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Cover Page Footnote

I acknowledge the guidance and support given by my research guide Dr. Kochuthresiamma Thomas (Rtd. Principal, Govt. Nursing College , Trivandrum), in completing this study. Also acknowledge the Principals of all selected Nursing Colleges for giving administrative permission for conducting this study in their colleges. source of support: None Conflicts of interest: None declared Source of support in the form of grants: None

Professional values among BSc nursing students and their perception of the status of nursing as a profession

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Abstract

Introduction: Professional values are the values reflected in our relationships with clients, colleagues and significant others. The “Code of Ethics” for nurses provide directions for the relationship of nurses with clients, the community, and the profession. It delineates the fundamental values of professional nursing. **Objectives:** To describe and correlate the professional values of BSc nursing students and their perception of the status of nursing as a profession; to compare the professional values and perceptions of I-, II-, III- and IV-year students; to find out the relationship of professional value and perception scores of students with their socioeconomic status (SES). **Methods:** This descriptive correlational study was done in selected nursing colleges of Kerala with a total sample size of 580, using multi-stage random sampling. Data collection tools used were the Socio-Demographic Factors Inventory, the Professional Value Scale for Nursing Students, and the Semantic Differential Scale on Perception on Status of Nursing as a Profession. **Results:** Analysis showed that the majority, 239 (41.2%) of subjects had a “very good” level of professional values. The perception of students about the status of nursing was interpreted by the scores given by them to items in the semantic differential scale from 0 to 7. The characteristics which received a score of 7 by the majority of subjects were Essential for society (79.8%); Responsible (68.6%) and Ethical (51%). Statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.187$, $p = .001$), was found between professional value score and perception score. Professional values were highest among IV-year students and the perception score was highest among I-year students. Socioeconomic status had a significant relationship with the perception of students, but not with their professional values. **Conclusion:** The study concluded that BSc Nursing students in Kerala had a very good level of professional values. They perceived nursing as essential for society, responsible and ethical, as well as “dependent” rather than autonomous and “mechanical work” rather than intellectual work.

Keywords: BSc nursing students, nursing, perception, professional values, status of nursing.

Introduction

From the time of Florence Nightingale, each generation of nurses has fostered the movement to professionalize the image of nurses and nursing. Today the world has moved from the nostalgia of an age gone by to contemporary nursing practice. We often hear comments from nurse leaders and nurse educators that

“students are not just what they used to be; it is not like when we were students!!” Yes, they are correct. On several levels, nursing education is different, students are different, and practices are different (Catalano, 2015). Nursing students of today graduate with an enormous body of knowledge in various areas like pharmacology, patient safety and symptom management, but they have only a vague sense of how to be a true professional and how to view professional growth as an essential part of their career (Chitty & Black, 2010).

Values are enduring beliefs or attitudes about the worth of a person, object, idea or action and they are learned through observation and experience. As a result, they are heavily influenced by a person’s socio-cultural environment-that include societal traditions,

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cultural, ethnic, religious groups; and family and peer groups. Nurses' professional values are acquired during socialization into nursing from the Code of Ethics, nursing experience, teachers, and peers. Professional values are standards of decision making. Value clarification is an internal process that includes thinking, choosing, prizing (feeling) and behaving (acting). Value clarification promotes personal growth by fostering awareness, empathy, and insight. Therefore, it is an important step for nurses to take while dealing with ethical problems (Berman, Snyder, & Frandsen, 2018).

Weis and Schank, of Milwaukee University, USA who developed the Nurses' Professional Value Scale (NPVS), based on the statements of the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses, concluded in their study that values are basic aspects of nursing and they are integral to professional socialization, evident in nursing care and fundamental to decisions that affect practice. The authors recommended that measuring professional values based on the "Code of Ethics" can raise the consciousness among nursing students that values and ethics are cornerstones of professionalism (Weis & Schank, 2009). Studies were done in Iran (Parvan, Zamanzdeh, & Hosseine, 2012) and Taiwan (Lee-Hsich and Turton, 2005) among BSc Nursing students which investigated the most important and least important professional values as well as the caring behaviours of the students. Both groups of students rated values directly related to patient care as most important to them.

