

Full Length Research Paper

Factors in the career decision-making of nurses in Rivers State of Nigeria: Implications for counselling

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This paper investigated the factors in the career decision-making of nurses in Rivers State of Nigeria. The sample was made up of 128 participants, comprising an equal number of nurses and student-nurses selected from three health institutions in Rivers State of Nigeria; two General Hospitals and a School of Nursing. A standardized instrument titled "Motivation for Occupational Preference Scale" (MOPS) was administered to elicit information about the relative influence of the external and internal variables on the vocational choice of nurses. Three null hypotheses were formulated for the study; the data obtained were analysed using the chi-square technique for the first two hypotheses, and the t-test statistic for the third. The results showed no significant relationship between external variables and career decision-making; a significant relationship between internal influence and career decision-making; and no significant sex difference in the career decision-making factors of nurses. Based on the findings, counselling implications and recommendations were made.

Key words: Motivation, career choice, nursing, counselling, vocation, MOPS.

INTRODUCTION

The choice of a vocation is based on some motivating factors which an individual considers to be crucial to his satisfaction and performance on a job. The person may be motivated by extrinsic factors such as parents, teachers, counsellors and a few significant others, high salary, societal influence, environmental pressures, chance, and mass media. It could also be that the pressures on them are mainly internal such as interest, ability utilization, altruistic reasons, values, physique and sex (Denga, 2001). In Nigeria, it is unfortunate to notice that many inappropriate career choices have been made by youngsters because of ignorance and illiteracy on their part, on one hand; and that of their parents, on the other. Some parents tend to have a fixed idea of the vocation their children should choose irrespective of the child's intelligence, interest and other capabilities. Such wrong choices, whether due to parental pressures or some other considerations, have driven the youth into untold psychological problems, some of which have marred their future prospects.

The choice of a career, of subjects and courses in schools, is one of the most difficult decisions in a person's life. Anastasi and Urbina (2003) observe that few areas of life are as important to people as their occupations, not only because of the much time spent at

work but also because work can provide opportunities for many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Infact, Denga (2001) notes that vocational choice involves a person's total life because it determines his income, his choice of friends, his pattern of dress, his influence in society, and very often, the amount of risk to which he is exposed. Vocational guidance thus becomes an utmost necessity in schools so that the youth can be properly assisted in making realistic and appropriate career decisions.

In a profession like nursing or midwifery, the training programme is most concerned with developing as fully as possible each trainee's potentialities as a nurse or midwife. The choice of such a career should therefore be based on variables possessed by an individual that would enhance practice if finally admitted into the training programme.

In an earlier study, Ikeotuonye (1986) had stressed that somebody being selected into the nursing training programme must have the greatest potentials for effective nursing. These potentials, according to him, derive not only from the cognitive but also from the affective and psychomotor behaviours. Thus any force motivating the choice of the nursing career must not just be external but must include intrinsic factors, especially the possession of the required traits, which play a domi-

nant role in the career decision-making. He had noted with dismay a situation where decisions for admission or rejection of applicants into nursing training programmes in many states of the Nigerian federation, had been based on the possession of secondary school certificate or its equivalent, entrance examination scores, interview, and other intellectual variables.

The above admission practice totally disregards possession of affective characteristics needed in moulding a nurse or other health-care professional. Such aforementioned qualities include respect for the worth and dignity of human life, interest in people, social maturity, sensitivity to others' attitudes and reactions, sympathetic attitude, friendliness, patience and tolerance, to mention a few.

This study was borne out of this unhealthy development, and intends to find out what factors actually necessitated the choice of the nursing career among the student-nurses and their practising counterparts, with a view to determining what guidance programmes can be mounted to help them successfully manage problems of wrong vocational choice. This study was therefore an investigation into the motivational factors in the choice of the nursing career in Rivers State of Nigeria, and implications for the guidance counsellor.

Literature review

Many young people including students are often not sufficiently knowledgeable about themselves, about their abilities, and about the world of work around them (Kinanee, 2004). Furthermore, there are variables that seem to appeal more to them in the choice of a vocation than the ones that should be given utmost priority. These factors include desire for high salaries and job security, prestige, parental expectations, to mention a few (Denga, 2001; Nwachuku, 2007).

The need to assess young people's vocational interests, abilities, aptitudes and other personality variables in Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, cannot be overemphasized. Assessment of such behavioural characteristics is the starting point for an individual who is planning to choose or make a change in career pattern (Salami, 2002). The use of psychological tests in vocational counselling is thus an important aspect of counselling as it helps both the counsellor and the client to know the next step to take.

Kolo (2001) sees testing as a very useful tool in pre-counselling diagnosis, during counselling, and in post-counselling vocational decision-making. In the same vein, Anastasi and Urbina (2003) have observed that the practice of career assessment involves helping someone discern the appropriate career choice, considering the person's abilities, interests, abilities, goals, values, and temperament, as well as the requirements of the given vocation.

The concept of motivation is of great relevance to ca-

reer choice. Under normal circumstances, an individual will prefer a job that he thinks would satisfy his basic psychological needs and that the reasons for choosing a particular vocation are the same as the things he hopes to derive from that vocation or the goal he hopes to achieve by choosing that career.

