

Nursing Students' Perception about Nursing as a Professional Career Choice at Taif University, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: Globally, the significant and increasing shortage of nurses is alarming. Nursing students' perception towards the image of the nursing profession has an apparent impact on their self-concept, self-esteem, recruitment, retention, and performance. **Aim:** To describe and explore nursing students' perception of professional nursing image as a career choice at Applied Medical Sciences College, Taif University, Saudi Arabia. **Subjects and methods:** A descriptive online survey was conducted at previously mentioned setting. All nursing students (114) enrolled in the second semester academic year 2016/2017 and as well as agreed to participate were included in this survey. One questionnaire was used for data collection. **Results:** The present study's findings revealed that most of participant students entered nursing department due to their preparatory year grades. Likewise, the highest percentage of both male and female students feel proud when talking about nursing, while, a small percentage of them were shy and attack nursing. **Conclusion:** The majority of participant students from both gender have positive image about nursing profession. The highest percentage of positive image were among male students. **Recommendations:** Develop and organize an awareness program about nursing as a profession. This awareness program should be implemented in the most public visited places. Moreover, it could be very effective to arrange nursing awareness program at national day events to attract large numbers of young Saudi students into nursing.

Keywords: Nursing, Students, Career Choice, Professional Image.

1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a profession is a complex process affected by many factors varying from one country to another and from one culture to another. In addition, to the properties of the profession and individual characteristics of the person, environmental conditions, political, economic, legal and systematic characteristics, luck, norms, social values and attitudes affect one's choice of profession (*Zencir and Eşer 2016*). In choosing a profession, if a person is to adapt to the profession and to maintain a productive working life, he/she should have a positive opinion and attitude towards the profession. Having a positive opinion and attitude towards the profession plays an important role not only in fulfilling individual success but also in the development of the profession (*Midilli and Durgun, 2017*).

Nursing students' perception towards the image of the nursing profession has an apparent impact on their self-concept, self-esteem, recruitment, retention, and performance. Thus, nurses who have positive professional images will have more and stronger relations with their patients, peers and community. Although there is an enormous advancement in the nursing profession, nurses still face multiple challenges in relation to a professional image (*Chauke, 2014 and Ibrahim et al., 2015*). Nurses are the "front line" staff in most health systems and their contribution is recognized as essential in meeting development goals and delivering safe and effective care (*Lim and Muhtar, 2016*).

The image of both nurses and nursing as a profession is vital in the successful recruitment and retention of staff in the healthcare industry (*Caroline and Ngoma, 2015*). *Waters (2010)* believes that nurses are the backbone of the healthcare sector and are fundamental in the delivery of quality care for all the inhabitants of a country. The perception of nursing by the public plays an important role in determining the choice of nursing as a profession by young people. Understanding the perception of nursing students about their profession will help in identifying misconceptions and information that could be helpful in planning public enlightenment about the profession (*Emmanuel, 2015*).

Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood or interpreted. It is important to ascertain how students perceive nursing and the decision to choose nursing to be their career. Understanding career decisions of nursing students are an essential component of recruitment and retention strategies. To educate nurses to meet the needs of society, we need to know their career preferences and reasons for them (*Swarna, 2015*).

Nursing emerged as a profession in the latter part of the 19th century. Historically women have been the principal caregivers of sick family members, although religious traditions such as Christianity also have contributed to the history of nursing. It was not until the 19th century however that nursing began to gain recognition as a profession. The British Nurse Florence Nightingale was instrumental in effecting this change (*Belete et al., 2015*). Despite the great advances in the nursing career, nurses still face considerable challenges related to its image that impact on status, power and the ability to affect changes in health care. The image of nursing is vital to the profession, necessary in today's changing workplace and an important concept for future nurses to understand (*Mohamed and El Sayed, 2013*).

Nursing students face many difficulties during their education process. Consequently, to improve the quality of nursing education by evaluating nursing curricula, to improve educational environments, to solve problems arising between educators and students, to increase students' satisfaction from education and profession, to make nursing a preferred profession by changing negative aspects of nursing, it is considered that it would be useful to encourage students to favor nursing and to determine their views on the institution they are studying in (*Midilli and Durgun, 2017*). Nursing students come into nursing education with inherent lay beliefs about nursing that evolve over years of education, enabling them to be professionally socialized into the nursing career (*Caroline and Ngoma, 2015*). The nursing profession has suffered greatly from public stereotyping and for being strictly linked with femininity and non-masculinity. This view is subjective and based on peoples' misunderstanding of nursing activities, image, practices and different personalities (*Abandari et al., 2016*). Moreover, students often have misconceptions regarding the reality of nursing and the opportunities available to nurses that sometimes result in poor choices related to pursuing nursing as a career (*Lundberg et al., 2011*).

