



Interest in nursing among academic degree holders in Israel: A cross-sectional quantitative study



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SUMMARY

Background: The shortage of nurses is a global problem. One strategy for producing more registered nurses worldwide and in Israel in particular is to offer graduate entry nursing programs for individuals with non-nursing academic degrees. In order to recruit academic degree holders into the nursing profession, it is important to identify factors that might attract them.

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to explore whether the perception of nurse characteristics by academic degree holders is associated with their interest in enrolling in a graduate entry nursing program or in recommending this program to a family member, and whether ethnic background, gender and interaction with a nurse have an effect on this interest.

Design: A cross-sectional quantitative study.

Settings: The setting of the study was on the campus of Tel Aviv University.

Participants: A convenience sample of 522 individuals with an academic education, men and women, aged 18–60 and equally distributed between Jewish and Arab Israelis, took part in the study.

Methods: Participants completed a questionnaire based on the Porter Nursing Image Scale.

Results: A moderate positive correlation was found between perception of nurses and interest in nursing ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$). Arab Israelis, women, and individuals who have or have had interactions with nurses, viewed nurses in a more positive light and had a higher interest in nursing than their counterparts.

Conclusions: Efforts should be made to foster a positive public image of nursing among the population of people with an academic education. Recruitment strategies should be tailored to each of this population's subgroups.

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Introduction

The shortage of nurses is a global problem that is expected to intensify due to the aging of the current registered nurse (RN) force as well as the growing population healthcare needs (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, AACN, 2014; Ministry of Health, 2012). One strategy to produce more RNs worldwide, and in Israel in particular, is to offer graduate entry nursing programs to individuals with non-nursing academic degrees, in order to enable them to obtain a second career as an RN in a shortened, intensely concentrated period, and thus enter the workforce at a more rapid rate than their traditional counterparts. This is particularly true for academic degree holders who are currently unemployed or dissatisfied with their field (AACN, 2013).

In contrast to the US, where such programs have been offered since the 1960s (Plummer and Phelan, 1976), in Israel graduate entry programs opened for the first time in 2000, but since then the number of courses offered continues to grow annually. These programs were developed by the Division of Nursing of the Israeli Ministry of Health,

which oversees their curriculum (Kaplan et al., 2009). Apart from being one of the solutions to the nursing shortage, the nursing profession may benefit in many ways from absorbing professionals from other disciplines who have decided to become nurses. This nurse population may add professional depth and richness to the nursing profession, with the many layers of skill and education it brings to the profession. Nurse employers appreciate them for their maturity, strong clinical skills, and being quick on the job-learners (AACN, 2013). Moreover, graduates of this program have been shown to have a high commitment to nursing in comparison to nurses who graduated from Bachelor degree in nursing programs (Neill, 2012). In order to recruit academic degree holders into the nursing profession, it is important to identify factors that might attract them.

Background

Recruitment problems are one of the main reasons for the shortage of nurses in Israel and elsewhere (Ben Natan and Becker, 2010). These problems are probably a consequence of nursing image (Ben Natan and Becker, 2010; Price, 2009; Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012). Nursing image is a paradoxical and complex concept (Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012). That is, in general, the public respects nursing (Price, 2009),

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but studies and surveys reveal that people usually do not consider and do not recommend nursing as a career choice for themselves, their children or their pupils (Morris-Thompson et al., 2011). A survey of a general population of Israeli men and women aged 18–50, conducted by Ben Natan and Becker (2010), revealed that although nursing is perceived as a noble profession, it is unattractive to the Israeli public, being strongly perceived as unglamorous, unrewarding and uninteresting.

The nursing image is strongly influenced by various nursing stereotypes, both favorable and derogatory (Kelly et al., 2012; Luchesi et al., 2013). The public's perception of nursing is often negative (Kelly et al., 2012; Morris-Thompson et al., 2011) and the public does not always value nurses' skills and competences (Hoeve et al., 2014). The image of nursing is often distorted and does not reflect reality (Hoeve et al., 2014; Morris-Thompson et al., 2011). This distortion appears to be created and perpetuated by the media (Kelly et al., 2012), but it has been claimed that the nurses themselves contribute to it, with their invisibility and their lack of public discourse (Hoeve et al., 2014). While the image of nursing in the media is often distorted, personal experience with relatives or friends who are nurses, or interactions with nurses in healthcare settings, forms a deeper and more realistic understanding of the profession (Price, 2009).

