

A Study to Assess the Level of Student Empowerment and Explore the Challenges and Perceived Barriers among Undergraduate Nursing Students in a Selected College of Nursing

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Abstract

Student empowerment is the process in which the learner attains the ability to direct one's own self and utilises it to make independent decisions which bring out the benefit to the individual as well as to the society. Student nurses are the future of the healthcare system, who need to be motivated to steer the wheels of learning. In this process of learning a teacher plays a vital role in inculcating the ability to choose and drive self-decision power. A cross sectional descriptive design was adopted to assess the level of empowerment, challenges and perceived barriers using purposive sampling technique. The study was performed in 1st and 2nd semester nursing students in 3rd and 4th year of College of Nursing AFMC. The study demonstrated no low level of empowerment while 5.83 percent were moderately empowered and 96.16 percent students were highly empowered, which is inconsistent with other studies, majority of which showed moderate level of empowerment. The reason behind high level of student empowerment can be that it was conducted in Category A, NAAC-accredited premier nursing institute. As the study showed high level of empowerment, further research is needed on a larger scale to assess level of empowerment and challenges faced in order to develop measures and strategies to enhance the level of empowerment among nurses. Such students show job satisfaction, productivity and high standards of nursing care.

Key words: Student empowerment, Challenges, Perceived barriers

As the country's future lies on the youth of that country, so the students are to be motivated to take charge of their life, steer the wheels of learning and acquire the necessary skills with integrity and self-motivation. It's being emphasised time and again that for the empowerment of students and the country indirectly, teachers need to open the doors to a new world of education. Also, it is the student's responsibility to take that first small step and head towards wisdom.

Student empowerment is the process in which the learner attains the ability to direct one's own self and utilises the power of choice and decision making in learning and gaining skills. Distinctly, it refers to how a teacher is able to teach and inculcate the ability to choose and drive self-decision power in them.

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An article published on 17 December 2019 in *Mangalore Today News Network* by Menon (2019) stated that "Nursing is the only profession in India that can satisfy all the requirements, that is, affordability, empowerment of self and family, ready employment, prospects in India and also abroad, enhanced quality of life, personal hygiene, community hygiene and completely untouched by any slow-down in the Economy." Nurses are an integral part of healthcare system and represent the largest portion of healthcare sector."

Smith (2023) from University of South Australia published an article stating that Nursing is distinct from other healthcare providers implying wide scope of practice and approach to medical care. Nurses play an integral role in promoting health, preventing illness and caring for all patients including mentally ill and the disabled.

Background of the Study

The word 'Empowerment' goes hand in hand with liberty. Empowerment would only be ensured when

no one defines the life of a student, but the individual defines him/herself.

Many institutions claim themselves that they have strong models of education system and ensure student participation and empowerment covering all aspects and adopting different strategies. The institutions also present data to propagate and draw conclusion of student's empowerment. However, there is lot of scope of improvement. A descriptive study done by Al-niarat & Abomoghli (2023) on nursing student to assess their perception of empowerment and academic satisfaction showed a moderate perception of empowerment with a mean score of 79 and SD of 17.35. It showed a strong association of student's perception of empowerment and their academic satisfaction.

Students are not passive participants or empty vessels ready to be passively filled. But the educators need to widen their horizon and consider learners as respected partners in the process of learning.

Need of the Study: Nursing is both an art and science. For better understanding and gain of clinical skill, the educators and education system need to promote a sense of control and self-efficacy among the undergraduates. Nursing students must be empowered.

Nursing is striving towards achieving an autonomous position; however, it's a long journey and is predominantly empowered by doctors especially in India. The nurse educators and planners too become autocratic in their approach over a span of time. Very little is being researched and projected in the public domain about the extent of nursing students' empowerment and its impact on learning. Hence a research study was undertaken by the investigator to assess the student's empowerment and its challenges and perceived barriers for empowerment of students.

