

# Joining the nursing profession in Qatar: motives and perceptions

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الانضمام إلى مهنة التمريض في قطر، تقبله وحوافره

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خلاصة: قد حاولنا معرفة سبب انضمام الممرضات إلى مهنة التمريض في قطر، وكيف يفهم تلميذات التمريض نظرة المجتمع وموقفه من التمريض. وقد وزع استبيان مغفل من الأسماء ويستكمل ذاتياً على 57 من تلميذات التمريض في أربعة صفوف أكاديمية لوحدة التمريض في جامعة قطر في السنة الدراسية 1999-2000 وقد وجد أن أكثر الأسباب شيوعاً للانضمام إلى مهنة التمريض هما الاهتمام بالخدمات الطبية وما يتسم به التمريض من طبيعة إنسانية، فيما اعتبر 33 من التلميذات (57.89%) أن موقف المجتمع سلبي تجاه التمريض بسبب وجود مرضى وزملاء من الذكور أثناء العمل. وتفتقر الدراسة القيام بحملة إعلامية وتقديم الدعم الحكومي لتغيير هذا الموقف.

**ABSTRACT** We aimed to identify why female students in Qatar decide to become nurses and how the students perceived the community attitude towards nursing. A self-administered anonymous questionnaire was distributed to all (57) female students of the four academic classes of the Nursing Unit, University of Qatar for the academic year 1999-2000. The two commonest reasons for joining the nursing profession were an interest in medical services and the humanitarian nature of nursing. There were 33 (57.89%) students who considered there was a negative community attitude towards nursing mainly due to the presence of male patients and colleagues and the working hours. A mass media campaign and governmental support were two strategies suggested to change this.

## Intégrer la profession infirmière à Qatar : motifs et perceptions

**RESUME** Notre objectif était d'identifier les raisons pour lesquelles les étudiantes au Qatar décident de devenir infirmières et la manière dont elles perçoivent l'attitude de la communauté vis-à-vis des soins infirmiers. Un questionnaire anonyme à remplir soi-même a été distribué à toutes les étudiantes (57) des quatre classes du Département Soins infirmiers de l'Université de Qatar pour l'année universitaire 1999-2000. Les deux raisons les plus courantes pour lesquelles elles intègrent la profession infirmière étaient l'intérêt porté aux services médicaux et le caractère humanitaire des soins infirmiers. Il y avait 33 étudiantes (57,89 %) qui considéraient qu'il y avait une attitude négative de la communauté vis-à-vis des soins infirmiers, principalement en raison de la présence de patients et collègues de sexe masculin et des horaires de travail. Une campagne dans les médias et l'appui du Gouvernement étaient deux stratégies suggérées pour changer cette attitude.

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## Introduction

In the state of Qatar, most hospitals and healthcare facilities are staffed predominantly by expatriate nurses. The majority of Qatari nurses are female, and they comprise only 6% of the total number of nurses employed. The shortage of Qatari national nurses is due to a decline in the number of students entering nursing schools [1].

Roper et al. stated that nursing demands understanding, respect, explanation, support and teaching [2]. All these activities require communication between nurses and patients. Developing a constructive rapport is the foundation of successful nursing intervention. This, however, requires nurses and patients to speak the same language [2]. Non-Qatari nurses and Qatari patients often experience extreme frustration due to language barriers. This, coupled with the constant turnover of expatriate nurses, reduces patient progress and quality of care. It is difficult to maintain standards as there is insufficient time to train and develop the new recruits. Furthermore, the cost of replacing and recruiting registered nurses from overseas can have a substantial impact on any organization. This problem will persist until enough national nurses can be hired to staff all the country's healthcare facilities [1].

The aims of the present study were to identify why female nursing students at university in Qatar decide to join the nursing faculty, and to identify the students' perception of the community attitude towards the nursing profession and their opinion on the causes and manifestations of that attitude.

## Methods

The target subjects were the female students of the four academic classes in the

Nursing Unit, Faculty of Science, University of Qatar for the academic year 1999–2000. Data were collected using a self-administered anonymous questionnaire distributed to the students. The questionnaire was devised following a review of related literature. It was pretested before data collection on a sample of 10 students, and unclear expressions and questions were modified to make them more understandable. The questionnaire included the following sections:

- general information: age, residence (Bedouin or urban), academic class (1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th), marital status and parents' education;
- Motives for joining the nursing profession;
- perception of the community attitude towards nursing as a profession, and the reasons for and manifestations of that attitude;
- degree of satisfaction of the nursing students.

