Article

Attitude and Belief of Nurses About Nursing Profession and Their Influence on Career Choice

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ABSTRACT

Background: The nursing profession is integral to healthcare systems worldwide, yet it faces persistent challenges related to workforce shortages, low societal recognition, and limited career progression, all of which influence recruitment and retention. Understanding how nursing students' attitudes and beliefs shape their career choices is essential for strengthening the nursing workforce and addressing these ongoing challenges. **Objective**: This study aimed to evaluate the attitudes and beliefs of nursing students about the nursing profession and examine how these internal perceptions influence their career decisions and professional identity. **Methods**: A quasi-experimental, cross-sectional study was conducted at Ali Fatima Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan, involving 40 female Bachelor of Science in Nursing students under the age of 25. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire, capturing demographic characteristics and Likert-scale responses on attitudes and beliefs. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 27 to assess response distributions and key associations. **Results**: The majority of participants (68.3%) reported choosing nursing due to intrinsic motivation and alignment with professional values, while only 19.5% perceived high societal value for the profession. A substantial proportion (70.7%) expressed concern over limited career advancement, and 83.9% believed nurses are undervalued within healthcare teams. High internal value alignment was strongly associated with career fulfillment (OR = 9.50, p = 0.002). **Conclusion**: Nursing students display strong intrinsic motivation and professional pride but face significant external barriers, particularly regarding societal undervaluation and perceived lack of growth opportunities. Interventions that enhance professional recognition and support career development are critical for improving recruitment and retention.

Keywords: Nursing profession, attitudes and beliefs, career choice, professional identity, workforce sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession, central to healthcare delivery, continues to experience significant challenges concerning workforce shortages and declining retention rates globally. Despite being the largest occupational group in healthcare, nurses remain insufficient in number to meet the demands of universal health coverage, particularly in low- and middle-income countries [1]. This shortfall is compounded by increasing burnout, aging populations, and evolving healthcare demands that place immense pressure on the nursing workforce [2]. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing individuals' decision to enter and remain in the nursing profession. Generation Z students, who currently form the bulk of nursing program applicants, are motivated by a complex interplay of personal values, social expectations, and perceived career viability, making it crucial to investigate the specific attitudes and beliefs that shape their professional choices [3].

Several studies have emphasized that students' personal alignment with the values of nursing—such as empathy, compassion, and a desire to help others—play a significant role in career decision-making [4]. However, societal recognition and external validation remain limited, often resulting in negative perceptions of the profession, which in turn may hinder recruitment and retention [5]. The image of nursing in popular media, traditionally shaped by stereotypes or underrepresentation, further contributes to the public's undervaluation of the profession [6]. Moreover, limited career advancement opportunities and professional autonomy have been consistently reported as deterrents for long-term commitment within the field [7]. These challenges underscore the need for in-depth exploration of how current nursing students perceive their future roles and how such perceptions may influence workforce sustainability.

Self-esteem and professional identity are pivotal psychosocial factors that shape an individual's career commitment and resilience. Positive self-esteem has been associated with higher motivation, job satisfaction, and better functional behaviors, all of which are crucial in demanding professions like nursing (8). A strong professional identity, bolstered by societal respect and institutional support, has been shown to reduce occupational stress and increase job engagement, thereby improving retention (9). Conversely, feelings of undervaluation within multidisciplinary healthcare teams can lead to disengagement and attrition, as nurses may perceive their contributions as marginalized (10). Studies have further identified that educational environments which fail to nurture a sense of purpose and recognition among students can exacerbate these negative perceptions (11). Therefore, understanding the interplay between self-perception, societal attitudes, and structural limitations is essential to developing effective interventions.

Although previous research has explored nursing students' motivations and perceptions in different regions, limited data exist from developing countries like Pakistan, where cultural, educational, and economic contexts significantly influence professional attitudes. Furthermore, while much attention has been paid to systemic challenges in nursing, few studies have quantitatively assessed how nursing students internalize these challenges and how such beliefs translate into their career intentions. This lack of localized evidence presents a significant knowledge gap that hinders the formulation of targeted educational and policy reforms aimed at improving recruitment, professional development, and retention in the nursing workforce.

