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Males' Motives for Choosing a Nursing Career: A Quantitative Study

Dr. Keren Grinberg

Head of Nursing Department, Faculty of Social and Community Sciences, Ruppin Academic Center, Emek- Hefer, Israel

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INTRODUCTION

At present, in Israel and all over the world, there is still a great shortage of academic nurses. Nursing is considered a 'feminine' profession; therefore, not many men choose it. Males constitute between 5 and 10 percent of the nursing work force in England, the USA and Canada. For instance, in 2000, only 5.4% of nurses in the USA were men. Despite their small numbers, there has been an increase of 226% in male nurses in the last two decades (Mullan & Harrison, 2008). Understanding males' motivation for choosing nursing as a profession could add, potentially, up to one half of the population, which does not typically consider this direction, and might help to recruit many more nurses to the profession (Zamanzadeh et al., 2013).

Historically, nursing has been considered a female occupation. However, recently, men are deemed to be suitable to treat patients and to be trained in all nursing activities. The literature indicates some reasons why men do not tend to choose nursing: the profession is not considered 'masculine' and its economic status is low. In general, men tend less to enter a feminine profession, in comparison to women who do tend to choose male occupations (Abudari et al., 2016; Mullan & Harrison, 2008). Therefore, the challenge faced by men in nursing is the stereotypical and cultural challenge of joining a profession that has been traditionally feminine. Consequently, men interested in nursing must deal with a number of problems, including thoughts, feelings and beliefs not only among the public, but also among coworkers and other colleagues in the healthcare professions in general. These challenges must be addressed in order to encourage youths, primarily boys in high school, to study nursing (Abudari et al., 2016).

Factors of nursing career choice:

Career choice and professional adaptation are influenced by multiple factors. As in other professions, the decision whether to choose nursing as a career is affected by a variety of social, cultural, physical, psychological, personal/inherent factors, as well as many external factors that affect one's career choice (Auerbach et al., 2007). Research has indicated many factors that influence decisions about choosing a profession: parents, teachers, and friends; the profession's image; interests and fears; early exposure; ethnic origin; status and salary; work hours and work load; information and social support; and gender (Alexander, 2010).

A study conducted in Israel (Haroun et al., 2011) found that the main cause for choosing nursing was direct contact with the patient, such as the treatment aspect of the nurse's work, guiding patients, and emotional involvement. The second factor was the features of the nurse's work, such as varied interests and responsibilities. The third factor was employment conditions, such as the possibility of always finding work, and salary. A study that compared Jewish and Arab nursing students in Israel found differences in the reasons for choosing nursing (Halperin & Mashiach-Eizenberg, 2014). Among Jews, 46% mentioned 'helping others' as the main factor, compared to 34% among Arab students. Also, 32% of the Jewish students noted 'personal interests', compared to half that number (16%) among the Arab students. The Arab students emphasized 'promotion opportunities', which was hardly mentioned by Jewish students.

There has been an increase not only in numbers of men who choose nursing, but in the quality of their achievements at work and promotions (Stanley et al., 2016). Despite the increase, there is a worldwide shortage of men in nursing and the numbers are still low. For example, in Canada and the USA, only 5% of nursing workers are men, 10% in England, and 4% in Ireland. A relatively large number of men in the nursing profession (23%) can be found in Iran (Zamanzadeh et al., 2013).

In Israel, the number of men in the nursing profession is also high, especially men who belong to the Arab sector. Unlike other professions, in which Israeli Arabs are underrepresented, the situation is different in nursing. In the health services, 13% are Arabs, and of all the male and female nurses in Israel – almost 20% are Arabs. In nursing, there are many more Arab men than their share in the population: about 45% of the men in the nursing profession in Israel are Arabs, as opposed to only 8% Jewish men (Keshet et al., 2015).

