

The Experiences of Male Nursing Students at North-West University: Insights from Mafikeng Campus

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Abstract

Men in nursing are still seen as unusual for being in a profession that the society perceives as suitable only for females. There is also the notion that men have difficulty caring, traditionally, men are resilient and often are told "men do not cry", they are not supposed to show emotion, if they do, they tend to be considered weak. Men who choose nursing as a career not only risk challenging gender-based stereotypes but gender roles defined traditionally as well. The purpose of this paper was to explore the experiences of male nursing students at NWU (MC) and the empirical evidence suggests that there is still much to be done in institutions of higher learning to enable male nursing students to also feel a sense of belonging in their respective nursing programs. The study utilized qualitative research method in exploring the issues of gender with a particular focus on masculinity and it has uncovered the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Structured interviews were employed, and the data was transcribed and analysed through content analysis. A comprehensive search of the literature from different disciplines reveals deeper issues than just the commonly held assumption that nursing is not masculine. The findings of the study suggest that Connell's theory of masculinity should not attempt to balance supposedly masculine and feminine qualities, but to challenge the assumption that masculinities are predominantly masculine or feminine. Recommendations include institutions creating campaigns that will ensure that only students that are passionate about nursing are recruited and implement strategies that will improve the experiences of male nursing students in institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: *Male nurse students; masculinity; North West University; Patriarchy and institutions of higher learning.*

Introduction

Caregiving is often considered as emotional labour or an occupation that demands passion, resulting in a gendered division of labour. Male nurses experience adverse stereotypes, discrimination based on gender, and limited work opportunities. Men are frequently considered as unfit caregivers, lacking sympathy and sensitivity (Prosen, 2022). Men have an extensive background in nursing; nonetheless, the percentage of men in present-day nursing labour force is consistently low.

In 2020 (Noordien, 2020; Organization, 2020) confirmed that just 10% of the nursing workforce globally were males, and 15% of the nursing employment with proportions varying by area and country. Male nurses account up to 10.6% of the workforce in the United Kingdom, compared to 10.9%, 1%, and 12.7% in Australia, China, alongside Hong Kong (Nursing and Midwife Board 2022). In light of the existing and potential shortages of nurses, healthcare authorities have devised a variety of measures to recruit, train, and retain more men into the field. In spite of these efforts, men currently account for only 11.5% of the qualified nursing industry in Australia, which is comparable to America (13%), Europe (11%), and South East Asia with approximately 11% (Organization, 2020). In 2019, the South African Nursing Council reported that just 10.4% of practising nurses and 8% of nursing students were male. Nursing has always been seen as a natural extension of women's care and nurture. Care is often viewed as a feminine attribute and a way for women to embody their moral views. Males are increasingly entering the nursing profession. However, male nurses have expressed discriminatory interactions due to gender bias, nursing culture, an absence of parity in educational opportunities, including media stigmatization of male nurses. Although statistics show that men continue to be a minority in this female-dominated sector, an institution of higher

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learning in the province of Western Cape recorded a rise in male admissions in nursing programs (Noordien, 2020).

Males have claimed a variety of motivations for choosing to become nurses; many, like their female colleagues, describe a humanitarian motivation to do caring labour as well. However, in many circumstances, it is not directly defined as caring; rather, it is characterized as a meaningful means to obtain job satisfaction (Organization, 2020; Yip *et al.*, 2021). Considering having similar motivation for joining the field, men studying nursing feel discrepancies in how they are portrayed in clinical settings, which may be due to gender stereotypes. According to various studies (Lyu *et al.*, 2022; Prosen, 2022; Yip *et al.*, 2021), many male nurses are seen as providing muscle for helping to carry or transport patients, or as security backup in the event of a violent incident. Others have felt especially unwelcome while undergoing their clinical practice in maternity hospitals settings, either due to a lack of support from medical instructors or restrictions on what they are expected to carry out and understand. Other instances of gender bias include male nurses being tasked to look after patients rather than do practical tasks, and being instructed to leave the room even though the patient did not demand it and not being included both in the labour wards and newborn units (Prosen, 2022; Yip *et al.*, 2021).