Literature Review

A study conducted by Bradbury et al (2011) on empowerment and wellbeing demonstrated that when the students are being valued as learners, team members and individuals, they feel empowered, and experience disempowered vice versa. This has a detrimental impact on their learning and intention to continue their programme.

An article published in Journal of Women Empowerment and studies in July 2022 by Mahender K discussed about nursing profession and expressed as a flag bearer of Women's journey to financial independence.(5) Nursing as a profession is the best choice of work for women in India.

Another article published in International Journal of Advances in Nursing Management by Radhakrishnan et al (2016) on Nursing Empowerment for Quality

Improvement mentions that quality of care is inevitable regardless of the healthcare settings. For the accomplishment of positive outcomes in nursing practice, the ability to mobilise and motivate oneself is defined as Nursing Empowerment. Evaluation of health services to improve practice or quality of care is termed as Quality Improvement. Hence, nurse's empowerment and patient's quality are the two sides of the same coin.

Statement of Problem: A study to assess the level of student empowerment and explore the challenges and perceived barriers among undergraduate nursing students in a selected college of nursing.

Objectives

The study was carried out with following objectives.

1. To assess the level of student's empowerment
2. To explore the challenges and perceived barriers to student's empowerment
3. To determine the association of level of empowerment with selected variables.

Operational Definition

Empowerment: The term Empowerment refers to the process of becoming more confident, decisive and clinically proficient to contribute towards the care of the patient. The level of empowerment would be expressed as low, moderate and high as measured by self-semi-structured tool administered to the sample under study.

Training: It refers to the process adopted to gain skills required to do a particular job. For the present study, training refers to the four years university programme for nursing students designed to become independent nurse and work proficiently in health care setting.

Challenge: It refers to the difficulties faced by students in attaining self empowerment. It can be under our control or beyond our control.

Barriers: 'Barrier' refers to the obstacles that come during training that serves as obstacles in the path of self-empowerment of nursing students.

Scope of the study: A comparative study was undertaken by Visiers-Jimenez et al (2022) to understand empowerment and related factors of nursing students in six European countries. The study depicted that level of empowerment among nursing students was moderate, with statistical differences between countries. High empowerment was associated with greater academic accomplishment, higher self-rated general competence levels, and no intention to leave the nursing profession. The findings imply that nursing education needs to focus more on empowerment. To fully comprehend the emergence of empowerment in the early stages of a nursing career, more research is required.

Limitations: Being an informant-based study; it entirely relies on the response of the informants. Secondly, the small size sample and purposive sampling may pose a limitation for generalisation of the study.

Ethical Aspects: The current study was evaluated for its ethical considerations and implications by the in-house institutional Ethical Committee. (Appx A)

Review of Literature

Caroline BJ, Sally S, Fiona I (2011) conducted a longitudinal study exploring the empowerment of nursing students in clinical practice in 2010. The study comprised of 13 1st year Nursing students who were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy viz. in-depth interview technique. It highlighted that students can be empowered in clinical practice when both areas of influence are targetted equally and critically.

Sharmila (2012) conducted a study in 2012 to assess the nurse's perception towards job empowerment among 22 staff nurses using Empowerment Scale. The study assessed three aspects: commitment domain, job-related empowerment and psychological empowerment using a questionnaire. The study concluded that most of the participants had average level of perception towards various aspects of empowerment and there was a positive co-relation between years of experience and perception of job empowerment.

A master's thesis published by Contreras (2007) in California State University explored whether nursing students in a baccalaureate nursing programme were feeling empowered. A 44-item Likert Style Survey was used to measure empowerment level of students. The results of this study revealed high level Empowerment score of 144.18. The perceived level of student empowerment was significantly higher in sophomores than their seniors.

Methodology

Research methodology includes the strategies to be used in collecting and analysing the data to accomplish the research objectives and to test research hypothesis.

