Nursing Students' Attitudes and Knowledge Toward Their Career Planning in Turkey

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Key words: career planning; nursing students; questionnaire; Turkey.

Summary. *The aim* of this study was to describe nursing students' attitudes and knowledge toward career planning in Turkey.

Methods. The study group comprised 157 baccalaureate senior nursing students from one university school of nursing. The participation rate was 95%. A questionnaire was developed by the researchers and had two sections including the students' demographic and personal information, and attitudes and knowledge toward career planning.

Results. More than half of the students (51.7%) chose nursing because of job security. A pediatrics unit (28.2%) was the most preferred department for working, and the least preferred was a psychiatric ward (6%). The most preferable position in which students wanted to work after graduation was a hospital staff nurse (53.7%) followed by an education nurse (31.5%). Less than one-fourth (22.8%) of nursing students thought that marriage could affect his/her career, and 39.6% of students thought that having children would disrupt his/her career. The majority of nursing students (65%) thought to enter further education (master and doctorate degree studies). Less than half (44.3%) of nursing students had knowledge toward career planning. More than one-fourth (26.2%) of students knew to develop a professional portfolio, 42.3% of students had knowledge how to write a curriculum vitae, and 33.6% of students knew job interview techniques.

Conclusions. Educators and clinicians must be positive role models, and they are responsible to guide nursing students before graduation. A career counseling unit and career week activities can be organized to share the experiences with the students about future career opportunities.

Introduction

A career is defined as advancing in a chosen job and as a result of that earning more money, taking on more responsibility, gaining more status, power, and respect (1). Careers need attention and nurturing. They are "life expressions of how a person wants to be in the world" (3). Career planning is not a one time event, but rather is a process that, over time, becomes part of the repertoire of skills and experiences and enables the nurse to develop as a professional and achieve the objectives. Moreover, career planning can play a crucial role at every stage of nurse's career (2). It is something that students, beginning practitioners, and experienced professionals can use to enrich their current role or to assist them in changing roles (3). The career planning and development process helps students answer the following four questions: "Where have I been?" "Where am I now?" "Where would I like to go?" and "How will I get there?" (1, 3). Career plans include personnel goals and targets but they can change.

The reality is that you cannot control every aspect of your life all the time. At different points in your life, different priorities will compete for your attention, and you will need to focus on whatever is most important. For this reason, career plans, instead of being certain steps that need to be taken, need to be considered flexible (4).

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) has taken a leadership role in this area. In 1995, the ICN published a working document "Career Development for Nurses." In the Introduction, the ICN stated that "nurses' career development should be encouraged and supported by appropriate professional attitudes, educational systems, workplace structures and management attitudes" (5). Educators, employers, and professional organizations are challenged to collaborate with nursing students on career-development activities that will enable to continue to provide high quality care when they become nurses. By paying attention to students' values, interest and goals, educators can help students to use their expe-

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riences to develop appropriate and marketable skills, and to position themselves for future job and career opportunities. Determining whether the nursing students have any career needs to design their career path/plan and knowing whether the school provides career programs that meet and satisfy nursing students' career needs is crucial (2). A "career counseling unit" generated for the purpose of guiding nursing students before graduation. Furthermore, "career week" activities are organized so that nurses who work in different areas and positions may share their experiences with the students (6).

Background

In Turkey, nursing education was based in elementary schools until 1959. Four-year undergraduate nursing education offering a Bachelor's degree first started at Ege University in 1955. In 1997, nursing education was undertaken at universities where the nursing schools commenced offering a 4-year university education. Today, there are 80 nursing schools affiliated with universities (7). There was no master's program for nursing until 1968. From 1963 to 1973, Ege University provided a doctoral degree for nurses (8).

