

Journal of Applied Business and Management Studies, Volume 1 No.1

<<http://www.jabms.net>>

Influences on Students' Choice of Nursing Education in Singapore – An Exploratory Study

Ching Li Gwendoline Tan-Kuick

Southern Cross University
ctanku10@scu.edu.au

Yong Ngee Keith Ng

Southern Cross University
keith.ng@scu.edu.au
Tel: +65 90214323

Copyright © 2010, Journal of Applied Business and Management Studies. In accessing the web pages on the Journal of Applied Business and Management Studies (JABMS) web site, you agree that you will access the contents for your own personal use but not for any commercial use. You can download and you can print out hard copies of any part of the content on JABMS online web site for your personal use. Uses beyond that allowed by the "Fair Use" limitations require permission of the publisher. Any uses and or copies of this Journal in whole or in part must include the customary bibliographic citation, including author attribution, date and article title.

Abstract

Title

Influences on Students' Choice of Nursing Education in Singapore - An Exploratory Study

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to propose a theoretical model amalgamating the factors that influence students' choice in choosing nursing education as their tertiary study in Singapore.

Design/methodology/approach

The approach taken to construct the theoretical model is to review extant literature that influence different facets of the students' decision making process in selecting a nursing study.

Findings

The findings indicated that the factors influencing students' choices in selecting a nursing study are i) education and career aspirations (includes student's belief that nursing is the choice of career or education, student's belief that there is advancement in nursing career or education), ii) personal ability (includes stress management, motivation, perseverance and self confidence), iii) socio-economic status (includes job security, images, sexual stereotypes and monetary reward) and iv) parental and peer encouragement (parental and peer perceptions and support).

Research limitations/implications (if applicable)

This study is conducted in the Singapore context and generalisability is not claimed.

Originality/value

This is the first study conducted in Singapore to understand student choice process in selecting a nursing study. This study will provide information in the creation of targeted marketing strategies and profession-friendly work practices by the Health Ministry and the healthcare provision industry, which may help arrest or reverse the current trend by enticing to school-leavers to join the nursing profession.

Category of Paper

Research Paper

Influences on Students' Choice of Nursing Education in Singapore – An Exploratory Study

Introduction

Singapore nursing education has experienced a number of significant changes in recent years. Singapore healthcare education industry is finding the competition for the limited pool of students with better grades increasingly difficult. This had been felt acutely, as the high quality of students Singapore Nursing has had over the years was a prominent contributing factor to the well-received professional image of the Singapore nursing workforce. The shortage of competently trained nurses is a global phenomenon. Previous studies (Knox, Irving & Gharrity, 2001; Fonza & Tulker-Allen, 2007; Zysberg & Zisberg, 2008) reported that fewer qualified school leavers chose to be trained as nurses. The resultant shortage of nurses has raised many healthcare delivery concerns globally.

In Singapore, there is a gradual chronic manpower shortage of healthcare workers over recent years. While registered nurses form the largest segment in the frontline work-force in the Singapore healthcare system, training sufficient competent registered nurses is now a priority in the local healthcare system. The continued inability of the nursing profession to attract sufficient new recruits demonstrates that a mismatch still exists between incentives and disincentives of the profession. Therefore, it is critical for the healthcare education industry to understand factors which influence students' choice of nursing education and the relationship among those factors. But the factors have not been documented by research locally.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a theoretical model amalgamating the factors that influence students' choice in choosing nursing education as their tertiary study in Singapore. Particularly, this study aims to explore the factors that attract students to undertake nursing study against the background of multi-racial and multi-cultural Singapore. Thus, this paper analyses different facets of the students' decision making process and tries to explain those factors that determined their choices and the relationships underlying the process of selecting their appropriate education programs. With this aim in mind, this paper reviews extensive literature to determine the influences that eventually made students decide upon nursing study, and proposes an amalgamated model.

Background of the Study

The nursing education in Singapore is provided by both tertiary and private healthcare education institutes. These institutions generate approximately one thousand nurses for the industry each year. School-leavers can enroll for the Polytechnic or University Nursing education directly after their GCE 'O' or 'A' levels school-leaving examination. This is a three years full time study, and

these students would be awarded with the Diploma or Degree of Nursing upon graduation, and become registered nurses.

Up till 2004, the nursing education was offered by a single Polytechnic. In 2005, it was joined by two other tertiary institutions and they now account for an average of fifty percent of graduating nurses each year. A third private healthcare education institution has entered the market recently in 2008 and had just started its first class.

