

Voices from the future: A Qualitative exploration of undergraduate nursing students' perspectives on the nursing profession

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Abstract:

The nursing profession is one of the most important in providing health care; therefore, understanding the attitudes of undergraduate nursing students is imperative. This understanding aids in recruiting, teaching, and mentoring future nurses in the best ways possible. The primary aim of this research was to assess the perception of undergraduate nursing students regarding the nursing profession at Mosul University. A qualitative phenomenological design was done between December 12, 2023, and February 25, 2024. The study employed a qualitative research design in which a proportional purposive sampling procedure, group and individual interviews, and thematic analysis were used in data collection and analysis. In choosing participants for the study, a purposive sampling technique was used in-house, emphasizing undergraduate nursing students at Mosul University. Five open-ended questions were posed to the twenty-five participants, and the questions were aimed at unraveling the participants' views, expectations, and opinions about the nursing profession. The interviews were tape-recorded, and the responses obtained were transcribed verbatim, and themed analysis was conducted. From the study, it can be deduced that students have a favorable attitude towards the nursing profession. Some view nursing as a fulfilling and meaningful employment driven by their desire to help people in need. Nevertheless, some issues are connected with the challenges and tasks inherent in the profession. Therefore, there are other social and cultural factors that influence nursing students' attitudes, some of which include societal beliefs about the profession or stereotypes. Nursing as a profession is usually accompanied by the aim of caring for and improving the quality of life of other people. It consists of patience, taking the side of the patient, and the need to support this patient in enhancing their health. Emphasis is placed on interpersonal communication, interpersonal relations, teamwork, principles of justice and equity, and the overall well-being of each client. Nursing is a relatively safe and provided profession because of the continually increasing need for nurses, but the job is not easy, and people need help in managing the load and combating burnout.

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INTRODUCTION

Nurse shortage is a universal phenomenon, and the attraction and retention of nurses are global concerns (Marcé et al., 2019; Nydahl et al., 2024). Nursing is one of the most valued occupations, and a warm heart is needed to warm up the atmosphere of the patients (Kalogirou et al., 2020). Nurses are usually the initial or frontline of first contact in health facilities, and their efforts are essential to the full accomplishment of development ambitions and provision of quality healthcare services (Létourneau et al., 2022). Nursing students' professional attitude determines their performance and the development of this profession (Glerean et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2021). Nurses

play a key role in the entire medical field, and their tasks are critical for increasing the population's living standards and preventing diseases (Liu et al., 2020; Paterson et al., 2020).

Attitude likewise plays a significant role in the student's retention and recruitment, funding for nursing education and research, and relations with healthcare administrators and others (Owens et al., 2020; Negrin et al., 2020). Nursing students may be positive towards their professions since they are highly skilled people who can offer quality service to members of society. However, negative attitudes towards nursing may emanate from the tiring activity in the hospital, working on holidays, unnoticed for the work done, and low salaries paid (Akter et al., 2019). Finally, the author urges nursing students to have a positive attitude toward the profession to enhance the development of nursing education and new strategies in nursing (de Swardt et al., 2017). Attitude is another important facet in motivating human activity towards accomplishing objectives and improving achievement motivation (Emire et al., 2022; Kitsios & Kamariotou, 2021).

Nursing is one of the most labor-intensive career paths out there, and the nurses are under a great deal of stress in their workplace as they attend to the patient's symptoms and states, thus low job satisfaction (Çelik et al., 2023; Saifan et al., 2022). This is so even though nurses are some of the most important 'guardians' of public health despite society not appreciating their efforts (Hennekam et al., 2020). This omission impacts the recognition of the value of the nursing profession and further reduces aspiration and traineeship among nursing students (Mai et al., 2018).

There are a few cultural barriers that nursing faced in the course of its development. These include Relatively low status, which might have discouraged candidates from joining the nursing field (Belita & Ford, 2021). Some research work undertaken in several countries has sought to establish the perception of the public concerning nursing and their attitude towards such an approach to a career (Jones et al., 2023). This research aligns with these trends by exploring the perception of nursing students at Mosul University, aiming to uncover the factors influencing their attitudes. The hypotheses that have been argued in prior research: possession of a favorable attitude toward nursing is linked to a better appreciation of the profession's role and the ability to build a career in the nursing field (Maharani et al., 2022). Cuning and other researchers have argued that the main reasons the healthcare profession is chosen are the desire to acknowledge the humanistic aspect of the nursing profession, job security and promotional opportunities, and interest in people and the health sciences area (Neumbe et al., 2023; Mohamadi et al., 2022).

