# Professional Self-Concept among Student Nurses

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*Abstract*
*Professional self-concept plays a vital role among nursing students enabling them to accept the profession and willingly render quality care to the patients in the future. This study aims to assess the level of professional self-concept among student nurses and to associate their socio demographic characteristics with it. A quantitative descriptive survey was conducted using Cowin's Nurses Self Concept Questionnaire (NSCQ) based on six dimensions namely Nurse General Self-Concept (NGSC), Care, Staff Relations, Communication, Knowledge and Leadership among 169 students, of RNBSN Bridge and BSN program selected using purposive sampling technique. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 23) with differential and inferential statistics. In the area of professional self-concept, communication (44.4 ± 0.38) and care 44.74 ± 0.29) dimensions had higher mean among students of RN BSN bridge program. Among the BSN, students with self-concept (40.8 ± 1.01) care (40.2 ± 0.68) and communication (40.3 ± 0.67) gained higher mean scores. Professional self-concept was found to have a significant relationship between student nurses age, marital status and the program of study with the subdomains namely staff relations, care, communication, knowledge and leadership (P< 0.000*).*
*Key words: Professional self-concept, nursing students, Nurses General Self-Concept, Staff relations, Communication, and leadership.*

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## I.    Introduction

New graduate nurses entering the workforce face numerous challenges. The health care organization expects these graduates to have the self-confidence to provide quality comprehensive care to meet patient's needs. Professional self-concept plays a vital role among nursing students by enabling them to understand oneself and the patients during their clinical practice. Student nurses inculcate self-concept by developing and constructing nursing identity. Factors like sense of belonging, peer support; critical thinking abilities, confidence and positive role models play an important role in building self-concept among them [1] and student nurses self-concept strongly related to clinical performance [2].

It is noted that in UAE, students opting for nursing as a profession are comparatively lower than other countries. Among 7,300 nurses, only three percent Emiratis work in the public run SEHA hospitals. Emirati students were reluctant to become nurses due to the shifts and long hours of work. Therefore, to overcome the hindrances the educational institutions are trying to create awareness among students in schools regarding the role of nurses through educational programs and career counselling [3.] Once the student enrols, they are given the opportunity to work with the multicultural environment of the health care organizations, assessing the level of self-concept among nursing graduates will help them to understand themselves and about the profession. Due to the discrepancy in the image of nursing as a profession between nurses and the public, which can contribute to the nurse environment misfit. This distortion can be reduced among future nurses by increasing their self-awareness [4.] There is a lack of research carried out in UAE regarding self-concept among student nurses. This study is an effort to initiate filling the gap by conducting this research contributing to the body of knowledge in nursing.

**The aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to assess the professional self-concept among student nurses studying in selected Nursing Colleges of UAE. And to find the relationship between their selected demographic variables with professional self-concept scores.

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## II.    Method

A descriptive study was undertaken to assess the professional self-concept among 169 nursing undergraduate (RN BSN bridge & BSN program) students selected by purposive sampling technique. The first part of the questionnaire comprised of socio-demographic data such as age, sex and marital status, year of the study, program, nationality and type of family. The second part consisted of the Nurse's self-concept questionnaire (NSCQ), designed to measure the professional self-concept of nurses [5]. The NSCQ has 36 items with six dimensions namely Nurse General Self-Concept (NGSC), Care, Staff Relations, Communication, Knowledge and Leadership. All the items are positively worded and each dimension contains a balance of affective (I feel) and cognitive (I think) declarative statements. An eight point Likert type scale was utilized ranging from one (Definitely false) to eight (Definitely true). The NSCQ has published evidence of theoretical, construct validity and its reliability.  Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of RAK Medical & Health Sciences University. Data collection was carried over a period of one week. Questionnaires were distributed to the students in their respective classroom and its completion took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Data obtained were entered in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 23. The data was analyzed with descriptive statistics and relationship was assessed between socio demographic variables with their professional Self Concept score.

## III.    Results
**Table 1. Distribution of demographic characteristics of nursing students (n=169)**

| Demographic characteristics | | N (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Age (in years) | < 20 | 15(8.9%) |
| | 21- 25 | 35 (20.7%) |
| | 26- 30 | 32 (18.9%) |
| | 31- 35 | 47(27.8%) |
| | 36-40 | 30(17.8%) |
| | >40 | 10 (5.9%) |
| Gender | Female | 160 (94.7%) |
| | Male | 9 (5.3%) |
| Marital status | married | 91 (53.8%) |
| | Single | 77 (45.6%) |
| | Divorced | 1 (.6%) |
| Nationality | Emiratis | 114 (67.5%) |
| | others | 55 (32.5%) |
| Program | BSN | 54(32%) |
| | RN BSN | 115(68%) |

**Table 2. The mean and standard deviation of NSCQ dimensions (n=169)**

| NSCQ | Mean + SD |
|---|---|
| Nurse self -esteem | 41.59 + 5.87 |
| Nursing care | 43.34 + 4.39 |
| Nursing knowledge | 42.52 + 3.97 |
| Staff relations | 43.12 + 4.79 |
| Communications | 41.72 + 4.24 |
| Leadership | 39.24 + 7.36 |

**The overall mean and standard deviation regarding professional self- concept among nursing students ranged from 43.34 + 4.39 to 39.24 + 7.36

