

Personal, Social, and Institutional Factors Influencing Nursing Career Decisions: Evidence from a Post-Conflict Philippine Setting

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How to cite this article: Arapia M. Diampuan. Personal, Social, and Institutional Factors Influencing Nursing Career Decisions: Evidence from a Post-Conflict Philippine Setting. *International Journal of Nursing Education* / Vol. 18 No. 1, January-March 2026.

Abstract

Nursing remains a socially relevant and globally in-demand profession, yet students often struggle to make informed career decisions and maintain sustained motivation. This study explored the factors shaping nursing students' career choices and the challenges they face at Mindanao State University – College of Health Sciences (MSU-CHS), Marawi City. Using a cross-sectional descriptive design, data were collected from 231 students through a structured questionnaire assessing personal, interpersonal, and social influences, as well as access to career, counseling. Descriptive statistics highlighted that personal motivations, particularly caring for ill family members and a strong commitment to service, were the most significant drivers of career choice. Interpersonal encouragement from family and mentors, and admiration for nurses, also shaped decisions, while social factors such as financial security and opportunities for overseas employment were influential. Students reported major challenges, including academic pressure, financial limitations, and external expectations. Most respondents indicated limited access to effective career counseling. Findings emphasize the need to strengthen institutional support by improving counseling, mental health services, and financial assistance, and by engaging parents, faculty, and community partners more effectively to prepare resilient, committed future nurses.

Keywords: Career choice, nursing career decisions, nursing students, academic and social challenges

Introduction

Nursing is widely regarded as a socially meaningful and globally in-demand profession; however, career decision-making among nursing students remains complex and shaped by multiple factors. Existing studies demonstrate that intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to help the sick, provide compassionate care, and serve others, are primary drivers of choosing nursing as a career^{34,14}. Familial

influences, including parental encouragement, admiration for nurses, and exposure to role models, further reinforce career decisions, although excessive pressure may lead to dissatisfaction or reluctance among students^{20,26}.

Social and economic considerations also shape nursing career preferences. Financial stability, employment security, and opportunities for international work are strong motivators, while

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Submission date: October 19, 2025

Revision date: December 24, 2025

Published date: February 5, 2026

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societal respect for the profession contributes to sustained commitment¹. However, negative stereotypes, gender biases, and the perception of nursing as a female-dominated and less prestigious profession may discourage potential students, particularly males¹¹.

To navigate these influences, guidance and counseling services play a critical role in helping students make informed and autonomous career decisions. Evidence suggests that access to structured counseling enhances clarity, confidence, and career satisfaction^{14,27}. The Philippines, Republic Act No. 9258, and CHED Memorandum Order No. 9, Series of 2013 mandate the provision of guidance and counseling in higher education institutions⁶. Yet, in socio-economically disadvantaged and post-conflict areas such as Marawi City, access to such services remains limited.

Despite a wide literature on nursing career choice, little is known about how it unfolds within the unique socio-cultural and post-conflict context of MSU-CHS in Marawi City. This study addresses this gap by examining the personal, familial, social, and economic factors influencing students' decisions and the challenges they face. These insights are essential for developing context-sensitive guidance and support programs that promote informed and resilient career pathways in nursing.

Research Method

This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive design to examine the factors and challenges influencing nursing students' career choices. Conducted at MSU-College of Health Sciences, Marawi City, during the first semester of AY 2024-2025, the study used a quantitative approach to measure students' characteristics, motivations, and perceptions systematically.

A total of 231 first- to fourth-year nursing students were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire based on Nwodoh and Ugwu's framework, covering socio-demographic data, personal and external influencing factors (rated on a 5-point Likert scale), and career-choice and counseling challenges. All items were closed-ended for consistency²⁶. Content

validity was established through expert review, and a pilot test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating high reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequencies and percentages for categorical variables, and weighted mean and standard deviation for influence scores.

Ethical approval was obtained from the College Dean, and informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality were ensured. While the findings offer valuable local insights, generalizability is limited due to the unique socio-cultural and post-conflict context; future studies may conduct comparative research across institutions or regions.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

This section presents the respondents' demographic characteristics, age, gender, year level, civil status, religion, mode of entry, and monthly family income, to contextualize their backgrounds and potential influences on career choice. Frequencies and percentages were used to identify demographic patterns relevant to interpreting students' motivations, challenges, and counseling needs. Age is particularly important, as it reflects developmental stage and life experience, both of which shape career aspirations and readiness for the nursing profession.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile in Terms of Age

AGE	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18-19 years old	44	19.05%
20-21 years old	89	38.53%
22-23 years	80	34.63%
24 and above	18	7.79%
Total	231	100.00%

Figure 1 shows that most respondents are 20-21 years old, indicating that the study largely captures the perspectives of students in their early twenties, a stage characterized by active academic involvement, career exploration, and personal development. The smaller proportion of younger (18-19) and older (24+) participants suggests that the sample is concentrated among those in transitional academic or early professional phases. This age

distribution should be taken into account when interpreting age-related findings, as it may influence the generalizability of the results.

