

REASONS TO CHOOSE NURSING AS A PROFESSION

MOTIVOS PARA ESCOLHA DA PROFISSÃO DE ENFERMEIRO

MOTIVOS PARA LA ELECCIÓN DE LA PROFESIÓN DE ENFERMERO

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Objective: to identify the reasons why nursing students choose nursing as a profession. **Methodology:** a quantitative and qualitative descriptive exploratory study, conducted in 2015-2016. In total, 100 students from an undergraduate nursing course participated in this study. A semi-structured instrument was used for data collection. Data analysis was performed using simple descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. **Results:** most of the students (55%) applied for another course besides nursing; of these, 52.7% tried a medical school. **Conclusion:** the reasons why nursing students chose the nursing course were personal aptitude and access to the job market.

Descriptors: Health Education. Career Choice. Staff Development. Nursing.

Objetivo: identificar os motivos dos discentes de enfermagem para escolher o curso de enfermagem Método: estudo exploratório descritivo de caráter quanti-qualitativo, ocorrido entre os anos de 2015 e 2016. Participaram do estudo 100 discentes do curso de enfermagem. Para coleta de dados, utilizou-se um instrumento semiestruturado. A análise de dados foi realizada por meio da estatística descritiva simples e análise temática. Resultados: os discentes (55%) prestaram vestibular para outro curso, além de enfermagem; desses, 52,7% tentaram para o curso de Medicina. Conclusão: os motivos dos discentes de enfermagem para escolher o curso de enfermagem foram aptidão pessoal e acesso ao mercado de trabalho.

Descriptores: Educação em Saúde. Escolha da Profissão. Desenvolvimento de Pessoal. Enfermagem.

Objetivo: identificar los motivos de los alumnos de enfermería para elegir dicha carrera. Método: estudio exploratorio, descriptivo, de carácter cuanti-cualitativo, realizado entre los años 2015 y 2016. Participaron del estudio 100 alumnos de la carrera de enfermería. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó un instrumento semiestructurado. El análisis de los datos se realizó aplicándose estadística descriptiva simple y análisis temático. Resultados: los alumnos (55%) rindieron examen de ingreso para otra carrera además de enfermería; de ellos, el 52,7% intentaron con el de

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la carrera de Medicina. Conclusión: los motivos de los alumnos de enfermería para elegir dicha carrera fueron la aptitud personal y el acceso al mercado de trabajo.

Descriptores: Educación en Salud. Selección de Profesión. Desarrollo de Personal. Enfermería.

Introduction

Authors argue the public image of nurses would have to change to attract and keep students in professional training courses. Non-visibility and non-appreciation of nurses happen due to inconsistencies in their public image, which do not contribute to the creation and strengthening of a professional identity. The importance of nurses must be disseminated and recognized, allowing them to have more autonomy and hold relevant roles in the health system⁽¹⁾.

Some of these inconsistencies, however, are related to the reasons why people become nurses. Many choose this profession not because they know it very well or admire it, but because they have no other option or were not approved in other high education courses. In addition, nurses themselves have expressed discontentment regarding the tasks related to the profession and, especially, their remunerations. Only those who achieve, with hard work, a permanent position through a test can have financial security, not always receiving that much-desired prestige⁽²⁾.

These aspects have been reflected in nursing courses, causing discontentment with the career among many professionals. Professors transfer their dissatisfaction along the course, which influences students, who incorporate the experiences of their professors into theirs. Therefore, their experiences during the nursing course create representations in the student's imaginary, which then become associated with other visions generated in the course of life⁽³⁾.

Considering the above, the creation of a professional identity in students does not result only from the capabilities developed along the nursing course; it is also a result of the student's experiences in social interactions⁽⁴⁾.

Based on these reflections, this study was conducted to analyze the student's imaginary and

understand the reasons why they choose nursing as a profession, since the academic environment can be an important locus to influence the understanding of the world and society, which will certainly contribute to the development of a professional identity. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the reasons why nursing students choose nursing as a profession.

Method

This is a quantitative and qualitative descriptive exploratory study conducted in 2015-2016, in the nursing course of a state university located in the countryside of the state of Ceará, Brazil.

The inclusion criteria of this study were: students properly enrolled in the institution attending the first, the fifth, or the tenth semester of the nursing course during the period of data collection. These semesters were chosen because they mean the beginning (first), the middle (fifth), and the end (tenth) of the nursing course, allowing to analyze identity transitions occurring in the whole period. Then, 38 students from the first semester, 35 from the fifth, and 27 from the tenth semester agreed to participate in the study, totaling 100 students, who signed an informed consent form.

A semi-open instrument specially developed for this study was used to collect data containing questions related to student's interests in the profession and nursing aptitudes. Simple descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze data. The statistical information was organized into tables.

This study is part of a larger investigation titled "*Representações Sociais para Bacharelandos de Enfermagem: Encantos e Desencantos nos Itinerários Formativos*" (Social representations

for bachelors in nursing: good and bad aspects of the nursing training courses), approved by a Research Ethics Committee, protocol nº. 1.323.463/2015, and CAAE 46346215.9.0000.5053. To maintain anonymity, the participants were identified according to the order of analysis of their answers in the open-ended questions of the instrument, for example: D1S1 refers to (D) student and (S) semester. The subscript number after D refers to the order of analysis of instruments, whereas the number after letter S refers to the semester of participants.

