

NURSING STUDENTS' BACKGROUND, CHOICE OF PROFESSION AND PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION

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DESPITE the fact that nurses are increasingly specializing and developing their professional capacities in a multiplicity of ways—their practice is inextricably bound up with the care of sick patients—not much effort is made to identify factors influencing their choice of profession and consequent professional satisfaction. In Great Britain, Christopher Maggs has recently made a mighty good attempt to study the social history of nursing.^{1,2}

In India, as early as 1914, Miss Martin, a nursing teacher, had tried to explore the reasons why higher educated Indian Christian girls did not like to join the nursing profession. She brought out three reasons for their reluctance to join the nursing profession. These were: (1) The idea is still firmly rooted in the mind of all Indians, even the best Christians, that nursing is not an honourable profession.....; (2) The work is hard with long hours and little leisure; the pay is small compared to that of teaching or of a hospital assistant.....; (3) The life is an unprotected one, both in hospital and private wards and parents are not willing that their daughters should meet and mess with all sorts and conditions of people.....”³

An Essay in Neglect

Yet, even today, not much is known about who joins the nursing profession and for what reasons? These are as worth exploring in different parts of the country where nurses are trained to work as full-fledged professional workers.

It seems, right from the beginning, the country's health planners did not pay as much atten-

tion to the problem of nursing profession as was required and expected. Many years ago, when the Bhore Committee⁴ reviewed the health situation in India, it took a rather casual look at the development of the nursing profession. Even the Mudaliar Committee⁵ did not pay much attention to the varied problems of the nursing profession, particularly, those related to the nursing education and their role performance. The Mudaliar Committee report simply stated that “in regard to training of nurses, we agree that the nursing programme outlined by the Trained Nurses Association and Nursing Council is sufficient for the purpose.” But this Committee had emphasized that the duties allotted to the student nurses should be specific and not general.

Present Study

Undoubtedly, different nursing students look at their profession differently. We had, early this year, made a study of 48 nursing students (20 B.Sc. post-basic and 28 B.Sc. (N) third year students basic) to find out from them their reasons for joining the nursing profession and also about their professional satisfaction.

All of these students belong to the Post-graduate Institute's College of Nursing, Chandigarh, which is affiliated to the Punjab University. The College of Nursing started functioning in 1964 with the aim of preparing nursing teachers and ward sisters by offering a two-year B.Sc.(N) Post Basic Programme to the registered nurses and midwives with at least three years bed-side experience and two-year College education. In 1973, a B.Sc.(N) basic programme of three-year duration with nine months internship was launched for those who had premedical qualification and were 17 years old. This was aimed at preparing registered nurses. Presently, 50 students are annual-

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ly admitted for Basic program and 40 for Post Basic B.Sc.(N) program.

It was felt that adequate knowledge about the nursing students' background, choice of profession and professional satisfaction was necessary for reviewing the present training-cum-service programme and also for modifying it to further meet the needs. It hardly needs to be emphasized that if the nursing student is considered the centre of gravity of the nursing profession, she has to be regarded as an active and living factor and not as a passive object. It needs to be recognized that as a thinking being, she has her own ideas about the profession and that she may react in a positive or negative manner, favourably or unfavourably to numerous aspects of the nursing profession.

Age-wise, all of the 28 B.Sc. pre-basic students interviewed by us were below 25 years. But at the same time, the post-basic students were all above 25 years; eight belonging to the age group '26-30'; eight to the age group '31-35' and the remaining four were above 35. As regards their religious background, of the 28 pre-basic students, 20 were Hindus and eight Christians. However, of the post-basic students, 18 were Hindus and two Christians.

As far as occupational background of their fathers was concerned, we found that 21 had their fathers engaged in service; 12 in business; seven in agriculture; and, the remaining eight had retired from service. It was striking to note that only three of them had working mothers—two of whom worked as teachers and one as a nurse. Significantly, in 34 (70.8%) cases, their fathers were educated above high school level. Thus, one could conclude that, by and large, they represented educated families.

