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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing students' perspectives about nursing as career choice and nursing profession's image: A descriptive cross-sectional study

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Abstract--Healthcare Industry has taken a center-stage in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Which affected many countries globally to rethink and strengthen its healthcare infrastructure. The student nurses experienced various emotions during the pandemic period which may impact their attitude towards choosing nursing as their career choice. For that, this study aimed to determine the nursing students' attitude towards the chosen nursing profession and its image during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, to investigate the impact factors that may affect the students' attitude on choosing nursing as their career choice in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A descriptive quantitative, cross-sectional design was used. A quantitative survey instrument was developed, piloted, factor analyzed, checked for reliability, validity and implemented. The survey was conducted in a

nursing institution in the UAE and received 372 responses. In general, there seems to be a positive attitude towards choosing the nursing profession as a career choice and the nursing profession image. In conclusion, this study showed that the pandemic has not affected the nursing students negatively on the attitude towards their career-choice. The students' families and the government of UAE have been very supportive during the pandemic. They have greatly recognized the contributions of the front liners, especially the nurses.

Keywords---career choice, COVID-19, nursing education, nursing image, nursing profession, nursing students, pandemic, UAE.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost every country on the globe, with far reaching consequences being felt across many sectors of the society. The health care sector is of no exception. Nurses comprise the largest workforce within this sector. Within the nursing profession, an integral component is Nursing Education. The multitude of student nurses annually graduating from the nursing schools, serve to provide the lifeline for the health care industry's ever-growing needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to many countries calling on their novice nurses to meet their workforce needs for patient care.

Within the United Arab Emirates, the scenario is similar and unique. Nursing students within the Emirates, have additional socio-cultural-political influences that impress upon their career decisions. For the current generation of graduating nurses, the psychological impact of the pandemic is also new. This study intends to explore whether the COVID-19 situation have any additional influences on nursing students' career choices.

Background

In most nations, health care workers have been lauded for being the front line first defense, in tackling this global crisis of pandemic proportions. Nursing has always catered to the dynamic demands of society, acclimating the care provided to suit the current need. Nursing's image in the UAE is tied closely to its professional role and identity. It differs based on social and cultural factors. In the wake of the pandemic, nursing institutions in the UAE, in line with other educational institutions, swiftly transitioned onto virtual learning platforms to satisfy their theoretical learning requirements, but their clinical components suffered the change.

With a widespread need to isolate and prevent the spread of infection, hospitals in the UAE, temporarily ceased student placements in their premises. But this did not deter the second, third and fourth-year nursing students from eagerly doing the volunteering services by supporting the healthcare professionals. They helped in the virus screening services, developed and disseminated communication materials that provided people with critical information regarding the nature of

the disease. These students did find varied ways to leverage their training in fighting the pandemic from behind the scenes.

Aim

This study aimed to determine the attitude of the nursing student towards the nursing as their career choice. To determine the image of nursing profession, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. To identify which factors, affect the students to change their attitude towards nursing as a career choice and the nursing profession's image. The study also intended to identify the associations in perception among the students in different year of study of the nursing program, with respect to the attitude towards nursing as a career choice, and nursing image during the pandemic situation.

Literature Review

A review of the existing literature has revealed that there are many aspects that could potentially affect attitude and perception of the student-nurses towards the image of nursing profession. They are in danger of contracting the disease themselves. Maltezou and Tsiodras (2014) recall that during the MERS-CoV epidemic, healthcare-associated transmission played a pivotal role in the evolution of the disease. Nurses were the ones mostly affected, attributed by their prolonged, repeated, and close physical contact with patients. As nursing students attend their clinical practice in hospital settings, they could also be potentially exposed to patients and health care workers, who are suspected of or diagnosed with MERS-CoV infection. During the same MERS-CoV outbreak, Kim and Choi (2016) observed in South Korea, that there was a need to further prepare nursing students by reinforcing universal precautions to provide protection from novel infectious diseases.

More recently, O' Bryan (2020) reports that the pandemic presents practical, logistical challenges, patient safety concerns, students may acquire the virus while training and also potentially spread the virus when asymptomatic. Jackson (2020) observed that in the United Kingdom (UK), clinical staff who had recently left National Health Service (NHS) were asked to return to practice for supporting the rapidly escalating numbers of patients. Nursing students above year two of their degree program were asked to opt-in to an extended placement working to further bolster the numbers of care staff available. This later practice is similar to that observed in the UAE, in recent times.

