



Original Article

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NURSING STUDENTS' PSYCHIATRIC ENCOUNTERS AND THE CHOICE OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING SPECIALTY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Management of mentally ill patients is mainly done by psychiatric nurses in Kenya. This study sought to identify the association between nursing students' psychiatric encounters and the perception towards psychiatric nursing in Kenya using a cross-sectional study design. Cluster and systematic random sampling were used to select the study participants. Data was analysed using SPSS version 21. Odds ratio was used to identify the association between variables. A significant association existed between the students who were supported by clinical instructor/mentor and the desire to pursue psychiatric nursing (OR: 2.31; CI: 1.14-4.70; $p=0.018$). A strong association existed between the preparedness of the nursing staff for the arrival of the students and their wish to pursue psychiatric nursing programme (OR: 0.69; CI: 0.63-0.76; $p<0.001$). A significant association existed between the nursing staff knowledge about the objectives of the students and the desire of the nursing students to pursue psychiatric nursing (OR: 6.73; CI: 0.87-51.89; $p=0.025$). A significant association existed between the unwillingness of the respondents to tell anyone if they developed mental illness and their desire to pursue psychiatric nursing ($p<0.001$). In addition, a significant association was exhibited between the belief that people with mental illness are more likely to commit crime and the aspiration of the respondents to pursue psychiatric nursing ($p=0.002$). The study findings revealed that students' clinical experience and perception influence their desire to pursue psychiatric nursing. Students should also be mentored well while in the clinical area in order for them to have a good experience.

INTRODUCTION

The healthcare system in Kenya relies heavily on psychiatric nurses for the provision of mental health services (Pal *et al.*, 2013). However, despite the primary reliance, the psychiatric nurses are

severely overstretched hence significantly affecting the delivery of mental health services in the country (Jenkins, Heshmat, Loza, Siekkonen, & Sorour, 2010; Jenkins *et al.* 2010). In the recent past, there has been a significant decline in the number of psychiatric nurses in Kenya due to attrition and the

failure to attract nursing students to pursue psychiatric nursing. This translates to a shortage of psychiatric nurses available to manage psychiatric disorders (Jenkins *et al.*, 2010).

Ministry of Health (MOH) estimates availability of an average of 0.42 psychiatric nurses per 100,000 people against a global average of 7.7 psychiatric nurses per 100,000 people (WHO, 2013; WHO, 2016). The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), in their report, observed that there are 418 psychiatric nurses in Kenya of whom only 180 work in areas where they are able to directly deliver mental health services to the people (KNCHR, 2011). There is a dire need for the increment in the number of psychiatric nurses as well as the number of students enrolling in psychiatric nursing programs.

A low numbers of nursing students pursuing psychiatric nursing creates a blink future for this specialty. The fewer the number of students enrolling in these course imply that in the future , there shall be a n immense shortage of psychiatric nurses (Jenkins, Heshmat, Loza, Siekkonen, & Sorour, 2010; Muga & Jenkins, 2010). Several researchers have observed that fewer nursing students would wish to pursue psychiatric nursing. It has also been noted that students tend to hold negative attitudes towards psychiatric nursing (Pal *et al.*, 2013). Scholars have also found out that the nature of experience received by the students in the clinical area during the clinical placement considerably influences their desire to pursue psychiatric nursing (Ng *et al.*, 2010; Hamdan-Mansour *et al.*, 2011; Herisko *et al.*, 2013; Sun *et al.*, 2016). This study therefore sought to identify the association between nursing students' psychiatric encounters and the perception towards psychiatric nursing in Kenya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, a descriptive cross-sectional study design was employed. The study was conducted in selected colleges offering diploma and degree programmes in nursing in Kakamega, Kisumu, Bungoma, and Kericho counties in Kenya. The

nursing students in in their final year of training in Kenyan colleges and universities were targeted.

Inclusion Criteria

All the nursing students in their final year of training in the universities and diploma training colleges.

Exclusion criteria

Final year nursing students who had not done psychiatric nursing both theory and practical.

Sampling Procedures and Data Collection

Cluster sampling was used to select participating institutions while systematic random sampling was used to select the participants. 245 study participants were sampled by use of Fisher's exact formula. Self-administered questionnaires i.e. the "Psychiatric/mental health clinical placement survey" questionnaire was used in collecting data. The questionnaire has been validated (Happell, 2008). Data was analysed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 and presented using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the research was sought from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology Institutional Review and Ethics Committee (IREC). All principles of research ethics were adhered to in the course of this study. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics and Distribution of the Respondents

Figure 1 illustrates that the majority of the respondents were young, aged between 20-26 years old. Most of the respondents (57) were aged 23 years old. The youngest respondents were aged 18 years while the oldest respondent was aged 37 years old. The mean age of the respondents was 23.63 years (SD=3.106).