Many strategies currently needed to address a profound nursing shortage that is threatening to health care quality. One of them is to increase the interest of young adolescent in the nursing profession. Perceptions of higher secondary school students about nursing are important because they offer strategic clues towards successful recruitment of the next generation of nurses. They are the one part of the society and therefore the great impact of the society what they think and believe about nursing profession (*MistriKinjal, 2013*).

Perceptions held by the public about the nursing profession greatly influence the personal and public image of nursing. The role of gender in the choice of a career is an extremely important concept, because men constitute nearly half of the potential recruitment pool. Noticing a male nurse ridiculed would prevent boys to think of a nursing career (*Kiwanuka, 2010*). Moreover, the image of the nursing profession is affected by various other dynamics such as the media, public image, social prestige, nurses themselves, other medical professions, school preparations, role models, nursing educators, and the risk of violence and exposure to health hazards (*Abdel El-Halem et al., 2011; and Ibrahim et al., 2015*).

The nursing students' perception regarding nursing as a profession varies. Some consider nursing as a caring profession. Others perceived nursing as a profession that helps people to gain better health (*Beck, 2000*). Further, there are additional views, such as: seeing nursing as a noble and respected career (*Mackintosh, 2006*). However, further opinion, nursing is still viewed as a 'medical-technical' activity as reported by *Tawash et al., in (2012)*. Moreover, a recent study about "Associate nursing students' perceptions toward the nursing profession in Jordan" showed that the associate nursing students generally have a significantly positive perception about the image of the nursing profession and the majority of them feel proud when talking with others about a nursing career (*Al Jarrah, 2013*). These variations regarding perceptions among nursing students and community views, pose a great question regarding the reasons and the factors of these differences in points of views.

In Saudi Arabia, nursing is not considered a respectable profession for women, despite its long, respected history during the period of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Nursing was ranked last in the list of appropriate occupations for women. Reasons for this low ranking included the type of work, inadequate financial rewards and long working hours that were found to be prohibitive for some women as they must fulfill obligations of the wife and mother role (*Miligi and Selim, 2014*). The reasons for the perceived lack of interest in nursing as a career are multi-factorial, and may differ from context to context. In South Africa, the low status of the profession, heavy workloads, and poor access to personal development programs have been proposed as some of the reasons learners are not attracted to nursing as a career; other negative perceptions about nursing include that the workload is physically demanding, and that the shortage of nurses increases the stress of the work (*Buerhaus, 2005*).

In fact, Saudi females who choose nursing as a career face many obstacles, primarily based on religious and social norms. Nursing suffers from a poor image in Saudi society, which considers it a job for "maids" or uneducated women. Saudi men who choose nursing also face criticism from family and friends. One Saudi male nurse known to the authors related, "My mother refused to tell her friends I am a nurse. If they see me in the hospital, she tells them I am a doctor, as doctors are better than nurses moreover nursing in Saudi Arabia has some major problems (poor education, foreign nurses, poor Saudi Nursing Association, lack of nursing media, absence of voice of nursing, ignorant decision makers, lack of legislation and constitution (*Al-Mahmoud, 2013*). *Al-Omar (2004)* conducted a study in Saudi Arabia about high school students' perceptions of nursing as a possible career. He concluded that community image, family disagreement, cultural and communal values, long working hours, mixing with members of the opposite gender, and the worry of not being a "marriageable" prospect were the main reasons why Saudi females did not choose nursing as a career. Additionally, both historically and currently, nurses have been viewed as an extension of the physician (*El-Sanabary, 2003*).

At present, the nursing image in Arab countries is improving, and nursing is considered one of the appreciated and recommended professions. Admission to nursing faculties in Arabian countries became a competition determined by high academic grades. The image of nursing in Saudi Arabia has been changing gradually from holding very negative attitudes to positive attitudes towards the profession (*Mutair and Redwan, 2016*). It may appear that the image of nursing as a profession in the Egyptian community was not improved significantly even after the nurse was university qualified (*Abdel El-Halem et al., 2011*). In addition, nursing is an unacceptable profession and is a last option for Bahraini students. Families in Bahrain perceive nursing as an inappropriate profession for girls, low paying, low status, and involving much hard and unpleasant work (*Tawash et al., 2012*).

