
Research

Study of factors influencing the pursue of higher education among registered nurses

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International Journal of Nursing & Health Sciences, 2025; 1: 49-55

Abstract

The nurse is essential in delivering good patient care in the hospital, and her standard of education and experience is very important. While attending to the patient's needs, the nurse is also responsible for improving her continued professional development. The factors that influence nurses not to pursue higher education in Sri Lanka still remain unclear and unattended which requires a proper study of those influencing factors in order to find solutions and mitigate the existing shortcomings. As educated nurses can provide better quality patient care, which will improve the nursing profession as well as the health sector itself, the focus of significance of this research is to identify the factors that affect the nurses not pursuing or continuing higher education. Identifying such barriers will be beneficial for health policymakers and stakeholders to take necessary actions to motivate nurses to continue higher education in Sri Lanka. This is a descriptive cross-sectional study. Data will be collected by principal investigators with a self-administered questionnaire during non-working hours and when nursing care will not be compromised. The questionnaire will be developed in English, Sinhala, and Tamil. It consists of four main parts. The sample was 327 nurses, with a 100% response rate. There were 310 female respondents (94.8%) and 17 male respondents (5.2%). The majority of participants (68.8%) were between the ages of 31 and 40. Overburdening of tasks in the unit was identified as a barrier responsible for 93.9% of the 07 items assessed for personal factors influencing nurses' future education. The single most significant obstacle among the four social components assessed was a lack of employer support. Only the assistance offered to increase the educational level of the unit was a motivating factor (63.3%) when administrative variables were included. Higher education institutions were considered. Everything was inspiring. When nurses join higher education, they identify the load of responsibilities they fulfil, a lack of peer support, and the effect of administration as impediments. According to the study, the necessity of higher education for nurses, the psychological benefit and the higher financial gains, and awareness of higher education prospects are all motivating elements.

Key words: Higher education, National Hospital Kandy

Background

Nursing involves providing care to individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent illness, and facilitate recovery. According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), nursing is an automated and collaborative approach to healthcare, emphasizing

health promotion, illness prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation [1]. Nurses also engage in research, policymaking, patient education, and healthcare management [2]. The profession is distinguished by its unique body of knowledge, lifelong learning, and commitment to service [3].

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New Zealand became the first country to register nurses under the Nursing Registration Act of 1901. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, nurses complete a three-year training program and must pass an examination to become registered professionals [4]. By 2019, Sri Lanka had 46,331 nurses, with a ratio of 212.4 nurses per 100,000 populations [5]. Despite the availability of higher education programs – including a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Nursing from institutions like the Open University of Sri Lanka – most nurses remain diploma holders. Recently, private colleges have also begun offering nursing degrees [6].

A well-educated nursing workforce is essential for high-quality patient care [7]. A Bachelor of Nursing degree enhances nurses' ability to adopt new medical technologies and collaborate effectively with healthcare professionals. However, in hospitals in Kandy, most nurses are diploma holders, leading to slower professional growth compared to other healthcare fields [8].

Tertiary hospitals, such as Kandy National Hospital, require specialized knowledge and skills, including critical thinking, leadership, and decision-making. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Health's National Health Policy emphasizes increasing nursing education to a degree level [9]. Initiatives like upgrading nursing schools into universities and offering flexible degree programs have been introduced. Despite these opportunities, many nurses remain reluctant to pursue higher education, which could negatively impact healthcare quality in Sri Lanka [10].

The factors discouraging nurses from higher education remain unclear and require in-depth investigation. Identifying these barriers is crucial for improving nursing education policies and enhancing patient care quality.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research approach with a descriptive design to explore factors influencing registered nurses' pursuit of higher education at the National Hospital Kandy (NHK), Sri Lanka. The research will be conducted at NHK, the country's second-largest hospital, serving a large portion of the population. A stratified random sampling method will select 327 nurses from a total of 1,800 nurses, ensuring representation from various departments. The list of nurses will be provided by the hospital's Chief Nursing Officer, and random numbers will be used to select participants. Nurses

will be contacted personally, and informed written consent will be obtained from those willing to participate. This approach is chosen for its simplicity and cost-effectiveness, without requiring manipulation or experimental control.