A nurse in Turkish is "hemşire" and means a sister. Therefore, nursing considered to be a woman's profession (9). Nursing is traditionally perceived as a feminine occupation by public not only in Turkey but worldwide (10). Studies have shown that nursing profession is not generally chosen willingly, it is chosen to get a job, because it is easy to find a job or because it is seen as the most appropriate job for a woman in society (11, 12). With regard to occupational status and prestige, nursing profession is not rated high (10).

Nursing offers many and diverse practice contexts. Although there may be national differences, in general nurses can work in the areas of preventive and therapeutic health care services, education and management, and different health-related work places (6). Many students enter their undergraduate program with preconceptions about their future nursing careers. Clinical placements are important components for the professional development of nursing students. However, placements also have an impact on guiding decision-making with regard to future career and allow for validation of preferred career pathways, often challenging long held preconceptions (13). As nursing students plan their careers, it is also important for them to choose departments and areas of work that are consistent with their desires and needs, skills and interests (6). Kloster et al. (14) found that areas considered by students to be difficult were avoided later in choosing career pathways. Career pathways can change over the duration of an undergraduate course. Clinical placements have the potential to influence career choice; it is important that students make informed decisions in the planning of their future careers. Clinicians as well as educators are responsible for counseling and supporting the students during clinical placements (13).

All nurses should maintain a professional portfolio to reflect on their own development of knowledge and skills over time, present evidence of competencies, and market themselves when applying for career ladder positions or new jobs in nursing. A professional portfolio is a collection of carefully selected materials that document the nurse's competencies and illustrate the expertise of the nurse. The portfolio does not replace the resume or curriculum vitae, but provides information not available from these alone. Portfolios in nursing may be used for professional development, for career ladder promotions and with job applications, for annual performance appraisals, as documentation of employee performance for accreditation surveys, when applying to educational programs, and for document continuing competence (15). When a newly graduated nurse found the ideal position, he or she must proceed to the next and crucial step in obtaining the position: a job interview. Job interview entails some preparation such as learning as much as possible about the possible employer, dressing for the interview, being on time, and using suitable body language during a job interview (16).

Little is known about nursing students' knowledge and attitudes toward their career planning in Turkey (6, 17, 18). This study addresses attitudes and knowledge of Turkish nursing students at one school of nursing. The research questions were as follows:

- 1. Do nursing students start nursing education willingly?
- 2. What are the reasons of students for choosing nursing?
- 3. What are their preferences regarding area, position, and department after graduation?
- 4. What are their knowledge and attitudes toward career planning?

Methods

Participants. The study group comprised 157 baccalaureate senior nursing students from one university school of nursing. All the students were asked to participate, and the participation rate was 95% (n=149). The data were collected in 2008, one month before last-year students' graduation.

Measures. The tool comprised two sections. In the first section, there were questions about the students' demographic (age, gender) and personal information (whether or not they start nursing willingly, reason for choosing nursing as a profession, after they graduate in which area, position and department did they want to work). In the second section, the questionnaire based on the literature about knowledge and attitudes toward career planning was used (1, 2, 16, 17). The questionnaire had 7 questions. The participants were asked to answer yes (1) or no (0). Attitudes toward the impact of marriage and children on career and further education, and knowledge of developing portfolio, job interview techniques, and writing curriculum vitae were documented. An expert consensus panel, experienced in different nursing fields, ascertained content validity. The panel was asked to validate the scale. A pilot study enrolling 10 nursing students was carried out to test the acceptability and validity of the items. These participants were not included in the further study. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Internal consistency of the scale was tested using the Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability coefficient. The data analysis was performed with the program SPSS version 13.0.

Ethical Considerations. Permission for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of Nursing School. Participant students were orally informed about the aim of this study. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the research whenever they wished and their identity would be kept strictly.

Results

These results were found after the reliability and validity studies: a pilot study showed that the questions were understandable and no changes in wording were needed. These participants were not included in the further study. The Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability coefficient was 0.78.

