



The effect of a career activity on the students' perception of the nursing profession and their career plan: A single-group experimental study

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SUMMARY

Background: Students' conceptualizations of nursing and their reasons for choosing the profession motivate them and affect their education, work performance and career plans. Nursing educators should support them to plan their careers consciously during their education.

Objectives: The study aimed to investigate the effect of career-planning event for nursing students on their conceptualizations of the nursing profession and their career plans.

Design: The study was as single-group experimental study using a pre-test and post-test.

Settings: The career-planning event was held in the conference hall of the university involved in the current study, and was open to the all students of the nursing school.

Participants: The sample of the study consisted of 105 students who participated in the "Nursing Career Symposium" held on 27 March 2015.

Methods

At the event, the importance of career planning and the opportunities of the nursing profession was presented. The data were collected using a questionnaire consisted of two sections including descriptive characteristics and the opinions of the students regarding their career plans and Perception of Nursing Profession Scale. The students completed the first section of the questionnaire before the career event began and the second section of the questionnaire and scale both before and after the event.

Results: The participants had positive conceptualizations of the profession. Following a career event, the participants' opinions of professional qualities and professional status as measured through the Perception of Nursing Profession Scale showed a significant increase, and that the event had made an important contribution to their career plans.

Conclusions: In the light of these results, it is possible to suggest that such events have an important place during education in that they introduce the nursing profession, and they develop the students' positive thoughts regarding the profession in terms of both course content and teaching methodology.

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Introduction

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) defines nursing as a profession which encompasses both the autonomous and collaborative care of individuals, families, groups and communities who are either sick or well in all settings. Nursing also includes the prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Key nursing roles also include advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research,

training, contribution to the shaping of health policies and participation in the administration of health systems (The International Council of Nurses, 2015). With these important roles and responsibilities, nurses have an irreplaceable role in health services. However, these roles and responsibilities are not well-known by either society or those students who have chosen or are thinking of choosing to study at Departments of Nursing (Andsoy et al., 2012; Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Şirin et al., 2008). It is generally narrowly assumed that nurses have limited responsibilities, such as taking blood, measuring blood pressure, administering medicine (Sis Çelik et al., 2013). Moreover, nursing is generally conceived of as a female profession, and nurses are viewed as doctors' assistants and as non-autonomous individuals who are dependent on others in their use of professional and academic knowledge (Brodie et al., 2004).

Despite the insufficient knowledge of the wide roles and responsibilities of nurses and the misconceptions regarding the nursing profession, some students autonomously choose to enter the nursing profession

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because they like working with people and helping others. Yet others choose to enter the profession for economic reasons, job guarantee, because the nursing school is close to their home, because they could not be placed on another program or because of recommendations of parents, friends and nurses they know (Andsoy et al., 2012; Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Jirwe and Rudman, 2012; Mooney et al., 2008; Şirin et al., 2008). Students' conceptualizations of nursing and their reasons for choosing the profession motivate them throughout their education and working life, and also work performance and career plans. Çitlik Sarıtaş et al. (2014) stated that the intentions to stay in the profession were high in students whose reasons for choosing nursing and whose conceptualizations of the professional image were also high.

The current literature on the nursing career plans of students appears to be limited (Rognstad et al., 2004; (Arslan et al., 2013; Çınar Yücel et al., 2011; Yildirim et al., 2011)). In the studies, it has been shown that students do not have any knowledge about career planning (Arslan et al., 2013), and that they are worried about employment (Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Kızgüt and Ergöl, 2011; Shoqirat and Abu-Qamar, 2015). However, nursing is a profession that holds many employment possibilities. Following technological developments and improvements in the health services, there have been rapid changes and new opportunities for employment in the nursing profession. Graduates of nursing departments can find employment in public/private hospitals, outpatient clinics, medical centers, rehabilitation centers, rest homes, care homes, dialysis units, infertility centers, drug companies or various training centers. According to their interest areas and skills, graduates can take on the various positions of clinical nurse, special branch nurse (e.g., oncology nurse, diabetes-training nurse), administrative nurse, trainer nurse, home care nurse, and occupational health or school nurse. Alternatively, they can continue their postgraduate studies and take on academic posts (Aydın Özkan and Geçkil, 2015). Despite this wide range of opportunities, a majority of students are not aware of the career possibilities of the nursing profession, and only realize that they can develop their careers once they have gained some professional experience. Furthermore, when nurses who have just entered employment after graduation work in areas that they would otherwise not prefer, due to their not being able to plan their careers according to their personal interests and skills, it has been observed that their work satisfaction decreases, and that they suffer burnout after a short time or they leave the profession entirely (Beecroft et al., 2008).

