

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE NURSING PROFESSION*

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Abstract: Demographic data for nursing employees is changing. Different generations are entering the nursing profession, including Generation Z which has different career expectations compared to other generations already included in work processes; these expectations are also influencing their decision to go into nursing. The percentage of young people who find work after secondary school is decreasing. The aim of the study was to identify key factors influencing the decision to enter the nursing profession and expectations of Generation Z students towards nursing.

A non-experimental quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected with an on-line survey. A purposive sample included first-cycle nursing students of the Angela Boškin Faculty of Health Care. Data were analyzed with statistical software SPSS, v. 21.0. Univariate and bivariate statistics were used. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

The competences with the highest scores were communication ($M=4.81$; $SD=0.39$) and empathy ($M=4.72$; $SD=0.45$). Respondents agreed that working conditions in nursing are demanding ($M=4.27$; $SD=0.76$) and that this occupation is based on knowledge ($M=4.27$; $SD=0.76$) and evidence ($M=4.00$; $SD=0.68$). Respondents completely agreed that personal development is important in their work ($M=4.54$; $SD=0.54$), that they want to develop a career after receiving education ($M=4.27$; $SD=0.71$), and that they decided to go into nursing because of good employment opportunities ($M=4.00$; $SD=0.92$).

As a society, we are facing new challenges which have to be met so that new generations can bring about change also in nursing and health care. It is essential to establish integrated, friendly relations among different generations—this represents a challenge for nurses working in intergenerational teams. Generation Z nurses expect effective communication with active listening, desire concise and to-the-point feedback, expect constructive criticism, want to be part of a team, and want to work in a supportive environment. Autonomy in decision making and the possibility of career-long professional development are becoming key drivers for future nurses and for the development of young nurses.

Key words: young people, profession, nurse, expectations, relations

Introduction

Of the different generations entering the nursing workforce today, Generation Z has different career expectations compared to other generations already included in work processes [1]; these expectations are also influencing their decision to go into nursing [2]. Compared to members of other generations, Generation Z members tend

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to focus more on their studies and career, i.e. personal development [1]. Members of Generation Z are characterized by relatively high confidence, a desire to make a good future for themselves, an awareness of the importance of hard work, they value satisfaction with work, appreciate team work, like to be included in social activities, and value an encouraging organizational climate, independence and autonomy [3]. Generational differences are reflected predominantly in the values and working practices of different generations. Failure to be aware of these differences may mean that work methods or communication become hindered. In multigenerational settings, it is important to look for common denominators and to be aware of the differences. Also crucial are active listening, providing feedback, cooperation, and the capacity to adjust when necessary. In light of current demographic trends, intergenerational cooperation should be included in curricula and recognized as an inseparable part of ensuring the provision of high-quality, safe nursing care. Tension may arise when nurses from four different generations work together closely because different generational perspectives may lead to misinterpretation and misunderstandings. Nurses must learn how to establish integrated, collegial relations with members of a different generation—this may represent a challenge for nurses working in multigenerational teams [4].

There is a shortage of nurses all over the world. The main reasons behind a global lack of nursing professionals include nurses leaving the profession sooner, a limited influx of young nurses, and not enough interest among young people for a nursing education. The salary, the perception of nursing work specifics, and the image of the profession additionally decrease the interest of young people to obtain a nursing degree. It is therefore becoming essential to adopt measures which could make the nursing profession appealing to young people and to promote it as such. In young people who decide for a career in nursing, one of the most important decision-making factors and guiding principle is their perception of the nursing profession [5]. Several studies investigating the motives which influence the decision to go into nursing have revealed that the most frequent motives include the desire to “help others” and to “work with people”. Other factors which impact the decision to go into nursing include interesting work and possibility of working in different fields [6]. The way young people perceive nursing is influenced by the public image enjoyed by nursing. It has been shown that the public image of nursing portrays nurses stereotypically and negatively, the conception still persists that nursing is inferior to medicine [7]. The percentage of secondary school graduates who opt for a career in nursing is decreasing. Young people perceive nurses as being inferior to physicians, and as having limited autonomy and career opportunities—this is certainly not a good starting point for the development of the nursing workforce in Slovenia [8].

The aim of our study was to identify key factors in the decision to go into nursing and to establish the expectations of Generation Z students in relation to the nursing profession.

Methods

A quantitative method of empirical research was employed.