The pandemic seems to offer some student rewards but comes with risks and costs. Psychologically, it seems to suggest that those who have already undergone their training would not waiver in their decision to pursue a career in healthcare, though it remains to be seen if their choice of specialty may shift to reflect an increasing or decreasing interest in those areas most affected by the virus. Jackson (2020) notes that there is an inherent risk that the decision to go onto an extended placement might prove to be a wrong one for some nursing students. Their desire to help might be overshadowed by a sense of failure by being unable to do much to stem the pandemic progression, and the resulting financial costs

cumbered with overdue future learning prospects, might prove to be taxing and lead to burnout.

There has been no study conducted in the UAE till date, to gauge nursing students' attitude towards the COVID pandemic, and to investigate the impact of the COVID pandemic on their career choices, and specialization pathways within the nursing profession. This has led to the conceptualization of the need for the current study, and its urgent purpose concerning nursing students, nursing education, and the nursing profession, in the UAE.

Methods

Research Design

This study is descriptive in nature, intended to get the perceptions of the nursing students. It is a cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach. The survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic period among the students of the nursing department (600 students) in a Health Sciences Institution situated in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, UAE. A quantitative survey tool was developed for this purpose. The survey was conducted using Google Forms. All the students were requested by email to participate in the survey. The survey was taken in four different campuses of the Nursing Institutions in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. The survey was voluntary in nature, and it was anonymous as names were not included as a part of demography questions.

Research Sample

Purposive Sampling technique was used for this study. The data was collected by survey, using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on personal experience, review of the literature and expert review. A pilot study was then conducted among 30 participants, and the validity and reliability of the tool was established. Data for this study was collected from students studying at a College of Health Sciences in the UAE. The College offers baccalaureate degrees in health science-related programs in nursing, pharmacy, paramedics, medical imaging, and radiology. It has four campuses distributed across different geographical areas around the UAE. Students within the nursing program, from all four campuses, participated in the study (n=372).

Research Instrument

The Survey tool contained the demographic data and the study variables. The demographic data consisted of five items namely, campus, age, year of study, marital status and the reason for joining nursing. The participants were female nursing students who are currently engaged in their undergraduate study. The questionnaire contained 20 items including reflective and formative constructs. The items were of 6 points Likert Scale. The points were 1-totally disagree, 2-disagree, 3-likely to disagree, 4-likely to agree, 5-agree and 6-totally agree.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the Department of Nursing in the college. All participants were informed about the study and requested to sign the informed consent form. Clear communications of the intent of the study with the assurance of anonymity and reporting of aggregate results were done. Participants were reassured that their information would be kept confidential, with no identifiers being used and only code numbers used. Participation in the study was purely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis was used initially with varimax rotation for forming the different reflective and formative constructs using the Pilot Study data. different constructs were formed based on the Content of the variables and the Exploratory Factor Analysis results. Six Reflective Indicators were constructed for construct: "Attitude change towards choosing Nursing as career choice" and four reflective indicators for construct: "Nursing Image during COVID-19 Pandemic period". Three formative Factors were constructed for the construct, namely Self and Internal factors (Four Variables), External Factors (Two Variables) and Risk of Susceptible to Infection Factor (Four Variables).

Followed by the Exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor Analysis was also performed, and the factor loadings are given in Table I. The confirmatory factor loading values were above 0.5 and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ indicating strong convergent validity. (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Finally, reliability analysis was done using Cronbach's Alpha method for the Constructs' scales and all the values found to be above 0.7 as shown in Table.1, indicating good reliability of constructs (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Table I: Factor and Reliability Analysis of Reflective and Formative Construct

Reflective Constructs & their Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude towards choosing Nursing as Career Choice		
I am pleased with having chosen this profession now	0.891	0.950
I can continue to help in any way I can and this COVID situation did not make me to feel bad that I'm a Nurse.	0.86	
I believe that I will be able to overcome the difficulties that I will have in the nursing profession	0.854	
I do not feel anxious about the decision that I took to be a Nurse during this COVID situation now.	0.832	
Present COVID-19 situation and the response to nurses by the public has made me to think positively about my choice of career as a Nurse	0.82	
I do not regret to have chosen the nursing profession	0.766	
Nursing Profession Image		
If I had to choose a profession again, I would like to	0.769	0.931

