



Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

**THE PERCEPTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF FEMALE NURSING
STUDENTS TOWARD MALE NURSES**

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Bachelor of Nursing with Honours
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TOWARD MALE NURSES**

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ABSTRACT

Negative perception and acceptance of a male nurse have potentially to limit professional development of males in nursing profession. This cross-sectional descriptive study explored the UNIMAS female nursing student's perception and acceptance of a male nurse in three different aspects namely social, educational and clinical as well as the relationship between demographics data and the perception and acceptance. A number of 99 female nursing students who are Year to Year Four had participated in this study by answering self-administered questionnaire. The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 15.0 software. Generally findings showed a positive perception and acceptance held by most of the respondents. The findings also pointed to nursing educational program as having lack of proper guidelines regarding gender-based social relationship which include communication differences and the use of touch. There also only half of respondents that agreed male nurses had been accepted by patients or physician. Only Malay races are highly agreed that male nurses should only working at male wards. Recommendations for future research include obtaining male students' perspectives on these questions and researching male students or male nurses regarding their experience as minority in nursing. There is also a need to reassess nursing educational system to practice gender-neutral and to include gender-based social relationship in syllabus. The recruitment of men into nursing also should be increased as the findings showed recently men are more acceptable in nursing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgement	ii
List of table	vi
Chapter I Introduction	1
Background	
Statement of problem	
Objectives	
Significant of research	
Operational definition of terms	
Chapter II Literature Review	7
The history of men in nursing	
The perception of a male nurse	
The acceptance of a male nurse in educational system	
The acceptance of a male nurse in clinical setting	
The socialization of a male nurse	

Chapter III Methodology	18
Research design	
Subject and setting	
Research instrument	
Ethical consideration	
Data collection procedure	
Data analysis	
Chapter IV Results	22
Characteristic of sample	
Perception towards male nurse	
The socialization of a male nurse	
The acceptance of a male nurse in education	
The acceptance of a male nurse in clinical setting	
Chapter V Discussion	30
Female nursing students' perception of a male nurse	
Female nursing students' acceptance of a male nurse:	
Education	
Clinical setting	
Socialization	
Chapter VI Conclusion	37
Implication	
Recommendation	
Limitation	

References

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance from Research and Ethical Committee

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UNIMAS

Appendix 2: Cover page for questionnaire

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Appendix 4: Informed consent form

LIST OF TABLE

Tables	Page
1 Demographic Variables	23
2 Perception of a male nurse	24
3 Socialization of a male nurse	26
4 Acceptance of a male nurse in educational system	27
5 Acceptance of a male nurse in clinical setting	29

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The significance of today will not be truly apparent unless seen against the backdrop of yesterday. However for the nursing profession, historical always focus only on a female-dominated occupation, thus created the assumption that such a role is inherently natural to the female sex alone. Yet men have worked as nurses since the profession's infancy, fulfilling the caring role in areas such as asylums, workhouse infirmaries, military services and private associations (Davis 1980, Dingwall et al. 1988 cited in Mackintosh, 1997).

Throughout the world today, more men are entering the nursing profession and there is a major push to delete the stereotype that nurses are women. Indeed the tradition of nursing as female-only profession has now been changed to a female-dominated profession and nursing is expected to become gender-free in the future.

Background

The looming nursing shortage in Malaysia with had just one nurse for every 645 people have placed the nursing profession and the health-care industry in crisis (The Star, 2005). With that crisis in mind, Malaysia needed to train 8000 nurses each year to meet community demand for ideal ratio of one nurse for every 200 Malaysian populations (Bernama, 2006). Moreover, various researches has suggested that one possible solution to the nursing shortage that requires greater emphasis is the recruitment of men into the nursing profession (Buerhaus, Donelan, Norman, & Dittus, 2005; Meadus, 2000; O'Lynn, 2004 cited in Meadus & Creina, 2007). However, according to Free Library (2005), both government and private nursing college in Malaysia today can only educate 3000 nurses each year with only 5 percent are male nurses. Therefore, in 2007, Malaysia Government encouraged more men to join nursing profession and its target is to produce 300 male nurses from the 3,000 qualified nurses produced every year (Bernama, 2007). An increase of 8000 nurses each year may seem unobtainable yet, but Malaysia actually is making some progress, albeit slowly since the number of men entering nursing profession gradually increasing every year. In 2006, almost 300 men were entered nursing program as compare to the year 2001 where not more than 50 men made up the nursing workforce (Bernama, 2006).