While only a few nursing students have been researched to assess their attitudes to the nursing profession, the author considers it necessary to come to a broad conclusion. General objectives can be set for learning to alter the negative perception of nursing. This might lead to more heart and soul healthcare providers (Yücel & Metin, 2023). Knowledge of the attitudes of nursing students can go a long way in defining the forces that compel or discourage the students or their struggles to succeed in the profession and enhance the quality of nursing education as well as the nursing workforce prognosis for the benefit of the patients as well as the nursing profession itself. It helps educators and organizations to understand how students perceive the profession in order to develop ways to support them, modify teaching methods, and offer teaching aids as well as opportunities for career enhancement. This work aims to determine the perception of nursing students of Mosul University on their profession and the factors associated with it.

METHOD

Design: The study was carried out from December 12, 2023, to February 25, 2024, and the research method employed was Qualitative Phenomenological research design. The research was carried out in the College of Nursing at Mosul; the data collection method was qualitative descriptive content analysis.

Sample and sampling: The participants were selected purposively based on the conviction that the purposive sampling technique is well suited to feeding me specific and detailed information on the study problem area. To this end, the eligibility criteria comprised the stage of the study and the participant's awareness of the nursing profession and course accomplishment in nursing. In the end, once data accumulation was done, twenty-five undergraduate students at Mosul College of Nursing

were used in the study. Notably, the first and the fourth level stages' of students who showed the desire to participate in the research were involved in the study.

Instrument and data collection: The data collection technique used by the researcher was interviews with Mosul University undergraduate nursing students through purposive sampling. The data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews carried out by author Karam Yaseen Fathi. The researcher introduced himself/herself to the participants before data collection and explained the purpose of the interviews, their general features, type, and duration. All the interviews were recorded, and each patient's entire interview was transcribed to obtain a verbatim account.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during this research, each taking approximately 40 to 45 minutes to complete. Participants were interviewed in a private room to minimize interference. They used open-ended questionnaires; thus, the study sought to obtain qualitative findings. To avoid ambiguity, participants were provided with a list of questions to ask during the interview in both Arabic and English. All the interviews were conducted orally, and to enhance their reliability, they were recorded using a digital voice recorder. These interviews were both tape-recorded and detailed notes were taken after each interview, including the word-for-word transcription of all interviews. These transcripts and notes were imported into MAXQDA software for further analysis and review.

Validity: To ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings, the questions of the survey were kept in a more general fashion and were particular to the respondents' knowledge so that they could make some reflective responses. The research methodology was laid down clearly, and there was a clear sequencing of the research activities. The notes and recorded interviews were kept very detailed. Moreover, the personal expertise of the researcher in the discussed topics was high to ensure the credibility of the obtained data and its quality. To confirm curate credibility, the participants are allowed to cross-check the results. Therefore, this study's findings will help identify the state of the nursing profession and the experiences and attitudes of nursing students toward it.

Ethical considerations: The researchers obtained formal approval from the university's research ethics committee, and each participant was asked to sign a consent form after explaining the type and purpose of the study.

RESULT

The study involved a diverse group of male and female nursing students at different stages in their educational journey—specifically, those in the first and fourth years of nursing college (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Shows the demographic characteristics of the participants

	Variables	Number	Percentage
Sex	Male	16	64%
	Female	9	36%
Age Group	18-22	17	68%
	23-27	4	16%
	28-32	2	8%
	>32	2	8%
Type of Study	Morning	14	56%
	Evening	11	44%
Study Stage	Stage one	10	40%
	Stage four	15	60%

Based on the analysis, the researcher depicted 180 codes from the interview data and grouped them into five themes and 14 subthemes, as shown in Figure 1.

