

Motivations, Values, and Emotions among Nursing Students Volunteering in an Emergency: Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare personnel absenteeism increased. Hospitals called on students to volunteer. This study aimed to a) examine the motivations and experiences of nursing students in their volunteering during the pandemic and b) propose a model for developing a volunteer program for students in emergencies.

Methods: In this qualitative study, 20 nursing students who volunteered at a hospital during the pandemic underwent an in-depth interview.

Results: Personal and professional values contributed to the student's participation. Most students stated that the value of volunteering was rooted in their social and family background and perceived it as a valuable and meaningful experience expressing the essence of nursing. The academic environment positively affected their decision to volunteer.

Conclusions: Student volunteering uniquely contributes to their professional and personal development. The value of volunteering must be taught as part of shaping the professional identity of an academic nurse.

Keywords: volunteering, nursing students, nursing education, emergencies, hospital

This paper adds:

- The value of volunteering stemmed from their social and family background.
- The academic environment positively affected the decision to volunteer.
- Students saw it as a valuable and meaningful experience expressing the essence of nursing
- This study emphasizes integrating volunteer projects into nursing studies to develop a professional identity and empower students in emergencies

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering has a significant social value that represents good citizenship. Volunteering is an individual's behavior towards another without expecting a return, a situation in which the volunteer contributes his time for

the benefit of society (Mykletun & Himanen, 2016; Omoto & Snyder, 2016; Wilson, 2012). Young people volunteer for different motives and benefits. A significant motivator for young people is the opportunity to gain work-related experience, skills, and qualifications that can help them in their education and careers (Eley, 2003). "To learn new skills" was the second most important reason for volunteering among the 16-to 24-year-old participants from the U.K. More than half of 15-to 19-year-olds in Canada said they had volunteered to improve their job opportunities (Byrne et al., 2021).

Volunteering brings outcomes, or impacts, for students, communities, education institutions, and employers (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). Astin and Sax (1998) found that volunteering can enhance students' academic and personal skills development and sense of civic responsibility. Benefits were also associated with career choice and employability after graduation. Instrumental motives and benefits - such as career development - dominate the volunteering discourse as students recognize the need to build their capital (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). A national study among university students in England found that respondents gave altruistic and instrumental reasons for volunteering (Holdsworth, 2010). The most important reasons for volunteering were as follows: to help someone in their community, to learn new skills, to respond to their needs or skills, and to help gain experience to benefit their future career.

Ghose and Kassam (2014) examined volunteering among 596 Indian college students. They identified three types of volunteering: formal volunteering in non-profit agencies, informal volunteering outside these agencies, and hybrid volunteering consisting of volunteering informally in non-profit agencies. Structural and individual-level factors influenced volunteering. Altruism was associated with volunteering in all three sectors but did not influence volunteering frequency. Parents, friends, and the internet were significant sources of information that encouraged volunteering.

Smith et al. (2010) reported high volunteerism among students across the sampled universities in five countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This finding is positive for educational institutions and governments that seek to encourage volunteerism by students and young people. Campus-based volunteering can be a route to volunteering. However, encouraging activities off-campus suggests creating partnerships with local nonprofit organizations and volunteer resource centers to develop existing university-community relationships further. An international study among students from 13 countries reported that Israelis volunteer less than students worldwide but volunteer weekly and donate more money than others. Israeli students were found to volunteer mainly for public organizations, community organizations, and child support organizations. Their motivations and benefits were represented by satisfaction and recognition, but they did not perceive volunteering as a career opportunity (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008). Another study found that Israeli ultra-Orthodox nursing students had a positive volunteering experience in general, which affected their professional identity with feelings of satisfaction and inspiration (Or, 2020).

Governments regard student volunteering as essential to perpetuate an engaged civil society (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008). However, students face several barriers, such as the rising costs of education and the need to undertake more paid work, thus reducing the time available to volunteer (Evans & Saxton, 2005). Some young people also have a negative perception of volunteering as "not cool," "boring," and time-consuming, based on stereotypical views of volunteering (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2008).

