



# Specialty satisfaction, positive psychological capital, and nursing professional values in nursing students: A cross-sectional survey



Chung Hee Woo, Ju Young Park\*

College of Nursing, Konyang University, 158, Kwanjeodong, Seo-gu, Daejeon, Republic of Korea

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Ideally, college majors should be chosen to achieve self-realization and correspond to self-concept. However, some students select a major based on extrinsic factors, rather than aptitude or interests, because of a lack of employment opportunities. If they have negative college experiences with an unsatisfactory major, they might not engage fully in their occupation following graduation.

**Objective:** This study aimed to identify factors affecting specialty satisfaction in preclinical practice nursing-college students.

**Design:** A cross-sectional descriptive survey.

**Setting:** A nonprobability convenience sample of 312 nursing-college students at colleges in Daejeon City, South Korea. The survey questionnaire was distributed to those who agreed to participate.

**Participants:** Freshmen and sophomore nursing students (n = 312).

**Methods:** Participants were 312 students at colleges in Daejeon City. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, which were analyzed using SPSS/WIN.

**Results:** Positive psychological capital and nursing professional values were positively correlated with specialty satisfaction. Significant predictors for specialty satisfaction included hope and optimism (as components of positive psychological capital), the roles of nursing service and originality of nursing (as nursing professional values), and aptitude/interests and job value (as motives for selecting a major).

**Conclusion:** The findings suggested that nursing students' specialty satisfaction was partially linked to positive psychological capital and professional values. Therefore, the promotion of positive factors should be useful in enhancing specialty satisfaction in preclinical-practice nursing-college students.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale

Interest and satisfaction in major is one of the most important factors in college students' academic achievement (Hakim, 2014). Nowadays, however, many students choose their major mainly because of job opportunity. Students who choose an academic specialty without enough consideration on potential talent had negative college experiences (Lim et al., 2009; Noorafshan et al., 2014). College students' specialty satisfaction involves evaluation of their academic majors with respect to professional standards or their chosen career paths. Satisfaction is often high if the chosen academic department matches the idealized career path (Kim and Ha, 2000). However, if specialty satisfaction is low, students could delay or avoid making career decisions (Lim et al., 2009). If this problem is severe, the student could take a leave of absence from university, withdraw completely, or abandon the academic

specialty following graduation. Even if a graduate begins working in the field related to the specialty, he or she could resign in the midst of his or her career. Within the nursing profession, graduates could work as novice nurses because they do not (or are unable to) adapt to the professional environment (Ko et al., 2011). In other words, specialty satisfaction in college students could be an important factor in predicting the continuity of their careers and job satisfaction following graduation.

Luthans et al. (2007a, b) developed a scale to measure positive psychological capital, which represents positive appraisal of the probability of success based on motivation-related effort. Positive psychology assesses complexity involving positive characteristics, such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, within the individual. When these traits are considered in an integrated fashion, they are highly predictive of work-related attitudes and performance outcomes. Furthermore, they can be improved throughout the lifespan (Luthans, 2002; Luthans and Youssef, 2007; Luthans et al., 2007a, b). Therefore,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [createjane@konyang.ac.kr](mailto:createjane@konyang.ac.kr) (C.H. Woo), [jypark@konyang.ac.kr](mailto:jypark@konyang.ac.kr) (J.Y. Park).

research in positive psychology has focused on organizational human resource management and students' academic performance (Luthans et al., 2012; Vanno et al., 2014). However, few studies have been conducted to examine academic performance in Korean students. Positive psychological capital is more than a mental health factor; it can also be considered an individual characteristic that is relevant to specialty satisfaction, which predicts college students' academic outcomes and future career trajectories. In addition to positive psychological capital, nursing-college students require strong professional values to ensure stability and satisfaction in their careers and efficacy in the provision of ethical care. If these values are strong, nurses are able to provide consistent, high-quality nursing (Lin et al., 2010). Once they have emerged, nursing professional values evolve continuously (Kwon and Yeun, 2007). To allow nursing-college students to grow into mature and successful professionals, adequate education should be provided during the early college years, before their career-related value systems are established.