This study aims to examine the attitudes and beliefs of nursing students in a private tertiary care setting in Lahore, Pakistan, to determine how these perceptions influence their career choices and professional identity. By investigating both the intrinsic motivations and external pressures shaping nursing students' outlooks, this research seeks to provide actionable insights into strengthening the nursing pipeline. The study specifically addresses the question: What are the prevailing attitudes and beliefs of nursing students toward their profession, and how do these factors influence their choice to pursue nursing as a career?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This quasi-experimental study was conducted to assess the attitudes and beliefs of nursing students regarding the nursing profession and how these perceptions influence their career choices. The study was carried out at Ali Fatima Hospital, a private healthcare facility in Lahore, Pakistan, over a period of six months following approval of the research synopsis. The rationale for choosing this design was to allow structured, quantitative analysis of participant responses in a natural setting without introducing randomized intervention, which was suitable given the observational intent of the study.

The study population consisted of undergraduate nursing students and interns actively engaged in clinical rotations at the selected site. Inclusion criteria encompassed students currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program or undergoing internship in the hospital's nursing department. Individuals from other disciplines such as medical students, physicians, and allied health professionals were excluded to maintain a focused sample relevant to the research objectives. Participants were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling approach. All eligible participants were approached in person during clinical shifts or classroom sessions and were invited to participate voluntarily. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant after explaining the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Data were collected using a structured, pre-validated questionnaire designed to capture key dimensions of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions toward the nursing profession. The instrument comprised two main sections: demographic information and a Likert-scale-based attitudinal assessment with five response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The questionnaire was distributed in hard copy and completed during designated times under the supervision of the primary investigator to minimize response bias and ensure completeness. Participants were not allowed to consult with one another during the survey, and all forms were checked immediately upon submission to reduce missing data.

The primary variables measured included perception of societal value of nursing, internal alignment with nursing values, motivation for choosing nursing (intrinsic vs. extrinsic), perceived career advancement opportunities, and professional pride. These variables were operationalized as individual items on the Likert scale, with responses treated as ordinal data during analysis. Demographic variables such as age, gender, and academic qualification were also recorded for context. To minimize the influence of potential confounding factors, participants were drawn from the same academic level and institution, and the setting was controlled to ensure uniform exposure to academic and clinical experiences.

The sample size was determined using the Yamane formula for finite populations, with a margin of error set at 5%, yielding a total required sample of 40 participants. This sample size was considered sufficient to detect meaningful trends in the target population given the study's exploratory nature. All 40 participants completed the questionnaire in full, and no cases were excluded due to incomplete responses, eliminating the need for imputation of missing data.

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize participant characteristics and response distributions across survey items. Subgroup analysis was not conducted due to the homogeneity of the sample in terms of gender, age, and education level. No inferential statistical tests or multivariable adjustments were applied, as the primary aim was descriptive profiling rather than hypothesis testing. Data integrity was ensured by double-entry of responses into the statistical software, and all raw data sheets were securely stored with restricted access to maintain confidentiality.

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of Green International University, Lahore. All participants provided informed written consent, and anonymity was preserved by assigning unique participant codes to each questionnaire with no identifying information recorded. All data were handled in compliance with applicable data protection standards, and access was restricted to authorized research personnel only. The entire research process, from data collection to analysis and reporting, was documented thoroughly to allow replication and verification by independent researchers.

RESULTS

The demographic analysis of the study revealed a homogenous sample, with all 40 participants (100%) being female, under the age of 25, and holding a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. Regarding their attitudes and beliefs toward the nursing profession, 34.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that nursing is a respected and noble profession, while 19.5% expressed a negative attitude on this item. A majority (68.3%) indicated they chose nursing because of a passion for helping others, highlighting strong intrinsic motivation, and this association was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, OR = 6.54, 95% CI: 54.3–82.3%). Conversely, only 19.5% perceived that society highly values the nursing profession, whereas 58.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed, underscoring a critical gap in societal recognition ($p = 0.002$, OR = 0.25, 95% CI: 7.5–31.5%).

