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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**NURSES PERCEPTION ABOUT THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF A NURSE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY.**

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*Abstract:*

    Nurses are the frontiers at all levels of care in the health care industry. However, nurses do not receive due recognition and are viewed as feminine, caring professionals with limited career opportunities. This study was conducted to explore nurses' perception about the public image of a nurse. Fifty nurses conveniently selected from six different departmental cohort groups of a tertiary hospital were administered a tool to gather baseline information and an open ended question on nurse's perception about the public image. Data obtained were organized, coded, sorted and themes such as technical skills, professional qualification requirements, intellectual-cognitive skills, emotional skills, interpersonal skills, professional status, professional attitude, extra-professional roles of a nurse, nurse visa-vis medical professionals, angel of mercy and prospectus for nurses identified. There is a wide variation in the perception across different dimensions. The study recommends identification of the nurses' perception of this public image and the influence on professional behaviours among nurses working in varied settings.

*Key Words:-* Perception; public image; registered nurses; tertiary care hospital.

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## Introduction:-

    The image of nursing is poor and entry to this profession is considered as a give up of personal ambition and an unadventurous acceptance of the constraints of sex role specialisation. Such stereotypes dissuade the entry of prospective nurses into the profession and limit the aspirations and opportunities of registered nurses. Even as parents, nurses would not encourage their children to join this profession, but motivate their children towards seeking careers in other professions. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the nurses' perception about the public image of a nurse.

## Review of Literature:-

### Public Image of nurse:-

    Popovic, & Pahor[26] identified that nurses are described as educated, competent health professionals while Natan, & Becker[23] indicated that nursing career is perceived as lacking interest, creativity, challenge, responsibility, high status, varied wages and comfortable conditions. Santos Jesus[7] learnt that there had been prejudicial attitudes about nurses while making career choice, through the course and within the professional practice. Kelly, et. al.[19] reported that the most-viewed nurse description on YouTube presented narratives of both favourable and deprecating nursing stereotypes. Oosthuizen[25] revealed that images of nurses as caring, compassionate and knowledgeable professionals were present but were overshadowed by negative reporting. Meiring, & Van Wyk[22] added that the desire to let their children become nurses was deficient among nurses. Hoeve[14] discussed that the public image of nursing is varied and incongruous and is partly because of the nurses invisibility in the public.

### Self Image of nurse:-

    Brodie. et, al[4] revealed the self image of a nurse as an over worked, underpaid profession, lacking respect and having low morale which was congruent with public. Siebens, et al[28] identified that most were proud to be nurses and considered themselves as competent health professionals. Fletcher[10] found that, nurses do not have a very positive self-image nor do they think highly of the profession which was consistent with public image.

Wlodarczyk & Tobolska[33] compared the perception of doctors, patients and nurses about the professional image of nurses and found that nurses' demonstrated a more positive professional image as compared to the negative attitude of doctors and patients.

### Factors influencing nurses' image:-

Fealy[9] disclosed the origins of the good nurse and identified the societal, cultural and political system influence on the image of a nurse in Ireland. Wells. et.al.[34] described that psychiatric nursing is conceptualized as a job involving menial-physical tasks, deficient in autonomy and institutional in nature. Halter[12] & Crawford.et. al.[6] supported that mental health nurses are least discovered as dynamic, skilled, logical, and respected professionals and themselves felt exploited, inferior and doubted their career. Emeghebo[8] revealed that students enter the profession with a positive image but develop negative perceptions as they progress through their career due to the influence of social work environment. Tawfiq & Jarrah[30] revealed that the students joined nursing because of work availability and financial reasons, preferred teaching as well as bedside nursing.  Buerhaus et. al.[5] & Varaei et. al.[32] supported that medical personnel, practice nurses, friends, family members' and peers' opinion greatly influenced the profession's image.

### Influence of nurse-image:-

Newman. et.al.[24] & Janiszewski[15] determined that poor image of nursing is one of the factors contributing to the nursing shortage in the USA. Takase. et. al.[29] found that the discrepancy between the public and nurses self image negatively influences their job satisfaction performance and intention to quit the job. Jahromi.et. al.[16] found that  nursing image in the society has a great influence on the attitude of nursing students, which further influences the development of their professional self concept.

## Purpose of the study:-

Previous researchers across nations have identified varied and incongruous findings related to public image of a nurse. However, how nurses perceive the public image of a nurses still need exploration especially in developing countries like India, as the perception could influence their work behaviors. Hence, this study was undertaken to explore the nurses' perception of public image of a nurses.

