

Ordem dos Enfermeiros

Young Nurses Network



***Study on the professional situation of young nurses in
Portugal***

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of 2008, the Ordem dos Enfermeiros (hereinafter referred to as OE) created a working group constituted by young nurses in representation of its five Regional Sections. The purpose was to establish a close relationship with students and young nurses so as to identify their worries and needs.

It was within this scope that this study was developed, having as fundamental goal to collect information about the beginning of the professional life and the employment conditions of young nurses in Portugal.

The questionnaire form was sent in December 2008 and in January 2009, to the nurses registered in OE since the 1st of January 2006, using the OE database. The study was implemented in this range to collect information on the problems and difficulties related to employment in young professionals with less than three years of practice.

The document is organized in a practical way, with a short introduction contextualizing the reasons for the study, followed by the presentation of results. Throughout the text are indications for the graphs and tables found in Annex 1 and 2.

This document was originally written in Portuguese, to better understand some of the expressions used we recommend that you begin the reading of the English version by Annex 3 – Glossary.

1. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

In January 2009 about nine thousand messages were sent to the email addresses included in OE's database of the nurses registered from January 1st 2006 onwards.

Of these, only approximately eight thousand reached its recipient and 730 got a reply. They constitute our sample.

We can consider a reply rate of about 9 to 10%, yet it is difficult to estimate the actual number of nurses who received the questionnaire given the volatility characteristic of e-mail addresses, which was a limitation to the study.

Of the nurses who did reply, 85% are females and only 15% are males. Mean age was calculated in 24 years and two months.

The distribution by district of birth shows that about 36% of the nurses who replied were born in the districts of Lisbon or Oporto¹.

The reply came from nurses graduated in all Nursing Schools in the country². There were 22.3% of the nurses graduated in 2006, 25.4% in 2007, and 46.5% in 2008. The remaining did not identify their graduation year³.

The total amount of nurses registered in the OE per year is in average 3572. The distribution of new inscriptions per year is: 2006 – 3627 new inscriptions; 2007 – 3859 new inscriptions; and in 2008 – 3594 new inscriptions (OE data Jan 09).

¹ See illustration 1

² See Table 1

³ See Illustration 2

2. RESULTS

2.1 Employment

Of the inquired nurses more than 27% were not practising the profession. Considering only the nurses graduated in 2008, the percentage of nurses who were not practising increases to 49%.⁴ Which means that almost half the nurses graduated in the previous year had not find a job after six months and among those, 77% never received any employment offer.

Regarding the nurses graduated in 2006 and 2007 only about 1% was unemployed.

It's in the north of the country that unemployment is more visible, with 38% of nurses without job, while in the central and south region the percentage is around 14 to 16%.

From the nurses without employment, there were 71 individuals who reported to have refused job offers. The reasons appointed were: low-paid proposals (26.7%), poor working conditions and lack of stability (18%).⁵

Of the sample, 33% reported having a previous professional experience to the situation on the date of the inquiry. This experience refers to a Nursing occupation before the current employment or unemployment.

There were 5% of the answering nurses working outside Portugal.

2.2 Type of work contracts⁶

The unstable working contract dominates, with only 31% of the nurses having permanent contracts. Of the remaining, about 42.8% has a fixed-term contract

⁴ See Table 2

⁵ See Table 3

⁶ See Table 4 and Annex 3 for the glossary.

and 17.8% are providing services as liberal professionals or issuing receipts to health institutions.

2.3 Working hours⁷

The majority of nurses (73% of the sample) work from 35 to 40 hours per week with respectively 38% and 35% of respondents.

Of the remaining sample, 16% did not mention the type of schedule, 10% work in part-time and of this 4% work less than 10 hours per week.

2.4 Nurses working in other areas

There are 5% of nurses working in areas other than Nursing. Of these, 29% work in the trade business, namely in the area of catering, restaurants or in large commercial facilities.

When asked about the reasons for working in other areas, 66% say they do it due to the lack of nursing jobs and 18% refer they are better remunerated in other activities.

