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SCHOOL LEAVERS' PERCEPTIONS OF NURSING AS A CAREER OF CHOICE

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Science in Nursing

Johannesburg, 2011

DECLARATION

I, Nomonde Euphonia Mphahlele, declare that this research report is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Science in Nursing in the branch of Nursing Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other University.

Nomonde Euphonia Mphahlele

_____

_____day of _____, 2011

DEDICATION

To all women who juggle job and family demands with conducting meaningful academic research work

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study used a cross-sectional descriptive survey to determine school leavers' perceptions of nursing as a career of choice and how those perceptions influence them in choosing or not choosing nursing as a career. A sample size of Grade 12 school leavers was (n=328). Respondents were invited to participate voluntarily In the study and were selected from 11 public schools from five regions in the Johannesburg district stratified random sampling was employed to select the participating public schools In order to determine the number of respondents per region while the school regions were used as strata. Simple random sampling was used to select participating schools with school names from the sampling frame printed on paper, separated and placed in each bowl representing each of the five regions. Schools were selected randomly from each bowl until the desired sample size was reached.

Data was collected by using a 21-itern self-administered questionnaire with closed- and open-ended questions to elicit and describe the school leavers' perceptions of nursing as a career of choice and how those perceptions influence them in choosing or not choosing nursing as a career. Data was analysed through SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences) Version 13.

Results of the study revealed that the perceptions held by school leavers are that nursing as a career of choice is amongst the least popular, less interesting and poorly appealing. This supports the hypothesis that nursing is rated poorly when compared to other career choices of school leavers. Interest in nursing as a career of choice could only be stimulated if the school leavers are given clear, accurate and continuous information on nursing to create awareness about nursing as a career of choice.

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It was an honour and privilege to work with several people who contributed to make this research a success.

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The research could not have been accomplished without permission to conduct the study by the Gauteng Department of Education. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the educators and school leavers in the Johannesburg district for their support in this exercise to develop our local communities.

I would like to thank my statistician Mr Matondo Lusembo for contributing to the statistical analysis of the research.

To my loving husband Matuku Mphahlele (*Moloto, 'a Phaahle 'a Hlabirwa Mokgakga wa Sekhukhune*) for affording me family time, support and motivation to commence and conclude this project. To my sons Tokollo and Tiisa: I value you for understanding when mom was busy with the project.

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CHAPTER ONE
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide there is declining interest in nursing as a career choice by school leavers. In South Africa several factors have been speculated as playing a major role in school leavers' lack of interest in nursing. School leavers' interests in the careers that they choose after high school are often stimulated by perceptions they have about the particular career. The declining number of new recruits into nursing casts doubt as to whether the school leavers possess correct knowledge about nursing as a career. Since there is no evidence of what perceptions school leavers hold about nursing, it is important to survey high school learners on the perceptions that they hold about nursing as a career of choice, in order to understand what they think of nursing as a career.

Perceptions can be defined as "an organised process in which an individual selects cues from the environment and draws inferences from these in order to make sense of his or her experience" (Quinn, 2007:63). School leavers or high school learners are also influenced by exposure to nursing either by personal observations or what they learn from others. Positive imaging of nursing and effective promotion of nursing as a career could have a positive impact in recruiting more school leavers into nursing.

Timing of when to begin informing learners about nursing is crucial because individuals are influenced about careers from an elementary age. By the time learners reach high school they have narrowed down their career choices. Gradual introduction of nursing to children according to their developmental stages through to high school is important. In South Africa formal career guidance lessons begin at high school. At high school level perceptions about careers, including nursing, are already formed; these perceptions could be based on little or false information. The survey also seeks to understand if the school leavers' perceptions are based on correct information about nursing as a career.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Perceptions about a career are thought to be the main influence on career choices of school leavers, and nursing as a career is no exception. Poor perceptions about nursing as a career have resulted to a decline in interest by school leavers to join the nursing profession. It has become critical to know what perceptions high school leavers hold about nursing as a career as they are the target market for future nursing personnel.

The Gauteng Provincial Government Member of Executive Council (MEC) Health Department, Brian Hlongwa indicated in a nursing conference that health information indicated that there is a shortage of nurses in Gauteng and countrywide, and that this shortage has become a crisis (Gauteng News, 2006). The study commissioned by the Department of Labour indicates that the total number of vacancies for professional nurses in South Africa from April 2006 to March 2007 was 3,482 (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008). The National Skills Authority (NSA) indicates that there are more than 3,000 vacancies for nurses in South Africa (Baloyi, 2006). Only 1,537 nurses successfully completed the four-year nursing course in 2006, which is half the amount needed to fill vacant posts. Baloyi (2006) further suggests that there is a need for proper career guidance for high school learners before they enter the tertiary education system. Simply recruiting for the sake of increasing numbers is therefore not enough; those recruited to follow a career must have received full and proper information about a particular career and its education path. People who join nursing without proper pre-entry information are likely to be unfulfilled and drop out of nursing colleges or divert to other careers after completion. The consequences may lead to challenges for the Government to address the shortage of nurses which is exacerbated by an increase in the population living with diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

Population growth poses a threat to the demand and supply of professional nursing services. The population of South Africa has increased from 42,130 million in 1996 to 47,400 million in 2006 which is a 12% growth (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008). . Volumes of economic and political immigrants from countries such as Zimbabwe, West Africa, Maputo, Lesotho, India and Europe have increased the burden of health care in South Africa. The South African Nursing Council (SANC) registered 172,520 nurses in 1996 which increased to 196,914 nurses in 2006, translating to a 15% growth (South African Nursing Council, 2007). The positive growth of nurses indicates that there are adequate numbers of nurses South Africa,

but there is abundant anecdotal evidence suggesting that many nurses remain registered with SANC and choose not to practise as nurses (Solidarity Research Institute, 2009). In terms of nurse population ratios the figures translate to one nurse per 244 people. World Health Organisation standards stipulate that the nurse population ratio should be at a minimum of one nurse per 200 people and a maximum of 500 people per nurse (Solidarity Research institute, 2009). The nurse population ratio could be higher than what is indicated in 2006 because some of the SANC registered nurses are not actually practising as nurses. Despite the positive growth of registered nurses the National Human Resources Planning Framework proposes a national production of 3,000 professional nurses by 2011 (Department of Labour, 2008). The number of vacant professional nurses' posts in SA is at 40.3% (Solidarity Research Institute, 2009). Therefore given all the challenges related to the shortage of nurses, there is a need to find out whether school leavers would consider nursing as a career of choice. Information gathered from school leavers could assist stakeholders who are responsible for educating future nurses and those responsible for human resource planning to develop effective strategies to produce and retain professional nurses.

Roles and responsibilities of nurses have evolved dramatically over the past years. Primary Health Care (PHC) is the pillar of the National Health Care system. Given the fact that it is the first level of health care contact for preventative and curative services care it needs an adequate supply of well prepared nursing professionals. Nurses have become key PHC personnel of specialist clinics on which the National Department of Health has had to rely on for the provision of accessible and affordable health care to the citizens of SA. HIV and AIDS is a complicated chronic disease that also affects the nurse workforce. Non communicable (chronic) disease management is a service provided by professional nurses at the PHC level. The secondary level of the health care system is also highly reliant on professional nurses for specialized care like Intensive Care Units and the management of hospitals and units. Therefore the need to focus on the production of professional nurse personnel needs special attention.

In South Africa training and education for nurses is offered at tertiary level of education institutions as a diploma or a degree. Despite these nursing courses being offered in all the provinces, nursing has not been attracting adequate numbers of students and coupled with that is a significant drop out rate of student nurses. Nurse graduate output is far less when compared with new entry statistics. Figure 1.1 shows a sharp increase in the intake of new

students in 2007 and 2008, coupled with a low rate of completions. Of note, is the low intake of new students (first entry) in 2000 in relation to the number of completions. This may indicate a higher number of repeating students in this cohort of students.

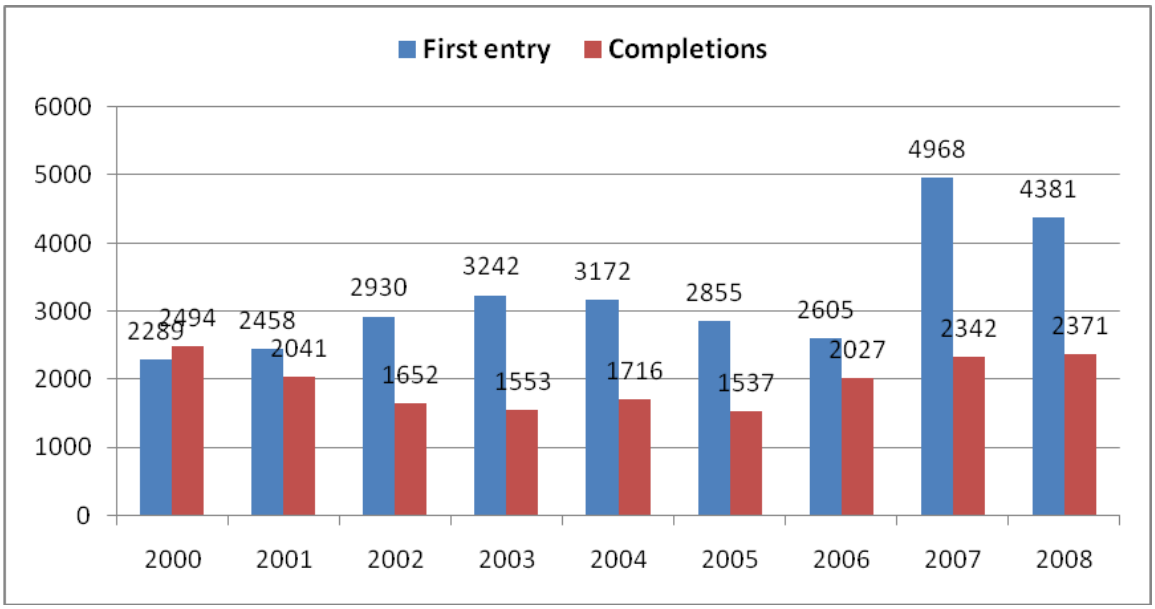


Figure 1.1 – Student nurses intake and output (2000 – 2008)

The South African Nursing Council (2008) indicates that nurse graduate output is far less when compared with new entry statistics as represented graphically in figure 1.1 There was a sharp increase in student intake in 2007 and 2008 coupled with a low rate of completions as indicated in figure 1.1..

In 2007 and 2008 only one completion is noted for every two entries. Terminations outstrip improved intake. This could be caused by a high rate of either drop outs or failures. There is a need for investigation of the reasons for the wide gap between first entries and completions of the student nurses. Baloyi (2006) chairperson of the National Skills Authority (NSA) has already raised concern on proper career guidance for high school learners. The high number of students who fail to complete the nursing course makes it difficult to accurately forecast the number of nurse graduates or prospective nursing workforce. Refer to Figure 1.2.

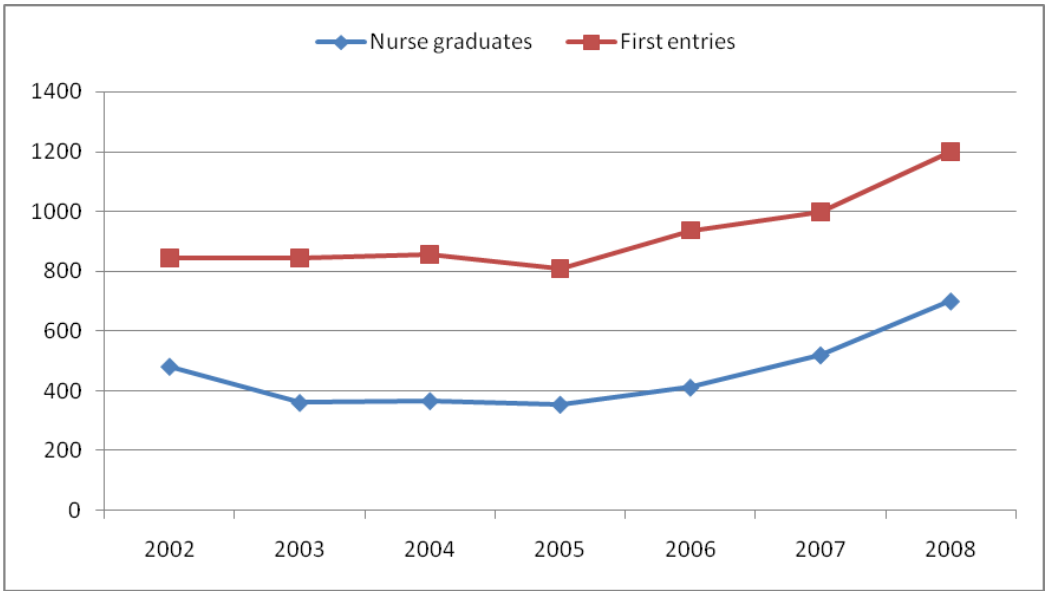


Figure 1.2 – Illustration of a constant gap between first entries and completions (2002-2008)

South African Nursing Council (2008) indicates that the gap between first entries and completions is consistently wide, as represented graphically in figure 1.2. Despite a high and improving intake of new nursing students, about 40% to 50% drop out. This indicates that there is a need to investigate the cause of student nurse drop-out. Drop-out could be attributable to poor career guidance or failure of students to complete due to poor performance.

There has been speculation that the lack of interest in nursing as a career by school leavers is due to the perceptions that they have about nursing. Poor working conditions, salary, status, physical and the psycho-social pressures associated with being a nurse are some of the factors which influence school leavers to choose or to not to choose nursing. Factors that could further influence school leavers to choose or not choose nursing are complex and some are based on inaccurate information and on speculation. Insight gained from the survey of perceptions held by school leavers of nursing as a career will assist stakeholders to address negative and misinformed perceptions.

While the South African nursing profession needs to work on increasing new nursing recruits, it also needs to work on long lasting retention strategies like improving working conditions and salaries of nurses. South Africa has good international relations which have contributed to it becoming part of the global village. People's choice of work is no longer limited to the

country of citizenry. It is said that South African nurses are either emigrating or working abroad for better working conditions or salaries (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008).