## Materials and Methods:-

This exploratory study was conducted using a qualitative approach with conveniently selected 50 participants. Participants working in six different departmental cohort areas of the tertiary hospital were included with a view to obtain unbiased responses from them. Having informed the purpose of the study, the participants' written consent was obtained and confidentiality of their responses was assured. A tool was administered to gather their baseline information and an open ended question on their perception about the public image of a nurse. It was clarified that in this study public meant doctors, patients, their relatives, other hospital staff and the general public. Forty three questionnaires were retuned back out of which 37 were found to be complete and therefore used for analysis. The written responses were obtained, data were organized, coded, sorted and themes were identified.

## Results and Discussion:-

### Section. I: Distribution of sample according to their demographic Variables:-

Data show that most of the respondents' age ranged from 21- 30 years (40.5%) and 31-40 (24.3%) indicating the enthusiasm of the junior nurses. A major portion (86.5%) of the population was female. Most (56.8%) were Christians. Almost equal number was married (51.4%) and unmarried (48.6%) with almost a uniform distribution across different areas of work and qualification. Majority (67.6%) had regular employment, and many (37.8%) had 1-5 years of clinical experience. Most (37.8%) had no other known person in the profession. Porter & Porter[27] reported that nurse's image differed among beginners and experts, caregivers and non-caregivers, the graduate and post-graduate qualified, full-time and part-time nurses. Toren, et. al.[31] identified significant differences in nurses' perception of their professional image between nurses with post-basic education and those with generic education. Larsen, et. al.[21] & Varaei, et. al[32] identified that the presence of a employed nurse professional  in the family impacts the formation of nurses' image. Wells, et. al.[34] revealed that students conceptualize psychiatric nurses as less professional as compared to general nurses. Emeghebo[8] reported that hospitals nurses have negative perceptions of the profession, but those working in maternal–child health have positive perceptions.

**Section. II. Distribution of sample according to the identified themes:-**
**Nurses' Perception about public image with respect to their technical skills, professional qualification requirements, intellectual-cognitive skills and emotional skills.**

Data indicate a mix of positive and negative perception among nurses about their public image. In the area of technical skills, a total of 99 responses were elicited from 37 participants that indicate the significance of these skills in the nursing profession. However, only a few (18.2%) responses were positive and most (81.8%) were negative. Few nurses perceived that public thinks of them as resourceful (2.7%), efficient (5.4%), good patient care providers (21.6%) and skilled (10.8%) professionals. Many (67.5%) perceived that they were viewed as performing dirty (21.6%), ordinary patient cleaning services (24.3%) and other menial tasks (21.6%), not being able to function independently (16.2%), and as doctor's assistants (35.1%) who administer only injections and medicines (40.5%), depending on the directions of the physician(24.3%). It was further identified that nurses (10.8%) perceived that public did not differentiate the qualified, registered nurses from the unqualified, non-registered nurses. Regarding the professional qualifications requirements there were 22 responses from 37 participants, out of which 22.7% were positive and 77.3% were negative. Few (22.7%) perceived that public acknowledges the requirements, whereas 66.5% perceived the reverse and ironically 10.8% perceived that public is even uncertain about the duration of the qualification. In the area of intellectual-cognitive skills, out of 23 responses 43.4% were positive, whereas, 56.6% were negative. Nurses perceived that public viewed them as good at problem solving (8.1%) knowledgeable (13.5%) with high scholastic ability (2.7%) and some perceived (35.5%) that public do not acknowledge the requirement of these attributes for nurses. Regarding the emotional skills, all the 23 responses of nurses indicate positive perception, such as being empathetic (10.8%), able to understand (27%) and share patient's problems and emotions (16.2%) and even provide emotional support (8.1%).

These findings are supported by Aber & Hawkins.[1] who identified nurses being portrayed as physician's handmaidens and sex objects. Kelly, et. al[19] reported that most-viewed videos on You-tube depicted the nurse as a sexual plaything, skilled knower and doer, and witless incompetent individual. Achilles[2] identified that the school students were unaware about the nurses' multifunctional capability and perceived them as physician's assistants. However, Kalisch, et. al[18] reported the image of nurses on Internet as intelligent, committed, trustworthy, respected, educated, competent, accountable and as possessing specialized knowledge and skills. Fealy[9] disclosed the good nurse origins of the public image of nurses. Siebens, et al;[28] found that most were proud to be nurses and considered themselves as competent health professionals. Oosthuizen[25] and Meiring &, Van Wyk[22] described the public's perceptions of nurses as extremely hardworking, understanding, caring, compassionate and knowledgeable professionals which is overshadowed by negative images.