Despite the efforts made in increasing the number of education institutions offering nursing courses, significant nursing manpower shortages are still projected by the Ministry projection in the coming years. While working conditions had been reworked and wages of nurses had been subjected to regular revisions to ensure that competitiveness in the tight job market, these attempts fall short in stemming the decline of nurses in Singapore. While many studies (Law & Arthur, 2003; Meadus & Twomey, 2007; Sweet, 2004) examined students' preferences of nursing as a career choice, there is currently no study done in the context of Singapore that specifically explores the factors that influence the youths in their choice of the nursing profession.

This study will attempt to bridge this knowledge gap which can potentially find useful application beyond the healthcare education institutions. Access to this information may assist in the creation of targeted marketing strategies and profession-friendly work practices by the Health Ministry and the healthcare provision industry, which may help arrest or reverse the current trend by enticing to school-leavers to join the nursing profession.

Conceptual Framework

The shortage of competently trained nurses is a global phenomenon for over a decade (Carpenito-Mayet, 2002; Jinks & Bradley, 2004; Wilson, 2006). In the ideal scenario, the number of new nurses entering the workforce; either trained locally or recruited from overseas, will match the attrition in the industry and cover expansion requirements. In reality, there are fewer entering the profession with more and more exiting (Buerhau, Staiger & Auerback, 2000; Crow & Hartman, 2005; Mavundla & Mabemella, 1997). This phenomenon and its negative impact on healthcare service have attracted much discussions and studies in recent times.

Bolan and Grainger (2003) provided possible reasons as to why few adolescents view nursing as a career option. Their study suggests that perceived characteristics of these adolescents' ideal career were markedly different from their perceptions of the characteristic of a nursing career. This would help explain why fewer youths are opting for the nursing course as their choice of education, and also why a greater number of junior nurses are choosing to leave the profession.

American Nurses' Association (1991) described a decline of 19% in youth enrolling for nursing education from 1995 to 2000, and this was compounded by a similar increase in young nurses leaving the industry shortly after they have graduated. The result is an imbalance between the number that enter the professions and those who have left it (Dragon 2009).

The general feeling in recent years is that emphasis on increasing enrolment will likely to have a bigger impact than emphasis on reducing attrition. The healthcare and education industry recognize that our youths are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and complex in their needs and wants. The push and pull factors would need to be managed properly in order to entice more youths to enter the healthcare industry (Canadian Nurses Association, 2002). Previous studies (Davidhizar & Bartlett, 2006; Gaynor, Allasch, Yorkston, Stewart & Turner, 2006; Jrasat, Samawi & Wilson, 2005; Liegler, 2000; Joel, 2002; Wilson, 2006; Zysberg & Zisberg, 2008) examined explicit and implicit factors that provide insights into why high-school leavers pick nursing as their study of choice. Knowing these factors could help explain the phenomenon of decline in enrollment of better grade school leavers over the past years.

The theoretical model

The factors that influence the choice of students choosing nursing as a career have analogous findings with many other studies. In order to predict the choices of these students, it is important to consider both explicit and tacit influences that they make.

The model presented in this paper aims to explain the factors influencing the enrolment choice of entering the nursing program. The intention is to examine how these influencing factors interplay in the choice process of the students and as a predictor for the preferential choice of these students in order to improve the industry marketing efforts as an education service provider.

The theoretical model comprises the students' career choice as a dependent and four factors with a total of four categories of independent variables identified in existing literature. The factors identified are education and career aspirations (includes students' belief that nursing is the choice of career or education, students' belief that there is advancement in nursing career or education), personal ability (includes stress management, motivation, perseverance and self confidence), socio-economic status (includes job security, images, sexual stereotypes and monetary reward), parental and peer encouragement (parental and peer perceptions and support). The model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Education and Career Aspirations

Brennan, Best and Small (1996) suggest that when considering nursing as a career, students tend to view nursing as a rewarding and challenging profession. Potential nursing students indicated that they enjoy caring and helping others as the most frequently stated reason why students chose to enroll in the nursing program (Liegler, 2000). Young college leavers were found to own career aspirations that may dissuade them from taking nursing study (Scanlon 2008). In Singapore, the nursing career choices available for registered nurses include teaching, research, healthcare management and business enterprises. Local academic advancement for registered nurses ranges from diplomas, advanced diplomas, bachelor and master. Various overseas doctoral and PhD degrees are possible educational advancement for registered nurses. In Scanlon's (2008) study young college leavers were found to own negative career and education aspiration about nursing that have dissuaded them from taking nursing as their tertiary study.