Covid-19 pandemic is a touchstone for volunteering

The COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide in 2020. The pandemic proceeded in Israel in five waves while the fifth wave (2021) had a significant morbidity and mortality rate. The spread of the Omicron (B.1.1.529) coronavirus variant rapidly increased healthcare worker (HCP) absenteeism (El-Sadr & Shea, 2022), which exacerbated the already severe pressure due to nursing staff shortages and increasing hospital admissions due to COVID-19 (Gareth, 2022). During the fifth wave of the epidemic, the number of confirmed cases and isolated medical staff was the highest among all waves (Ministry of Health, 01.2022) and was about 30% of all staff members in all health professions.

Considering the HCP reinforcement needs during the pandemic, some countries and medical organizations have relied on a volunteer workforce of health professions students (Tran et al., 2021). In the U.S.A., many

national organizations, such as the American Association of Intensive Care Nurses, have created educational materials for the treatment of patients with COVID-19, and have written guiding documents for integrating nursing students, new graduates, and retired nurses into the workforce (Health Impact, 2021).

In contrast, others enforce policies to limit students' involvement in medical practices based on the approach that students are not essential healthcare workers, their role is unclear without defined responsibilities, and their professional training is required to continue as planned, especially among final year students (O'Byrne, Gavin, & McNicholas, 2020). A study among nursing students demonstrated a high willingness to be involved in the COVID-19 pandemic (74.2%), while most of them (65.3%) did not feel prepared to be involved with these patients (Cervera-Gasch, González-Chordá; Mena-Tudela, 2020).

A shortage of personnel created difficulties in the operation of the general hospital in southern Israel. The nursing management of this hospital initiated an appeal to the Nursing Department at the close Academic College to receive voluntary assistance and support from the nursing students. After receiving relevant approvals, a call was issued for students from second to four years to volunteer and help the nursing staff at the hospital during these difficult times of dealing with the pandemic. The students' responsiveness was high despite the semester break and the burdens of the exam period.

We did not find studies that examined students' motivations to volunteer in an emergency. A good understanding of the motivations and benefits of this type of volunteering may serve as a basis for planning to deal with future pandemics or major emergencies. Therefore, the aims of the study were: a) to examine the motivations and experiences of the nursing students in their volunteering at a large public hospital in southern Israel during the Covid-19 pandemic, and b) to propose a future model for developing a volunteer program among students in emergencies and pandemics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and participants

In this qualitative study, the data were collected from 20 nursing students, who volunteered in a general hospital during the fifth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, in January-February 2022. The background characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. The volunteers were between the ages of 25-35; about half (11) were married, all in their last year of studies, 17 (85%) of them had volunteered in the past. The students underwent personal semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted by experienced interviewers external to the nursing sector (women, and social workers). There were no managerial or academic relationships between the interviewees and the interviewer. The interviews lasted about 30-45 minutes. They were conducted according to a uniform outline addressing: a) background (personal details and voluntary in the past), b) motivations for volunteering, c) experiences from volunteering, and d) challenges and suggestions for improvement. The outline for conducting an interview was created by the authors and was validated by three experts in qualitative research.

Procedure

Data collection began after receiving ethical approval. All study participants were invited to participate voluntarily by email.

The interviews included questions on topics related to the participants' volunteering, for example, whether you had volunteered in the past, what were the factors that encouraged you to volunteer, and what was the reaction of your family and social environment to your volunteering.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants received an explanation of the research objectives and confirmed their consent in writing. The data were transcribed at the end of the interview.

Ethical considerations

The Ashkelon Academic College Ethics Committee approved the study (Approval #028, 02.03.2022). The students were explained the purpose of the study, participation was voluntary. Before each interview, the students gave informed consent and the information that they could stop their participation in the research at any moment and this would not affect the continuation of their studies in any way. Each participant received a participation number, and the names of the students were recorded only with initials to avoid identification and bias of the findings.

