Choosing to Become a Nurse in Saudi Arabia and the Lived Experience of New Graduates: A Mixed Methods Study

Submitted by

Mohammed Alboliteeh

A thesis submitted as the requirement of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Nursing

February 2015
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................................... ii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................................ vii
List of Tables ................................................................................................................................................... viii
Statement ........................................................................................................................................................... ix
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................ x
Abstract ............................................................................................................................................................ xi
Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1
  Introduction to the Study ............................................................................................................................... 1
  Personal Interest in the Research ............................................................................................................... 2
  The Research .............................................................................................................................................. 3
    The Research Aim .................................................................................................................................. 3
    The Research Questions ......................................................................................................................... 3
    The Potential Significance of the Research ........................................................................................... 3
  Structure of the Thesis .............................................................................................................................. 4
Chapter Two: Background .............................................................................................................................. 6
  Saudi Arabia ............................................................................................................................................... 6
    Economic and Political Background ....................................................................................................... 7
    Cultural and Gender Issues ..................................................................................................................... 9
  Saudisation Plan ......................................................................................................................................... 11
  Healthcare in Saudi Arabia ...................................................................................................................... 12
  Nursing in Saudi Arabia .......................................................................................................................... 14
  Nursing Organisations .............................................................................................................................. 16
  Men in Nursing in Saudi Arabia ............................................................................................................... 18
    The Current Situation of Men in Nursing ............................................................................................... 19
  Recruitment and Retention ....................................................................................................................... 21
  Image of Nursing in Saudi Arabia ........................................................................................................... 22
  Nursing Education in Saudi Arabia .......................................................................................................... 24
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 25
Chapter Three: Research Design ................................................................................................................... 28
  Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 28
  Research Strategy ..................................................................................................................................... 29
  Research Design ........................................................................................................................................ 29
  Mixed Methods Research ......................................................................................................................... 32
List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia showing the bordering countries ......................... 7
Figure 2: Study design using sequential explanatory mixed methods ............................................. 40
Figure 3: Age of respondents ......................................................................................................... 59
Figure 4: Number of dependents .................................................................................................. 60
Figure 5: Respondents’ province of origin .................................................................................... 61
Figure 6: Highest qualification in nursing ....................................................................................... 62
Figure 7: Years of experience in nursing ....................................................................................... 63
Figure 8: Type of position held ...................................................................................................... 64
Figure 9: Area of nursing practice ................................................................................................ 65
Figure 10: Motivation to become a nurse – altruism ................................................................. 66
Figure 11: Motivation to become a nurse – a caring profession .................................................. 66
Figure 12: Motivation to become a nurse – job security .............................................................. 68
Figure 13: Motivation to become a nurse – a good salary .......................................................... 68
Figure 14: Motivation to become a nurse – family expectation ................................................... 69
Figure 15: Motivation to become a nurse – advice from a nurse ................................................ 70
Figure 16: Motivation to become a nurse – personal experience of healthcare .......................... 71
Figure 17: Perceptions – nursing is for women ............................................................................ 72
Figure 18: Perceptions – nursing does not require high academic qualifications ....................... 73
Figure 19: Perceptions – nursing is a respected profession .......................................................... 74
Figure 20: Number of days respondents would prefer to work .................................................... 75
Figure 21: Intention to leave nursing ............................................................................................ 76
Figure 22: Reason to leave nursing – my gender ......................................................................... 77
Figure 23: Reason to leave nursing – dealing with the opposite sex .......................................... 78
Figure 24: Reason to leave nursing – dealing with patients of the opposite sex ......................... 79
Figure 25: Reason to leave nursing – I will become a fulltime student .......................................... 80
Figure 26: Reason to leave nursing – I have to work long hours ............................................... 81
Figure 27: Reason to leave nursing – difficulty communicating in English ............................... 81
Figure 28: Interpretation of the experience of being a new graduate Saudi nurse ....................... 170
List of Tables

Table 1: The provision of healthcare in Saudi Arabia ................................................................. 13
Table 2: Gender of respondents .................................................................................................. 58
Table 3: Years of experience in nursing ..................................................................................... 63
Table 4: Changes that would alter the decision to leave nursing ............................................... 82
Table 5: Examples of the themes and sub-themes ................................................................. 164
Statement

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University’s digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Signature:

Date:
Acknowledgements

There are two important groups to whom due acknowledgement needs to be made. The first is formal and the second is informal. It is difficult to know which group is the most important because without either one, this thesis would never have been written and completed. Convention decrees that the formal acknowledgement be made first.

