

## Saudi Nursing Students' Attitudes towards the Nursing Profession

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The purposes of the current study are: 1. Measure the nursing student's attitude toward nursing profession

2. Investigate the effect of Socio demographic factors on nursing students' attitudes toward the nursing profession.

**Methodology:** A descriptive cross- sectional design was utilized to identify the nursing students' attitudes toward nursing profession. A non probability convenience sample was used in the present study. All of the students enrolled in the fall semester Academic year 2012/2013 at the College of Nursing, were invited to participate in the survey of Student Nursing Attitudes towards the Nursing Profession. The participation was voluntary and anonymous and the purpose of the study was fully explained before gaining the participants' consents. Only 152 students participated and returned the questionnaires. The students were allocated in different academic years including the first, second, third, fourth and the internship year. Data were collected using the Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession developed by Coban&Kasikci (2011), which was used in surveying the nursing students' attitudes toward nursing profession. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 18.0.

**Results:** Current study findings revealed that the mean attitude score of the nursing student was  $150.48 \pm 17.86$ , which tended to be a positive attitude toward the nursing profession with a range of scores from 96 – 178. And the student coming from the Central (Mean score =151.92,  $p = 0.02$ ), South (Mean score =156.75,  $p = 0.02$ ) and East region (147.30,  $p = 0.02$ ) had significant statistical differences regarding positive attitudes toward the profession when compared to the students coming from the North region (Mean score =110.50,  $p = 0.02$ ) who on the contrary had significantly statistically negative attitudes.

**Conclusion:** The attitude of Saudi nursing students tends to be positive towards nursing profession. On the other hand, the negative attitudes towards nursing profession held by the minority of the students were related to residence in North region and young age group; less than 20 years old.

**Key words:** Nursing profession – nursing students – Attitudes.

### 1- Introduction:

Although nurses form the largest professional group involved with health care delivery, there is a worldwide suffering from the shortage of nurses to meet the demand of health care setting this shortage will influence the delivery of health care and negatively affecting patient outcomes. (Juraschek, Zhang, Ranganathan, & Lin, 2012). A World Health Organization International Council of Nurses discussion paper in 2009 estimated the global shortfall of nurses to have been close to 2 million in 2005 and projected it would rise to 2.8 million by 2015. The short fall is most acute in South East Asia, Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean but exists in all regions( Canadian Federation Of Nurses Union 2011). Saudi Arabia, like many areas of the world, is challenged by a nursing shortage. Expatriate nurses form a large proportion of the nursing workforce in Saudi healthcare facilities, with Saudis comprising only 29.1% of the total nursing workforce (Almalki et al, 2011). Addressing nurses' attitudes toward their profession represents an important aspect of understanding the issue of nursing shortage. Addressing the negative attitudes of nurses is important because the problem of resolving the nursing shortage is compounded by the negative effects these negative attitudes have on nursing education (Hathorn, Machtmes, & Tillman, 2009)

Saudi Arabian society is divided in its view of the nursing profession. Nursing is not considered a respectable profession for women in Saudi Arabia, despite its long, respected history during the period of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) (Mansour, 1994). Nursing was ranked last in the list of appropriate occupations for women. Reasons for this low ranking included the type of work, inadequate financial rewards and long working hours that were found to be prohibitive for some women as they must fulfill obligations of the wife and mother role (Tumulty, 2001).

The nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia has consisted primarily of an extensive expatriate population. In 1996 Saudi nurse comprised 9% of the total nursing workforce (Gary, 1992), 17% of the total nurse workforce was Saudi nationals (Marrone 1999). The increase in Saudi graduates from – grown programs has increased the percentage to 18% in 2003 (Central Department of Statistics, 2004). It was argued that nurses with higher degree qualifications are the promise for the future and they will assume positions of leadership (Tumulty 2001).

