



**Perception of Patients Towards Nurses’
Attitudes: Implication on the Public Image of Nursing**

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Background: The negative public image of Nurses is not in agreement with the important work they do. There is therefore a need to investigate what attracted this negative image to Nurses.

Aim: The study aims to investigate patients’ perception of nurses’ attitudes and how that impact on their perception of the public image of nurses **Method:** A cross-sectional descriptive design was used to select 380 patients attending clinics/admitted in the wards in a tertiary hospital, Zaria systematically. The ensuing data was subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. **Result:** While the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that nurses are not friendly or tend to shout at them (166 or 51.4% and 165 or 51% respectively), the majority were also of the view that the nurses were competent and efficient in professional service delivery such as; administering the medication on time (117 or 87%, n=134), doing the necessary temperature checks (239 or 74%, n=323), and overall dedication to duty (294 or 91%, n=323). **Conclusion:** Patients have negative perceptions towards nurses’ attitudes as such; nurses need to work on their social skills and attitudes in order to complement their technical competence as a way of improving patient perception and public image. Among the recommendations for achieving this are training of nurses on positive attitude and stress management, formal recognition of friendly Nurses, and wearing of name tags to easy identified by patients.

Keywords: *Perception, Public image, Nursing, Patient.*

Introduction

Nursing professionals pay attention to people with a view to assist, help, support, facilitate, and enable them to recover from their ill health or to help patients handle disability or death (Tomey, 2008). One cannot help but wonder why such professionals suffer a negative image from the public. The public image of Nursing as a profession is important because it reflects the perception and value that society places on nursing services and affects the nurse-patient relationship (Hoeve, Jansen, & Roodbol, 2014; Ozaras & Abaan, 2018).

The perception of the public toward nurses in not encouraging, for instance, In India, Vaz e De Braganca and Nirmala (2015) reported that 25% of the respondents in their study stated that the public perceive nursing as a dirty job and nurses as being rude to patients. In African countries, a substantial number of public members have often voiced reservations about nurses’ behaviour or conduct in handling patients. In a recent radio talk show in the Gambia, the public was asked to air their view about nurses. Majority of those who contributed stated that they had personally experienced aggression from

nurses (Bah & Sey-Sawo, 2018). They went further to suggest that aggression is probably part of the training of nurses since it is much common with nurses than doctors. An exploratory study conducted in some East African countries (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) by Ndirangu, Sarki, Mbekenga, and Edwards (2020), found that the public has both positive and negative public image of nursing and that this was significantly influenced by both personal experience and the media. This image also affects the number of people applying to study nursing, therefore, affecting the workforce of the profession.

In Ghana, Appiah, Agyeiwaa, and Amponsah (2020) reported that the public has repeatedly complained through social media about the negative attitude of nurses towards their patients and how it affects the care of patients. In Nigeria, nurses working in tertiary hospitals perceived that members of the public hold a negative image of them. This in turn affects their work satisfaction and negatively influence their motivation to continue practising as nurses (Ingwu, Ohaeri, & Iroka, 2016).

Moreover, when one party holds a negative image of the other in the nurse-patient relationship, it has the dangerous tendency of resulting in a mutually reinforcing relationship of negative outcomes whereby the negative image toward nurses affects the attitude of patients to nurses and on the one hand also affects nurses' attitude towards their patients. Some of the publicly held negative images and stereotypes about the nursing profession include: Nurses tend to be rude and saucy to patients; the role of nurses is at the bedside of patients, to administer injections and should only administer doctors' instructions; and anybody can be trained to become a nurse (Glerean, Hupli, Talman, & Haavisto, 2017; Hoeve *et al.*, 2014). The consequences of this negative are; Shortage of nurses as a result of reduction of individuals aspiring to study nursing as a career, Undermining of the nursing profession from other health professionals, Disrespects for

nurses, work stress, Job dissatisfaction and low self-esteem (Price, MacMillan, Awad, & Paynter, 2019; Rezaei-Adaryani, Salsali, & Mohammadi, 2012)

The study aims to investigate patients' perception of nurses' attitudes and how that impact their perception of the public image of nurses. This will be achieved through the following objectives:

- i). To identify patients' perception about nurses' attitude
- ii). To identify patients' perception of nursing services
- iii) To identify the impact of patients' perception on the public image of nursing

Methods and Materials

Research Setting: Clinics and wards of a tertiary hospital in Zaria, Kaduna State of Nigeria constituted the research setting. This hospital was selected because of the high patients' patronage and the availability of well-trained qualified nursing staff.

Research design: A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional design was used in this study. This is because it is most appropriate for collecting data at a spot from respondents and can cover a large population at a time.

Study population: These are clients/patients (about 40000) receiving nursing services in the hospital or have been admitted in the hospital (Ahmed *et al.*, 2014). These people were selected because they have had close encounters with nurses and their opinion of nurses' attitudes may be relatively accurate. The inclusion criteria are clients/patients who are receiving the services of nurses from the tertiary hospital, either in the clinics or wards. The exclusion criteria are non-patients and patients who are critically ill or have children.

