

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceived Practice among Newly Enrolled Students at the Jordanian Ministry of Health Nursing Colleges and Institutes in 2003

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ABSTRACT Introduction: *This study investigates beginning Jordanian nursing students' level of awareness and attitudes toward the nursing profession, their expected future practices and their anticipated reactions when faced with challenging hypothetical situations, together with any correlation between these variables and the students' sex, age and social status.*

Methods: *The cross-sectional, descriptive methodology was applied to a population of 330 male and female students enrolled at the first year level of associate nursing at two Ministry of Health (MOH) training institutions in November 2003.*

Findings: *A student's personal desire to become a nurse accounted for only 31.0% of the total, while 69.0% began a nursing career because of other reasons, such as family or economic pressures. There was no correlation between the student's gender, high-school public certificate average, or socio-economic condition and the decision to become a nurse. Upon graduation, 30.0% of students would prefer to work at hospitals, 19.0% at emergency rooms, 21.0% at an ambulatory health center and 26.0% in administrative positions. Females favoured working at health centres over males (24.8% vs. 12.1%, respectively), while more males favoured working in administrative positions than females (30.8% and 23.5%, respectively). Analysis of students' expected reactions to various challenging encounters with a patient showed that approximately 50% would react in a less than professional manner.*

Recommendations: *Curricular emphasis should be placed on expanding and raising nursing students' awareness of their responsibilities toward patients, especially in challenging or difficult situations, and on improving their concept of nursing as a profession.*

KEYWORDS *Nursing, students, perceived practice, attitudes, Jordan.*

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Introduction

Nursing as a profession started in Jordan approximately 50 years ago. Because of the significant social changes over the past few decades, the public perception of this profession has steadily improved. The number of nurses in Jordan in 2003* was 29.5 per 10,000 population, a number which is considered to be relatively high in the region but low compared to Western countries that also suffer from nursing shortages in their hospitals due to baby booming, aging and shifting to Primary Health Care Settings. Buerhaus *et al.* saw that hospitals in the USA need more nurses, especially those that deliver specialized care (Buerhaus *et al.*, 2000; American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 1999).

In the past, the lack of desire and enthusiasm among students in Jordan, due to the social stigma toward nursing profession, was one of the major obstacles for choosing to join this career. This situation has some similarities in other countries. For example in Hong Kong, the results of a 1999 study of 375 high school students indicated that the students were generally knowledgeable about nursing but were reluctant to pursue nursing as a career. However, students, who were socially acquainted with a nurse, demonstrated a slightly more positive attitude towards nursing and slightly higher intention to pursue nursing as a career compared with those having no social acquaintance with a nurse (Rossiter *et al.*, 1999). Another study, with a small sample of 20 people taken from an outpatient department in Eastern Cape Province in 1997, revealed that 95% of the respondents viewed the nursing profession as a calling, whilst only 5% viewed the nursing as a job (Mavundla & Mabamella, 1997). Nevertheless front-page newspaper stories paint a picture of a nursing shortage born of increased patient loads and escalating pressure to treat more people, more quickly, for less money. Second, highly visible patient and professional complaints about managed care in the early 1990s have discouraged young people from entering the nursing profession. These complaints have led many guidance counsellors to advise students not to enter the profession. Just as the health care needs of an aging population are increasing, some segments of the public are encouraging students to choose alternative careers (Gray, 1999). In the last few years, that attitude (the lack of desire and enthusiasm among students in Jordan) has changed, as evidenced by an increasing demand on the nursing institutes and colleges. However, little is known about the attitudes and underlying values of the new generation of nursing students, and so this study was developed to explore these issues.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) Identify nursing students' attitudes toward nursing and their expected future practices.

*All categories of nurses in 2003 year according to the annual statistical book (MoH, 2003).

- (2) Identify nursing students' attitudes and ethical standards when faced with hypothetical situations involving patients or colleagues, and the association with students' sex, age and social status.