**Table 3. Relationship between demographic characteristics with professional self-concept (NSCQ) in nursing students**

|  | Nurse self – esteem r (p- value) | Nursing care r (p- value) | Staff relations r (p- value) | Communication r (p- value) | Knowledge r (p- value) | Leadership r (p- value) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -.094 (.224) | .377 (.000) * | .382 (.000) * | .370 (.000) * | .228 (.003) * | .429 (.000) * |
| Marital status | -.128 (.097) | -.219 (.004) * | -.261 (.001) * | -.212 (006) * | -182 (.018) | -384 (.000) * |
| Gender | -.051 (.511) | -.036 (.639) | -.138 (.075) | -.100 (.197) | -.115 (.137) | -.342 (.000) * |
| Program | -.097 (.208) | -.470 (.000) * | -.452 (.000) * | -.392 (.000) * | -.311 (.000) * | -.524 (.000) * |
| Nationality | .046 (.550) | .013 (.868) | -.075 (.330) | -.075 (.330) | -.067 (.388) | .001 (.988) |
| Type of family | .039 (.619) | -.054 (.482) | -.010 (.902) | .025 (.744) | -.106 (.168) | -.049 (.528) |

*p- value is significant (P< 0.05 level)

   *The relationship between selected demographic characteristics and professional self – concept was assessed using Pearson's correlation. It was noted that a statistical significance in dimensions of nursing care, staff relationship, communication, knowledge and leadership. The aspect regarding nurse's general self-concept was not found to have any significant relation with age, gender, marital status, program, type of family or nationality.

## IV.    Discussion

Among the participants 115 of the participants (68%) were studying RN BSN bridge program and 54 (32%) were pursuing BSN program. The majority of the students were female (94.7%) and married (53.8%). About 27.8% were between 31- 35 years of age and the majority (67.5%) were hailing from the United Arab Emirates. It may be noted that students who enrol for RN BSN bridge program require three years of diploma with minimum of two years of work experience unlike the BSN students who join the university after their schooling.

According to the Kaiser family foundation, 92% of the total nursing workforce were female, outnumbering men in nursing [6]. About 51.4% of the students were married and were living in a nuclear family (74.3%). Majority (56%) of the nursing students were from the Emirates who were settled in UAE living with their families.

The way nurses deliberate and feel about themselves personally and professionally, is associated with their well-being, the quality of provided patient care, their job satisfaction and retention [7]. Many factors influence an individual nurse's perception that eventually develops into the self – concept over a period. In the present study professional self-concept among nursing students pursuing nursing program, showed that in the dimensions of professional self- concept firstly the communication (44.4 + 0.38) and care (44.74 + 0.29) component had higher mean followed by staff relation (43.75 + 0.30), nursing general self –concept (42.0 + 0.46) and knowledge (42.6 + 0.32). While leadership (41.8+ 0.41) had the lowest mean, congruent to this finding a study by Purander et al[8] that working nurses had higher scores in self-concept (6.70 ± 0.06) and the lowest score was in the dimension of leadership (6.06 ± 0.04). Another study carried out by Afzal et al[9] revealed that transformational leadership style had a significant and positive relationship with nurse's self-esteem. The variation among the dimensions especially regarding leadership could be due to the experience they might have had during their work period or clinical exposure. A study among nursing students in Health School carried out by Ozturk and Kahriman 59% of them expressed that the nurse managers at hospitals did not have necessary peculiarities of leadership (p= 0.001) [10].

Having the right role models imprints the perception the students develop through their exposure to the nurse managers during their training can build a positive or negative opinion regarding the leadership in nursing.

Regarding the relationship between professional self-concept with selected demographic variables shows that there is a significant relationship (p=0.000) between all the dimensions of professional self-concept except nurse self – esteem with age, gender, the type program and their marital status. Concurrent findings are noted in a study done by Clearly et al[11] , where the self-concept was rated in a positive manner among the nursing graduates of Singapore. This finding illustrates that student nurses build self-concept during their work period positively influenced by the educational experience provided to them. Adequate support from the spouse or significant others may build their self-concept reflecting in their professional growth or career. A study done by Edwin [12] revealed that only marital status was associated with self-concept and its components.

With years of experience, the ability to comprehend and focus on self is greater.

According to a study by Sabanciogullari [13] the professional self-concept was found to be significantly higher among nurses older, more experienced, female and master's degree graduates than in the nurses who were younger, less experienced, male and high school graduates. A study carried out by Karanikola [14] identified that nurses develop self – esteem reflecting their self - concept throughout their professional journey. Student nurses need constant nurturing and mentoring during their course of study and training. While it necessitates that staff, nurses require continued support and a positive environment to enhance quality of care, which in turn can increase job satisfaction and retention of nurses in various health care settings.

## V. Conclusion

Professional self-concept has lately considered an essential component in every professional and hence adopted into various nursing systems. The study findings show that professional self-concept needs enhancement among BSN students during their course of study while the RNBSN students too require constant support and encouragement to maintain it. By developing the self-concept among student nurses it will enable them to accomplish their professional goals in various health care settings. Constant counselling and strengthening communication skills during the educational program will improve nurse's self-concept, which in turn enhance the quality of care to benefit the health outcomes in patients.

## Acknowledgement

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