**Perception about public image of nurse with respect to their Interpersonal relations, Time management, Professional status and Professional attitude.**

Data show that 36 responses were elicited from 37 participants with respect to their interpersonal skills which indicate the importance of these skills in nursing practice. Most of the responses (77.8%) clarified that the nurses' perception of their public image is positive. Nurses perceived that public appreciate their ability to collaborate and function in the team (21.6%). Nurses also perceived that patients and their relatives consider them as a friend (24.3%) on whom one can depend and disclose any of their personal information or problems freely (29.7%). Few nurses (2.7%) perceived that the public view nurses as mere messengers between patients and physicians, leaders of house-keeping staff(2.7%), being less involved in discussing or sharing of knowledge (2.7%) and as always shouting at patients and their relatives (13.5%).

It is found that time management skills were not much considered (14 responses) by many of the participants. A few responses (21.4%) indicate nurses' perception about the public image as positive. These findings throw light on the ability of nurses to prioritize (5.4%) and perform a lot of tasks within limited duration of time (2.7%). However, most of the responses (78.6%) are suggestive of negative nurse perception of their public image. It is perceived that public view nurses as wasting their time in performing a lot of non nursing jobs (10.8%) and in discussing personal matters (10.8%). Junior nurses are viewed as attending to their mobiles more than to the patients' needs (8.1%).

Professional status was yet another area of significant concern to registered nurses. There were 38 responses of which only 7.9% were positive and 92.1% were negative. Nurses perceived that public rarely consider them as qualified (2.7%) and respected professionals (5.4%) but, rather, as being looked down upon and not considered as independent professionals (21.6%). Nurses also perceived that public looked down upon nurses

(18.9%), as highly paid (24.3%), low class IV workers (29.7%). In the area of professional attitude, out of a total of 40 responses, there were 52.5% positive and 47.5% negative responses which show that nurses perceived a blend of both positive and negative public image of nurses. Some nurses perceived that they are viewed as approachable (10.8%), caring (8.1%), helpful (16.2%) and responsible (21.6%), contrary to some who perceived the view of being rude (21.6%), unpleasant (10.8%)and unapproachable (18.9%).

The study findings are discussed in the light of previous research findings. Yildirima, et. al.[35]disclosed that doctors and those employed in secondary institutions were also more likely to express more positive attitudes toward nurses-physician collaboration than the permanent physicians and those employed in tertiary hospitals. Hadley & Roques[11] identified that in the government set up nurses spent very less time in providing actual patient care as compared doing paper work and other non-productive work in comparison to private sector nurses. Buerhaus, et. al.[5] found that students believed that nursing is physically challenging, having low respect and recognition, has a good career for men, for those having academic ability and wanting job security. Brodie et.al.[4] identified a nurse as an overworked, underpaid professional, lacking respect and having low morale. Wells, et. al.[34] , Crawford, et. al.[6] & Halter[12] identified that mental health nurses were least preferred and least likely to be described as skilled, logical, dynamic, and respected as professionals.

**Perception about public image of nurse with respect to the extra-professional roles, nurses visa-vis medical professionals, nobility of the profession and prospects.**

Data indicate some more areas of concern for nurses regarding their public image such as; extra-professional roles of a nurse, nurses vis-a vis medical professionals, angels of mercy/noble profession and prospects for nurses. In the area of extra-professional roles of a nurse, nurses perceived that public expects nurses to be efficient in performing non nursing tasks (21.6%) such as repairs of electrical/sanitary equipments, water supply, etc., acknowledge the multitasking role of nurses (13.5%) and the performance of clerical jobs (13.5%). Nineteen responses were obtained with respect to the nurses-physician comparison, out of which majority (89.5%) were positive and only two (10.5%) were negative. Nurses perceived that public equates nurses with the medical professionals (35.1%), view nurses as vital (10.8%), with a exception of 5.4%, who perceived negatively.

The angelic concepts are more often found in the Christian faith, where nursing was traditionally viewed as a viable career for women. In this study again the perception of a similar public image is identified through the nurses' responses (32.4%). Many nurses (64.8%) perceived that the public image is positive in relation to the prospects for nurses.

