

**NURSING AS A CAREER: First year Students' perception of and
the reasons for their choice of Nursing as a career.**

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Abstract The purpose of this thesis was to provide information for the school authorities to be able to improve on the nursing degree program. This was done by finding out the perception of nursing career for the first year nursing students in the international program in JAMK University of Applied sciences and getting to know what influenced their choices of the nursing career. The research was carried out using qualitative research method where closed and open-ended questions were used in data collection. A total of 26 answered questionnaires. Questions asked revealed students' understanding of the nursing career as that which involves care, help, professional skills and responsibility, their reasons for studying nursing were that it provides personal satisfaction, job security and they possess the needed potentials required of the nursing profession, and the influences for their choice of nursing career that it provides personal satisfaction, job security and they possess the needed potentials required of the nursing profession. A follow up study of the same group of students after a year or so is recommended. To find if their perceptions changed, if their expectations on their studies and career are met and what their future expectations are in the career.		
Keywords Nursing career, Perception of nursing career, Nursing students, Attitudes, Influences, Choices, Nursing history, nursing shortage		
Miscellaneous		

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1 INTRODUCTION

Nursing is defined as the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations (American Nurses Association, 2012). It is also defined as the use of clinical judgment in the provision of care to enable people to improve, maintain, or recover health, to cope with health problems, and to achieve the best possible quality of life, whatever their disease or disability, until death (Royal College of Nursing 2003, 3).

Nursing is widely regarded as a noble profession in the society because of the core value it promotes in its practice-which is the care of life. Public opinion polls identify the nurse as a person who makes the healthcare system work for them. Therefore, a nurse is an important person and nursing an equally important career to the health care system. (Booth 2002, 392- 340.)

In this paper we will look at the global view of nursing, nursing education and the perceptions of nursing career which will help us to relate with the target group of study. The data will be collected from students having an international background which means they are able to work anywhere in the world after their studies.

There is an increasing evidence of imbalance in the global nursing work force supply and demand. (The International council of nurses 2004; WHO 2006; Imison et al. 2009.) Worldwide, there also exists a shortage of nurses when

compared to the required services for them. (Attree, Flinkman, Howley, Lakanmaa, Lima-Basto & Uhrenfeldt 2011, 787).

In Finland nursing shortage has been a cyclic phenomenon since the 70's, 80's and earlier 90's. However, the early 90's witnessed a run of unemployment due to a drop in demand for nursing so much that young nurses could not get employment positions. As a result, they had to move to other areas of profession. This increased shortage in supply of nursing which reached critical and difficult level when compared to other areas of employment in Finland as reported by the Finnish ministry of employment and Economy. (Attree et al. 2011, 787.)

Therefore there is need to increase recruitment of nurses into the healthcare institutions and also devise ways to retain the nurses. This is a major challenge in today's nursing shortage environment as there are many factors that determine the reasons why a Registered Nurse (RN) would accept a certain job and whether they will still work in the same institution after the employment or move to other more gainful areas of employment. (American Nurses Association, 2013.)

Tackling this global trend has seen several measures employed in different countries. Most notably in developed countries, the measures are far reaching, all inclusive and futuristic in execution. In the United States for example, for several years, the enrollment of nursing students for bachelor's degree programs declined as reported by Association of colleges of nursing. Strategies were developed to provide a long run solution to the problem. Some of these strategies are recruiting high school students, committing

millions of dollars to support the nursing programs and offering scholarships for students who agree to work in long term facilities. (Nevidjon & Erickson 2006, 464.)

In Finland, the measures taken are quite similar; JAMK University of Applied sciences increased the intake of students in the past three academic years. In 2011 there was an increase in the annual intake quota for English-taught degree programmes. The intake quota increased from 190 to 210 places in all degree programmes, where 10 additional study places were allocated to the nursing degree programme. (JAMK University of applied sciences, 2011.)

In year 2013 the intake was 30 students in the international nursing programme and it increased to 40 in year 2014 (JAMK University of applied sciences 2012 & 2013). JAMK University of Applied Sciences has a provision of transfer to another degree programme within the same field of study only if the degree programmes have had the same selection criteria (JAMK University of Applied Sciences, 2013).

Therefore, it has become expedient to identify what the perceptions of prospective students are about nursing and what were or are the reasons for their choice of nursing as a career so that the programme authorities can take measures to improve on the courses that would guide the students to take the right path, sustain motivation, arouse more enthusiasm and retain them in this chosen career.

2 NURSING PROFESSION

2.1 History of Nursing

The nursing profession has developed throughout history in that earliest nurses never attended nursing school; they were often nuns and other women who provided care for the sick, poor, or homeless without family support. During the middle ages, early hospitals were operated by nurses who were affiliated with religious organizations. (Nursing school path, 2012.)

The history of professional nursing traditionally began with Florence Nightingale who was a well-educated daughter of wealthy British parents, where she defied the social conventions to become a nurse which was not a respectable career for a well educated and bred lady. She believed that nursing provided an independent calling which was full on intellectual and social freedom for women who had less career options at the time. In 18th and 19th centuries, nursing profession expanded into care of soldiers during prominent wars including the Crimean war in 1853 where Florence Nightingale served as a nurse with her trained nurses too who reorganized the barracks military hospital. (D'Antonio & Buhler-Wilkerson, 2013.)

She later authored a book by the name 'Notes on nursing' between 1856 and 1860, which was a guideline for nurses and would go ahead and she open one of the first nursing schools, The Florence Nightingale School of Nurses In 1860, in London (Nursing school path, 2012).

