Perceptions of the Public Image of Nursing among Baccalaureate Nursing Students

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Abstract: Perceptions of public image are important because they offer strategic clues to overcome the increasing nursing shortage, and public negative stereotyping. The aim of this study was to investigate perceptions of the public image among nursing students at faculty of nursing, Damanhour University. The study was conducted at Damanhour Faculty of Nursing (Egypt). A convenience sample of all baccalaureate nursing students who were enrolled, at the academic year 2012-2013, at the four years and the internship year were included (N = 904) participated in this quantitative descriptive study. The data was collected through self-administered questionnaire containing three major parts: first part is the demographic characteristics; the second part included six statements to explore the subject's information about nursing; and finally, the third part is the Perception of Professional Nursing Tool (PPNT), to measure their perceptions utilizing the tenets of nursing practice, values, and public image of nursing. Results: The study showed that the nursing students enrolled at the four years and the internship year; generally have significance positive perceptions about the image of the nursing profession. The highest percentage of study subjects joined the faculty of nursing because of career opportunity; financial reasons; and secondary school grade. Majority of the students divert attention when talking with others about nursing profession. The relatives and friends opinion have the greatest effect in influencing the students to enter the nursing profession. A positive correlation between participants' perception of the public image of nursing was found. In conclusion, these participants viewed the public image of nursing as positive. These findings have implications for practice, as it has a critical impact on whether nursing is chosen as a career as well as the effective functioning of nurses that should be embraced and fully utilized. It is recommended that in order to attract more individuals to the profession, a positive image of nursing needs to be engendered by nurse education and the general community.
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1. Introduction

Perceptions of public image among students of nursing are important because the image of both nurses and nursing as a profession are vital in the successful recruitment and retention of staff in the healthcare industry to overcome the increasing nursing shortage, after long suffer from public negative stereotyping and from being closely associated with femininity and powerlessness (Meiring, 2010). The image of the nurse has developed throughout the past century from stereotypes of battle-axe/sex symbol, from doctors' handmaiden to a worker in a separate caring profession with a scientific theoretical basis (Stanley, 2004). Nursing image is conveyed by how nurses present themselves in every setting, from the classroom, to clinics, to professional meetings and to the workplace (National Students' Nurses Association, 2009–2010). The Oxford English Dictionary (2010) defined perception as one's awareness and understanding of sensory information attained through interplay between past experiences, one's own culture and the interpretation of the perceived. Image of Nursing is viewed as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of nurses and nursing" (Kalisch and Kalisch, 1987). Positive images reflect high-quality nursing care, recognized by nurses and other groups for the difference it makes to patient wellbeing, and will contribute to empowerment of the profession (Ulmer, 2000). Maintaining an intraprofessional positive image is significant in attracting new recruits to the profession, contributing to morale and job satisfaction, and influencing social status, economic value and career development (Takase *et al.,* 2006).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2012), number of trained nurses in Egypt at year 2011 were just 300,000. Nurses in the market are not just low in numbers, but they are poorly qualified too. An image which is not highly appreciated and a lack of motivation due to low salaries and incentives are two of the reasons why less women wants to take that career path. In several Cairo hospitals, nurses earn up to only EGP 1.25 for an entire night's shift- less in other governorates. Most nurses resort to having a second job at private hospitals where hourly rate in the shift can reach up to EGP 9. Working for too long

hours, the quality of service provided by nurses severely declines. Other recurring challenges regarding nursing are centered around education, performance. Skills and knowledge of new technical health expertise are still missing out in preparing the graduates of nursing schools (WHO, 2012).

A small number of research studies that addressed the impact of nursing students' perceptions of the public image of nursing were found (Wallace, 2007). Although nursing students' perception of nursing and factors influencing it were well investigated in the West, this was less examined in the Arab Islamic region. An understanding of students' perception and its evolvement during the course of the study can assist nurse educators in evaluating the educational program's strengths and weaknesses. This understanding can enhance curricular development towards a caring and holistic paradigm of nursing. Moreover, it will add to the body of knowledge of nursing, especially in relation to admission processes, by examining specific personal factors that influence students' perceptions. (Safadi *et al.,* 2011).

