

## DETERMINANTS OF REDUCED STUDENT INTEREST IN PURSUING NURSING AS A PROFESSION: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

**Background:** Pakistan faces a critical nursing shortage, worsened by the migration of trained nurses abroad. Despite growing demand, interest among students in pursuing nursing remains limited, particularly in Punjab.

**Materials and Methods:** The survey results revealed that 82.8% of students reported no interest in pursuing nursing as a career, while only 10.9% expressed willingness and 6.3% remained undecided. Furthermore, 68.8% stated they would not recommend nursing to others, with low pay (71.9%) and high workload (65.6%) identified as the most common negative factors.

**Results:** In conclusion, these findings emphasize the urgent need for policy reforms to improve working conditions, compensation, and career prospects in order to enhance the attractiveness of nursing among students.

**Conclusion:** Strengthening financial incentives, professional recognition, and retention strategies is essential to address declining student interest and reduce nurse migration.

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, the nursing profession faces an alarming shortage of human resources, which poses challenges for the sustainability and efficiency of health systems. Countries across Europe and Asia continue to struggle with the dual pressures of an aging workforce and migration of skilled professionals, leading to uneven distribution of health workers and overburdened healthcare institutions (Curchod, 2012; Health workers' intra-EU migration causes headaches, 2023). These shortages are not only numerical but also reflect skill gaps that compromise the delivery of safe and quality care (Scheffler & Arnold, 2019). The problem is further compounded by younger generations showing less interest in pursuing nursing as a career, making the workforce crisis a long-term concern.

Nursing shortages have been documented in diverse contexts such as Malaysia, New Zealand, and Bulgaria, where systemic issues—ranging from poor retention strategies to limited incentives—have exacerbated the problem (Barnett, Namasivayam, & Narudin, 2010; Moloney, Gorman, Parsons, & Cheung, 2018; Republic of Bulgaria National Statistical Institute, 2024). Similar dynamics are increasingly evident in Pakistan, where urban centers such as Lahore face growing health service demands but encounter difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified nurses. Despite increased healthcare infrastructure, the inability to motivate students to join nursing programs has created a widening gap between demand and supply.

In Pakistan, reduced student interest in nursing is shaped by multiple determinants, including perceptions of professional prestige, working conditions, career advancement opportunities, and economic migration trends (Haddad, Annamaraju, & Toney-Butler, 2024; Toncheva, 2018). Understanding these determinants is crucial to formulating targeted strategies that improve the attractiveness of nursing as a profession. This study, conducted in Lahore, Pakistan, seeks to identify the factors that contribute to declining student interest in pursuing nursing. By situating the local context within broader global evidence, it aims to inform policy measures that could strengthen workforce development and ensure the sustainability of healthcare delivery.

## 1. Materials and Methods

### 1.1 Study Design

A cross-sectional survey was conducted between February and May 2025 in Lahore, Pakistan, to explore determinants of reduced student interest in pursuing nursing as a profession. The study targeted fourth-year BS Nursing students to assess their attitudes toward the profession, satisfaction with their academic and clinical training, and intentions regarding their future careers.

## 2. Results

Table 1. Interest of Students in Pursuing a Nursing Career (n = 320)

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
I don't know yet	20	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%
Yes	35	10.9%	10.9%	17.2%
No, I have other interests	265	82.8%	82.8%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	-

Table 1 presents the responses of 320 fourth-year BS Nursing students regarding their interest in pursuing nursing as a career. The majority of students (82.8%) reported that they do not intend to continue in the nursing profession, citing other career interests. A

### 1.2 Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of 320 fourth-year BS Nursing students drawn from three private nursing institutions: Rashid Latif Nursing College, Doctors Hospital College of Nursing, and Ittefaq College of Nursing, Lahore. A structured questionnaire was administered to all participants to capture their perceptions, motivations, and challenges related to the nursing profession. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from each respondent.

### 1.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire designed to assess attitudes toward nursing, professional satisfaction, and willingness to remain in the field within Pakistan. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions were applied to summarize the findings, while correlation tests were performed to examine associations between selected variables.

### 1.4 Ethical Consideration

The study was carried out in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the concerned authorities of the respective institutions prior to data collection.

smaller proportion (10.9%) expressed willingness to pursue nursing, while 6.3% remained undecided about their future choice. These findings indicate a predominant lack of interest in nursing as a long-term career among the students surveyed.