Results

The profile of the students was analyzed in terms of age and sex. Students from the first semester were 16 to 25 years old, most of them were 18 years old. The fifth-semester students were between 18 and 23 years old, and most of them were 21 years old. In the tenth semester, they were aged between 21 and 41 years, most were 24 years old.

Regarding the sex of students, most of them were female, 28 (73.7%) from the first semester, 28 (80%) from the fifth, and 22 (81.5%) from the tenth semester.

In order to identify the students' reasons to choose nursing, they were asked whether they applied for nursing only, or if there were other courses as well. Of all 100 participants, 45% reported they only applied for nursing, and 55% reported other courses, including: medical course, dentistry, nutrition, pharmacy, law, biology, and civil engineering. However, a significant number of students also applied for a medical course, accounting for 52.17% of course intentions of those students who tried another profession besides nursing.

Therefore, the future intentions of students after starting a nursing course were questioned in successive questions. The possible answers included: drop out of nursing; continue in nursing, but try another course; among others, as listed in tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1 – Students who applied for nursing and other courses. Sobral, Ceará, Brazil – 2015-2016 (N=100)

| Semester | n | Applied for nursing only n(%) | Applied for other courses n(%) |
|----------|-----|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| S1 | 38 | 22(57.8) | 16(42.5) |
| S5 | 35 | 18(51.4) | 17(48.6) |
| S10 | 27 | 5(18.5) | 22(81.4) |
| Total | 100 | | |

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 2 – Intention of students to drop out of nursing or to continue in nursing. Sobral, Ceará, Brazil – 2015-2016 (N=100)

| Semester | n | Continue in nursing n(%) | Drop out of nursing n(%) |
|----------|-----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| S1 | 38 | 29(76.3) | 9(23.7) |
| S5 | 35 | 30(85.7) | 5(14.3) |
| S10 | 27 | 27(100) | - |
| Total | 100 | | |

Source: Created by the authors.

Note: Conventional signal used:

- Numerical data equal to zero not resulting from rounding up.

Table 3 – Intention of students to continue in nursing until approval in another course or to continue in nursing only. Sobral, Ceará, Brazil – 2015-2016 (N=100)

| Semester | n | Continue in nursing until approval in another course n(%) | Continue in nursing only n(%) |
|----------|-----|--|----------------------------------|
| S1 | 38 | 15(39.5) | 23(60.5) |
| S5 | 35 | 15(42.9) | 18(51.4) |
| S10 | 27 | 6(22.2) | 21(77.8) |
| Total | 100 | | |

Source: Created by the authors.

The students were asked about their reasons to keep trying other courses, even while attending nursing. The answers are provided below:

Medical course is my dream! (D3S1).

Because dentistry is what I've always wanted. (D9S1).

Because unfortunately I didn't like the course. (D9S5).

I still want to go to a medical school. (D14S5).

I was not sure about what I wanted to study. (D2S1).

I was curious about the course! (D3S5).

Nursing is the first step to start a medical course. (D4S5).

In this context, the students were asked about what contributed to their decision to attend a nursing course. The most frequent answers were personal aptitude and job opportunity. The options included: salary, social prestige, influence of family members and/or friends; influence of high school subjects and/or teachers; already working in the health area. Table 4 lists these options.

Table 4 – Answers of students regarding what contributed to their decision to attend a nursing course. Sobral, Ceará, Brazil – 2015-2016 (N=100)

| Option | n(%) |
|--|--------|
| Personal aptitude | 60(60) |
| Salary | 7(7) |
| Job opportunity | 29(29) |
| Social prestige | 5(5) |
| Influence of family members and/or friends | 15(15) |
| High school and/or teachers | 3(3) |
| Already working in the health area | 2(2) |
| Other | 5(5) |

Source: Created by the authors.

Finally, they were asked about the area of work they would choose after completing the nursing training (Table 5).

Table 5 – Areas of work nursing students would choose after completing the course. Sobral, Ceará, Brazil – 2015-2016 (N=100)

| Areas of work | Number of students n(%) |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Hospital | 54(54) |
| Family health strategy | 28(28) |
| Management | 12(12) |
| Education | 34(34) |
| Research | 7(7) |
| Other | 8(8) |

Source: Created by the authors.

Discussion

Studies on the profile of students starting a nursing course report similar ages to those found in this study. At the State University of Rio de Janeiro, the students were 18 to 20 years old⁽⁵⁾. At a university in Londrina, 16 to 20 years old⁽⁶⁾. Female students are predominant in these studies.

In the world scenario, these data are similar. A cross-sectional study conducted in nine countries (Chile, Egypt, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United States) on the quality of life of more than 3,700 nursing students reported a mean age of 20 to 22 years and predominance of female students in all countries⁽⁷⁾.