To reduce any possible bias, the interviews were conducted by a third party who did not know the participants and had no academic connections to teaching or guidance in general and within the framework of studies in particular. It is worth noting that the interviewer did not influence the participants' responses due to a lack of familiarity with them.

Data analysis

The content analysis was carried out using the Constant Comparative Analysis method by classifying the findings into content worlds, which were repeated in the words of the interviewees. The content was classified into themes, which were into main categories that served as a basis for the processing of the data. This method allows the researchers a wide range of expression for their experiences, feelings, and thoughts (Bryman, 2012). The data processing was based on behavioral theories - Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the Role Theory (Merton, 1957; Biddle, 1986). Nurses assume their position through government policy, professional development, and social attitudes. Merton's role theory (1957) presents the way people behave in different social situations and how external factors relate to these behaviors (Brookes et al., 2007). The findings, the division into themes, and the categories were validated by a third researcher in a strict, precise, and logical manner. The researchers discussed the issues or doubts that were raised during the validation process.

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed three main themes (motivations, professional pride and values, and emotions and feelings), divided into nine categories (three per theme) (Table 2).

Theme 1: Motivations

The motives that brought students to volunteering were reported while three main elements (categories) were identified: a) volunteering in the past, b) socialization for the profession, and c) socialization for the group of students.

For example, about volunteering in the past, as stated by interviewee #1: *"I volunteered in high school as part of a personal commitment"* and interviewee #3, *"I previously volunteered at an organization for families affected by terrorism"*. Student #12 indicated: *"It was important for me to volunteer, I live in such an atmosphere of giving and contributing to society, I volunteered at an association for children at risk"*, and #17 indicated: *"Back in the youth movements I taught giving and volunteering and I volunteered at an institution that takes care of older people"*.

It was also found that the participants expressed their willingness to volunteer due to a sense of belonging to the profession and belonging to the group of students. *"I felt it was my duty".... "As if they were talking about a medical team in the media and I felt I was with them"...., "That's why I came to study to be part of it, so here I am part of something big. I didn't have a single moment when I wondered if I should do it"* (#1). *"I saw how other students got involved and I decided it was right for me too, it felt the most right to be a significant part of it"*(#17). *"If others are there then of course I am there too"* (#19). The interviewees justified the motivations for volunteering as depending on experience and related to socialization in nursing and belonging to a group as students.

Theme 2: Professional pride and values

Throughout all the interviews, the importance of professional pride and expression of personal values of helping others and mobilizing for a common goal of promoting public health stood out. The most prominent finding presented by most interviewees was a sense of professional and personal pride they felt following their inclusion in the work of nursing teams. *"I was proud to be part of the nursing team"* (#14) and *"It fills me with pride to know that I made it a little easier for the exhausted team"* (#15).

Another prominent value that emerged from the interviews was the education they received at home and the professional education they were exposed to during nursing studies. As expressed by interviewee #5: *"I volunteered for something, which is much bigger than me. It symbolizes our society, where we support each other, that's how I was raised", "This is something that is instilled in us as nursing students, we have an empathy beyond, a desire to help that may not exist in other professions such as high-tech"... "My family is one of the first to give and help. I come from a family that gives without expecting anything back, so volunteering is a value for me, and it is a part of me"* (#2).

The interviewees reported a willingness to contribute beyond what is required in the curriculum due to the unusual situation they were exposed to, despite being on a semester break that included exams and assignments. The desire to contribute and volunteer stemmed from the values they were taught at home and based on the professional values they received as part of the nursing curriculum. According to the students, this volunteering led to a sense of personal and professional pride and the understanding that they had chosen the right profession.

