
Values Attitudes and Beliefs of Lyceum Students Towards Nursing as a Career Choice

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to describe and compare values, attitudes and beliefs of last class lyceum or secondary education students, towards the ideal career and the nursing career. A comparative descriptive survey was used partially replicating the study carried out by May et al. (1991). The sample comprised of 1467 last class lyceum students all over the country. The instrument developed by May et al. (1991) was used after permission was obtained from the authors. First descriptive statistics were computed. Paired t-test and one Way Analysis of Variance were performed to test for significant differences. All differences between the ideal and nursing career were statistically significant. Students perceived the ideal career as knowledgeable, respected, appreciated, practiced in a safe

environment, with job security, autonomy in decision making and opportunities for making money. Nursing was perceived as caring for people but technical in nature. Although nursing was studied in college, to some extent this was appreciated and that it required good grades, however it was seen without autonomy in decision making and respect, unsafe, with no job security and not offering opportunities for making money. The results suggest the need for actions to improve the low profile of the profession.

Key words: Nursing education, attitudes, values, beliefs, ideal career, nursing career, recruitment, Greece

INTRODUCTION

Despite the changes taken place during the last two decades in nursing education in Greece, nursing still is not much valued as a future career. Usually, it is among the last choices of the candidates for higher education. (Damoliatis et al. 1991). The problem becomes more apparent due to continuing decline in birth rates in Greece that results in a decrease in the proportion of young population (Versieck et al. 1996, N.S.S.G. 2000). Changes in the

Greek families that tend to be more ambitious for girls regarding their future careers, and the fact that women today have more attractive and promising opportunities for employment, may affect their decision to choose a rather female orientated occupation as nursing (Firby 1990, Niakas 1994, Mousourou 1999). This of course may lead to a decline not only in numbers, but also in the level of the future nursing manpower, with immediate effect on the quality of services provided to clients.

Literature review

No study was found in Greece designed to explore the lyceum student's values, attitudes and beliefs towards nursing as a future career. Studies conducted using as samples students or registered nurses, report as the main reason of disappointment the low prestige of the profession. The same samples answered that the reasons for choosing to stay in nursing although they were not satisfied with its social image, were financial and job security, or the intention to use it as a step for a different career. Very few said that they were really interested in nursing (Fasoï et al. 1993, Andrioti et al. 1994, Doureka -Aglezi 1999). It is possible that the growing unemployment in Greece is a factor, which forced them to stay in nursing despite their dissatisfaction.

International literature reports that young persons seem to hold equivocal attitudes towards nursing as a career. Nursing is described as low status, not well educated and not well paid occupation. It is also characterized as "technical", "high stress", "tough" and "demanding", "dirty", "unpleasant", "dealing with death", "mainly feminine work", with "shift long working hours" and "repetitive tasks". Nurses are seen as "doctors helpers" or "subordinates", and in certain studies subjects report difficulties in finding a job after graduation (Firby 1990, Kohler & Edwards 1990, Marriner-Tomey 1990, May et al. 1991, Grossman & Northrop 1993, Stevens & Walker 1993, Foong et al. 1999, Hemsley-Brown & Foskett 1999, Rossiter et al. 1999).

In most of the studies respondents seem to be aware of the helping and caring aspects of the job. However in some studies, subjects reported misconceptions, or lack of information particularly in relation to the expanded role of the nurse (Grossman et al. 1989, Marriner-Tomey 1990, May et al. 1991, Grossman & Northrop 1993, Stevens & Walker 1993, Foong et al. 1999, Hemsley-Brown & Foskett 1999, Rossiter et al. 1999).

Positive attitudes present nursing as a profession requiring "college education", "interesting" and "useful to society", "respected", "well paid", "stimulating", and an "occupation for smart people". Nurses were considered as "well educated" and "thought off" (Firby 1990, Kohler & Edwards 1990, May et al. 1991, Grossman & Northrop 1993, Stevens & Walker 1993, Foong et al. 1999, Hemsley-Brown & Foskett 1999, Rossiter et al. 1999).

However even in the case respondents were positive, the percentage of those willing to choose nursing as a future career was relatively small (Grossman et al.

1989, Firby 1990, Kohler & Edwards 1990, Grossman & Northrop 1993, Stevens & Walker 1993, Foong et al. 1999, Hemsley-Brown & Foskett 1999, Rossiter et al. 1999).

