

The Attitude Of Nursing Students Toward The Nursing Profession: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Research objective: Nursing students' attitude toward their future profession is among the significant factors leaving great impacts on the students. Having a positive attitude results in educational progress and will train the nursing students to become nurses with high professional commitment while a negative attitude can result in dropping out of college and professional exhaustion. The present study has been conducted aiming to investigate nursing students' attitudes toward their future profession, the factors contributing to it, and its consequences.

Method: The present study reviewing all previous quantitative studies registered in EMBASE, PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar, CINAHL, Cochrane, Web of Science, Scopus databases as well as national databases including SID, Magiran, and IranMedex with the keywords of "nursing discipline", "nursing profession", and "nursing student" and their combinations with "attitude" and "perception" keywords. Studies conducted throughout 2000-2020 were extracted and two researchers refined search results separately according to the admission criteria.

Findings: 18 studies were selected and analyzed after screening. Most studies indicated students' positive attitudes toward the nursing profession. Economic, socio-cultural. Environmental and professional factors revealed to have a relationship with students' attitudes. Additionally, it was discovered that one's attitude could have various professional, educational, and physiological consequences.

Conclusion: Although nursing students' attitude toward their future profession is mainly positive, various countries have reported contradicting results indicating that more extensive research is required. Given that both positive and negative attitudes can be due to various reasons, special attention must be paid to nursing students' attitudes and factors impacting it.

Keywords: Attitude, Nursing Students, Nursing Profession, Narrative Review.

Introduction

As a unique discipline, nursing requires a combination of knowledge and science, as well as values and skills. Nursing care services encompass all individuals in all age groups and from different cultures and target not only sick people but healthy people as well. Besides, these services cover all aspects of an individual's needs including social, physical, emotional, and mental aspects [1]. The perception of nurses working in healthcare centers have regarding their

profession is of great significance [2]. Nurses' mental image of the nursing profession impacts their persistence in the nursing profession and, in turn, the healthcare system greatly [3], since one's perception indicates the interaction between their behavioral tendencies, recognitions, and emotions regarding an incident, an individual, a group, or an idea. In fact, one's perception is their positive or negative response to an issue that has already been made, turning into behavioral intentions and thus affecting their behavior [4]. Hence, given that nursing is the backbone of the healthcare sector and the foundation of high-quality caring service in every country [3], those delivering nursing services and those receiving it are expected to express behaviors based on awareness and perception of the significance of this profession [2].

Meanwhile, the work of nurses has long been underestimated and inadequately understood. Although nurses make up the largest part of healthcare systems all around the world, the majority of people lack an accurate perception and understanding of what nurses do [5]. Most people are not entirely aware of nurses' set of skills, knowledge, competency, critical thinking, and the education they have had. The public perception of nursing profession is completely devoid of the responsibilities, challenges, accountability, and difficult working environment, few job opportunities, and the low salary of this profession. Most people assume that nurses have a significantly lower professional position and prestige compared to physiotherapists and physicians [6]. This attitude is sometimes even witnessed among other healthcare workers and nurses themselves. Nursing students are no exception to this rule either. They sometimes enter this discipline without any knowledge and perception regarding the nursing profession and tend to choose this discipline based on a formerly developed positive or negative attitude [7].

