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Journal of Development Economics and Management Research Studies (JDMS)

A Peer Reviewed Open Access

International Journal

ISSN: 2582 5119 (Online)



Crossref Prefix No: 10.53422

09(14), 50-60, October-December, 2022

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Nursing Profession: A Rewarding and Challenging Career Choice in India- An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Nurses form the backbone of any medical services or patient care in the health sector. The nurses are paid a reasonably high salary in most countries all over the world. This is because of the lack of adequate number of qualified nurses. The demand for nurses in developed countries is very high because of the high level of healthcare provided there. But in India, this important section of workers are highly exploited, with lack of respect and dignity at workplaces and more importantly paid extremely low salaries. Motivation, morale and retention of nurses have emerged as issues of significant concern for healthcare providers and policymakers in recent time. Day-to-day nursing tasks are physically and emotionally demanding and depend not so much on standardized rules but on situational requirements. This paper discusses on nursing education, career opportunities for nursing, lucrative income of nurses and the challenges faced by nurses in their profession. The study noted that there is a dire need for nursing transformation at the national and state levels in both the government and private sectors. New opportunities for nurses to participate in shaping the future health care delivery system should be provided.

Keywords: Nurses, salary, health sector, motivation, morale and retention.

INTRODUCTION

The health care industry in India is one of the largest economic and fastest growing professions. In the process of health care, nurses are considered as a key factor as they share major responsibilities of patient care. To achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Nurses in India have to play a major role to improve the health and quality-of-life of people. Among different specialties in health care settings, female nurses have a major share among public

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health care providers. In India, more than 90% of the nurses are women. In the rigid healthcare hierarchy, nurses are not considered independent professionals but are dominated by physicians and hospital managements. As with many careers in healthcare, nursing is one of the most rewarding professions. The nurses are paid a reasonably high salary in most countries all over the world. This is because of the lack of adequate number of qualified nurses. The demand for nurses in developed countries is very high because of the high level of healthcare provided there. This causes many nurses completing their education from developing countries like India and Philippines to leave the country. They prefer to work in other developed countries like Ireland, USA and England. This creates a deficit in the number of nurses who are available to work in India and Philippines. India's nurse-to-population ratio is 1:475, including registered nurses and midwives and lady health visitors, whereas WHO recommends a nurse-to-patient ratio of 1:500. In India nursing is not only a challenging profession but also nursing salaries are also comparatively rewarding. Currently nurses are in shortage and hence qualified nurses can find exceptional nursing career opportunities across the country.

NURSING AND NURSING EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU

In the ancient era, until 17th century, formalized nursing was not traced. Every village had a dai/traditional birth attendant to take care of maternal and child health needs of the people. Military nursing was the earliest type of modern nursing introduced by the Portuguese in the 17th century. In 1664, East India Company started a hospital for soldiers at Fort St. George, Madras. Florence Nightingale was the first woman to have great influence over nursing in India and brought reforms in military and civilian hospitals in 1861. St. Stevens Hospital at Delhi was the first one to begin training Indian women as nurses in 1867. In 1871, the government General Hospital at Madras started the first school of nursing for midwives with four students. In 1908, the Trained Nurses Association was formed to uphold the dignity and honor of nursing profession. The first state registration council at Madras Nursing Council was constituted in 1926. In 1949, Indian Nursing Council (INC) was established to maintain a uniform standard of training for nurses, midwives and health visitors and regulate the standards of nursing in India. INC act was passed in 1947. General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) syllabus was revised in 1951, 1965, and 1986, ANM in 1974 and B.Sc. in 1981.

Education brings changes in behaviour of the individual in a desirable manner. It aims at all round development of an individual to become mature, self-sufficient, intellectually, culturally refined, socially efficient and spiritually advanced. Nursing education has expanded considerably post independence. University education in nursing brought about changes in nursing education. The type of nurses required today is an "all round personality". There are six levels of nursing education in India today. They are:

1. Multi-Purpose Health Worker Female training (ANM or MPHWF)
2. Female Health Supervisor training (HV or MPHS-F)
3. General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM)
4. BSc. Nursing
5. MSc. Nursing
6. MPhil and PhD

Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) is one and a half years (18 months) of certificate level course offered by various prominent institutions in India. The course makes aspirants familiar with the ways through which they can take care of the health-related problems of sick, injured, recovering mothers, new-born mentally challenged and old people. Diploma in General Nursery and Midwifery popularly known as the GNM Course is basically a Diploma course in Paramedics and is conducted by many nursing colleges throughout India. It is a 3½ years long Diploma program. Academic program is 3 years long and 6 months are dedicated towards internship. The ANM, HV, and GNM are conducted in schools of nursing. The last 3 are university level courses and the respective universities conduct examinations. Beside there are several certificate and diploma courses in specialties. After these courses, the students need to register as nurse in nursing council both Indian Nursing Council and State Nursing Council. For GNM and ANM students, they need to register in Nurses Examination Board.

