

Impact of Alternative Practicum Approach on Enhancing Paediatric Clinical Learning among Male Nursing Students in Oman

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Abstract

Objectives: The pursuit of providing competent childcare is an utmost concern of all nurses, despite cultural issues. This study aimed to assess the impact of alternative practicum approach on improving paediatric clinical learning among male nursing students in Oman compared to the traditional approach. **Methods:** A quasi experimental design was conducted. Male nursing students from Oman Nursing Institute were divided into two groups and allocated into two clinical settings; alternative practicum approach and traditional practicum approach. Alternative care settings included areas like health centers, schools, emergency and outpatient department, pediatric intensive care unit and post cardiac surgical unit, while traditional setting referred to hospital general pediatric wards. Randomization of the only available third year male General diploma nursing students (N= 19) were included. The traditional group (N=10) being the control group during the first semester while that of alternative as experimental group (N= 9) during the second semester. Both groups completed the semi-structured questionnaire that was duly validated by external researchers, revealing the level of impact of alternative over traditional approaches and their preferences. The level of extent of agreement between alternative and traditional approaches in terms of clinical learning, providing child's care, facilitating factors, barriers in providing childcare was identified. **Results:** One-way ANOVA, version 24 was conducted and the results revealed a statistical significant difference in the alternative practicum approach compared to the traditional approach (F= 59.989, P=.0002). The results indicated that 56% of the students on the alternative practicum approach agreed that they were confident in providing care to children in paediatric settings compared to the students on the traditional approach (33). The findings also suggested that 89% of students in the alternative approach agreed to high extent that the settings designed facilitated confidence as future pediatric nurse as well as fostered knowledge, skills acquisitions and caring attributes of a pediatric nurse. It was found that cultural barrier was a main issue in providing comprehensive care to children by male nursing students in pediatric clinical settings in Oman. **Conclusion:** The study showed that the alternative practicum approach was effective. Male nursing students felt confident in performing childcare skills in the absence of female gender in the area of clinical settings, considering the sensitivity of culture. Partnerships with health care team and community in giving equal opportunities to male nursing students in the childcare practicums fosters a better milestone in nursing education. Alternative paediatric clinical approach fostered confidence in male students as future paediatric nurses. It also facilitated skills acquisitions and instilled in students the essence of caring to care for children.

Key words: *Alternative care settings, Male nursing students, childcare, clinical learning, clinical practicums.*

Introduction & Background

Nursing is considered as one of the appreciated

and recommended professions in Oman and some Arab countries. It is stereotyped as a feminized profession with qualities of nurturing and caring since the time of Florence Nightingale, worldwide.,^{20,22} Although the demand of recruiting male nurses in nursing profession has increased over the last two decades, the intake of male nurses in nursing profession in Oman and elsewhere

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is still less. Recently, there was a growing need to have more male nurses in Oman and; therefore, the nursing education programs in Oman lately had increased the recruitment of male nurses into nursing education.^{2,17} In nursing profession, male students are required to practice nursing skills for pediatric and obstetrics and gynecology; which is not welcomed in the Omani culture as these specialties are considered a female- dominated specialty.²³ Due to cultural challenge faced in Oman to provide care in those specialty areas, it was imperative to examine alternatives to strengthen the male nursing students' clinical skills in pediatric clinical settings.

Providing pediatric nursing care requires diligence in assessment of children and addressing parental concerns.³ In nursing education, the clinical placements are considered enriches the clinical learning of the students and have an important role in shaping the students perceptions towards nursing^{1, 2, 8} A review study conducted in Oman and showed that admission to nursing colleges is higher for female student (80-85%) compared to male students (15-20%).² Ministry of Health in Oman (MOH) justified that female nurses can work in any area of health care, whereas male nurses were restricted to some areas of practice to include only male wards and critical areas.^{17,18} Currently, the proportion of female to male nursing in Oman is about 7:1.¹⁷ Another study highlighted that male students showed positive attitudes towards nursing profession and have more humanistic approach and professional power, offering care unconditionally at all levels; not recognizing any limits in who they would work with or care for.^{9,10,11} However, research highlighted some challenges encountered by male nursing students; which may have effected them as students and future nurses. Male students encountered gender barriers; which have negatively affected their nursing education, academic achievement and professional practice.^{12,13,24,25} Other studies explored the experiences and perceptions of male nursing students towards nursing and nursing education.¹⁵ The findings revealed that male nursing students had negative feelings about nursing, experienced a gender bias and had psychological pressure significant.¹⁶ It was reported that male nursing students face discrimination by nurses, physicians and the public.⁵ The study argued that male nurses are professionals who care the same way as female nurses and therefore, learning outcomes of male nursing students must be improved and more