One question that arises is whether there are differences in the various motives to choose to study nursing between men and women. Another necessary question is: What are the factors that predict positive gender perceptions of men in the nursing profession? Thus, the aim of this study was to investigate what led men in Israel to choose nursing as their future profession. We examined men's motives to make this career choice, alongside the causes of stereotypes concerning male nurses.

Consequently, our research hypotheses were:

H1: A difference will be found between men's and women's motives to choose the nursing profession.

H2: A link will be found between sociodemographic characteristics and perceptions of the nursing profession.

H3: Internal and external motives, gender perceptions, and attitudes towards the nursing profession will predict the choice of nursing as a profession.

H4: A link will be found between prior acquaintance with male and female nurses and positive perceptions of the nursing profession, and positive perceptions of men in the nursing profession; the earlier people are acquainted with male or female nurses, the more positive their perceptions of nursing and of male nurses are.

METHODS

180 questionnaires were distributed to nursing students in all the nursing programs all over Israel. The questionnaire, built specifically for this study, included the following measures:

- Sociodemographic data: gender, nationality, education, previous acquaintance with a nurse;
- Motives for choosing the nursing profession: The importance of 12 factors (such as good salary, stable work, work satisfaction, etc.) was rated on a Likert scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important);
- Perceptions of the nursing profession: The respondents answered whether they agreed with 13 statements about nursing in general on a Likert scale of 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (agree completely);
- Gender perceptions of men in nursing: The respondents replied whether they agreed with 5 statements about the suitability of the nursing profession for men on a Likert scale of 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (agree completely).

The questionnaire's validity and internal consistency were tested; Cronbach's alpha was between 0.84 and 0.88.

Data analysis:

The data were analyzed by means SPSS (v. 21) software. A t-test for independent samples was performed to compare men and women on the factors for choosing the nursing profession. Pearson correlation tests (variables: age and education) was implemented to examine the link between sociodemographic features and the perceptions of the nursing profession, and the link between previous acquaintance with male and female nurses and positive perceptions of the nursing profession in general, and gender perceptions of men in nursing in particular. Linear regression was used to examine whether internal and external motives, gender perceptions, and attitudes towards the nursing profession would predict the choice of the nursing profession.

Ethical considerations:

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Ruppin Academic Center (ethics code 2318-23 L/ND). 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.

RESULTS

The questionnaire was completed by 166 nursing students (8 were not returned and 5 were not filled out properly), of whom 116 were women (69.5%) and 50 were men (29.9%). The mean age of the respondents was 23.7 (SD=4.55). 24 participants did not state their age.

To examine the first hypothesis (H1), that differences would be found between men's and women's motivations to choose the nursing profession, we performed a t-test for independent samples to compare men's and women's reasons for choosing nursing. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1. Comparison between men's and women's motives for choosing the nursing profession (on a scale of 1-5)

	Gender	Mean	SD	T
[1] Good salary	Female	3.7414	1.06421	-2.216
	Male	4.1429	1.06066	
[2] Job stability	Female	4.1478	0.88102	-0.118
	Male	4.1667	1.03827	
[3] Work without pressure	Female	2.8534	1.20329	-1.41
	Male	3.1429	1.20761	
[4] Promotion opportunities	Female	4.319	0.87077	0.706
	Male	4.2083	1.0097	
[5] Respect	Female	4.2783	1.00479	1.157
	Male	4.0816	0.97546	
[6] Flexible work hours	Female	3.5172	1.1683	0.342
	Male	3.449	1.17369	
[7] Autonomy	Female	3.7632	1.04163	**2.19
	Male	3.3404	1.27308	
[8] Doing something important and meaningful	Female	4.4483	0.87819	**4.52
	Male	3.6531	1.33153	
[9] Enjoyment from work	Female	4.3103	0.9456	**3.437
	Male	3.7083	1.18426	
[10] Leadership and power	Female	3.9655	1.0949	2.584
	Male	3.4783	1.04858	
[11] Challenges	Female	3.9035	1.03024	2.64
	Male	3.4348	0.98098	
[12] Opportunities to travel	Female	3.0172	1.131865	0.075
	Male	3	1.42887	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Differences were found between men and women on only three factors: the desire for autonomy at work, doing

something meaningful, and achieving enjoyment from work. Women's averages were higher for each of these three

factors; i.e. women attributed more importance to autonomy, meaningful work, and enjoyment. The hypothesis (H1) was partially confirmed – although differences were found between men and women on choosing the nursing profession because of internal rewards, no differences were found for external rewards; for instance, no differences were found for salary or job stability.

