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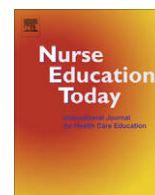
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Israelis' perceived motivation for choosing a nursing career

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ABSTRACT

Recruitment problems are one of the main reasons for the shortage of nurses in Israel and elsewhere. The purpose of this study is to clarify factors affecting choice of ideal careers and nursing careers among the general population. A questionnaire constructed by McCabe et al. (2005) was administered to 309 men and women aged 18–50. Data were analyzed by quantitative methods.

Research findings indicate that 8% of respondents expressed interest in studying nursing. Significant differences were reported between the choice of ideal and nursing careers. Nursing careers were perceived as lacking interest, challenge, creativity, responsibility, varied wages, high status, comfortable conditions, versus ideal careers. A moderately positive correlation was identified between choice of a nursing career and intrinsic factors affecting this choice. People motivated by desire to help others rather than personal interest or challenges are predisposed to choose a nursing career. Finally, a negative correlation was identified between psychometric scores and choice of a nursing career. The study also identified a positive correlation between both the image of nursing as a profession and the availability of nursing jobs – and the decision to choose a nursing career. This study may facilitate the development of nurse recruitment programs.

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Introduction

Rising life expectancy and the growing number of patients suffering from chronic and acute illnesses form an increased need for nursing staff; however a problematic issue is human resources. Recent years have seen many reports on the difficulties of recruiting nurses and filling positions at hospitals and in the community in the US, Europe, and Israel. Information provided by the US Ministry of Health indicates that in 2000 there was a shortfall of approximately 110,700 registered nurses (Sochalski, 2002) and according to Buerhaus et al. (2008) the shortage of registered nurses in the US is expected to reach 500,000 by 2025. Acute shortages are evident in England and Australia as well (Finlayson et al., 2008; McCabe et al., 2005) and the situation in Israel is not much different. A report prepared by the Israeli Ministry of Health in 2007 indicates that Israel has 5.8 nurses for every one thousand people, one of the lowest rates in western countries. The lack of interventions or additional training options will cause this ratio to decrease to 4.9 per one thousand by 2020 (Yasur Beit-Or, 2008). The Committee Korene in the Ministry of Health Israel, which discussed the state of nursing personnel, reported that it will be necessary to train 1350 nurses in 2008 and even more in consequent years, and according to the Head of Nursing at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Shosh Riba, “in order to maintain this rate an increase of 800

nurses per year will be required, in addition to those nurses produced by existing schools” (Yasur Beit-Or, 2008).

Literature review

Choosing a profession is a significant stage in life and expresses one's personal inclinations. The Theory of Self Determination developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) claims that people who choose life professions are basically motivated to seek positive experiences and avoid negative experiences. Motivation, or behavior with a certain orientation, results according to this approach from the history of reinforcements related to this behavior, including self-reinforcements or self-punishments. This theory presents two major motivations: *Intrinsic motivation* is a motivational behavior aimed at achieving a feeling of competence and control. It includes inquisitiveness and seeking challenges and opportunities to excel. *Extrinsic motivation* is a motivational behavior aimed at achieving concrete reward or avoiding punishment. When the activity is the means of achieving another goal and not a goal or aim per se, motivation to act is extrinsic.

In the current study, the variables representing the two types of motivation are as follows: *Intrinsic motivation*: helping others, interest, self fulfillment and esteem, challenge and excitement, creativity and responsibility, helping society and professional status. *Extrinsic motivation*: job security, flexible hours, high salary, promotion and responsibility, comfortable working conditions, short training, working and studying concurrently.