The population of individuals with an academic education possesses unique sociodemographic and academic-related characteristics, which might differentiate it from the general population and from other population groups (Shier et al., 2008). These individuals are mature and self-accomplished, and they usually know what they want (Everett et al., 2013; Neill, 2012). Due to their unique sociodemographic and academic-related characteristics, individuals with an academic education may have a different perception of nursing, and different factors might influence their interest in nursing. The purpose of this study is to explore whether the perception of nurse characteristics by academic degree holders is associated with their interest in enrolling in a graduate entry nursing program or in recommending this program to a family member. Additionally, the research examined whether ethnic background (Arab or Jewish Israelis), gender and interaction with a nurse have an effect on this interest. This study may help design recruitment strategies for attracting individuals with an academic education to the nursing profession.

Methods

Study Design

A cross sectional quantitative study was performed during February–April 2015.

Sample

A convenience sample of 522 individuals with an academic education took part in the study. The inclusion criteria were having an academic degree in any field, age 18–60, and Arabic- or Hebrew-speaking. The choice to examine respondents based on Arab or Jewish ethnic background is due to the population compilation of Israel (approximately 20% Arab and 80% Jewish).

Instrument

The research instrument is a questionnaire consisting of 41 items and divided into 3 parts. Part 1 of the questionnaire examined sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as information regarding interaction with nurses. Part 2 of the questionnaire explored respondents' perception of nurses. This part was based on the Porter Nursing Image Scale, developed by Porter and Porter (1991), which originally consisted of 30 randomly ordered matched-pair, bipolar adjectives, describing nurses' characteristics. Permission

to use the questionnaire was obtained from the authors of the original instrument. The characteristics relate to interpersonal power, which describe the nurse as a professional; interpersonal relations, which describe how a nurse should ideally interact with a patient and the patient's family; and intrapersonal ability, which describes the nurse's ability to be organized, rational, competent, neat, logical and controlled (Porter and Porter, 1991). The present study used 27 items that, in a pilot study, showed reliability of Cronbach's alpha 0.96. Three questions were removed because they negatively impacted the reliability of the Cronbach's alpha.

Part 3 explored interest in nursing (2 items) (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80). These items were developed by the researchers. The responses in Parts 2–3 were ranked on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6, with low scores indicating low agreement and high scores indicating high agreement. The questionnaire was translated into Hebrew and Arabic. Three specialists in nursing education examined the questionnaire's content validity and modified certain items using more coherent wording.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Tel Aviv University. The questionnaire was distributed by trained Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking students. The research population was recruited at various locations on the campus of Tel Aviv University. Respondents to the questionnaire were all academic degree holders who were attending non-degree courses at the university. After the purpose of the study was explained, and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study were assured, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Questionnaires were completed on the spot. Five hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed and 522 were returned completed, for a response rate of 94%.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-PC, version 22, Chicago, IL). Descriptive statistics were used to depict sociodemographic data and responses to the questionnaire items. Pearson correlations, ANOVA, independent sample t-test and Chi-square tests were used to explore associations between various factors and interest in the nursing profession. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Approximately half of the respondents were women (57.3%), and that respondents were 32.2 years old on average (SD = 10.3, range = 18–60). The sample was equally distributed between Jewish and Arab Israelis. The majority were born in Israel (85.6%), while the rest were born in the former USSR. Approximately half of the respondents were married (43.7%), they had two children on average (range = 1–4). The majority had only a Bachelor's degree (73.7%), and the remainder held advanced degrees. Most of the respondents estimated their level of income as below average (44%) or average (38.3%), while a minority estimated their level of income as above average (17.7%). More than half indicated that a family member or close friend works as a nurse (56.3%) or that they had been cared for by a nurse over the past year (53.7%).

A moderate positive correlation was found between perception of nurses and interest in nursing ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, positive correlations were found between age and interest in nursing ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$) and between number of children and interest in nursing ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$).

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