At the end of the 19th century, more nurses started working towards leadership and education policy in nursing schools, therefore recognizing their roles as more than bedside caregivers. In the 20th century, nursing continued to evolve to having professional organizations and new programs designed to specifically address nursing profession challenges. Nursing skills developed more during this time and nurses gained greater roles with more critical functions and not being a doctor's assistant only but expanded into many specialties. (Op. cit. 2012.)

The increasing emphasis on national and international work in developing countries and the advocacy of healthy and safe environments has strengthened the nursing profession. World Health Organisation (WHO) supports and recognizes nursing as the backbone of most health care systems around the world. (D'Antonio & Buhler-Wilkerson, 2013.)

2.2 Shortage of Nurses

The multidisciplinary Global Advisory Group of the World Health Organization has acknowledged the worldwide nursing shortage. The shortage is due to the fact that fewer people are choosing nursing as a profession and the current nurses worldwide are aging. (Booth 2002, 392-400.)

The Majority of member countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), including high income countries, report nurse shortages (OECD 2009), and the WHO reported in 2006 that almost all Western- European and Scandinavian countries have a shortage of nurses which is more likely to increase and persist (Op. cit. p. 787).

Shortage of nurses has reached a crisis point for health services internationally and this shortage has repercussions for the next generation of nurses which means there will be workforce shortage and this holds implications for development of nursing research and continued practice development (McDermid, Peters, Jackson & Daly 2012).

Due to aging of current nurse faculty and undersupply of well-prepared nurses there are feelings of uncertainties, anxiety and isolation associated with the changed responsibilities. (McDermid, et al. 2012.) The shortage is said to be also due to factors related to wage, work, job satisfaction or dissatisfaction demographic or workplace factors which determine whether the nurse switches from healthcare to non-healthcare roles. (Kankaanranta & Rissanen 2007, 2).

The shortage of nurses doesn't affect all countries because in some European countries and some healthcare areas there is no real nurse shortage (Attree et al. 2011, 787). An example would be of Poland, which has sufficient registered nurses, though many migrate to earn more money by working in a foreign country (Pedersen 2008).

In Finland, it has been estimated that a quarter of the Finnish population will be over 65 years old of age by 2020 which will raise the demand for healthcare services and advances in medical practice and technology. There will be changes in the public expectations in health care system which will increase demand for Registered Nurses. (Kankaanranta *et al.* 2008, 2.) Many retirements are expected in the coming years, however, there are fewer

replacements for them. Some reports say that 1 in 5 nurses are expected to leave the profession within the next 5 years. (Kankaanranta *et al.* 2008, 2.)

There is urgent need to retain nurses for the profession because of the shortage and growing intentions to leave the profession. The reasons given by a cross sectional research done in 10 European countries state some of the major reasons that would lead to the nurses to leave the profession were, nurse-physician relationship, leadership, participation in hospital affairs, female-gender, working fulltime and burnout (Heinen, Achterberg, Schwendimann, Zander, Matthews, Kózka, Ensio, Sjetne, Casbas, Ball and Schoonhoven, 2013).

To reverse this trend, all the faculties dealing with healthcare issues should work together to make sure that the working conditions of nurses are good and that they can be able to retain them in the profession. As per recruitment, improving recruitment and retention is related to multiple factors, such as improving nursing's image, providing early role models and exposure to careers in nursing, improving working conditions and wages compared to alternative careers, professionalism, and better education. (Brewer, Zayas, Kahn & Sienkiewicz 2006, 56.)

Also, the factors to be considered in recruitment include the faculty's reputation, the salary, the union status and the autonomy while the factors that influence the retention include the ability to be involved in decision making, practice autonomy, management's respect for workers, and the work load and shift arrangements and worked. If the faculty works on these factors,

then the recruitment and retention of staff will help in curbing the problem of nurse shortage. (American Nursing Association, 2013.)

More or so, it is important to start from the core of the issue which is the recruitment of students, who would study to be well-equipped and prepared for the working life and this starts by knowing their perceptions and expectations in the profession and be able to guide them in the right direction and therefore being able to retain them too.

2.3 Perception of Nursing

Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted (The Oxford dictionary 2013). Therefore nursing as a 'concept' is more than just a definition (Mason-Whitehead et al. 2008). It is part of a framework of communication, language of a group and this reflects who nurses are and this definition carries a person's perception (Safari, Saleh, Nassar, Amre & Froelicher 2011, 2).

It is important to ascertain how students perceive nursing and the decision to choose nursing to be their career or any other career is highly influenced by one's previous ideas about the career. The society and media play a major role in influencing the image and ideas the student has of nursing career.

(Mooney, Glacken & O'Brien 2008, 386.)

Studies investigating students' perception of nursing at the beginning of the nursing programme showed that the students had idealistic views of the profession with concepts of caring, compassion and nurturing but after the

exposure to clinical experiences it shifted towards it being more of technical, documentation and procedural skills (Safadi et al. 2011, 2).

A study done in Rio de Janeiro by Spindola, Seibert, Francisco and Clos (2005), of 62 high school students indicated that the students associate the nurse figure to the assisting function and they visualize nurses as an auxiliary of the physician and that they were not aware of the different categories of the nursing profession and the education level of the profession. Therefore it is essential to give information to the youngsters before entering college for them to know what nursing is all about so that they choose the profession knowing what it entails therefore reducing the rate of dropouts and therefore retaining them in the profession.

Vanhanen and Janhonen (2000,1054), say that majority of nursing students perceive nursing as a career which offers opportunities in caring for people and the students also emphasized on employment opportunities while it (nursing) promotes their own personal growth. However, Mendez and Louis (1991), say that nursing students do not always regards nursing as an ideal career. Therefore the students choose nursing for other reasons, like recruitment opportunities.

