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A study to assess perception regarding benefits and barriers of taking higher education among staff nurses working in selected government hospital of Gujarat State

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Abstract

A descriptive survey was conducted to assess staff nurses' perceptions regarding the benefits and barriers of pursuing higher education. The global COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of advanced knowledge, acquisition of new skills, and professional advancement in nursing practice, thereby influencing nurses' attitudes toward continuing education. Understanding how staff nurses perceive and manage these challenges is essential for strengthening nursing education and workforce development.

The objectives of the study were: (1) to assess the perception regarding the benefits of higher education among staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat State; (2) to assess the perception regarding the barriers of higher education among staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat State; (3) to determine the association between perception of benefits and selected demographic variables; and (4) to determine the association between perception of barriers and selected demographic variables.

A descriptive survey approach was adopted. Six government hospitals were selected using a lottery method, and 300 staff nurses were chosen through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a self-designed five-point Likert attitude scale comprising three sections: demographic variables, perception toward benefits, and perception toward barriers of higher education. The benefits and barriers sections included 20 items each, with equal numbers of positive and negative statements. Responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with scores categorized as positive (61-100) or negative (20-60). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

The findings revealed that 52.06% of staff nurses demonstrated a positive perception toward the benefits of higher education, while 48.34% showed a negative perception. In contrast, 46.21% had a positive perception and 54.34% had a negative perception regarding barriers to higher education. Chi-square analysis indicated a statistically significant association between perceptions of both benefits and barriers and selected demographic variables, including age, religion, years of experience, and educational qualification.

Keywords: Perception, benefits & barriers, higher education, staff nurse, government hospital

Introduction

Higher education in nursing is a structured and purposeful learning process aimed at enhancing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of registered nurses to strengthen nursing practice, education, administration, and research, ultimately improving the quality of health care delivered to the public^[1]. The American Nurses Association (1975) emphasized that higher education is essential for the professional development of nurses and for meeting the growing complexities of health-care systems.

Nursing professionals have traditionally perceived higher education as a key determinant of competent and effective practice. Evidence from the Annual Higher Education Survey (2003) indicates that continuing and higher education is increasingly recognized as a professional necessity, with re-licensure requirements mandating higher education in 28 states, thereby reinforcing the importance of lifelong learning in nursing^[2]. Such regulatory measures

reflect global recognition of advanced education as a means to ensure quality, safety, and accountability in nursing care. Despite its recognized benefits, the intention to pursue higher education varies significantly among nurses due to personal, professional, and social factors. Gender differences play a crucial role in educational aspirations. Female registered nurses often experience limited opportunities for higher studies due to dual responsibilities related to family and professional obligations, whereas male registered nurses demonstrate greater inclination toward pursuing advanced education^[3]. Davey and Robinson (2002) reported that societal roles and work-life balance significantly influence nurses' decisions regarding continuing education.

Age, employment status, and financial stability are additional determinants influencing participation in higher education. Studies have shown that employed registered nurses who pursue higher education tend to be relatively

younger, return to academic programs after initial work experience, and possess higher income levels that enable them to meet the financial demands of advanced studies [4]. A report published in the Taxila International Journal (2019) further highlighted that economic capacity and institutional support significantly affect nurses' ability to engage in higher education.

Understanding these factors is crucial for developing supportive educational policies and workplace environments. Assessing staff nurses' perceptions regarding the benefits and barriers of higher education can provide valuable insights for nursing administrators and policymakers to promote professional growth, improve retention, and enhance the overall quality of nursing services [5].

Need of the study

Higher education in nursing is essential for strengthening professional competence, leadership capacity, and evidence-based practice, all of which are critical for improving health-care quality and patient outcomes. The American Nurses Association (1975) emphasized that advanced nursing education enhances nursing practice, education, administration, and research, thereby contributing to improved public health services [1]. Despite this recognized importance, many countries, including India, continue to face challenges related to the availability of adequately educated nursing personnel.

India is currently experiencing an acute shortage of nurses, particularly in public health-care institutions, where staff nurses shoulder heavy clinical workloads. Strategies to address this human resource crisis require scaling up nursing education while simultaneously improving educational quality, governance, and institutional capacity. Several national and regional assessments have identified deficiencies in nursing education systems, including inadequate faculty strength, limited professional development opportunities, and inconsistent educational standards [2]. Kivunja Charles (2001) highlighted that strengthening nursing faculty through structured faculty development programs is a key strategy to address complex health human resource challenges and to sustain the quality of nursing education [3].