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According to information provided by the British Ministry of Health, problems of insufficient nursing staff often stem from difficulties involved in recruiting nurses (Finlayson et al., 2008). Over the past 40 years, international research in Europe, USA and Canada, has provided insights regarding those who choose to study nursing and work in the profession. The results of these studies have been homogeneous, focusing on candidates whose only wish was to study nursing. These studies reported no information on the diverse motives of different samples, and the motives discovered were that students wish to have contact with people, to help others, and to feel that they are doing something useful. These motives are defined as intrinsic factors and are internally derived and they include personal achievement, sense of accomplishment, and prestige (Shader et al., 2001). Kersten et al. (1991, p. 32) identified students' emotional needs as the underlying reason for their career choice. Intrinsic attraction was identified as self-esteem, fulfillment, challenge, excitement, and emotions. Evardsen (1995) also identified interesting work, contact with people, and helping others, as crucial factors affecting the choice of a nursing career. McCabe et al. (2005) compared a study performed by Nowak et al. (2003), among Australian nursing students in 2003 with a study performed by Nowak et al. (2002), among registered nurses in 2002. The studies examined their student's degree of consent to 28 statements on the motivational reasons for choosing a nursing career. This comparison revealed that nurses' and students' responses were compatible, and the three statements ranked as the most influential in choosing a nursing career were: (1) helping others, (2) interesting/challenging work, (3) working with people. These statements are identified as intrinsic attraction factors.

In contrast to this study, other research studies indicate that extrinsic factors have a greater influence on career choice than intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are those derived from elements in the practice environment and they include pay and benefits, working conditions, and resources (Shader et al., 2001). A German study held by Veit (1996) reported that the wish to work at a job with social utility, as well as factors such as a salary, good working conditions, and the opportunity for self development, were important for students. Another study revealed that students emphasized economic advantages and personal suitability as reasons for choosing a nursing career (Williams et al., 1997).

Maurer (1994) reported that students cited the opportunity to earn a living and develop a career as external motivation factors and altruism and self-realization as intrinsic motivation factors crucial for their career choice. The report concluded that choice of a nursing career is influenced more by the intrinsic factors related to their professional career.

Williams et al. (1997) identified other motivating factors, for example scientific interest. Moreover, a few students even considered familial influence and professional experience to be important motivational factors in choosing a career. Another factor identified in several studies as affecting the choice of a nursing career is job security (Kersten et al., 1991; McCabe et al., 2005).

Currently, only few major studies have been held in Israel to determine motivation for choosing a nursing career. The first, performed by Shoval (1961), reported that most female students who chose nursing had a low socioeconomic status and regarded their job as a strategic way of attaining higher financial status. Some female students chose nursing since they had not been accepted to medical school. A second study was held by Ben-Sira (1975) and it presented the different orientations towards choosing nursing among National Service volunteers (a common alternative to military service in Israel among modern Orthodox Jewish girls). The main factors influencing their decision were: perceiving the occupation as interesting. A third study was performed by Gonen (1990). This study aimed at analyzing the different factors affecting the inclination of 12th graders to choose a career in nursing. A sig-

nificant correlation was identified between the image of nursing and the decision to choose a career in nursing.

Another study held in Israel among male and female nurses identified a statistically significant difference between men and women in their reasons for choosing a career in nursing. The significance of intrinsic motivational factors such as helping others and interesting work was identified as greater among women than men. In addition, women more than men were reported to have chosen a career in nursing because they had always wanted to be nurses and since they perceived their personality traits as suited to this profession. Nonetheless, no significant differences were identified between men and women in the importance of extrinsic factors such as professional status and job security. The study also reported that support of a parent or spouse, as well as early exposure to nursing, whether in military service or by a role model in the family, are important determinants of the decision to study nursing (Romem and Anson, 2005).

Liberman (1992) examined factors influencing the decision of immigrants from the former Soviet Union to study nursing in Israel, and a positive correlation was identified between the economic image of nursing and the propensity to choose a career in nursing. This finding is compatible with another study which reported that nursing attracts males who do not belong to mainstream Israeli society. They include ethnic minorities or new immigrants, who choose the profession for reasons of economic security and the need to survive, more than mainstream males (Romem and Anson, 2005).

Studies indicate that people choose a career when it is compatible with factors they perceive as significant for an ideal career. Myer et al. (1993, p. 548) add that compatibility leads to greater commitment to the chosen career, while incompatibility will eventually result in burnout and exit from the profession.