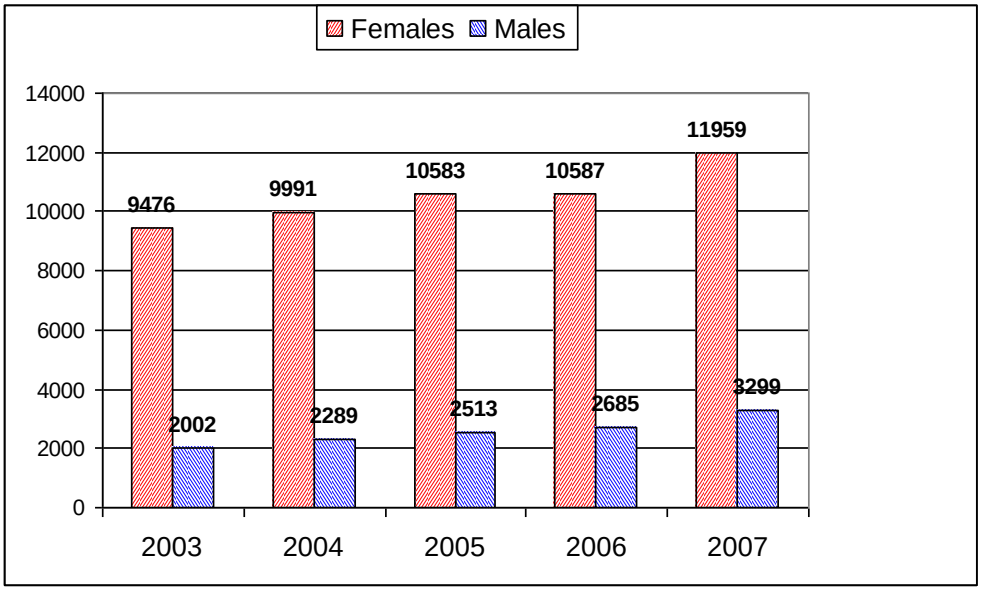


Figure 1.3 – Gender distribution of nursing students from 2003 – 2007

Gender is also posing a challenge to adequate recruitment of student nurses. In 2003 for every one male there were five female students which is a male: female ratio of 1:5 (South African Nursing Council, 2008), as indicated in figure 1.3. The male: female ratio gradually reduced from 2003 to 2007, with 2007 at 1:3. Current gender policies advocate for parity between males and females. The above graph indicates that the number of males joining the nurse profession is still low however, the ratio is improving. Nursing is still regarded as a female dominated profession.

Although Figure 1.3 shows minimal improvement in the number of male students as compared to female student nurses, there is still a challenge to nursing when it comes to a pool of potential recruits. Contributing factors to the declining recruits in nursing is that careers which were previously popular to males are now popular with both genders. National gender equity policies and industrial development changed gender stereotypes in career choices. These developments increased career choices for school leavers regardless of gender. Female school leavers who traditionally joined nursing after high school are now entering careers such as economics, engineering, arts and business. The pool for potential recruits has thinned out and the nursing profession now has to compete for potential recruits.

Career guidance in schools has a role in informing school leavers about various careers including nursing. The impact of career guidance among school leavers towards making informed choices about nursing as a career still needs to be investigated. Learners often approach career advisors having already narrowed their career choice or chosen a career. The duty of career advisors is reduced to merely giving advice on a career which has already been selected by a learner (King, Hardie & Conway, 2007:145). In South Africa, career guidance lessons are offered as part of the Life Orientation subject in grades eleven and twelve. These lessons merely place careers in groups, for instance, "practical, analytical and abstract, creative arts, care giving and support, leadership, management, administrative, and methodical" (Brink, Hotzkamp, Van Zyl, Brink, Fourie, Huysamer & Van Deventer, 2006:193). Learners are advised to choose what is suitable for them. At the end of the lesson learners are advised to conduct their own investigation into career choices (Brink *et al*., 2006:208). Universities do however conduct open days to inform learners about different courses offered by the institution. Attendance of open days is voluntary for learners. The latter approaches to career information for school leavers provide limited knowledge, and the timing is late for school leavers to change career choices due to academic streams which are taken early in high school.

School leavers who obtain enough credits to enrol for an undergraduate course in health sciences prefer medicine to nursing. This view is supported by a study that was conducted in Australia among high school learners (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999). Many students use their nursing degree as a stepping stone into academia, but end up practising in related other fields, or change specialisation to end up in related but a different field to the initial degree, for instance going from nursing to psychiatry or medicine (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008). The reason given for choosing other health professions over nursing is that nursing lacks autonomy. Nurses do not take decisions for interventions in patient management but are usually dependent on medical doctors to give directives which are carried out by nurses. School leavers might not be aware that the complexity in preventative, curative and chronic care calls for a team approach and each member has a significant role to play, including nurses. Measures need to be put in place in the future in order to promote nursing as a career among the school leavers in South Africa.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

School leavers who complete high school have over many years been a major new source of recruits into nursing. Anecdotal evidence suggests that recruits into the nursing profession have dropped and are inadequate to meet the demands, resulting in a shortage of nurses within the health services. A declining interest in nursing as a career has been put forward as a possible factor in school leavers' choices. The perceptions of nursing by school leavers have been described as a significant factor in countries such as Australia, USA, China, and Israel, and to a limited extent in one South African Province, namely Kwa-Zulu Natal. If perceptions about a profession are shaped by information learners receive, then it becomes important to determine what these perceptions are and how they are shaped. Positive imaging and appropriate career information may have a positive influence on school leavers' perceptions and hence their career choice.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- What influences school leavers into choosing or not choosing nursing as a career?
- What are the perceptions held by school leavers of nursing as a career of choice?

1.4 STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to determine school leavers' perceptions of nursing as a career of choice and how those perceptions influence them in choosing or not choosing nursing as a career.

The following objectives guided the study**:**

- to identify the nature of careers chosen by school leavers;
- to determine the association between the careers chosen and the factors which influence those choices;
- to identify how nursing is rated as a career choice compared to other careers; and
- to obtain suggestions on how nursing can be made attractive to high school learners.

1.5 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

This study seeks to explore and explain the influence that perceptions (independent variable) which school leavers hold of nursing as a career of choice upon them to choose or not to choose nursing as a career (dependent variable).

The following operations definitions apply:

- **School leavers –** are Grade 12 learners and are at the final year of school level education. After this stage of education they either go to tertiary institutions for finer preparation towards their chosen career or go straight to work.

- **Perceptions –** are organised processes in which "an individual selects cues from the environment and draws inferences from these in order to make sense of his or her own experience" (Quinn, 2007:63). In this study perceptions of school leavers are based on influences by; significant others (parents and friends), personal experience (hospital visit), icons (successful people), guidance teachers, fashion and technology.

- **Nursing –** is the use of clinical judgment in the provision of care to enable people to improve, maintain or recover health, to cope with health problems and to achieve the best possible quality of life, whatever the disease or disability until death (Royal College of Nursing, 2003).

Career – is the "series of jobs that a person has in a particular area of work, usually involving more responsibility as time passes" (Hornby, 2000:164).

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Information generated from the study may provide the Provincial and National Departments of Health and Education with insights into how school leavers regard nursing as a career. Effective career guidance, marketing, recruitment and retention strategies may be developed by stakeholders in order to strengthen and sustain the professional nursing workforce in South Africa.

1.7 CONCLUSION

School leavers are the main source of constant supply for the nursing workforce. Anecdotal evidence has shown that the supply of nursing recruits is not adequate to meet the demands. The perceptions held by school leavers on any career choice are bound to influence them to choose or not to choose a particular career, including nursing. Therefore it has become important to study the perceptions of school leavers upon nursing as a career of choice, to identify career choices of school leavers in order to determine how nursing is rated as compared to other careers, and to obtain suggestions on how nursing can be improved in order to make it more attractive to school leavers. Information gathered from the study will assist to identify misconceptions so that corrections are made and stakeholders will be able to align nursing according to the current employment, education and training trends in order to meet the expectations of school leavers where possible.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A declining interest in nursing as a career is not unique to South Africa and is a worldwide challenge. Several studies have been conducted internationally and in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province in South Africa to investigate perceptions held by school leavers of nursing as a career. A common factor in the findings of the studies conducted is that it is not poor remuneration as previously thought that results in a failure to attract school leavers to nursing. There is lack of clear information among school leavers and career guidance teachers about nursing as a career. Perceptions of high school leavers about nursing as a career of choice are thought to be influenced by various factors, some of which are baseless and untrue.

This chapter discusses relevant literature regarding factors and issues that influence school leavers to choose or not to choose nursing as a career. Recent and relevant research conducted in this field is integrated into the discussion.

2.2 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORK OF NURSES

The work of nurses has been associated with several factors and these factors are an origin of perceptions about the nursing career. These include:

- Exposure to occupational diseases and injuries
- Working conditions
- Difficult work, which is discussed below

2.2.1 Exposure to occupational injuries and diseases

A study conducted by the Health Systems Trust (2006) in Kwa-Zulu Natal showed that salary is not the main determinant of negative perceptions of a nursing career; 41% of respondents perceived low salaries as a negative aspect of nursing as a career that discourages school leavers from entering the nursing profession. 'Other negative aspects' were rated by 45% of perceptions and included a fear of contracting diseases such as AIDS. Nurses employed in tuberculosis clinics and hospitals are exposed to TB infection and the most dangerous types of TB which are multi-drug resistant and XDR TB. This 2006 study highlights school leavers'

lack of information regarding policies and procedures that are in place to protect nurses from work related illnesses, and that almost all kinds of jobs have risk factors.

Occupational injuries do occur during the course of patient care by the nursing personnel as concluded in the study of job strain as a risk factor for musculoskeletal symptoms among nurses (Josephson, Lagerström, Hagberg & Hjelm, 1977:685). Nurses in the hospital setting care for bedridden patients who need to be washed and turned frequently for purposes of hygiene and to prevent complications such as bedsores. Nursing is a female dominated career and females naturally lack strong muscles and bone strength. Nurses find themselves in a situation where they do not have a choice but to lift and turn patients themselves. Prolonged strain on muscle and bone result in back injuries, chronic back ache and osteoarthritis. Varicose veins are also common among people whose job involves standing for long periods of time, including nurses who work in labour wards, intensive care units, and other wards where patients are bedridden. This highlights the need to attract more males into nursing.

The shortage of nurses has caused disgruntlement among patients and their relatives. Long queues and waiting times for desperate patients and relatives often result in verbal and physical abuse of those nurses on duty. Improving working conditions for nurses might attract more school leavers into the nursing profession and bring remedy to all challenges caused by shortage of nurses.

2.2.2 Working conditions

Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 stipulates conditions of employment which include contracts between employer and employee on salaries, work shifts, rest periods, leave based on incapacity, and work environment (Department of Labour, 1997). In a survey conducted by the Health System Trust (2006) poor working conditions rated a score of 45%. The score is higher than that of 41% of the responses to the question of salaries as a negative factor in the nursing career.

In the public sector there is “no commitment to maintain facilities and expertise” (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008:49). On the other hand the private health sector puts emphasis on making profits by compromising human resources (Sookha, 2007). Nurses are driven away by poor working conditions such as nurse and tools of trade shortages including unkempt work environments. The “working environment and respect are some of the major obstacles for

nurses to recommend their career to others" (Donelan, Buerhause, DesRoches, Dittus & Dutwin, 2008:149). Poor working conditions contribute to discouraging nurses to recommend their profession to the others.

Shift work was mentioned as an unfavourable working condition in nursing associated with "unsociable hours and low skilled manual work" (Hemsley and Foskett, 1999:1349). Nursing is considered a "manual job with skills used mainly at the bedside" (Hoke, 2006:95). That is another misinformed perception about the work of nurses who might be working shift hours which does not necessarily involve manual work. On the other hand careers associated with shift work are a deterrent for school leavers to choose because of the unsociable hours. School leavers might not be aware of special treatment and allowances offered to the private and public health employers for such services.

2.2.3 Difficult work

Nursing is physically and emotionally demanding. In a study conducted in Kwa-Zulu Natal, 45% of respondents rated nursing as emotionally challenging (Health Systems Trust, 2006). Dealing with death and the possibility of a patient dying in their care, learners mentioned that they would feel "responsible for someone's death" (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999:1345).

Some young people indicated that they admire a nursing job but perceived handling unpleasant tasks, especially body wastes as repulsive (Rossiter & Yam, 1998:126). Even though young people rate nursing as a good career they do not have the desire to be nurses themselves.

Nursing was inaccurately perceived by young people as an occupation with a strong labour component similar to technician level engineering (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999:1348). Clearly this shows how inaccurate the information is which young people possess on the real roles and tasks of qualified professional nurses. The fact that there are other nursing categories such as auxiliary and enrolled nurses who are responsible for elementary roles in health care services, is not clear to most school leavers .

2.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Socio-economic conditions are the main reasons why school leavers choose or do not choose certain careers. Status has been mentioned in several studies as the main reason for choosing

careers, such as medicine as opposed to nursing. Males who choose female dominated careers are regarded as weak by their male counterparts. On the other hand remuneration goes hand in hand with careers which have high status attached to them e.g. medicine, engineering and accountancy. The following socio-economic factors are discussed in the text that follows:

- Remuneration
- Status
- Nursing and gender

2.3.1 Remuneration

A study conducted by the Health Systems Trust (2006) on the career choices of school leavers in relation to nursing revealed that salary is not the main determinant of negative perceptions of a nursing career.

In a study conducted by Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999:1348), "89.5% of participants had made a career choice without regard for reward and had based their career choice based on interest and enjoyment".

Donelan *et al*., (2008:149), share the same sentiment with Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999:1348) that among those who have considered a career, salary does not appear to play a major role in decision making.

The entry salary of nursing is relatively high, "particularly for an occupation with an entry salary of the associate degree level" (Seago, Spetz, Alvarado, Keane & Grumbach, 2006:103). Nursing salaries are viewed as rewarding and on par with other graduate counterparts. Salary is therefore perceived as one of the positive attributes of the nursing profession. If remuneration for nurses is at an acceptable level what is it that really discourages school leavers to consider choosing nursing as a career?

Overall young people of all ages indicated that they want intellectually challenging jobs which involve decision making, and meeting and helping people in a dynamic role. Nursing continues to lag considerably behind the medical profession in perceptions of occupational prestige and status (Seago *et al.*, 2006).

2.3.2 Status

Nursing is viewed as a caring activity as opposed to being academically challenging. The role of a nurse is seen as that of a helper to a medical doctor, a suggestion that nursing is supportive rather than proactive and thus lacks autonomy. Preparation for a nursing career has an apprenticeship image. Learners who had taken mathematics and science subjects as majors felt that they could go for more challenging health sciences careers like Bachelor of Medicine rather than nursing (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999).

In a study conducted by Seago *et al.,* (2006:100) nursing was perceived positively in areas of "good job security, good income, interesting work and making a difference in people's lives". This shows that learners have a positive attitude towards the nursing career while at the same time they feel nursing is not a good career choice due to certain difficult aspects of nursing work.

