"EXPLORING THE JOURNEY OF EMPOWERMENT: STUDENT NURSES' PERSPECTIVES IN SHAPING THEIR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND FUTURE ROLES"

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INTRODUCTION:

The journey to become a nurse entails more than just learning clinical skills and medical information; it also includes a transformative process of self-discovery, empowerment, and the formation of a professional identity. In this study, we conduct a phenomenological exploration of the views of student nurses in order to shed light on the dynamic relationship between empowerment and the development of their professional identity. This research intends to contribute to a larger understanding of nursing education and practice by examining the obstacles, motivations, and personal growth encountered by student nurses.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Empowerment is the degree of autonomy and self-determination. This enables them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way. Measures for student empowerment has been adopted by various institutions, but limited studies have been conducted in context of understanding effectiveness of those measures or to study about students' own perception about their empowerment. The existing studies has identified both empowering and disempowering factors. Being valued as a learner, team member, and person are important factors in the empowerment of nursing students in clinical practice. According

to nursing students, effective mentorship and a supportive environment are factors influencing empowerment significantly.[1] Continuity of placement, presence of a mentor and time had empowering experiences and absence had a disempowering effect.[2] These studies dates back about a decade and further research is needed to study current trends.

OBJECTIVES

o   To know the perspective of student nurses on their empowerment.
o   To identify the student nurses' perceived challenges in their empowerment.
o   To explore the student nurses' perception regarding prospects in their own empowerment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

SL. NO	Title	Author	Major findings	Remarks
1	Empowerment and being valued: A phenomenological study of nursing students' experiences of clinical practice	Bradbury-Jones C, Sambrook S, Irvine F. (2011)	The value as learner, team member and person are important factors in empowering of nursing students in clinical practice.	Strategies to empower nursing students should address their sense of value.
2	The meaning of empowerment for nursing students: a critical incident study.	Bradbury-Jones C, Sambrook S, Irvine F. (2007)	Students experience empowerment and disempowerment in clinics in areas like learning in	Supportive mentors are vital in the empowerment of nursing students.

			practice, team membership and power. Continuity of placement, a mentor and time had empowered and disempowered if they were absent.	
3.	Graduating Nursing Students' Empowerment and Related Factors: Comparative Study in Six European Countries	Laura Visiers Jimenez, Lissa Kuokkanen, Helena Leino Klipi, etal. (2022)	Graduating nursing students' self-assessed empowerment level was moderate, with differences among countries. students with high empowerment had good attrition, and better academic achievements, and a higher competence level.	Empowerment needs to be enhanced during nursing education

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study uses qualitative phenomenological research design. The study tries to explore the journey of empowerment among student nurses and its impact on their professional identity and future roles. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the study uncovers the underlying structures and patterns that shape the participants' understanding of their experiences

Participants

Nursing students from different parts of Kerala within the age group 18-23 years were recruited by purposive sampling technique. Course pursuing, gender and year of study were taken into consideration when selecting them for the study.

Data collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interview conducted over video conferencing. Open ended interview questions were used to get detailed narratives from participants about their perspectives of own empowerment. Validated the tool and methodology by subject experts. The questions were pilot tested with 3 participants and interview questions were revised and modified. Each interview lasted about 10-15 minutes. The interview was recorded using screen recorder with consent from the participants. Cross validated the main concept conveyed by the participant with them at the end, to avoid any misunderstanding of themes from the side of interviewer.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed from Malayalam to English in verbatim and the data was analysed using modified Colaizzi's 7 step thematic analysis. Proof read the transcript many times to reach the themes. The analysis involved a systematic and rigorous approach to extract meaning from the collected qualitative data. Sampling, data collection and analysis continued until saturation point (16) was reached when no new themes emerged.

Ethical considerations

The study adheres to ethical principles, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was maintained, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point was given to participants. To ensure the ethical conduct of the research, suggestions of experts were obtained.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 16 participants from various parts of Kerala

Demographic distribution

The selected demographic variables were:

- ➢ Course pursued
- ➢ Gender
- ➢ Year of study
- ➢ Family income
- ➢ Type of institution they are studying

The demographic distribution of samples:

- Out of 16 students 11 were pursuing BSc Nursing courses across different years and 5 students enrolled in the General Nursing Diploma program.
- Among the 16 participants 7 students were studying in first year, 4 students in final year and 5 students in between first and final years.
- Among the student nurses 4 were males and the rest i.e., 12, were females.
- Among the student nurses 5 students studied in government institutions, 4 students studied in private medical colleges, and 7 students studied in normal private institutions.
- Majority of the students, 7 belongs to moderate income families, followed by 6 students of low-income families, and only 3 students belonged to high income families.

