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### Attitudes Toward the Nursing Profession Among First- and Final-Year Nursing Students at Kabul University of Medical Sciences

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#### Abstract

Nursing students' attitudes affect learning, professional performance, and adaptation to clinical practice. This study assessed and compared the attitudes of first- and final-year nursing students at the School of Nursing, Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Afghanistan. A cross-sectional descriptive-analytical study was conducted among 128 students. Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used, with chi-square tests for categorical associations. Overall, 85% of students reported positive attitudes toward nursing. No significant associations were found between overall attitudes and academic year or sex. However, Final-year students reported significantly less favourable attitudes regarding workload, safety, salary, community respect, student comfort, and patient care satisfaction. Institutional measures are recommended to sustain positive attitudes and strengthen professional commitment.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Education, Nursing, Professional attitude, Students

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### Introduction

Nursing constitutes the backbone of most health care systems (Abo-Alazm et al., 2021) and represents one of the largest humanitarian services worldwide (ArifulIslam et al., 2020). The sustainability and advancement of the profession depend on nursing students, who will assume future leadership roles (Humane, 2022). As key assets to the profession (Ramjan et al., 2024), nursing students must acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary during their education to deliver independent and professional nursing care (Čukljek et al., 2019).

Nursing students' attitudes toward the profession are a critical factor in shaping nursing education strategies, supporting students' academic success, and advancing the profession (Emire et al., 2022; Humane, 2022; Navidjouy et al., 2023; Salihović et al., 2021). Attitudes play a central role in guiding human behavior, influencing goal attainment, and enhancing

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motivation—psychological factors that strongly affect students' commitment to study and work, thereby determining their academic success (Soliman Salama et al., 2022). Consequently, nursing students' attitudes influence their capacity to learn, perform professionally, and adapt to clinical environments. Positive attitudes foster motivation to acquire nursing knowledge and practical skills, whereas negative attitudes may disrupt learning and adversely affect clinical performance (Humane, 2022). Accordingly, educational systems should prioritize fostering and sustaining positive attitudes toward the nursing profession (Fathi et al., 2024).

Studies indicate that multiple factors shape nursing students' attitudes toward their profession. Sociodemographic characteristics—including gender, academic year, reasons for enrolling in nursing school, satisfaction with the nursing department, and family support for enrolment—have been shown to influence students' attitudes toward the nursing profession significantly (Afewerk et al., 2023).

Nursing students' attitudes, whether positive or negative, evolve over the course of their education as a result of the educational process (Čukljek et al., 2019; Neumbe et al., 2023). These attitudes often shift as students progress from preclinical to clinical training, becoming more or less favorable with advancing years of study. For instance, during clinical placements, students are supervised by physicians and senior nurses while simultaneously encountering stressful situations. Moreover, the high expectations students hold upon entering university may be challenged by the realities of professional practice, which often involve demanding interventions (Neumbe et al., 2023). Evidence further indicates that the proportion of nursing students reporting positive attitudes toward the profession varies widely across countries, ranging from 42% to 99% (Afewerk et al., 2023).

Extensive evidence indicates that requiring a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite for nursing enhances the quality and safety of care and positively influences outcomes for patients, nurses, health care organizations, and society (Schnelli et al., 2024). Establishing the bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement is therefore essential to developing a respected, competent, and satisfied nursing workforce. In 2006, the first and, so far, only center for baccalaureate nursing education (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) in Afghanistan was established at the School of Nursing, Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina. This center plays a critical role in preparing a professional, knowledgeable, and committed nursing workforce for the country's health care system and may serve as a model for establishing similar programs in other regions of Afghanistan.

Nursing students' perceptions of the profession are among the most influential factors shaping their education. Understanding these perceptions, the factors that influence them, and how they evolve during training can support more effective learning and contribute to student success (Fathi et al., 2024).

To this end, the present study evaluates and compares the attitudes of first- and final-year nursing students at the School of Nursing, Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, to examine how attitudes toward the profession change over time. Insights into these

evolving perspectives can assist nursing education planners, faculty, and instructors in assessing curricula and implementing reforms that strengthen both nursing education and the profession itself.

## **Methods and Materials**

This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive-analytical design and was conducted at the Faculty of Nursing, Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Afghanistan.

### **Participants**

The study sample comprised 128 nursing students enrolled in the first ( $n = 74$ ) and fourth ( $n = 54$ ) academic years at the Faculty of Nursing, Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina. No sampling technique was applied; all students who consented to participate were included. Both male and female students were represented in the sample, ensuring gender inclusivity. Exclusion criteria included refusal to participate, incomplete questionnaires, and missing data.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using a structured, two-part self-report questionnaire. The first part captured sociodemographic characteristics, while the second assessed students' attitudes toward the nursing profession through 15 items. The attitude items included:

1. I am interested in nursing.
2. Being a nursing student provides peace of mind.
3. Caring for patients is satisfying.
4. Nursing is a safe profession.
5. Nursing salary is acceptable.
6. I derive great joy from seeing patients improve in nursing.
7. Nursing is not a female-only profession.
8. I can find a job in nursing anywhere.
9. My family encourages me to be a nurse.
10. I believe my qualifications are suitable for nursing.
11. My friends consider nursing an important profession.
12. Society admires nursing.
13. The nursing work environment is pleasant.
14. The working hours in nursing are reasonable.
15. Nursing is respected in the community.

Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Total scores ranged from 15 to 75, with higher scores reflecting more favourable attitudes toward the profession. For analytical purposes, overall attitudes were classified into two categories: negative (15–45) and positive (46–75).

Content validity was established through a review of relevant literature and expert evaluation by nursing faculty members and nursing administrators at the affiliated teaching hospitals of Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina. The questionnaire's reliability was assessed using the test–retest method. It was re-administered to a subset of second-year students ( $n = 30$ ) after a two-week interval. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the two administrations was 0.87 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating good instrument reliability.

### Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 22.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize qualitative variables. Associations between categorical variables were examined using the chi-square test. A  $p$ -value of  $<0.05$  was considered *statistically significant*.

### Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the study protocol was approved by the Scientific Research Committee of Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina. Official authorization to conduct the study was also obtained from the relevant authorities. All participants were informed about the study objectives and procedures. Voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time without justification, anonymity of responses, and confidentiality of the collected data were assured.

## Findings

A total of 128 nursing students participated in the study, including 74 (57.8%) first-year and 54 (42.2%) final-year students. The mean age was 20.7 years ( $SD = 2.3$ ; range, 17–31), with most participants ( $n = 113$ , 89.7%) falling within the 18–23 age group. Females comprised 59.4% of the sample.

The mean attitude score toward the nursing profession was 51.89 ( $SD = 6.03$ ; range, 15–75). Overall, 85% of students demonstrated a positive attitude, while 15% reported a negative attitude. By academic year, 86% of first-year and 83% of fourth-year students expressed positive attitudes. Regarding sex, 84.2% of female and 86.5% of male students reported positive attitudes. Chi-square analysis revealed no statistically significant associations between overall attitudes toward the nursing profession and academic year ( $p = 0.716$ ) or sex ( $p = 0.716$ ) (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Attitudes of Nursing Students Toward the Nursing Profession by Academic Year and Gender

Students	N (%)	Attitude Score (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Positive Attitude (N (%))	Negative Attitude (N (%))	Statistical Test (Chi-Square)
<b>Total</b>	128 (100)	51.89 $\pm$ 6.03	109 (85.2)	19 (14.8)	
<b>First Year</b>	74 (57.8)	52.65 $\pm$ 5.61	64 (86.5)	10 (13.5)	P = 0.620
<b>Fourth Year</b>	54 (42.2)	50.85 $\pm$ 6.48	45 (83.3)	9 (16.7)	
<b>Female</b>	76 (59.4)	51.62 $\pm$ 5.46	64 (84.2)	12 (15.8)	P = 0.716
<b>Male</b>	52 (40.6)	52.29 $\pm$ 6.82	45 (86.5)	7 (13.5)	

Statistically significant associations were observed between several components of attitudes toward the nursing profession and academic year. The findings are summarized in Table 2. The results indicate that 73.3% of first-year students agreed that nursing involves reasonable working hours, compared with 22.2% of fourth-year students ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2:** Components of Nursing Students' Attitudes Toward the Profession Associated With Academic Year

Statements	Academic Year				Statistical Test (Chi-Square)
	First Class		Fourth Class		
	Positive Attitude (%)	Negative Attitude (%)	Positive Attitude (%)	Negative Attitude (%)	
Reasonable working hours in the nursing profession	73.0	27.0	22.2	77.8	$P < 0.001$
Safety of the nursing profession	63.5	36.5	29.6	70.4	$P < 0.001$
Acceptability of the nursing profession's salary	43.2	56.8	13.0	87.0	$P < 0.001$
Respect for the nursing profession within the community	51.4	48.6	81.5	18.5	$P < 0.001$
Sense of peace of mind as a nursing student	71.6	28.4	46.3	53.7	$P = 0.004$
Satisfaction derived from caring for patients	89.2	10.8	75.9	24.1	$P = 0.045$

Significant differences were also found regarding perceptions of the safety of the nursing profession ( $p < 0.001$ ), acceptability of nursing salaries ( $p < 0.001$ ), respect for nursing within the community ( $p < 0.001$ ), sense of peace of mind as a nursing student ( $p = 0.004$ ), and satisfaction derived from caring for patients ( $p = 0.045$ ).

### Discussion

According to the findings of this study, the majority of participants (85.2%) reported a positive attitude toward the nursing profession. However, evidence from previous research indicates that the proportion of nursing students with favorable attitudes varies considerably across countries, ranging from 42% to 99% (Afewerk et al., 2023). This discrepancy may be related to differences in demographic characteristics, reasons for enrolling in nursing, academic year (Afewerk et al., 2023), available resources, workload, and study environment (Emire et al., 2022).