2.3.3 Nursing and gender

Gender refers to "the societal roles and expectations imposed on women and men" (MacIntosh, 2002:171). Socialisation of most women has led to them assuming roles of subordination, service and compliance which are in sharp contrast of the roles expected of men. In their work situation nurses work closely with medical doctors who are mostly male and adopt a dominant position when compared to nurses who are mostly female and naturally adopt a subordinate position. That is one of the reasons why nurses are seen as medical doctor's subordinates. Boys view nursing as a female job, (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999:1346). Generally nursing has for a long time been considered as a female career. A study conducted in Israel by Sagy (1997:156) among ex-Soviet student immigrants showed that in the former USSR (known as Russia today), the process of "defeminisation of some professions including nursing" was already influenced by state policies on gender equality. Youth from the USSR viewed nursing as a job in demand and a chance to enter the labour market irrespective of gender. The study on Promoting Nursing as a Career Choice showed that "more females than males were influenced to consider nursing as a career of choice" r (Hoke, 2006:98). In South Africa the ratio of male to female student nurses is improving, it was 1:5 in 2003 and 1:3 in 2007 (South African Nursing Council, 2008).

In a study conducted in Tanzania among high school students on their attitudes towards professional courses medicine was the most liked profession while nursing was the least liked

(Kikwilu, Mugonzibwa, Rugarabamu, 2000:143). Improving the nurse-patient ratio is crucial in order to achieve good quality of health care for the citizens of South Africa. It is therefore important to investigate factors that influence school leavers in their career choices. Based on the findings attempts can be made to attract more suitable candidates into the nursing profession.

2.4. ACADEMIC FACTORS

Academic factors are formal and effective instruments used to enhance capabilities of a learner in the career of choice. Career guidance and academic streams are both used in the formal education system to inform and guide a learner towards a suitable career. Career guidance is a lesson offered to learners informing them of the nature of various career options and the criteria for admission at tertiary institutions. Academic streams are major subjects taken as early as Grade 10. These subjects are related to the careers at tertiary institutions (refer to table 2.1.). Career guidance is very important because it assists learners to choose suitable careers.

The following academic factors are integral in the determination of choice of career of school leavers :

- Academic stream
- Career guidance

2.4.1 Academic streams

Academic streams refer to a group of subjects in the learning fields such as science, business, arts and humanities. Ministers Asmal (Education Department) and Mdladlana (Labour Department) indicated in the National Qualification Framework Consultative Document (2003) that these learning fields prepare school leavers to form broad based orientation towards employment or prepare them for admission to higher education institutions. According to the current high school curriculum in South Africa the academic stream is selected from as early as Grade 10 and it dictates the career choices for tertiary level training and education. Table 2.1 shows the academic streams and matches them with relevant careers.

Table 2.1 – Faculty or career options and pathways or requirements for admission

FACULTY/CAREER OPTION	PATHWAY/REQUIREMENT FOR ADMISSION
Arts, Design and Architecture	Mathematics
Economic and Financial Sciences	Accounting and Mathematics
Education	Specific to area of specialisation at tertiary level
Engineering and the Built Environment	Mathematics and Physical Science
Health Sciences	Mathematics and Physical Science
Humanities	Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy
Law	Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation
Management	Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation
Science	Mathematics and Life Orientation

Should a learner wish to divert from one stream to the other that decision should be taken before Grade 10. This pathway restriction makes it difficult for school leavers and parents to change choices after Grade 10 and at tertiary level. School leavers who wish to join nursing will only be successful if they had followed the physical science and mathematics stream from as early as Grade 10. Hoke (2006:94) indicates that by the time learners enter middle and high school they would have "narrowed their career options based on their perceptions". There is a need for a review of the academic streams as they lack flexibility to accommodate the learners who choose careers late in high school.

2.4.2 Career guidance

Career guidance is about giving information to learners about different career options that are available after finishing high school. Information is given formally as a lesson in schools. Learners are given a guide on how to choose career opportunities that are suited to their abilities and interests, and the availability of job opportunities and funding in case they choose to go to further tertiary education institutions. In some cases career advisors possess limited information about a career in nursing (King *et al.*, 2007:138). Effective promotion of nursing among career guidance teachers could help to indirectly boost the interest of learners in nursing as a career. The study findings of perceptions of career advisors regarding nursing suggested that there were few requests for the nursing career (King *et al.*, 2007:145). The

study also revealed that career advice only begins in mid-high school at the time when career choices have already been made (King *et al*., 2007:145; Hoke, 2006). In a study "nursing was rated the lowest profession among school guidance counsellors with male's attitude more negative" (Cohen, Ehrlich-Jones, Burns, Frank-Stromborg, Flanagan & Askins, 2005:91). In South Africa career guidance is taught formerly from mid-high school when learners have already made career choices. In the career guidance lesson there is no active promotion of any career including nursing. The latter suggests that there is a lack of awareness about the nursing profession among school leavers. School leavers will not take interest in nursing unless they get positive information about it from an early age.

Tertiary students who experienced discrepancies between pre-entry perceptions and the actual educational requirements of a nursing degree were more likely to leave the course (King *et al.*, 2007:138). This is an indication that accurate pre-entry information about the nursing career is important. The study conducted by King *et al.,* (2007:138) concluded that career advisors had "limited knowledge of the multitude of nursing roles and responsibilities and lacked awareness of the availability of a variety of advanced practice, roles and professional development opportunities available to nurses". Career advisors and guidance teachers need a thorough workshop about the nursing profession for them to gain a positive attitude and effectively promote nursing among school leavers.

2.5 PRE-EXPOSURE TO NURSING

Pre-exposure to nursing is affected by:

- Media
- Personal experience
- Role models

2.5.1 Media

Substantial proportions of the general public watch television and the news. In the past 14 years nurses have gone on strike for better salaries almost every year. These protests are screened in the local and international television news bulletins. The message sent to the public by these demands for better wages is that nurses are unhappy with their salaries. News stories about nurses working in disaster situations such as Hurricane Katrina generated substantial public respect for nurses; 75% of people who watched the stories said it made a

positive impact on their respect for nurses (Donelan *et al*., 2008:146). A study conducted in the USA showed that people who watch television shows such as ER, Scrubs and Grey's Anatomy which portray the positive side of nursing were more likely to recommend nursing to others (Dutwin *et al.,* 2008). The media can create a negative or positive influence about nursing dependent on what people see or hear from the media. Media can be used as a powerful tool to show the positive aspects of a nursing career to the public.

2.5.2 Personal experience

Personal experience may have a negative or positive influence on a learner's decision to choose or not to choose nursing as a career. Among those who consider the career, personal experience of illness was more likely to influence people to consider nursing as a career. Personal experience rated at 46% – the highest as compared to career guidance (27%), news (24%), television shows (20%), and advertisements (17%) – in stimulating those with personal experience of nursing to discuss the career with others (Donelan *et al.*, 2008:148). Conversely learners who have had a negative personal experience with nursing might not prefer nursing as a career of choice and might not even recommend it to others. Other students viewed handling of sick patients and blood as unpleasant and risky tasks and this made a possibility of them choosing nursing or recommending it to the others very remote (Rossiter & Yam, 1998:216).

2.5.3 Role models

A role model is a person that "one admires and tries to copy" (Hornby, 2000:1021). Role models are usually people in close contact with whom they influence, hence personal experience is a direct and powerful influence. Patients and their relatives who visit a health service centre are exposed to direct observation of nurses in action. Nurses serve as direct role models. Naturally, female role models in nursing are in the majority. Based on the female dominated character, the nursing profession draws more females than males. Inasmuch as nurses can be role models for their family members, Donelan *et al.,* (2008:150) suggest that nurses rarely recommend their profession to young people close to them. "Poor attitude displayed by nurses at work projected an image that they seem unhappy and conducted their duties with little enjoyment and compassion" (Rossiter & Yam, 1998:216). If nurses themselves are discouraged about their work, how do they influence interested candidates?

2.6 CONCLUSION

Literature reviewed for this study provided clear background information as to what perceptions school leavers hold about nursing as a career of choice and how those perceptions influence them to choose or not choose nursing as a career of choice.

The positive aspects of nursing mentioned outnumber the negative aspects. Generally there is a high regard for nursing by learners but a majority do not wish to be nurses themselves. It is clear that there is little knowledge about the overall diversity of the nursing career for example, becoming a lecturer, executive manager or clinical specialist. Furthermore nurses are members of a health team among whom opportunity is provided to contribute in a meaningful way. Poor working conditions are not unique to nursing; almost all jobs have negative aspects but nursing is singled out, perhaps due to lack of proper marketing. Unsociable working hours like night duty are paid for and there are policies and procedures in place to prevent exposure to occupational health hazards. Ancillary health care workers who are employed for manual duties like feeding and washing patients are not mentioned.

The research methodology is described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study design, methods and procedures are outlined in this chapter. This includes the study design, setting, population and sample. The chapter further explains how data was collected. The validity and the reliability of the instruments are described. Ethical issues taken into consideration throughout the study are outlined in this chapter.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive survey design was used to address the study objectives. The survey design is a "quantitative research approach in which the researcher systematically asks large numbers of people the same question for which answers are written or recorded" (Neuman, 2003:43). This design involved determining the perceptions held by high school leavers of nursing as a career. A survey by means of a self-administered questionnaire was used by the researcher to collect data to ultimately describe the relationship between perceptions of school leavers and their career choices. Impartial collection of data involved participants who were school leavers at public high schools. Data sets collected were analysed and reported on in order to provide an objective account of participants' perceptions of nursing as a career of choice.

3.3 RESEARCH SETTING

The setting was natural as the study was conducted in participants' respective schools during normal school hours. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire administered during a typical classroom session. The place and time allocated for the study was within the teaching/learning period (timetable) in a classroom reserved for the school leavers' usual daily lessons. Eleven participating schools (n=11) from the five districts in the Johannesburg Region of the Gauteng Department of Education, provided a research setting.

3.4. RESEARCH METHODS

3.4.1 Population

The study comprised two population sets: high schools and Grade 12 learners in the district of Johannesburg. This district is divided into five regions; North, South, West, And East and Central Regions.

A list of the total number of public sector high schools (n=300) situated within the District of Johannesburg was used as a sampling frame and constituted the study population of schools. All school leavers enrolled in Grade 12 in the year 2009 comprised the target population. A total of 271,807 learners were enrolled in the Johannesburg District high schools, and Grade 11 learners made up 50,731 (19%) of the total number of learners enrolled in 2008 (Department of Education, 2008). The target population therefore was approximately 50,000 school leavers (N=50,000).

3.4.2 Sampling

Sampling was done in two stages: Stratified random sampling was used to select the participating schools. The school regions were used as strata. As stated earlier the District of Johannesburg is divided into five regions with the number of schools as follows: Central Region (N =53), Eastern Region (N =83), Northern Region (N =61), Southern Region (N =65), and the Western Region (N =38) schools. All five regions were included in the survey.

Simple random sampling was used to select the number of participating schools from the districts. School names from the sampling frame were printed on paper, separated and placed in a container each representing a region (n=5). Participating schools were selected randomly from each bowl representing each of the five regions. Schools were selected randomly from each bowl until the desired sample size was reached. Table 3.1 shows the sampling plan for schools and school leavers according to region.

Table 3.1 – Sampling of schools and grade 11 learners according to regions

Sample information	**GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS**					
	Central	**East**	**West**	**North**	**South**	**TOTALS**
Number of high schools	53	83	38	61	65	300
Number of Learners in Grade 11	12 791	10 432	6 862	10 566	10 090	50 741
Participating schools & number of participants	Mondeor High(28) Jabulani Technical College (60)	Centurion College(27) Malvern High(34)	Phefeni High(12) West Ridge High(33)	Diepsloot Combined(20) Fourways High(18) Emshukantambo Secondary(30)	United Churches (39) The Hill (27)	Participating Schools=11
Number of participants	88	61	45	68	66	328
Actual% of participants per region	0.68%	0.58%	0.65%	0.64%	0.65%	3.2%

School leavers from each school were not sampled but were invited to participate voluntarily in the study. Only school leavers 18 years and older who gave written consent and those under 18 years who obtained signed consent from a parent or guardian were enrolled in the survey. School leavers were informed about their right to excuse themselves from taking part prior to the study or withdraw during the course of the survey.

3.4.3 Statistical power and sample size determination

The power of a statistical test is the probability that the test will correctly reject the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis is in fact false. This will allow the researcher to accept the research hypothesis. The power of any statistical test is equal to 1 minus the probability of a Type II error (error of failing to accept a true research hypothesis).

Several factors can affect the power of a statistical test:
(1) the size of alpha (the significance level),
(2) the sample size,
(3) the difference between the means of the two populations from which the samples come, and
(4) the type of statistical test used in the analysis (Vernoy, 2002).

In this study, as all the variables are on a nominal scale, the Chi Square analysis was used to test association between variables**.** A power analysis for proportions was conducted to determine the sample size needed to detect the critical Chi Square value with an adequate level of statistical power.

To estimate the mean age of the participants, the minimum age of 17 years old was considered as the study is dealing with Grade 12 learners only. So using the formula for class intervals, the mean age is approximately 19 years old (Refer to Table 3.2)

Table 3.2 – Percentage of learners per region

Sample information	**Central**	**East**	**West**	**North**	**South**	**Totals**
Number of schools	53	83	38	61	65	300
Number of learners in Grade 11	12,791	10,432	6,862	10,566	10,090	50,741
Percentage of learners	0.68%	0.58%	0.65%	0.64%	0.65%	3.2%

A stratified random sampling is used to determine the number of respondents per region (Refer to Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 – Sample size distributions across geographic regions

Sample information	**Central**	**East**	**West**	**North**	**South**	**Totals**
Participating Schools & Numbers of participants	Mondeor High: 28 Jabulani Technical College: 60	Centurion: 27 Malvern High: 34	Phefeni High: 12 West Ridge High: 33	Diepsloot Combined: 20 Fourways High: 18 Emshukantambo Secondary: 30	United Churches: 39 The Hill: 27	
Total number of participants	88	61	45	68	66	328

The response rate and final sample size (n =328). An acceptable level of power for the result to be considered significant is 80% or 0.8 (Burns & Grove, 2003:340). Several factors can affect the sample and need to be taken into consideration when critiquing the adequacy of the sample size. Factors which impacted on this study will be explained in Chapter Five.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 Data collection technique

Questioning was the data collection technique chosen; a 21-item self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data (Appendix E). An information sheet was distributed to the participants, which informed them about the study and their rights. Participants or their parents (in the case where a participant is a minor) were required to sign at the bottom of the information sheet if they agree to participate in the survey. Thereafter questionnaires were distributed to participants who gave a written consent. Sections of the questionnaire (socio-demographic, career choices of school leavers, positive and negative aspects of nursing and suggestions on how to make nursing appeal to school leavers) were read out to the participants by the researcher to provide clarity. Questionnaires were completed without the assistance of the researcher. Once completed the questionnaires were collected by the researcher from the participants' desks.

