

Empowerment: Its Prerequisites, Prospects and Challenges Perceived by Nursing Students in Indian Context - A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Nursing and nursing education in the present era must meet the evolving demands related to the complexity and scope of patient care. Nursing programmes in our country need to adapt their curricula to foster student's academic and clinical skills and produce empowered graduate nurses to provide quality services. This study intended to assess the student nurses' perceptions about prospects and challenges of Nurses in India and the prerequisites for empowering student nurses. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was adopted for the study. In this study, 310 student nurses from selected nursing colleges in private sector were covered for the study. Data was collected using a standardised tool for assessing the psychological empowerment. A semi structured tool with forced choice rank option questions for assessing prospects, challenges and pre-requisites for empowerment was used. The data were analysed quantitatively with SPSS 20 version. It was found that only about half (48.7%) of the under graduate students felt that they are empowered. Student nurses perceived that consideration (n=98, 31.6%) and open communication by the faculty (n=69, 22.2%) may facilitate empowerment. Low pay (n=180, 58.1%), poor working conditions but long working hours (n=28, 9.0%) and poor public image of nursing (n=26, 8.4) were the main perceived challenges for empowerment of nurses in Indian context. Improved remuneration (n=72, 23.2%) and adherence to the standard norms (n=53, 17.1%) set out by the accrediting bodies in both government and private setting may improve the prospect of Nurses in India. Creating healthy working condition that empowers nurses and improved educational climate and provide freedom to act according to their expectation as a professional may be a fruitful strategy for nurses and administrators to retain nurses in India. Creating a healthy working environment and adhering to the standard norms may foster empowerment of nurses irrespective of the setting where they work. Curriculum with inclusion of empowerment and faculty role modelling may facilitate student nurses to be empowered during their graduation. This study finding shows the nursing fraternity the means that cater for empowerment of nurses and nursing students.

Key words: Empowerment, Prospects & challenges for empowerment

Empowerment is a term that has come into common usage in nursing. This term has been used extensively in the nursing literature related to administration and management; it is also highly relevant to the domain of clinical practice. Today's health care environment demands enormous amounts of energy and diligence, regardless of clinical setting: acute care hospitals, long-term care facilities, community-based agencies, home, or hospice care.

In the era of consumerism, quality of care is most looked after regardless of the health care setting. Nursing leaders, in employment settings or in

professional organisations, exercise power in making professional judgments in their day to day activities. Power is authority over others. Empowerment, in contrast, is the authority purposely shared with others. Nursing empowerment means the ability to effectively motivate and mobilise self and others to accomplish positive outcomes in nursing practice and work environment (Anuchithra S, 2016). Further, Laura VJ (2022) believed that empowerment needs to be hence during nursing education itself.

Quality improvement is an organised process that assesses and evaluates health services to improve practice or quality of care. The nurse's empowerment and patient quality care are the two sides of the same coin. The empowered team influences staff

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morale, productivity, staff retention and associated costs, patient care quality, and patient safety.

Need and Significance

Nurses constitute the largest group of healthcare professionals and have high potential to influence population health. Moreover, they have a key role in empowering patients regarding their own health and to work towards promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, such as good health and wellbeing. However, global shortage of nurses and the future challenges facing global healthcare, such as delivering health in conflict zones and dealing with the climate crisis and epidemics, have brought about an urgent need to invest in healthcare workers.

New nurses with a high competence are needed to respond to these challenges. To be able to meet the role expectations of a registered nurse, nursing students must feel empowered right at graduation stage, in the beginning phase of their nursing career.

There is an estimated shortfall of 2.4 million nurses in India. This deficit can be explained by large scale migration, especially from Kerala. Reason is multifactorial (WHO, 2022; Garner SL, 2015).

Enhancing leadership skills, being a positive change agent, education upgradation and being and believing in evidence-based practice (EBP) are required for nurses to become an empowered professional to render quality care. The factors contributing to nurse empowerment are: Decision-making, Autonomy, Manageable workload, Fairness, Reward and Recognition. Nurses in India hardly have a voice and most of them are not assertive; they lack confidence when it comes to talking about their rights as an RN; all this could be due to lack of empowerment (Sharma SK, 2020).

To meet the role expectations of an RN, nursing students must feel empowered at graduation level. However, there are only a few studies focusing on nursing students' empowerment.

Review of Literature

Related to need for empowerment in nursing

Articles published by many researchers like Patil PS (2020), Nair S (2020), James MM (2017) highlight that nursing profession in our country lacks dynamic leaders and there are very few unsung leaders who are meticulously putting efforts to improve empowerment, represent ignored issues and problems of nurses.

