



Pressure and protective factors influencing nursing students' self-esteem: A content analysis study

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SUMMARY

Background: A review of the literature shows that the range of self-esteem in nursing students ranges from normal to low. It is hypothesized that different contextual factors could affect levels of self-esteem.

Objective: The main aim of this study was to explore these factors from the viewpoint of Iranian nursing students using a qualitative approach.

Design: A qualitative content analysis study.

Setting: Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, 2014.

Participants: Fourteen student nurses and two qualified nurses.

Methods: This study has been applied to various depths of interpretation. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Fourteen student nurses and two qualified nurses were interviewed.

Results: Two main themes of the “pressure factors” with subthemes: low self-efficacy, sense of triviality, ineffective instructor–student interaction, low self-confidence and “protective factors” with subthemes: knowledge acquisition, mirror of valuability, professional autonomy, religious beliefs, and choosing the nursing field with interest was extracted in this study. Results showed that these themes have interaction with each other like a seesaw, as pressure factors decrease, the effect of protective factors on the self-esteem are increased.

Conclusion: Nurse educators not only should try to improve the students' skills and knowledge, but should also try to enhance the protective factors and decrease pressure factors by enhancing the nursing students' feeling of being important, using participatory teaching methods, considering students' feedback, and attempting to improve facilities at the clinics are also recommended.

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Introduction

As early as 1890, William James pointed out that people form an idea of their own individual characteristics (for example, their needs, abilities, etc.) and therefore they gain an impression of their own character. This impression is described as the person's self-concept and this self-concept is not limited to a description of the individual, but rather an evaluation which is described as self-esteem (Kanning and Hill, 2012).

In general, low self-esteem has been linked with depression (King et al., 1993), anxiety (Rosenberg, 1986), and is associated with poor mental health, self-efficacy, body image, and sense of leadership (Ni et al., 2010). Nursing students have a great responsibility in the future in terms of the role they play as health care providers (Cha and Sok,

2014). It can be argued that the presence of negative feelings in nursing students will result in far more negative consequences than students of other disciplines (Megahed and Mohammad, 2014). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that nursing students need to have a high level of self-esteem (Megahed and Mohammad, 2014). Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case as many studies identify that low self-esteem among nursing students is prevalent (Barkhordary et al., 2009; Dimitriadou–Panteka and Koukourikos, 2014; Megahed and Mohammad, 2014). There are some studies, however, which suggest a normal or medium range or rising trend of nursing students' self-esteem during their education (Suliman and Halabi, 2007; Furegato et al., 2008; Janati et al., 2012). It is hypothesized that different contextual factors could be affecting the diversity of levels of self-esteem. Based on this hypothesis, we decided to further explore self-esteem among nursing students using the research question: “What are the factors that affect levels of self-esteem among nursing students?”

A review of the literature demonstrated that most studies which focused on the factors affecting students' self-esteem were done using

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correlation methods (Suliman and Halabi, 2007; Barkhordary et al., 2009; Kamali et al., 2009; Ni et al., 2010; Janati et al., 2012; Peyrovi et al., 2012; Azizi et al., 2013; Iacobucci et al., 2013; Tameh et al., 2014).

These studies suggest that the low self-esteem of student nurses significantly correlate with student's attrition rate and depression (Azizi et al., 2013; Peterson-Graziose et al., 2013). In addition, these studies argue that some teaching strategies and interpersonal relationship educational programs could promote self-esteem levels and that levels of self-esteem rose as students neared the end of their course (Lo, 2002; Begley and White, 2003; Yoon et al., 2011; Ni et al., 2012; Lakdizaji et al., 2013). However, no study could be located which specifically focused on exploring the factors affecting self-esteem from the viewpoints of nursing students. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to explore factors affecting self-esteem among Iranian nursing students using a qualitative approach.