Methodology

This study is the first baseline evaluation of the attitudes and practice of nursing that occurs over the 2-year course of nursing training. A follow-up study is planned to compare the level of awareness and attitudes towards nursing with the same group at the completion of their 2-year training course.

The cross-sectional descriptive methodology was applied to the entire population of 330 male and female students enrolled at the first year level of associate nursing at the Nursing and Midwifery Colleges and Assistant Medical Professions Institutes of the Ministry of Health of Jordan at Yajuz and Irbid in November 2003.

A structured questionnaire composed of 31 questions was developed, which included demographic information, attitudinal questions and a series of hypothetical scenarios. The survey instrument was created based on the experiences of the authors. No reliability or validity analysis was done, other than an initial pilot testing on 30 students, in which several questions (#10, 12, 22), that appeared to be poorly understood, were rewritten in simpler Arabic. The revised self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 330 students, and 319 replied for an overall response rate of 96.9%. Since the original questionnaire was developed in Arabic, a translated copy is included in Appendix 1. SPSS was used for statistical analysis, and the Chi Square test was used to determine the level of associations with study variables.

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

Of the 319 students who responded, 71% were females and 29% males. Because of the selective criteria of the nursing institute, all of the students were unmarried and aged between 18–21 years. All students successfully completed 12 years of high school with final composite scores greater than 60%. Most of our study population came from low-middle income families, based on the average income for the Jordanian population.

Results

An analysis of the study results demonstrates the following:

- Beginning students indicated a somewhat greater preference for ultimately working in a hospital (30%) or administrative setting (25.6%) than in an emergency room or health centre (Table 1).

- 31.1% of students chose nursing based on their own personal desire and interest in the profession, while 23.3% had no desire to nurse at all but enrolled either merely to improve their financial conditions or due to their parents' desires.
- When asked their perceptions of the characteristics of a successful nurse, the majority (79.6%) indicated the collective commitment to moral, ethical and academic standards was the most important characteristic.
- 79.6% believed that the nurse-patient relationship should be on a professional level but with demonstrable empathy for the patient.
- 39.9% of students believed that the lack of sympathy and dealing with patients without showing emotions was the behaviour most harmful to the profession, while 5.4% of students believe that the behaviour least harmful to the profession was wearing nursing uniforms outside places of work (Table 2).
- 57.3% of students believed that prolonged telephone conversations during official working hours, specially for personal affairs, was harmful to the profession, while 26.1% found it a common ordinary practice.
- The study showed no statistical significant correlation between the students' gender and their preferred future place of work (at hospitals or other alternatives). A separate question showed a trend that more females favoured working at health centres than males (24.8% and 12.1%, respectively). On the other hand, more males favoured working in administrative positions than

Table 1. Preferred workplace for students after graduation (Question #8)

Preferred workplace	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Emergency room	19.8	19.0	19.2
Hospital departments	31.9	29.2	30.0
Health centres	12.1	24.8	21.1
Administrative work	30.8	23.5	25.6
Other ^a	5.5	3.5	4.1

^aNursing tutor, school nurse, working at day care institutions.

Table 2. Nursing opinion about the acts and behaviours most harmful to the nursing profession (Question #17)

Harmful behaviours	(%)
Dealing with patients without showing emotions.	39.9
Going out of the workplace wearing the nursing uniform.	5.4
Exploiting working hours for personal interests.	27.5
Dealing rudely and untrustingly with the medical team.	27.2
Total	100.0

females (30.8% and 23.5%, respectively). It should be emphasized that none of these differences were statistically significant.