These observations align with the findings of Pham, Bao, and Bui, who have reported that students aged 20 to 23 are more actively engaged in exploring career options and developing confidence in their decisions³¹. This correspondence reinforces the notion that early adulthood represents a critical period for career decision-making, suggesting that the majority of respondents in this study are at an optimal stage for receiving meaningful career guidance and planning support.

Gender is also an important factor in understanding students' perspectives within the nursing profession, particularly in a field historically dominated by women. Examining the gender distribution offers insight into the dynamics of gender at the MSU College of Health Sciences. It highlights the level of male participation in a traditionally female-oriented discipline. Understanding this distribution is vital for discussions on diversity and inclusivity in nursing education and practice. Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of respondents by gender, providing a clear profile of the study's demographic composition.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile in Terms of Gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	35	15.15%
Female	196	84.85%
TOTAL	231	100.00%

The gender distribution of respondents shows a clear predominance of female students, indicating that the findings may largely reflect female perspectives. This should be considered when interpreting results, especially when gender differences may influence motivation, career choices, or experiences in the program. The underrepresentation of male students may also affect the generalizability of the findings and highlights the need to situate the results within the broader gender dynamics of the nursing profession.

This imbalance reflects global and regional trends in nursing education, where women continue to dominate the field. Mbavai et al. note that caregiving is

widely perceived as a traditionally female role, which often discourages men from pursuing nursing²⁰. Similarly, Kandil, El Seesy, and Banakhar believed that male nursing students frequently encounter cultural and societal barriers, contributing to their underrepresentation¹⁵. These findings suggest that the low proportion of male respondents reflects broader societal patterns rather than sampling bias, underscoring the need to promote gender-inclusive strategies in nursing education and career guidance programs.

Academic year level also provides important insight into students' training and professional development stages. Examining the distribution across year levels helps contextualize differences in perspectives, motivations, and challenges. It allows for a more nuanced understanding of how career choices and counseling needs shift as academic progression and clinical exposure progress. Figure 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by academic year. The results show that 2nd-year students comprise the largest group, followed by 4th-year, 1st-year, and 3rd-year students. Although 2nd-year students are most represented, the distribution remains relatively balanced, indicating that perspectives from all stages of the nursing program are captured. These patterns may reflect enrollment trends, retention rates, or program structure and should be considered when interpreting findings related to academic experiences and student progression.

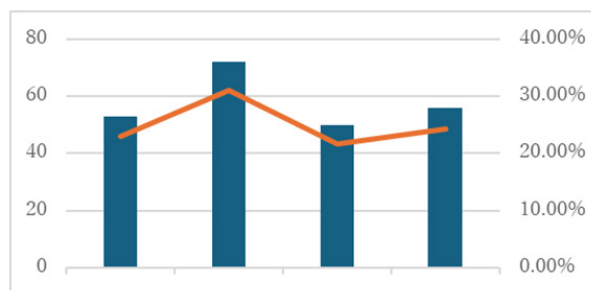


Figure 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profiles in Terms of Academic Year Level

These results align with previous research suggesting that nursing students' motivations and challenges evolve according to their year level. Lim and Muhtar observed that first-year students

are often influenced by external guidance, whereas senior students focus more on clinical experiences and future career planning¹¹. Similarly, Pham, Bao, and Bui found that as students advance academically, they engage more actively in career exploration and develop greater confidence in their career decisions³¹. Including students from all year levels therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of the different stages of career development and offers valuable insights into their corresponding guidance and counseling needs.

Monthly family income also provides important context for respondents' socio-economic backgrounds, which can shape access to educational opportunities, career decision-making, and perceptions of financial stability associated with the nursing profession. Examining income distribution helps clarify how economic factors may motivate students to view nursing as a practical or sustainable career path. The table below presents the frequency and percentage distributions of respondents by monthly family income.

