



## Interest in medical health care for foreign residents among Japanese nursing students in areas of varying ethnic diversity

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Exposure of nursing students to foreign residents may improve cultural understanding. Nursing students are expected to have differing rates of contact with foreign residents, depending on how many foreign residents live in their municipality where they study in. Those in areas densely populated by foreign residents are more likely to encounter foreigners, and to have favorable views of them than students in areas with sparser foreign-resident populations. As of 2015, 2.23 million foreign residents lived in Japan, equaling 1.76% of the population; however, Japan still has fewer foreign-born residents compared to other countries. Therefore, interest in Medical Health Care for Foreign Residents (MHCFR) may be greater in students in ethnically diverse areas. While nursing students may have different levels of recognition of foreign nationals as potential clients and interest in MHCFR, no research validates this assumption.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to clarify the association between proximity to foreign nationals and interest in MHCFR among Japanese nursing students. The secondary purpose was to describe knowledge and interest regarding MHCFR among students. To elucidate these topics, education and development of human resources in MHCFR should be considered.

**Research design and method:** The study design was cross-sectional. A self-administered questionnaire survey was conducted with 143 nursing students.

**Results:** Most students understood the likelihood of providing nursing care to foreigners; however, knowledge and interest were low, regardless of whether lectures on MHCFR were provided. Knowledge of MHCFR, recognition of providing care to foreign nationals, and level of contact experiences with foreign nationals were significantly associated with students' level of interest in MHCFR.

**Discussion:** Nursing students in ethnically diverse areas tend to show greater interest in MHCFR in Japan. To foster global health perspectives, including MHCFR, in nursing students studying in ethnically diverse areas, contact experiences with foreigners and acceptance of international students by universities might be effective.

### 1. Introduction

At the end of 2015, there were 2.23 million registered and non-registered foreign residents in Japan, accounting for 1.76% of the country's total population. This value that has almost doubled in the last 20 years (Ministry of Justice, 2016). However, Japan still has fewer foreign-born residents compared to other countries, such as Australia (28.5% in 2016), Canada (20.6% in 2011), Sweden (14.4% in 2012), and the United States (12.9% in 2010) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Ministry of Health, 2007; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2016). Among

industrialized countries, Japan remains one of the most highly homogeneous cultures (Chris, 2007). Compared to other countries, societal acceptance is low and systems of medical healthcare services are not well designed for foreign residents in Japan. Nonetheless, medical stay visas were introduced in January 2011 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), and the number of foreign nationals visiting Japan exceeded 24 million at the end of 2016 (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2017).

As Japan becomes increasingly heterogeneous, opportunities to provide nursing care to foreign nationals and foreign residents will increase for nurses. However, nurses working in Japan have struggled

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to adapt to these societal changes, citing the language barrier and cultural differences when providing medical care to foreign residents (Hasegawa et al., 2002). These difficulties are also reported by foreign residents when receiving medical care services (Hashimoto et al., 2011; Igarashi et al., 2013; Tashiro et al., 2014).

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "study group on the improvement of nursing basic education," when working internationally, nurses should hold values arising from a considered, broad, and international perspective, and should foster their ability to respond to globalization and informatization. These principles were incorporated into the teaching guidelines for nurse education in 2009 (Ministry of Health, 2007). As of April 1, 2015, there were 248 nursing universities in Japan (Japan Association of Nursing Programs in Universities, 2015). While all basic nursing education programs include the study of international/global health, the contents of these classes and the credits students receive for them vary between institutions (Nakagoshi et al., 2014).

A positive perception and greater awareness of global health issues are influential factors in determining whether nursing students engage with foreign residents in their professional careers. However, in a study addressing global health perspectives, most nursing students (91.5%) felt that it referred to "international cooperation in developing countries"; no students perceived it to mean "providing medical health and nursing care for foreign residents in Japan" (Yoshimizu et al., 2011). According to one study, in a question that allowed multiple answers asking about the reason for studying abroad, nursing students answered the following: developing better language skills (82.7%), nursing training (38.5%), and international cooperation activities (34.6%) (Nishito et al., 2014). However, a few students (11.5%) indicated that international study was helping them provide Medical Health Care for Foreign Residents (MHCFR) when they returned to Japan (Nishito et al., 2014). It is thought, therefore, that student interest in MHCFR is low in Japan.