2.5 Waiting time for obtaining the first job

In a general analysis, 3 months after the graduation, 44% of the nurses still hadn't found a job. A decreasing percentage as the time advance as we can see after 6 months only 17% were not working in nursing and after one year there was slightly more than 3%.

In the analysis split by years⁸ – 2006, 2007 and 2008– there is an increased time gap between graduation and practising the profession. Of the nurses graduated in 2008 only 51% were employed at the time of the study

⁷ See illustration 3

⁸ See table 5 and illustration 4

(correspond to a six-month interval since the majority of nurses graduated in July 08 and the data collection took place in January 09).

2.6 Requirements requested by health institutions in employment applications or interviews⁹

Of the enquired nurses, 47% say that they were requested other conditions by the employers above and beyond the legal requirements to have access to the profession. There are 3 main requirements referred: to have residence or have been born in the institution's region of influence, to have professional experience as a nurse or to have carried out clinical learning (within the academic scope) in the institution.

2.7 Young nurses perception of discriminations while seeking employment

The data collection reveals that 26% of the nurses referred that there was at least a moment when they felt discriminated or saw their professional dignity affected during the process of job seeking.

When asked to identify the persons responsible for these situations nurses refer the administrative workers (29%) and health institutions' directors (25%) as the main authors. Also referred were other health professionals (19%), security workers and doorkeepers (7%), employment selection juries (3%) and non-identified persons.

The mostly identified types of discrimination were:

- Rejection of curricula vitae and in some cases with the information that it would be thrown into the waste bin;
- Unjustified exclusion from employment opportunities, with the feeling of injustice, corruption or «favouritism»;

⁹ See table 6

- Unfriendly treatment or disrespect, including rudeness and arrogance.
- Exclusion due to lack of professional experience;

The nurses have identified the specific authors responsible for each type of discrimination. This information is included in annex.

2.8. Professional traineeship

From the data collected, 77 nurses had already done a professional traineeship, which represents 10% of the sample. Of these, 25 nurses were still working in these conditions at the time they responded to the questionnaire.

The questions about this issue were based on the legal requirements for traineeship promoted by the National Institute for Employment and Professional Training, including the definition: of a tutor, training objectives and training plans.

In what regards to tutoring, 85% of the nurses took the stage under the supervision of a nurse; while 5% said that the tutor was from other profession; and 10% had no supervision.

Regarding the definition of training objectives, 83% indicated that they were set at the beginning. The remaining indicated that there were no objectives set or that they were unaware of them.

In what respects to the training plan, 33% of the nurses said they had no formal training session included in this period; 57% said they have set a training plan with the employer in an early stage, and of these 94% fulfilled it. About 9% of the nurses reported that, although there was no training plan set initially, hours for training were included.

2.9. Volunteer work

From the sample, 45 nurses reported to have exercised the profession or still are as volunteer work, which corresponds to 6% of the sample.

The majority of the nurses reported to work as volunteers in transport or emergency ambulances and / or in the Portuguese Red Cross (46%). Other volunteer activities reported were: the involvement in social support associations; youth associations; social services institutions; youth health programs of the Portuguese Institute of Youth; and health screenings. Also referred were the activities of health assistant or similar action and sports massager.

CLOSING NOTE

The professional situation in our country is changing rapidly, particularly in Nursing. The Ordem dos Enfermeiros launched for the first time this study and the information collected confirm the need for regular monitoring of young nurses employability conditions, so we hope to be able to keep this survey every year, thus contributing for a better image of the tendencies in this area.

As already stated by the OE, the increasing time gap between graduation and the beginning of practising have serious repercussions on the maintenance of skills and knowledge. As a result, the induction periods must consider this contingency, contributing to the guarantee of the quality of care.

Similarly, the emergence of discrimination perception by young confirms the pressure to analyse the International Labour Organization document - «Decent work opportunities for young women and men: Overcoming discrimination and disadvantage - Equality in diversity: A dream or a necessity?» - presented at the Global Forum of the organization in Lisbon during the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union.

