Volume 3, Issue 7, 2025

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

FACULTY AND STUDENT INTROSPECTION ON THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON NURSING AND NURSING EDUCATION IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Shahida Kousar[*1], Amna Noureen[2], Faiza Munir[3]

[*1]*RNO, Bahawal Victoria Hospital, Bahawalpur, Pakistan*
[2]*Charge Nurse, Tehsil Headquarter Hospital, Yazman, Pakistan*
[3]*Registered Nurse, Shalamar Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan*
[4]*Head Nurse Kidney Transplant, Akber Niazi Teaching Hospital, Islamabad, Pakistan*

[*1]shahdkousar28@gmail.com; [2]nooramna014@gmail.com; [3]fmunir916@gmail.com

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17112446

Keywords
COVID-19, Nursing Students, Nursing Faculty, Nursing Education

Article History
Received: 21 June 2025
Accepted: 31 August 2025
Published: 13 September 2025

Copyright @Author
Corresponding Author: *
Shahida Kousar

Abstract

Introduction: Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound effects on the mental, physical, and academic well-being of nursing students and faculty. In Pakistan, the impact on nursing education during successive pandemic waves remains underexplored. Objective: To explore the lived experiences and introspections of nursing students and faculty regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing education and clinical training in Punjab, Pakistan. Methods: A qualitative phenomenological design was employed with thematic analysis. A voluntary sample of 65 participants, including 57 fourth-year BS nursing students and 8 faculty members, provided narratives between April and June 2022. Data were collected using an optional interview guide with open-ended reflective questions, capturing both clinical practice and teaching experiences during the specified period. Results: Thematic analysis of student narratives revealed four key themes: (i) heightened fear and anxiety of COVID-19 during clinical placements, (ii) disruptions and adaptations within the learning environment, (iii) personal and institutional factors that promoted perseverance, and (iv) strategies for preparedness in future health crises. Faculty narratives highlighted three themes: (i) the need for structured preparatory measures, (ii) physical and psychological tolls of mentoring students in high-risk environments, and (iii) recognition of resilience among both students and educators. Conclusion: The findings emphasize the necessity for nurse educators and institutions in Pakistan to develop proactive strategies for supporting students and faculty during large-scale health emergencies. Incorporating structured preparatory frameworks, psychological support systems, and resilient teaching methodologies can strengthen nursing education and safeguard the well-being of future healthcare providers.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted health systems worldwide and significantly impacted nursing education, leading to unprecedented challenges for students and faculty. Nursing students, particularly those in their final year, faced increased stress as they transitioned from classroom learning to frontline

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

clinical placements during the pandemic. Studies have shown that the pandemic created heightened anxiety, fear of infection, and concerns about academic progression among nursing students, as well as additional burdens for faculty in providing guidance and psychological support under rapidly changing conditions (Aslan & Pekince, 2021; Nishimura et al., 2021). These experiences underscore the importance of exploring how both students and educators internalized and reflected upon the crisis.

In Pakistan, where nursing education has historically struggled with limited resources and structural challenges, the pandemic amplified existing gaps in training, preparedness, and student support systems. Research indicates that nursing students in low- and middle-income countries experienced greater disruptions in their learning due to limited access to protective resources, inconsistent vaccination policies, and lack of technological infrastructure for remote education (Hayat et al., 2021; Ulenaers et al., 2021). Faculty, on the other hand, were tasked with balancing clinical responsibilities, online teaching, and emotional mentoring, all while managing their own risks and stress. These dynamics illustrate the pressing need to examine both faculty and student introspections in Punjab, Pakistan, where health facilities bore a significant burden during successive waves of COVID-19.

Recent global and regional studies suggest that the lessons learned from the pandemic can reshape the future of nursing education by fostering resilience, adaptability, and innovative teaching practices. For instance, reflective accounts from nursing students in Canada and Europe highlighted the role of institutional preparedness and faculty mentorship in maintaining educational continuity during health crises (Foli et al., 2021; Rieckert et al., 2021). Similarly, in South Asia, where the health workforce shortage is acute, understanding the lived experiences of nursing faculty and students is critical for developing sustainable models of education that prioritize both professional competency and psychological well-being. Thus, examining the introspection of faculty and students in Punjab offers valuable insights into building a resilient nursing education system in the post-pandemic era.

