

THE NURSING PROFESSION IN THE NEW ERA OF SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

People unfamiliar with Saudi Arabia will never realize the change the country is experiencing today. Women have become empowered over a short period. Change is happening now and is happening quickly. Women who have never even considered being engaged in higher positions are taking managerial and leadership positions. Along with the change that is taking place, the healthcare sector is one priority for the newly crowned prince Mohammed bin Salman in his 2030 vision to the nation. The Minister of Health addresses that nursing is the top priority to achieve the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, pointing out that 50% of the total workforce in the health sector are nurses. The researcher used secondary data from the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia to do a Descriptive Comparative Research Design to compare the number of nursing students to medical students in the major public universities in Saudi Arabia to see if there is a big difference between choosing nursing and medicine in the light of the high demand for the nursing profession.

Key Words: Nursing, Saudi Arabia, Nursing Shortage, Vision 2030

Introduction

The Nursing Profession in the New Era of Saudi Arabia

Many Saudi women have been wondering and thinking in the quietness of their heart and looking around us and seeing how amazing women are doing many remarkable things. It has left us thinking, when is our turn. The Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated in an interview on the television show 60 Minutes, "That Islam does not prohibit mixing between genders, and women are half of our society, so we have to give them the right to participate equally" (M. Salman, 60 Minutes, March 19, 2018). This was a correction of the entire Saudi path dealing with half of the society, "women" and a strong indication of how important the Saudi women are, and the is the most important message of Prophet Mohammed is to have a society that respects all people no matter their gender, race, and colour (Sahih al-Bukhari).

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Now the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States is a woman (Alsoraihi, 2022). Along with the change that is taking place, the healthcare sector is one priority for the newly crowned prince Mohammed bin Salman. In his 2030 vision to the nation (Rahman & Al-Borie, 2021); the Minister of Health addresses that nursing is the top priority to achieve the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, pointing out that 50% of the total workforce in the health sector are nurses (Ministry of Health, 2019).

Purpose

The aim is to compare the number of nursing students to the medicine students in the major public universities in Saudi Arabia to see if there is a big difference between choosing nursing and medicine in the light of the high demand for the nursing profession.

Review of the Literature

Universal Nursing Shortage

The country of Saudi Arabia is experiencing issues with its health care system due to the insufficient number of Saudi nurses to meet the country's needs. This nursing shortage is related to many factors, including the life expectancy of the Saudi population, which has increased from age 69 in 1990 to age 76 in 2012. Also, the annual population growth rate in Saudi Arabia has increased by 2.5% each year from 1990 to 2012, and that will lead to a growing demand for healthcare (Alghamdi & Urden, 2016). Furthermore, although the overall number of nurses who are working in Saudi Arabia is 140,389, only 51,350 are Saudi nurses. Thus, the representation of Saudi nurses among all the other registered nurses in Saudi Arabia is only 36.6% (Aboshaiqah, 2016).

The poor image of nurses as maids who must follow the physician's orders is still prominent and influences the decision-making of parents and children (Aboshaiqah, 2016). Some nursing students left their schools because they got married, and their husbands did not agree to let them continue studying to be nurses in the future. Moreover, many families did not like the idea that their daughters would work night shifts, long hours, and weekends (Lamadah & Sayed, 2014). Together, these issues led to a nursing shortage in Saudi Arabia. The public needs to be educated about nursing to be able to attract more Saudi citizens (Aboshaiqah, 2016).

Cultural beliefs have a big impact on the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia. Many Saudi families believe that nursing is an inappropriate profession for their daughters because they will be exposed to male patients. Such interaction between males and females is inappropriate in many Saudi families, given the importance of preserving modesty and gender segregation in Islam. Some nursing practices, such as taking care of the private (e.g. genital) areas, create a negative perception among conservative Muslims (Aboshaiqah, 2016). The necessity of separation of men and women in society is a debatable issue in Islam. Many scholars agree that the interaction of genders is acceptable in Islam as long as the female modesty requirement is met through modest dress and the interactions with unrelated men are limited to only conversations that discuss professional and educational issues. There are some considerations and limitations that should be considered when males and females interact. They should discuss only their joint work, and this necessitates maintaining respect and having limits between each other to prevent any prohibited relationship (e.g., sex outside marriage) that could occur between them (Smerecnik, 2010).

Improving the quality of patient care has become one of the major priorities for all healthcare providers, and making it happen in the hospital is mainly the responsibility of the nursing staff. Due to the fact that nurses are the largest group in the hospital who are delivering direct patient care, the quality of care for patients is strongly connected to the performance of the nursing staff. Many studies have shown that a shortage of nurses has a direct impact on patient care by correlating to longer lengths of stay and increased incidence of urinary tract infections, pneumonia, and cardiac arrest (Zarea et al, 2009).