Figure 1: Age Distribution of the respondents in years

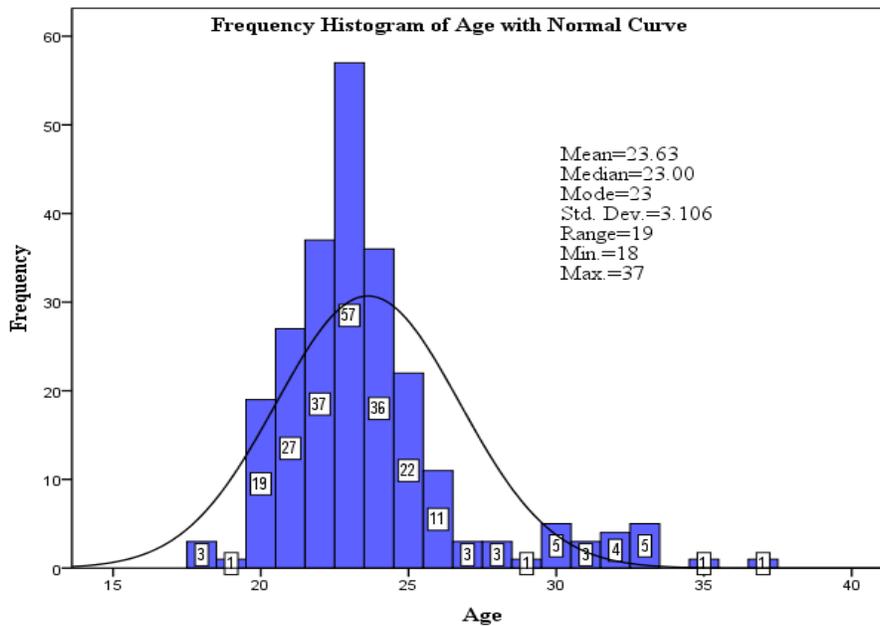


Table 1 displays the socio demographic distribution of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (60.3%) were aged between 18-23 years. The female gender comprised 51.3% of the respondents.

In regard to marital status, (83.8%) of the respondents were not married. The non-Catholics comprised 58.8% of the respondents.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Characteristic	Grouping	Frequency	Percent
Age Range (Years)	18-23	144	60.3
	Above 23	95	39.7
	Total	239	100.0
Sex	Male	117	48.8
	Female	123	51.3
	Total	240	100.0
Marital Status	Married	39	16.2
	Single	202	83.8
	Total	241	100.0
Religion	Catholic	99	41.1
	Others	141	58.5
	Total	240	100

Choice of Post Basic Psychiatric Nursing Program

Table 2 presents responses of participants capturing the socio-economic distribution in relation to the choice of psychiatric nursing. A higher proportion (29.5%) of the respondents aged above 23 years wished to pursue psychiatric nursing after their basic nursing training. A higher proportion (83.6%) of the respondents who were single wished to

pursue psychiatric nursing as compared to their counterparts who were married (16.4%). The proportion of males (49.3%) who wanted to pursue psychiatric nursing was almost similar to the females (50.7%) who wished to pursue the specialty. In terms of religion, 40.4% of the respondents from the Catholic denomination wished to pursue psychiatric nursing while 59.6% of respondents from the other religions wished to pursue psychiatric nursing.

Table 2: Socio-demographic Distribution in Relation to Choice of Post Basic Psychiatric Nursing Program

Socio-demographic characteristic	Grouping characteristic	Will apply for post basic course in psychiatric nursing		Total
		Yes	No	
Age Range	18-23	36 (26.7)	99 (73.3)	135 (60.5)
	Above 23	26 (29.5)	62 (70.5)	88 (39.5)
	Total	62 (27.8)	161 (72.2)	223
Sex	Male	36 (32.4)	75 (67.6)	111 (49.3)
	Female	27 (23.7)	87 (76.3)	114 (50.7)
	Total	63 (28)	162 (72)	225
Marital Status	Married	10 (27)	27 (73)	37 (16.4)
	Single	53 (28.2)	135 (71.8)	188 (83.6)
	Total	63 (28)	162 (72)	225
Catholic vs Other	Catholic	32 (35.2)	59 (64.8)	91 (40.4)
	Others	31 (23.1)	103 (76.9)	134 (59.6)
	Total	63 (28)	162 (72)	225

Perception towards Mental Illness and Choice of Post Basic Program in Psychiatric Nursing

Table 3 presents perception to mental illness and choice of post basic program in psychiatric nursing. A significant association exists between the perception that people with mental illness are unpredictable and the aspiration of the respondents to pursue psychiatric nursing ($p=0.036$). In addition, a significant association existed between the unwillingness of the respondents to tell anyone if they developed mental illness and their desire to

pursue psychiatric nursing ($p<0.001$). A significant association was noted between the perception that people with mental illness cannot handle too much responsibility and the wish of the respondents to pursue psychiatric nursing ($p=0.042$). Furthermore, a significant association exists between the belief that people with mental illness are more likely to commit crime and the aspiration of the respondents to pursue psychiatric nursing ($p=0.002$).

