

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# IMAGE OF NURSE AND NURSING: INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICE AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG NURSING STUDENTS IN A SELECTED INSTITUTE OF GOA.

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## ABSTRACT

Nursing as a profession and nurses in general, have suffered for long from public stereotyping and being closely linked with femininity and powerlessness. Though the influence of this image is unknown, the growing shortage of nurses, places a significant emphasis on their career choice, development, recruitment and retention. The objective was to assess the image of a nurse and nursing as perceived by the nursing students and identify the image related factors influencing career choice and development in nursing through the four year Bachelor degree in nursing programme. Focus group approach was used in the study. Using proportionate stratified random sampling technique four focus groups consisting of seven female and one male student in each group were selected from among the whole population of B.Sc. Nursing students who were in their fourth month of the course in the respective academic years. Data were collected using open ended questions. The participants verbatim were recorded, transcribed, coded and the most relevant themes were identified. Results show that before joining the profession students perceive a relatively negative image of nursing which change significantly towards a positive image through the four year programme. Factors influencing their career choice and development are studying at a government institute, low fee structure, better job opportunities, pay structure, job security and failure of getting into Medicine. The influencing people identified are parents, relatives, school teachers and friends in the profession. Findings emphasize the need for planning strategies to improve the work-environment and work behaviours of nursing personnel which is imperative for a positive portrayal of the profession.

**Keywords:** Image, nursing, nurse, nursing students, career choice, development.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, there have been considerable changes in the health care delivery system particularly with regards to characteristics of healthcare workplace as well as workforce<sup>1</sup>. Focusing specifically on nurses, a number of negative societal perceptions have been identified. These may be related to gender stereotyping,<sup>2</sup> low academic standards,<sup>3</sup> subordination to doctors,<sup>4</sup> poor pay and conditions,<sup>5</sup> limited career opportunities,<sup>6</sup> etc. These increasing challenges and complexities contribute to the uncertainties and stipulate for a need to address the profound nursing short-

age which is threatening the health care quality. The success of any strategy that focuses on the improvement of recruitment and retention in nursing profession will depend partly upon the understanding the factors and influences from nurses' career choice through job satisfaction.<sup>8</sup> One strategy to overcome this issue could be to motivate the youth in taking up the profession of nursing.<sup>1,9,10</sup> Therefore, this study focuses on assessing the image of nurse and nursing as perceived by the nursing students and identify the image related factors influencing career choice and development in nursing through the four year Bachelor's degree in nursing programme.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Permission from the authorities and consent of the participants was obtained after explaining the purpose of the study and assuring the confidentiality of their responses. Using Focus group approach a sample of 4 groups was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The population was the B.Sc. Nursing students in their fourth month of the respective academic years at the Nursing Institute in Goa. From among the four strata, the students of each year were further stratified as male and female and a proportionate sample of seven female and one male student from each of these strata were randomly selected in four focus groups. Focus group interview is considered because the researcher assumes that this method of data collection will facilitate group interaction/dynamics and yield richer/detailed information on the hidden perceptions, and collective/conflicting views of the homogenous group of respondents on the professional issue. Eight open ended questions were used to gather the data from the participants which were framed based on review of literature and researcher personal experiences. The researcher facilitated the interaction among the group members ensuring that every member had equal chance to respond. The responses of the participants were recorded and transcribed. The overall interview with each focus group took about 60 minutes. The transcripts are coded and the most salient themes emerging across the responses identified.

## **RESULTS**

The respondents age ranged from 17 to 20 years [8(25% per group)]. Major portion 28(87.5%) of the population was female. Most 24(75%) of them were from the rural areas. Majority 28(87.5%) were from low socio-economic background family. Some had parents 2(6.2%), relatives 4(12.5%) or friends 4(12.5%) in the profession **Table 1**.