1. Methods

1.1 Design

A qualitative phenomenological design guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was employed. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of nursing students and faculty in clinical placements during the COVID-19 pandemic. The design emphasized exploration of participants' perspectives, feelings, and reflective insights regarding the challenges and coping mechanisms encountered during the health crisis.

2.2 Research Question

What are the lived experiences of nursing faculty teaching clinical courses and nursing students undertaking final-year clinical placements during the COVID-19 pandemic in Punjab, Pakistan?

2.3 Sample and Setting

The study was conducted between April and June 2022 at Lahore General Hospital and its College of Nursing. A purposive sample of 65 participants was recruited, including 57 third and fourth-year BS nursing students and 8 faculty members supervising them. Clinical placements were primarily situated within the hospital's wards and specialized units, with exposure to acute care, emergency, and critical care settings. This sample provided a comprehensive reflection of both the students' and faculty's challenges and adaptive strategies during the pandemic context.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Narratives were collected through an optional interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants' reflection on their pandemic experiences. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the six-phase thematic analysis approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed. First, transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarization, and initial codes were generated by identifying significant features of the data. Codes were then collated into potential themes and subthemes. Themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to capture the essence of participants' experiences. A thematic map was developed to illustrate the connections between themes. Faculty validation of

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

themes was completed to ensure accuracy, while student participant validation was not feasible due to institutional constraints after graduation. Manual analysis ensured immersion in the data and consistency in theme development.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

Written informed consent was taken from all participants, with assurance of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using coded identifiers, and data were stored securely with restricted access. Given the sensitive nature of the pandemic experiences, participants were informed they could skip questions or discontinue at any point, and referrals for psychological support were available if needed.

2. Results

2.1 Characteristics of the Participants

This study did not collect detailed sociodemographic characteristics, as participants were invited to reflect on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic anonymously. The available demographic information indicates that participants were primarily nursing students aged 21–26 years, enrolled in the third and fourth year of the BS Nursing program, and engaged in clinical placements at Lahore General Hospital. The student group was predominantly female, reflecting the class's gender distribution.

The final sample included 65 participants, consisting of 57 nursing students and 8 faculty members. Thematic analysis of the narratives yielded four central themes from student reflections and three themes from faculty perspectives. Together, these themes captured both the challenges and the strengths that shaped the academic, clinical, and personal lives of nursing students and faculty during the pandemic.

2.2 Nursing Student Narratives

Theme 1: Fear and Anxiety of COVID-19 During Clinical Practice

Students expressed a wide range of emotions during their clinical placements, with an overwhelming majority (98%) reporting significant anxiety and concern. Many described how the realities of the pandemic became more tangible once they entered frontline care. As one student reflected, *"Understanding this pandemic's difficulties never truly impacted me until I was on the front lines facing uncertainty, terror, and fear."*

This anxiety was further intensified by uncertainty surrounding academic progression and program completion. Concerns about delayed graduation and the transition to online learning left students feeling unsettled. One participant noted, *"With our lives shifting significantly and school turning to online, the fear crept up inside of me whether I will be able to finish my school, how placements would work, what does this mean for me in the future."*

While students appreciated the continuation of clinical placements, many worried that restrictions might compromise the quality of their learning experience. The fear of transmitting COVID-19 to vulnerable patients and family members was particularly distressing. One student explained, *"The lingering thoughts of potentially being exposed to this deadly virus, bringing something home to my family was highly heartbreaking to think about."*

Several students reported interruptions to their placements after developing symptoms, feeling unwell, or being exposed to COVID-19. In some cases, the impact was severe. A participant recounted, *"I was hospitalized in Intensive Care and on 100% oxygen."* Another student described ongoing challenges after infection, stating, *"I contracted the virus and struggled with fatigue when I returned to the practice environment."*

