



Faculty experiences with rapid integration of male nursing students within a patriarchal societal context



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SUMMARY

Background: In 2007, reforms by the Turkish government forced a rapid integration of male nursing students into previously all-female schools. The minimal amount of time for faculty preparation, little guidance from nursing leaders and the extant literature, and a societal context of patriarchy created unique challenges for faculty.

Objective: The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and interpret the experiences of nursing faculty as they adapted to the sudden inclusion of men in schools of nursing.

Design: A qualitative descriptive study

Settings: Nine schools from six regions across Turkey

Participants: 99 nursing faculty who were 22 to 55 years of age, primarily female (97.8%), married (65.6%).

Methods: Focus groups were used to collect data. Data were analyzed using constant comparison and tripartite discussion.

Results: Analysis yielded three categories, seven themes, and seven subthemes describing variable experiences, perceptions, and adaptive strategies.

Conclusions: The findings presented contradictions characterized by both optimism and concern following the rapid infusion of men into schools of nursing. Concerns primarily centered on the state of gender relations in a larger patriarchal society. The findings foster reflection and discourse as societies characterized by relatively rigid and traditional gender roles confront rapid cultural change and growing calls for diversity within nursing.

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More men are becoming nurses, though their overall numbers remain small. Men make up the 9.6% of the nursing workforce in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012) and 10.2% of registered nurses in the United Kingdom (Oxtoby, 2003). In the United States, only 7% of working registered nurses in the United States, but 11% of nurses recently licensed between 2010 and 2013 (Budden et al., 2013). It is also well documented that nursing has been viewed as a predominantly female profession (Stott, 2004). Nursing education, management and practice have developed primarily from the work of women and a feminine worldview (Anthony, 2004; Dyck et al., 2009; Grady et al., 2008; O'Lynn, 2004). Such gender dominance facilitated a bias that has partly challenged the recruitment and retention of men into nursing (Bartfay et al., 2010; O'Lynn, 2004).

The slow growth of men in nursing experienced in many countries has afforded nurse scholars sufficient time and opportunities to explore men's entry into the profession, particularly in light of the evolving

societal roles for women in many countries. O'Lynn (2013) reported that the literature on this topic has grown relatively large. Although significant gaps remain, the literature provides context for the development of strategies for nurse educators as they encounter more male students in their programs.

The entry of men into nursing in Turkey, however, has been quite different. The 1954 Turkish Nursing Law identifies nursing as a profession which only can be performed by Turkish women (Ulker et al., 2003). Men were barred from nursing schools, though men were allowed entry into population health programs. In 2007, the Turkish government passed sweeping reforms affecting health care education programs. Men's population health programs and women's nursing programs were suddenly integrated as the professional roles were unified. Consequently, male students were suddenly thrust into what were once all-female nursing schools across the country. Although statistics are not available, the authors have observed that male enrollment quickly grows to 10–40% of all nursing students, in part due to high job placement opportunities for nurses (Kulakaç et al., 2009). Many nurse educators were unprepared for this rapid change. The extant literature provides little guidance for adjusting to such rapid changes in

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student demographics. Furthermore, the literature on male nursing students is derived primarily from Western samples where, unlike many countries, gender roles have changed relatively quickly. The need to explore the experiences of Turkish nursing faculty undergoing rapid change is urgent for meaningful and supportive guidance.

Background

Most of the the literature on male nursing students focuses on the perceptions and experiences of male students as they consider becoming a nurse (recruitment) and progress through nursing programs (retention) (Anthony, 2004, 2006; Bartfay et al., 2010; Bell-Scriber, 2008; Brady & Sherrod, 2003; Kulakaç et al., 2009; McLaughlin et al., 2010; Meadus & Twomey, 2007; O'Lynn, 2004; Özdemir et al., 2008; Paterson et al., 1996; Stott, 2007). Recruitment of men in nursing is hampered by a number of barriers including long-standing gender role norms that run counter to perceptions that nursing is a feminine profession (Anthony, 2004, 2006; Evans, 2002). Conflicts between gender role norms and perceptions of nursing can induce much stress that may turn men away from nursing (O'Lynn, 2013) or over-emphasize personal masculine characteristics (Beck, 1995; Evans, 2002). Gender-based retention barriers including the lack of information and support from guidance counselors and faculty, lack of exposure to non-feminist paradigms of nursing care, and lack of sufficient role models are well-described by multiple authors (Brady & Sherrod, 2003; Dyck et al., 2009; Keogh & O'Lynn, 2007; O'Lynn, 2004; O'Lynn, 2013; Paterson et al., 1996). Notably lacking in the literature is exploration of the perceptions and experiences of nursing faculty working with male students (Bell-Scriber, 2008). No studies describing the rapid infusion of male nursing students into previously all-female schools were located. This gap is significant as patriarchal societies confront pressures for cultural change and nursing calls for increased diversity within its ranks.

