DO PERSONALITY FACTORS DETERMINE THE CHOICE OF PROFESSION? AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF FEMALE NURSING AND FEMALE MEDICAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Medical profession and nursing profession are noble professions. Both professions place heavy emphasis on desirable personality traits of being affectionate, humble and responsible. Personal qualities such as integrity, responsibility and empathy have often been mentioned in the literature as desirable qualities for these professions. The present study was planned to explore these personal attributes. Sample for the study consisted of 26 female medical students of first year MBBS and 29 female nursing students of first year B.Sc. Nursing course. The subjects were matched for age and sex. Personality profile was evaluated by administering 16 Personality Factor Form A. Findings revealed significant differences on factor 'A', 'F', 'H' and 'M'. On second order factors significant differences were noted on introversion-extroversion and independence-subduedness dimension.

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KEY WORDS :Female medical students; Nursing students; Personality profile.

Introduction

Every person joining a profession is influenced by some motivating factors that vary depending upon the socio-psychological background or circumstances of the individual. The medical and nursing professions, due to their humanitarian nature and social service orientation are looked upon with great respect by society. Economic gain, security, high social prestige and power attached to the particular profession may serve as important inducing factors for selecting a profession.

Medical Council of India has defined the institutional objectives of undergraduate medical education. It is interesting to note that several of the objectives are related to the abilities pertaining to psychological factors and personality attributes. Personal attributes highlighted include personal integrity, sense of responsibility, dependability and ability to relate to or show concern for other individuals [1]. Equally noteworthy is the fact that every student enrolling at a nursing school to train as a nurse, brings a set of personal qualities, values and motivations. Cohen [2] found that two third of students chose nursing because they thought that taking care of people was important. Students have preconceived ideas that nursing is nurturant and feminine. During the education process cer-

tain changes in these humanitarian values and idealism occur partly because faculty regards personality traits such as dominance, autonomy and professionalism as professional qualities [1].

Pursuit of knowledge and service to humanity are common to both the medical and nursing professions. Though the objectives are similar yet the training is different. Training for a career in medicine and other health professions (nursing) is associated with significant demands on personal attributes such as responsibility, sincerity and compassion. The process of becoming a health professional entails significant risk and increased disillusionment. The stressors of medical training that precipitate these adverse reactions include intense academic pressures, lack of time for personal and social needs and the demanding nature of medical practice, which requires involvement with the most personal and emotionally draining aspects of life i.e. human suffering, death, sexuality and fear [3-5]. The available literature on psychological distress in health profession students has largely ignored personality traits that may act as catalysts in shaping up successful professionals. Recent studies demonstrate a strong association between perfectionism and increased risk of depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms and suicide [6,7]. In view of the pau-

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city of studies exploring the personality traits of the students of these professions (medicine and nursing) the present work was undertaken.

Material and Methods

Sample for the study comprised all female medical students of first year MBBS course and all first year female B.Sc. Nursing students of a reputed medical college. All the students were administered information schedule and 16 Personality Factor (PF) form A [8] in group setting. Information schedule was a semi-structured questionnaire prepared for collecting socio-demographic information. 16 PF was administered to evaluate the personality profile of these groups. Data so generated was statistically analyzed by Chi-square test and students 't' test.

Results

Sample for the study comprised 26 female medical and 29 female nursing students. The sample size was small, as total strength of students admitted to these courses is limited. The study groups were homogenous in respect to sex, age, domicile and family background (Table-1). However, significant differences were noted in parental education and parental occupation (Table-2). Majority of the students in both groups hailed from civil background (Table-2). Among those from service background there were 20.69% JCOs wards among the nursing students as compared to 3.85% JCOs wards among medical students.

