

Despite the Barriers Men Nurses are Satisfied with Career Choices

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Abstract

Men remain a minority in the nursing profession. In 2005, 5.6 per cent of the nurses in Canada were men (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2005); while in the United States (U.S.) men comprise about 5.8 per cent of the registered nurses (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2004). Although the basis for this gender imbalance has been discussed in the literature, there is a paucity of data regarding reasons why men choose nursing as a career, perceived barriers experienced in practice, and factors associated with career satisfaction. A descriptive design was used by the researchers to examine these questions among a group of male registered nurses ($N = 250$) in one Canadian province. Knowledge about reasons why men choose nursing, the barriers they experience in practice, and information about factors that impact career satisfaction may help to attract men into the nursing profession, and aid development of recruitment and retention strategies.

Key Words: male nurses, career choice, barriers, career satisfaction

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Despite significant changes in the health care professions over the last century, nursing continues to remain a female "gendered" occupation. Men have made slight inroads in the profession and as such, continue to be a minority within the registered nurse workforce. In 2005, 5.6 per cent of the nurses in Canada were men (CNA,

2005), while men comprise about 5.8 per cent of the nursing workforce in the U.S. (HRSA, 2004). Although reasons for this gender imbalance have been debated in the literature, scant evidence is available regarding why men choose nursing and what factors are associated with their career satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to explore reasons why men in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) choose nursing as an occupation, what are the perceived barriers they experience in practice, factors associated with career satisfaction, and their reasons for recommending nursing as a career option for other males.

Literature Review

There is an abundance of literature both anecdotal and research based related to the topic of men in nursing. Most of this literature is concerned with the recruitment of men nurses and the barriers they experience in their chosen career. Men historically have been identified as having caregiver roles in organized nursing throughout history. For example, military, religious, and lay orders of men throughout the centuries have provided care to the sick and injured. Despite this history, the role of men in nursing tends to be forgotten (Mackintosh, 1997).

One of the dominant barriers identified as a major deterrent to men entering the nursing profession is stereotypes. The public perception of nursing as a sex-role occupation exclusive to females is a well-entrenched societal belief based upon the traditional image of the nurse as being white and female. This perception supported by the mass media is reinforced through images of nursing solely based upon female attributes. These beliefs influence societal perceptions for nursing and feed the cycle of bias that limits the role of men in nursing. Historically, nursing is considered to be a natural extension of a

woman's role in society. The gendered nature of nursing work is reflected by the patriarchal social structure that associates the characteristics, of caring, compassion, nurturance, and empathy exclusive to women. As a result, the nursing profession is considered not to be suited to men who are believed not to have any of those attributes (Meadus, 2000). Again; these factors hinder men in choosing a nursing career.

In the nursing literature and popular press, sex stereotypes are seen as a major obstacle to men entering nursing. A common stereotype concerning men who choose nursing is that they are effeminate or gay (Jinks & Bradley, 2004; Hart, 2005). According to Jinks and Bradley, little has changed in societal attitudes towards nursing stereotypes over the years. Thus, men who chose to become a nurse may be questioned about their masculinity. Other stereotypes reported from the literature were that men end up in nursing because they are perceived as underachievers and lack the ability to enter medical school (Poli-fico, 1998).

Several researchers have examined why men choose nursing as a career option, the most common motive noted was the wish to help others; other factors were job security, salary and career opportunities (Boughn, 1994, 2004). In a recent study investigating why nursing students choose nursing other factors were reported such as, the desire to work with complex technology and the inability to get into another program (Rheume, Woodside, Gautreau, & Ditommaso, 2003).

A large body of literature is available on factors associated with work satisfaction of registered nurses. Factors such as work setting, job stress, pay, promotional opportunities and involvement in patient care have been identified as key determinants in job and career satisfaction for nurses (Kovner,

Brewer, Wu, Cheng, & Suzuki, 2006; Hoffman & Scott, 2003; Shaver & Lacey, 2003). Most of these studies have not investigated specific factors for men nurses related to career satisfaction and reasons for recommending nursing to others as a career option. A worrisome finding from a recent study was that male nurses within the first four years following graduation are leaving the profession approximately four times more frequently than female nurses. Male nurses in comparison to women also reported less satisfaction with nursing regardless of their clinical setting or position (Sochalski, 2002). With men being a minority and many leaving the profession, it is imperative that greater efforts are undertaken to understand this phenomenon and also strategies are needed for recruitment and retention of males.