Male nursing students are perceived as not doing what real men do in their efforts to care. As a result, they are continually forced to defend their chosen career. The ongoing perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities in society portrays males as sexual predators or even violent individuals. Providing basic nursing care becomes difficult for males because they frequently believe their reason to touch is looked with mistrust, or that they risk being accused of sexual harassment. Sexual misbehaviour by male nurses and nursing students is a major concern in South Africa, where gender-based violence (GBV) and rape rates among women and young girls are increasing (Prosen, 2022). Comprehending the broad influence of hegemonic masculinity is crucial to understanding why nursing is stereotyped as a female occupation and males who work in nursing as homosexual. There is no uniform blueprint for masculinity. The idea of hegemonic masculinity acknowledges the diversity of masculinities and recognizes that some are more linked with a sense of power and authority than others. Men who additionally work in female professions challenge traditional masculinity and are often labelled as different, such as effeminate or homosexual, to explain their involvement in the employment of women. Heteronormativity prioritizes masculinity above feminine activities and jobs (Jamieson *et al.*, 2019).

Literature Review

Factors Affecting Both Academic and Practice

There has been an increasing initiative to enhance the conditions whereby students in nursing acquire clinical skills. Clinical practice at practical settings ought to enable individuals to put into practice their understanding of theory in a real-world setting, improve skills in nursing and reasoning skills, and observe as they adjust to professional tasks. A variety of issues can have a negative impact on the environment in which nurses learn clinical practice, particularly in sub-Saharan African contexts. Some elements known to effect students' learning in clinical areas function at various levels, in particular the individual level, hospital surroundings, social-economic challenges, and the nursing profession tutor influences. It has been found that the attitudes of clinical lecturers influence how well nursing students perform in clinical settings. Additionally, a positive mindset and an encouraging atmosphere enhance student learning. Inadequate opportunities for practical application at training hospitals, a dearth of nurse instructors and clinical lecturers, and excessively numerous pupils in the curriculum can all have an adverse effect on students' clinical performance (Gemuhay *et al.*, 2019; Gu & Sok, 2021)

Sexual and Gender-Based Stereotypes

The demand for additional nurses is being driven by demographic changes and an increase of nurses' duties within various industries. Nurses continue to dominate the global healthcare workforce, comprising roughly 59 percent of all healthcare workers. Australia, like the rest of the world, is experiencing a shortage of nurses (Organization, 2020). However, it is worth noting that female nurses account for roughly 90% of the entire

nursing workforce. The present recruitment issue and gender imbalance in nursing have highlighted the need for more effective programs to encourage more men to pursue nursing as a career (Guy *et al.*, 2022; Ramjan *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, the continuous inadequate enrolment of males in nursing continues to be a persistent problem, exacerbated due to negative gender stereotypes, unfavourable societal expectations, and challenging work conditions that operate as impediments to men choosing a career in nursing (Kane *et al.*, 2021; Ramjan *et al.*, 2023).

A number of misconceptions about males in nursing involves the idea that the majority of men who pursue the nursing as a profession are somewhat gay as well as the notion that men tend to be less sympathetic, making them unsuitable for the caring duty required of nursing. These are regarded to be major contributing factors to the high retention rates, even at the undergraduate level when career intentions are nourished and maintained. Even though there has been some progress in enrolling more men into nursing in institutions of higher learning lately, recent studies (Guy *et al.*, 2022; Prosen, 2022; Ramjan *et al.*, 2023) demonstrates that men frequently face unique hurdles during their nursing education which may increase their chances of dropping out. These obstacles vary between experiences of societal solitude due to customary and traditional gender-based prejudices and unfavourable attitudes, as well as sentiments of marginalization caused by gender bias in teaching techniques and curriculum resources (Panda *et al.*, 2021; Saleh *et al.*, 2020; Smith *et al.*, 2021).

Challenges Faced by Male Nursing Students.

