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Nurse students' attitudes toward the nursing profession after witnessing workplace violence

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Abstract

Background: Workplace violence is one of the most compelling problems facing health care sectors all over the world. The detrimental impact of workplace violence extends to affect nurse students who receive their training in clinical areas.

Objective: The study aimed to investigate the impact of witnessing workplace violence during clinical training on the attitudes of Jordanian nursing students toward the nursing profession.

Methods: Cross-sectional design was used in this study. Data were collected through electronic survey questionnaires from 131 nursing students from three nursing schools in Jordan. Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession was used to assess the participants' attitude toward nursing profession.

Results: The results showed that about 34% of student participants witnessed workplace violence during their clinical training. Nursing student participants who did not witness workplace violence showed significantly more positive attitude toward nursing profession than who did witness.

Conclusion: Witnessing workplace violence had a significant negative impact on how nursing students view nursing job.

Keywords: attitudes; nursing profession; nursing students; workplace violence.

Background

Workplace violence is one of the most compelling problems facing large proportion of workers from various labor sectors (Lippel, 2016). Although the concept of workplace violence was widely studied in the literature, there is still no consensus on a universal definition of this concept. This might be attributed to the cultural sensitivity of the workplace violence concept, which means that workplace violence might have different meanings and connotations among different communities which have different socio-political contexts (Galín & Avraham, 2008; Makarem, Tavitian-Elmadjian, Brome, Hamadeh, & Einarsen, 2018). However, the most recognized definition of workplace violence was adopted by the International Labor Office (ILO), International Council of Nurses (ICN), World Health Organization (WHO), and Public Services International (PSI), and it viewed workplace violence as: "Incidents where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, including commuting to and from work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, wellbeing or health" (Richards, 2003, p.2).

According to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA, 2018), around two million workers in USA are suffering from workplace violence yearly (Gotham & Kennedy, 2019). In United Kingdom (UK), it is estimated that 694,000 violent acts were perpetrated against employees in their work in 2017 (Health and

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Executive Safety, 2018). Because of the high-level tension that dominates over the environment of health facilities, health care providers are at the greatest risk of workplace violence (Phillips, 2016). Estimates of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2013) suggested that non-fatal workplace violent accidents in the health care sector were four times more prevalent than any other industrial sector. Nurses who constitute the majority of health care providers were identified as the most victimized from workplace violence in the health care settings (Al-Omari, 2015; Alsaleem et al., 2018; Ferri, Silvestri, Artoni, & Lorenzo, 2016; Phillips, 2016), and this might be attributed to the unique nature of nursing jobs which necessitates nurses to be on the frontlines of health care processes, and spend longer times and maintain close contact with their clients (Berlanda, Pedrazza, Fraizzoli, & de Cordova, 2019).

Workplace violence against nurses is an issue of concern all over the world. A recent study conducted in China showed that the prevalence of violent situations against nurses has increased considerably to 68.3% (Zhang et al., 2017). A systematic review carried out by Azami et al. (2018) in Iran; found that approximately 80.8% of Iranian nurses were exposed to verbal and physical workplace violence. Other studies in Hong Kong (Cheung & Yip, 2017), Saudi Arabia (Alkorashy & Al Moalad, 2016), and Jordan (Al-Omari, 2015) reported prevalence rates of different violence behaviors of 44.6, 47.3, and 67.8% respectively.

Given the global prevalence of workplace violence against nurses, the detrimental impact of this problem might not be limited to nursing staff who are working in the field but also nursing students who receive their training in clinical areas. A study was conducted by Magnavita and Heponiemi (2011) found that nursing students who witnessed or experienced workplace violence during clinical training suffered more from psychological problems particularly feeling of fear, anger, and irritation. These results were congruent with the findings of a survey conducted by Tee, Özçetin, and Russell-Westhead (2016) who found that frequent witnessing of workplace violence by nursing students during clinical training exaggerated their feeling of embarrassment and anxiety, which was reflected negatively on their attitudes toward nursing profession, as 19.8% of nursing students who witnessed violence were giving serious consideration to withdrawal from studying nursing. Similar findings were reported by Cheung and Yip (2017) study who revealed that intention of nursing students to leave nursing was significantly increased after experiencing and witnessing workplace violence. Nursing students' lack of well-defined social or financial bond – that nursing staff have – to the nursing job which might maximize their intention to leave nursing (Magnavita & Heponiemi, 2011), particularly if they found that nursing job will not fulfill their aspirations in a safe and promising career.

