

## Mainland Chinese nursing students' perceptions on their career choices: A discursive analysis

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to find out the perceptions of Chinese nursing students (CNSs) on their career choices, with a discursive analysis of gathered narratives. The combined findings involve three main themes: 1) Easy to find a job, 2) Family decides it all, 3) Choices other than a clinical nurse. It is identified that career choice can be affected by various factors, and a further critical nursing shortage shall be noticed.

**Keywords:** Chinese nurse student, nursing education, career choice, discursive analysis

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### I. Introduction

The global shortage in medical staff deserves attentions [1]. In China, it is estimated by the Chinese Nurse Association (CNA) that there is a shortage of at least 1 million registered nurses [2-3], and nursing recruitment and retention is becoming a major concern. A recent report (4) described the current problem of He Bei Province in China. The local health department indicated that the ratio of 1.52 nurses for 1000 local residents was far from the WHO standard, which required 2 nurses for 1000 people at least. Under the strains from a fast aging society and a number of growing people with multiple chronic diseases, it is seen that nowadays the Chinese medical system is encountering a troubling period because of lack of professional human resources, particularly in nursing staff.

Some recent researches pointed out that an increasing number of CNSs intended to leave the clinical work after graduation due to some reasons such as work stress, fear of medical dispute and social stigma [5-6], and it could be a very important cause for the further shortage of nursing personnel if this disadvantaged tendency is still neglected. Given all that, an deep understanding how nursing students choose nursing as a career decision is crucial to the nursing education and important to the further recruitment strategies. However, it is scare of knowledge that what influence student decision to choose nursing as a career. A discursive study is suitable to provide with a view into phenomena via an intensive analysis of comprehensive information, and it is recommended as an appropriate and productive method within nursing research. Therefore, this study adopted a discursive analysis method as a basis to explain the perspectives about career choice of CNSs. Additionally, there is no similar study on CNSs has been published in an international journal after a primary database search. This study has the implications for further research and decision-making for educational leader, moreover, it will help to determine the potential demerits of current nursing recruitment and education system.

### II. Aim

The aim of this study is to explore CNSs' perceptions on their career choice.

### III. Method

#### 3.1 Design

This study adopted an exploratory discourse analysis using the focus group interview data.

#### 3.2 Participants

This study utilized a purposive sample strategy. The samples were recruited from the nursing department of a medical University located in the central of Mainland, China. In consideration of the variation of Chinese nursing education schedule, the inclusion criterion for the sample was at least three years course learning experience (equal to junior student in Chinese high education system), and agreed to join. Totally, 57 students were numbered by their IDs and divided into three groups, randomly.

#### 3.3 Data collection

Data were collected via the use of a focus group interview (FGI) in the form of narratives (Table 1). One of the researchers (Cheng C.) independently conducted the whole interview activities in a week during November, 2014. The length of each interview was between sixty minutes and ninety minutes. There was a brief introduction of speech regulation before each interview in order to keep procedures smooth. The recordings were put down in hand-writing and taped by a specialized digital voice device. To ensure the accuracy, all the

recordings were double checked by another researcher (Bai J.) who did not participant in the interview. Only rigorous data will be reported.

A discursive research targeted to investigate the “versions of world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse”[7]. Enlightened by some other nursing articles utilized the same approach to analysis the individual attitudes and speeches [8-9], a critical discourse analysis was used to describe and elucidate the collected data, and the process was divided into three steps: 1) Describing the text; 2) Explaining the discursive practice; 3) Explicating the discourse as social practice.

**Table 1** Focus group interview

Serial number	Content of questions
NO. 1	The motivation of you want to be a nurse worker
NO. 2	The factors impact your career choice during the study period
NO. 3	The other job planning besides nurse

#### **IV. Results**

It is believed that the gathering data will not enable the revealing of the strength or drawback of followed perceptions. However, there were a significant number of CNSs, who expressed different feelings on their career choices.