Gender Segregation in The Workplace

Although women outnumber males in the health department, men appear to be catching up, with the share of male nurses increasing at a quicker rate. (Lyu *et al.*, 2022) argued that women's occupations have lower prestige than men's occupations, and that men who are recruited into nursing challenge established conceptions of what constitutes appropriate gender behaviour and what it truly means to be manly. Such men are frequently distinguished from actual men because real men establish their identification by performing tasks traditionally associated with men. Men in nursing, which is considered a women's occupation, frequently report that other men evaluate them as failing to be true men and performing men's roles (Prosen, 2022; Yip *et al.*, 2021)

Choices of Specialization for Male Nursing Students

The existing literature implies that male nursing students' career interests are motivated by acute surgical areas of medicine (Mao *et al.*, 2020; Sari & Putu, 2020). However, (Ramjan *et al.*, 2023) discovered that undergraduate students are more interested in working with children, and it was ranked first out of nine preferences. validated the results that paediatrics was the most favoured career option for students, as well as the most popular career preference among nursing students. However, paediatric nursing is apparently having trouble hiring nurses. The popularity of male nursing students working with children increases the chance of graduates filling the paediatric area of nursing, given the difficulty that the nursing profession experienced in recruiting sufficient number of nurses into the field. (Guy *et al.*, 2022) also found that there were positive attitudes towards working with children which made graduates consider working in paediatric areas. It could also be argued that there are two needed characteristics required for nurses who are interested in being paediatric nurses, the question also lies in the sufficiency of nurses' retention. There is inadequate literature available to address whether the attributes or characteristics required in this area are really the reasons why male nurses choose to go the paediatric path instead and because of lack of empirical support identified, the skills needed by nurses are not acknowledged and as a result, every nurse believe that anyone is capable of nursing children (Guy *et al.*, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Men are still perceived as uncommon for entering the nursing profession, which is deemed feminine and claimed to be only appropriate for persons with feminine roles. Men find it difficult to accomplish their jobs successfully because society believes they are incapable of caring. Men who seek nursing as a vocation

risk violating gender preconceptions of traditional roles. The subject of masculinity and gender has been ignored in nursing education.

To better understand, if not remedy, the challenges that affect male nursing students, this study employs Connell's theory of masculinity to investigate the experiences of male nursing students, as well as the gendered and sexed relationships that structure disparate experiences for men in nursing. Connell's sociology of masculinity work serves as the foundation for the study's masculinity description. In 2001 Connell used the term masculinity to describe male domination in all aspects of life over other males and women. Hegemonic masculinity is frequent in the nursing profession, as males work in an occupation that is considered feminine in nature.

Additionally, (Connell, 2016) highlights that individuals establish their own gender identity based on more than just biological differences. Masculinity and femininity have been used interchangeably for eras, with the terminology used solely to signify gender. Globally, the name nurse refers to a distinctly gendered profession, hence in some parts of the world, more women than males are nurses. There is still a widespread assumption in society that nursing is a home role reserved for women. Furthermore, (Carlsson, 2020) on the other hand, describes masculinity as a set of roles, various behaviours, and meanings prescribed for males in their dominant culture in their community. Masculinity includes four distinct qualities that differ among cultures; for example, the definition of a man in South Africa differs from that of Zimbabwe. The second dimension of masculinity is that it varies over time in different countries; for example, being a man in the early twentieth century in South Africa differs from being a man in the twenty-first century in South Africa; prior to the twenty-first century, men were barred from the nursing profession, demonstrating the change that occurred over time. The notion of masculinity is also expected to evolve during an individual's life, which is why Connell's theory of masculinity suggests revising the term. Masculinity is defined differently in each culture or country; for example, not all South men define masculinity in the same way, and not all South African men see men in nursing as gay (Carlsson, 2020; Yang, 2020).

Hegemonic Masculinity

The term hegemonic masculinity was coined more than 20 years ago and has recently played an important role in establishing the link between men's research, gender, and patriarchy. There are various masculinities, and in order to establish the linkages that exist between them, character typology must first be acknowledged. The word hegemonic masculinity originated from the many masculinities. (Connell, 2016) describes hegemonic masculinity as how gender is experienced to ensure men's dominance over other men, while women validate patriarchy. Connell highlights the contemporary importance of hegemonic masculinity in nursing, as males in nursing fight long-held beliefs that nursing is only for women, as well as the development of a new hegemonic age. Masculinities, on the other hand, are not synonymous with males, but rather represent males' standing in the gender hierarchy. Connell's theory of masculinity assists in understanding the current situation of men in nursing and how the attitudes of nursing have changed throughout time. Connell underlines how hegemonic masculinity implements a new recognized technique for upholding patriarchy in society. According to hegemonic masculinity, males who are currently entering the nursing profession are challenging societal norms and constructing a new hegemony. Men in nursing defy traditional definitions of masculinity (Jamieson *et al.*, 2019).