TABLE 1
Demographic characteristics of female medical students (n=26) and female nursing students (n=29)

Characteristic	Medical students n (%)	Nursing students n (%)	p
Mean age	19.2 years	18.5 years	—
Domicile			
Rural	0	5 (17.24)	—
Urban	26 (100)	24 (82.76)	
Family type			
Nuclear	25 (96.15)	28 (96.55)	X ² = 0.24
Joint	1 (3.85)	1 (3.450)	p > 0.70; NS
Family income (Rs/month)			
< 5000	4 (15.38)	8 (27.58)	
5001 - 10,000	17 (65.38)	18 (38.52)	X ² = 1.74
10,001 - 15,000	3 (11.53)	2 (6.89)	p > 0.70; NS
> 15,000	2 (7.69)	1 (3.44)	

NS - not significant

On personality profile (Table-3), significant differences were noted on factor 'F' (Desurgency vs Surgency), factor 'H' (Threctia vs Parmia) and factor 'M' (Praxernia vs Autia). On second order factor also, significant differences were noted between the two groups on factors 'E1' (Introversion vs Extroversion) and factor 'I1' (Subduedness vs Independence). Findings of the present study revealed female medical students to be outgoing, warmhearted (A+), cheerful and happy-go-lucky (F+) with adventurous (H+) and imaginative (M+) tendencies. On the other hand nursing students have sober, aloof and cool temperament (A-). Nursing students had introspective and serious dimension of personality (F-), were restrained and shy (H-) with practical approach (M-). On second order factors also, medical students were found to be extroverted and independent while nursing students were more subdued and introverted (Table-3).

TABLE 2

Parental education, occupation and background (defence vs civil) of female medical students (n=26) and female nursing students (n=29)

	Medical students n (%)	Nursing students n (%)	p
Education level			
Father			
12 & below	1 (3.85)	16 (55.17)	X ² = 22.2
Graduate	14 (58.85)	10 (34.48)	p < 0.01; S
Postgraduate	11 (42.30)	3 (10.34)	
Mother			
12 & below	7 (26.92)	20 (68.96)	X ² = 9.7
Graduate	15 (59.70)	6 (20.69)	p < 0.001; S
Postgraduate	4 (5.38)	3 (10.34)	
Occupation			
Father			
Professional	23 (88.46)	9 (31.03)	X ² = 16.30
Executive	3 (11.54)	15 (51.7)	p < 0.01; S
Skilled worker	0	5 (17.24)	
Mother			
Housewife	24 (92.31)	23 (79.31)	X ² = 0.96
Nurse	0	3 (10.34)	p > 0.50; NS
Teacher	2 (7.69)	3 (10.34)	
Background			
Civil	23 (88.46)	33 (75.86)	X ² = 1.46
Service officer	2 (7.69)	1 (3.45)	p > 0.30; NS
JCO	1 (3.85)	6 (20.69)	

S= Significant; NS - not significant

TABLE 3

16 Personality factor profile of female medical students (n=26) and female nursing students (n=29)

Factors	Medical students Mean (SD)	Nursing students Mean (SD)	p
A	4.65 (1.47)	3.75 (1.35)	0.02 (S)
B	5.80 (2.10)	5.27 (2.10)	0.64 (NS)
C	5.46 (2.04)	4.69 (2.31)	0.19 (NS)
E	5.46 (1.94)	4.86 (1.43)	0.19 (NS)
F	4.76 (1.88)	3.41 (1.84)	0.01 (S)
G	4.92 (1.69)	5.7 (1.91)	0.78 (NS)
H	6.34 (1.59)	5.00 (1.66)	0.003 (S)
I	4.76 (2.20)	4.79 (2.14)	0.96 (NS)
L	5.65 (2.17)	6.00 (1.66)	0.51 (NS)
M	5.53 (1.90)	4.55 (1.93)	0.05 (S)
N	6.53 (1.79)	6.79 (1.98)	0.63 (NS)
O	5.42 (1.70)	6.13 (2.74)	0.26 (NS)
Q1	5.42 (1.96)	4.58 (1.52)	0.07 (NS)
Q2	5.80 (1.91)	5.24 (1.32)	0.20 (NS)
Q3	6.11 (2.00)	5.31 (2.20)	0.16 (NS)
Q4	4.19 (1.78)	4.44 (2.30)	0.66 (NS)
E1	4.98 (1.38)	4.04 (1.57)	0.02 (S)
A1	4.71 (1.60)	5.27 (2.5)	0.66 (NS)
T1	5.80 (1.93)	5.61 (1.54)	0.68 (NS)
I1	5.25 (1.45)	4.45 (1.34)	0.04 (S)