People are attracted to a profession not because it matches their own values and those of the profession, but because of other personal, social, economic or political factors (Vanhanen et al. 2000, 1055). Nursing career is also perceived as lacking in interest, challenge, creativity, responsibility, varied wages, high status, comfortable conditions compared to other ideal careers (Ben & Becker 2012).

Another perception about nursing is that it is regarded as a career more suitable for females than male and this was found out from a research made in the University of Ontario Canada (Bartfay, Bartfay , Clow & Wu 2010). The research was made from female and male nurses and non-nursing university students. It was found out that it is generally perceived by the society and stereotypes that male nurses are for example, gay, effeminate, less compassionate and caring than female nurses and it contributes negatively to the recruitment and retention of the nursing students in the program and adds to the shortage of nurses (Op.cit. 2010). Due to the fact that the career (nursing) has been associated with feminine characteristics, it is frequently perceived as a woman's job (Mooney, Glacken & O'Brien 2007, 1845).

In general, nursing is perceived favorably for its ability to provide security of employment and a steady income (Op. cit. 2007, 1844). As mentioned earlier, it is perceived as a job that involves caring, nurturing and teaching it also required compassion, patience and strength (Mooney et. al 2008, 386).

Many males perceive nursing as involving working with complex technology and therefore consider nursing to offer career potential (Op.cit. 2008, 387).

A charge nurse at Newham community children's home by the name Andrew MCGovern (2006) wrote an article which brought out the perception of the public on nurses. He said that the public view nurses as people who take care of the sick and he adds in his own perspective nurses care for people at every age, from before birth to death. He also says that nursing is not just a career but it is about making a difference to the patients and their family. As much as it will never be the most financially rewarding career, nurses remain to be the

most recognizable health service symbol. Hard work, effective communication skills and being practical and having the ability to work in a team and act as a leader are some of the characteristics a nurse requires.

A research done of highly academic students in the United Kingdom revealed a different perception of how some people perceive nursing. These students wouldn't consider taking a nursing career because of the perception that doctors cure patients whilst nurses only care for patients. The students also believed that nursing shouldn't be a university programme because they didn't believe that nursing required a university education. In short the students believed that nursing wasn't for high achievers but for low achievers and dim students, therefore, this hindered the students from choosing nursing as their career and therefore chose to undertake other courses which were believed to be in line with their grades and nursing was viewed as the last resort career choice. (Neilson & Lauder 2008, 687.)

2.4 Reasons for choosing nursing career and factors that influence the choice of the career.

The reasons students choose to study nursing are firstly, the education and career aspirations which include the student's belief that nursing is their choice of career and that there is advancement in the nursing career or nursing education. (Tan-kuick & Ng, 2011.)

The second reason is the personal ability which is the stress management, motivation, perseverance and self-confidence. Third reason is the socio-

economic status which includes job security, images, stereotypes and monetary reward and another one is parental and peer encouragement which includes the parental and peer perceptions and support. (op. cit. p. 2.)

Another reason would be the expectations of employment. This boils down to job security, knowing that after studying it is easy to acquire a job and that as a healthcare professional, one cannot go without a job. (Gutierrez , Maranon, Poch & Prat 2010, 236-42.)

Vanhanen and Janhonen (2000), refer to prior research results by Vanhanen et al. (1999), where nursing students' orientation to the profession is defined in terms of orientation to caring, students' own experiences and nursing expertise. These orientations differ with regard to the student's pre-educational experiences of nursing and caring, the meaning of nursing as work to them, and the students' expectations of nursing education and a future career in nursing. (Op. cit. p. 1055.)

A study revealed that registered nurses and nursing students chose to study nursing because of the opportunity for caring and that it was their vocation in life which were congruent with the character and temperament found in the participants (Eley D, Eley R, Bertello & Rogers 2012, 1546).

A study done in Ireland came out with findings that some of the students, who took part in the study, didn't have nursing as their first choice career. Some preferred careers in alternative healthcare professions like occupational therapy, medicine or physiotherapy, some were interested in teaching but due to insufficient grades, they chose nursing, but none of them regretted the choice of nursing career. (Mooney et al. 2008, 389.)

A study done by Raines (2010) brings out the fact that there are individuals who hold a baccalaureate degree in another field and they desire to change careers and more specifically to nursing and the factors that attracted these individuals to nursing were three. These factors were to bring something in nursing, to seek work which is satisfying and to get the missing piece.

One of the many factors that influence people's choices in life is having a career which is good and stable. A study done in Hongkong School, indicated that the students decision to choose or not choose nursing was significantly influenced by factors like Gender, biology subject pursued, previous academic achievement and mother's occupation and the students' perception. The parents, the school teachers, friends, past experiences with career activities and working in hospital were some of the influences that made the students have the intent to study nursing. (Law & Arthur 2003, 23.)

In addition, personal contact with the healthcare world or with someone in the healthcare world influences the decision to choose nursing career. If one experiences a loss of a loved one or near loss of a loved one, this would influence one in choosing nursing as a career, with the intention of helping the loved one or others with similar conditions. (Gutierrez , Maranon, Poch, and Prat. 2010. 236-42.) Knowledge about the career can be the main factor to influence one's decision to study nursing and this could come through family members and exposure to work experience (Mooney et al. 2007, 389).

