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Would you recommend nursing as a career to men?

David Stanley, Tania Beament, Darren Falconer, Margaret Haigh, Rosemary Saunders, Karen Stanley, Peter Wall

Abstract

Objective: The principle objective of this study was to establish a profile and perception of men in nursing in Western Australia. This paper will discuss one sub-objective which sort to explore responses to the question: "Would you recommend a nursing as a career to males that you know?"

Design: Main study was a quantitative, descriptive survey design, however the question under review was significantly qualitative in nature and analysed as such.

Setting: The study took place across Western Australian public and private sector health care facilities, nurse education institutions and non-government providers across rural, remote and metropolitan locations.

Main outcome measures: Data was collected through responses to one question (within a larger survey) that related to recommending nursing as a career to males. An online survey instrument was used.

Results: 70.5% (n=377) said they would recommend nursing to males. Of the respondents that selected “yes” 19.6% were male and 80.4% were female. Of the 29.5% (n=158) respondents that selected “no” 24.7% were male and 75.3% female.

Qualitative data reported supports the perceptions in the current workforce.

Conclusion: Whilst the majority of respondents in the study would recommend a career in nursing to men, a quarter of respondents felt that a career in nursing was not suited to men. Reasons identified included; poor pay, a difficult job, men’s values were incompatible with care, or that they were using nursing as a spring board to other careers. Identifying the perceptions of men in nursing and if current nurses would promote nursing to males they knew assists in the potential recruitment of a much needed future workforce.

Introduction

Much of the literature about men in nursing asserts that nursing remains the dominion of women (White, 2014; Maiolo, 2014; Olson, 2014). However, within the media there is an acknowledgment that a change is taking place, as men are entering nursing in greater numbers and even taking a hand in the recruitment of other men into nursing (Olson, 2014). Within the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA) and Australia evidence suggests that the percentage of men in nursing is increasing (Marsh, 2014; Pratt, 2014; Stanley, 2014; O’Lynn & Tranbarger 2007) and there are claims that nursing will have a more sustainable workforce if nurses are recruited from across the population spectrum (O’Lynn, 2013). This article offers the results of one question dissected from a larger study of the profile and perceptions of men in nursing and midwifery in Western Australia undertaken between 2013/2014
The media’s portrayal of male nurses in this way has a serious impact on the recruitment and retention of the current male nursing workforce. From a historical perspective, men have had a long relationship with nursing although this has been largely overlooked by historical texts that in the main focus on the achievements of women in nursing (Evans, 2004). Further examination by Brown (2009) indicates that even though the numbers of men in nursing are lower than those of women, the presence of men is growing as they manage to create environments within the public and hospital environments within the public and private sector, nurse education institutions and the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council. This is a requirement if the inequities between men and women are to be reduced and more men are to be attracted into the profession, with Meadus and Twomey (2007) affirming there will continue to be a low representation of men in nursing until these barriers are addressed.

Methodology

A quantitative-nonsensical, comparative, descriptive research design was employed, using an on-line survey, with the survey questionnaire being distributed via email using SurveyMonkey to a convenience sample of registered, enrolled nurses and midwives in Western Australia. Respondents were invited to complete the survey at a single point in time to ensure reliability. This paper addresses responses to only one question that asked participants, “Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?” (question 20). The question began with a “Yes” / “No” option before asking for comments on the choice.

Setting: Western Australian health care environments within the public and private sector, nurse education institutions and government providers across rural, remote and metropolitan locations were included in the study catchment.

Survey Instrument: The self-reporting questionnaire consisted of 30 questions in seven sections for all participants, an additional section with 4 questions for men only and a final section for free text comments. The findings reported in this paper are from question 20 of the study, “Profile and Perception of Men in Nursing in Western Australia” (Stanley, et al., 2014) that considered the issue of “recommending nursing to men.” Validity of the instrument was confirmed as much of the questionnaire content was based on a similar questionnaire by Hodes Research (2005) that sought to explore the image of male nurses in California.

In addition to the data table in Offer 1, only 535 of the 1039 who ticked either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ commented. The majority of those who commented (n = 377/70.5%) said they would recommend nursing to males that they knew. Of the respondents who selected ‘Yes’ 19.6% were male and 80.4% were female. Of the responses the selected ‘No’ (n= 158/29.5%) almost a quarter were men (24.7%) with the majority (75.3%) being female.