Methodology

To satisfy the objectives of the study, the study utilizes a qualitative research design because qualitative research design reinforces an understanding of the problem under study and interpretation of the importance involved to the experience and different nature of the problem (Bhavnani *et al.*, 2014). Qualitative research design investigates individual occurrences in the belief that serious certainties about reality are grounded in people's experiences which have already occurred, however, the main aim is to understand perceptions and experiences to which it gives rise. There are limitations associated with Qualitative research method, particularly based on using human beings as a way of gathering data (Bhavnani *et al.*, 2014).

Qualitative research as a multifaceted research method enables researchers to develop a holistic picture of the phenomenon in question. Qualitative research provides an exploratory and descriptive objective rather than explanatory.

Study Area

The study was conducted at North West University, the nursing science department. North West University has approximately 95 first year students enrolled in the nursing science, 30 of the students are males, and 65 are females; in turn making nursing science female dominated, although the numbers have increased over the years.

Population

Most studies of men in nursing have focused on the challenges and barriers that men experience by choosing to nurse as a career rather than their experiences as male nursing students or rather as men in a feminized profession. The sample consists primarily of 10 male nursing students of North-West University (Mafikeng Campus) who are enrolled for the nursing program and are currently in the third-year level. It is however not viable to use the entire population of the male nursing students in the third-year level, but a representative sample was selected for this study.

Sampling Technique

When a study is conducted, there are many possibilities of using different kinds of sampling techniques, although samples in qualitative research are somewhat small (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). The researcher chooses participants simply because they can provide rich and relevant descriptions of their experiences and are prepared to express their experiences, thus providing relevant information that enables the researchers to enrich their understanding of the problem under study (Bhavnani *et al.*, 2014). This study utilizes the non-probability method: Purposive and snowball sampling techniques. According to (Pace, 2021), the power of non-probability lies in its power to select information rich studies for in depth analysis related to the fundamental issues being under study. Purposive sampling is relevant in exploring and understanding the phenomena under study in more detail, in order to recruit more participants, the researcher utilized snowball sampling.

Gaining Entry

Permission to conduct the study was required through contact by written and informed consent to contact suitable participants. The consent letter enclosed the succeeding information to gain entry, access as well as involvement from the participants, namely:

Their involvement in the study

The sole purpose of the study

The intentional nature of the study

The participant's right to withdraw from the study when they wish to

The assured confidentiality

Data Collection Instrument

Since this study utilizes the qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were used to collect data; In-depth conversations serve as main sources of data. Participants were assisted to describe their experiences without the discussion being led by the researcher. The researcher utilizes in-depth interviews to gain entrance to the world of participants, also to have access to their experiences (Bhavnani *et al.*, 2014).

According to (Majid *et al.*, 2017) interviews in qualitative research serves as valuable tools for data collection. This study utilized an unstructured interview method because this method allowed the researcher to understand the difficulty of the circumstances without imposing any prior classification (Majid *et al.*, 2017). Interviews were more suitable as they allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' constructions through dialogue and non-verbal cues and the use of language in constructing the different discourses. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and pseudonyms were utilized.

Validity and Reliability

Reliability discusses the consistency of the research instruments to measure specific variables, whereas validity discusses the ability of a research instrument to measure variables that it is intended to measure (Cohen *et al.*, 2017). The research tools, which were utilized: the interview guide for male nursing students of North-West University. The procedure of sharing the tool with the supervisor was done to safeguard content validity which is generally utilized in the progress of interview guides. Content validity was utilised to guarantee how good the tool signified all the apparatuses of the variables which are supposed to be measured. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, interviews were conducted with informants enrolled for the nursing program at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus).

Analysis of Data

According to (Ravindran, 2019), qualitative data analysis converts data into findings thus, refers to reducing raw data into the most relevant area. This study utilized the content analysis to bring meaning and order to the mass of data collected. The following was used in the analysis of data: adjustment with data through reviewing other materials, reading and listening, tape-record transcribing, development of theory and combination of pre-existing information, the protection sensitive data and identification of themes. Data was analyzed to gain insight into the participants' experiences as obtained from the interviews conducted.

