

Career Aspirations and Challenges Among Final-Year Nursing Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

This study explores the career aspirations and challenges experienced by final-year nursing students, aiming to identify the influencing factors behind their professional goals and the obstacles that hinder their career planning. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design, data were collected from 120 final-year nursing students across three colleges using a structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that while 78% of students aspired to clinical roles, a significant number expressed interest in further studies, research, or international opportunities. Major challenges identified included lack of mentorship, job insecurity, and fear of workplace violence. The study highlights the need for institutional support, career counselling, and policy reforms to address these issues and guide students toward fulfilling career paths.

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I. Introduction

Nursing is not only a profession but a calling that demands knowledge, skill, compassion, and resilience. Final-year nursing students stand at a crucial juncture, transitioning from academic life to professional practice. Their career aspirations are influenced by various factors including personal interests, clinical exposure, perceived job security, societal expectations, and mentorship.

Despite their enthusiasm and academic preparation, many students face uncertainty and psychological stress due to a lack of structured career guidance and real-world readiness. These challenges can dilute motivation and contribute to attrition from the nursing workforce. The present study seeks to assess these aspirations and barriers among nursing students to inform institutional and policy-level interventions.

II. Review of Literature

Studies indicate that nursing students commonly prefer clinical roles, especially in intensive care and emergency settings (James & Smith, 2021). A considerable number also consider postgraduate studies, global migration, and academia (Ali & Thomas, 2020). Challenges such as inadequate salary, burnout, and safety concerns hinder commitment (Kumar et al., 2022). Patel and George (2023) highlight the impact of poor mentorship and emotional fatigue on students' career decisions. Therefore, it is critical to identify both aspirations and challenges in a structured and evidence-based manner.

Objectives

1. To assess the career aspirations of final-year nursing students.
2. To identify the challenges, they face in career planning.
3. To analyse the association between demographic variables and career aspirations.
4. To develop a tool to measure perceived career challenges using a Likert scale.

III. Methodology

Design: Descriptive cross-sectional design

Setting: Three nursing colleges in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Sample: 120 final-year B.Sc. Nursing students

Sampling: Convenient sampling

Tool: Structured questionnaire with 3 sections:

- Demographic Profile
- Career Aspirations Checklist
- 8-item Likert Scale Inventory of Challenges

Likert Scale Items (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree*):

1. I lack clarity on available career options.
2. There is insufficient career guidance from the college.
3. I feel unprepared to work in clinical settings.
4. I fear harassment or violence at work.
5. I feel pressure from family to pursue certain careers.
6. Financial constraints limit my choices.
7. I lack professional role models.
8. I am unsure of opportunities for advancement.

Data Collection: Self-administered survey; consent obtained.

Analysis: SPSS v25 for descriptive statistics and chi-square tests.

IV. Results

Demographics

- Mean age: 21.4 years
- Gender: 88% female, 12% male
- Residence: 72% urban, 28% rural
- Mentorship exposure: 38% had consistent mentorship

Career Aspirations

- Clinical roles (ICU, Emergency): 78%
- Post-graduate studies: 42%
- Working abroad: 38%
- Education/Research: 25%
- Healthcare entrepreneurship: 10%

Challenges (Mean Likert Scores)

- Lack of guidance: 4.2
- Fear of harassment: 4.1
- Financial constraints: 3.9
- Lack of role models: 4.0

Statistical Associations

- Urban students more likely to aspire to overseas jobs ($p < 0.05$)
- Clinical internship increased confidence in clinical roles ($p < 0.01$)
- Mentorship exposure linked to career clarity ($p < 0.05$)

V. Discussion

The majority of students intend to pursue clinical roles, echoing the findings of Musa & Fernandes (2021). However, their ambitions are dampened by a lack of guidance, limited specialty exposure, and systemic challenges such as low pay and workplace hostility. This disconnect between aspiration and preparedness calls for stronger institutional support.

International career aspirations reflect dissatisfaction with domestic prospects. Students need structured exposure, mentorship, and counselling to make informed decisions. Educational leaders must foster career development environments aligned with both student goals and healthcare system needs.

VI. Conclusion

Final-year nursing students are hopeful yet hindered. Their aspirations are high, but the challenges they face—both internal and systemic—require urgent attention. Institutions must step forward to bridge the guidance gap, protect student interests, and nurture future nursing leaders.

VII. Recommendations

1. Create Career Counselling Cells in every nursing college.
2. Introduce structured mentorship programs.
3. Enhance clinical exposure and specialty rotation.

4. Conduct regular surveys to track aspirations and challenges.
5. Develop safety assurance policies for young nurses.
6. Encourage peer-to-peer guidance models.

Ethical Clearance

Approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee. Participation was voluntary with written informed consent.

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