Several campaigns have been undertaken within the U.S. that emphasized the recruitment of people into nursing programs. Some of these have been at the national level such as the Johnson and Johnson Discover Nursing advertising campaign. Although not specifically focused on the recruitment of men, several of the promotional materials have highlighted men in nursing on television, brochures, and posters (Buerhaus, Donelan, Norman, & Dittus, 2005). Another campaign aimed on the recruitment of males into the nursing profession has been launched by the Oregon Center for Nursing. A component of this campaign is a poster with the slogan, "Are You Man Enough To Be A Nurse" that highlights the diversity of men in nursing and a program called Men in Scrubs that specifically targets middle school and high school students. Participants in this program get an opportunity to gain insight into nursing by "shadowing" men nurses in the practice setting (Trossman, 2003).

Several universities within the U.S. have formalized plans for the recruitment of men into the nursing profession. The University of Iowa College of Nursing for example, has instituted a men in nursing mentoring task force whose sole purpose is to develop and to implement strategies focused on recruitment and to increase the visibility of nursing as a career choice for men (The University of Iowa College of Nursing

Men in Nursing Mentoring Task Force, 2006). No formalized plans to actively recruit males into university schools of nursing have been undertaken in Canada. A national U.S. group of men and women known as the American Assembly for Men in Nursing (AAMN) was formed in 1971 to encourage men to choose nursing as a career choice and increasing the visibility of men in nursing through education of the public (The American Assembly for Men in Nursing, 2005). Recently, in Canada the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) launched the establishment of the Men in Nursing Interest Group (MINIG) with similar objectives as the AAMN (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario [RNAO] The Men in Nursing Interest Group, 2007). This initiative has potential to strengthen the nursing profession for all interested stakeholders throughout Canada through ongoing education and support around the image of nursing and the role of men as nurses. This may lead to a greater emphasis on the promotion of nursing as an appropriate career choice for males.

Methodology

Ethical considerations

The necessary steps were taken to ensure that the rights of all subjects were recognized and protected throughout the study. Confidentiality with respect to both participants and storage of data was maintained throughout. Ethical approval was granted from the Human Investigation Committee, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Consent was implied by completion of the survey.

Sample and Setting

Using a descriptive design, the researchers surveyed the opinion of 62 nurses on reasons for entering the profession and perceived barriers to being a male practicing in a predominantly female oriented profession. Open-ended questions were included to allow participants to voice their recommendations regarding recruitment and satisfaction with career choice and willingness to advise a career in nursing.

In 2005, 5,629 RNs were employed in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL);

250, (4%), of these were men (ARNNL, 2005). The convenient sample included all males who agreed to participate in research as identified by their response on the ARNNL registration form ($n = 78$). Subjects were also recruited using an advertisement included in an ARNNL mail out and snowball sampling. In total, 102 questionnaires were distributed, 87 were sent through the regular mail system and 15 were delivered via the internal hospital mail system. To aid return, all questionnaires contained a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Instrument

Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire developed by the researchers. No appropriate published instrument for examining men's career choice and barriers specific to nursing was available. Questions related to career choice and barriers were partially based upon findings from a qualitative research report prepared by the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) on men in nursing (Hanvey, 2003). By reference to this report and existing literature, the draft questionnaire was developed and pilot tested for face and content validity. Two nurses, one a content expert on men in nursing and two male nursing students completed the survey. As a result of this review, adjustments were made to increase item clarity and readability. The final questionnaire assessed the following four areas:

Demographic data; 2) Reasons for entering the nursing profession; 3) Perceived barriers experienced by men in nursing and 4) Recruitment strategies, Career satisfaction, and Career recommendations.

Reliability testing of the instrument indicated a Cronbach's Alpha of .63 for the subscale measuring the reasons for career choices and the barriers subscale had an alpha of .81. With this population, the internal consistency levels suggest that the subscales adequately measure the constructs.

