Undergraduate Nursing Student Perception of the Profession and Career Intentions in a Nigerian University

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Abstract

Perception and determination of future life orientation is important is judging student's outcome in whatever profession or career they have chosen to study. This study used a cross-sectional research design to determine student's perception and their future intentions toward nursing as a profession, a career or otherwise. A stratified random sampling method was used in the selection of 150 students who are from 200 to 500 levels in their bachelor degree nursing programme in a Nigeria University that participated in the study. A self-constructed questionnaire was used for data collection and analyses were done with 148 questionnaires retrieved. The results showed that majority (82.4%) of the respondents were females. More than half of the respondents (67.6%) were self-motivated to study nursing as it create avenues to settle early and opportunity to get a government jobs. Most of them (90.5%) perceived nursing to be an opportunity to serve humanity. About 93.3% of respondents are attracted to travel abroad. Also, 94.6% of the respondents are interested in continuing higher education, 93.4% of the respondents are not interested in changing profession. 93.2% of the respondents want to specialize. It was e recommended that nursing educators should play an important role in guidance and counseling of students about future prospect.

Keywords: Profession, Perception, Student, Future intentions, Nursing

Introduction

Nursing is defined as the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations (American Nurses Association). Unfortunately, in November, 2022 the Punch newspaper stated that 57,000 nurses have migrated from Nigeria for greener pastures abroad within a period of five years spanning from 2017 to 2022. This was in a statement accredited to the President of the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, Michael Nnachi.

There is increasing evidence of imbalance in the global nursing work force supply and demand. The COVID 19 Pandemic has magnified and exacerbated the global nursing shortage issues and obviously increased risks to the health workforce, including occupational infections, stress and burnout. Worldwide, there also exists a shortage of nurses when compared to the required services for them (Attree *et al.,* 2011).

The Secretary-General/Registrar of the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria, Dr Faruk Abubakar stated that over 7,000 professional nurses travelled abroad for greener pastures in 2021 (National Tribune online, 2021). This translates to 600 nurses leaving per month. This is of great concern as it is difficult to maintain a stable supply and demand of nurses because there is a lot of competition for nursing jobs, and the health care business is always expanding, making it difficult to keep up with demanding patient needs (Sherwood & Shaffer, 2014). The dependence of developed nations on nurses from developing nations has contributed to a global migration of Nurses. This migration has impacted the countries exporting healthcare workers and the countries receiving them. As a direct consequence of this, there is an increased demand for nurses, particularly in countries with limited resources.

The World Health Organization in 2020 recommended that there is need to increase the number of graduating Nurses and strengthen retention packages in order to maintain access to health services, address issues of ageing health workforce patterns that threaten the stability of the nursing stock, as such prevent the shortages of nurses by the year 2030.

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The current forecasts aim for 36 million nurses worldwide by the year 2030, yet it is anticipated that there will be a shortage of 5.7 million nurses worldwide, particularly in Africa which includes Nigeria, Southeast Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The retention of nurses in any country is dependent of the perception, internal and external motivations and the service package. It is through the eyes of those who are in a profession that the identity of that profession is likely seen. One's professional identity is shaped by their personal view, values, attitudes, and motives, as well as their experiences. The individual's perception of themselves and their career intentions affects their decisions of the part they pursue following their graduation from the university. It is important to access the perspectives held by nursing students in order to improve public education, make favorable job policies and of course improve the service package this is the likely approach to ensuring Nurses retention and reduced immigration which will in turn translate to greater nurses' work force, job satisfaction and improved patients care.

Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted (The Oxford dictionary 2013). It is important to ascertain how students perceive nursing and the decision to choose nursing to be their career or any other career is highly influenced by one's previous ideas about the profession, which in turn fuels their future intention as to where they wish work and specialize in. The society and media play a major role in influencing the image and ideas the student has of nursing career. (Mooney, Glacken & O'Brien 2018).

