

Nurses' Self Perception about their Public Image in a Metropolitan City, Karachi

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the diploma- prepared nurses' self perception about their public image in a metropolitan city of Karachi, Pakistan.

Study Design: This study was conducted through cross-sectional quantitative design.

Materials & Methods: A convenience sample of 281 diploma- prepared nurses' from four public and private hospitals was selected. Data were collected using the standardized Porter Nursing Image Scale, and a self developed demographic tool.

Result: The perception of their public image was ranked positive by the participants but differed in degree by the three components of the tool.

Conclusion: Efforts to understand and enhance the image of the nursing profession are associated with improved job satisfaction, better quality patient care, and improved retention leading to cost effective organizational nursing management.

Key words: Nurses, nursing profession, self perception, public image.

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INTRODUCTION

Public image is a key concern for the nursing profession throughout the world^{1,2}. Image is a mental conception held in common by members of a group and is symbolic of a basic attitude and orientation³. Image is developed through people's interaction, which influences people's expectations towards each other and communicates to them, perceptions of others about themselves^{4,5}. The public image of a profession has a significant effect on its professionals' status^{4,5}. Being a key player in health sector, nurses should have a positive perception about themselves and about their profession^{6,7}. However, the nursing image and the public perception of the nursing profession remain low in many countries, including Pakistan^{1,8-10}.

In Pakistan, little research has been done to document nurses' status and self image. Anecdotal reports reveal that several measures have been taken to enhance the

status of the nursing profession and to mitigate negative stereotypes, particularly after establishment of University-based private school of nursing in 1980. It is believed that during the last three decades, the profession has experienced tremendous growth, which presumably has had a positive effect on its public image. However, the nursing development process for creating a strong future for the nursing profession is slow and challenging, and the struggle continues.

Nursing literature has revealed stereotypical images of nurses around the world. A handful of studies conducted in Pakistan echo the findings that the public image of nurses is low^{1,2,8,9,11}. Nurses' self perception about their image is important to study because the stereotypical image affects their self perception about their public image and their practice¹². Nurses who have a positive perception about their public image have a greater likelihood of having job satisfaction and good performance^{2,12-14}.

This study was a pioneering effort to fill the knowledge gap and develop a better understanding about the nurses' perception of their professional public image.

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the diploma- prepared nurses' self perception about their public image in a metropolitan city of Karachi, Pakistan. What was the diploma- prepared nurses' self perceptions about their public image, in Karachi, Pakistan?

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MATERIALS & METHODS

A cross-sectional design was used to study the diploma-prepared nurses' self perception about their public image. The study settings were two public and two private hospitals in Karachi. The study population was the diploma- prepared nurses of any age, gender, and experience, registered with the Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC), and working in the selected study settings.

The study was approved by the Ethical Review Committee of Aga Khan University. Permission was obtained from the participating organizations for data collection and written informed consent was obtained from each participant. Demographic form was assigned codes to maintain anonymity of the participants.

A sample of 281 participants was obtained by using a combination of cluster sampling and convenience sampling techniques. The cluster sampling technique was used to select units/ wards from each hospital, while the participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique.

A standardized questionnaire called: Porter Nursing Image Scale was used along with a Demographic Form developed by the primary researcher. The Porter Nursing Image Scale was developed by Porter and Porter in 1991 consists of three components: professional aspects, interpersonal relations, and intrapersonal abilities and uses the "Likert" type rating ranging from 1 to 7 and for rating the participants' positive and negative perception¹⁵. The scores ranging from 1- 3 indicate a positive perception, and the scores ranging from 5-7 indicate a negative perception, whereas, number 4 indicates a neutral perception of the participants. The research tool has established validity and reliability. Data were collected both in Urdu and English Language based on the participant's preference.

Data collection tools and the informed consent were translated into the Urdu language by professional translators, to allow participation of nurses who may prefer using Urdu language. The Urdu translations were back translated into English and the tools were modified accordingly.