The overwhelming majority (98.0%) of students were females, and the mean age of the students was 22.89 ± 1.19 years. Of the students participating in this study research, 45.6% (n=68) of students started nursing willingly. Reasons for choosing nursing were as follows: job security (51.7%), ideal (25.5%), family's desire (12.1%), and profession related to healthcare (10.7%).

The areas where students wanted to work after graduation were as follows: hospital staff nurse (53.7%), academician at a university (26.2%), school nurse (8.7%), occupational health nurse (6.7%), and pharmaceutical company sales (4.7%) (Table 1). The positions in which students want to work after graduation were as follows: education nurse (31.5%), nursing services director (30.8%), head nurse (22.8%), and supervisor nurse (14.9%) (Table 2). The ward mostly preferred as working place by students was pediatric ward (28.2%), followed by intensive care (23.4%), operating room (15.4%), maternity units (12.0%), and other (14.3%) depart-

Table 1. Areas Where Nursing Students Would Like to Work After Graduation (n=149)

Area	n	%
Hospital staff nurse	80	53.7
Academician at a university	39	26.2
School nurse	13	8.7
Occupational health nurse	10	6.7
Pharmaceutical company sales	7	4.7
Total	149	100.0

Table 2. Positions that Nursing Students Would Liketo Choose After Graduation (n=149)

Position	n	%
Education nurse	47	31.5
Nursing services director	46	30.8
Head nurse	34	22.8
Supervisor nurse	22	12.1
Total	149	100.0

 Table 3. Departments Where Nursing Students Would Like

 to Work After Graduation (n=149)

Department	n	%
Pediatric units	42	28.2
Intensive care units	35	23.4
Operating room units	23	15.4
Maternity units	18	12.0
Psychiatric units	10	6.7
Other units	21	14.3
Total	149	100.0

ments. The least preferred was a psychiatric ward (6%) (Table 3).

Table 4 presents nursing students' attitudes and knowledge toward career planning. Less than onefourth (22.8%) of nursing students thought that marriage affects his/her career, 39.6% of nursing students thought that children might disrupt his/ her career, and 65.1% of students planned to enter further education. Less than half (44.3%) of nursing students had knowledge toward career planning, 26.2% of nursing students knew how to develop a professional portfolio, 42.3% of students had knowledge how to write a curriculum vitae, and 33.6% of nursing students knew job interview techniques.

Discussion

This study aimed to describe nursing students' attitudes and knowledge toward their career planning. More than half (54.4%) of nursing students started nursing unwillingly. Job security (51.7%) is the most reason for choosing nursing as a profession. The results of our study are consistent with the findings of Yıldırım et al. (6) and Erkin and Tokem (12), who reported that 65% and 50% of students, respectively, did not choose nursing willingly. A study by Erkin and Tokem (12) reported that 59% of nursing students chose nursing because it is easier to find a job, whereas Yıldırım et al. (6) reported that more than half of the students if given a chance

 Table 4. Nursing Students' Attitudes and Knowledge Toward

 Career Planning (n=149)

	n	%
Attitudes toward career planning		
Do you think that marriage affects your career?		
Yes	34	22.8
No	64	43.0
Partially	51	34.2
Do you think that having children disrupt your career?		
Yes	49	32.9
No	41	27.5
Partially	59	39.6
Do you think to enter further education?		
Yes	97	65.1
No	52	34.9
Knowledge toward career planning		
Do you have knowledge toward career planning?		
Yes	66	44.3
No	83	55.7
Do you know to develop a professional portfolio?		
Yes	39	26.2
No	110	73.8
Do you know how to write a curriculum vitae?		
Yes	63	42.3
No	86	57.7
Do you know job interview techniques?		
Yes	50	33.6
No	99	66.4
Total	149	100.0

would not transfer to another school because it is easy to find a job in nursing after graduation. According to these results, nursing profession is not generally chosen willingly, it is chosen to get a job easier.

