



PERCEPTION OF THE NURSING PROFESSION AMONG STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SPLIT

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Aim: The aim of this study was to investigate the perception of the nursing profession among the students at the University of Split.

Methods: The study was conducted at 5 institutions of the University of Split: University department of health studies, School of medicine, Faculty of Law, Faculty of maritime studies, and Catholic Faculty of Theology, and included 516 students. The questionnaire was completed anonymously and online via Google Forms from November 2020 to March 2021.

Results: The results of this study show that the Croatian version of the revised questionnaire with 16 statements about the Perception about the image of the nursing profession has acceptable measurement properties. The analysis of internal consistency on the entire questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.85$) showed that the selected statements are suitable for determining the overall level of perception of the nursing profession. Attitudes toward the nursing profession differed significantly among the 5 faculties ($P<0.001$). Students from School of Medicine had the most positive attitudes toward the nursing profession ($X=0.28$; $SD=0.61$), followed by University Department of Health Studies students ($X=0.18$; $SD=0.97$), whereas Catholic Faculty of Theology students had negative attitudes toward the nursing profession ($X=-0.98$; $SD=1.42$).

Conclusion: Nurses should promote their profession, especially towards young people who are on the verge of choosing their professional career.

Keywords: NURSING, PERCEPTION OF OCCUPATION, ATTITUDES TOWARD NURSING, STEREOTYPES ABOUT NURSING

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, nursing has proven to be an attractive profession, mainly because of the frequent demand on the labour market, job security, and more generally, the nobility of the profession itself (1). One of the reasons for taking up a nursing degree is also the desire to help and empathize with people, as well as the feeling of having a useful profession or pursuing an activity people depend on and could not survive without (les Students enrol in this study programme because they have previously completed a high school education for nursing

profession and therefore wish to further their education, or someone in the family is in the profession and they have received their recommendation (2). Another advantage of this profession is the wide range of activities. In addition to the primary, secondary and tertiary care, nurses can also work in the educational institutions such as schools, kindergartens and colleges (3-5).

When enrolling for a bachelor's degree in nursing, a dozen people apply for one place, which indicates that good rumours about nursing as a life or career choice circulate among young people, although in recent years the media have increasingly portrayed the ugly side of nursing in Croatia (6). In addition, there are more and more young people who decide to study nursing after having finished high school (which does not include health high school) (6, 7). One of the most burning problems of nurses in Croatia is the overload and the number

of patients that nurses care for, as well as the insufficient compensation for their work, because some European Union member states, which are economically better off than Croatia, offer their nurses a much higher salary for a lower volume of work, at the highly qualified medical staff, after completing their education, unfortunately mostly go to other countries in search of work (7).

As with all other professions, there is prejudice and stigma associated with nursing. The image of nursing is determined by the attitudes of the nurses who work and by the public image, that is, how others perceive nursing as a profession. The most common and popular prejudices about nursing in Croatia are certainly that nurses are actually subordinate to doctors or that nursing is exclusively a profession for women (8, 9). There are also stereotypes and prejudices that nurses face in the nursing field. Besides the fact that they are usu-

ally seen as assistants to doctors, there is also, for example, the stereotype that media persistently spread, namely the sexualization of a nurse (10).

Nurses should definitely promote their profession more in the media and encourage them to talk about positive issues and spread awareness about different opportunities and education that nursing offers today (9). Public awareness of nursing should be raised, and a different image of nursing should be shown, discrimination and denigration of nursing work should stop, and stereotyping and stigmatization should be eliminated. Now, in a pandemic, we have experienced a shortage of nurses. Unfortunately, the number of patients is increasing day by day (10, 11). For this very reason, the aim of this study was to investigate the perception toward nursing profession among the students at the University of Split.

METHODS

Subjects

This cross-sectional study was conducted in the academic year 2021/2022 using the online survey method via Google Form. The subjects of this study were students studying at 5 faculties of the University of Split (University Department of Health Studies (UDHS), School of Medicine (SM), Faculty of Law (FL), Faculty of Maritime Studies (FMS) and Catholic Faculty of Theology (CFT)). The link to the survey was given to the student representatives, who forwarded it to their fellow students. Students voluntarily participated in the study and there were no additional exclusion criteria.

