

# Ground Reality of Nursing Turnover; Professional Discontent

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## Abstract

Nurses are the backbone of the global healthcare delivery system and a major group of professionals in the healthcare system. When we discuss the importance and functions of nurses and the nursing profession, we must need to converse the issue of shortage of nurses as well. The shortage is not restricted to a specific geographical area, it's a global concern. The potential causes which make young and energetic male and female nurses to leave this noble profession at the beginning of their career includes stereotyping, feminism in nursing, compromising social and personal life and many more.

This paper aimed at discussing perceptions of nurses regarding professional retention and identification of the factors which compel nurses to leave the profession in their early career. This can help to improve the retention of nurses in the country therefore, prevent from shortage as well.

**Keywords:** *Nursing turnover, professional discontent, nursing shortage.*

## Introduction

Nurses are the backbone of the global healthcare delivery system and a major group of professionals in the healthcare system. Nurses are not only responsible for patients' care, treatment, recovery, health promotion, maintenance and restoration in the hospitals but also for families and communities at large. When we discuss the importance and functions of nurses and the nursing profession, we must need to converse the issue of shortage of nursing staff. The growing population is an increasing demand for healthcare services and simultaneously a remarkable decline in the pool of nurses becomes a serious issue. The shortage is not restricted to a specific geographical area, it's a global concern. According to the most recent official statistics, there are 40,879 nurses in Sri Lanka; 154,309 nurses in Iran; 3.3 million nurses in the USA, and in Pakistan it is around: 94,766 nurses [1]. A figure cited by the Journal of pioneering medical sciences in Pakistan, revealed that the current nurse-patient ratio is around 1:50 whereas the ratio prescribed by the Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) is 1:10 in general areas and 2:1 in specialized areas [2].

If we compare the number of nursing institutes and production of nurses in Pakistan from the time of independence to now, then we get to know the quantity

has increased very much. In 1948, there were only two nursing schools in Pakistan, one in Lahore and the other one in Karachi. But now there are a lot of government nursing schools, colleges, and universities, as well as some private institutions, are also enrolled by PNC for training and education of graduate nurses. Altogether thousands of nurses are graduating every year. According to Meghani et al [3, 4] almost, 13132 nurses per year from all four provinces are produced. There is one nurse for every 3,175 people. This ratio signifies that nursing has remained a neglected area in Pakistan and healthcare system desperately requires nurses greater than ever before.

According to the WHO report as cited in Flinkman et al [5, 6] "the healthcare workforce crisis is having an impact on many countries' ability to fight disease and improve health". Shortage of nursing has a disastrous impact on health care systems. If any country fails to deal with this issue of shortage, it will lead it to failure in improving health services.

Simultaneously a percentage of nurses are moving into other professions and withdrawing from the workforce. This is observed that attrition rate is higher among nurses from previous a couple of years. In many published studies around the world, a number of variables

have been identified that influence nurses' intention to leave the profession, which includes; demographic, work-related, individual and social factors [7].

Many factors are identified related to young nurses' intentions to quit their profession. An imbalance of effort and reward, higher occupational stress level, a higher job strain, lack of retention policies, horizontal and vertical bullying, poor infrastructure of advance academic resources, and lack of opportunities of involvement in decision making at different managerial levels are the reasons of poor image of nursing profession in public [8,9]. Previous researches have explored a lot of negative societal perceptions of nursing like stereotyping, subordination to doctors, low salary, poor chances of career development which make people think of nursing a low profile job, and which influence nurses intention to quit this profession which led the country to higher attrition rate. Likewise, the nursing profession is perceived as a social stigma, which has become one of the primary reasons for the shortage in the nursing industry [2,10].

According to the director of BscN programs the Aga Khan University Karachi Nursing is not the first choice for many people who joined it [2]. It is not considered a well-reputed profession, especially in Pakistan. In a developing country like Pakistan it's a financial burden on country's economy because it takes much cost to educate one nurse, and if they will not continue with nursing profession it will be a big loss of cost and financial investment. So, there is a dire need to explore the reasons of nurses to early career switch in order to overcome the issue of shortage and improvement in the healthcare system. Below is the narrative synthesis of the findings from relevant studies.

### **Literature Review**

The number of studies which included in this review is 13, out of which 4 are qualitative and remains 9 are quantitative in nature. There was no research relevant to this topic in Pakistan. Therefore, there is a possibility that variables associated with the intention to leave the profession which derived from this literature may or may not be the same in Pakistan.

A qualitative descriptive study was done in Iran by Farahani et al [11] on attrition among Iranian nurses to investigate the perceptions of nursing students about factors which influence attrition. It was a content analysis

approach in which purposive and snowball sampling method was used and data was collected from 19 participants by face to face interviews and focus group discussion. This study demonstrated that choosing the Nursing as the wrong career due to lack of information about nursing and thus appears to be an incongruity between reality and expectation which further leads to higher attrition rate during earlier in a career of nursing.

A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted in Taiwan by Chin et al [12] on workplace justice and intention to leave the nursing profession, data was collected from 2268 nurses by stratified and random sampling to assess the effect of workplace justice on nurses' intention to leave the nursing profession by performing multiple logistic regression and population attributable risks. The findings indicate that nurses with low workplace justice had a higher intention of leaving the profession (odds ratio =1.34, and 95% confidence interval =1.02–1.77). This was the first study which indicates an association between workplace justice and intention to leave nursing; it also suggested that hospital administrations need to increase the autonomy of nurses in order to increase the probability of retaining nurses.

A multi-country multi-level quantitative study on cross-sectional design was conducted by Leineweber et al [13] on the sample of 23076 RNs, from 384 hospitals of 10 European countries in which dissatisfaction related to work was found the reason of intention to leave within a multi-country multi-level context. The limitation of this study is that only dissatisfaction based turnover intention was studied.

