

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The professional image of nursing as perceived by nurses working in tertiary hospitals Enugu, Southeast Nigeria

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Nurses' image has always been a concern among those in the profession. This study set to determine the professional image of nursing as perceived by nurses working in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State, Southeast Nigeria. The objectives were to assess the factors within the nursing profession that motivates the nurses to practice nursing, determine the organizational factors that inhibit nurses to practice nursing. A cross sectional descriptive study was used. A sample of 281 nurses was used for the study. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. A stratified proportionate sampling was used to select respondents from the study settings while the respondents were selected using systematic sampling technique utilizing the inclusion criteria. Findings revealed that nurses have a negative perception about the profession with overall mean score of 2.43, the major factor within the profession that motivate nurses to continue with the practice of the profession was team work 218(80.7%), organizational factor that inhibits nurses from continuing with the practice of the profession was poor remuneration 150(55.6%) and upgrading the diploma schools 195(72.2%). It was recommended that nurses should be encouraged to be self motivated and continue with the practice of nursing as a career, the government should give adequate remuneration to the nurses and Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria should upgrade the diploma schools to degree awarding institutions.

**Key words:** Nursing, profession image, Southeast Nigeria, tertiary hospitals.

## INTRODUCTION

Nursing is a health care profession which is focused on the care of individuals, families and communities so that they can attain, maintain or recover optimum health. Nurses care for individuals of all ages and cultural background who are healthy and ill in a holistic manner based on the individuals' physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, social and spiritual needs. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the image of nursing was that of an inferior, undesirable occupation (Waters, 2005). It was often associated with prostitutes, widows, women from

poor families and other female criminals. Due to the involvement of the aforementioned type of people, the reputation of nursing was low in the society and the attitude of people and nurses towards it was negative and nursing was seen as employment that needed neither study nor intelligence (Patidar, et al, 2011). Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp who was from an affluent family improved the profession drastically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This made people to gradually begin to accept nursing as a respectable profession in the society. The image of both nurses and nursing as a profession are vital in the successful recruitment and retention of staff in the health industry. According to Waters, (2005) nurses are the backbone of the health care sector and

are fundamental in the delivery of quality care for all the inhabitants of a country. Jarrah (2013) assert that the image of nursing has changed remarkably within the past 50 years, the nursing profession has faced different cultural challenges including a negative image which has resulted in discouraging people from joining the profession. The attitude of most nurses is believed to be negative towards this profession. A number of factors determine this negative attitude of nurses which include low reputation of the profession in the society, no definite job description for nurses, no criteria for various administrative posts in nursing, no higher degrees for higher posts, dominance by doctors everywhere in the job settings, no autonomy to the profession and poor remuneration (Patidar et al, 2011).

According to Emeghebo (2012) nurses in the United States of America (USA) have a negative perception of the profession and this is influenced by the working environment and interaction with others in the health care arena. A study conducted in USA, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia by Mering and Van Wyk (2013) to explore the perception of health workers and the public about professional image of nursing revealed that they had stereotypical and negative views about nursing.

A study conducted by Takase, Maude and Manias (2006) shows that nurses were proud about their job considering that they are competent health professionals having great responsibilities and felt that they are respected and trusted professionals. In another qualitative study, nurses described their daily work situation as highly stressful and as a scale of balance that oscillated between strain and stimulation. Also, they suggested that there is a mismatch between the desired nursing roles and the actual role in practice. This mismatch is about participation in decision making, professional recognition and opportunity to earn a higher income (Takase, Maude and Manias, 2006).

Despite the great advances in the nursing profession, nurses still face considerable challenges related to its image that impact on status, power and the ability to effect changes in health care (Mering and Van Wyk, 2013). Where there is a negative image of nursing, it will impact on the quality and number of persons who will choose nursing as a profession and therefore might influence young people not to consider nursing as a career option.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nurses' image has always been a concern among those in the profession. The decision to enter nursing, to remain in nursing, to promote nursing and to further a career in nursing maybe as a result of the nurses' perception of the image of the profession (Emeghebo, 2012). Nurses in contemporary Nigerian hospitals are less caring, committed and dedicated to meeting the needs of clients. Most nurses are resistant to change, professional

development and advancement. In nursing practice and education, some nurses tend to hold onto previous knowledge and skills without making efforts to improve and maintain new skills (Obadiya, 2011). Most nurses are not willing to accept the challenges of staying abreast with education and development of new skills in their areas and levels of nursing practice. Similarly, the natural qualities expected to be found in nurses (punctuality, selfless service, among others) is virtually absent these days. This has serious implication for nursing practice.