Instrument

Data were collected with a survey, a structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was formulated based on a literature review of several authors researching the topic [9, 1, 10, 11, 12, 13].

Questions were divided into three sets: demographic data, decision to go into nursing, and expectations towards the nursing profession. Closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and items in the form of closed-ended statements were used. Respondents were asked to express their agreement with each item on a five-point ordinal scale (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neither agree nor disagree, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha of internal consistency was .85.

Sample

A purposive sample was employed. A total of 113 students of Angela Boškin Faculty of Health Care participated in the study. All of them studied nursing and belonged to Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2012) [12]. Most respondents were female (97 or 85.8%). The age of respondents was between 19 and 27, with a mean age of 21 years (SD=1.5). In terms of educational background, most respondents had a vocational secondary school nursing degree (70 or 61.9%), followed by a high school degree (33 or 29.2%).

Data collection

Data were collected in January and February 2023. Respondents gave their prior consent to participate in the study. The questionnaire was completely anonymous. Data were analyzed with statistical software SPSS, v. 21.0, which was used to perform descriptive statistics. The nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was employed for the bivariate analysis, and two-step cluster analysis was employed for formulating sets. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

The competences with the highest scores were communication (M=4.81; SD=0.39) and empathy (M=4.72; SD=0.45). Although to a lesser extent, respondents still agreed that working conditions in nursing are demanding (M=4.27; SD=0.76) and that this occupation is based on knowledge (M=4.27; SD=0.76) and evidence (M=4.00; SD=0.68). Results for the 'Career development' set were less clear-cut and also more spread. Respondents fully agreed with the statement that personal development was important in their work (M=4.54; SD=0.54), that they want to develop a career after they get their education (M=4.27; SD=0.71), and that they decided to go into nursing because it is easy to get a job after graduation (M=4.00; SD=0.92). However, a lower

level of agreement was established for the decision to go into nursing because of career advancement opportunities ($M=3.65$; $SD=1.10$) and because nursing is viewed as an autonomous discipline ($M=3.23$; $SD=1.04$). Of all the statements describing motivators to go into nursing, internal motivators such as a desire to work with people ($M=4.39$; $SD=0.68$) and altruism ($M=3.86$; $SD=0.93$) were considerably more prominent compared to being talked into deciding for nursing by parents ($M=1.71$; $SD=0.98$) or other relatives ($M=1.52$; $SD=0.84$) (Table 1).

We also checked for any significant differences and discrepancies according to socio-demographic factors (gender, age, educational background). No significant differences were established according to gender and age. For educational background, however, testing the differences between groups with the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that above average agreement with the item "I decided to go into this profession because it is easy to find work after graduating" ($p=0.046$) was achieved for those respondents who had a general high school degree. Further, for the item "I decided to go into nursing because I am altruistic", below average agreement was achieved for respondents with a vocational secondary school degree in nursing and above average agreement for respondents with a high school degree or other vocational secondary school degree ($p=0.013$).

Discussion

The aim of the study was to identify key factors influencing the decision to enter the nursing profession and expectations of Generation Z students towards nursing. Our results showed that respondents had quite a unified opinion on nursing and a good idea of their chosen profession. The competences of communication and empathy received the highest scores, and these are indeed very important for nurses. Active listening received a somewhat lower score, although it was still rated as important. Nursing students expect nurses to have highly developed communication skills, as these are of key importance in patient work. Other authors have also found that Generation Z nurses expect effective communication with active listening, desire concise and to-the-point feedback, expect constructive criticism, want to be part of a team, and want to work in a supportive environment. Further, they want to be included in decision-making processes and respected. We are facing new challenges which will have to be met so that new generations can bring about change in nursing and health care [12]. Our results also showed that nursing students view working conditions in nursing as demanding and believe nursing is based on knowledge and evidence. The RN4CAST study results for Slovenia confirmed what Slovenian nursing professionals have been trying to point out for years: that working conditions in nursing have to improve and that the professional status of nurses has to be regulated, including better career development opportunities and educational opportunities which have to meet the actual needs of work settings. Our study showed that the professional status of nurses has to improve, and this includes better career development opportunities, educational pathways meeting work setting needs, and introducing new types of work placements (clinical specializations) [14].

