

Gender Dimension of Men in the Nursing Profession: A Case Study Context

Dimensi Gender Lelaki dalam Profesion Kejururawatan: Satu Konteks Kajian Kes

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Abstract

The aims of the study were to discuss gender dimension of men in the nursing profession and to determine the gender-related factors that may influence men's participation in the nursing profession from Malaysian perspective. The literature showed extensively that the gender stereotypes associated with men have limited them to participate in certain non-traditional occupations. It has been argued that men who work in the female dominated profession are facing challenges because of gender stereotypes and norms. To find out the status of men in the nursing profession in Malaysia, a study was conducted at Kolej Islam Sains dan Teknologi (KIST) which is the largest private college of nursing and health sciences in the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. A total of 50 male students from the college were selected to be investigated by using questionnaires. The results revealed that there are several factors such as gender stereotypes, female patient perception, gay image and relationship with physician are influencing male students' attitudes towards their future. Given the importance of male involvement in the nursing profession to improve and support the quality of this profession, this study suggests that nursing schools, colleges and the government should recognize the importance of male nurses' role and show the positive image of male participation in the nursing profession. These efforts may encourage male involvement in the nursing profession in the future.

Keywords *male, nursing, gender stereotypes*

Abstrak

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk membincangkan dimensi gender mengenai lelaki dalam bidang profesion kejururawatan dan mengenal pasti faktor gender yang mempengaruhi penglibatan lelaki dalam bidang ini menurut perspektif masyarakat Malaysia. Banyak kajian lepas menunjukkan stereotaip gender telah menghadkan penglibatan lelaki dalam bidang profesion bukan tradisional. Terdapat pandangan yang mengatakan bahawa lelaki yang bekerja dalam bidang yang didominasi oleh wanita berhadapan dengan cabaran stereotip gender dan norma masyarakat. Untuk memahami kedudukan lelaki dalam bidang profesion kejururawatan di Malaysia, kajian ini dijalankan di Kolej Islam Sains dan Teknologi, yang merupakan kolej swasta kejururawatan dan kesihatan sains yang paling besar di Pantai Timur Semenanjung Malaysia. Seramai 50 orang pelajar lelaki telah dipilih untuk menyertai kajian dengan menggunakan kaedah soal selidik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan beberapa faktor telah mempengaruhi sikap pelajar lelaki terhadap masa depan mereka, contohnya stereotip gender, persepsi pesakit wanita, imej gay dan hubungan dengan doktor. Dengan menyatakan kepentingan penglibatan lelaki dalam bidang profesion kejururawatan untuk meningkatkan dan menyokong kualiti profesion ini, kajian ini mencadangkan sekolah kejururawatan, kolej dan kerajaan harus mengiktirafkan kepentingan peranan jururawat lelaki dan menunjukkan imej positif jururawat lelaki. Ini akan mengalakkan penglibatan lelaki dalam bidang profesion kejururawatan pada masa akan datang.

Kata kunci: *lelaki, jururawat, gender, stereotaip*

Introduction

The article discusses gender dimension of male in the nursing education and profession in Malaysia. Nursing is a health care profession which cares the individuals, families, and communities in order to attain, maintain, or recover an optimum health (Anurag, Patidar, Jasbir Kaur, Suresh. K., Sharma, N., S., 2011). Nursing is not only considered as a job, but also a profession that serves for the mankind (Kiger, 1993; Raatikainen, 1997; Spouse, 2000). Currently, nursing education is becoming a demanding profession day by day and more men have interned in this profession, however, there has not been a significant increase in the percentage of men in nursing (Vahid, Leila. V., Reza, N., Morteza, M., Arman, A., 2013). It is noted that currently, there are shortages in the field of nursing in many countries, including the United States, and this occupation is crucial to the function of society (Tiffany, 2008).

