Would you recommend nursing as a career to men?

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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.
Typing needs to be eliminated if more women enter the workforce. Portraying male nurses in this way has a negative one, with men shown as either incompetent, effeminate, or simply incompetent (Stanley, 2012). The ideology of gender stereotypes in nursing activities and was essential for nurses in particular in films is generally a negative one, with men shown as being morally corrupt, effeminate or simply incompetent (Stanley, 2012). This internal and the external issues faced by men in nursing may also impact on their willingness to recommend a nursing career to men they know.

Methodology
A quantitative non-experimental, comparative, descriptive research design was employed, using an on-line survey and 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 two questions 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 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>1079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the data table in Offer 1, only 35.5% 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 men that they knew. Of the respondents who selected "Yes, 19.6% were male and 80.4% were female. Of the responses who 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. A thematic 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 men. This instrument was designed and validated for the research question with a number of respondents commenting on why they saw nursing as a good career choice. One respondent suggested that, "It is a good career with many rewards." (Male)

2. A Good Career for Men: Nursing is a career men do particularly well in. This was also a strong theme, with a number of respondents suggesting that nursing was a career that men did well in. One respondent said, "We have patients with different cultural backgrounds and having male nurses will assist with providing healthcare" (Female).

3. A Positive Contribution: Men make (or can make) a positive contribution to the profession of nursing or midwifery. Nursing were also recommended because the men can provide healthcare to a different group. One respondent suggested that, “I have found working with male midwives, helps them to balance their ratio and that, “men bring a completely different perspective and often bring the “oestrogen” fuelled work environment (in a positive way)” (Female). Another respondent suggested that, “Male nurses can be caring and also calm under pressure” (Female), and that in a “female dominated workplace, an important male team members aids in allowing the nursing population to be more reflective of society and adds value to the nursing cohort through diversity” (Male). Another said, “I have worked with a number of male nurses and midwives over the span of my career as a nurse/midwife, and do not think they bring any negative 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. A plethora of reasons were offered in support of this, that “gender makes no difference when it comes to sufficiently 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” (Male).

5. Helping Others: Nursing is a career for 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, “If one wants to work with different cultural backgrounds and have patients with different cultural backgrounds, male nurses will assist with providing healthcare” (Female).

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 only 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 recommend to those with an ability and people in vulnerable situations and if they were interested in ‘caring’ for people as opposed to ‘caring’ (and providing positive influence to the team and when it becomes very hectic) (Female).

7. Something Different: Because men offer something different that adds value to the nursing profession. A number of respondents suggested that they would recommend nursing to the profession with one stating, “men have a lot to offer (nursing). They are...
much more readily accepted now than in previous generations when men see 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 it would change” (Female), and that “I studied with a male midwifery student and was provided care by a male midwife with my third delivery. They had great empathy and provide excellent care” (Female). Lastly, one 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’s 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 felt 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 that nursing was not suited to men, with views such, “males by nature are not nurturers” (Female), or “most male nurses I have worked with are lazy and appear to have the misconception that female nurses are their ‘lackeys’” (Female). Another added men are not, “suited for the caring role...OK with a passion for nursing, team work and the delivery of healthcare has something to offer the profession” (Female).

3. A Poor Option: Nursing is not suitable for men because of poor pay and work conditions. 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 strain or workloads levels, 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, “men 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 to enter. 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 “(Men) will go for management positions 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 the professional career because the 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 other careers or Australian residency. Comments supporting this theme included, “it appears that some of them (male nurses) are frustrated doctors who could not make the grade and rejected their second choice” (Female), or that, “the only reason they became nurses was because of the 457 visa and nursing was the only job they could obtain permanent residency on” (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 a specific question within the study that sought to explore respondent’s answers to the question: “Would you recommend nursing as a career to men or women?” The majority of 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 a 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 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 disadvantage of nursing was the lack of ability to work independently and significantly more men suggested that their moral was poor (39.2% male / 25.2% female) (Stanley et al., 2014). Female nurses offered a more emphatic endorsement of the advantages of nursing than did male respondents (Stanley et al., 2014). This apparently greater degree of enthusiasm of female respondents, for promoting the ‘men in nursing’ message, and the fact that fewer men would recommend nursing to males that they knew brings into question the level of career satisfaction experienced by the male respondents.

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 in contrast to the core values of nurses or the nursing profession. 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 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).

Acknowledgements
Western Australia Nurses Memorial Charitable Trust, WA Department of Health, Chief Nurse and Midwives Office

• 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.