A study was done in Bangalore among 129 nursing students to explore their perceptions and attitude toward the nursing profession which found that the majority of students chose nursing careers based on their own interest to improve their financial situation. The majority of students perceived this career to improve the image of nursing in India and the prejudices of the public so as to have a major influence on the status of the nursing profession. The study reports that perception about the profession has a great influence on the future quality of nursing and the development of nursing students. There are very few studies being done in India to know the contemporary generation's attitude and perceptions of the nursing profession

and further studies need to be done (Vijayalakshmi, Ramachandra, & Reddemma, 2012). Another study was done in Punjab state among 530 outgoing nursing students to find out future nurses' perceptions towards the profession and career plans which revealed that two-thirds of the subjects perceived their profession as dignified and respectful, as well as a way to get due recognition in the society. A vast majority of students were not planning to change their profession. The authors concluded that the majority of students perceived nursing as a promising profession with bright prospects and the perception of the nursing profession is moving towards the positive side (Patidar, Kaur, & Sharma, 2011).

Studies carried out in Jordan (AlJarrah, 2013) and China (Zhang & Petrini, 2008) reported that nursing students generally have significant positive perceptions about the image of the nursing profession. The curriculum design appears to play an important role in forming the students' attitude towards nursing. A thematic analysis of perceptions of 240 nursing students from two universities in the UK concluded that students would take on the beliefs and values and will adapt to the professional culture they are exposed to during their training period; sometimes they are socialized into the demoting aspects of the heart and care, in favour of aspects of the head and the technical work. The dissonance between ideals and reality can lead to feelings of disappointment and disillusionment among nursing students. It is the duty of the profession to ensure that values are inculcated by all who enter the profession (Wood, 2016).

Nursing students, who are well moulded into professionalism during their course period itself, would certainly uphold the dignity and status of the profession in their future workplace. Nurse educators, who play a major role in the formation of young nurses, need to be aware of the value systems of students and how they perceive the profession's social status, in order to inculcate the right attitudes and values in them. Recognizing the importance of this, the Indian Nursing Council has included an additional subject, "Professionalism, Professional Values and Ethics" in its BSc Nursing Revised Regulations, 2020. Scientific

studies exploring and describing the professional values of the nurses and nursing students of our country and taking measures to improve them will, of course, increase their acceptability and credibility in the healthcare system.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional survey with the descriptive-correlational design was used in this study and it was done in randomly selected 14 nursing colleges across Kerala State, affiliated to Kerala University of Health Sciences. Data were collected from 580 BSc Nursing students, (145 from each year of study) selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. The sample size was calculated with power analysis to get a power of 0.95. In the first stage, 14 colleges were selected from the six geographical zones under the Kerala University of Health Sciences, using the lottery method (from zone A and C three colleges each were selected and from all other zones two colleges each were selected, in proportion to the total number of colleges in the zones). In the second stage, systematic random sampling based on the roll numbers was used to select 10 to 12 students from each batch (I, II, III and IV years), in each college.

Tools and technique

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher's parent institution approved the study and prior written permission was obtained from the Principals/Directors of the 14 colleges. Written consent was also taken from all the subjects before data collection. Data was collected using three tools. A Socio-Demographic Factors Inventory with two sections, Section A with eight multiple-choice questions exploring baseline data and Section B, Socio-Economic Status Scale (modified Srivastava scale); Professional Value Scale for nursing students and perception scale on status of nursing as a profession.

The Professional Value Scale for Nursing Students, a five-point Likert scale with 24 items, was developed by the researcher based on the statements of the Code of Ethics by the Indian Nursing Council (2006) exploring how much importance is given by nursing students to the values expected in their day-to-day practices.

Perception Scale on Status of Nursing as a Profession, a seven-point semantic differential scale with 10 items, was also developed by the researcher based on 10 characteristics of a 'true profession' namely, ethical, autonomous, intellectual, accountable, organized, research-oriented, essential, self-developmental and well-reputed. Students' responses on this scale represent their perception of how well the nursing profession in India is fulfilling or not fulfilling each criterion for a true profession. Content validity of all the above tools was assured by giving it the expert opinion of seven experts in the field of Nursing Education and Sociology. Reliability testing of the Professional Value Scale and Perception Scale on the status of Nursing was done using the test-retest method (with 14 days intervals) and it was found to be 0.89 and 0.87 respectively.

As per the schedule fixed in each college, the researcher personally visited the college with the required number of data collection tools. With the help of the class coordinators of each batch, a systematic sampling technique was used to identify the sample from each class, based on the roll number of students. The subjects took an average of 10 to 15 minutes to fill out all the data collection tools.