The response rate was 100%. Data were analysed using *SPSS* and *Epi-Info* version 5 software. The chi-squared test, Fisher exact test and Student *t*-test were applied where needed. A level of 5% was chosen to indicate significance.

## Results

### General characteristics of the students

There was a total of 57 students, distributed among the four academic classes of the faculty (Table 1); 43 (75.44%) came from urban areas while 14 (24.56%) came from Bedouin areas. The students' ages ranged between 18 and 35 years with a mean of  $21.9 \pm 2.7$  years. There was no statistical difference between the mean ages of urban

and Bedouin students ( $21.6 \pm 2.9$  years and  $22.8 \pm 1.5$  years respectively,  $t = 1.420$ ).

Most students were unmarried (77.19%), nearly one fifth were married - (21.05%) and only one student was divorced (Table 1).

About one half of the students' fathers (47.37%) and three-fifths of their mothers (59.65%) were illiterate or only just able to read and write. Lower percentages had primary or preparatory education, while a small proportion had secondary or university education. None of the students' parents worked in the medical field.

### Motives of students for joining the nursing profession

The most common motive, given by more than half the students, was an interest in working in medicine (Table 2). The second most common motive was the humanitarian or service nature of the nursing profession, which was mentioned by about two-fifths of the students (38.60%). Other motives included the scores obtained in the final years of secondary school, national needs or community service, economic reasons and others. A statistically significant difference between the urban and Be-

Table 1 General characteristics of the nursing students by place of residence

Characteristic	Urban (n = 43)		Bedouin (n = 14)		Total (n = 57)		Test of significance
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<i>Academic class</i>							$\chi^2 = 10.81^*$
First	14	32.56	1	7.14	15	26.32	
Second	16	37.21	3	21.43	19	33.33	
Third	5	11.63	7	50.00	12	21.05	
Fourth	8	18.60	3	21.43	11	19.30	
<i>Marital status</i>							FET = 0.463*
Unmarried	34	79.07	10	71.43	44	77.19	
Married	8	18.60	4	28.57	12	21.05	
Divorced	1	2.33	0	0.00	1	1.75	
<i>Father's education</i>							$\chi^2 = 1.79$
Illiterate/read and write	21	48.83	6	42.86	27	47.37	
Primary/preparatory	16	37.21	6	42.86	22	38.60	
Secondary	3	6.98	2	14.28	5	8.77	
University	3	6.98	0	0.00	3	5.26	
<i>Mother's education</i>							$\chi^2 = 1.40$
Illiterate/read and write	25	58.14	9	64.29	34	59.65	
Primary/preparatory	14	32.56	5	35.71	19	33.33	
Secondary	4	9.30	0	0.00	4	7.02	

\*Divorced were included with unmarried.

\*Statistically significant at  $P < 0.05$ .

FET = Fisher exact test.

Table 2 Students' motives for joining the nursing profession

Motives <sup>a</sup>	Urban (n = 43)		Bedouin (n = 14)		Total (n = 57)		Test of significance
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Interest in medical service	23	53.49	7	50.00	30	52.63	$\chi^2 = 0.050$
Humanitarian career	14	32.56	8	57.14	22	38.60	$\chi^2 = 2.690$
Scores in final year of secondary school	5	11.63	4	28.57	9	15.79	FET = 0.202
National need	3	6.98	5	35.71	8	14.04	FET = 0.017*
Economic reasons	4	9.30	3	21.43	7	12.28	FET = 0.346
Other	2	4.65	1	7.14	3	5.26	FET = 1.000

<sup>a</sup>Categories are not mutually exclusive.

\*Statistically significant at  $P < 0.05$ .

FET = Fisher exact test.

douin students was only found for the motive of "national needs or community service", given by a significantly higher percentage of Bedouin students than urban ones (Fisher exact test = 0.017).

### Community attitude towards the nursing profession

Most of the students (57.89%) felt that there was a negative community attitude towards the nursing profession. Statistically there was no significant difference between the urban and Bedouin students' responses to this question (Table 3).

