

# TODAY'S STUDENTS ARE TOMORROW'S COLLEAGUES: EXPLORING THE NURSE EDUCATOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN AN EMERGING DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

Following the introduction of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa, anxiety and fear were observed to permeate society, including the nursing profession. Nursing colleges have been constantly characterised by strife and conflict between nurse educators and nursing students. A qualitative study utilising in-depth phenomenological interviews was conducted to explore the nurse educator-student relationship at a Nursing College in Gauteng. The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the nurse educator-student relationship following the democratic dispensation in the country. During March 2013, 19 participants consisting of 10 nurse educators and 9 nursing students were sampled and interviewed. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using Tesch's method. The findings reflected experiencing *enhancers* among few within the two groups of participants. These were characterised by positive attitudes, interaction and feelings. The majority experienced *obstacles*, characterised by negative



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attitudes, interaction and feelings towards one another, impacting negatively on the learning-teaching environment. A third group was non-committal about how they experienced relationship with one another. A unique contribution of these findings is that students viewed nurse educators as lacking political astuteness. Students became increasingly frustrated by what they regarded as political naivety among nurse educators. The study concluded that the interplay between politics, democracy and transparency on the one hand, and nursing education, human rights and support on the other, is critically important. Recommendations of the study were that while there was a need for nurse educators to be provided with emotional and professional support so they can, in turn, support students adequately, they too need to familiarise themselves with political changes taking place in the country, especially in as far as these changes affect health reform. In addition, further research should be conducted to explore the value of political education in the curriculum of nurse education.

**Keywords:** conflict, nurse educator, nursing student, power, relationship

## INTRODUCTION

To live is to experience relationships. By nature, man is a social being who socialises through relationships that are dependent, independent or interdependent. These relationships are not always pleasant as they are sometimes fraught with difficulties such as mistrust, scepticism, self-doubt, and so forth. These may be perceived as challenging, especially by the youth. Youth, by nature, have a questioning mind and always seek answers that make sense and are aligned with their world view. According to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, a rapidly changing political environment and health care reform are having a dramatic effect on the role of nursing faculty. Universities are facing a 'new' and sometimes hostile world (Billings & Halstead, 2012:2).

According to Ayes et al. (in Killen, 2010:38), effective teachers have friendly, mature relationships with their learners, and demonstrate caring, humour and commitment. Students who enjoy a good relationship with faculty are more likely to experience low stress levels, minimal psychological and physical problems, and overall satisfaction with graduate school (Adrian-Taylor, Noels & Tischler, 2007: 92). One salient feature of the student-faculty relationship is the power differential that exists between the two groups under study. This power differential often determines the way students and nurse educators relate and manage conflict. A power differential, whether perceived or actual, exists within the graduate student/faculty relationship or realm (Brockman, Nunez & Basu, 2010:278). This power differential is often regarded as paternalistic. This paternalistic image leads graduate students to perceive the faculty as extremely powerful. This perception, coupled with the organisational expectation that

faculty members function as 'gatekeepers' of the discipline, creates a power gap, which students see as insurmountable, and thus resulting in disputes.

## STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

South Africa has been in a state of political transformation for the past 20 years. Even prior to 1994, the South African Nursing Council was under visible pressure to change, to Africanise, to democratise, to become more transparent and to repudiate the apartheid past (Ehlers, 2000:78). The new dispensation introduced immediately following the advent of democracy was observed to usher in anxieties and fears among the people of South Africa, resulting in conflicts in all facets of society. The nursing profession was no exception. While travelling throughout the country conducting accreditation of nursing colleges for the South African Nursing Council, the researcher observed with concern that nursing colleges were constantly characterised by strife, conflict and disputes between nurse educators and their students. Disputes can create volatile situations in which students and instructors (educators) hold opposing views, different expectations of one another, and distinct feelings regarding the outcome (Tantleff-Dunn, Dunn & Gokee, 2002:197). Students often criticised nurse educators, expressed dissatisfaction with results of tests/examinations, questioned evaluation criteria, deliberately came late for classes, boycotted classes/academic activities, made unreasonable demands on nurse educators or management, as well as 'toyi-toyied' (staging protests by singing, dancing and displaying placards). This kind of conduct is a microcosm of the conflict seen prevailing nationwide with communities demanding basic services, for example, clean water and sanitation. This conduct prompted the researcher to investigate this emerging phenomenon to establish whether it could be the result of students perhaps feeling misunderstood on the one hand, while on the other, tutors (usually experienced and matured adults) also feeling unappreciated and downgraded by their students. She observed that some of the nurse educators came across as rigid, inflexible autocrats who are resistant to change. For instance, she noticed that there were those educators who still regarded nursing students as *tabulae rasae* (blank slates) who are uninformed on health matters, or lacked opinion. These *tabulae rasae* have to be filled with all kinds of information by educators without expecting any challenge from the students. This type of attitude on the part of educators, in addition to the new culture of confrontation observed among students as described above, is a good recipe for conflict. It invariably compromises the teaching-learning environment if allowed to prevail or thrive.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the nurse educator-nursing student relationship in a nursing college in Gauteng, within the context of an emerging democracy in South Africa.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How is the relationship between nurse educators and nursing students in a nursing college in Gauteng, following the democratic dispensation?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore and describe how nursing students experience relationships with their nurse educators within a democratic South Africa
- To explore and describe how nurse educators experience relationships with their nursing students within a democratic South Africa
- To make recommendations regarding the improvement of nurse educator-student relations to policymakers responsible for the governance of nursing education institutions in South Africa.

## Definition of key concepts

**Conflict:** An interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities, that is, individual, group, organisation (Rahim, 2010:16).

**Nurse educator:** A professional nurse with an additional qualification in Nursing Education and registered as such with SANC (SANC, 2005:1). The terms nurse educator and tutor are used interchangeably in this article.

**Nursing student:** A person undergoing education and training in basic nursing at an accredited institution, which has complied with the prescribed standards and conditions for education and training (SANC, 2008:5).

**Power:** The capability of acting or producing some sort of effect, the potential capacity to exert influence (Huber, 2006:502).

**Relationship:** A connection or association between social entities, that is, individual, group, or organisation (Rahim, 2010:16).

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Nurses constitute the backbone of health human resources and are the largest number of health personnel in South Africa. In the light of this, South Africa cannot afford to leave the chaos in some nursing colleges to continue unabated. It is envisaged that evidence

gleaned from this study will bring about a clearer understanding of what the relational obstacles are, thereby contributing to more effective relational approaches between nursing students and nurse educators in order to promote a conducive teaching and learning environment. Previous studies done were undertaken in stable communities, as opposed to communities in political transition (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2009:20). Hence this study seeks to gain better insight into how tutors and nursing students experience relationships with one another in the context of the new political climate in South Africa. It is the researcher's fervent belief that such insight and understanding will help to build bridges, foster healthy relationships, thereby promoting and enhancing teaching and learning. It is also envisaged that this study could stimulate further research into how political education can be integrated into nursing education curricula in a non-threatening or non-intimidating manner in a changing society.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design was used for this study.

## METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling was used for this study. The size of the sample depended on data saturation, that is, sampling to the point at which no new information is obtained and redundancy achieved (Polit & Beck, 2012: 521). A total of 19 participants were sampled, 10 nurse educators and 9 nursing students.

The study utilised in-depth phenomenological interviews as this is an approach that is appropriate to describe life experiences and gives them meaning. According to phenomenologists, each individual has his or her own reality. Reality is considered subjective and, thus, experience is considered unique to the individual (Burns & Grove, 2009:55).

Data collection was conducted in two interrelated phases. In the initial phase, pilot interviews using the central question, 'How would you describe your relationship with your tutors/students in the emerging democratic environment?', were conducted with one tutor and one nursing student to determine whether the central question would elicit the required information. At the end of these pilot interviews, the participants were asked about the clarity of the central question, and their comprehension of it. It elicited the desired information and participants reported that it was simple, straightforward and clearly understood. In-depth interviews were subsequently conducted in the second phase, using *bracketing* and *intuiting*. Nursing students were interviewed in the comfort of their residences after classes, while nurse educators were interviewed in the comfort of their respective offices. The interviews were audio-taped for accuracy and completeness, as well as to constitute material for subsequent transcriptions at a

later stage. The purpose of audio-taping the interviews was clearly explained to the participants. Field notes (which included observational, theoretical, methodological and personal) were also recorded after each interview to describe the underlying themes, dynamics and situation observed during the interviews.