Recently, in Arabian and non-Arabian countries, males have plentiful job opportunities, good salaries, and career prospects. The nursing field is required to maintain this, to overcome nursing shortages, rapid changes, reforms in health care, globalization, negative community image and poor media presentation (*Gaber and Mostafa, 2013; and Al Jarrah, 2013*).

Significance of the study:

It is merely observed that nursing students has negative thinking towards nursing profession resulting in lack of interest which is an obstacle in academic performance affecting the productivity of the students (Darade et al., 2017). Moreover, there is a constant need to promote a professional nursing image and enhance its position in the community and to be a magnet for attracting prevalent number of students to enter this profession and maintain professionalism in nursing practice (Ibrahim et al., 2015). Hence researchers felt a very strong need to explore the Saudi students' perception of nursing as a profession. There are many studies done here in Saudi Arabia about nursing students' perception of professional nursing image. However, there is no studies conducted in Taif city about professional nursing image. Therefore, this study aims to describe the perception of professional nursing image among nursing students at Applied Medical Sciences College, Taif University, Saudi Arabia.

Aim of the study:

The present study was aimed to describe and explore nursing students' perception of professional nursing image as a career choice among male and female nursing students at College of Applied Medical Sciences, Taif University, Saudi Arabia.

Research Questions:

1. Is there a difference in the professional nursing image among both male and female nursing students?
2. What are the factors that influence the choice of nursing as a career among male and female students?
3. What is the family reaction to enrollment of their sons into nursing among both male and female students?

2. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Research Design: A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted from January 2017 to March 2017.

Setting: The study conducted among nursing students in nursing department, Applied Medical Sciences Colleges, Taif University.

Subjects: All students enrolled in the second semester academic year 2016/2017 at previously mentioned setting were invited to participate in this survey. The participation was voluntary and anonymous. Online survey of 114 participant students were selected. The students were allocated in different academic years including the second, third and fourth within the nursing department.

Instrument:

Self-report questionnaire was used for data collection. It was developed by researchers from relevant literatures and previous similar studies to collect data for this study. It was translated into Arabic by the researchers. It composed of three main parts:

The first part: included socio-demographic characteristics of participant nursing students. It contains age, sex, marital status, number of siblings, student's number in the family, parents' level of education, mother level of education and family income per month.

The second part: consisted of 29 questions that explored nursing students' feelings and perceptions toward the nursing profession in terms of the beliefs, ideas, and impressions that they have on nursing as a profession. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The possible responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on all items. The higher the scores, the higher the image is.

The third part: composed of students' personal questions about nursing profession. It includes 4 questions, which are reasons for enrollment into nursing collage, family's reaction to students' enrollment, students' feeling about nursing profession when talking with others and students' career plan after graduation.

Tool Validity:

Tool was reviewed by a panel of five faculty members specialized in the field of nursing administration, medical surgical nursing, community health nursing, nursing education and mental health nursing to test both face and content validity, and to evaluate the appropriateness of questions to the Saudi culture. Modification was carried out according to the panel judgment on clarity of sentences and appropriateness of content.

Pilot Study:

A pilot study was conducted on ten nursing students not included in the study sample to test the practicability and applicability of the tool, identify any difficulties, estimate the time needed to fill in the questionnaire. Based on the results of the pilot study, the necessary modification and clarification of some questions were done. Validity and reliability of the study tool was tested using Cronbach's coefficient alpha (0.84).

Data collection procedure:

Approval of institutional Review Board (IRB) at Applied Medical Sciences College, Taif University was obtained. After that, once the subjects were agreed to fill in the questionnaire, then the researchers gave the questionnaire for filling it out, each participant was spent 20-30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The researchers told the participants that all information gathered will be used only for research's purpose, and results of the study will be published in aggregates. The data collection phase of the study was carried out in three months from 1/1/2017 to 30/3/2017.

Ethics and human rights:

Explanation of the study aim in a simple and clear manner was done to each participant. All data was considered confidential. Participants were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason.

Data Analysis Plan:

Data were revised, coded, entered, analyzed and tabulated using SPSS version 23. Both descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and chi-square tests) were used according to type of variables. P value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

3. RESULTS

Table (1): Socio- demographic Characteristics Among Participant Students (N= 114).