Table 1: Factors and expectations related to career choice

	DECISION TO GO INTO NURSING				
	Working conditions and required competences				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
I believe that a nurse must be able to communicate.	113	4	5	4.81	0.39
I believe that a nurse must have empathy.	112	4	5	4.72	0.45
I believe that a nurse must be able to listen actively.	113	4	5	4.69	0.46
I believe that nursing is a skill-based occupation.	113	3	5	4.42	0.56
I believe that working conditions in nursing are demanding.	113	2	5	4.27	0.76
I believe that nursing is a knowledge-based occupation.	113	2	5	4.20	0.68
I believe that nursing is an evidence-based occupation.	113	2	5	4.00	0.68
Career development					
Personal development is important in my work.	113	3	5	4.54	0.54
I want to develop a career after I get my education.	113	2	5	4.27	0.71
I decided to go into this profession because it is easy to find work after graduating.	113	1	5	4.00	0.92
I decided to go into this profession because of career advancement opportunities.	113	1	5	3.65	1.10
I decided to go into this profession because nursing is an autonomous discipline.	113	1	5	3.23	1.04
Reasons to go into the profession					
I decided to go into nursing because I want to work with people.	112	2	5	4.39	0.68
I decided to go into nursing because I am altruistic/I want to make a difference in the world.	113	1	5	3.86	0.93
I decided to go into nursing because my parents talked me into it.	113	1	5	1.71	0.98
I decided to go into nursing because my relatives talked me into it.	113	1	5	1.52	0.84

Note: n = number of students; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

Our study has shown that most respondents decided to go into nursing because of their own desire and motivation to work with people. Working with people and providing

care have proven to be the most significant factors also in other studies conducted in Slovenia [15] and abroad [6]. Student respondents also strongly agreed with the statement that personal development was important in their work and that they want to develop a career after completing their education. It seems that the labor market situation is an important factor spurring young people to decide for a career in nursing. Respondents also agreed with the statement that they decided to go into nursing because of good employment opportunities. A lower level of agreement was obtained for the decision to go into nursing because of career advancement opportunities and because nursing is an autonomous discipline. Our study results indicate that Generation Z members desire personal development and career development, but are not entirely sure whether they will be able to pursue those in nursing. Autonomy in decision making and the possibility of career-long professional development are becoming key drivers for future registered nurses and for the development of young nurses [16].

Babnik et al. [15] investigated how Slovenian nursing students made their occupational decision and found that they mostly decided to continue their studies in their chosen occupational field years after obtaining their undergraduate degree. Authors have pointed out that people who have a clear overall picture of their profession are able to better develop their professional interests [6]. Nursing students thus meet both of these criteria: they have prior nursing education and decide to go into the profession after completing their secondary education, so it can be said that they are well familiar with their chosen profession and consequently have better developed professional interests or a more developed career pathway. Our study also investigated opinions of two groups of students: those with a vocational secondary school nursing degree and those with other secondary school degree (i.e. high school degree). Our results showed that high school graduates—a group with a general secondary education—had a significantly higher agreement with the statement that they decided to go into nursing because it is easy to find work after graduating, while the group with a prior nursing education had a significantly higher agreement with the statement that they went into nursing because they were altruistic. It seems that students with a prior general secondary education regard good employment possibilities as an important safety factor and that they also expect further professional development. A research conducted abroad revealed that good employment opportunities were one of the most important reasons why young people decided for a career in nursing [17].

Investigating the factors that influence young people's decision for a career in nursing can significantly contribute to understanding the professional culture and identity of nursing, and can help provide guidelines for future development of nursing. The current generation of nursing students was primarily spurred to go into the profession because of the ability to provide care in nursing work; the aspect of care provision is thus very important in the nursing profession. The future development of nursing as a profession must continue to be based on care provision while at the same time increasing autonomy of nursing and its responsibility for ensuring greater population health [18].

A study limitation includes a relatively low response rate among student respondents and the need to remind them several times to fill out the questionnaire. Empirical limitations are connected to the number of included student respondents. Study results show the findings for one higher education institution in Slovenia. There are many opportunities for further research because studies such as ours are important for planning the future of nursing.

Conclusion

As a society, we are facing new challenges which have to be met so that new generations can bring about change also in nursing and health care. Most countries have been struggling with nursing workforce shortages for years. Young people are our future and they need to adopt our vision for the future of nursing, on condition that first working conditions in nursing and remuneration for nursing work improve. It is essential to establish integrated, friendly relations among different generations—this represents a challenge for nurses working in intergenerational teams. Young people—Generation Z members—have different beliefs, different values and a different way of thinking that everyone can benefit from so it is essential to integrate younger generations into society.

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