S - significant; NS - not significant

Discussion

Findings of the personality dimensions of medical students in the present study are by and large consistent with available literature [9-10]. In the present study, female medical students were found to be cheerful and happy-go-lucky which does not conform to earlier studies suggesting possibility of medical school being more stressful for women [11]. A possible explanation is that surgent persons have generally had an easier, less punishing and more optimism-creating environment. A glance at the demographic factors strongly indicates the possibility of better exposure and more enriched environment in respect of medical students. Moreover, the fact that parents of medical students are more professionally qualified as compared to parents of nursing students may have influenced the personality dimension of the students (Table-2).

Review of previous research concerned with motivating factors of prototypical nursing students indicates that different personality patterns are common among nursing students. However, as a group, nursing students tend to score higher on traits of deference, nurturance and endurance, but lower on autonomy [2]. Consistent with the above, in the present study also, nursing students emerge as sober, introspective, practical and group dependent. Group dependence or passive traits may go in favour of conformity, which is required in the nursing profession. Since all the students were taken from first year B.Sc. Nursing, it is difficult to comment on whether there is a degree of socialization present before entering the profession, or one is predisposed to the values and perspectives endorsed by the particular profession. In fact, one of the values highlighted by researchers [11] for the ideal nurse, is the willingness and ability for multi-disciplinary teamwork and strong identification with the nursing culture. Hence, personality traits of being practical and group dependent may help the nursing students in meeting the challenges of the profession.

One of the interesting findings of the present study is the shy and restrained aspect of personality dimension of nursing students (H-). This trait has been shown to have constitutional influences. The persons having the dimension (H-) have an over responsive sympathetic nervous system, which makes him especially threat reactive [14]. Further, on second order factors, female nursing students were more introverted and group dependent compared to female medical students. These traits would be a hindrance to nursing, which demands one to one contact with the patient. It is possible that further training might modify the traits

of being shy, restrained, introverted and group dependent [13]. Moreover, some of the professional traits like supervision and decision-making are being inculcated into nursing students during the nursing educational process [14]. It is worth mentioning here that nursing students have the same sex education whereas medical students have a co-educational system, which might be playing a role in restraining them. Further, it is evident from Table-2, education levels of parents of female nursing students are significantly lower than education levels of parents of female medical students. Education of parents is equally important in modifying this dimension.

Female nursing and medical students did not differ on factors 'B', 'E', 'G', 'I', 'L', 'N', 'O', 'Q1', 'Q2', 'Q3' & 'Q4' (Table-5). Both groups had average abstract thinking and accommodating tendencies. Students of both groups had average tendencies on being spontaneous, perseverant, trustworthy, adaptable, resilient, respecting established ideas, group adherent, socially precise and emotionally stable.

In conclusion, we may state that there are certain striking differences in the personality profile of female medical and nursing students (Factors 'A', 'F', 'H', 'M', 'E1', 'I1'). It appears that students who are opting for nursing profession are more feminine in disposition. All these factors appear to be determined by both constitutional factors and environmental influences. To assume a definite position about the contributions of any one of these determinants, the authors propose to repeat the study on these students at the culmination of their courses with the same tool. In addition the findings could be correlated with a comprehensive tool like the MMPI. This might give valuable insight into understanding the effects of environmental influences on the personality profiles of these groups.

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