3.5.2 Data collection instrument

Data were collected from school leavers at eleven high schools (n=11) within the District of Johannesburg. A 21-item self-administered questionnaire with closed and open ended questions was used to collect data. The same questionnaire has been previously used by the Health Systems Trust (HST). Permission to use the questionnaire (Appendix E) was obtained from the HST.

There are three sets of questions in the questionnaire comprising both closed and open ended questions that elicited:

- **Socio-demographic data:** In this section school leavers were required to write the name of their school, their age and gender.

- **Career choices of school leavers:** This section required the school leavers to respond to the nature of career chosen by them and the reason why that particular career was chosen, factors which influence them to choose careers such as role models, relatives and the academic streams that they have chosen.
  They were also asked about the positive and negative aspects/characteristics of nursing.

- **Suggestions on how to make nursing more appealing:** This part of questionnaire invited suggestions from participants on how nursing could be improved in order for it to become an attractive career to school leavers.

The questionnaire was printed in English and isiZulu. Using these languages was based on the following reasons; English is the medium of instruction in most Johannesburg public high schools, and isiZulu is a language studied by a wide population of African learners.

Items were originally developed by researchers at the HST after a thorough literature and peer review process. For the purpose of this study the questionnaire (Appendix E) was reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of experts at the University where the study was approved.

3.5.3 Validity and reliability of data collection instrument

Validity of an instrument is the "extent to which it accurately measures the abstract concept being examined" (Burns & Grove, 2003:559). In this study the relationship between perceptions of school leavers on nursing and whether or not they choose nursing as a career were measured.

Reliability of an instrument is consistency of the measurement technique (Burns & Grove, 2003:552). In this study the co-relation among variables was tested using nominal scales. The participants responded to the same set of questions. A similar study was previously conducted by the Health Systems Trust in 2007. The instrument used in this study is the same instrument that was tested and used in the HST 2007 study and found to be both valid and reliable.

3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A written request to conduct the survey in the Johannesburg Public High Schools was forwarded to the office of the Gauteng MEC for Education. Permission was granted in writing (Refer to Appendix B).

Permission to conduct the study in schools was requested and granted either telephonically or in person from headmasters of participating schools.

Copies of the parent's consent form (Appendix C) and participant's consent form (Appendix D) were distributed to the school headmasters with a request to forward them to school leavers and parents/guardians for consent on behalf of the researcher. School leavers who volunteered and signed and returned consent forms were invited to participate in the study. Minor school leavers who wished not to participate after parents had given consent were given an opportunity to give a written assent in order to refute the parental consent. Ethical issues regarding confidentiality and anonymity were upheld throughout the study; codes instead of participant's names were used for each questionnaire. The identities of participating schools and school leavers were withheld by the researcher at all times and will not be publicly disclosed at any time. The raw data was kept safe and confidential to the researcher alone. School leavers were issued with consent forms for provision of brief overview of the study and the rights and expected roles of participants. School leavers had to indicate by putting a signature on the consent form that they were willing to participate in the study. At the venue, prior to the distribution of questionnaires, participants were further informed that they have a

right to remove themselves at any time during the study and that this would not interfere in any way with the learner-teacher relationship.

3.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter methodological aspects of the study were put into perspective. Research designs, methods and procedures were outlined in detail. Validity and reliability of the instrument used to collect data was explained. Ethical considerations which were upheld throughout the research were outlined. The following chapter contains the survey results.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was about surveying school leavers' perceptions of nursing as a career in order to understand how those perceptions influence them in choosing or not choosing nursing as a career. The study objectives were to identify career choices of school leavers, to determine the association between the careers chosen and the factors which influence those choices, to identify how nursing is rated as a career choice compared to other careers, and to obtain suggestions on how nursing can be made attractive to school leavers. In this chapter the findings of the study will be discussed and the appeal of nursing as a career of choice to the potential recruits (school leavers) will be determined.

4.2 APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

All data analysis was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences) Version 13. To achieve these objectives, descriptive statistics, namely frequency distributions and measures of central tendency were used to analyse, describe and present the results. Considering measures of central tendency, the mode is preferred to the mean and median as all the variables are in nominal scale.

In order to determine the association between the careers chosen and the factors which influence those career choices, contingency tables were used. Chi Square analysis was used to test for association between variables. However, most of the questions in the study have multiple responses and missing values, which are hindrances to the use of contingency tables. Therefore, the association will only be determined by comparing frequency distributions and Chi Square value. The level of significance is set at 0.05. One open-ended question was analysed using content analysis.

The study results are presented in the following order:

- Demographics of the sample
- Distribution of careers of mothers and fathers of participants
- Career choices of school leavers
- Recommendations on how the nursing career can be made attractive to school leavers.

4.3 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4.3.1 Demographic aspects

The number of school leavers who agreed to respond to the questions constituted the final sample. The population size was 50,000 (N=50,000) and the sample size was 328 (n=328). Participants were from eleven participating schools (n=11).

The highest number of participants was from Jabulani Technical College in the Central Region 60 respondents (18.3%), it was followed by the united church in the South Region with 39 respondents (12%). Phefeni secondary school in the West Region had 12 respondents (4%) and Fourways High in the North Region had 18 respondents (5.5%); both these schools had the lowest number of participants compared to the eleven participating schools. Participation in the study was voluntary, but the total number of school leavers enrolled in each school was proportional to the amount of participants.

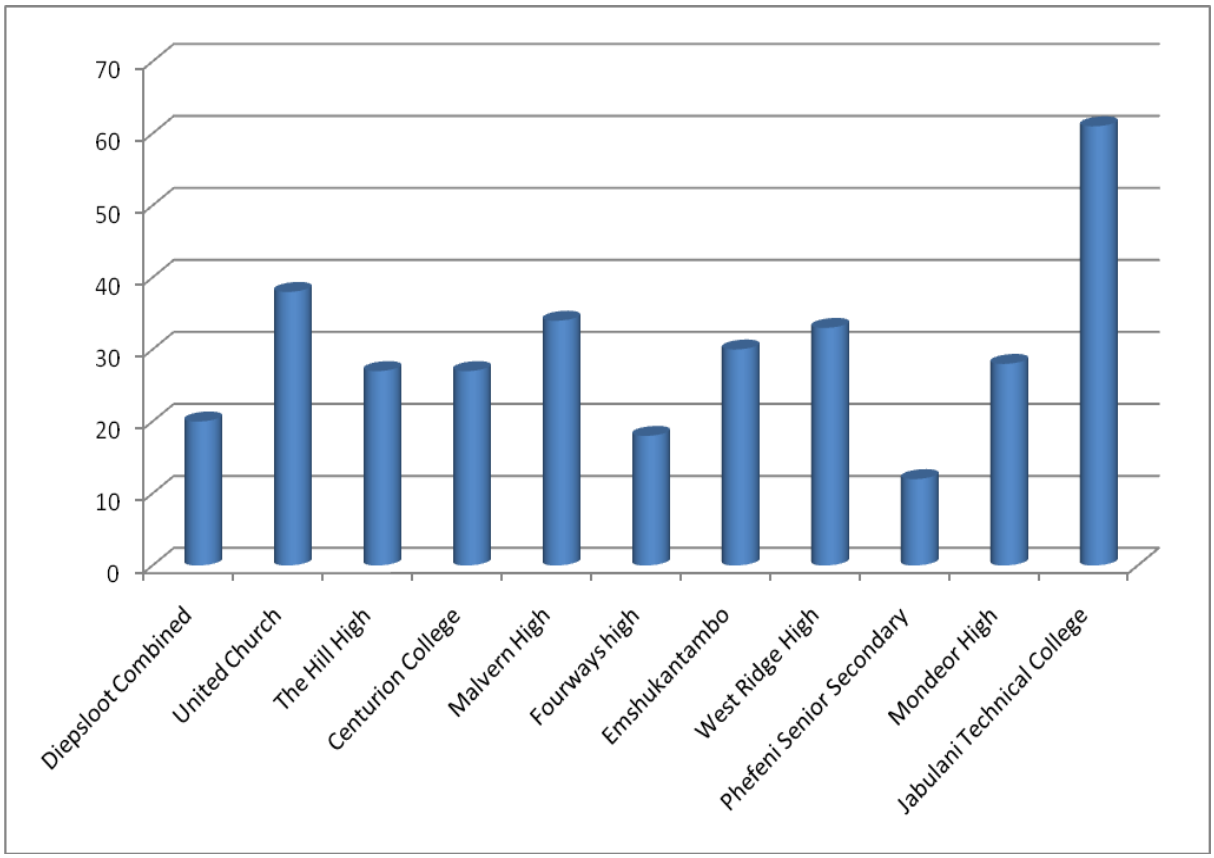


Figure 4.1 – Distribution of school leavers according to schools (n=11)

With reference to age distribution, majority of respondents (51.2%, N=163) were less than 18 years old (n =163), compared to respondents whose ages were 18 to 22 years old (48.7%,

n=155). Ten (n=10) school leavers did not mention their ages. There were no school leavers above the age of 22 years. Figure 4.2 illustrates the age distribution of participants.

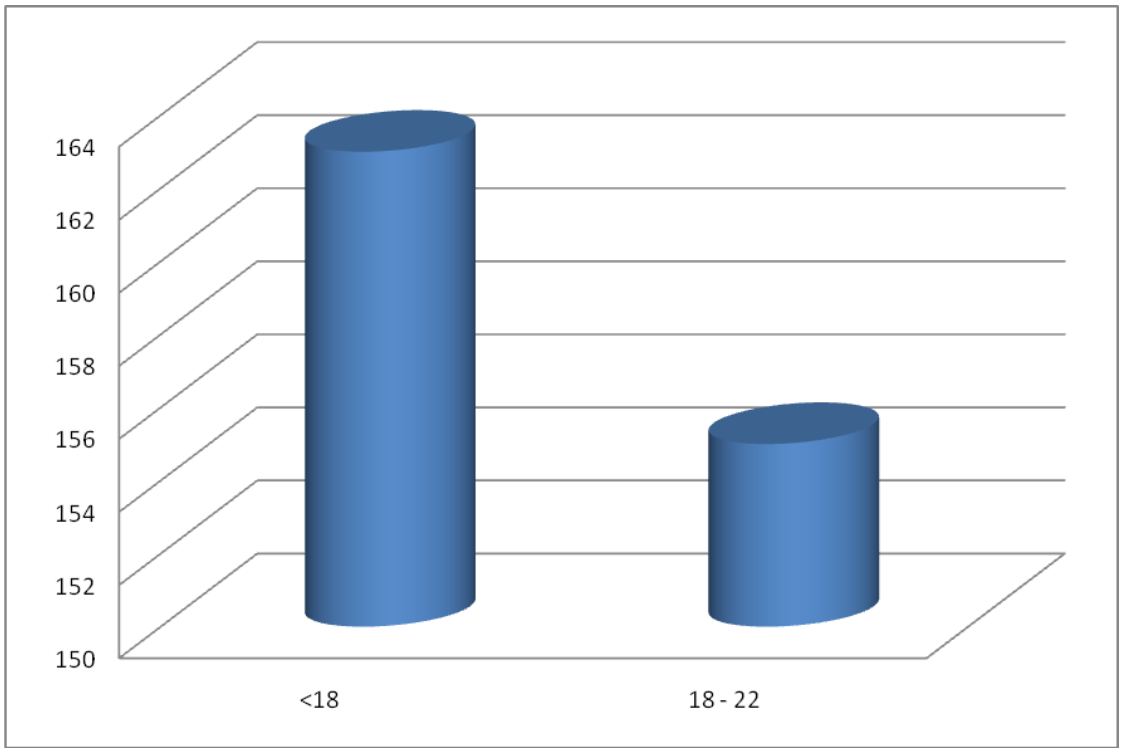


Figure 4.2 – Age distribution of participants (n=318)

In order to determine a relationship between their age and a choice of nursing as a career, school leavers were asked if they would ever consider nursing as a career. Out of the 306 respondents to this question 50% (n=153) who were less than 18 years of age gave a 'yes' response. Of those who gave a 'no' response 51% were less than 18years and 49% were aged 18 to 22 years. The Chi Square value shows that the association between age and a participant's consideration of nursing as a career is not significant (^{X2} [4] = 0.023, p-value = 0.897). Table 4.1 shows the age distribution of participants who would choose/not choose nursing as a career.

Table 4.1 – Age distribution of participants who would choose or not choose nursing (n=306)

		Ever considered nursing as a career		Total
		Yes	No	
Age of participants	**<18**	47	108	155
	18 - 22	47	104	151
Total		94	212	306

Figure 4.3 shows the gender distribution of school leavers in the study; 56.1% (n=184) of female school leavers participated in the study against 40.5% (n=133) of males. 3.4% (n=11) did not respond to the question about gender. Female respondents (n=184) outnumbered males who were 41% less than female respondents in this item. Female participants who opted for nursing as a career were 38% (n=73), the majority of female school leavers 59.2% (n=106) said nursing was not an option. Out of 126 male respondents only 21 (6.8%) reported that they would consider nursing as a career.

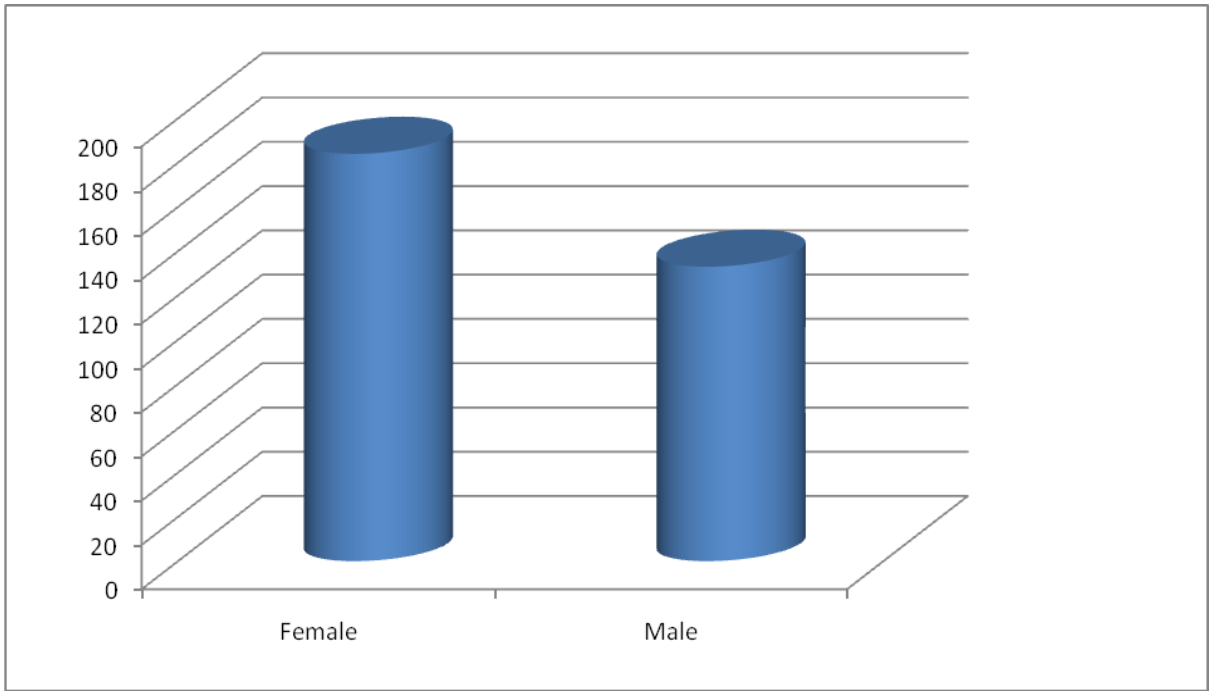


Figure 4.3 – Gender distribution of school leavers (n=328)

The nursing profession has long been considered to be a female career and that perception still exists. Though numbers of male who join nursing are improving nurses are still very few (refer Figure 1.3.and Table 4.2). The hypothesis of an association between gender and a choice of nursing career by school leavers is acceptable (^{X2} [4] = 20.170, p =0.000), the p-value is less than 0.05.

