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The concept of professional identity in nursing students and practitioners: a research protocol of a cross-sectional study

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Abstract. *Background:* social identity plays an important role in the development of a society (1). Social identity refers to individual perception of the single person, based on membership in a particular social group (2). Professional identity is a subcategory of social identity, it is linked to interaction and professionalism of the group. It includes the best practice, the creation of ideals and professional values. It can be defined like attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills that are common among a special professional category. Professional identity is also connected to social roles of a particular profession (1). Therefore, professional identity includes individual experience and self-image of a particular category about its profession and its social image. Professional identity is the foundation for operation and conception of professional role (1). Studies show that nurses who have obtained professional identity are more flexible when facing with role changes and this is reflected on best practice and the patient's welfare (1,9).

Aim: the aim of this document is to present a research protocol of a cross-sectional study for assessing the concept of professional identity in nursing students of Bachelor's Degree and in nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree on Sapienza University of Rome.

Methods: a review of the literature regarding professional identity was performed. The search strategy included electronic databases CINAHL and PubMed. Use of Nurses Professional Values Scale – Revised questionnaire for assessing the concept of professional identity. Translation and validation in Italian language of Nurses Professional Values Scale – Revised.

Keywords: Nurses professional values, professional identity.

Background

Social identity plays an important role in the development of a society (1). According to the Tajfel's theory of social identity (1979), this concept refers to individual perception of the single person, based on membership in a particular social group (2). A society without identity has low self-esteem, under-development of the ethical aspects and the interpersonal relations. Public interests are replaced by private interests. Therefore, identity is the prerequisite of social action and necessary condition for development and a source of meaning for social activists (1).

In the theory of social identity, the membership in a particular social group is a real, vital and dynamics part of person. In order to increase self-image, the person tries to improve status of the membership social group (2).

Professional identity is a subcategory of social identity, it is linked to interaction and professionalism of the group. It includes the best practice, the creation of ideals and professional values. It can be defined like attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills that are common among a special professional category. Professional identity is also connected to social roles of a particular profession (1).

Therefore, professional identity includes individual experience and self-image of a particular category about its profession and its social image. Professional identity is the foundation for operation and conception of professional role (1).

The formation of nurse professional identity starts in the first day of university and continue in professional life. It should be the result of great theory and practice professional socialization. Professional socialization is the process through the future professional acquires the knowledge and skills required. It is possible with the interaction between neophyte, university professor and tutor during the internship. But unfortunately, its importance is underestimate in the process for the acquisition of professional values (1,3,4,5).

Nursing profession has changed in the years its training model in a modern university formation, in order to acquire appropriate identity and standard. The new university formation is based on nursing theories, nursing process and Evidence Based Nursing (EBN). This image is in contrast with what students are facing in the clinical practice. In fact, there is a discrepancy between theory and practice, also some tutors that aren't updated about new advances (1,6,7,8).

The result is a cognitive conflict that can cause an insecure development of professional identity (8).

Furthermore, professional identity is closely linked to social image of nursing. Nurse, in the social image, is considered as a doctor's assistant, a practical job, not intellectual. Nursing is always compared with medicine, which leads to a feeling of professional inferiority (1,9). This is in contrast with the Ministerial Decree n. 739 of 1994, on the professional profile of the nurse, which establishes his professional autonomy and which in Article 1 and 2 mentions (10):

Art 1 – Nurse's professional figure is identified with the following profile: the nurse is the health worker who, in possession of bachelor's degree and enrollment in the professional register is responsible for general nursing care.

Art 2 - Preventive, curative, palliative and rehabilitative nursing assistance is technical, relational and educational. The main functions are disease prevention, the care of patients and disabled of all ages and health education.

As a result a poor social image and inappropriate social status of nursing. This is reflected on professional identity of future nurses and university dropout (1).

Studies show that nurses who have obtained professional identity are more flexible when facing with role changes and this is reflected on best practice and the patient's welfare (1,9).

Professional values have an important role, they are essential in clinical practice, they are a guide in the interaction with patients, colleagues, other health professions and society (11). The professional values are the aspects of the working activity to which the entities attribute greater importance, compared to others. They can be defined like characteristics or conditions of work that respond to aspirations that can be satisfied more or less independently of the different professional sectors (12). If nursing is to remain a player in this era of health care transitioning, the values espoused by the profession need to be brought to the forefront of organizational decision making (11).

The acquisition and internalization of professional values are central to professional development and provide a common framework on which expectations and standards can be developed (9,11).

Research design

Main objective

The aim of this document is to present a research protocol of a cross-sectional study for assessing the concept of professional identity in nursing students of Bachelor's Degree and in nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree on Sapienza University of Rome.

Specific objectives

- Validation of the "Nurses Professional Values Scale - Revised" questionnaire in Italian language.
- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in first-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree, before the beginning of the practical training internship.
- Cross-sectional study to assess the development of the concept of professional identity in second-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree, at the beginning of the second year of training.
- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in third-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree, at the beginning of the third year of training.
- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in first-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree, at the end of the practical training internship and lecture of the first year of the course.

- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in second-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree, at the end of the practical training internship and lecture of the second year of the course.
- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in third-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree, at the end of the last practical training internship and lecture of the third year of the course.
- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in first-year nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree, beginning and end of the first year of training.
- Cross-sectional study for assessing the development of the concept of professional identity in second-year nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree, beginning and end of the second year of training.

Instruments: Description, Design and Scoring

Use of Nurses Professional Values Scale – Revised questionnaire.

NPVS-R is an assessment tool of nurse professional values, it is based on *Code of Ethics for Nurses* of American Nurses Association (ANA), it was made for the first time in 1994 and it was updated in 2015 (11,13).