A quantitative, longitudinal study conducted in China on newly graduate nurses' intention to leave in their first year of practice by Zhang et al [14] on 343 sample size. This study reveals that occupational stress and professional identity are constantly affecting the intention to leave and the researchers suggested that while planning retention strategies, stakeholders need to provide support to neophyte nurses, for the reduction of their stress and enhancement of their professional identity.

In Japan, a quantitative cross-sectional study was done by Yamaguchi et al [15] to measure job control, family-related variables and work-family conflict among nurses working in different healthcare settings on 1461 participants. Results interpret that in hospitals

by reducing nurses work-family conflict would increase retention of nurses. In healthcare, by allowing nurses to fulfill the family's responsibilities can help to reduce attrition. And in nursing homes, by increasing nurses' job control would help to increase retention.

An integrative review of nurses' intention to leave the profession was done by Flinkman et al <sup>[5]</sup>. The sample was 31 studies (1995 – 2009) from a different database. They used 5 step coopers method for collection, analysis, and synthesis of data as well as identified demographic, work-related and individual related variables which affect on nurses intention to leave the profession.

A quantitative study on the intentions of nurses to quit the profession in the context of demographic factors was done by Omar et al <sup>[16]</sup> in Malaysia. By stratified random sampling 700 questionnaires distributed in 11 different hospitals of Malaysia. This study exhibited that income and organizational tenure show differences in intention to leave nursing, while age, marital status, educational level have no impact on intention to leave. These findings fill the research gap. The limitation of this study is that some findings presented only in the Malaysian context.

A study on the Impact of nurses' turnover on organizations' performance in the neighbor country India was conducted by Rajan <sup>[17]</sup> the study adopted judgmental and convenient sampling and the sample size was 30. The research reveals that turnover increased the workload on remaining staff, this further leads to minor injuries on workplace like needle stick injuries etc and this, in turn, affects the morale of remaining nurses, who may have overworked.

A quantitative study on job insecurity and intent to leave the nursing profession in Europe was conducted by Laine et al <sup>[18]</sup> in Finland. The study design was a cross-sectional prospective and the sample size was 77,681. The study findings revealed that perceived job insecurity may lead to the high attrition rate of nurses, and the study suggested that effects of job insecurity can be reduced by making nurses feel that they are important to the institution for which they are working.

Another quantitative study on bullying among nurses and its effects, conducted in Turkey by Yildirim <sup>[19]</sup> in which sample was 286 nurses and it was a cross-sectional and descriptive study to find out that bullying

among nurses has a great impact on their performance and intention to leave the profession. This leads them towards poor job satisfaction and ultimately reduces their motivation, performance, and productivity.

### **Synthesis of the Review**

All the researches related to nurses intention to quit the profession and their perceptions related to nursing synthesized under three main themes. These themes are derived from an integrative review of Flinkman et al <sup>[7]</sup>.

### **Individual related factors**

It is found in different studies that attrition or retention both are individual choices. Many people joined nursing as a second career or choose wrongly without having much information about the pros and cons of this profession. Thus incongruity between expectation and reality leads them to quit this profession in early career or to take the decision to change it ultimately. Professional career advice can overcome this issue <sup>[5, 6, 11, 12]</sup>.

### **Work-related factors**

In most of the studies, reasons are related to the working environment. There are a lot of factors related to the working environment play a significant role in attrition or retention of nurses in any organization. Various studies, it was explicitly defined that staff satisfaction has a very strong impact on their job status either they would like to continue with present job or would try to change it. Moreover, workplace bullying leads to nurses towards many psychological problems as well as it lowered work motivation, poor output lack of loyalty to work and destroy social relations with colleges and patients. In another study in the working environment, there are different pull and push factors which attract and distract nurses to continue with their jobs. The nurses, who experiencing job insecurity are more prone to intend to leave nursing <sup>[7, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19]</sup>.

### **Demographic characteristics/social community-related factors**

Stereotypical public images about nursing are playing a part to make the people to quit this profession as well as being underpaid is another reason for lack of interest and low morale among nurses. By reducing nurses' work-family conflict and by allowing them to fulfill family's responsibilities would increase retention of nurses <sup>[5, 15]</sup>. Contrary to this study another study

finding showed that there is no role of demographic factors on the nurses' intention to leave the profession [16].

### Discussion and Suggestions

According to this literature review, there are multiple factors which effect on nurses intention to leave their profession like stereotyping, bullying, low salary high work demand, occupational stress and imbalances in family-work demands, and job insecurity in different European as well as Asian countries. Most of them are work-related, a few are individual related and very few studies predict that these factors could be demographic. And different strategies were proposed to control the turnover and to increase the rate of retention of nurses to overcome the issue of shortage. Proposed strategies included autonomy of nurses, incentives, involvement in different motivational activities, justice on the workplace, and career advises in order to reduce stress and confusion about the persuasion of a nursing career. In this regard, nursing managers and higher authorities need to keep an eye on these factors and policies and management should be changed according to the situation. As well as there is a need to involve the media to spread positive messages about this sacred profession and struggles should be made to remove the negative images of nurses from social media and the film industry. Involvement of nurses in decision-making processes and policy planning would be crucial in this regard.

### Conclusion

This review provided some knowledge about the phenomena that why nurse tend to leave their profession in different geographic areas as well as it is related to their perceptions and experiences. Shortage of nurses can have a direct and negative impact on the health of patients around the communities who needs nursing care. In the light of literature, there is a dire need of applying different strategies to control the turnover ratio and provide satisfaction to the nurses.

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