Al-Omar (2003) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia about high school students' perceptions of nursing as a possible career. He concluded that community image, family disagreement, cultural and communal values, long working hours, mixing with members of the opposite gender, and the worry of not being a "marriageable" prospect were the main reasons why Saudi females did not choose nursing as a career. Additionally, both historically and currently, nurses have been viewed as an extension of the physician (Jackson & Gary, 1991) and (El-Sanabary, 2003).

A stereotype of nursing that occurs in other cultures e.g., Australia Darbyshire (2000). Indeed, El-Sanabary (1993, 2003) suggested that stereotyping of the nurse as an uneducated subservient female hospital worker discourages many Arab women from entering the nursing profession. One of the research findings was that interest in nursing as a career is low. Only 5.2% of a sample of high school respondents in Saudi Arabia intended to pursue nursing after school (Al-Omar, 2004). In fact, Saudi females who choose nursing as a career face many obstacles, primarily based on religious and social norms. Nursing suffers from a poor image in Saudi society, which considers it a job for "maids" or uneducated women. Saudi men who choose nursing also face criticism from family and friends. One Saudi male nurse known to the authors related, "My mother refused to tell her friends I am a nurse. If they see me in the hospital, she tells them I am a doctor, as doctors are better than nurses moreover nursing in Saudi Arabia has some major problems (poor education, foreign nurses, poor Saudi Nursing Association, lack of nursing media, absence of voice of nursing, ignorant decision makers, lack of legislation and constitution (Rosser, K., 2006).

Some studies worldwide reported in nursing as a carrier is low. In Kuwait, 19% of female high school students interviewed were considering nursing as a career (Al-Kandari & Lew, 2005). A Tanzanian study showed that, of all the medically related professions (including veterinary medicine), nursing was the least popular with only 9% of students expressing an interest (Kikwilu et al, 2000). Whilst in Hong Kong the results indicated that the students were generally knowledgeable about nursing but were reluctant to pursue nursing as a career (Rossiter et al, 1998).

The reasons for the perceived lack of interest in nursing as a career are multi-factorial, and may differ from context to context. In South Africa, the low status of the profession, heavy workloads, and poor access to personal development programs have been proposed as some of the reasons learners are not attracted to nursing as a career; other negative perceptions about nursing include that the workload is physically demanding, and that the shortage of nurses increases the stress of the work (Buerhaus, 2005).

All studies done in Saudi Arabia were focused on high school students and on the society and there is a study conducted by Dean of the College of Nursing at King Saud University in Jeddah, Dr. Tagwa Omer highlighted that there is an increase of nurses' turnover among Saudi female nurses. To her, the factors that contributed to turnover is related to the nature of work which demands long hours and the requirement for working during festive holidays such as Eid Mubarak and night shifts ( Okaz Newspaper, 2010, June 19). However there were no studies conducted on the nursing students to measure their attitude towards the nursing profession, therefore it is important to introduce an overall determination on the issue. Besides if there are negative attitudes towards the profession it might be possible to plan and apply certain education targets for changing these attitudes. By these means candidates of nursing profession might attain positive attitudes towards the profession during their education which in turn might contribute to the increase in the number of nurses who are devoted to their profession. This research is considered to provide a contribution also to the studies on the improvement and enhancement of nursing profession.

## Objectives of the study

The objectives of the current study were to:

1. Measure the nursing student's attitude toward nursing profession.
2. Investigate the effect of Sociodemographic factors on the nursing students' attitudes towards the nursing profession.

## 2 Subjects and methods

**2.1 Research Design:** A descriptive cross-sectional design was utilized to identify the nursing students' attitudes toward nursing profession.

**2.2 Setting:** This study was carried out in College Of Nursing Riyadh (CON-R) – King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS).

**2.3 Participants:** A non probability convenience sample was used in the present study. All of the students enrolled in the fall semester Academic year 2012/2013 at the College of Nursing, were invited to participate in the survey of Student Nursing Attitudes towards the Nursing Profession. The participation was voluntary and anonymous and the purpose of the study was fully explained before gaining the participants' consents. Only 152 students participated and returned the questionnaires. The students were allocated in different academic years including the first, second, third, fourth and the internship year.