Measuring instruments

Two questionnaires were used for this study, as follows:

- Sociodemographic questionnaire includes age, gender, and a study institution.
- Croatian version of the second part of the questionnaire on the Perception about the image of the nursing profession (12): The original questionnaire consists of three content-independent parts. The first part of the

questionnaire and the third part of the questionnaire were not considered in this research. We did not include the first part of the questionnaire, which contains questions about sociodemographic characteristics, because, given the objective of our research, we created a specific questionnaire that contains questions about sociodemographic characteristics of a sample of respondents who are the focus of our research. The third part of the questionnaire contains questions about the social value of work, the perception of health care as a profession, the change in the image of nursing after enrolling in nursing, and potential work, which did not apply in our case because the majority of our respondents were students from different faculties and had no relation to the study of nursing. The second part of the questionnaire contains questions about the image of nursing among students and consists of 22 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

With prior consent of the author, the questionnaire was translated from English to Croatian and back to English, using the back-translation method to ensure that the translation does not lose the meaning and significance of the original questionnaire (12, 13).

Data analysis

The basic metric properties were evaluated and a validation of the Croatian version of the Perception about the image of the nursing profession scale were examined. Homogeneity - determination of the latent structure of the test was performed using exploratory Factor Analysis (FA) with orthogonal varimax rotation and Kaiser-Guttman criteria to determine the number of significant components, such as reliability by calculating Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient. Descriptive statistics (percentage, frequency of responses, arithmetic mean, standard deviation) were performed for data analysis. A chi-square test was performed to test the difference in presentation with respect to the observed characteristics. For a de-

per analysis, a qualitative investigation between the obtained factors was performed using the ANOVA test. The Tukey post-hoc test was used to determine the differences in arithmetic means between factors. For statistical analysis, all data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet according to a prepared code plan and processed using the program IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0. Data were interpreted at the significance level $P<0.05$.

Ethical approval

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University Department of Health Studies (2181-228-07-20-0006). Approvals were also obtained from the: School of Medicine, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Maritime Studies and Catholic Faculty of Theology.

RESULTS

The study involved a total of 516 students from 5 faculties of the University of Split: UDHS (N = 175; 33.9%), SM (N = 110; 21.3%), FL (N = 140; 27.1%), FMS (N = 56; 10.9%) and CFT (N = 35;

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of subjects

	Subjects (N=516)	
	N	%
Gender	Male	120 23.3
	Female	396 76.7
Age	from 18 to 24 years	457 88.6
	from 25 to 31 years	43 8.3
	from 32 to 38 years	7 1.4
	from 39 to 45 years	7 1.4
	from 46 to 52 years	2 0.4
Study institution	UDHS	175 33.9
	FMS	56 10.9
	FL	140 27.1
	CFT	35 6.8
	SM	110 21.3

Legend: N - number of subjects; % - the proportion of subjects

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6.8%) (Table 1). The sample consisted mainly of women (76.7%). The average age of whole sample was 22 years. Most students were 18 to 24 years old (88.6%), followed by students aged 25 to 31 years (8.3%), while the same number of students were aged 32 to 38 years, as well as 39 to 45 years (1.4%). The smallest number of students was between 46 and 52 years old (0.4%) (Table 1).

An analysis of the reliability of the questionnaire Perception about the image of the nursing profession was performed for all statements together and for specific factors. After subtracting statements 3, 7, 11, 14, 16, and 22 because of similar scores on more than one factor,

Cronbach's alpha was 0.85 for 16 statements, indicating a satisfactory degree of consistency (Table 2). In this way, a revised form of the 16-item questionnaire was developed and further used in the analysis.