The greatest challenge of nursing in Nigeria is the nurse herself. The industrial strike action embarked upon by Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU) among nurses in Nigeria on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014 is an issue of concern and conflict among nurses. The Graduates Nurses Association of Nigeria (GNAN) currently known as University Graduates of Nursing Sciences Association of Nigeria (UGONSA) and the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) has been at loggerheads since the resumption of the strike. The UGONSA refused to join the industrial strike stating that their interests such as implementation of internship programme for university graduate nurses, starting point of scheme of service from level 10 for university graduate nurses and agitation for nurses to become consultants etc were not represented in the request which NANNM presented to the government for implementation. This action seems to have torn the profession in bits and the image of the profession dented.

Furthermore, the researchers observed during clinical postings and subsequent interaction with nurses in the clinical areas noticed series of complaint on the image of the nursing profession. Nurses often make comments like "I will leave nursing profession", "nurses are not united", "nurses are the ones killing themselves", "nurses are confused", "nurses sabotage themselves a lot", "nursing needs revival", "nurses lack autonomy; they only carryout the physicians orders" and other derogatory statements. This necessitates the researchers to investigate the perception of the image of nursing profession among nurses working in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of the image of nursing profession among nurses working in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State, South East Nigeria.

## Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the perception of nurses towards the practice of nursing among nurses working in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State.
2. Identify the factors within the nursing profession that motivates the nurses working in tertiary hospitals in

Enugu State to continue with the practice of nursing as a career

3. Determine the organizational factors that inhibit nurses from continuing with the practice of nursing as a career among nurses working in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State.

4. Identify ways in which the image of nursing profession can be improved among nurses working in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State.

### Hypothesis

There will be no significant relationship between the nurses' years of clinical experience and their perception about the nursing profession.

### Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is delimited to the perception of the image of nursing profession in terms of their attitude, views and beliefs about the nursing profession. It is also delimited to nurses working in the clinical area in tertiary hospitals in Enugu State irrespective of their educational background, age, rank, gender.

### Operational Definition of Terms

**Perception:** Refers to the belief, views and understanding nurses have concerning the image of nursing profession as a result of their past and present experiences in the course of their practice. A total mean score of  $\geq 2.5$  indicates positive perception.

**Professional Image:** The general impression that nurses have and present to the public and other nurses about nursing profession.

**Tertiary Hospitals:** This implies third tier health care facilities where nurses work and care for patients on admission.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research design

The research design was a cross sectional descriptive study.

### Study setting

This study was conducted in the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH) Ituku Ozalla, Enugu and National Orthopaedic Hospital, Enugu (NOHE). UNTH Ituku Ozalla is located along Enugu Port Harcourt express way in Nkanu East Local Government Area in

Enugu State. The hospital was established as a standard General hospital and became a full teaching hospital in 1976. There are nine training schools/ programmes It is a teaching hospital which renders 24 hours services and responsible for training high level medical personnel. It is a 500 bedded health care facility with 41 main departments. It is designated as cardiothoracic centre of excellence and therefore a referral centre for cardiothoracic cases in Nigeria.

National Orthopaedic Hospital, Enugu is located at Enugu-Abakaliki express road. It is a third tier health care facility. It serves as referral centre for states in the south east, south-south, and north central geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The hospital was established in 1970 and is one of the three National Orthopaedics Hospitals in Nigeria that specializes in treating deformities, injuries, and diseases of the bones and plastic surgery. It has 222 beds spread over eight wards.

### Population of study

The population of study comprised of all cadres of nurses working in the Nursing Services Department of UNTH and NOHE. The total populations of the nurses are 665 and 283 respectively. (**Source:** Hospital Records, UNTH and NOHE, 2015).

### Sample Size

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane formula (Chinweuba et al, 2013). The formula is shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(d)^2}$$

Where n = the sample size

N = the population size and

d = the level of precision (assumed to be 0.05 at 95% confidence interval).

A total of 281 was the sample for the study.