Choice of Profession

A review of literature on who joins the nursing profession and for what reasons does not yield any worthwhile information. It is safe to assume that their decision-making to join the profession is influenced by a multiplicity of factors. All of these factors cannot be easily identified.

We had tried to find out from the nursing students their main reason for joining the nursing profession.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF NURSING STUDENTS
ACCORDING TO FATHER'S OCCUPATION AND
MAIN REASON FOR JOINING THE
PROFESSION

Sr. No.	Main reason for joining the profession	Father's occupation				Total
		Agriculture	Business	Service	Others	
1.	Could not get admission in any medical college	3 (21.4)	4 (28.6)	5 (35.6)	2 (14.4)	14 (100.0) (29.2)
2.	Jobs are easily available to nurses	2 (15.4)	2 (15.4)	6 (46.1)	3 (23.1)	13 (100.0) (27.1)
3.	Nurses can easily go abroad	1 (10.0)	1 (10.0)	5 (50.0)	3 (30.0)	10 (100.0) (20.7)
4.	For serving the people	1 (14.4)	3 (42.8)	3 (42.8)	—	7 (100.0) (14.6)
5.	Others	—	2 (50.0)	1 (25.0)	1 (25.0)	4 (100.0) (8.4)
Total		7 (14.6)	12 (25.0)	20 (41.8)	9 (18.6)	48 (100.0) (100.0)

Thus as is shown in Table 1, out of 48 students, 14 (29.2%) had joined the nursing profession only when they had failed to secure admission in a medical college. But at the same time, we learnt that as many as 23 (47.9%) had joined the profession because they saw certain definite advantages. Of these, 13 mentioned that they felt that 'jobs are easily available to nurses' and to (20.1%) mentioned that they felt 'it is easy for the nurses to go abroad'. Only 7 (14.6%) of them mentioned that they had joined the profession from the consideration of serving the people.

Interestingly, of these seven, three represented business families, three service families, and one belonged to an agricultural family. Thus it seems that at the time of joining the nursing profession the factors that weighed heavily with a majority of them were more utilitarian than humanitarian.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF NURSING STUDENTS
ACCORDING TO MAIN REASON FOR JOINING
THE PROFESSION AND HAVING/NOT HAVING A
FAMILY MEMBER IN THE NURSING
PROFESSION

Sr. No.	Main reason for joining the profession	Family Member in the Nursing Profession		Total
		With a family member in the Nursing Profession	Without a family member in the Nursing Profession	
1.	Could not get admission in any medical college	5 (35.6)	9 (64.4)	14 (100.0) (29.2)
2.	Jobs are easily available to nurses	4 (30.8)	9 (69.2)	13 (100.0) (27.1)
3.	Nurses can easily go abroad	8 (80.0)	2 (20.0)	10 (100.0) (20.7)
4.	For serving the people	—	7 (100)	7 (100.0) (14.6)
5.	Others	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)	4 (100.0) (8.4)
Total		19 (39.6)	29 (60.4)	48 (100.0) (100.0)

Incidentally, 19 (39.6%) of them also had a relative working in the nursing profession (Table 2). And of these 19, 12 had joined the profession on the consideration of 'easy job availability' and 'opportunity to go abroad'.

Professional Satisfaction

Whether or not nursing students derive professional satisfaction after having been exposed to theoretical and practical concepts is also a matter of great importance. When we tried to explore this area we found that as many as 30 of them (62.5%) felt that they were professionally satisfied. The remaining 18, who felt that they were dissatisfied professionally, included those 14 who had earlier mentioned that they took to the nursing profession because they had failed to join a medical college.