Having merged the words of participants, discursive analysis of FGI data resulted in findings of three themes pertaining to CNSs' perceptions of their nursing career: 1)Easy to find a job, 2)Family decides it all, 3)Choices other than a clinical nurse.

##### **4.1 Easy to find a job**

The students took part in the interview showed the similar opinions that the degree in nursing is crucial for them, and they both believed that a baccalaureate major in nursing would help them to get a satisfied job easily.

“I am not sure if it is a good job for me, but I still think I will work in a hospital after graduation. Since I have chosen it, and I do not have any other plans for future. Although there could be some risks (The student means medical disputes). But what do I have any other choice? I just want to take the path of self-reliance. As far as I know, the general hospital, especially in some economically developed areas will give me fair pay and benefits, and a lot of opportunity to grow, which is good for me”

These students who came from a low income family or a developing area (rural or economic low-developed area) usually expressed their concerns about pressure of real life and family, though the nursing program is not their first choice for college learning.

“...I come from countryside and my parents are common farmers with a low income. There are four people in my family. I have a younger brother who will go to college next year. I tell myself that I have a responsibility to contribute to my family after graduation. So I have to choose a specialty which is easy to find a job quickly. My relatives and my teachers advised me to study nursing here, so I am here.”

##### **4.2 Family decides it all**

In accordance with texts, it is found that family member such as parents and relatives can play a conclusive part in the decision-making. Generally speaking, it is known that personal career development is significantly connected with the total family networks in Chinese social formation. Some students also reviewed their original choice of college learning, they highlighted that it was a part of the family plan determined by the entire family.

“...I am from a family with some medical workers. Both of my parents are working in the hospital. My mother is a nurse. My original choice is financial management because I like it. But my parents insisted that I must follow their advice, because, firstly, I am a girl so that it is safe to live with them (They will help me to find a job in my hometown). Secondly, they said nursing job is suitable for me...I was confused, I had no choice but took it.”

“...honestly, I do NOT know what is nursing before college, I also have no idea what I am going to be in my future. My aunt is a nurse. As she said before, it is good to be a nurse in my hometown. It is easy to get a job if I hold a Bachelor degree in nursing. So I chose to study nursing here.”

It was surprised that only a small percentage of total students claimed that they came and sought for a degree in nursing motivated by their personal interests. Several students showed their ambitions and confidences.

“...I would love to be a medical worker, for example, Doctor, nurses, pharmacist. I do not have any particular aim, but want to work in a medical institution. Now, I believe, I was born to be a nurse. Since I chose nursing, I will insist on learning. Probably I will pursue a PhD in the future”

"Nursing is a job which emphasis on practice, so course learning is important to me. I will earn a high degree such as Master of Nursing, even a Doctoral degree. I am not sure when I can be a leader in my working place, but definitely I will try my best."

#### **4.3 Choices other than a clinical nurse**

As stated before, China has confronted with a problem of shortage of nursing workers. It currently seems the causes of this circumstance have influenced the perspectives of CNSs. During the interview, some interviewee made it clear that they would not intend to work as a nurse. Most of them underlined the negatives in nursing work such as pressure, relative low salary and rows between medical worker and patients. Moreover, the rest of them chose other alternatives because of lack of interests and own reasons.

"I do NOT want to work in a hospital because I am afraid of medical tangle. The previous accidents are frightening. So maybe I will find a job in nursing school or a university. I want to be a nursing teacher. I think that it is easy and the working hours are good.

"For me, I will continue my study, but in some other related subjects and will never be a nurse. It is pity that I will spend five years on it. However, I do not care it. People usually say that it is useless to be a nurse in a hospital because of low salary and low position level...they say that I can not actually help a patient but follow what a Doctor's order."

"I DO have my intention for future and I am so sure that I will not be a nurse. My family runs a company in my hometown. My parents asked me to get on with it after graduation. The reason I come here because I just need a BSc degree.