Results

Data obtained from the 580 subjects of the main study were entered into MS Excel datasheets and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistical tests were used to analyze the data based on the study objectives. The variables were described with Mean, SD (Standard Deviation) and Range. Parametric tests namely, Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA were computed to find out the significance of relationships between the study variables. The analysis findings are described below based on the objectives of the study.

Demographic characteristics and socioeconomic status of BSc nursing students.

In this study, data regarding the demographic factors and socioeconomic status (SES) of the student's family were collected using Tool-1, the Socio-Demographic Factors Inventory, with two sections. The demographic characteristics of the subjects are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1
Description of the Demographic Factors of BSc Nursing Students in Kerala

Sample characteristics	N = 580	
	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (in years)		
17	4	0.7
18	78	13.4
19	130	22.4
20	150	25.9
21	161	27.8
>21	57	09.8
Gender		
Male	9	1.6
Female	571	98.4
Religion		
Hindu	171	29.5
Christian	369	63.6
Muslim	40	06.9
Year of study		
I-year	145	25
II-year	145	25
III-year	145	25
IV Year	145	25
Type of College		
Govt. college	40	06.9
Private self-financing	500	86.2
Co-operative	40	06.9

The majority of students (63.6%) belong to the Christian religion and are females (98.4%). The majority, 399 (68.8%) students reported that nursing was their first career choice and the remaining (31.2%) had joined BSc nursing even though it was not their career choice. Among the subjects, 133 (22.9%) had selected nursing based on their own interest and parent's motivation, whereas the majority, 133 (29.9%) students were motivated by career guidance classes.

Data regarding the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students were obtained in section B of the Socio-Demographic Factors Inventory with 13 multiple-choice questions, to explore the social as well as the economic status of the family. The maximum score on the scale was 63, mean score was 29.45, (SD = 7.39). The majority of subjects, 485 (83.6%) belonged to families with moderate SES, whereas 65 (11.2%) and 30 (5.2%) were from low SES and high SES families, respectively.

Descriptive analysis of the Professional Value scores of subjects

The professional value scores of the subjects obtained in the Professional Value Scale for nursing students were analyzed and classified into four categories, namely excellent, very good, good, and poor, based on the Mean and SD values of the sample (Mean = 85.81; SD = 9.28; Range = 53 - 100). The items on the scale explored how much importance the students give to behaviour manifesting their professional values in their day-to-day nursing practice. Responses against items vary from "not important" to "most important" with scores ranging from one to five. The maximum score on the scale was 120. The distribution of subjects based on their scores obtained in the Professional Value Scale is given in Table 2.

Table 2
Distribution of Subjects Based on Their Scores Obtained in Professional Value Scale.

Category of professional value score	N = 580	
	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Excellent (104-120)	83	14.3
Very good (95-103)	239	41.2
Good (76-94)	190	32.8
Poor (<76)	68	11.7
Total	580	100

Data given in Table 2 show that majority, 239 (41.2%) of subjects had a very good level of professional values. Excellent professional value scores were obtained by 83 (14.3%) and 68 (11.7%) got poor scores. Certain items of the tool eliciting some very important values to be demonstrated by students while giving patient care were analyzed in detail and the findings are given in Table 3.

Data given in Table 3 show that majority, 444 (76.6%) of students responded that it is most important for them to consider life as a valuable gift of God and handling it with dignity and respect. Providing care without discrimination was most important for 431 (74.3%) subjects. The majority, 375 (64.7%) responded

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Subjects Based on Their Responses Given to Selected Items of Professional Value Scale

N = 580

Description of item	Response frequency and percentage				
	Not Important f (%)	Some what Important f (%)	Important f (%)	Very Important f (%)	Most Important f (%)
Providing care for clients without discrimination based on religion, caste, social status etc.	41 (7.1)	6 (1)	35 (6)	67 (11.6)	431 (74.3)
Safeguarding the individual's right to privacy Being honest while reporting and recording the care given to clients	1 (0.2)	9 (1.6)	61 (10.5)	134 (23.1)	375 (64.7)
Adhering to the "Code of Ethics" for nurses and knowing relevant rules and regulations related to nursing practice	2 (0.3)	7 (0.2)	36 (6.2)	130 (22.4)	405 (69.8)
Practising healthy behaviours and being a role model to elements regarding health habits and practices	2 (0.3)	16 (2.8)	118 (20.3)	168 (29)	276 (47.6)
Considering "life" as a valuable gift of God and handling my client's life with dignity and respect	7 (1.2)	26 (4.5)	107 (18.4)	162 (27.9)	278 (47.9)
Contributing to improving the status and dignity of the nursing profession by practising the best quality nursing care	Nil	5 (0.9)	30 (5.2)	101 (17.4)	444 (76.6)
Contributing to improving the status and dignity of the nursing profession by practising the best quality nursing care	3 (0.5)	8 (1.4)	59 (10.2)	205 (35.3)	305 (52.6)

