



Differences in Nursing Career Choices among Parent and Non-Parent Nursing Students

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Abstract

Background: In Israel, many nursing students are parents. Parenting may affect one's perceptions and life choices. Being a parent probably affects nursing students' career choices.

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to examine whether being parents might be associated with students' nursing career choices, and whether there are differences between parent and non-parent students in the factors affecting this choice.

Design: The study is a cross sectional study.

Participants: The participants were 101 final-year nursing students, 56 non-parents and 45 parents.

Methods: The participants were 101 final-year nursing students, 56 non-parents and 45 parents. The participants completed a questionnaire that explored their preferred field of nursing work after graduation and the potential role of the clinical placement, clinical preceptor, and self-efficacy in this choice.

Results: A difference was found in the nursing career choice of parent and non-parent students. The factors that most affected students' career choice was their clinical placement (81%), perceived self-efficacy (80.2%), and clinical preceptor (66%), and no differences were found between the two groups of students ($p > 0.05$). Nonetheless, students who were parents reported higher self-efficacy than non-parent students. Moreover, differences were found between the two groups of students in their perception of the clinical placement as a positive experience in several training settings, and in their satisfaction with the clinical preceptor.

Conclusion: The research findings show that it is necessary to take into account students' status as parents when providing career guidance. The research findings may help nursing policymakers plan policy concerning guiding and channeling nurses to fields with a shortage of nursing staff. Self-efficacy, clinical preceptors, and clinical placement can be used as tools to attract students to fields of nursing practice, including those less in demand. However, adaptations must be made for students who are parents.

Keywords: Nursing students; Self-efficacy; Attitudes; Career choice

Introduction

Some fields of nursing practice are still experiencing a shortage of nurses, as these fields are less attractive for potential candidates. These include community care, mental health, and geriatric nursing [1-5]. This shortage is challenging, particularly due to the aging population [6].

To attract nursing students to fields in which there is a shortage, it is important to understand how they choose their future field of practice. The clinical preceptor and clinical placement are considered factors that shape nursing students' professional identity and may thus play an important role in their future career choice [7].

Research indicates that the clinical placement plays a role in one's career choice [8]. The placement has a positive impact even in less popular training settings. Hence, a positive training experience in the field was shown to raise students' interest in community nursing [2,4] and mental health nursing [9]. Nonetheless, other studies show that exposure to a certain field of nursing does not necessarily raise interest in it. For example, despite the exposure, the interest in geriatrics and mental health remained low [2]. Moreover, a study conducted in the Netherlands found that even

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when students had a more “community care oriented” curriculum they still did not show greater preference for placement in community care than students who did not study this curriculum [5].

Studies also support the role of the clinical preceptor in nursing students’ career choice [10]. The clinical preceptor often serves as a role model and affects students’ perceptions [11]. Moreover, the clinical preceptor has a critical role in students’ socialization to nursing and in building their professional identity [12,13].

Another factor that may affect one’s nursing career choice is self-efficacy. According to Bandura [14], self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy is an individual’s conviction that he/she can learn and perform a behavior effectively in the face of challenges. Self-efficacy has been reported to serve as a motivator for goal achievement [15,16]. People with high self-efficacy persevere in their efforts to reach success and achievements [15,16].

Bandura [17] claimed that perceived self-efficacy plays an important role in one’s career choice. According to Bandura, people are inclined to rule out options due to their perceived self-efficacy. A person with low self-efficacy will be concerned of undertaking a task perceived as beyond his or her capabilities and will prefer to undertake tasks perceived as compatible with these capabilities. Accordingly, nursing students with a low sense of self-efficacy will avoid situations or tasks at which they previously failed. This might impact their interests and career choices [17,18]. Notably, self-efficacy might improve during one’s studies [19,20].

The literature also addresses nursing students’ personal characteristics as affecting their nursing career choice. Hence, there is evidence that the student’s gender and age are important elements that may affect their nursing career choice [2,21,22]. Another factor that may affect a student’s career choice is being a parent.

In Israel many nursing students are parents, particularly students in the academic retraining track. These students are usually older than those studying for a regular BSN, and there is a high likelihood that they are parents. Having children changes people and affects their choices in life. It might also change their perceptions [23-25]. Hence, being a parent may affect the nursing student’s career choices, perceptions, and the factors that affect this choice.

Research purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine whether being a parent is associated with students’ nursing career choice and whether there are differences between parent and non-parent students in the factors that affect this choice.

Materials and Methods

Research design

This is a quantitative correlational study.

Participants

The research population included a convenience sample of 101 final-year nursing students, of whom 56 were not parents and 45 were parents.

