



Becoming a nurse – A study of career choice and professional adaptation among Israeli Jewish and Arab nursing students: A quantitative research study



Ofra Halperin ^{a,*}, Michal Mashiach-Eizenberg ^{b,2}

^a The Max Stern Academic College Emek-Yezreel, P.O. Box 105, Givat Ela 36570, Israel

^b The Max Stern Academic College Emek-Yezreel, P.O. Box 104, Eyn Haemek 19250, Israel

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SUMMARY

Background: The growing shortage of nurses is a global issue, with nursing recruitment and retention recognized as priorities worldwide. Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs share residency and citizenship. However, language, religion, values, customs, symbols and lifestyle differ between the groups. This research covers only Arab citizens of Israel and not those in the occupied territories, the West Bank and Gaza. The future of the profession lies in the ability to recruit and retain the next generation of nurses.

Objective: To examine career choice and professional adaptation among Israeli Jews and Israeli Arab nursing students by addressing motivation, materialistic factors and professional adaptation.

Participants & Settings: 395 students, which comprised the total number of students in the first five years of the nursing program's existence, in the nursing faculty at an academic college in Israel.

Method: A questionnaire was created and administered to the students in the first week of their first year in the nursing program.

Results: Altruistic motivation, such as the opportunity to help others, was the primary factor that influenced students to choose nursing as a profession followed by professional interest. Materialistic factors, such as social status and good salary, had less influence. A significant positive correlation was found between professional adaptation and all three dimensions of role perception – teamwork, professional knowledge, and treatment skills. The female students perceived those components as more important than the male students and the Jewish students perceived themselves as more suitable for nursing than the Arab students.

Conclusions: Career choice and professional adaptation are influenced by multiple factors. Future recruitment and retention strategies used to address the critical nursing shortage should consider these factors, as well as the role of mentors, peers, and role models in the formulation of career expectations and career choice decisions.

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Introduction

Background

The growing shortage of nurses is a global issue, with nursing recruitment and retention recognized as priorities worldwide. An accurate and consistent account of the shortage is problematic, given the different systems used to quantify need (Oulton, 2006).

The International Council of Nurses (2003) has identified this shortage as a global crisis, recognizing that the number of nurses worldwide is insufficient. Many European countries and other developed nations, such as Israel and Australia, do not have enough nurses to serve the populations in need of care (Oulton, 2006; Toren et al., 2010). According

to Toren et al. (2010), the number of employed nurses in Israel (5.7 to 1000 population) is almost half their number in other OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (8.4 to 1000 population). Contributing to this inequity is the migration of nurses from places where the needs are dire to countries where their skills are better compensated and respected (Chaguturu and Vallabhaneni, 2005; Oulton, 2006). In developing countries, such as those in Africa, the shortage is drastic (Nigeria 0.28 per 1000 population; Zimbabwe 0.72 per 1000 population).

Effects of the nursing shortage are being experienced by all, and individuals who are vulnerable and fragile are at increased risk for negative health outcomes. Today's health care environments are increasingly complex and require a high level of technological skill. Shortened hospital stays have decreased the time allocated to provide comprehensive care (Goodin, 2003). Greater incidences of adverse outcomes for patients have been correlated to fewer qualified RNs caring for them (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2007; Aiken et al., 2003; Needleman et al., 2002).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ofrah@yvc.ac.il (O. Halperin), michalm@yvc.ac.il

(M. Mashiach-Eizenberg).

¹ Tel.: +972 52 3216544; fax: +972 4 6515803.

² Tel.: +972 52 3361026; fax: +972 4 423627.

Education is a recognized strategy through which the professional status of nursing can be enhanced at both the micro and macro levels (Wynd, 2003). Baccalaureate education in particular is a critical factor in cementing this status (Clark, 2004; Wolf and Hoerst, 2007). However, enrollment statistics indicate that fewer persons in their twenties are entering nursing schools. The percentage of the nursing workforce under 30 years of age has dropped in every survey since 1980, with only an estimated 8% under 30 in the US in 2004 (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). Yet, there has been a significant increase in nursing students in their thirties (Buerhaus et al., 2003). College students enrolled in nursing programs now tend to be older, culturally diverse, and more likely to change their career major several times during the course of their education.

Methods to identify and guide appropriate students toward nursing are generally lacking (Roberts and Ward-Smith, 2010). Career choice and professional adaptation are influenced by multiple factors, which can be extrinsic, intrinsic, or a combination of both. For example, many people are heavily influenced by the professions that their parents favor, whereas others follow the career paths that their educational choices have opened up for them. Some choose to follow their passion, regardless of how much or how little money it will make them, while others pursue the career that will pay them the highest salary (Myburgh, 2005).