become a nurse			
I feel that the Image of Nursing has been improved during this pandemic situation.	0.769		
After the COVID -19 I perceive nursing to be a honourable profession	0.766		
I know to protect myself, my patients and my colleagues even if I have to care for COVID-19 patients and I will be happy to be a Nurse	0.753		
Formative Constructs & their Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	
Factor 1: Self and Internal Factors			
The nursing profession is appropriate for me	0.769		
My family gives full support for me to be a Nurse	0.769		
I find it honourable to care for the people lives by working as a nurse	0.766	0.893	
The idea of helping people in Nursing pleases me	0.753		
Factor 2: External Factors			
The support to nurses by the Government has positively influenced my choice to be a Nurse	0.738		
The appreciation for Nurses in social media and News has strengthened my choice of career as Nurse	0.677	0.795	
Factor 3: Risk of susceptible to infection			
I do not think my family is at risk with this profession	0.769		
I do not consider Nursing profession as "high risk" and I feel Ok to I have chosen to be a Nurse	0.769		
I like to help people, that's why I choose to be a nurse, even now with this COVID 19- it seems possible	0.766	0.832	
I am not scared to continue with this profession in this current COVID situation	0.753		

Execution Procedure

The demographic data characteristics was expressed using descriptive statistics. The scores of the attitude change of Nursing Students towards choosing Nursing as the career choice and the Students' Image on the Nursing profession were assessed using Descriptive Frequency table of the medians of their respective indicator variables. The impact of the factors on Attitude and Nursing image was assessed using the non-parametric Spearman Correlation Rho analysis. The associations and differences between the Year of Study and career choice Attitude, Year of Study and Nursing image were assessed using Post Hoc ANOVA Tukey method.

Results

Response Rate

The total response rate was 62%. Totally, 372 students participated in the survey out of 600 students to whom the mails were sent.

Demographic Data Analysis

The demographic data collected on the sample included Education Campus, Age, years of study in nursing education, Marital Status and reason for joining Nursing Education. Demographic data is shown in Table II. The student year level in the nursing study varied, 29.8% in the first year (BN1), 23.7% in the second year (BN2), 21.8% in the third year (BN3) and 24.7% in their fourth year (BN4) of study. The age of the participants' ranged between 18 to 26 years, with the majority (54.0%) falling between 18- 20 years of age. The school of study has four campuses distributed around the UAE, 23.1% of the respondents' study in Abu Dhabi campus, 29.8% from the Al Ain campus, 30.1% from the Ajman campus and 16.9% are from the Al Dhafra campus.

Table II: Demographic Characteristics of the Nursing Students Sample for attitude towards Nursing as a career choice.

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Education Campus		
Abu Dhabi	86	23.1
Al Ain	111	29.8
Ajman	112	30.1
Al Dhafra	63	16.9
BN Year Level		
Year 1	111	29.8
Year 2	88	23.7
Year 3	81	21.8
Year 4	92	24.7
Age		
18 to 20 Years	201	54.0
21 to 22 Years	101	27.2
23 to 24 Years	55	14.8
25 to 26 Years	14	3.8
26+ Years	1	0.3
Marital Status		
Single	336	90.3
Married	36	9.7
Reason for Joining		
Nursing	338	90.9
Own Choice	28	7.5
Parents' Choice	3	0.8
Friends' Choice	3	0.8
Other Reasons		

Almost all participants were single (90.3%), with only 9.3% were married. The respondents were asked to provide the reason behind choosing nursing as a profession; the majority (90.9%) if it was their own choice. While only 7.5% of the participants stated that it was the influence of their parents. Besides, only three participants (0.8%) chose nursing because of their friends, and only three participants (0.8%) provided other reasons.

Determining the Attitude perception of Nursing Students towards the Nursing as a Career Choice during the COVID-19 pandemic

Among the nursing students who participated in the study, 79.1.9 % of them were very pleased with having chosen the nursing profession even during the time of COVID. 80.1% agreed that they can continue to help in any way they can in COVID and did not make them to take a back step from becoming the nurse. About 77.4% agreed that COVID-19 situation and the response to nurses by the public has made them to think positively about their choice of career as nurse as presented in Table III.