All interview transcripts, including follow-up interviews and field notes, were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Tesch's eight steps (Cresswell, 2009:186). A protocol was designed and given to an independent coder who is qualified in qualitative studies, with a request to also analyse the transcribed data. In the interest of triangulation, the researcher and the independent coder subsequently met to compare the emerging patterns and themes, as well as hold consensus discussions.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

To ensure rigour, Lincoln & Guba's Model for establishing trustworthiness was used (in Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:303). It is based on four criteria for developing the trustworthiness of a qualitative enquiry, namely credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

**Credibility:** Prolonged engagement is the act of the researcher spending a lot of time during data collection to be able to understand the phenomenon better. In this study, the researcher, who has extensive experience in nursing education, spent enough time with the participants during the interviews to gain their trust and build rapport. She listened carefully and probed the participants to unearth their experience. Field notes were taken and a pilot study conducted. Member checking was done when the researcher gave the participants their transcribed text of the interviews for them to check for accuracy and completeness of data collected. Any additional information the participants wished to provide was incorporated. This act allows the participants to support truthfulness and consistency in the results (Creswell, 2013:252; Streubert & Carpenter, 2011:48).

**Dependability:** This is where the researcher has to demonstrate credibility of the findings. By demonstrating credibility, dependability has been achieved (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011:49). Triangulation of data collection was used to achieve this. Dense description of the methodology, including verbatim quotes from individual interviews was done. The data analysis protocol and consensus discussions between the researcher and the independent expert also ensured that dependability was achieved.

**Confirmability:** This criterion can be achieved by the researcher leaving an audit trail. An audit trail is a record of the all the activities that were followed in the study process that can be reproduced to arrive to the same conclusions. In this study, the researcher recorded a full account of how the research process was carried out to reach the final understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon. Confirmability can also

be achieved through triangulation. The researcher in this study triangulated data by collecting from both nurse educators and nursing students.

**Transferability:** This is the probability that the meanings obtained can fit into other similar situations. However, this is only applicable to the potential users of the findings and not to researchers (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011:49). It refers to the potential for extrapolation, that is, the extent to which findings can be transferred to, or have applicability in other settings or groups (Polit & Beck, 2012:585). In this study, the researcher provided dense description by describing the details of the participants, the setting used in the study, including verbatim quotes from the transcriptions of the interviews as evidence of what they said.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee and the Management of the Nursing College concerned. Detailed information pertaining to the study was given to individual participants, after which their voluntary consent was secured in writing.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The two groups of participants provided rich, dense and detailed accounts of their experiences of interaction with one another. The description of themes related to *attitudes*, *interactions* and *feelings* that were perceived as positive by participants were grouped together under the category *Enhancers*, and those that were perceived as negative, were categorised as *Obstacles*. Descriptions that were non-committal, as they related to the experiences that were sometimes positive and at other times negative, were grouped together under the category, *Variable*. The findings are presented below in two broad sections in terms of the sample strata, namely, nursing students and nurse educators.

### Nursing Students:

#### Enhancers

Positive attitude and interaction emerged as common themes among only two of the student participants, as illustrated in the following excerpts taken from their interview transcripts:

Because their attitude towards us is good, it makes me look forward to the next day of class.

With regard to associated feelings experienced during interaction with nurse educators, only the two students who experienced positive interaction reported experiencing positive feelings too, while the others remained sceptical. They echoed the following statements of contentment:

I feel very proud of my tutors because they make me feel free and enjoy the course.

Because the tutors are open, understanding and supportive, interacting with them makes me feel good.