The variables grouped around the first factor (2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 20, 21) determine attitudes toward nursing as a profession. The first factor entitled Attitudes toward nursing as a profession includes 8 statements and its' internal consistency showed high reliability (Cronbach $\alpha=0.90$) (Table 2). The analysis of the variables grouped around the second factor (1, 5, 6) refers to the respect for nursing as a profession. The second factor enti-

itled Respect for nursing as a profession, includes a total of 3 statements, and its' internal consistency has shown satisfactory reliability (Cronbach $\alpha=0.72$) (Table 2). The variables grouped around the third factor (4, 17, 19) refer to the stereotypes about nursing. The third factor entitled Stereotypes about nursing, has a total of 3 statements and its internal consistency is less acceptable (Cronbach $\alpha=0.50$) (Table 2). The variables grouped around the fourth factor (15, 18) were related to the questions about attitudes towards careers in nursing. The fourth factor entitled Attitudes about careers in nursing, consists of a total of 3 statements, and its' internal consistency is less acceptable (Cronbach $\alpha=0.33$) (Table 2).

Table 2.
Reliability analysis of Perception about the image of the nursing profession questionnaire

Item	X	SD	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
			Attitudes toward nursing as a profession	Respect for nursing as a profession	Stereotypes about nursing	Attitudes about careers in nursing
10. Nursing is a human profession	4.6	0.93	0.89			
9. An essential profession in any society	4.5	0.97	0.87			
12. A significant in patient's recovery	4.4	0.93	0.83			
13. Helping in promotion of health and prevention of diseases	4.2	1.05	0.75			
8. An extremely hard profession that does not receive enough appreciation	4.1	1.03	0.74			
21. Caring profession in which ethical standards of care is maintained	4.1	0.93	0.71			
20. Opportunity for personal growth	3.9	0.95	0.58			
2. An occupation and not a profession	3.7	1.25	0.58			
5. A well appreciated profession in the society	3.1	1.04		0.83		
1. A respectful profession	3.5	1.15		0.80		
6. A prestigious profession	2.6	0.95		0.66		
17. Nurses waste a lot of time being busy doing nothing	4.1	0.94			0.75	
4. Similar to that of the servants' job	4.0	1.01			0.69	
19. Anyone could be a nurse easy	4.2	0.78			0.62	
18. I would like my child to become a nurse	3.0	0.80				0.86
15. Nurses are given a chance to use their own initiative in their work	3.1	1.07				0.44
Total percentage of explained variance (%)			30.12	13.06	9.71	8.97
Cronbach's α			0.90	0.72	0.50	0.33
P			<0.001	<0.001	0.046	0.011

Table 3.
Analysis of variance between the age of students at the University of Split and the perception of the nurse's profession.

Factors	Age	SS	df	MS	F	P
Attitudes toward nursing as a profession	Between groups	85.004	23	3.696	4.229	<0.001
	Within the groups	429.996	492	0.874		
Respect for nursing as a profession	Between groups	21.961	23	0.955	0.953	0.527
	Within the groups	493.039	492	1.002		
Stereotypes about nursing	Between groups	33.803	23	1.470	1.503	0.064
	Within the groups	481.197	492	0.978		
Attitudes about careers in nursing	Between groups	39.537	23	1.719	1.779	0.015
	Within the groups	475.463	492	0.966		

Legend: SS - sum of squares; df - degrees of freedom; MS - mid-square; F - ratio in variance analysis; P - level of statistical significance

There were no statistically significant differences in the analysis of variance for Perception about the image of the nursing profession by gender, which included all four factors. However, the

analysis of variance for perceptions of the nursing profession by age, which included all four factors, revealed a statistically significant level difference (P<0.001) for the Attitudes toward nur-

sing as a profession factor and (P=0.015) for the Attitudes about career in nursing (Table 3).