In order to have uniformity of nursing education standards, inspections of nursing institutions are conducted under section 13 of Indian Nursing Council Act, 1947. Total number of nursing institutions found suitable by Indian Nursing Council as on 31st March 2018 for the various nursing programmes is as follows:

Table 1: No. of Institutions Certified for the year 2018 in India

Programme	Total
ANM (2 years)	1909
GNM (3 ½ yrs)	3215
B.Sc. (Nursing) (4 years)	1936
Post. Basic B.Sc. (Nursing) (2 years)	775
M.Sc. (Nursing) (2 years)	643
Post Basic Diploma Programme (PBDP) (one year after graduation)	292

Source: Indian Nursing Council Annual Report 2017-18

Other than the above mentioned standard UG (Degree and Diploma) and PG programs, there exist numerous other PG Diploma and certificate courses too. Such PG Diploma and Certificate courses help one take on different specialties. Some such well known areas of specialization are-

- Neonatal Nursing
- Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation Nursing
- Operation Room Nursing
- Critical Care Nursing
- Emergency Nursing
- Neuro Science Nursing
- Nursing Administration
- Cardio-Thoracic Nursing

Table 2: Number of Institutions approved in Tamil Nādu as on 31st December 2017

S.No	Course	Govt	Pvt	CMAI	Govt	Pvt	CMAI
		No. of Schools			Intake of Students		
1	GNM	26	170	11	2120	4585	410
2	ANM	14	11	5	650	320	110
3	B.Sc	7	180	-	426	10505	-
4	P.B.B.Sc	3	66	-	115	2305	-
5	M.Sc	4	79	-	107	1676	-

Source: Tamil Nādu Nursing Council Report

According to the Indian Nursing Council (Snapshots, 2017), there were 2.04 million nurses/midwives and 8.57 lakh auxiliary nurse midwives in India registered in the different state nursing councils of the Country. Thousands of female health supervisors and public health nurses are working in the public health sector alone. They are responsible for implementing all national and state health programmes at ground level.

As nursing services have been commercialized over the past two decades, thousands of nursing institutes emerged between 2012 and 2015, especially in the southern parts of Tamil Nādu. Some of the top nursing colleges in India today are established in the earliest days and are continuing to maintain standards and quality of education. AIIMS College of Nursing, Delhi, CMC College of Nursing, Vellore, St. John's College of Nursing, Bangalore, Government College of Nursing, Thiruvananthapuram, Sri Ramachandra Medical University College of Nursing Chennai, and Apollo College of Nursing, Chennai is some of the top colleges of Nursing today.

The candidates who obtain Recognised Qualification within Tamil Nādu have to register the same Qualification in Tamil Nādu Nurses and Midwives Council as per the Act and they are assigned Primary Registration numbers. Candidates may apply in person or by Postal with the required documents to this Council for Registration. Bulk Registration may be done through the Head of the Institution for all the Candidates trained in their Institution with the required documents and in that case Registration Certificates will be sent to the Institution and the Institution may hand over the Certificates to the Individual.

Table 3: Number of Registered Nurses(qualification-wise)

YEAR	ANM	H.V	G.N.M	B.Sc	P.B.B.Sc	M.Sc	D.N.E.A
2007	18993	2697	82106	2848	238	377	36
2008	19165	2808	86843	2727	377	418	16
2010	19439	2808	91236	3319	94	698	-
2011	19691	2808	96284	4390	160	713	
2012	19899	2809	100732	3341	276	1148	15
2013	20172	2810	106485	4493	497	967	20
2014	20487	2827	111863	7146	841	961	19
2015	21221	2857	118198	5655	991	703	52
2016	21719	2876	124554	7877	1048	555	10
2017	21949	2887	128889	6433	806	409	36

Source: Tamil Nadu Nursing Council Report

The above table shows that the outlook for new Registered Nurses is exceptionally good; the number of new jobs for registered nurses is expected to increase at a rate far greater than that of most other jobs in coming years.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

It is well known in the medical profession that about 60% of advertised vacancies in the health care sector are for the nursing profession. This means that there is a huge potential for job opportunities for nurses. When the employment possibilities in many other professions are falling, the nursing profession is on a roll. There is a lot of shortage of nurses at all times. The main reason for this is that as India becomes a developed country, the health care sector keeps expanding. This means that more nurses will be needed to take care of patients in a much better manner. Health care sector, which will drive the economy, will generate 40 million jobs by 2020.