The fact that female students were more predominant in nursing is a result of the history of nursing. Religious matters, for example, imposed for a long period that nursing should be only or mostly conducted by women and for charity. This profession has been marked by the predominance of female workforce because it involves care⁽⁸⁾.

Regarding the selection of nursing, a survey conducted in Natal with nursing students reported similar answers to those found in this study, that is, the students answered their first option was a medical course, but they chose nursing after failing in the test⁽⁹⁾.

This indicates that indecisions when choosing a profession can cause several issues for the students, such as low self-esteem, tendency to depression and insecurity, nervousness, and fear of assuming responsibilities. This way, an inconsistent choice of nursing can result in less socialized individuals, and may have an impact on the future performance of these professionals⁽¹⁰⁾ and the identity of the profession.

Besides such impact on the construction of an identity of nurses, indecision is a factor that supports the student's decision to drop out of the nursing course. Authors report the reasons that make students lose motivation may be related to individual issues, such as immaturity, difficult adaptation to the course, lack of information

about the course and profession⁽¹¹⁾. In addition, many students at first do not think of the tasks of the profession and/or compare it to other health areas, generating frustration and distance from professional fulfillment⁽¹²⁾. These comparisons come mainly from representations of society in relation to nursing and medical courses.

In the social imaginary, medical courses have a relevant place in society as it is the most valued profession in health. On the other hand, nursing presents itself as a subordinate profession. These two professions have interfaces, but they are not similar. Each one conducts its own activities, with complementarity between them. Thus, nursing students should be aware of their work as nurses, and the skills related to their professional practice that define nursing as a profession, constituting the identity of this profession⁽⁹⁾.

The participants of this study from the tenth semester did not report a desire to drop out of the course. They probably have an understanding of what being a nurse is like, as they are already in the final stage of the course, having acquired experience during the program. On the other hand, the students from the first and fifth semesters reported a clear desire to try another course. The lack of understanding of what the profession is and the perception of social discredit may be factors that contribute to students losing the interest and dropping out of the course. A study conducted in Rio Grande do Sul confirms these findings, reporting students' lack of motivation to go to nursing classes, while feeling attracted to start a different course⁽¹⁴⁾.

The most frequent reasons identified in this study that led students to choose nursing were personal aptitude and job opportunities. These findings were similar to those of a study conducted in Rio Grande do Norte, which reported affinity with the health area as the main reason to select nursing. Since basic education, these students already identified with disciplines such as biology and chemistry⁽¹⁵⁾.

Few students analyzed in this study reported they had selected nursing due to social prestige or someone's influence. It shows the gaps in the construction of an identity and professional

image. Nurses themselves, whether assistants, researchers or professors, report dissatisfaction with the profession mainly regarding the aspects of autonomy and remuneration⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁾. Many studies report nurses' dissatisfaction with the profession in Brazil⁽¹⁸⁾ and other countries⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾.

Despite such dissatisfaction of nurses, another reason for the participants of this study to choose nursing was the different areas of work for nurses. When compared to other areas of health, nursing has more options⁽²¹⁾. A survey conducted with nursing students from the University of São Paulo (USP) analyzed their trajectory after graduation and the areas of practice in their first jobs. Of the 172 participants, 56.7% chose hospitals, similar to the interest presented by the students of this study; 14.7% chose education; and 2.6% started working in the Family Health Strategy (FHS) program⁽²²⁾.

The FHS work has broadened the tasks of nurses, attracting more attention to nurse performance⁽²³⁾. Nurses are responsible for management actions related to planning, supervision and intersectoral coordination, as well as assistance actions of promotion, protection, healing, and rehabilitation in collective health contexts⁽²⁴⁾.

In addition, nursing students show a clear interest in teaching, which can be explained by an increase in the number of nursing schools in Brazil, which started to demand more professors. According to data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP) Anísio Teixeira, the number of graduates increased from 7,046 in 2001 to 42,940 in 2010, growing by more than 500%⁽²⁵⁾.

This scenario shows significant changes in the areas of work of nurses. Therefore, the arrival of large numbers of graduates and the retirement of older nurses require constant studies about identity transitions of nursing professionals.

Although this study reports significant information to understand why students choose nursing, it was limited to some semesters of the nursing course to obtain a situational diagnosis. For this reason, cohort studies with nursing students are suggested to understand their identity

transitions during the course, or retrospective studies that analyze these transitions in graduates.

Conclusion

The study showed students still have uncertainties about the nursing course. Their main reasons to choose nursing as a profession were personal aptitude and the job opportunities. Nursing course is still assumed as a second option – after medical course – causing a desire to drop out of the course and discontentment among nursing students. Therefore, this study concludes that the real practice of nurses is not aligned with the idea of how this profession is seen by society. Lack of social prestige of the profession does not encourage students to choose nursing.

Collaborations:

1. conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Rayanne Branco dos Santos Lima, Maria da Conceição Coelho Brito, and Maria Socorro de Araújo Dias;
2. writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Rayanne Branco dos Santos Lima, Marília Campos Fernandes, Caroline Ribeiro de Sousa, and Victor Matheus da Silva Evangelista;
3. final approval of the version to be published: Rayanne Branco dos Santos Lima and Maria Socorro de Araújo Dias.

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