### Sampling technique

Simple random sampling technique was used to select two out of the four tertiary hospitals in Enugu State. Also simple random sampling was used to select the wards/units from the study settings. A proportionate sampling technique was used to determine the total number of respondents from each of the study settings. 84 and 198 nurses were selected from NOHE and UNTH respectively. The respondents were selected by systematic sampling technique using the wards/units staff rosters utilizing the inclusion criteria of nurses present during the time of data collection and willing to participate in the study.

### Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection was a researcher developed

**Table 1. Demographic data of respondents****n=270**

The mean age of respondents is 37.01 ± 8.65

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>percentage</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	26	9.6
	Female	244	90.4
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	76	28.3
	Married	194	71.7
<b>Professional Qualification</b>	RN/RM	116	43
	RN/other specialties	62	23
	BSc Nursing/BNSc	75	27.7
	MSc Nursing	17	6.3
<b>Cadre</b>	Nursing Officer II	12	4.4
	Nursing Officer I	24	8.9
	Senior Nursing Officer	30	11.1
	Principal Nursing Officer 11	52	19.3
	Principal Nursing Officer 1	60	22.2
	Asst Chief Nursing Officer	20	7.4
	Chief Nursing Officer	68	25.2
	Asst Director Nursing	4	1.5
<b>Years of Experience</b>	0-5	36	13
	6-10	52	19.4
	11-15	68	25.3
	16-20	72	26.7
	21 and above	42	15.6

questionnaire. It has four sections. Section A consists of the demographic data, section B consists of questions to determine the perception of nurses towards the practice of nursing. Section C consists of questions on the factors within the nursing profession that motivates the nurses to continue with the practice of nursing. Section D consists of the organizational factors that inhibit nurses from continuing with the practice of nursing.

#### **Validity of Instrument**

To ensure validity of instrument, copies of the questionnaire was given to professional colleagues for face validity and supervisor for content validity after which the necessary corrections were made.

#### **Reliability of Instrument**

For reliability of instrument, a pre-test study was conducted using 10% of the sample size of 28 nurses working in Enugu State University Teaching Hospital Parklane, Enugu which is not among the institutions for the study. Data gotten was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Co-relation to determine the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient was 0.716 and the questionnaire was therefore considered reliable.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to obtain ethical clearance for the study, a summary

of the research protocol was submitted to the Health Research Ethical Committee of UNTH and NOHE. Approval was given via Ref no: UNTH/CSA/329/Vol.5 and Ref no: RET/313/III respectively. The researchers' secured informed verbal consent from the respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents was maintained and participation was voluntary.

#### **Method of Data Collection**

Three research assistants were recruited and guided on the purpose of the study, the selection of the respondents and how to administer the research instrument. The researchers and research assistants meet with the nurses in their different wards/units during morning and afternoon shifts from Monday to Friday and distributed the copies of the questionnaire to nurses on duty. The questionnaire was collected at the spot after about 30 to sixty minutes of distribution to avoid sharing of information. Data collection lasted for period of two weeks.

#### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected was manually sorted out and analyzed using descriptive statistics and results were presented in frequency, percentages and mean and tables. Statistical package for social sciences, SPSS (version 20) was used

for the analyses. Cross tabulation with chi-square was used to analyze the hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05.

## RESULTS

Result from table 1 showed that majority 244(90.4%) were females, 194(71.9%) were married and 76(28.1%) single. Majority 116(43%) were holders of RN/RM, 62(23%) had RN/ other specialties qualifications, 75(27.8%) BNSc holders while 17(6.3%) were MSc Nursing holders. The table 1 also shows cadre of respondents to be 4(1.5%) ADNs, 68(25.2%) were CNOs, 12(4.5%) and PNO1 were 60 (22.2%). The respondents years of clinical experience for 0-5years was 35(13%) and 16-20 years with majority of 72(26.7%).

Results from table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents disagreed that nursing is a women's profession with mean score of  $3.07 \pm 0.95$ , that nurses obey doctor's order without questioning ( $3.22 \pm 0.92$ ) and that nursing is stereotyped ( $2.74 \pm 1.08$ ). The respondents agreed that the profession does not receive enough appreciation ( $2.01 \pm 0.86$ ), it is an independent profession by which nurses make decisions for themselves ( $2.23 \pm 1.02$ ), that they will encourage their child to become a nurse ( $1.96 \pm 1.08$ ) and that they will encourage the people they know to become nurses ( $1.78 \pm 0.97$ ). The overall mean score of 2.43 showed negative perception

