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FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICE IN NURSING: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN KARACHI, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Objective: *To identify the primary motivations and influencing factors behind the selection of nursing as a career path.*

Methodology: *A quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted using simple random sampling (n=80) among Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students at a private nursing institute in Karachi. Data were collected via a validated self-administered questionnaire and analyzed to identify the hierarchy of motivational factors.*

Results: *The cohort was predominantly young, with 98.8% of participants aged 17–26 years and a balanced gender distribution. While 73.8% of respondents cited a high degree of personality alignment with the profession and 85% were attracted by the prospective career scope, the most "magnetic" driver was economic pragmatism. An overwhelming 93.8% of participants selected nursing due to guaranteed employment and the ease of entering the workforce immediately following clinical training.*

Conclusion: *The selection of nursing in Pakistan is governed by a dual-incentive model. While the profession serves as a profound outlet for humanitarian and spiritual values, its primary attraction remains its status as a recession-proof career. The study concludes that "zero unemployment" is the most dominant factor in career recruitment, though it is often harmonized with a genuine desire to serve the community and satisfy religious obligations.*

INTRODUCTION

Nurses serve as the foundational backbone of the global healthcare system. Beyond mere workforce numbers, the advancement of the field depends heavily on the quality, dedication, and clinical competence of its practitioners [(1)]. Recognizing this, the World Health Organization (WHO) has called for strategic initiatives to expand the global nursing workforce. This need was underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a dual catalyst: it highlighted the professional risks of nursing while simultaneously inspiring a new generation to enter the field due to its essential nature [(2)]. Understanding why individuals choose this path is critical for higher education institutions and healthcare policymakers seeking to address chronic shortages [(3)].

The decision to enter nursing is generally driven by a complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivations are rooted in altruism a "personal calling" to serve humanity, care for the ill, and contribute to social welfare [(4)]. Conversely, extrinsic motivations focus on professional security,

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financial stability, and the high demand for nurses globally. Research indicates that nursing is often perceived as a "recession-proof" career, offering rapid employment post-graduation [5].

Socio-economic variables, including parental education, family income, and demographic background, significantly influence career trajectories [6]. In the Pakistani context, specific cultural and religious affiliations play a unique role. For instance, the Ismaili and Christian communities are disproportionately represented in the nursing workforce. Within the Ismaili community, nursing is often viewed as a prestigious bridge to humanitarian service, aligned with religious values of self-dedication and global citizenship [7].

However, in many developing nations, the absence of robust career counseling means students may choose nursing not out of primary interest, but due to external pressures from family or limited alternatives. Paradoxically, while domestic challenges like unfavorable work environments lead to burnout [8], the "pull factor" of international migration remains strong. The demand for foreign-trained nurses in nations like Saudi Arabia where over 60% of the nursing workforce is expatriate offers a lucrative pathway for Pakistani nurses to secure financial prosperity and global exposure [9]. In the post-pandemic era, the perception of nursing is evolving from a "fallback option" for those with lower academic grades to a preferred profession offering both spiritual fulfillment and economic mobility. This study seeks to investigate the shifting landscape of nursing recruitment in Pakistan.

Methodology

A quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted following ethical approval from the Khyber Medical University Institute of Health Sciences, Islamabad (Ref No: KMU-BSN/ISB/ERC/2025/009). The study was carried out at a private Institute of Nursing in Karachi, Pakistan. Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their data. The study population was ethnically diverse, including students of Pashtun, Punjabi, and Muhajir backgrounds enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program. A simple random sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants. The sample size was determined using Slovin's Formula: With a total population of 94 and a margin of error of 0.05, the calculated sample size was 74. To account for a 10% non-response rate, the final sample was increased to 80. A self-developed questionnaire consisting of 15 items was used for data collection. The instrument's validity was confirmed by field experts, and its reliability was established through a pilot study of 10 nursing students. The internal consistency, measured via Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.73, indicating a statistically reliable tool. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize variables, while Chi-square tests were applied to assess associations between categorical variables.

