

Relationship Between Socio-demographic Characteristics and Attitudes of Nursing Students Toward Psychiatry in Kenya

Philip Kimutai Sanga^{*}, Donald Kokonya, John Arudo, Juliah Nyamwata

School of Nursing and Midwifery, Department of Clinical Nursing and Health Informatics, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakamega, Kenya

Email address:

phisanga@gmail.com (P. K. Sanga)

^{*}Corresponding author

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Abstract: There exists disparity between the level of demand for mental health nursing services and the number of psychiatric nurses available. Few students enroll in the psychiatric nursing specialty in Kenya. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students and their attitudes towards psychiatric nursing. The study was carried out at three universities and five colleges of nursing in Western Kenya among students pursuing bachelor's degree & diploma courses (n=245). Cluster and systematic random sampling techniques were used to select the study participants. A descriptive cross sectional design was used and data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for windows version 21. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$. Two-sided t-test was used to compare the mean of those willing to pursue psychiatric nursing and those not willing. There was a significant relationship between religion and preparation for mental health clinical placement ($p=0.03$). The Catholics had a higher mean of 2.9 (95% CI = 2.8 – 3.0) unlike the protestants who had a mean of 2.8 (95% CI = 2.8 – 2.9). Female participants were significantly knowledgeable about mental illness compared to males ($p = 0.03$) with a mean of 2.8 (95% CI = 2.7 – 2.8) versus a mean of 2.7 (95% CI = 2.6 – 2.8) for the males. A significant relationship between anxiety surrounding mental illness and availability of a psychiatric unit within the training institution was noted ($p=0.008$). Those who had a psychiatric unit within their training institution had a higher mean of 2.5 (95% CI = 2.4 – 2.6) compared to that of those in institutions that did not have psychiatric training institutions within the learning institutions with a mean of 2.3 (95% CI = 2.2 – 2.4). There was a significant relationship between the students' interests in nursing after completion of secondary school and experience during clinical placement ($p = 0.05$). Those who had higher interest had a higher mean of 2.8, 95% CI=2.7 – 2.8 compared to their counterparts with a mean of mean 2.4 (95% CI=1.9–2.8). The researchers recommends early exposure of students to psychiatric patients in their training, improvement on mentorship programmes for the students in psychiatry, thorough preparation of students for their clinical placement and provision of more opportunities for further studies in psychiatric nursing. A study to determine the influence of religion on attitudes towards psychiatric nursing is recommended.

Keywords: Psychiatric Nursing, Attitude, Mental Health, Nursing Student

1. Introduction

Few psychiatric nurses are available in Kenya to manage the increased demand for mental health services. Data from the Ministry of Health (MOH), Kenya, shows that there were

418 psychiatric nurses in Kenya and out of this number, only 250 worked in the mental health units across the country [1, 2]. The rest of the psychiatric nurses are distributed and deployed across non-psychiatric units/departments including medical-surgical, obstetrical and gynaecological units in the

various health care settings [2]. About 70 of these psychiatric nurses work at the Mathari National Hospital, Nairobi, Kenya [1, 3]. This further created a deficit on the total number of psychiatric nurses required for the management of patients with psychiatric disorders in Kenya [1]. This left about 180 psychiatric nurses distributed across the country, giving an average of less than 1 psychiatric nurse per Sub-County in Kenya [1, 2]. This means that the psychiatric nursing workforce is thinly distributed and its capacity severely overstretched. With low enrolment rates of students into psychiatry, the situation is projected to become worse [3, 4]. Fewer and fewer applications for psychiatric nursing and mental health training are being received in medical training colleges in Kenya [2, 3]. According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), failure to attract an adequate number of students into psychiatry nursing poses a great challenge to the future care of people with mental disorders and illnesses in Kenya [5]. There has to be strategies on how to attract and recruit students of nursing into the mental health and psychiatry specialty. Studies have shown that nursing students have negative attitude towards psychiatric nursing [6–8]. Some of the students were found to stigmatize people with mental illness [8–11]. It was also observed that students believed that psychiatric patients are people who are risky to deal with; they are people who have poor self-care among other negative beliefs [12]. Stigma towards psychiatric nursing has therefore, led to low enrolment into the training [6, 7, 13, 14]. Other studies have pointed out that students believe that psychiatric nursing is of low status compared to other nursing specialties and therefore; it is not worth specializing in it [15, 16]. Another perception that was found out from the studies is that students believed that specializing in psychiatric nursing had little opportunity for career growth [14, 17, 18]. Therefore, an understanding of the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and attitude of nursing students towards psychiatry is important in the development of strategies that would improve admission of students into the field of psychiatry, leading to an increase in the number of psychiatric nurses available to care for people with mental disorders in Kenya.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study Design