The perceptions of the nursing image, held by nursing students, are indicated by three tenets of nursing practice, values and public image. ***Practice***, which referred to how individuals perceived the role of the nurse in the healthcare setting. ***Values*** explored how participants viewed nursing as a profession, and are important because they motivate and reward behavior (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). A conflict results when nurses live outside the values that inspired them to choose nursing. Unfortunately, this often leads to stress and exhaustion in the work environment (McNeese and Crook, 2003). Finally, ***public image*** which asked participants how they felt the public viewed the nursing profession. These perceptions are useful in understanding how nurses view these dimensions of their profession. It is helpful for nurse educators to obtain relevant information to share with students seeking education or a career in nursing. This information will also assist leaders of the profession in determining which perceptions of nursing need attention and improvement (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006).

2. Literature Review

As a result of nursing shortage, schools of nursing experience pressure from healthcare organizations to increase student enrollment to produce more nurse graduates. Despite numerous studies that have been carried out to investigate the public image of nurses, there has been little work exploring how students perceive the nursing profession upon entry into a nursing education program (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). They added that students most frequently reported choosing

nursing because of the availability of career opportunities, jobs security, salary, and interest in nursing. In their study, students identified pursuing further education as a career goal followed by 'doing one's best in nursing'. Williams *et al*. (1997) showed that students choose to study nursing because it offered work abroad and opportunities for further professional development. The influence of role models in choosing nursing as a career was also reported (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). A number of studies found that past experiences with illness, working in health care and having family members as nurses were important motives for undertaking nursing (Beck, 2000; Rheaume *et al.,* 2003; Larsen *et al*., 2003). Students who seek nursing as a field of study as well as the public often possess little knowledge about the different levels of nursing practice or nursing education requirements (Huffstutler *et al.,* 1998). A study involving 180 US oncology nurses reported that they felt a lack of recognition from administrators and physicians (Krebs *et al.,* 1996). A study by Takase *et al*. (2001, 2002) involving 80 Australian nurses also showed nurses perceived the public saw them as being less powerful than they thought of themselves. These studies may suggest nurses perceive their public image fairly accurately, which is congruent with psychological research that reported that individuals have quite accurate pictures of how others see them (Kenny and DePaulo, 1993; Cook and Douglas, 1998). Nonetheless, the limited number of studies in this area does not fully explain nurses' interpretation of their public images.

Studies have identified a number of negative societal perceptions of nursing related to gendered stereotyping such as subordination to (male) doctors, low academic standards, limited career opportunities and poor pay and conditions (Brodie *et al.,* 2004; Yun *et al.,* 2010). There are reports that many career seekers perceive nursing as a poor career choice for reasons such as lack of prestige and defined career ladders, too little financial compensation and the subservient image of nursing's role (Goodin, 2003; Hoke, 2006; Wallace *et al.,* 2007). The stereotypical public image of nursing is therefore a major concern to nurses. It is known that the relationship between nurses' perceived public image and self-image is associated with their job performance and turnover intentions (Takase *et al.,* 2006), and that stereotypical images also affect nursing by distorting the public's concept of nursing, possibly depriving the profession of high-quality recruits, by affecting the decisions of policymakers, and by affecting nursing's self-image (Fletcher, 2007). Career seekers outside the profession presented constantly with inaccurate and negative nurse images may view a nursing career as undesirable (Kalisch *et al.,* 2007).

Improving the public image of nurses is important, because the image influences nurses' recruitment and retention, motivation to work, self image, self-esteem and job satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and policy making (National Students' Nurses Association, 2009–2010; Fletcher, 2007). Although some studies have been conducted on the public image of nurses globally, there is a lack of research on how nurses perceive their public image in Egypt. Therefore, this study, as few on nursing image in Egypt, aimed to investigate perceptions of the public image among baccalaureate nursing students at the Faculty of Nursing, Damanhour University.

Research aim and questions

The aim of this study was to investigate perceptions of the public image among baccalaureate nursing students at faculty of nursing, Damanhour University.

The primary research question for this study was: what are nursing students' perceptions of the public image of nursing? The more specific questions that this study aimed to answer were: What is the feeling of nursing students toward nursing profession? What are the main reasons for enrollment to the faculty of nursing?

3. Material and Methods:
Research design:

This is a quantitative exploratory descriptive study.
Setting

The study was conducted at Damanhour University (Egypt), Faculty of Nursing.
Subjects

The study subjects included all nursing students who were enrolled, at the academic year 2012-2013, at the four years of Bachelor of Nursing Sciences and the internship year were included (N = 904).
Tool for data collection

The data was collected through self-administered questionnaire containing three major parts:
Part I:

This part included questions related to demographic characteristics of the study subjects such as age, gender, presence of a nurse friend or relative, and family's reaction to students' enrollment.
Part II:

This part included six statements to explore the subject's information about nursing, concerning: prior information about nursing; type of effect and source of information; reasons for enrollment to the faculty of nursing; feeling about nursing as a profession; and factors related to change in nursing image after joining faculty of nursing (Spouse, 2000; Hallett, 2007; Mooney and Glacken, 2008).