Table III. Descriptive Analysis of Reflective Construct “Attitude Change towards choosing Nursing as Career Choice”

Attitude Change towards choosing Nursing as Career Choice during the COVID-19 pandemic								
Reflective Constructs & their Items	Mean (SD)	Median	Frequency in %					6-totally agree
			1-totally disagree	2-disagree	3-likely to disagree	4-likely to agree	5-agree	
I am pleased with having chosen this profession now	5.06 (1.37)	6.0	5.6	3.0	2.4	9.9	27.2	51.9
I can continue to help in any way I can and this COVID situation did not make me to feel bad that I'm a Nurse.	5.15 (1.33)	6.0	4.8	2.2	3.8	9.1	22.6	57.5
I believe that I will be able to overcome the difficulties that I will have in the nursing profession	5.02 (1.33)	5.0	5.4	2.2	3.5	9.9	32.5	46.5
I do not feel anxious about the decision that I took to be a Nurse during this COVID situation now.	5.02 (1.30)	5.0	4.0	2.4	4.6	14.5	25.8	48.7
Present COVID-19 situation and the response to nurses by the public has made me to think positively about my choice of career as Nurse	5.07 (1.33)	6.0	4.3	3.8	2.7	11.8	24.7	52.7
I do not regret to have chosen the nursing profession	4.94 (1.46)	6.0	5.1	5.9	3.8	11.6	22.3	51.3

Determining the Students' perception about the Image of Nursing Profession during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As expressed in table 4, 81.2 % nursing students agree that after the COVID-19, they strongly perceive, nursing to be a very honorable profession. 80.1% agreed that the image of nursing has improved during the pandemic situation. Even if they were given a chance to choose their profession again, they would again choose nursing. The 76.9 % of the nursing students agreed that they know how to protect themselves, their patients and their colleagues. Even if they were

assigned to take care of patients who were COVID positive that they would be happy.

Table IV: Descriptive Analysis of Reflective Construct “Nursing Profession Image Change”

Nursing Profession Image Change among Nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic								
Reflective Constructs & their Items	Mean (SD)	Median	Frequency in %					
			1-totally disagree	2-disagree	3-likely to disagree	4-likely to agree	5-agree	6-totally agree
If I had to choose a profession again, I would like to become a nurse	4.91 (1.46)	5.5	6.2	3.8	3.5	15.9	20.7	50.0
I feel that the Image of Nursing has been improved during this pandemic situation. I had to choose a profession again I would like to become a nurse	5.17 (1.27)	6.0	3.8	3.0	2.7	10.5	23.1	57.0
After the COVID -19 I perceive nursing to be an honourable profession	5.15 (1.41)	6.0	5.9	3.0	3.0	7.0	20.7	60.5
I know to protect myself, my patients, and my colleagues even if I have to care for COVID-19 patients and I will be happy to be a Nurse	5.05 (1.38)	6.0	5.6	2.7	3.0	11.8	23.4	53.5

As shown in Table IV, the mean for the responses were ranging from 4.9 to 5.1 with a low standard deviation indicating that the responses were not variant but distributed very closely reflecting high reliability of the responses.

Impact Factors Characteristics

Among various factors that contribute to choose nursing as their profession, the main constructs identified were self and internal factors, external factors and the risk for susceptibility to infection, mainly the COVID infection. Descriptive analysis results of the impact factors are shown in Table V. More than half of the participating nursing students expressed that it is the self and internal factors that impacted their decision to be a nurse.

Table V: Descriptive Analysis of the Formative Constructs – Impact Factors

Descriptive Analysis of the Impact Factors								
Reflective Constructs & their Items	Mean (SD)	Median	Frequency in %					
			1-totally disagree	2-disagree	3-likely to disagree	4-likely to agree	5-agree	6-totally agree
Factor 1: Self and Internal Factors								
The nursing profession is appropriate for me	5.02 (1.36)	6.0	5.4	2.4	3.2	13.2	25.0	50.8
My family gives full support for me to be a Nurse	5.04 (1.42)	6.0	5.6	2.4	4.6	13.4	17.5	56.5
I find it honourable to care for the people lives by working as a nurse	5.23 (1.36)	6.0	5.4	2.7	1.9	7.8	18.3	64.0