More than half of students (53.7%) wanted to work as a hospital staff nurse, followed by an academician at a university (26.2%). Similarly, in a study by Yıldırım et al. (6), 59% of nursing students wanted to work as a hospital staff nurse, 38% of students wanted to be an academician, and 7% of students wanted to have a job not related to nursing (health insurance, pharmaceutical company sales, etc.) after graduation. Unlu et al. (18) reported that a large proportion of nursing students wanted to work as academicians or administrator nurses. The reason that being an academician was more preferential than being a clinician was thought to be the hard working conditions of the nurses in hospitals and the low position they get relatively to the work they accomplished.

The analysis revealed that most frequently students would like to work as an education nurse (31.5%) or a director of nursing services (30.8%). Similarly, in a study by Yıldırım et al. (6), 42% of nursing students wanted to work as a education nurse at the hospital, 30% of students chose to be a nursing services director, and 21% of students wanted to be a head nurse. In line with our findings, Karadakovan (19) reported that 89% of nursing students wanted to work in the areas of management and education. Studies have shown that nursing as a profession is rated low (4, 10). In addition, in Turkey, nursing is traditionally perceived as a feminine occupation by public. It is thought that there could be a relationship between the students wanting positions such as education/management and higher status of the position in society.

When the departments where nursing students would like to work after graduation were examined, most of nursing students preferred pediatric units, followed by intensive care and operating room, maternity and other units. Psychiatric units were least preferred by nursing students. Similarly, in a study by Happell (20), pediatric nursing was shown as popular among students. It is very interesting that any students in this study reported that the department to work with healthy people whereas Norwegian students reported mostly wanting to work with healthy people such as public health nursing (21). Kloster et al. (14) reported that career choice could change over the duration of an undergraduate course. In a study by Robinson et al. (22) in which the impact of a positive experience influencing career choice, reported that promoting a positive welcome to uninteresting department, students changed their mind. According to this, clinical placements and education are important factors in nursing education. It is important to take nursing students to nursing practice departments where the educators and clinicians will be positive role models to ensure the students will like departments such as psychiatry and public health.

It was determined that nearly one-fourth (22.8%) of students thought that marriage would affect his/her career and 39.6% thought that having children was a factor disrupting future career. Betz and Fitzgerald (23) reported that marital and family status was the most consistent predictor of women's career orientation and innovation. In social life, it is primarily expected from a woman to be a mother and a wife. As a result, the success in career was left to second place (24, 25). Nursing is traditionally perceived as a female occupation by public in Turkey and worldwide. However, Yang et al. (26) reported that nursing was more preferred among men than women because of not having potential risks like pregnancy, which interrupts the career.

It was found that nursing students (65.1%) thought about further education. Rognstad et al. (21) reported that 70% of Norwegian students wanted to enter further education. Shattell et al. (27) found that American nursing students envisioned further their education. Further education in nursing is necessary because of an unprecedented growth in professional knowledge, rapid changes in

the healthcare system, and the consequent changes in nurses' roles (28). Health practitioners need to adapt as professional requirements change to maintain competence and to safeguard the public. The findings are promising because the students wanted to enter further education and compensate the lack of nurses in their country.

In this study, less than half (44.3%) of students had knowledge toward career planning, and only 26.2% of nursing students knew how to develop professional portfolio. A professional portfolio contains materials that document the nurse's competencies and experiences and illustrate the career path of the nurse. Portfolios in nursing contain the nurse's background and expertise for others to review (15). A portfolio also helps nurses in planning their careers. All too often nurses change positions without considering where they want to be in 1, 5, and 10 years, and they do not evaluate how each position fits into their career plans. In the portfolio, the nurse can list professional goals to be achieved and can use the portfolio to monitor progress in meeting them. In this way, the portfolio is a career-planning journal that guides setting career goals and making career decisions (29). Findings show that students had little knowledge about the portfolio. It is thought that educators and clinicians are responsible to raise awareness of the crucial role of portfolio for nursing students' career plan.