- The study also indicated the lack of any statistically significant association between a student's choice of the nursing profession with his/her sex, high-school public certificate average or socio-economic condition.
- The majority of students (96.3%) believed that the nurse-medical team relationship should be a working relationship based on mutual respect and understanding.
- On their reaction to situations involving a patient abusing the nurse, the study indicated that 51.3% of students would be tolerant and forgiving of the situation, 5% would react negatively to the patient, 30.7% would resort to filing a complaint with the nurse in charge and 13% would only report the incident in writing.
- On how they would deal with a drug-abusing colleague, 67.4% of students indicated that the best approach would be to counsel their colleague, and in addition, inform the physician or person in charge of their department. 1.6% of the students indicated they would ignore it.
- In cases requiring the notification of legal authorities, 55.5% of students indicated they would provide emergency services as a first step, and then notify the physician in charge of the case, while 8.3% indicated they would contact the authorities (police) before informing the physician in charge.
- In dealing with the admission of an AIDS patient, 82% indicated they would deal with the patient in the same way as other patients while taking infection prevention measures, while 7.6% indicated they would keep away from the patient despite their knowledge of AIDS' methods of transmission and 10.4 % would refer the patient to another nurse.
- If faced with the death of a patient in their department, the majority of students (78.1%) indicated that the best approach would be to take the patient's family out of the department in an appropriate manner, inform the physician of the need to meet with the family and break the news, at which time they would provide psychological support. Some students (0.6%) indicated they would ignore the situation.
- If personally abused by a patient, 61.5% of female and 46.6% of male students indicated they would be tolerant and attempt to work with the patient.

Discussion

The findings indicated that students' personal desire to join the profession accounted for only 31.1% of the total. These results are consistent with a recent study from Hong Kong (Law & Arthur, 2003) that reported that 28% of high school students were interested in studying nursing, and that the student's decision to choose nursing was significantly influenced by demographic factors,

such as gender ($p > 0.0005$) or previous academic achievement ($p > 0.0005$). In contrast, this study showed no correlation between a student's gender, high-school public certificate average or socio-economic condition and his/her decision to join this profession.

The findings indicated that 79.6% of students are aware of the required nature of the nurse-patient relationship, which demonstrates "a professional relationship that at the same time sympathizes with the patient". These findings are in accordance with the findings of an earlier study in Cincinnati (Kelly, 1993) in which 23 senior baccalaureate-nursing students in their final clinical rotation prior to graduation also voiced a commitment to the ethical principle of respect for the client. Jordanian nursing students (96.0%) were aware of the required nature of the nurse-physician team relationship "based on mutual respect and understanding among members of a medical team". This awareness should facilitate the functioning of the health care team and eventually improve the quality of the students' future performance.

Analysis of students' anticipated reactions to experiencing a clash with a patient reveals that 50% would respond in a personal manner or would take other measures, such as informing the nurse in charge, submitting a written report or reacting negatively to the patient. However, a recent study about the effect of patient responsibility on the nurse-patient relationship in Yale University School of Nursing (Oslen, 1997), in which 51 students and graduate nurses were interviewed about their feelings toward difficult patients, showed that 49% of the participants felt that the patient carried some responsibility for the success of the clinical encounter. These results indicated an essential need to improve nurses' awareness of their duties towards patients and their sensitization and understanding of the psychological impact on patients of poor health conditions. This should go hand in hand with informing students of the correct way to deal with patients.

Study results revealed no significant concern among nursing students with abiding by a code of attire, where 5.4% indicated that wearing the nursing uniform outside their places of work was the behaviour least harmful to the profession. This highlights the need to underscore the significance of adherence to a code of professional attire.

Our findings indicated that 82% of nursing students would deal with HIV-infected patients similarly to other patients, which was in accordance to the findings reported by the study from Sweden (Rondahl *et al.*, 2003), which investigated the attitudes of nursing students and staff toward HIV-infected and homosexual, HIV-infected patients. They reported an empathic attitude toward HIV-infected patients, as well as a low level of fear of HIV-contagion. However, 18% of the nursing students in our study would totally avoid the patients, and would refrain from caring for them.

