



Nurses in Mauritius motivated by extrinsic rewards: A qualitative study of factors determining recruitment and career choices

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ABSTRACT

Background: International studies have shown that motivation and career considerations related to nursing reveal that the decision is determined by a multitude of factors, generally distinguishing between the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and work values. Although changing values seem to be important with greater emphasis on personal development and a reduction in other-orientation and altruism, nursing still stress the caring component with a desire to help and care for others.

Objective: To describe and analyze those factors and conditions influencing the decision to choose nursing as a career among men and women nurses in Mauritius. The objectives are to provide information on the nurses and their social background, their reasons for entering the nursing profession and to explore how nursing is perceived in a society with a different cultural and historical background. This will be compared with knowledge about recruitment to nursing in some developed as well as developing countries.

Design and setting: A qualitative study based on in-debt, semi-structured interviews and convenience sampling. Nurses of all grades working in five government hospitals and community health centers in the central and southern part of Mauritius, a small island situated in the Indian Ocean. The data were collected over a 5-month period during 2005–2006.

Participants: Individual interviews with 47 nurses, both men (27) and women nurses (20). The nurses came from different grades, age groups, religious and ethnic background.

Results: Findings revealed that nursing is attractive as a career due to extrinsic rewards such as job security, good income and government employment, with all the privileges and social status that it entails. These conditions, together with paid education and possibilities for international migration, were the most important factors explaining the recruitment of nurses from both sexes. Most of them did not want to do nursing but entered it because of financial difficulties in the family, unemployment, lacking other opportunities or as a default of poor grades from secondary education.

Conclusions: The majority of the Mauritian nurses in the sample had a more pragmatic and materialistic approach to the nursing profession and hardly any emphasis on caring and a desire to help others. Nursing was considered a gender neutral occupation and a job like any other jobs. Entering the nursing profession is regarded as the achievement of considerable social mobility taken into account the predominantly working class background of most nurses.

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What is already known about the topic?

- The decision to choose nursing as a career is determined by many factors among which the desire to help and care for others is predominant.
- Nursing in most developed and industrialized countries is still defined as women's work and a female-dominated occupation.
- Caring and nurturance is still important to the profession's identity and image of the ideal nurse, despite changes in values and the recruitment to the profession.

What this paper adds

- Nursing in Mauritius is an attractive career due to job security, good income, social mobility, employment in the public sector and possibilities for international migration.
- Nurses showed a more utilitarian and instrumental approach to the nursing profession, treating it as a job like any other jobs.
- Nursing can be differently defined, perceived and constructed due to other historical, social and cultural conditions.

1. Introduction

Previous research on motivation and career related to nursing shows that the decision or choice is determined by a multitude of factors ranging from job security and employment opportunities to the desire to help others and caring as key reasons for wanting to become nurses (Kersten et al., 1991; Day et al., 1995; Williams et al., 1997; Beck, 2000; Larsen et al., 2003). Nursing seems to have maintained a relatively strong value-orientation despite changes in society, with more emphasis on personal development that the profession may give in return, which is apparent in students' preference for specific fields of nursing (Kloster et al., 2007). Nursing in industrialized countries with a predominantly Christian-based culture and European values share much in common in the way nursing has been perceived and evolved, turning it into a distinctively female dominated occupation.

There exists a lot of research concerned with nursing students' motivation, choice of occupation and education, conceptions about nursing, and the professional socialization through education and clinical practice which entirely or partly confirm the stereotype of nursing as primarily concerned with caring and a desire to work with and help people (Kersten et al., 1991; Day et al., 1995; Beck, 2000; Larsen et al., 2003). Although the motivation and decision to choose nursing as a career is less dominated by altruistic service as the previous stress on calling or vocation implied, the choice of nursing as an education and occupation is still influenced by idealistic perceptions.

Some studies (Boughn, 2001; Kersten et al., 1991; Beck, 2000) pay considerable attention to the intrinsic rewards related to the profession and a nurse ideal as affective positive which emphasizes values and personality traits as more important than practical and materialistic concerns such as salary, career and job opportunities. This becomes evident when students express their desire to help and

care for other people, regarding the profession meaningful and promote personal development. Boughn (2001) has shown that care for others was the major motivational factor for both men and women in choosing nursing as a career. A study of female students' motivations revealed that their references to practical motivations for choosing nursing were so notably scarce that their virtual omission constituted an important theme (Boughn and Lentini, 1999:156). It is commonly assumed that this is related to the fact that nursing is considered a female-dominated occupation.

In another study from UK, Murray and Chambers (1990) found that the most important reasons for choosing nursing were 'to help people' and 'to obtain job satisfaction'. A study of Canadian students by Williams et al. (1997) revealed that job opportunity/security was the primary reason for students to choose nursing as a career, followed by helping others and working with people. A Danish study of men nurses' motivation for selecting nursing stressed the importance and value of working with people, but also economic security, interest for science and technology in nursing, many job opportunities, and the possibility of working in foreign countries (Hundborg and Hall, 2003). In a study from Finland, Vanhanen and Janhonen (2000) found that there were three major orientations towards nursing; caring, nursing expertise and life orientation, which changed from the beginning towards the end of nursing education.

Recent studies from Norway emphasize that, although caring and a desire for helping others are important factors, there is also an expectation that the profession has something to offer in return to meet the students' own need for intimate relations, personal development, excitement and professional challenges. This seems to reflect a stronger self-orientation, individualization related to modernity and becomes evident in their preferences for specific nursing fields (Rognstad, 2006; Kloster et al., 2007). It is allegedly connected with changes in recruitment to nursing, reduced grades at intake, resulting in a more heterogeneous student population than previously. Motivations for choosing nursing as a career are changing and, despite the fact that a narrow majority gave priority for nursing only, there were many who ended up with nursing by coincidence, lack of other educational opportunities, or preferred other occupational careers (Rognstad, 2006).

Other international studies (Day et al., 1995; Larsen et al., 2003; Murray and Chambers, 1990) reported the importance of previous experience from the health service, part-time work, practice, encounters with patients and nurses, and experience from own or family members' illness for the youths' choice of nursing as a career. This type of experience and the fact that family and friends were working as nurses, influenced their images of nursing and nurses, and contributed to make nursing a deliberate choice of career.

1.1. Comparison to findings in developing countries

Most of the studies referred to above are concerned with recruitment to and motivation for nursing among

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