Table 3: Perception towards mental illness and choice of post basic program in psychiatry

Attitude toward mental illness	Scale	Will apply for post basic course in psychiatric nursing		P value
		Yes	No	
People with mental illnesses are unpredictable	Not Sure	1 (16.7)	5 (83.3)	0.036
	Strongly Disagree	0 (0)	4 (100)	
	Disagree	5 (11.9)	37 (88.1)	
	Agree	25 (29.8)	59 (70.2)	
	Strongly Agree	32 (36)	57 (64)	
I wouldn't tell anyone if developed mental illness	Not Sure	2 (22.2)	7 (77.8)	<0.001
	Strongly Disagree	8 (19)	34 (81)	
	Disagree	12 (16)	63 (84)	
	Agree	14 (30.4)	32 (69.6)	
	Strongly Agree	27 (50.9)	26 (49.1)	
Mental health patients can't handle too much responsibility	Not Sure	0 (0)	1 (100)	0.042
	Strongly Disagree	4 (26.7)	11 (73.3)	
	Disagree	5 (21.7)	18 (78.3)	
	Agree	19 (19.6)	78 (80.4)	
	Strongly Agree	35 (39.3)	54 (60.7)	
Mental health people more likely to commit crime	Not Sure	0 (0)	6 (100)	0.002
	Strongly Disagree	2 (50)	2 (50)	
	Disagree	4 (22.2)	14 (77.8)	
	Agree	15 (16.3)	77 (83.7)	
	Strongly Agree	42 (40)	63 (60)	

Clinical Support and Enrolment in Psychiatric Nursing Programme

Table 4 shows the relationship of the perception of students towards clinical support while in the clinical area verses the enrolment of into psychiatric nursing programme. There was significant association between the students who were supported by clinical instructor/mentor and the aspiration of those students to pursue psychiatric nursing. A significant association between students who felt that they were better supported in mental health than in other placements and the attitude towards pursue psychiatric nursing was noted (OR: 2.31; CI: 1.14-4.70; $p=0.018$). Another finding was that there was significant association between students who were encouraged

to become involved with mental patients care while on placement and their attitude towards psychiatric nursing (OR: 5.86; CI: 0.75-45.57; $p=0.044$).

A significant association existed between the welcoming nature of mental health nursing staff and the desire of the students to pursue psychiatric nursing (OR: 3.78; CI: 0.85-16.78; $p=0.047$). A significant association was exhibited between the preparedness of the nursing staff for the arrival of the students and their wish to pursue psychiatric nursing programme (OR: 0.69; CI: 0.63-0.76; $p<0.001$). A significant association existed between the nursing staff knowledge of the nursing staff about the objectives of the students and the desire of the nursing students to pursue psychiatric nursing (OR: 6.73; CI: 0.87-51.89; $p=0.025$). No

significant association existed between organized and comprehensive orientation of the students at the start of placement and their aspiration to pursue psychiatric nursing programme (OR: 1.32; CI: 0.35-4.95; $p=0.482$). There was no significant association between the students perception towards the nursing staff support during their clinical placement and their wish to pursue psychiatric nursing programme (OR: 2.52; CI: 0.71-8.87; $p=0.106$). No significant association

existed between the students' perception towards nursing staff being too busy to provide them with proper support and the urge to pursue the psychiatric nursing programme (OR: 1.66; CI: 0.92-3.01; $p=0.094$). Equally, there was no significant association between the responsiveness of the nursing staff to the students' requests for clarification or assistance and the desire to pursue psychiatric nursing programme (OR: 2.82; CI: 0.34-23.38; $p=0.289$).