The second hypothesis (H2) postulated that a link would be found between sociodemographic characteristics and perceptions of the nursing profession. To measure the linear correlation between the two variables, age and education, we performed a Pearson correlation analysis. We found no correlation between perception of the nursing profession and age or education. In addition, a t-test for independent samples was performed to examine the difference between the perceptions of single people and married people. We found that single people choose the nursing profession

because of promotion opportunities and the challenges it provides more than married people.

The third hypothesis (H3) was that internal and external motives, gender perceptions, and attitudes towards the nursing profession would predict men's choice of nursing as a profession. This hypothesis was partially corroborated. We found that the main motives among men for choosing nursing as a career were: promotion opportunities, job stability and salary – all external motives. Women, on the other hand, were motivated by the desire to do something meaningful, promotion opportunities, and enjoyment of work – a combination of external and internal motives. To examine the degree to which the various motives and gender perceptions predicted perceptions of nursing, we conducted a linear regression with the various factors as independent variables (see Table 2).

Table 2. Linear regression to predict perceptions of the nursing profession

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.467	0.19		12.997	0
[1] Good salary	0.05	0.035	0.115	1.412	0.16
[2] Job stability	-0.003	0.05	-0.005	-0.054	0.957
[3] Work without pressure	-0.089	0.031	-0.239	-2.851	0.005
[4] Promotion opportunities	0.18	0.049	0.35	3.738	0
[5] Respect	0.088	0.042	0.198	2.088	0.039
[6] Flexible hours	0.003	0.032	0.008	0.089	0.929
[7] Autonomy	-0.027	0.038	-0.068	-0.725	0.47
[8] Doing something meaningful	0.093	0.042	0.219	2.208	0.029
[9] Enjoyment from work	0.019	0.045	0.042	0.413	0.68
[10] Leadership & power	-0.018	0.038	-0.044	-0.477	0.634
[11] Challenges	0.006	0.04	0.014	0.15	0.881
[12] Opportunities to travel	0.017	0.027	0.051	0.621	0.536
Gender attitudes	-0.13	0.048	-0.179	-2.713	0.008

As can be seen, the factors that predicted positive perceptions about nursing as a career were: work without pressure, promotion opportunities, respect, the desire to do something meaningful, and gender attitudes.

We further hypothesized (H4) that a link would be found between prior acquaintance with male and female nurses and positive perceptions of the nursing profession, and positive perceptions of men in the nursing profession. To examine the hypothesis, we performed a Pearson correlation analysis, which found a significant relationship between prior acquaintance with a male or female nurse and perceptions of nursing, so that if there was prior acquaintance – perceptions of nursing were more positive ($r = 2.34$; $p=0.03$). However, we did not find a significant relationship between prior acquaintance with a male or female nurse and perceptions of men in nursing ($p>0.05$). Thus, H4 was partially supported.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the differences between men and women in the choice of nursing as a career. In addition, the factors that affected stereotypical gender perceptions of men in nursing were examined. The research hypotheses were partially corroborated.

In general, it seems that men are more motivated by external rewards, whereas women place more emphasis on internal

rewards. Men noted promotion opportunities, stability at work, good salary and respect; enjoyment was rated only in the fifth place. Women, on the other hand, mentioned as their main motivations – doing something meaningful, promotion opportunities, enjoyment of work, and respect. The differences between men's and women's motivations to choose a nursing career are apparent: men mainly see external motives, and women see both internal and external motives.