This study aims to investigate the factors influencing registered nurses' access to higher education at the National Hospital Kandy (NHK), Sri Lanka. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, utilizing a stratified random sampling method. A sample of 327 nurses was selected from the total population of 1,800 nurses working at NHK. The data collection process involved the use of interviewer-administered questionnaires, distributed in Sinhala, Tamil, and English to accommodate the linguistic diversity of the participants. These surveys were conducted during non-working hours to ensure that patient care responsibilities were not compromised. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Peradeniya, and formal approval was also secured from NHK's Director and Chief Matron Officer. The research followed strict ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, – nurses voluntarily participated, and provided written consent.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: personal factors, socio-cultural factors, managerial factors, and barriers related to higher education institutions. To ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, a literature review was conducted, and expert opinions were incorporated. The tool was pre-tested to identify potential errors, and the questionnaire was subsequently refined. Reliability was maintained through repeated measures, and content validity was ensured by reviewing previous studies and existing literature on the subject matter. The data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics via SPSS software, which provided a comprehensive overview of the variables influencing the nurses' access to further education. The study achieved a 99.99% response rate, with all 327 questionnaires being completed and returned.

Several limitations were encountered during data collection, particularly related to the time constraints imposed by the participants' demanding schedules. Despite the challenges, the data collection process was extended beyond the initially planned period to accommodate the busy nature of the nurses' work. In conclusion, the study employed a systematic and ethical approach to explore critical factors impacting

the pursuit of higher education among registered nurses at NHK, providing valuable insights into the barriers they face and potential solutions to enhance access to further education within the healthcare sector.

Results

Data analysis is the act of looking through, cleaning, manipulating, and modeling data with the aim of emphasizing important information, offering hypotheses, and assisting in decision-making. In several fields of scientific and social research, data analysis has many facts and methodologies, incorporating various techniques under a number of titles. This chapter examines the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from 327 registered nurses at the Kandy National Hospital. It covers the tool description, pilot research report, validity, reliability, data collecting

technique, score interpretation, data analysis method, results, and findings presentation. This section will discuss about the findings gathered through the questionnaire in relation to objectives of the study and will be presented with graphs, charts and percentages.

Demographic characteristics

A total of 327 participants were sampled and the response rate was 100%. Among the respondents, 310 (94.8%) and 17 (5.2%) were females and males respectively. The majority of participants (68.8%) were 31 to 40 age range. When considering the highest level of education (64.5%) was a Diploma registered nurse and the minority was a Master's degree (2.8%). Married, Single, Divorced, and Widowed nurses were there. The results revealed that the majority of nurses (52.3%) have 5-10 years of experience.

Table 1. Demographic survey

<i>Demographic factor</i>	<i>Category No</i>	<i>(n-327)</i>	<i>N %</i>
Gender	Male	17	5.2%
	Female	310	94.8%
Age	20-30 years		
	31-40 years	22	6.7%
	41-50 years	225	68.8%
	51-60 years	71	21.7%
		9	2.8%
Marital status	Single	53	16.2%
	Married	255	78.0%
	Divorced	13	4.0%
	Widowed	6	1.8%
Highest level of education	Diploma registered nurse	211	64.5%
	Associated RN degree	55	16.8%
	Bachelor's degree	52	15.9%
	Master's degree	9	2.8%
Current job title	Grade III registered nurse	105	32.1%
	Grade II registered nurse	203	62.1%
	Grade I registered nurse	13	4.0%
	Supra Grade	6	1.8%
	below one year	4	1.2%

(Continued)

<i>Demographic factor</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>No (n-327)</i>	<i>N %</i>
Number of years of nursing service experience	1-5 yrs.	58	17.7%
	5-10 yrs.	171	52.3%
	10-15 yrs.	70	21.4%
	15-20 yrs.	18	5.5%
	More than 20 yrs.	6	1.8%
Currently working hours per week	between 31-40 hours	8	2.4%
	over 40 hours per week	319	97.6%
Average family income (Rs)	≥ 50000	327	100.0%
Family members or relatives working as nurses	Yes	105	32.1%
	No	222	67.9%
Have you advanced your formal education since you obtained your nursing diploma	Yes	117	35.8%
	No	210	64.2%