The idea of helping people in Nursing people pleases me	5.17 (1.40)	6.0	6.5	1.6	2.2	10.5	16.4	62.9
Factor 2: External Factors								
The support to nurses by the Government has positively influenced my choice to be a Nurse	4.93 (1.39)	5.0	5.4	3.2	3.8	15.3	25.3	47.0
The appreciation for Nurses in social media and News has strengthened my choice of career as Nurse	4.73 (1.43)	5.0	5.1	5.6	5.4	17.7	26.6	39.5
Factor 3: Risk of susceptible to infection								
I know the susceptibility of infection for my family is more with this profession, but I still want to be a Nurse.	3.64 (1.74)	3.5	14.5	15.1	20.4	14.5	12.6	22.8
I do not consider to leave the nursing profession though we are at "high risk" and I feel Ok to I have chosen to be a Nurse	3.76 (1.81)	4.0	18.3	11.0	13.7	12.1	22.8	22.0
I like to help people, that's why I choose to be a nurse, even now with this COVID 19- it seems possible	4.09 (1.91)	5.0	16.7	9.4	12.4	9.1	14.5	37.9
I am not scared to continue with this profession in this current COVID situation	4.60 (1.73)	5.0	10.2	6.7	9.4	6.5	21.2	46.0

Interestingly, 74% students mentioned that they have their full support from family in deciding to join the nursing profession and to continue in the same profession even during the COVID situation. The support to nurses by the Government has positively influenced their choice to be a Nurse was mentioned by 72.3% of the nursing students. 66.1% of the nursing students agree that the appreciation for Nurses in social media and News has strengthened their choice of career as Nurse.

Another noteworthy finding is about the impact of the risk of susceptibility factor on the career choice of students to choose nursing among the COVID pandemic situation. The study reveals that 67.2% agree that they are not scared to continue with the nursing profession in the current pandemic situation.

Determining the relationship between the three impact factors and Nursing Students' attitude on choosing Nursing as Career-Choice during COVID-19 pandemic

The impact relationship between the impact factors (Self and Personal Factors Influence, External Factors Influence and Risk of Susceptible to Infection Influence) and Nursing Students' attitude on choosing Nursing as Career-Choice were measured using Spearman's Rho Correlation using SPSS, as shown in Table VI.

Table VI: Spearman Rho Correlation Analysis Results for Attitude towards Nursing during COVID-19.

Correlation	Spearman Rho Value	p Value
of attitude of the Nursing Students regarding the choosing Nursing as a Profession in COVID-19 Pandemic time.		
Impact Factor 1: Self and Personal Factors Influence	0.68**	< 0.001

Impact Factor 2: External Factors Influence	0.58**	< 0.001
Impact Factor 3: Risk off Susceptible to Infection Influence	0.14**	< 0.001

* Correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Among these impact factors, Self and Personal Factors Influence ($r = 0.68$, $p \leq 0.001$) and External Factors Influence ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.001$) were statistically significant and associated with strong positive correlation with the Nursing Students' attitude on choosing Nursing as Career-Choice. Risk off Susceptible to Infection Influence ($r = 0.14$, $p = 0.001$) was statistically significant and associated with weak positive correlation with the Nursing Students' attitude on choosing Nursing as Career-Choice

Determining the relationship between the three impact factors and Nursing Students' image on Nursing Profession during COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact relationship between the impact factors (Self and Personal Factors Influence, External Factors Influence and Risk off Susceptible to Infection Influence) and Nursing Image Change during COVID-19 pandemic were measured using Spearman's Rho Correlation using SPSS, as shown in Table VII.

Table VII: Spearman Rho Correlation Analysis Results for Nursing Image Change

Whether the attitude of the Nursing Students regarding the choosing Nursing as a Profession in COVID-19 Pandemic time correlated with	Spearman Rho Value	p Value
Impact Factor 1: Self and Personal Factors Influence	0.71**	< 0.001
Impact Factor 2: External Factors Influence	0.63**	< 0.001
Impact Factor 3: Risk off Susceptible to Infection Influence	0.06**	< 0.001

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Among these impact factors, Self and Personal Factors Influence ($r = 0.71$, $p \leq 0.001$) and External Factors Influence ($r = 0.63$, $p = 0.001$) were significantly associated with strong positive correlation with the Nursing Image Change during COVID-19 pandemic. Risk off Susceptible to Infection Influence ($r = 0.06$, $p = 0.001$) was significantly associated with very weak or poor positive correlation with the Nursing Image Change of the nursing students.

Association between year of experience in the nursing program, with the attitude towards nursing as a career choice, during the pandemic situation

The association among different Student Year Levels with respect to attitude change towards nursing as a career choice during the COVID-19 pandemic situation were measured using Post Hoc Anova Tukey's method using SPSS, and the result is depicted in Figure I.

