



Review

Gender differences in the academic and clinical performances of undergraduate nursing students: A systematic review



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SUMMARY

Objectives: Nursing is often regarded as a female-dominated profession. Many nursing curricula are received by mainly female students. It is uncertain how male students behave in this environment of nursing education in hospitals and universities. This article aimed to review gender differences in the academic and clinical performances of undergraduate nursing students.

Design: A systematic review was assessed and different themes were extracted by inductive approach.

Data Sources: A search strategy was carried out for the period 2006–2011 utilising six computerised databases: Academic Search Premier, CINAHL, ERIC, MEDLINE, ScienceDirect, and the Wiley Online Library.

Review Methods: Research studies were included and screened by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guideline. All articles in English that met our aim were selected and relevant results were abstracted and thematised.

Results: Fifty-five articles were included. Five themes were generated from the literatures, including the differences of academic, clinical, psychological, nursing profession identity and health concept between male and female nursing students.

Conclusions: Both genders performed similarly in different aspects. Most studies revealed that the clinical placement satisfaction of male students was similar to that of female, despite the negative experiences the former faced during obstetric placement. Further research is needed to examine the gender differences in studying and make changes in the nursing curricula to accommodate with male students.

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Introduction

Sexual stereotypes are still found in the nursing professions in clinical settings, and male nursing students tend to face more challenges during their educational and clinical studies such as fear of affecting their masculinity and low acceptance from patients (Meadus, 2000; Williams, 1995). Bell-Scriber (2008) and Wilson (2005) have reported that male nursing students have complained of being isolated, discriminated against, and unfairly treated during lessons or laboratory sessions. During laboratory classes, males have complained of frequently being asked to role-play in front of classmates, while female classmates were not required to do so (Stott, 2007). By contrast, Dyck et al. (2009) found positive views of male nursing students, who are likely to challenge speakers and receive knowledge in the curriculum.

Male nurses are an important labour force in the clinical contexts. They can particularly help female nurses on the physically-demanded tasks. This review explored gender differences in nursing education to shed light on the voices of male students and balance the feminine image on nursing profession.

While there have been many studies related to male perceptions of both the educational and clinical settings, no systematic review has yet addressed the subject of gender differences in the academic and clinical performances of nursing students. This article aimed to fill this knowledge gap and review the studies on gender in nursing undergraduate education.

Methods

Aim

The aim was to explore the influence of gender in nursing education, including campus learning and clinical placement. Two review questions were: “Were there any gender issues affecting the academic performance of nursing students?” and “were there any differences in the performance of clinical practicum for each genders?”.

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Design

The research papers were analysed based on PRISMA statement (Moher et al., 2009). As the results contain both numerical and qualitative data, it was not feasible to carry out a meta-analysis, and the papers were analysed qualitatively.

Search Methods

Keywords were decided based on the research questions. The targeted six electronic databases were: Medline, CINAHL, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Science Direct, and the Wiley Online Library. Different search strategies were adopted for different databases (keywords from MeSH for Medline, CINAHL Heading for CINAHL, Thesaurus for ERIC, and Subject Terms for Academic Search Premier). For Science Direct and the Wiley Online Library, only freetext searches were employed. In an attempt to retrieve all relevant studies, those freetext keywords were applied to all of the fields. An example of the search strategy is shown in Table 1.

Inclusion Criteria

To be included in the review, the papers should be relevant research studies with full text published in 2006–2011 in English. The participants had to be nursing students.

Exclusion Criteria

Papers were excluded if they were not relevant to the research questions, or were only abstracts. Advanced practiced nursing students were excluded, since they had already graduated and differed from pre-registered students.

Search Outcome

A total of 23,111 papers were initially retrieved. Then, 17,553 papers were eliminated by the accessibility of full-text and time frame. The remaining 5558 papers were checked for duplication and 358 papers were discarded. After checking the title, abstract, and full text, 5118 papers were screened out, and 82 papers were synthesised. 33 papers were then excluded from the 82 articles, as the participants were non-nursing students. To expand the coverage of searching, additional records were found through other sources; in particular, six papers

Table 1
An example of the search strategy for Medline via OvidSP.