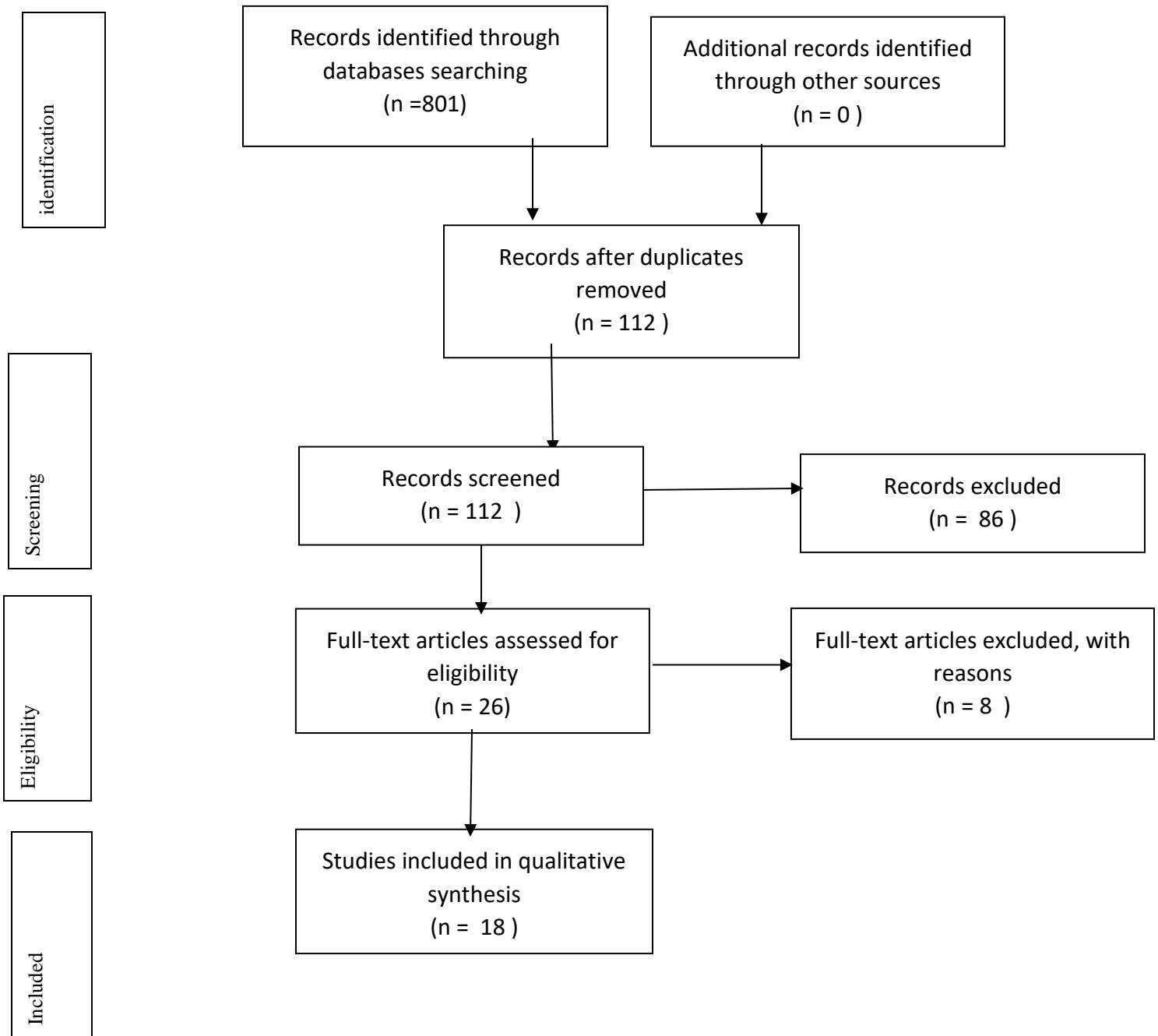
Generally, it appears that various factor contributes to the formation of nursing students' attitude toward nursing profession, factors that are largely dependent on the cultural context and nurses' professional position in each country, resulting in the manifestation of various attitudes among the students [8]. Factors such as professional attractions, individual and family experiences, and motivation to help others can contribute to a positive attribute while factors such as a heavy workload, working on holidays, low professional value, and low salary can contribute to a negative attitude [8-10]. These factors that are often derived from the heart of each society and the conditions governing their healthcare system, impact the students; perception and attitude before they enter the nursing profession; however, such perceptions might change after entering this discipline and during the education period or after entering the professional environment [11]. Since one's attitude is dependent on their tendencies, beliefs, and organized behavioral tendencies developed over the long term [2], and the fact that the attitude of nursing students in various countries towards their profession is under the influence of a variety of factors that can impact their behavior, the present narrative review aims to examine evidence relating to nursing students' attitude toward their future profession to develop more comprehensive knowledge and information regarding this subject.