Part III:

The Perceptions of Professional Nursing Tool (PPNT), developed by Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer (2006), was used to measure the perceptions of nursing image among nursing students. It consists of 37-items, concerning three subscales, namely: *practice* (13-items), which explored perceptions regarding the importance of teaching health promotion and disease prevention, autonomy, competence, accountability, and physician/nurse collaboration; *values* (11-items), which explored perceptions regarding the importance of nursing, the characteristics of nurses, and their opinion of the profession as a whole; and *public image* (13-items), which explored aspects of the profession that included whether the public considered nurses as professional, valuable, hard workers, intelligent, and other descriptors. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert rating scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The total score ranged from 37 to 185. The higher the scores, the higher perception of nursing image.
Methods

The study was executed according to the following steps:

Official Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the dean of the faculty of Nursing, Damanhour University. The tool used in this study was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient test, its value was (0.89). A pilot study was conducted on 99 nursing students (10 %) of the total sample size (N = 994), who were selected randomly from the previously mentioned setting in order to test the relevance and applicability of the study tool (20 students from first, second, and fourth academic; as well as internship year; while 19 students from the third academic year), who were excluded from the main study sample.
Ethical considerations:

The purpose of the study was explained to each student and oral consent to participate in the study was obtained from them. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured to participants.

Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires that were distributed among the subjects at clinical settings (nine students/day). The data was collected for a period of 4 months started from the beginning of October 2012 to the end of 31st of November 2012 and from the beginning of February 2013 to the 1st of April 2013.

Statistical analysis

The response rate was 100 %. After data were collected it was revised, coded and fed to statistical software SPSS version 17. The given graphs were constructed using Microsoft Excel software. All statistical analysis was done using two tailed tests and

alpha error of 0.05. *P* value equals to or less than 0.05 was considered to be significant. As for the tool, scores were given according to Likert scale items. Then the sum of scores for each dimension and total score was calculated by summing the scores given for its responses. Descriptive statistics were done using numbers, percentage, mean with standard deviation. Analytical statistics were done using significance test for independent samples t-test, One Way ANOVA, and inter-scale correlations.

4. Results

Table (1) shows that the majority of students were in their early twenties (60.3 %); while the minority had more than 20 years old (39.7 %). However, the mean age ($\overline{X}$±SD) was 19.1±1.7. Nearly two-thirds (69.9%) of the subjects were females and about one-third (30.1 %) of them were males. About quarter of the students were enrolled in first academic year (25.1 %); whereas students at second and internship year got approximately the same percentage (21 % and 20.1 %), respectively. About one fifth (14.8 %) of the subjects were at the third academic year. The majority of the subjects (63.9 %) had none of their relative or friend in the nursing profession. Majority of the subjects' family reaction (51.9 %) was positive.

According to data in table (2) above half of the study subjects joined the Faculty of Nursing due to the variety in career opportunity (54.4 %). Yet, nearly half (50.2 %) of them did so due to their grade in the secondary school. Both the challenging/rewarding career (financial reason) and their families' advice were the reasons for 44.6 % and 41.7 % of them, respectively. However, the desire to help others was the reasons for (31.6 %) of the subjects.

Figure (1a) reveals that above one-half (56.1 %) of the study subjects had prior information about nursing; whereas, 43.9 % had not prior information. Whereas, figure (1b) shows that a vast majority (89 %) of the subjects were positively influenced by such information; compared to (11 %), who were negatively influenced.

Figure (2) indicates that the main source of such information was relatives or friends (67.7 %). Moreover, 25.8 % of them got such information from media; and only 6.5 % of them got information from healthcare settings usage.

Table (3) states that the total student nurses' perceptions of nursing image had a mean score ($\overline{X}$) and standard deviation (SD) (120.0±7.6). The highest dimension mean score and standard deviation is practice (52.8± 2.6). On the other hand, the lowest subscale $\overline{X}$±SD is public image (26.0±4.7); compared to values subscale (41.1±3.7).