Research Design: This study adopted a cross sectional descriptive design to assess the level of empowerment among undergraduate nursing students at a selected college of Nursing. The research approach was survey approach which attempted to explore the challenges and perceived barriers in student empowerment.

Setting for the study: The selected College of Nursing is an affiliated college. Availability of the subjects, proximity and familiarity of the investigator were few reasons for selection of setting.

Sampling technique: Purposive sampling was the

technique adopted for sampling from the target population. First 30 numbers were selected for the study after obtaining consent.

Variables under the study: Selected variables like age, year of training, basic educational qualification and setting of the educational qualification were included. The dependant variable is level of student empowerment among undergraduate nursing students.

Sample size: The sample size was calculated assuming that Pearson correlation coefficient for our study will be 0.25, significance level 0.05 and power the study as 80%. The sample size came out to be 120.

Tool preparation: The self-empowerment tool was prepared based on the conceptual model of student empowerment used in the research done by Chris Michael Kirk at Wichita State University in 2010. It includes three components: (a) Intra-personal component, (b) Interactional component, and (c) Participatory component.

The tool for the study was divided in two sections:

Section I: Demographic variables of the study sample

Section II: Self empowerment tool comprising of 30 items wherein the three components (Intrapersonal, interactional and participatory) were assessed (Contreras, 2007; Dennison & El-Masri, 2012). Each component was assessed with 10 items. A mix of positive and negative questions was prepared. The total score was calculated by adding together the scores for each of the 30 items. Items left blank were simply ignored (i.e score equals to 0). If four or more items were left blank, the questionnaire was considered invalid. Maximum score of the tool was 150 and minimum score of the tool was 30. The negative questions were marked in reverse direction.

Level of Empowerment

S. No.	Score	% of score	Level of empowerment
1	<60	<40	Low level
2	61-105	40-70	Moderate level
3	>105	>70	High level

Analysis and interpretation

N=120

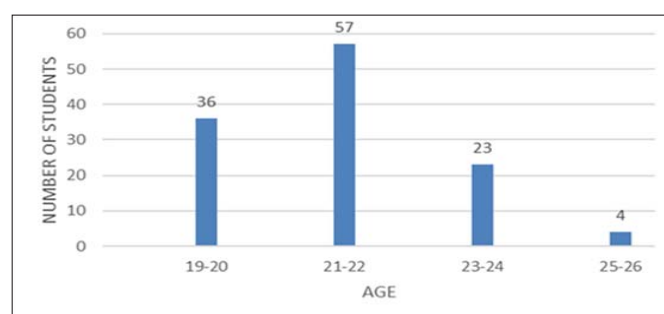


Fig 1: Distribution of sample based on age.

N=120



Fig 2: Distribution of sample based on level of training.

N=120

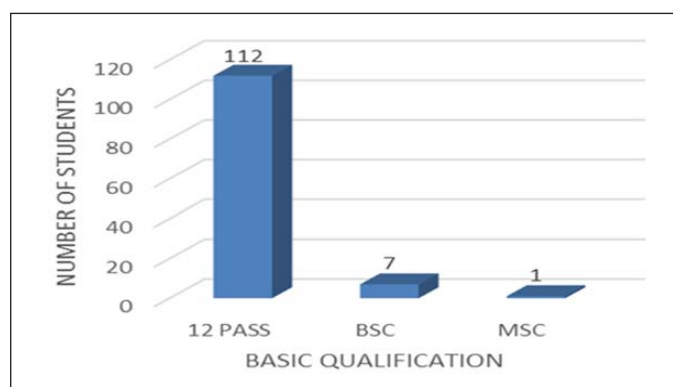


Fig 3: Distribution of sample based on qualification.