Students recognized that nursing inherently carries *"personal risk to their health,"* yet they felt that working through the pandemic posed an *"increased risk that affected their ability to fulfill the program's demands."* Those placed in high-risk environments, such as long-term care (LTC) facilities, expressed heightened fears. One student reflected, *"I didn't realize how much COVID-19 scared me until I entered my final consolidation in a long-term care home as a nursing student. I wasn't scared about my health; I had a massive fear that I would be the one to bring it into the LTC home and be the cause of an outbreak."*

Uncertainty related to rapidly changing pandemic guidelines also contributed to anxiety. When vaccines became available, many students expressed relief at being eligible. As one participant shared, *"During the term in placement, I had the opportunity to receive my vaccination which helped me feel safer and comfortable going into work for each shift knowing I am putting my part*

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

to help reduce the spread of the virus and protecting not only my family, friends, myself as well as my patients." Others, however, worried about delays in access and possible health effects. One student explained, *"I think a lot of the hesitancy comes from how quickly the vaccine was created, tested and distributed.*

Theme 2: Impact on Students' Learning Environments

Students faced steep learning curves moving between virtual and in-person placements. While simulations were useful, they limited the development of *"soft skills."* Isolation was a common challenge, as one noted, *"One of the biggest challenges was probably the sense of isolation… study support groups were separated."*

Restricted rotations, understaffed units, and constant changes reduced hands-on learning, leaving some *"stifled."* Emotional strain was evident, with a student stating, *"My mental health was affected at times when the workload was overwhelming or when experiencing death related to a patient diagnosis of COVID."*

Despite barriers, 83% reported growth in adaptability and infection control skills. Students also gained awareness of social determinants of health, remarking, *"Housing, food security, social inclusion and income should be considered in care."* Visitor restrictions reinforced empathy, with one sharing, *"Since visitors were not allowed, I often set up facetime for patients and their family."*

Theme 3: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors That Influenced Perseverance

Students highlighted resilience, courage, and compassion as intrinsic qualities that enabled them to persevere. One reflected, *"My experience as a nursing student who got to work through a global pandemic has taught me how to demonstrate courage, compassion, and humility."*

Extrinsic supports included orientation, clear communication from faculty and preceptors, and strict IPAC protocols, which reinforced safety. Social networks and peer support were also crucial. As one student shared, *"Throughout the year, my preceptor provided me with emotional support whenever I felt overwhelmed especially when the majority of my patient load was COVID positive."*

Passion for nursing gave students purpose, and many saw the pandemic as a chance to grow through externships. One concluded, *"I was proud to finish placement with a fulltime job to return to at the facility, wonderful relationships that I've formed, and knowing that I've accomplished something that many haven't—working through a pandemic."*

Theme 4: How to Deal with Future Pandemics

Students recommended more active faculty check-ins and stronger institutional support. They emphasized the need for primary prevention and addressing social determinants of health. Many highlighted restructuring of long-term care settings for safer patient care and work environments.

They also called for greater representation of nurses in media and policy, noting that *"nurses' voices should be part of decision-making."*

2.3 Faculty Narratives

Theme 1: Importance of Preparatory Work

Faculty emphasized the critical role of early and deliberate planning to prepare students for practicum during the pandemic. One noted, *"Preparing students for an integrated practicum during a global pandemic was a significant and remarkable undertaking that required deliberate planning and meticulous preparation."* Preparations began months earlier than usual, focusing on course delivery, student support, guidelines for unique practicum settings, and protocols for potential scenarios.