Ethical Consideration

The current study is subjected to certain ethical issues. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants of the study. The participants were knowledgeable about the contents of the study, as well as the reasons in advance while being reassured that their answers will be treated as confidentiality and used only for this study's academic purposes. The process of informed consent was done to ensure that participants understand what the study requires to form them.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The Experiences of Male Nursing Students of North West University in an Institution of Higher Learning

Globally, and across different tribes, nursing is still considered women's occupation, no matter how many men join nursing. According to the society, only women are capable of providing appropriate care and that in turn makes them the only suitable gender for feminine professions like nursing. The perception that only women can excel in nursing makes it difficult for men to do their jobs exceptionally as nurses or soon to be nurses. Despite the global increase in the number of men enrolling for the nursing program, there are still uncertainties when it comes to men in nursing. Male nursing students experience all sorts of challenges and the most common reported one includes gender-based stereotypes (Yip *et al.*, 2021).

This study also confirms that male nursing students experience a number of challenges just by being men in nursing. In one of the interviews, the interviewee mentions that

“Students from other courses undermine us because they often ask us what are we doing in nursing as it is a female profession. They still look at us as if we are not men enough; we get such comments from other students. Even in the nursing building, they still think we do not belong there as males”. (Interviewee No. 2, September 2019)

In addition to that, another respondent also mentioned that:

“I have realized that other students from other courses undermine us, as they feel nursing is for females only”. (Interviewee No. 5, September 2019).

However, despite the challenges that most male nursing students experience, there are some who has the most pleasant experiences in the nursing profession. For some students, nursing is challenging but they are able to make it enjoyable. In one of the interviews, the interviewee confirms it

“The experiences as a male nursing student in the university are fairly an epitome of nice so far. I have enjoyed my stay here so far though there are challenges here and there, it is good all the same”. (Interviewee No. 4, September 2019).

The interviewee confirms that nursing is not always about the challenges and barriers presented earlier in literature by (Guy *et al.*, 2022; Prosen, 2022; Ramjan *et al.*, 2023), the interviewee acknowledged the other side of nursing which many researchers overlooked. Undoubtedly, challenges are there in every career but plenty of research is more focused on what the male nursing students go through in their respective programs in terms of barriers and challenges but fail to also acknowledge the good side of being a male in nursing. There are so many barriers and challenges that male nursing students and men already in nursing come across, but what about the other side, nursing cannot always be about the challenges and barriers, research must also present and report the good side that one often talks about.