N=120

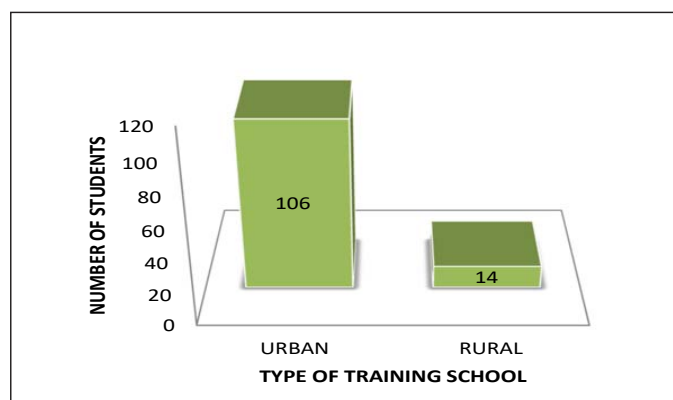


Fig 4: Distribution of sample based on setting of basic education.

Figs 1-4 shows distribution of selected demographic characteristics of the study sample. For the purpose of the study, the age was divided into 4 classes. Out of the total sample of 120, most (47.5%) of the study sample were in the age group of 21-22 followed by 30 percent in the age group of 19-20 and least (0.03%) in the age group of 25-26 years. Since representative sample was to be taken from each year of training, hence 25 percent of the study sample were from each year of undergraduate programme.

Majority of the participants (93.3%) had a basic qualification of 10+2 before joining nursing programme. Setting for basic education was also assessed. The data interpreted that 88.33 percent of the study sample had their basic education in urban areas and only 11.6 percent had completed their basic education from rural areas.

Table 1: Distribution of study sample based on level of self-empowerment (N= 120)

Level of self-empowerment	Score	Frequency	Percentage
Low	< 60	0	0
Moderate	61-105	7	5.83
High	>105	113	94.16

Table 1 shows that out of 120 study samples, 113 had high level of self-empowerment and only 5.83 percent had moderate level of self-empowerment. The present study did not have low self-empowerment.

Table 2: Association of demographic variable with self empowerment (N= 120)

Variable	Level of self-empowerment			Chi Square	p value
	Low	Moderate	Severe		
Age				2.8411	0.4167
19-20	0	3	33		
21-22	0	2	53		
23-24	0	1	23		
25-26	0	1	4		
Year of training				1.3654	0.2426
I yr	0	2	28		
II yr	0	3	27		
III yr	0	2	28		
IV yr	0	0	30		
Basic education level				8.0818	0.01758
10 + 2	0	5	105		
Graduation	0	1	7		
Postgraduation	0	1	1		
Setting for basic Education				0.0495	0.8239
Rural	0	1	13		
Urban	0	6	100		

The above table represents association of various demographic variables with self-empowerment of the study sample. Chi Square (χ^2) test was used to assess the association of demographic variable with self-empowerment. The calculated χ^2 value was not significant with age, year of training and settings for basic education. It showed no statistical significance at 0.05 level. However, the computed χ^2 value of 8.0818 showed statistical significance at 0.05 level indicating that there is significant association existing between basic education and self-empowerment. ($\chi^2=8.0818$, $p<0.05$)

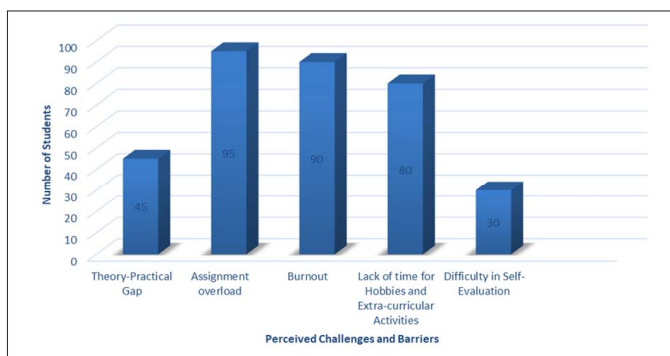


Fig 5. Distribution of Sample based on Perceived challenges and barriers

Discussion

Nurses have been called upon to lead and to be partner in the transformation of health care industry. Nurses & nurse managers must be empowered to perform their leadership roles to facilitate positive patient outcomes. Empowerment is possible when employees have access to information, support, resources and the chance to discover and development.