Occurrence of workplace violence incidents against nursing staff in the presence of nursing students might lead to a conflict between what those students learned during their study course particularly in terms of professional and ethical conduct on one hand, and workplace violence they experienced or witnessed during practical training in clinical settings on the other hand (Tee et al., 2016). This conflict might lead to devastating effects on nursing students if they did not receive appropriate support measures. Those support measures might be provided through provision of training courses to enhance their awareness of workplace violence and to clarify misconceptions that might arise about nursing profession as result of workplace violence phenomenon. For these training programs to be more effective, they should be based on perspectives, attitudes, and misconceptions of nursing students who witnessed workplace violence toward the nursing profession.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which forms the theoretical basis of the current study, each nursing student is motivated by needs. The five categories of needs are ordered hierarchically from the bottom represented by physiological needs, to the top represented by self-actualization needs (Gobin, Teer-oovengadam, & Becceea, 2012). According to the theory, it is supposed that safety needs of students should be satisfied before meeting the next needs category of belongingness and love, which also should be met before achieving self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs (Gobin, et al., 2012). Accordingly, this study may assist in detecting the influence of witnessing workplace violence among nursing students, which might be considered as threat to safety needs of students, on their attitudes toward nursing profession.

To the researcher's knowledge, no prior studies were conducted to study the impact of witnessing workplace violence on Jordanian nursing students' attitudes toward the nursing profession. Therefore, the current study was conducted with the purpose of exploring the relationship between the Jordanian nursing students' attitudes toward the nursing profession and witnessing the workplace violence during the clinical training.

Methodology

Study design

A cross-sectional, descriptive comparative design was used. This design is appropriate because the intention was to describe the attitudes of nursing students who witnessed workplace violence during their clinical training in relation to those who did not (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Study participants

Study participants were nursing students who practically trained – for at least one semester – in one of health care institutes. Inclusion criteria were Jordanian nursing students who were in at least their second academic year and had completed at least one clinical training period (one semester) in one of the clinical settings. Exclusion criteria were nursing students who were studying through bridging program and working in any health care setting at the time of data collection. Three Jordanian nursing schools providing a four years nursing study course (one governmental and two private) were selected by convenience sampling method to recruit the participants. One nursing school from the capital and two other schools from two other cities in Jordan were selected. The sample size was estimated using G*Power (version 3.1.9.4). The minimum sample size required for this study is 128, assuming a significance level of 0.05, an effect size of 0.50, and a power of 0.80. To overcome potential participation refusal rate, a total of 200 questionnaires were electronically sent via social media applications to eligible nursing students. The response rate was 68.5% (137 nursing students). One hundred thirty one questionnaires were considered for data analysis and six questionnaires were not used because of incomplete data.

Instruments

The questionnaire which was distributed to the potential participants included two parts: the first part was developed by the researcher and guided by the reviewed literature, and included age, gender, academic year, reason of choosing to study nursing, future preferable work unit, whether they were witnessed or exposed to any violence during their clinical training, and the most frequent type of hospital where they trained. The second part of questionnaire was the Arabic version of Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession (ASNP) which was originally developed by Coban and Kasikci (2011). The questionnaire consists of 40 items which are clustered into three subscales: Properties of nursing profession, Prefer to nursing profession, and General position of nursing profession. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale according to the degree of agreement from '1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree'. The higher the total score means more positive attitude towards of the nursing profession. A respondent can achieve at minimum 40, and maximum of 200 points. A total score above 120 point indicate a positive attitude. Getting a score of 54 points and above on the first subscale, 39 points and above on the second subscale, and 27 points and above on third subscale, show a positive attitude towards the nursing profession (Coban & Kasikci, 2011).

The authors of the ASNP established its content validity using the expertise of a panel of experts. Additionally, Coban and Kasikci (2011) established the reliability and stability of the ASNP through test-retest correlations, and the results showed high reliability for both the whole scale ($r=0.90$, $p<0.001$) and for each subscale (ranging from 0.98 to 0.99). Furthermore, the psychometric analysis for ASNP was tested in a recent study conducted by Coban and Yurdagül (2014) which found that Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was 0.91.

After approval from the author has been obtained to use the ASNP, the researcher followed the (WHO, 2020) guidelines for translating and adopting research instrument. A pilot study was conducted with a sample

of 15 nursing students to check the quality, adequacy, and appropriateness of the Arabic version of ASNP, and demographic questionnaire. The respondents revealed that both parts of the questionnaire were easy-to-read, easy-to-comprehend and needed an average of 8 min to be answered. Reliability analysis of ASNP was done which showed Cronbach alpha of 0.81, which indicated that the Arabic version of ASNP has a good internal consistency (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Data collection procedure and ethical consideration