Differences between men and women were found for three motives: autonomy, the desire to do something meaningful, and enjoyment of work. Women chose these reasons more than men did. These findings are congruent with previous studies in which women claimed that they chose nursing primarily because it was interesting (e.g., Mullan & Harrison, 2008); and others in which men stated external reasons such as salary, job stability and promotion opportunities (Stanley et al., 2016). It seems that the reason for these differences is that men see themselves as the main providers, so they are more concerned with their salary and job stability. Another study has found that the differences between men and women are not about work conditions, but about factors directly related to the patients. Namely, the aspect of direct patient care as a factor influencing the choice of nursing as a career was lower among men than among women. For other aspects such as employment

conditions no significant differences were found between men and women (Haroun et al., 2011).

The second hypothesis, that a link would be found between the demographic variables age and education and perceptions of nursing, was not substantiated. In comparison, other studies have found that variables such as age and education usually affect career choices (Twomey & Meadus, 2008; Zuabi et al., 2015). It is possible that the fact that our sample was relatively uniform and included many single men and especially Muslims affected the results.

The third hypothesis, which postulated that internal and external motives and gender perceptions would predict perceptions of nursing, was partially corroborated. Choice due to factors such as work without pressure, promotion opportunities, respect and doing something meaningful, and gender perspectives, predicted positive perceptions of nursing. It seems that men's main motives for choosing nursing were external. Motives such as salary, stability and promotion opportunities are significant factors in men's decision to choose a nursing career. These findings are supported by Alexander's (2010) study among Chinese, Malaysian and Indian men, who also attributed importance to similar external motives. Unlike men, women are also influenced by internal factors such as enjoyment and the desire to do something important and meaningful for others. Halperin and Maschiach- Eizenberg (2014) found that 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. The female students perceived dimensions of role perception — (teamwork and professional knowledge) as more important than the male students did.

We also found that prior acquaintance with a male or female nurse promoted more positive perceptions of the profession. This finding is congruent with previous studies, which have shown that acquaintance with nurses adds a lot of knowledge about the profession and about nurses' roles, so that perceptions change positively (Alexander, 2010; Price et al., 2013). Conversely, no link was found between prior acquaintance with a male or female nurse and gender perceptions of male nurses. It could be that due to the shortage of men in the profession, the opinions are varied. Also, it is possible that for the same reason – very few have actually met a male nurse.

CONCLUSIONS

This research displays information that supports strategies for increasing the recruitment of men into nursing, and describes the respondent's perceptions of how to positively promote the concept of men in nursing. Additionally, the study provides a better understanding and profile of the population of men who are nurses in Israel. There are differences between men and women in the motives for choosing a nursing career. In order to encourage men to choose nursing, it is important to emphasize external factors such as salary, job stability, and promotion opportunities at the workplace. It is also imperative to raise the image of male nursing in the media. With the changes taking place in

healthcare systems, nursing education programs are attracting fewer students, and active recruitment of young men may be a means of addressing nursing shortages.

LIMITATIONS

This study has a number of limitations. First, the sample included mostly young Muslims, so that comparison between different religions in the motives for choosing nursing was not possible. Second, the sample was not balanced between single and married respondents, so that no conclusions could be made about the link between marital status and motives for choosing nursing. Third, and very importantly, there is no way of knowing if the motives for choosing nursing changed after having completed their studies, and if there had been different motives before. It could be that motives and perceptions changed during the course of studies. This study does answer this question. Fourth, a degree of selection bias may exist, as the study used a convenience sample that had the potential for respondents who had strong views about men in nursing to participate in the study.

Further research is necessary to determine the reliability of our findings such as studies that examine a more varied population regarding religion, age and marital status. Also, future research could compare men and women nurses regarding the work-family clash, and examine whether having a family disrupts women's choice, or whether having a family changes men's choice of a nursing career.

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