Even in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), there are more men in nursing profession in recent years as compare to the year 1997 when it started the first intake of male students. However, recently male students made up only 0.06% of the bachelor nursing at UNIMAS. This trend also can be seen at Sarawak General Hospital (SGH) where male nurses only can be seen working at male wards. With the

small proportion of male students and male nurses, there is no doubt that they face additional challenges in their educational process and profession. Research had indicated that even though men are a part of a nursing team, there are few female nurses, who remain uncomfortable with men entering the profession to the extent that they bias and pose professional hurdles for their male colleagues (Fottler, 1976; Scrubs Gallery, 2007). Unequal opportunities, negative attitudes, prejudice and discrimination are the stumbling block that needs to be dispelling away from nursing profession (Fottler, 1976; Scrubs Gallery, 2007). Female nurses should be more accepted if nursing is expected to be gender-free profession. If such the negative attitude came from female nurses herself, can nursing attract and retain male nurses in the future? Indeed, it is no hesitation that if these problems are prevalent, absolutely it will be difficult for male nurses to obtain satisfactory recognition and professional equality.

Attitude must be recognized before they can be changed. Apparently it is tremendously important to recognize the perception and acceptance of a male nurse by female nursing students or female nurses in the first place before other people is in concerned. It must be reminded that in nursing educational system and profession, equality should be emphasize regardless gender differences to make sure the satisfaction is achieve by all members.

Statement of the problem

Nowadays, just as the population of nurses is facing an acute shortage, the traditional belief that nurses are women still hard to be deleted. Men who are entering nursing profession still facing lots of challenges and barriers. Not only from the society and patients, female colleagues also had been revealed to have negative attitude towards male nurses. Gender stereotypes, social isolation, refusal to address individual learning needs, reluctant to acknowledge men as a vital part of the nursing profession and the belief men are inappropriate as a caregiver are the role stress for male nurses (B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod & Rasch, 2005).

On the other hand, the involvement of men into nursing will be desirable since it would contribute to a gender-free profession and the breaking down of occupational segregation. Moreover, from the nurse-centric concept, its' indicated that management of male patients is better handled by nurses of the same gender. This nurse-centric concept is reported to be practice in more hospital in Malaysia in the future rather than doctor-centric concept (Bernama, 2007). It is undeniably that working together with male nurses also may lessen the burdens faced by female colleagues. Apart from that, it was believed that male nurses were an asset in some clinical environment where there was a potential violence for example is accident and emergency department (Armstrong, 2002). Therefore nursing profession demands more men nowadays.

The advantage of men in nursing profession may contribute to nothing if the barriers for men still persistent. At heart of this situation, it is imperative to identify the existence of gender barriers in nursing profession and educational system in order to

make nursing more appealing to men. Female colleagues should be the starting point to identify the attitude of perception and acceptance toward male nurses before other people is in concern.

Objective:

The main objective for this research is to find out the perception and acceptance of a male nurse from the female nursing students' perspectives.

Specific objective

1. To identify the perception of female nursing students towards a male nurse
2. To identify the socialization of a male nurse with female colleagues
3. To identify the acceptance of a male nurse in nursing education system
4. To identify the acceptance of a male nurse in clinical setting

Significance of the research

At the moment, researchers from other countries have conducted lots of studies about male nurses. However, small amount of data had been found in Malaysia regarding this issue despite the undeniable facts that the existence of negative perception and non-acceptance of a male nurse tend to deter men away from nursing profession. Therefore this study was conducted to increase awareness of UNIMAS Nursing program as well as female colleagues regarding this issue. Thus the strategies can be arranged to improve the equality in the nursing educational process and profession. Apart from that, researcher also hope the findings from this study will be useful in the development of educational and profession friendly to men in the future.

Operational definitions of terms

Perception: Perception is the sense of apprehending based on individual's mind, cognition and understanding as a result of variables surrounding the interpretation (Free Dictionary, 2007).

Acceptance: Acceptance is the state or quality of being recognized or acknowledged (Free Dictionary, 2007)

Socialization: Socialization is a complex process by which individuals learn skills, attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior that enable them to function within a particular culture. Socialization enables members of a society to interact with one another and to pass on skills, values, beliefs, knowledge, and modes of behavior pertaining to that society (Answer, 2007).

Male nurse: Male nurse is referring to the male students in Nursing Program at UNIMAS, or male nurses throughout the world in general.

Female nursing students: Female nursing student is referring to female student in nursing program at UNIMAS

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss on history of men in nursing and the perception towards male nurses. It also will emphasize on the differences and analogues of findings in the previous studies pertaining to the acceptance, barriers and discrimination in the aspects of educational, clinical and socialization of a male nurse in the past, which may still present today.