In the worldwide, therefore, men are found a small minority of the nursing population (Robert, 2000). Studies show that men nurses are lacking behind than female nurses in nationwide. In Canada, only 5% of nurses are men (Vahid, 2013; Meadus, 2011). Statistics showed that in England, 9:10 nurses are women, 98:8 of the midwives are women, 3:4 supervisors are men, and only 10% of the surgeons are women (Equal Opportunities Committee, 2006; Christiana & Charis 2011). A recent study showed that men continue to be a gendered minority in nursing, representing only 6.6% of the registered nurse workforce in the United States (United States Department of Health Resources and Services Administration, 2010; Barbara, 2011). Similarly in Malaysia, the numbers of male nurses are low.

The nursing profession is commonly viewed as a feminine occupation that is evaluated by male dominated patriarchal society. It has been noted that male nurses separate themselves role from their female colleagues because of masculine sex (Evans, 1997). Due to male gender characteristics and existing public image, nursing is often not considered as a career choice by men (Vahid, et al., 2013). 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). Generally, the gender stereotypes associated with men who are in nontraditional occupations are problematic that limit their choice of specialty like nursing profession (Genua, 2005). Therefore, nursing occupation is majority of female. In these circumstances, it is worth to investigate what are the scenarios of the gender dimension of men's participation in the nursing profession? Is there any influence of gender stereotype and norms that encounter the challenges for men in the nursing profession? There is little known about the gender dimension of men's participation in the nursing from Malaysian context.

Research Objectives and Methodology

The general objective of the study is to discuss gender dimension of men in the nursing profession. The specific objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to review previous studies for determining the influence of gender stereotypes on men in the nursing profession and (2) to investigate the attitudes among nursing students towards their future profession. The study is based on two main types of data. Firstly, previous literatures were reviewed to provide a general picture about gender perspective of men in the nursing profession. Secondly, the study also provided a case study based on primary data collected in selected study areas in Malaysia. For the case context, the study was conducted at Kolej Islam Sains Dan Teknologi (KIST) in the Campus of Bachok, which is situated in Kelantan, Malaysia. KIST is the largest private college of nursing and health sciences in the east coast of peninsular Malaysia. A total of 50 male nursing students were selected as the respondents from the selected study area. A cross sectional survey was carried out on the basis of one selection criteria. First, the respondent must be a male student who is currently studying at the selected nursing college during research. The variable such as respondent's attitudes towards their future challenges were measured by using a five point Likert format ranging from 1=strongly Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree. For presenting data on respondent's perceptions and attitudes towards nursing profession frequency and percentages were largely used in this study.

Review of Previous Studies on Gender Dimension of Men in the Nursing Profession

This section examines gender dimension of men in the nursing profession based on previous studies and research. If we look the historical background of men in the nursing profession, it is found that in ancient times; generally men perform nursing duties (LaRocco, 2007; Tiffany, 2008). Those days men were seen as the doctors while women were seen to take care of patients as nurses. However, there are the changing attitudes have been noted in the various contemporary countries. Now more men are entering into this profession. Despite, there is a question to what extent gender norms and values have an influence on men in the nursing profession.

Several authors (Evans, 1997; MacPhail, 1996; Okrainec, 1994; Poliafico, 1998) found major barrier that deters men from entering the profession is nursing's traditional image. Robert (2000) also supported the view that nursing's image perpetuates cultural understandings and societal attitudes about occupations appropriate for men and women. According to these views, nursing remains stereotyped as a female occupation. Thus, men entering into the nursing profession encounter barriers that limit their choice of specialty and risk being labeled and stereotyped (Genua, 2005). Creina & Meadus (2008) also identified stereotypes as the dominant barriers that limit men entering in the nursing profession. A recent study was conducted by Vaismoradi M, Salsali M, Ahmadi F. (2011) among the nursing students in Iran. The study identified the main barriers for the development of professional identity was related to lack of clear and acceptable public image of nursing.

In line with gender norms, the possible challenge that may be faced by nursing students is challenging towards their masculinity. Several studies argued that when men enter traditionally female occupations, like nursing, their masculinity is challenged. The female-dominated occupations the men have chosen desire and value female or feminine characteristics and traits. Men who attempt to be masculine in the female occupation may experience discomfort, conflict, shame, guilt, and embarrassment (Tiffany, 2008; Sargent 2000, 2005).

