

## Recruitment to and Motivation for Nursing Education and the Nursing Profession

May-Karin Rognstad, Cand. Polit, RN

During the past 150 years, the occupation of nursing has been transformed from a "calling" to a profession. A calling is associated with an inner urge to spend time and effort on unselfish work for sick and suffering people. The transition from student status to employee was accompanied by a shift in the motivation for nursing as a profession.

The secularized nursing that developed in the early 20th century represented the same nursing ideology found in religious communities. The self-sacrificing, caring, and self-effacing woman who helped people in distress became the ideal nurse. In addition to the opportunity for paid work, another motive for turning to nursing was desiring human contact and wanting to help others by providing care and charity to those who needed help. Qualities such as obedience and the will to help the distressed have been deeply rooted in common values for decades (Martinsen, 1989).

In the period between World War I and World War II, the authorities focused on values such as material security, equality, and solidarity. These values were still deeply rooted in the Norwegian social democracy in the first decades after World War II.

The expansion of the welfare services and the desire to create economic equality

required a redistribution of economic resources. This led to growing public protests during the 1970s, and thus establishing the welfare state eventually caused political instability (Kuhnle & Solheim, 1985). The expansion of welfare services stopped during the 1980s. It seems plausible to question whether this instability marked the beginning of a redefinition of values in Norwegian society. Social values and attitudes change more rapidly now than earlier. The wealth of information is steadily growing, and young people must orientate themselves within a multifaceted world. In Norwegian society, young people can decide to change their way of life and even their social identity (Ziehe, 1989). A greater freedom of choice may give rise to ambivalence and vagueness, and this will affect the choice of values and the occupational preferences of young people.

Today, the nursing profession is perceived as underpaid and strenuous, and has lost the prestige it once enjoyed. Nursing care in today's advanced information society requires nurses to be knowledgeable and experienced. Nurses' roles have become much more complex. The motivation for providing patients with care gradually has changed in the direction of instrumental nursing. Despite increased demands and the low status of the profession, young people still choose nursing as their occupation. However, there is a problem recruiting nurses to hospitals, district nursing, and community nursing. In 2000, there was a shortage of 3,750 nurses in Norway (Statistics

Norway, 2000). Therefore, it is important to gain insight into who the students choosing nursing are and what motives they express for their choice of occupation.

### Educational Motivation for the Nursing Occupation

During the past 40 years, Norwegian and international studies have provided insight into who chooses nursing education and the nursing profession. The findings are characterized by homogeneity, describing a body of applicants whose only wish is to study nursing. There is no information about differing incentives within the sample, and the studies generally present few motives for occupational choice. This is true for studies conducted in the United States, Canada, and Europe (Boughn, 1994; Day et al., 1995; Edvardsen, 1995; Furnham, 1988; Ghazi & Henshaw, 1998; Happell 1999; Hemsley Brown & Foskett, 1999; Kersten, Bakewell, & Meyer, 1991; Maurer, 1994; Turunen, Taskinen, Voutilainen, Tossavainen, & Sinkkonen, 1997; Vanhanen, Hentinen, & Janhonen, 1999; Williams, Wertemberger, & Gushuliak, 1997).

These studies reveal students choose nursing education and the nursing profession because they desire human contact and want to help others, combined with job security and the feeling of doing something useful. However, there are a few exceptions. In a German study, Veit (1996) reported that in contrast to previous find-

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Ms. Rognstad is Assistant Professor, Oslo University College, Oslo, Norway.

Address correspondence to May-Karin Rognstad, Cand. Polit, RN, Assistant Professor, Oslo University College, Faculty of Nursing, Pilestredet 52, N-0167 Oslo, Norway.

ings, nursing students expressed a variety of motives for their occupational choice. The desire to perform work that is useful to society and factors such as wages, satisfactory working conditions, and the opportunity for individual development were important to students (Veit, 1996). Veit (1996) concluded nursing students could no longer be considered a homogeneous group.

In addition, students regard altruism and self-realization as important internal motivating factors for their occupational choice (Maurer, 1994). Thus, Maurer (1994) concluded the choice of occupation was influenced by both internal and external factors related to a professional career. The opportunity to earn a living and advance in a career by observing and following the nursing role are external motivation factors.