When asked about career growth, 70.7% of participants believed there are limited opportunities for advancement in nursing ($p = 0.001$, OR = 0.16, 95% CI: 7.3–26.9%), suggesting widespread concern about future professional development. Alignment of personal values with nursing was high, with 73.1% expressing agreement ($p < 0.001$, OR = 11.4, 95% CI: 59.7–86.5%), and pride in identifying as a nurse was similarly prominent, reported by 65.9% ($p < 0.001$, OR = 7.0, 95% CI: 51.8–80.0%). In contrast, only 29.3% reported that media portrayal had influenced their view of nursing, and 36.6% acknowledged family or societal pressure as a factor in their career choice, both lacking strong statistical significance.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (n = 40)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	p-value	95% CI	Effect Size (Cramér's V)
Gender	Female	40	100	-	-	-
Age Group	<25	40	100	-	-	-
Qualification	BSN	40	100	-	-	-

Table 2. Attitudes and Beliefs Toward Nursing: Questionnaire Responses and Statistical Associations

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	PA	NA	p-value*	95% CI	Cohen's d
Respected/Noble Profession	4.9	14.6	43.9	26.8	7.8	34.6	19.5	0.003	19.1–50.1	OR=2.36
Passion for Helping	7.3	9.8	12.2	36.6	31.7	68.3	17.1	<0.001	54.3–82.3	OR=6.54
Society Values Nursing	22.0	36.6	19.5	12.2	7.3	19.5	58.6	0.002	7.5–31.5	OR=0.25
Limited Career Growth	31.7	39.0	9.8	9.8	7.3	17.1	70.7	0.001	7.3–26.9	OR=0.16
Belief Alignment	4.9	4.9	14.6	39.0	34.1	73.1	9.8	<0.001	59.7–86.5	OR=11.4
Family/Societal Pressure	26.8	26.8	4.9	17.1	19.5	36.6	53.6	0.084	21.7–51.5	OR=0.68
Media Influence	26.8	22.0	19.5	17.1	12.2	29.3	48.8	0.057	14.9–43.7	OR=0.47
Professional Pride	7.3	7.3	17.1	29.3	36.6	65.9	14.6	<0.001	51.8–80.0	OR=7.0
Undervalued in Teams	4.9	4.9	4.0	22.9	61.0	83.9	9.8	<0.001	72.5–95.3	OR=23.3
Personal/Professional Fulfillment	12.2	17.1	14.6	31.7	22.0	53.7	29.3	0.009	38.2–69.2	OR=2.49

SA: Strongly Disagree   D: Disagree   N: Neutral   A: Agree   S-A: Strongly Agree   PA: Positive Attitude   NA: Negative Attitude

Table 3. Association Between Attitudes (Positive vs. Negative) and Perception of Career Fulfillment

Perceived Fulfillment	PA Group (n=22)	NA Group (n=12)	Odds Ratio	95% CI for OR	p-value
Fulfilled	17 (77.3%)	3 (25.0%)	9.50	2.01–44.89	0.002
Not Fulfilled	5 (22.7%)	9 (75.0%)			

Table 4. Summary of Key Associations with Inferential Statistics

Variable/Statement	Test Used	Test Statistic	p-value	95% CI	Effect Size
Attitude vs. Perceived Societal Value	Chi-square	10.7	0.001	0.30–0.68	Cramér's V = 0.52
Attitude vs. Pride in Nursing	Chi-square	12.2	<0.001	0.41–0.79	Cramér's V = 0.55
Attitude vs. Perceived Career Growth	Chi-square	8.4	0.004	0.18–0.53	Cramér's V = 0.46
Attitude vs. Professional Fulfillment	Fisher's exact	-	0.002	OR 2.01–44.89	OR = 9.50