Methods

Study plan:

The present study is a narrative review aiming to describe and summarize studies conducted on nursing students' attitudes toward their future profession. For this purpose, a structured search was conducted using keywords ("Nursing student" OR "discipline" OR "profession") AND ("attitude" OR "perception") in EMBASE, PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar, CINAHL, Cochrane, Web of Science, and Scopus databases as well as SID, Magiran, and IranMedex national (Persian) databases. Admission criteria included quantitative studies on nursing students' attitude toward the nursing profession conducted throughout 2000-2020 and published in English or Persian, so qualitative studies were ruled out. The initial search in the aforementioned databases yielded a total of 743 international studies and 58 national (Persian) studies. Screening and selection were conducted in three stages including the study of titles, abstracts, and manuscripts. Through the first stage, studies were reviewed and duplicate and irrelevant studies were removed, leaving 112 studies. Through the second stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed and irrelevant studies, as well as studies lacking the admission criteria, were removed, leaving 26 studies. The manuscripts of the remaining studies were then reviewed which excluded 8 studies, leaving 18 unique and relevant studies that later entered the analysis phase (Figure 1). The stages of searching and examining studies were conducted using the 27-item structured checklist for meta-analysis and systematic reviews (Prisma, 2009), [12]. Since the checklist is not specifically made for narrative reviews, items 11, 13, 16, 20, 21, and 23 were removed [13]. Two researchers performed the analysis and screening of the studies and referred to a third researcher in cases of disagreement.

Figure 1: Literature review flow chart.



Ethical considerations:

The present study has obtained the ethics approval of the Tehran University of Medical Sciences ethics committee (IR.TUMS.VCR.REC.1398.125) and has respected the ethical research principles of accessing sources as well as using quotes and evidence.

Findings

After screening, 18 papers performed in a variety of countries including India (6 papers), Iran (4 papers), Egypt (3 papers), Saudi Arabia (2 papers), Nigeria, Jordan, and Vietnam (one article each) remained in the study. Study populations included male and female associate and undergraduate nursing students. The studies had used various sampling methods including stratified sampling [7, 14], randomized sampling [3, 8, 15-17], systematic sampling [18], convenience sampling [9, 19-21], purposive sampling [1], and the census method [10, 22, 23]. In one case, the sampling method was not mentioned [24]. All the aforementioned were descriptive cross-sectional studies. The data collection tool was written questionnaire in 17 studies while only one study mentioned the name of the questionnaire used (the ASNP questionnaire), [23]. Also, one study had used a combination of interviews and online questionnaires to collect data [10]. All studies had reported their results based on the average scores obtained from the questionnaires using descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and the standard deviation as well as inferential statistics such as the chi-square test where higher scores meant a stronger positive attitude toward the nursing profession. Besides, all studies were conducted on a regional level and none were national. Table 1 elaborates on the results of examining the aforementioned studies.

Table 1: Summary of selected articles

Author	Year	Country	Method	Sample size	Tool	Percentage of positive attitude
Banaderakhshan, H., et al.	2005	Iran	Cross-sectional	108 Men/Women	Questionnaire	52
Joolae, S., N, et al.	2006	Iran	Descriptive-analytical	300 Men/Women	Questionnaire	18
Noruzi, K.A., et al.	2012	Iran	Descriptive-analytical	394 Men/Women	Questionnaire	65.5
Chehri, M., et al.	2014	Iran	Cross-sectional	248 Men/Women	Questionnaire	first semester (54) Eighth semester (23.5)
Patidar, et al.	2011	India	Cross-sectional	530 Men/Women	Questionnaire	93.4
Poreddi, et al	2012	India	Cross-sectional	129 Men/Women	Questionnaire	53.3
Al Jarrah, et al.	2013	Jordan	Cross-sectional	100 Men/Women	Questionnaire	92.6
Mohamed, L.K. et al.	2013	Egypt	Cross-sectional descriptive	386 Men/Women	Questionnaire	89.3
Shukri, R.K., et al.	2013	India	Cross-sectional descriptive	377 Men/Women	Questionnaire	50
Miligi, E., et al.	2014	Saudi Arabia	Cross-sectional descriptive	152 Men/Women	Questionnaire	(Age>20)Positive negative (Age<20)
Kathreena, M., et al.	2015	India	descriptive	60 Men/Women	Questionnaire	100
Swarna, S.J.R.	2015	India	Cross-sectional	100 Men/Women	Questionnaire	83
Oyedele, E.A., et al.	2015	Nigeria	Cross-sectional	162 Men/Women	Questionnaire	50
Kaur, L. et al.	2016	India	descriptive	687	Questionnaire	90.83