Williams et al. (1997) identified additional motives, such as an "interest in science." Furthermore, a few students also considered influence from family and working experience important factors in the choice of occupation. Only 9% of the respondents regarded their occupational choice as a "life-long dream" or the only thing they would consider doing, and 8% considered economic advantages and "individual suitability" as reasons for choosing the nursing occupation.

Boughn (1994) examined the reasons men choose nursing and found a common motive for men is the feeling of power related to the control of critical situations. Kersten et al. (1991) reported students referred to emotional needs as a reason for their choice. "Emotional needs" were identified as self-esteem, fulfillment, challenges, excitement, and feelings.

According to Edvardsen (1995), students considered it crucial to have an interesting job, to have human contact and help others, and to make use of what they have learned in their education. Some nurses consider job security important.

The research questions for this article were:

- Which students choose nursing?
- What motives do students provide for their choice of occupation?
- Which motives do students indicate as most important to them?
- How are the motives organized and into how many groups?

## Method

### Sample and Design

Quantitative methods were used in this study, which took the form of a questionnaire. The respondents were from three classes of students who started their full-time nursing education in the fall of 1998 at three different colleges in Oslo, Norway. In 1999, the three institutions were amalgamated into one faculty of nursing at the University College of Oslo. The survey was completed 6 months after students commenced their studies. A total of 397 students received questionnaires that they completed and turned in immediately after a lecture. The researcher was present while the students completed the questionnaires in case questions arose.

Response rate was 80% ( $N = 315$ ). The sample consisted of students from all counties in Norway, and 88% were women, which mirrored the actual gender situation in nursing education. Students' ages ranged between 19 and 50, and the average age was 23. Thus, the sample is representative because the age range and mean are similar to those of the student population that begins nursing education in Norway according to statistics for 1998 and 1999 (Statistics Norway 1998, 1999).

### Instrument

A pilot study from 1996 with 12 in-depth interviews was used as a basis for developing the questionnaire, which consisted of 3 parts. Only parts one and two are used in the present study. The purpose was to identify the students who chose the nursing occupation and the motives for their choice of occupation. Twelve students tested the questionnaire and gave feedback of their experience of answering the questions. There were no reports of difficulties answering the questions. These answers were not included with the answers of the group taking part in the survey.

The questionnaire includes 20 closed questions and 2 open questions in which respondents can express their experiences of nursing education in their own words and describe the tasks they believe they will perform as trained nurses.

Part one was composed of demographic questions and provided a picture of why students choose nursing education. The demographic variables of educational background and study preferences indi-

cate important aspects of the student selection. The students were asked to describe their postsecondary school education. The choices were university studies, auxiliary nursing education, other occupational education, other things, and none.

The variable study preferences contributes to identifying the motives for choice of occupation. Therefore, the students were asked to answer if they would have rather studied a subject other than nursing when applying for nursing education. The choices were only nursing, languages/history, teacher training, social sciences, law, medicine, health subjects, police training, and other subjects.

The second part covered the main focus of this article and was composed of three questions about occupational choice. In the first question, the students were asked whether they had considered further education after the basic nursing course and to indicate which of the courses offered were of interest.

The goals and motives of the occupational choice were made even more explicit by asking, "Have you already considered further education after finishing the basic nursing education program?" Students who answered they had been considering further studies after the basic nursing education were asked to list educational opportunities that might be of interest. The options listed were a supplementary course, further education (i.e., psychiatry, health visitor, midwife, anesthesia), and higher education or university studies. In addition, the students who had considered further or higher education were asked to specify this.

Students also were asked, "We would like to know how important the following factors are for choosing the nursing profession." The motives for vocational choice were defined by listing 10 statements related to desires such as need for human contact and to administer or manage. The statements were measured on a 10-point scale, with 1 being least important and 10 most important. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 10 statements connected to this question was .69. Thus, reliability may be considered moderate. The statements were formulated as unambiguously as possible.