Pre-testing was conducted with 5% (n=14) of the total sample size from the one public and one private hospital that were not part of the actual study. Data were collected over the period of 2 months from nurses working in all three shifts. The primary researcher met with each participant to obtain the consent. The estimated time for the completion of the questionnaires was about 20 minutes. Response rate was 100%. Data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

RESULTS

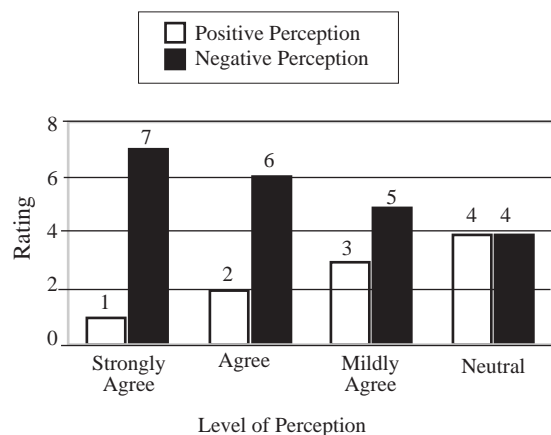
Majority of the participants were women, between 20 and 30 years of age. Almost all, 98.9 % (278) of the participants were working full time. Most of the participants, 84 % (236), were working as staff nurses and 57.7% (162) of were in private hospitals. More specifically, 60.9% (171) of the participants had nursing education at the basic level (diploma in general nursing). The majority of the participants, 43.8% (123), were from the general units, including medical, surgical, cardiology, burn, orthopedics, neurosurgery, ENT, and pediatrics.

The mean score of the image scale components indicated that the participants perceived their public image as mildly positive. Scores also revealed that participants believed that the public valued their "Interpersonal" relationship skills, such as "nurturing", "sympathetic", "friendly", "responsible" and "compromising", more than other abilities. Public perception about "Intrapersonal" abilities such as "organized", "rational", "competent" and "logical", were also rated positively. Furthermore, the Professional aspects of nurses' roles, such as "scientific", "confident", "active", and "intelligent" were also viewed positively

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Perceived Public Image of the Nurses

| Component of PNIS | Mean (SD) |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Professional aspects | 3.10 (. 94) |
| Interpersonal relations | 2. 53 (1.01) |
| Intrapersonal abilities | 2.80 (. 90) |

Figure 1. Scoring of the PNIS as related to the positive and negative perception of the



Mean scores of each of the three components of PNIS revealed that nurses had a positive perception of their public image, as shown in Figure 1.

Selected demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

| | Demographic Characteristics | n (%) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 105 (37.4) |
| | Female | 176 (62.6) |
| Age | 20 – 30 years | 200 (71.2) |
| | 31 – 40 years | 56 (19.9) |
| | 41- 50 years | 22 (7.8) |
| | 51 – 60 years | 3 (1.1) |
| Present nursing position | Register Nurse/ Staff Nurse | 236 (84.0) |
| | Clinical Nurse Teacher | 2 (0.7) |
| | Shift In-charge | 21 (7.5) |
| | Head Nurse | 15 (5.3) |
| | Supervisor | 7 (2.5) |
| Place of Job | Government | 119 (42.3) |
| | Private | 162 (57.7) |
| Nursing Education | Diploma in General Nursing | 171 (60.9) |
| | Diploma in General Nursing, and Diploma in Midwifery | 104 (37.0) |
| | Diploma in General Nursing, Diploma in Midwifery, and Diploma in Teaching Administration/Ward Administration | 6 (2.1) |
| | | |
| Working experience as a nurse | Less than 1 year | 26 (9.3) |
| | 1-5 years | 143 (50.9) |
| | 6 -10 years | 53 (18.9) |
| | 11-15 years | 26 (9.3) |
| | 16 -20 years | 17 (6.0) |
| | More than 20 years | 16 (5.7) |
| Area (cluster)of working | Critical Care Units | 93 (33.1) |
| | General Units | 123 (43.8) |
| | Special Units | 65 (23.1) |

Nurses' Self Perception about Their Public Image

by the nurses with regard to the public perspective. Mean scores of each of these components revealed that nurses had a positive perception of their public image, as shown in Table 2.

The demographic data (see Table 1) showed that the majority of the participants were women. This is reflective of higher numbers of women, vs men, in nursing. Data also illustrated that about half of the nurses were single, and a majority were within the age range of 20 to 30 years. These are working women from the middle and low-income families, who support their families financially. As evident in other countries, in Pakistan also, the economic responsibilities have influenced women's decision to marry late¹⁶.