The income distribution shows that most respondents come from households earning ₱31,000 and above, indicating a predominantly middle- to upper-income group. Students from families earning ₱21,000–₱30,000 account for 19.05% of the sample, while those from households earning ₱11,000–₱20,000 account for 17.75%. Only a few respondents belong to families earning below ₱10,000. This suggests that many students have relatively stable financial support, which may influence their educational experiences and career choices. This trend is consistent with Reyes and Manansala's findings that students from higher-income families are more likely to pursue nursing due to stronger educational support and family encouragement³⁵. Their study reported that over 60% of respondents came from households earning more than ₱30,000 per month, which closely mirrors the 54.55% observed in the present study. This similarity reinforces the idea that financial stability plays an important role in shaping students' academic experiences and influencing their decision to pursue nursing.

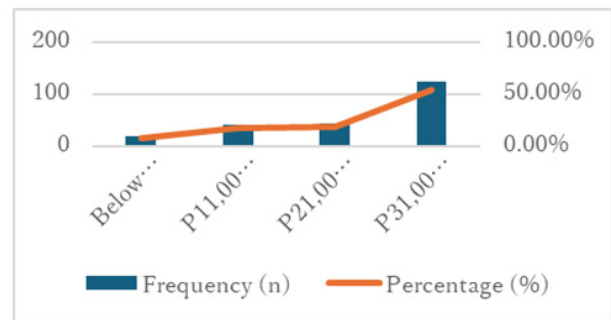


Figure 2. Monthly Family Income of the Respondents
Factors Influencing Nursing Career Choice among MSU College of Health Sciences Students

Personal Factors

Personal factors refer to the internal motivations and values that influence students' decisions to pursue nursing. These include a genuine interest in the profession, a strong desire to care for others, and the motivation to support ill family members. Understanding these intrinsic drivers helps clarify how deeply personal convictions inform career choices. The table below presents the weighted mean and standard deviation of respondents' agreement with various personal factors.

Table 3. Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Personal Factors Influencing Nursing Career Choice among MSU College of Health Sciences Students

Statement	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
I have a strong interest in the nursing profession.	4.35	0.83
I have a passion for saving and caring for the sick.	4.52	0.74
I have a strong desire to help others.	4.52	0.74
I am motivated to pursue nursing to boost my self-esteem.	4.32	0.87
I desire to earn respect from significant others by becoming a nurse.	4.07	1.1
I admire the smart appearance of nurses.	4.42	0.86
I want to acquire knowledge on how to care for my immediate family	4.85	0.44

Analysis of personal factors shows that the highest mean score was recorded for the statement, *"I want to acquire knowledge on how to care for my immediate sick family members"* ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.44$), indicating strong agreement among respondents. This underscores that the desire to support ill family members is a major motivation for pursuing nursing. In contrast, the statement *"I desire to earn respect from significant others by becoming a nurse"* had the lowest mean ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.10$), reflecting comparatively lower – though still positive – agreement.

The standard deviation values further illuminate response patterns. The highest variability was observed in the item on earning respect ($SD = 1.10$), suggesting diverse views among students. In contrast, the lowest variability was observed in the item on caring for sick family members ($SD = 0.44$), indicating strong consensus. Overall, the consistently high mean scores across items highlight the significant influence of personal motivations on students' decisions to pursue nursing.

These findings align with existing studies, which identified personal motivations, particularly the desire to help others and care for sick family members, as central factors influencing nursing career choice^{18,19,13,12}. The strong alignment with the highest-rated item in this study underscores that altruistic and family-oriented motivations remain pivotal in shaping students' commitment to the nursing profession.

Second-Party Factors

Second-party factors refer to the influence of individuals close to the students – such as parents, siblings, mentors, teachers, and friends – on their decision to pursue nursing. These significant others can shape career choices through encouragement, expectations, or role modeling. Examining these external influences provides insight into how social relationships contribute to students' motivations. The table below presents the weighted mean and standard deviation of respondents' agreement with various second-party factors.

Table 4. Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Second-Party Factors Influencing Nursing Career Choice among MSU College of Health Sciences Students

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Influenced by parent(s)/ guardian(s)	3.82	1.29
Influenced by a mentor	2.65	1.16
Influenced by primary/ secondary school teachers	2.44	1.15
Influenced by siblings	2.96	1.36
Influenced by friends	3.22	1.33
Admire the diligence of nurses	4.44	0.86
Desire to help neighbors with nursing care	4.14	0.89
Influenced by a role model who is a nurse	3.62	1.32

Analysis of second-party factors shows that the highest mean score ($M = 4.44$) was recorded for the statement, *"I admire the diligence of nurses in carrying out their duties in the care of others,"* indicating strong agreement among respondents. This suggests that admiration for nurses' dedication is a major external influence on students' decision to pursue nursing. In contrast, the lowest mean ($M = 2.44$) was observed for the item stating that primary or secondary school teachers influenced their career choice, indicating minimal teacher influence in this area.