Research done in Dublin came up with findings that media played a role in the students' choice but it didn't influence them directly in making the choice

but it was acknowledged that the media influences society's impression of nursing as a career. Family, friends and society play important roles in influencing the choice of nursing career and the recruitment of nursing students into the profession. Friends and society are influential to the recruitment of nursing students into the nursing profession. (Op. cit. p. 391.) Gender as mentioned earlier is also a factor which can lead to choice of nursing career or not. According to the high achieving students, they had a stereotype image of female nurses being viewed as sexual objects and male nurses as homosexuals therefore, being a dissuading factor to choosing nursing career. (Neilson & Lauder 2008, 684.)

The media played a major role in the career choice of students in the United Kingdom, to the high academic achieving students whose main source regarding nursing appeared to be through television programmes and were reliant in the small amount of television programmes for their image of nursing and nurses (Op. cit. p. 684).

2.5 Global view of nursing studies

Nursing practice encompasses autonomous and collaborative care for individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings (The international council of nurses 2010).

Due to safe and standardized nursing care, all countries have set up minimal qualifications for entry into practice and continuing of nursing education. European and South American countries enact national systems for licensing nurses due to the centralized health systems (D'Antonio & Buhler-Wilkerson

2013). To become a nurse, one has to study for it and different countries, continents have different requirements to becoming a nurse.

In the United States, to practice nursing professionally, one must graduate from a state-approved school of nursing. A four year university program, a two-year associate nursing degree program, or a three-year diploma program and then upon graduation they have to pass the RN licensing examination which goes by the name National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN). (Nursetogether 2012.)

Associate's degree in Nursing in the United States takes 2-3 years and is offered at community colleges, or senior colleges and universities. The studies include course work in general education and nursing and it prepares graduates for licensure and registered nursing and students are prepared to practice in structured care settings. The baccalaureate is studied in senior colleges and universities and the graduates are licensed as registered nurses and employment in a variety of inpatient setting and ambulatory care settings. The program lasts for four years and upon completion of a state approved program, graduates may take the Registered Nurse state licensing examination. (Gilbert 2013.)

In Africa, the nursing studies are different for different countries. South Africa is one of the countries in the Africa's south. The bachelor of Social Science in Nursing in South Africa takes 4 years with total Credits of 568 and additional 4 credits for students who are not computer literate. This enables a student to register as a nurse (general, Psychiatric and community health) and midwife at the south African Nursing council (SANC). (Prof. Zyl 2013, 7.)

Students have to meet specified qualifications to get admitted to the program. Students have contact lessons which are compulsory; both practical and theoretical. Those students who attend fewer than 80% of contact lessons are not allowed to take part in the examination and are regarded as they have failed the module and have to retake. (Op. cit. p. 8.)

The students have to have the clinical experience which is compulsory and it consists of 2 components, and these are the scheduled nursing experiential learning contact sessions and work-based hours in health services institutions (Op. cit. p. 9).

The students have to pass in all the modules and if one fails they are assessed after 6 months. After doing the practices and studying, the students do an examination, which is the final examination for them to qualify to be nurses. If the student obtains a combined average mark of 75% in all nursing modules, 70% in any extra modules and is able to complete the degree within the minimum prescribed period, they are awarded a distinction. (Op. cit. p. 10.)

Students are usually compelled to register with the South African Council as students in Nursing and after the completion of the degree B.Soc. Sc (Nursing) they are registered with the South African Nursing Council as professional nurses (Op. cit. p. 10).

In Europe, studying nursing means one can practice in any of the European Union member countries, but the only problem is language part because to work in another European country one has to have a good knowledge of

around 'A' level standard (Freeney, 2008). 'A' level standard is the later of two standardized tests in a secondary school subject, used as a qualification for entrance into a university (The American heritage, 2009).

Nursing studies in Finland are done in the Universities of Applied sciences. They are taught both in English and Finnish, which means there are two groups of students, those taught in Finnish and those taught in English. In JAMK University of Applied Sciences, The degree is of health sciences and the course takes 3, 5 years which is equivalent to 210 ECTS. In JAMK, studies are based on a personal study plan, which allows a student to choose their own career path. After the graduation, the graduates qualify to work as a registered nurse and the qualification meets the strict quality requirements set by the EU in the European Union Legislation.

The nursing programme covers various areas of health example basics of nursing, nursing in different health-care settings, family and community nursing among others. There is practical training which is implemented in several phases of the study period and it carters for a third of the whole programme. The studies consist of lectures, assignments, group work, exams, virtual studies, practical training and for the students to graduate they have to write a bachelor's thesis on a topic of choice and interest. This is where the student learns skills, gets knowledge and learns decision-making together with the teachers, experts and fellow-multi professional students. The studies are mostly practical oriented, therefore a student is allowed and expected to be self-directed in readiness to learn. (JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Degree Programme in Nursing 2013.)

3 PURPOSE, AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

Identifying the reasons and perceptions of nursing as a career for first year Students in the English Degree program in nursing in JAMK University of Applied Sciences is the aim of this study.

The purpose is to provide useful information for the school authorities to be able to improve on the nursing program so as to develop and sustain interest of first year nursing students, enhance their motivation and consequentially develop their competences after graduating from the school.

Research Questions

What is the First year students' perception of Nursing as a career?

What are the reasons for their choice of Nursing as a career?

What influenced their choice of Nursing?

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

4.1 Research Methodology

The method used is qualitative research and according to Kananen (2011, 37), qualitative research is applicable when a new phenomenon needs to be understood and what it is all about.