Table (1): Percent distribution of the study subjects according to their demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	No. (N=904)	%
Age (years)		
▪　　<20	545	60.3
▪　　20+	359	39.7
Mean ± SD	19.1 ± 1.7	
Gender		
▪　　Male	272	30.1
▪　　Female	632	69.9
Academic year		
▪　　1st year	227	25.1
▪　　2nd year	190	21.0
▪　　3rd year	134	14.8
▪　　4th year	171	18.9
▪　　Internship Year	182	20.1
Presence of a nurse friend or relative:		
▪　　Yes	326	36.1
▪　　No	578	63.9
Family's reaction to students' enrollment:		
▪　　Positive	469	51.9
▪　　Negative	187	20.8
▪　　Neutral	248	27.3

Figure (3) reveals the attitude of nursing students about nursing profession in front of others. The majority of nursing students (42 %) divert attention by changing the topic. Almost equal proportions (27 % and 26 %) of them were either proud or defensive about nursing, respectively. However, small percentages of them were shy (4 %). Only 1 % of them attacked the profession.

Table (4) shows that of the subjects` image was improved after enrollment to the faculty of nursing. The average for positive change in the image of nursing was (51.3 %) and was mainly due to both working condition, family member opinion and effect of faculty members (69.7 %, 68 %, and 63.3 %), respectively. The average for worst image was 39.5 % and only 141 students (15.6 %) had no change. In relation to those with worst image, (55.1 % and 46.9 %) of subjects got such change related to working conditions and public view about nursing, respectively. Approximately equal percentages of their reasons for such change were clinical training and relationship with medical staff (41.8 % and 40.5 %), respectively.

According to table (5) there was significant difference between age and total nursing image; as well as public image and values subscales where *P* = (0.000, 0.000, and 0.021), respectively. This significance were the same with academic year where *P* = (0.000) for total nursing image and public image and values subscales. Whereas, a significant difference

was found between gender and practice subscale where $P = (0.028)$.

Table (6) presents the inter-scale correlations among the three subscales items (Practice, Values, and Public Image). Both Practice and Public Image are related to Values as indicated by their significant low to moderate association. However, Practice and Public

Image are not significantly correlated. Values and Public Image are more closely related to one another than Values and Practice. The correlations among the overall nursing image subscales revealed that they are interrelated but measure very different aspects of nursing perceptions as indicated by their significant moderate to high association.

Table (2):Distribution of the study subjects according to reasons for enrollment at the Faculty of Nursing

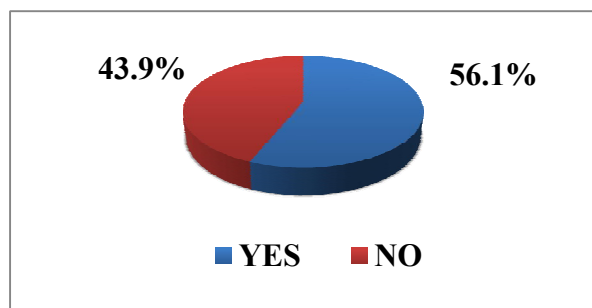| Items*	1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year		Internship Year		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	(N=91)	(N=136)	(N=68)	(N=122)	(N=39)	(N=95)	(N=36)	(N=135)	(N=38)	(N=144)	(N=904)
Desire to help others	6	46	34	47	13	38	6	31	21	44	286
	6.6%	33.8%	50.0%	38.5%	33.3%	40.0%	16.7%	23.0%	55.3%	30.6%	31.6%
Challenging/rewarding career	37	65	24	51	23	17	31	79	37	39	403
	40.7%	47.8%	35.3%	41.8%	59.0%	17.9%	86.1%	58.5%	97.4%	27.1%	44.6%
Variety of career opportunity	46	63	33	51	32	27	36	75	32	90	492
	50.5%	46.3%	48.5%	41.8%	82.1%	28.4%	100.0%	55.6%	84.2%	62.5%	54.4%
Secondary school grade	13	42	55	99	12	51	26	61	21	74	454
	14.3%	30.9%	80.9%	81.1%	30.8%	53.7%	72.2%	45.2%	55.3%	51.4%	50.2%
Advice from relatives/friends	15	55	43	56	21	53	12	48	11	63	377
	16.5%	40.4%	63.2%	45.9%	53.8%	55.8%	33.3%	35.6%	28.9%	43.8%	41.7%

More than one- answer

Figure (1a): Distribution of the study subjects according to their prior information about nursing.
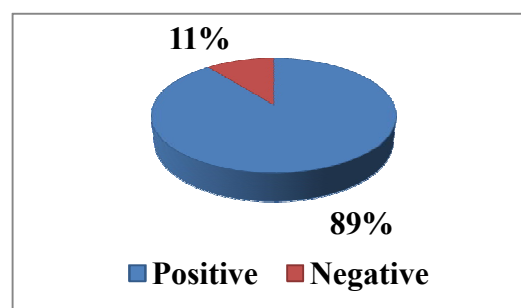