The interest shown by females in working at health centres was not surprising considering local family attitudes that commonly discourage evening and night shifts. One result that was contrary to our expectations, however, was the

higher percentage of males over females favouring administrative positions. Although these figures showed a trend, they were not statistically significant.

Similarly, although nursing is commonly perceived in Jordan as a humane, feminine profession, our results showed no statistically significant correlation between the gender of students and their choice of nursing as a career. This was similar to what Yang *et al.* found in their study about professional career development for male nurses in Taiwan; Taiwanese male nurses believed that nursing was a profession suitable for both men and women (Yang *et al.*, 2004). According to Kim and Lee in their study on 711 students in nine nursing colleges in Seoul, 57% of those students desired to be a clinical nurse while 55% desired to be a community health-nurse (Kim & Lee, 1978).

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a need for nursing curricula to focus on a number of issues, such as nursing fundamentals, duties and ethics. In addition, there should be expanded attention to raising the awareness of students to their duties towards patients, health care teams and colleagues and case-based discussions of potential future difficult situations involving patients and colleagues. The curriculum covering patients' psychological health should highlight the psychological impact of physical illness on patients and enhance the students' understanding and tolerance of patients during their hospitalization. A follow-up study is needed to compare the level of awareness and attitudes towards nursing of the same group at the completion of their two years training course of nursing.

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Appendix 1 (Translated from the Arabic original)

A Study on MOH Nursing Students Awareness, Perceptions and Attitudes toward Nursing Principles and Values

In the box opposite to each question, mark the number corresponding to your answer. You may indicate more than one answer for some questions.

(1) Sex: 1. Male 2. Female

(2) Area of Residence: 1. city 2. Village

(3) High School Average:
1. Under 60. 2. (61 to 70) 3. (71 to 80) 4. 81 or above.

(4) Father's education level:
1. Illiterate 2. Elementary 3. Secondary 4. High school
5. College graduate or diploma 6. Higher education

(5) Number of family members living in the same house, without exception:
1. Under 4. 2. (4 to 6). 3. More than 6.

(6) Family's monthly income (any financial income to the family):
1. Under JD 150. 2. JD 150–250. 3. JD 251–350.
4. More than JD 350.

(7) Are you currently a smoker:
1. Yes (indicate how many cigarettes a day) 2. No

(8) Where do you prefer to work in the future:
1. Emergency department. 2. Hospital wards. 3. Health Centre
4. Administrative position 5. Other (indicate) _____

(9) In your opinion, would it be preferable to limit studying nursing to:

1. Females only. 2. Males only. 3. No difference.

(10) Do you believe that studying nursing is:

1. Theory and practice. 2. Only practice 3. Only theory

(11) The reason behind my choosing to enrol in nursing is:

1. My own interest in nursing.
2. Not my wish but my parents'.
3. No desire of my own; merely to improve my financial situation.
4. My own interest and to improve my financial situation.

(12) In your opinion, the characteristics of a successful nurse are:

1. Commitment to good manners.
2. Establishing a good nurse-patient relationship.
3. Commitment to moral and professional ethics.

(13) In your opinion, the duties of a nurse towards patients are:

1. Only help patients recover.
2. Help patients recover and maintain their own and their families' legitimate rights to privacy, confidentiality and psychological support.
3. The nurse has nothing to do with maintaining patients' rights and dignity.

(14) In your opinion, the nurse-patient relationship should be:

1. Purely professional. 2. A relation of sympathy
3. Both. 4. Personal.

(15) In your opinion, the nurse-medical team relationship should be:

1. Personal. 2. Work relation. 3. Based on mutual understanding and respect.

(16) If a situation develops with a patient involving an abuse to your person, do you:

1. Show the patient your negative reaction.
2. Approach the nurse in charge to take the appropriate action.
3. Only submit a report of the incident.
4. Be tolerant and forget about it.