Qualitative research is suitable when there is no knowledge, theories or research results available on a phenomenon in which the aim is to acquire a deep understanding of it. The aim is to create new theories and hypotheses, triangulation, so as to acquire a precise description of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research doesn't deal with numbers but it helps us understand a phenomenon. Qualitative research has a main rule that says the less you know about the phenomenon, the more probable qualitative research is possible.

When the phenomenon is quite unknown and new, only qualitative research is possible. (op. cit. p 41.)

Qualitative research is most useful in answering 'why?' and 'how?' questions (Marshall 1996, 522) and it is characterized by the relationship between the researcher and the participants being close and being based on a position of equality as human beings. The researcher should be able to communicate with and treat the participants as equals. Qualitative research also focuses on the emic perspective, the views of the people involved in the research, their perceptions, meanings and interpretations of the phenomenon. (Holloway & Wheeler 2002, 10.)

The researchers in qualitative research describe, analyse and interpret data after or while collecting the data. It is required that in qualitative approaches that the researchers immerse themselves in the natural setting of the people whose thoughts and feelings they wish to explore. (Op. cit. p. 10.)

4.2 Setting

The study site is JAMK University of Applied Sciences which is an attractive, internationally oriented higher education institution with a strong role among developers of the Jyväskylä region and central Finland. The institution hosts about 8000 students. It is located in Jyväskylä city, in central area of Finland. (JAMK University of Applied Sciences 2012.)

The overall public image of JAMK was rated the best among the universities of applied sciences. In 2000, the Ministry of Education nominated Jyväskylä team academy as a centre of excellence in education. JAMK University of Applied Sciences is internationally oriented and it is manifested by the versatile cooperation with international partners, in terms of project activity and education.

The Internationalization of the institution and Jyväskylä city has been supported by the over 2500 international degree and exchange students over the past 10 years who study and enjoy JAMK's high-quality education and get the opportunity to complete their studies in close interaction with working life. (Op.cit. 2012.)

In JAMK University of Applied Sciences, there are three Bachelor degree programs offered in English. These are Degree program in logistics

engineering, international business and nursing. There has been a transformation of the international nursing degree programme student intake from just 16 to 40. (JAMK University of Applied Sciences 2013.)

4.3 Participants and data collection

Kananen (2011, 53), says that qualitative research cannot define the number of participants in advance as sometimes the number of people affected by or involved in the phenomenon is so small that all of them can be interviewed or it could be so large that the answers keep on repeating themselves, so according to Kananen, some books state that 12- 15 interviewees are sufficient.

The method used in sampling is purposive sampling method. Sampling is the selection method or procedure of a small proportion of a population to where data is collected (Parahoo 2006, 258).

It is a common strategic sampling method where the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall 1996, 522 - 525). The researcher not only decides on the participants (sample) but also on the time and location of the research. The criteria for the selection must be clearly identified. (Holloway & Wheeler 2002, 127.)

In this study, the participants are the JAMK University of applied sciences first year nursing students in the international programme. The participants had just begun their studies and therefore their responses were not influenced by their studies in any way.

The participants were categorized into two groups. Those who were studying nursing as their first career and the second group were those who were studying nursing as their second, third or nth career.

The exclusion criterion was those who had a diploma in nursing or are practical nurses. This exclusion criterion was due to the fact that they are already in the nursing field and their responses will not meet the aims and goals of this paper. Those who were not willing to participate in the research would have been exempted in the question answering.

In qualitative research, there are no rigid rules in that for homogenous samples 6-8 informants suffice and in heterogeneous 12-20 suffice. Some writers mention that most often a sample consists of between 4- 40 informants though certain research projects have and many as 200 informants.

(Holloway& Wheeler 2002, 128.) A total of 26 students participated in the survey and after the exclusion criteria, only 21 transcripts were left for use.

A formal permission was submitted to the department of Nursing in JAMK University of Applied Sciences, for approval before the commencement of the research. When the permission was granted, all the participants were informed of the aim, expectation and the research procedure and they were asked to sign the consent forms which explained the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The participants were also informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that when it gets to a point they felt like withdrawing, it would be accepted and they were not forced to participate.

The data collection was done through questionnaires. Open-ended and closed questions were used. Open-ended questions give the respondents the opportunity to frame their answers in their own words and give respondents freedom to express themselves. The length of response in open-ended questions varies from one individual to another. (Parahoo 2006, 290.)

In the closed-ended questions the respondents are given categories and options to choose from, therefore the respondents don't have the ability to express themselves freely (Op. cit. p. 286). The closed questions are asked when the researcher knows the potential answers and only requires respondents to select the one (s) that apply to them (Op. cit. p. 288). Closed questions are used for the coding purposes and they will help in the results analysis.

The students were briefed about the task and questionnaires were going to be distributed to them and given time to answer in class so that maximum amount of questionnaires were answered by the participants.

The questionnaire was tested and it turned out that it would take about 10 to 20 minutes depending on the understanding of the students and how fast they respond to the questions. The data was interpreted and thereafter kept safely until the presentation of the researcher's findings and thereafter the transcripts were destroyed.

4.4 Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse data and the inductive method used. In qualitative research, data analysis starts or takes place during data collection and thereafter (Parahoo 2006, 391). It is not a linear process and not all qualitative forms take the same approach to data analysis. The process is a complex, time-consuming and iterative activity which should have quality time allocated to it. (Holloway & Wheeler 2002, 235.)

In analyzing written material data, the text was read through thoroughly several times and the researcher interpreted the material by compression techniques which can be used to find the structures hidden in the material (Kananen 2011, 62).