Variables	N0.	%
Sex		
Male	37	32.5%
Female	77	67.5%
Age		
18-20	30	26.3%
20-25	80	70.2%
More than 25	4	3.5%
Marital status		
Single	106	93%
Married	8	7.0%
Number of Sibling		
Less than3	4	3.5%
3-5	47	41.2%
More than 5	63	55.3%
Order in Family Member		
First	27	23.7%
Middle	68	59.6%
Last	19	16.7%
Fathers' Educational Level		
Primary	14	12.3%
Intermediate	28	24.6%
High school	28	24.6%
Bachelor Degree	37	32.5%
Master Degree	7	6.1%
Mothers' Educational Level		
Primary	41	36.0%
Intermediate	14	13.2%
High school	26	22.8%
Bachelor Degree	31	27.2%
Master Degree	1	9.0%
Fathers' Occupation		
Work	50	43.8%
Don't work	12	10.6%
Retired	52	45.6%
Mothers' Occupation		
Work	18	15.8%

Don't work	88	77.2%
Retired	8	7.0%
Income per Month		
Less than 3000	11	9.7 %
3000-5000	17	14.9%
More than 5000	86	75.4%

Table (2): Comparison between Male and Female Students Concerning Reasons for Enrollment into Nursing Department among Participant Students (N=114).

Items	Female		Male		Total		P value
	N0.	%	N0.	%	N0.	%	
Preparatory year grade.	45	58.4%	20	54.1%	65	57.0%	X²=0.446 P=0.931
Desire to help others.	21	27.3%	11	29.7%	32	28.1%	
Economic reasons.	5	6.5%	2	5.4%	7	6.1%	
Advice from family member.	6	7.8%	4	10.8%	10	8.8%	
Total	77	100%	37	100%	114	100%	

Table (3): Comparison between Male and Female Students Regarding Family Reaction to Enrollment into Nursing Department among Participant Students (N= 114).

Items	Female		Male		Total		P value
	N0.	%	N0.	%	N0.	%	
Positive	27	35.0%	15	40.5%	42	36.8%	X²=0.503, P=0.778
Negative	20	26.0%	10	27.0%	30	26.4%	
Neutral	30	39.0%	12	32.5%	42	36.8%	
Total	77	100%	37	100%	114	100%	

Table (4): Perception of Nursing Image among Participant Students (N= 114).

Items	Agree		Disagree		Neutral		Total	
	N0.	%	N0.	%	N0.	%	N0.	%
You respect the profession of nursing as much as the profession of medicine.	102	89.5%	5	4.4%	7	6.1%	114	100%
The public has a positive image of nursing.	8	7%	75	65.8%	31	27.2%	114	100%
Nursing is female job.	10	8.8%	91	79.8%	13	11.4%	114	100%
Nursing job is to similar to housemaid.	16	14%	89	78.1%	9	7.9%	114	100%

Table (5): Comparison between Male and Female Students Regarding Feeling When Talking about Nursing (N= 114).

Items	Female		Male		Total		P value
	N0.	%	N0.	%	N0.	%	
Proud	46	59.7%	24	64.9%	70	61.4%	X²=8.33, P=0.080
Shy	6	7.8%	7	18.9%	13	11.4%	
Change subject	14	18.2%	3	8.1%	17	14.9%	
Defensive	11	14.3%	2	5.4%	13	11.4%	
Attack	0	0.0%	1	2.7%	1	0.9%	
Total	77	100%	37	100%	114	100%	