The researchers prepared an electronic questionnaire form through specialized Internet website (Google Forms tool), which enabled the potential participants to review and answer the questionnaires anytime and anywhere they want during the period of data collection. Additionally, collecting data through Internet has advantages of recruiting large number of potential participants within less time, easily pretesting the questionnaire, and tracking and viewing responses (Waltz, Strickland, & Lenz, 2017). The prepared electronic questionnaire was embedded in an electronic attachment link. Each electronic questionnaire started with the consent form which includes the description and purpose of the study, confidentiality pledge, and participants' rights to participate, refuse, and withdraw from the study. After reviewing the consent form, each participant is asked to click "Next" to participate and answer the questionnaire. After obtaining the approval of the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) from the University of Jordan and the targeted universities, the researchers contacted a number of faculties in each participating university to assist in identifying potential student participants and getting their electronic means of communication to send them questionnaire electronic link. Participants were not asked to express or write their identifying data such as their names and academic numbers on the questionnaires.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 22.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y., USA). Means, standard deviations (SD), percentages, and frequencies were computed to describe participants' characteristics, their experience related to workplace violence, and their attitudes toward nursing profession. To investigate if there are any differences in attitudes toward the nursing profession between Jordanian nursing students who witnessed workplace violence during clinical training and those who did not witness it, two-tailed independent t-test was used.

Results

Participants' characteristics and experiences

A total of 131 Jordanian nursing students participated in this study. The majority of participants were female (61.1%). Sixty-two participants (47.3%) were in their second academic year. The mean age of participants was 20.7 years old. About three-quarters of the participants were training in governmental hospitals. Fifty-three participants (40.5%) stated that they prefer to work as a nurse in the operation room in the future, and only 22 participants (16.8%) expressed their desire to work in emergency departments. About 34% (n=44) of student participants witnessed workplace violence during their clinical training, and 93.2% (n=122) of them stated that the most common form of violence was verbal abuse. The Emergency Department was the most common reported place of workplace violence as stated by one hundred and two participants (77.9%). Seventy-two participants (55%) stated that workplace violence topic was not covered in any course in their nursing curriculum.

Attitudes of nursing students who did not witness workplace violence toward the nursing profession

The results revealed that the average total score of nursing students who did not witness workplace violence on ASNP scale was approximately 168 which indicates that those participants had a positive attitude toward the nursing profession (>120). The item of “I think nurses are indispensable members of the health staff” was ranked first by nursing student participants with a mean score of 4.9 out of 5. On the other hand, the nursing student participants ranked the item “Nurses work under very difficult conditions” in the last place with a mean score of 1.66 out of 5. The top and least five ranked items as perceived by nursing students who did not witness workplace violence were shown in Table 1.

Attitudes of nursing students who witnessed workplace violence toward the nursing profession

The results of this study showed that the average total score for nursing students who witnessed workplace violence on ASNP scale was approximately 155 which indicates that those participants had a positive attitude toward the nursing profession (>120). The item “Nursing requires a lot of patience” was ranked first by nursing student participants with a mean score of 4.77 out of 5. On the other hand, the nursing student participants ranked the item “Nursing is a very exhausting profession.” in the last place with a mean score of 1.70 out of 5. The top and least five ranked items as perceived by nursing students who witnessed workplace violence were shown in Table 2.

Differences in attitudes toward nursing profession between nursing students who witnessed and who did not witness workplace violence

To answer the study question whether there is a relationship between the nursing students attitudes towards the nursing profession according to witnessing a workplace violence a two-tailed independent samples t-test indicated that there were significant differences in the mean scores on attitudes toward nursing profession between nursing students who witnessed and who did not witness workplace violence (Table 3). However, no significant differences in the mean scores were found between nurses who witnessed workplace violence based on age and academic year variables.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the top and the least five ranked items as perceived by nursing students who did not witness workplace violence (n=87).

The top five ranked items			The least five ranked items		
Item	Mean	SD	Item	Mean	SD
I think nurses are indispensable members of the health staff.	4.90	0.306	Nurses work under very difficult conditions.	1.66	0.986
I think nursing profession is an indispensable profession for a society.	4.85	0.390	Nursing is a very exhausting profession.	2.17	1.002
Nurses should be compassionate.	4.77	0.450	Nursing can be practiced only by enthusiasm	2.23	1.064
I think nurses among all health care personnel communicate the most with patients.	4.75	0.463	I think that not everybody can become a nurse.	3.45	1.149
Nursing is a profession which requires skills besides knowledge.	4.70	0.485	Job opportunities are more abundant in the profession of nursing.	3.70	0.764

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the top and the least five ranked items as perceived by nursing students who witnessed workplace violence (n=44).

