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ASCERTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS' AGE, GENDER
AND THEIR LEVEL OF ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR.



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ASCERTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS' AGE, GENDER AND THEIR LEVEL OF ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR.

^{1*}Ajumoke O. O., ²Gbaranor K.B., ³Mube W. A., ⁴Austin-Asomeji I., ⁴Bademosi A., ²Okpara E. P., ²Reuben E., ⁴Ohaka J. C. ²Orij I. E, ⁵Famba Famba D., ⁴Bruce I.

¹Department of Nursing Sciences, College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

²Department of Human Physiology, College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

³Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

⁴Department of Community Medicine, College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

⁵Department of Family Medicine, College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Corresponding author:

Dr. Gbaranor, Kekii Barinua

Department of Human Physiology,

College of Medical Sciences,

Rivers State University

Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Barinua.gbaranor@ust.edu.ng

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study is to ascertain the relationship between undergraduate nursing students' age and their level of assertive behaviour. Assertiveness is communicating and expressing your thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a way that makes your views and needs clearly understood by others, without putting down their thoughts, feelings, or opinions. Assertiveness is the ability to express our thoughts and feelings openly in an Honest, Appropriate, Respectful and Direct way.

Methodology: The participants were students of 2nd - 5th levels at the Department of Nursing, University of Port Harcourt with a total of 205 participants. The study was a cross sectional descriptive survey design with an adapted structured questionnaire using Rathus Assertiveness schedule instrument with a four point Likert scale of strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. All statistical analysis was performed using statistical package for social Science (SPSS).

Findings: The findings revealed an increased in assertiveness level with students in the 5th and 4th levels of study being more assertive than the lower levels of study. Age and gender of students did not have any influence on their assertive behaviour. Chi-square Test of independence was the inferential statistics used to test the hypotheses on whether significant relationships existed between student nurses' level of assertiveness and their age, gender and year of study with the level of significant 0-05.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: The study recommended that all Nurses should be exposed to assertiveness training so that they can mentor/coach students and it also recommended that assertive behaviour should be included in the curriculum of nursing programme.

Key words: *Ascertain, Relationship, Undergraduate, Nursing, Students*

Introduction

Assertiveness is communicating and expressing your thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a way that makes your views and needs clearly understood by others, without putting down their thoughts, feelings, or opinions. Assertiveness is the ability to express our thoughts and feelings openly in an Honest, Appropriate, Respectful and Direct way. It can be hard to do, but it gets easier with practice. In assertive communication both individuals are considered to be equally important (www.mirecc.va.gov/cihvisn2). According to McCabe and Timmins (2003) assertiveness is necessary for effective nurse/patient communication and it is suggested that its development may also aid the confidence of the profession as it develops.

Assertiveness differs from aggressiveness, which involves inappropriate expression of thoughts, emotions, and beliefs in a way that violates the rights of others (Lawton and Stewart, 2005).

Nurses play a vital communication role in the healthcare System, and advocacy and empowerment are central to this. In this perspective, Ibrahim (2015) suggested that to empower their patients, nurses need to be assertive. The concept of empowerment in nursing education according to Ibrahim (2015) is an interpersonal process in which educators provide the tools and an environment conducive to increasing autonomous decision making in students. Hence it is compulsory for nurses and midwives and undergraduate nurses who will provide individuals, families and society in the field of health and education in the future, be individual with high self-esteem and assertiveness in order to be able to establish communication more comfortably in society and to be able to use their professional knowledge and skills more effectively (Karagozolu *et al*, 2008).

Few researchers have investigated demographic factors such as age, gender, experience, and nursing education on assertiveness. Unal (2002) examined assertiveness in 79 nursing students and found that age and sex were not related assertiveness.

Materials and Method

It was a cross-sectional study involving students from 2nd - 5th year in the department of nursing science. A structured questionnaire using Rathus Assertiveness schedule instrument with a four-point Likert scale of strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was used to collect data. Assertiveness instrument developed by Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) (1973) was used.

Results

Table 1: Relationship between the Student Nurses' Age and their Level of Assertiveness

	Student Nurse' Assertive (n=84)	Assertiveness Unassertive (n=121)	Total	Chi-Square	df	p-value
Age	<20	16(36.4)	28(63.6)	44	3.781	2
	21-	59(45.7)	70(54.3)	129		
	>25	9(28.1)	23(71.9)	32		

Result on the relationship between students' nurses' age and their level of assertiveness. Their age had no significant relationship with their level of assertiveness ($p = .151$). No age group was significantly associated with higher level of assertiveness than others. The level of assertiveness for the different age groups were thus distributed: 20 years and below (36.4%), 21-25 years (45.7%) and above 25 years (28.1%). Hence, student nurses' level of assertiveness was not related on their age (Table 1).