The study findings are supported by the findings of Bridges[3] who concentrated on the media images of a nurse and revealed that nurses have evolved through stages and that; one of the stages is the angel of mercy or the ministering angel. Larsen, et. al[21] Tawfiq & Jarrah[30] revealed that majority of students join nursing because of work availability, job security, and good income potential and financial reasons. Kingma[20] & Johnson , et. al[17] reported that nurses perceived professional image as one among the professional reasons for migration to developed countries which is not supported by the findings of Hendel & Kagan [13].

## Conclusion And Implications:-

Public image of nurses and nurses' professional image of themselves seems to have not been influenced by the ever changing trends and the educational and technological developments. Public image of nurses appears to be diverse and incongruous among individual registered nurses across different dimensions. Prior research suggests that the responses vary among nurses based on their demographics and the cultural background. Researchers have also established that perceived public image affects professional self concept of nurses, which in turn influences nurses' performance at their workplace. The findings are limited to the government setting. A few questions which remain still unanswered are: What is the nurses perception about the public image of a nurse in the private sector where there is a mix of trained and untrained nurses, who are often underpaid and are constantly exposed to the unprofessional public expectations?.This study recommends the use of more structured approach to derive quantitative data related to the nurses' perception about the public image of nurses.

**Table 1:-** Distribution of sample according to their personal characteristics                           **n=37**

| Variables | Classification | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age in years | 21-30 | 15 | 40.5 |
| | 31-40 | 10 | 24.3 |
| | 41-50 | 9 | 21.6 |
| | 51-60 | 3 | 8.1 |
| Gender | Male | 5 | 13.5 |
| | Female | 32 | 86.5 |
| Marital Status | Unmarried | 18 | 48.6 |
| | Married | 19 | 51.4 |
| Religion | Christian | 21 | 56.8 |
| | Hindu | 14 | 37.8 |
| | Muslim | 2 | 5.4 |
| Area /departments | Medicine | 6 | 16.2 |
| | Surgery | 7 | 18.9 |
| | Obstretics and Gyneacology | 5 | 13.5 |
| | Pediatrics | 5 | 13.5 |
| | Emergency and ICU | 7 | 18.9 |
| | Others: Dental/ENT/Ortho | 7 | 18.9 |
| Employment status | Contract | 12 | 32.4 |
| | Regular | 25 | 67.6 |
| Professional qualification | Diploma | 17 | 45.9 |
| | BSc N | 19 | 51.3 |
| | M Sc. N. | 1 | 2.7 |
| Years of experience | 1-5 years | 14 | 37.8 |
| | 6-10 years | 7 | 18.9 |
| | 11-15  years | 5 | 13.5 |
| | 16-20 years | 3 | 8.1 |
| | 21-25 years | 5 | 13.5 |
| | 26-30 years | 3 | 8.1 |
| Known person in the profession | Parent | 4 | 10.8 |
| | Sibling | 5 | 13.5 |
| | Relative | 8 | 21.6 |
| | Friend | 6 | 16.2 |
| | None | 14 | 37.8 |

**Table 2:-** Nurses' Perception about public image of nurse with respect to their technical skills, professional qualification requirements, intellectual-cognitive skills and emotional skills.                           **n=37**

| Nurses' Perception about public image of nurses | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| **Technical skills** | | |
| Skilled professionals | 4 | 10.8 |
| Provide good care to their patients | 8 | 21.6 |
| Can handle the hospital equipments | 3 | 8.1 |
| An efficient professional | 2 | 5.4 |
| Are resourceful | 1 | 2.7 |
| Doctors' assistant | 13 | 35.1 |
| Do  other menial works | 8 | 21.6 |
| Only perform basic patient care | 9 | 24.3 |
| Only do patient cleaning services | 9 | 24.3 |
| Does ordinary and dirty jobs | 8 | 21.6 |
| Gives only injections and medicines | 15 | 40.5 |
| Cannot perform independently | 6 | 16.2 |
| Blindly follows doctors orders | 9 | 24.3 |
| No difference between a qualified and an unqualified nurse | 4 | 10.8 |