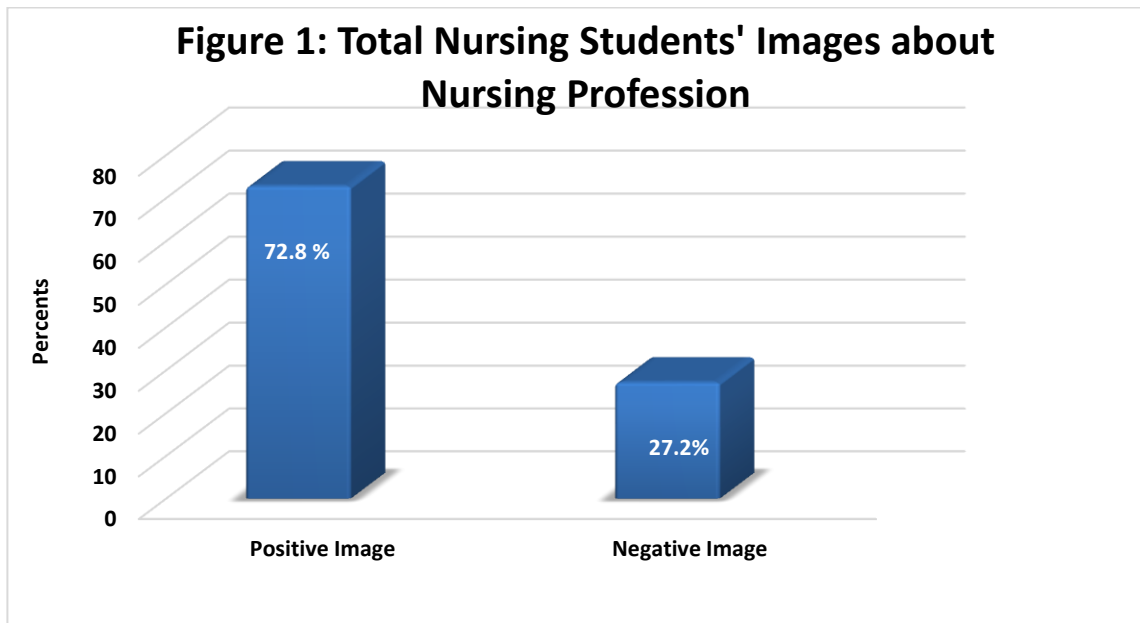


Table (6): Comparison between Male and Female Students Regarding Future Plan after Graduations (N= 114).

Items	Female		Male		Total		P value
	N0.	%	N0.	%	N0.	%	
Nursing Administration	16	20.8%	13	35.1%	29	25.4%	X ² =5.835 P=0.120
Higher Education	40	51.9%	20	54.1%	60	52.6%	
Educational Field	5	6.5%	2	5.4%	7	6.1%	
Changing Career	16	20.8%	2	5.4%	18	15.8%	
Total	77	100%	37	100%	114	100%	

Table (1): showed socio- demographic characteristics of participant students, as evident from the table, most (67.5%) of participant students were female. Regarding age, the great majority (96.5%) of participant students' age were between 18-25 years. Concerning marital status, the majority (93%) of participant students were single. More than half (59.6%) of them are middle child in their families. Regarding father' educational level, nearly about one third (32.5%) of participant students their fathers had bachelor degree. The highest percentage (45.6%) of participant students their fathers were retired and (77.2%) of them their mothers weren't worked. While, about three fourth (75.4%) of participant students was from high family income that is more than 5000 SR per month.

Reasons for enrollment into nursing department among participant students are illustrated in Table (2): As observed from the table, most (57%) of participant students entered nursing department due to their preparatory year grades and (28%) of them entered nursing department owing to their desire to help others. While, only (6%) of participant students entered nursing department because of economic reasons. Finally (9%) of participant students entered nursing department due to their desire to advice others. The difference between male and female students were not statistically significant (P=0.931).

Table (3): displayed family reaction to enrollment into nursing department among participant students. As evident from the table, nearly about one third (35.0%) of participant students had positive family reaction for female students. Meanwhile (40.5%) of family reaction for male students was positive. While, about one quarter (26.0%) of them were negative reaction for female students and (27.0%) were negative reaction for male students. Finally, (39.0%) had a neutral reaction for female students and (32.5%) had a neutral reaction for male students. Regarding, both female and male students' family reaction, about (36.8%) of them had positive reaction and the same percentages had neutral reaction. Moreover, nearly about one fourth (26.4%) of them had negative image. There were not statistically significant differences between male and female students (P=0.778).

Table (4): revealed perception of nursing image among participant students. As noticed from the table, regarding, respecting the profession of nursing as much as the profession of medicine, the majority (89.5%) of participant students agreed that nursing is a respectful profession as medicine. While, only (4.4%) of them disagreed. Concerning, public's positive image the about nursing, nearly about two thirds (65.8%) of participant students disagreed that nursing has a positive image and only (7%) of them agreed. Regarding, nursing is female job, the majority (79.8%) of participant students disagreed that nursing is female job and only (8.8%) of them approved. In relation to, nursing job is like housemaid, the highest percentage (78.1%) of participant students disagreed that nursing is like housemaid, while only (14%) of them agreed.

Table (5): demonstrated nursing students' feeling when talking about nursing profession among study participants, as noticed from the table, (59.7%) of female students were proud when talking about nursing profession while (64.9%) of male students feel proud. Moreover, (7.8% and 18.9% respectively) of female and male students feeling shy when they talk about nursing profession. Meanwhile (18.2%) of female students and (8.1%) of male students change subject. (14.3%) of female students and only (5.4%) of male students defense against nursing profession and only 1% male students attack nursing profession. Concerning, both female and male students the majority (61.4%) of participant students feel proud when talking about nursing. While, (14.9%) of them change subject. Likewise, (11.4%) of them feel shy and defense against nursing. The difference between male and female students were not significant statistically ($P=0.080$).