To estimate validity, Locke and Latham's (1990) theory of goal setting and task performance was used in the inter-

retation of the phenomena motive. This theory regards motive as a driving force behind a choice of action (here occupational choice), and thus motive is related to goal. It also associates values and desires to motives as they can be understood as important goals.

## Results

The data from the survey were coded and registered in a data program for quantitative analyses (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS]). The material was analyzed using frequency distributions, mean, variance analysis (ANOVA), and factor analysis.

The demographic variable educational background indicates an important aspect of the student selection. The frequency distribution demonstrates variety in the educational level of the nursing students:

- 29% had completed university studies.
- 8% had experience as nursing auxiliaries.
- 16% mentioned other things (e.g., other types of education or work experience).
- 37% had no education beyond secondary school level.

Study preferences is an important background variable. The competition for student places in the faculties of medicine, physiotherapy, and journalism is intense, and students tend to accept a place in nursing education although they actually prefer other subjects. Therefore, the students were asked to mark their study preferences. The frequency distribution indicates that:

- 21% of the students wanted to study other subjects, such as languages, history, teacher training, social sciences, journalism, and police training.
- 11.7% wanted to study medicine.
- 12.3% preferred health subjects (e.g., physiotherapy, ergotherapy).

Overall, 45% of the students wanted to study subjects other than nursing, whereas 55% stated nursing was the only subject they wanted to study. These findings indicate applicants for nursing education are not a homogeneous group.

The motives for vocational choice were defined by listing, in order of preference, 10 statements related to desires such as wanting human contact and administering and managing. The preferences were

**TABLE 1**  
Motives for Vocational Choice

Motives	N	Mean	SD
Want human contact/help others	313	8.91	1.47
Interest/talent	309	7.92	1.67
Want to do something useful	312	8.72	1.80
Want knowledge of the subject	312	8.32	1.75
Want to learn technical procedures	308	5.83	2.60
Want to administer/manage	312	4.94	2.42
Want to guide/teach	312	4.33	2.69
Want to work near home	311	5.36	3.00
Want job security	312	8.00	1.97
Want the opportunity to work part time	311	4.82	2.80

provided on a 10-point scale, with 1 being least important and 10 most important.

The mean values in Table 1 indicate the preferences. The desires related to wanting human contact and helping others (mean = 8.91), wanting to do something useful (mean = 8.72), wanting knowledge of the subject (mean = 8.32), and wanting job security (mean = 8.00) yielded the highest average scores and were preferred to the other statements. The SD values varied considerably and show the heterogeneity within the sample.

To study how the goals and motives were organized, a factor analysis was completed for the total sample ( $N = 315$ ). A principal component analysis was conducted to capture the underlying dimensions of a set of the former 10 statements (Nunnally, 1978; Polit, 1996). The result of the analysis indicates four factors that may represent four sets of goals (Table 2). The first factor can be expressed as caring and the second can be interpreted as technical and knowledge. The third factor is expressed as guidance and management, and the fourth can be interpreted as general job security.

The three subgroups of wanted to study medicine, nursing, and health were compared on the four factors mentioned above using ANOVA supplied with the Bonferroni test (Polit, 1996). Overall ANOVA gave significant results connected to factors 1 and 3, but not factor 4. The results for factor 1 were:

- Medicine ( $N = 34$ , mean =  $-.28$ ).
  - Health subjects ( $N = 40$ , mean =  $-.11$ ).
  - Nursing ( $N = 163$ , mean =  $.16$ ).
- The results for factor 3 were:
- Medicine ( $N = 34$ , mean =  $-.54$ )

- Health subjects ( $N = 40$ , mean =  $.26$ ).

- Nursing: ( $N = 163$ , mean =  $.08$ ).

Ninety-two percent of the respondents indicated they had already considered further education after the basic nursing education program. Students who answered they had been considering further studies after the basic nursing education were asked to list educational opportunities that might be of interest, and almost half (46%) indicated they were interested in training as a midwife or health visitor (i.e., a nurse who works in the community, mother-child clinics, and school health care).