The nursing profession suffers from lack of autonomy and due respect; in fact the scene is dominated by the physicians who usually make decisions and give directions with regard to nurses and nursing care; this can directly affect empowerment of nurses as suggested by Walt on R (2012).

Nurses with new perspective are needed in healthcare. Considering the need, Indian Nursing Council has included empowerment in the first semester syllabus of BSc Nursing by including a 2 hours unit under the subject 'Psychology.' To meet the role expectations of a registered nurse, nursing students must feel empowered at graduation.

Related to factors allied with nursing students' empowerment

Visiers-Jiménez L; Kuokkanen L; Leino-Kilpi H; Löyttyniemi E; Turjamaa R; Brugnolli A; Gaspar F; Nemcová J; Palese A; Rua M, and others conducted a study on Graduating Nursing Students' empowerment and related factors: Comparative study in six European countries (2022). The study aimed to describe and analyse graduating nursing students' level of empowerment in six European countries and potential related factors. A comparative and cross-sectional study was performed in the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain with 1746 graduating nursing students using the Nurse Empowerment scale. Potentially related factors included age, gender, previous degree in health care, work experience in health care, graduation to first-choice profession, intention to leave the nursing profession, level of study achievements, satisfaction with the current nursing programme, clinical practicals, theoretical education, and generic competence measured with the Nurse Competence Scale. The data were analysed statistically. Graduating nursing students' self-assessed level of empowerment was moderate, with statistical differences between countries. Those with high empowerment had no intention to leave the nursing profession, had a higher level of study achievements, and a higher self-assessed generic competence level. The results suggest that empowerment needs to be enhanced during nursing education and concluded that further research is needed to understand the development of empowerment during the early years of a nursing career.

Related to nurse's perception on job empowerment

Sharmila JR did a study to assess the Nurse's Perception on Job Empowerment at Selected Hospital, Coimbatore (2012). Descriptive design was used to conduct the study. Twenty staff nurses were selected conveniently as samples. Nurses' perception on empowerment was assessed by using empowerment scale (1995) which consists of three aspects such as commitment domain, job-related empowerment and psychological empowerment. The questionnaire was issued to the staff nurses and collected on consecutive days. Most of the participants had average level of perception towards various aspects of empowerment and there a positive correlation was found between years of experience and perception of job empowerment.

Related to status of nurses in Indian context and challenges

Sharma SK, Thakur K, Rani PP wrote an article on status of nurses in India: Current situation analysis and strategies to improve revealed that Indian Nurses. It was found that nurses face lack of autonomy and nurses have to face challenges at organisational, individual and societal levels in India.

James M(2017)published an article in International Journal of Nurses and Midwifery, which highlighted the need for empowering nurses. The author identified certain challenges which nurses face in the present healthcare system. These challenges arise due to issues at the organisational, state and national levels. It is of utmost importance to first recognise and understand each and every possible challenge faced by the nurses in order to deal with them efficiently-not just recognise and understand but also find solutions to mitigate them.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To assess empowerment among nursing students.
2. To find out anticipating prerequisites, prospects and challenges of empowerment.
3. of in doubt association between level of empowerment and selected socio demographic variables.

Operational definitions

Empowerment: It refers to the power of the subjects to control their work activities with full autonomy and is measured using standardized psychological empowerment scale and graded as very low, adequate and well empowered.

Pre-requisites: It refers to the expectations of the subjects from nursing faculty to empower nursing students and is measured using forced choice ranking questions.

Prospects: It refers to those factors that the subjects wish to have for Indian nurses to become empowered and is measured using forced choice ranking questions.

Challenges: It refers to those factors which pose difficulty to work in Indian setting as perceived by the student nurses and is measured using forced choice ranking questions.

Methodology

Research approach: Quantitative approach.

Research design: Descriptive cross sectional study.

Population: Entire nursing students of Kottayam district.

Sample: Nursing students of St Thomas CON & Thiruhudaya CON.

Sampling technique: Non-probability convenience sampling

Inclusion criteria: Students who are willing to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria: Students who are on clinical duty during the time of data collection.

Sample size:

- Calculated using Rao soft software; by keeping following parameters.
- Margin of error-5 percent
- Confidence level-95 percent
- Population size-3,400*
- Calculated sample size - 287
- Final sample size-310

Setting

The study was undertaken at St Thomas CON, Chethipuzha and Thiruhudaya CON, Kottayam both in Kerala.

Tool and techniques used

Section A: Socio demographic proforma.

Section B: Psychological Empowerment scale (standardised tool with permission), 8 items, validate and reliable; Cronbach's alpha the over all scale was 0.80 (Gretchen S, 2003).