Theme 2: Psychological and Physical Manifestations of Supporting Students

Faculty expressed constant worry about students' safety, reporting guilt and moral distress over sending them into high-risk environments. One shared, *"I felt like I was sending students into a war zone without armor."* Increased emotional support demands led to burnout, with faculty spending *"double or triple the number of hours required to teach and support students compared to previous semesters."* Rapid policy changes further heightened stress, as a faculty member described, *"I was coping with rapid changes on a daily basis; struggled to keep on top of the rapid changes."* Workload pressure from virtual teaching also caused physical strain, including *"headaches and neck pains."*

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

Theme 3: Resilience of Students and Faculty

Despite challenges, faculty observed remarkable resilience in students, many of whom secured jobs after graduation. One recalled, *"About three months after the placement was over, I received a card from a student in nursing scrubs with a hospital badge, smiling. Seeing her find meaning through her experiences made me happy."* Daily check-ins and teamwork strengthened collegial bonds, as another explained, *"By far the biggest accomplishment was having all our students complete the term successfully… Our core team of three Course members became so close, we have truly bonded for life."* Faculty highlighted preparation, clear communication, and strong peer support as essential strategies for future pandemics.

3. Discussion

This study is the first in Punjab, Pakistan to explore the lived experiences of nursing students and faculty during clinical placements in the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistent with international findings, students reported heightened anxiety regarding infection risks, vaccine uncertainty, program completion, and the possibility of transmitting the virus to family members (Aslan & Pekince, 2021; De Gagne et al., 2021; Grande et al., 2022; Mendez-Pinto et al., 2022). Previous studies also indicate significant psychological distress among nursing students, including stress, depression, obsessive behaviors, sleep disturbances, and high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (Cengiz et al., 2022; Kuru Alici & Ozturk Copur, 2022; Usher et al., 2022). Isolation further compounded mental health concerns, echoing Kokturk Dalcali et al.'s (2021) findings. To mitigate these challenges, researchers recommend distance counseling, peer support groups, and integration of coping skills training, such as meditation and stress management, into nursing curricula (Cengiz et al., 2022; Grande et al., 2022; Kuru Alici & Ozturk Copur, 2022).

Learning environments were also heavily disrupted. Students faced reduced clinical exposure, restricted interdepartmental rotations, and increased reliance on online simulations, which limited skill development. Similar global studies found remote learning heightened anxiety and compromised confidence in clinical decision-making (Cengiz et al., 2022; Grande et al., 2022; Kuru Alici & Ozturk Copur, 2022; Usher et al., 2022). Understaffing, role ambiguity, and inadequate hands-on training risked long-term impacts on student preparedness and patient safety. Literature suggests structured transition programs and collaborative partnerships between nurse educators and practice colleagues are essential to bridge these gaps (Godbold et al., 2022; Merino-Godoy et al., 2022). Moreover, sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, residence, and pre-existing conditions were linked to varying levels of psychological distress (Kokturk Dalcali et al., 2021; Kuru Alici & Ozturk Copur, 2022; Mendez-Pinto et al., 2022; Usher et al., 2022).

Despite the challenges, both resilience and adaptability emerged strongly. Students drew strength from intrinsic factors such as self-care, professional passion, and sense of purpose, and from extrinsic factors like supportive preceptors, peers, and institutional protocols. Similar to Munn et al. (2022) and Bahcecioglu Turan et al. (2022), students maintained positive attitudes and demonstrated grit, though such skills were often not formally taught in curricula. Faculty narratives echoed findings from Sacco and Kelly (2021), Bejster et al. (2021), and Sessions et al. (2022), describing guilt, burnout, and moral distress, but also resilience and professional commitment reinforced by collegial support. Faculty recommended pre-planning, team-based communication, and leadership support, aligning with Leaver et al. (2022) and Sessions et al. (2022), who emphasized proactive strategies to strengthen preparedness for future health emergencies.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, nursing education in Punjab should prioritize structured mental health support, resilience training, and consistent faculty engagement to better prepare students for future health crises. Additionally, integrating pandemic preparedness, enhanced clinical transition programs, and stronger collaboration between academia and practice can safeguard both students' learning outcomes and psychological well-being.

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

References

Aslan, H., & Pekince, H. (2021). Nursing students' views on the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceived stress levels. Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, 57(2), 695–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12597.

Aslan, H., & Pekince, H. (2021). Nursing students' views on the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceived stress levels. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, *57*(2), 695–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12597.