Results

The study sample consisted of 80 nursing students from a private institute in Karachi. The demographic analysis revealed a young cohort, with the vast majority of participants (98.8%) falling within the 17–26 years age bracket, while only 1.2% were aged 27–35 years. Gender distribution was nearly balanced, with 53.8% male and 46.3% female respondents. In terms of academic standing, 57.5% of the participants were enrolled in the first year of the G.BSN program, while 42.5% were in their second year. The nursing student body reflected significant religious and ethnic pluralism. Regarding religious affiliation, 83.8% identified as Muslim, followed by 15% Christian, and 1.2% belonging to other religious groups. The ethnic composition was diverse, with Pathans forming the largest group at 42.5%. This was followed by Urdu speakers (28.7%), Punjabis (17.5%), and Sindhis (3.8%), while 7.5% identified with other ethnicities. These figures underscore the role of nursing as a cross-cultural profession in the urban center of Karachi.

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Table:1 Demographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	Frequency (80)	Percentage (%)
• *Age* 17-26 27-35	 79 01	 98.8 % _1.3 %
• *Gender* Male Female	 43 37	 53.8 % 46.3 %
• *Education* 1st year BSN 2nd year BSN	 46 34	 57.5 % 42.5 %
• *Religion* Islam Christianity Others	 67 12 01	 83.8 % 15.0 % 01.3 %
• *Ethnicity* Urdu speaker Punjabi Pathan Sindhi Others	 23 14 34 03 06	 28.7 % 17.5 % 42.5 % 03.8 % 7.5 %

The findings of this study illustrate a multi-dimensional motivation profile among nursing students, where pragmatic economic concerns slightly outweigh altruistic ideals. The most powerful drivers for entering the profession are related to financial and professional stability, categorized here as extrinsic rewards. Notably, the highest-rated factor in the entire study was the ease of securing a job post-training (93.8%), supported by the perception that nursing offers "zero unemployment" (76.3%). Furthermore, students are highly motivated by the field's rapid advancement and promotion opportunities (92.5%) and its long-term earning potential (85%). A significant portion of the cohort (67.5%) also views a nursing degree as a strategic "passport" to facilitate migration and employment abroad.

Despite these dominant economic factors, the "calling" to help others remains a core pillar of the student experience. In terms of intrinsic and humanitarian motives, 87.5% of participants joined the profession to serve suffering humanity, while 81.25% expressed a deep-seated personal desire to be a nurse. Additionally, 77.5% were attracted by the prestige and respect associated with the role, and 73.8% believed the profession was a strong match for their personality traits. However, the data also suggests that for some, nursing was a pragmatic academic alternative; 56.3% of students chose the field because their intermediate scores were inadequate for other competitive medical programs. Religious preferences influenced 56.3% of the participants, and 48.6% of female respondents perceived the profession as naturally suited to their gender.

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The locus of decision-making reveals that entering the nursing field is often a collective family process rather than a purely individual one. While 45% of students made the choice independently, a significant 55% of decisions were influenced by external parties. Parents were the primary influencers at 32.5%, followed by siblings and friends at 15%. In contrast, professional career advisors had the lowest impact, influencing only 7.5% of the cohort, which suggests a reliance on social networks over formal vocational guidance in the Pakistani context.

Table: 2

	Choice for selecting nursing profession	**Frequency n-80**	**Percentage (%)**
	To Serve the Humanity		
01	To serve the suffering humanity	70	87.5%
	Intrinsic Attraction to Nursing		
02	Intrinsically wanted to be a nurse	65	81.25%
03	Joined nursing profession because it carried prestige	62	77.5%
04	Due to religious preference	45	56.3%
05	Because nursing profession is suitable for my personality	59	73.8 %
06	Due to intermediate score inadequacy	45	56.3 %
07	Because it is suitable profession for females	18	48.6 %
	Extrinsic Rewards of Nursing		
08	Because nursing profession ensured future earning potential	68	85%
09	Because of the wide opportunities of advancement and promotion in nursing	74	92.5%
10	To get a degree as a source to go abroad	54	67.5%
11	Because of the accommodations provided by institute	58	72.5 %
12	Will choose nursing, If get another chance to select profession	55	68.8 %
	Influence of Others in Choosing Nursing		