Advanced educational preparation has been shown to positively influence nurses' clinical competence and leadership roles. The Institute of Medicine (2011) reported that nurses with Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and higher qualifications are better prepared to meet complex patient needs, function effectively as leaders, and contribute to safer, higher-quality patient care [4]. However, inadequate faculty capacity and limited institutional support continue to constrain nursing education programs. Bvumbwe (2016) identified faculty shortages, heavy non-academic responsibilities, and low remuneration as major contributors to limited nursing school capacity and reduced opportunities for nurses to pursue higher education [5].

In government hospitals, staff nurses often face additional barriers such as shift duties, family responsibilities, financial constraints, and lack of study leave or career incentives. At the same time, the increasing complexity of patient care, public health emergencies, and technological advancements demand nurses with higher-level knowledge and skills.

Understanding staff nurses' perceptions regarding the benefits and barriers of pursuing higher education is therefore crucial for identifying gaps between professional aspirations and practical constraints.

There is limited empirical evidence from Gujarat State focusing on staff nurses working in government hospitals. Assessing their perceptions will provide valuable insights for nursing administrators, educators, and policymakers to formulate supportive educational policies, improve access to higher education, strengthen faculty and institutional capacity, and promote lifelong learning. Ultimately, such efforts can contribute to workforce development, improved job satisfaction, and enhanced quality of nursing care in the public health sector [6].

AIMS

1. To explore the perceptions of staff nurses working in government hospitals regarding the benefits and barriers of pursuing higher education.
2. To identify the motivating factors that encourage staff nurses to pursue higher education in government hospital settings.
3. To analyse the challenges and barriers perceived by staff nurses in pursuing higher education while in service.

Methodology

Research Objectives

1. To assess the perception about benefits of taking higher education among staff nurses working in selected Government hospitals of Gujarat State.
2. To assess the perception about barriers of taking higher education among staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat state.
3. To find out association of perception regarding benefits of taking higher education among staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat state with the selected demographic variables.
4. To find out association of perception regarding barriers of taking higher education among staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat state with the selected demographic variables.

Research Design

A quantitative research design with a descriptive survey approach was adopted for the present study to assess the perception of staff nurses regarding the benefits and barriers of pursuing higher education. This design was considered appropriate as it enables systematic collection and analysis of data to describe existing perceptions and to examine relationships among study variables in a natural setting.

Population, Sample and Sample Size

The study population comprised staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat State. A total sample of 300 staff nurses was selected using a simple random sampling technique, ensuring equal probability of selection and minimizing sampling bias.

Reliability

The reliability of the tool was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which demonstrated acceptable internal

consistency for both sections of the scale. The reliability coefficient for the benefits scale was 0.70, and for the barriers scale was 0.80, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

Inclusive Criteria

- Staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat State.
- Staff nurses who are registered with the State Nursing Council.
- Staff nurses who are willing to participate in the study.
- Staff nurses who are available at the time of data collection.

Exclusive Criteria

- Nursing officers or staff nurses working in private hospitals or institutions.
- Student nurses, interns, and nursing trainees.
- Staff nurses who are on long-term leave during the period of data collection.
- Staff nurses who are unwilling to participate in the study.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool was developed systematically based on informal observations, interaction with staff nurses, and an extensive review of relevant literature. A structured Likert's attitude scale was prepared to assess staff nurses' perceptions regarding higher education. The tool consisted of three sections

Section I: Demographic data of staff nurses (age, religion, years of experience, and educational qualification).

Section II: Likert's attitude scale to assess perceptions regarding the benefits of pursuing higher education.

Section III: Likert's attitude scale to assess perceptions regarding the barriers to pursuing higher education.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study to test the feasibility, clarity, and reliability of the research tool and methodology. The pilot study findings revealed that 60% of staff nurses had a positive perception regarding the benefits of higher education, while 80% exhibited a negative perception regarding barriers to higher education. The mean perception score for benefits was 65.33, whereas the mean perception score for barriers was 44.73, supporting the adequacy of the tool for the main study.

