

Empowering Postgraduate Nursing Students: Their Perspective and Challenges Faced during Study Program

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Abstract

Aim: The study aims to explore the financial constraints faced by working nurses enrolled in postgraduate nursing studies, emphasizing the importance of higher education in providing safe patient care. **Material and Methods:** A qualitative case study design was used to explore the challenges faced by working students while enrolled in the postgraduate studies in nursing. A tentative sample of 10 participants was interviewed based on data saturation for the purpose to collect the required information. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with audio-tape recordings. Data was analyzed and themes were developed for its proper description. **Results:** The study results showed that education in nursing at postgraduate level is a demanding and exigent task specifically when a student is supposed to carry out these studies with a part or full time employment. Overall, it was found that working students has multiple challenges including financial constraints, time management issues, personal and professional burnout, keeping lack of balance in family and social life activities and inconsistency in the learning outcomes. Further working students explicates that they try to cope up with these challenges by their own efforts however they need administrative and academics level facilitation which they thought; could help out to overcome their problems. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the importance of higher studies for nurses' professional intensification, but employees face challenges in balancing work and postgraduate studies, impacting time management, finances, personal, professional, and social aspects, necessitating the development of effective strategies.

Keywords: Working Students, Nursing, Challenges, Experiences, Post Graduate Studies.

INTRODUCTION

The world has become a global village and developments in all the fields of life have changed the trends and styles. It is the need of hour to groom 21st century students as versatile individuals, equipped with all the skills and attributes besides updated knowledge to keep pace with the ever changing world.

It is important to facilitate the university students in all the possible ways by developing strategies to synthesize the characteristics that would align with the university's mission to develop professionals for a better world. The world has become a global village and developments in all the fields of life have changed the trends and styles. It is the need of hour to groom 21st century students as versatile individuals, equipped with all the skills and attributes besides updated knowledge to keep pace with the ever changing world. It is important to facilitate the university students in all the possible ways by developing strategies to synthesize the characteristics that would align with the university's mission to develop professionals for a better world.

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Getting enrolled in higher studies is one of the needs of the ever-changing world. Development in all spheres of life has brought innovations to the trends, styles and living standards of people. All these developments, evolution, improvement, expansion and succession are only possible to be updated with the recent, evidenced based and scientific based skills, knowledge and education. It helps to shape the consistent, decent and civilized societies of people around the nations if individuals would get encouraged towards getting opportunities at advanced level of education in their fields (Farhana & Ahmad, 2018).

Trends in education are shifting towards more specialized and sophisticated levels of learning among the students. A gradual increase in the number of students have been found to get enroll in postgraduate studies programs in various fields and disciplines around the globe. The trend is moving with same pace in nursing discipline. This increase in enrollment in nursing has certain motivation among nurses to be the part of postgraduate studies. Post graduate studies in nursing assist nurses in their knowledge, skills, confidence, professional growth, academic progress, career development, social status, and earning. (Essa, 2011)

Nursing is one of the growing professions and the inclination towards higher studies among nursing students is gaining attention around the world. There is a dire need of improvement to enroll, retain and complete the maximum of nurses in the post graduate studies to serve the sick humanity in a more significant, expressive and meaningful way. (Patelarou et al, 2009). Although nursing is an emerging profession in its scopes and nurses are having proclivity and inclination to get enroll in post graduate studies however they face certain challenges and avertable experiences sometime that affect their studies and becomes barriers in the successful completion of their studies. Various challenges are experienced by the students at personal, academic and administrative levels in terms of financial resources, institutional rules and restrictions, teaching and learning resources while to be the part of postgraduate studies in general cadres of education (Markey et al, 2019).

Nursing as a practicing profession requires both practice experts and nursing researchers to expand the scope and scientific basis of patient care. Doctoral and master's levels educational programmes prepare and train the nurses for advanced level of clinical practice, leadership roles and scientific enquiry (Ten Ham-Baloyi & Jordan, 2016)

Students who are working as an employee and enrolled at the same time in their studies is the area that still requires to be explored because limited work has been done in this area. There could be certain reasons to carry on with the higher studies among the nursing students while working however

financial problems may be one of the major areas that make the students inclined to earn and spent it on their families and education specifically getting enrolled in higher studies in the nursing discipline.