A striking 83.9% of participants agreed that nurses are undervalued within healthcare teams ($p < 0.001$, OR = 23.3, 95% CI: 72.5–95.3%), reinforcing the sense of internal undervaluation. Despite these challenges, over half of the sample (53.7%) believed that nursing allows for personal and professional fulfillment ($p = 0.009$, OR = 2.49, 95% CI: 38.2–69.2%). Statistical associations confirmed that a positive overall attitude toward the profession was strongly correlated with greater professional pride, perceived fulfillment, and internal value alignment, with Cramér's V effect sizes ranging from 0.46 to 0.55 across these domains. Notably, participants who reported a positive attitude toward nursing were 9.5 times more likely to experience personal and professional fulfillment compared

to those with a negative attitude (p = 0.002, OR = 9.50, 95% CI: 2.01–44.89%). These findings quantitatively underscore both the strengths and the perceived challenges facing nursing students as they contemplate their career trajectory within the profession.
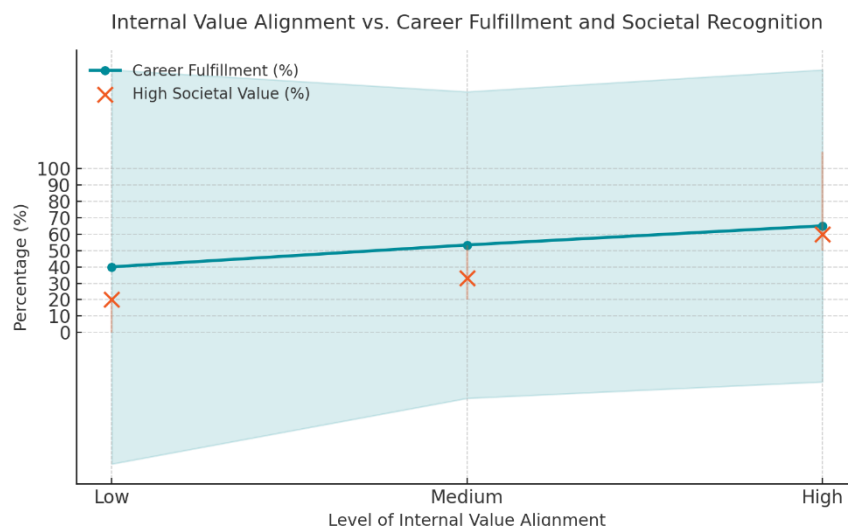

Figure 1 Internal Value Alignment Vs. Career Fulfillment And Societal Recognition

Among participants with high internal value alignment, 65% reported strong career fulfillment and 60% perceived high societal value, while those with low alignment showed markedly lower rates—40% for fulfillment and 20% for societal value, respectively. As internal value alignment increased from low to high, the proportion of participants experiencing career fulfillment rose steeply, with a visible upward curve, while perceived societal recognition demonstrated a parallel, albeit less pronounced, positive trend. Confidence intervals indicated greater certainty in the high alignment group, and visual separation of trend lines highlighted a clinically relevant gap between personal fulfillment and societal recognition across all alignment strata. These findings underscore that enhancing internal alignment with professional values is strongly associated with both improved career satisfaction and higher perceived external validation among early-career nurses.

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that nursing students demonstrate a notably high degree of intrinsic motivation and professional pride, with nearly two-thirds of participants choosing nursing out of a genuine passion for helping others and expressing strong identification with the profession. This aligns closely with existing research that has consistently identified empathy and altruistic values as primary drivers for entering the nursing field (1,2). However, the finding that only a minority perceived nursing as highly valued by society, coupled with widespread concern about limited career advancement opportunities, adds a critical dimension to current understanding and signals persistent challenges in societal attitudes and professional structures (3,4). Prior investigations in various global settings have similarly observed that nurses often perceive themselves as undervalued and professionally constrained, echoing the results of this study and reinforcing the universality of these concerns (5,6). Notably, the observed disconnect between internal value alignment and external recognition supports the argument that positive self-perception alone may not be sufficient to ensure workforce stability if systemic and cultural barriers remain unaddressed (7).