The results in the present study demonstrated predominantly highly empowered undergraduate nursing students.

The findings are in consensus with the thesis done on Nursing Student Empowerment by Contreras M. (9)

The results of our study are inconsistent with majority studies (3, 5, 8). A comparative study conducted in 6 European countries by Jimenez L and et al. concluded moderate level of empowerment using Nurse Empowerment Scale.(7) Also a study conducted by Tanhany Al-N, Fathieh Al in Jordan to assess the relationship between UG nursing student's perception of empowerment and their academic satisfaction showed moderate with a mean score of 79 out of [0-140]. (3)

The disparity in the results may be explained by the fact that the study was conducted in Category A premier nursing institute. It's NAAC accredited and ranks among the top 10 nursing institutes of the country. Moreover, students selected here for training are through competitive examination held at All-India level who are self-motivated to join services. This also may be attributing to perception of more self-empowerment.

The data about the challenges and perceived barriers was collected with the help of open-ended questions. The data was assessed again and again by the investigator to draw inference about challenges and perceived barriers. It was represented in quantitative form. Majority of the study sample expressed assignment overload as a major challenge

and perceived barrier to self-empowerment followed by burnout and lack of time for extracurricular activities. This results in decreased interest in new learning and gain of clinical competence. The findings revealed in other studies are consistent with the present study.(10,11)

Summary and conclusion

Nurses constitute an inseparable part of healthcare professional team. Hence, Nursing students if given adequate resources and opportunities can promote health wellness and prevent illness.

Present study showed high level of empowerment among study sample of 120 nursing students in a selected college of Nursing. Research studies shows that one can serve for a long time in services if they have a sense of self-empowerment and motivation.

As Nurses manages people, material, task and funds in the day-to-day activities, she must be empowered completely in order to take wise decisions and smooth functioning of the health care delivery system. The empowered nurse gains autonomy and takes ownership of the happenings. Nursing empowerment also contributes for job satisfaction, productivity and higher standards of patient care.

Implications: There are several implications emanating from the present study to be utilized in all aspects of Nursing Education, Nursing Practice, Nursing Research and Nursing Administration.

Nursing education

The basic aim of education is to bring about the desired change in the behaviour of the learner. Nursing requires critical thinking skills and quick decision making. The present research showed that the nurses are highly empowered which makes them self-motivated and better learners to develop an attitude of thinking out-of-the-box. Measures to tackle the challenges faced by student nurses like Assignment overload can be implemented by formulating change in curriculum.

Nursing Practice

Nursing is both an art and science. Nursing Empowerment can enhance the quality of individualised patient care. Empowerment makes the person more self-driven and confident enough to analyse all critical situations beforehand in hospital settings and the nurse becomes more efficient to develop a customized nursing care plan which can be implemented for the patients under their care.

Nursing Research

The research settings of the present study don't extrapolate for all the student nurses across pan-

India. Therefore, similar study can be performed in multicentric places to have a comparison.

A Case-Control Study can also be performed for nurses in clinical settings and can be compared to a different population working in the same settings with the implementation of measures to challenges faced and then, results can be compared.

Nursing Administration:

Nurse administrator needs to facilitate the utilisation of research-based practices in day-to-day care. As we assessed the challenges and perceived barriers to student empowerment like burnout and lack of time for hobbies and extra-curricular activities can be reduced if measures are being implemented by administration. Simultaneously, it will lead to increased productivity and job satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the finding, following recommendations may be proposed for future research

- A. Similar study can be replicated with a larger sample to assess level of self-empowerment.
- B. A comparative study can be conducted in Private and Govt. college to assess the findings.
- C. A qualitative longitudinal study maybe undertaken to explore the challenges and barriers to self-empowerment.

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