Compression is done by making notes on the margins of the text material to get important meanings from the 'torrent' of words, just like making notes in the margin of books while reading for an exam. Each sentence, clause and paragraph may contain hidden messages and the compression is done by 'naming' the segment by compressing the segment into a word or few words that describes what the segment contains. This technique helps see the units that the material consists of. The text is then converted into a table and coding is done. (op. cit. p. 59.)

Once the transcripts/questionnaires were collected from the participants, the transcripts were sorted out and the ones which didn't meet the inclusion criteria put aside. Then the transcripts were read through for the first time to get the general idea of the responses given. They were read the second time

and 'opening- up' was done by noting all parts that come across as important. Then the third time they were listed down on 3 separate sheets of plain papers and grouping was done into themes. Then analysis required the researcher to begin to explain how the themes are interrelated. The researcher had to constantly read the answered transcripts to look for links, relationships, transitions, stages, phases, preconditions or outcomes in the data. Mapping, construction networks (of relationships between concepts) or using diagrams, are useful techniques used to helping the researchers to make sense of the data. (Parahoo 2006, 393-394.)

5 RESULTS

The results reflected the three important aspects of this research-the perception of nursing career and what it is all about, the reasons for their choice of the career and the influences on the participants in choosing the nursing career. Based on the students' responses to the questionnaires, the results were analyzed and then grouped into categories and sub-categories. On this platform the research questions were carefully analyzed.

5.1 First year student's Perception of Nursing as a career

The students gave their responses on the perception they have on the nursing career and the responses were grouped into three sub categories which were care, help, responsibility and professional skills. (See table 1 below)

Responses	Sub-categories	Question
Provide care for the needy Taking care of people and helping taking care of sick, community and family in a clinical way taking care of helpless and weak people.	Care	Explain in your own words what you think nursing is all about?
Helping patients recover with professional skills	Help	

and effective methods Helping people recover Knowledge and practice of how to help patients		
Helping recover with professional skills and effective methods Taking responsibility of patients health It is hard work working with people	Responsibility and Professional skills	

Table 1: What nursing is all about.

Care

Slightly more than half of the participants thought that nursing is about care which is an important aspect in nursing career. Care is protection; charge. The care aspect which was brought out from the responses was to the needy, the sick, the helpless, weak, helpless. Some responses described the manner the care was or should be given for instance with love, understanding. Example of some participants' responses;

'Providing care for those in need.'

'Generally, nursing's main task is to take care of helpless and weak people, in order to help them recover.'

Help

Along with care was help which was always classed together with care in the answers given by the participants. The students thought that nursing was about helping people to recover, to be healthy mentally and physically to improve life quality and too share love with other people and that it was a profession where a nurse helps patients with knowledge and practice.

Responsibility and professional skills

Also, some participants thought that nursing was about being a professional caregiver with responsibility for people. It was perceived as being an intensive and hard job to work with people and that it is a noble profession which requires practice and knowledge to help patients.

'I think it is a hard work, working with other people. Responsibility, important work'

However, a handful of responses particularly pointed out that the nursing profession is an important job in the society as well as a noble one especially in Finland.

'It is really good profession. Country like Finland needs more nurses and of course it is a noble profession'

Some of them said that they think nursing is a good profession that requires attentiveness, patience, tolerance and knowledge.

'Nursing is about care, determination of integrity and patience, tolerance.'

'It is really a good profession.....and of course it is a noble profession'

5.2 Reasons for choosing the nursing career.

The students' responses concerning the reasons for their choice of studying nursing were arranged into 3 sub categories. (See Table 2 below).

Responses	Sub-Categories	Question
Occupation that I don't get unemployment Easy to find a job It has been my dream for many year It is a suitable job situation	Job situation/Socio-economic factors	Why did you decide to study nursing?
Do something that matters Do something to feed the souls and something that really matters It was my dream to help people	Personal satisfaction	
I think my characteristics meet required nurse traits It is practical and needs to communication a lot	Personal abilities	

with people.		
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Table 2: Reasons for studying nursing

Job situation/Socio-economic factors

The focus was on the reasons why participants chose to study nursing.

Most of the students said the reason for their choice of studying nursing was job security and the assurance of being able to get employment at any time. It is easy for immigrations and the wages and good.

'I decided to study because there is high demand of the profession in Scandinavian countries.'

Personal satisfaction

Personal satisfaction was another reason for their choice of nursing career. The urge to do something that really matters to the society and for themselves. To some of the students, nursing is their dream career, therefore giving them satisfaction of doing what they have always wanted to do.

'I want to do something which would really feed my soul and something that really matters'

'It has been my dream for many years. I want to have a job where I can help other people.'

Others said that they had personal abilities/ characteristics of being a nurse that's why they decided to study nursing and that included the ability to talk a lot with people and that it was very practical.

'I think my characteristics meet the required traits of a nurse'

5.3 Influences of career choice

There were two questions asked to get the answer on what influenced their choice of career. They had to give the reasons why they changed their careers to nursing and what influenced their changes to nursing.

5.3.1 Reasons for change to nursing career.

Responses to the reasons for their change to nursing brought about two subcategories, which were Job situation/socio-economic factors and personal ability. (See table 3 below).

Response	Sub-categories	Question
couldn't get a job suitable job situation work in the real hospital environment	Job Situation/Socio- economic factors	Why did you change to study nursing?
Characteristics suits the quality required for being a nurse Communicate with people	Personal ability	

Table 3: Reasons for changing to nursing from previous Profession

Job Situation/Socio-economic factors

According to the students the reasons for change of career was the job situation/socio-economic factors and personal ability.