Nursing is a demanding and challenging profession and requires the scientific, theoretical as well as practical expertise to expand the patient care on their evidenced based practices therefore higher and post graduate studies helps them to be prepared for advanced practiced, skills and research based practices towards the provision of best possible care among the patients and their families (Girmay et al, 2018). The study was conducted with the to determine challenges faced by by working students and coping strategies adopted while enrolled in postgraduate studies in nursing discipline

Research Objectives

Research objectives are the declarative statements that an investigator wants to accomplish in a specified time frame and resources. Objectives require to be clearly structured to that keep the researcher in the right direction.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore challenges experienced by working students while enrolled in postgraduate studies in nursing discipline
2. To assess the coping strategies in relation to the challenges faced by working students enrolled in postgraduate studies in nursing discipline.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case studying was used for the current study to explore the challenges experienced by working students while enrolled in the postgraduate studies in nursing. As the intent was to explore challenges of a group of postgraduate students in a specific discipline with an in-depth way, therefore qualitative case study design was found an apt design used for conducting the study. The current study was conducted in Institute of Nursing Sciences, Khyber Medical University. The participants of the study were the students enrolled in master and doctoral level programs.

A tentative sample of 10 participants from graduate studies including master and doctoral level nursing programs was taken to be interviewed based on data saturation for the purpose to collect the required information

Purposive sampling method was used to select the sample from the postgraduate nursing students. As the population was from a specific level of education and discipline, therefore this type of sampling was appropriate to be used in taking the sample.

All those students enrolled in master and doctoral level nursing programs were included in the studies who were employed in different public and private sector institutions. Their challenges were explored in a context to know that how did they carry with their studies and employment at the same time.

Student enrolled in postgraduate nursing programs whose focus was only their studies and they were relived from their departments. Further, those students who were not willing to participate voluntarily were excluded from the study.

Data Collection Procedure

Approval was taken from the concerned department to conduct the current study. Detailed information regarding the study purpose, objective, significance and all other relevant information in the form of an instruction sheet was given to all study participants. A consent form was signed by each participant for their voluntary participation. Further, the study participants were ensured with

the rights that they may take part or withdraw from the study any time without any consequences. The participant was guaranteed that their confidentiality and anonymity would be kept throughout the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interview. Approximate time of 10 to 20 minutes time was decided to conduct the interview as per the participant availability and feasibility. The study guide questions were framed in English however, the study guide questions were also translated in Urdu to make it easier for the understanding of the participants as well to share their thoughts, perceptions, experiences and challenges more expressively. After the interviews it was translated back into English after taking the required information. All the interviews were audio taped recorded. Probing questions were also used to get in-depth information. Nonverbal cues and expressions were also observed during the interviews to know the gravity of their problems and challenges.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis is one of the most imperative and integral part of any research study that gives the reflection and interpretation of the collected information. Data was analyzed after getting the required information. Audio tape recordings for each of the interview were listened many times in order to transcribed and translate it for its real comprehension, narration and description. Transcription and verbatim were framed after listening the interview to understand and comprehend the actual words and expression of the participants. After the process of transcription codes were generated based each of the statement of the participant. Same information related codes were merged and categories were made based on the same type of information collected. Themes were then extracted and supported through representative statements and quotes of the informants. Finally the themes were written in a descriptive format for its understanding, organization, comprehension and dissemination.