The history of men in nursing

Nursing had been known as a female-dominated profession for a long time, despite the fact that men have worked as nurses since the profession's infancy (Mackintosh, 1997). History have shown that the first nursing school came up in India in 250B.C which only men were allowed to become a nurse due to the belief that men are clean and pure enough to be worthy of such a noble service (Scrubs Gallery, 2007). However men's association with nursing ended in the mid-nineteenth century when Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern day nursing, firmly established it as a women's occupation. According to her, "every woman was a nurse, and women who entered nurse training were doing only what came naturally to them as women" (Nightingale, 1969 cited in Evans, 2003, p.322). With this belief, she establishes nursing schools that did not mix male and female students. In fact, men were barred

from her schools. The value of female nurses that had been established by Nightingale was quickly acknowledged. Consequently, her belief had influenced well in many other countries in 20th century (Donahue, 1996; Kalisch & Kalisch, 1986 cited in O'Lynn, 2003). On the other hand, men who are currently working in health care institutions were disqualified from going further in their education in most nursing institutions and were downgraded to non-nursing positions like attendants and orderlies (Kalisch & Kalisch, 1986 cited in O'Lynn, 2003). As the result, men lost their interest to be involved in nursing profession. Thus leads to the declining of the percentage of men in nursing profession.

At present, nursing remains as an unpopular career choice for men. When doors of opportunity for women have swung open throughout the other profession like medical, pharmacy and engineering, the infusion was rapid. But when nursing opened its doors to men, the movement has been slow. Researches indicated that men who choose nursing as profession mainly due to the wish to help others. The other reasons were job security, salary and career opportunities (Boughn, 1994; Bush, 1976; Okrainec, 1994; Williams, 1973 cited in Meadus & Creina, 2007). However in this moment, nursing does not have successful experience in recruiting men into the profession. In fact, research had proved that nursing profession has strong history of discouraging men from entering nursing profession (Avery, 2001; Burt, 1998; Christman, 1988a, 1988b; Gomez, 1994; Mackintosh, 1997; Porter-O'Grady, 1995; Simpkin, 1998; Sullivan, 2000 cited in O'Lynn, 2003).

The perception of a male nurse

In the Malaysian culture, it was belief that nurturing, caring, dependence and obedience are the personalities for women while strength, aggression, dominance, self-control and objectivity are the personalities for men. Therefore due to these incompatibility personalities, it was belief that nursing is a career choice only for women. Furthermore it also was traditionally believe that nurses are the image of angle, sex symbol, doctor's handmaiden, and notably women. According to Meadus and Creina (2007), this belief was based upon female aspects and values established by Florence Nightingale. Then it has been reinforced by the mass media, which continues to accentuate nursing as a feminine profession. In addition, public perceptions of nursing also have been reinforced by societal attitudes and beliefs pertaining to which occupations are not appropriate for men than women. Thus had created and conserve the cycle of prejudice, which in turn limits the role of men in nursing (Anthony, 2004 cited in Meadus & Creina, 2007).

Apart from that, it also had been proved that sexual stereotype is the major factor deterred men from entering nursing profession. The men who choose nursing as a profession will be stereotyped as anomalies, effeminate or homosexual (Boughn, 1994; Bush, 1976; Jinks & Bradley, 2004 cited in Meadus & Creina, 2007). In addition, they will also be depicts as having lower intellectual capability and motivation because they incapable to be a doctor which had been believed are more suitable for the men (Chung, 2000; Farella, 2001, Maedus, 2000 cited in McMillan, Morgan & Ament, 2006; Sowell & Misener, 1997 cited in Brady & Sherrod, 2003). Research had indicated that little had changed in societal attitudes towards nursing stereotypes (B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod & Rasch, 2005). With lack of men in the nursing

profession and nursing school, nursing curricula continue in a trend that prefer only woman and persist to be label as a feminine profession for a long time (AACN, 2001; Villeneuve, 1994 cited in O'Lynn, 2004).

The acceptance of a male nurse in education

Nursing school is the first place for male nurses to understand nursing in the “professional sense” and provide the “first route to socialize new nurses into the profession” (Ellis, Meeker & Hyde, 2005, p.523). Nonetheless in nursing educational system, male nurses also needed to engross in few hurdles. Researches had proved that in nursing school, male nurses face “lack of information and support from lecturers, lack of exposure to non-feminist paradigms of nursing care, lack of sufficient role models, unequal clinical opportunities and requirements, isolationism, poor instruction on the appropriate use of touch, lack of content related to gender-based social relationships, and the nonuse of teaching strategies amenable to male learning needs” (Barkley & Kohler, 1992; Dunn & Griggs, 1998; Kelly et al., 1996; Kippenbrock, 1990; Okrainec, 1994; Paterson et al., 1996; Rochelle, 2002; Sterubert, 1994; Trachtenberg, 2000; Villeneuve, 1994 cited in O'Lynn, 2004, p.231).