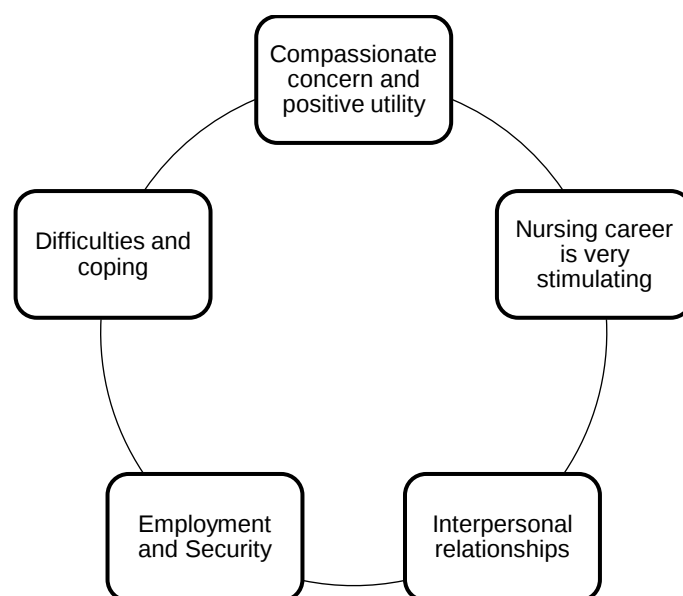


Figure 1. Shows the main themes that emerged from the participants

Compassionate concern and positive utility

1. Self-generated helping motivation

Most students who want a nursing career will likely have a strong passion for caring for the sick and taking charge of their needs. They see it as a distinct way of addressing clients and their families and influencing them with their ideals and calibrations. For instance, one learner said:

"I deeply love helping people, and that is why I took my course in nursing...Nothing is as rewarding as knowing that you are why people are happy and not suffering." (participant# 7)

The last testimonial comes from another participant who said, as it was mentioned, nursing is about helping others:

"I chose nursing as my profession after experiencing the miraculous power of nursing care to transform the life of Wadi, who was struggling with paralysis. When I saw him praying for 'compassionate nursing care,' tilted my life towards nursing." (participant #15)

2. Kindness and Empathy

It has been established that nursing students always exercise a high level of caring attitude towards patients, which is why caring is one of the core values. They understand the importance of providing holistic, individualized, holistically, and holistic patient care, targeting the patients' body, mind, and social self under their treatment. One participant said:

"The nursing profession, as we all know, requires one to possess a deep level of concern or empathy for the patients that are under their care: this is true because at the center of the nursing process is the patient's physical, emotional and social care needs" (Participant#3).

3. Need to enhance the condition of the patient

As we have noted earlier, nursing students are motivated by the desire to influence significantly the health and general quality of life of their patients and society. They appreciate the vocational function of nurses in maintaining health, preventing diseases, and offering steady encouragement to patients at all stages of their treatment.

Concerning preferences, one of the respondents wrote that:

"to achieve the status of a good nurse, a person has to have a high level of determination and passion necessary to boost the health of the patient, avoid illnesses, and always stand by a patient." (participant #5)

4. Advocacy and Justice

This study also revealed that nursing students are highly motivated and passionate about asserting patient's rights and espousing fairness to healthcare organizations. They comprehend the more effective, timely, and efficient elimination of health inequalities- equal quality of services irrespective of status or origin. As one of the participants summarized:

"Nursing is the commitment to fight for patients' rights and support them as a caregiver to every person regardless of class, color, beliefs, and gender" (Participant 1).

A Nursing career is very stimulating

1. Intention and Meaning

Students clearly understand their professional identity and feel the meaningfulness of their future profession, which helps nursing students. They are very much aware of the core function of nursing in the healthcare sector and the potential that one has to transform lives and society.

2. Holistic approaches

Overall, nursing is most famous for the qualitative and extensive scope of patient care, which prospective nursing students find very appealing. Instead of being more concerned with patients' disease models by emphasizing the treatment process, these students embrace a biophysical and psychosocial model of the patients.