The most frequently given reason for this negative attitude was "dealing with male patients" (57.57%). The second most common reason was the night shifts involved in nursing work (51.51%). Long working hours (39.39%) and "working with male colleagues (36.36%) were also mentioned (Table 4). Bedouin students more frequently mentioned the reasons related to male patients and colleagues than urban students, who were more likely to mention the working hours, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 3 Students' perception of a negative community attitude towards the nursing profession and their place of residence

Negative attitude	Urban (n = 43)		Bedouin (n = 14)		Total (n = 57)		$\chi^2$
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Yes	23	53.49	10	71.43	33	57.89	1.394
No	20	46.51	4	28.57	24	42.11	
Total	43	100.00	14	100.00	57	100.00	

**Table 4 Reasons given for negative community attitude towards nursing (as given by the 33 students who felt there was a negative attitude)**

Reason <sup>a</sup>	Urban (n = 23)		Bedouin (n = 10)		Total (n = 33)		FET
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Presence of male patients	11	47.83	8	80.00	19	57.57	0.245
Night shifts	12	52.17	5	50.00	17	51.51	1.000
Long working hours	11	47.83	2	20.00	13	39.39	0.131
Presence of male colleagues	8	34.78	4	40.00	12	36.36	1.000

<sup>a</sup>Categories are not mutually exclusive.  
FET = Fisher exact test.

In terms of the community's negative attitude towards nursing, the most commonly stated manifestation was husbands' refusal to allow their wives to work as nurses (51.51%), followed by the reluctance of young men to marry nurses (48.48%) and family resistance to allowing their daughters to work as nurses (36.36%) (Table 5). Urban and Bedouin students did not show statistically significant differences in these responses.

As shown in Table 6, half the students said that they would insist on continuing

working as nurses even if their husbands (or future husbands) wanted them to leave the profession. Urban students gave this response more often than Bedouin students (58.14% and 28.57% respectively). Just over one-fifth of the sample (21.05%) said that they would leave their nursing work in response to their husbands' resistance. Bedouin students were more likely than urban students to give this response (28.57% and 18.60% respectively). A relatively large percentage of the students (17.54%) did not know what they would do, while a mi-

**Table 5 Manifestations of the negative community attitude**

Manifestation <sup>a</sup>	Urban (n = 23)		Bedouin (n = 10)		Total (n = 33)		FET
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Objection by nurses' husbands	11	47.83	6	60.00	17	51.51	0.708
Reluctance of young men to marry nurses	10	43.48	6	60.00	16	48.48	0.465
Objection by nurses' families	8	34.78	4	40.00	12	36.36	1.000

<sup>a</sup>Categories are not mutually exclusive.  
FET = Fisher exact test.

nority suggested other possible reactions (Table 6).

All students felt that mass media campaigns would be an effective strategy to change the negative community attitude. Governmental support was the second suggested strategy (69.70%). The support of religious leaders was also suggested (60.61%), and significantly more Bedouin students than urban ones gave this response (90.00% and 47.83% respectively, Fisher exact test = 0.050) (Table 7).

### Degree of satisfaction of students with the nursing profession

Most of the students (92.98%) said they were either fully satisfied or mostly satis-

fied with their chosen profession. A minority was more neutral (5.26%), and only one student was not satisfied. There was no statistical difference between Bedouin and urban students (Table 8).

## Discussion

Nursing is a vital component in every country's health system [1]. An increased awareness of factors affecting job satisfaction, nursing shortages and turnover in the nursing profession has led to the development of many creative approaches to the recruitment and retention of nurses [1-3].

Table 6 What the students considered they would do if their husband insisted that they gave up nursing

Response	Urban (n = 43)		Bedouin (n = 14)		Total (n = 57)		$\chi^2$
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Continue work	25	58.14	4	28.57	29	50.88	4.57
Leave work	8	18.00	4	28.57	12	21.05	
Don't know	7	16.28	3	21.43	10	17.54	
Other	3	6.98	3	21.43	6	10.53	
Total	43	100.00	14	100.00	57	100.00	

Table 7 Suggested strategies to change the negative community attitude towards the nursing profession

Strategy <sup>a</sup>	Urban (n = 23)		Bedouin (n = 10)		Total (n = 33)		FET
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Mass media campaigns	23	100.00	10	100.00	33	100.00	0.215
Governmental support	18	78.26	5	50.00	23	69.70	
Religious leaders' support	11	47.83	9	90.00	20	60.61	

<sup>a</sup>Categories are not mutually exclusive.

\*Statistically significant at  $P < 0.05$ .

FET = Fisher exact test.