Research tool

The research tool was a digital questionnaire, based on a questionnaire constructed by Liora Waxman [26]. The original questionnaire aimed to explore how students perceive their clinical

placement, clinical preceptor, and previous experience, as affecting their sense of self-efficacy, and how perceived self-efficacy affects one’s nursing career choice. The original questionnaire included 101 questions, from which 63 questions that suited the purpose of the current study were extracted. In the study conducted by Waxman [26], the tool had a high level of reliability (Cronbach’s alpha =0.87). In the current study, the questionnaire was comprised of seven parts:

Part 1 – consisted of 10 items exploring sociodemographic information.

Part 2 – explored the variable of perceived self-efficacy and consisted of 24 questions. Respondents were asked to rate the items on a scale ranging from 1-4, according to the extent to which the item describes them professionally (1 - does not describe me at all, 4 - describes me very much).

Part 3 – consisted of 10 items exploring students’ impression of their clinical placement. Respondents were asked to rate the items on a response scale ranging from 1-5, where 1 represents a very negative experience, 4 a very positive experience, and 5 irrelevance.

Part 4 – consisted of 10 questions exploring the relationship between students and the clinical preceptor. Respondents were asked to rate the items on a response scale ranging from 1-5, where 1 represents a very negative relationship, 4 a very positive relationship, and 5 irrelevance.

Part 5 – consisted of 2 items on previous nursing work experience during one’s studies.

Part 6 – consisted of 3 items exploring students’ preferred field of practice upon graduation. Respondents were asked to note three fields by order of priority.

Part 7 – consisted of 6 items exploring factors that affect students’ choice of nursing field, in their view. Respondents were asked to rate the factors on a response scale of 1-4, where 1 represents no effect and 4 represents a strong effect. These items were formulated by the current researchers.

Research procedure

The research was approved by the institutional Helsinki Committee. One-hundred-and-forty questionnaires were distributed to final-year nursing students, by means of class WhatsApp groups. One-hundred-and-one forms were returned fully completed, for a response rate of 72%. An explanation of the research purpose was provided to the students, and they were assured that their anonymity would be maintained. Completion of the questionnaire took about 10 min. The data was collected from January to April 2022.

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics were employed, followed by the appropriate inferential statistics. Specifically, assumptions for parametric tests were met and the data were then analyzed using χ^2 , t-test for independent samples, and Pearson correlation.

Results and Discussion

Sample characteristics

The research population consisted of 101 final-year nursing students, where two groups were compared: 56 non-parent students and 45 who are parents. The research findings indicated a significant difference between the groups in age, income level, country of birth,

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by sociodemographic variables.

Variable	Categories	Non-parent students (n=56)				Students who are parents (n=45)				P
		n	%	M	SD	n	%	M	SD	
Study track	Academic track	34	60.7			13	28			P<0.01
	Academic retraining track	22	39.3			32	71.1			
Gender	Male	6	10.7			6	13.3			P>0.05
	Female	50	89.3			39	86.7			
Age	22-66			26.87	5.02			40.35	10.11	P<0.01
Income level	Below average	43	79.6			14	34.1			P<0.01
	Average	9	16.7			16	39			
	Above average	2	3.7			11	26.8			
Country of birth	Israel	53	94			34	75.6			P<0.05
	USSR	1	1.8			4	8.9			
	Ethiopia	0	0			1	2.2			
	Other	2	3.6			6	13.3			
Religion	Jewish	30	53.6			28	62.2			P>0.05
	Muslim Arab	26	46.4			17	37.8			
Religiosity	Secular	22	40.7			22	48.9			P>0.05
	Traditional	18	33.3			17	37.8			
	Religious	14	25.9			6	13.3			

Table 2: Preferences in the choice of a nursing field.

	Non-parent students			Students who are parents			P
	Department	n	%	Department	n	%	
First priority	Emergency room	12	21.4%	Maternity wing	13	29%	P<0.05
Second priority	Maternity wing	10	17.9%	Community	9	20%	
Third priority	Surgery	8	14.3%	Emergency room	7	15.6%	
	Operating room	8	14.3%				

and study track. Thus, the mean age of students who are parents was higher (M=40.35, SD=10.11) than that of non-parent students (M=26.87, SD=5.02). Regarding income level, students who are parents reported a higher income level than non-parent students. Among students who are parents, 65.8% reported an average or higher income level (n=27), versus 20.4% of non-parent students (n=11). Regarding country of birth, 24.4% of students with children had been born in countries other than Israel (n=11), versus only 5.4% of non-parent students (n=3). Regarding study track, most of the students who are parents were studying in the academic retraining track (71.1%, n=32), versus non-parent students, of whom most were studying in the academic track (60.7%, n=34). Then again, no significant differences were evident between the groups regarding gender, religion, and religiosity, where most of the respondents were female (86.7% to 89.3%), most were Jewish (57.4%), and with regard to religiosity 44.4% defined themselves as secular, 35.4% as traditional, and 19.8% as religious (Table 1).