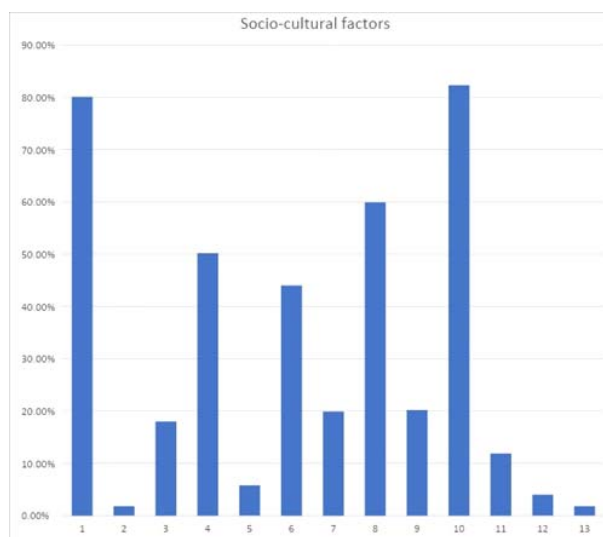
Personal factors affecting access to higher education among nurses

According to the evaluation of personal variables, 95.7% (n=313) of registered nurses believed that obtaining a bachelor's degree was necessary to become a qualified nurse, while 3.4% (n=11) were undecided. In the current study, 93.3% of participants believed that upgrading their professional education may help them become better nurses. As a result, the majority of registered nurses understand the relevance of higher education and the value it provides them, and they increasingly believe it is necessary for the progress of the nursing profession and the health sector. 93.27% (n=305) were already aware of higher education alternatives for nurses, whereas just a handful were unaware. And the majority of nurses were dissatisfied with their jobs, with 70.0% (n=229) dissatisfied and 25.1% (n=82) satisfied, however there were a few nurses who had no opinion (4.9%). 60.2% of nurses claimed they could afford the expenditures if they enrolled for the degrees, while 9.8% had no clue since they couldn't properly voice an opinion without attending higher education. 28.7% of registered nurses were advised they would be unable to manage their time if they pursued higher education, whereas 69.1% had no difficulty with time management. In this case, 2.1% were unaware. The majority of nurses (93.9%) stated that there is too much work in their unit.

Socio-cultural factors

According to the findings of the current survey, 80.1% of nurses obtain emotional support from their families

in order to complete their studies. However, 18% of the nurses did not have a particular answer, and 1.8% reported that their family provided no emotional help. 50.2% of nurses claimed they received financial help from their families to continue working, while 44% said they did not. And 5.8% of those polled had no knowledge. Furthermore, peer support was taken into account while attending higher education. 59.9% of nurses said they do not support patients at the same time. The 20.2% of nurses stated that they had no precise plan. Furthermore, the majority of nurses' families (82.3%) have not completed higher education.



Managerial factors

According to this poll, 63.3% of institutional heads favor higher education for nurses in their unit. However, 30% of the nurses were unable to provide a clear answer.

Furthermore, 4% of nurses believe that leaders of the organization do not support them. Following that, nurses' thoughts on the easiness of taking duty leave were solicited. There are 56.3% believe it is tough. In addition, 15.9% of nurses felt it may be simpler at times, while 9.8% had no clue. However, 18% claimed it is simple to obtain work leave.

The 41.9% of nursing officers have no awareness of the leaders of institutions working for the welfare of their staff, and 9.8% have no idea. However, 30.6% of nurses believe that the welfare of staff is vital to institution leaders. If they are unable to report for duty owing to higher education, 23.9% of nurses claim their supervisors will cover the shift, while 59.3% of nurses do not have a clear response, and 12.8% have no clue. Following that, the leaders of the institutions were asked about their support for nurses continuing their higher education activities. Only 11.9% of nurses stated they would support, despite the fact that the majority of nurses were favorable.

Barriers relating to higher education institutions

Nurses should have some information and comprehension of the possibilities open to them before enrolling in higher education. Ignorance of it may be dangerous. They inquired whether they had looked at educational options to enhance their work situation. The 92% of nurses have investigated it. Meanwhile, both local and international nurses are eligible for study scholarships. It is known to 84.1% of nurses. Furthermore, 84% of nurses are aware of colleges where they may further their study. Furthermore, 91.4% of nurses in Sri Lanka are aware of further education opportunities.

Discussion

The majority of the nurses who participated in the current survey (95.7%) agreed that nurses should obtain higher education, implying that education is essential for a quality nurse. Additionally, 93.3% of nurses stated that increasing their degree of professional education would make them more effective nurses. However, a significant portion of nurses (70.0%) expressed dissatisfaction with their work, while 25.1% reported being satisfied, and 4.9% had no opinion.