The ‘Yes’ responses

A plethora of reasons were offered in support of recommending nursing to men, with many respondents providing more than one reason. Analysis of the comments resulted in the identification of seven key themes. The themes are as follows:

1. A Good Choice: Nursing is a good career choice for a man.

This instrument was designed and validated the research theme with a number of respondents commenting on why they saw nursing as a good career choice. One respondent suggested that, “This is a good career (in a positive way)” (female). Another respondent suggested, “I have worked with a number of male nurses and midwives over the span of my career as a nurse/midwife. This has given me a positive influence to the team and when it becomes very hectic” (Female).

4. Suitable for Both: Nursing is a career suited to both men and women. It was also clear that respondents saw nursing as suited to both men and women, with some quotes indicating that, “gender makes no difference when it comes down to sincerely caring” (Male). Another added that it was a “good career choice for both genders” (Female). One respondent added, “regardless of sex anyone with a passion for nursing, team work and the delivery of healthcare has something to offer the profession” (Female).

5. Helping Others: Nursing is a career suited to helping others and serving the community.

While not a strong theme, a number of respondents suggested that they would recommend nursing to men because it was a career focused on helping others. One respondent said, “I want to make a difference in people’s lives and feel good and satisfied about oneself, it’s a good profession” (Female). Another added, nursing is a “very satisfying career because you are helping others and have the opportunity to be a sociable career! Great if you love working with people” (Male).

6. Only the Right Man: While they would recommend nursing to men they knew, they would only do so to the ‘right’ men. A strong theme was that nurses would recommend nursing to men if they were the “right” men for the job or “if they are interested” (Female). Another said, “nursing is a physically and mentally active job that they might be interested in thinking about” (Male). The following view paralleled this opinion, “I would be someone with an affinity and ability to deal with people in vulnerable situations and if they were interested in “caring” for people as opposed to (in a positive way)” (Male).

7. Something Different: Because men offer something different that adds value to the nursing profession.

A number of respondents suggested that nursing offered a “good career choice for both men and women” (Female). Another respondent said, “I have worked with a number of male nurses and midwives over the span of my career as a nurse/midwife. This has given me a positive influence to the team and when it becomes very hectic” (Female).

### Table 1: Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>185</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>98.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>28.1</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Stanley et al., 2014). Addressed below are some of the key themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.
much more readily accepted now than in previous years, partly because society views things from a male perspective which is valuable when offering holistic care” (Female). Another said, “I do think if more men came into the profession that there would be a huge shift” (Female), and that “I studied with a male midwifery student and was provided care by a male midwife with my third baby. Another respondent said, “I always encouraged men to look at nursing as I have always felt that this is what is missing in the nursing profession” (Female).

The ‘No’ responses

Twenty four percent of all respondents would not recommend nursing to a male they knew. Many reasons were offered in support of their decisions and many respondents offered more than one reason. During the analysis, six key themes were identified; these were:

1. Not Anyone: Nursing is not a suitable job for anyone, not just men. Some respondents offered more than one reason for their position and expressed that nursing was not suitable for men or women. One respondent said, “I would not recommend the profession to either males or females. For the level of education required I feel there is inadequate financial recompense in comparison to other fields” (Female). Another said, “nursing is no longer the profession it used to be. Hospitals are run like a business where it is all about stats and not patients” (Female). Another respondent added, “it is full of an unfortunately high percentage of toxic, middle aged women who perpetuate the stereotype of being overworked, marginalised and handmaidens” (Male).

2. Not Suitable for Men: Nursing is not a suitable job/career/profession for men. Some respondents felt nursing offered poorly paid work with comments such as “poor earning capacity” (Female), “allied health positions are afforded better recognition and do not have the same salary or workloads, most other professionals have a higher level of autonomy, ability to set up business or work privately” (Male). Another said, “in a female dominated profession pay is lower, promotional positions once SRN are very limited and often require a move away from patient care. Another respondent said, “males in Mental Health are quite often seen as security officer/fully boys to deal with aggressive clients” (Male).

4. Too Difficult: Nursing is too difficult for men to do, and too difficult for them mentally.

Others felt nursing was too difficult a career for men saying, “the study is tough” (Female) or that there was a “low benchmark to enter nursing lowering the standard and there is a lack of male role models or peer support...the work is just too difficult (find an easier job) / always need to do more study” (Male).