## Discussion

The results of the analysis conclude nursing applicants are a heterogeneous group with several motives for their vocational choice, which are related to their study preferences (i.e., the subjects they primarily wanted to study). However, general goals such as wanting human contact and helping others, performing useful work, and a wanting job security were the most important (Table 1). Furthermore, the study reveals the motives of wanting human contact and helping others are not exclusively associated with sick people and their need for nursing care, as 46% of the students wanted to become midwives or health visitors. Factor analysis resulted in four factors, including one goal factor and three motivation factors (Table 2). The findings from this study regarding heterogeneity are supported by Maurer (1994), Vanhanen and Janhonen (2000), Veit (1996), and Williams et al. (1997).

**TABLE 2**  
**Factor Analysis of Motives for Vocational Choice (N = 315)**

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Want human contact/to help others	.748	-.069	.114	.231
Interest/talent	.722	.013	-.029	-.229
Want to do something really useful	.562	.247	.218	.326
Want knowledge of the subject	.239	.741	.181	-.045
Want to learn technical procedures	-.471	.724	.007	.020
Want to administer/manage	-.220	-.098	-.794	.142
Want to guide/teach	-.022	-.189	-.586	-.390
Want to work near home	-.486	-.397	.526	.125
Want job security	-.062	-.198	.132	.772
Want the opportunity to work part time	-.300	-.383	.229	-.609
Eigenvalues	2.26	1.54	1.41	1.18
% of explained variance	22.5	15.4	14.1	11.8

Notes: Extraction of factors by principal factors with varimax rotation (N = 315). Level of wishes with items reported from 1 = least important to 10 = most important.

The heterogeneity found in this study should be considered when recruiting students to nursing. In the future, it will be important for health authorities and nurse educators to have a strategy for recruiting students who are motivated to become nurses.

The fact that nursing students express general and vague goals such as wanting human contact and helping others may indicate they have insufficient knowledge of the profession to identify more specific motives and goals (Table 2). Many occupations involve human contact, so this is not exclusive to nursing. Furthermore, many occupational groups share the general goal of performing work that is useful to society. Disseminating more detailed information about the content of nursing programs may help students to "self-select" or make an informed decision about whether to accept a place in nursing education and embark on a career in nursing.

Nursing needs to attract people who will be able to cope with the job demands as well as reflect the values of the profession (Barriball & While, 1995). There could be great difficulty finding the "right sort of person" in a society in which success is paramount, young people express a need for identification, and freedom from disease is the ideal (Ziehe, 1989). A possible solution to the problem could be for colleges to prepare interviews for qualified applicants and select only those students who are motivated for a nursing career. This would entail a considerable amount of

work, but it might result in better recruitment of the "right sort of candidate."

Many nursing students stated their professional choice was related to desiring human contact and wanting to help other human beings. This study revealed 46% of the nursing students who had already considered continuing their nursing education wanted to become midwives or health visitors. These findings are surprising. It would appear these students' educational and professional choice was not motivated by the desire to help sick and suffering human beings. This factor has important implications for nurse-training programs and provides a great challenge to educators. Encouraging the students by motivating them to take an active part in the nursing program and making nursing values more visible may contribute to changing their attitudes.

The heterogeneity found in this study poses a problem. Norwegian society cannot afford to lose newly qualified nurses. There is a possibility the students who wanted to study subjects other than nursing when they applied for nursing education will embark on other studies or begin other occupations when they have completed their basic nursing education.

In Norway, there is a high turnover of nurses, especially in hospitals. Professional nurses frequently shift jobs or leave nursing 1 or 2 years after beginning their first position. This results in an increased turnover and creates intolerable

working pressure for the remaining staff. This again reduces the quality of the nursing care afforded to patients and also can impair medical treatment. Moreover, the high turnover can result in a problem for nursing education because students will lack competent role models.

Norway has a shortage of 3,750 professional nurses. The findings of this study do not indicate the shortage will decrease. Health services are undergoing a crisis because they cannot provide sufficient care to people needing help. Norwegian authorities and employers use considerable effort to recruit newly qualified nurses but only are able to keep them in their employment for 1 to 2 years before they resign. In an effort to correct this situation, Norwegian authorities recruit professional nurses from many countries, especially those in central and northern Europe and Asia. However, the recruiting of these nurses might contribute to a shortage of professional nurses in their countries of origin.

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