The most popular reason for the change of career to nursing was job situation/socio-economic factors. The students said that they changed careers because there were problems in finding jobs after graduating from their previous careers, and that in nursing, it is easier to get a job due to high demand of nurses. Also that there are multiple options in working, that is a nurse can work in different settings. They mentioned that the wages were good and that nursing career was good for immigration purposes too.

'Work in the real hospital environment'

'..Involved with patients and there are multiple options (possibility to work in different setting).'

Personal ability

Some students said that they have the abilities or characteristics of being a nurse. They said that they can communicate with people and that nursing makes them feel more of they can help people.

'Because I have characteristics that suits the quality requires for being a nurse'

5.3.2 Influences to choice of nursing career from previous careers.

The students' responses for influences for career choice were divided into three sub categories which were job situation/socio-economic factors, peer encouragement and feeling of satisfaction. (See table 4 below).

Response	Sub-Categories	Question
couldn't get a job suitable job situation work in the real hospital environment	Job Situation/Socio- economic status	What influenced your choice of nursing career?
Characteristics suits the quality required for being a nurse Communicate with people	Peer encouragement	
Decide to have a new experience Better career, good pay and most importantly mental satisfaction	Feeling of satisfaction	

Table 4: Influences of choosing nursing career.

Job Situation/Socio-economic status

The Job situation/ socio-economic factors was what influenced the students most in changing careers to nursing as they said there is ease in finding a job with a nursing degree and the pay was good.

'Good chance of getting a job as a nurse'

Peer encouragement

Some of them were influenced by their peers groups and friends and even workmates who were already in the nursing field, sick relatives and voluntary activities which they undertook before joining the nursing field.

Feeling of satisfaction

They also revealed that the feeling of satisfaction influenced their choice of the career. The students said that the urge to make a difference and serve the community and have new experiences in nursing career appealed to them. Some said that they have interest in nursing career and they want to work with people to have satisfaction in what they do and to serve humanity.

6 DISCUSSION

From the study findings, the first year nursing student's perception of nursing career, the reasons of choosing the career and the influences for the choice were conveyed. The students said that nursing involved caring and helping others and it was one of the most mentioned reasons for the choice of nursing as a career. This is consistent with a study done by Vanhanen and Janhonen (2000, 1054) which says that majority of nursing students perceive nursing as a career which offers opportunities in caring for people. This finding ensures that caring remains the main essence of nursing and that it shouldn't be undervalued and ignored. This is true as the main idea of nursing is caring for people especially the sick and if some other things like example money is given priority over care, the whole idea of nursing is eroded and it is easy for someone to leave the career for some other career altogether.

Responsibility and Professional skills emerged from the students' perception of nursing as a career. This is reflected by McGovern (2006), where he said that a nurse requires characteristics of work hard, effective communication skills and being practical and having ability to work in a team and act as a leader. He also added that nurses remain to be the most recognized in the health system but it will never be the most financially rewarding career, of which is contrary to what the students expect, as the students expect the career to be financially rewarding.

The main reason for the choice of nursing career from the responses was job situation which was explained in form of job security, easy access to jobs, diverse opportunities in the career. Job situation came out on top because the

students want an occupation where they don't get unemployed which was reflected by a study done by Mooney et al. where they said that nursing is perceived favorable for its ability to provide security of employment and steady income. (Mooney *et al.* 2008).

The fact that there is shortage of nurses worldwide therefore it is easier for graduated nurses to get jobs and they have the job security. Therefore there is job security and the knowledge that after studying it is easy to acquire a job and that as the healthcare professional, one cannot go without a job, makes nursing an ideal career. Gutierrez *et al.* 2010, 236-42). Nursing has good wages and it is easy for a nurse to settle in foreign nations and work (Op. cit. p. 236-42).

Some students said they have characteristics/traits of a nurse and that they wanted to do something that really matters to give them satisfaction. This was explained by Eley D *et al.* 2012 that one of the reasons for study nursing and working as a nurse was that it was an opportunity for caring and that it was a vocation in life which is congruent with the character and temperament of a nurse.

Apparently media did not play any role in influencing the students in their career choice. None of the student mentioned it to be an influence though society and media play a major role in the influence of career choice according to Rooper *et al.* 2006. Then again there could be a possibility that media played a role indirectly just that the students did not see that as being important. A study done in Dublin showed that media played a role in the students' choice

but it didn't directly influence them in making the choice and it influences the society's impression of nursing career. (Mooney et al. 2007, 385-392.)

6.1 Credibility, Dependability and Transferability

The verification of reliability, validity and quality is extremely important in scientific research. Reliability refers to consistency and repeatability of the measurement and research results while validity refers to whether the thesis answers the questions it is intended to answer. This is difficult in qualitative research because they are not easily applicable to social sciences, where the research object is an individual or a group of individuals. These reliability and validity issues are mostly developed in natural sciences example in physics and chemistry. Human being is a feeling and thinking being who can change his opinion for no reason at all, therefore reliability and validity issues should be taken into account at the planning stage, after collecting and analyzing the data. (Kananen, 2011, 66.)

Documentation is one of the ways Kananen (2011, 67), says that gives credibility to the study. Polit and Hungler (1999), Graneheim and Lundman (2003) state that credibility deals with the focus of the research and it refer to confidence in how well data and process analysis addresses the intended focus.

Therefore, documenting reasons for each solution and the choice made in every step of work done is essential. Keeping the diary on all actions

connected to the thesis Kananen (2011, 67). The consistency of interpretation increases the credibility of results according to Kananen. (op. cit. p. 67.)