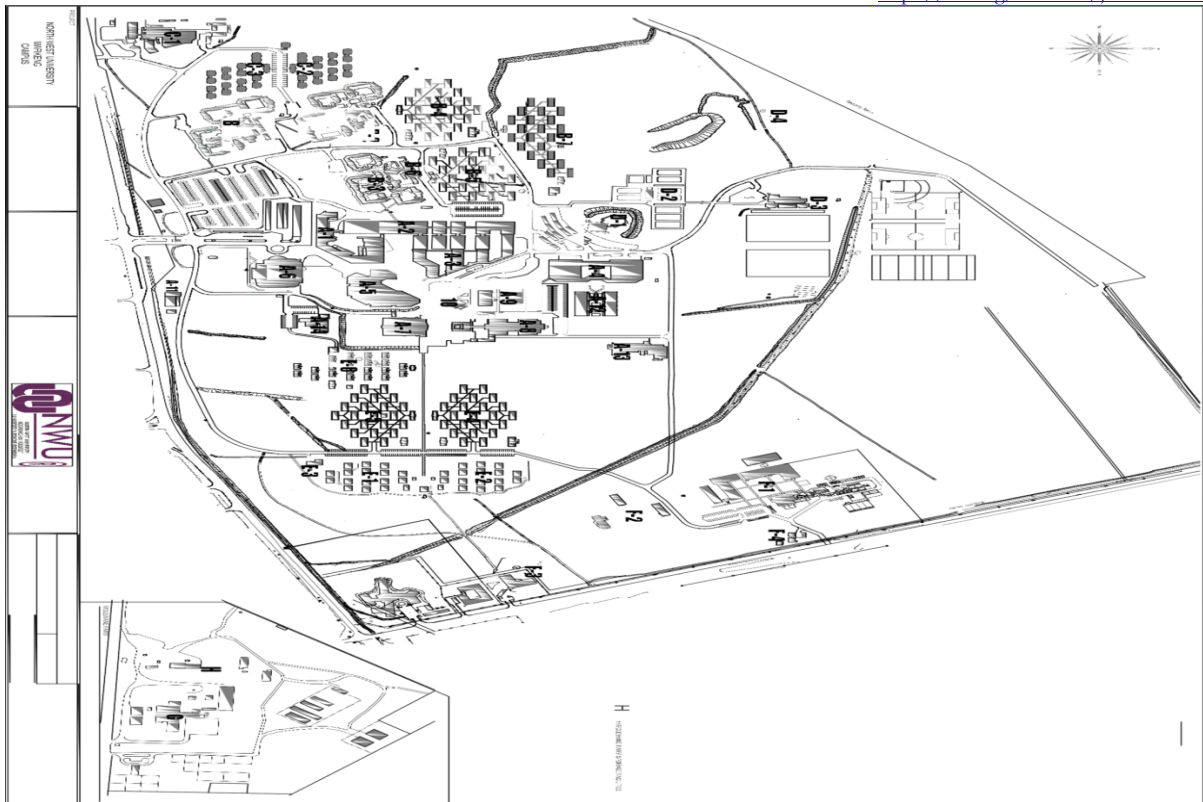


Figure 4.1.1 NWU MC Map

Factors Affecting Male Nursing Students of North-West University (Mafikeng Campus) Both in their Academic and Practice Settings.

Gender Stereotypes

Despite the worldwide increase in the enrolment and recruitment of men in nursing, the nursing curriculum is still largely based on a female worldview. There are, however, factors that affects male nursing students both in their academic and clinical practice settings. A number of studies confirms that indeed men pursuing to nurse as a career, as well as men who are already nurses experience certain barriers and one of the major barriers identified is gender stereotypes. Research also suggests that there are other barriers other than gender stereotypes that men in nursing experience in their prospective programs (Panda *et al.*, 2021; Saleh *et al.*, 2020; Smith *et al.*, 2021).

In one of the interviews, an interviewee confirms it.

“Male nursing students suffer amplified scrutiny amongst their peers from different courses due to the stereotype that nursing is for women. They also face challenges at the practicals from the matriarchal society if they are ordered to serve them and lastly, being the minority of the profession, we are overruled by 10:1 in any bureaucratic motion” (Interviewee No. 4, September 2019).

In relation to the literature presented earlier, indeed, male nursing students suffer from gender-based stereotypes. Given that the society still perceive nursing as a feminine occupation, male nursing students suffer amplified scrutiny amongst their peers from different courses as mentioned by the interviewee in one of the interviews. The nightmare does not only end at the university, they also experience these stereotypes from their patients when they are doing their clinical practice work and this can also be one of the reasons why some students consider nursing schools as a hostile experience and stressful.

The Difference between Theory And Practical Work

According to the interviewees, theory and practical work differ and sometimes it is difficult to figure everything out. The difficulty comes when what has been taught in class does not correspond with the practical work. One of the interviewees confirms it

“Theory and practical work differ. You would find that we were taught the normal ranges for blood pressure in theory but when we arrive at the field is it a totally different thing” (Interviewee No 5, September 2019).

The frustration that comes with not knowing how to tackle a certain issue because what one has being taught is different with what one has to do at that present moment, must be unimaginable. The theory part of the program must correspond with the practical work in order to minimise the frustrations that male nursing students are already experiencing.

The Society’s Perception on Male Nurses

Another factor that affects male nursing students is the society’s perception that nursing is only suitable for women and as a result, male nursing students are unable to exceptionally do their work as practicing nurses. Patients do not feel comfortable being assisted by males and sometimes it goes beyond to being turned down by patients. One of the interviewees confirms it

“I meet many challenges like the matriarchal society turning down my services. I stay away from them if no form of reassuring comes to reaching consensus”. (Interviewee No. 4, September 2019).