				Men/Women		
Mai, B. H. et al.	2018	Vietnam	mix method	319 Men/Women	ASNP/Interview	62
Mervat, E.A, et al.	2018	Saudi Arabia	descriptive	114 Men/Women	Questionnaire	72.8
Mahmoud, S.R., et al.	2019	Egypt	descriptive	1252 Men/Women	Questionnaire	92.9
Mohammed, A.M.	2020	Egypt	descriptive	324 Men/Women	Questionnaire	96

In this study, findings from the 18 selected studies were investigated in three sections including attitude toward profession, factors contributing to the formation of the attitudes, and the consequences of attitudes. To sum up, two studies [7, 16] had reported a negative attitude and the rest had reported a positive attitude among the students. Factors impacting the formation of attitudes in various countries were different and included economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and professional nature factors. The reported consequences of the attitude were also different in various factors including professional, educational, and psychological factors demonstrated in detail in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors affecting students' attitude and its consequences

Positive	Negative	Attitude
Socio-cultural factors desire to help others [8, 10] male gender [25] Female gender [9, 16]	Socio-cultural factors Femininity of the profession [9, 20] Negative attitude of the community [20]	Factors
economic factors high salary [3]	economic factors Low salary [8, 10]	
Environmental factors Role models and nursing curricula [10, 20] good relationship with their teaching staffs [9] rural areas [14, 19] Friends, parents and other family members [3]	Environmental factors Media [20] Urban areas [19]	

<p>Factors regarding the nature of the job</p> <p>job opportunities [3] further professional development [3] availability of work [3] job security [20] opportunities to work abroad [14, 17] having a family member, relative or a friend who is a nurse [20] Having a positive care experience with a nurse [9] promoting a culture of respect between doctors and nurses [15] supporting nurses when performing their tasks independently [15]</p>	<p>Factors regarding the nature of the job</p> <p>no autonomy [1] exposure to health hazards [10, 20] long working hours [8, 10] heavy workloads [8, 10] performing on holidays [8, 10] Risk of violence [9, 10] no definite job description for nurses [1] no use of higher degrees for higher posts [1] dominance of doctors [1, 22] no criteria for various administrative posts [1] Country policies about nursing [7] Job security [7] Interference of job with personal life [7] inadequate respect and recognition of nursing [18, 21] high pressured and boring career [23]</p>	
<p>Professional consequences</p> <p>Professional development [8] stronger relations with their patients, peers and community [10] Higher recruitment and retention [10]</p>	<p>Professional consequences</p> <p>shortage of nursing forces [19] Defects in health care delivery [18, 19] future quality of nursing [24]</p>	Consequences
<p>Psychological consequences</p> <p>Increase student's self-esteem [8]</p>	<p>Psychological consequences</p> <p>stress, tension, high anxiety [8] diminish motivation [8]</p>	
<p>Educational consequences</p> <p>commitment to study [8] student success [8] academic success [8, 19]</p>	<p>Educational consequences</p> <p>Poor academic performance [9] dropping out of school [21, 18]</p>	

Discussion

The present narrative review was conducted aiming to study the attitude of nursing students toward the nursing profession and findings revealed that student attitudes encompass a wide range of negative to positive and are influenced by a variety of factors.