Another factor that contributes to the challenges of men's participation in the nursing profession is considering male nurses as "Gay". According to Jinks & Bradley (2004) and Hart (2005) it is a common stereotype concerning men who choose nursing is that they are effeminate or gay. The authors argued that little has changed in societal attitudes towards nursing stereotypes over the years.

However, there are numbers of studies (Degazon & Al-Omar, 2004; Neilson & Lauder, 2008) found other factors such as a career option. These studies revealed that the nursing profession is not attractive among most of the students since they do not see it as a good career option. A recent study was conducted by Anurag et al., (2011) which showed that the perception of the nursing profession among nursing students is changing towards the positive side. The study was conducted about future nurses' perception towards profession in the state of Punjab and the results revealed that the majority of the students believed that nursing is a profession to serve humanity, earn the blessings of the people; which also may provide an opportunity for personal growth, bright prospective in abroad and there by an economic security.

Similarly, other studies showed that nursing students are motivated to pursue a nursing career by a desire to help others and to serve society (Barriball and While, 1996; Kersten J., Bakewell, K., Meyer, D 1991). These studies revealed that the choosing of profession was more likely to have chosen on the basis of a desire to help people. Based on the above discussion, it is indeed to say that most reviewed literature identified the unique difficulties and challenges experienced by men in nursing education and the profession. However, there are numbers of studies showed changing trends and motivation factors that influence to pursue a nursing career by a desire to help others and to serve society.

The Case Study

Demographic Information of the Respondents. As mentioned elsewhere, the article is based on two types of data. From this aim, this section attempts to examine the attitudes of male nursing students towards their future challenges from the country context. However, it is worthy to provide a demographic profile of the respondents of the study. There is no well-documented literature about demographical data of men who enter the nursing profession from Malaysian perspective. Table 1

summarized demographic profile including age, race, marital status, religion and year of study for a better understanding about male nursing student's attitudes towards their future challenges.

Table 1 Demographic information of the respondents

Item	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	20 years and below	30	60
	21-30 years	20	40
	31-40 years	0	0
Race	Malay	47	94
	Chinese	0	0
	India	3	6
	Others	0	0
Marital status	Bachelor	50	100
	Married	0	0
	Divorced	0	0
Religion	Muslim	47	94
	Hindu	3	6
	Buddhist	0	0
	Christian	0	0
	Others	0	0
Year of study	First	12	24
	Second	21	42
	Third	17	34
	Fourth	0	0

The data show that the majority of respondents (50%) involved in this research were aged between 20 years old and below while only 40% of respondents belonged to the age range between 21-30 years. In terms of racial status, the majority of the respondents (94%) were Malay. Only a small number of respondents (6%) were Indian.

From these results, it can be noted that the majority of the respondents were Malays is the largest ethnic group in Malaysia. Similarly, with respect to religious status, the majority of the respondents (84 %) were Muslim while only 6 % of respondents were Hindu in religion. These results show the majority of respondents are Muslim as Islam is the official religion in Malaysia. However, the study also examined the marital status of the respondents which showed all respondents were unmarried at the time of research. There was an importance to examine the year of study of respondents. Data on the year of study revealed that the majority of the respondents were second year students, followed by 34 % belonged to third year and 24 % were first year students respectively.

Analysis and Results

The main aim of this article is to assess male nursing student's attitudes towards their future profession. The sample of this study consists of young male nursing students in the female dominated profession. For examining the male nursing students' attitudes, a total of ten statements were adopted from Hodes Research (2005). However, based on the country context some questions have been modified to fulfill the entire objectives. The selected variables are (1) people stereotype (2) female dominated profession (3) gay or too feminine (4) considering "not caring" (5) difficulty to serve the female patient (6) difficulty to make the relationship with female counterparts (7) challenges to the masculinity (8) disapproval by the female patient (9) lacking of male role models and mentors (10) difficulties in the relationship with physician. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Attitudes of male nursing students towards their future profession

	Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	People stereotype that men are not suitable for the nursing profession.	7	14	17	34	1	2	12	24	13	26
2	Nursing is traditionally female dominated profession.	4	8	6	12	2	4	20	40	18	36
3	Men in the nursing profession are seen as gay or too feminine.	3	6	8	16	2	4	9	18	28	58
4	I would be considered as “not caring” for the patient like female nurse.	6	12	29	58	0	0	11	22	4	8
5	Being the male nurse I would have difficulties in serving the female patient	2	4	18	36	4	8	8	16	4	8
6	I would have difficulty to befriend with female counterparts.	2	4	13	26	7	14	18	36	8	16
7	I will face the challenges related to my masculinity.	2	4	6	12	0	0	8	16	34	68
8	Female patients would not like or accept me as they like the female nurse.	11	22	1	2	0	0	18	36	20	40
9	I would have difficulty related to lack of male role models and mentors in this profession.	18	36	8	16	3	6	14	28	7	14
10	I would have difficulties in the relationship with a physician.	2	4	8	16	0	0	18	36	21	42

The results showed that there are several factors such as gender stereotype, challenges to masculinity, difficulty to form the friendship with female counterparts and not caring like female nurse that influence the male students attitudes towards their future profession. These factors are considered as the gender related factors that may contribute the future challenges for the male in the nursing profession. The results revealed that the most prominent factor was in terms of challenges related to “I will face the challenges related to my masculinity” (84%). The majority of the respondents agreed that they would face the challenges related to their masculinity since masculinity is seen as assertive, competitive, decisive, confident, ambitious, and instrumentally oriented, whereas women are more nurturing, empathetic, helpful, sympathetic, gentle, affectionate, and expressively oriented (Lueptow L. B., Garovich-Szabo, L. and Lueptow, M. B., 2001; Hoffman & Borders, 2001). Based on these characters of masculinity men are suitable for the nursing profession that would bring the challenges towards their masculinity.

These findings are supported by the previous studies (Tiffany, 2008; Sargent 2000, 2005). These studies argued that when men enter traditionally female occupations, like nursing, their masculinity is challenged. The female-dominated occupations the men have chosen desire and value female or feminine characteristics and traits. These studies also argued that when a man attempts to be masculine in the female occupation may experience discomfort, conflict, shame, guilt, and embarrassment.

In another statement “Nursing is traditionally female dominated profession” a large number of respondents (76%) agreed that found as a dominant factor may contribute to the future challenges while men in the nursing profession. These findings are supported by the previous studies (Evans, 1997; MacPhail, 1996; Okrainec, 1994; Poliafico, 1998) who found the major barrier for men entering the nursing profession is traditional images. Similarly, the majority of students believed that “Men in the nursing profession are seen as gay or too feminine” (76%).

These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Jinks & Bradley (2004) and Hart (2005) that argued that it is a common stereotype concerning men who choose nursing is that they are effeminate or gay. Moreover, the results disapproval or dislike by a female patient (76%) and difficulties in the relationship with the physician (78%) were seen as the prominent challenges that strongly agreed with the majority of the respondents to the men who want to pursue a nursing career. Based on the findings above, it can be summarized that there is an influence gender related norms such as challenges to masculinity, considering gay or too feminine, gender stereotype, difficulty related to the acceptance or approval by the female patient and communication related to the difficulty with the physician on men nursing students' attitudes who are in the female dominated profession.

Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to discuss gender dimension of men in the nursing profession and to determine the gender related factors that may influence on men participation in the nursing profession from Malaysian perspective. An extensive literature showed that the gender stereotypes associated with men who are in nontraditional occupations are problematic that limit their choice of this profession. Moreover, the study investigated student's attitudes towards their future profession. The results revealed that men in the female dominated profession are facing challenges because of challenges to masculinity, gender stereotype, disapproval or dislike by female patient, gay or too feminine and difficulties in the relationship with a physician. The study suggests that nursing schools, colleges and government should give the importance of male nurses' role and show the positive image of male participation in the nursing profession. These efforts may bring the positive images towards male involvement in the nursing profession. The study is a mini research involving a small number of students. Given the small sample size of this study, the results need to be interpreted with caution.

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