Figure (1): revealed total nursing student images about nursing profession. As observed from the figure, most (72.8%) of participant students had positive image about nursing profession, meanwhile (27.2%) of them had negative image.

Finally, future plan after graduation was presented in **table (6)**. As revealed from the table, (51.9% and 54.1% respectively) of female and male students preferred to continue their post graduate studies. While, (20.8%) of female students and nearly about one third (35.1%) of male students preferred nursing administration. Likewise, the lowest percentage (6.5% and 5.4% respectively) of female and students selected educational field. Regarding both female and male students nearly about one half (52.6%) of participant students preferred to continue their post graduate studies. One quarter (25.4%) of them preferred nursing administration. (15.8%) of participant students planned to change their career after graduation and finally (6.1%) of them selected educational field. There were not statistically significant differences between male and female students ($P=0.120$).

4. DISCUSSION

Despite the great advances in the nursing profession, nurses still face considerable challenges related to its image that impact on status, power and the ability to affect changes in health care. Where, a negative image of nursing has a number of negative consequences, it has impacts on the quality and quantity of persons who choose nursing as a profession. The public who are constantly presented with an inaccurate and negative nursing image will view a career in nursing as undesirable (*Miligi and Selim, 2014*).

This cross-sectional descriptive study included 114 nursing students, with the aim of exploring and describing nursing students' image about nursing profession. The present study's findings revealed that the majority of participant students entering nursing department due to preparatory year grades. This result was supported by many studies which indicating that the students did not prefer nursing in the first place or would never prefer it (*Al-Kandari and Lew 2005 and Mooney et al., 2008*). This is probably due to cultural, social and political differences or due to the characteristics of the study populations. In the same context, the enrollment of female to the nursing profession has been objected by both Saudi parents and students as they were concerned that female and male will work together in a mix working environment and that they will be away from home due to the long working hours and shifts duty (*Mutair and Redwan, 2016*).

This is contrary to the result obtained by *AlJarrah (2013)*, in his study who told that the study exposed the highest percentage of study subjects joined the faculty of nursing because of financial reasons and availability of work. Moreover, the study's findings were in contradiction with *AbdKarim et al., (2004)* in Egypt, they found that around two-thirds of their subjects have chosen nursing as it represented a good opportunity for them to work. *Buerhaus et al., (2005)*, (U.S.A) reported that slightly more than three quarters of the subjects joined nursing because of availability of work. *Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, (2006)* added that students most frequently reported choosing nursing because of the availability of career

opportunities, jobs security, salary, and interest in nursing. Another study showed that students choose to study nursing because it offered work abroad and opportunities for further professional development (*Williams et al., 1997*).

The results was disparity with *Midilli and Durgun (2017)* who reported that more than half of participant students preferred the nursing department of their own free will and were pleased with the department. In several studies conducted in Turkey, half of the nursing students voluntarily selected the nursing profession and nursing took the first three places among their preferences (*Eser et al., 2008, Demiray et al., 2013 and Zencir and Eser 2016*). Some studies conducted by (*Miligi and Selim, 2014 and Mutair and Redwan 2016*) yielded different results to those of the present study indicating that they chose the profession by their own preference. Meanwhile, the result was in disagreement with *Swarna (2015)* who declared that (80%) of participant students are motivated to join in nursing to settle early and to get a government job. Also, (84.8%) of nursing students choose nursing for easy employment (*Diomidous et al., 2011*).

More than one quarter of participant students entered nursing profession for their "desire to help others". In the same track *Lim and Muhtar (2016)* confirmed that the notion of "desire to help others" remains as the most valid reason for people to take up nursing as their career choice. Similar findings was also noted in a Swedish study by *Jirwe and Rudman (2012)* where 73.3 % of the nursing students stated that they choose nursing because they wanted to care and help others while another study done in India by *Patidar et al., (2011)* reported that 99.1% of nurses chose to enter nursing as this profession served as an opportunity to serve humanity.

Likewise, the findings indicated that the least reason mentioned by the participant students was economic reasons. This result is similar to the results of (*Gamel, 2006*) in Egypt where availability of work and financial reward were the least mentioned reasons among her subjects, as the subjects of such study were female nursing students. Moreover, this finding may be due to the high socio-economic status and negative professional nursing image here in Saudi Arabia made students don't prefer nursing as a career.