Understanding how practicing nurses and those considering a career in nursing feel about the profession is beneficial for a number of reasons, including recruitment, retention, and the capacity to look into the future of the nursing industry. Students in undergraduate nursing programs are given preparation for their future work as graduate nurses. Education is one part, but individual characteristics and health care settings for further development of nurses' knowledge are also important.

This study's objective was to investigate the perception and attitudes held by nursing students in a Nigeria University toward the nursing profession as well as their future career goals. There has been an alarming rate of emigration rate of health workers (nursing inclusive) in the country, this study will help to predict the future prospect of the profession.

2.0 Materials and Methods
2.1 Research Design and Setting
A cross sectional research design method was use to assessed perception and future intention of students in the Bachelor degree nursing programme of Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State.

Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State was established in 1992 by the civilian governor of Delta State, Olorogun Felix O. Ibru. It is located in Ethiope East local Government area between Eku and Obiaruku Community. The University runs in a multicampus system with two campuses (Abraka and Oleh) and has a number of faculties with numerous departments. The Nursing Science Department was established in 2004/2005 academic session.

2.2 Sample size, Sampling method and Sampling procedure
A stratified random method was used in the selection of 150 students who are in their 200 to 500 level of their nursing programme (51 students in 200, 48 in 300, 45 from 400, 4 in 500 levels) of the 2021/2022 academic session

2.3 Instrument, Data collection and Data analysis
A self-constructed questionnaires based on the objectives of the study was used for data collection. It consists of 34 closed ended questions in four (4) sections (A, B, C, D and E). Section A assessed the demography data of the students. Section B assessed the students' motivation in selecting nursing as a profession. Section C assessed students' perception of nursing profession. Section D assessed the future intention of the students in nursing. Section E assessed the reason for travelling out of the country for those students that have the plan to do so. The instrument was tested for reliability. Questionnaires were administered to the respondents after a brief explanation about was the study was given to them, assurance of confidentiality ascertained and consent was obtained. Data analysis was done with statistical software package for social (SPSS) 20 and interpreted using frequently table and percentage.

2.4 Ethical Consideration
Permission to carry out the study was granted by the Head of Department, Nursing Science, Delta State University, Abraka. The respondents gave their consent to participate in the study. There were no columns for names, initials, address and signature on the questionnaire to ensure privacy, anonymity and confidentiality to all involved in the research process.

Data presentation

Table 1: **Section A:** Social demographic characteristic

Variables	Items	Frequency (n=148)	Percentages (100%)
Gender	Female	122	82.4
	Male	26	17.6
Ethnicity	Urhobo	51	34.5
	Igbo	45	30.4
	Yoruba	15	10.1
	Others	37	25.0
Status	Single	136	91.9
	Married	12	8.1
Level	100	-	-
	200	51	34.5
	300	48	32.4
	400	45	30.4
	500	4	2.7
Family members/relatives in nursing	Yes	59	39.9
	No	89	60.1

Table 2: **Section B:** Motivation to select Nursing profession

Variables	Items	Frequency (n=148)	Percentages (100%)
Motivation	Self-Motivated	100	67.6
	By parents	30	20.3
	Others	18	12.2
An opportunity to settle early	Yes	88	59.5
	No	60	40.5
An opportunity to get government job	Yes	86	58.1
	No	62	41.9
A means to earn blessings	Yes	110	74.3
	No	38	25.7

Table 3: **Section C:** Perception of Nursing students towards Nursing profession

Variables	Items	Frequency (n=148)	Percentages (100%)
Dignified and respectful profession	Yes	136	91.9
	No	12	8.1
Actual / equal to other professions	Yes	60	40.5
	No	88	59.5
Opportunity to serve humanity	Yes	134	90.5
	No	14	9.5
Opportunity for personal growth	Yes	135	91.2
	No	13	9.8
Caring profession with ethical standards	Yes	137	92.6
	No	11	7.4