Ellis, Meeker and Hyde (2005) had conducted a qualitative research using face-to-face audiotape interviews with 13 male nursing students to explore the male's perceptions of their experiences in baccalaureate nursing education. The findings revealed that male students perceived lack of enjoyment in nursing school. They experienced many difficult paths, but this did not deter them from finishing. It also had been revealed the difficulties for male nurses to understand the feminization of educational process in women's standpoint. Particularly it is undeniable since

majority of nursing instructors, textbook authors, and test item writers are women (Brady & Sherrod, 2003). In fact, nursing had been dominant by the women for a long time and there were lack of male role models in nursing school (Ellis, Meeker & Hyde, 2005; B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod & Rasch, 2005).

B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod and Rasch (2005) indicated that men had not been acknowledged as vital part of nursing profession. The history of men in nursing never been presented in the class and textbooks. The authors and faculty also referred to the nurse as “she” rather than “she/he” (B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod and Rasch, 2005; O’Lynn, 2003). It also had been reported the lecture format presented in nursing educational program does not prepare male students to work primarily with women. According to B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod and Rasch (2005), a majority of the male students stated that the content presented without different communication style between men and women in educational process. Furthermore Duffin’s (2006 cited in Lou, Yu, Hsu & Dai, 2007) also revealed that male nurses feel isolated and embarrassed at work because they are not properly trained in nursing school to provide personal care services to female patients. Therefore while in the clinical setting, male nurses tend to avoid traditional nursing roles and the caring ideology especially toward female patients in order to protect themselves from sexual allegation (Evans, 2002).

In addition, various literatures had proved that in nursing educational program, there was lack of gender-based social relationship guidelines for the students to be applied while taking care of female patients. Research done by Keogh and Gleeson (2006) indicated that male nurses feel anxious when caring interventions for female patients because it might be seen as sexually inappropriate. It also had been proved in nursing

educational program, there was no proper guidance on physical touch to the female patients to provide comfort and supportive role of the nurse. In fact, this topic was not covered in separate subject but was taught with communication and self-awareness. According to Keogh and Gleeson (2006), male nurses learnt about physical touch from their experiences rather than theoretical instructions in nursing educational program.

O'Lynn (2003) also had stated that the barriers do exist in nursing educational process and it was "pervasive, consistent, and have changed surprisingly little during the past few decades" (p.235). From her research concerning gender-based barriers for male students in nursing education programs, O'Lynn (2003) had concluded that "nursing education, as a whole, has failed to provide an environment optimally conducive to attracting and retaining men as students and, thus, preparing men for the nursing profession" (p.235).

The acceptance of a male nurse in clinical setting

Clinical attachment is tremendously crucial for nurses to get the real experiences with patients as well as health care team members. The experiences gained during attachment together with theory in the classes are indispensable for preparation before nurses enter the workforce. Studies had indicated that in comparison between male and female nurses, almost twice percent of new male nurses leaving the profession within four years of graduation (Healthwatch, 2002). At heart of this situation, lack of respect from the medical community, job dissatisfaction and difficulty working in a female-dominated profession had been consider as the main problems (McMillan, Morgan & Ament, 2006).

Besides that, Healthwatch (2002) stated that nurses are looked down especially by physicians. This is because for a long time nurses had been stereotyped as doctor's handmaiden and had been labeled as powerless and unable to function in a position of strength or independence. However, study done by Ellis, Meeker and Hyde (2005) had proved that physician treated male nurses equally than female nurses. Indeed, it was believed that male nurses are more stable employees and easier to get promotion compared to the female nurses (Ellis, Meeker and Hyde, 2005).

Nevertheless, literature stated that generally patients prefer female nurses more than male nurses (CNA, 2003 cited in Meadus & Creina, 2007). Chur-Hansen (2001) had conducted a quantitative study of 215 people to investigate the preferences of both males and females patient for a male or female nurse. This study was done to make a comparison from the findings of the same research on 1984. The results showed that the preferences for a male or female nurse were not significantly different for males or females patient in 2000 as compared with 1984. In fact female patients prefer female nurses more than male patients especially when being bathed or showered. According to researcher, this trend is obviously can be seen especially in younger females. Generally the findings from this study showed that female patients normally prefer for a same-gender health care providers where a "situation is 'intimate' in nature" and requiring a patient to undress (Ackerman-Ross & Sochat, 1980 cited in Chur-Hansen, 2001) or when personal thoughts and emotions is in concern (Kerssens *et al.*, 1997 cited in Chur-Hansen, 2001). Male patients also preferred a nurse of their own gender but to the lesser extent (Chur-Hansen, 2001).