Table 4.2 – Gender distributions of responses to consideration of nursing as a career

		Ever considered nursing as a career		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender	Female	73	106	179
	Male	21	105	126
Total		94	211	305

4.3.2 Career distribution of mothers and fathers of school leavers

The careers of significant persons such as school leavers' mothers and fathers were thought to be important in their choice of careers. The proportion of participants who responded to this question was 73.3% (n=27). Careers mentioned in the questionnaire had 41.7% (n=99) responses. It can be seen in Figure 4.4 that the majority (58.3%, n=138) of the mothers are in careers other than the ones proposed in the questionnaire. Most of the mothers (16.5%, n=54); were in the commerce/business fields; nursing followed teaching closely at (n=23) with a difference of only (n=2); (n=28) of mothers were indicated to be unemployed, (n=9) were general workers, (n=12) were domestic workers, (n=10) had no mothers and (n=10) were self employed. The remainder mentioned careers as estate agents, accountants, directors, engineer and admin clerks, and secretaries.

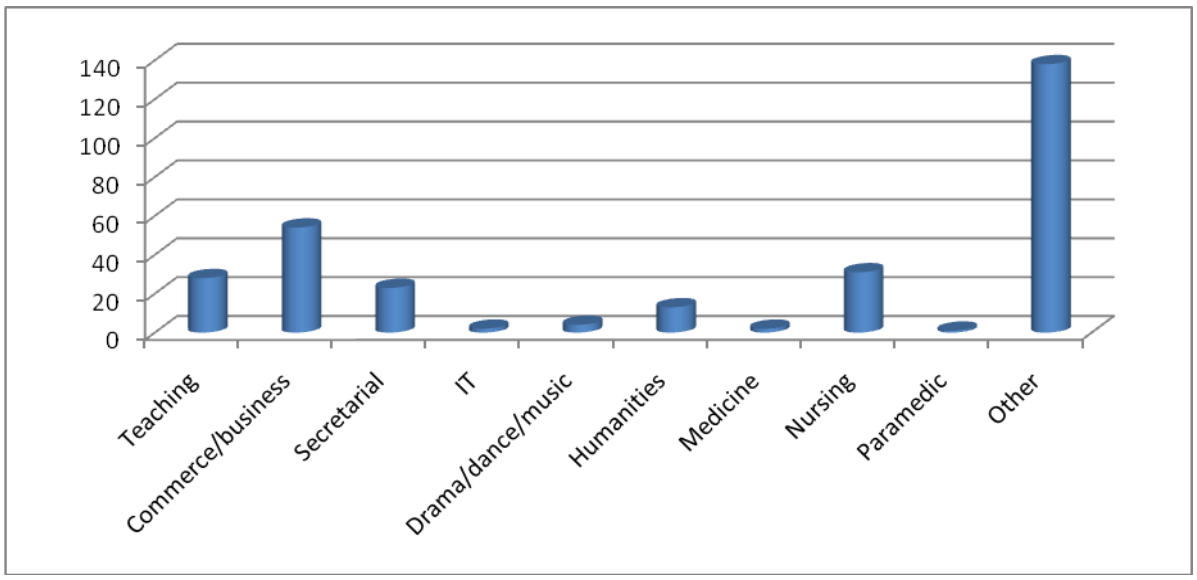


Figure 4.4 – Distribution of the careers of mothers of school leavers (n=237)

On top of the list of careers of fathers of school leavers, 21% (n=50) have a career in commerce/business, followed by teaching (6.3%, n=15) and IT (5.9%, n=14). Nursing rated poorly at 2% (n=5); and medicine outnumbered nursing 4.2% (n=10). Other careers of fathers which were not mentioned in the questionnaire were 58.1% (n=135). Those employed as general workers were 6.1% (n=14), self employed were 5.5% (n=13), fathers in engineering were 4.2% (n=10), unemployed were 4% (n=9) and those in the security industry were 3.3% (n=8). School leavers who had no fathers were 5.5% (n=13). The remainder of fathers were employed as estate agents, technicians, managers, accountants, architects and office workers.

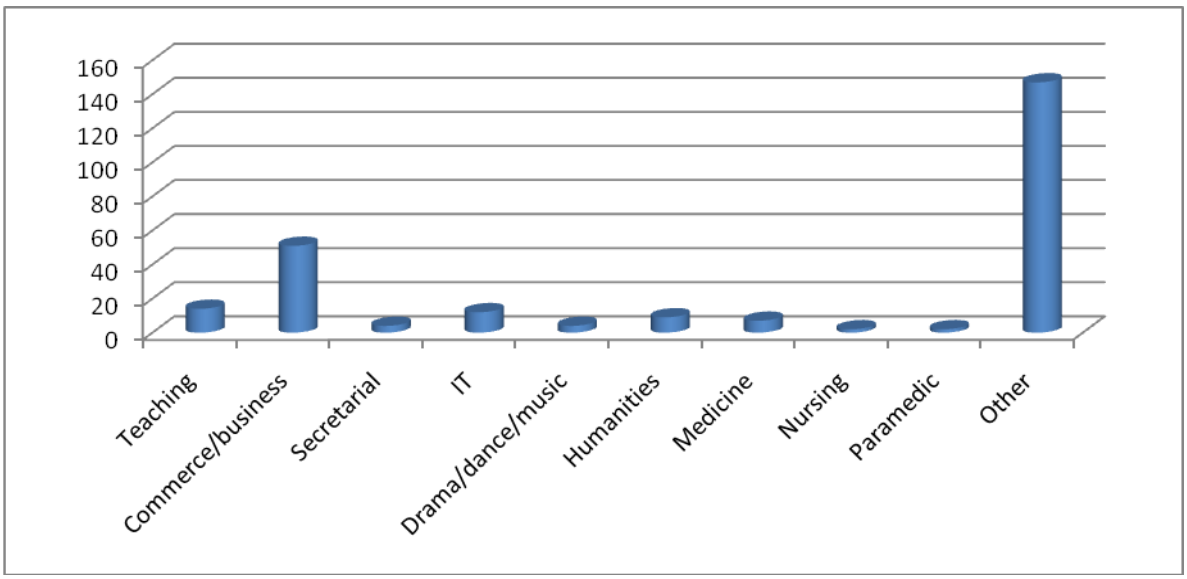


Figure 4.5 – Distribution of careers of fathers of school leavers (n=238)

4.3.3 Identification of career choices

Respondents were asked to indicate their academic streams, reason(s) for choosing the stream, and future use of the knowledge acquired from the stream. Choice of careers of school leavers and reason(s) for choosing the career are analysed.

4.3.4 Academic streams

The main academic stream 0.7% (n=31) is science followed by commerce 29% (n=95). Other streams such as technical, travel and tourism amounted to 15% (n=61). General/Humanities were the least popular streams with 14% (n=43) of the responses. Figure 4.6.shows the distribution of the current academic stream of school leavers.

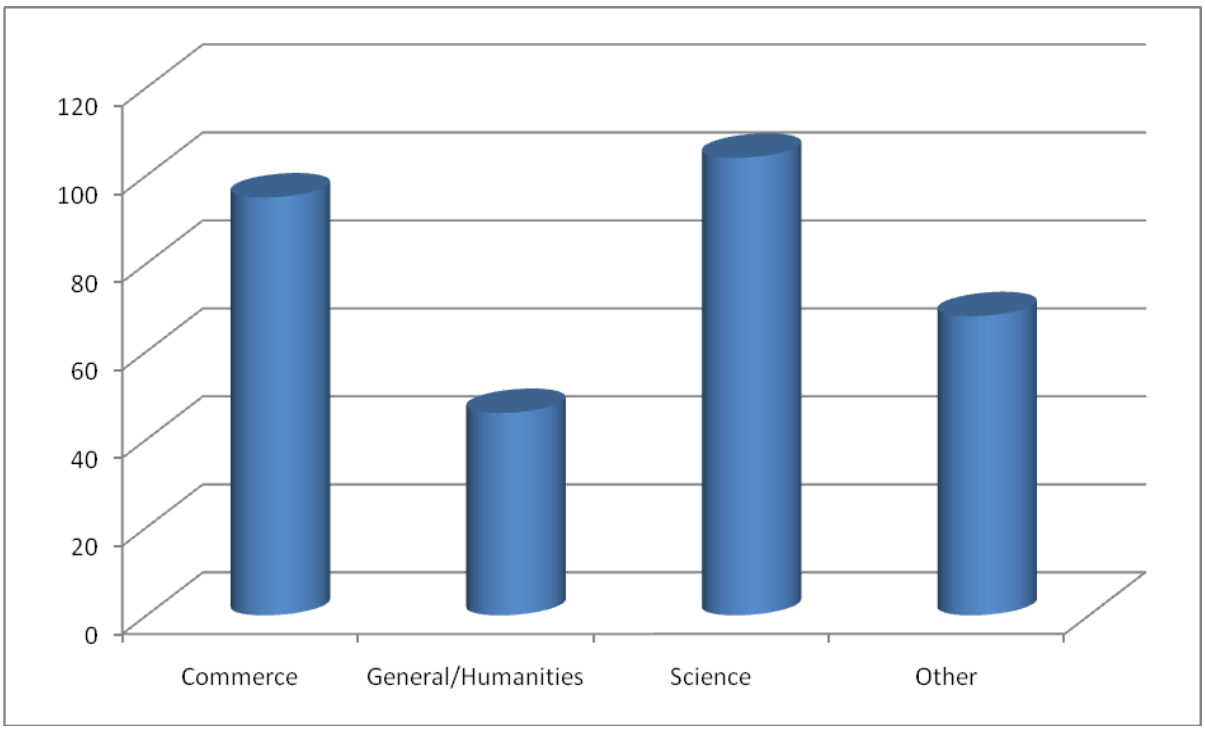


Figure 4.6 – Distribution of the current academic stream of school leavers (n=303)

4.3.5 Reasons for choice of academic stream

Two hundred and ninety six (n=296) which translates to 75% of participants, responded to this question. The majority of respondents 54% (n=161) stated that their choice of stream was based on what they thought was best suited to the career of their choice. Dream/desire/passion came second with a response rate of 15.5% (n=46). Choice based on personal strength was third at 9.5% (n=28). Career choice/ interest rated the highest, indicating that most school leavers chose particular streams because they are in line with their future career choices of interest.

When asked if the chosen subjects were in line with the careers they wish to pursue the responses were mostly positive. Respondents who agreed that their subjects were in line with the desired career were in the majority 82.3% (n=270) (refer to Figure 4.4). Only a small minority 17.7% (n=58) said their subject choice was not in line with their desired careers. This gives the impression that, by the time school leavers reach Grade 10 (middle high school) their minds are already made up about their career choices.

4.3.6 Future use of knowledge acquired from the chosen stream

Respondents were required to state what they intend doing with the knowledge acquired from the academic stream they chose. In response to this item of the questionnaire most school leavers 17% (n=50) expressed a wish to study towards a degree as a reason for choosing a particular stream. This indicates that school leavers have the insight that a stream leads to a career after high school education. Ability to manage own business and to become an engineer came second at 15.3% (n=45). Wanting to be a successful person rated third 5% (n=25). The responses show that school leavers have ambitions to work towards a positive future. A career in the health profession rated poorly being a choice for only 3.4% (n=10) of the school leavers.

The majority 89.9% (n=294) of school leavers expressed their hope to further their studies after leaving school. Some school leavers expressed the wish to become lawyers, accountants, information technologists, historians, engineers, constructors, scientists etc., and others indicated that they wanted to get a degree. All this means that school leavers want to further their study either at college or university. These results are illustrated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 – Future use of knowledge acquired from the chosen stream

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Use of knowledge acquired from stream Mode = Get a degree	Lawyer	21	7.1%
	Manager/Own business	45	15.3%
	Accountant	14	4.8%
	Radio presenter	1	0.3%
	Information technologist	9	3.1%
	Filmmaker	7	2.4%
	Social worker	3	1.0%
	Tourist guide	6	2.0%
	Historian	1	0.3%
	Engineer	45	15.3%
	Graphic designer	9	3.1%
	Constructor	2	0.7%
	Get a degree	50	17.0%
	Hospitality manager	7	2.4%
	Health sciences	10	3.4%
	Pilot	3	1.0%
	Get a job	5	1.7%
	Businessman	9	3.1%
	Successful person	25	8.5%
	Architecture	9	3.1%
	Scientist	8	2.7%
	Teacher/Lecturer	4	1.4%
	Do not know	1	0.3%
Total		294	100.0%

4.3.7 Future careers of school leavers

4.3.7.1 Career choices

Only 4.8% (n=16) of participants hope to pursue a career in nursing after high school. This response rate put nursing at number five out of nine choices. Medicine was just above nursing at fourth place 6.0% (n=20). Paramedic training, which is similar to medicine and nursing, was rated the lowest 6% (n=2). At the top of school leavers' choices was a career in commerce/business 22.6% (n=75), followed by information technology 8.7% (n=29). Humanities ranked third having been a choice for 8.4% (n=28) of school leavers. Other career choices which are not mentioned in the questionnaire are; engineering (n=26), law (n=7) art, media, hospitality and air traffic related jobs. The pool of career choices has become very wide. Other future careers of school leavers which were not mentioned in the questionnaire are; mechanical engineering (n=31), law (n=16), art and design (n=4), sports management (n=3), air traffic and pilot (n=6), environmental studies (N=3). Others mentioned at a rate of less than two were; media and journalism, social work, marketing, management geology, psychology, philosophy, human resources, climatology, auditor and soldier.