The small but growing number of men in the nursing profession does not represent a substantial addition of masculine and feminine sex roles. The interviewee suggests that even in female-dominated occupations such as nursing, patriarchal gender relations which reflect a high valuation of all that is male and masculine, play a significant role in situating a disproportionate number of men in administrative and elite specialty positions. At the heart of this gender dynamic is the need to separate the masculine from the lesser valued feminine. Male nursing students do this by employing strategies that allow them to distance themselves from female patients and the ideal feminine image of nursing itself, as a condition to uplifting their own status and power. They are aided in this task by patriarchal cultural institutions that create and preserve male advantage, as well as by women nurses themselves who, consciously or unconsciously, nurture the careers of men colleagues.

Nursing Curriculum Structure

Another factor mentioned is the way that the curriculum is structured, there is so much work to do in just a short period of time and it makes students not to fully focus when they are doing their practical work because of constantly thinking about the deadlines of assignments and presentations. One of the interviewees confirms it

“In this university, this campus, they structured Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays for theory work and Thursdays and Fridays for practical work. The work we are supposed to be doing and the deadlines, when at the facilities, I am always aware that there is something that I am supposed to do and sometimes I am really able to focus on patients but because I am expected to perform certain procedures, I think I am forced to cope. Yes, I am coping but there is a lot of pressure on how meet the deadlines and complete the assignments and submit on Friday. It is not like I am complaining; it is something I have to do” (Interviewee No. 1, September 2019).

Some of the male nursing students interviewed confirm that the nursing curriculum has programs that sometimes only women are advised to perform. In one of the interviews, the interviewee confirms it

“Some procedures we cannot perform on female patients because they feel uncomfortable, for example, inserting a catheter is not easy because they feel like we are insulting them” (Interviewee No. 6, September 2019).



Fig 4.2.3.1 NWU Registered nursing students: women dominated.

The interviewees confirm what the literature presented earlier suggests, that despite the worldwide rise in the quantity of men enrolled for the nursing program, programs of nursing are still largely based on a female worldwide (Lyu *et al.*, 2022; Organization, 2020). Men in nursing still suffer for being enrolled in the program because the programs favour men more than women.

The Reason Why Male Nursing Students Join Nursing

Passion for The Nursing Profession

Even though society still supports this perception of nursing being a female profession, men still join nursing with record numbers. There is absolutely no reason for men not to join nursing, given the rate that men have been joining the nursing profession. Male nursing students join nursing for totally different reasons but out of the 10 participants involved in the study, 6 of the 10 participants joined nursing because of passion and the zeal to help people whereas the others join nursing because of employment opportunities. One of the interviewees confirms it

“I am driven by passion and a lot of people drift away from entering the health sector, so, to me it was quite a life revolution to know that I would be saving lives of my loved ones too” (Interviewee No. 7, September 2019).

Similarly, another participant further alluded that:

“The fact that I like helping people. The fact that nursing is more of a practical work. I also saw it as an opportunity for employment, because it is easy to find a job when you have a nursing degree” (Interviewee No. 8, September 2019).

Despite what the literature suggests, that the reason why some men join nursing was because of job opportunities, salary and job security (Kane *et al.*, 2021), some males actually join nursing because they are passionate about helping others, there are careers which involves working with people and in turn helping them such as social work, but the fact that they chose nursing to begin with, proves that nursing is special

to some men more than women. And that makes them the best caregivers, a fact that the society still overlook because they believe that men do not belong in nursing.

A Desire for Change For Nursing

For some, passion alone seem not to be enough for someone to consider joining nursing, it goes beyond passion. One of the interviewees mentions

“I was driven by passion for working with people. I opted for nursing or social work, I got accepted in nursing and here I am. Growing up I saw how negligent some nurses were especially those that came to nursing because they felt like they did not have a choice to study something else, they do not care about patients, they shout and often insult patients and no one talks about that. I joined nursing with the hope of putting a stop to nurses’ negligence” (Interviewee No. 6, September 2019).

We have had so many cases of nurses’ negligence, babies dying because nurses were negligent, Mothers dying because nurses were not paying attention. It is good to discover that there are still people who join careers because they want to change the perception of how the society views a certain occupation. Across the world, nurses are perceived as lazy because there are certain people who join careers, not for the same reasons as those that are passionate but for their own selfish reasons. Nurses in public hospitals are reported to be one of the rudest, laziest nurses in the nursing department. Nurses who join nursing because of the passion for helping others can actually help minimise the deaths resulting from nurses’ negligence and make a difference in the nursing department, perhaps, change the perception that nurses are rude and lazy.