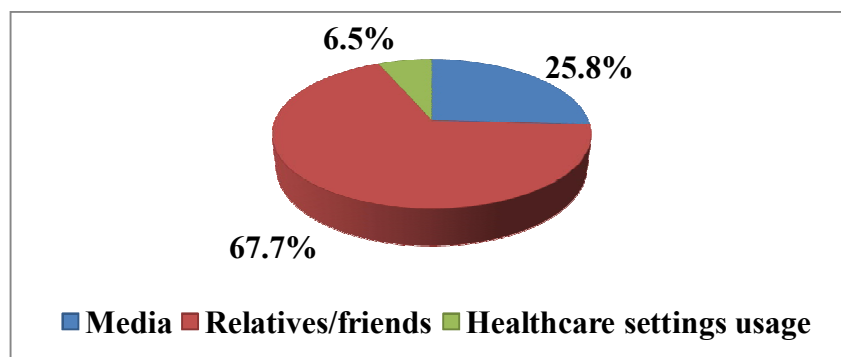**Figure (1b): Type of effect of this information on nursing image.**

Figure (2): Distribution of the study subjects according to their source of such information (N = 507).

Table 3:Distribution of students nurses' perceptions of nursing image at Damanhour Faculty of Nursing.

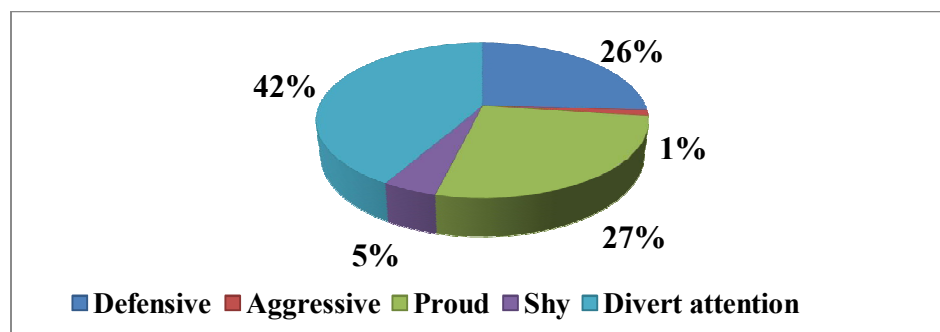| Nursing Image Subscale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	±SD
Practice	13	65	52.8	2.6
Values	11	55	41.1	3.7
Public image	13	65	26.0	4.7
Overall	37	185	120.0	7.6

Figure (3): Attitude toward nursing profession for nursing students in front of others (N = 904).

Table (4) Distribution of the study subjects according to the factors that change nursing image after joining Faculty of Nursing (N = 763).

Factor	To Better* (N = 469)		To Worse* (N = 294)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Working conditions	327	69.7	162	55.1
Clinical training	134	28.6	123	41.8
Effect of faculty members	297	63.3	101	34.4
Relationship with medical staff	269	57.4	119	40.5
Relationship with friends	235	50.1	95	32.3
Family member opinion	319	68.0	75	25.5
Public view about nursing	103	21.9	138	46.9
Average	51.3 %		39.5 %	

* More than one- answer

Table (5): Relationship between demographic characteristics of study subjects and nursing image.

	Nursing Image Subscale							
Demographic characteristics	**Practice**		**Values**		**Public image**		**Total**	
	Mean	**±SD**	**Mean**	**±SD**	**Mean**	**±SD**	**Mean**	**±SD**
Age (years)								
▪ <20	52.8	2.7	40.7	3.6	24.4	3.4	118.0	6.5
▪ 20+	52.9	2.6	41.6	3.6	28.4	5.2	123.0	8.1
P $^\epsilon$	0.731		0.021*		0.000*		0.000*	
Gender								
▪ Male	52.5	2.8	41.1	3.7	25.6	4.6	119.3	7.8
▪ Female	53.0	2.5	41.1	3.6	26.2	4.7	120.3	7.5
P $^\epsilon$	0.028*		0.804		0.073		0.079	
Academic year								
▪ 1st year	52.9	3.0	43.1	3.3	25.5	3.1	121.6	6.3
▪ 2nd year	52.6	2.6	39.4	3.2	23.9	3.6	115.9	5.8
▪ 3rd year	52.9	2.0	38.5	2.2	23.4	3.2	114.9	4.5
▪ 4th year	52.8	2.3	39.5	2.9	25.6	4.5	117.9	7.0
▪ Internship Year	52.9	2.9	43.7	3.1	31.3	4.3	127.8	6.0
P $^\pi$	0.668		0.000*		0.000*		0.000*	

*P $^\epsilon$ P value for independent samples t-test; P $^\pi$ P value for One Way ANOVA; * P < 0.05 (significant)*

Table (6): Inter-Scale correlation matrix between the nursing image subscales.