Summarizing one can point out that in the studies mentioned above, young persons seem to hold both positive and negative attitudes and misconceptions about nursing or are not aware about the changing or extended role of the nurse. In most of the studies respondents tend to prefer other careers than nursing. The main reasons for it seem to be the low status of the profession, low salaries and bad working conditions.

Aims of the study

The aims of the study were to:

1. Describe values, attitudes and beliefs of lyceum students towards the ideal career and the nursing career
2. Identify significant differences in values, attitudes and beliefs between the ideal career and the nursing career, and
3. Identify significant differences among several demographic group variables, comparing them with values, attitudes and beliefs, for the ideal career and the nursing career respectively.

Methods

Sample and settings

A comparative descriptive survey was chosen for this study, which partially replicated May's et al. original research (1991). The sample included last class lyceum students all over country. Lyceum in Greece includes the last three classes of a six-year secondary education. A random stratified cluster sample was selected. (Sachini-Kardasi 1997) On the whole a sample of 17 general lyceums, 15 technical and 8 evening lyceums was selected. A total of 1467 questionnaires were completed from all three-school strata.

Instrument

The instrument developed by May et al. (1991) was used. It includes two five-point scales one measuring the ideal and the other the nursing career, with 17 parallel questions. Each respondent had to rate one of the five points: Strongly disagree (1), disagree (2) uncertain (3) agree (4) and strongly agree (5). Questions for demographic data included in the instrument, were adapted to Greek situation. The first page of the instrument contained guidelines related to rating procedure, as well as information regarding the

anonymity and the confidentiality of the data and the right of the subjects to withdraw at any time.

Procedure

The instrument was translated from English to Greek and again from Greek to English. Permission to translate and use the instrument was obtained from the authors. Also permission to carry out the study was given by the Research Office of the Greek Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute. The instrument was piloted to a last class of lyceum students who were excluded from those participating in the main study and adapted on the basis of their comments. The members of the research group contacted the directors of the lyceums by telephone, explaining the purpose of the study and the procedure, and requesting their co-operation. The questionnaires were mailed to schools and a second phone call was done to ensure that there was no problem with the understanding and the completion procedure of the questionnaires. There was almost a 95% response.

Data analysis

First frequencies and percentages were computed. Then mean scores were estimated for each item of the scales for the ideal and the nursing career. Paired t-test was run between the parallel items of the scales for the ideal and the nursing career to test for differences. One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test for significant differences between the sum means of the scales for the ideal and the nursing career and the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Results

Mean scores

Table 1 presents the mean scores for the ideal and the nursing career according to their magnitude, in a descending order. In the ideal career scale, students rated higher the items "knowing a lot" being appreciated" and "having respect", "working in a safe place" and "always having a job". Sixth in their choice was the item "making a lot of money" while seventh and eighth but still with a score above 4 were the items "making good grades" and "making decisions themselves".

In the nursing career scale only one item "caring for the people" was rated with a score above 4. Next were

the items "working with hands", "going to college", "being appreciated", "making good grades", "knowing a lot", "working very hard", "being very busy" and "having respect", all rated with scores above 3. All the other items were rated with scores below 3, which mean that the subjects to a large extent did not agree that the nursing career provides job security, work with high technology, high salaries or safe working environment. Furthermore, they did not agree that nurses work intellectually, have autonomy in decision making, are leaders, or are very powerful.

Table 2 presents the paired samples t- test for the differences between the ideal and the nursing careers. All differences between the items of the ideal and the nursing career were statistically significant with $P=0.00$, with exception the item "being very busy" where $P=0.04$. The greatest difference was between the items "making decisions themselves", "always having a job", "working in a safe place", "having respect", "making a lot of money", "knowing a lot", and "being appreciated". In three items, the items, "caring for the people", "working with hands", and "being very busy". The t value was negative.

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 present the results from the One Way Analysis of Variance for the comparisons between the demographic variables and the total mean scores calculated for the ideal and the nursing career, with negative items being recoded. Age was tested with Pearson's correlation coefficient but there was no significant relationship with either the ideal or the nursing career.

In the ideal career, there were significant differences only between the different categories of lyceum, - general and technical and the categories related to respondent's preferences for a future-nursing career. The general lyceum students rated higher in the ideal career characteristics. Students who did not prefer nursing as a future career or preferred it as an alternative solution only, rated the ideal career characteristics more positive as compared with those who thought to follow nursing as a future career. This, of course is a rather expected finding.