Table 4.4 – Future career choices of school leavers

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Career to be followed after school Mode = Other	**Teaching**	14	4.2%
	Commerce/business	75	22.6%
	Secretarial	4	1.2%
	IT	29	8.7%
	Drama/dance/music	13	3.9%
	Humanities	28	8.4%
	Medicine	20	6.0%
	Nursing	16	4.8%
	Paramedic	2	0.6%
	Other	131	39.5%
Total		332	100.0%

4.3.7.2 Reason(s) for choosing a career

The majority of the school leavers chose their career because it is what they are interested in 41.6% (n=150). In addition many of them chose it for fulfilment: This was the second highest reason given by school leavers 32.1% (n=116). Good remuneration rated third 12.5% (n=45), status came fourth 3.35% (n=12) and the lowest was parents /significant influences 2.5% (n=9), refer to Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 – Reasons for choosing the career

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Reason(s) for choice of career **Mode = Interesting**	**Fulfilling**	116	32.1%
	Good remuneration	45	12.5%
	Interesting	150	41.6%
	Status	12	3.3%
	Parents/significant influences suggested	9	2.5%
	Other	29	8.0%
Total		361	100.0%

4.3.7.3 People who influenced school leavers in their career choices

Although school leavers were influenced by parents in their career choices 27.5% (n=98), it does not mean they followed the career according to their parents' wishes, because Table 4.5 shows that most 41.6% (n=150) of the respondents chose careers that were interesting to them. The other important influential persons were popular icons 13.2% (n=47) followed by teachers 10.1% (n=36). Friends were rated as influential by 8.5% (n=30) learners. Guidance counsellors had a relatively low influence choice as stated by 7.6% (n=27) of learners.

Table 4.6 – People who influenced school leavers in their career choices

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Influences of the career choice **Mode = Parents**	**Parents**	98	27.5%
	Teachers	36	10.1%
	Guidance counsellors	27	7.6%
	Pastors	2	0.6%
	Friends	30	8.4%
	Heroes	27	7.6%
	popular icons	47	13.2%
	Other	89	25.0%
Total		356	100.0%

4.3.7.4 Obstacles which may have impact in following a chosen career

Learners were requested to indicate obstacles that could hinder them in following their careers of choice (refer to Tables 4.6 and 4.7). The main challenge faced by learners in this regard is lack of money, 65% (n=288) learners foresee difficulty in paying for their tertiary education. Distance to travel to college which is associated with costs was foreseen as a possible obstacle by 14.2% (n=47) of respondents. Other learners 10.0% (n=33) reported that they would be required to take over responsibilities such as being bread winners immediately after leaving high school. Respondents who chose "other" amounted to10% (n=33). Table 4.7 shows the main obstacles reported by learners.

Table 4.7 – Obstacles to following a chosen career

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Obstacles in following the chosen career **Mode = Difficulty in paying for further education**	**Difficulty in paying for further education**	218	65.9%
	Far to travel to college	47	14.2%
	Responsibilities at home	33	10.0%
	Other	33	10.0%
Total		331	100.0%

Learners were further asked how they would overcome these obstacles in following their chosen career; 57.5% (n=191) prefer to look for scholarships. Others 25.6% (n=85) said they would get a part-time job. Only 5.7% (n=19) mentioned that they would study part-time. Table 4.8 below shows that despite envisaged obstacles the majority 79.8% (n=265) of participants were planning to get bursaries or scholarships, do part-time jobs and study part-time in order for them to realise their wish to study further at tertiary institutions.

Table 4.8 – Plans to overcome obstacles to pursue your chosen career

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Plans to overcome obstacles to the career **Mode = Get a bursary/Scholarship**	**Get bursary/scholarship**	191	57.5%
	Get part-time job	85	25.6%
	Study part-time	19	5.7%
	Other	37	11.1%
Total		332	100.0%

4.3.8 Identification of nursing as a career by school leavers

What is the level of ambition of school leavers to pursue a career in nursing? How is nursing rated compared to other careers? What are the barriers for school leavers to pursue a career in nursing? What can be done to change the position of the nursing career? These questions required responses from learners to determine specific issues around nursing career choice.

4.3.8.1 Consideration of nursing as a career choice by school leavers

Nursing seems to be among the least popular career choices of school leavers. When participants were asked if they would consider nursing as a career, 70.0% (n=208) indicated that they did not consider nursing as a career option and those who said 'yes' to nursing as a career option were 29.9% (n=89). Out of (n=89) learners who are willing to become nurses 77.5% (n=68) of them were females.

Learners who indicated that they do not consider nursing as a career gave various reasons. Out of 208 learners 49% (n=102) indicated that nursing is not interesting, others reported that they were squeamish 28% (n=59). Nursing was considered to be an underpaid job 2.8% (n=6) with a heavy workload 2.8% (n=6). It would seem that practising nurses are not a source of inspiration. Very few learners 2.4% (n=5) expressed that they drew inspiration from nurses. Those who view nursing as a female occupation amounted to 5.2% (n=11). Only 1.4% (n=3) of learners mentioned that their subjects were not in line with the stream in a nursing career which prevented them from choosing nursing.

4.3.9 Negative and positive aspects of nursing

4.3.9.1 Positive aspects of nursing

Positive and negative aspects of nursing received multiple responses from some learners. The negative aspects of nursing reported by learners exceeded the positive aspects. On the positive side 26% of respondents (n=101) found nursing to be an opportunity to care for others, many job opportunities followed closely at 20.3% (n=79) and the possibility of getting paid while studying was third at 15.4% (n=60). Learners who viewed nursing as a stable career were 12.1% (n=47). Respondents who saw good career progression/prospects in nursing were 6.2% (n=24). Those who found nursing interesting comprised 5.4% (n=21).

Table 4.9 – Positive aspects of nursing

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Positive aspects of nursing career	**Stable career**	47	12.1%
	Many job opportunities (shortage of nurses)	79	20.3%
	Many different avenues to follow within	29	7.5%
	Possibility of getting paid while studying	60	15.4%
	Good career progression/prospects	24	6.2%
	Good prospects for travel	19	4.9%
	Interesting	21	5.4%
	Opportunity to care for others	101	26.0%
	Other	9	2.3%
Total		389	100.0%

4.3.9.2 Negative aspects of nursing

Poor salary was high on the list of negative aspects of nursing with 30.2% (n=120) responses. Close after poor salary was long hours of work at 29.6% (n=118). Nursing as a physically demanding ranked third with 11.8% (n=47) responses. A few learners 6.5% (n=26) found nursing to be of low status. Difficult work and few males in the profession were seen as negative aspects of nursing by 9.5% (n=38) participants. Refer to Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 – Negative aspects of nursing

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Negative aspects of nursing career	**Long hours**	118	29.6%
	Poor salary	120	30.2%
	Low status	26	6.5%
	Difficult work	38	9.5%
	Physically demanding	47	11.8%
	Few men in the profession	38	9.5%
	Other	11	2.8%
Total		398	100.0%

4.3.9.3 Difficulties that may be encountered when training to become a nurse and after qualifying as a nurse

Item 20 of the questionnaire requested participants to state the difficulties they think they may encounter to becoming a nurse and after qualifying as nurses. Among the difficulties mentioned by school leavers who plan to become nurses were; paying for further education, foreseen by 33.0% (n=111) of the respondents; and 28.6% (n=96) cited few improvement opportunities in nursing. Insufficient places to study for nursing such as universities, nursing colleges and hospitals was said to also pose difficulties by 14.6% (n=49) of participants. Other foreseen difficulties for the learners were responsibilities at home 11.6% (n=39) and far distances to travel to college 4.5% (n=15).

Difficulties after qualifying as a nurse were topped by low salary by 30.5% (n=113) of the learners. Competition in employment opportunities followed by 22.1% (n=82). Those who regarded nursing as a female job were 14.0% (n=52). Fear of infections including HIV rated at 5% (n=79). Learners who said there were no jobs in nursing amounted to 9.7% (n=36).

4.3.10 Suggestions on how nursing can be improved to attract learners

The last question (Item 21) requested learners/school leavers to make suggestions to the Department of Health on how a nursing career can be improved so as to make it an attractive career for school leavers. These were the suggestions made by school leavers:

Working conditions

Improvement of salaries 33.0% (n=111)

Improvement of working conditions 15.5% (n=52)

Reduction of workload 3.9% (n=13)

Create more job opportunities for nurses 1.2% (n=4)

Comments on improvement of working conditions for nurses:

"Reduce risk of HIV though stringent health and safety measures."

"Better outfits, working conditions and more smiles will do."

"Make sure that current nurses are happy because if few nurses complain the better things will look, and living conditions for nurses should change."

"Salary improvement"; "Nursing is tough work, especially for women and it has low salaries, so they must increase salaries to attract people."

"Salaries of nurses should be like doctors because apparently they do the same work."

"Improvement of nurses' salaries; nurses work for long hours but instead get extremely low salary."

Make nursing education accessible to school leavers

"Provide scholarships to learners who want to become nurses" 8.0% (n=27)

"Create more nursing schools" 2.7% (n=9)

Comments on how nursing can be made accessible to school leavers:

"Supply students with bursaries"

"Decrease fees for nursing careers"

"Create more nursing schools"

Market the nursing profession

"Conduct awareness campaigns in schools" 27.7% (n=93)

"Attract more males to the profession" 3.3% (n=11)

"Advertise nursing schools and profession" 3.3% (n=11)

Comments on creating awareness about the nursing profession:

"The department must make sure that school leavers are taught to care for one another so that they may consider caring for people their whole lives."

"Visits to clinics and hospitals should be organised for learners."

"Go to schools to show what nursing is all about."

Table 4.11 – Suggestions on how nursing can be improved

		Responses	
		n	Percent
Advice to the Health Department to attract school leavers to nurse career	**Salary improvement**	111	33.0%
	Campaign at schools	93	27.7%
	Improve working conditions	52	15.5%
	Scholarships to school leavers	27	8.0%
	Create more nursing schools	9	2.7%
	Reduce the workload	13	3.9%
	Attract males to the profession	11	3.3%
	Advertisement	11	3.3%
	None	4	1.2%
	Decrease the APs score at varsities because school leavers feel that it is too high and makes tertiary entrance inaccessible.	1	0.3%
	More job opportunities	4	1.2%
Total		336	100.0%

4.4. SUMMARY

The literature reviewed for this study suggested that perceptions about a career played a major role in school leavers' career choices including nursing. In a study conducted by Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999:1345) 6.6% of the sample expressed an interest in nursing as a career of choice and 27.3% of reasons for not choosing nursing indicated that they were 'not

interested' in nursing. Those perceptions were shaped by various factors of which some of them were misconceptions. In a similar study by Hoke (2006:99), negative perceptions about the nursing career decreased by 50% after learners were exposed to nursing by means of presentations. The results of this research support those of previous studies; it revealed that 70% of school leavers opted not to choose nursing as a career. The following reasons were given by participants: 49% said nursing is not interesting and 27.7% of them suggested that campaigns should be conducted in schools to create awareness about the nursing profession. Salary did not seem to be the main determinant for learners to choose or not choose nursing as a career Health System Trust (2007), Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999:1348).. In this study salary was highest on the list of negative factors of the nursing career (30.2% participants), and highest on the list of recommendations on how nursing can be made attractive to school leavers by 33.0% participants. Poor working conditions were mentioned as negative factors (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008) that even prevented nurses from recommending their profession to the others (Donelan *et al.*, 2008:148). In the study conducted by the Health System Trust (2007:17) "29% of learners indicated long working hours as a negative factor that discourages them to pursue nursing and 13.8% view nursing as a difficult work". Other influential factors to school leavers' choice of nursing career which came up in this study as well as previous studies by the Health Systems Trust (2007), and Hoke (2006:99), were that nursing was regarded as a low status career and that it is a female job.

The following chapter will discuss the results of the study in detail and will provide insight into how a nursing career is regarded by school leavers and the implications thereof to the future of the nursing profession.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The results of this study were presented in the previous chapter and provided a clear description of school leavers' perceptions of nursing as career and how those perceptions influence them to choose or not to choose nursing. This chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to the implications for an adequate supply of nurses and sustainability of a recruitment strategy for the profession. The study is applicable within a prescribed area: Johannesburg, South Africa.

The study objectives were to:

- Identify the nature of careers chosen by school leavers;
- Determine the association between careers chosen and factors which influence those choices;
- Identify how nursing is rated as compared to other careers; and
- Obtain suggestions on how nursing can be made attractive to school leavers

5.2 Discussion of Main Findings

5.2.1 Demographics of the sample

School leavers are the most important pool of potential human resources that any service provider including nursing can rely upon. The literature reviewed in this study has shown that by the time school leavers reach Grade 12 they have been exposed to various careers and have made a career choice. Their choices are based on what they know/do not know about careers including misconceptions about a career. The knowledge/lack of knowledge moulds their perceptions about careers and influences their choice of careers.

Participants in this study comprised of 56.1% female, which was 15% higher than male participants. The gender difference in this study is similar to high school learner demographics whereby female school leavers outnumber males in high schools. School leavers who opted for nursing as a career comprised 40.7% (n=73) females and 16.6% (n=21) males. Nursing was not considered as a career choice by 59.2% (n=106) of female and 83.3% (n=105) of male school leavers. Literature reviewed for the purpose of this study revealed that males are gradually increasing in the nursing profession. This study confirms the findings of a previous study conducted by Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999:1346) that nursing is viewed as a female job by the majority of young males. The age difference of participants in the study was not significant; 49.7% of participants were below the age of 18 years and 47.3% were between 18 to 22 years, 3% participants did not mention their ages.

The results of this study have shown that 'interest' plays a significant role in school leavers' career choices; 41% (n=150) of school leavers expressed that they chose careers that they found to be interesting to them. Fulfilment was also mentioned by 32.1% (n=116) as one of the reasons for making a career choice. Parental influence in career choices was mentioned by 27.5% (n=98) of participants. This could be attributable to the fact that parents are primary care givers and natural role models to their children. Children of successful parents will want to follow in their footsteps, and children of parents in unpopular careers may either be guided by parents to follow better careers or the children themselves choose careers based on other successful role models. With reference to the occupations of the parents of participants 50% of mothers were employed in commerce and business, outnumbering fathers in the similar field who comprised 44%. Commerce and business are still rated the highest of all occupations mentioned in the study for both mothers and fathers. Only 30% were reported as being in the nursing field and less than 10% of participant's fathers are in nursing. School leavers whose fathers are reported to be in the medical profession amounted to 10% and mothers in medicine were at 4.2%. Other occupations not included in the study, such as domestic workers, entrepreneurs, security officers and engineers were also mentioned by participants. Other participants mentioned that their parents were unemployed, of which 11.8% were mothers and 4% were fathers.