Empowerment Levels:

The participants' perspectives on empowerment were categorized into three levels: empowered, moderately empowered, and not empowered.

Four participants reported feeling empowered, seven reported moderate empowerment, and five participants expressed not feeling empowered as nursing students. These varying levels of empowerment form the backdrop for the thematic analysis.

Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: **Clinical Competence and Skill Development.**

Empowerment is influenced by participants' perceptions of their clinical skills and competence. The subthemes within this theme are:

- **Effective Skill Acquisition and Self-Assuredness:** Empowered participants attribute their empowerment to effective skill acquisition and a sense of self-assuredness in clinical settings.
    - A participant reported "I feel I have acquired some skills needed to handle various situations, which provides me confidence in patient care."
- **Inadequate Clinical Training and Confidence:** Participants who do not feel empowered emphasize their lack of confidence due to insufficient clinical skills training.
    - A participant reported "I find difficulty in performing certain procedures or handling specific situations. It makes me feel like I'm not prepared to be a skilful nurse."

Theme 2: Support and Mentorship

Support from educational institutions and mentorship influence participants' feelings of empowerment. The subthemes within this theme are:

- **Nurturing and Guiding Mentorship:** Empowered participants attribute their empowerment to the presence of nurturing and guiding mentorship.
    - A participant reported "Having mentors who guide and support me has been helpful in my journey as a nursing student."

- **Lack of Mentorship Support and Guidance:** Participants who do not feel empowered highlight the absence of guidance and support from their colleges.
  - A participant reported "The support from my college is not as I expected. There's a lack of guidance and mentorship, making it difficult to face the challenges."
- **Hierarchical Bullying:** Participants who feel less empowered highlighted presence of bullying from teachers, staff, seniors etc.

  - A participant reported "As student I experienced bullying from teachers, senior students as well as staffs in hospital"

Theme 3: Professional Identity and Future Roles

Participants' sense of professional identity and their envisioned future roles impact their empowerment. The subthemes within this theme are:

- **Alignment of Identity and Aspirations:** Empowered participants connect their empowered feelings with their professional identity and future nursing roles.
  - A participant reported "I'm confident that my current experiences will shape me to become an expert nurse."
- **Doubts About Professional Identity:** Participants who do not feel empowered express doubts about their suitability for the nursing profession and the alignment of their professional identity.
  - A participant reported "When I face situations beyond my expertise, I feel like I am not made for this."
  - Another participant reported "In the ward many patients do not like student nurses doing certain procedures, so it creates a confusion about what is our role in the clinical setting."
- **Gender and empowerment:** Male nursing students experience many disempowering experiences in clinical learning compared to female students.

- A participant reported "In the beginning, I faced uncertainty from both my peers and instructors, as there was a prevailing belief that nursing was a field more suited for females."

Theme 4: Educational Enhancement for Empowerment

Participants' suggestions for educational enhancements that promote empowerment. The subthemes within this theme are:

- **Value of Mentorship Programs**: Participants highlighted the significance of mentorship programs for fostering empowerment.
    - A participant reported "Having staff nurses as mentors would provide the guidance need in clinical field."
- **Need for Practical Training and Simulations:** Participants across empowerment levels highlight the importance of hands-on training and simulations to enhance empowerment.
    - A participant reported "Practical training and simulations will build our confidence and empower us to handle real-life situations."
    - Another participant reported "New syllabus has more mandatory modules in training but we don't have, I expect institutions to conduct workshops or other training programmes for us also to learn advanced and latest updates in medical science."

Theme 5: Attrition

- **Future Benefits:** Participants' attrition is largely determined by future rewards which may be offered by the course in their life.

    - A participant reported "I felt I'm not fit for this course and I should quit, but the scope of nursing field reinforces me to continue."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The themes identified in this analysis shed light on the perspective of empowerment among student nurses. Similar to reviewed studies, in this study the students felt less or moderate empowerment, which encompasses the need for better mentorship, simulation programmes, clinical training, and prevent bullying.

CONCLUSION

In order to enhance empowerment, educational institutions should emphasize mentorship programs, practical training, updated curricula, and prevent hierarchical bullying in educational and clinical settings.

LIMITATIONS

- Lesser availability of time restricts the ability to capture the full spectrum of factors influencing empowerment.
- The nursing students might have provided socially acceptable answers.
- Institutional differences may hinder the generalizability of findings.

RECOMENDATIONS

- Nursing schools and colleges can implement various measures to ensure an empowered learning by measures such as mentorship, simulation programmes, more opportunity to develop skills and knowledge.
- Hospital authorities can encourage their staffs to support students in clinical learning and skill acquisition.

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