**2.4 Data collection tools:** Data were collected using the Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession developed by Coban&Kasikci (2011), which was used in surveying the nursing students' attitudes toward nursing profession. The scale is composed of 40 items; each item is rated on a five point likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). The negative statement rating was reversed for counting the total score of the attitude scale. The total attitude scores ranged from 40 as the lowest to 200 as the highest score. Content and face validity of the instrument were assessed by three experts who examined the tool and approved it. And Cronchach  $\alpha$  was used to measure the scale reliability by evaluating the internal consistency of the scale 40 items.

A pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility and applicability of the tool. The pilot study was carried out on fifteen subjects and the result of the pilot study used in refining the questionnaire form.

The other part of the questionnaire included items related to socio-demographic characteristics subjects such as age group, marital status, and academic year. Additionally, semi structured interview were used to explore the subject information about nursing profession and reasons behind choosing nursing as a profession.

### 2.5 Procedure:

After obtaining the official approval from the research unit. The tool was administered with the permission of the instructor; the questionnaire was administered to students during regular class periods during the academic year 2012/2013. The students received written instructions that specified the purpose of the study and explained the procedures to be followed in responding to the items. They were told that there was no right or wrong responses. Students were asked to return the survey to the class instructor who in turn returned it to the researchers. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete

### 2.6 Ethical issues:

Informed written consent was obtained from the students who agreed to participate in the study. It was clearly stated that students' participation is voluntary and confidential and students were assured about their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Results:** Findings of the current study are presented in four main sections: demographic characteristics of nursing students, reasons behind choosing the nursing profession and then student`s attitudes towards nursing profession

**Table I: Socio- Demographic Profile of Nursing Students**

Demographic Data	Frequency (n = 152)		Missing Data
	No	%	
<b>Age</b>			1
Less than 20 yrs	23	15.2	
20 - 24 yrs	117	77.5	
25 yrs or more	11	7.3	
<b>Marital Status</b>			0
Single	125	82.2	
Married	26	17.1	
Divorced	1	0.7	
<b>Children</b>			0
Students who have children	11	7.2	
Students who have no children	141	92.8	
<b>Residence in Saudi Arabia</b>			0
Central region	118	77.6	
East region	19	12.5	
West region	5	3.3	
North region	3	2.0	
South region	7	4.6	
<b>Father`s Education</b>			0
Illiterate	10	6.6	
Elementary school	45	29.6	
Secondary school	54	35.5	
College	34	22.4	
Postgraduate	9	5.9	

<b>Academic Year</b>			0
First	15	9.9	
Second	21	13.8	
Third	25	16.4	
Fourth	79	52.0	
Internship	12	7.9	
<b>Pre university Qualifications</b>			10
Secondary school	132	93.0	
Faculty of science	10	7.0	
<b>GPA</b>	3.32±0.57		42

Table I showed that the majority of the nursing students' ages ranged between 20 and 25 years were unmarried (82.2%), were residents of central region in Saudi Arabia – Riyadh – in which the College of Nursing is located (77.6%) and their pre university qualification was high school degree (93.0%). More than half of the students were enrolled in the fourth year (52.0%).

Table II: Reasons behind choosing the nursing profession and students' information about the nursing profession

	Frequency (n = 152)		Missing Data
	no	%	
<b>Reason Behind Choosing Nursing</b>			
My own interest in nursing	51	34.0	2
Not my wish but my parents' wish	11	7.2	
No desire of my own; Only to improve my financial situation	19	12.5	
My own interest and to improve my financial situation	28	18.4	
Secondary school grade / Computer random selection	33	21.7	
Interest in Health Sciences	6	3.9	
Others	4	2.6	
<b>Do you have any information about nursing before joining the college?</b>			0
Yes	96	63.2	
No	56	36.8	
<b>Source of information about nursing before joining the college</b>			0