Nursing Image Subscales		Practice	Values	Public image
Values	r	0.108	1	
	P	0.001*		
Public image	r	0.017	0.386	1
	P	0.614	0.000*	
Overall	r	0.410	0.756	0.805
	P	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*

r range from low (.09 - .24), moderate (.25 - .48), and high (> .49) (McMillan, 2006).

5. Discussion

Image is part of a profession. It is the way a person appears to others, the way that profession appears to other disciplines and to the general public, consumers of health care. Image and the perception of the profession impact recruitment of students, the view of the public, funding for nursing education and research, relationships with healthcare administrators and other healthcare professionals, government agencies and legislators at all levels of government, and ultimately, the profession's self-identity. Just like individuals may feel depressed or less effective if others view them negatively, professionals can experience similar reactions if their image is not positive. It impacts everything the profession does or wishes to do (Santos and Cox, 2002)**.** Therefore, this study aimed to investigate perceptions of the public image among baccalaureate nursing students at faculty of nursing, Damanhour University. It focuses on the image of nursing from the perspectives of how the profession views its own image and how those outside the profession view nursing and nurses as perceived by nurses' students.

The findings revealed that the majority of the subjects had none of their relative or friend in the nursing profession and the majority of their family reaction was positive and this positive family image support and encourage their sons/daughters to enter the nursing profession. This study also demonstrates the societal perception in Damanhour, as the family encourages their sons/daughters to join the nursing career for variety of career opportunities, secondary grade and financial reasons. This result was congruent with the findings of Kelly *et al.* (1996), who stated that family members were the most encouraging forces to their entering nursing and was the main source of moral support during the years of schooling. This is not in accordance with Abdel El-Halem *et al.* (2011), who conducted a study in Egypt about "Undergraduate Male Nursing students' Perception about the Image of the Nursing Profession". Their study indicated that there is significant relation between the nursing image as a profession and the presence of family members, friends or acquaintances who were nurses. These results are also supported by El Sharkawy and El Haddad (1996), who studied "factors affecting students' choice of nursing as a career in Egypt and Syria"; and found that the family members had the significant impact on the choice of nursing as a career in Egypt and Syria. They mentioned that the family members had significant impact on the choice of nursing as a career. These findings were confirmed, as there is significant relation between nursing image and parents' reaction to joining the faculty of nursing. In this respect, Heath (2001) stated that young students

may be applying to nursing programs as a response to parents' dream instead of their own.

Regarding the reasons for enrollment at the Faculty of Nursing, the study showed that more than half of the study subjects joined the Faculty of Nursing due to variety in career opportunity, or due to their grade in the secondary school. These were followed by challenging/rewarding career (financial reason); their families' advice; and the desire to help others**.** This finding revealed that, in the societal culture, students tend to join the top societal ranked faculties as Faculty of Medicine; when it is not reached, it is replaced by Faculty of Nursing. In addition to that, students found this career as an economic opportunity. This may be attributed to the low economic status of such a rural governorate. This result is partially in line with the results of Gamel (2006), who conducted a study to determine the image of nursing as a profession among nursing students and interns. The results indicated that the availability of work and financial reward were the least mentioned reasons among her subjects, as the subjects were female nursing students. However, the second highest reason was the secondary school grade. In this respect, Abu-Gharibeh and Siluman (1992) stated that the poor image of nursing, combined with university admission policies, in which, students are assigned to various faculties based on their secondary school grade, influence recruitment of high quality students. In Abdel El-Halem *et al.* 's study (2011), it was found that more than one-fourth of the study subjects stated that an advice from a family member was the main reason for joining the profession. This may be attributed to the fact that family members are more experienced and know the rapid employment opportunities available for faculties of nursing. Moreover, a study conducted by Mohamed and Al-Nagshabandi (2012) revealed that the highest percentage of study subjects joined the faculty of nursing because of the availability of work in and outside the country. Another study performed by Streubert (1994), in Pennsylvania, discovered that nursing was attractive because of job opportunities, security and availability. This is also in accordance with that of AbdlKarim *et al.* (2004), who conducted a study in Egypt and found that around two-thirds of the subjects have chosen nursing as it represented a good opportunity for them to work. Furthermore, Buerhaus *et al.* (2005) reported that slightly more than three quarters of the subjects joined nursing because of availability of work. They concluded that it is likely that more men will choose nursing as a career because nursing offers stable employment with reasonable wages in an otherwise unstable economy. In addition, studies in Sultanate Oman and Canada showed that the most common reasons for joining the nursing profession were the humanitarian nature of nursing,

job opportunity/security, helping others, working with people and an interest in the science (Shukri *et al.*, 2013; Rheaume *et al.*, 2003).