Many studies and trials made around the countries, with different cultures, showing its validity and reliability (11,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21).

The NPVS-R is a 26-item instrument with a Likert-scale format ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (most important). Each item in the NPVS-R is a short descriptive phrase reflecting a specific code provision and its interpretive commentary. All items are phrased in the positive direction; none are reversed scored. The nurse professional values considered are take care, activism, confidence, professionalism and justice.

The possible range of score is 26 to 130. The higher the score, the stronger is the nurse's professional values orientation. Total scores are obtained by summing numeric responses to each item (11).

Compliance has been assessed between NPVS-R and Italian nurse code of ethics of 2009 (22). The distribution and completion of the questionnaire will be made electronically.

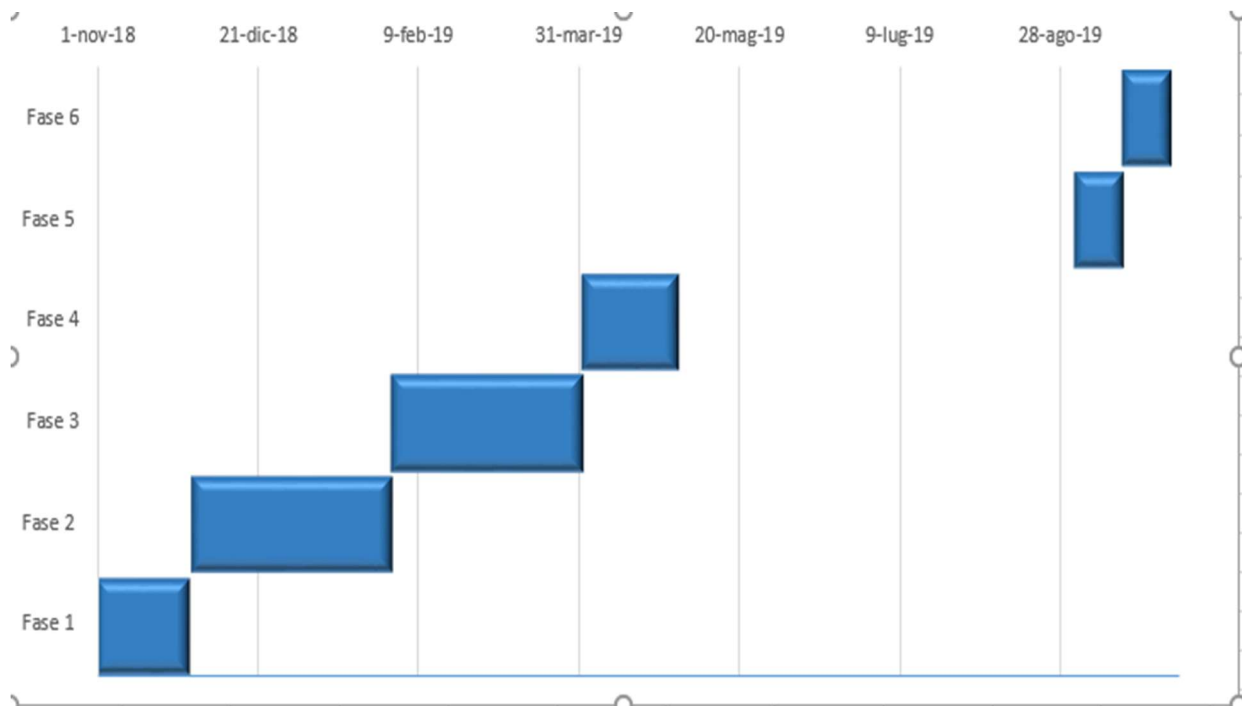
Setting and sample

- Nursing students of Bachelor's Degree on Sapienza University of Rome.
- Nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree on Sapienza University of Rome of Umberto I Polyclinic.

The duration of the study is between November 2018 and September 2019.

Methodology and phases of the project

Gantt chart



Phase 1 (November 2018)

- Revision of literature:
The search strategy included electronic databases CINAHL and PubMed. Searches included the following keywords: “professional identity”, “nurs*”, “students”, “nursing”, “student attitudes”, “Nurses Professional Values Scale – Revised” with boolean operator AND. The selected limits are: “Free full text”, “Full Tex”.
- Identification of the study population.
- Translation in Italian language of Nurses Professional Values Scale – Revised.

Phase 2 (December 2018 – January 2019)

- Request for collaboration and authorization from the Presidents of Bachelor’s Degree and Master’s Degree of nurse.
- Validation of NPVS-R in Italian language. Administration of the NPVS-R, twice in few days, to first-year nursing students of Bachelor’s Degree in Civitavecchia and Umberto I (Course C) before the beginning of the practical training internship.

- Data processing with SPSS software.

Phase 3 (February 2019 – March 2019)

- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to first-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree before the beginning of the practical training internship.
- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to second and third year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree.
- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to first and second year nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree.

Phase 4 (April 2019)

- Data processing with SPSS software.

Phase 5 (August/September 2019)

- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to first-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree at the end of the practical training internship and lecture of the first year of the course.
- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to second-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree at the end of the practical training internship and lecture of the second year of the course.
- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to third-year nursing students of Bachelor's Degree at the end of the last practical training internship and lecture of the third year of the course.
- Administration of the NPVS-R in Italian language to first and second year nursing students/practitioners of Master's Degree at the end of training.

Phase 6 (September 2019)

- Data processing with SPSS software of phase 5.
- Data processing with SPSS software of phase 2,3 and 5.
- Discussion and conclusion.

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