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13	Student's own choice Parents' choice Sibling's, friends', and relatives' choice Career advisor	36 26 12 06	45 % 32.5 % 15% 7.5 %
	Employment Security		
14	Because it ensured zero unemployment	61	76.3 %
15	Because it is very easy to get job after completing training	75	93.8%

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a critical insight into the shifting motivations of nursing students in Pakistan. The most prominent theme identified is the role of employment security as a primary driver. With 93.8% of participants citing the ease of securing a job post-training and 76.3% acknowledging the "zero unemployment" status of the field, it is clear that nursing is viewed as a vital economic lifeline. This reflects the current healthcare landscape in Pakistan, where a chronic shortage of qualified nurses ensures immediate market absorption for graduates. These results align with previous studies, who observed that job security and career variety are the most effective factors in professional selection within similar socio-economic contexts [6,10].

Extrinsic rewards surfaced as the second most significant motivator. The high valuation of advancement opportunities (92.5%) and future earning potential (85%) suggests that the new generation of nurses is highly career-oriented. Furthermore, the intent to use the nursing degree as a gateway for international migration (67.5%) is a notable trend. This corroborates the research by previous study in Lahore, which found that while passion exists, the preference for working abroad is driven by superior salary packages and a more positive professional image in foreign healthcare systems [8].

Interestingly, while the desire to serve suffering humanity was the third most cited reason (87.5%), its significance remains profound compared to other regions. For instance, while studies in North Cyprus showed only 15.6% of nurses chose the field for humanitarian reasons [12], our findings suggest a much stronger altruistic "calling" among Pakistani youth. This may be linked to the cultural and religious values prevalent in Karachi, where nursing is often seen as a noble path of spiritual service. However, the fact that 56.3% of students joined due to intermediate score inadequacy reveals a pragmatic reality: for many, nursing is a secondary choice necessitated by competitive academic barriers in other medical fields.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the selection of the nursing profession in Pakistan is governed by a dual-incentive model. The "magnetic" force of the profession lies in its pragmatic utility offering guaranteed employment (93.8%) and rapid financial advancement (92.5%). Simultaneously, it fulfills a deep-seated spiritual and humanitarian urge, with 87.5% of students motivated by the desire to serve. While the high alignment of personality suitability (73.8%) is encouraging, the reliance on nursing as a "fallback" due to academic scores highlights a need for better vocational alignment.

Future Recommendations

- Regional Expansion: Research should be scaled to provincial and national levels to explore how regional socio-economics influence career choice.
- Expectation Assessment: Longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine if the high expectations of financial security and professional prestige are met after entering the clinical workforce.
- Ethical Counseling: Career advisors and educators must emphasize the "service" aspect of the

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profession. If students enter nursing solely for financial security without an intrinsic commitment to care, it could lead to professional burnout and a decline in the quality of patient care.

Limitation:

- This study was limited to a single private nursing institute in Karachi with a small sample size, which may not represent the diverse nursing student population across all of Pakistan.
- The use of a self-reported questionnaire may involve social desirability bias, as participants might overstate altruistic motives compared to economic ones.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No

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No

AUTHORS DECLARATION

- We certify that the manuscript is our original work and has neither been submitted to/published in any other journal
- We certify that all human and/or animal studies were undertaken as part of the research comply with the regulation of our institution(s) and with generally accepted guidelines governing such work.
- We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all the named authors and that there is no other person who satisfied the criteria for authorship is not listed.
- We confirm that all the authors meet the criteria for authorship as in ICMJE recommendations.
- We agree to stand accountable for all aspects of the work to ensure accuracy or integrity.
- We understand and confirm that the correspondence author is the sole contact for communications in the editorial process. He/she will be responsible for communicating with all the other authors.

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