Students studying at the Nursing faculty understand the many opportunities available for growth and development in nursing. They discover much enthusiasm in constant growth in the storehouse of their knowledge, repertoire of skills, and spheres of interest. This practice area is diverse, allowing for numerous specializations from floor-level care to nursing managerial positions, researchers, and teachers. This, along with the possibility of promotion, makes the prospects of nursing students appealing. For instance, one of the students said:

"Personally, as a nursing student, I enjoy the fact that the nursing profession has a lot of promotion openings and promotional opportunities in their careers in nursing, so meaning you can do numerous fulfilling jobs nursing direct care, nursing advanced practice, nursing research, nursing educator, and nursing administrators" (participant #2).

One student concisely said:

"For me, it is not simply a job to become a nurse, but it is a mission. Making others' lives better and giving them the care they need and hope in their darkest days is worth coming to work for." (participant #8).

Interpersonal relationships

1. Communication

The communication process cannot be overemphasized in nursing as it entails the relationship that nurses have with other members of the health care team and the patients and their families. One nursing student stressed understanding:

"it is fundamental to the nursing process, according to the articulation of the nursing approach. They want to engage with their patient, clarify their fears, and give them all the necessary information that doctors call 'the whole context' of the problem professionally and trustfully" (participant #21).

2. Collaboration

Perks of collaboration with other nurses, proficient, other healthcare specialists, and teachers are also significant for nurse career advancement. Nurses, doctors, and allied health professionals should provide collaborative and integrated care, which, in effect, leads to comprehensive caregiving that enhances the outcomes.

The third and final opinion indicated that:

"effective collaboration with the other health care team members and patients is crucial when assessing the output of an intervention since quality care cannot be maintained without inter-professional collaboration." (Participant #19).

Likewise, another student noted eagerness to attend team meetings, case discussions, and interdisciplinary rounds because such propositions are thought to improve clinical judgment and problem-solving.

"During my clinical practice, I've identified that there is a problem of interdisciplinary cooperation, which means that interdisciplinary cooperation should be promoted." (participant #25).

Employment and Security

The view that the nursing profession has good prospects and stability is one compelling reason why nursing students have a positive attitude toward the profession.

1. Demand for Nurses

Nursing students also acknowledge the need for nurses in the healthcare industry regarding the demands of the aging population, the increased rate of chronic diseases, and the need for adequately trained personnel to provide quality healthcare services. They know the numerous employment opportunities available to them in different health-related settings such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, schools, and health-related non-governmental organizations. This perception of the great demand for nurses enhances confidence and reliability among nursing students because they feel that the nursing profession is secure and demanding. From one of the students:

"The nursing profession can hardly be overestimated, especially within the framework of hospitals, and as far as the population is increasing and the number of both state and private healthcare facilities is expanding, the demand for nurses will remain high. "(Participant #14).

2. Job Stability and Security

Sometimes, nursing students find it helpful that nursing provides almost complete job security, unlike some careers. They are enticed by the fact that the nursing profession continues to enjoy high demand, and more importantly, there is a prediction that the employment opportunities of nursing professionals will improve in the future. This notion of job security augments the sense of job stability, which helps nursing students to have no concerns about the future of their profession. "

3. Difficulties and coping

Students interested in becoming registered nurses are informed of the extent of the trade requirements, the extent of the push, and the physical and emotive strain involved; however, their feelings towards these characteristics may not be the same.

4. Awareness of Workload

As nursing students, they are fully aware that nursing always comes with long working hours, commitment to providing care to patients, and a relatively fast-paced work environment. They understand that nurses always experience high work stress, which causes a burden on their physical and emotional health. These realities of the nursing profession are usually learned during our studies, clinical practice, and socialization with other professional nurses.

5. Burnout

There have been a lot of complaints from nursing students about burnout, predicting that the nursing career is tremendously stressful. They are concerned about the impacts of such care on their emotions and well-being, managing patient's conditions, and dealing with the organization's challenges. Such students have low expectations about their capability to keep a work-life balance and avoid burnout in the future. Defying all odds and stress factors, some students express their ability and readiness to meet them without necessarily being overwhelmed by them. Such people might have skills in handling stress, relapse prevention, taking care of themselves, and creating resources to deal with adverse situations that they acquired in their educational programs or from their experiences. Further, they may be highly committed to their purpose and the nursing profession, which will lead to them framing challenges as the experience of personal and professional development.