Better understanding of the perception of an ideal career and of nursing may facilitate targeted marketing and provide useful guidelines for changes in the workplace to help attract new recruits to the profession.

The ambiguity indicated by the findings reviewed above called for a study aimed at clarifying determinants of decisions made by the general public in choosing an ideal career and particularly a career in nursing. Compatibility between perception of the ideal occupation and perception of the nursing profession will increase the likelihood of choosing a career in nursing also warranted examination. This study also examines optimal ways of recruiting nurses in Israel.

Methods

A descriptive survey was conducted in October–December 2008 with 309 self-identified adults who were attending social-health events in the community. It was reviewed by the ethics committee of the Pat Matthews Academic School of Nursing. The researchers presented the topic of the research and its purpose to each subject in both written and oral form. They received the subjects' consent to participate in the study and assured subjects that their anonymity would be maintained. Completion of each questionnaire took approximately 15 min.

Sample

A convenience sample of 309 individuals was chosen out of 320 self-identified adults. Criteria for participation were that participants be at least 18 years of age, able to read and speak Hebrew. Males and females aged 18–50 who were residents of Israel completed the survey, reflecting a 96% response rate. Adults were solicited by the authors in 4 demographic regions of Israel. Permission

was obtained from participants before administration of the survey. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by means of the removal of all identifying information.

Instruments

The instrument used to measure factors influencing respondents' choice of a career in nursing was developed by McCabe et al. (2005) and it had never before been used nor assessed for reliability. The instrument measures 45 parallel items on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 "not important" to 5 "very important". In addition, several modifications to the original instrument were made. The final survey contained 75 questions, including the following:

1. Fifteen demographic questions (e.g., psychometric scores, interest in nursing career, nurse relative).
2. Eighteen questions assessing the factors influencing the perception of an ideal career by measuring agreement on a scale of 1 (i.e., *do not agree at all*) to 5 (i.e., *agree very much*; e.g., "high status", "responsibility", "the ability to help people").
3. Eight questions assessing the intrinsic factors influencing the perception of the nursing career by measuring agreement on a scale of 1 (i.e., *do not agree at all*) to 5 (i.e., *agree very much*; e.g., "high status", "challenging job", "the ability to help people").
4. Eight questions assessing the extrinsic factors influencing the perception of the nursing career by measuring agreement on a scale of 1 (i.e., *do not agree at all*) to 5 (i.e., *agree very much*; e.g., "responsibility and autonomy", "opportunity for promotion", "appropriate payment").
5. Three questions assessing the job security perception of the nursing career by measuring agreement on a scale of 1 (i.e., *do not agree at all*) to 5 (i.e., *agree very much*).
6. Seven questions assessing the affect of support and the influence of others on choosing the nursing career by measuring agreement on a scale of 1 (i.e., *do not agree at all*) to 5 (i.e., *agree very much*; "teachers recommendation", "the ability to work while learning").
7. Five questions on the publicity used for recruiting nurses were presented, and respondents were asked to rank on a 5-point Likert scale what impact these contents would have on their intention to study nursing. The publicity conveyed nursing as a profession that is (1) similar to medicine, (2) a life-saving profession, (3) allows one to share inspiring moments in people's lives, (4) a gratifying profession, (5) a profession with advanced technology.
8. Five questions discussed the proposed methods of publicity. The options were: press, television, university bulletins, lectures given by nurses, and radio.
9. Five questions discussed changes in the field of nursing aimed at raising motivation to study nursing. The proposed changes are reducing the required period of study, raising salaries, varying employment options, offering multiple opportunities for clinical expertise, and offering opportunities for research positions.

Finally, the instrument measures 75 parallel items and has been assessed for reliability, $\alpha > 0.78$, and content validity by a panel of experts. The entire revised instrument was piloted using 20 adults aged 18–50 to assess the readability and time necessary to complete the survey. No changes were made following the pilot, as the questions, scaling and glossary definitions were considered to be clear and unambiguous.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 14. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics followed by the appropriate inferen-

tial statistics. Specifically, assumptions for parametric tests were met and the data were then analyzed by *t*-test and Spearman correlation.