Rigor in Study

Rigor is one of the features of trustworthiness in qualitative researches that keeps and maintains excellence and quality in the collected information about a specific research problem in terms of its validity and reliability (Maher, 2018). The process of rigor and trustworthiness was assured of the data being assessed using the process of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was granted by the supervisor and concerned department to conduct the study. All the relevant information regarding study aim, purpose, benefits and risk, right of autonomy to refuse or withdrawn from the study at any time without any consequences were shared with the participants. Informed consent was taken for the voluntary participation of the study. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity were maintained. All other relevant ethical consideration were maintained as needed per the nature of the study

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Status of the Participants

A total of Ten (n=10) semi structured interviews were conducted among the post graduate working students, where number of male were 7 (70%), age 30 years and above were 8 (80%), master of sciences program students were 9 (90%), married 7 (70%), employment period of 1-5 years 4 (40%) and above 10 years were 4 (40%), and status of charge nurse 6 (60%) were in majority. (See table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	07	70.00 %
	Female	03	30.00 %
Age	Age (25-30 Years)	02	20.00 %
	Above (30-Years)	08	80.00 %
Post Graduate Studies Level	PhD Nursing	01	10.00 %
	Master of Science in Nursing	09	90.00 %
Marital Status	Single	03	30.00 %
	Married	07	70.00 %
Employment (Experience)	1-5 Years	04	40.00 %
	5-10 Years	02	20.00 %
	Above 10 Years	04	40.00 %
Employment Status	Lecturer	04	40.00 %
	Charge Nurse	06	60.00 %

Perspective about Challenges Faced by Working Students

Students enrolled in postgraduate nursing programs shared a range of their perspectives on their studies, experiences, challenges, impact on learning, personal, professional and social lives and the ways they managed with their problems in relation to both of their studies and employment. Challenges of the working students enrolled in postgraduate studies in nursing were coded and categorized based on the essence of information collected and analyzed. Thematic analysis was carried out towards the configuration of major themes. From the process of coding around 17 categories were extracted which further were framed in 5-major themes including perception regarding higher studies in nursing, challenges experienced during post graduate studies, challenges and students personal, professional and social life, impact of challenges on learning and challenges management. All the mentioned themes have been summarized in the following thematic figure (Figure-1)

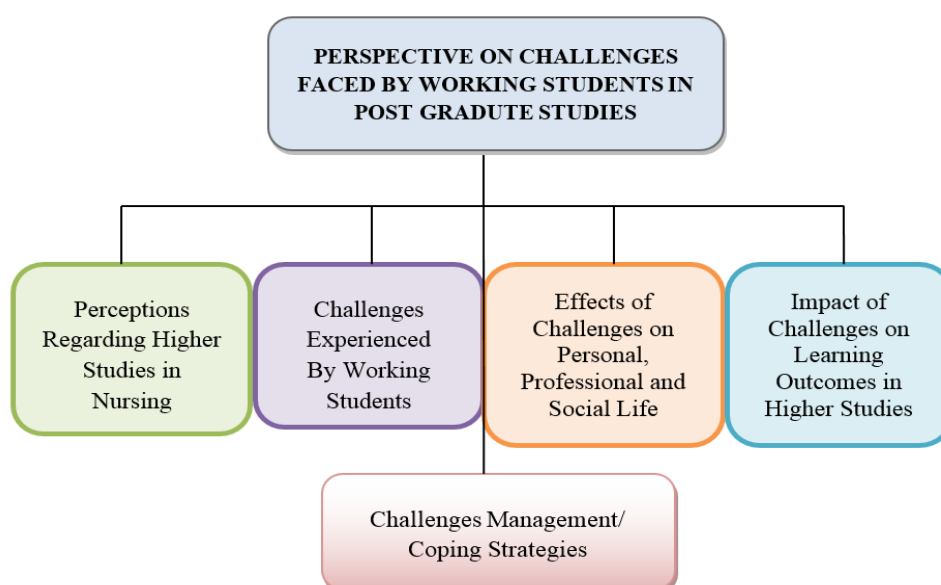


Figure 1: Thematic Analysis

The first and preliminary theme that was derived from the information collected through semi-structured interview was to be acquainted with the perception of post graduate students regarding their meaning to higher studies in nursing. Students shared their views ingenuously and explicitly.

Analysis of the information reflected their perceptions in different ways. They perceived that higher studies in nursing may assist them in enhancing with their knowledge and skills, professionalism and academics progression and promotion and earning opportunities.

The next or second theme was concluded as the challenges and problems the students experienced during their higher studies. The informants shared the challenges with their own point of views and exposures and they further pointed out its impact on various spheres of their lives. Multiple challenges including financial constraints, time management related issues, having lack of balance in personal and professional life, lack of correspondence in family and social life and activities.