## Obstacles

Three themes were also identified under this category. These themes included negative attitudes, negative interaction, as well as negative feelings experienced by most students towards their educators. More than half of the participating students experienced their interaction with nurse educators as problematic and therefore, negative because tutors either victimised or undermined them whenever students challenged something about their attitude or their teaching, be it method of teaching or content, as seen in the statements below:

The tutors are nasty ... period!; I'm not hundred percent satisfied about the interaction with the tutors. At times I feel when I have to raise some queries or questions ... I am either mocked at, undermined or ridiculed for my stupidity, often subtly so.

Okay, relationship with my tutors is ... is a little bit ... er ... er ... impersonal; bad because when they come to class, sometimes a tutor can just say "I, Ms Mokekete (So and So), I'm here to teach you and it's up to you to listen to what I've come to teach you, neh; If you sleep in my class and have problems later, you must know that you are on your own, ok? You snooze, you lose!"

This is in stark contradiction to Wong's assertion that nursing students come with life experiences and educational expectations. They come with fresh ideas, high expectations and eagerness to serve. My job is to inspire them, honour their work and efforts, touch on each student's soul and spirit, and maximise potential (Wong, 2012:9).

Negative interactions evoke negative feelings. Consequently, student participants reported experiencing associated negative feelings emanating from the negative attitude and interaction seen in the examples above. The quotations below support this notion:

Hm ... I feel confused, actually. I feel we are being oppressed because of that thing [referring to an incident where high-level provincial intervention became necessary to resolve conflict between a tutor and the participant concerned, with other fellow students].

I don't feel ok towards tutors. They oppress us because they are politically illiterate and we are politically literate and active. Unfortunately, our opinions don't matter to them.



If health care workers, including nurses, do not participate in the politics of their country, they cannot exert any influence on health legislation and they become mere implementers of political decisions in the health care services (Ehlers, 2000:75).

In some cases, the actions of some of the tutors only serve to exacerbate the already strained relations. For instance, one student participant lamented:

It's not that I want to keep myself at a distance. I don't take them (tutors) as my confidantes because some of them, they really can't keep a secret! If you go to them, you know – crying and telling them your secret, the next time, another different tutor will come to you and say, 'I hear you told Ms So and So about such and such a problem.' That makes me very angry.

Such poor display of confidentiality is not acceptable to the students as it leads to feelings of mistrust. In articulating what might make the difference between teachers who would routinely score highly on most elements of quality teaching, and those who would rarely score highly on any element of quality teaching, it has been pointed out that the high scorers respect and protect the rights of learners, including the right to privacy in matters such as test results (Killen 2010:39). However, the resentment they experience towards the nurse educators sometimes seems to be misplaced because, for some students, its source is actually the excessive learning workload, and not the relationship per se. For instance, one of the student participants explained:

... that's why sometimes I resent my tutors and end up fighting with them; it's because we are overworked and this causes a lot of stress on our part. They don't care as all they are interested in, is for us to meet deadlines."

## Variable

It is also significant to note that two of the participating students reported that interaction with their tutors was subject to variations under certain circumstances. They believe that individual versus group interaction, uniqueness of individuals, as well as the political climate and changes happening within the nursing college are perhaps some of the factors that make interaction between them variable at different times. This notion was substantiated by, among others, the following excerpts:

My interaction with tutors is fine although sometimes as a class or a group, we did have problems which were resolved anyway, but after a lot of meetings with the very tutors, with management and sometimes with some senior officials from head-office.

My interaction with tutors has been fine so far although it is gradually changing now. It is changing because tutors are resistant to change. The whole country is in the process of changing, but they don't want to be democratic and transparent. You see, this resistance to change does affect our relationship sometimes.

## Nurse Educators:

### Enhancers

Two of the ten tutors described *attitudes* of students and their *interaction* with them in positive terms. They reported that students' eagerness and willingness to listen, as well as the fact that they are able to consult them whenever the need arises, as rationale behind such positive interactions. The quote below is an example to support this:

I relate very well with my students. They are eager and willing to listen, and therefore to learn.

Experiencing positive *feelings* was reported by the same three tutors, in tandem with the positive attitude and interaction they enjoyed with their students. A plethora of terms including proud, happy, pleased, enjoyable, were used to describe these positive feelings. They commented:

You know, I feel comfortable and happy about interaction with my students.