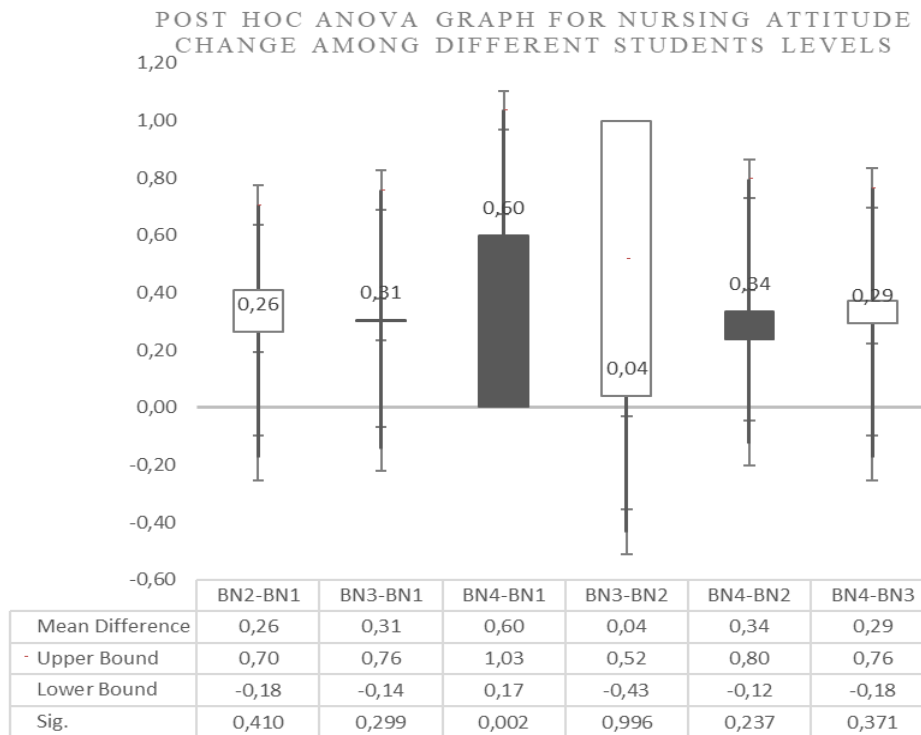


Figure I: Graph showing Tukey's post hoc ANOVA result for Attitude perception towards nursing as a career choice, during the COVID-19 pandemic situation

As shown in Fig. I, Tukey's Post Hoc Anova Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of Attitude perception towards nursing as a career choice, during the COVID-19 pandemic situation was statistically significantly different between BN4 Level and BN1 Level (p (Sig) = 0.002, 95% C.I. = 0.17, 1.03).

Association between year of experience in the nursing program, with the Nursing Students' image on Nursing Profession during the pandemic situation

The association among different Student Year Levels with respect to Nursing students' image perception towards nursing profession during the COVID-19 pandemic situation were measured using Post Hoc Anova Tukey's method using SPSS, and the result is depicted in Figure II.