Choice of nursing field

When examining the differences between the group of students who are parents and those who are not parents, a significant difference is evident in their choice of nursing field [$\chi^2=17.15$ (df=8), P<0.05], where students who are parents ranked the maternity wing as their first priority (29%), community care as their second (20%), and the emergency room as their third (15.6%). In contrast, non-parent

students ranked the emergency room first (21.4%), the maternity wing second (17.9%), and in the third place there was a tie between the surgical department and the operating rooms (14.3%) (Table 2).

Factors that affect the choice of nursing field

It is evident from the research findings that the factors that most affected students' choice of a nursing field were their clinical placement (81%), sense of self-efficacy (80.2%), and clinical preceptor (66%), where no differences were found between the two groups of students.

Level of self-efficacy

The self-efficacy of the entire research population was medium high (M=3.44, SD=0.47). It is evident from the research findings that there is a significant difference in the level of self-efficacy between non-parent students and those who are parents (t= -3.65 (df=99) P<0.01). The mean self-efficacy of students who are parents (M=3.62, SD=0.41) was higher than that of non-parent students (M=3.30, SD=0.46).

Among students who are parents, 68.9% were confident that thanks to their resourcefulness they would know how to deal with unexpected situations, versus 34.5% of non-parent students ($\chi^2=11.71$ (df=2), P<0.01). Among students who are parents, 66.7% anticipated no difficulty adapting to work in nursing, versus 32.1% of non-parent students ($\chi^2=13.92$ (df=3), P<0.01). Among students who are parents,

Table 3: Factors that ensure the highest level of self-efficacy.

Variable	Non-parent students		Students who are parents		P
	n	%	n	%	
If something opposes me, or someone, I can find means and ways of achieving what I want	19	33.9%	30	66.7%	P<0.05
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to deal with unexpected situations	19	34.5%	31	68.9%	P<0.01
I am capable of remaining calm in face of adversity because I utilize my coping skills	20	35.7%	26	57.8%	P<0.05
When I encounter problems, I usually think of several ideas for dealing with them	23	41.8%	32	71.1%	P<0.05
When I am in trouble, I usually consider what can be done	29	51.8%	37	82.2%	P<0.01
I am capable of doing things well in very severe conditions	22	39.3%	29	64.4%	P<0.05
I'm confident in myself when I perform new tasks	19	33.9%	28	63.6%	P<0.05
I anticipate no difficulty/problems with adapting to work in nursing	18	32.1%	30	66.7%	P<0.01
I have all the necessary technical knowledge to deal with my work, all I need is practical experience	23	41.1%	32	71.1%	P<0.05
I'm confident that my skills and ability are at least equal to those of my peers	15	26.8%	26	57.8%	P<0.05
In a new situation, it seems to me that I can cope with things	25	44.6%	34	75.6%	P<0.05
I believe that I utilize my skills as best as possible	25	44.6%	35	77.8%	P<0.01

Table 4: Comparison between non-parent students and students who are parents, in their perception of the clinical placement as a positive experience.

Variable	Non-parent students		Students who are parents		P
	N	%	N	%	
Internal medicine	25	44.6%	26	57.8%	P<0.01
Operating room	16	28.6%	22	48.9%	P<0.05
Pediatrics	14	25%	23	51.1%	P<0.01
Maternal wing	23	41.1%	29	64.4%	P<0.05

77.8% believed that they make the best use possible of their skills, versus 44.6% of non-parent students ($\chi^2=13.96$ (df=3), $P<0.01$) (Table 3).

The research findings also indicate a positive association with medium intensity between one's number of children and level of self-efficacy ($r=0.36$, $P<0.01$). Namely, the more children one has, the higher the level of self-efficacy. Notably, age was not found to predict self-efficacy, i.e., it is apparently having children that affects one's self-efficacy rather than age.

Clinical placement

Differences were found between the two groups of students in their perception of the clinical placement as a positive experience in several training settings. Thus, placement in internal medicine [$\chi^2=14.20$ (df=4), $P<0.01$], the operating room [$\chi^2=10.40$ (df=3), $P<0.05$], pediatrics [$\chi^2=16.43$ (df=4), $P<0.01$], and the maternity wing [$\chi^2=10.20$ (df=4), $P<0.05$] had a higher likelihood of being perceived by students who are parents as a positive experience than by non-parent students (Table 4). In the other departments, no differences were found between the two groups.