Objectives

With limited literature addressing faculty experiences and studies examining primarily Western students, exploration of the entry of men into Turkish nursing schools is warranted. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and interpret the experiences of Turkish nursing faculty with male students in the classroom, laboratory, and practice settings.

Method

A descriptive qualitative research design was used to better understand the experiences of faculty. After receiving approval from the Akdeniz University Ethics Committee, a purposive sample of nursing faculty with experience teaching male nursing students was invited to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Invited participants represented two nursing schools from each of six regions in Turkey in order to provide geographic diversity.

Participants were interviewed between May 2010 and December 2012 in groups with no more than ten members, congruent with the maximum ideal size for focus groups (Polit & Beck, 2006). Each interview lasted between 105 and 140 min and occurred in a quiet meeting room on each school's campus. Additionally, participants completed an eight-question demographic survey. A semi-structured interview form was used to solicit data. The opening interview question, "Tell me about your experiences of working with male nursing students..." encouraged participants to discuss their experiences. Four open-ended questions and three prompting questions for clarifying experiences were used, followed by a series of probing questions. For example, "How did you feel about that?" or "Can you tell me more about that." During the interviews, one researcher served as a moderator and the others as observers and recorders to enhance data reliability. Observations and personal reflections were carefully documented to avoid

bias. Following each interview, the researcher reviewed the videotapes and transcribed the discussions verbatim yielding 307 pages of transcripts. Fictitious names were used in the transcripts to protect the identities of the participants.

Data were analyzed using a constant comparison method and guidelines developed by Colaizzi (1978). With the assistance of NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software, data were analyzed and coded by each researcher individually except by one whose native language is not Turkish. Formulated meanings from participant responses were organized into categories and clusters of themes. Next, the original texts were analyzed by the researchers as a group. Tripartite researcher discussion and further analysis led to consensus in the findings.

Results

Faculty ($n = 99$) representing nine of the twelve invited nursing colleges agreed to participate. The sample was primarily female (97.8%), married (65.6%), and had graduate degrees (54.4%). The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 55 years (mean = 36.2 years; SD = 7.9 years). Findings were organized into 3 categories, 7 themes, and 5 subthemes.

Category 1. Preacceptance of Gender Roles

Faculty described the personal characteristics of female and male students in a manner stereotypical of social gender roles. Specifically, faculty described female students favorably as responsible and relationship-oriented. Negative characteristics attributed to female students suggested emotional instability and introversion. Conversely, male students were positively described as emotionally strong and extroverted. Negative characteristics attributed to male students suggested a sense of irresponsibility and a low relationship-orientation. These descriptions created a quandary for faculty who wished to foster a blending of positive stereotyped characteristics: "Our complaints related to male students are, in fact, what we really want...Obey me, but question others."

Category 2. Perceived Impairment in Comfort

Faculty stated that working with female students is easier and more comfortable, primarily because as women, faculty understood their students and could predict their behaviors and plan for their needs. The immersion of male students, however, caused distress and required consideration of factors that were previously irrelevant when nursing programs only had female students. The subsequent disruption caused substantial discomfort among the faculty. The discomfort can be classified into three themes:

Theme 2.1. Restructuring of Educational Practices

Faculty had to make significant adjustments due to cultural and religious modesty and customs related to cross-sex care for intimate matters. For example, it is customary for nursing students to use models or each other to practice skills that require the exposure of sensitive areas of the body. "Formerly I could explain the anatomy demonstrating on my body....it was very easy....I did demonstrations using the girls' bodies....Now with male students such a demonstration is difficult." Discomfort was also present among the students who were uncomfortable receiving touch from opposite-sex lab partners. "During injection administration practice by two matched students, I was surprised to see that male students were more conservative than the female students."

Apprehension prompted requests from students and families for having male students care for male patients and female students care for female patients. Some faculty considered these requests problematic; however, other faculty pondered the advantage of patients now having the ability to choose the gender of their nurse.

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