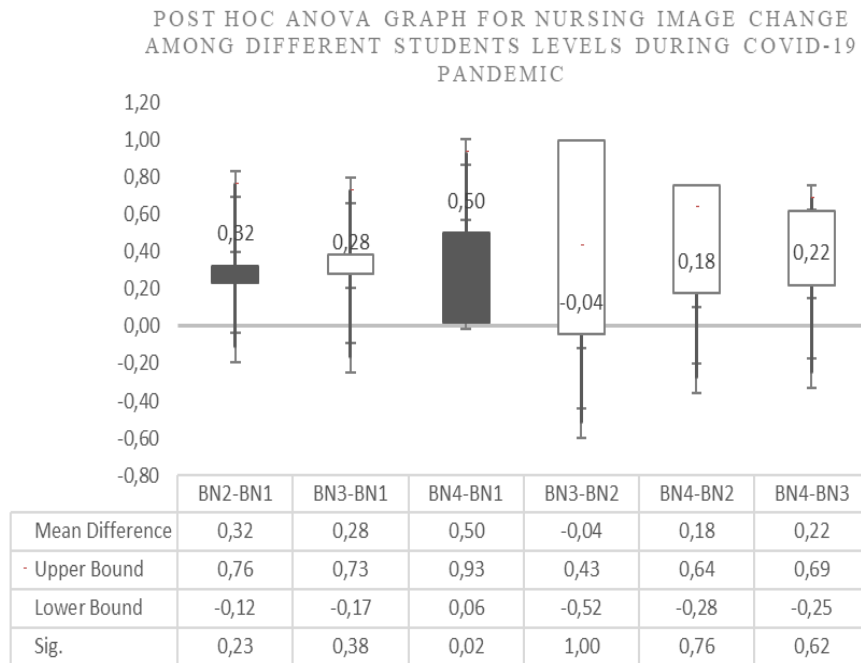


Figure II: Graph showing Tukey's post hoc ANOVA result for Nursing Students' image perception towards nursing profession, during the COVID-19 pandemic situation

As shown in Fig. 2, Tukey's Post Hoc Anova Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of Nursing Students' image perception towards nursing profession, during the COVID-19 pandemic situation was statistically significantly different between BN4 Level and BN1 Level (p (Sig) = 0.02, 95% C.I. = 0.06, 0.93).

Discussion

This research study investigated the (COVID-19) pandemic's impact on the decision of students already enrolled in nursing profession. The health professionals encounter many difficulties including the high threat to their life and safety and also to their family members. There have been many studies undertaken around the world about the health professionals regret about their career choices. Also, there are more studies that focuses on the career choices that is influenced by the recent pandemic situation. This study results surprisingly uncovered that majority of the nursing students posed a "no turning back" attitude. The results also mentions that the students felt that the pandemic situation has strengthened the professional status and popularized the profession. It had a positive effect due to the response of public to the nursing professionals (Öncü et al., 2022). The study results informed the nursing professionals in the academic and the practice setting, to set up strategies, to focus on the young people who are at the crossroads of choosing the profession. It emphasizes that leadership and management should guide the interested students, to choose their career in nursing and also continue to encourage and

motivate the students already in the nursing profession to remain in the nursing field.

In this study it is also seen that the nursing students in the nursing program did not have any regrets for choosing the nursing profession. A significant number of them were willing to join the health professionals in combating the pandemic situation. This will potentially create a much-motivated workforce of the profession, leading to improved patient outcomes and nurse retention rates in the future. The results also showed that the nursing students in UAE, especially in the time of the pandemic situation, perceived the image of nursing profession to be very honorable. It further adds that if they are given a chance to choose their profession once again, they would choose nursing only. This is clearly an inspiring change of attitude from what it used to be in the year 2010 (Swan, 2010).

The nurses have not taken any effort to showcase their capacities, contributions and competencies in the past. This lack of public discourse and invisibility the image of nursing is diverse and incongruous in the eyes of public (ten Hoeve et al., 2014). The study reveals that the students felt inspired that they and their profession has received much attention, appreciation and honor from the UAE government and across the globe during the pandemic period. The work of the nurses was lauded by the public to a great deal in real and in social media. These factors have impacted them to stay in the nursing profession and feel that they have made the right career choice to heed to the calling of being a nurse.

It was reported earlier by the student that the role of nurses is often “misunderstood” in the emirates and further added that only her mother supported her to be in the nursing profession amidst the disapproval from the other members of the family (Nowais, 2019). On the contrary, majority of the present nursing students agreed that their family provide immense support for them to join the nursing profession and to be a future nurse. The families also and support the nursing student’s decision to step up to participate in health professional interventions, namely to volunteer in the COVID screening, vaccination centers or to provide nursing care for patients diagnosed with COVID or to substitute and relieve the senior nurses in their units so that they can be available to work in the COVID units.

In general, the study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic situation has been an eyeopener to the society and the magnifying lens to the public to clearly see and appreciate the role of nurses in the life of patients who are sick and suffering amidst the life threatening COVID condition. The study results implied that the governments and the nursing leaders should provide more necessary infrastructure to practice professional and specialized role of nurses in the health care system of UAE.

Conclusion

During COVID-19 pandemic situation across the globe, the nurses have been in the frontline and undertaken the hardships including the nurses in UAE. This pandemic situation has assuredly emphasized the role of nurses and introduced the nursing profession to a different level. The study highlights the various

internal and external factors that impacts the attitude and the image of nursing profession among nursing students in a way improves the perception from year one to year four. The study informs the government and nursing leaders and administrators to reform misconceptions about the nursing profession, provide more professional image and provide a voice for improving the future health care policies and practices paving way for attracting more young people into nursing profession.

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