As nurse practitioners - There are many career opportunities for nurses as nurse practitioners. The shortage of doctors in rural India and smaller cities has led to the recruitment of nurse practitioners in various hospitals. The nurse practitioner would be required to function as a practitioner in a hospital setting. The nurse will be able to specialize in various specialties and then function as a member of a highly specialized team. The role of a nurse practitioner is more clinical than a general nurse. This is because of the specialization of the nurse in a specific area of nursing.

As specialist nurses - In India, the specialist nurses do not have a special salary. The salary of nurses is based on the qualification and experience. It is not based on the specialty in which the nurse is working. In some countries abroad, specialist nurses may get a better pay. For example, a operating room nurse or a theater nurse would get a better pay than a nurse with the same qualification and experience, who works in a ward. Similarly, a community nurse or a cardiac nurse would also be able to obtain a higher pay abroad. On the other hand, the nurse in

India would be able to obtain only uniform pay in any specialty and the only criteria for determining the salary would be experience and qualification.

In nursing colleges, the mushrooming of more nursing colleges in India has led to a huge increase in the career opportunities available for nurses. These colleges will need faculty and so the graduates who have some teaching experiences are recruited in the colleges as faculty. There is ample chance for growth in these educational institutions as teachers. The nurse will be able to start the career as a tutor and then become lecturer, reader, associate professor and professor. The salary of nurses working in teaching institutions is usually higher in India.

The following are the career options available for nurses in India.

- Staff nurse -direct patient care, supervision and assists ward management.
- Ward's sister of the nursing supervisor -full charge of the ward or unit.
- A supervisor/assistant - manage the surgical department or death patient's department.
- Deputy nursing superintendent - assists the nursing administration of the hospital.
- Director of nursing -responsible for both hospital's nursing services and education.
- Community health nurse- focuses on the reproductive child health program.
- Nursing teacher - planning, teaching and supervising the nursing education for candidates.
- Industrial nursing -works as first aid for community illness, accidents, education, and other industrial hazards.
- Military nursing services - earn the ranks from assistant to major general.

LUCRATIVE INCOME OF NURSES

The role of a nurse underwent significant changes over the course of the 20th century, as the field professionalized and the duties of a nurse went from, essentially a non-skilled service to a highly educated qualified, and licensed profession. As per the data released by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the national average salary of a registered nurse as of 2019 is at \$75,510 per year. The highest paid nursing salary in the world is in Luxembourg. Though the salary in Luxembourg is high, it is not beneficial because of the small size of the country which means there are hardly any nurse jobs available. Next 'highest paying country' is Iceland which boasts a high-quality government-funded health system that is the envy of many larger nations. Salary of nurses will improve with inflation. Nurses are working around 6 to 8 hours but their salary is very low in India when compared to other countries like US, UK, Canada and Australia. As expenses in India go up, the healthcare expenses will increase too. In fact, it is said that unlike regular inflation which is about percent, healthcare inflation in India is about 20%. This means people spend more on healthcare each year. This is sure to increase the salary of nurses in India.

The salary of a nurse in India may not be as high as that of a similar professional in developed countries. But as the experience of the nurse increases, there are more opportunities for the nurse. The pay of the nurse also improves with better qualification and with specialization. The place of work also matters. A hospital in a city usually pays more than a rural hospital. The government also tries to ensure that the salary structure of the nurses is quite

high. Nurses working in state government and central government of India are far better standard of living compare to nurses working in private hospitals. Those in the government set up have better scales and on par with nurses working in other countries. First few years of life as staff nurse are very difficult to survive because what they earned is very less than what they spend for their personal expenses. Only few selected hospitals mainly super specialty, there is an increment process for every 6 months but other hospital, there is no proper increment for nurses. These conditions should be changed and we need to make overall structural changes so that every nurse in any hospital can get regular increment in regular basis. There should be fixed salary for nurses, irrespective of cities or towns.

In India, there is difference in salary package, for example, North India salary package is good when compare to South India. As a result, most nurses change the home and move distant away from their families and this trend should be changed. If they work in other sectors, within 5 years, they could have settled and taken care of their families but for nurses it takes nearly 10 to 15 years of time to settle and have decent life style. Being on top of the list of career choices, nursing offers a variety of fringe benefits. There are some hospitals which are offering some fringe benefits like accommodation, food facilities, and various other additional benefits. Paid leaves, sick leaves and PTO's also come under these fringe benefits. There are options available for three days work of week or 4 as per nurse's choice.