care must be given to them to help them enjoy nursing and improve their clinical practice.⁵ Moreover, another study stressed that male students in nursing education might have some concerns and barriers to effective care; therefore, addressing and identifying the stigmatizing factors is essential as it may form a barrier for their care and affect the care provided by them.²⁰ Male nursing students should be given opportunities to practice tasks and receive feedback, being allowed to work independently and collaborating with staff, gaining a sense of control and feel acceptable in the clinical setting.²⁰

Justification for the study:

In the past five years, the intake of male students has increased in the nursing institutes; which constituted around 15 % of the annual intake in 2013. The existing literature found that male students encountered gender barriers, felt uncomfortable during their placement, which negatively affected their academic achievement and practice.^{14,21,26} Male nursing students in Oman are eager to work effectively in paediatric clinical settings; however, they experience anxiety, gender bias, cultural barriers in providing effective child care.^{4,14, 25,27} The current study is the second phase of a mixed method study.¹ The first phase was designed to assess the male nursing students' perception of pediatric clinical placement using a focus group interview. The students found culture as a barrier to deliver effective pediatric care, experienced gender bias and lack of support from health care providers.³ Therefore, it was suggested to develop and examine an alternative approach for pediatric training than the previous traditional approach for training male nursing students; hence this study was designed. No similar studies had been conducted in Oman, nor in the Middle East, which adds more emphasis to conducted this study. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the impact of Alternative Practicum Approach (APA) compared to the Traditional Practicum Approach (TPA) to strengthen pediatric clinical skills, caring, and confidence among male nursing students. Alternative care settings refer to the areas like health centers, schools, emergency and outpatient department, pediatric intensive care unit and post cardiac surgical unit, while traditional setting refers to hospital General pediatric wards.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative comparative design with two groups recruited on different semesters. A purposive sampling approach was selected to choose the participants. The TPA group were all third year male nursing students available in semester one (N= 10). Those students posted in the regular pediatric clinical wards in Royal Hospital; while the APA Group (all male nursing students, N= 9) were assigned in the alternative practicum settings; which included schools, health centers and some intensive pediatric units in semester two (table 1). Both groups received equal

weeks of training, exposed to same credits of theory courses, practicum and were comparable at the level of study. Both groups completed modified structured questionnaire adopted from O'Lynn's Inventory of Male Friendliness in Nursing Programs (acceptable reliability= 0.7) the assessed the students' general perceptions of the APA/ TPA, gaining pediatric skills, barriers and the facilitators of the APA compared to the TPA. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the clinical rotation for both groups. The tool had four different domains: 1) Perception of practicum approach (4 items), gaining of pediatric skills (6 items), barriers in providing child care (8 items).

Table 1: Alternative Approach of practicums (15 weeks)

APA approach	TPA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Paediatric wards (5 weeks) • Schools visits (2 weeks) • Health Centre (2 weeks) • Adult male ward (2 weeks) • Paediatric ICU/PCSU(2weeks) • OPD / A& E (2 weeks) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Paediatric wards (13weeks) • Schools visits (1 week) • OPD / A& E (1 week)

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using SPSS, version 24. One-way ANOVA was conducted to elicit the differences between both groups. Initially, frequencies were calculated, missing cases were excluded from the study.

Results

The results elicited a significant difference between the two groups in the overall clinical rating scores ($p < 0.05$ $F = 59.989$, $P = .0002$). The APA group had higher clinical rating scores ($M = 14$, $SD = 2.3$) compared to the TPA ($M = 9$, $SD = 3.6$). In addition, 71% of male students in the APA reported high confidence in providing pediatric clinical skills compared to male students in the TPA (33%). Moreover, 89% of the APA group agreed to high extent that Alternative pediatric approach facilitated confidence to become a future pediatric nurse as well as it fostered gaining of knowledge, skills and caring attributes of male nursing students (Figure 1) compared

to the TPA (61%) group.