In a study carried out in Nigeria by Bakare (1977) in which he compared the value orientations of professional nurses and professional engineers using a self-developed, but standardized instrument, 'Motivation for Occupational Preference Scale' (MOPS), he discovered that for nurses, intrinsic factors (people-oriented values followed by self-expression values) ranked higher than the external variables in their vocational choice.

In a more recent study by Lundmark (2007) in which he examined two theology-based nursing theories as they affect vocational choice, the investigator observed that intrinsic values act as guarantees against reducing nursing practice to mechanistic applications of techniques and as being a way of reinforcing a high ethical standard. In a similar study of the expectations of young nurses with regard to their job, Cooman, Pepermans, Bois, Caers and Jegers (2008) indicated that altruism is a recurrent factor, in addition to other traditional attractions. Furthermore, in yet another study of the motivation for the choice of the nursing and teaching careers among students carried out by Toth (2008), the results showed that the primary motivation was of altruistic nature.

Denga (2001) has identified certain factors that can influence career decision-making, which include societal prestige factors regarding certain occupations, the financial rewards, personal reputation and social status, parental expectations for their children, among others. Other variables include the need to accomplish something difficult, or to help the needy, as well as reinforcements and incentives which the individual considers attractive, capable of luring and energizing behaviour.

Super's career development theory has indicated that what is learned is a function of the interest, values, attitudes and behaviour patterns that are valued and rewarded by the individuals, peers and adult models (Sharma, 2007). According to the theorist, individuals choose vocations according to their interests and abilities, skills, training, and personality characteristics. Occupations and life satisfaction, therefore, depend upon the extent to which the individual finds adequate outlets for their interest.

From the studies cited above, it is shown that many authorities assert that internal factors are a major consideration in the choice of helping professions like nursing. Motivation is, however, basically intrinsic, but could be brought about by external forces as well.

Hypotheses

This research study was guided by the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between External Influence and the choice of the nursing career.
2. There is no significant relationship between Internal Influence and the choice of the nursing career.
3. There is no significant difference between male and female nurses in the motivational factors affecting the choice of the nursing career.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The research participants comprised 128 nurses drawn from a population of about 550 nurses in the three health institutions in Rivers State of Nigeria; two General hospitals, and a School of Nursing. The sample was made up of 37 males and 91 females, out of which were 64 practising nurses and 64 final year student-nurses. The stratified random sampling technique was used in the selection of the sample, considering the preponderance of the females in the nursing profession in the institutions visited. The researcher got the necessary approval of the authorities of the institutions mentioned and the consent of the participants before the data-collection process.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for the study was the 'Motivation for Occupational Preference Scale' (MOPS) developed by late Professor Bakare. The MOPS is a self-rating scale consisting of three major sections. The first section has to do with the respondent's bio-data, while the second section is about career preferences. The third section, which is the main section of the scale, is designed to identify the reasons for occupational choice. Sixteen reasons for occupational preference are provided and the respondent is required to rate them according to their importance in influencing their choice (Table 1).

In this study, 'External influence' refers to the overall influence of all factors in Sections A and B, while 'Internal influence' is the overall influence of factors listed in Sections C and D.

Procedure

Copies of the instrument were personally administered to the respondents with the assistance of some staff delegated by the management of each of the institutions to assist the researcher. The participating nurses were asked to circle round only one of the options according to the relative influences. Some of the questionnaires were filled and submitted to the researcher immediately, while others were returned later with the helping hands of the matrons or senior tutors as the case may be.

A maximum of 20 points was given to each of the 4 groups of reasons. The scores made on each factor were then taken into consideration for all the 128 respondents. Scores in Sections A and B added up to make the overall score for "External influence", while scores in Sections C and D summed up to give the total score for "Internal influence".

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between external

influence and the choice of the nursing career.

To test this hypothesis, the chi-square statistic was used to investigate the relationship between external influence and the choice of the nursing career. Results showed that X^2 -critical (3.84) was greater than X^2 -cal. (0.086) at $p < 0.05$, hence the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is no significant relationship between External influence and the choice of the nursing career.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between internal factors and the choice of the nursing career.

Table 2 shows that the X^2 -cal. (8.2) is greater than X^2 -crit. (3.84), hence the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, concluding that there is a significant relationship between Internal influence and the choice of the nursing career.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between male and female nurses in the motivational factors affecting the choice of the nursing career.