Theme 3: Emotions and feelings

Controversial findings were revealed when the interview addressed emotional reactions surrounding volunteering. Different and even conflicting feelings arose. The participants stated that they felt empowered because of being included as part of the nursing teams in the various departments. At the same time, they stated that they felt frustrated since they were only sometimes allowed to exercise their clinical abilities. The opportunity to be part of a multi-professional team and the achievement of the goals that were set for them during the volunteering period evoked a feeling of personal and professional empowerment that was reflected in the statements such as *"I felt that I was contributing and I was proud of myself, a feeling that I was significant today"* (#11) or *"I felt useful and independence"* (#7).

Volunteering in different nursing frameworks taught the students that they can contribute to the patients at different levels of care, such as accompaniment, explanation, training, and support. In addition, the students stated that just being part of the team gave them a sense of belonging and sharing. All of these contributed to the feeling of competence and led to the empowerment of the student. *"My conversation with people had meaning, they thanked me, I was patient and pleasant, and they felt that there was sensitivity and intention on my part". "In a conversation with a lonely elderly woman I felt that I was there for her, and it was very significant for me"* (#12), and *"I felt that I was part of the nursing team"* (#18).

Along with empowering experiences, some of the participants expressed frustration due to their desire to be significantly more involved in the nursing practice, which was not always possible due to the system's constraints. From the students' point of view, sometimes the high motivation does not come to a practical expression. *"There was a feeling of frustration because I am a student, I did my best, but I wanted to do more"* (#2) or, *"They asked me to do things of the beginning of studies when I was already in the fourth year"* (#3). The complex medical conditions, the fears of getting infected, and the frequent encounters with disease created negative feelings that accompany these situations. The pressures at work and the emotional reactions of staff during illnesses added to the emotional burden. Feelings of anxiety arose among some participants due to the uncertainty regarding the goals of volunteering and the expectations of the teams. The students feared they would not meet expectations and could not complete the assigned tasks: *"I was afraid - like what if they ask me something and I don't know"* (#1). Another student #11 indicated: *"I was afraid of the reaction of the patients who would ask me to help them with something I'm not allowed to do, and I wouldn't know how to deal with"*

it". Student # 5 indicated: "I was worried that I didn't have enough knowledge and wouldn't be able to volunteer optimally".

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the students' motivations, barriers, and personal experiences to volunteer at a general public hospital in the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study's findings are consistent with the literature that claims that students who volunteered during COVID-19 justified their behavior out of a sense of wanting to contribute to the community, self-efficacy beliefs, and learning new and strengthening existing skills. It was reported that these qualities made them feel personally and professionally empowered (Byrne et al., 2021; Ghose & Kassam, 2014).

Volunteering is a behavior that requires continuity and commitment. This study found that motivation, experience, and characterizations of voluntary activity form the basis of the individual's desire to continue or stop volunteering. Behnia (2021) claims that motivation affects the individual's commitment to volunteering out of altruistic motives and the realization of personal interests and goals, such as the desire to help others, a sense of contribution to the community, and learning new skills. Or & Gon (2020) claimed that the volunteering and involvement of ultra-Orthodox nursing students in the community was seen as a meaningful positive experience of giving and a significant contribution to society and their professional development. As part of academic nursing studies, students volunteered during their studies as part of the curriculum in a supportive community project. This program, which originates from the values of giving and social commitment, was reflected in the student's behavior even during the current pandemic.

The research also found that many students volunteered not only because of the values and education they received from home but also because of the feeling of belonging to the students' community and their belonging to the nursing department of the College. Social identity theory claims that people who associate themselves with a social group tend to behave similarly among group members and even feel more committed to the group than people not defined as belonging. This behavior is based on values, a code of ethics, and beliefs. The more the individual feels belonging to a specific group, the higher his commitment to behavior according to the group's codes will be (Behnia, 2021).