Nearly, about one tenth of participant students reported that an advice from a family member was the main cause for joining nursing profession. These findings were in the same line with *AlJarrah (2013)* who revealed that more than one-fifth of the study subjects stated that an advice from a family member was the main reason for joining the profession. This may be attributed to the fact that a considerable number of family members, friends who were nurses as the present study revealed. Furthermore, these results are supported by (*El Sharkawy and El Hadad, 1996*) who studied "factors affecting students' choice of nursing as a career in Egypt and Syria". They found that the family members had the significant impact on the choice of nursing as a career. In the same track, *Abdel El-Halem et al., in (2011)*, discussed that there is a significant relation between the presence of family support and entering the nursing profession.

The results of the study revealed that nearly about one quarter of families expressed negative reaction to enrollment of their sons into nursing. It was observed that the majority of families expressed negative family reactions when their sons joined nursing profession. In addition, It was found that most families expressed negative reactions when knowing that their sons will join nursing as a future career. This disposition shows the powerful impact of families on influencing sons' career desires (*Abudari et al., 2016*). Moreover, *Al Jarrah (2013)* stressed that the family members had the upper hand in deciding various livelihoods, while others have shown that families were also the most supportive factors that affected college selections.

Similarly, the study of *Tawash et al., (2012)* confirmed this finding. They found that Bahrain families perceived nursing as an inconvenient profession for girls thus they are not encouraging their daughters to enroll in nursing. Constantly, *Gamal (2006)* reported in his study that Saudi parents refuse the enrollment of their daughters in nursing. Therefore, it negatively impacts the social image of nursing as a profession.

Our findings revealed that the majority of participant students agreed that nursing is a respectful profession as medicine. This results are consistent with *Gebrezgabher & Abera (2017)* who stated that the majority of the respondents 106 (78.5%) like nursing profession. However, *Spindola et al., (2005)* indicated that the students associated the nurse figure to the assisting function and they visualize nurse as an auxiliary of the physician and that they were not aware of the different categories of the nursing profession and the education level of the profession.

Approximately, about four fifth of participant students disagreed that nursing is female job. Conversely, *Bartfay et al., (2010)* regarded nursing as a career more suitable for females than males. Moreover, the study of *Eman et al., (2012)*

contradicted our findings. They found that Bahrain families perceived nursing as an inconvenient profession for girls thus they are not encouraging their daughters to enroll in nursing. Also, the results were in disagreement with *Ella et al., (2018)* who mentioned that adults in Calabar municipality have a negative perception of male nurses. Male nurses were perceived as not skillful in giving care as their female counterparts.

The present study also found that most participant students had positive image about nursing profession. *Gebrezgabher & Abera (2017)* revealed that the majority of the respondents had a favorable attitude towards nursing profession. This result was in the same line with *Manpreet et al., (2007)* who reported that almost all study participants perceived nursing as an opportunity to serve humanity. *Poreddi et al., (2012)* as well found nearly (48.8%) of subjects agreed that social prejudice has great influence on nursing students in choosing nursing profession as their career. Similar results were found by *Sand-Jecklin & Schaffer (2006)* when the authors stated that the students had less positive perceptions when it was about public's perceptions about nursing as a profession. Moreover, *Rubbi et al., (2017)* highlighted that general population and nursing students showed a significantly better image of nurses than did Very Important Persons (VIPs) and upper-school students.

Internationally, *Chauke (2014)* reported that the nursing students corroborated a positive change in their image of nursing as a respected and appreciated profession. Moreover, these results were supported by *Al Jarrah (2013)* who indicated that the associate nursing students generally have positive perceptions about the image of the nursing profession. The findings related to the students' perception are statistically significant. This finding is consistent with many studies in Egypt (*Abdulkarim et al., 2004 and Baddar, 2006*), in Belgium (*Rognstad and Aasland, 2007*), in Bahrain, (*Tawash et al., 2012*).

Similarly, some female Saudi students stated that they had been "dreaming to become nurses since they were children" while others stated that "they want to become nurses because they feel this profession teaches them many good activities that are useful for their daily lives even if they do not practice or work after graduation". Many students commented that they always wanted to work as a health professional or in a hospital. Moreover, some of them commented that they joined nursing because, when they or a member of their family had been hospitalized, they suffered from the barriers between non-Arabic and non-Muslim nurses and the patient in terms of language, communication, religion, and culture differences (*Al-Mahmoud, 2013*).