Table 4.
Perception of the nursing profession by factors between 5 institutions

Factor	Study institution	N	%	X	SD	F	P
Attitudes toward nursing as a profession	UDHS	175	33.91	0.18	0.97	8.965	<0.001
	FMS	56	10.85	-0.19	0.93		
	FL	140	27.13	-0.35	1.08		
	CFT	35	6.78	-0.98	1.42		
Respect for nursing as a profession	SM	110	21.32	0.28	0.61	4.755	0.001
	UDHS	175	33.91	-0.22	1.04		
	FMS	56	10.85	0.26	0.92		
	FL	140	27.13	0.17	0.96		
Stereotypes about nursing	CFT	35	6.78	0.21	1.26	1.608	0.171
	SM	110	21.32	-0.07	0.85		
	UDHS	175	33.91	0.07	0.98		
	FMS	56	10.85	-0.29	1.03		
Attitudes about careers in nursing	FL	140	27.13	-0.03	1.06	2.970	0.019
	CFT	35	6.78	-0.03	1.15		
	SM	110	21.32	0.08	0.87		
	UDHS	175	33.91	0.09	1.05		
Attitudes about careers in nursing	FMS	56	10.85	0.01	1.23	2.970	0.019
	FL	140	27.13	-0.04	0.96		
	CFT	35	6.78	0.37	0.90		
Attitudes about careers in nursing	SM	110	21.32	0.82	0.08	2.970	0.019

Legend: N - number of subjects; % - the proportion of subjects; X - arithmetic mean; SD - standard deviation; F - ratio in variance analysis; P - level of statistical significance

Analysis of Attitudes toward nursing as a profession among faculties showed a statistically significant difference ($P < 0.001$). Students from the SM had the most positive attitude toward nursing as a profession ($\bar{X} = 0.28$; $SD = 0.61$), followed by students from the UDHS ($\bar{X} = 0.18$; $SD = 0.97$) and students from the FMS ($\bar{X} = -0.19$; $SD = 0.93$), whereas students from the CFT had the worst attitude toward nursing as a profession ($\bar{X} = -0.98$; $SD = 1.42$), and then the FL students followed ($\bar{X} = -0.35$; $SD = 1.42$) (Table 4). Regarding Respect for nursing as a profession, the statistical significance was also found among the responses of the 5 faculties ($P = 0.001$). Students from the FMS showed the highest respect for nursing as a profession ($\bar{X} = 0.26$; $SD = 0.92$), followed by students from the CFT ($\bar{X} = 0.21$; $SD = 1.26$), and students from the FL ($\bar{X} = 0.17$; $SD = 0.96$). The students from the UDHS showed the least respect for the nursing profession ($\bar{X} = -0.22$; $SD = 1.04$), followed by SM students ($\bar{X} = -0.07$; $SD = 0.85$) (Table 4). Analysis of Stereotypes about nursing among the 5 faculties revealed no statistically significant difference ($P = 0.171$), with the fewest stereotypes held by students from the SM ($\bar{X} = 0.08$; $SD = 0.87$), followed by the UDHS students ($\bar{X} = 0.07$; $SD = 0.98$), and FL students ($\bar{X} = -0.03$; $SD = 1.06$). The most stereotypes about nursing were expressed by the students from FMS ($\bar{X} = -0.29$; $SD = 1.03$), followed by the CFT students ($\bar{X} = -0.03$; $SD = 1.15$) (Table 4). Statistical significance was also found in the responses to the question about Attitudes about career in nursing ($P = 0.019$). The SM students ($\bar{X} = 0.82$; $SD = 0.08$), CFT students ($\bar{X} = 0.37$; $SD = 0.90$) and students from the UDHS ($\bar{X} = 0.09$; $SD = 1.05$) had the best attitudes about career in nursing. The FL students had the worst attitudes toward career in nursing ($\bar{X} = -0.04$; $SD = 0.96$), followed by the FMS students ($\bar{X} = -0.01$; $SD = 1.23$) (Table 4).

When analysing the differences in the first factor titled Attitudes toward nursing as a profession between 5 faculties, a difference at the level of statistical significance ($P < 0.001$) was found between the UDHS and the FL students, also between the FL and the SM students,

while a statistical significance ($P = 0.027$) was found between the SM and the FMS students.