5.2.2 Career choices of school leavers

Career choices were based on personal choices of individual school leavers and the academic streams which they were expected to select in Grade 10 The most popular academic stream

was science which was reported to be a choice for 31.7% (n=104) school leavers. It was followed by commerce at 29% (n=95) and general/humanities at 14% (n=43). Reasons given by participants for choosing a particular stream were that it best suited their future career choice by 54% (n=161) of participants, dream/desire/passion for the job was reported by 15.5% (n=46) of school leavers, and having personal strength was reported by 9.5% (n=28) school leavers. When asked if their subject choices/academic streams were in line with their career choices 82.3% (n=270) gave a 'yes' response.

School leavers' future career choices in rank order comprised of teaching, commerce, secretarial, information technology, drama/dance/music, humanities, medicine, nursing and paramedic.

5.2.3 Nature of careers chosen by school leavers

Nursing is among the least appealing of career choices by school leavers with only 4.8% (n=16) of participants looking forward to become nurses. Commerce/business was the most appealing choice having been chosen by 22.6% (n=75) of school leavers; 8.4% (n=28) of school leavers looked forward to careers in humanities. Health careers/medicine was an ambition held by only 6.0% (n=26) and paramedic by 0.6% (n=2) of school leavers. The p-value of how nursing is rated as compared to other career choices is p=0.147. This supports the hypothesis that nursing is rated poorly when compared to other career choices of school leavers.

5.2.4 Careers chosen and factors which influence those choices

The basis for preferred career choices as given by most school leavers 41.6% (n=159) was based on the notion that the career is interesting. This finding suggests that interest plays a major role in influencing school leavers in their career choices. Nursing is amongst the least popular career choices of 66.2% of school leavers and 49% of those participants expressed that they did not opt for nursing as a career choice because it was not an interesting career.

About one third of participants 32.1% (n=116) based their career choices on personal fulfilment. This factor is associated with what participants viewed as a positive aspect of nursing: "opportunity to care for others" which is a fulfilling factor. Out of 389 responses about the positive aspects of nursing the highest was 26% (n=101) who perceive nursing as an opportunity to care for others.

Good remuneration was cited by 12.5% (n=45) of school leavers as a factor that influenced them in their career choices. One of the reasons that was given by school leavers for not choosing nursing was that it is an underpaid job. Among the recommendations by participants on how nursing can be made attractive to school leavers, improvement of living conditions of nurses was mentioned. This implies that school leavers are watching and comparing living conditions of workers and are looking for jobs with an income that will have a positive impact on their living conditions.

Perceptions about careers are shaped by what school leavers know about various careers, some of the knowledge is based on misconceptions. These perceptions in turn influence them in making their career choices. The main influential factor in career choices of school leavers is how interesting the career is which was a mode expressed by 41.6% (n=150) respondents out of a response rate of 100% (n=361).

5.2.5 How nursing is rated compared to other careers

Nursing is lagging behind as a career of choice for school leavers; 4.8% of school leavers expressed an ambition to become professional nurses after high school. The most popular career choice of school leavers was commerce/business with a response rate of 22.6%. Commerce/business was followed by information technology chosen by 8.7% of participants. A career in humanities was an option for 8.4% of participants. Health related careers including nursing were the least popular choices for school leavers. Paramedic training and medicine were chosen by 2.6% and 6% of school leavers respectively.

The nursing profession has long been regarded as a female career; although this study has shown that the number of males entering the profession is increasing, it is still far from significant. In the questionnaire item whereby school leavers were requested to state whether they will ever consider nursing as a career, (n=305) of them responded. The 'yes' response came from 30.8% (n=94) of participants, 23.9% (n=73) were females and 6.8 % (n=21) were males. Those who gave a 'no' response amounted to 69.1% (n=211); 34.7% (n=106) female and 34.4% (n=105) male. Nursing as a choice of career is still not popular with males having only been chosen by 6.8% of male respondents. The popularity of nursing as a career of choice is equally poor among male and female school leavers, 37.7% female and 34.4% of male respondents indicated that nursing was not their future career option. Nursing is regarded as a female profession , and is also perceived to be "subservient, supportive role and

as a manual job with skills used mainly at the bedside (Hoke, 2006:95). There is a perception that males who join the nursing career are not positively accepted by society (O'Brien, Mooney & Glacken, 2008). This perception instils fear among male school leavers that once they become male nurses they will be laughed at. The perceptions of school leavers on nursing as a career of choice are also misguided by misconceptions. School leavers seem not to be aware of the rich and vast career path in the nursing profession, which includes being executive directors of hospitals and Primary Health Care services, clinical nursing and lecturing at tertiary institutions.

Nurses are regarded as among the most poorly paid workers. Among the negative aspects of nursing, poor salary was mentioned by most respondents 30.2% (n=120). Therefore this perception deters school leavers from opting for nursing as a career choice and this study has shown that the most popular career choice for school leavers was commerce/business which is known for high remuneration. Previous studies have shown that nurses are not happy with their income (Wildschut & Mqolozana, 2008) as almost every year nurses go on strike for better salaries. The result of this study has shown that high on the list of negative factors of the nursing profession was poor salaries. This observation by school leavers causes them not to consider nursing as a career option.

Long working hours was mentioned as a negative factor by 29.6% (n=118) school leavers. It seems school leavers are not aware that nurses work forty hours per week like all employees in the Republic of South Africa. The laws that protect employees from unfair labour practice also protect nurses. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 (BCEA) regulates the right to fair labour practices for employers and employees of the Republic of South Africa. The BCEA is also applicable to nurses. The perception held by school leavers that nurses work long hours is misinformed because of lack of correct knowledge.

Nursing was seen to be a difficult type of work and physically demanding by 21% (n=85) respondents. Nursing might be perceived as difficult for a non-nurse observer because nurses attend to human beings when they are in a vulnerable state. But, an appropriately qualified and dedicated nurse might not find the job as difficult. Fear of exposure to communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDs was expressed by 13.5% (n=79) of participants. School leavers were not aware that almost all kinds of occupations have potential hazards and that there are work policies and procedures in place to deal with those hazards.

Results of this study have revealed that perceptions of school leavers regarding nursing as a career of choice were shaped by lack of correct information. This has put nursing amongst the least popular of career choices of school leavers when compared to other career choices. Nursing is disadvantaged when it comes to attracting school leavers into the profession because of poor marketing of the nursing career to the school leavers. A study conducted by King *et al.*, (2007) revealed that in some cases career advisors possess a limited knowledge regarding a career in nursing. School leavers themselves acknowledge that they need information about the nursing profession, 27.7% (n=93) of them recommended that campaigns should be conducted in schools to inform learners about the nursing profession.

5.2.6 Suggestions on how nursing can be made attractive to school leavers

In response to the question on how the perception of a nursing career can be improved so that it is made attractive to school leavers; improvement of salaries of nurses was highest on the list of suggestions made by the respondents, recommended by 33.0% (n=111). It correlates with poor salary also being high on the list of negative aspects of nurses as given by participants.

The reason given by 50% of boys and 53% of girls as to why nursing is not their career option, is that nursing is not an interesting career. Interest in the nursing career can only be stimulated by giving accurate, continuous and positive information about the nursing profession to the target group who are learners and school leavers in this research. In this regard participants suggested that campaigns to raise awareness about the nursing profession among learners should be conducted in schools. Creating more nursing schools was also recommended by 2.7% (n=9). This could improve and increase access into the nursing profession for learners who live far from nursing schools.

Improvement of working conditions of nurses was recommended by 15.5% (n=52) of participants. Poor working conditions was also mentioned as a negative factor of nursing by most participants 29.6% (n=118).

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The results of the study can be generalized only to other schools in the Johannesburg Region of the Gauteng Department of Education;
- Since there are great variations in provincial education systems, the results may not be generalised to other provinces;
- The tool that was used for this study was not all inclusive of various career choices available to post high school students;
- It could have been more interesting to conduct the study at the middle and end of high school concurrently. That would have provided clues about the advantages or disadvantages of academic streaming at middle high school, taking into consideration the level of maturity of a Grade 10 learner who is expected to make subject choices that would eventually influence his or her career choice. Therefore it is recommended that in future a longitudinal study be conducted.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a shortage of practising nurses in South Africa which is one of the countries with a Health Care System that is highly reliant on nurses. The shortage of nurses is exacerbated by increasing demand on the health service from migrants, HIV and AIDS all of which impact on nurses. The results of this research show that nursing is counted among the more difficult jobs and yet nurses are poorly remunerated. Therefore it is important for the government to consider equitable recognition of remuneration packages, especially for professional nurses. Findings of this research have also revealed that some of the perceptions that deterred school leavers from choosing nursing as a career were based on incorrect information.

5.4.1 Recommendations for the Department of Labour, Health and Education

- Improvement of salaries for nurses to make it equal to the social, emotional and physical demands that are associated with the occupation of nurses;
- Create awareness about nursing among learners from elementary schools through to high schools using electronic media including edutainment, formal teaching and open days for departments of nursing at tertiary institutions. Market nursing among male learners and demystify the misconception that nursing is a female career;

- Promotion of nursing career through media in order to reach out to all community members including parents.
- Fund and conduct ongoing studies on the status of nursing education in the country in the interest of the citizens of the Republic of South Africa;
- Issue bursaries and scholarships for tertiary nursing diploma and degree courses to deserving and interested students;
- Contents of career guidance syllabus should be designed in such a way that it gives clear and concise information about the nursing career**.**

5.4.2 Recommendations for Nursing Education

- Conduct ongoing research on the patterns of nursing student registrations, terminations and successful completions in order to measure amounts of recruits and completions, and reasons for terminations of student nurses;
- Conduct research on nursing students' perceptions of the nursing career before entry and after successful completion;
- Conduct research on knowledge possessed by career guidance teachers and their perceptions of the nursing career;
- Forge a partnership with the Department of Education with the view of making contributions to the career guidance curriculum specifically about the nursing career;
- Conduct effective open days to promote awareness of nursing as a career so as to attract school leavers; and
- Disseminate information to schools about nursing in the form of talks, issuing pamphlets and booklets about the nursing career.

5.4.3 Recommendations for the South African Nursing Council

- Conduct research on reasons for student nurses' terminations and those of registered nurses who quit nursing;
- Make recommendations to the Department of Basic Education on how nursing can be promoted in schools;
- Stimulate interest in nursing by means of making policies which will give learners an opportunity to be exposed by opening health service centres for learners to volunteer

during school holidays, and encourage establishment of Youth Friendly services in health service points.

5.5. CONCLUSIONS

The interest in a nursing career by high school leavers who are potential nursing recruits is declining. The results of this study have shown that a nursing career is the least popular career among school leavers. Negative perceptions that are held by school leavers about the nursing career have caused them to not choose nursing as a career.

The results of this research have revealed that the highest selected career choice by 22.6% (n=75) participants was commerce/business. Information technology was the second highest having been a choice for 8.7% (n=29) of participants. Humanities ranked third and was a choice for 8.4% (n=28) of participants. This study has also found that generally careers in the health field are not popular with school leavers. Nursing was reported to be a career choice for 4.8% (n=16) of respondents, medicine was a career option for 6.0% (n=20) and paramedic training was a career choice for 0.6% (n=2) participants.

It is interesting to note that when participants were asked to state reasons for their career choices, parental influence ranked the lowest (2.5%, n=9). But, when school leavers were asked to state the careers of their parents, the highest number of school leavers reported that their fathers and mothers were in the commerce/business careers and this field ranked the highest when school leavers reported their career choices. It can be concluded that parents do play a significant role in influencing the career choices of their children. Another influential factor for career choices was personal fulfilment which was reported by 32.1% (n=116) of participants. Among reasons given by school leavers for their career choices, 'interesting career' seemed to play a major role, it was reported by 41.6% (n=150) and is a mode in this particular item of this study. Interest can only be stimulated by knowledge or information that one possesses about a phenomenon. Some of these perceptions were based on lack of correct information. Similar to previous studies by the Health System Trust (2007), and Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999:1348), the results of this study have revealed that remuneration does not seem to play a major role in career choices of school leavers. Good remuneration as a reason given by school leavers for their career choices ranked third being reported by 12.5% (n=45) of participants.

The results of this study have shown that nursing has poor appeal among school leavers. School leavers who reported that they will never consider nursing as a career of choice were (n=94) and those that stated that nursing is not their career option were (n=211). Negative aspects of nursing were also reported by school leavers and could deter school leavers from choosing nursing as a career. Among the negative aspects of nursing that were reported by school leavers were; poorly paid job by 30.2% (n=120), long working hours by 29.6% (n=118), and physically demanding by 11.8% (n=47) of participants. Other negative aspects that were reported on nursing were; difficult work by 9.5% (n=38), few men in the profession by 9.5% (n=38) and low status by 6.5% (n=26) of respondents. Some of the perceptions that school leavers have on nursing as a career of choice are misinformed. Nurses do not work longer hours than other employees in South Africa. The BCEA of 1997 which regulates work and rest periods for employers and employees also applies to nurses. Professional nurses' role in patient care is not mainly comprised of manual activities; there are enrolled nursing assistants who assist with tasks such as washing, changing of patients and bed making. The societal indoctrination that nursing is a job for females scares potential male nurses away from the profession. Males have a major role to play in nursing as much as females do. School leavers seem to be unaware of the variety of roles of professional nurses in the health team. Some of these roles are very important and involve accountability which characterises a profession. School leavers are observing careers in terms of status, remuneration and working conditions. They seem to be taking notes and making comparisons and in turn take decisions on what they perceive as best careers choices for them, and nursing seems to be lagging behind.

School leavers were invited to make recommendations on how nursing can be made attractive to school leavers. A recommendation on salary improvement of nurses was made by 33.0% (N=111) of school leavers although remuneration was not high on the list of factors that influence school leavers in their career choices. This recommendation could be based on the fact that school leavers view nursing as a difficult and physically demanding job, so salary improvement is seen to be equal to the task. Another recommendation which was made by 27.7% (n=93) of school leavers was that campaigns should be conducted in schools in an endeavour to promote nursing among learners. Somehow learners are aware of the fact that they do not possess adequate information on the nursing career in order for them to base their decision of choosing or not choosing nursing as a career.

5.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter a concise summary of the study is outlined. The results of the study (including the discussion) provided an insight into the perceptions held by school leavers of nursing as a career of choice. Explanations are given on various influences upon school leavers in order for them to decide to choose or not to choose nursing as a career and how nursing is ranked as compared to other career options. Recommendations are based on information gathered from the results, and the discussion thereof may be of great value to the Department of Health in South Africa. Such information may be used to correctly represent the nursing profession amongst the career guidance educators/advisors and learners so that the decision to choose or not to choose nursing by school leavers is based on accurate information.