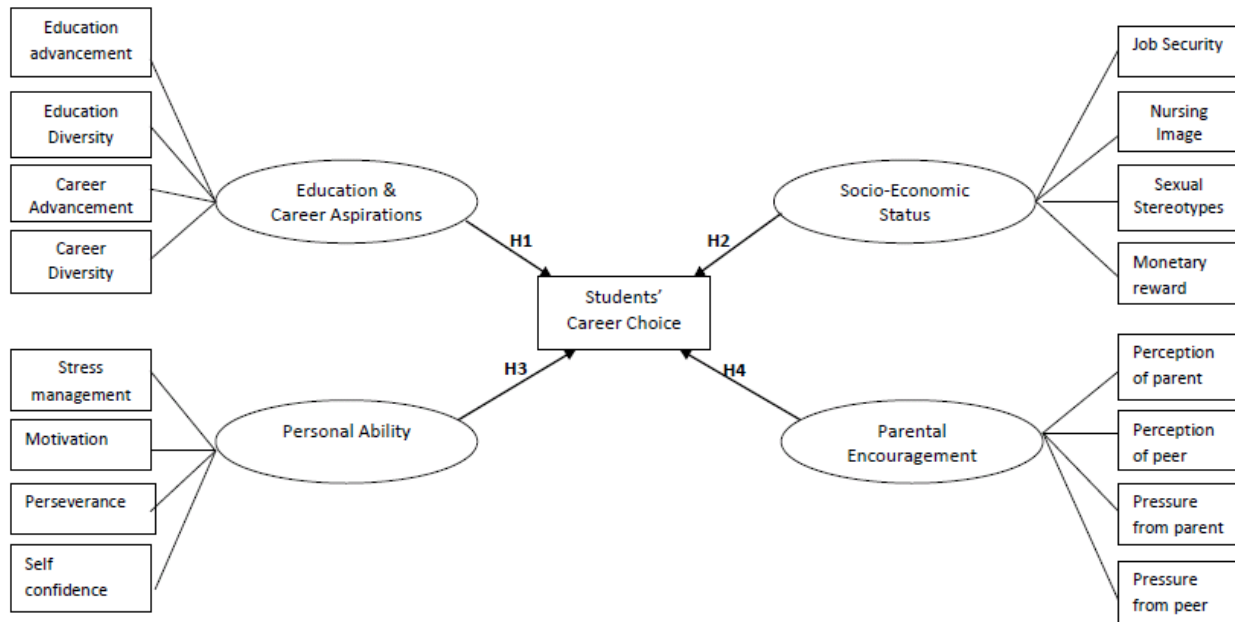


Figure 1 - A model of students' choice of nursing education in Singapore (developed for this research)

Personal Ability

Another study by Beggs, Bantham and Talyors (2008) found that the main factor that entices young college school leavers into choosing nursing as their choice of career was the positive self-perception of nursing as a caring and helpful profession. For personal qualities rating, most of the participants see themselves as caring, helpful, patient and understanding. However, the startling truth is that out of 106 participants who took part in this research study, only 21% expressed interest in choosing nursing as their career. The study also examined the reasons as to why 79% of the participants were not interested in nursing as their choice of career and there appeared to have a range of deterring factors. The most commonly cited reason was that the career 'does not appeal to me'. Low expected pay was ranked second. Notably, most of the participants who cited these two reasons are also males. On the contrary, females cited 'dislike the sight of blood' and hard work as their top two reasons. To identify the possible personal ability effect on the student's choice, items such as 'I chose nursing because nursing is a reliable job', 'I can work in demanding and stressful environment', 'I feel good about myself whenever I care and look after people', 'I enjoy meeting people' and 'I am good in interpersonal skills such as listening, caring and understanding' were used as measurements.