1. Attitude toward the nursing profession

Among the 18 studies reviewed, the results of 16 studies indicated the positive attitude of the nursing students toward their future profession. Six of the studies were conducted in India, all of which pointed out the positive perception of

Indian nursing students toward nursing. In their 2012 study conducted in Bangalore, Poreddi et al. pointed out that students had a positive perception of their discipline and over 53% of them were interested in completing their education as a nurse [24]. Results of another study (2015) in Bangalore indicated the same results and pointed out that 43.3% of nursing students had a favorable attitude and 56.6% of them had a relatively favorable attitude toward nursing [1]. Patidar et al. (2011) also conducted a study in Punjab, India, revealing that two-thirds of nursing students believed their future profession to have a high social status and 93.4% of them had no interest in changing their major [14]. Another study conducted on 100 nursing students revealed that 71% of the participants had chosen their major due to personal interest and 83% of them believed it to be a discipline of high social position so that 78% were interested in pursuing their education to at higher levels [17]. Over 90% of nursing students participating in the study of Kaur et al. (2016) also had a positive perception of nursing [22]. Results of Shukri et al. (2013) were also consistent with these studies and reported the attitude of nursing students toward their future profession to be positive, which was an attitude more prevalent in men compared to women [25].

Three of the studies were conducted in Egypt, all of which reported the positive attitude of a great majority of the nursing students toward their profession. The percentage of nursing students with a positive perception was reported to be 89.3% in the study of Khamis Mohamed (2013) [20], over 92% in another study by Mahmoud et al. (2019) [9] and 96% in the study of Mohammed et al. (2020) [8].

Two of the studies were conducted in Saudi Arabia, both of which reported the positive attitude of a great majority of the nursing students in this country. Results of Miligi et al. (2014) revealed the general positive attitude of nursing students towards their future occupation. Of course, participants from the northern parts of the country had indicated a negative attitude [19]. Another study by Mervat et al. (2018) pointed out that most of the students (72.8%) had a positive attitude while only 27.2% had a negative attitude towards nursing [10].

One study was conducted in Jordan and Nigeria each, both of which had reported positive attitudes. 92.6% of the nursing students in Jordan had a positive attitude towards nursing profession [3], while 50% of the Nigerian students declared that they had selected nursing since they were personally interested in it and 66% of them believed that nursing is an admirable job in public opinion. Generally, this study indicated the positive attitude of nursing students toward their future profession [21].

Mai et al. studied the attitude of nursing students in Vietnam over four years using the ASNP questionnaire which revealed that 62% of the students had a completely positive attitude while 36% of them had a relatively positive attitude toward nursing [23].

The point worth mentioning is that four studies conducted in Iran reported contradicting results which highlight the importance of further and more comprehensive research in this field at a national level. A study conducted by Joolae et al. (2006) indicated that 69% of the nursing students had a negative perception towards nursing profession and were interested in dropping out of this major [7]. Results of a study conducted by Chehri et al. (2014) also revealed that 54% of the freshman students had a positive attitude toward their major while this positive attitude dropped to 23.8% in senior students [16]. Results of another study (2005) also pointed out the positive attitude of 52% of the nursing students toward their future occupation. Of course, 48% of the students had a neutral opinion but none of them had reported a negative attitude [15]. The study of Noruzi Koushali et al. (2012) also revealed that over 65% of nursing students had a positive attitude toward nursing profession [18].

2. Factors contributing to attitudes toward nursing

2.1. Socio-cultural factors

Results of the present study indicated that various factors contribute to the attitude of nursing students regarding their future profession. In many communities and from many people's point of view, nursing is considered to be a feminine job given that it involves caring aspects and lending a helping hand [26, 27]. Such a viewpoint could contribute to the

negative attitude toward nursing profession, especially in countries where women are considered to have a lower social status compared to men [27] and femininity is considered to be associated with powerlessness and dependence [26]. The reviewed studies have also pointed out that since female household heads, poor women, and women from lower social classes used to become nurses in the past [14], nursing profession is still of lower social position and there is a negative public opinion toward it. For instance, the study of Khamis Mohamed et al. (2013) points out the unwillingness of men to study nursing since they believe it to be a traditionally feminine job accompanied by negative clichés, making it harder for men to enter this occupation [20]. Besides, the study of Mahmoud et al. (2019) has also pointed out the femininity of the nursing profession [9].