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APPENDIX A – CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE WITS UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Division of the Deputy Registrar (Research)

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MEDICAL)
R14/49 Ms Nomonde E Mphahlele

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**M090525**
PROJECT	School Leavers Perception of Nursing as a Career of Choice
INVESTIGATORS	Ms Nomonde E Mphahlele.
DEPARTMENT	Department of Nursing Education
DATE CONSIDERED	09.05.29
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE*	Approved unconditionally

Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid for 5 years and may be renewed upon application.

DATE 2009/08/07 **CHAIRPERSON** .....
(Professor R B Cleaton-Jones)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
PROF AJ WOODIWISS
Co - Chair
2009 -09- 21
HREC (Medical)
JOHANNESBURG

*Guidelines for written 'informed consent' attached where applicable

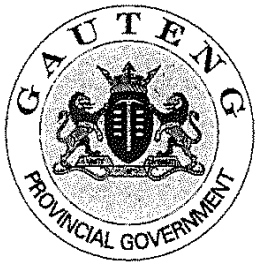
cc: Supervisor : Prof J Bruce

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.
I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to a completion of a yearly progress report.**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES...

APPENDIX B – LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION GAUTEND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



UMnyango WezeMfundo
Department of Education

Lefapha la Thuto
Departement van Onderwys

Enquiries : Shadrack Phele (MIRMSA)
Tel. no. : [011] 355 0285

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Mrs Nomonde Euphonia Mphahlele
PO Box 7485
HALFWAYHOUSE
1685

Dear Mrs Nomonde Euphonia Mphahlele

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: PROJECT

The Gauteng Department of Education hereby grants permission to conduct research in its institutions as per application.

Topic of research : "School leavers' perception of nursing as a career of choice."

Nature of research : M.Sc. [Nursing].

Name of institution : University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor/Promoter : Prof. Judy Bruce

Upon completion of the research project the researcher is obliged to furnish the Department with copy of the research report (electronic or hard copy).

The Department wishes you success in your academic pursuit.

Yours in Tirisano,

p.p. Shadrack Phele [MIRMSA]

Ms Mmapula Kekana
Chief Director: Information Systems and Knowledge Management
Gauteng Department of Education



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF DIRECTOR
INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT
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Tel: (011) 3550809 Fax: (011) 0248 E-mail: mmapulak@gpg.gov.za or elridar@gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX C – PARENT'S CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent / Guardian

I am a Master of Science in nursing student at the University of Witwatersrand, and would like to conduct a study on school leavers' perceptions of nursing as a career of choice.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how the perceptions held by the grade 12 learners influence them in choosing or rejecting nursing as a career.

The findings of the study will assist the Departments of Health and Education to develop proper career guidance, recruitment and retention strategies for nursing students and workforce.

I would like to request the voluntary participation of your son/daughter in the study which will take place in July 2009 to October 2009. They will be expected to fill in a questionnaire about career choices.

Should you not grant permission, this will not in any way have a negative impact on your son/daughter. If you agree, you can withdraw your child's participation at anytime during the study. Your identity or that of your child will not be revealed during and after the study.

Should you have any questions or comments please contact me on telephone number 011 318 2369 / 0827603044.

Thank you

Yours truly,

_____

Nomonde Mphahlele

I have read and understood the contents of the letter.

Tick

I give permission for my child to participate voluntarily in the study. [ ].

I do not give permission for my child to participate in the study. [ ].

Date: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Thumb Print of Parent/Guardian: _____

Learner assent:

I have read and understood the contents of the letter.

Tick

I will participate in the study [ ].

I will not participate in the study [ ].

Signature of Participant: _____Date:_____

I have explained the study to the participant and sought his/her understanding of informed consent.

Signature researcher: _____Date:_____

APPENDIX D - LEARNER'S CONSENT FORM

Dear learner

I am a Master of Science in nursing student at the University of Witwatersrand, and would like to conduct a study on school leavers' perceptions of nursing as a career of choice.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how the perceptions held by the grade 12 learners influence them in choosing or rejecting nursing as a career.

The findings of the study will assist the Departments of Health and Education to develop proper career guidance, recruitment and retention strategies for nursing students and workforce.

I would like to request your voluntary participation in the study which will take place in July 2009 to October 2009. You will be expected to fill in a questionnaire about career choices. Time it will take to complete the questionnaire is forty minutes.

Should you not wish to participate in the study it will not in any way have a negative impact on you and your relationship with the Educators. If you agree, you can withdraw your participation at anytime during the study. Your identity will not be revealed during and after the study.

Should you have any questions or comments please contact me on telephone number 011 318 2369 / 0827603044.

Thank you

Yours truly,

_____

Nomonde Mphahlele

I have read and understood the contents of the letter and wish to participate voluntarily in the study.

Signature of Participant: _____Date:_____

I have explained the study to the participant and sought his/her understanding of informed consent.

Signature researcher: _____Date:_____

APPENDIX E – LEARNER QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND
FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF NURSING EDUCATION

DESCRIPTIVE STUDY INVESTIGATING SCHOOL LEAVERS` PERCEPTIONS OF NURSING AS A CAREER OF CHOICE

Definition of term perception: How you see or understand, (Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary 2000)

Learners` questionnaire

Uhla lwemibuzo Lwabafundi

Introduction:

My name is Nomonde Mphahlele. I am a student at WITS University conducting a survey entitled **"School leavers` perceptions of Nursing as a career of choice"**. I would like to invite your written responses to the following questionnaire. Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be linked to your name or personal information.

Thank you

Instructions
To be administered by the researcher.

Date: DD/MM/YEAR	[___|___|___|___|_2__|_0__|_0__|_9__]
Grade: 12	
Name of school:	
Researcher: Nomonde	

Question	Response/codes	Coded response
What is your age	< 18 18 – 21	**01 [__]** **02 [__]**
What is your gender	Female Male	**01 [__]** **02 [__]**

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
3	**What is your mother's career?** Ingabe umama wakho wenza msebenzi muni?	**Teaching** Ukufundisa	01	
		Commerce/business Ezomnotho/amabhizinisi	02	
		Secretarial Ukuba umabhalane	03	
		IT Ezobuchwepheshe	04	
		Drama/dance/music Ezokulingisa/ukudansa/umculo	05	
		Humanities Ezithinta ubuntu	06	
		Medicine Ezokwelapha	07	
		Nursing Ubuhlengikazi	08	
		Paramedic Ezokwelapha okuphuthumayo	09	
		Other (specify) Okunye……..		

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
4	**What is your father's career?** Ingabe umama wakho wenza msebenzi muni?	**Teaching** Ukufundisa	01	
		Commerce/business Ezomnotho/amabhizinisi	02	
		Secretarial Ukuba umabhalane	03	
		IT Ezobuchwepheshe	04	
		Drama/dance/music Ezokulingisa/ukudansa/umculo	05	
		Humanities Ezithinta ubuntu	06	
		Medicine Ezokwelapha	07	
		Nursing Ubuhlengikazi	08	
		Paramedic Ezokwelapha okuphuthumayo	09	
		Other (specify) Okunye……..	10	
5	What academic stream are you doing in your school? **Ingabe wenza izifundo ezikumuphi umkhakha esikoleni?** (Current stream)	Commerce	01	
		General/Humanities	02	
		Science	03	
		Other Specify…… ……	04	
6	Why did you choose that stream? **Kungani wakhetha lezozifundo ezikulowomkhakha?**			
7	What are you hoping to do in future using the knowledge you acquired from that stream? **Ingabe ohlose ukwenzani kwikusasa lakho ngolwazi ozoluthola kulezifundo ezikulomkhakha?**			

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response

8	What career would you like to follow when you leave school? **Ingabe yimuphi umkhakha othanda ukuwulandela uma usuqede isikole**	**Teaching** Ukufundisa	01	
		Commerce/business Ezomnotho/amabhizinisi	02	
		Secretarial Ukuba umabhalane	03	
		IT Ezobuchwepheshe	04	
		Drama/dance/music Ezokulingisa/ukudansa/umculo	05	
		Humanities Ezithinta ubuntu	06	
		Medicine Ezokwelapha	07	
		Nursing Ubuhlengikazi	08	
		Paramedic Ezokwelapha okuphuthumayo	09	
		Other (specify) Okunye……..	10	
9	Are the subjects you are doing, in line with the career you want to pursue? **Ingabe izifundo ozenzayo zisemgudwini owodwa nomkhakha ofisa ukuwenza?**	Yes	01	
		No	02	

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
10	Why have you chosen this career? **Kungani wakhetha lomkhakha?**	Fulfilling **Kuyakwenelisa**	01	
		Good remuneration **Iholo elinelisayo**	02	
		Interesting **Kuyathokozisa**	03	
		Status **Izinga lempilo**	04	
		Parents/significant influences suggested it **Abazali/imithelela ethile eyakuhlonza**	05	
		Other (please explain) **Okunye (cacisa)** …….. ……...		

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
11	Who has influenced you in your career choice? **Ingabe ngubani owaba nomthelela ekukhetheni kwakho umkhakha Ozowenza?**	**Parents** **Abazali**	01	
		Teachers **Othisha**	02	
		Guidance counselors **Othisha abafundisa ezokweluleka**	03	
		Pastors **Abefundisi**	04	
		Friends **Abangani**	05	
		Heroes **Amaqhawe**	06	
		Popular icons **Abadumile**	07	
		Other **Okunye ……...** ……		
12	**What other factors have influenced you in your career choice?** Ingabe yiziphi ezinye izinto ezibe nomthelela ekukhetheni kwakho umkhakha owukhethile?			

13	**Do you foresee any obstacles in following your chosen career?** Ingabe zikhona yini izingqinamba ozibona zisendleleni yakho yokuqhubeka nomkhakha owukhethile?	**Difficulty in paying for further education/training** Ubunzima bokukhokhela ukuqhuba izifundo/ukuqeqeshwa	01	
		Far to travel to college Kukude ukuya ekolishi	02	
		Responsibilities at home Izidingo zasekhaya	03	
		Other (please explain) Okunye (sicela uchaze) ……... ……		

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
14	**How do you plan to overcome these?** Ingabe uhlele ukubhekana kanjani nalezingqinamba	**Get bursary/scholarship** Ukuthola umfundaze)	01	
		Get part-time job Ukuthola umsebenzi wesikhashana	02	
		Study part-time Ukufunda ngasese	03	
		Other (please explain) Okunye (sicela uchaze) …… ……		
15	**Have you ever considered nursing as a career?** Ingabe ubusuke wakucabanga ukwenza umkhakha wezobuhlengikazi	**Yes**	01	
		No	02	

16	**Please explain your answer you gave above** Sicela uchaze ngempendulo yakho oyinike ngenhla	

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
17	What in your opinion are the positive aspects of a career in nursing? **Ngokubona kwakho, ingabe yiziphi izinto ezinhle ngomkhakha wobuhlengikazi?**	Stable career **Umkhakha omiyo**	01	
		Many job opportunities (shortage of nurses) **Amathuba amaningi omsebenzi (ngokwentuleka kwabahlengikazi)**	02	
		Many different avenues to follow within nursing **Imikhakha eminingi engenziwa kubo ubuhlengikazi**	03	
		Possibility of getting paid while studying **Amathuba okuholelwa ngesikhathi usafunda**	04	
		Good career progression /prospects and specialisation **Ukuqhubeka kulomkhakha engikuwo/amathuba nokuba ngusolwazi kuwo**	05	
		Good prospects for travel **Amathuba amahle okuhamba**	06	
		Interesting **Ngiyayithanda**	07	
		Opportunity to care for others **Ukuthola ithuba lokunakekela abanye**	08	
		Other (please explain) **Okunye (sicela uchaze)**…		

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
18	What in your opinion are the negative aspects of a career in nursing? **Ngokubona kwakho, ingabe yiziphi izinto ezimbi ngomkhakha wobuhlengikazi?**	Long hours **Amahora amade okusebenza**	01	
		Poor salary **Iholo elingenelisi**	02	
		Low status **Izinga eliphansi**	03	
		Difficult work **Umsebenzi onzima**	04	
		Physically demanding **Ingaphezu kwamandla**	05	
		Few men in profession **Abesilisa bambalwa kulomsebenzi**	06	
		Other (please explain) **Okunye (Sicela uchaze)** …… ……		

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
19	What difficulties do you think you might encounter if you wanted to become a nurse? **Yiziphi izingqinamba ocabanga ukuthi ungahlangabezana nazo uma ube ngumhlengikazi?**	Difficulty in paying for further education/training **Ubunzima bokukhokhela ukuqhuba izifundo/ukuqeqeshwa**	01	
		Far to travel to college **Kukude ukuya ekolishi**	02	
		Responsibilities at home **Izidingo zasekhaya**	03	
		Not enough places at nursing colleges, universities or hospitals **Azenele izikhala ezikhungweni zokuqeqeshela ubuhlengikazi, ezikhungweni zemfundo ephakeme noma ezibhedlela**	04	
		Few improvement opportunities **Mancane amathuba Okuzithuthukisa**	05	

		Other (please explain) **Okunye (sicela uchaze** **……..** **……..**	

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response	
20	What difficulties do you think you might encounter in future when you have obtained nursing qualification? **Yiziphi izingqinamba ocabanga ukuthi ungahlangabezana nazo uma usuthole iziqu zakho zobuhlengikazi?**	Competition in employment opportunities due to many nursing colleges and many qualifying nurses. **Ukuncintisanela amathuba emisebenzi ngenxa yobuningi bezikhungo zokufundela ubuhlengikazi nabanye abahlengikazi abaqeqeshiwe.**	01	
		No jobs in nursing. **Ukungabikho kwemisebenzi ebuhlengikazini**	02	
		Low salary **Imali encane**	03	
		Nursing being regarded as a female job **Ubuhlengikazi buthathwa njengomsebenzi wabesifazane**	04	
		Fear of infections generally **Ukwesaba ukutheleleka ngezifo**	05	
		Fear of HIV infections **Ukwesaba ukutheleleka ngegciwane lesifo sengculazi**	06	
		Other (please explain) **Okunye (sicela uchaze)** **……** **……...**		

QID	Question	Response/codes	Coded response
21	What in your opinion can be done by the Department of Health so that nursing will be attractive to other learners who are still going to make career choices? **Ingabe yini ngokubona kwakho engenziwa Umnyango Wezempilo ukwenza umkhakha wezobuhlengikazi uhehe nakwabanye abafundi abasazokhetha imikhakha?**		

End time [……..]

Thank you for participating