Table 8 Degree of satisfaction with the nursing profession

Degree of satisfaction	Urban (n = 43)		Bedouin (n = 14)		Total (n = 57)		FET
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Fully satisfied	25	58.14	8	57.14	33	57.89	0.563 <sup>a</sup>
Mostly satisfied	14	32.56	6	42.86	20	35.09	
Neutral	3	6.98	0	0.00	3	5.26	
Not satisfied	1	2.33	0	0.00	1	1.75	
Total	43	100.00	14	100.00	57	100.00	

<sup>a</sup>Neutral responses were included with not satisfied, and mostly satisfied with fully satisfied.  
FET = Fisher exact test.

In the present study, students most commonly stated that their reasons for joining the nursing profession were their interest in medical work and the humanitarian nature of the nursing profession. These results are similar to those of Munro who investigated the motives and attitudes of young graduate nurses [4]. The great majority of the present study sample (92.98%) was mostly satisfied or fully satisfied with their chosen career. This is also in agreement with Munro's findings, where most of the nursing graduates were happy with their choice [4]. A series of studies conducted on the factors that increase human motivation and satisfaction found that workers were less motivated by pay and working conditions than by psychological needs that could be satisfied by membership of a particular employment group [5-7].

Most of the students in our study acknowledged that there was a negative community attitude towards nursing. The main reasons given for it were the fact that nursing involves contact with the opposite sex, whether patients or colleagues and the pattern of working hours. These same reasons and the poor social image were also given for the refusal of Saudi parents to approve

of their sons or daughters joining the nursing profession. This negative attitude existed even though both the Saudi parents and university students recognized the humanitarian nature of nursing, and the religious, social and psychological reasons behind the need for Saudi national nurses. Similar findings have been reported from Jordan, Egypt and Kuwait [8-11].

Dedmon reported that lack of respect and recognition, combined with the poor image of the nursing profession, were the reasons why hospitals experienced nursing shortages [12]. Tumulty, however, gave multiple reasons for why experienced North American and European nurses continue to leave nursing [13]. The only reason in common with our findings for the perceived negative community attitude was "working hours" or "shifts". Other reasons in the Tumulty study were more related to the administrative and financial circumstances of nursing jobs, e.g. low salaries, poor benefits, lack of promotional opportunities, medical/legal problems, rather than the cultural and social aspects of nursing as found in the present study. To some extent this reflects differences between the West and the Middle East as regards community attitudes [13].

Our students agreed that mass media campaigns, governmental and religious leaders' support were potential strategies to change the negative community attitude towards nursing. Many previous studies have recommended strategies for recruitment and retention of nurses, including changes in organizational structure and management, improvements in working conditions and salaries, improvements in nursing image, continuous education [1,2,14].

In a recent study, Aber and Hawkins examined the content of American medical and nursing journals to determine whether the images of nurses in these journals reflected the roles nurses play in healthcare [15]. The study revealed that the image of nurses in the print media of both the medical and nursing professions is out of date [15]. Suggested strategies to enhance the image of nursing included monitoring and reacting to the media, having awards and competitions, and looking seriously at what nursing is, what nurses do in practice and

what characteristics they possess [2,4,7,16].

Some recommendations can be drawn from this study. Health authorities should improve the organizational and financial conditions of nurses, taking into consideration the cultural characteristics of the community. Thus the problems of mixing with the opposite sex and the pattern of working hours and shifts should be addressed. This may take the form of allocating female nurses to the wards and clinics of female patients. Health authorities should cooperate with the mass media, religious leaders and other concerned sectors to implement planned long-term campaigns to improve the image of nurses, and change the negative community attitude towards nursing. Efforts should be made to increase and maintain the job satisfaction of nurses and improve the profession's image. This might involve offering scholarships for further education or establishing a nursing council.

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### **Strengthening nursing and midwifery: progress and future directions: summary document 1996-2000**

In almost all countries of the world, qualified nurses and midwives are the backbone of the health care system, yet they have not enjoyed the status or economic support to realize their full potential. In May 1996, the World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA 49.1 on strengthening nursing and midwifery. This document reports on the resolution and discusses global progress in nursing and midwifery service development during the period 1996 to 2000. It focuses on: progress made in implementing resolution WHA 49.1; present challenges and strategic issues; how nursing and midwifery services can meet the challenges; goals for strengthening health and health systems development; WHO support. The document can be obtained from: Department of Health Service Provision, World Health Organization, Avenue Appia 20, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. It is also available free on the Internet at: [http://www.who.int/health-services-delivery/nursing/who\\_eip\\_osd\\_2001.5en/](http://www.who.int/health-services-delivery/nursing/who_eip_osd_2001.5en/)