Although specialty satisfaction has been shown to affect nursing professional values (Kwon and Yeun, 2007), the reverse could be true during the early college years, when nurses' value systems are developing. The overall aim of the study was to identify factors predicting specialty satisfaction in preclinical-practice nursing-college students. And the specific objectives were as follows: The first was to examine general characteristics, specialty satisfaction, positive psychological capital, and nursing professional values for preclinical-practice nursing-college students. The second was to determine whether specialty satisfaction differed according to students' general characteristics. The third was to examine the relationships between specialty satisfaction, positive psychological capital, and nursing professional values. The fourth was to identify factors predicting students' specialty satisfaction. The results could provide basic data for the development of interventional strategies targeting nursing-college students to fortify resources integral to career efficacy and satisfaction.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

The study involved the administration of a cross-sectional descriptive survey.

### 2.2. Participants and Data Collection

The study included a nonprobability convenience sample of 312 nursing-college students of colleges located in Daejeon city, South Korea. All participants who have no experience in clinical practice were freshmen and sophomore. In Korea, most nursing colleges are 4 year education system and students have access to clinical practice from 3rd year. Appropriate sample size was calculated using G\*Power 3.1.5. Based on standard conventions (i.e., a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , power of 80%, and a medium effect size of 0.15 for regression analysis), the appropriate sample size was 118, with specialty satisfaction used as the dependent variable and general characteristics, 4 subdomains for positive psychological capital, and 5 subdomains for nursing professional values as independent variables. In total, 320 survey questionnaires were distributed to students who were eligible for participation. Of these, 8 were excluded because of incomplete responses, with 312 included in the final analyses.

Data were collected between September 25 and October 14, 2014. One of the researchers or a trained research assistant met with potential participants to explain the study objectives, the survey, and completion of the written consent form. The survey questionnaire was distributed to those who agreed to participate. Participants took approximately 15 min to complete the questionnaire.

### 2.3. Ethical Considerations

The study protocol was approved by the research ethics committee at the institution with which the authors were affiliated. Data were not used for non-research purposes. Data collection commenced only after participants had provided written informed consent.

### 2.4. Research Instrument

We used a structured questionnaire, which consisted of 67 items that measured specialty satisfaction (18 items), positive psychological capital (24 items), nursing professional values (18 items), and general characteristics (7 items). The questionnaire was estimated by 6 students with similar backgrounds before the survey. Items that were ambiguous or difficult to understand were revised with reference to previous research. Specific item content within each domain in the final questionnaire were as follows.

### 2.5. Specialty Satisfaction

Specialty satisfaction reflected the extent to which students were satisfied with their current academic specialty, considering their chosen career paths or professional standards (Kim and Ha, 2000). Specialty satisfaction was measured using items pertaining to satisfaction with an academic specialty (Kim and Lee, 2014) from a scale used to examine curriculum satisfaction (Kim and Ha, 2000), which was adapted from a program evaluation tool developed by the University of Illinois (Braskamp et al., 1979). The questionnaire included 18 items in 4 subdomains: general satisfaction (6 items), recognition satisfaction (6 items), curriculum satisfaction (3 items), and satisfaction with the professor-student relationship (3 items). Responses were provided using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (highly). Higher scores indicated greater satisfaction. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s for the items were 0.91 in Kim and Lee's (2014) study and 0.93 in the present study.

### 2.6. Positive Psychological Capital

Positive psychological capital refers to improved personal outcomes through innovative thinking and behavior derived from positive psychological strengths within the environment (Luthans and Youssef, 2007). We used the Positive Psychological Capital Scale developed by Luthans et al. (2007a), which was adapted for Korean nurses by Lee and Kim (2012). The instrument contains 24 items in 4 subdomains (6 items in each): self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. Responses are provided using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 6 (highly). Higher scores indicate greater positive psychological capital. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were 0.92 in Lee and Kim (2012) and 0.93 in the present study.

### 2.7. Nursing Professional Values

Nursing professional values refer to systematic opinion regarding the nursing profession and perceptions regarding nursing duties. We used the 18-item Nursing Professional Values Scale developed by Yeun et al. (2005) and revised by Han et al. (2008). The scale consists of 5 subdomains: self-concept of the profession (6 items), social awareness (5 items), professionalism of nursing (3 items), the roles of nursing service (2 items), and originality of nursing (2 items). Responses are provided using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (highly). Higher scores indicate higher nursing professional values. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were 0.92 at the time of development (Yeun et al., 2005) and 0.80 in the present study.

### 2.8. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS/WIN 22.0. Frequencies,

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