Table 4: section D: Future intention of student Nurses

Variables	Items	Frequency (n=148)	Percentages (100%)
Plan to go abroad	Yes	138	93.2
	No	10	6.8
Higher education	Yes	140	94.6
	No	8	5.4
Bedside nursing	Yes	43	29.1
	No	105	70.9
Teaching institution	Yes	52	35.1
	No	96	64.9
Nurse administration	Yes	97	65.5
	No	51	34.5
Change of profession	Yes	31	20.9
	No	117	79.1
Opportunity to specialize	Yes	139	93.9
	No	9	6.1

Table 5:   Section E: If your answer to section D1 is yes, what are your Reasons for wanting to travel? Where "n" the number of people that want to go abroad=138

Variables	Items	Frequency (n=138)	Percentages (100%)
The monetary value of the profession in other countries	Yes	126	91.3
	No	12	8.7
The profession is least valued in the country	Yes	109	79
	No	29	21.0
The prestige	Yes	117	84.9
	No	21	15.2
The quest for foreign exposure	Yes	131	94.9
	No	7	5.1
Future academic pursuit	Yes	132	95.7
	No	6	4.3

Discussion

Demographic profile of gender showed that most of the nursing students in the study were female (82.4%) which was consistent with the finding of Mervat *et al..,* (2018). That almost (67.6%) all the students are self-motivated to choose nursing as a course correlates with the finding of Elif *et al..,* (2015) in which the students stated that they selected nursing willingly. On the perception of nursing students towards nursing profession, more than 90% of the respondents perceived nursing as a dignified / respective profession, one that offers them opportunity to serve humanity and a caring profession. This is similar to the findings of Prudence (2014) who also reported that perception of student nurses about the nursing profession was found to be positive. Benner, Tanner and Chesla (2009) also found reported that the most frequent reasons for choosing nursing include love to care for others. These are all expression of positive perceptions towards the nursing profession.

It is perspectives that for nurses to take up office jobs in advanced positions and leadership roles they are expected to already have some years of clinical experience (Nightingale College Blog, 2021). Well, statistically only 29.1% of the students who participated in study are willing to go on bedside nursing, good enough 79.1% intend to remain as nurses even though a vast majority of them (93.9%) intend to specialize, 65.5% focus on nursing administration while   94.6% pursue higher education following their first degree. The good thing is that there are increased opportunities for nurses beyond the bedside; this includes work as analysts, consultants, educators, researchers, project managers, sales, and leadership roles

Future intentions of BNSC Students in this study revealed that a good number of the students **(**93.2%) are interested to travel abroad and this is consistent with the findings of Prudence (2014) and Swarna (2015). On the reasons for wanting to travel abroad which is a multiple choice questions, **(**95.7%) of the respondents stated for future academic pursuit, **(**94.9%) respondents stated the quest for foreign exposure, while **(**91.3%) of the respondents stated the monetary value of the profession in other countries compared to Nigeria.

This is a red flag as it is indicative of the fact that the exoduses of nurses to developed countries from developing countries may not be ending soon. This is a great concern to the providers and recipients of nursing care across the country.

Conclusion

Nurses are the back bone of health sector and are fundamental in the delivery of quality care for all the inhabitants of a country. Almost all the students perceived nursing profession as an opportunity to serve the humanity but majority stated that it is not equal to other professions. More than half preferred not to work at bedside nursing, but want to become nursing administrators and educators. More than two thirds are interested to pursue higher education. More than half of them are planning to go abroad.

To ensure retention of Nurses in Nigeria, it is of utmost importance that Nursing administrators recommend better financial incentives and promotional opportunities to attract the students to be employed in nursing service as the ultimate aim of nursing profession is better provision of patient care. Nurse educators have to provide guidance and counselling regarding career to nursing students.

Suggestion for further studies

This study can be replicated among other nursing students of other universities to compare result.

Conflict of interest: Nil

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