(17) In your opinion, among the acts/behaviours most harmful to the nursing profession is/are:

1. Going out of the workplace wearing the nursing uniform.
2. Dealing rudely and untrustingly with the medical team.
3. Exploiting working hours for personal interests.
4. Dealing with patients without showing emotions.

(18) Lengthy telephone calls, especially personal conversations, during official working hours is considered:

1. Harmful to the profession.
2. Up to the person because it only reflects on him/her.
3. Has nothing to do with harming the profession.
4. Not considered out of the ordinary these days.

(19) In your opinion, going out of working place wearing the nursing uniform is:

1. Appropriate appearance. 2. Not an appropriate appearance.
3. Has nothing to do with the profession. 4. Up to the person.

(20) While working in the operations ward, you saw a colleague abusing a narcotic, the action you would take in that case is:

1. Report the incident to the person or physician in charge at the time.
2. Inform his/her family. 3. Ignore it.
4. Try to advise the colleague and inform the nurse in charge.

(21) In your opinion, the appearance of a nurse that is appropriate to the nursing profession should be:

1. Commitment to uniform while jewellery could also be worn.
2. Commitment to uniform and appropriate shoes without wearing jewellery.
3. Clothes have no bearing on the appearance appropriate for nursing.
4. Wearing makeup and bright clothes to help patients' recovery.

(22) When a case requiring notification of legal authorities is admitted to one of the hospital's departments where you are working as a nurse, what would be the appropriate action for you to take:

1. Immediately inform the physician or nurse in charge.
2. Provide emergency treatment then inform the physician in charge.
3. Inquire about the legal situation, then inform the person in charge.
4. Immediately call the police before informing the physician in charge.
5. No difference in handling legal and non-legal cases.

(23) One of your patients dies while treated in your ward. How do you deal with his/her family:

1. Ignore the situation.
2. Inform the family and support them psychologically to ease their pain.
3. Get the family out of the ward to avoid disturbing other patients.
4. Only inform the family of cause of death.
5. Ask the physician to inform the family of the death, then support them psychologically to ease the pain.

(24) An injured patient is bleeding in the emergency room due to a deep wound, what is the action you would take:

1. Begin the appropriate procedure without asking for help.
2. Immediately inform the physician and start emergency treatment.
3. Inform the physician and wait until he/she arrives
4. Ask the nurse or physician to provide emergency treatment.

(25) The person responsible for diagnosing diseases is:

1. Physician.
2. State registered midwife.
3. State registered nurse.
4. Pharmacist.

(26) In your opinion, the person who orders laboratory tests for the patient is:

1. Physician in charge.
2. Nurse in charge.
3. Laboratory supervisor.
4. Any member of the medical team.

(27) The person(s) responsible for washing hands between one patient and the other is:

1. Physician.
2. Nurse.
3. Laboratory supervisor and X-ray technician.
4. All members of medical team.

(28) Prescribing a patient's medication is the responsibility of:

1. Attending physician.
2. Nurse in charge.
3. Pharmacist.

(29) What action would you take if you find a colleague smoking in the patient's room:

1. Ignore the incident.
2. Advise the colleague positively, and inform the superior if colleague shows negative response.
3. Smoking does not affect patients.
4. Stop him/her immediately.

(30) In relation to an AIDS patient in the hospital:

1. Disease is not transmitted through touching or breathing.
2. Simple procedures like measuring temperature, blood pressure and pulse do not cause the transmission of infection from patient to nurse.
3. Required infection prevention procedures should be applied when drawing blood from the patient or performing a surgical procedure.
4. No need to fear infection—AIDS is only transmitted through sex.

(31) What would be the appropriate action to take if an AIDS patient is admitted to your ward:

1. Although I know that AIDS is not easily transmitted in a hospital, nevertheless, I will stay away from the patient.
2. Ask the person in charge to come and shoulder the responsibility.
3. Provide treatment while following infection prevention procedures.
4. Transfer the patient to another nurse.