Furthermore, 60.2% of nurses stated that they could afford the expenses associated with pursuing higher education, while 9.8% were uncertain, citing the lack of effective self-expression without a college education. Interestingly, 28.7% of registered nurses reported concerns about managing their time effectively if they sought higher education, although 69.1% expressed confidence in their ability to manage their time. A small percentage (2.1%) were not aware of such implications. Moreover, 93.9% of nurses reported that their unit had too much work. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies, including research by Sonia Bellfield and Gina Gessner (2010), which found that 53% of nurses believed that increased professional education would enhance their self-esteem, with similar expectations regarding job satisfaction and respect from family and colleagues [11]. In contrast, 60.2% of nurses in this study reported no concern about income loss when pursuing higher education, while 30% expressed concerns.

Further supporting this, a study by Nashwan et al. (2022) indicated that 74% of nurses felt a flexible work schedule would be highly beneficial in pursuing higher education, and 71% believed scholarships or tuition support would be helpful [12]. However, in this study, 69.1% of nurses believed they could manage their time if they pursued higher education, and 60.2% felt they could handle their financial situation. Additionally, 93.9% reported that their workload was too heavy. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2019) found that a significant percentage (55.6%) of nurses believed that educational advancement could enhance their professional expertise [13].

This finding aligns with research by Duffy et al. (2014), which highlighted that uncertainty about university education was a barrier for 9.9% of nurses pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSc.N.) [14].

In terms of socio-cultural factors, 80.1% of nurses reported receiving emotional support from their families in order to complete their education. On the other hand, 18% of nurses had no response, and 1.8% stated that their family did not provide emotional support. Moreover, 50.2% of nurses received financial assistance from their families to continue their studies, while 44% did not, with 5.8% being uncertain.

Peer support was also examined, and 59.9% of nurses stated they did not receive support from their peers when pursuing a higher degree. Furthermore, 82.3% of nurses' families did not hold a high school diploma,

which may impact the family support structure. These findings are consistent with Naicker's (2006) research, which found that family responsibilities and financial constraints were not significant barriers to continuing education (CE) for nurses. The majority of respondents (77.8%) expressed interest in pursuing further education, despite family and financial challenges [15]. Similarly, Naicker (2006) highlighted that 59.6% of nurses strongly agreed that financial difficulties were a barrier to enrolling in higher education programs.

In terms of managerial factors, 63.3% of institutional heads in the current study believed that higher education for nurses in their unit was important. However, 30% of nurses were unable to provide a definitive response, and 4% of nurses reported that their organization's executives did not support them in this regard. The ease of obtaining duty leave for education was also examined. 56.3% of nurses found it difficult to obtain leave, while 15.9% found it easier at times, and 9.8% had no opinion. In contrast, 18% reported that obtaining work leave was uncomplicated.

The heads of institutions working for the well-being of their workers were unknown to 41.9% of nursing officers, with 9.8% expressing uncertainty. These findings are in line with research by Thulth and Sayej (2015), who found that 72.2% of management and 79.2% of nurses in a North West Bank study reported work overload as a significant issue [16]. Similarly, Sneha G. Nair (2015) identified that 36.6% of nurses in Casablanca-Sett hospitals believed that the lack of freedom to take leave was a significant barrier to continuing education [17].

Finally, regarding barriers relating to higher education institutions, 92% of nurses in this study reported that they had investigated further education opportunities, and 84.1% were aware of various scholarships available locally and globally. Additionally, 84% of nurses were aware of higher education institutions where they could extend their studies, and 91.4% were aware of the opportunities for further education available to nurses in Sri Lanka.

This is consistent with findings by Mbombi and Mothiba (2020), who identified several institutional barriers to postgraduate nursing education at South African higher education institutions [18]. These findings further suggest that while many nurses are aware of the educational opportunities available, barriers such as financial constraints and work commitments continue to hinder their ability to pursue higher education.

Conclusion

The study found that most registered nurses in National Hospital Kandy (aged 31-40, with 5-10 years of experience) aspired to higher education, recognizing its importance for career growth and advanced nursing care. While overwork was a barrier, financial constraints and time management were not. Emotional and financial support from family were motivators, though peer support was lacking. Administrative challenges, such as difficulty obtaining leave, hindered education despite general support for learning. However, nurses were well aware of higher education opportunities and scholarships, making awareness a strong motivator.

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