To my principle supervisor Associate Professor Judy Magarey, who always supported and encouraged me in every stage of my journey, thank you for your patient supervision during my journey and unwavering faith in my capacity to complete the thesis. To my co-supervisor Dr. Richard Wiechula who gave me valuable, skilled and thoughtful advice, encouragement and guidance. I am thankful for the valuable experience I gained from both of you during the last four years.

The informal group is much larger and there are too many to name. However, I wish to acknowledge my friend Mr Fahad Algahtani, for his considerate support and treasured friendship during the difficult and great times.

Finally thanks goes to my beloved wife and my daughters Nora, Dalal and Razan, my son Ibrahim, my mother and father, my brothers and sisters for their support, patience and encouragement during my study and stay in Australia. I am also thankful to all participants and to the hospitals and health administration for their participation in this study. Also, I would like to thank my sponsor the University of Ha’il for their valuable sponsorship and support during my study.
Abstract

Saudi Arabia has undergone rapid social and economic change in recent years. As one of the largest employers in the country, these changes have had a significant impact on the healthcare sector, in particular on the nursing workforce. In the past, Saudi Arabia relied almost exclusively upon expatriate nurses to meet the healthcare needs of its growing population. However, an increase in the Saudi population, high levels of Saudi unemployment, and a desire to redress the country's reliance on an expatriate workforce, led the Saudi government to implement a Saudisation program, an initiative to recruit, train and employ Saudi nationals throughout the workforce. As a result, approximately 50% of nurses are now of Saudi nationality.

This research is a mixed methods study. A quantitative study was undertaken to gain a description of the Saudi nursing workforce in Riyadh city; in particular their motivations, views of the profession and future plans. The initial aim of the quantitative study was to ascertain why high numbers of Saudi males were entering the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia; however, female nurses were also surveyed in order to understand if there was a relationship between gender and motivations to undertake nursing, views of the profession and future plans. In this component of the study, a self-administered survey was distributed to all Saudi nurses working as registered nurses in Ministry of Health (MOH) hospitals in Riyadh. The results indicated that the Saudi Arabia nurses surveyed were young and inexperienced with a mean age of 27 years and with 80% having less than five years' experience in the nursing field. Other important issues emerged in this study, such as the nurses’ desire for educational and professional development; poor working conditions in the sector; the low social status of the profession; difficulties associated with working in a mixed-gender environment; and cultural and communication problems. Significantly, just below half of all respondents intended leaving the profession.
These results informed the second, qualitative component of this study which sought to explore in more depth, some of the findings which emerged from the initial component of the study. The second study aimed to explore the lived experience of newly graduated Saudi Nurses. Twelve newly graduate nurses who had been working in Ministry of Health Hospitals in Riyadh five years or less were interviewed. In-depth interviews in the Arabic language were performed with the nurses, who had been working in the profession for five years or less.

Themes were identified from the data using van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Six major themes emerged from analysis of the data. Firstly, nurses felt unprepared for nursing. They felt they lacked the educational and training support they required, had little knowledge of the profession before joining, and had rarely chosen the profession themselves. Secondly, nurses in the study felt they were not readily included in nursing teams and were marginalised and discriminated against by management and expatriate nurses. In addition, Saudi nurses suffered from the poor social status associated with the profession and were subject to criticism and poor treatment by family, other health professionals and society at large. Despite this, nurses in general had a positive attitude to their profession. Saudi nurses indicated that they believed Saudi nurses were vital to the profession; both male and female nurses considered male nurses of central importance to the profession to ensure that the cultural and religious needs of Saudi patients were met. Finally, Saudi nurses showed an awareness of social changes occurring in nursing and in society in general and expressed a desire to be part of this change.

This study offers important insights into a segment of the Saudi nursing workforce, which has not been the subject of intensive study. This new, emerging nursing workforce is making a mark on the Saudi healthcare sector. In order to prevent attrition in the nursing field, Saudi nurses need to be provided with appropriate education, training, respect and
working conditions. This study offers important recommendations and insights for the future of Saudi nursing.