The nursing shortage is a universal problem even in industrialized countries such as the United States of America. Joyce Murray, a nursing professor in the United States, said "As a faculty, we also have a very important role to play. We must communicate how the faculty shortage stands in the way of increasing the number of nurses who are available to provide healthcare in the United States" (Murray, 2005, p.2). The International Council of Nurses warned that there could be a shortage of 13 million nurses in the US by 2030 (International Council of Nurses, March 2023). Nurses and all other healthcare providers need to work together now more than ever to increase the size of

the nursing workforce and to design alternative ways to maintain the quality of care during nursing shortages.

Why do we need part-time nurses?

To overcome the nursing shortages or at least to increase the number of nurses around the globe, there have been many agencies to support hospitals with part-time nurses to fill the shortages that they are experiencing. Part-time nurses are not only beneficial to reduce the nursing shortages, but are also cost-effective because the nurses are paid hourly or by shift without the incentives that are given to the permanent nurses (Seo & Spetz, 2014).

There are some social issues that impact the nursing shortages too, as we discussed earlier, about the Saudi culture in Saudi Arabia and how the majority of the nursing profession are women. Part-time work will give them more flexibility to take care of their children, and allow gradual exposure to the workload stressors. Moreover, as healthcare providers are always at risk of getting sick while dealing with patients, part-time work will give them more time to recover from work. Finally, the culture of Saudi Arabia is family centered, so working too many night shifts will not allow the nurses to be engaged in many family occasions. That is why part-time nurses allow for a better adjustment to the considerations of family and friends (Halger, Maarten, Steffen & Hans, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Reasoned Action

A theoretical model is an important component in research because it is the foundation that can guide scholars to identify which concepts are important, what these concepts are like, and how they may be related to each other. They shape what research questions are asked, and then influence how the findings are interpreted. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is a very common model that is used in vaccination behaviour literature and will guide this study (Dunn et al., 2015).

Concepts of the Theory

The components of the theory include the constructs of attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, behavioural intention, and outcome behaviour. How these four concepts are related is depicted in the following diagram (see Figure 1).

Applying the TRA to the Present Study

The author examined how the concepts used in the TRA can guide the study of how attitudes and subjective norms would influence intentions of Saudi students to choose the nursing major and will lead to improved quality care and reduced cost. The attitudes (which include reflection or are influenced by behavioural beliefs) and subjective norms will predict the behavioural intentions, which will lead to the behaviour. The attitudes toward the nursing profession in this study will be assessed by secondary data of the number of nursing students compared to medical

students in Saudi Arabia. It is assumed that if nurses have positive attitudes toward the profession of nursing, they will work as nurses, and be effective. Subjective norms are important factors that affect decisions regarding any health issue. These norms include behavioural and cultural trends that affect personal decision-making when the students choose nursing as a profession. It will be measured through all the literature reviews regarding the Saudi families' opinions toward the nursing profession.

In this study, there are several subjective norms to consider. Subjective norms in this theory means the opinions of the surrounding people and beliefs about the behaviour. In the context of this study, some Saudi Arabian families see that nursing is not a prestigious profession for their daughter because in their opinion nurses are the assistants of the doctors. These subjective norms are expected to influence their intention to work as registered nurses when they graduate.

The diagram (see Figure 1) below summarizes the application of the TRA to the present study. It shows how the attitudes and the subjective norms are expected to affect intention to work as nurses. This, in turn, will lead to the desired behavioural outcomes. Future behaviour, the last element of the theory, will not be included during this study. If the results show that nurses have the intention to promote cervical cancer prevention methods then it will likely lead to the implementation of those methods in the future.

Ethics

No ethical approval was needed because the data was secondary data from the website of the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia (MOH).