However, career planning is a strategic approach that begins with career choice and needs to be developed during education. Nursing educators should help students to realize the career opportunities related to the nursing profession and support them to plan their careers consciously during their education (Göz and Gürbüz, 2005).

In the light of this knowledge, a "Nursing Career Symposium" was organized at the nursing school involved in the current study with the aim of informing the students about the concepts of career, career planning, and the opportunities of the nursing profession. Hence, the aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of this career-planning event for nursing students on their conceptualizations of the nursing career and their career plans.

Methods

Design, sample and setting

The current study was designed as single-group experimental study using a pre-test and post-test. The population of the study consisted of the 129 student nurses who participated in the "Nursing Career Symposium" held on 27 March 2015. The sample consisted of the 105 nursing students who participated voluntarily in the study and responded to the research instrument completely. The career symposium was held in the conference hall of the university involved in the current study, and was open to the all students of the nursing school. At the event, the academic

staff of the nursing department presented the importance of career planning and the opportunities of the nursing profession. This was followed by talks given by leaders in the clinical, academic, and private enterprise areas of nursing about how they planned their own careers, and presentations by hospital representatives who wanted to work with nursing students.

Instruments

The data were gathered by means of a questionnaire and Perception of Nursing Profession Scale (PNPS).

The questionnaire

It consisted of two sections that were developed by the researchers following a review of the literature (Çınar Yücel et al., 2011; Jirwe and Rudman, 2012; Kızgüt and Ergöl, 2011; Kloster et al., 2007; Yildirim et al., 2011). The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 15 questions regarding socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, year of study, place of residence, education level and income of parents), career choice (career chosen voluntarily, person effective in the choice of career, the order of preference of the nursing department, members of family in the health profession).

The second section included eight questions regarding the participants' opinions about career planning, participating in research on nursing, experiencing employment problems after graduation, postgraduate education, membership to nursing associations after graduation and the field of work.

Perception of Nursing Profession Scale (PNPS)

This is a five-point Likert-type scale of 22 items designed by Eser and her colleagues to measure the conceptualizations of nursing students regarding the nursing profession (Çınar Yücel et al., 2011). It consists of two subgroups: "professional qualities" (17 items) and "professional status" (five items). The former includes such aspects as "intense nursing communication," "requiring sacrifice," "based on knowledge and skills," "satisfying," "tiring," "stressful," "heavy work conditions," "independent practices," "team work," "use of technology," "use of problem solving skills," "requiring higher education," and "based on science." The latter includes "the place of nursing among the other health professions," "prestige" and "the place of the profession in society." The highest possible score for the whole instrument is 110, and the lowest is 22. The highest score for the "professional qualities" dimension (17 items) is 85, and the lowest is 17. For the "professional status" dimension (five items), the highest possible score is 25 while the lowest is five. A high score suggests a positive career conceptualization. The Cronbach α in the original study was .83 (Çınar Yücel et al., 2011), and in the current study, it was calculated as .74, which suggests an acceptable internal reliability. Factor analysis was used to describe variability among items of the scale. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value for this analysis was .81. According to the principal component analysis, two factors emerged. The items in the first factor explained 34.3% of the variance; while the items in the second factor were 11.3%. The items loading to first factor were 1., 3., 4., 5., 9., 10., 11., 13., 14., 15., 16., 17., 18., 19., 20., and 21. Thus, the first factor represented the "professional qualities" dimension, and second factor the "professional status" dimension.

Data collection procedure

After explaining the aim of the study, the researchers distributed the first section of the questionnaire to volunteers before the career event began, and the second section of the questionnaire and PNPS both before and after the event. It took approximately 15–20 min for the participants to complete the instruments.

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