Sampling technique: A systematic sampling was used to select 380 patients/clients. This sample size was calculated using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of the sample. Every

fourth person was selected from the row the respondents were sitting in the clinics or from the bed where respondents were laying down in the wards.

Data Instrument

A four-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the research objective. It has two sections, section A is the socio-demographic characteristics and section B is the Likert scale questions with ten questions (five questions on the attitude of nurses, three questions on nurses' services and two questions on nursing image

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity to check for relevance, simplicity, clarity and ambiguity (Lynn 1986). Copies of the questionnaire were sent to a panel of three (two lecturers from the Department of Nursing Science and one nurse from the clinic). Based on their suggestions and recommendation, the instrument was rephrased. For the reliability test, test-retest was conducted with ten respondents in another hospital, in order not to contaminate the study. The result of the questionnaire was analysis and a reliability coefficient of 0.90 was obtained. This was considered good but the result was not included in the main study.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained for this study from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the research setting (NHREC/10/12/2015). Informed Consent was obtained verbally by the researcher explaining the research to the respondents. Each respondent that agreed to participate in the study was given a questionnaire to fill. Other ethical principles such as confidentiality, privacy and justice were adhered to in the study.

Data Collection: The data collection of the study commenced from 7th to 20th September 2020. To gain entrance to the research site, the researcher with two trained researcher assistance approached the matrons of the clinics and wards and introduced themselves. The research was, explained and the ethical clearance form was shown to the matron. The matrons permitted the researcher to approach their patients /clients in the wards and clinic. The researcher approached the respondents based on the inclusion criteria and explained the research and obtained verbal consent from them and gave them the questionnaire to filled. The same procedure was applied to the rest of the respondents until the desired sample size was obtained. Those who were admitted to the hospital for long were noted and only filled the questionnaire once. A response rate of 85% was achieved. The data were stored and analyzed with SPSS version 25.

Results of Study

Description of Sample

The respondents in this study were mostly above 40years of age. The clinics are the Gastrointestinal Clinic, Cardia Clinic and General Outpatient Department. The wards are Medical and Surgical wards, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and Arthopaedics. The majority of the respondents were female (190 or 58.8%), married (225 or 69.7%) and educated (204 or 63%) as seen in Table 1. The respondents were mostly educated because the study was carried out in a teaching hospital affiliated with a University. The University staff, their families and students patronize this hospital because of its proximity, the expertise there, and it is a referral hospital to the university sickbay.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
< 21	49	15.2
21-30	84	26.0
31-40	70	21.7
>40	120	37.1
Total	323	100
Gender		
Male	133	41.2
Female	190	58.8
Total	323	100
Marital status		
Single	63	19.5
Married	225	69.7
Divorced/ separated	35	10.8
Total	323	100
Educational Level		
No Formal education	20	6.2
Primary	26	8.0
Secondary	73	22.6
Tertiary	204	63.2
Total	323	100

Table 2, presents the perception of the patients/ clients about nurses' attitude and how this influence their perception of the public image of the nursing profession. For easy understanding and interpretation of the data, Strongly Agree (SA) was merged with Agree (A), and Disagree was merged with Strongly Disagree (SD) (Stephanic, 2015). The majority (166 or 51.4%) of the respondents were of the opinion that nurses treat their patients with respect. Precisely 168 (or 52%) of the respondents agree that nurses are approachable and 166 (or 51.4%) of them agree that nurses are polite and courteous. It is noteworthy that while the percentages of respondents that disagreed with these statements are less (48% and 48.6% respectively), they are still so high and are worrisome.

Table 2: Perception of Patients/Clients on Nurses' Attitude (n=323)

ITEMS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total A	%	Total D	%
1. Nurses treat patients with respect.	36	11.2	130	40.2	96	29.7	61	18.9	166	51.4	157	48.6
2. Nurses are usually approachable.	61	18.9	107	33.1	86	26.6	69	21.4	168	52.0	155	48.0
3. Nurses are usually polite and courteous.	51	15.8	115	35.6	97	30	60	18.6	166	51.4	157	48.6
4. Nurses are friendly and well mannered.	36	11.2	119	36.8	144	44.6	24	7.4	155	48.0	168	52.0

5. Nurses have shouted at me twice or more.	122	37.8	94	29.1	31	9.6	76	23.5	216	66.9	107	33.1
6. Nurses regularly checked temperature & blood pressure* (n=134)	38	28.5	61	45.5	22	16.4	13	9.6	99	74.0	35	26.0
7. Nurses gave me my drugs on time* (n=134)	47	35.1	70	52.2	11	8.2	6	4.5	117	87.3	17	12.7
8. Nurses are hardworking and dedicated to their work.	184	57.0	110	34.0	17	5.3	12	3.7	294	91	29	9
9. I wish to be a nurse / my children/relative.	118	36.5	137	42.4	41	12.7	57	17.6	225	69.7	98	30.3
10. Nursing is a caring profession	92	28.5	97	30.0	71	22.0	63	19.5	189	58.5	134	41.5

SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD =Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree

The point is further underscored by the fact that the majority (52.0 % or 168) of the respondents do not agree that nurses are friendly. A significant majority (70% or 216) of the respondents claimed that nurses have shouted at them at least twice or more on different occasions. This is a rude attitude of the nurses towards their patients.