Table 4 : Salary of Nurses in India

S.No.	Position	Qualification	Experience	Min. salary	Maximum salary
1	Staff nurse	DGNM	0-5 years	Rs 13,000	Rs.25,000 - 30,000
2	Senior Staff nurse	DGNM	10-20 years	Rs 25,000	Rs. 80,000 - 1,00,000
3	Tutor / Clinical nursing instructor	B.Sc Nursing	0-5 years	Rs 25,000	Rs.45,000 - 70,000
4	Professor in nursing	M.Sc Nursing	5-10 years	Rs45,000	Rs.85,000 - 1,50,000
5	Senior professor of nursing	Ph.D Nursing	adequate	Rs45,000	Rs.1,05,000 - 2,00,000
6	Internship positions	Any degree	3 months – one year	Rs 5,000	Rs 10,000

The National Rural Health Mission recruits' nurses on contractual basis with salaries from Rs 5,000 to Rs 11,000 but without offering any other conveniences. Even if they work for the same hospital, nurses with the same qualification and job description are paid differently depending on whether they are permanent and contract workers. These differences are in the range of Rs 15,000 to Rs 30,000. Nurse salary in India is lucrative and increases with the work experience of the professional. Though this career did not have much scope in the earlier times, the horizons for nurses have expanded in the present days. The salary ranges for nurses in India according to the various parameters.

Table 5: Salary of Nurses in India according to Employer Type

Employer Type	Salary Ranges
Government – State & Local	Rs 60 402 – Rs 1 191 952
Company	Rs 79 660 – Rs 293 614
Hospital	Rs 60 713 – Rs 308 129
Foundation/Trust	Rs 117 110 – Rs 1 274 737

The above table indicates that Trusts and Foundations offer maximum salary to Nurses in India. Nurses working in AIIMS, PGIMER AND JIPMER has other benefits such as loan, increment, PF, ESI, Living allowance and pension etc. Pay Commission of India revises the Pay Scale for every ten year and nurse salary is doubled.

Table 6: Salary of Nurses in India according to Industry type

Industry	Salary Range
Medical Services	Rs 58 958 – Rs 111 910
Hospital	Rs 60 650 – Rs 593 917
Acute Care Hospital	Rs 90 000 – Rs 330 000
Nurse Staffing	Rs 65 098 – Rs 304 102
Health Care Services	Rs 58 958 – Rs 183 126

The salary ranges for nurses in India according to the types of industries proves that Acute care Hospitals are providing highest salary package.

Table 7 : Salary of Nurses in India according to Skills

Skills	Salary Range
Medicine/Surgery	Rs 60 820 – Rs 306 386
Nursery	Rs 73 250 – Rs 228 000
Intensive Care Unit (ICU)	Rs 72 483 – Rs 309 126
Case Management	Rs 72 000 – Rs 240 000
Operating Room/OR	Rs 59 867 – Rs 604 024
Acute Care	Rs 85 459 – Rs 176 874
Emergency Room (ER)	Rs 59 733 – Rs 450 071
Dialysis	Rs 72 000 – Rs 210 000
Pediatrics	Rs 75 627 – Rs 734 896
Labor & Delivery	Rs 76 340 – Rs 728 381

The salary ranges for nurses in India according to the different types of skills have shown that the nurses working in Acute Care blessed with huge salary.

Table 8 : Salary of Nurses in India according to Hospital Beds

Number of Hospital Beds	Salary Range
50 or less	Rs 60 402 – Rs 321 827
50 to 99	Rs 122 084 – Rs 459 873
100 to 299	Rs 81 731 – Rs 297 988
300 to 499	Rs 70 800 – Rs 144 000
500 or more	Rs 60 200 – Rs 618 252

Nursing is a noble profession. It is a career that provides job satisfaction and decent salary. Qualified and skilled nurses are in huge demand abroad. To become a Registered Nurse (RN) in India, one must successfully complete a relevant nursing course recognized by the Indian Nursing Council (INC).

Table 9 : Salary of Nurses in India according to Certification

Certification	Salary Range
Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS)	Rs 61 825 – Rs 1 174 457
Critical Care	Rs 59 900 – Rs 349 847
Registered Nurse (RN)	Rs 122 084 – Rs 436 290
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	Rs 60 505 – Rs 573 895

The salary ranges for Registered Nurses(RN) in India is at the top.