Scoring

Grading	Score
Very low	1-24
Adequate	25-31
Well empowered	31-40

- **Section C: Three sections** (Prerequisites, prospects & Challenges) with forced choice statements to rank as per subjects perceptions on empowerment.

Ethical considerations

- Setting permission from both nursing colleges.
- Permission from author to modify and use PES scale
- Clearance from SRB of St Thomas CON.
- Clearance from IEC of St Thomas Hospital.
- Assurance in confidentiality of data being collected.
- Written informed consent from study subjects.

Data Collection

After obtaining permission from the head of the institution of setting 1 and setting 2, subjects were selected through non-probability convenience sampling. Brief introduction of the study objectives was given to the subjects. Written informed consent was obtained after ensuring confidentiality of the data. And the tool was administered to sample.

Results

A. Socio-demographic data of subjects

Table 1: Distribution of subjects on the basis of socio demographic data (n =310)

Variable	Findings
Age of subjects	20.4±1.45 years
Place of residence	Urban(45.8%) Rural(53.9%)
Reason to join Nursing	Jobsecurity(61%)
Intention to migrate	Yes(84.8%) No (15.2%)
Funding for studies	Yes(10%) No (90%)
Feels Indian nurses are empowered	Yes(15.8%) No(84.2%)

Table 1 shows that the mean age of the participants is 20.4±1.45 years. Place of residence of subjects were urban (45.8%) and rural (53.9%). 61 percent of subjects choose nursing course because of job security; 64.8 percent study subjects feel self empowered; 84.8 percent subjects have an intention to migrate after the nursing course; 90 percent subjects have no funding for studies and 84.2 percent subjects opined that Indian nurses are not empowered.

Figure 3 shows that majority of subjects (48.7%) are well empowered, 47.7 percent are adequately empowered and 3.5 percent are empowered very low. The mean empowerment score of nursing students was 31.33±3.94.

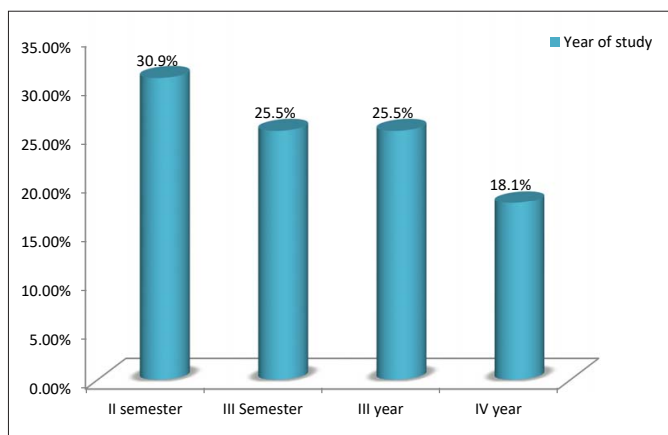


Fig 1: Distribution of Nursing students based on year of study (n=310).

Figure 1 shows that 30.9 percent of subjects are in II semester BSc Nursing students and 25.5 percent are from both III semester and 3 year and 18.1 percent from 4 year BSc Nursing students. Figure 2 shows that 64.8 percent of subjects feel self empowered.

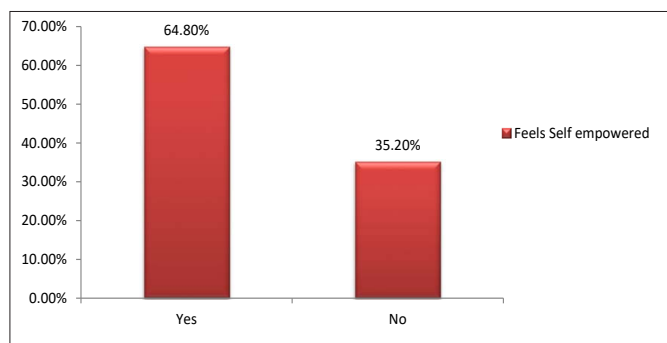


Fig 2: Nursing students who feel self empowered (n=310).

B. Empowerment of nursing students

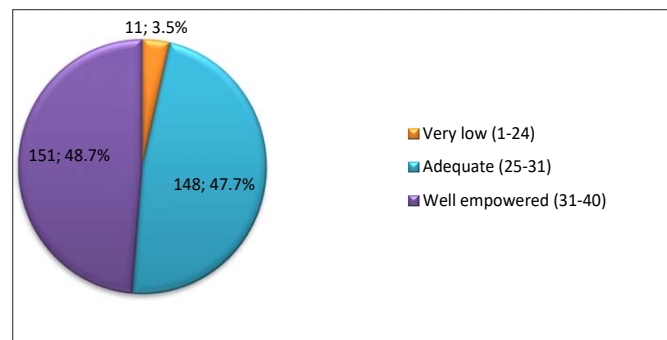


Fig 3: Level of empowerment of nursing students (n=310).