The pilot study was conducted at G.G.G. Hospital, Jamnagar, while the final data collection was carried out in selected government hospitals across Gujarat State to enhance representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage wise distribution of the demographic data of sample (N = 300)

The frequency and percentage-wise distribution of demographic variables revealed that the majority of the staff nurses (85.33%) were in the age group of 21-25 years, followed by 26-30 years (7%), 31-35 years (5%), and 36-40 years (3%), indicating a predominantly young nursing workforce. With regard to religion, more than half of the participants were Hindu (56%), followed by Muslim (29%), Christian (10%), and others (5.33%), reflecting the religious diversity of the sample. In terms of professional experience, the majority of staff nurses (51.66%) had 0-5 years of experience, while 36.33% had 6-10 years, 8% had 11-15 years, and 4.66% had more than 15 years of experience, suggesting that most participants were in the early phase of their careers. Regarding educational qualification, a large proportion of staff nurses (86.66%) were General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) qualified, followed by B.Sc. Nursing (9%) and Post Basic/other nursing programs (5%), indicating that diploma-qualified nurses constituted the majority of the study sample.

Table 1: Areas for Research Study

Government Medical college Attached Hospital	District	Target Population	Accessible Population
Pilot Study			
G.G.G Hospital	Jamnagar	860	30
Main Study			
S.S.G Hospital	Vadodara	680	60
New Civil Hospital	Surat	520	60
P.D.U Hospital	Rajkot	510	60
Civil Hospital	Ahmedabad	1700	60
Sir T. General Hospital	Bhavnagar	500	60

Table-1: list of selected areas for research study, the investigator adopted a simple random sampling technique to select the samples for the study. The target population comprised staff nurses working in government hospitals of Gujarat State. A sampling frame was prepared, and a total of

300 staff nurses were selected: 60 each from S.S.G. Hospital, Vadodara; New Civil Hospital, Surat; P.D.U. Hospital, Rajkot; Civil Hospital, Ahmedabad; and Sir T. General Hospital, Bhavnagar.

Table 2: Distribution of Perception Scores Related to Benefits and Barriers of Higher Education among Staff Nurses (N = 300)

Sr. No	Perception	Number of statement	Max Score	Obtained Score	Percentage%	Mean Score	Mean Perception Score
1	Positive	10	15000	9944	52.06%	33.14	65.77
2	Negative	10	15000	9595	48.34%	32.01	
	Total	20	30,000	19539			

Table-2: The analysis of perception scores regarding the benefits of taking higher education among staff nurses (N = 300) revealed a mixed pattern of responses. Out of the total 20 statements, 10 were positive and 10 were negative, with a maximum possible score of 30,000. The obtained total score was 19,539, indicating an overall moderate perception toward higher education. For positive statements, the obtained score was 8,831, accounting for 52.06% of the maximum score, with a mean score of 33.14 and a mean perception score of 65.77, reflecting a generally favourable attitude toward the benefits of higher education. In contrast, the negative statements yielded an obtained score of 9,083 (48.34%) with a mean score of 32.01, suggesting the presence of notable reservations among staff nurses. Overall, the findings indicate that although a slight majority of staff nurses perceived higher education positively, a substantial proportion still held negative perceptions, highlighting the coexistence of both encouraging and discouraging views regarding higher education.

Association between Selected Demographic Variables and Perception Scores Regarding the Benefits of Taking Higher Education among Staff Nurses (N=300):

The chi-

square analysis demonstrated a statistically significant association between selected demographic variables and the perception scores regarding the benefits of taking higher education among staff nurses (N = 300). With respect to age, the calculated chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 10.11$, df = 3) exceeded the tabulated value (7.85), indicating that perception toward the benefits of higher education varied significantly across different age groups. Similarly, a significant association was observed between religion and perception scores ($\chi^2 = 16.91$, df = 3), suggesting that religious background influenced nurses' views on higher education. Years of professional experience also showed a significant association with perception scores ($\chi^2 = 11.64$, df = 3), implying that nurses' perceptions differed according to their length of service. Furthermore, educational qualification demonstrated a significant relationship with perception scores ($\chi^2 = 13.47$, df = 2), as the calculated value exceeded the tabulated value of 5.99. Overall, the findings indicate that age, religion, years of experience, and qualification significantly influenced staff nurses' perceptions regarding the benefits of pursuing higher education.

Table 3: Distribution of Perception Scores Regarding Barriers of Taking Higher Education among Staff Nurses (N = 300)

Sr. No	Perception	Number of statement	Mean Perception Score	Max Score	Obtained Score	Mean Score	Percentage%
1	Positive	10	65.77	15000	8831	29.43	46.21%
2	Negative	10		15000	9083	30.27	54.34%
Total		20		30,000	19539		

Table-3: Presents the distribution of perception scores regarding the barriers of taking higher education among staff nurses (N = 300). The scale consisted of 20 statements, equally divided into 10 positive and 10 negative statements, with a maximum possible score of 30,000. The total obtained score was 19,539, indicating an overall moderate level of perception toward barriers of higher education. For the positive statements, the obtained score was 8,831 out of a maximum of 15,000, accounting for 46.21%, with a mean score of 29.43 and a mean perception score of 65.77. This finding suggests that less than half of the respondents perceived minimal barriers toward pursuing higher education. In contrast, the negative statements yielded a higher obtained score of 9,083 (54.34%), with a mean score of 30.27, indicating that a majority of staff nurses perceived substantial barriers to pursuing higher education.