5. Wrong Values: Men’s values and interests are not reflected in the nursing profession.

Respondents also said that men’s values and interests conflict with nursing and that “(Male) will go for management position and leave less opportunity for females in what has always been a female occupation” (Female) or that, “I don’t feel that the males I know would be suited to nursing career because their personality that is not focused on wages and promotion” (Female) or that, “not many males I know have the attitude of compassion and tolerance” (Female).

6. To Move on: Nursing may be used as a stepping stone to other careers/professions.

A few respondents also suggested that men used nursing as a stepping stone to another career or to return to their medical profession that female nurses are their ‘lackeys’ (Female). Another added men are not, “suited for the caring role...OK with (Female). Another added men are not, “suited to men, with views such, ‘suitable job/career/profession for men. Another respondent said, “I always encouraged men to look at nursing as I have always felt that this is what is missing in the nursing profession” (Female).

Discussion

While the larger study aimed to establish a profile and perceptions of men in nursing in Western Australia, this paper has focused on one specific question within the study that sought to explore respondent’s answers to the question: “Would you recommend nursing as a career to men?” Respondents said they would (75.6%), with slightly more women than men answering “yes” (76.8% / 71.7%). About one quarter would not, although more of the male respondents indicated that they would say “no” (28.2%), compared with the female respondents (23.1).

Analysis of the comments indicate that respondents suggested that they would not recommend nursing as careers to men said it was because; this was not a career for just anyone and specifically it was not suitable for men; because the pay is poor; the work too difficult; because men use nursing as a stepping stone to other careers; or because men have values that are in contrast to the core values of nurses or the nursing profession.

The data offered from this question pointed toward a lower level of career satisfaction among male respondents. This apparently lower degree of enthusiasm may also be found in the responses to other questions in the study. In one other question of the larger study (Stanley et al., 2014), 7.2% of male respondents, compared with only 2.7% of female respondents, indicated that they had intentions of leaving nursing, or related fields, within the next five years. This was consistent with Hodes Research (2005) study, in which 7% of male respondents indicated an intention to leave nursing and related industries completely.

In another, in question within the larger study, almost twice as many men (21.4% male / 11.7% female) suggested that a small number of men in the nursing workforce in Western Australia (8.82% men / 91.18% women) (NMBA, 2014) makes this disparity very significant (Stanley et al., 2014). This concept was supported by findings from Hodes Research (2005), with results pointing toward a general view that many male nurses progress in their careers more quickly than women, or that a greater proportion of men seek out and attain nursing management and senior positions.

The quarter of respondents who suggested that they would not recommend nursing as careers to men said it was because; this was not a career for just anyone and specifically it was not suitable for men; because the pay is poor; the work too difficult; because men use nursing as a stepping stone to other careers; or because men have values that are in contrast to the core values of nurses or the nursing profession.

In the wider study, when respondents were asked, ‘why do you think more men are not attracted to nursing?’ (Stanley et al., 2014). Poor salary was identified as a significant reason and was also offered as a motivating factor for leaving the profession, particularly among male respondents. However, the most popular options selected by respondents, regarding why more men are not attracted to nursing, were ‘nurses and midwives are seen as intrinsically feminine’ (64.7% male / 73.2% female), and that nursing is a ‘traditionally female occupation’ (66.8% male / 72.4% female). These opinions and perceptions of negative stereotypes were popular among the male respondents, highlighting the degree to which the respondents believe society’s gendered, even prejudiced views can have a negative impact on recruitment of men into nursing (Stanley et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Most nurses would recommend a career in nursing to men that they know because it is a good career choice, it allows men to make a positive contribution to the health care of others and as long as the man is, ‘the right man’ and focused on helping others or adding something of value to nursing they would be welcome” and encouraged to join the profession. About a quarter of respondents felt a nursing career was not suitable for everyone and in particular, men. As well, the pay was poor, the job too hard, that men had inappropriate values or that men were using a nursing career as a spring board to other careers would not recommend a career in nursing to men they knew. However, it is worth noting, as one person commented, “regardless of sex anyone with a passion for nursing, team work and the delivery of healthcare has something to offer the profession” (Female).

Recommendations

• The message that nursing is a suitable career for both men and women needs to be reinforced.
• Further study is needed to discover if men who are nurses have generally lower morale, and if this is the case, why.
• Further study is required to explore the issue of why a quarter of nurses (male or female) in WA would not recommend nursing as a career to others.
• Further study is required to gain a better understanding of the experience of male nurses across Australia.

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