Okay, as a male tutor, I must say I haven't encountered any problems with my students, as such. I have enjoyed interacting *with them and feel proud about it*.

### Obstacles

Unlike findings related to students' responses, no tutor reported their relationship with students in outright negative terms. In other words, none of the nurse educators reported experiencing students' attitudes and interaction with students as exclusively negative. However, the majority reported feeling discouraged, demotivated, bad, frustrated, miserable, unappreciated, unsupported, and even humiliated because *sometimes* nursing students displayed disrespect towards them, as illustrated in the following quotations:

For example, students would fail a test and you write to them: "PLEASE SEE ME", and they don't come and see you. When you follow-up why they did not come and see you, they would retort: "If you saw that we have failed, why didn't you come and see us?" It makes you feel bad and de-motivated ... it really does.

Er ... you know, it breaks a person; to be disrespected makes you feel like you are nothing. You know, it makes you feel like you are not appreciated; respect is important in life. So once you don't have it from the people you interact with daily, it becomes quite a miserable situation.

## Variable

Variable *attitudes, interaction* and *feelings* were predominant in the narratives by tutors, since the majority reported that the attitudes and interaction with their students were not consistent throughout. It would be positive at times but negative at other times, depending on the circumstances. For instance, they mentioned 'uniqueness of individual students' as affecting their attitudes and interaction, as well as the fact that students generally 'misbehave' as they progress in their levels of training. Different groups of students were also found to relate differently with tutors. This is how they articulated this notion:

Relationship with my students changes now and then since we come across different types of students. We don't generalise; we have to regard every student as a unique person. Often students are good when they are new, but as they progress in their training they change, you know. They are unpredictable.

## DISCUSSION

Several studies have explored the nature of relationships between graduate students and faculty. In general, most of these studies acknowledge that, from time to time, conflict does rear its ugly head in these relationships. In contrast, students who enjoy nurturing relationships with their tutors/faculty flourish in their quest for sanity and success (Adrian-Taylor, Noels & Tischler, 2007: 92). However, on campuses of higher education, there appears to be increasing incidences of incivility among students (Clark & Springer, 2007:244). Additionally, Clark found that students sometimes experience incivility at the hands of faculty (Clark, 2008a:E37). Students perceive condescending remarks or putdowns by faculty as uncivil. Thus, although it is tempting to focus on student misconduct and incivility from a narrow perspective, it is prudent to avoid this. Poor student behaviour and incivility, although never appropriate, may be influenced by a broad spectrum of variables, including stress levels and lack of general civility within the environment (Billings & Halstead, 2012:245). Additionally, lack of teaching acumen by faculty may serve to increase student stress and frustration. The adult student flourishes when the learning climate is mutually respectful, collaborative and supportive, as was the case with participants in this study.

In the themes presented above, nursing students, albeit only a few, emphasised the caring and supportive nature of tutors with whom they interacted and how this invariably evoked good feelings in them, thereby setting the stage for a conducive climate of learning and relating. This therefore highlights the notion that to find satisfaction in life, people need to be able to establish positive interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships between nursing students and their tutors are no different. It is apparent from the results presented in this study that when nursing students experience their relationships with their tutors in a positive light, they thrive in learning.

It is a generally known fact that with little or no formal power, students are excluded from participating in most decisions that affect their fate in the education system. It has been demonstrated that negative attitudes and interaction breed negative feelings, and negative feelings breed negative actions. When students feel frustrated and helpless by what is being done or said, it means that there are a few channels or platforms available to them for confronting tutors and administrators. Even if differences are raised, students have little clout to force educators to consider their concerns seriously. This disenfranchisement of students has a number of dysfunctional consequences. Consequences for students include their continuing frustrations – their inability to change conditions that they experience as untenable. Consequences for the college system include the loss of considerable positive energy where committed students could have contributed to the management of the nursing college and help resolve issues that affect their lives.

Tanner observes that it is frequently assumed by authors that if one knows how to care for patients as a nurse, in the same way, one can therefore also care for students as an educator. When this happens, relations are facilitated, naturally (Tanner, 2007: 51).