Family / Friends	52	51.5	
School	12	11.9	
Health Services	15	14.9	
Media	36	35.6	
Others	3	3.0	
<b>Effect of information</b>			<b>1</b>
Positive	64	64.0	
Negative	14	14.0	
Neutral / None	22	22.0	
<b>Preferred Nursing Specialty</b>			<b>4</b>
Medical / Surgical Nursing	46	31.1	
Pediatric Nursing	30	20.3	
Maternity Nursing	16	10.8	
Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing	15	10.1	
Management of Nursing services	11	7.4	
Critical Care Nursing	5	3.4	
Others	19	12.8	
<b>The characteristics of a successful nurse</b>			<b>3</b>
Commitment to good manners.	32	21.5	
Establishing a good nurse-patient relationship.	61	40.9	
Commitment to moral and professional ethics	67	45.0	

Table II revealed that, 34.0% of nursing students have chosen the nursing profession because nursing was their own interest. The second ranked percentage among participants was their grade in secondary school followed by, they considering nursing as opportunity to improve their financial situations. The findings revealed that nearly one third of the students had no previous information about nursing prior to their admission to the College of Nursing. Moreover, 51.5% of the students, their information were from their families and friends, followed by the media (35.6%). However, this information affected their image of nursing positively in 64% and negatively in only 14.0% of the participants. Regarding the preferred nursing specialty, Medical Surgical Nursing gained the highest percentage among the students (31.1%), followed by Pediatric Nursing (20.3%), Maternity Nursing (10.8%) and Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in the fourth place (10.1%).

**Table III: Mean scores of students' attitudes towards Nursing Profession and the internal consistency of the scale**

<b>Students' Attitudes Scale Scores</b>	
Mean ± Standard Deviation	150.48 ± 17.86
Minimum - Maximum Score	96 - 178
Reliability – Internal consistency	Cronbach $\alpha$ = 0.906

As per Table III, the mean attitude score of the nursing student was  $150.48 \pm 17.86$ , which tended to be a positive attitude toward the nursing profession with a range of scores from 96 – 178. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  showed a strong reliability of Coban&Kasikci (2011), scale of attitude toward Nursing Profession as it was 0.906.

**Table IV: Students' Nursing attitude scores and Sociodemographic factors**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	P value
<b>Age</b>			
Less than 20 yrs	145.76	25.97	0.50
20 - 24 yrs	151.82	16.13	
25 yrs or more	146.75	7.71	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	149.91	19.16	0.65
Married	151.66	12.18	
Divorced	166.00	.	
<b>Children</b>			
Students who have children	153.20	15.65	0.72
Students who have no children	150.28	18.09	
<b>Residence in Saudi Arabia</b>			
Central region	151.92*	16.67	0.02*
East region	147.30*	20.48	
West region	153.50	7.77	
North region	110.50*	7.77	
South region	156.75*	12.94	
<b>Father's Education</b>			

Illiterate	149.40	19.88	0.32
Elementary school	153.41	12.42	
Secondary school	153.17	16.37	
College	147.94	21.14	
Postgraduate	136.20	24.81	
<b>Pre University Qualifications</b>			
Secondary school	152.04	17.93	0.06
Faculty of science	134.50	16.54	

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	P value
<b>Academic Year</b>			
First	142.90	20.80	0.08
Second	139.90	26.41	
Third	151.88	15.33	
Fourth	154.50	13.90	
Internship	155.25	12.09	
<b>Family reaction towards choosing nursing</b>			
Positive/Encouraging	152.87	17.10	0.21
Negative	140.60	17.55	
Neutral	147.10	19.21	
<b>Reason behind choosing nursing</b>			
My own interest in nursing	154.77	16.71	0.19
Not my wish but my parents' wish	141.50	23.07	0.19
No desire of my own; Only to improve my financial situation	143.63	18.60	0.16
My own interest and to improve my financial situation	150.17	17.32	0.90
Secondary school grade / Computer random selection	151.30	18.44	0.88