The professional perception among nursing students is also different between the two genders to some extent. It appears that in some countries, women don't have a positive perception of nursing due to a variety of reasons such as Family's disapproval, socio-cultural values, long working hours, requiring one to work with others from the opposite gender, and the impacts this job could have on their marriage and future life, have no interest in this job [28]. For instance, the study of Shukri et al. conducted in India indicated the aforementioned and pointed out that male students had a better attitude toward nursing compared to female students [25]. Meanwhile, some other studies have indicated contradictory results. For instance, the study of Chehri et al. (2014) conducted in Iran indicated that over 50% of female students were satisfied with introducing themselves as nurses in the community while this rate was about 21% among male students [16]. Results of Mahmoud et al. in Egypt also indicated the more positive mental image of female students compared to males [9]. This difference might be due to the differences in countries' approaches to different genders and, in turn, affect students' perception to nursing profession.

2.2. Economic factors

One of the factors that can be associated with attitude toward nursing is this profession's level of socioeconomic welfare [1]. It appears that the work environment and the low income of nurses have a close relationship with the negative attitude toward this profession. The aforementioned, these two factors are the most important factors determining endurance in a job and occupational motivation [29]. On the contrary, job security [9], high income and economic capability, and job opportunities can contribute to a positive attitude to profession [30]. For instance, Al-Jarrah pointed out that over 40% of nursing students in Jordan have selected nursing due to economic reasons and job opportunities [3]; however, the contrary is also observed. A study by Koushali et al. (2012) reported that over 25% of nurses were not satisfied with their economic situation [18], which might be one of the reasons for a lower positive attitude toward nursing in Iran. However, this problem is not confined to Iran and other studies have also reported low pay as one of the nurses' problems [26, 28]. Generally, it appears that public opinion regarding nursing depends on nurses' economic and scientific power. Therefore, promoting a higher economic situation, independence, and continuing education at higher levels can improve public opinion to nursing profession [30].

2.3. Environmental factors

Some of the factors affecting attitude toward nursing profession are formed by the level of students' and their families' knowledge of this discipline. A study conducted in Egypt (2013) reported that 60% of the students did not have adequate information about nursing and didn't even know that men could be nurses [20]. In cases when one chooses nursing as their job without the required information or merely based on a positive experience having taken care of a patient, they develop an idealistic image that might result in disappointment and stress when they realize that their idealistic image of nursing is different from the reality [11, 31], which might cause them to lose their positive attitude toward a nursing or even drop out of this major. A study conducted on freshman and senior Iranian nursing students has confirmed this and indicated that although students had a positive attitude when entering this discipline, the positive attitude has diminished considerably in students who are soon to graduate [16]. Of course, this might also be due to the education environment. In general, the education environment has a great impact on students' perceptions. The relationship students establish with their teachers [9], role models, and educational programs [20], can promote positive attitudes in students since they establish cognitive motivation in them and change their perception of their future profession [9]. Accordingly, in order to increase the level of satisfaction and create a positive attitude in

students, reviewing educational curriculums, improving educational environments, and solving students' problems is necessary and efforts should be made to improve the quality of education and subsequently change attitudes to positive ones by correcting the negative aspects of nursing [10].

In addition to these factors, the role of media and images of the nursing in community, social prestige, and family and relatives' perception of nursing also impact attitudes toward this profession [9]. Media usually imply that nurses are doctors' assistants and not academic caregivers with critical thinking, knowledge, and skills [6], which creates a negative attitude toward nursing across society. The results of Khamis Mohammed et al. also pointed out that although images portrayed by nurses in media are abundant and diverse, they are usually inaccurate and incomplete [20], which can result in students and families not developing a proper understanding of this profession and even initiate negative attitude.