Regarding the barriers that hindered providing child care, equally both groups reported the socio-cultural as the most common factor; 80% of male students perceived that nursing is a female dominated profession that to some extent hindered them from performing child care. The presence of female attendee limited providing care to children in the wards, treated them differently and females generally favored communicating the child's needs to female nurses. In addition, students in the TPA reported feelings of fear & anxiety, low self-esteem in providing care to children in the pediatric wards (77%) compared to APA group (38%).

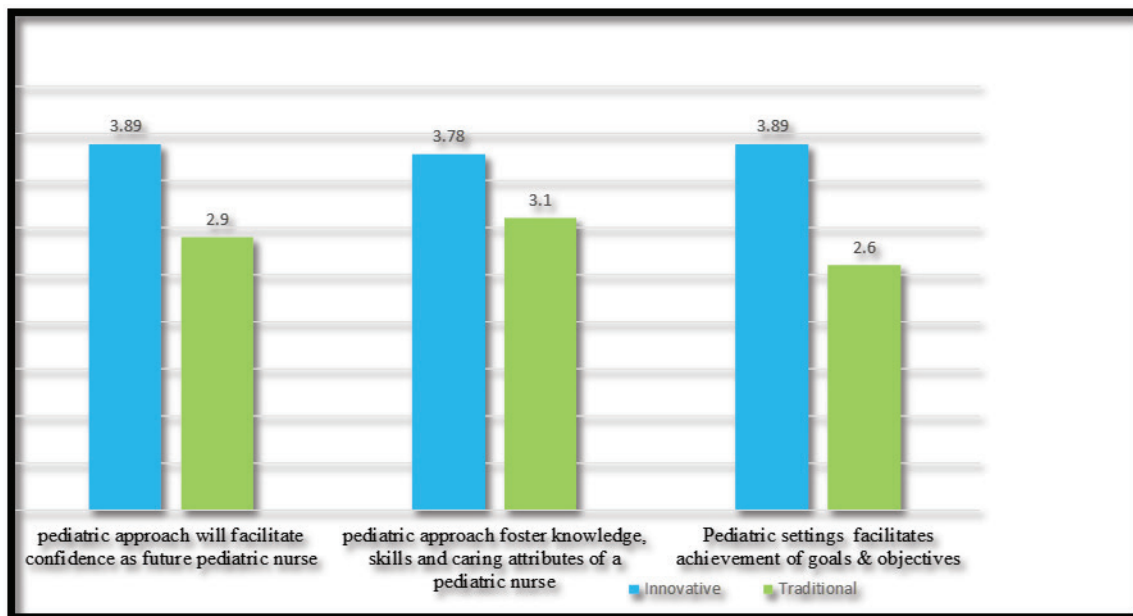


Figure 1: Male students' perception of APA & TPA

Discussion

The study provides a useful insight into the impact of APA on the satisfaction, confidence and improvement of male nursing students' pediatric clinical skills. The finding suggested that the alternative practicum settings for the male students helped changing their perception about caring in pediatric settings, facilitated gaining clinical skills and boosted more confidence in them. To our knowledge, this is the first study in the Middle East that examined the male students' perception on clinical posting in pediatric settings. We found that sociocultural issues and gender bias was the most common factor underlying all issues related to barriers to caring for children in Oman, as reported by male nursing students. The findings are consistent with the earlier studies.^{19,20,,22,24,25,26,27} Where they found Gender bias does exist in nursing education and can lead to discrimination against male students; which may effect quality patient care. The male nursing students in the study reported that they were interested to work in critical care areas, and expressed their desire to work in health centers and schools. Almost half of the participants expressed their desire to work in paediatrics, but very challenging in reality due to socio-cultural factor.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the perceptions of male

nursing students in providing care for children in the new alternative pediatric settings compared to the traditional approach. The APA facilitated confidence in male nurses, fostered gaining of skills, knowledge and caring attitudes, which are required as a future pediatric nurse. The study implies the need to design an alternative approach for strengthening child health care clinical placements for male nursing students that help contribute preparing diversified workforce. It is essential for policy makers and curriculum planners ensure that courses include some distinct flexible clinical process whereby the clinical learning takes place in a more effective way, providing equal opportunities for both genders in the nursing program, incorporate changes/additions to the curriculum to nurture male nursing students and equip them with the essential practicum skills of pediatric nursing and achieve the course objectives.

Limitations

The study had a small sample size which limits the generalizability of the findings. Data were collected in two different semesters for the two groups; which may have influenced the results. Possibility of study contamination was another limitation of the study. It is recommended to replicate the study with more sample size.

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