The report of the Committee on the Future of Volunteering and the Manifesto for Change (2008) claimed that volunteering is based on altruistic motives among young people and is seen as an empowering positive behavior that contributes to personal development. The main question that arose was how to direct the group of young people who are in the minority in their negative perception of volunteering to harness them and encourage them to volunteer. The study's findings indicated that most students who volunteered felt that volunteering contributed to them personally and professionally. At the same time, it was found that a minority of the participants stated that volunteering did not contribute to them, and they felt bored and wasted their time. This can be explained by the field, in which they volunteered, which did not manifest the professional ability they acquired as part of their studies.

This study's findings demonstrated that all volunteering program participants were 25-35 years old. Their motivation for volunteering was to learn new skills and to improve the skills they were already learning with the support of their academic curriculum. These findings are supported by studies conducted on volunteering among young people aged 16-24 that motivation for volunteering was learning new skills and a personal contribution for them as well as a contribution to the institution and society (Holdsworth, 2010; Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010; Smith et al., 2010; Elay, 2003; Austin 1998). In addition, Ghose and Kassam (2014) indicated there is a positive effect on the desire to volunteer under the influence of parents, social media, and friends. Similarly, concerning experience and the educational milieu, the findings of our study showed that an educational environment and values from home were significant motivating factors to participate in the current volunteering project.

Following students' positive feedback, as reflected in the quotes, we see great importance in creating a model that directs the teaching staff to create similar projects. The model in Figure 1 shows that the student's response to volunteering must be assessed. This will include conducting surveys or focus groups to collect data on the

types of volunteer activities in which nursing students currently participate, the barriers they face to volunteering, and the benefits they perceive from volunteering. Based on the data collected, it will be possible to identify areas where nursing students could benefit from additional support or resources to increase their volunteer participation. For example, addressing logistical barriers such as transportation or scheduling conflicts or providing training and education on how to find volunteer opportunities and get the most out of the experience. To increase the availability of volunteer opportunities, it is essential to create partnerships with community organizations that can offer meaningful and engaging experiences, such as hospitals, clinics, schools, nursing homes, or other health organizations. The next step will involve the preparation of a framework for volunteer engagement to ensure that nursing students can get the most out of their volunteer experiences. This can be done by creating guidelines for choosing suitable volunteering opportunities, providing training and support, and establishing a system to monitor volunteer hours and recognize student achievements. Finally, it is crucial to promote the benefits of volunteering among nursing students, both in terms of their impact on the community and the personal and professional growth they can experience through volunteering. This can be done by hosting information sessions or providing opportunities for nursing students to share their volunteer experiences.