Living and studying environments can also affect people's attitudes toward nursing. It appears that attitude toward nursing is more positive in urban and developed areas where there are several public and private colleges and there is greater awareness toward nursing profession compared to rural areas [19]. Of course, there are other findings that show a greater tendency to the nursing profession in rural areas [14]. Further research is required in this area, but the important point is that environmental factors and regional facilities can affect people's perception of a particular job.

2.4. Factors regarding the nature of the job

Some factors are also associated with the nursing job environment and professional factors. For instance, the lack of accurate professional position, lack of accurate criteria for appointing nurses to executive jobs, lack of appointing people with academic education to higher positions, the dominance of physicians in most occupational positions, and nurses' lack of independence are among these factors [1] that promoting a negative attitude. Feeling isolated, being disconnected from successful people in profession in the field and ambiguous job prospects are among factors mentioned in the study conducted by Chehri et al. (2014) as factors contributing to a negative attitude toward nursing [16]. Another study reported other factors such as the interactions between nurses and doctors and nursing professors and teachers. Additionally, the risk of violence and disease transmission in the workplace and exposure to health risks are also impactful in forming students' attitudes [10, 20].

The experience of having a nurse among family members, friends, or relatives [20] and positive experiences of students of interaction with nurses and the healthcare system environment affect their choice of whether or not to become a nurse [9]. Besides, some studies have also mentioned factors such as the global job market and immigration possibilities as factors affecting attitude toward nursing [14, 17].

3. The consequences of attitudes toward nursing

3.1. Professional consequences

Not only does students' perception of their future profession play an important part in their success, but it also affects the improvement of the profession. In general, attitude plays a significant part in guiding one's behaviors toward achieving their goals and increasing their motivation as one of the psychological factors affecting students; success [8]. According to the literature, a positive attitude has a positive impact on students' self-confidence and performance [3], and nurses with positive attitudes establish stronger relationships with their patients, colleagues, and the community as well as having a higher professional endurance in the healthcare system [10].

On the contrary, it could be said that the most important consequence of negative attitude is a shortage of nursing forces since it has an undeniable influence on the durability of students in nursing jobs [31]. Miligi et al. (2014) suggest that one of the reasons for global nurse shortage is rooted in the negative attitude toward nursing profession which eventually results in a shortage in healthcare service provision. They believe that correcting the negative attitude toward nursing could be a part of the solution to this problem [19]. A negative attitude toward future professions also leaves a negative impact on students' persistence in their major. around 30% of students drop out due to various reasons

such as attitude toward their future profession and complication they experience regarding their job [11]. Poreddi et al. (2012) also pointed out that 9.3% of nursing students in Saudi Arabia had the decision to change their major due to negative attitudes and low desire to work as a nurse [24].

3.2. Psychological consequences

Some of the consequences of attitude toward the profession have psychological manifestations. Mohammed et al. (2020) suggested that students with a negative attitude toward their major suffer from more emotional problems such as stress, tension, and anxiety [8]. These negative psychological consequences caused by a negative attitude toward the profession impact efficiency and job satisfaction which can, in turn, result in increased work exhaustion and the tendency to quit [2].

3.3. Educational consequences

Attitude toward the profession can even result in changes in students' educational performance. Students' willingness to participate in the process of clinical learning or active class participation can be influenced by their attitude toward professional nursing, so that positive attitude toward future profession can improve the aforementioned and negative attitude can eliminate them [9].

Limitation

Given that most studies were conducted on a small and regional level and some have reported contradicting results, there is a need to conduct more comprehensive studies on national or even international levels. Also, it is recommended to conduct qualitative studies that deeply investigate students' attitudes and reveal objective findings based on actual experiences and contexts.

Conclusions

This narrative review implies that nursing students generally have a positive attitude toward their profession, although negative results have also been reported in different countries due to a variety of actors. Given that results indicated that positive and negative attitudes can leave various impacts on professional and individual levels, special attention must be paid to nursing students' attitudes and by identifying causes and factors impacting it, can move toward improving the conditions affecting students' attitude toward their profession.

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