6. Support Systems

The attitude that nursing students have towards the challenges and stresses of the nursing profession, therefore, depends on the amount of support available to them and their capability to

formulate ways of handling the stresses they encounter. Depending on what existing structures of support they expect to have at their disposal, either counseling, mentorship, or arrangements for work-life balance, their attitudes will differ. For the former, if they believe they will have the capacity and means to meet the demands of nursing, then they will feel less worried; in contrast, the latter will certainly feel more worried with little or no input toward one's self-care or perceived organizational culture that does not encourage self-care.

7. Adaptability and Resilience

Many nursing students consider the challenges and stress in the nursing profession as opportunities to develop flexibility and or perseverance. This they regard as challenges given the rigors of training and practice, which help them improve on problem-solving skills, management of time, and emotional intelligence. Finally, they expect that by overcoming these issues, they will be more prepared to combat the complex features of life with higher levels of readiness and resilience.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study on the outlooks and beliefs of the nursing students are consistent with prior studies on the drives and experiences of the nursing students. The desire to help and care for others and the perceived meaning and relevance of the occupation are well-recognized factors influencing the decision to become a nurse (Malfait & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2023). The emphasis on the broad and integrative approaches to nursing work is in harmony with the nursing discourse about patient-orientated and interprofessional care (Moradi et al., 2016).

Regarding the employment opportunities and stability in the nursing domain, similar sentiments have been expressed in the literature, with the level of demand for nurses rising globally as a result of factors such as increasing population aging and rising incidence of chronic diseases (Tamata, & Mohammadnezhad, 2023). This perception of job security and availability can be one of the forces for nursing students (Shamsi & Peyravi, 2020).

Nevertheless, realizing the challenges and opportunities to 'burn out' in nursing is a commonplace topic (Fischer et al., 2025). Several studies have documented increased stress, workload, and emotional demands placed on nursing students and practicing nurses, which lead to burnout and attrition (Hwang & Kim, 2022). Creating informative coping strategies and the availability of support resources have been underlined as critical for nursing students and professionals in overcoming these challenges (Roca et al., 2021).

The observations made in this exploration also highlighted the prospects of P-BL given the roles and prototyping culture of the nursing competence and are supported by a growing body of work that discussed the value of adaptability and resilience to nursing motion (Antonsdottir et al., 2022). It is postulated that nursing students with a 'challenge perception' or notion of the challenges as a springboard for growth and development may be better placed in managing the demands of the nursing profession (Morioka et al., 2020). In summary, the findings of this research offer valuable insights into the complex nature of the attitudes and perceptions of nursing students regarding educational experiences, faculty support, workforce image, career opportunities, and role models, which may help to develop future education programs, protective mechanisms, and efforts to promote the recruitment, successful career progression or students and nurses.

CONCLUSION

Nursing is all about caring and making a difference for others since its practice derives from caregiving. This entails desiring to work diligently on patients, specifying them with a Personal passion that comprises compassion, Empathy, and passion to enhance patients' health. Another important function of nursing is to speak out on justice issues and be responsible for patients' all-around and encompassing care. Interpersonal interactions, collaborativeness, and good communication skills are among the essential characteristics of nursing. On the employment side, nursing has tremendous opportunities and is almost guaranteed because of the ever-increasing job openings. But it can sometimes be tiring, and the nurses themselves should bear this in mind:

workload and burnout can be a real issue, and again, they should not underestimate the importance of having an appropriate support structure when dealing with such challenges.

Here is the recommendation to enhance the welfare of the nurses and consequently reduce incidences of burnout: Such measures include fostering staff's wellness, reasonable work demands, coworkers, championing effective communication, professional growth, reasonable working, and off-working balance, and the enhancement of the image of the nursing profession. Through the implementation and advocacy of such measures, healthcare organizations can affirm the acknowledgment of the employees, especially the nursing profession, boost the morale of the workers, and thus amplify patient care.

Several limitations may have impacted the study findings. One is that the study used a purposive sampling technique, which may have led to selection bias. In addition, the participants may respond in ways that are socially acceptable.

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