The following themes are identified from the responses:

1. Image of nurse and nursing
2. Factors influencing the career choice and development among nursing students
3. Reasons for the perceived public imagey the respondents
4. Strategies to improve the public image of nurses

## **Image of nurse and nursing**

Some of the respondents, 12(37.5%) said that before joining nursing their idea was that nursing is a course which does not require scientific knowledge and skill, 8(25%) stated that nursing is only about caring out doctors orders, 6(18.75%) were ignorant about nursing and had never thought as to what nursing would be, 4(12.5%) mentioned that nursing is a dirty job, only doing bed making, housekeeping and cleaning work. On the contrary, 7(21.8%) had perceived nursing as a noble profession of caring and helping people and achieving blessing for the good deeds, 3(9.3%) stated that nurses can interact with a number of people. The respondents reported a significant change in their perception about nursing through the four year programme. Majority, 22(68.7%) expressed gain in a lot of scientific knowledge and skill, almost in par with the doctors which helps them in their professional and personal life. More than half 18(56.2%) agreed that they feel very proud, confident and satisfied in the profession. Some 6(18.7%) highlighted the scope for better professional and higher educational opportunities such as pursuing MBA and PhD, also 3(9.3%) shared the experience that patients often approach nurses for help and clarifications as compared to doctors. Regarding public image of nursing, 8(25%) stated that the public perceive nursing as a dirty job and nurses as being rude to patients. Another 8(25%) said that according to public, nursing is only giving medicines, injections, cleaning, bed making, or housekeeping and subordinate to medical profession. Contradicting the above statements 7(21.8%) expressed that public respect, are thankful to nurses and feel much free to approach nurses than doctors **Table 2**.

## **Factors influencing their career choice and development**

Majority 28(87.5%) mentioned that they would not join nursing if they had to, in a private college where they would have to pay more fees. Most 26(81.25%) stated that they had joined nursing as they would be studying at a government institute where they have to pay less fees to acquire a professional degree. Many 20(62.5%) expressed that degree qualified nurses have better job

opportunities, security in a variety of job settings and (62.5%) the pay structure much higher than regular degree graduates. Some respondents 14(43.7%) joined nursing since they did not get admission for Medicine and considered Nursing next to Medicine. Their personal experiences about nurses motivated some 14(43.7%) to join nursing. A few of the respondents 6(18.7%) expressed great desire to care and help the needy people and get blessed for the noble service. The various influencing people identified were parents 2(6.2%), parents and relatives who were in the profession 4(12.5%), school teachers 4(12.5%), and friends studying in the same profession 4(12.5%). The respondents 6(18.7%) reported that significant others have questioned when they first sought admission for nursing as to whether they could not do anything better, why they chose nursing and what they would be learning for 4 long years. They also commented using statements like, "Nursing is not for you" 4(12.5%). At this juncture negative emotions were exhibited by the respondents through weeping. A few girl respondents 3(9.3%) expressed that girls are freely not allowed to move out of the state for the purpose of pursuing further studies **Table 3**.

#### **Reasons for the perceived public image by the respondents**

According to the respondents 8(25%) the reason for the perceived public image is the unpleasant behaviour of nurses towards the patients. They identified heavy work load 20(62.5%), lack of proper job description 14(43.7%), lack of authority in the profession 14(43.7%) and lack of knowledge and skill update 6(18.7%) as some of the reasons for the nurses' unpleasant behavior. Respondents 8(25%) mentioned that the public does not consider nursing as a standard profession probably because nurses are not actively involved beyond their work area. **Table 3**

#### **Strategies identified by the students to improve the image of nurses**

Many respondents agreed on the need for in-service education programmes 18 (56.2%) for nurses, development and use of certain protocols and standards 14 (43.7%) related to patient care to improve nurses' authority and accountability, maintaining nurse-patient ratio in hospitals

20(62.5%), having clear job description and hierarchy of positions 18(56.2%) and nurses to actively involve themselves in social activities 14(43.7%). **Table 3**

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Image of nurse and nursing**

Before joining nursing, the students perceived nursing as a course which does not require scientific knowledge and skill, but is only about caring out doctors orders. Some mentioned that nursing is a dirty job, only doing bed making, housekeeping and cleaning work. Some were ignorant and had never given a thought as to what nursing would be. These findings are consistent with Santos Jesus, et al.<sup>11</sup> who inferred that there had been prejudicial attitudes from career choice in nursing, through education to professional practice. Campbell-Heider et al.<sup>6</sup> reported that many students viewed nursing as having persistent negative stereotypes and a dangerous field offering few career advancement opportunities. Buerhaus et al.<sup>12</sup> confirmed that many students believe that nursing is physically challenging, having low respect and recognition, has a good career for men, for those having academic ability and seeking job security.