Results

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents were female (75.4%), average age 28.5, (209) were Jewish and secular (67.6%), having studied 12 years on average, and most were self-identified as having a low socioeconomic status. Slightly more than 226 (73%) of respondents indicated that they would be interested in academic studies. Respondents' self-reported psychometric score average was 560, with a standard deviation of 5.8. Sixty-six-percent (204) had a close relative or friend who was a nurse, and 233 (75.4%) indicated that they or a family member had been hospitalized within the past year. Eighty-four-percent (260) claimed that they had witnessed nurses at work during the past year. Regarding their future likelihood of choosing a career in nursing, 179 (57.9%) indicated that they would definitely not study nursing and only 25 (8%) indicated that their likelihood of studying nursing was high to very high.

When examining the total sample by mean for each item, the top five qualities identified as influential in making a career choice were (see Table 2): (1) interesting work, (2) potential for high salary, (3) possibility of promotion, (4) suitable salary, (5) comfortable working conditions. Most of the significant elements influencing respondents' choice of a career were identified as involving extrinsic factors. No compatibility was reported between the five leading reasons for choosing an ideal career and the five leading reasons for choosing a career in nursing. The factors by order of significance are: (1) potential of helping others, (2) potential of contributing to society, (3) working with people, (4) interesting work, (5) challenging work.

Regarding factors influencing career choice, the lowest means (thus measuring the least desirable characteristics) were reported for possibility of taking a limited leave of absence, and for inspiring work. These participants rated the lowest reasons for choosing nursing as high status and opportunities for local travel.

Comparison between choice of an ideal career and choice of a career in nursing identified no significant differences in the following factors: (1) working with people, (2) possibility of taking a limited leave of absence, (3) potential of contributing to society, (4) inspiring work. In other words, these traits are perceived as characterizing both ideal careers and nursing careers.

Table 1
Sociodemographics of the research population (N = 309).

	N	%
<i>Age</i>		
30–50	89	28.8
18–30	220	71.2
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	233	75.4
Male	76	24.6
<i>Religion</i>		
Jewish	170	55.0
Christian	20	6.5
Muslim	119	38.5
<i>Degree of religiosity</i>		
Secular	209	67.6
Religious	100	32.4
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>		
Under average	211	68.3
Average	50	16.2
Above average	48	15.5

Table 2
Comparing ideal career to career in nursing.

	n	Ideal		Nursing		SE	t	P-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
<i>Intrinsic factors</i>								
Helping people	318	4.09	0.85	4.33	0.77	0.05	-4.84	0.00
Interesting work	320	4.56	0.62	4.06	0.90	0.05	9.48	0.00
Working with people	318	4.08	0.90	4.16	0.88	0.06	-1.31	0.19
Challenging work	313	4.27	0.82	4.05	0.91	0.59	3.74	0.00
Possibility of taking limited leave of absence	318	3.59	1.14	3.50	1.07	0.07	1.24	0.21
Potential to contribute to society	319	4.08	0.87	4.16	0.85	0.05	-1.54	0.12
Travel opportunities	316	3.93	2.37	3.24	1.11	0.13	5.01	0.00
Inspiring work	318	3.75	0.95	3.81	0.98	0.06	-0.98	0.33
<i>Extrinsic factors</i>								
Public appreciation of the profession	313	3.82	1.01	3.61	1.03	0.07	2.84	0.01
Flexible work hours	318	4.03	0.90	3.63	1.45	0.08	4.72	0.00
Potential for high salary	319	4.53	0.69	3.91	1.01	0.06	9.92	0.00
Promotion possibilities	317	4.53	0.72	4.05	0.90	0.05	8.66	0.00
Responsibility	314	4.24	0.84	3.90	0.94	0.06	5.52	0.00
Comfortable working conditions	317	4.43	0.71	3.82	0.98	0.06	10.27	0.00
High status	317	4.09	0.97	3.22	1.16	0.07	11.66	0.00
Suitable salary	313	4.43	0.75	3.75	1.03	0.65	10.50	0.00
Possibilities of creativity	316	3.95	0.96	3.43	1.06	0.66	7.79	0.00

