

# Would you recommend nursing as a career to men?

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## 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.

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## 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

(Stanley et al., 2014). Addressed below are the results from only one sub-objective that sought to explore respondent's views to the question: "Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?"

#### Literature Review:

There is substantial literature available related to men in nursing generally. However, there is a lack of literature that offers insight into the issues faced by men in nursing in Australia. The gap widens when considering literature that highlights the perceptions of the peers of men in nursing view them, as well as how men view themselves and what they feel are the major issues that affect the recruitment and the 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 women, the level of achievement by men is growing as they manage to create successful careers and are promoted to leadership positions. In fact, the evidence suggests that male nurses are twice as likely to hold a key management position within the UK, than their female counter-parts (Santry, Gainsbury & Ford, 2010).

The theme of masculine identity was explored by Fisher (2011), who investigated the differences in perceived gender characteristics between Australian male nurses and Australian male engineers. The findings indicated that there were differences in expressive characteristics between male nurses and male engineers, with the male nurses believing that they had feminine characteristics which enabled them to undertake nursing activities and was essential for nursing. Whereas, the male engineers held strongly to the traditional view of masculinity in order to work within engineering. It is these types of examples where the ideology of gender stereotyping needs to be eliminated if more men are to be encouraged into the nursing profession (Fisher, 2011).

Stigmatising male nurses creates a barrier, which may prevent men from entering the profession. The media's portrayal of male

nurses in particular in films is generally a negative one, with men being shown as being morally corrupt, effeminate or simply incompetent (Stanley, 2012). Portraying male nurses in this way has a serious effect on the public's perception of male nurses, which may in turn have a negative impact on the recruitment to men in nursing. Positive images of competent, self confident male nurses are less common. However, as Stanley (2012) concludes, these are required if barriers 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.

Ekstrom (1999), Hereford (2005), Takase, Maude and Manias (2006) and Bartfay et al. (2010) support the notion that nursing is a female orientated profession and much of this perspective adds to a persistent inclination for nursing, as with other female dominated professions e.g. primary school teaching (Cushman, 2005) to be seen as 'low status' occupations, devaluing the contribution made by both men and women and potentially turning men away from the profession. However, Roth and Coleman (2008) suggest a number of strategies that are aimed at challenging the public's perception of nursing, with one being that the profession critically assess and address the image of nursing to ensure that it reflects gender diversity.

It appears that it is not solely external factors that have presented difficulties for men. For men who have contemplated a career in nursing or who are already within the profession challenges are evident. Issues, such as communication difficulties, the lack of acceptance of men in nursing by some of their female colleagues and the residual effect of the traditional female orientated profession

impact negatively on men in nursing (McMillan, Morgan, & Ament, 2006). These 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, 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 on-line 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 made.

**Setting:** Western Australian health care environments within the public and private sector, nurse education institutions and some non-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.

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

	No		Yes		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Female</b>	185	23.1	613	76.8	<b>798</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Male</b>	68	28.1	173	71.7	<b>241</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Combined</b>	253	24.3	786	75.6	<b>1039</b>	<b>100.0</b>

This instrument was designed and validated following advice and consultation with experienced nurse researchers.

**Sample:** There were 1055 respondents to the survey. However, only 1039 respondents answered question 20.

**Ethical Approval:** Ethical approval was granted from the University of Western Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Western Australian Nurses Memorial Charitable Trust.

**Data analysis:** The qualitative analysis used to consider the free text aspects of question 20 explored the data by examining content for specific words, which were categorised and subsequently created sub-categories. From this, themes were identified, patterns confirmed and an integrated picture of the data content was created. In addition, detailed analysis of the qualitative data from question 20 took place with the aid of NVivo10 software program.

#### Results

Of the 1039 respondents to question 20 (**Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?**), 786 (75.6%) (n=613 female and n=173 male) selected 'Yes', and 241 (24.4%) (n=185 female and n=68 male) selected 'No'. A higher proportion of females, than males said they would recommend nursing as a career to males (76.8% compared with 71.7%), (see Table 1).

In addition to the data offered in Table 1, only 535 of the 1039 who ticked either 'Yes' or 'No' offered comments. 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 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. 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 presented as strong theme with a number of respondents commenting on why they saw nursing as a good career choice. One respondent suggested that, "you meet lots of people and you get to look after and care for people which is interesting" (Female). Another commented that nursing offered a "good stable job with good retention figures so allows job stability, also would really suit some caring males and we could do with their skills and role modelling" (Female). Another respondent suggested that nursing was, "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). Another said, "the men that I know in the profession have done very well - in terms of career progression and clinical opportunity. I also feel that men within this profession have a lot to offer the women they work with and the patients they care for. I have always enjoyed my professional relationships with the male nurses/midwives I have worked with" (Female). Another respondent supported this theme by suggesting that nursing offered, "a solid career (with) management opportunities if desired" (Male).

#### 3. A Positive Contribution: Men do make (or can make) a positive contribution to the profession of nursing or midwifery.

Nursing were also recommend because, men can make a positive contribution. One respondent suggested that, "I have found working with male midwives, helps to balance out the female ratio" (Female), and that, "men bring a completely different perspective and often break up 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 workforce, an increase in male team members aids in allowing the nursing population to be more reflective of society and adds value to the nursing cohort through diversity" (Female). Another said, "I have worked with a number of male nurses and midwives over

the span of my career as a nurse/midwife and find that they add a positive influence to the team and calm 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. Some respondents indicated 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 focused on 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 make a difference in the community and feel good and satisfied about oneself, it's a good profession" (Female). Another added, nursing is a "very satisfying career if you want to help others, (offering a) very 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 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 if it was 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 someone only interested in being an expert technical nurse - i.e. possibly in ED/ICU etc" (Female).

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

A number of respondents suggested that men added something different to the profession with one stating, "men have a lot to offer (nursing). They are

much more readily accepted now than in previous times. They see things from male perspective which is valuable when offering holistic care" (Female). Another said, "I do think if more men came into the profession the perception of nurses would change" (Female), and that "I studied with a male midwifery student and was provided care by a male midwife with my third baby. I feel they have a 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' 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 strongly 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 it was a job 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 management or physical hard work, not the emotional caring side" (Female), or that men, are just "not caring enough" (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 stress 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, "males in Mental Health are quite often seen as security officer/bully 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 professions.

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 a nursing career because it requires a 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 nursing is 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 the results from one question within the study that sought to explore respondent's answers to the question: "Would you recommend nursing to a male that you know?" Most 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 recommend nursing as a career to men they knew because it was a good career choice, it was a good career for men and that men could, and do make a positive contribution to the nursing profession. Comments also supported the notion that while nursing was suited to both men and women, respondents hoped the right men, focused on helping others and who added something different or an additional value to nursing could be encouraged. The results suggested that it was evident that, "men are very welcome in nursing" (Female) and should be sought or encouraged.

In other parts of the larger study it was noticeable that for men, a desire to help people, the desire to have a stable career and a secure employment with career variety, all rated highly as motivating forces for choosing a career in nursing (Stanley et al., 2014). These results were consistent with Hodes Research (2005) findings that also suggested the advantages of being a nurse, included a suitable salary and career stability as being relatively more important for males than females.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the question was that nursing is a good career for men and that nursing is a career men do particularly well in. As such, many comments supported the idea that men progress well, moving into management and senior nursing positions. The results in other parts of this study (Stanley et al., 2014) showed that although the percentage of men that indicated they were in management positions was only slightly higher than

those selected by women (11.3% men / 10.5% women), the disproportionately 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.

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 addition, in another 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 morale 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.

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).

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## 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 about 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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