

A Qualitative Study to Explore the Perception regarding Challenges and Prospects of Empowerment among Nursing Students in a Selected College of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Empowerment of nursing students is vital in ensuring positive prospect towards future nursing domain. Empowering nurses early in their learning era ensures building of a competent, knowledgeable, confident nurses pool with excellent decision-making, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Descriptive qualitative research was undertaken among BSc and Diploma nursing students to explore their perception regarding challenges and prospects of empowerment. A focus group discussion was conducted for students selected through purposive sampling technique. Audio-recording of the discussion occurred after participants' informed consent was obtained. The audio-recorded data was transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clark's thematic analysis. Interview notes were also used to gain further insights. The data revealed that nursing students' empowerment is hindered by educational, academic, experiential learning and clinical setting. Perception of empowerment varied among the students. Multilingual patients and prodigious patient load are an asset as well as a liability. Short staffing in hospital ward hinders efficiency, thereby precluding opportunities to disseminate knowledge regarding advanced clinical procedures and practices. Self-motivation, initiation to achieve knowledge, and awareness about facilities available play a huge role in nurses' empowerment.

Key words: Nurses' empowerment, Perception & prospects, Nursing students

The concept of nursing empowerment has become increasingly important in the recent years. Empowerment is “the act of strengthening an individual's belief in his or her sense of effectiveness” (Al-Niarat & Abumoghli, 2019). Empowering nurses is essential for improving work outcomes and to stimulate nurses' productivity, preserve their mental and emotional health and wellbeing (Mahmoud & Nidal, 2022). According to Chandler (1992), empowerment means “enable to act” and “enabling individuals to feel effective so they can successfully execute their jobs”.

Nursing education has strongly been influenced by educational theories. Structural empowerment is congruent with psychological empowerment, that is, a person's intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment is when the individual believes they have power and are motivated to exercise their power (Spence et al, 2012). Student

autonomy by encouraging self-direction has been largely been emphasised (Espeland & Shanta 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2003). Learners are required to develop autonomous learning skills to solve problems, manage time, manage learning resources and ultimately manage themselves. These are based on the view of individuals as “having the capacity to think critically, situate themselves as self-motivating students and exercise social responsibility” (Copp 2002; Mailloux, 2006) which are close to the definition of empowerment.

Empowerment in nursing is not a new concept and there is plenty of literature discussing the same. Of late, importance of empowerment during the student period due to its increasing relevance in contemporary nursing education and practice. Studies have identified barriers and facilitators of nursing students' empowerment. Kanter (1993) proposed that the organisational conditions such as the accessibility to resources, opportunity, information and support facilitate internal motivation and empowerment. Other factors include well-established, goal-oriented teaching process, clinical competence levels, confidence, attitude towards learning and independence in performing nursing skills (Azizi SM, 2020).

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Low level of knowledge, fear of failure and of making mistakes, poor clinical exposure, lack of encouraging mentors, lack of opportunities to enhance leadership are some of the barriers impede nursing students' empowerment. The purpose of this study was to identify the perception of nursing students regarding challenges, enablers and prospects of empowerment among nursing students in a culturally relevant context.

Problem statement: A descriptive qualitative study to identify perceptions regarding challenges and prospects of empowerment among nursing students in selected College of Nursing in an urban district of Tamil Nadu.

Objectives

The study was carried out with following objectives.

- To describe the meaning of 'empowerment' as perceived by nursing students
- To explore the perception of nursing students regarding challenges and enablers of empowerment
- To identify the perception of nursing students on prospects of being empowered.

Review of Literature

Meaning of empowerment. "Empowerment is an inner strength and an inner power transcending expected behaviours due to the importance and meaning that individuals derive from their work" (Dahiya & Bansal, 2021).

Challenges and barriers to empowerment. According to Bandura (1997), lack of clinical or academic excellence fills in doubt and fear which hampers the progress to empowerment. Studies have proved that poor staff cooperation, and lack of independence during clinical placements decreases the pace towards empowerment.

Facilitators of empowerment. The literature review sheds light on significance of supportive mentors playing pivotal role in nursing students' empowerment (Jones-Bradbury & Fiona, 2007). Ensuring proper clinical orientation to foster a sense of belongingness is widely recognised (Beskine, 2009; Levett-Jones et al, 2009). Freedom and opportunity of student nurse in decision making, at a clinical setting, students' self-esteem, recognition as an individual, and rich varied clinical experience positively influence empowerment (Ahn & Choi, 2015).

Prospects of empowerment among student nurses. Research in the past has proved that the end products of nursing students' empowerment are high self-esteem, motivation for learning and

positive regard for placement (Jones-Bradbury & Fiona, 2007).