C. Pre-requisites from nursing faculty, prospects and challenges for empowerment faced by nursing students in Indian context

Table 2: Expected pre-requisites from nursing faculty for empowering students perceived by subjects (n=310)

S. I.	Statements	Rank	f(%)
A	Creates opportunities for students in decision making, leadership	4	31(10)
B	Shows me new perspectives/ viewpoints so that my work will go well	7	13(4.1)
C	Supports efforts to reflect upon issues in approach for nursing	6	14(4.5)
D	Praise the results of work and utilizes the result of students' work	8	12(3.8)
E	Realises difficult situation and shows empathy	5	27(8.7)
F	Listens to students' opinions and thoughts in studies	3	43(13.8)
G	Open communication with students	2	69(22.2)
H	Considers students as unique individuals and gives due respect	1	98(31.6)

Table 2 shows that 31.6 percent subjects opined that nursing faculty can empower by considering them as unique individual and 22.2 percent considers open communication with them and 13.8 percent wants their faculty to consider the opinions and thoughts in studies may make them more empowered.

Table 3: Prospects that subjects wish to have for Indian nurses to become empowered (n=310)

SI No.	Statements	Rank	f (%)
A	Reasonable remuneration as per Govt standards in private sector	1	72(23.2)
B	Enhance accountability, decision making, leadership opportunity	7	13(4.2)
C	Respect from general population	3	50(16.1)
D	Maintains nurse patient ratio as per INC guidelines	6	16(5.2)
E	Sense of being in multidisciplinary team	10	7(2.3)
F	Scope for professional development and provision of mentorship	9	9(2.9)
G	Financial support for higher studies	4	41(13.2)
H	Getting treated as professionals	2	53(17.1)
I	Better working standards and effective use of technology	5	40(12.9)
J	Opportunity and scope for open communication with higher officials	8	12(3.9)

Table 3 shows that 23.2 percent subjects ranked reasonable remuneration as per government standards in private health care agencies as the first prospect for an Indian nurse to become empowered and 17.1 percent ranked getting treated as professionals and (16.1 %) wants respect from general population as the succeeding prospects.

Table 4: Perceived challenges of empowerment for novice/new graduating nurses in India by subjects (n=310)

Sl. No.	Statements	Rank	f (%)
A	Low pay, poor working conditions and long working hours	1	180(58.1)
B	Poor nurse patient ratio	3	26(8.4)
C	High turnover (leaving) of nurses in hospitals	7	10(3.2)
D	Stagnant career with no promotional opportunities	9	7(2.3)
E	People not considering nursing as a professional and respectable job	2	28(9.0)
F	Violence by patients, visitors and co-workers at work place	5	12(3.9)
G	Lack of dynamic or influential leaders to be a role model	10	6(1.9)
H	Excessive migration of nurses to Europe and Gulf countries	4	24(7.7)
I	Poor recognition and social status	6	11(3.5)
J	Physician dominated health-care system	8	10(3.1)
K	Involvement of nurses in non-nursing roles	11	2(0.6)

Table 4 shows that 58.1 percent of subjects ranked low pay, poor working conditions and long working hours as the prime challenge for empowerment. The 9 percent consider public not considering nursing as a profession and respectable job as the second challenge for empowerment. The poor nurse-patient ratio existing in the health care agency is another challenge for 8.4 percent subjects.

Table 5: Association between empowerment and socio demographic variables of subjects (n=310)

Variable	Chisquare	df	p value
Year of study	11.13	6	0.084
Place of residence	8.73	4	0.096
Reason for joining Nursing	7.11	6	0.311
Feels self-empowered	6.54	2	0.038*
Intention to migrate	10.14	2	0.006**
Funding for studies	1.86	2	0.648
Think Indian nurses are empowered	1.52	4	0.822

Table 5 shows that the variables feeling self-empowered and intention to migrate have a statistically significant association at p value less than 0.05 and 0.01 respectively with the level of empowerment of students. Other variables like year of study, place of residence, reason for choosing nursing, funding for studies and feels Indian nurses are empowered are not associated with the level of empowerment of subjects.

Discussion

Empowerment of nursing students

Nearly half of subjects were well empowered (n=151, 48.7%) and 148 (47.7%) are adequately empowered. Only

11 (3.5%) were having very low empowerment.