Based on the vigorous and vibrant process of coding and categorization; another theme was derived to explore and understand the effects of these challenges on students overall way of living during their higher education. The participants' answers and point of views concluded that these challenges may affect them mainly in the parameters of their personal, professional and social life activities.

The fourth theme was derived regarding the challenges in perspective to look into its effects on the students' learning summarized based on the coding process extracted from the participants' point of views. Majority of the participants were in opinion that challenges during studies affect the entire orb of their learning process in one way or the other that may affect their cognitive abilities, practical skills and professional attributes.

The fifth and final theme was framed after knowing the verbal responses of the participants during interviews that how they manage their problems when encountered with these challenges during their higher studies and employment. The theme was concluded regarding the coping mechanism, strategies and management of the challenges, which were shared by the participants with their own point of views. They concluded that they cope with their challenges with making their study timetable, request their parent departments for facilitation, restricting social activities and demanded for scholarships or financial aids.

To wrap up in short words; it would be rightly articulated that although post graduate studies are really very imperative in the field of nursing and nurses have their own perspectives regarding it however they face certain challenges when they enrolled in higher studies as well they work as an employee in an organizations. The following themes which were finally derived from the entire discussions of all the interviews of the participants were labeled as their perspectives and experiences regarding their higher studies, challenges they faced, effects of these challenges on their overall life, impact of these challenges on learning and the methods and strategies to cope up with their studies and employment at a time.

Theme-1: Perceptions Regarding Higher Studies in Nursing

Majority of the study participants shared their perspectives that higher education in nursing is the most indispensable need of the day, which ensures nurses to be knowledgeable, competent, skilled and well-informed in their practices. According to their point of views, progress in nursing education is directly associated with the provision of high quality care among the patients. Therefore, nurses have to update their knowledge and skills through higher studies in their filed. Some of the participants' points of views are further shared here to have a more comprehensive look of their perspectives. One of the statements from the participants in this regard is reflected here that;

"Post graduate qualification to me is much needed these days as per the changing needs of patients and nursing care. I can improve my level of competency, knowledge and skills through higher studies that in response will make me to provide quality care to the patients" (P-8)

Further one of the participants shared his own point of view that postgraduate studies helps them in their level of competence, professionalism and academic growth; reflected as

"We get developed with more advanced knowledge, communication, Leadership. Problem solving and decision making skills that help us to be good professionals, academicians and researchers which is only possible with high qualification in the field"
(P-2)

Some of the participants verbalized that higher studies in their field provide them better opportunities of promotion or working in organizations where they may use it as a good source of income. One of the participants verbalized that;

"Majority of our senior MSN colleagues have promoted or getting handsome salaries in private sector nursing colleges" (P-5)

All these point of views and reflections shows that post graduate studies may help the nurses in multiple spheres of their knowledge, skills, competence, academic progression, professionalism. Further higher studies may tend them towards better working opportunities that in response may help them to improve with their income levels and earnings.

Theme-2: Challenges Faced by Working Students in Studies

Undoubtedly there are certain advantages to get higher education in the field of nursing. On one side it gives individual benefits to the individuals in order to bring improvement in their knowledge, skills and as a good source of income while on the other side it may give provision to the safe and quality care among the patients. However to get degree in higher studies is not an easy task especially when it is carried out with a full time employment. Nursing students experiences certain challenges during their studies. Some of the added statements are given here to know further the real reflections of their challenges.

"I am doing job in the evening to fulfill my hostel, food, transportation and educational expenses to continue my master level study because at this stage of life my family cannot support me anymore because of their own issues". (P-6)

Another statement by a participant reflected that sometime they are facing problems with their time schedule to attend their classes.