Pertaining to prior information, the vast majority of the subjects were positively influenced by information given to them before entering the nursing profession by relatives/friends and then by media. As in Egyptian culture, people tend to listen to others' previous experiences and advices. The media is the second factor that influence, is still influencing, and most probably will continue to influence the public's image of nursing. It always pictures nursing as a low social status, subordinate, not respected, and female dominant profession, being presented as careless females who perform housekeeping activities and accept tips from others. This is in line with Abdel El-Halem *et al.* (2011), who found a significant correlation between presence of information and its effect on both students and image of nursing as a profession; and it seems that receiving information about nursing before joining the faculty- whether from family, friends or from schools of nursing- plays an important role in influencing the students' image of nursing and their career choice. These findings also matched those of Gamel (2006); Summers (2004); and Steven and Walker (1991), who indicated that such image not only influences how consumers view nurses, but also has an impact on the nurse's self-image and that the high school educators must develop strategies that target recruitment of high school students to professional careers in nursing. Furthermore, Mohamed and Al-Nagshabandi (2012) concluded that nursing is not considered a respectable profession for women, and was ranked last in the list of appropriate occupations for women because of the type of work, inadequate financial rewards and working hours. Moreover, they stressed that working hours are prohibitive for some women because they must fulfill obligations of the wife and mother role, which explained the high percentage of single female nurse, since Saudi's women traditionally are married at a young age. The study authors observed that young Saudis, both male and female, choose careers that offered higher prestige and financial remuneration than nursing (Mohamed and Al-Nagshabandi, 2012). This is supported by many studies, which showed that parents and friends were very powerful motivators for nursing students to join nursing; and therefore, this influence of significant people on students' perceptions suggests that positive marketing and recruitment strategies through the School of Nursing should target not only the students themselves, but the students' parents and peers as well; and that by using the public media to promote and announce nursing developments, this will impact positively on the nursing profession (Williams *et al.*, 1997; Tawash *et al.*, 2012).

The findings also displayed that the majority of nursing students divert attention by changing the topic in front of others, and above one-quarter of them were either proud or defensive about nursing. However, small percentages of them were either shy or attacked the profession. These results are opposite to those of Milisen *et al.*'s study (2010), in which 95.5% of nursing students were proud of becoming a nurse, and 83.4% of them would recommend family or friends to study nursing; while above three quarters would choose nursing again as their field of higher education. The results of the present study showed that the subjects' image was improved after enrollment to the Faculty of Nursing, as the average for positive change in the image of nursing was mainly due to working condition, family members' opinion and effect of faculty members. The average for worst image was 39.5 % and only 15.6 % of the students did not change. In relation to those with worst image, working conditions and public view about nursing were the most important factors. Furthermore, approximately equal percentages for such change were for both clinical training and relationship with medical staff. This may be due to working condition - both a leading factor for better and worst change - which was found as attractive for many nurses to gain learning experiences and by their experiences in private hospitals; or it may be found as unsafe, threatening, uncomfortable, exposing to hazards whether physical or emotional; lack of facilities and resources; and the gap between theories taught and the actual practices in governmental hospitals. Moreover, the clinical environment increases the interaction between medical staff and students, and also, among students themselves because of clinical instructors' shortage. Several studies were in accordance, Abdel El-Halem *et al.* (2011) showed positive changes in the image of nursing as a profession among more than half of the study subjects, and illustrated that more than one-third of the study subjects were positively influenced by clinical training; followed by working conditions; relationship with faculty members and relationship with friends. Whereas, the highest percent of the study subjects were negatively influenced by public view about nursing. Furthermore, Gray (2004), in California, revealed that about quarter of nurses perceived that the public portrayed them as handmaidens to physicians. Moreover, Shukri (2005) reported that nursing is still suffering from negative public image in the Arab world. This is supported by the findings of Morris-Thompson *et al.* (2011), who mentioned that the public appear ill-informed of what nurses do, purporting to respect nursing but would not recommend nursing as a career choice for themselves,

their children or their pupils. Moreover, Adib Hajbaghery and Salsali (2005) claimed that Iranian people have a poor image of nursing and those who choose nursing as a profession experience low self-esteem. In addition to that, Tawash *et al*., (2012) concluded that the impact of society and influence of culture and tradition is strongly reflected in the perceptions of nursing as a career; and that the respondents claimed that nursing is not very well accepted socially.