From the analysis, the computed z (0.35) was less than the critical value (1.96); therefore the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. It is hereby concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female nurses in the factors influencing the choice of the nursing career.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis which indicated that there is no relationship between External influence and the choice of the nursing career was supported by this study's findings. Similarly, the study showed a positive relationship between intrinsic factors and the choice of the nursing career. The findings corroborate that of an earlier study by Bakare (1977) which indicated that for nurses, the ranking of the value orientations was people-oriented. The findings are also supported by the writings of Denga (2001) and Holland's personality theory of vocational development which had shown that one's personality type has influence on one's career choice. By Holland's classification in his career development theory, the nursing profession falls under the social (supportive) environment, thus individuals with such personality type would normally gravitate towards person-oriented occupations (Sharma, 2007). This is in consonance with the 'people-oriented values' in MOPS, which falls under intrinsic factors. The implication of this finding is that one's choice of any vocation, including nursing, is an expression of one's personality, which is an internal va-

Table 1. Various reasons for choosing occupations.

| Section | Group of reasons influencing choice |
|---------|---|
| A | External influence from parents, friends, books, TV, etc. |
| B | Extrinsic-reward oriented values |
| C | Self-expression values |
| D | People-oriented values |

Table 2. Showing the testing of the relationship between internal factors and the choice of the nursing career.

| Sections | fo | fe | N | X ² -cal | X ² -crit |
|----------|----|----|----|---------------------|----------------------|
| A | 52 | 45 | | | |
| B | 12 | 19 | 64 | 8.2 | 3.84 |
| C | 38 | 45 | | | (df = 1, p < 0.05) |
| D | 26 | 19 | | | |

riable. A few other studies cited earlier (Lundmark, 2007; Cooman et al, 2008) have also shown that people are motivated by internal rather than external factors in the career decision-making towards nursing. This is not to say, however, that external factors may not be a consideration at all in the choice of the nursing career. For instance, Adesuji (1979) in his study had observed that nurses primarily felt unsatisfied with their work because of lack of prospects for promotion and because of negative public opinion about the job. This finding may imply that, although intrinsic factors affect the choice of the nursing career to a large extent, other external variables like salary package and promotion prospects may have been a consideration for those individuals used in that study. Furthermore, the salaries and general condition of service of nurses and other health-care providers have been greatly enhanced in Nigeria today compared to the 1970's when the government of the military dictatorship was in place.

Finally, this study failed to show any significant influence of gender on the factors motivating the choice of the nursing career. Respondents from both sexes seemed to have been motivated into the nursing career by similar factors. This indicates that internal variables like self-expression and people-oriented values have overriding influence on people opting for the nursing profession, whether they are males or females.

It is necessary to mention at this point that although this study has shown the overwhelming influence of internal rather than external factors in the vocational choice of nurses, it is possible that there could be gender differences in the internal subscales. This study was not designed to examine that. The investigation by Toth (2008), for instance, had revealed such gender differences. The result had shown that female respondents

got a higher value on the item in the instrument dealing with 'helping people' than their male counterparts with regard to the choice of nursing as a career. Their finding, nonetheless, is still consistent with those of this study in that both have stressed the important role intrinsic variables play in a helping profession like nursing.

Implications for counselling/ recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following implications are examined:

1.) This study has shown that intrinsic variables have more influence on the choice of the nursing career than the extrinsic. This means that people-oriented values have more significant influence on individuals aspiring to go in for the nursing profession than any other variable. It therefore becomes necessary that admission of students into any nurse-training programme should not only be based on cognitive characteristics but also the possession of requisite affective characteristics like interest in people, friendliness and empathy.

2.) Another implication of this study is the need for the inclusion of counsellors and psychometrists in admission committees/ units of the Ministry of Health (which handles admissions into Schools of Nursing, Midwifery, and Health Technology) for the proper selection of candidates with appropriate cognitive and personality characteristics required for their chosen vocations.

3.) It is also necessary for governments and private school proprietors to employ counsellors so that they can properly guide young people in their vocational aspirations. Furthermore, appropriate appraisal tools like psychological tests should be provided for school counsellors to adequately diagnose the interests, aptitudes, academic and vocational strengths and weaknesses of the students. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) has provided for career officers and counsellors to be appointed in post-primary institutions for that purpose. There has to be a commitment on the part of school proprietors to make that provision a reality.

4.) The school system should provide every child completing school with necessary vocational decision making skills. Each level of education must be capable of helping the student in making smooth transition from school to work. The curricular choices of individuals at any educational level have a lot of vocational implications which the present 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria must not overlook.

5.) The findings reveal the utmost necessity for the use of psychological tests in vocational guidance. There is need for the development of more indigenous tests by psychometrists and other psychologists as some of the standardized tests in use in Nigerian educational institutions are foreign-based. The use of tests gives a scientific basis to the work of counsellors in guiding young people into making informed vocational choices.

6.) The study has shown the motivational factors in the choice of the nursing profession. Counsellors in Schools of Nursing, Midwifery and related institutions as well as those in other tertiary institutions need to be acquainted with these factors. An understanding of what students want from a job and what jobs they perceive as offering them the chances of fulfilling such needs, will be of great importance to career counsellors in correcting misconceptions and directing youths to fuller vocational self-realization.

Conclusion

This study investigated the motivational factors in the choice of the nursing career in Rivers State of Nigeria, using selected health institutions as a case study.

From the findings, it was revealed that internal factors played more important roles than the external ones. It therefore becomes imperative that counsellors, teachers and other stakeholders take seriously the issue of factors in career decision-making while guiding young people in vocational matters.

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