Choices of Specialization for Male Nursing Students

According to (Mao *et al.*, 2020; Sari & Putu, 2020), and the literature available suggests that there is motivation behind career interests of male students of nursing associated with acute surgical areas of medicine. There is always motivation behind choosing a career to pursue, and in one of the interviews, an interviewee confirms it

“I want to specialize in trauma, so many people go through so much and I would like to make a difference in helping them” (Interviewee No 10, September 2019).

On another note, another participant further confirmed:

“I would like to specialize in midwifery. So many mothers have died in the hands of negligent nurses and I want to make a difference” (Interviewee No. 6, September 2019).

Some students consider having more than one choice of specialization and the most preferred by male nursing student is midwifery. The motivation or rather the reason behind opting for midwifery is the fact that midwifery is quite challenging. Out of the 10 participants, 5 of the participants opt for midwifery while the rest are opting for casualty and theatre nursing because they do not want to work with a lot of patients like in other nursing areas. One of the interviewees confirms it

“I am considering three, casualty, and the qualification allows me to specialize in trauma. Seeing since patients come through casualty from there, they are referred to different wards for observation and I would like to participate in that. I can stand blood and I find it interesting also to (I have only been observing, maybe a person comes with a cut and losing blood, I am more of a person who would grab gloves, control the bleeding and let the person who does the stitching do the job)” (Interviewee No. 1, September 2019).

These are similar views presented by another participant who mentioned that:

“I am opting for primary health care and midwifery” (Interviewee No. 2, September 2019).

However, the findings of this study contradict what the literature presented earlier suggest. (Guy *et al.*, 2022) have found that the interest of the undergraduate’s students lies in working with children, and out of the

nine preferences it was considered the most preferred (Guy *et al.*, 2022) supported the results that paediatric was the most preferred career path for students and that it is the most popular career preference for students of nursing. However, paediatric nursing is reportedly experiencing difficulty recruiting nurses. Paediatric nursing is experiencing difficulties recruiting nurses, the reason may be that the study was conducted a long time ago, male nursing students' preferred career paths have changed over time. Most male nursing students prefer and opt for midwifery upon completion of their qualifications, as the findings of this study confirms.

Recommendations

There is a need for recruitment campaigns in institutions of higher learning, in order to select prospective students who are really interested in pursuing a career in nursing. Institutions of higher learning have selection tests that are written before the student registers to be a student, but selections tests are not enough in determining who is really into nursing for helping people or for other unknown reasons. To minimise the nurses' negligence, the nursing schools should be able to spot and allow people who are passionate about other people's health to enrol in the nursing program.

In addition, the North West University and other institutions of higher learning together with the Department of Health should put into strategies to improve the experience of male nursing students, support minority groups in nursing, which in this case happens to be males, through further exploration of more flexible learning and assessment methods in order to meet unique student needs. A major objective of this strategy being to improve overall retention of minority student groups. A component of this exploration would be investigation to explore the mechanisms by which males in nursing learn.

Conclusion

Connell theory of masculinity as the key theory utilized in the study should be attempting not to balance supposedly masculine and feminine qualities, but to challenge the assumption that qualities are predominantly masculine or feminine. There is a certain irony in the fact that in many instances there is little connection between the jobs nurses do and our current construction of femininity.

Many men in nursing have a challenge of managing their masculinity performance for them to minimize negative performance of themselves, because if they conform to stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity, it means they are open and fine with accusations of being sexually exploitative. Alternatively, if they do not measure up to masculine expectations; they may not be considered masculine enough, and then are open to accusations of being labelled as a homosexual. As has been highlighted, one of the major reasons for their continuing to be so few men in nursing is the challenge it presents to hegemonic forms of masculinity. What is needed then is not a reproduction of the same hegemonic masculinities or a masculinization of nursing but a challenge to the patriarchal forces that allow this to continue. This would allow those men to feel comfortable in their expression of nursing, allowing them to focus on their own valuable contribution to nursing regardless of their sexuality.

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