Search strategy used for Medline via OvidSP
#1 Students, Nursing/
#2 ("student nurs*" or "nurs* student*" or "undergraduate nurs*").af.
#3 education/ or exp curriculum/ or education, distance/ or exp education, professional/ or clinical clerkship/ or education, continuing/ or education, nursing, continuing/ or education, professional, retraining/ or education, graduate/ or exp education, nursing/ or internship, nonmedical/ or exp educational measurement/ or faculty/ or faculty, nursing/ or inservice training/ or international educational exchange/ or mentors/ or needs assessment/ or preceptorship/ or exp teaching/
#4 exp Learning/
#5 exp nursing/ or nursing, practical/
#6 (education* or curricul* or learning or training or practic* or academic or teach* or clinic*).af.
#7 exp gender identity/ or sex/ or sex characteristics/
#8 (gender or sex or female or male or femini* or masculin*).af.
#9 1 or 2
#10 3 or 4 or 5 or 6
#11 7 or 8
#12 9 and 10 and 11
#13 limit 12 to yr = "2006–2011"
#14 limit 13 to full text

were identified from the reference lists of the included papers. Finally, 55 papers were identified (see Fig. 1).

Quality Appraisal

Relevant papers were critically appraised by utilising the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) developed by Pluye et al. (2009) as a decent interrater reliability in assessing review studies (Pace et al., 2012). Papers that met the criteria listed on MMAT were included for data extraction. Details of the quality appraisal are included in Table S1.

Data Abstraction

The design, aims, sampling, data collection methods, and relevant findings of each study were extracted. Table 2 shows the characteristics of the studies. The results were categorised into five themes.

Synthesis

Ten reviewers were divided into two subgroups with the first author as the supervisor. Each subgroup organised the findings and identified different themes. The themes were verified by the supervisor.

Results

This review adopted inductive reasoning. It included 55 articles comprising 8 qualitative, 42 quantitative, and 5 mixed-method studies. Males made up less than 30% of the participants in the majority of the studies ($n = 38$, 69%). The findings of various countries were extracted to compare the similarity and differences across these countries and depict a holistic picture of gender in nursing education around the world.

Gender Differences in Nursing Education

Nineteen studies were found relating to gender differences; four were from the West, three from Canada, three from the southern hemisphere, six from the Middle East and three from Asia. The differences in study preferences between the two genders were insignificant (Alkhasawneh et al., 2008; James et al., 2011). Although insignificant, according to James et al. (2011), more males preferred multiple use of sensory modality in learning. For e-learning and self-directed learning, there were no significant differences in the perception of both genders (Tait et al., 2008; Yuan et al., 2012). Kelly et al. (2009) found that both male and female Irish students wanted skill demonstrations. This result was consistent with Fooladi (2008), which showed that Pakistan males prefer an interactive learning experience. Al-Kandari and Vidal (2007), Ali and Naylor (2010), Chen and Chiou (2010), Dyck et al. (2009), Peyrovi et al. (2009), Reime et al. (2008), Shulruf et al. (2011), and Timer and Clauson (2011) indicated that males and females have different preferences and performance in education. However, Blackman et al. (2007) found no obvious relationship between both genders in learning results.

Regarding the teaching format and academic performance, males and females were found to have similar perception of peer assessments, problem-based learning, and traditional lecture (Melo et al., 2010; Shiu et al., 2012). Fooladi (2008) showed that the concentration of male students in Pakistan would decrease when females sat next to them.

Gender Differences Encountered in Clinical Settings

Fourteen studies fell in this theme; two from Australia, six from European countries, one from the United State, two from Africa, two from the Middle East, and one from Taiwan. Male students in western

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