Material and Methods

Participants and Setting

In order to explore students' experiences, a qualitative content analysis approach was used. Participants (14 nursing students and 2 newly graduated nurses) were chosen based on purposive sampling and saturation principles. The inclusion criteria included studying as a nursing undergraduate student in faculties affiliated to Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (Tabriz and Maragheh branch) or Islamic Azad University (Tabriz and Bonab branch) in the North West of Iran. The School of Nursing and Midwifery in Tabriz has a nearly 100-year history in educating nursing students and currently provides nursing education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition to the state universities in Iran, nursing education is also provided by the non-state sector which is known as the Islamic Azad University; however, both universities have the similar curricula. Two newly qualified nurses were also interviewed and while their data were not included in the final analysis, it was used to support and confirm the themes which emerged from the student interviews.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. In addition, nursing students were observed in their natural environment. This meant that students' care behaviors were observed at the patient's bedside, in the classroom, and in their interactions with other students and teachers. Field notes were used to record these observations in the natural environment.

Data were collected from September until the end of January 2014. Interviews were conducted in a place of convenience for the participants and each interview lasted about 45 minutes and began with general informal questions. However, the questions became more detailed as the simultaneous processes of data collection and analysis progressed. Interviews began with a general question, for example, "As a nursing student, when you hear the term 'self-esteem' what comes to your mind?" Or "Based on your experiences, what factors influence self-esteem in nursing students?" Some participants, were interviewed twice in order to improve the depth of data collection and to reach saturation in the emergent categories and subcategories. Maximum variation in sampling was considered with the participants' gender, age, entrance year, and the participant's academic progress.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly in order to obtain a full understanding of the data. Whole interviews and field notes were considered as units of analysis. Words, sentences, and paragraphs considered as units of meaning were condensed according

to their content and context. The condensed meaning units were abstracted and labeled with codes. Codes were sorted into subcategories and categories based on comparisons regarding their similarities and differences. Discussion about the process of coding and categorizing the data frequently continued with all of the researchers involved until consensus was achieved.

In this study, we obtained two main categories and nine subcategories. To increase the validity of the data, the codes were compared, and the differences were discussed and re-evaluated in group research until shared codes and categories were created. Throughout the entire analytic process, subcategories and categories were compared with the original texts until consensus among all authors was attained.

Credibility and conformability were established through member checking. The report of the analyses was returned to the participants in order to get assurance that the researchers had portrayed their real world in codes and extracted categories (Rolf, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was achieved from ethical committee of Tabriz University of Medical Science (ethics code: 5/4/7617). The ethical considerations of the study were informed consent, voluntary participation, permission to record interviews and to observe students on wards and in college. Prior to the study, participants were informed verbally about the aim of the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All participants provided written informed consent. To protect the privacy, confidentiality, and the identity of the participants, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts prior to analysis and only one researcher conducted the interviews.

Results

The demographic variables of the participants can be seen in Table 1. According to the aim of this study, we explored the factors influencing nursing students' self-esteem using a qualitative content analysis. Factors were assigned into two themes called "pressure factors" and "protective factors." It seems that interaction between the two themes just being like a seesaw and interaction between those two results in formation and level of self-esteem of nursing students.

In this study, the pressure factors which contained subthemes of low self-efficacy, sense of triviality, ineffective instructor–student interaction, and low self-confidence, and the protective factors with the subthemes knowledge acquisition, mirror of valuability, professional autonomy, religious beliefs, and choosing nursing with interest emerged and were located on the opposite sides of each other like the planes of a seesaw. In that sense, the interaction between the two

Table 1
Demographic variables of nursing students who participated in research.

| Variable | | N | % |
|--------------------|--|----|-------|
| Age | 18–20 | 1 | 6.25 |
| | 22–24 | 5 | 31.25 |
| | 24–30 | 8 | 50 |
| | 30–35 | 1 | 6.25 |
| | | | |
| Sex | Male | 9 | 56.25 |
| | Female | 7 | 43.75 |
| Previous work | As a student work | 4 | 25 |
| | Human resources plan | 2 | 12.5 |
| | Only being as a student | 10 | 62.5 |
| Semester | 1–2 | 1 | 6.25 |
| | 5–6 | 6 | 37.5 |
| | 7–8 | 7 | 43.75 |
| | Graduated bachelor degree | 2 | 12.5 |
| Times of interview | 1 | 13 | 81.25 |
| | 2 | 3 | 18.75 |
| University | Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (Tabriz and Maragheh branch) | 13 | 81.25 |
| | Islamic Azad university (Tabriz and Bonab branch) | 3 | 18.75 |

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