In this context, the OE cannot stop worrying and raise awareness of this issue, complying with their statutory obligations regarding the protection of the nurses' professional dignity.

Annex 1 - Illustrations

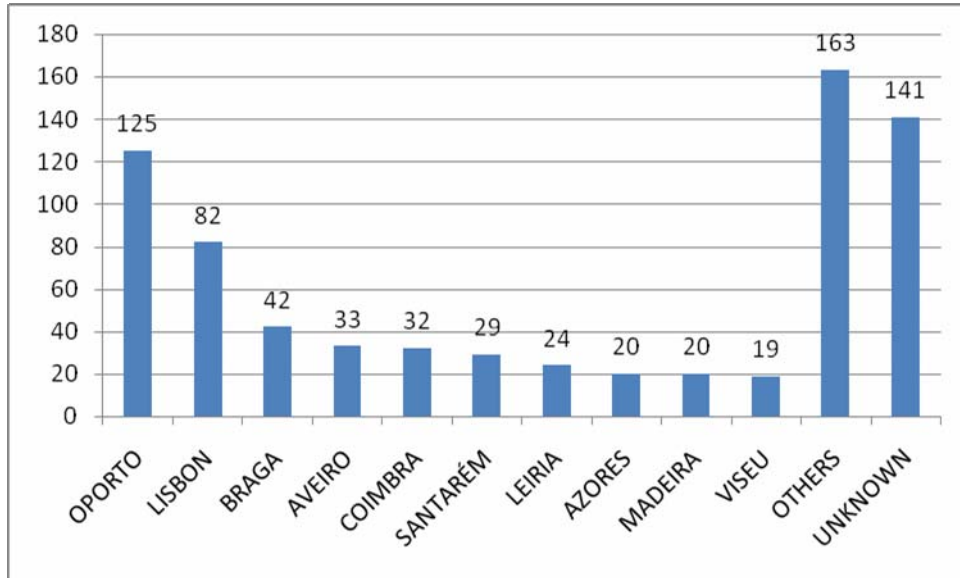


Illustration 1 – Distribution of nurses per district (first 10)