When analysing the differences between the second factor titled Respect for nursing as a profession between 5 faculties, statistically significant differences were found between UDHS and the FMS students ($P = 0.014$), as well as between UDHS and the FL students ($P = 0.004$).

For the third factor Stereotypes about nursing, there were no statistically significant differences among the 5 faculties. When differences among the 5 faculties were analysed with respect to the fourth factor titled Attitudes about career in nursing, a statistically significant difference was found between the SM and the CFT ($P = 0.019$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study have shown that the Croatian version of the questionnaire on the Perception about the image of the nursing profession has good measurement properties for the first two factors, while the third and fourth factors have low reliability and factor saturation. Although we are aware of these limitations, these factors were nevertheless used in the analysis for practical reasons. The analysis of internal consistency between all statements (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$) showed that the selected statements are used appropriately in determining the overall level of perception of the image of the nursing profession, with the exception of stereotypes of nursing and attitudes towards the nursing profession. The questionnaire Perception about the image of the nursing profession is determined by four factors: Attitudes towards nursing as a profession (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$), Respect for nursing as a profession (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72$), Stereotypes about nursing (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.50$), Attitudes about career in nursing (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.33$). Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$ indicates that the selected set of statements is used appropriately in establishing the overall level of Perception about the image of the nursing profession, with the exception of the factors Stereotypes about nursing and Attitudes about careers in nursing (14).

In the original study conducted by Al Jarrah IAT on a sample of 68 nursing students in Jordan, the internal consistency of the questionnaire Perception about the image of the nursing profession was not analysed (12). Therefore, this is the first study in Croatia that conducted validation of the Perception about the image of the nursing profession questionnaire.

Positive perceptions of nursing contribute to the success of recruiting and retaining nurses in the health care system and, more importantly, to young people choosing to study nursing. In a 2013 study conducted by Al Jarrah IAT, among nursing students at the University of Jordan found that when students were asked about their attitudes toward the nursing profession, they had overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward nursing (12). The students' positive attitudes were also reflected in their responses to the question of "How many students were proud of their future profession". In total 80.9% of students responded positively to this question (12).

This study showed that there was no gender difference in perceptions of the nursing profession for all four measurement factors, while a significant age difference was found for the two factors. Factors Attitudes toward nursing as a profession, as well as Attitudes about career in nursing showed significant differences between groups and within groups sorted by age. We did not find any study that analysed differences by age and gender in the available literature.

Abdelrahman SM, in 2018 examined the relationship between nurses' public image, their own presentation, and nurses' self-confidence in a sample of 320 nurses at Minia University Hospital in Egypt (15). When asked if society values the nursing profession as much as the legal profession, 46.3% of the respondents agreed with this statement, while 53.7% disagreed (15). FL Students in this study believe that the nursing profession is highly valued in society. In this sense, the FL students have a more positive image of nursing in society than the nursing students. In the aforementioned study, the public believes that nursing is

one of the necessary professions in any society. In a study conducted in Egypt, 46.8% of respondents disagreed and 53.2% agreed with this statement. The nursing students have a positive attitude towards the nursing profession and therefore agree with the statement that nursing is a profession that is necessary in the society (15). According to the surveys of public attitudes toward nursing as a necessary profession in the society, over 50% of respondents believe it is an important profession (15).

It is important to emphasize that the SM students also have a positive attitude because doctors and nurses work as a team. It is also important to emphasize that nurses must improve the perception of nursing among themselves.

Research has shown that long-term efforts are needed to educate people about the nursing profession and to encourage young people to enrol in the nursing programmes (16). This was confirmed in a study conducted in Poland, which found that the decision to enrol in nursing programme may be influenced by employment opportunities (17). Although young people are aware of the low reputation of the nursing profession in Poland they still believe that it is possible to improve the image of the profession and increase its prestige (17). In addition, it is important to point out that research has shown that nursing is a profession that offers many employment opportunities. However, young people often do not have enough knowledge about career planning and have concerns about employment (5). Also, the available research found that nurses are hired immediately after graduation for jobs they would not otherwise prefer. This can often lead to a lower job satisfaction and a burnout syndrome, which in turn can lead to leaving the profession (5).