Interest in Health Sciences	162.66	11.37	0.23
Others	152.50	13.43	0.88
<b>Do you have any information about nursing before joining the college?</b>			
Yes	150.00	19.42	0.74
No	151.44	14.65	
<b>Source of Information</b>			
Family	153.06	18.16	0.14
High School	147.28	21.70	0.70
Health Services	151.42	27.57	0.82
Mass Media	150.07	16.41	0.69
Others	152.50	13.43	0.88
<b>Effect of Information</b>			
Positive	150.18	17.01	0.21
Negative	155.57	16.31	
Neutral/None	139.22	27.34	

As shown in table IV the regions of residence were significantly different regarding the mean attitude scores of the students. The student coming from the Central (Mean score =151.92,  $p = 0.02$ ), South (Mean score =156.75,  $p = 0.02$ ) and East region (147.30,  $p = 0.02$ ) had significant statistical positive attitudes toward the profession when compared to the students coming from the North region (Mean score =110.50,  $p = 0.02$ ) who on the contrary had significantly statistically negative attitudes. The present study illustrated a borderline statistical significance of the students' age. Students in the age group from 20 - 24 yrs (Mean score = 151.82,  $p = 0.05$ ) showed more positive attitudes toward the Nursing Profession when compared the younger and older other two age groups.

## Discussion

Despite the great advances in the nursing profession, nurses still face considerable challenges related to its image that impact on status, power and the ability to affect changes in health care. Where, a negative image of nursing has a number of negative consequences, it has impacts on the quality and quantity of persons who choose nursing as a profession. The public who are constantly presented with an inaccurate and negative nursing image will view a career in nursing as undesirable (Kalisch, 2006).

The present study illustrated a borderline statistical significance between the students' age and their attitude toward nursing profession it showed that the young students had a negative attitude toward nursing profession compared to the students their age ranged between 20 -24. This finding is consistent with the researchers' expectation that the new students admitted to the college, faced many challenges such as language barriers, lack of exposure or orientation to the clinical practice which are interesting to them in the first two years and they are exposed to new learning styles which is different from the styles applied in the high school. Additionally, most of them are away from their families This finding were consistent with Abdel El-Haleem (2011) who reported that negative attitude among the young nurses could be due to their exposure to reality shock and due to gap between theory and practice. In the same line, Gamel (2006) found that nursing students became more attracted to their profession and more closely identified with it as they progressed in their nursing

education. The present results demonstrated a significant effect of the regions of residence on the student's attitude toward nursing profession. The students coming from central, South and East region exhibited more positive attitude toward the profession when compared to the students coming from the North region (Hail, Arar, Hafer El Baten) who displayed significant negative attitude. It was noticed that the North regions are more conservative, restrictive and they view a nursing carrier as undesirable. The North region might lack awareness about nursing giving the fact that here is only one college of nursing located there. Moreover also consistent with student's feedback who come from north region they reported that their families have stereotyped images of nurses as maids and physician handmaidens. Add references on the North region view of nursing. On the other hands the other regions with positive attitude toward nursing profession, it was noted that they are more modern regions, urbanized and each has several Colleges of Nursing in public and private universities and they are more oriented about the nursing. Accordingly, they view nursing as an attractive profession because of the availability of job opportunities. This finding contradicted with Aunrag, et al (2011) who found out that the students of the rural areas were interested to join nursing because they belonged to poor families and they have to satisfy economic needs of their families on priority basis and jobs in nursing are easily available while the urban students who belonged to middle class were reluctant to join to nursing.

According to the student's academic year it was found that there was no significant relationship between the academic year and their attitude toward nursing profession.. This finding was contradicted with the researcher's expectation that the young students and who are in the first year were expected to have negative attitude compared to the students who are enrolled in the third and fifth year because the students were expected to have more positive attitude as they progress from year to year during the undergraduate education this finding contradicted with the Harrison, (1998) and Begeny ,( 2006) who found that nursing students became more attracted to their profession and more closely identified with it as they progressed in their nursing education.