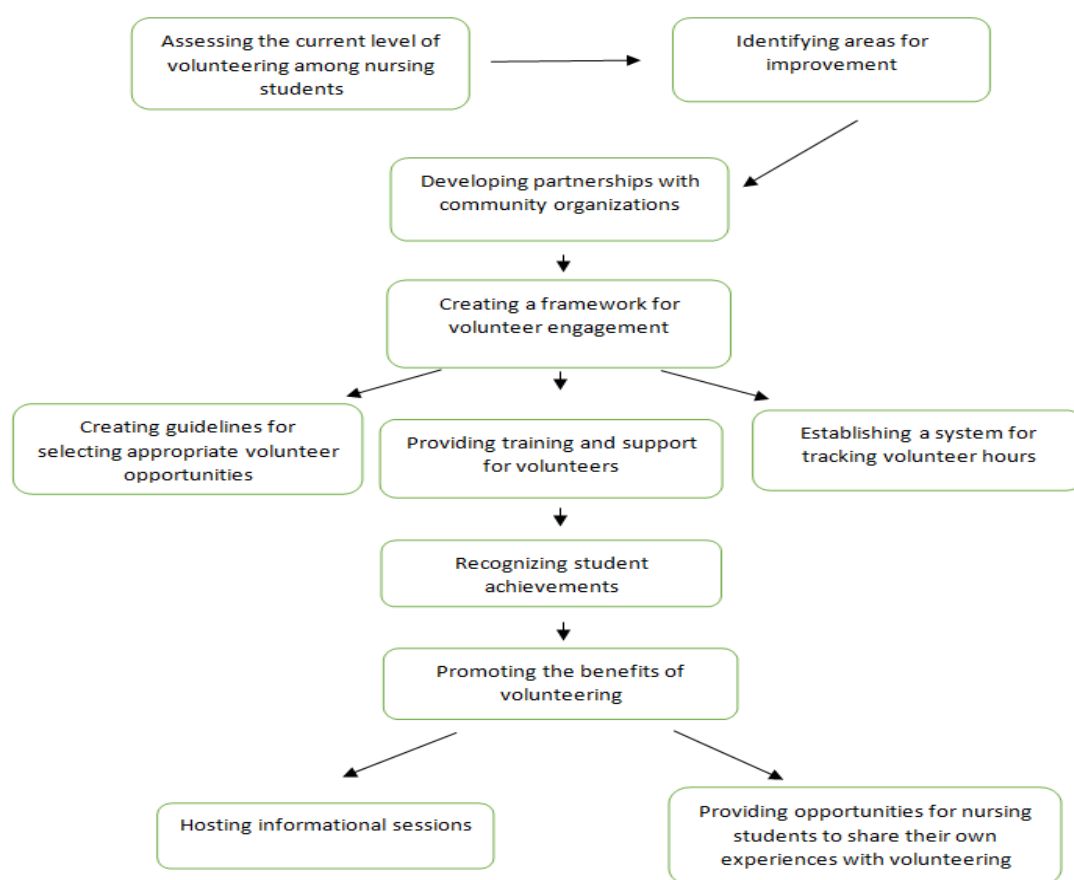


Figure 1: A model for integrating programs to strengthen volunteering among nursing students

We offer a volunteer model so that in the second year after completing the curriculum, students can volunteer in various institutions and organizations such as nursing homes for the elderly in the community, and this was indeed a success. The students expressed a desire to participate in this program. The social volunteer model includes:

The model will consist of 10 biweekly meetings in various organizations, including elderly nursing homes, and a population with special needs. As part of the proposed program, students will receive tools to deal with this population. Students will also receive support and guidance from licensed clinical instructors.

To conclude, this model aims to create a supportive and engaging environment that encourages nursing students to volunteer and helps them build the skills and knowledge they need to become effective healthcare

providers. By collaborating with community organizations and providing targeted support to nursing students, this model can help create a culture of volunteerism that benefits both students and the community. Since this study was carried out on a small group of participants and one project, there is room to conduct additional studies and expand the number of projects and participants to arrive at an established model that will suit the needs of the population and the students' study stage.

Despite the positive findings regarding volunteering, we also found barriers expressed by the participants, such as fear of exposure to infectious diseases, that they would not be clinically prepared to provide an appropriate response, and that the training is still insufficient, although these barriers were raised, the study presented significant positive data regarding the desire to volunteer.

CONCLUSIONS

This study emphasizes integrating volunteer projects into nursing studies to develop a professional identity and empower students in emergencies. The research findings emphasize the importance of the activity of the teaching staff in creating possibilities and availability for volunteering in the community while supporting an academic envelope for this activity. We recommend introducing volunteering and social involvement programs into the core nursing education program and contacting relevant parties in the community to create a joint volunteering program. Volunteering for nursing students increases their ability to identify the population's needs and improves their learning experience.

Additionally, conducting follow-up research on the impact of volunteering on academic achievement and clinical training can provide in-depth insights for developing academic teaching programs.

Declarations

Manuscript type: Original research paper

Declarations of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval: The Ashkelon Academic College Ethics Committee approved the study (Approval #028, 02.03.2022). The students were explained the purpose of the study, participation was voluntary. Before each interview, the students gave informed consent and the information that they could stop their participation in the research at any moment and this would not affect the continuation of their studies in any way. Each participant received a participation number, and the students' names were recorded only with initials to avoid identification and bias of the findings.

Authorship: We confirm that all authors meet the criteria of substantial contribution to all the following: (1) the conception and design of the study, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data, (2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, (3) final approval of the version to be submitted.

