment of young nursing hopefuls.

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The shortage of nurses has become such an issue that it brings multiple disciplines together to research, report, and support efforts to recruit and educate future generations of this profession (American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2013). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012b) projects a registered nurse growth of 26% from 2010 to 2020, a need for over 700,000 new graduates in this decade, with a higher demand for a baccalaureate entrance degree and graduate certifications. The increase in healthcare coverage legislation and aging population coupled with the aging workforce forecasts this increasing demand (AACN, 2013). Entering the field as a nurse is not the only challenge in the nursing profession: with the current faculty shortages reported, almost two-thirds of baccalaureate and graduate student applicants are turned away unable to advance their education (AACN, 2013).

Encouraging nursing as a career choice to students of all ages can prevent career disillusionment, nursing school dropout, and stimulate interest to the profession (Buerhaus et al., 2000; Turner, 2011). By identifying students at earlier ages who wish to enter the field of nursing, the profession will benefit from confident and valuable individuals capable of lessening the nursing shortage. Examining relationships between undecided students and nursing undergraduate students, specifically examining their career interest, self-efficacy, and perceptions, can add to the body of knowledge surrounding career choice and influencing

nursing education to pursue the recruitment and retention of future nurses. Nurse educators and scholars have a key role in impacting the perception of the nursing field through professionalism and dedication to improvement through continued diligence in research efforts.

Background

The U. S. Department of Labor reported in 2012 that registered nurses were at the very top of the list of careers with the largest projected growth from 2010 to 2020. Reasons for this projection come from an aging nursing workforce, an aging population, healthcare reform, and an anticipated boost in the economy will make a renewed critical nursing need (American Nurses Association, 2013). Research suggests that the nursing shortage will continue unless efforts are made to increase recruitment and retention efforts beyond media portrayal and multiple degree modalities (Allen, 2008; Auerbach et al., 2007; Beck, 2000; Rudel et al., 2009). Portrayal of nursing in the media coupled with many degree possibilities allowing entrance into bedside nursing practice is not enough to pull more working nurses into the field.

Evidence demonstrates that longevity in the field and educational advancement throughout nursing careers are enhanced through integrating younger nurses into the profession (Cluskey et al., 2006; King et al., 2007; Rudel et al., 2009; Shepherd, 2008; Tremayne and Robson, 2008). Students that gain an interest and a belief of capability in a certain field are empowered to choose that particular career (Breeding,

* Tel.: +1 309 655 6352; fax: +1 309 624 8973.
E-mail address: valentina.m.fillman@osfhealthcare.org.

2008). Recruiting through informed career counseling could impact interest and self-efficacy in nursing.

Existing literature demonstrates a poor perception of nurses from the public through media misperception (Donelan et al., 2008). Positive perceptions of nursing as a career have been documented in other research, but fail to explain the continued shortage of nursing graduates (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). Younger students starting their career have a higher chance of continuing through to a terminal degree and educating future generations (Allen, 2008). The impact of perception proves to be a necessary inclusion to future research efforts and has been integrated into this study's research.

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is the major theoretical foundation for this study regarding career choice with variables of career interest, self-efficacy, and perception. With support gleaned from Social Learning Theory of Career Choice and Women's Career Development funneled into Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the SCCT was developed (Bandura, 1986; Coogan and Chen, 2007; Hackett and Betz, 1981; Krumboltz, 2006; Lent et al., 2002). This theory also assumes the importance of sociocultural and environmental contexts within factors affecting career choice (Lent and Brown, 1996).

The conceptual framework for this study was the context of career choice as it relates to propagating the future of the nursing profession. Within the umbrella of career choice are the supporting antecedents of career interest, self-efficacy, and perceptions of nursing. These conceptual variables were chosen based upon findings from sound research and theory focused on enhancing knowledge of career decision-making. Fig. 1 gives this framework a visual appeal.

Methods

Design

This study was a quantitative ex post facto, comparative design using survey methodology. It used descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to report if any relationship existed between the variables of career interest, self-efficacy, and perceptions between undecided and nursing student groups.

Procedures

The target population for this proposed research was undergraduate nursing and undecided students enrolled in a public midwestern university. The total sampling frame was 2000 undergraduate students in the undeclared and nursing majors. The subdivided sample had a significantly smaller number of enrolled nursing students of 277 versus the undeclared group with 1727. Due to the large difference in enrolled student population between nursing and undeclared students and the need to have an equal sample, a census of the entire enrolled nursing sample was used. A random sample of 300 students was used through the university admissions office, providing anonymity to the sample. With a voluntary survey collection, participants were able to access the survey link from any electronic device with internet access.

The instrument adapted for this research, named the Career Choice Survey, was a combination of the Career Search Questionnaire (CSQ) (Roberts, 2008) and Perceptions of Professional Nursing Tool (PPNT) (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). This survey contained five demographic questions and 35 ordinal Likert-type questions. These questions were ordered in accordance with the research hypothesis, with variable-titled headings in order of career interest questions (10), self-efficacy questions (13), and public image questions (12).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS software version 21.0.0 after importing from the electronic data collection tool. All responses remained anonymous and confidential. Reporting of responses was completed with descriptive statistics including measures of central tendency (mode, median, and mean), and variability (range, standard deviation, and variability). Hypotheses were addressed through analysis of questions subsets. Once normality in the data for each set was verified non-parametric, hypothesis testing was done to look for significant differences on the variable scores between the two groups of subjects. Due to the low sample size and non-parametric distribution of data, the Mann-Whitney *U* test was done to demonstrate significance between groups.

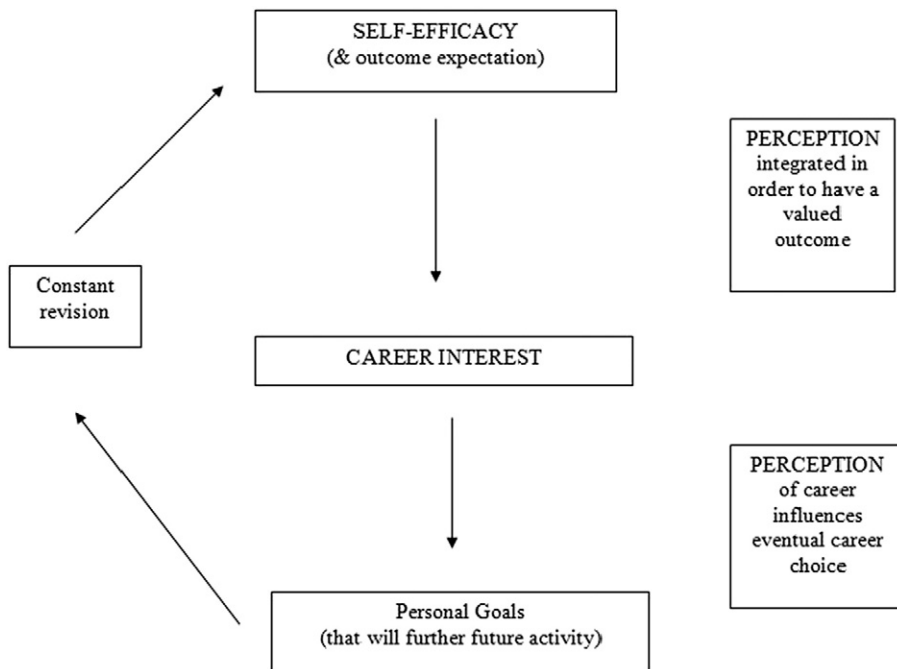


Fig. 1. Integrating SCCT with research variables.

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