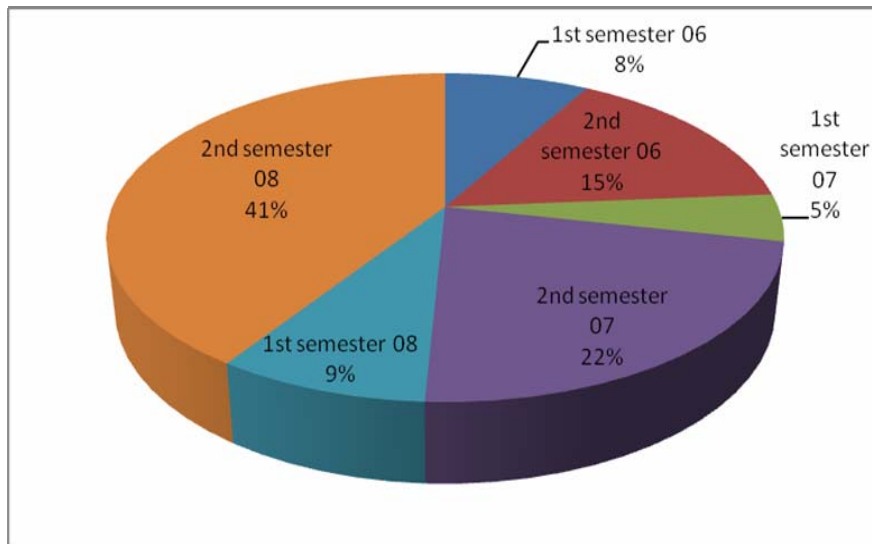


Illustration 2 - Percentage of nurses per semester and graduation year

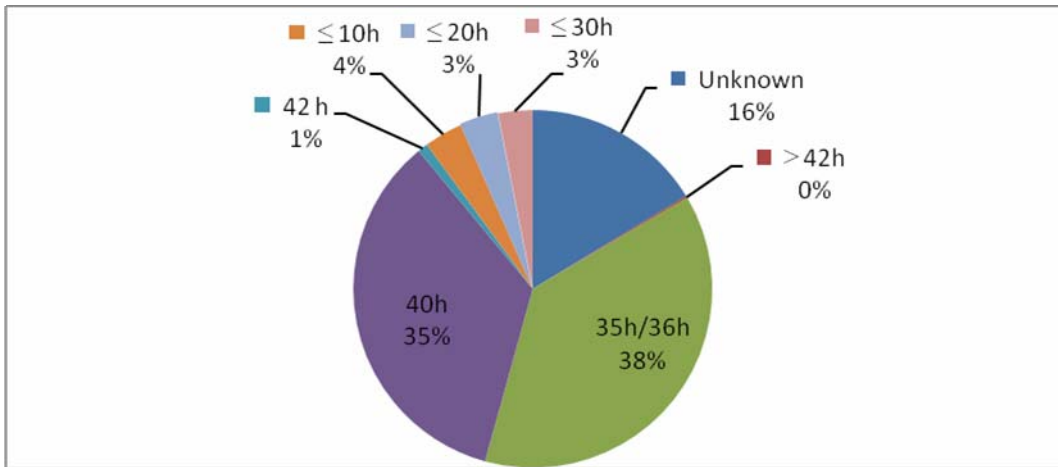


Illustration 3 – Percentage of nurses per working hours contracted

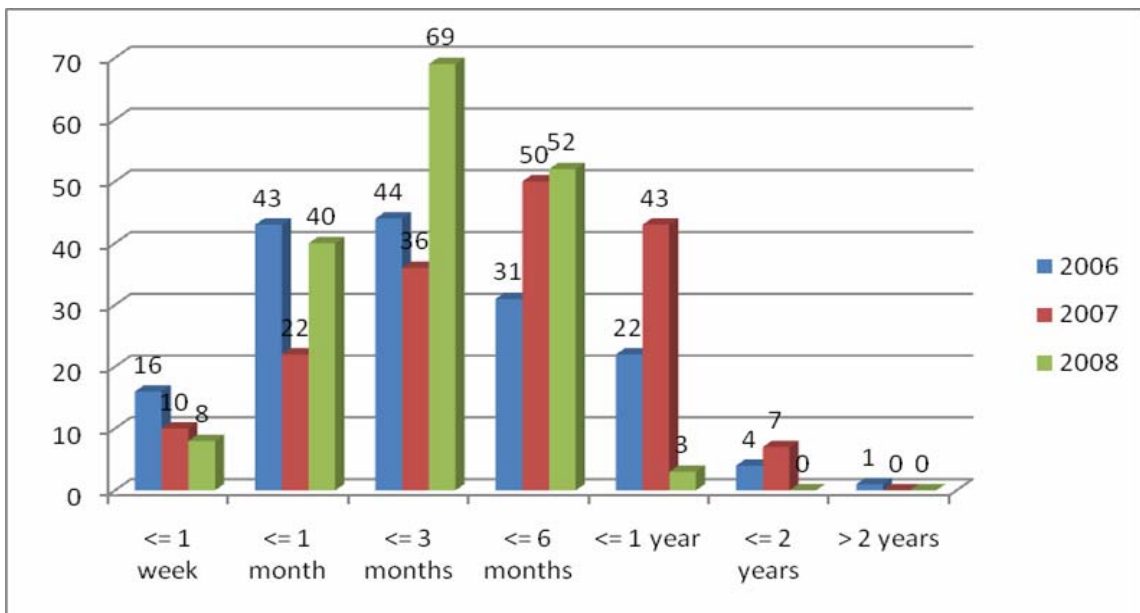


Illustration 4 – Representation of the time elapsed since the end of the Nursing course until the beginning of the professional activity, by year, from 2006 onwards