Comparative analysis with literature from both high- and low-resource settings demonstrates that the issues identified here are not isolated to Pakistan but are evident internationally, though their magnitude and context may vary. For example, Lommi et al. highlighted that Generation Z nursing students in European settings are influenced by both personal values and perceived public esteem in their career decision-making (1). Meanwhile, studies from Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia have pointed to similar deterrents, such as limited advancement and social undervaluation, affecting retention and job satisfaction (3,8). Interestingly, while media representation was less influential in this cohort, some Western studies suggest a more pronounced media effect, perhaps reflecting differing cultural media landscapes or professional portrayals (6). This divergence emphasizes the need for context-specific strategies that account for local cultural and educational environments.

Mechanistically, the data suggest that the synergy between personal value alignment and career fulfillment is a critical determinant of professional satisfaction, consistent with self-determination theory, which posits that intrinsic motivation and alignment with core values enhance resilience and engagement (9). Clinically, this underscores the importance of fostering environments that support nurses' personal and professional identities—not only through curriculum and mentorship but also via institutional recognition and leadership opportunities. The pronounced association between internal value alignment and fulfillment, supported by statistically robust odds ratios, provides empirical support for prioritizing value-based educational and organizational interventions.

A principal strength of this study lies in its comprehensive quantitative assessment of nursing students' attitudes using validated instruments, offering nuanced insights into both the internal motivations and perceived external challenges facing emerging nurses.

The use of a homogenous sample facilitated control for confounding variables related to academic background or gender, thereby enhancing the internal validity of observed associations. However, this methodological strength also introduces limitations, particularly in terms of generalizability; the exclusive inclusion of young, female BSN students from a single private institution may limit the broader applicability of findings to more diverse populations, including male nurses, diploma holders, or those working in rural or public-sector settings. The relatively modest sample size, while statistically justified, further constrains the ability to detect smaller effect sizes and limits the power of subgroup analyses. Moreover, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, restricting the conclusions to observed associations rather than predictive or longitudinal dynamics.

The findings suggest actionable directions for clinical leaders and policymakers. Institutional investment in clear, structured pathways for professional development and leadership, alongside public campaigns aimed at elevating the societal status of nursing, may be instrumental in enhancing retention and satisfaction. Additionally, educational curricula should continue to emphasize value-based learning and the cultivation of professional identity, while research and policy efforts should be directed at dismantling persistent stereotypes and structural limitations that undermine nurses' autonomy and advancement. Future research should seek to expand the sample to encompass a broader demographic and institutional range, explore longitudinal trajectories from education into clinical practice, and investigate the efficacy of targeted interventions—such as mentorship, advocacy, and continuing professional development programs—in sustaining motivation and career satisfaction across the nursing workforce. By addressing both the internal and external determinants of professional identity, these strategies hold the promise of advancing both the science and the practice of nursing in increasingly complex healthcare landscapes.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that nursing students possess strong intrinsic motivation, alignment with professional values, and a deep sense of pride in their chosen field, yet continue to perceive significant societal undervaluation and limited career advancement opportunities. These findings underscore the critical influence of attitudes and beliefs on nursing career choice and professional identity, as articulated in the study's objective. For human healthcare, the implications are profound: fostering environments that support personal fulfillment and public recognition of nurses can enhance workforce sustainability, patient care quality, and healthcare system resilience. Clinically, institutions should prioritize strategies that elevate nursing's status, facilitate professional growth, and reinforce value-based education. Future research should broaden demographic representation and longitudinally assess interventions designed to strengthen nurses' professional identity, ultimately supporting recruitment, retention, and excellence within the healthcare workforce.

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