Bahcecioglu Turan, G., Bayrak Kahraman, B., & Ozcelik, S. (2022). Nursing students' attitudes toward the nursing profession during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Nursing Education*, *61*(4), 218–223. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20220316-04.

Bejster, M., Yilmaz, D., & Gill, J. (2021). Nursing faculty resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *37*(6), 1032–1038. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2021.08.006.

Cengiz, R., Gurdap, Z., & Işik, K. (2022). The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on nursing students' mental health: A cross-sectional study. *Nurse Education Today*, *109*, 105248. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.105248.

De Gagne, J. C., Cho, E., Park, H. K., Nam, J. D., & Jung, D. (2021). A qualitative analysis of nursing students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nurse Education Today*, *97*, 104706. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2020.104706.

Foli, K. J., Forster, S., & Zhang, L. (2021). Nursing students' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: A longitudinal study. Journal of Professional Nursing, 37(5), 887–894. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2021.06.004.

Godbold, R., Whiting, L., & Hunston, K. (2022). Transition to practice during the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons for nurse education. *Nurse Education in Practice*, *64*, 103415. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2022.103415.

Grande, R., Delvecchio, E., Mancini, G., & Di Riso, D. (2022). The role of risk and protective factors in predicting psychological distress in Italian nursing students during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 869–879. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.869011.

Hayat, A. A., Arshad, A., & Rafiq, S. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on nursing education in Pakistan: A cross-sectional survey. BMC Nursing, 20(1), 104–112. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-021-00609-8.

Kokturk Dalcali, B., Altintas, E., & Gokler, M. E. (2021). Nursing students' mental health and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Psychiatric Nursing*, *12*(2), 144–150. https://doi.org/10.14744/phd.2021.35010.

Kuru Alici, N., & Ozturk Copur, E. (2022). The relationship between anxiety levels and coping strategies among nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Nursing Research*, *30*(3), e199. https://doi.org/10.1097/jnr.0000000000000476.

Leaver, C. A., Evans, S., & Lindo, J. L. M. (2022). Pandemic preparedness in nursing education: Lessons learned from COVID-19. *Nurse Education Today*, *112*, 105328. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2022.105328.

Mendez-Pinto, M., Pardo, A., & Garcia, J. (2022). Psychological impact of COVID-19 on nursing students: A multicenter study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(9), 5123. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19095123.

Merino-Godoy, M., Navarro-Abal, Y., & Climent-Rodriguez, J. A. (2022). Supporting transition from nursing student to nurse in pandemic times. *Nurse Education Today*, *109*, 105236. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.105236.

Munn, Z., Porritt, K., & Lockwood, C. (2022). Grit and resilience in undergraduate nursing students during COVID-19. *Collegian*, *29*(6), 666–672. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2022.04.007

Frontier in Medical & Health Research

ISSN: (e) 3007-1607 (p) 3007-1593

Nishimura, Y., Miyoshi, T., Hagiya, H., Kosaki, Y., & Otsuka, F. (2021). Burnout of healthcare workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic: A Japanese cross-sectional survey. Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine, 26(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12199-021-00971-5.

Rieckert, A., Schuit, E., Bleijenberg, N., et al. (2021). How can healthcare professionals be supported during COVID-19? Recommendations based on a scoping review. BMJ Open, 11(5), e046733. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-046733.

Sacco, T. L., & Kelly, M. M. (2021). Nursing faculty experiences during COVID-19: Stress and resilience. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 60(9), 493–499. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20210816-06.

Sessions, L. C., Van Sell, S. L., & Roy, C. (2022). Nurse educators' experiences during COVID-19: A phenomenological study. *Nurse Education Today*, *108*, 105148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.105148.

Ulenaers, D., Grosemans, J., Schrooten, W., & Bergs, J. (2021). Clinical placement experience of nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional study. Nurse Education Today, 99, 104746. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.104746.

Usher, K., Durkin, J., & Bhullar, N. (2022). Mental health of nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 31*(5–6), 657–668. https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16002.