Results from table 3 indicated that 198(73.3%) of the respondents agreed that Nurses are given the chance to use their own initiative in their work, 218(80.7%) of the Nurses are of the affirmative that Nurses work as a team, 119(44.1%) did not agreed that nurses usually have the interest of their fellow colleague, 163(60.4%) reported yes to other health professionals enjoy working together with Nurses, 165(61.1%) are affirmative that Nursing is a well appreciated profession in the society, 219(81.1%) of the respondents disagreed that the working conditions of Nurses is favorable, majority 237(87.8%) did not agree that the working environment is favorable, 205(75.9%) said that the practice of Nursing provide them with self actualization, 207(76.7%) of the respondents are satisfied with the job and want to continue with the career and majority 209(77.4%) were self motivated to join the profession.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Demographic data of respondents

Majority of the respondents were females while few were males. This can be attributed to the fact that nursing was historically a female dominated profession. The study is in line with (Zamanzadeh et al 2013) who said that a historical review of nursing reveals that the perception of

nursing as a gender segregated profession, meant only for females which emerged when Florence Nightingale firmly established nursing as a woman's occupation. It is also in line with Achilles, (2010) who stated that nursing is associated with femininity and powerlessness. Also, majority of the respondents were RN/RM holders while few were degree holders. This result shows lack of appropriate education base for the nurse as majority of them are trained at diploma level. According to Ingwu (2009) in order for the nurse to be effective, they must have a broad and sound knowledge base so that they can make an informed decision. He further stated that many studies looking primarily at clinical decision have found that nurses use intuition and experience. The nurse needs knowledge and skills relating to the cognitive process of problem solving. This can be attributed to the fact that degree in Nursing is a new trend in nursing profession and most Universities do not offer it but the diploma schools have always been in existence and was the major training for nurses before now.

### Perception of nurses towards the practice of nursing

Findings revealed that nurses have a negative perception with overall mean score of 2.43 towards nursing profession. This can be attributed to many issues surrounding the profession in Nigeria for instance, nurses without degree in Nursing are not promoted above rank of Chief Nursing Officer and those with degree in nursing are not allowed to go for internship. It is more likely as a result of nurses not usually being part of the decision making body where important decisions concerning the health sector are made and so on. This finding is in line with Emeghebo (2012) assertion that nurses have negative perception of the profession as they progress through their career which is influenced by working environment and interactions with others in the health care arena. This also agrees with Wang et al (2011) to explore the perceptions of the nursing profession and learned experiences of male students in a baccalaureate nursing programme in Changsha, China which showed that the perception of nursing was negative.

The findings is in contrast with the work conducted by Jarrah (2013) in Balqa Applied University, Jordan to find out the perception of associate nursing students towards nursing profession which showed that associate nursing students generally have a significant positive perception about the image of the nursing profession. It is also in contrast with the cross sectional survey done by Patidar et al (2011) to explore the perception of outgoing nursing students towards nursing profession which revealed that perception of nursing profession among nursing students is changing towards positive side.

From the findings, the respondents would encourage their children and the people they know to become nurses respectively. This finding agreed with the cross sectional study carried out by Milisen et al (2009) to des-

**Table 2.** Perception of nurses towards the practice of nursing.

Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Nursing is a woman's Profession	24(8.9%)	30(11.1%)	114(42.2%)	102(37.8%)	3.07	0.95
An extremely difficult profession that does not receive enough appreciation	120(44.4%)	82(30.6%)	51(18.9%)	7(6.3%)	2.01	0.86
An independent pro-Nurses make decisions for themselves	59(21.9%)	88(32.6%)	95(35.2%)	28(10.4%)	2.23	1.02
Nurses obey doctors orders without questioning	12(4.4%)	26(9.6%)	107(39.6%)	125(46.3%)	3.22	0.92
Nursing is stereotyped	29(10.7%)	57(21.1%)	111(41.1%)	73(27%)	2.74	1.08
I will encourage my child to become a Nurse	57(21.3%)	128(47.8%)	49(18.3%)	34(12.7%)	1.96	1.08
I will encourage people I know to become nurses	59(22%)	143(53.4%)	48(17.9%)	18(6.7%)	1.78	0.97

cribe the professional self- image among students in their final year of baccalaureate education in the Flemish region of Belgium which revealed that most of the students were proud of becoming nurses and would recommend nursing to others and would choose nursing again as a field of study. It also agrees with the study conducted by Buerhaus et al (2005) which has it that RNs would recommend a career in nursing to a qualified high school or college student.