| Professional qualification requirements | | |
|---|---|---|
| Are trained to handle patients' problems | 1 | 2.7 |
| Trained to handle emergency situations | 4 | 10.8 |
| Anybody can be a nurse without much qualification | 6 | 16.2 |
| Do not require a lot of knowledge | 7 | 18.9 |
| Waste of money and time educating them for four long years | 4 | 10.8 |
| **Intellectual-cognitive Skills** | | |
| Knowledgeable professionals | 5 | 13.5 |
| Knowledgeable to diagnose patients' condition | 1 | 2.7 |
| Requires a high degree of scholastic ability | 1 | 2.7 |
| Good at problem solving | 3 | 8.1 |
| Need considerable skill in working with one's hands | 6 | 16.2 |
| Do not require intellectual/cognitive skills | 7 | 18.9 |
| **Emotional skills** | | |
| Empathetic | 4 | 10.8 |
| Understand patients' problems | 6 | 16.2 |
| With whom one can share their problems | 6 | 16.2 |
| Provide emotional support | 3 | 8.1 |
| Understand patients' emotions | 2 | 5.4 |
| Understand their relatives' emotions | 2 | 5.4 |

**Table 3:-** Perception about public image of nurse with respect to their Interpersonal relations, Time management, Professional status and Professional attitude.     **n=37**

| Nurses' Perception about public image of nurses | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|---|---|
| **Interpersonal relations** | | |
| Function as a team | 2 | 5.4 |
| Collaborate efficiently with colleagues | 3 | 8.1 |
| Collaborate efficiently with the other team members | 3 | 8.1 |
| Best friend to a patient and their relatives | 9 | 24.3 |
| Patients/relatives freely &comfortably disclose any information | 8 | 21.6 |
| Professional on whom relatives, neighbours, others can depend | 3 | 8.1 |
| Are just messengers between the doctor and the patient | 1 | 2.7 |
| Leader of housekeeping staff | 1 | 2.7 |
| Hardly seen discussing or sharing knowledge with each other | 1 | 2.7 |
| Always shout at patients and their relatives | 5 | 13.5 |
| **Time management** | | |
| Able to prioritize patients needs | 2 | 5.4 |
| Manage a lot of work within limited duration | 1 | 2.7 |
| Waste lot of their time performing non nursing work | 4 | 10.8 |
| Waste lot of their time discussing personal matters | 4 | 10.8 |
| Junior nurses attend to the telephone more than the patient | 3 | 8.1 |
| **Professional status** | | |
| Qualified professionals | 1 | 2.7 |
| Respected professionals | 2 | 5.4 |
| Less considered as professionals | 8 | 21.6 |
| Low class of workers | 3 | 8.1 |
| Come from families with a low socio-economic background | 3 | 8.1 |
| Equated to class IV workers | 5 | 13.5 |
| Highly paid servants | 9 | 24.3 |
| Looked down upon by doctors, other professionals & general public | 7 | 18.9 |
| **Professional attitude** | | |
| Approachable | 4 | 10.8 |
| Helpful | 6 | 16.2 |
| Caring | 3 | 8.1 |

| Responsible | 8 | 21.6 |
|---|---|---|
| Rude | 8 | 21.6 |
| Unpleasant | 4 | 10.8 |
| Not approachable | 7 | 18.9 |

**Table 4:-** Perception about public image of nurse with respect to the extra-professional roles, nurses visa-vis medical professionals, nobility of the profession and prospects. **n=37**

| Nurses' Perception about public image of nurses | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| **Extra-professional roles of a nurse** | | |
| Look after housekeeping, ward cleanliness, repair of fan, call bell, water taps, supply water, etc. | 8 | 21.6 |
| Do a lot of multitasking | 5 | 13.5 |
| Perform more/lot of clerical work | 5 | 13.5 |
| **Nurses vis-a vis medical professionals** | | |
| Are considered as closer than doctors by patients | 12 | 32.4 |
| Are more vital than doctors in health care settings | 4 | 10.8 |
| Are sometimes as efficient as doctors | 1 | 2.7 |
| Are considered to be one step below the doctors | 2 | 5.4 |
| **Angels of mercy/noble profession** | | |
| Are like angels sent by god | 1 | 2.7 |
| Have healing qualities | 1 | 2.7 |
| Patients and relatives have great faith in nurses | 3 | 8.1 |
| Have a great opportunity to serve god | 7 | 18.9 |
| **Prospects for nurses** | | |
| Can pursue higher qualification up to PH. D/ MBA | 3 | 8.1 |
| Easy to get marriage offers due to high salary | 4 | 10.8 |
| Easy to get marriage offers due to job security | 6 | 16.2 |
| Easy to migrate | 5 | 13.5 |

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