Author contribution (CRediT roles): Conceptualization - RS, BT, IK; Data curation - RS, BT, HBC; Formal analysis - RS, BT, HBC; Methodology; Project administration - IA, SSC, RS; Resources - IA, SSC; Supervision - IK; Validation - RS, BT, IK; Writing - original draft - RS, BT, HBC; and Writing - review & editing - IK, SSC, IA

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Reporting guidelines: COREQ reporting guidelines were used

Data availability statement: The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author [IK], upon reasonable request.

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Table 1: Personal characteristics of the participants (n = 20)

| Num. | Gender | Age | Family Status | Volunteering department | Covid-19 morbidity | Volunteering in the past | Learning year | Residence |
|------|--------|-----|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Female | 25 | Married | Maternity | Yes | Yes | IV | Ashqelon |
| 2 | Female | 26 | Single | Children's emergency room | Yes | Yes | IV | Ashdod |
| 3 | Female | 32 | Married | Adult emergency room | Yes | Yes | IV | Ashqelon |
| 4 | Male | 32 | Married | Adult emergency room | No | No | IV | Bitsaron |
| 5 | Female | 25 | Married | Adult emergency room | No | Yes | IV | Sansana |
| 6 | Female | 25 | Single | Maternity | No | Yes | II | Qiryat gat |
| 7 | Male | 26 | Single | Corona center department | No | No | II | Ashqelon |
| 8 | Female | 25 | Single | Maternity | No | Yes | IV | Ashdod |
| 9 | Male | 26 | Single | Internal department | No | Yes | IV | Rishon le Tzion |
| 10 | Female | 26 | Married | Adult emergency room | Yes | Yes | IV | Ashdod |
| 11 | Female | 25 | Single | Internal department | No | Yes | IV | Bear Sheva |
| 12 | Female | 31 | Married | Corona department | Yes | Yes | II | Ashqelon |
| 13 | Female | 28 | Married | Children's Department | Yes | Yes | IV | Rechovot |
| 14 | Female | 27 | Married | Delivery room | No | Yes | IV | Shomerya |
| 15 | Male | 33 | Married | Adult emergency room | Yes | Yes | IV | Netivot |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------|----|---------|---------------------------|-----|-----|----|----------------|
| 16 | Male | 30 | Married | Children's emergency room | No | Yes | IV | Ashqelon |
| 17 | Female | 35 | Married | Corona department | yes | Yes | II | Ashdod |
| 18 | Female | 27 | Single | Adult emergency room | No | Yes | IV | Beer Sheva |
| 19 | Female | 27 | Married | Maternity | yes | Yes | IV | Sderot |
| 20 | Male | 29 | Married | Adult emergency room | No | No | IV | Qiryat Malachi |

Table 2: Themes and categories

| Themes | Categories | Quote (example) |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Motivations | Volunteering in the past | "I previously volunteered in the youth movement of Bnei Akiva" (# 19) |
| | Socialization for the profession | "This is something that is instilled in us as nursing students, we have an empathy beyond, a desire to help that may not exist in other professions such as high-tech" (# 2). |
| | Socialization for the group of students | "I felt like I was part of a national elite group that helps his country" (# 12) |
| Professional pride and values | Pride | "I felt that I was contributing and I was proud of myself, a feeling that I was significant today" (# 11) |
| | Education from home | "I come from a home that supports and helps. My mother always volunteered" (# 9). |
| | Professional Education | "To me, this is the college's education, an ideology that sees students as an integral part of the experience and volunteering" (# 11). |
| Emotions and feelings | Frustration | "On one hand, you contribute to feeling professional, but on the other hand, you understand how hard you work and are not appreciated because you want to do more" (#20). |
| | Empowerment | "An excellent learning experience strengthened me emotionally" (# 9). |
| | Anxiety | "I was assigned to the children's Department and at first I was very afraid" (# 13). |