CHALLENGES FACED BY NURSES IN INDIA

Nursing as a profession has faced lots of challenges be it nationally or internationally. According to an India Spend analysis of data from the Indian Nursing Council (INC) and the World Health Organization, India is short of 1.94 million nurses. The acute shortage of nurses—attributable to low recruitment, migration, attrition and drop-outs are due to poor working conditions. May 12 every year is observed as International Nurses Day. Female Nurses form the backbone of any medical services or patient care in the health sector. But in India, this important section of workers are highly exploited, with lack of respect and dignity at workplaces and more importantly paid extremely low salaries with lack of job security. It is in this context that nurses across the country should unite and confront the hospital management and the government on these issues.

Many nurses, who mainly come from poor backgrounds, have to pay lakhs of rupees to get a nursing degree and hence have to take huge loans thus leaving them indebted. But after graduation, what really confronts them is lack of opportunity in government run hospitals. Despite shortage of nurses and other staff in government run hospitals, the government deliberately follows a totally unscientific method of recruitment which keeps the majority of aspirants from getting a post in the government services and at the same time recruits nurses on a contract labour at extremely low wages to fill some of the gaps. In the private sector, the nurses are confronted with extremely low paying jobs between Rs. 3000 – Rs. 4000 a month as against the labour standard of around Rs. 6000. Even the most experienced ones only get paid about Rs. 8000 – Rs. 9000 a month. Many have to sign a 2-3 year bonded contract that inevitably binds the

nurses to the hospital and breaking the contract often entails shelling out Rs. 50,000-Rs. 100,000 for obtaining their release. Otherwise, all their certificates are held by the hospital management.

Nurses working in private/ corporate hospitals located in various states in India, many of them hailing from Kerala, face extreme form of exploitation in these hospitals. Most of India's nurses work in private hospitals, which are largely unregulated and do not follow the norm of having nurse-patient ratios of one to every four. Nurses work nine- to 14-hour days, often doing double shifts. Their starting salaries are between Rs 3,000 and Rs 15,000. Many nurses are required to sign contractual bonds with their employers withholding their educational certificates as guarantee. In the public sector, nurses are paid better than in private hospitals. Nurses get promotions based on their management abilities and the number of years of experience they have. However, higher authority positions are occupied by physicians, with a nurse being restricted to one promotion in the course of his/her career. Many retire as staff nurses due to a lack of the higher positions and few opportunities for continuing education. Daily duties are also difficult with most hospitals not providing proper spaces for nurses to change or rest

Nurses salary will be different according to place of work and hospitals. For example, if nurse work in urban areas, their salary is good compare to the nurse work in rural areas. Most nurses from South India like to migrate to North India because of good salary given there. Nurses works in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata earn more salary when compare to Chennai, Bangalore, Kochi, Hyderabad.

Most of the female nurses are forced to work beyond the mandatory 8 hrs working day, to more than 10 to 11 hrs. Apart from low wages, none of the nurses are given employment benefits like Provident Fund (PF) and gratuity. A new dimension to female nurses' exploitation is through contractual systems and recruitment outsourcing. The nurses are not even given health coverage despite facing higher risk of infections. The problems faced by nurses are not realized and they are struggling hard to keep up expectation but still they don't have recognition both from hospitals and society.

There are numerous problems faced by nurses in hospitals such as staff shortage which led to more work pressure or staff nurse. Nurses are working day and night but their salary package is very poor compared to western countries. Female Nurses are 23% more likely to commit suicide than women in general, and nurses are four times more likely to commit suicide than people working outside of medicine. Recently there have been reports of growing number of nurse's strike in many private/ corporate hospitals in parts of urban India especially in Tamil Nādu demanding permanent job, higher pay and eight-hour work shifts. Also, several nurse organizations and associations are holding management of hospitals at ransom by indulging in strikes and other activities. This is to force the managements to increase the salary of nurses in India.

CONCLUSION

Motivation, morale and retention of nurses have emerged as issues of significant concern for healthcare providers and policymakers in recent time. Day-to-day nursing tasks are physically and emotionally demanding and depend not so much on standardized rules but on situational requirements. Nurses will be able to get salary on par with nurses from around the world in future. This can happen when uniform health insurance or a uniform social security

scheme for all citizens of the country is enforced. This is not too far ahead because the government only has to enact one law to make sure that the health industry is completely revamped to incorporate universal health insurance. Already the system is in place for health insurance schemes to cover people. There are Chief Minister's health insurance schemes in every state that will help people to obtain health care. When healthcare becomes available through insurance companies, these companies will pay the employees of hospitals. This will in turn improve the salary of nurses. As expenses in India go up, the healthcare expenses will increase too. In fact, it is said that unlike regular inflation which is about percent, healthcare inflation in India is about 20%. This means people spend more on healthcare each year. This is sure to increase the salary of nurses in India.

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