Discussion

The present study assessed the perception of staff nurses regarding the benefits and barriers of pursuing higher education while working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat State. The findings indicate that staff nurses hold mixed perceptions toward higher education, reflecting the coexistence of motivating factors and significant challenges related to professional advancement. Similar mixed perceptions have been consistently reported in nursing education literature across national and international settings, highlighting the complex decision-making process nurses undergo when considering further education [1].

In the present study, more than half of the staff nurses (52.06%) demonstrated a positive perception regarding the benefits of higher education. This finding suggests that

nurses recognize higher education as a pathway for professional growth, enhancement of knowledge, development of advanced clinical competencies, and improved decision-making skills. Comparable results were reported by Davey and Robinson, who found that nurses pursuing higher education perceived it as beneficial for career development, leadership roles, and professional confidence [2]. Likewise, the Institute of Medicine emphasized that nurses with higher educational qualifications are better prepared to deliver safe, high-quality patient care and to function effectively in complex health-care environments [3].

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have further reinforced positive attitudes toward higher education. Studies conducted during and after the pandemic reported that nurses increasingly valued advanced education due to the need for evidence-based practice, critical care skills, infection control expertise, and leadership during health crises [4]. This contextual influence may partly explain the favorable perceptions observed in the present study.

However, a considerable proportion of staff nurses (48.34%) expressed negative perceptions regarding the benefits of higher education. Similar findings have been reported in earlier studies, where nurses perceived limited returns on educational investment due to lack of promotions, minimal financial incentives, and increased responsibilities without adequate recognition [5]. Such perceptions may reduce motivation to pursue higher education despite its acknowledged long-term benefits.

Regarding barriers, the majority of staff nurses (54.34%) reported negative perceptions, indicating substantial obstacles in pursuing higher education. Consistent with

previous research, commonly identified barriers include time constraints, family responsibilities, financial burden, work-study imbalance, and lack of institutional support [6]. Studies conducted in government hospital settings have particularly emphasized workload, staff shortages, and rigid duty schedules as major deterrents to continuing education [7].

The significant association between demographic variables such as age, years of experience, and educational qualification with perceptions of benefits and barriers aligns with findings from earlier studies, which suggest that younger nurses and those with higher qualifications are generally more inclined toward pursuing further education [8]. Overall, the findings highlight the need for supportive organizational policies, flexible educational pathways, financial assistance, and structured motivation programs to facilitate higher education among staff nurses and strengthen nursing practice.

Conclusion

The present study concluded that staff nurses working in selected government hospitals of Gujarat State possess mixed perceptions regarding the benefits and barriers of pursuing higher education. While a majority of nurses recognized higher education as an important means for professional growth, enhancement of knowledge, development of advanced clinical competencies, and improved quality of patient care, a substantial proportion continued to perceive limited immediate benefits. These findings are consistent with earlier studies, which highlighted that although nurses value higher education, lack of visible incentives and career advancement opportunities may reduce their motivation to pursue further studies [1-3].

The study also revealed that perceived barriers to higher education outweighed perceived benefits among many staff nurses. Time constraints, heavy workload, family responsibilities, financial limitations, and insufficient institutional support were identified as major obstacles, supporting findings reported in previous research conducted in similar health-care settings [4-6]. Government hospital nurses, in particular, face additional challenges due to staff shortages and demanding duty schedules.

Furthermore, the significant association between demographic variables such as age, years of experience, and educational qualification with perceptions of benefits and barriers indicates that personal and professional characteristics play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward higher education, as reported in earlier studies [7, 8]. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for supportive organizational policies, flexible learning opportunities, financial assistance, and structured motivation and incentive programs to encourage staff nurses to pursue higher education. Addressing these barriers can contribute to professional development, workforce retention, and enhancement of nursing practice and patient care outcomes.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. The

authors have no financial or non-financial relationships, affiliations, or involvements with any organization or entity that could influence or be perceived to influence the content or outcomes of this study.

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