On the contrary, it is also found that some of the respondents perceived nursing as a noble profession of caring, helping people and achieving blessing for the good deeds and one in which they could interact with a number of people. These findings are similar to those of Patidar et al.<sup>10</sup> who studied that majority outgoing nursing students were self motivated and perceived nursing as an opportunity to serve humanity and get societal recognition. The respondents reported a significant change in their perception about nursing through the four year programme. Majority expressed gain in a lot of scientific knowledge and skill, almost in par with the doctors which helps them in their professional and personal life. More than half mentioned that they feel very proud, confident and satisfied in the profession. Some highlighted on the scope for better professional and higher educational opportunities such as pursuing MBA and PhD, some shared the experience that patients often approach nurses for help and clarifications as compared to doctors. These findings are

congruent with tawfiq and jarrah<sup>13</sup> who revealed that associate nursing students have a significant positive image of profession. Safadi et al.<sup>14</sup> Found that student perceptions changed from mere caring to theoretical-medical-technological view of the profession over the four years educational programme. Brodie et al.<sup>3</sup> Revealed that many nursing students earlier unaware of the high academic standards, acknowledged the tremendous knowledge, skills set and responsibilities as they acquired them.

Regarding public image of nursing, some of the students stated that the public perceive nurses as being rude to patients, and nursing as a dirty job, only giving medicines, injections, cleaning, bed making, or housekeeping and subordinate to medical profession. The findings support fletcher<sup>2</sup> and brodie et al.<sup>3</sup> who found that public do not possess a positive image of the nursing profession. Contradicting the above statements some expressed that public do respect the nurses, are thankful to nurses and in the hospital, and approach nurses more than doctors which is compatible with meiring and van wyk<sup>15</sup> who described that the south african public perceived nurses as extremely hardworking, understanding and caring. Kalisch, et al.<sup>16,17</sup> Found that internet and motion picture industry presented a professional image of nurse.

### **Factors influencing their career choice and development**

The findings show that majority of the students mentioned that they would not join nursing if they had to, in a private college and most of them agreed that they had joined nursing as they would be studying at a government institute where they would have to pay lesser fees to acquire a professional degree. Many expressed that degree qualified nurses have better job opportunities, security in a variety of job settings and pay structures much higher than regular degree graduates. The findings also clarify that some of the respondents have joined nursing since they did not get admission for medicine and considered nursing next to medicine. Their personal experiences about nurses motivated them to join nursing. A few of the respondents expressed great desire to care and help the needy and get blessed for the noble service. These findings are consistent with tawfiq and

jarrah<sup>13</sup> who indicated that the majority of the students join the nursing profession because of financial benefits and job security. Patidar et al.<sup>10</sup> identified that majority of the students joined the profession as they perceived that they would get an opportunity to serve humanity and societal recognition

The various influencing people identified by the respondents were parents, parents and relatives in the profession, school teachers, and friends studying in the profession. They reported that significant others have questioned when they first sought admission as to whether they could not do anything else, why they chose nursing and what they would be learning for <sup>4</sup> long years. They also have commented using statements like, "nursing is not for you". A few girl respondents expressed that in goa girls are freely not allowed to move out of the state for the purpose of pursuing further studies.

Similar findings can be derived from the studies conducted by buerhaus<sup>12</sup>, spouse<sup>17</sup>, grossman et al.<sup>18</sup> Who found that parents, friends, family members, and advice from practice nurses was the most influential factor in decision making to join the profession.

### **Reasons for the perceived public image by the respondents**

The reasons for the perceived public image by the respondents were found to be the unpleasant behaviour of nurses towards the patients, which may be due to the heavy work load, lack of proper job description, lack of knowledge and skill update and lack of authority in the profession. Respondents also mentioned that the public does not consider nursing as a standard profession probably because nurses are not actively involved beyond their work area. These findings support foong et al.<sup>5</sup> And grossman et al.<sup>18</sup> Who identified the reasons for the undesirability towards nursing profession as the poor pay structures, lack of awareness about the expanded roles and career advancement opportunities and low professional status.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

This study is limited to the data from only one setting and one method of data collection. Hence, it is recommended that further research may be considered in exploring perceptions about the image of nurse and nursing among higher secondary students, practice nurses, other team members or

the general public which might provide directions towards formulating policies and planning strategies towards improving the work environment, work benefits and work discipline of nurses. This will

greatly boost efforts towards provision of decent, deserving and safe care for all.