There is still a need for contextualised description of the nursing students' perspectives on aspects of empowerment, which this study aims to provide.

Methodology

Research approach: Qualitative

Research design: Descriptive

Setting of the study: Selected College of Nursing in an urban district of Tamil Nadu.

Population: Students studying either BSc or GNM Nursing in selected College of Nursing in an urban district of Tamil Nadu.

Sample: Students studying BSc Nursing and Diploma in Nursing, in a selected College of Nursing in an urban district of Tamil Nadu.

Sample size: Seven undergraduate students (3 Diploma students and 4 BSc students) selected.

Sampling technique: Purposive sampling technique was used. One student representing each year in the respective undergraduate programmes was selected.

Criteria for sample selection

Inclusion criteria: Students who (1) were part of either BSc Nursing or Diploma Nursing programme (2) Were able and willing to express their views and ideas openly (3) Had at least 8 weeks of clinical experience (4) Were above 18 years of age (5) Were fluent in English.

Data collection

A focus group discussion guide was developed keeping the main themes of the study in mind.

Probing questions for the theme were:

1. What is empowerment according to you? What do you understand by the term 'empowerment' as a student nurse?
2. Being a nursing student, what do you think are the challenges and barriers existing that impede empowerment?
3. What are the facilitators and prospects of empowerment?
4. What are your suggestions to ensure empowerment among student nurses?

Data collection was conducted using focus group interview over a single session. The seven participants representing all undergraduate classes were included with two researchers moderating the

discussions. One student researcher moderated and facilitated the group discussions and the other recorded the proceedings. Audio-recording of the discussion occurred after informed consent was taken. The duration of the interview was 45-50 minutes and repetition of views and ideas was achieved. Participants were given sufficient opportunities to express their views.

Ethical considerations: The study was conducted after obtaining approval of the College of Nursing Research Committee. Oral and written informed consents were obtained from the participants before the data collection procedure. Respect, privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study.

Data analysis and management

The audio-recorded data was transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clark’s thematic analysis (Braun &, Clarke 2015). The researchers got familiar

with the text data and identified codes. Interview notes were also used to gain further insights.

Results

Participant characteristics: All the respondents were girls, between the age group of 18-22 years belonging to middle class family from various parts of India.

The main themes identified were meaning, facilitators and prospects of nursing students’ empowerment (Table 1).

The study subjects perceived empowerment as a gateway to confidence and self-esteem. Empowerment for them catalyses their potential in being competent nurses. It motivates them to exercise independence. It was identified that sufficient clinical exposure, freedom to practise, material, money and manpower resources plays a vital role in facilitating empowerment. Clinical experience in a multilingual hospital poses great

Table 1: The themes identified, description and quotes

Themes	Description	Quotes
Interpretation of empowerment by nursing students	Empowerment was perceived as increased confidence in abilities, development in good skills, ability to take initiative and to provide patient care independently, development of self, strengthening areas of deficit, ability to work like staff (managing similar patient loads), understanding the rationale behind care and freedom to practice (with/without supervision)	“Empowerment is anything that helps me build my confidence in a particular area, helping me to develop my skill to be a better individual and a student nurse” “For me, empowerment means to develop myself, to improve my knowledge, confidence or skill in whatever field I am in, especially in the nursing profession. “As an intern, we are able to do some work like a staff” “I am doing my internship now. For me, empowerment is getting to know why we are doing it behind each thing and allowing us to learn about it”
Facilitators for empowerment	Participants identified that return demonstrations, sufficient exposure to clinical areas, providing hands-on care to patients, freedom to practice and learn under supervision, teaching junior students, receiving appreciation from mentors and patients, involvement in co-curricular activities, strong nursing role-models & leaders, hand-holding by tutors in formative years, access to resources like WIFI and voluminous library, approachable teachers, availability of scholarships (financial assistance), integration of teaching & practice, specific postings like research and administration as facilitators to student nurses empowerment	“Co-curricular activities in nursing are also a good part of empowerment” I feel that one main facilitator is the patients. So, they are the biggest empowering people I have felt as a student nurse” “Being a first year, I feel that my biggest support would be our tutors” “Our scripture class, counselling class and foster prayers was the greatest facilitators I had”