We had tried to look at this factor of professional satisfaction in relation to their fathers' educational status as well. Interestingly, of the 14 students whose fathers were either illiterate or had studied up to the primary level, only one

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF NURSING STUDENTS
ACCORDING TO FATHER'S EDUCATIONAL
STATUS AND PROFESSIONAL
SATISFACTION

Sr. No.	Professional satisfaction of Nurses	Father's Educational Status				Total
		Illiterate	Upto Primary level	Upto Secondary level	College & above	
1.	Professionally Satisfied	3 (10.0)	10 (33.3)	7 (23.4)	10 (33.3)	30 (100.0) (62.5)
2.	Professionally not Satisfied	1 (5.5)	—	9 (50.0)	8 (45.5)	18 (100.0) (37.5)
Total		4 (8.4)	10 (20.0)	16 (33.3)	18 (37.5)	48 (100.0) (100.0)

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF NURSING STUDENTS
ACCORDING TO MOTHER'S EDUCATIONAL
STATUS AND PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION

Sr. No.	Professional satisfaction of Nurses	Mother's Educational Status				Total
		Illiterate	Upto Primary level	Upto Secondary level	College & above	
1.	Professionally satisfied	7 (23.4)	12 (40.0)	8 (26.6)	3 (10.0)	30 (100.0) (62.5)
2.	Professionally not satisfied	2 (11.1)	6 (33.3)	6 (33.3)	4 (22.3)	18 (100.0) (37.5)
Total		9 (18.7)	18 (37.5)	14 (29.2)	7 (14.6)	48 (100.0) (100.0)

nursing student had expressed lack of professional satisfaction, thus giving us the impression that those representing such families are more likely to feel professionally satisfied (Table 3). A more or less similar pattern emerged when we looked at the relationship of their professional satisfaction in relation to their mothers' educational status (Table 4).

These findings may have some policy implications for the nursing profession, particularly, regarding selection of candidates. Being conscious of the obvious limitation of our sample, we refrain from making any generalization in this regard.

TABLE 5
DISTRIBUTION OF NURSING STUDENTS
ACCORDING TO THEIR MAIN REASON
FOR JOINING THE PROFESSION AND DESIRE
TO SEEK CHANGE OF PROFESSION IN FUTURE

Sr. No.	Main reason for joining the profession	Desire to seek change of Profession			Total
		Do not want to change	Want to change	Undecided	
1.	Could not get admission in any medical college	6 (42.9)	8 (57.1)	—	14 (100.0) (29.2)
2.	Jobs are easily available to nurses	11 (84.6)	2 (15.4)	—	13 (100.0) (27.1)
3.	Nurses can easily go abroad	9 (90.0)	—	1 (10.0)	10 (100.0) (20.7)
4.	For serving the People	6 (85.7)	1 (14.3)	—	7 (100.0) (14.6)
5.	Others	—	1 (10.0)	3 (30.0)	4 (100.0) (8.4)
Total		32 (66.6)	12 (25.0)	4 (8.4)	48 (100.0) (100.0)

When asked whether they would like to change their profession, 12 of them were frank enough to express that they 'want to change'. These included eight of those who had joined the nursing

profession after their failure to secure admission in a medical college. Their dissatisfaction is understandable because their aspirational level was high right from the beginning. Yet the fact remains that the bulk of them (66.6%) had not shown any inclination to seek change of profession (Table 5).

Unchanged image

One obvious conclusion of this study is that most of those who join the nursing profession do so on economic considerations. But this must be true of from other professional too. Yet given the choice, a majority of them would opt for a medical career rather than a nursing career. Somehow, the image of the nursing profession has remained unchanged all these years. Thus a great deal of attention needs to be paid toward improving the living and professional conditions of the nurses. Already the oil-rich Arab countries have absorbed a sizeable proportion of our nursing manpower to meet their health needs. Why not reverse this trend by making their service conditions as attractive as one could possibly hope for in the present situation!

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APPEAL TO LIFE MEMBERS

TNAI has been facing the financial difficulties and is running under deficit due to hike in prices of all goods and high cost of production of Nursing Journal. The association has been supplying the NURSING JOURNAL OF INDIA to its members free as well as meeting all other expenses like affiliations, welfare activities an scholarships etc. without putting any burden on the members.

In its recent meeting, the Council of the TNAI has given a considerable thought to this big problem of meeting the deficit and it was decided to APPEAL TO ALL THE LIFE MEMBERS TO CONTRIBUTE GENEROUSLY TOWARDS GENERAL FUND TO MEET THE DEFICIT and help the association grow from strength to strength to safeguard the social and economic welfare of nurses in our country.

Secretary, TNAI.