Results

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Indices of central tendency were calculated and depending on the level of

Table I:
Practice Setting (n = 61)

Setting	Frequency	Percentage
Med/Surg Adult	17	27.9
Mental Health	8	13.1
Nursing Home	7	11.5
ICU/CCU	7	11.5
Occupational Health	3	4.9
Education	3	4.9
Emergency	3	4.9
Administration	2	3.3
Community Health	1	1.6
Other	10	16.4
Total	61	100

Table II:
Reasons for Choosing Nursing (n = 62)

<i>Reason for Choosing Nursing</i>	<i>Mean¹</i>	<i>SD¹</i>
Career Opportunities	2.41	.78
Job Security	2.39	.91
Salary	1.79	.83
Travel	1.23	1.2
Family in the Profession	.77	1.1
Knew a Nurse	.74	1.1
Volunteer or Patient	.72	1.1
Peer Pressure	.56	.95
To meet Women	.34	.83

¹ Mean = mean score (average based on the following scale: 0 = not at all to 3 = very important) and SD = standard deviation for each of the identified reasons for choosing nursing.

Table III:
Barriers to Men in Nursing Practice (n = 62)

<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Mean¹</i>	<i>SD¹</i>
Sexual Stereotypes	1.75	1.1
Inadequate Recruitment	1.70	1.2
Female Oriented Profession	1.67	1.2
Lack of Exposure to Male Role		
Models in the Media	1.57	1.2
Low Salary	1.23	1.0
Patients prefer Female Nurses	1.15	1.0
Families View of Nursing as a Career		
Choice	0.74	1.0

¹ Mean = mean score (average based on the following scale: 0 = not at all to 3 = very important) and SD = standard deviation for each of the identified reasons for choosing nursing.

data, tests of difference were computed. Alpha was set at $p < .05$. Sixty-two questionnaires were returned to the researchers for a return rate of 60%. The mean age of the sample was 38.1, with a range of 23 to 58 years, respondents had been practicing nursing for one to 35 years, with a mean of 13.2 years. Overall, the subjects had been in the same position for an average of 6.3 years. Most (80.6%) were employed full time, 8.1 % were part time, 9.7 % worked in casual positions and only 1.6% were unemployed. The majority of nurses worked on a medical/surgical adult practice setting (see Table I) and as expected 68.3% were employed by the Eastern Health Authority; this region is the most populated geographical area in NL.

The second part of the questionnaire examined why men choose nursing as a career. The subjects were requested to rate their reasons on a scale from 0 ("not important") to 3 ("very important"). The most common motives (in descending order) for becoming a nurse (see Table II) were career opportunities, job security, and the salary. Other reasons identified as important were the opportunity to travel and having a family member in the profession. In the category labeled *other*, nine respondents stated that they chose nursing because they wanted to be part of a caring profession and they felt it was a calling.

In the third section of the survey, subjects were asked to circle the number which best reflects their assessment of perceived barriers (see Table III) encountered when they first decided to enter the nursing profession. Using the same rating scale, 0 to 3, the most commonly perceived barriers (in descending order) to being a male in a female dominated profession were: sexual stereotypes, female oriented profession, lack of recruitment strategies, and few male role models portrayed in the media.

Further analysis was completed and the respondents were grouped by age, level of education and practice roles. At Alpha $p < .05$ there were no significant differences between age groups, levels of education or practice roles in terms of reasons for career choices or barriers experienced.

Instrument Part II

In this section of the survey, subjects were asked three open-ended questions:

*What do you think would increase the recruitment of male nurses?

*Are you satisfied with the choice that you made? Please explain.

*Would you recommend nursing to other males? Please explain

All nurses stated there is a lack of recruitment initiatives specifically aimed at males to consider nursing as a career choice. Many of the study subjects articulated the invisibility of men in nursing and offered particular suggestions such as: a greater need to work on demystifying the stereotypes, more media advertisements promoting men as nurses, using testimonies from nurses during recruitment, promoting travel and career opportunities that nursing offers, and increasing the salaries.

In response to the questions on career satisfaction, over 93 per cent of the subjects were satisfied with choosing nursing as a career. Specifically, 58 subjects, out of 62, were satisfied with their career choice and would recommend it to others. Four nurses, of the 62, were not satisfied or were unsure, of whether they would recommend nursing to others. Some of the narrative responses demonstrate their satisfaction with being a nurse:

"Absolutely satisfied, it is who I am. It isn't just a job to me, I live my nursing role."