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted on 245 study participants at multiple sites in Kenya

2.2. Study Sites

The study was carried out at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) and at the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTC), Kakamega in Kakamega County. In Kisumu County, the study was conducted at the Great Lakes University, KMTC Kisumu campus and at St. Joseph's Medical Training College, Nyabondo while in Kericho County; it was conducted at the University of

Kabianga (UoK) and AIC Litein School of Nursing. In Bungoma County, the study was conducted at the Webuye and Bungoma KMTCs.

2.3. Study Population

The study population comprised the diploma and degree students of nursing in their final years of their basic training in the selected universities and colleges offering degrees and diplomas respectively in Kenya.

2.4. Sampling Techniques

Cluster and systematic sampling techniques were used to select the study participants.

2.5. Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data collection took three (3) weeks from the month of August to September 2016. Primary data was collected using locally designed semi-structured questionnaires. The “psychiatric/mental health clinical placement survey” questionnaire, a standardized tool, was used to collect quantitative data. This tool was adopted from a study conducted by Happell in Australia [19]. The study involved comparing two cohorts of second and third year nursing students of the same university in Australia on attitudes before and after clinical placement. The questionnaire consists of subscales that captured preparedness for the mental health field, knowledge about mental health, attitudes towards mental health nursing, satisfaction with clinical experience, and future career options.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Scientific and ethical approval was granted by the Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology Institutional Ethics and Review Committee (IERC) vide ERC No. MMU/COR: 403009 (38). All principles of research ethics were adhered to in the course of this study. The respondents were given the following rights; right to self-determination, right to privacy, right to maintain self-respect and dignity, right to refuse to participate, right to no harm, right to confidentiality and right to service. The researcher maintained anonymity and confidentiality in order to protect the respondents' identities by keeping the information provided by the study participants confidential.

3. Results

Out of the 245 questionnaires distributed, 241 were returned. Male participants were almost equal to females in the ratio of 1:1. The age group 20-24 years constituted 74% of the study participants. The sample population was comprised largely of single (83%) men and women, most of whom (61%) were Protestants and the rest (39%) were Catholics by faith (Table 1). The determinants of specialisation in psychiatric nursing included early exposure to and familiarity with mental illnesses in health institutions ($p=0.03$) as displayed on Table 2. These socio-demographic

characteristics enhanced the interest of students of nursing to specialize in psychiatric nursing. Students of nursing who had prior exposure to mental patients at the psychiatric units experienced much less anxiety ($p=0.008$) in handling psychiatric patients compared to those who trained where there was none. Though there had been interest in psychiatric nursing after secondary school ($p=0.05$), the interest was even higher among the Catholics and Protestants ($p=0.003$) as shown in Table 2.

Out of a total of 241 respondents were interviewed, a minority (15.4%) preferred pursuing psychiatric and mental health nursing while the majority (84.6%) wanted to pursue other courses in nursing. The proportion of males among those who wanted psychiatric and mental health nursing (48.7%) was similar to those who wanted other nursing specialties (48.8%). The pattern was seen more among

females where slightly over half (51.3%) preferred psychiatric and mental health nursing while 51.2% wanted other nursing specialties. A higher proportion (81.1%) of those who liked psychiatric and mental health nursing were young, aged 20 – 24 years compared to 18.1% in the same category. The mean age was similar for those who wanted psychiatric and mental health nursing (23.2 ± 3.0) and a range of 18 – 32 years compared to their counterparts with a mean age of 23.7 and a standard deviation of ±3.1 with a range of 18 – 37 years. The proportion of those single was similar for those who liked psychiatric and mental health nursing (83.8%) and those who did not want psychiatric and mental health nursing (83.3%). A larger proportion of those who preferred psychiatric and mental health nursing were Catholics (64.9%) in comparison to those who would not, most of whom were Protestants (35.1%) as shown on Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variable	Categories	Mental Health Specialty		Other Specialties	
		n	%	n	%
Sex	Male	18	48.7	99	48.8
	Female	19	51.3	104	51.2
	Total	37	100.0	203	100.0
Age group in years	15 – 19	1	2.7	3	1.5
	20 – 24	30	81.1	148	72.5
	25 – 29	3	8.1	37	18.1
	30 – 34	3	8.1	14	6.9
	≥ 35	0	0.0	2	1.0
	Total	37	100.0	204	100.0
	Mean age in years (Range)		23.2 \pm 3.0 (18 – 32)		23.7 \pm 3.1 (18 – 37)
Marital Status	Single	31	83.8	170	83.3
	Married	6	16.2	33	16.2
	Separated	0	0.0	1	0.5
	Total	37	100.0	204	100.0
Religion	Protestant	13	35.1	123	60.6
	Catholic	24	64.9	80	39.4
	Total	37	100.0	203	100.0