The standard deviation values also reflect the variability of responses. The greatest variation ($SD = 1.36$) was observed for the item on influence from siblings, suggesting that students had differing experiences. Meanwhile, admiration for nurses' diligence had the lowest variability ($SD = 0.86$), indicating strong consensus. Overall, the findings highlight that role modeling from healthcare professionals, particularly admiration for nurses' commitment to care, is the most significant second-party influence. At the same time, teachers and mentors exert the least effect on career choice.

These results align with Dacanay and Ocampo, who found that students are strongly influenced by admiration for nurses' dedication and compassion,

whereas school teachers and mentors play a minimal role^{7,10,9,8,4}. The study also noted that family members and community values contribute variably, depending on personal experiences, which explains the diverse responses reflected in the standard deviations observed.

Social Factors

Social factors refer to the broader societal and economic conditions that influence students' decisions to pursue nursing. These include perceptions of job security, financial stability, opportunities for overseas employment, and the social prestige associated with the profession. Examining these influences helps clarify how societal expectations and external conditions shape students' career preferences. The table below presents the weighted mean and standard deviation of respondents' agreement with various social factors.

Table 5. Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of Social Factors Influencing Nursing Career Choice among MSU College of Health Sciences Students

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Easy access to travel abroad as a nurse	4.06	0.96
The ease of employment for nurses	3.65	1.14
To attract good suitors	2.04	1.21
To be known as a nurse	3.72	1.16
The belief that nurses earn high incomes	3.25	1.2
To gain financial security	3.9	1.05
To be able to provide financial help to relatives and significant others	4.16	1

The Analysis of social factors shows that the strongest motivator for respondents is the desire to provide financial assistance to relatives and significant others, reflected in the highest mean score ($M = 4.16$). In contrast, the aspiration to "attract good suitors" had the lowest mean ($M = 2.04$), indicating minimal influence on students' career choices.

In terms of variability, the statement "To attract good suitors" had the highest standard deviation

($SD = 1.21$), suggesting that respondents held widely differing views. Meanwhile, "Easy access to travel abroad as a nurse" recorded the lowest variability ($SD = 0.96$), indicating relatively consistent agreement. Overall, the findings suggest that financial stability and international employment opportunities are key social motivators for pursuing nursing, whereas considerations related to personal attractiveness play little to no role.

These results are supported by Santos and Rivera, who found that providing financial support to family and opportunities for overseas employment are major motivators for choosing nursing^{9,27,24}. Similarly, attracting suitors had a negligible influence, aligning with the low mean observed in this study ($M = 2.04$).

Challenges and Implications for Guidance and Counseling

This section examines the challenges nursing students face in choosing nursing as a career and their implications for improving guidance and counseling services. Key difficulties include academic stress, financial constraints, family and peer pressure, limited information, and negative societal perceptions. Understanding these concerns highlights the support students need and identifies areas where career guidance needs strengthening. The table below presents the frequency and percentage of these challenges to guide targeted interventions.

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Challenges in Choosing Nursing as a Career

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Academic stress	158	68.40%
Financial constraints	146	63.20%
Family and peer pressure	125	54.10%
Lack of adequate information about nursing	80	34.60%
Negative societal perceptions	51	22.10%
Others (Health-related concerns)	1	0.40%

These findings align with previous studies showing that nursing career decisions are influenced not only by personal motivations but also by external pressures and expectations within the profession. McKenna et al. and Kinanee and Millner reported that many nursing students decide to enter the profession due to a combination of altruistic values and perceived job stability; however, they also revealed that students often struggle with emotional stress and uncertainty during training^{21,16,23}. Moreover, Tiliander et al. found that financial concerns and limited resources affect students' decisions to pursue further specialization in nursing, reinforcing this study's observation that financial constraints are a major challenge for 63.2% of respondents³⁶. These studies support the idea that academic stress, economic limitations, and external expectations are pervasive challenges in nursing education, underscoring the need for structured guidance, psychosocial support, and accessible financial aid systems within nursing institutions.

Effectiveness of Career Counseling

This section assesses students' perceptions of the effectiveness of career counseling services provided before or during their decision to pursue nursing. These insights help determine whether existing guidance adequately supports informed career choices and identifies areas for improvement. The findings also align with studies showing that academic stress and financial difficulties are the most common challenges faced by nursing students in the Philippines^{22,16,17}.