that it is always important for them to safeguard the privacy of patients and 405 (69.8%) said it is most important to be honest while reporting and recording the care given to clients. Only 278 (47.9%) subjects said it is most important to practice healthy behaviours themselves and be role models to clients regarding healthy habits. Almost the same number, 276 (47.6%) also said it is most important to adhere to the "Code of Ethics" for nurses. Contributing to improving the status of the Nursing Profession was most important for 305 (52.6%) subjects.

Descriptive Analysis of the BSc Nursing students' perception of the status of Nursing as a Profession.

BSc Nursing students' perception of the status of nursing as a profession was measured using a 10-item semantic differential scale with each item depicting characteristics of nursing as a profession. Rating of each characteristic was done with scores of 1 to 7. Descriptive analysis of each item of the tool was done to see how the subjects perceived each characteristic existing or not existing in today's nursing profession. It was found that the majority of BSc Nursing students

very confidently perceived that the nursing profession is essential for society (79.8%), nurses are responsible (68.6%) and ethical (51%). The characteristics which received the least number of "score 7" were Autonomous (17.2%), Intellectual work (22.8%) and Altruistic (22.8%). Only (43.1%) of subjects confidently could say that nursing is a well-reputed profession and (45.3%) perceived that members of the profession are organized by professional associations. Among them, (48.8%) of each perceived that the nursing profession is modern and research-oriented rather than being traditional, as well as self-developmental rather than self-destructive. The maximum score of the tool was 70 and a descriptive analysis of the total score given by each subject in this tool showed that the mean score of the study sample was 56.54 (SD = 8.59) with a Range of 20 – 70.

Pearson correlation (r) was calculated to find out the correlation between scores obtained by subjects on the professional value scale and perception scale. The value was 0.187** (p = .0001) which indicates a weak positive correlation, but it was statistically significant.

Table 4

The Mean and SD of the B.Sc Nursing Students on Professional Values and Perception on Status of Nursing as a Profession

Variable	Statistics	I-year (N = 145)	II-year (N = 145)	III-year (N = 145)	IV-year (N = 145)	Total sample (N = 580)
Professional values	Mean	85.80	85.65	85.65	86.13	85.81
	SD	9.77	8.92	8.92	9.58	9.28
Perception of the status of Nursing as a profession	Mean	57.22	56.14	56.11	56.69	56.54
	SD	8.03	9.74	8.15	8.35	8.59

Comparison of year wise scores of the BSc Nursing students on the professional value scale and perception scale.

Table 4 gives a comparison of the mean and SD values of the scores obtained by I-, II-, III- and IV-year subjects on scales measuring the professional values and perception of the status of nursing as a profession.

The mean of professional value scores was highest among IV-year BSc students and lowest among II-year and equal among III-year students. The I-year students had better professional values than II-years and III-years. The mean of perception of nursing as a profession was highest among I-years and lowest among III-year students. A one-way ANOVA test was done to find out the significance of the difference in mean scores of the professional values and perceptions among I-, II-, III- and IV-year students. The F value obtained between professional values and year of study was 0.084 ($p = .969$) and the F value between perception scores and year of study was 0.548 ($p = .650$). Both values were statistically non-significant which indicates that as the students progressed through the four years course their professional values and perceptions about nursing were not significantly changing.

Relationship of professional values and perception of subjects with their Socio-Economic Status.

Pearson correlation values between SES score and score on the professional value scale was -0.013 ($p = .75$), which is not statistically significant. The correlation value between SES and perception of the status of nursing was -0.120 ($p = .004$), which is statistically significant. These negative correlations revealed that as the family socioeconomic status of the BSc Nursing

students increased their professional values and perception of nursing as a profession decreased.