**Acknowledgment** None

**Conflict of Interest** None

**Tables**

**Table 1: Distribution of sample according to their personal characteristics**

n=32

Variable	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age in years	17	8	25
	18	8	25
	19	8	25
	20	8	25
Gender	Male	4	12.5
	Female	28	87.5
Place of residence	Urban	8	25
	Rural	24	75
Annual income of the family	Below 50000	4	12.5
	50001-100000	10	31.2
	100001-150000	9	28.1
	150001-200000	5	15.6
	More than 200000	4	12.5
Known Nursing personnel	Parent	2	6.2
	Relative	4	12.5
	Friend	4	12.5

**Table 2: Distribution of sample according to their responses on the theme: Image of nurse and nursing**

n=32

Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>1. Image of nurse and nursing</b>		
<b>A. Before joining the profession</b>		
1. Nursing is a course which does not require lot of scientific knowledge and skill	12	37.5
2. Nursing is only about caring out doctors orders	8	25

3. Nursing is a dirty job, only doing bed making, housekeeping and cleaning work	4	12.5
4. Nursing as a noble profession of caring and helping people and achieving blessing for the good deeds	7	21.8
5. Nurses can interact with a number of people	3	9.3
<b>B. Change in perception during the course of study</b>		
6. Gain in a lot of scientific knowledge and skill, almost in par with the doctors which helps them in their professional and personal life	22	68.7
7. Feeling very proud, confident and satisfied in the profession	18	56.2
8. Scope for better professional and higher educational opportunities such as pursuing MBA and PhD	6	18.7
9. Experience that patients often approach nurses for help and clarifications as compared to doctors.	3	9.3
<b>C. Public image of nursing</b>		
10. Nursing as a dirty job	8	25
11. Nurses as being rude to patients	8	25
12. Nursing is only giving medicines, injections, cleaning, bed making, or housekeeping and is subordinate to the medical profession.	8	25
13. Public do respect the nurses, are thankful to nurses and in the hospital people feel much free to approach nurses than doctors	2	1.8
<p><b>Table 3: Distribution of sample according to their responses on the theme: Factors influencing their career choice and development, Reasons for the perceived public image by the respondents and Strategies identified by the students to improve the image of nurses.</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>n =32</b></p>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>D. Factors influencing their career choice and development</b>		
14. Would not join nursing in a private college where they would have to pay more fees	28	87.5
15. Studying at a government institute where they have to pay lesser fees to acquire a professional degree	26	81.25
16. Degree qualified nurses have better job opportunities	20	62.5

and security in a variety of job settings.		
17. Pay structure of a degree qualified nurse is much higher than regular degree graduate.	20	62.5
18. Joined nursing since did not get admission for Medicine	14	43.7
19. Motivated by personal experiences about nurses	14	43.7
20. Great desire to care for and help the needy people	6	18.7
21. Positively Influential people:- Parents	2	6.2
- Parents & Relatives in the profession	4	12.5
- School teachers	4	12.5
- Friends in the same profession	4	12.5
22.Experienced negative comments from significant people like:		
-“Could not do anything better”	6	18.7
-“Nursing is not for you”	4	12.5
23.Girls are not freely allowed to pursue studies out of Goa	3	9.3
<b>E. Reasons for the perceived public image by the respondents</b>		
24.Unpleasant behaviour of nurses towards patients	8	25
Identified reasons for nurses’ unpleasant behavior.		
- heavy work load	20	62.5
- lack of proper job description	14	43.7
- lack of authority in the profession	14	43.7
- lack of knowledge and skill update	6	18.7
25.Nurses are not actively involved beyond their work area.	8	25
<b>F. Strategies identified by the students to improve the image of nurses.</b>		
26. In-service education programmes	18	56.2
27. Development and use of certain protocols and standards	14	43.7
28. Maintaining nurse- patient ratio	20	62.5
29. Clear job description and hierarchy of positions	18	56.2
30. Nurses to actively involve themselves in social activities.	14	43.7

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