The two-sided t-test showed a significant relationship between religion and preparation for mental health clinical placement ($p=0.03$) with a mean of 2.8 (95% CI=2.8–2.9) for protestants and a mean of 2.9 (95% CI=2.8–3.0) for Catholics (Table 2). Participants of the Catholic faith had higher mean scores for being well prepared for psychiatric nursing placement, having a good understanding of the role of a psychiatric nurse, feeling confident in their ability to care for people experiencing a mental health problem and their theoretical component of psychiatric nursing having prepared them well for their clinical placement. There was a significant relationship ($p=0.003$) between religion and experience during clinical placement (Table 2). Students of the Catholic denomination had a mean of 2.9 (95% CI=2.8–2.9) had significantly more positive experience during their clinical placements in comparison to the Protestants with a mean of 2.7 (95% CI=2.6–2.8). Female participants were significantly more knowledgeable about mental illness compared to their male counterparts ($p=0.03$) with a mean of 2.8 (95% CI=2.7–2.8) compared to the males who had a mean of 2.7 (95% CI=2.6–2.8) as shown on Table 2. Females scored higher mean in the knowledge that mental illness is not a sign of weakness

in a person, having known someone who had experienced a mental health problem, knowledge that when someone develops a mental illness, it is not their fault and that the way people with mental illness feel can be affected by other people's attitudes towards them. Analysis on anxiety surrounding mental illness revealed that students who were trained in institutions with psychiatric units within their training institutions were less anxious as follows: anxiety about working with people experiencing a mental health problem and uncertainty about how to act towards someone with a mental illness and feeling safe about psychiatric placement. Those training in such training institutions scored a mean of 2.5 (95% CI = 2.4 – 2.6) compared to that of those in institutions ($p=0.008$) that did not have psychiatric training institutions within where they are learning with a mean of 2.3 (95% CI = 2.2 – 2.4) as displayed on Table 2. There was a significant relationship between the students' interests in nursing after completion of secondary school and experience during clinical placement (p value of 0.05). Those who had higher interest had a higher mean of 2.8 (95% CI=2.7 – 2.8) compared to those who had no interest who had a mean of 2.4 (95% CI=1.9–2.8). Students who had interest in nursing felt

that they were encouraged by staff to consider psychiatric nursing as a career, enjoyed psychiatric/mental health placement, nursing staff demonstrated a high level of clinical

skill, nursing staff treated patients with dignity and respect and nursing staff were responsive to their requests for clarification or assistance (Table 2).

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics and attitude towards psychiatric nursing.

Dimensions	Category	n	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	95% CI	P value
Preparation for mental health clinical placement	Protestants	136	2.8	0.3	239	2.1	2.8 – 2.9	0.03
	Catholics	105	2.9	0.2				
Knowledge of mental illness	Male	117	2.7	0.4	239	2.2	2.6 – 2.8	0.03
	Female	124	2.8	0.3				
Anxiety surrounding mental illness	Psychiatry Unit within training institution	93	2.5	0.5	239	2.7	2.4 – 2.6	0.008
	Not within training institution	148	2.3	0.6				
	Protestants	136	2.7	0.5				
Experience during clinical placement	Catholics	105	2.9	0.3	239	3.0	2.8 – 2.9	0.003
	Interested in nursing after finishing secondary school	226	2.8	0.3				
	Not interested	15	2.4	0.6				