It was found that about half (42.3%) of the nursing students knew how to write a curriculum vitae. With the curriculum vitae, nurses can more easily market themselves to potential employers, illustrating their value and how they could fulfill the demands of the position (15). Findings may be related to the nature of the job application. At the first step of job application, it is possible for an employer to request a person to fill in some forms including background information such as educational level, course experiences, and specialties. It is hopeful that nursing students are aware of the importance of a curriculum vitae.

However, less than half (33.6%) of nursing students knew job interview techniques. The prospect of a job interview can intimidate even the most seasoned of nurses. Therefore, it would be harder for a newly graduate nurse. Of course, few people relish being put on the spot and made to feel insecure, both of which commonly occur during job interviews. However, preparedness can help a great deal in making the experience less threatening and even enjoyable. The process, however, entails some preparation (16). For these reasons, educators and clinicians can help students to use their job interview experiences, to develop appropriate and marketable skills, and to position themselves for future job and career opportunities.

Study Limitations and Implications for the Future Research

The most important limitation for the study was the small study sample including baccalaureate senior nursing students in one university. It results in difficulties to generalize the results. Future studies that would include larger samples and more nursing schools are needed. Additional exploration of qualitative studies on nursing students' attitudes and knowledge toward career planning is recommended. Nursing students' attitudes and knowledge toward their career planning must be studied with different cultures and countries if both high performance and job satisfaction is a desire among professional members in nursing.

Conclusions

Educators and clinicians must be positive role models, and they are responsible for guiding the nursing students before graduation. Using the results of this study, a career counseling unit and career week activities can be organized. So that nurses who work in different areas and positions may share their experiences with the students, and employers and professional organizations might guide them to develop portfolio and teach them job interview techniques.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

The authors state no conflict of interest.

Slaugos studentų žinios ir požiūris į karjeros planavimą Turkijoje

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Raktažodžiai: karjeros planavimas, slaugos studentai, anketa, Turkija.

Santrauka. *Tyrimo tiksla*s. Straipsnyje pateikiamos slaugos studentų žinios ir požiūris į karjeros planavimą Turkijoje.

Tiriamųjų kontingentas ir tyrimo metodai. Tyrime dalyvavo 157 universitetinės slaugos mokyklos bakalauro programos vyresniųjų kursų slaugos studentai. Atsako dažnis – 95 proc. Apklausa organizuota naudojant tyrėjų parengtą dviejų dalių anketą. Pirmoji anketos dalis skirta demografiniams ir asmeniniams duomenims rinkti, antroji – žinioms ir požiūriui apie karjeros planavimą išaiškinti.

Rezultatai. Daugiau kaip pusė studentų pasirinko slaugos profesiją, siekdami užsitikrinti darbo vietą ir darbą ligoninėje. Vaikų ligų skyriuje pageidautų dirbti 28,2 proc. būsimų slaugytojų, o psichiatrijos skyriuje – vos 6 proc. Labiausiai studentų pageidaujamos pareigos, baigus studijas, yra slaugytojo-mokytojo (31,5 proc.). Penktadalis studentų įsitikinę, kad šeimos sukūrimas gali neigiamai paveikti jų profesinę karjerą, 39,6 proc. mano, kad vaikų auginimas galėtų iš viso sustabdyti jų karjeros augimą. 65 proc. visų respondentų ketintų toliau studijuoti magistrantūroje ar doktorantūroje. Apie karjeros planavimą informuotas tik kas antras studentų žino, kaip parašyti gyvenimo aprašymą ir 33,6 proc. yra susipažinę su įsidarbinimo pokalbio procedūra.

Išvados. Dėstytojai ir slaugos praktikai turėtų rodyti teigiamą pavyzdį ir konsultuoti slaugos studentus karjeros planavimo klausimais dar studijų metu. Įsteigtas karjeros planavimo centras ir organizuojama karjeros savaitė sudarytų galimybes slaugos studentams įgyti daugiau žinių apie profesinės karjeros galimybes.

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