**Factors within the nursing profession that motivates the nurses to continue with the practice of nursing**

The finding showed that majority 237(87.8%) respondents stated that the working environment is not favorable. This can be attributed to the fact that the necessary instruments and equipments needed by the nurses to work with are not usually available in the hospital wards. This finding is in accordance with the study conducted by Buerhaus et al (2005) who identified a negative work environment as one of the main reasons for the nursing shortage. This is also in agreement with the work conducted by Heinen et al (2013) to determine the factors associated with nurses' intention to leave the profession across 10 European countries which showed that elements of work environment are associated with intention to leave the nursing profession.

Findings revealed that majority of the respondents were self motivated to join nursing profession. This agrees with a Patidar et al (2011) assertion that majority of the nurses were self motivated to join the profession. Majority of the subjects stated that they were satisfied with the job and want to continue with the practice of nursing as a career. This is probably because most of them have attained a reasonable height in the profession and thus will not want to leave the profession and begin afresh to look for new jobs. The findings agrees with the survey conducted by Buerham et al (2005) result showed that nurses level of satisfaction increased from 21% in 2002 to 34% in 2004. However, finding is in contrast with Becks (2012) revealed that intent to stay in the nursing profession was low among the nurses.

**Organizational factors that inhibits nurses from continuing with the practice of nursing**

Majority of the respondents said that the remuneration is not commensurate with the job they do. This is probably because of shortage of nurses' manpower in the hospital where one nurse - patient ratio is above the recommended. More so, nurses are not well regarded and their job not well appreciated in Nigeria unlike other developed and developing countries where they are well paid. This finding is in line with Bailey (2010) who stated

**Table 3.** Factors within the Nursing profession that motivates Nurses to continue with the practice of Nursing.

Responses	Yes N(%)	No N(%)
Nurses are given a chance to use their own initiative in their work	198(73.3%)	72(26.7%)
Nurses work as a team	218(80.7%)	52(19.3)
Nurses usually have the interest Of their fellow colleagues at Heart	119(44.1%)	151(55.9%)
Other health care team usually enjoy working together with Nurses	163(60.4%)	107(39.6%)
Nursing is a well appreciated Profession in the society	165(61.1%)	105(38.9%)
The working conditions of Nurses are favorable	51(18.9%)	219(81.1%)
The working environments of Nurses are favorable	33(12.2%)	237(87.8%)
Nursing provide me with self actualization	205(75.9%)	65(24.1%)
I am satisfied with the job and want to continue with the practice of Nursing as a career	207(77.4%)	63(23.3%)
I was self motivated to join the Profession	209(77.4%)	61(22.6%)

that nurses leave the profession mainly because of low pay and job satisfaction. Also, majority of the respondents said that much conflicts being in nursing was a factor that inhibits nurses from continuing with the practice of nursing as a career in Nigeria. This may be because some nurses have the interest of other health care workers more than their own colleagues. This finding is not in line with any study.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, nurses have a negative perception about the profession. Remuneration not being commensurate with the job, many conflicts among nurses and many conflicts among nurses and other medical staff were the organizational factors that inhibit nurses from continuing with the practice of nursing as a career in Nigeria.

This implies that nurses should be encouraged to change their mind set about the profession and inculcate team spirit as this is very important for professional growth.

Nurses should be assertive in dealings with themselves and members of the health care team in collaboration to render effective and quality care to patients. Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria which is the statutory body in charge of regulation of nursing education and practice in Nigeria should upgrade the diploma schools by merging them with the University programme.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Nurses should be encouraged to be self motivated and continue with the practice of nursing as a career. This will create awareness on her duties/roles as important as any other member in the health care team and working together with other team member

The government should give adequate remuneration to the nurses and provide the necessary equipment to facilitate their roles in order to motivate them to achieve their primary purpose which is ensuring the quick recovery of the patients.

There should be implementation of internship program

which would help prospective nurses acquire the practical skills needed to function more effectively as qualified nurses in the society.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria should stop approving new diploma training schools and should upgrade the existing diploma schools to degree awarding institutions. This will ameliorate the existing conflict between the various interest groups in the profession.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited with paucity of literature on the topic in Nigeria and also lack of sufficient finance for a more elaborate study.

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