The study revealed that the highest percentage of study subjects have chosen the nursing profession because of their own interest followed by their secondary school grades and to improve their financial status this result in accordance with that of Okasha, (2001) had reported that most of the students stated their reasons for joining the nursing profession were their interest in the medical field and the humanitarian nature of the nursing profession. Also these result is similar to Munro ( 1988), who investigate the motives and attitudes of young graduate nurses the great majority of the present study sample ( 92.98%) was mostly satisfied with their chosen career and most of the nursing graduate were happy with their choice. This finding supported by the study conducted by (Abdel El-Haleem, 2011 ) who had conducted a study in Egypt and found that around two - third of subjects have chosen nursing as it represented a good opportunity for them to work in and outside country . On the same line Streubert, (1994) revealed that nursing was attractive because of job opportunities, security and availability. Also another reason behind choosing the nursing and mentioned by the study subjects was the secondary school grade. In this respect Abu-Gharibeh and siluman(1992) stated that the poor image of nursing combined with the university admission policies in which students are assigned to various faculties based on their secondary school grade. The present study revealed that two third of students had information about the nursing before joining the college and the sources of information were their family and friends followed by the media as a source of information. These information affected their image of nursing positively beside there was no significant relationship between the presence of information and nursing attitudes toward the nursing profession. Consistently, Gamal(2006) reported a significant correlation between presence of information and its effect on image of nursing. The study showed that there was no a significant relationship between the their family's reaction and their attitude toward the profession this findings from the researcher's point of view that although the students and their families had information about the nursing but still the poor social image were also given for the refusal of Saudi parents to approve of their daughters joining the nursing profession. This finding is contradicted with Abdel El-Haleem (2011) who reported that there is a significant relationship between nursing attitude toward nursing and parent's reaction to joining the college of nursing . In the same line Heath ( 2001), stated that young students might be applying to nursing programs as a response to parent's dream instead of their own and also supported by El sharkawy and El Hadad (1996) who found that the family members had a significant impact on the choice of nursing as a carrier. In the same line Law and Arthur, (2003) reported that about two-thirds of the respondents 69.5% agreed that their parents had a positive influence on their career choice.

Overall, the study showed that the majority of nursing students had a positive attitude toward the nursing profession while the minority had a negative attitude. This finding contradicting with the researcher's expectation's because the negative image of nursing in the society as a female-dominant work This result consistent with Abd-El Halem (2011) showed positive changes in the image of nursing as a profession among more than half of the study subjects the following will explore the factors affecting that positive changes; working condition clinical training ,relationship with faculty members and with the friends. Moreover, Gray, (2004) revealed that the highest percent of his study subjects were negatively influenced by public view about

nursing and reported that 23% of nurses perceived that the public portrayed them as handmaidens to physicians. Furthermore, Shukri (2005) said that nursing is still suffering from negative public image in the Arab world. In the same line, Alexander (2010) reported that only 8.3% indicated an interest in pursuing nursing as a career and the rest 90.5% were interested in a wide variety of careers. The main reasons given for it were the fact that nursing involves contact with the opposite sex. On the contrary, the more knowledge and positive attitude on nursing, the more likely that the students would be attracted to nursing.

An increased awareness about the nursing profession should be made to improve the image of nursing and change the negative community attitude toward nursing (Okasha, 2001). Moreover through our ongoing involvement in research, we will seek the attention of policy and decision-makers who have the power to affect transformative change at legislative, organizational, and community levels and develop national strategies to reduce shortages in regions of greatest need.

Finally, for sustained change and assurance of an adequate supply of nurses, solutions must be developed in several areas: education, healthcare delivery systems, policy and regulations, and image.

### **Conclusion:**

The attitude of Saudi nursing students tends to be positive towards nursing profession. On the other hand, the negative attitudes towards nursing profession held by the minority of the students were related to residence in North region and young age group; less than 20 years old.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the current research study, the following recommendations are suggested replicate this study with larger and more randomly selected sample.

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