Empowering the Oppressed: Factors Related to the Advanced Education of Nurses

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Due to the unprecedented growth of the aging American population, a significant shortage of health care providers is developing. Employment growth for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) is expected to be 31 percent from 2014 to 2024, exceeding the occupational average (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Therefore, the predicted growth of the profession necessitates an increase in the number of nurses pursuing advanced practice degrees. The Institute of Medicine's report, "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health" stresses the need to increase the numbers of advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), but focuses on conflicts of time, cost, and class schedules as common barriers to education (2011).

In order to increase the number of registered nurses (RNs) choosing to pursue advanced nursing degrees, it is important to understand the many factors that may influence this decision. Commonly identified barriers include time constraints, family obligations, and financial limitations (Schwarz & Leibold, 2014). Consequently, a better understanding of the intrinsic characteristics that enable a nurse to overcome barriers and return to graduate school will provide novel information to the profession. Other less common barriers to the education of advanced practice nurses that are not well studied include oppression within the nursing culture and institutional workplace factors.

Purpose: The purpose of our research is to study the intrinsic characteristics that empower and motivate RNs to pursue higher levels of education and how the nursing culture and institutional workplace may encourage or discourage this career achievement. The data generated from our research can be used by the individual, institution, and nursing profession to increase the number of RNs returning to graduate school and functioning as APRNs thereby relieving the current provider shortage in American healthcare.

Theoretical Framework: Self-determination theory (SDT) explores the concept of goal-directed behavior in terms of internal and external motivators and personality (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The pursuit of higher education in nursing is a goal directed behavior. Paulo Freire’s model of oppression is a theory grounded in the marginalization of Brazilians by the imperialist Europeans (2000). Nurses are often perceived as an oppressed profession, due to exploitation experienced in the profession (Dong & Temple, 2011). SDT and Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed provide the foundational theoretical component of our research.

Methods: The research design for our project is a quantitative, descriptive correlational, cross-sectional study. In our study, we are using a self-report questionnaire to collect data from a convenience sample of registered nurses, followed by the use of statistical techniques to examine the relationships and correlations between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators among registered nurses across the educational spectrum.

In our study, we use the General Causality Orientation Scale (GCOS), created from the concepts defined in the SDT, to measure the dependent variable of intrinsic motivation among nurses (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
We use the GCOS to measure the personality characteristics of nurses in order to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in causality orientation as a nurse's level of education increases. We also utilize the Nurse Workplace Scale (NWS) in our study. This scale was created by Demarco, Roberts, Norris, and McCurry to measure behaviors in nursing that are counterproductive and associated with oppressed group behavior (2008). The healthcare profession is dominated by the medical model and for this reason, nursing is oftentimes classified as an oppressed profession (Demarco, Roberts, Norris & McCurry, 2008).

The target population for our study is registered nurses, 18 years of age and older that hold an active license from his or her respective Board of Nursing. To select participants, we utilize a convenience sampling method with a network or “snowball” effect. Using the Qualtrics online survey program, a survey was distributed online via email and social media outlets, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Linked-In. The sample size of the study is unknown until the completion of the open survey period.

**Results:** The autonomous orientation predominated over the control and impersonal orientations. Oppression scores decreased as education increased. Kruskal Wallis H testing showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between nurses’ education levels, age, and questions of the NWS. Mann-Whitney U testing showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between financial incentives and perceived support.

**Conclusion:** An implication of this research is advancement of knowledge surrounding RNs’ pursuit of higher education. Our research indicates that the majority of nurses are oriented towards autonomous personality traits which may result in increased job satisfaction, improved performance, and improved competence. As education level advances, a nurse’s sense of self-confidence increases and oppressed behavior decreases. Facilities that offer financial incentive for education foster a supportive environment for nurses pursuing advanced education.

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Burrow, S., Mairs, H., Pusey, H., Bradshaw, T., & Keady, J. (2016). Continuing professional education: Motivations and experiences of health and social care professional's part-time study in higher education a


Abstract Summary:

There are many factors that influence a registered nurse's decision to return to school once in the workforce. Our study examines the roles of institutions, culture of nursing, and nurses' intrinsic factors in the motivation to pursue further education in nursing.

Content Outline:

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Author Summary: Mary Helen Durland graduated from Wofford College in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science in Biology before obtaining a BSN from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in 2009. Her RN clinical experience includes five years working in labor and delivery, two years at an OB/GYN office, and one year in college health at UTC. Mary Helen is currently pursuing an MSN with FNP concentration at UTC and will graduate in May 2018.

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**Author Summary:** By trade a specialist in trauma and emergency nursing, Dr. Kemplin's scholarly work focuses on combat trauma and Special Forces clinicians’ practice. She is the first woman appointed by the Special Operations Medical Association to chair research, and a frequent speaker and collaborator for military medical initiatives. Dr. Kemplin is a 2012 Jonas Foundation Scholar and is nearing completion of her second doctorate (PhD, Nursing Science) at Rush University.