The top five ranked items			The least five ranked items		
Item	Mean	SD	Item	Mean	SD
Nursing requires a lot of patience.	4.77	0.476	Nursing is a very exhausting profession.	1.70	0.878
I think nurses are indispensable members of the health staff.	4.77	0.424	Nurses work under very difficult conditions.	1.73	0.924
I think nurses among all health care personnel communicate the most with patients.	4.70	0.462	Nursing can be practiced only by enthusiasm	2.32	1.137
Nursing is a profession which requires skills besides knowledge.	4.66	0.479	I would not like my children to become nurses.	2.48	1.355
Nursing is a profession requiring taking great responsibilities.	4.64	0.532	I think nursing is not a cheerful profession.	2.95	1.293

Table 3: t-test results comparing the attitudes of nursing students who witnessed and who did not witness WPV (n=131).

	Nursing students who witnessed WPV (n=44)		Nursing students who did not witness WPV (n=87)		t-test
	M	SD	M	SD	
Attitudes toward the nursing profession	150.77	13.13	163.38	11.77	5.57**

*WPV, workplace violence; **p<0.001.

Discussion

Although the results of the present study showed that nursing students who witnessed workplace violence had significantly less positive attitudes toward the nursing profession than those who did not witness workplace violence, the overall attitudes of both groups of nursing student participants was positive (ASNP score >120), and this was congruent with the findings of many previous studies (Mahmoud, 2019; Mai et al., 2018; Miligi & Selim, 2014; Sorio & Hatamleh, 2017). It was apparent from the study results that the student participants highly appreciate and value nursing as they deemed it as a pivotal profession in the Jordanian society and health care system. This finding is congruent with the results of study conducted by Mai and her colleagues (2018) who found that “nursing is extremely important in the health care system”. Students’ attitudes toward their academic specialization has a big role in shaping the image of the profession among society, especially students’ families, relatives and friends, and this might promote the interest in studying nursing specialization among secondary school students. Additionally, positive attitudes of Jordanian nursing students toward the profession might give the nursing educational policymakers a good indication about potential retention of nursing staff in the Jordanian health care system. However, the vast majority of study participants expressed some unfavorable attitudes toward the work environment of nurses as they considered nurses’ clinical work as extremely burdensome facing numerous difficulties, and this might be considered as unsurprising result as most of the study participants were training in governmental hospitals where nursing staff shortage problems predominate (Al-Hamdan, Manojlovich, & Tanima, 2016). Those participants witnessed the overload and work stressors experienced by nursing staff in the clinical settings, and this could have led to negative attitudes among nursing students toward nursing work conditions in Jordan.

Findings of the present study revealed that nursing students who witnessed workplace violence during clinical training had significantly less positive attitudes toward the nursing profession than who did not.

Negative feelings among participants toward nursing profession after experiencing workplace violence were an anticipated finding, particularly when those students were not adequately prepared to such unfavorable events. This was evident in the findings of the present study which revealed that half of the participants who witnessed workplace violence stated that workplace violence topic was not addressed in any course during their study. Previous studies found that nursing students who experienced violent cases against nursing staff might develop feelings of fear, anxiety, and embarrassment (Tee et al., 2016), and this might explain why most of nurse participants viewed nursing profession as not cheerful. Those negative psychological feelings could directly affect the perceived image of these students toward nursing, because they might perceive it as a humiliating and risky job. Furthermore, continuously experiencing workplace violence might make nursing students – who are considered as future nurses – more cautious in communicating with their clients, affecting the quality of provided care and this could reflect negatively on the nursing profession reputation.

Recommendations

Witnessing workplace violence against nursing staff was shown to have a significant impact on nursing students' attitudes toward the nursing profession. Therefore, it is recommended to incorporate the concept of workplace violence in nursing curricula particularly in courses taken prior to enrolling in clinical training. This may have an impact on limiting the reality shock which nursing students might face as a result of the gap between what they learned in the theoretical courses and the actual clinical training experience. Additionally, nursing students need to enhance their preparedness to the clinical training environment, specifically in terms of how to cope with workplace violence. Further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of such workplace violence prevention programs on both nursing students' preparedness for clinical training and on their attitudes toward the nursing profession. Furthermore, qualitative research needs to be conducted to study the experiences of nursing students who witnessed or experienced workplace violence, focusing on the short, medium and long-term impact of this experience on them.

Study limitations

The main limitation of this study was the use of convenience sampling technique. This implies that the results presented might not be truly representative to all nursing students of other governmental and private Jordanian universities, due to differences in training places and student's characteristics. Future studies should include a sample of nursing students from other universities, so that the results can be more generalizable. Furthermore, use of nonprobability sampling and assignment does not guarantee that all characteristics of participants (e.g., gender, academic year, age, and training place) were well distributed in both groups.

Conclusion

The attitude of Jordanian nursing students tends to be positive toward the nursing profession. However, witnessing workplace violence events against nursing staff during clinical training had a significant negative impact on how nursing students view nursing. The topic of workplace violence should be addressed in nursing curricula. Future research is required to address the effectiveness of these curricula changes.

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