**Table 2. Work Experience in the Nursing Profession (n = 320)**

Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
2-5 Years	120	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%
6-9 Years	95	29.7%	29.7%	67.2%
10 & Above Years	105	32.8%	32.8%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	-

Table 2 shows the distribution of nursing work experience among 320 participants. The largest group (37.5%) had between 2-5 years of experience, while 29.7% reported 6-9 years, and 32.8% had 10 years or more. These results highlight that most respondents were relatively early in their careers, with a considerable portion also having long-term experience, reflecting a diverse range of professional exposure within the sample.

**Table 3. Recommendations to Others for Studying Nursing (n = 320)**

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	55	17.2%	17.2%	17.2%
No	220	68.8%	68.8%	86.0%
Rather yes	15	4.7%	4.7%	90.7%
Rather not	20	6.3%	6.3%	97.0%
I can't judge	10	3.0%	3.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	-

Table 3 illustrates students' willingness to recommend nursing as a profession to others. A large majority (68.8%) stated they would not recommend nursing, while only 17.2% expressed a clear willingness to do so. Smaller proportions indicated ambivalence, with 4.7% answering "rather yes," 6.3% responding "rather not," and 3.0% unable to judge. These findings emphasize the prevailing reluctance among students to promote nursing, aligning with the overall theme of declining interest in the profession.

**Table 4. Factors Contributing to Negative Evaluation of the Nursing Profession (n = 320)**

Negative Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Low pay	230	71.9%
Reduced workforce and high workload	210	65.6%
Unresolved professional problems over many years	175	54.7%
Perception of nursing as unprestigious/unattractive	185	57.8%

Table 4 highlights the major factors contributing to students' negative evaluation of nursing as a profession. The most cited issues were low pay (71.9%) and reduced workforce with high workload (65.6%). More than half of the respondents also identified unresolved professional problems (54.7%)

and the perception of nursing as an unprestigious or unattractive career (57.8%). These findings underline the structural and social challenges that discourage students from viewing nursing as a desirable long-term profession.

### 3. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a significant lack of interest among nursing students in Lahore to pursue nursing as a long-term profession. The majority of participants expressed reluctance to

recommend nursing to others and cited structural barriers such as low pay, heavy workload, unresolved professional challenges, and the perception of nursing as an unattractive career. These results are consistent with international evidence that highlights

both professional and socio-economic factors influencing career choices in nursing and related health professions.

Similar patterns have been observed in European contexts, where midwifery and medical assistant students also report concerns about professional realization, career development opportunities, and working conditions (Miteva & Atanasova, 2022; Todorova & Andonova, 2023). In particular, structural barriers such as high workloads and limited opportunities for professional growth are often cited as reasons for dissatisfaction and disengagement. Moreover, unresolved systemic problems over years of practice reinforce negative perceptions of the profession, as also reflected in preventive healthcare studies linking professional well-being with long-term retention (Manukova, Marinov, & Grozeva, 2019).

Career decision-making in nursing has been shown to be shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Recent studies suggest that while some students are motivated by personal interest in patient care, others are discouraged by factors such as lack of prestige, poor working environments, and workplace bullying—all of which negatively affect patient outcomes and organizational culture (Tiliander et al., 2024; Pogue et al., 2022). At the same time, positive rankings of nursing as a highly valued profession in other parts of the world, such as the United States, show that with better pay, prestige, and opportunities, nursing can be made more attractive (Black, 2025). This underscores the importance of policy reform and strategic investment in workforce planning.

Globally, the nursing profession is being reshaped by recommendations to strengthen equity, improve career pathways, and ensure sustainability of the workforce (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). Studies further emphasize that educational advancement and specialty training can significantly enhance nurses' commitment to the profession (Tiliander et al., 2023). In Pakistan's context, where student disinterest in nursing remains high, the alignment of nursing education with better working conditions, career progression opportunities, and professional recognition is essential. Such reforms, if implemented, can help reverse negative perceptions,

foster retention, and build a resilient workforce aligned with both local and global healthcare demands.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the declining interest in nursing as a career among students is strongly influenced by low pay, high workload, limited career advancement, and the perception of nursing as an unattractive profession. To address this, it is recommended that policymakers and institutions implement strategies such as improving compensation, enhancing professional recognition, and creating clear pathways for career growth to make nursing a more appealing and sustainable career choice.

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