Annex 2 – Tables

SCHOOL	TOTAL
NURSING SCHOOL OF COIMBRA	48
NURSING SCHOOL OF OPORTO	33
NURSING SCHOOL OF SANTARÉM	30
NURSING SCHOOL OF LISBON - CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN	25
NURSING SCHOOL OF S. JOSÉ CLUNY	22
INSTITUTE OF HEALTH ALTO AVE	22
SCHOOL OF HEALTH OF LEIRIA	21
SCHOOL OF HEALTH JEAN PIAGET-UISEU	20
NURSING SCHOOL OF LISBON - ARTUR RAVARA	20
NURSING SCHOOL OF VIANA CASTELO	20
REMAINING	469
TOTAL	730

Table 1 – Distribution of nurses by the schools of graduation

REGION	Total	Working as nurse	% working as nurse	Unemployed	% unemployed
North	171	108	63%	54	32%
Centre	147	112	76%	21	14%
South	187	148	79%	34	18%
TOTAL 1	505	368	73%	109	22%
Azores and Madeira or unknown region	172	123	72%	45	26%
TOTAL 2	677	491	73%	154	23%

Table 2 – Distribution of the practising of the profession per regions (The replies from Azores and Madeira were grouped with the elements from the unknown region due to the reduced number of replies)

REASON	TOTAL
Offer occurred during graduation	1
High associated expenses	4
Employer withdrew the proposal	3
Excluded due to lack of own car	1
Lack document	1
Job implied activities outside nursing	5
It meant moving out of the area of residence	1
Implied emigration	4
I was occupied at the time	3
No contract	1
Poor working conditions, including lack of stability	13
Health reasons	2
Did not want to work without support from senior colleague	1
High number of working hours	4
Job offer implied unpaid internship	6
Low paid job	19
No remuneration	2
TOTAL	71

Table 3 – Distribution by reason to refuse job offer

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TYPE OF CONTRACT	NUMBER OF NURSES
Fixed-term contract	233
Permanent contract	160
Tie to the public service	14
Provision of services (freelance worker receipts)	97
Professional non-remunerated training	5
Professional remunerated training	20
Voluntary work	9
Others	6
Unemployed or Does not reply	198
TOTAL	742

Table 4 – Distribution of the contractual figure of the nurses practising Nursing

PERIOD OF TIME	PERCENTAGE	ACCUMULATED
Up to 1 week	6.50%	6.50%
Up to 1 month	20.10%	26.60%
Up to 3 months	29.40%	56%
Up to 6 months	26.80%	82.80%
Up to 1 year	13.50%	96.30%
Up to 2 years	2.10%	98.40%
More than 2 years	0.20%	98.60%

Table 5 - Distribution in terms of percentage of the time elapsed since the end of the Nursing course to the beginning of the professional activity

REQUIREMENTS	TOTAL
Residence or have been born in this institution's region of influence	236
Have professional experience as a nurse	229
Have carried out clinical learning in the health institution	179
To be graduated by a specific Health/Nursing School	42
Have carried out a training outside the academic scope in this institution	11
Secondary school grade completion certificate	8
To know someone inside the institution	5
Graduation mark above a certain value	5
Requirements needed to work outside Portugal	5
Have specific courses/qualifications in certain areas	5
Driving license	3
Have experience in a certain area of care	3
Sign an exclusive contract	1
Capacity to bring clients to the institution	1
Permanent training	1
This should be the first job	1
Have family/friends/boyfriend/girlfriend in the institution's area of influence	1
Own a car	1
TOTAL	737

Table 6 – Requirements requested by employers to nurses to allow access to the job

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ADMINISTRATIVE	
Refusal of the nurse curriculum or information that it would be thrown into waste	24
Disrespectful conversation, lack of education or arrogance	11
To make fun of the nurse or his/her situation	6
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	3
Unspecified	28
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	91

Table 7 – Top five references of discrimination from administrative staff and number of nurses who referred it.