Themes	Description	Quotes
Barriers and challenges of empowerment	Barriers identified were lack of recognition among other healthcare team members, perceived sense of deprecation by being labelled as 'student nurse' (who is ignorant), getting opportunity to practise only procedures that are mandatory, lack of practise for advanced procedures, lack of tutor supervision, lack of support and encouragement from mentors, lack of knowledge, time and experience, language barriers (prevalent in a multilingual, multicultural country), packed curriculum, lack of awareness of facilities/resources leading to lack of utilisation, sleep deprivation, fear, corrections done by mentors in front of others that leads to demotivation	"You must feel worthy of whatever you're studying, you must know your worth. If not, nursing students will feel like, it's not a big deal, even if I do or not, it doesn't matter!" "As a first-year student, the challenges faced would be lack of knowledge or skill, mostly due to lack of time" "So, the challenges for empowering nursing students are ineffective communication with patients. So, I'm a Tamil student. When my tutor assigns me to patients who speak another language, it is very difficult for me to communicate with them"
Suggestions to ensure empowerment	Appreciation, need for information and open communication regarding patient care from other healthcare providers, space to make minor mistakes and acceptance, trust from staff and mentors, bedside clinics and nursing rounds were identified as needs	"I feel bedside clinic and nursing rounds can help more in clinical knowledge" "A little bit of trust in saying that I too was once a student, if that respect and trust is there, I think all barriers will go" "Allow us to learn from our mistakes so that it helps us to grow in ways we can be future leaders" "I personally feel that, we might need a little push of encouragement"

challenge to nursing students with respect to their communication. Covid era was rather a liability producing pre-judgement on 'Covid-batch' questioning their competency and skills. The label of 'just a student nurse' and stereotyped ignorance towards them questions their potentiality and confidence. Integration in teaching and clinical practice and time constraints would have led to lack of supervision. Appreciation and open communication from staff and mentors can direct empowerment to a higher echelon. Minor mistakes need to be considered as a stepping stone to empowerment, and not cause of apprehension.

Discussion

This study identified that the perception of empowerment varied among the students. Factors that enabled and challenged empowerment among nursing students were recognised. Having nursing education from a multi- speciality medical institution with multilingual patients and prodigious patient load is an asset as well as a liability. It puts immense pressure on clinical mentors to give their

full concentration when students of varying degrees are teamed in same clinical area.

Short staffing in hospital ward compels qualified nurses to delegate basic tasks to students to optimise efficiency, thereby precluding opportunities to disseminate knowledge regarding advanced clinical procedures and practices. Having discussed external factors influencing empowerment. Internal factors like self-motivation, initiation to achieve knowledge, and awareness about facilities available play immense role in enhancing empowerment. A cross-sectional survey study disclosed, "The students showed a strong correlation between the empowerment level and clinical competencies level" (Liao & Liu, 2016), which gives more light to the result discovered through the study.

Implications of the Study

Nursing is a dynamic process, which involves quality-based practice, sound professional knowledge and dissemination of research knowledge to practice.

Nursing Education

This study implies a need for an effective teaching-learning atmosphere with a definite goal-oriented process, good exposure to clinical areas, hand-holding by tutors in formative years, positive reinforcement from mentors, simulation and pre-clinical demonstrations to uplift the confidence, supportive facilities like WIFI, voluminous library and scholarships. Such an environment develops in inculcating a sense of emotional and psychological well-being among nursing students, which in turn builds confidence and empowerment.

Nursing Practice

Mentors and clinical instructors in respective clinical areas play a major role in facilitating the hands-on experience and building the body of professional knowledge and experience for nursing students. Identifying the area of knowledge required and empowering nursing students to attain the knowledge and skills poses great influence on the self-respect, self-esteem and empowerment. Appreciation, constructive criticism, healthy supervision, opportunity to learn advanced procedures can contribute to development of nursing practice and empower nursing students.

Nursing Research

This study highlights the challenges, enablers and prospects of empowerment among nursing students. The study findings develop and expand the body of existing knowledge and brings greater scope of future researches in the area of empowerment of nursing students.

Nursing Administration

Developing confidence and facilitating empowerment among nursing students builds in them leadership, responsibility and accountability. Clinical exposure including research and administration help them in decision making, critical thinking and problem solving skills. Empowered nursing students shoulders the responsibility of quality patient care.

Recommendations

- Structured clinical placements and curriculum can aid in empowerment.
- Participation of student nurses in bedside clinics and nursing rounds.
- Positive reinforcement and constructive criticism to be used instead of humiliation/punishments for healthy development, professionally and psychologically.

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Conclusion

The development of empowerment among nursing students leads to the maximum achievement of learning competencies and enables them to eventually become competent nurses. Empowerment is crucial for the students' personal and professional growth. It sets the foundation for a lifelong commitment to continued learning, excellence in patient care and making meaningful contributions within the nursing profession. Prospects of educational institutions investing on empowerment among student nurses can help in shaping the next generation of competent and compassionate nurses.

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