The present study' findings revealed that male students had a more positive attitudes toward nursing profession than female students. This result was in the same line with *Keshk et al., (2016)* who stated that male student had better career image than female students did. Moreover, *Ibrahim et al., (2015)* pointed out that Jordanian male nursing students have a more positive perception than Egyptians.

These findings were contradicted with many studies. Female students displayed a more positive attitude towards the nursing profession than did male students (*Midilli and Durgun, 2017*). While *Kalkim et al., (2015)* stated that female gender was a factor affecting career choice, *Mutair and Redwan (2016)* stated that female students' attitudes towards nursing were more favorable. However, many students have highlighted several preconceived misconceptions. For example, participants did not value nursing as a profession, believed that nurses are followers and not autonomous (*Hantash and Belkum, 2016*). Likewise, *The National Association of Student Nurses in 2012* claimed that male student nurses still have a view of negative stereotypes in nursing.

Another study conducted in Turkey, *Kalkim et al., (2015)* reported that until 2007, nursing was considered a women's profession and the majority of patients perceived nursing as a profession unique to women. They also report that in recent years, this view has changed and nursing is now perceived as a profession for both men and women and that in nursing practices not gender but success is of great importance. In fact, nursing is a profession aiming to protect and improve the health of the individual, the family and the society, to treat illnesses, to rehabilitate the person and to improve the quality of life, and it can be carried out by both genders without gender discrimination (*Midilli, and Durgun, 2017*).

More than half of participant students preferred higher education. These findings were consistent with *Al Jarrah (2013)* who revealed that a majority of the respondents preferred teaching institution. Nurses choose their career as a teacher in college of nursing as it provides them some autonomy in their work, increase job satisfaction, higher professional recognition and better salary (*Chauvette & Alexander, 2004 and Anurag et al., 2011*).

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In addition, the findings of this study revealed that the majority of participant students didn't want to change their profession. Also, *Al Jarrah (2013)* explored that most nursing students were not interested to change their profession. In addition, these findings were consistent with previous studies (*Abdel EL-Halem et al., 2011, Anurag et al., 2011 and Tawash et al., 2012*).

Patidar et al., (2011) explored that most of the nursing students were not interested to change their profession this contrary with *Pelletier et al.,(2005)* who reported that more than half of the undergraduates were interested to join teaching after completion of graduation which may highlight their need to get rid of bad social image of bed side nurse and it is self-satisfactory to them to be known as a teacher instead of a bed side nurse. Our findings supported by *Rognstad & Aasland (2007)*. While contrast with *Chauvette & Alexander (2004)* who mentioned that majority of the outgoing nursing students were not having any family member or relative in nursing profession. It indirectly suggests that those who are already in this profession do not want their children or relatives into the nursing profession.

Furthermore, in two studies one was conducted in Turkey (*Zencir and Eser, 2016*) and the other was conducted in Hong Kong (*Law and Arthur, 2003*), students who chose nursing of their own free will displayed more favorable attitudes towards nursing. In *Kalkim et al.,'s study (2015)*, the factor affecting the nursing students' choosing nursing as a profession was the fact that they liked nursing. The decision to choose nursing as a profession, to stay in this profession and to progress in the career is probably the consequence of nurses' perception of the profession (*Emeghebo, 2012*).

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the majority of participant students from both gender have positive image about nursing profession, and the difference between them was not statistically significant. The highest percentage of positive image was among male students. Nursing image among nursing students has a major effect on students' enrollment into nursing profession. Preparatory year grades is the major reason for entering nursing department. Family reaction toward nursing profession and public image are also affecting students' enrollment into nursing profession. Likewise, the highest percentage of both male and female students feel proud when talking about nursing, while a small percentage of them were shy and attack nursing. More than half of participant students in this study planned to continue their education in the future.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of study' findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop and organize an awareness program about nursing as a profession. This awareness program should be implemented in the most public visited places. Moreover, it could be very effective to arrange nursing awareness program at national day events to attract large numbers of young Saudi students into nursing.
2. Furthermore, the nursing curriculum should emphasize the importance of the nursing profession through outlining clearly the nursing scope of practice with its full broad spectrum.
3. Further studies on a large scale to cover more Arabian countries to examine the public's opinion of nursing careers and how personal experiences, media messages factors shape these perceptions and identifying strategies to overcome the negative image.

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