Discussion

In the present study, the professional value scores of the BSc Nursing students were found to be “very good” level in the majority. An item-wise analysis of the tool measuring professional values showed that the majority of students told it is very important for them to consider life as a valuable gift of God and handle client's life with dignity (76.6%); provide care for clients without any discrimination based on religion, caste or states (74.3%) being honest while reporting and recording (69.8%) and safeguarding the right for the privacy of patients (64.7%). These findings show that students have high consideration for important values like honesty, equality, respect for privacy and respect for the dignity of human life, majority of them (47.6%) also considered adhering to the “Code of Ethics” of the profession is most important to them. Values and ethics in nursing are included as a unit in the Nursing Foundations of I-year BSc Nursing students in the current syllabus prescribed by the Indian Nursing Council. About 10 hours are allotted for the teaching of these topics and students also learn the “INC Code of Ethics for Nurses in India” in the I-year itself. This might have possibly resulted in students having considerably good levels of professional behaviours and their awareness of the “Code of Ethics” in the profession.

Thorpe and Loo (2003) examined the values profile of 152 nursing undergraduate students in Canada. The most important values reported by the nursing students were “personal development” and “altruism”.

In this study, students rated social relations, ability utilization and achievement also as their important values. But cultural identity, creativity, physical prowess, and risk were relatively unimportant values for these nursing students. Significant negative correlations were found between age and social relations, altruism, social interaction, cultural identity, advancement, physical activity, and aesthetics. This shows that the younger nursing students viewed it as highly important than older nursing students. However, these correlation (r) values were between -0.37 to -0.17, accounting for only mild to moderate correlations. The present study also showed that as students progress from the I-year to the III-year of their course there was a gradual decrease in their professional values, but it increased during their final year of study. But these differences in mean scores were not statistically significant.

A study was done by Martin and Susan (2003) among BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing program). and AND (Associate Degree in Nursing) students in Texas, the USA showed a significant relationship between the professional values of graduating nursing students and sex and ethnicity, regardless of the educational program. Another study done in the USA among undergraduate nursing students, using Nursing Professional Value Scale by Weis and Schank, found that patient advocacy and maintaining the competence of care are the most important professional values of students. A cross-sectional survey study to assess professional values among Iranian nursing students was done by Praven, Zamanzdeh & Hosseini, (2012). It showed that the most important values identified by students belonging to two types of universities were "maintain competence in areas of practice" and "maintain the confidentiality of patient". The least important items identified by them were "participating in peer review" and "participating in public policy decisions affecting the distribution of resources". This study revealed significant differences in scores of professional value among students from different categories of family economic status. In the present study also, a mild negative correlation was found to be existing between nursing students' socioeconomic status and their professional value scores ($r = -0.013$, $p = .75$), but it was not statistically significant.

The perception of BSc Nursing students about the status of nursing as a profession was explored in the present study, using a 10-item semantic differential scale, each item representing a given characteristic of the profession. In an extensive review of literature, the researcher could not find any published studies done in India, analyzing how students perceive the nursing profession as fulfilling or not fulfilling the criteria for a profession. The present study found the majority of BSc Nursing students in Kerala perceived the nursing profession as "essential for society", "responsible" and "ethical". But they also perceived nursing as dependent rather than autonomous; mechanical work rather than intellectual work and self-centred rather than altruistic. Only 43% of students could confidently say that nursing is a well-reputed profession. A study done in Jordan among 100 Associate Nursing students showed that the majority of study subjects feel proud when talking with others about the nursing profession. The majority of them had the opinion that relationships with medical professionals and the opinion of family members about nursing had a great impact on the students' perceptions about the status of nursing (Al Jarrah, 2013). In a focus group study done among Polish nursing students, the authors concluded that in spite of knowing the low prestige of the nursing profession in Poland, they were hopeful of the possibilities of improving the image and prestige (Marcinowicz *et al.*, 2016).

Conclusion

This study showed that BSc Nursing students in Kerala, have very good levels of professional values, which adds to the credibility of "Kerala nurses" who are already accepted widely in the entire world. The majority of BSc Nursing students perceive that the nursing profession in India is more dependent than autonomous as well as more mechanical than intellectual work. This highlights the need for improving the nurses' freedom for decision making and their opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge into practice. The lower level of perception of the status of nursing as the students during the study period maybe because of the "reality shock". As the students progressed to higher classes there was no significant increase in their professional values. This issue also needs to be addressed and studied further. The study revealed that a large majority

of BSc Nursing students in Kerala are from middle-class families and as the socioeconomic status of the family increases the student's perception of the status of nursing as a profession reduces significantly. Leaders in the nursing profession have to be concerned about this and strategies to improve the acceptability of this profession among families with higher socioeconomic status has to be planned, which in turn will improve the social status of this profession in India.

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