In addition, male nurses also must face additional challenges and difficulties in clinical setting especially those involving care of childbearing families (Callister, Hobbins-Garbett, & Coverston, 2000 cited in Brady & Sherrod, 2003). It had been stated that some patients refused for male nursing students or male nurses to care for them (Evans, 2002). It has been said that it is embarrassing to be taken care by male nurses. According to Evans (2002), the natures of male nurses' caring interactions are interrelated with gender stereotypes and had established complex situations of acceptance, rejection and suspicion of men as nurturers and caregivers. As a result, this hindrance had influenced on the ability of male nurses to do the essential caring procedures in nursing profession.

Evans (2002) also had revealed that the nurse uniform have a negative influence towards the acceptance of male nurses by the patients due to the feminine image. However, Morin *et al.* (1999 cited in Evans, 2002) revealed that male nurses, who are older, married and have children are normally more accepted as caregivers by female patients. According to Evans (2002), this can be associated to the perception by female patients that such characters make male nurses sexually safer and hence more comfortable to be around. Particularly it was believed that male nurses are more acceptances if they can put women patients at ease (Evans, 2002).

Moreover, experienced of being care by a male nurse also will increase the level of acceptance (Chur-Hansen, 2001; Mallet, Blake & Fryatt, 1997). Study done by Lodge *et al.* (1997, cited in Chur-Hansen, 2001) among gynaecological patients showed that previous experiences with male nurses resulted in less preference of female nurses.

Thus, it was believe that exposure is needed to increase the acceptances of a male nurse.

The socialization of a male nurse

Studies done by Jiunn, Hsing, Hsiu and Hung (2007) had verified that female colleagues are the second most significant source of role stress for male nurses after the patients. Silver and McAtee (1972 cited in Jiunn, Hsing, Hsiu & Hung, 2007) also affirmed that female nurses have an essential opposition to the male nurses because they want to preserve nursing as primarily a women's profession since it was believe that men cannot be a good nurse. Some male nurses also have experienced direct and open discrimination, especially from colleagues and peers, as well as criticism from their employer which may leads to job dissatisfaction (Galbraith, 1991 cited in Lou, Yu, Hsu & Dai, 2007; Yang, Gau, Shia, Huw & Shih, 2004).

Furthermore research also had proved that male students faced a trouble fitting in with dominant groups of women in nursing school (Ellis, Meeker & Barbara, 2006; Villeneuve's, 1994). Therefore male students tend to exclude themselves from being socialize with their female colleagues. Ellis, Meeker and Barbara (2006) indicated that the differences in communication between men and women are main problems. Male nurses found that gender differences between men and women are a source of frustration. In addition, it is undeniable that there are few male colleagues in nursing field. Thus it limited the opportunities for male nurses to work with male in nursing school and in the clinical setting. Apart from that it was reported that male students also were discouraged to seek peer support from other male students and had been

discourage from participating in all student activities (B. Sherrod, D. Sherrod & Rasch, 2005).

Besides that, literature also cites a number of discriminations exist in nursing profession that may include the “refusal to make nursing conferences and events gender neutral, the pervasive literary bias that men neither belong nor have a voice in nursing, the reinforcement of men lack the caring skills requisite for nursing practice, the disregard for men’s contributions to the profession, the support for litigation to bar men from obstetric and gynecologic care settings, tokenism and the portrayal of male nurses as advancing in their careers on the backs of their female colleagues” (AACN, 1997; Avery, 2001; Burt, 1998; Chrisman, 1988; Coombes, 1998; Davis and Bartfay, 2001; Egeland & Brown, 1988; Gomez, 1994; Hawke, 1998; Haywood, 1994; Mackintosh, 1997; Poliafico, 1998; Sullivan, 2000; Swingle, 2001; Villeneuve, 1994; Young & James 2001 cited in O’Lynn, 2004, p.231).

Summary

In general, various literatures had proved that by choosing nursing as career, men will face series of barriers and difficulties started from the beginning of nursing school until they enter the workforce. In addition they have to challenge the social attitudes and sexual stereotypes entrenched into nursing which is difficult to dispel from nursing profession. Apparently if these barriers still persistent, it will be difficult for nursing to achieve gender free profession in the future.