In the nursing career the technical lyceum students were more positive than the general lyceum. Furthermore students living in the area of Athens or in small cities or villages rated higher the nursing career in comparison with those coming from county capital or big cities. In relation to preference for a future nursing career, students who would choose nursing rated significantly higher the nursing career as compared with the other two groups. Students coming from agricultural families or from families with parents employed in technical occupations rated more positive the nursing career. On the contrary

when their parents had a rather intellectual occupation, they rated nursing less positive.

There were no significant differences between males and females. Male nurses have a short history in Greece. Therefore this finding was a surprise, as the researchers were expecting male students to rate lower on the nursing career. Another surprise was the relatively high percentage of students who reported that they were thinking to choose nursing as future career. It was a percentage of 22.6%. Another 19.6% could choose nursing as an alternative solution. This is in all 42.2% that is much higher as compared to most non-Greek studies.

Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that nursing in Greece portrays to lyceum students a picture totally different from the one representing their future ideal career. The ideal job is seen as one that requires a high level of knowledge, provides appreciation and respect, is safe has job security, good salary and autonomy in practice. On the contrary, nursing provides a career where caring for the people is very important but this characteristic is not a prerequisite for an ideal job. Nursing was also seen as technical in nature despite the fact that it was studied in institutions of higher education. It is true that in Greece, various levels of nursing staff, from the University to those with minimum educational preparation can practise caring (Katostaras 1994). Subjects probably associated caring with this low knowledge nursing staff category.

Students believed that nursing has some appreciation for its practice but not autonomy in decision making. These findings rather confirm that subjects were seen nursing as subservient and low status occupation. Nursing is also seen as unsafe occupation. May et al. (1991) indicate that the reason for this is possibly fear of the subjects for contracting certain diseases such as Aids. This may be the reason for which our subjects described nursing as unsafe. This could be a fruitful area for future research. Besides, students believed that nursing is not well paid and it does not provide job security. At this moment in Greece finding a job as a nurse is relatively easier in comparison to other occupations. However this is rather the case in the private sector where job security is not always certain. Employment in the public sector provides real security because public employees are employed on a permanent basis, but entrance in it is more difficult. Student's belief however that nursing is not a well paid occupation is real because nursing salaries in Greece are relatively low in comparison to other jobs both in private and public sectors (Lemonidou & Merkouris 1998).

Nursing seems to be more preferable among future candidates who come from families whose parents are occupied with agriculture or other technical rather than intellectual jobs and therefore have less education and lower income, as compared with other occupational groups. The finding can be explained by the fact that nursing was considered as a low status occupation but students coming from higher income families, had ambitions to choose a high status occupation for their future career.

Students of technical lyceums show more preference to nursing as well as those living in the area of Athens or in small cities and villages. Technical lyceums provide specialized education on subjects related to Health and Social services and their students were possibly more knowledgeable and more in favor of nursing. Advertising must focus to those groups who were not very positive to nursing as a future career. Nursing in Greece, however seems to have equal opportunities to draw on its future candidates from males and females. Taking into consideration the subjects' responses that nursing career differed significantly from the ideal in relation to opportunities for employment, the relatively high percentage of students who were in favor of a future nursing career was an unexpected finding. It is true, that there is a great shortage of nurses in the public hospitals and in the community settings in Greece at the moment (Kotostaras 1994). The problem however is not only one of supply and demand in the market, but it is rather due to government's unwillingness to employ more nurses (Versiek et al. 1996). Therefore, the relatively high percentage of students who were in favour of a future nursing career can be explained by the high percentage of unemployment in general, that lately exists in Greece.

Conclusions

The nursing profession in Greece must concentrate on changing the low image it portrays to its future candidates. Pressures must be exercised on leaders and decision-makers of the Government for better working conditions and higher salaries. More nurses must be encouraged and supported to continue their studies for higher degrees and be ready to undertake leading posts within nursing and health care settings. These highly educated persons placed in positions where national health policy is decided, will be able to lead the necessary changes in order to improve the low profile nursing has today. They will also act as role models for the new generations. Although further research is required, it is obvious that more publicity must be given to the profession and the importance of caring and nursing. Finally as this is the first study on the subject, further research is suggested, in order to

better clarify and confirm the findings of the present study.