Sampling Selection

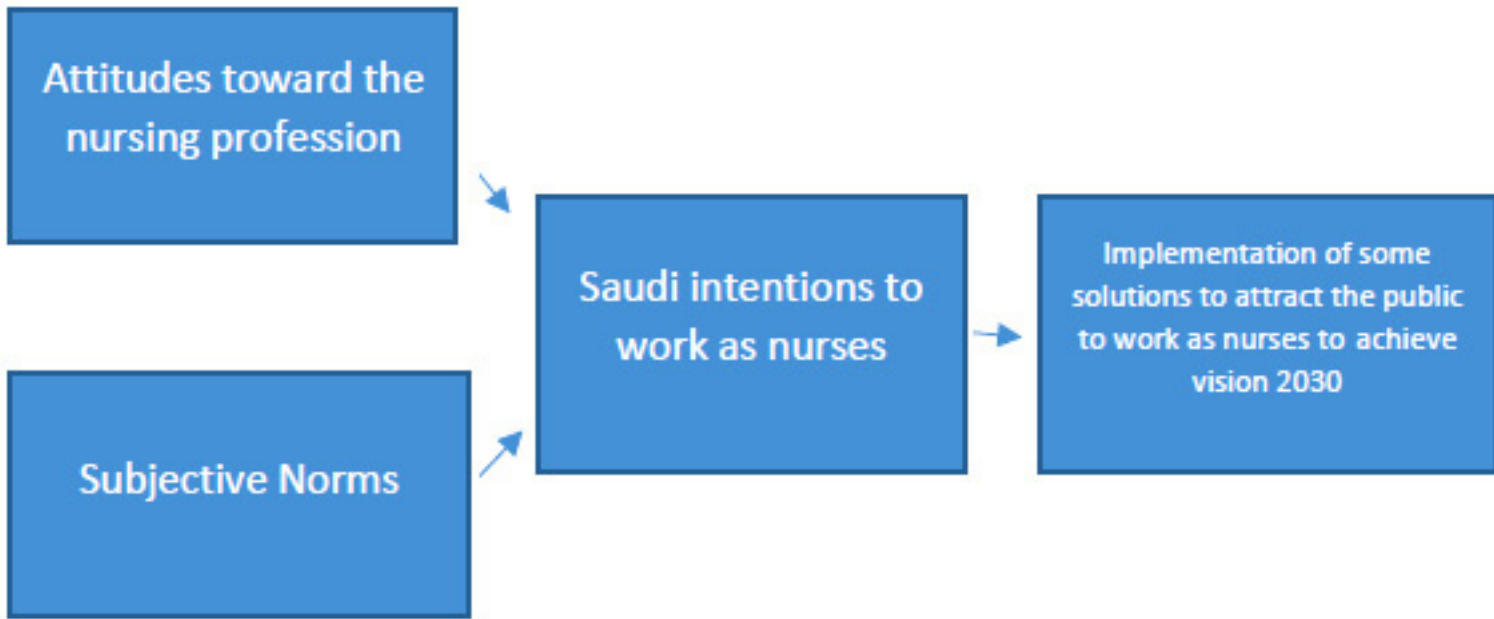
All the nursing and medicine student graduates who are studying in the major public universities in the year.

Design and Method

The data that has been used in this study was secondary data which is the use of existing data to answer new research questions. It is a proven methodology in many specialties. The use of this method in the nursing field has been very popular (Dunn et al., 2015).

The researchers used this data to do a Descriptive Comparative Research Design to show the intention of Saudi students to be nurses. The aim is to compare the number of nursing students to the medical students in the major public universities in Saudi Arabia to see if there is a big difference between choosing nursing and medicine in the light of the high demand for nursing profession.

Figure 1. Application of Theory of Reasoned Action to the Present Study



Results

Examination of Table 1 reveals that the majority of students have chosen a medicine major over the nursing major in most the universities that provided nursing and medicine majors. The results show that only in one university which is Hail University, the demand on nursing major is more than medicine. The number of the nursing students is (607). Thus, these data indicate the demand on nursing major is less than medicine.

Table 1: Comparison between the number of nursing and medical students in the Saudi Universities

| | University | Medicine Students | Nursing Students |
|----|--|-------------------|------------------|
| 1 | King Abdulaziz University | 2941 | 624 |
| 2 | Umm Al Qura University | 2015 | 714 |
| 3 | Taibah University | 840 | 593 |
| 4 | King Saud University | 1754 | 1226 |
| 5 | King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences | 2518 | 1381 |
| 6 | King Khalid University | 1196 | 898 |
| 7 | Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University | 1236 | 440 |
| 8 | Jazan University | 917 | 759 |
| 9 | Najran University | 376 | 353 |
| 10 | Al Qussaim University | 704 | 191 |
| 11 | Hail University | 418 | 607 |
| 12 | Northern Border University | 769 | 343 |

Statistical Year Book 2021, Ministry of Health (MOH), Saudi Arabia

Discussion

Despite the fact that the majority of healthcare providers are nurses, and they make up around 60% of the healthcare providers that are working at the hospitals, still the demand on nursing is low compared to medicine. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) named the year of the pandemic as Nursing and Midwifery year to shed light of the importance of these professions, and they discovered the severe nursing shortage all over the world.

Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that has a nursing shortage and especially among the Saudi nurses. The Saudi nurses make up only 40% among the other nationalities in their country. The Saudi government is working hard to fill the gaps of the nursing shortage. During the pandemic, the crowned prince Mohammed bin Salman initiated an internal scholarship for the nursing profession to increase the number of nursing students. Moreover, the Ministry of Education (MOE) encouraged all the schools to find ways to attract students to the nursing profession. The Vision 2030 has a huge impact on the nursing profession and that has led to an increase of nursing students. This study showed the number of students on 2021, and it is really important to do another comparison after at least 3 to 5 years to see if there is any difference.

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