How Do Student Nurses in Malawi Choose, Adapt to Career Transition, and Construct Careers?

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Figure 1: Student Nurses' Career Choice Framework (adapted from Hickey et al.2012)

Background

Malawi health system faces severe shortage of nursing personnel especially within the public health sector where nurses play a vital role in the delivery of primary health services. In 2011 the ministry of health and the World Health Organization (WHO) indicated a nurse-to population ratio was one-fourth of the WHO's recommendation leaving Malawi with a 65% vacancy rate for nurses in public health facilities.
 If this nursing shortage is left unchecked, it will undermine the delivery of health care services due to nurses burnout, job discontent and diminished patient safety.
To meet the ever-growing demand for nurses in Malawi, there is need to employ recruitment strategies which focus on nursing students during their training years as they attain profession socialisation. This entails understanding the relationships between the various motivation for becoming nurses and their career expectations which may influence their workplace preference and intent to remain within the nursing profession.(Figure 1)

Purpose

The objectives of this study were to understand students' nurses motivations for choosing nursing and their future career plans

Methods

The study was conducted in two colleges of nursing in Malawi; Nkhoma College which trains diploma students and Kamuzu College of Nursing (KCN) which trains BSc nurses
This was a qualitative study which used individual in depth interviews and focus group discussions for data collection (16 IDIs and three FGDs)
A purposively selected sample size of 37 final year students was used.
Interviews covered how and why nurses entered nursing, their training experiences and future career plans.
Data were analysed using thematic analysis.
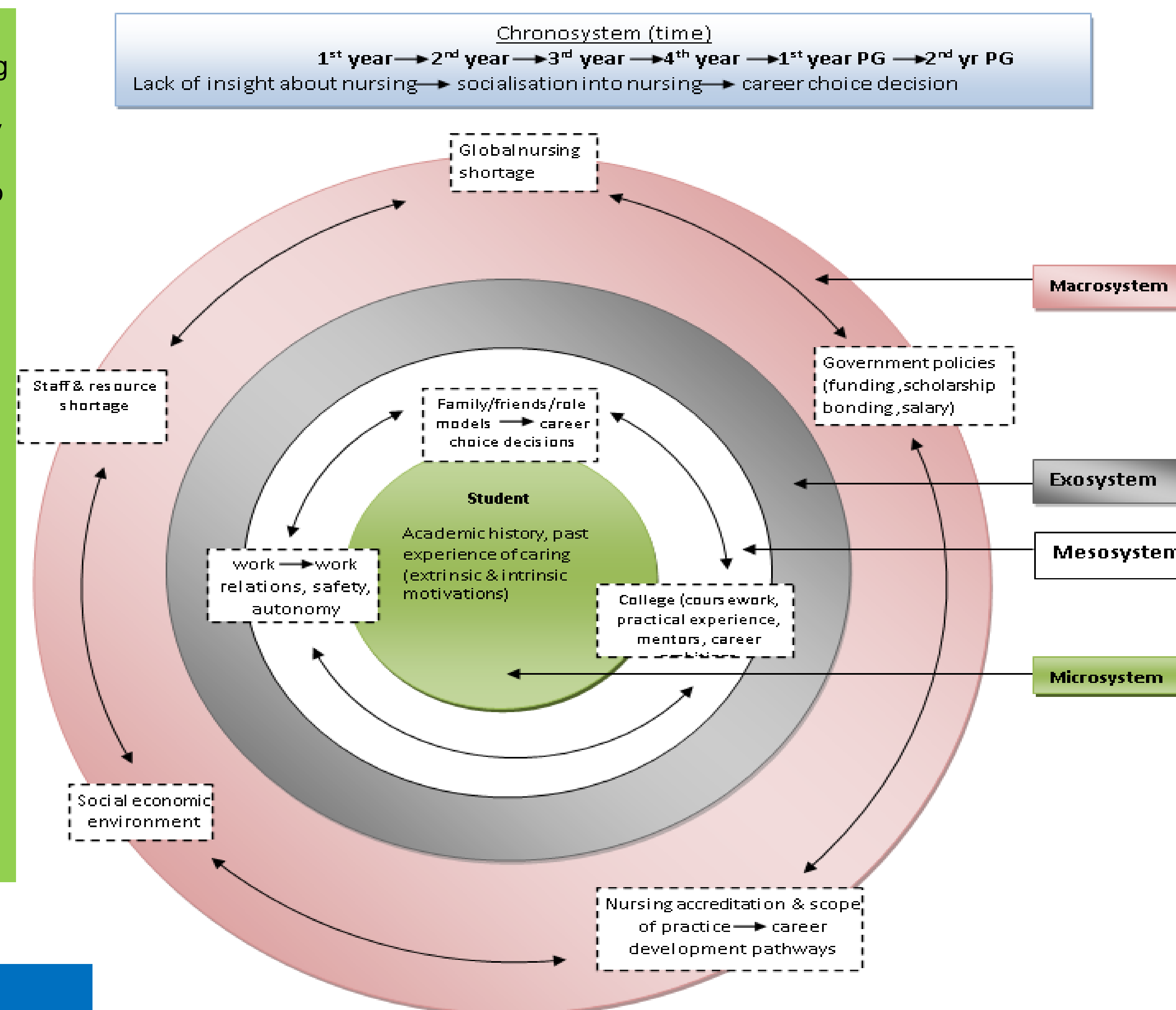
Results

The choice of nursing course was influenced by:
• Desire to help people
• Admiration of significant others including nurse models
• Anticipated career rewards

Training experiences
• Almost half of students entered nursing school by default however their training experiences were crucial to reframing nursing as a 'suitable job'.
• For nearly all students the impact of training experiences on career choice were marked through contact with coursework, practical and lecturers.
• Nursing was seen as a viable career particularly for undergraduate students from KCN, where it is regarded 'a guaranteed job with prospects'.

Career aspirations
• Almost all nurses interviewed intended to seek employment in public sector citing theirs reason as opportunities to pursue advanced nursing qualification to satisfy career objectives; increased knowledge, skills and economic rewards.
• Undesirably, most students indicated preference to have non clinical job after attaining higher qualifications following observation that there are no established clinical job post for nurse specialist in Malawi.

Conclusion

• Findings suggest that pre service orientation remains a key factor in choosing nursing.
• Students also look for a career which offer professional values and rewards.
• If advanced clinical nursing practioner career path remain undefined nursing may be in danger of losing service orientated recruits to other non-clinical professions.

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