4. Discussion

This study identified the socio-demographic factors influencing the attitude of nursing students towards psychiatric nursing programme in Kenya. The study showed that psychiatry appeared as a less popular career choice (15.4%) among the respondents than other nursing specialties (84.6%) in Kenya. A quarter of the respondents (25.7%) were undecided on the specialty they wished to pursue after their basic nursing training (Table 1). However, most of the respondents wished to pursue maternal and reproductive health nursing (17.3%). This finding was supported by the work of Stevens and his colleagues, who found out that most students wished to pursue nursing careers other than psychiatric nursing (6). In the same study, they also found out that the nursing students were encouraged by their lecturers to pursue specialties such as medical-surgical nursing and critical care nursing, about which the lecturers perceived that there was more utilization of technology unlike psychiatric nursing which they perceived that there was less utilization of technology. Other studies also pointed out that psychiatry was the least preferred career choice by the nursing students [6, 20, 21]. This false perception was likely to impart negatively on the recruitment of nursing students into the field of psychiatric nursing specialty. Findings from this study suggested that socio-demographic characteristics influenced the like or dislike of psychiatric nursing by the students of nursing. Age influenced specialization in psychiatric nursing as a career. The proportion of respondents who wished to pursue psychiatric nursing aged between 20-24 years was greater (81.1%) than that for the respondents who were above 24 years of age or 8.1% (Table 1). Another finding in this study was that gender played a significant role in the students' attitudes towards psychiatric nursing. The female students were more knowledgeable about mental illnesses compared to the males (Table 2). This corroborated with the findings of Ewalds-Kvist and colleagues, [22] who compared the impact of gender on attitudes towards mental illness in a study conducted in Sweden and they found out that female students of nursing tended to hold a more positive attitude in terms of open-mindedness and they were more positive to pro-integration than the male students and they

were, therefore, more likely to enroll for psychiatric nursing. It was also observed that the proportion of those who were married was similar for those who liked psychiatric nursing (83.8%) and those who did not want to pursue psychiatric nursing (83.3%). This was contrary to the findings of other researcher who found out that married people showed more positive attitudes towards people with mental illnesses than the single [23]. A significant relationship was noted between preparation for mental health placement and religion (Table 2). Also, as shown in Table 1, students of the Catholic faith were more likely to pursue psychiatric nursing (64.9%) than non-Catholics (35.1%). The beliefs of the students of the Catholic faith seemed to play a role in the formation of positive attitudes towards psychiatric nursing. It was also noted that students who had a psychiatric unit within their training institutions experienced less anxiety in mental health as opposed to those who didn't have a psychiatric unit within their training institution. These findings supported the works of other scholars, who found out that students who had more clinical placements and more theoretical hours showed more positive attitudes towards psychiatric nursing (20). Other researchers have recommended that the design of the curriculum should be such that it exposes students early to the psychiatric nursing experience. This has been found out to assist in fighting the negative perceptions the students had towards psychiatric patients [24–26]. Students who had prior contact with psychiatric patients had more positive attitude towards psychiatric nursing than those who did not have prior contact with psychiatric patients before their theoretical sessions. Students who had unpleasant experiences during their clinical placement showed less interest in pursuing psychiatric nursing as a career. Our findings concurred with the previous work of Hoekstra and other researchers, which showed that when students of nursing had negative attitude towards psychiatry, they were less likely to pursue psychiatric nursing [27].

5. Conclusion

The present study highlights the attitude of nursing students towards psychiatric nursing. It was evident that the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students play a significant role in relation to the attitude towards psychiatric

nursing. The females and the participants from Catholic denomination were found to have a more positive attitude towards psychiatric nursing than their counterparts. A study to determine the influence of religion on attitudes towards psychiatric nursing is recommended.

6. Limitations

1. The sample size is small
2. The study was a quantitative descriptive study which may not have captured all the attitudes of nursing students in relation to the socio-demographic variables.
3. Since this was a snapshot, the situation may provide differing results if another timeframe had been chosen

7. Conclusion

This study presented findings on the attitude of students of nursing towards specialization in psychiatric nursing. The key findings from this study showed that other than the students' socio-demographic characteristics, other factors which influenced nursing students' perceptions about psychiatric nursing included the clinical support the student received theoretical preparations and experiences the students receive during their clinical placements. The researchers recommended that nurses should be offered opportunities in well established institutions to pursue psychiatric nursing and more resources should be directed at the growth and development of mental health nursing in Kenya. The authors also recommended that psychiatric nurses should be deployed appropriately to areas where they were likely to utilize their skills. It was imperative that students should be exposed early to psychiatric environments for them to develop confidence in handling psychiatric patients and interest in psychiatric nursing. Every effort should, therefore, be made to ensure that positive attitudes were imparted on students. This was envisaged to assist in attracting more nursing students to the psychiatric nursing profession.

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