### **V. Discussion**

This study aims to investigate CNSs' perceptions on their career choice through a discursive method. Three obtained themes were found: (1) Easy to find a job, (2) Family decides it all, (3) Choices other than a nurse. The first one mentioned that, basically, holding a bachelor could be critical to apply for a position in China, from the other side, it also indicated that the nursing industry are requiring plenty of undergraduate nurses. The second one showed the important impact of family on the decision-making of student's career. The last one presented some other career options except a nurse job.

#### **5.1 The role of family**

Nearly all the objective declared the word of "family" during the whole interview. In the view of interviewee, family is vague meaning instead of social relation and network, often called "Guan Xi" in Chinese. To some extent this is the truth. Compare with Western cultures, Chinese social culture squint towards familial on career planning. On the one hand, it is rational, but on the other hand, it also has some drawbacks. Liu [10] interviewed twelve students including undergraduates and postgraduates in order to explore family factors on job choice. With a qualitative method, it was found that family had impacts on the personal career choice, mainly in two ways: 1) results of job application; 2) development of self-concept in career. It was also indicated that personal psychological or physical features were determined by family's hereditary characteristic. And personal values, capacity and horizon were influenced by demographic characteristics of family such as base, income level and education background. What is more, it was mentioned that human relations in society could be a decisive effect in students who prepared to find a job in China. Li [11] conducted a various questionnaires survey study in two Chinese Universities with over 800 college students, the results showed that the parents' profession was able to influence the assembling and transformation of student's job interests. Family background and financial situation was an impact on career self-efficacy in employment seeking. In light of combined findings both previous and present, the family including the members' social relation and sociological features could play a crucial role in college students' career choice, and it was related to Chinese culture.

#### **5.2 Inside motivation and outside obfuscation**

In a traditional description, the role of nurse is suggested as a profession who serves with care and affection [12], and it is also a noble career deserves honor. Positive image of a nurse such as "a job of heal the wounded and rescue the dying", "angles from the heaven" and "story of Nightingale" usually dominate the preference to be a nurse. With respect to college nursing student, Andersson [14] and Spouse [15] pointed out that previous feeling of a nurse and interactions with a nurse was a possible spur for individual to embark on nursing career for it could provide with a real and deep impression.

Furthermore, a report [16] revealed that gender and ethnicity were regarded as an impact. But there are no related results in this study. Another interesting finding is, most of objectives said that the well-paid salary was a motivation encouraged them to study nursing. However, nationally speaking, it is not a real situation in consideration of region difference and economy development. In China, a seven-year questionnaire survey on

the job satisfaction of clinical nurse concluded that it was necessary to struggle to increase the income level so as to decrease the turnover rate of nurses [17].

Eventually, it can not be denied that there are still some long-standing problems such as medical dispute, low salary and work pressure result in the inferior quality of care, as well as the leave of nursing workers. This study repeats a situation that the mounting adverse events and reports have exerted an influence on the mind of student nurse group, in a subtle way. Annually, plenty of accomplished researches present the various innovations and achievements within nursing area. However, a possible, large loss of nursing staff will become a tough challenge that we have to face.

### 5.3 Limitations

The application of this study is limited by its focus on only one Chinese medical university located in central China, and inevitably by the self-selection of focus group participants. The results are probably limited because students are looking ahead to real practical work and therefore the analysis is based on a prospective view.

The narratives from the students will never be a best and accurate way to present the real perceptions. However, they can represent the views at the time that research communicated with the CNSs. In next, it is difficult to ascertain that if the data we collected is saturated. Lastly, it is could be a weakness that the interviewer previous understanding as a nursing teacher, which perhaps influences the interview.

## VI. Conclusion

To sum up, this qualitative study in connection to perception of nursing student seemed to supply with a deep understanding of their career choice. Based on the discourse obtain, the suggestion and support from family can influence the career choice of nurse student. Probably it is associated with Chinese culture, but requires more deep researches. Obfuscation characterizes the students' response to decision-making of future planning, and it is nowadays urgent to present a positive and effective vocational instruction. To finish, we alerted that a negative social cognition could be a risk for early profession socialization.

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