Also, a majority of the nurses had work experience of 1- 5 years, illustrating that the participants are young and in the beginning of their professional life. Another

finding from the data is that majority, 60.9 % (171), of the participants had a general nursing diploma. The reason for a diploma being the basic level of nursing education among the participants could be that there are a limited number of nursing educational institutions for higher education. Also degree programmes are costly, whereas nursing education has been free in the schools of nursing, particularly, in the government institutions.

Another issue that explains the diploma being the basic educational level of the nurses can be related to the organizational policies, where opportunities are usually given to the senior nurses rather younger nurses to enhance their educational level, particularly, in the public sector. Thus, limited access to higher education, a very important factor related to negative nursing image^{6,13,14,17,18} may lead the nurses to believe that their profession is not valued by the public.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that participants' perception of their public image was mildly positive (see Figure 1). These findings are incongruent with the findings of the study by Takase, Kershaw, and Burt⁴ and Gul¹, in which they found that nurses' self perception about their public image was negative as compared to their self perception about their professional image.

The results also revealed that the degree of positiveness of the participants' perception about their public image differed in the three image scale components. The participants in this study perceived that the public valued their interpersonal relations more than the professional aspects and intrapersonal abilities. This is almost identical to the findings of the studies by Takase, et al.¹⁹, and Siebens et al.⁷. In contrast to the results of this study, Porter and Porter⁴ found that the nurses' professional characteristics and intrapersonal abilities were valued more than their interpersonal relations.

The slight tilt in the nurses' perception about their public image to the positive side may indicate that, perhaps, the positive changes that have come about in Pakistan due to efforts to improve the status of nursing, have influenced the nurses to perceive that their image among the public has improved. The trend of change from the negative to the positive images of the profession is well depicted in the a speech of the Governor of the province Sindh²⁰ in which he highlighted that nurses are demonstrating their responsibilities at broader levels for the welfare of the patients against their traditional stereotypical images in the country.

Shifts in the trend of nurses' perception about their public image could be related to effects of higher education among nurses. Nursing degree programs aim at personal and professional growth and to enable students to integrate their knowledge and skills in their practice²¹. Advanced education leads to improved practice, which in turn improves the public image. Improved media coverage of nursing may also be associated with nurses' positive perception about their public image^{1,4,13-15}.

The knowledge revealed through this study will add to the body of nursing knowledge about nurses' self perception about their profession in Pakistan and will serve as a basis for research studies in the future, at the national level. Findings of the study will be available to the leadership of the health sector, particularly, nursing leadership, at national and provincial level, to help them review their policies related to nurses' roles, and plan strategies to enhance the professional image of nursing.

It has been widely documented that developing a positive image of the nurses is of dire importance for their practice⁷, professional satisfaction, and improved health outcomes. The following recommendations are made to enhance the professional image of nursing:

1. Nurses, especially nursing leaders from the education and practice areas should plan a systematic program to educate the public about the work of nurses and how it complements the work of doctors and other health professionals.
2. Electronic and print media should be used effectively to clarify the myths about the nursing profession and communicate nurses' contribution in society.
3. The Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) should take strong and legitimate steps to establish and maintain the educational standards across the nursing educational programmes, from diploma in general nursing to master degree in sciences of nursing (MScN) or PhD in Nursing, throughout the country.
4. The Professional Nursing Association should be reactivated to take responsibility to facilitate positive coverage of the nursing in the print and electronic media (TV, radio).
5. A speaker's office can be established to create interest and awareness about the nursing profession at the college and school levels.
6. Nursing education systems must maintain high standards and prepare nurses to provide competent care, in accordance with the changing practice environment and evidence-based practice.

It is also recommended to replicate this study with larger sample size to enhance generalizability and applicability of findings to the larger nursing community.

CONCLUSION

Nurses perceived their public image as mildly positively, but the degree of positiveness of their perception differed by the three components of the scale. The interpersonal relation component was ranked higher than the intrapersonal abilities and the professional components of tool. Efforts to enhance the image of the nursing profession will result in improved job satisfaction, which is linked to better quality of care and improved health outcomes

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