Clinical preceptor

No differences were found between the two groups of students in their satisfaction with the clinical preceptor during clinical training in the different departments. An exception was placement in the operating room, where students who are parents had a higher likelihood of expressing satisfaction with the clinical preceptor (49% vs. 45%) [$\chi^2=13.50$ (df=4), $P<0.01$].

Discussion

The current study examined whether being parents is associated

with students' choice of a nursing field and whether there are differences between students who are parents and non-parents regarding factors that may affect this choice. The study found differences between the two groups of students in their preferred fields of practice. Thus, students who are parents tended to have a higher preference for working in the maternal wing and community care than non-parent students. In contrast, non-parent students tended to have a high preference for the emergency room and the surgical wing. These differences can be ascribed to whether they are parents. Thus, it is reasonable that the maternal wing is more attractive for students who are parents themselves. Moreover, these students probably ascribe greater significance to convenient work hours because they are parents, and this may explain the tendency to prefer community care, which indeed allows more flexibility. In contrast, non-parent students are at liberty to seek a field considered more prestigious and heroic. A study conducted in Israel found that most students preferred to work in a hospital after graduating, particularly in departments they perceived as close to medicine, such as operating rooms, emergency medicine, and pediatric medicine [3]. Hence, it is reasonable that being a parent might affect the student's choice of field.

It is evident from the research findings that the factors that most affected students' choice of field are their clinical placement, sense of self-efficacy, and clinical preceptor. These findings are compatible with the literature, which ascribes significance to the clinical placement [8], the clinical preceptor [10], and self-efficacy, when choosing a nursing field [18]. Notably, no differences were found between the two groups of students in ascribing significance to the three factors. Namely, the two groups are probably affected by similar factors when choosing their field of practice.

Interestingly, it seems that the clinical preceptor has less of an impact than the clinical placement per se and the sense of self-efficacy. This may be because in Israel the average number of students guided by the clinical preceptor is 6 students, and in some departments 8, such that the interpersonal relationship between the preceptor and trainee is affected and this might come at the expense of being a role model for choosing a field of specialization. The preceptor's attitude to the student is less close and less personal. This topic merits further research.

The current findings indicate that although the two groups of students ascribed similar significance to the three factors, differences were observed between the groups in their perception of these factors. Hence, students who are parents displayed greater self-efficacy than non-parent students. Specifically, students who are parents were more likely to feel confident that thanks to their resourcefulness they know how to deal with unexpected situations, anticipate no difficulty with adapting to work in nursing, and believe that they use their skills as best as possible. These differences can be ascribed to the fact that students who are parents have more life experience. Interestingly, the research findings show that these differences are apparently not associated with the older age of students who are parents but rather merely to being parents. There is evidence that parents may have a higher sense of self-efficacy than non-parents [27].

The current study found differences between the two groups of students in their perception of the clinical placement as a positive experience, in several training settings. Thus, placement in internal medicine, the operating room, pediatrics, and the maternity wing had a higher likelihood of being perceived by students who are parents as a positive experience than by non-parent students. The reasons for these differences are unclear. It may be because these departments were more considerate of students who are parents: Let them off earlier, made things easier for them one way or another, etc. In any case, these differences show that perceptions may change depending on whether the student is a parent or not.

In the current study, no differences were found between the two groups of students in their satisfaction with the clinical preceptor in the different departments. An exception was placement in the operating room, where students who are parents had a higher likelihood of expressing satisfaction with the clinical preceptor. Here too it can be assumed that the difference stemmed from dispensations given to students who are parents. Further research should examine the reasons for these differences.

Limitations

This study was based on cross-sectional data. Thus, it is hard to draw conclusions regarding causes and consequences. In addition, the convenience sampling introduces the possibility of selection bias, therefore the results might not be generalizable to the general population of nursing students. Moreover, the use of a self-report questionnaire may lead to additional biases, such as recall bias and social desirability bias, thus possibly affecting the research findings and conclusions. Furthermore, this study explored students' intentions, thus the results may not reflect their actual career choices.

Conclusion

The research findings show that being a parent should be taken into account when providing students with career guidance. The research findings may help nursing policymakers plan policy concerning

guidance and channeling of nurses to fields with a shortage of nursing staff. The factors of self-efficacy, clinical preceptors, and clinical placement can be used as tools to attract students to fields of nursing practice, including those less in demand. However, adaptations must be made for students who are parents. Although the reasons for the differences in perceptions of placements and satisfaction with the clinical preceptor are unclear, these differences indicate disparate perceptions that must be considered when planning strategies for recruiting potential candidates for less popular fields of practice.

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