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for the Ideal and the Nursing Career

Ideal			Nursing		
Item	Mean	S.D.	Item	Mean	S.D.
Knowing a lot	4.68	0.60	Caring for people	4.34	0.80
Being appreciated	4.66	0.63	Working with hands	3.53	1.01
Having respect	4.58	0.62	Going to college	3.50	1.03
Working in safe place	4.56	0.69	Being appreciated	3.40	1.04
Always having a job	4.51	0.72	Making good grades	3.34	1.12
Making lot of money	4.33	0.79	Knowing a lot	3.31	1.05
Making good grades	4.31	0.87	Working hard	3.17	1.10
Making decisions			Being very busy	3.08	1.09
themselves	4.18	0.93	Having respect	3.03	1.10
Working with high			Always having a job	2.85	1.01
technology	3.95	1.00	Working with high		
Going to college	3.81	1.14	technology	2.84	1.06
Working hard	3.62	1.11	Making lot of money	2.81	0.98
Caring for people	3.61	1.05	Working in safe place	2.79	1.14
Being a leader	3.57	1.08	Using my brain	2.58	1.02
Being very powerful	3.50	1.16	Making decisions		
Using my brain	3.41	1.06	themselves	2.34	0.95
Being very busy	2.96	1.14	Being a leader	2.26	0.96
Working with hands	2.89	1.14	Being very powerful	2.25	0.91

N=1467

Table 2. Paired Samples t- test for the Differences between the Ideal and the Nursing Career

Item	Ideal		Nursing		t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Making decisions themselves	4.18	0.93	2.34	0.95	54.90
Always having a job	4.51	0.72	2.85	1.01	52.50
Working in a safe place	4.56	0.69	2.79	1.14	51.49
Having respect	4.58	0.62	3.03	1.10	48.51
Making a lot of money	4.33	0.79	2.81	0.98	47.52
Knowing a lot	4.68	0.60	3.31	1.05	43.96
Being appreciated	4.66	0.63	3.40	1.04	40.90
Being a leader	3.57	1.08	2.26	0.96	34.38
Being very powerful	3.50	1.16	2.25	0.91	33.85
Working with high technology	3.95	1.00	2.84	1.06	29.72
Making good grades	4.31	0.87	3.34	1.12	28.85
Caring for people	3.61	1.05	4.34	0.80	-23.27
Using my brain	3.41	1.06	2.58	1.02	22.69
Working with hands	2.89	1.14	3.53	1.01	-17.98
Working hard	3.62	1.11	3.17	1.10	11.95
Going to College	3.81	1.14	3.50	1.03	8.12
Being very busy	2.96	1.14	3.08	1.09	-2.89

N=1467

P ≤ 0.05

Table 3. One Way Analysis of Variance for the Differences between Demographic Variables and the Ideal Career

Variable	Group	Mean	S.D.	F	P
Lyceum type	General (755)	3.91	.35	8.57	.003
	Technical (712)	3.86	.36		
Preference for future career					
in Nursing	Yes (332)	3.83	.34	5.17	.006
	No (847)	3.89	.38		
	Alternative choice (288)	3.92	.31		

Table 4. One Way Analysis of Variance for the Differences between Demographic Variables and the Nursing Career

Variable	Group	Mean	S.D.	F	P
Lyceum type	General (755)	2.74	.37	27.01	.000
	Technical (712)	2.84	.39		
Place of permanent living	Area of Athens (744)	2.81	.38	5.06	.006
	Big /capital cities (379)	2.73	.39		
	Small cities, villages (344)	2.81	.38		
Preference for future career					
in Nursing	Yes (332)	2.86	.38	7.98	.000
	No (847)	2.77	.39		
	Alternative choice (288)	2.75	.37		

Table 5. One Way Analysis of Variance for the Differences between Father's Occupation and the Nursing Career

Group	Mean	S.D.	F	P
Well educated professionals self employed or employed within the private or public sector (685)	2.74	.39	5.65	.000
Skilful and unskillful workers, various services providers & tradesmen (472)	2.82	.39		
Farmers, stock farmers, fishermen, forest guards (135)	2.85	.37		
Pensioners (77)	2.84	.35		
Unemployed-not mentioned occupation (98)	2.84	.36		

Table 6. One Way Analysis of Variance for the Differences between Mother's Occupation and the Nursing Career

Group	Mean	S.D.	F	P
Well educated professionals self employed or employed within the private or the public sector (440)	2.74	.38	4.13	.002
Skilful and unskillful workers, various service providers & Tradesmen (141)	2.78	.40		
Farmers, stock farmers, fishermen, forest guards (17)	2.93	.47		
Housewives (849)	2.82	.38		
Pensioners (20)	2.64	.33		

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