"I had entered nursing in the hopes of getting an education and then applying to the RCMP, but I enjoyed the profession so much I stayed."

"Yes, I do this job for the caring and safety of my patients and this gives me great satisfaction."

"Extremely satisfied-it met my professional needs and my personal needs."

"I believe it was a 'calling' because I always wanted to do it and still do. My father had the same feeling but 50 years ago could not afford it, and men were not encouraged to take on this profession."

"To be a professional career person; to have a career by age 21; to be part of one of the oldest professions to care for sick, disabled."

"Yes, the profession has been very good to me and I can't imagine doing anything else."

Discussion

Within this study, regardless of age, educational background and practice role, men in nursing reported the main reasons they chose nursing as a career were: job security, career and travel opportunities, and salary. Similar findings have been reported in the literature. In a study investigating how gender affected motivation for choosing nursing for freshman in three nursing programs in the U.S. male students in comparison to female students put greater emphasis on aspects such as salary, job security, and the social image of the profession (Zysberg, & Berry, 2005). To recruit more men strategies should be designed based upon these factors that influenced men's decision to enter a nursing program. It is imperative that school and career counsellors emphasize these qualities when providing career advice to young men interested in a nursing career. With the unstable economy, the financial security, career and geographic mobility that nursing offers are benefits important to men. These can be stressed during recruitment efforts for this population.

Other reasons for choosing nursing as a career identified by study subjects were: attraction to the social image of the profession; belief that the job would be rewarding; and congruence of a caring personality with their perceptions of being a nurse. These qualities need to be addressed during recruitment. It is also recommended that future research include further investigation of these concepts.

The findings of this study highlight that men remain an untapped resource and continue to be overlooked during recruitment efforts for the nursing profession. The subjects in this study reported that inadequate recruitment and lack of male role models in the media continue to be a barrier that inhibits men from choosing nursing as a career choice. A lack of recruitment efforts directed at the male population was identified as the top barrier. Even though it is the 21st century and nursing is a growing career, limited recruitment of men continues to impact males who may wish to pursue nursing as a career choice. Recruitment strategies specifically targeting men need to become top priority. Advertisements/promotional materials that portray nurses in mascu-

line ways should be developed to counter any stigma held by society. These posters should prominently be exhibited in places and locations frequented by the male population. A television ad campaign directed at men and shown during the news and sport events is another initiative that should be undertaken. Such materials would be an excellent resource for use by guidance and career counsellors in assisting individuals with career planning.

Despite the fact that men have been working in the profession for a number of years, stereotypes continue to be a barrier in the clinical setting. Nurses in this study reported being satisfied with their career choice and were willing to advise others to choose nursing as a career option. These findings were supported by their narrative responses. However, the movement of men into nursing is slow and gender bias continues to impact the profession. Unless a concentrated effort by all concerned stakeholders is undertaken to aid recruitment and retention, discrimination of men who are nurses will continue and men will still represent a small percentage of the registered nurse population. The focus on the occupation of nursing as a career needs greater development with an emphasis on the characteristics of gender neutrality by professional associations, university schools of nursing, and school and career counsellors. An objective for nursing organizations and nursing programs is to aid recruitment efforts by challenging the societal stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. These endeavors may lead to an increase of men joining the nursing profession.

Given the small sample size of this study, the results need to be interpreted with caution. The use of a convenience sample of nurses within one Canadian province may not be representative of nurses in other provinces or those outside of Canada. Additionally, the questionnaire used in this study should be refined and retested using a larger sample of men nurses. Also the authors recommend doing further qualitative investigations looking at career satisfaction among male nurses. These studies may aid discovery of particular factors that are responsible for satisfaction in choosing a nursing career. Such findings

may be useful for preparation of promotional materials in recruitment efforts and thus benefit retention of nurses.

Conclusion

If the nursing profession is sincere in its efforts to create a gender neutral workforce, then it needs to address the issue of not actively recruiting men. A major priority is a greater emphasis on the development of gender appropriate materials for nursing recruitment and career promotion. Such initiatives are necessary if the profession wishes to address the current issue of nursing shortages and lack of diversity among the nursing workforce. The time for nursing to act is now to deal with gender bias, recruit more men, and to take bold steps to correct the gender imbalance. These steps can only help strengthen the health care workforce which will benefit the profession and also the population served by nurses.

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