Expected pre-requisites from nursing faculty for empowering students perceived by subjects

The study revealed that the following three prerequisites are expected from nursing faculty to make student nurses empowered. The first prerequisite is for considering students as unique individuals and give due respect (n=98, 31.6%). Open communication with students (n=69, 22.2%) can make students to feel empowered. The third ranked pre-requisite was that nursing faculty should listen to students opinions and thoughts in studies (n=43, 13.8%).

Prospects that subjects wish to have for Indian nurses to become empowered

The study found that, the following conditions are required for a nurse to be empowered in Indian health care settings. The first ranked prospect is wages that is reasonable remuneration as per Government standards in public and private sector (n=72, 23.2%). Getting treated as professionals (n=53, 17.1%) and recognition of the job done may make nurses to feel empowered in Indian setting.

Changing the image of Nursing and improved respect and recognition from general population (n=50, 16.1%) was the third ranked statement for empowering nurses in India.

Perceived challenges of empowerment for novice/new graduating nurses in India by subjects

The study found that the first three ranked challenges for empowerment for a new graduating nurse in Indian context as under.

(a) Low pay, poor working conditions and long working hours (n=180, 58.1%); (b) People not considering nursing as a professional and respectable job (n=28, 9.0%); (c) Poor nurse-patient ratio in government and private settings (n=26, 8.4%)

Nurses manage people, material, task and funds in the day to day activities, she/ he must be empowered duly in order to take wise decisions and smooth functioning of the health care delivery system (Lashinger & Finagan, 2013; Smith et al, 2010).

Nursing Implications

The findings of the study have implications on the field of nursing service, nursing education, nursing administration and nursing research.

Nursing Practice

- Creating healthy working condition where the nursing personnel are working may empowers nurses.
- Nursing leaders must ensure better remuneration and appropriate nurse patient ratio can empower nurses in the health care setting and thus prevent migration.

Nursing Education

- Nursing educators should give utmost care while communicating with students with open mind.
- Nursing educators must listen to student's opinions and thoughts in studies and should give space for the students to express his/her empowerment difficulties.
- Nursing educators must create opportunities for students in decision making, leadership in clinical setting.

Nursing Administration

- The administrators must provide freedom for the nurses to act according to their expectation, which may be a fruitful strategy to retain nurses in India.
- Administration must ensure better remuneration and appropriate nurse patient ratio that can empower nurses in the health care setting.
- Nursing administrators must provide opportunities for professional development and provision of mentorship programme for nurses with low empowerment.

Nursing Research

- Research should be conducted to identify the challenges faced by nursing students at different levels of their education and the measures to resolve it.

- A multi centre study adopting mixed method approach to increase the generalisation of the findings may be conducted.

Limitations

- Subjects could not be stratified proportionally.
- Exploration of responses was limited.
- Limited generalis ability of study findings.

Recommendations

- This study recommends for the utilisation of the study findings in policy making in education of nurses by INC or NNMC.
- A multi centre study with mixed method approach to be adopted to increase the generalisation of the findings
- Nurse educators give utmost care while communicating with students with open mind.
- Creating healthy working condition that empowers nurses and improved educational climate and provide freedom to act according to their expectation as a professional may be a fruitful asset for nurses and administrators to retain nurses in India.
- Better remuneration and appropriate nurse-patient ratio can empower nurses and thus prevent migration.

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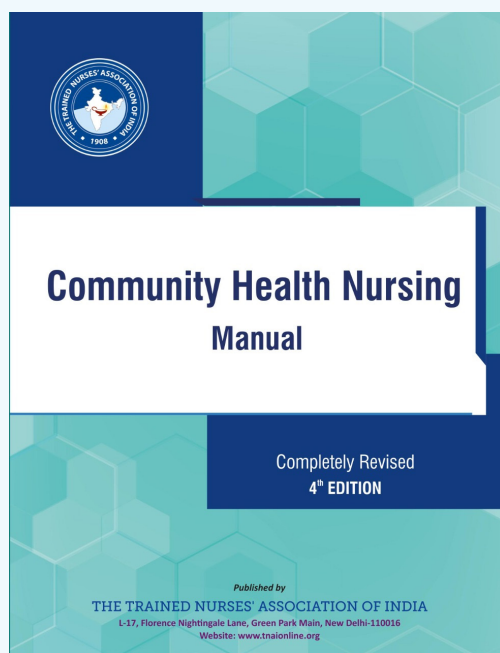
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Community Health Nursing Manual: *Completely Revised 4th Edition*



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