Comparison between factors for which significant differences were identified between perceived ideal career and perception of nursing as a career indicates that helping people is perceived as a factor more characteristic of nursing as a career than of the perceived ideal career. In contrast, the following factors: interesting work, challenging work, opportunities for travel, public appreciation of the profession, flexible work hours, potential for high salary, possibilities of promotion, responsibility, comfortable working conditions, high status, suitable salary, and possibilities for creativity, are perceived as less characteristic of nursing than of the ideal career. In other words, the nursing profession is perceived as offering no interest, challenge, creativity, responsibility, high wages, opportunities for travel, high status, comfortable working conditions, in comparison to the ideal career. Examination of correlations between factors influencing the choice of an ideal career and of nursing in particular and the intention to study nursing in the future indicates the following correlations, presented in Table 3.

A moderately positive correlation was identified between choice of nursing as a career and intrinsic factors affecting the choice of nursing as a career. In other words, people are more inclined to choose a career in nursing if their career choice is motivated by a desire to help society, interest, and personal challenge. In addition, a negative correlation was identified between psychometric scores and choice of nursing as a profession; that is, the higher the psychometric score the lower the inclination to choose a nursing career. The study also identified a positive correlation between both the image of nursing and job opportunities in nursing – and the decision to choose a nursing career. That is, the more positive the image of nursing and perceived confidence about finding a job in nursing – the higher the chance of choosing a nursing career.

When asked which advertising message would cause them to choose a nursing career, the most significant variable identified, as indicated in Table 4, was sharing inspiring moments in people's lives. Analysis of research findings indicates that as perceived by

Table 4
Means, standard deviations of the slogans, contents and publicity type.

	Mean	SD
<i>Slogans</i>		
Similarity to medicine	3.59	1.10
Life-saving career	3.89	0.91
Sharing inspiring moments in people's lives	4.10	0.94
Gratifying career	3.85	0.92
Profession utilizing advanced technology	3.69	1.04
<i>Contents</i>		
Reducing the required years of study	3.1	1.2
Raising wages	3.4	1.3
Varied job possibilities	4.5	1.2
Many specialization opportunities	4.6	1.1
Opportunities for academic research work	3.4	1.2
<i>Publicity type</i>		
Printed press	3.5	0.8
Television	4.1	0.8
University newsletters	3.6	0.9
Public lectures given by nurses	4.0	1.0

respondents the most ideal advertising techniques for spreading information on the nursing profession are through television ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.8$) and nurses' lectures to the public ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.0$). The research also indicates that advertising that presents the fact that nursing offers many fields of specialization ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 1.1$) and varied employment opportunities ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 1.2$) would increase public response and motivation for choosing this profession.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that the nursing profession remains unattractive to the Israeli public. Only a small proportion of the population is interested in studying this profession. One of the reasons, as indicated by this study, is the fact that the characteristics

Table 3
Spearman correlation between intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, psychometric score, confidence of finding a job, image of nursing and intention to choose nursing as a profession.

	Intrinsic factors	Extrinsic factors	Psychometric score	Confidence of finding a job	Image of nursing
Choice of nursing	0.35*	0.12	-0.32*	0.34*	0.35*

* $p < 0.05$.

of nursing are incompatible with characteristics of the ideal career as perceived by the Israeli public. An “ideal career” was seen as more financially rewarding, more respected, and more powerful than nursing. In other words, extrinsic motivational factors influence choice of the ideal career, while factors affecting choice of nursing as a career are mostly intrinsic. Similarly, other surveys of nursing students report that students are motivated to pursue a nursing career by a desire to help others and serve society (Barriball and While, 1996; Boughn and Lentini, 1999; Kersten et al., 1991). The decision to choose nursing as a career was “interest and enjoyment”, although those choosing nursing were more likely to have chosen on the basis of a desire to “help people”. The notion of “helping” was frequently mentioned in relation to nursing, and was viewed as having a positive and dynamic role.