In qualitative research, saturation is always an important issue. One case is not always enough, if however the nature of the phenomenon is such that only one case is relevant, the researcher has to just do with it and if the phenomenon nature is such that more than one person is involved or affected by it, then, many interviews can be done.

When the results start repeating themselves, then the saturation point has been reached. Another thing is dependability, which is the degree to which data change over time and alterations made in the researcher's decisions during the analysis process. There is risk of inconsistency during data collection if it extends over-time, therefore it is advisable to question the same areas for all the participants. (Graneheim & Lundman 2003, 110.)

Qualitative research does not aim at generalization, even if transferability is a relevant issue as transferability is related to generalization. Polit and Hungler (1999), Graneheim and Lundman (2003) say the transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups. This means that the results are also valid in other similar circumstances. (Op. cit. p 68.) This was achieved by collecting the data in one sitting with the participants. The participants were not allowed to keep the questionnaires for later response.

To facilitate transferability, it is valuable to give clear and distinct description of culture and context, selection and characteristics of participants, data

collection and process analysis. A vigorous and rich presentation of the findings together with appropriate quotations will enhance transferability. (Graneheim and Lundman 2003, 110.)

6.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethics pertains to doing 'Good' and avoiding harm through application of ethical principles. Therefore protection of human subjects or participants in any research study is imperative. (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2001, 93.) Due to the fact that data is collected in this thesis, ethical considerations are taken into account. One of them is autonomy which is done by recognition of participants' rights, and this is done by informed consent where reasonable balance is made in over-informing and under-informing the participants about the exercise to be undertaken and it also means that the participants exercise their rights as autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study. (Orb et al. 2001, 93.) In the data collection process for this paper, autonomy was achieved by giving consent forms to the participants which explained that they about the whole process and that the whole process was voluntary and they could decline if they wished.

This is where anonymity is considered and in small groups where recognition of participants is easy, participant protection identity is considered and they should be told of how the publications will be done. Quotations or other data from participants, even though anonymous, could reveal their identity. Therefore they would approve the use of quotations to be used in publications. (Orb et al 2001, 95.) This was done by pointing the issue out in

the consent form and that they wouldn't be identified and that after the analysis was done, the transcripts would be destroyed.

A formal application was sent to the department of nursing in JAMK University of Applied Sciences, to get the permission to conduct the data collection and informed consents forms were given to the participants and the understanding to ensure that their autonomy, confidentiality and anonymity was signed by the participants to ensure that they understood that was voluntary and if they decided to withdraw from taking part in the activity, they were free to withdraw.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study shows that majority of the students are attracted to the socio-economic benefits of the nursing career. A few say they are in the career because it is their dream to be nurses and to help people. Though majority of the students say that their influence of nursing is due to job security, availability of jobs, good wages, flexibility in working locations but they are not entirely into the socio-economic benefits, but have willingness to help people in need, to make a difference in the society, get involved in something that matters, get to communicate with people, to get fulfillment and also to make the best out of life. So, in conclusion, as much as the socio-economic aspect of the profession comes up so much in the study, the feeling of satisfaction, caring, helping, fulfilled dreams come up too and it shows that the students understand what the career is all about.

The purpose of this study was to provide useful information to the school authorities to improve the nursing programme by improving courses that would guide the students to take the right path, sustain motivation, arouse more enthusiasm and retain them in this chosen career. I would recommend the evaluation of the students' definition of nursing career and guide them to what nursing really entails.

I would also recommend the introduction of seminars with already graduated and working nurses who studied in the international program in JAMK University of Applied Sciences and other AMK Universities of Applied sciences to talk to the students and encourage them and give them incites to the working life of a nurse.

I would recommend the continuation of this study (longitudinal study) for the same group in second year or in their final year to see if their perception of nursing career has changed and if it was what they had expected it to be (were their expectations met?) and if they are confident that they would function well in the working environment and what their plans are for the future in the career.

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9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Kindly answer these questions honestly. You will not be identified from the answers you give and your information will be kept confidential and it will be used only for the purpose of the research and thereafter that the questionnaires and the consent information will be destroyed.

1. Gender Female Male

2. Age range

Please choose your age group

15-20 26-30 36-40 46-50

21-25 31-35 41-45 51-55

3. Explain in your own words what you think nursing is all about?

4. Why did you decide to study nursing?

5. What have you studied (Professional or any) before the decision of studying nursing?

6. Answer the following questions if you have done some academic/professional studies before:

i) Why did you change to studying nursing?

ii) What influenced your choice of nursing career?

Appendix 2: Consent form

Consent to be a research Subject

This research study is conducted by Betty Mkala a final year student at JAMK University of Applied Science and it is to find out the perceptions of nursing career and the reasons for choosing nursing as a career for the first year international students in JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

You will be asked to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 7 questions and it will take approximately 10-20 minutes. The questions will ask for detail about your previous studies, current studies and your reasons and ideas about nursing career and influences for choosing nursing career.

There are no risks for participation in this study. It is safe to participate and all information provided in this survey will remain confidential and reported anonymously with no identification information. After the research is over the questionnaire will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your education.

Thank you so much for your co-operation.

If you have any questions regarding the study, you may contact Betty on betty.mkala@jamk.fi.

I have read, understood and received a copy of the above consent and desire f my own free will and volition to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Key words

Nursing career – an occupation or profession in nursing.

Perception- The act apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding.

Nursing students- A person enrolled in studying nursing.

Attitudes- Manner, disposition, feeling, position etc, with regard to a person, thing; tendency or orientation especially of the mind.

Influences- The capacity of power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions etc of others.

Choices- An act or instance of choosing; selection.