Their research showed that heavy academic workloads, clinical demands, and limited financial support are major contributors to student stress. This aligns with the present study, which found that 68.4% of respondents reported academic stress and 63.2% cited financial constraints. In addition, 54.1% identified family and peer influence, reflecting the external pressures noted by Mendoza and Cruz. These findings underscore the need for stronger career counseling programs that address both personal and socio-environmental factors shaping students' career choices.

Table 7. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Effectiveness of Career Counseling

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very effective	7	12.50%
Somewhat effective	16	28.60%
Neutral	16	28.60%
Not very effective	6	10.70%
Not effective at all	11	19.60%

The data show that 75.8% of students did not receive career counseling before enrolling in nursing, revealing a major gap in guidance services. Only 12.5% of those who received counseling found it highly effective, indicating limited impact. These results echo studies noting that many Filipino students enter higher education without sufficient career guidance, often leading to uninformed or uncertain career choices^{28,4,8,9}. Similarly, their findings found that only a small proportion of students rated career counseling as "very effective," mirroring the present study's findings. Collectively, this evidence underscores the urgent need to strengthen and expand career counseling programs to ensure that students receive meaningful support in making informed, confident decisions about their professional paths.

Types of Career Guidance Needed by the Students

This section identifies the types of career guidance nursing students consider essential for their academic development and career planning. These needs include access to information sessions, psychological support, individualized counseling, financial aid guidance, and parental involvement. Understanding these priorities helps institutions design more relevant and student-centered support programs. The table below shows the frequency and percentage distribution of these needed guidance services.

Table 8. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Career Guidance Types Needed by Nursing Students

Type of Career Guidance Needed	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Information sessions on nursing careers	149	64.50%
Psychological support for academic stress	136	58.90%

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Individualized career counseling	135	58.40%
Scholarship and financial aid information	131	56.70%
Parental engagement in career decisions	86	37.20%

The results show that 64.5% of students requested additional information sessions on nursing careers, indicating a need for clearer guidance on professional pathways. Psychological support was also identified by 58.9% of respondents, reinforcing earlier findings on the stress associated with nursing education. Additionally, 56.7% highlighted the need for financial aid information, underscoring persistent economic concerns. These findings align with studies showing that health-related students generally require comprehensive career information, mental health support, and financial guidance to navigate academic and professional challenges^{2,3,4}.

Overall, the study shows that academic stress, financial difficulties, and external influences strongly shape students' decisions to pursue nursing, while existing career counseling services are often viewed as insufficient. Strengthening institutional guidance through personalized counseling, clear career information, financial aid support, and psychological services can better equip students to make informed choices. Involving parents and mentors further enhances students' motivation and confidence, supporting more deliberate and sustainable career decisions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that nursing students at MSU-CHS choose nursing due to a mix of personal, second-party, and social factors. Personal motivations, especially the desire to care for sick family members, were the strongest influences, followed by encouragement from family and peers and admiration for nurses. Social factors such as financial stability and overseas job opportunities also shaped decisions, while less relevant considerations, like attracting suitors, had minimal impact.

Students also face significant challenges, including academic stress, financial constraints, external pressure, and major gaps in career counseling services. Most respondents received no guidance before enrolling, and only a few found counseling effective. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive, student-centered career guidance that provides clear career information, financial aid support, and psychological services, with active involvement of parents, mentors, and faculty.

To address these concerns, the school should strengthen its guidance programs through regular career orientations, trained counselors, and collaboration with scholarship and mental health providers. Counselors should offer early and continuous support, faculty should integrate mentorship into academic advisement, and parents should be engaged in the career decision-making process. Students are encouraged to make use of available counseling services and reflect on their motivations and goals. Local governments and civil society organizations can further support by offering scholarships, wellness programs, and community-based career initiatives. Future research should explore other institutions, use qualitative approaches, and assess the effectiveness of current guidance interventions on student outcomes.

Ethical Approval This study received ethical clearance before its conduct. • Date of Ethical Approval: May 10, 2025 • Reference Number: 0-1411

All research procedures were carried out in accordance with the ethical standards of the approving body, which is the Muslim Mindanao Integrated College Academy, and with due respect for participants' rights, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Source of Funding The author declares that this research received no external funding and was conducted without financial support from any public, commercial, or non-profit funding agency.

Conflict of Interest Statement The author declares no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise, in relation to the conduct of this study and the preparation of the manuscript.

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