Indeed, the characteristics identified as representing the nursing career that compatible with the ideal career are working with people, contributing to society, and the underlying excitement. However, a dichotomy was identified between subjects' perception of nursing as a noble profession and an equally strong opinion that nursing is unglamorous, unrewarding, and uninteresting. This is supported by research held among high-school students reported that the nursing profession has a poor image (May et al., 1991; Tomey et al., 1996; Stevens and Walker, 1993).

The perception of nursing as a low-image profession, identified in the research, explains the finding that people with high psychometric scores were not inclined to choose a career in nursing. In addition, the perception of nursing as an unprofitable profession adds to the disinclination of people with high psychometric scores to choose this career. In contrast, people with low psychometric capabilities and difficulties finding a secure job, such as the Arab population and immigrants from the former Soviet Union, are inclined to choose this profession due to its congruence with these characteristics (Lieberman, 1992; Romem and Anson, 2005). The observation that nursing attracts groups that do not belong to the Israeli mainstream is not a novel one. Four decades ago, new immigrants and women with a low socioeconomic status were reported to perceive nursing as an opportunity for acquiring an academic profession and becoming integrated in the Israeli workforce and society (Romem and Anson, 2005).

Aside from high status, the ideal career is perceived by respondents as a career with more responsibility, more possibilities of promotion, and more opportunities for creativity, compared to a nursing career. The findings of this study were identified as compatible with other research (Boughn, 2001; Sochalski, 2002) indicating that the role of the nurse as ‘carer’ was assumed to involve dispensing sympathy without the autonomy to intervene medically. Young people on the whole were ambitious for themselves and wanted to enter careers that offered very good opportunities to reach a high status role.

Conclusion and recommendations

Nursing is seen as having limited career opportunities as well as restricted autonomy and positions of seniority indicating that the public has a major misperception of nurses' work.

Ongoing recruitment strategies are necessary to attract applicants to nursing programs. The future for registered nurses depends on nursing leaders' treatment of the issues at hand. Most of the applicants for nursing jobs have historically been women. There are currently more job opportunities for women in Israel, and therefore the prediction is that less women will express interest in the nursing profession. This study shows that a target population comprised of people who want to help others and serve society for selfless reasons should be exposed to the recommended processes.

Analysis of the research findings indicates that there is an urgent need for nursing schools to advertise the nursing profession among the broad public. Publicity must include information about the nature of the profession, as well as its underlying interests, challenges, and shared destiny. It is also extremely important to develop nurses' opportunities for clinical expertise and expand their authority and responsibility. These developments will raise the status of the profession, which will consequently become more attractive to those inclined to choose caregiving careers. Advertising of the nursing profession should be performed in the most widely accessible media, such as in the form of television adverts which can emphasize greatly its advantages.

Moreover, this study identified nurses' lectures to the public as very significant. Exposure of a defined target population to academic-expert nurses who hold various roles in the health system and in academia, and direct contact with these professionals, may raise the level of expectations and perception of nursing as a profession. There is the possibility of having incomparable effect on improving the image of the profession, and even raise motivation and encourage people to choose nursing as their life career.

It is also very important to discover which factors affect decisions to choose other caregiving professions, in order to encourage those who are undecided to eventually choose nursing. Thus, on the academic level it is necessary to conduct research examining why people who are inclined to choose caregiving professions eventually tend to choose a non-nursing career.

In addition, prospective studies may benefit from examination of the global state of affairs on this issue in order to enable implementation in Israel of processes introduced in other countries.

Limitation

The research instruments are translated from English into Hebrew. Some deviation may occur in both validity and reliability due to the accuracy of the Hebrew and English language translation. The research was measured by convenience sample that can make it difficult to generalize the results and does not represent the wide population.

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