Socio-Economic Status

Low expected pay was ranked second among fifteen variables that affected the school leaver's choice to choose nursing as higher education (Beggs et al., 2008). Consistently in a descriptive study done by Law and Arthur (2003) suggested that many students harbored a view that nursing is a low-status profession that does not generally command respect leading to the notion that nursing is not a good choice for higher study. However, another study indicated that job security as the prime reason why school leavers choose nursing as their higher education and career

(Brodie, Andrews, Andrews, Thomas, Wong & Rixon 2009). A similar result was reported in a correlation study by Rognstad, Aasland and Granum (2004), and Williams, Wertemberger and Gushuliak (1997). Thus this study will look into the effect of job security, nursing image, sexual stereotypes and wages on local students' choice for nursing education. This study will explore student choice by asking whether nursing is positively viewed in Singapore as a profession and whether students feel that they will be respected as nurses.

Parental Encouragement

Parental influence plays a substantial part on students' choice of nursing study (Beggs et al, 2008). The results found that parental influence featured strongly in affecting the choice of choosing nursing as a career. These results were consistent with a recent study by Law and Arthurs (2003) that reported a 28% of sampled high school students were interested in studying nursing, and that their choice was significantly influenced by parental influence or demographic factors such as gender. A similar study by Harrigan et al (2003) identified parental pressure as the major factor in preventing the Native Hawaiian, Samoan and Filipino students from choosing nursing as their career.

Paa and McWhirter (2000) studied the extent to which peer pressures have on high school students' career choices. They reported that peers and parental influence do significantly influence the students' eventual choice, especially in circumstances when the specifics of the course program are not familiar to them. Interestingly, advice from these students' school counselors influences the least.

In Singapore, nursing career is perceived as a hospital-based profession. There is a lack of information on career choices available to registered nurses, which can include teaching, research, healthcare management and business enterprises. This has led to an increased demand for well-educated nurses. This lack of public awareness may be one of the causes that youths tend to undervalue the nursing profession and reject it prematurely.

Many of the above-mentioned studies suggest that factors such as latterly educational and career progression, socio-economic status, personal ability and parental encouragement are all influential in whether a person chooses nursing as a study choice. This is supported by a similar study surveying 167 college entrants, which found that main factors influencing students' college choice included intellectual and social emphases, practicality and advice of others (Kinzie, Palmer.-Hossler, Jascob & Cummings, 2004).

Research Propositions

The above theoretical framework allows us to set forth the following research propositions:

- Hypothesis 1: Educational and career aspiration has direct positive correlation on students' choice of post-secondary study.
- Hypothesis 2: The level of students' perception on socio-economic status in nursing positively correlates their choice in choosing nursing program.
- Hypothesis 3: The students' interpretation of their personal ability in coping with the perceived demands imposed in nursing study is positively correlated to their eventual choice.

Hypothesis 4: Peer and parental encouragement has a direct positive correlation and will likely influence students' choice in choosing nursing program.

Conclusion

Until now, there is no recorded research study conducted in Singapore that specifically explores the factors that influence youths in their choice of the nursing profession. Existing literature has concentrated on identifying the elements which play a part in students' selection choice of nursing program. However these studies did not go on to form an amalgamated point of view; which is the central focus of this paper.

This study aims to contribute to bridging the knowledge gap which can potentially find useful applications beyond the healthcare education institutions. A theoretical model is suggested that integrates different factors that influence the enrolment choice of entering the nursing program. The model presented in this paper demonstrates how enrolment choice is dependent on four factors: educational and career aspirations; socio-economic status; personal ability and parental encouragement. These factors provide an explanation on the interplay in the choice process and as a predictor of enrolment choice made by the student.

Access to this information may assist in the creation of specific marketing strategies and profession-friendly work practices by the healthcare education industry and the healthcare industry of Singapore; which may help arrest or reverse the current trend by enticing school-leavers to join the nursing profession. The healthcare education industry in Singapore must recognize that there is a need for more focused marketing to attract young school-leavers into choosing nursing study as their tertiary academia. Many universities across the globe are increasingly tailoring their marketing approach to suit student choice. This comes about as the students of today have become better informed, more mobile and more able to make important judgments about a range of potential preferred institutes either locally or overseas.

Reference

- American Nurses' Association (1991). *Nursings' agenda for healthcare reform*. Washington DC: American Nurses Publishing.
- Beggs, J., Bantham, J., & Taylor, S. (2008). Distinguishing the factors influencing college students' choice of Major. *College student Journal*, 42(2), 381 – 394.
- Bolan, C., & Grainger, P. (2003). High school to nursing: given today's nursing shortage, it is crucial that universities select the nursing school applicants who most likely to succeed academically. *The Canadian Nurse*, 99(3), 18 - 24.
- Brennan, A., Best, D., & Small, S. (1996). Tracking student progress in a baccalaureate nursing program: Academic Predictors. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 28(2), 85 - 97.
- Brodie D., Andrews, E., Andrews, J., Thomas, G., Wong, J., & Rixon, L. (2009). Perceptions of nursing: confirmation, change and the student experience. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 41(7), 721 - 733.