"Sometime I do night duty and then I come directly for my class early in the morning that makes it difficult for to concentrate on studies. To manage the study with quality time becomes difficult specially when doing night duties in private sector hospitals". (P-5)

One of the participants verbalized his own concern in a way that it becomes difficult for them to keep a balance in the Job life and student life as reflected by his words;

"We do not have any personal life sometime when the hospital schedule is very demanding and studies are at its peaks near to the assignment submission and exams particularly" (P-6)

Family and social life is an important sphere of every individual however it also get compromised with the demanding nature of job and high level of expectations of teachers in the post graduate studies as reflected by one of the participant information;

"Busy schedule and high work burden in hospital make me so tired that I cannot give quality time to my family and relative" (P-9)

To conclude in short words working students have certain challenges in jobs as well as in their studies that affect them in their financial, time management, personal, professional and social life spheres.

Theme-3: Effects on Personal, Professional and Social Life

Doing Jobs and getting higher education in the nursing discipline is quiet challenging and demanding that may affect an individual in his or her personal, professional, family and social life therefore there is a dire needs to explore the challenges of working student in nursing so that better coping strategies may be planned to ease them in all their life spheres.

To explore the nature of challenges in terms of personal, professional and social life some opinions and perspectives of the participants are shared here. One of the expressions of the participant is quoted here;

It is difficult keep involve in any extracurricular, sport or any other exercise activity with the current duty roaster and study. Because I have been put on the schedule for the whole month night due to which I feel that my food, sleep and level of energy are not upto the required level to maintain my health properly" (P-7)

Another participant of the study recorded his response as;

"Because of the study stress and work demand we cannot maintain the proper professional ethics and standards in our work to provide better nursing care to the patients as required. We sometime do our own studies in wards when get close to our exams and when the hospital doesn't relieve us" (P-8)

Family and social life is one of the integral parts of every human being. It may get affect when there are multiple tasks to do in life. Majority of the participants reflected that they try to mange with families however they restrict their social activities because that was not possible to be maintained with their jobs and studies. One of the percipients expressed that;

"I have found that the study at post graduate level is very hard and the teachers and courses have high expectation to be covered. Similarly I have my duty in intensive critical care unit therefore when I come to home after my duty I hardly fulfill the needs of home and my children (P-5)"

The above mentioned statements conclude that it affect the overall personal, professional and family or social life of working students when trying to sustain with their job and studies

Theme-4: Impact of the Challenges on Students Learning

The foremost purpose of the postgraduate studies is to learn and to acquire the knowledge, skills and wisdom in a more sophisticated way that helps to develop the skills of research, communication, writing, interpretation, analysis, critical thinking, logics and reasoning. Working students shared their views that although the ultimate goal of their studies is to learn something more at advanced and rational level however somewhere it gets affect with the work demands of the job. One of the participants replied tha;

"It is supposed to get in-depth knowledge and concepts in our studies however the workload of jobs interferes and sometime we try to cover a subject just in order to get pass in it" (P-3)

Further it may affect with multiple of our gaining skills when focus the study with exam point of view and we cover the curriculum just for the sake of exams. One of the respondents said that;

"I don't know about the others but I feel that am deficient in my skills of confidence, writing, and presentation skills because I know that I have given more priority to my job which is main source of my income". (P-10)

One of the important areas of nursing education is to inculcate professional attributes among the graduate nurses and they are prepared in a way to provide care to the patient ethically sound and professionally safe. Participants of the study responded at various occasions that they try to provide quality care to the patients however the circumstances make them powerless sometimes to maintain that standards in care as reflected by one of the responses as;

"Master level study is very tough and challenging to me because it requires enough time to study. Secondly I go for my duty on daily basis in one of the most dense hospital of the province and I have more than 20 patients sometime to take care.

Therefore it becomes difficult to provide holistic care to all the patients after attending the classes"

All these responses from the participants showed that there are certain challenges which affect a working student in the acquisition of their knowledge, skills, professional and ethical boundaries.