The respondents, however, had a positive evaluation of the provision of medical or clinical services by nurses. The majority (74% or 99, n=134) of the respondents agree that nurses regularly checked them when they were admitted in the ward, checked their temperature and blood pressure too. Eighty-seven percent (117 n=134) of the respondents agree that their drugs were served on time them by the nurses. Ninety-one percent (294 n=323) of the respondents agree that nurses are hardworking and dedicated to the work.

The respondents' attitude towards nursing as a profession was also in positive terms. Hence, 70% (or 225) of them wished they or their children or relatives could be nurses. Most of the respondents (58.5% or 189) also see nursing as a caring profession.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate patients' perception of nurses' attitudes and how it influences the public image of Nursing. The findings of the study revealed that while a

slight majority of respondents' view nurses as respectful, approachable, polite and courteous, a substantial proportion of them (nearly half) disagree. Parts of the etiquettes of the nursing profession are about being respectful, polite and courteous to all patients irrespective of the ailment they may be suffering from. Patients should be able to approach nurses when they are sick for prompt treatment and management. In the Gambia, a similar finding was reported by bah et.al., (2018) in their study which found that nurses have both positive and negative public images. In Taiwan, Tzeng, (2006) also reported that due to the negative perception of patients to nursing, there is a need to improve the public image of nurses through in-service training. The training should also emphasize on ethics and etiquettes of the nursing profession (Morris-Thompson, Shepherd, Plata, & Marks-Maran, 2011; Tzeng, 2006).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that while a little over half of the respondents consider the nurses to be respectful/polite, a higher majority nevertheless consider nurses to be unfriendly, not well mannered and rude. This is similar to the finding by Vaz e De Braganca and Nirmala (2015) in India that the public perceives nursing as being rude to patients. It also appears to conform with the finding of Bah and Sey-Sawo (2018), that many nurses act as if rudeness is part of the nursing profession. Valiee, Nemat, and Valian (2020)

however, noted that nurses need to be more responsive to patients' questions, be friendly and well-mannered, be patient, and give patients expert care. All these will improve their nurse patients relationships and thereby improve the public image of nursing.

This study revealed that patients/clients have a positive assessment of nurses' performance of their duties or technical nursing service provision. Hence, the vast majority of respondents were satisfied with nursing services received; such as checking on them regularly while on admission, checking their temperature and blood pressure regularly and giving them their medications on time too. The respondents also agree that nurses are hardworking and dedicated to their job. This is consistent with the findings of Glerean *et al.* (2017), Norman (2015) and Olubiyi, Fatimo, Omotoriogun, Obafemi, and Oyewumi (2020) that nurses are kind, caring and hardworking.

A significant finding of this study is that notwithstanding the negative perception of a sizable number of respondents about nurses' attitude and public image, most of them would still wish their children and relatives to have a career in nursing. This is contrary to the findings of Ndiragu, Sarki, Mbenkega & Edwards (2020), Price *et al.* (2019), and Rezaei-Adaryani *et al.* (2012). These authors had argued that consequences of negative public image and perception of the public about nursing include; looking down on the profession, seeing it as a woman profession, and not wishing to have a career in nursing. They even maintain that this has led to a shortage in nursing students and nursing personnel. The high percentages of respondents in this study that wish to have nurses in their family may be influenced by the economic situation in Nigeria, job security, and the relatively high salary of nurses (Olubiyi *et al.*, 2020). Appiah *et al.* (2020) concluded that the right person should be chosen into the nursing profession, right from nursing school to nursing job, in order to reduce the poor ethical attitude of nurses towards their patients which creates patient

apathy to nurses and consequent erosion of public image of the nursing profession.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed at investigating patients' perception of nurses' attitudes and how that impacts their perception of the public image of nurses. This study found that patients have both negative and positive perceptions about nurses and it was influenced by their personal encounters with nurses. The study recommends that new nursing etiquettes which require nurses to work on their social skills and attitudes to complement their technical competence as a way of improving the patient perception of them. Towards achieving these, there is a need for training and retraining of nurses on creating a positive attitudes and stress management. This will reduce behaviour that patients perceive (wrongly or rightly) as uncooperative and hostile. It would also reduce the incidents of nurses talking down to, ridiculing, or shouting at patients. There is also a need for formal recognition and rewarding of friendly Nurses in all clinics and wards to encourage nurses to be friendly. Wearing of name tags by all nurses should be introduced by the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria to facilitate easy identification of nurses and reporting them (if need be) by patients in the complaint box.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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