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected online. This is because of the epidemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which made it impossible to collect data in a conventional way, and this was the only possible method at the moment. Second, this study was mainly related to the young population, which might limit the validity

of our results due to the lack of similar studies. Third, the revised form of the questionnaire obtained through Factor Analysis in the Croatian translation does not reach adequate metric property due to the poor saturation of the two subscales, but it still can be used in the study of students' attitudes. It is recommended that in the future research using this instrument, the metric characteristics should be re-assessed using different factor model(s).

The epidemic of COVID-19 demonstrated the need for trained nurses, as well as all other health professions. Nurses should do more outreach to change the public perception of their profession. Advertising for the nursing profession could be presented/implemented at faculty fairs to give as many young people as possible a better picture of the nursing profession and generate more interest in choosing it.

Abbreviations:

CFT - Catholic Faculty of Theology
FL - Faculty of Law
FMS - Faculty of Maritime Studies
SM - School of Medicine
UDHS - University Department of Health Studies

NOVČANA POTPORA/FUNDING
Nema/None

ETIČKO ODOBRENJE/ETHICAL APPROVAL
Nije potrebno/None

SUKOB INTERESA/CONFLICT OF INTEREST
Autori su popunili the Unified Competing Interest form na www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf (dostupno na zahtjev) obrazac i izjavljuju: nemaju potporu niti jedne organizacije za objavljeni rad; nemaju financijsku potporu niti jedne organizacije koja bi mogla imati interes za objavu ovog rada u posljednje 3 godine; nemaju drugih veza ili aktivnosti koje bi mogle utjecati na objavljeni rad./ All authors have completed the Unified Competing Interest form at www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf (available on request from the corresponding author) and declare: no support from any organization for the submitted work; no financial relationships with any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous 3 years; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

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Sažetak

PERCEPCIJA ZANIMANJA MEDICINSKE SESTRE KOD STUDENATA SVEUČILIŠTA U SPLITU

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Cilj: Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je istražiti percepciju sestrinske profesije među studentima Sveučilišta u Splitu.

Metode: Istraživanje je provedeno na 5 ustanova Sveučilišta u Splitu: Sveučilišni odjel zdravstvenih studija, Medicinski fakultet, Pravni fakultet, Pomorski fakultet i Katoličko bogoslovni fakultet, a obuhvatilo je 516 studenata. Upitnik je ispunjen anonimno i online, putem Google obrazaca od studenog 2020. do ožujka 2021.

Rezultati: Rezultati ovog istraživanja pokazuju da hrvatska inačica revidiranog upitnika od 16 tvrdnji o Percepciji zanimanja medicinske sestre ima prihvatljiva mjerna svojstva. Analiza unutarnje dosljednosti između svih tvrdnji (Cronbach $\alpha=0,85$) pokazala je da se odabrane tvrdnje na odgovarajući način koriste u određivanju ukupne razine percepcije sestrinske profesije. Stavovi prema profesiji medicinskih sestara značajno su se razlikovali između 5 fakulteta ($P<0,001$). Studenti Medicinskog fakulteta ukazuju na pozitivne stavove prema sestrinskoj profesiji ($X=0,28$; $SD=0,61$), zatim slijede studenti Sveučilišnog odjela zdravstvenih studija ($X=0,18$; $SD=0,97$), dok su studenti Katoličkog bogoslovnog fakulteta ukazali na negativan stav prema sestrinskoj profesiji ($X=-0,98$; $SD=1,42$).

Zaključak: Medicinske sestre bi trebale promicati svoju struku, naročito spram mladih ljudi koji su na pragu odabira svoje profesionalne karijere.

Ključne riječi: SESTRINSTVO, PERCEPCIJA ZANIMANJA, STAVOVI O SESTRINSTVU, STEREOTIPI O SESTRINSTVU

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