The findings of this study indicate notable changes in students' attitudes toward the nursing profession between the first and final years of study. Most first-year students perceived nursing as a safe profession with manageable working hours, whereas most senior students expressed concerns about occupational safety and acknowledged the workload's demanding nature. This shift suggests that the transition from the first to the final year involves transformative experiences that shape professional identity. Clinical exposure and the accompanying reality shock often lead to frustration as students confront the gap between theoretical ideals and clinical practice. Factors such as complex patient dynamics, bureaucratic constraints, hierarchical workplace structures, unpreparedness for high-stakes situations (e.g., caring for a dying patient) (EftelĪ et al., 2023), and exposure to occupational hazards—including infectious

diseases and the physical demands of nursing—can erode initial idealism and weaken students' perceptions of the profession.

Regarding salary perceptions, more than half of first-year students (56.8%) and the majority of fourth-year students (87.0%) at Kabul University of Medical Sciences Abu Ali Ibn Sina, considered nursing salaries unacceptable. Previous studies have similarly reported that nurses often perceive their compensation as inadequate (Vidanović & Popović, 2022). Because nursing education is expected to provide future employment opportunities, students generally anticipate stable and well-paid positions after graduation, which contributes to positive attitudes toward their future careers (Abo-Alazm Abd-Elgaleil et al., 2021). Conversely, if students lack confidence in securing stable employment with adequate compensation, they may lose interest in the profession, experience diminished motivation, and ultimately deliver lower-quality care—potentially resulting in adverse consequences for patients and health systems.

According to the study findings, more than half of first-year students and the majority of fourth-year students believed that the nursing profession is respected by society. Perceptions of respect and appreciation from families and the broader community have been shown to enhance nursing students' self-esteem and strengthen their commitment to the profession (Emire et al., 2022). Conversely, the provision of high-quality nursing care and education can also further improve the community's attitudes toward the profession (Salihović et al., 2021).

After completing introductory science courses, nursing students begin practical training in hospitals from the second year onward, thereby entering the professional practice environment. By the final year, they are predominantly engaged in clinical training, where they encounter challenges such as heavy workloads, exposure to infectious diseases, patient suffering, and extended working hours. These factors may negatively influence their attitudes toward the nursing profession (Afewerk et al., 2023). The findings of this study also indicate a decline in fourth-year students' sense of peace. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for university administrators, policymakers, and faculty members to recognize these challenges and implement appropriate measures (Kumar et al., 2021).

The present study also found that the majority of first-year (89.2%) and fourth-year (75.9%) students reported being happy and satisfied with their experience providing patient care. A positive attitude toward the nursing profession is often associated with students' intrinsic motivation to help and care for others (Afewerk et al., 2023). This sense of satisfaction may further reflect that many students enter the profession with a genuine desire to serve others (Yeşilyurt & Kendirikiran, 2025). However, the decline in satisfaction observed among fourth-year students may be attributed to their exposure to the realities of clinical practice. Unlike first-year students, who have limited clinical experience, senior students encounter challenges such as heavy workloads, complex patient care, and systemic constraints, which can diminish their initial enthusiasm and weaken their positive perceptions of patient care.

To foster and sustain positive attitudes toward the nursing profession, stakeholders in universities, health science institutes, and the Ministry of Health should prioritize the enrollment of students genuinely interested in nursing and promote a favorable image of the profession through seminars, brochures, media campaigns, professional journals, and nursing associations (Emire et al., 2022). In curriculum design and training processes, factors that

reinforce positive attitudes should be incorporated, and targeted initiatives should be implemented to strengthen further students' perceptions of the profession (Yeşilyurt & Kendirkiran, 2025). Nursing educators also play a critical role by guiding and supporting students in preparing for professional practice, assessing their educational needs, and addressing factors that may influence their career attitudes and long-term commitment to nursing (Almarwani et al., 2023).

The study also has certain limitations. Due to the cross-sectional design of this study, temporal relationships between the outcome and independent variables could not be established. In addition, the use of a self-report questionnaire may have introduced social desirability bias, potentially leading to over- or underestimation of participants' attitudes.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrated that nursing students at Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, generally held positive attitudes toward the nursing profession. No significant differences were observed in overall attitudes between first-year and final-year students. However, differences emerged in specific components, including perceptions of long working hours, occupational safety, salary acceptability, comfort as a nursing student, societal respect for the profession, and satisfaction with patient care. In these areas, final-year students reported less favorable attitudes compared with first-year students. To sustain the initial enthusiasm of first-year students through to graduation and to support the continued development of the nursing profession, faculty members, university administrators, and teaching hospital leadership should implement targeted measures to address these challenges.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

Both authors contributed to the study's conceptualization and design, as well as to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. ZHH drafted the initial manuscript, and MIM critically revised it for intellectual content. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and accept responsibility for its integrity and accuracy.

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