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.

Introduction

Much of the literature about men in nursing asserts that nursing remains the dominion of women (White, 2014; Maitolo, 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 theme of masculine identity was highlighted as an important factor in the recruitment and the retention of the current male nursing workforce. From historical texts that in the main focus on traditional female orientated professions, the image of nursing to ensure that it is a good profession with many management opportunities if desired (Male). 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 have found working with male midwives, helps me to balance my time as I enjoy my work and the delivery of healthcare to anyone with a passion for nursing, team work and the delivery of healthcare has a lot to offer 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 76 (75.6%) almost a quarter were men 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 a lot to offer the profession” (Female).

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, “I only recommend to men that 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 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 just dealing with them” (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 found that our ‘oestrogen’ fuelled work environment has different perspective and often break up barriers, that, "I 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 working 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).

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 obtained 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. A quick 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 using the recent research with a consultation with experienced nurse researchers. Sample: There were 1055 respondents to the survey. However, only 1039 respondents provided data. 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, the 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=56 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 Table 1: Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know?

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Methodology

A qualitative 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 survey at 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 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. It appears that it is not solely external factors that have prevented further gender characteristics between Australian male nurses and Australian male engineers. The findings indicated that there were different and more expressive characteristics between male nurses and male engineers, with the male nurses believing being more sociable is a characteristic which enabled them to undertake nursing activities and was essential for nursing. Whereas, the male engineers held a different view of masculinity in order to work within nursing activities and was essential for self-confidence. However, there is a lack of literature that offers insight into the issues faced by men in nursing at 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 they were in the past by men is growing as they manage to create a career within the UK, than their female counterparts (Santry, Gainsbury & Ford, 2010).

The Literature Review:

There is substantial literature available relating to gender and nursing, containing a range of articles and positions that impact negatively on men in nursing careers (McKinnon, Martin & Armit, 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.

Would you recommend nursing as a career to males that you know? (question 20)
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 felt 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 career/profession for men.
Some respondents failed to 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 that the profession would change” (Female), and that “I studied with a male midwifery student and was provided care by a male midwife with my first pregnancy – 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).

3. A Poor Option: Nursing is not suitable (Female).
3.1 Poor Option: Nursing is not a suitable job 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 offered 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, “men in Mental Health are quite often seen as security officer/fullly boys to deal with aggressive clients” (Male).

4. Too Difficult: Nursing is too difficult for men to do, and too difficult for them to train.
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” (Female). “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 “(Female) or men wouldn’t be suited to helping people” (Male). One of the strongest themes to emerge 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 factors 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).

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 seek a second career” (Female), or that, “the only reason they became nurses because of the 457 visa and nursing was the best job they could obtain permanent residency on” (Female).

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 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

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 question within the study that sought to explore respondent’s answers to the question: “Would you recommend nursing to a male nurse?” (Female). The quarter of respondents who said they would recommend nursing to a male nurse indicated that 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 is evident that “men are very welcome in nursing” (Female) and should be sought or encouraged.

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).
References