- Buerhaus, P, Staiger, D., & Auerback, D. (2000). Implication of an aging registered nurse workforce. *Journal of America Medical Association*, 283(22), 2948 - 2954.
- Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). 2002. *Planned for the future: nursing human resources projections*. Ottawa, ON: Author.
- Crow, S., & Hartman, S. (2005). Attrition in nursing-perspectives from national survey of college graduates. *The Health Care Manager*, 24(4), 336 - 346.
- Carpenito-Moyet, L. (2002). Nurses it's time to dust off your caps. *Nursing Forum*, 37(3), 3 - 6.
- Davidhizar, R., & Bartlett, D. (2006). Re-entry into registered nursing work forced. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 37(4), 210 - 218.
- Dragon, N. (2009). Nursing education:Our students our future. *Australia Nursing Journal*, 16(7), 22 - 25.
- Fonza, M., & Toker-Allen, S. (2007). Nursing education and health care in china: A study tour. *The ABNF Journal*, 58 - 61.
- Gaynor, L., Gallasch, T., Yorkston, E., Stewart, S., & Turner, C. (2006). Where do all the undergraduate and new graduates nurses go and why? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24(2), 26 - 32.
- Harrigan R., Gollin L., & Casken J. (2003). Barriers to increasing native Hawaiian, Samoan, and Filipino nursing students: perceptions of students and their families. *Nursing Outlook*, 51(1), 25 -30.
- Jinks, A., & Bradley, E. (2004). Angel, handmaid, battleaxe or whore? A study which examines changes in newly recruited student nurses' attitudes to gender and nursing stereotypes. *Nursing Education*, 24(2), 121 - 127.
- Joel, L. (2002). Education for entry into Nursing Practice. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, March.
- Jrasat, M., Samawi, O., & Wilson, C. (2005). Belief, attitudes and perceived practice among newly enrolled students at the Jordanian Ministry of health nursing colleges and institutes in 2003. *Education for Health*, 18(2), 145 - 156.
- Kinzie, J., Palmer, M., Hossler, D., Jacob, S., & Cummings, H. (2004). Fifty Years of College Choice: Social, Political and Institutional Influences on the Decision-Making Process. *New Agenda Series*, 5(3), 1 - 76.
- Knox, S., Irving, J.A., & Gharrity, J. (2001). The nursing shortage. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 20(9), 35 - 44.

- Law, W., & Arthur, D. (2003). What factors influence Hong Kong school students in their choice of a career in nursing? *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 40(1), 23 - 34.
- Liegler, R. (2000). Predicting student satisfaction in baccalaureate nursing programs: Testing a causal model. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 36(8), 357 - 364.
- Mavundla, T., & Mabandla, Z. (1997). The perception of the image of Nursing. *Curationis*, 15(11), 73 - 77.
- Meadus, R., & Twomey, J. C. (2007). Men in nursing: making the right choice. *Canadian Nurse*, 103(2), 13 - 16.
- Paa, H., & McWhirter, E. (2000). Perceived influences on high school students' current high school expectations. *Career Development Quarterly*, 49(1), 29 - 44.
- Rognstad, M., Aasland, O., Granum, V. (2004). How do nursing students regard their future career? Career preferences in the post-modern society. *Nurse Education Today*, 24(7), 493 - 500.
- Scanlon, A. (2008). How do university clinical school of nursing graduates choose their graduate nurse year program? *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(2), 34 - 38.
- Sweet, H. (2004). Wanted: 16 nurses of the better education type: provision of nurses to South Africa in the late 19th & 20th centuries. *Nursing Inquiry*, 11(3), 176 - 184.
- Williams, B., Wertenberger, D., & Gushuliak, T. (1997). Why students choose nursing. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 36(7), 346 - 348.
- Wilson, C. (2006). Why stay in nursing. *Nursing Management*, 12(9), 24 - 32.
- Zysberg, L., & Zisberg, A. (2008). Nursing students' expectations of college experience. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 47(9), 389-394.