This study mentioned significant differences between age and total nursing image; as well as public image; and values subscales. Moreover, significant differences were found between academic year and total nursing images, public image and values subscales. Finally, a significant difference was found between gender and practice subscale. This finding is supported by the researcher's expectations, because the students were expected to have more positive image as they progress from year to year during the undergraduate education. This positive change as the students' progress could be due to their experience in private hospitals and monthly income earned. This finding is in line with Gamel (2006); and Harrison, and Katz (1998), who found that nursing students became more attracted to their profession and more closely identified with it as they progressed in their nursing education. This was not in accordance with Abdel El-Halem *et al.* (2011), who found that there was no significant correlation between nursing image and the students' academic year.

The findings also revealed that both Practice and Public Image are related to Values as indicated by their significant low to moderate association. However, Practice and Public Image are not significantly correlated. Values and Public Image are more closely related to one another than Values and Practice. The correlations among the overall nursing image subscales revealed that they are interrelated but measure very different aspects of nursing perceptions as indicated by their significant moderate to high association. These results are in line with Lovan's study (2009), who concluded that the correlations among the three subscales revealed that they were generally interrelated but measured very different aspects of nursing views. In conclusion, when educators understand nursing students' perceptions of nursing before, during and after their education program, they can be more aware of potential disparities in student's ideals, expectations and realities of nursing practice; nursing leaders and faculty also should encourage the students' respect for the role that will be fulfilled in a dynamic healthcare system (Sand-Jecklin and Schaffer, 2006). A positive image is an important factor in attracting and retaining nurses and is therefore very important for the future of

the profession (Siebens *et al.*, 2006; Takase *et al.*, 2006; Yun *et al.*, 2010).

6. Limitations and recommendations for future studies

This study only considered nurses self-reporting about their professional image in a rural governorate, and the sample consisted of only baccalaureate nursing students; a broader range of nurses may have produced different perspectives. It is suggested that nursing managers' perspectives are sought in future studies in order to provide a complete picture of nursing image and factors influencing it. Above all, future studies with larger samples should be conducted in order to devise strategies to reduce the issue of nursing shortage and turnover.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this research are important in terms of providing insights that may lead towards a new direction in addressing nursing student recruitment. Moreover, lack of understanding of the reality of nursing as a profession by the public is a common phenomenon that contributes to a negative image of nursing. Since the public image of nurses and nursing can have a critical impact on whether nursing is chosen as a career as well as the effective functioning of nurses in a wide array of situations. The traditional public image of nursing needs to be replaced with a more realistic and accurate one that truly reflects nursing's unique and valuable work. In this regard, improving the prestige and social position of the nursing profession as well as providing the opportunity for creativity and originality in nursing practice will change the self-image of every nurse, facilitating effective and lasting changes in nursing image. In addition, the importance of reinforcing nurses' positive image is emphasized in order to sustain their job performance and cope with the potential pressure from the public's high expectations of nursing care. It follows that whatever improves and enhances the public image of nurses and nursing should be embraced and fully utilized.

It is recommended that in order to attract more individuals to the profession, a positive image of nursing needs to be engendered by nurse education and the general community. In education, nurses should prepare competent and devoted nurses who are ready to do the best of their abilities in this profession that is understaffed yet the salaries are not satisfying as the students were able to notice.

8. Implications for nursing management

Concerning management, professional bodies and nurse managers need to device measures to audit the activities of the members of the profession over time because incompetence is one of the reasons students noted deters them from opting for this profession. Many strategies are needed by nursing

organizations, administrators and the government to address the critical issues of this profession with the goal of reducing the nursing shortage through increased recruitment and retention of practicing nursing. Nurse managers are well-placed to influence nurses' perceptions of nursing's image. Nurse managers need to consider how they can work positively with their staff to enhance morale and nurses' experience of their job. Moreover, the participation of nurse managers in improving the public knowledge about the nursing profession and the diverse and effective roles of nurses in the health-care system through mass media will be helpful to rectify the public perspective about nurses.

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9. References

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