Nursing students are expected to have differing rates of contact with foreign residents, depending on the number of foreign residents living in the municipality they study in. Nursing students studying in areas more densely populated by foreign residents are more likely to encounter foreigners. They are thus likely to have a more favorable view of foreigners residing in Japan than students studying in areas with a sparser foreign resident population. Therefore, it is suggested that students studying in more diverse areas will have greater interest in MHCFR. While there are thought to be differences in the levels of recognition of foreign nationals as potential clients and interest in MHCFR between these groups of nursing students, currently no research exists to validate this assumption.

Consequently, the primary purpose of this study was to clarify the association between the potential to encounter foreign nationals and interest in MHCFR among nursing students studying in municipalities with different population densities of foreign residents. In addition, the secondary purpose was to describe current knowledge and interest regarding MHCFR among undergraduate nursing students, and the level of recognition they have about the probability of providing care to foreign nationals in the future. To elucidate these relationships and current situations, it is important to consider education and the development of human resources in MHCFR in Japan.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Procedure

The study design was cross-sectional. In terms of the selection process for the inclusion of participating universities, we used three lists to select three universities. The three lists contained the following: (1) information on the location of universities included in the Japan Association of Nursing Programs in Universities' list of member universities, as of April 1, 2015; (2) census population statistics of the

municipalities where the universities were located (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015); and (3) the number of registered foreign residents in all municipalities in Japan (Ministry of Justice, 2016). We then merged these lists to calculate the ratio of foreign residents to Japanese nationals (the number of foreign residents per population for each municipality).

Twelve universities were excluded because the statistical information regarding the number of foreign residents in their municipalities was missing, due to unknown reasons. After arranging the merged list in ascending order following the ratio of foreign residents to Japanese nationals, we selected three universities: (A) the university in the municipality with the lowest ratio, (B) the university in the municipality with the median ratio, and (C) the university in the municipality with the highest ratio.

After selecting the three nursing universities, we requested that staff from each university distribute study materials to participants, including consent forms and self-administered questionnaires. Participants were informed about the nature of the study both orally and through written documents; then, self-administered questionnaires (including response fields for age and sex) were distributed to 212 fourth-year nursing students by university staff, from October to November 2016.

Returning completed questionnaires was regarded as agreement to participate in this study voluntarily. We excluded participants who were aged more than 30 years as well as foreign residents to remove selection bias. We excluded students older than 30 years of age because they accounted for less than 1% (if rounded off) of those who entered nursing university in 2016 (Ministry of Health, 2016).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Interest in MHCFR

The dependent variable in this study was an interest in MHCFR among Japanese undergraduate nursing students. We used a visual analog scale (VAS: 0–100 mm) to measure the level of interest in MHCFR. The VAS was presented as a single line of 100 mm with scale anchors at either end (0 mm = "no interest" to 100 mm = "extremely interested"). VAS is a common response option in medical health studies, often being used to measure the severity of pain, for example. The authors found no article that evaluated the level of interest by VAS. However, according to a study comparing the results of VAS and Likert items, regarding psychosocial measurements, a single VAS question can replace a single Likert item and also be comparable (Hasson and Arnetz, 2005).

#### 2.2.2. Knowledge of MHCFR and Experience With Foreign Residents

Knowledge of MHCFR in Japan was measured with the item, "Have you heard about MHCFR in Japan?" ("yes" or "no"). Potentially having to provide care to foreign residents in the future was measured with the item, "Do you think that you will provide care to foreign residents in the future?" ("yes" or "no").

The variables of contact experiences with foreign nationals were measured with nine questions previously used in the Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS) (JGSS Research Center, 2003). Contact experiences with foreign nationals were considered as being either the result of active or passive exposure. Passive experience was gauged with the items: Q1. I share/shared a workplace, Q2. I study/studied with them at school, and Q5. I participate/participated with them in other groups or community activities. Active experience was gauged with the items: Q3. I am/was friends with them, Q4. I and/or a member of my family is married to a foreigner who lives/lived in Japan, and Q6. We participate/participated together in group activities for international exchange. In addition, general contact experience was measured by three items: Q7. I am/was on greeting terms with a foreigner; Q8. I do not know any foreigners and have never had any contact with a foreigner; and Q9. Do you often see foreigners in the area you live? Questions 1–8

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