Professional development through education goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills to include the adoption of professional values (Weis and Schank, 2002). The quest of the nursing profession to secure recognition and value as a discipline has been a tortuous one. Whether or not nursing can claim status as a profession continues to generate debate among scholars and practitioners in all areas and at all levels of practice (Wynd, 2003). Characteristics such as critical thinking, communication skills, ethical standards, and clinical competency (Iwasiw et al., 2007) are hallmarks of professionalism in any field. As both individual nurses and the profession at large embrace these characteristics as requisite elements of nursing practice, the status of nursing as a profession has been increasingly elevated.

Israel is a country of eight million citizens. Roughly eighty percent are Jews while the remaining twenty percent consists of Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after 1948 and their descendents are also referred to as Israeli Arabs (Muslim, 17%; Christian, 2%) and Druze (1.5%). The minorities, though formally citizens of equal standing, have been subjected to various sorts of formal and informal discrimination and restrictions. The employment patterns of Israeli Arabs are characterized – some would say dominated – by two features: near-exclusion from the technological domain and relative inclusion in the fields of education and healthcare. This relative openness is particularly evident in the north of the country, which houses the majority of this population sector (Smooha, 2010). Israel is and remains a deeply divided society of Jewish and Arab citizens. This division is reflected in institutions, culture, national identity, socioeconomic status, and stances on fundamental issues. Mutual rapprochement suggests that Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs are in the process of adjusting to one other and both are committed to coexistence and democracy. A better balance, compatible with the visions of both sides, could be struck between the Jewish and democratic character of the state by policies of nondiscrimination, inclusion, and integration of the Arab minority (Smooha, 2010).

Political events, such as government decision to exempt the Arab population from Israel's compulsory military service with the exception of the Druze and the October 2000 violent outbreak, might have underpinned the growing interest of Israeli Arabs in academic nursing, as a vehicle for greater public involvement and civil participation (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2007). In the college where this study was carried out, approximately 55% of the students are Jews and 45% are Arabs.

This research explores on the factors of career choice and professional adaptation experienced by baccalaureate Jewish and Arab nursing students in a college in northern Israel. Specific aims were: to identify

the underlying factors of the nursing students' career choice, using the constructs of interest and professional adaptation; to evaluate the students' early professional perceptions according to their definition of professional nursing roles and functions, as well as their body of professional knowledge; and to determine the factors accounting for the variability of these data.

Method

Procedure

In this retrospective quantitative research a questionnaire was created and distributed to 395 students, which comprised the total number of students in the first five years of the nursing program's existence. The questionnaire was administered to the students, by the researcher, in the first week of their first year in the nursing program and they filled it after giving their consent.

Instrument

The questionnaire that was administered to the students included four parts:

- 1) Demographic details of the students included gender, age, origin, family status, number of children, religion, and religious level.
- 2) Professional adaptation: This part was developed by the researchers and consisted of 13 statements referring to nursing profession characteristics and their compatibility with the student. For example: "I think I could use my personal qualifications in this profession". Respondents were asked to rate the degree of their agreement with each statement on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. High scores on the scale indicated a high level of compatibility. To validate the questionnaire two expert judges were asked to establish compatibility of each of the items. Considering the judges' comments, two items were removed from the questionnaire. The final version consisted of 11 statements. For purposes of data processing, one average score was calculated for the professional adaptation index for each subject. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.75.
- 3) Factors of career choice: This part consisted one question. The students were displayed with 10 factors of career choice: professional interest, convenient working hours, good salary, satisfying physical work conditions, high social status, opportunity to help others, economic security, possibility to influence, professional variety and promotion possibilities. The student was asked to choose the factor that influenced him the most in his career choice.
- 4) Role perception: The questionnaire is based on the nurse role questionnaire (Shachar, 1998). The original questionnaire consists thirty nine items that describe behaviors and perceptions regarding the nurses' role. In Shachar's research high internal consistency reliability for the total scale was observed ($\alpha = .91$). To validate the questionnaire two expert judges were asked to establish compatibility of each of the items. Considering the judges' comments, four items were removed from the original questionnaire and three others were added. The final version consisted of 38 statements divided into three dimensions. Respondents were requested to rate the degree of their agreement with each statement on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not important at all to 5 = very important. The three dimensions of role perception were:
 - A. Teamwork – Nine statements referred to the components of working in a team. For example: "To what extent is it important for a nurse to create good communication between different staff members?" Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.72.
 - B. Professional knowledge – Ten statements referred to the components of professional knowledge. For example: "To what extent is it important for a nurse to have comprehensive

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