Table 4: Clinical support and enrolment of into psychiatric nursing programme

Clinical Support	Will Apply for PB Course in Psychiatric Nursing		OR	95% CI	P value	
	Yes	No				
I was well oriented during my mental health placement	Yes	60 (28.3)	152 (71.7)	1.32	0.35-4.95	0.482*
	No	3 (23.1)	10 (76.9)			
I was supported by nursing staff during my clinical placement	Yes	60 (29.6)	143 (70.4)	2.52	0.71-8.87	0.106*
	No	3 (14.3)	18 (85.7)			
Psychiatric nurses were too busy to provide proper support	Yes	31 (33.7)	61 (66.3)	1.66	0.92-3.01	0.094
	No	30 (23.4)	98 (76.6)			
I was better supported in psychiatric placement than other placements	Yes	51 (33.6)	101 (66.4)	2.31	1.14-4.70	0.018
	No	12 (17.9)	55 (82.1)			
I was well supported by mentor/clinical instructor	Yes	62 (34.3)	119 (65.7)	21.36	2.87-159.0	<0.001*
	No	1 (2.4)	41 (97.6)			
I was encouraged to be involved with patient care during psychiatric nursing placement	Yes	62 (29.5)	148 (70.5)	5.86	0.75-45.57	0.044*
	No	1 (6.7)	14 (93.3)			
Psychiatric nursing staff were welcoming to students	Yes	60 (29.6)	143 (70.4)	3.78	0.85-16.78	0.047*
	No	2 (10)	18 (90)			
Psychiatric nursing staff were prepared for my arrival	Yes	60 (30.6)	136 (69.4)	0.69	0.63-0.76	<0.001*
	No	0 (0)	23 (100)			
Psychiatric nursing staff were familiar with my learning objectives	Yes	61 (29.6)	145 (70.4)	6.73	0.87-51.89	0.025*
	No	1 (5.9)	16 (94.1)			
Psychiatric nursing staff treated patients with dignity	Yes	59 (29.8)	139 (70.2)	2.12	0.70-6.48	132*
	No	4 (16.7)	20 (83.3)			
Psychiatric nurses were responsive to my request for clarification	Yes	62 (28.7)	154 (71.3)	2.82	0.34-23.38	0.289*
	No	1 (12.5)	7 (87.5)			

P value, Odds Ratio (OR) and 95% Confidence Interval (CI) were used to show significance of the association. Statistical significance (p value) determined by Pearson Chi square statistics however * Fisher's exact test was used to determine statistical significance.

DISCUSSION

As it can be noted in this study, the attitude a student holds towards psychiatric nursing influenced their aspiration to pursue psychiatric nursing. Mentally ill patients have suffered from stigma for ages; according to a study by Mas and Hatim (2002), the mental health condition with the most negative rating was schizophrenia. Such kind of perception when held by nursing students will discourage them from pursuing psychiatric nursing. The media industry also have been seen to portray psychiatry specialty as of low profile (Gough & Happell, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2010). This might contribute to poor attitude of students towards psychiatric nursing.

Another significant finding from this study was that self-stigma influences the willingness of the student to pursue psychiatric nursing (see *Table 3*). This corroborates with the findings of Corrigan and Rao (2012), who stated that people with mental illnesses tend to have certain feelings within them that the public do not value them. Other researchers have also pointed out that the society tends to believe that people with mental illnesses are the ones who caused the mental illness in themselves and are also they are seen as if they are not in full control of their condition (Hansson *et al.*, 2013). All those perceptions will mostly likely create a bad picture, which makes psychiatric nursing less attractive to the nursing students.

According to the study, clinical support the students receive significantly influence their attitude towards psychiatric nursing (see *Table 4*). Several scholars have identified that students need to feel comfortable and supported within the clinical area (Happell, 2008; Henderson *et al.*, 2007; Stevens *et al.*, 2013; Happell & Gough, 2007; Sun *et al.* 2016). The more the student feels supported, the more likely he or she will opt to pursue psychiatric nursing (Happell *et al.*, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2013). In the course of their training, students meet the psychiatric patients in different units of healthcare delivery system (Happell, 2009; Happell *et al.*, 2011). Such kind of exposure will make the student build certain perceptions about a programme (Dempsey & Ribak, 2012). If a student forms a negative attitude towards a specialty, such kind of

student is less likely to have an aspiration to pursue that course in future (Ng *et al.*, 2010).

Other researchers have postulated that students tend to develop negative attitudes towards a certain specialty because of the information they get from their mentors/teachers (Stevens *et al.*, 2013). Some lecturers advise their students to pursue other programmes after their basic nursing training. This they argue will assist the students get enough experience before they pursue psychiatric nursing thereafter (Stevens *et al.*, 2013; Jansen & Venter, 2015). In this study, it was evident that students who were well supported for their psychiatric placement were more willing to pursue psychiatric nursing unlike those who were not supported (see *Table 4*). Lecturers should therefore try their best to support and promote positive attitude towards psychiatric nursing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As observed in this study, the perception towards psychiatric nursing has a significant influence of the attitude towards psychiatric nursing. It was also found out that the clinical experience influences the nursing students' attitude towards psychiatric nursing. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that the delivery of psychiatric nursing content should instil positive attitudes towards psychiatric nursing. The nursing lecturers should be able to paint mentally ill patients in good picture. Students should also be mentored well while in the clinical area in order for them to have a good experience, which will promote positive attitudes towards psychiatric nursing. Career counselling should also be enhanced in nursing colleges so that as students are making career choices for the post basic course they would wish to pursue after their training, they have an informed choice.

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