

Time to Care for Male Nurses: Confronting Stigma and Workforce Imbalance

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History of stigma

Nursing remains predominantly female worldwide, even as the need for a diverse healthcare workforce grows. Nurses are the largest group of healthcare professionals; however, the profession faces an increasing shortage. Although nursing has expanded rapidly (Kouta & Kaite, 2011), it is often associated with traditional, female caregiving roles. In the Western world, Florence Nightingale is celebrated as a key figure in nursing (Turkowski & Turkowski, 2024), whereas Rufaidah Al-Aslamiyah is recognized in the Islamic world (Bodrick et al., 2022). Both are women, and their status as pioneers perpetuates the idea that nursing is a feminist profession. Historically, Indonesia has limited nursing education to female students, reinforcing this stigma. This perception has become a global issue (Subu et al., 2022), leading to fewer male nurses at all educational and professional levels in the field. For instance, a nursing school noted that a male student withdrew because he was the only male participant. Research indicated that male nurses often feel isolated or marginalized (Yip et al. 2021).

Male students remain a minority, comprising only a small share of the enrolled population in the study. This gap persists despite evidence that gender diversity in nursing improves patient care, teamwork, and workforce stability. Traditionally, nursing has been viewed as a female profession, with most countries reporting higher numbers of women than men, mirroring societal patriarchal norms. Globally, men account for approximately 11% of nurses (Guy et al., 2022; Noordien et al., 2020). Stigma around nursing often includes stereotypes of low ability, poor pay, limited education, lack of independence, and a high percentage of women in the field of nursing. Nevertheless, the view that nursing is mainly female persists, although the number of male registered nurses has grown in recent years (Prosen and Čekada, 2025).

Male nurses' shortage condition

The scarcity of male nurses marginalizes them further. Although data on the proportion of male and female nurses are limited, empirical evidence indicates a disparity between their numbers. The ratio of male to female nurses is reported to be only 5-10% (Ashkenazi et al., 2017), consistent with a survey in the United States (US), which found that male nurses comprised only 9.6% (Martsolf et al., 2023). This reduction in the number of male nurses will undoubtedly threaten nursing care quality. Male nurses are also needed in specific clinical settings where

they are essential (Yip et al., 2021), particularly in areas that require motor skills, such as emergency departments, critical care units, and operating rooms.

Problem Solution

The experiences of male nursing students in deciding to pursue a career in nursing have significant implications for nursing practice and education. Understanding the factors that influence men's decisions to enter nursing is essential for addressing workforce shortages. Examining barriers and enablers of men's enrolment (Nahas et al., 2003; Subu et al., 2022) helps clarify their decision-making process. Facilitators such as confidence, motivation, and support from family and friends can be innate or shaped by the environment (Nahas et al., 2003). Recognizing this problem is the first step toward solving it. In education, administrators and instructors must develop strategies and policies for male nursing students so that they can study without feeling like a minority (Younas et al., 2019). In addition, recognizing all factors that influence these students' decisions is crucial to understanding their choices. Understanding personal, cultural, and spiritual beliefs can be useful in sensitive areas, such as conflicts among male nursing students regarding certain maternal interventions (breast massage, vulva hygiene). In one case, a male nursing student decided to discontinue his studies due to breast cancer practices.

Factors affecting men's decisions to enter nursing are considered barriers or facilitators. Early exposure to the field, along with the influence of family, friends, and healthcare professionals, shapes these choices. Family opinions, particularly from parents and other relatives, significantly influenced men's decisions to pursue nursing. Economic motivations also contribute, with many men choosing nursing for stable employment and good income (Guy et al., 2022). Furthermore, stigma and stereotypes about male nurses hinder their education and clinical practice. Challenging societal perceptions that nursing is only suitable for women may be crucial in this regard. Strategies could include awareness campaigns to attract more men and encouraging nurse educators to promote gender equality. High school counsellors and advisors should also present nursing as a viable career for all students, including males (Prosen & Ćekada, 2025; Subu et al., 2022).

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