NURSE DIRECTOR	
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	9
Exclusion of job opportunity due to lack of professional experience	8
Refusal of the nurse curriculum or information that it would be thrown into waste	7
Dishonourable job offer or job activity	6
Unspecified	14
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	65

Table 8 - Top five references of discrimination from a nurse director and number of nurses who referred it.

NURSE WITH RESPONSIBILITIES IN AN HEALTH INSTITUTION	
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	7
Disrespectful conversation, lack of education, arrogance	5
To make fun of the nurse or his/her situation	2
Suggestion to emigrate or to keep emigrated	1
Unspecified	12
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	35

Table 9 - Top five references of discrimination from a nurse with responsibilities in an health institution and number of nurses who referred it.

OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONAL	
Dishonourable job offer or job activity	4
Immoral remuneration offer	3
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	2
Exclusion of job opportunity due to lack of professional experience	1
Unspecified	14
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	25

Table 10 - Top five references of discrimination from another health professional with responsibilities in an health institution and number of nurses who referred it.

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SECURITY STAFF OR DOORKEEPER	
To make fun of the nurse or his/her situation	3
Disrespectful conversation, lack of education, arrogance	3
Refusal of the nurse curriculum or information that it would be thrown into waste	2
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	1
Unspecified	11
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	21

Table 11 - Top five references of discrimination from security staff or doorkeepers from an health institution and number of nurses who referred it.

BOARD PRESIDENT OR DIRECTOR OF HEALTH INSTITUTION	
Dishonourable job offer or job activity	4
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	2
Sexual harassment	1
Exclusion of job opportunity due to lack of professional experience	1
Unspecified	3
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	12

Table 12 - Top five references of discrimination from the board president or a director of an health institution and number of nurses who referred it.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION JURY	
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	4
Unclear criteria for admission and lack of transparency of the procedures	1
Request for secondary school certificate to higher education graduates	1
To make fun of the nurse or his/her situation	1
Disrespectful conversation, lack of education, arrogance	1
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	8

Table 13 - Top five references of discrimination from an evaluation jury of an health institution and number of nurses who referred it.

UNSPECIFIED AUTHOR	
Exclusion of job opportunity due to lack of professional experience	13
Unclear criteria for admission and lack of transparency of the procedures	7
Unfair exclusion of job or perception of corruption	6
To make fun of the nurse or his/her situation	6
Dishonourable job offer or job activity	3
TOTAL OF REFERENCES	52

Table 14 - Top five references of discrimination from unspecified author and number of nurses who referred it.

Annex 3 – Glossary

The original of this document is written in Portuguese and despite all efforts to use the appropriate English words and expressions we are aware that it is quite difficult to convey in English the real meaning of some situations that are strongly influenced by local culture, habits and language. This is the reason why we decided to include this glossary. We hope that it will help all the readers to better understand the situations. If any doubt remains, do not hesitate in contacting us to gri@ordemenfermeiros.pt

Contracts

Fixed-term contract – An employment contract that ends in specified date fixed in the contract. Generally the workers have the same minimum rights of the permanent workers, except for progression in career (that doesn't occur).

Permanent contract – An open-ended employment a contract, that can only be lawfully terminated in certain circumstances, including resignation, retirement, ill-health or gross misconduct. In some public services also doesn't allow progression.

Tie to the public service - An open-ended employment a contract directly with the State, with more rights to the worker. Includes a stronger social and health security as well as a determined career development.

Provision of services (freelance worker receipts) – A worker regime that doesn't require a hierarchical relationship nor social security. It's use generally for providing specific services. Even so, in some cases the institution use this type of labor relationship for financial and management reasons, due to the high flexibility it allows, and the lack of professional stability.

Professional traineeship - refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement, includes observations or practical work after the University graduation.

Training plan – refers to the definition of an education/training contract between the nurse and the employer that includes a specific number of hours for formal professional education included in the traineeship.

Volunteer work – refers to the practice of working on behalf of others without being motivated by financial or material gain. Sometimes done to gain or maintain professional skills.