Table 2: Relationship between the Student Nurses' Gender and their Level of Assertiveness

	Student Nurse' Assertive (n=84)	Assertiveness Unassertive (n=121)	Total	Chi-Square	df	p-value
Sex	Female	76(41.3)	180(58.7)	184	.080	1
	Male	8(38.1)	13(61.9)	21		

Result on the relationship between student nurses' gender and their level of assertiveness. Their gender had no significant relationship with their level of assertiveness ($p = .777$). The female students (41.3%) were not significantly associated with high Assertiveness than their male counterpart (38.1%). Hence, student nurses' level of Assertiveness was not gender related (Table 2).

Table 3: Relationship between the Student Nurses' Years of Study and their Level of Assertiveness

	Student Nurse' Assertive (n=84)	Assertiveness Unassertive (n=121)	Total	Chi-Square	df	p-value	
	2nd	23(41.8)	32(58.2)	55	12.045	3	.007
	3rd	17(25.4)	50(74.6)	67			
Age	4th	8(47.1)	9(52.9)	17			
	5th	36(54.5)	30(45.5)	66			

Result on the relationship between student nurses' year of study and their level of assertiveness. Their year of study had a significant relationship with their level of assertiveness ($p = .007$). Students with high years of study (that is. 5th and 4th students) were associated with higher level of assertiveness; while the 3rd year were the least assertive. The level of assertiveness for the different years of study were thus distributed: 5th year (54.5%), 4th year (47.1%), 2nd year (41.8%) and 3rd year (25.4%). Hence, student nurses' level of assertiveness significantly depended on their years of study, with students in 4th and 5th years being more assertive than others (Table 3).

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that student nurses' level of assertiveness was not related to their age. This is in line with the findings of the study by Unal (2002), who examined at assertiveness in 79 nursing students and found that age and sex were not related to at assertiveness. In same vein, McCabe and Timmins (2005) in a study of 27 nurses found that regardless of gender, age and amount of education, nurses without any assertiveness training were less assertive than those who had assertiveness training. Amicone (2015) in their study also found that only a very weak positive correlation ($r = .113$) existed between age and assertiveness scores which was not even significant ($p = .116$).

The fact that age and assertiveness had no relationship can be attributed to the fact that the students under study were almost within the same age group; hence a high tendency to have the same level of exposure. The demographic characteristics revealed that 21.5% of the students

were aged 17-20 years; 62.9% were aged 21-25 years; 13.2% were aged 26-30 years while 2.4% were aged 31-33 years; implying that approximately 15% of the students were above 25 years while 85% were between 25 years and below. Relationship between age and assertiveness in this study can also be explained on the basis that assertiveness is a behavioural characteristic.

The findings of this study revealed no significant relationship between nursing students' level of assertiveness and their gender. This agrees with the findings of Unal (2002), and McCabe and Timmins (2005) as stated earlier. It is also in agreement with the work of Arigbabu *et al*, (2010) who carried out a study on gender, marital status and religious affiliation as factors of assertiveness among Nigerian education majors. The result obtained showed no significant difference in assertiveness between gender groups.

The age-assertiveness non-relationship is suggestive to gender and assertiveness also being unrelated. As stated earlier, being within the same age group already predicts a lot about their exposure level, which may be perceived to contribute to assertiveness irrespective of gender. The gender-assertiveness non-relationship can also be explained based on assertiveness as a behavioural characteristic as stated earlier; that is, a male or female can be assertive or unassertive because that has become the person's behaviour either inborn or learnt.

A similar study by Amicone (2015) found that assertive scores for males were higher than females and there was a significant difference ($p = .033$). This finding may be as a result of the uniqueness of the population as regards their race, employment status, place of employment and the government and human right laws of the place of study. The study noted less than half of the sophomore students and more than half of the senior students were employed; of which above 70% in each group were employed in health facility.

Conclusion

The assertiveness of the participants was not age-related neither was it gender-based. Assertiveness was however dependent on their year of study, the students in senior (5th and 4th year) level being more assertive than those in the lower level (2nd and 3rd year).

Recommendations

1. All Nurses should be exposed to assertiveness training so that they can mentor/coach students.
2. Assertive behaviour should be included in the curriculum of nursing programme.

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Declarations

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