Globally, student-faculty conflict on college campuses has received attention mostly in news reporting. A recent Web search revealed numerous reports of students suing universities over the actions of professors, including cases of sexual harassment (Goode, 1995; Gatsos, 2004); issues of religion and free speech in class assignments (Welling, 2004); claims of plagiarism, including that the charges were racially motivated (Napolitano, 2006); that professors plagiarised student papers for a conference (Bodnar, 1997); that professors did not adequately inform students that plagiarism is against the rules (Labi, 2004) and that professors were not catching their plagiarism quickly enough to prevent it, thus causing them to fail a course (Sherriff, 2004); as well as a host of other infractions, real or perceived, serious or frivolous (Harrison, 2007: 349).

In South Africa, the Chris Hani Baragwanath Nursing College was constantly in media reports for all the wrong reasons at the close of 2012 and beginning of 2013. Student nurses had embarked on a protracted mass action, demanding that three Heads of Department (HODs) should be removed from the college. They alleged that a number of them were failed by the three HODs in the academic years 2010 and 2011. The then Health MEC (Member of the Executive Committee), Hope Papo, declared that the department had taken all reasonable steps to resolve the dispute, but the students remained adamant (Mail & Guardian, 2013:4). Since no solution to the impasse could be reached with the students, the Nursing College had to close for months, losing valuable learning-teaching time.

Little has been written about the need for political astuteness and activity in nursing education settings. Yet the norms and standards for all educators published in the *Government Gazette No. 20844* in February 2000, clearly articulate the role of an educator as that of a community, citizenship and pastoral nature, among others (Killen, R 2010:397). In this study, participants also highlighted politics as an issue affecting their relationships. It is suggested that emancipation and empowerment of educators and

students would follow their enlightenment about the nature of the conditions of their practice. Others also contend that in order to become politically meaningful, nurses and nurses' organisations need to become audible and visible in the media, stating claims to their rights in politically meaningful terms (Ehlers, 2000:79).

## CONCLUSION

To transform nursing education in line with mainstream education, as well as other positive changes currently taking place in our country, demands that policymakers in nursing education take a long hard look at the interplay between politics, democracy and transparency on the one hand, and nursing education, human rights and support on the other. Furthermore, respect begets respect. Simply stated, respect is earned. Nurse educators who respect their students will, in turn, enjoy respect from their students. They need to change their mind-sets regarding the notion that they are the sole custodians of all knowledge and know what is best for students, while students assume a passive stance and acquiesce to academic demands without questioning.

Unfortunately, as students continue to defy authority, to disrupt academic programmes, to display disrespect, and make unreasonable demands in the name of asserting their basic human rights, nurse educators, on the other hand, become demoralised, despondent and discontented. Some resign, resulting in a brain drain from the profession. Emerging evidence suggests that incivility in the workplace has significant implications for nurses, patients and health care organisations. For example, new research suggests that victims of nurse bullying are more likely to report that they intend to quit their jobs and leave (Luparell, 2011:92). Therefore, both groups need all the support they can garner.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that nurse educators, as the more mature and more experienced of the two groups, should adapt their attitudes towards students, as well as adapt communication with them, that is, talking with, and not down at students. This will assist them to become sensitive to the power differential that exists between them and students. Inclusion of students in important decision-making is imperative. Maintaining confidentiality of student matters where necessary would also improve trust issues. From management's side, more personal or emotional as well as professional support for tutors who are grappling with a new cadre of nursing students is advocated and should be explored. This could come in the form of one-on-one or group support, and therefore a slot in their programme should be created for regular debriefing sessions between and among colleagues. Ideas should be exchanged regarding how to deal with difficult situations related to students. Perhaps specific coaching and mentoring programmes should also be put in place to support the tutors. Most importantly, future

studies should focus on transforming the curriculum to accommodate political content in line with a rapidly changing political landscape in South African society. The NHI is a good example that makes such change an imperative.

## LIMITATIONS

The study was confined to a large nursing college in an urban area of one province only. It is possible that expanding the study to other provinces, especially those with a rural slant, could have yielded different dynamics. The influence of gender differences between the participants was also not considered in this study.

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