Theme-5: Coping Strategies and Challenges Management

Practical, focused and constructive coping mechanisms help an individual to come out of his or her problems. Every individual is unique and has own style to manage with his or her problems. Majority of the participant articulated that they use certain strategies to face these challenges and to live with them. One of the respondents responded that;

"Making a practical and meaningful schedule may helps to overcome the challenges at post graduate level studies if each of the tasks is properly specified and framed to do." (P-2)

Departments and institutions may also play a vital role to adjust their employees and students to overcome the challenges in their higher studies. As one of the students responded in interview that;

"If I will be facilitated for my study and other educational related expenses in the form of scholarship or any stipend I will quit my part time job and will do my higher studies with a full stated dedication and commitment" (P-6)

Further one of the responses of the participants reflected that;

"I have not attended any of the social ceremonies in my relatives for the last 6-months and I think that isolation from the avoidable social activities may also help as a strategy to focus my own job and studies at the moment."(P-8)

DISCUSSION

Findings of the current study reflected that postgraduate education in nursing is one of the essence areas to be promoted among nurses for preparing them towards the provision of best possible practices in educational institutions as well in the diverse settings of health care system. Further the study reflected that students who were working in different health care settings and institutions had expressed about certain challenges and problems while they got enrolled in the higher studies. These challenges were explored by having semi structured interviews with the working students in the nursing discipline. Students expressed their perspectives regarding the challenges in their jobs and

higher studies. They were found to have time management issues, financial constraints, personal, professional and social concerns while doing jobs and postgraduate studies at the same time. Further some of the coping strategies were discussed by the students to cope up and manage with their issues, problems, concerns and challenges in association to their jobs and studies.

Comparing the study findings with previous studies it was found that some of the preceding studies have shown diverse type of challenges among the post graduate students at university level in different disciplines where it has not been shown or specified with the employment status of the students. One of the studies conducted in a private university of the country have reflected that post graduates students encountered with a range of challenges which they have classified as dispositional challenges (learners own problems in learning), situational challenges (financial, family and time management) and institutional (resources) and academic challenges which were related to the learning process (Farhana & Ahmad, 2018). Some of these challenges like financial, resources, time management and family related concerns are having parallel results to the current study findings. Another study was conducted in South Africa among postgraduate nursing students to explore their challenges. They explored and presented the postgraduate nursing students' challenges in three themes including personal challenges (financial, employment, family and accommodation), academic & Institutional (workload, time constraints and curriculum) and research related challenges (Havenga & Sengane, 2018). Majority of the mentioned challenges identified in their study have the same reflection and parallel findings of the current study conducted.

In contrast there is another study conducted in Malaysia have shown certain challenges among post graduate students which were not very associated directly with the postgraduate nursing students challenges as the context was different however some of the resources and facilities related challenges reflect as nursing graduates get deprived of financial and academic related challenges (Talebloo & Baki, 2013) One of the study conducted on Saudia Nurses who were getting master education in Australia have explored for their challenges. Students experienced challenges to a different form of culture, different education system, resources issue, employment issues and having no social relationship. All these challenges in one way or the other to some extent have reflection to the current study finding in terms of resources and financial management related challenges (Clerehan et al, 2012). Some other studies conducted by (Fawaz et al, 2018; Moghaddam et al, 2020) have also reflected same and parallel nature of challenges among nursing students when getting enrolled in higher studies however these challenges have been explored with having no description in context to the students work as an employee and students simultaneously. All the above comparison shows that students at postgraduate level in any discipline face certain challenges according to their own context which directly or indirectly affect their learning outcomes therefore it is important to explore the exact nature of the challenges among the postgraduate students specifically among those nursing students who do job as well as they are getting higher education in their field. The study was only limited to only a single identity institution therefore it may further be carried out in multi programs students in different institutions, contexts and disciplines for its more generalized implication and validation of the current study results.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study concluded that nursing education at postgraduate level is the essence of the profession that provide a foundation for the amplification of nurses in the ever changing world of health care delivery systems. The study reflected that nursing students at higher levels of studies face certain avertable challenges that affect in certain parameters of their learning, financial constraints, time management, personal, professional and social spheres. Therefore strategies need to be developed and adopted in a way to prepare them to cope up with their problems constructively

specifically when they are employee and students at the same time in their field of expertise. The study provides recommendation that the institutions, policy makers and other onboard personnel to identify these challenges and address them at their proper level to fulfill the needs of postgraduate students in nursing that in response would help to produce quality nursing professionals in the field.

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