

Nursing Science Trend, Current and Challenges in Ethiopia: A Narrative Review Evidence from Recent Literature and Policies

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nursing is a profession dedicated to promoting and maintaining the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. In recent years, the nursing profession has undergone significant changes in Ethiopia, with the number of nurses increasing and the profession becoming more professionalized. However, there are still significant challenges facing the nursing profession in Ethiopia, such as the shortage of nurses, poor working conditions, and lack of education and training.

Objective: To explore the current trends, advancements, and challenges within the field of nursing science in Ethiopia, drawing evidence from recent literature and policies.

Methods: A rapid narrative review was carried out utilizing PubMed/MEDLINE, Web of Science, and EMBASE to identify full-text original research articles written in English. Specific search criteria were applied to ensure the inclusion of relevant studies while establishing exclusion criteria to guide the selection process.

Conclusion and recommendation: The nursing profession in Ethiopia faces several challenges. The government and the nursing community need to work together to address these challenges and ensure that Ethiopia has a sufficient number of well-trained nurses to meet the needs of its population.

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1. Introduction

Nursing is a profession dedicated to promoting and maintaining the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. It encompasses a wide range of roles and responsibilities, including providing direct patient care, advocating for patients' rights, and collaborating with interdisciplinary teams to achieve optimal healthcare outcomes⁽¹⁾. Nursing is essential in healthcare systems worldwide, serving as the backbone of patient care. Nurses are at the forefront of healthcare delivery, providing holistic, patient-centered care across various healthcare settings. They play a vital role in disease prevention, health promotion, and managing acute and chronic conditions⁽²⁾.

Over time, nursing practice has evolved and expanded to meet the changing needs of populations and advancements in healthcare. Nurses now engage in evidence-based practice, integrating research findings into their clinical decision-making to deliver high-quality care⁽³⁾. They also embrace technological advancements, such as electronic health records and telehealth, to enhance communication and improve patient outcomes⁽⁴⁾.

Nursing education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills required to provide safe and effective care. It includes both academic and practical training, leading to various levels of nursing degrees, such as diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and advanced practice degrees^(5,6).

2. Methods

Searching Strategy: To identify all studies that investigated nursing science, a search of the electronic database containing keywords such as "nursing science," "trend," "current," and "Challenge" was conducted. The search engines PubMed, Google Scholar, and EMBASE were used to identify peer-reviewed English language literature. In addition, the reference lists from relevant studies were examined to identify older papers and unpublished literature in particular.

3. Results

Nursing Trend in Ethiopia

The nursing profession in Ethiopia has undergone significant changes in recent years. Nursing was seen as a low-status profession in the past, but this is now changing⁽⁷⁾. As a result, the number of nurses in Ethiopia is increasing, and the profession is becoming more professionalized. The number of nurses in the country has increased significantly. This growth has been driven by several factors, including the increasing demand for healthcare services, the government's investment in nursing education and training, and the efforts of the Ethiopian Nurses Association to promote the profession.

One of Ethiopia's most significant nursing trends is the increasing number of nurses with bachelor's degrees. In the past, most nurses only had diplomas or certificates, but now there is a growing emphasis on baccalaureate-level education. This is in line with global trends and is seen as essential for improving the quality of nursing care⁽⁸⁾.

According to the World Bank, Ethiopia's nurse to population ratio was 0.7844 in 2020. This means there were 0.78 nurses and midwives for every 1,000 people in Ethiopia. In 2010, the nurse to population ratio was 0.57, so the number of nurses has increased by 37% over the past ten years⁽⁹⁾. Another trend is the increasing specialization of nurses. In the past, nurses typically worked in general hospitals, but now, there is a growing demand for nurses with specialized skills in areas such as critical care, pediatrics, and public health. This is due to the population's changing needs and the increasing complexity of healthcare.

Current status of nursing in Ethiopia

Despite the progress that has been made, there are still significant challenges facing the nursing profession in Ethiopia. One of the biggest challenges is the shortage of nurses. The nurse-to-patient ratio in the country is estimated to be around

1:12, which is much higher than the recommended ratio of 1:6^(7,9). This shortage is particularly acute in rural areas, where many health facilities are understaffed. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that Ethiopia needs an additional 100,000 nurses to meet the needs of its population⁽¹⁰⁾. This shortage is due to several factors, including the high demand for nurses, the low salaries offered to nurses, and the lack of opportunities for professional development^(11,12).

Another challenge facing the nursing profession in Ethiopia is the poor working conditions for nurses. Nurses often work long hours, with little time for breaks or rest. This can lead to burnout and stress, impacting the quality of care that nurses provide⁽¹³⁾.

Challenges of nursing in Ethiopia

The challenges facing the nursing profession in Ethiopia are complex and interrelated⁽¹²⁾. This shortage is due to a number of factors, including the high demand for nurses, the low salaries offered to nurses, and the lack of opportunities for professional development^(14,15). Nurses in Ethiopia often work long hours, with little time for breaks or rest. This can lead to burnout and stress, which can impact the quality of care that nurses are able to provide. Many nurses in Ethiopia do not have the necessary education and training to provide quality healthcare. This is because there are not enough nursing schools in the country, and the quality of education at these schools is often poor⁽¹⁶⁾.

4. Discussion

The evolution of the nursing profession in Ethiopia reflects significant progress and ongoing challenges. Recent developments, such as the increase in the number of nurses with bachelor's degrees and growing specialization within the field, indicate a positive shift toward enhancing the quality of care and meeting the diverse needs of the population. The trend towards higher educational

qualifications aligns with global movements aimed at improving nursing standards and ensuring evidence-based practice⁽⁸⁾. This educational advancement is crucial, as it supports the delivery of more comprehensive and effective patient care, fostering a more skilled and knowledgeable nursing workforce.

However, despite these advancements, the nursing profession in Ethiopia continues to face substantial challenges. The shortage of nurses remains a critical issue, with the current nurse-to-patient ratio estimated at 1:12, significantly higher than the recommended ratio of 1:6^(7,9). This shortage is exacerbated by factors such as low salaries, high demand for services, and inadequate professional development opportunities^(11,12). The World Health Organization's estimate that Ethiopia requires an additional 100,000 nurses underscores the severity of this issue and highlights the need for targeted interventions to address workforce gaps⁽¹⁰⁾.

Furthermore, the working conditions for nurses in Ethiopia contribute to the problem. Long hours, insufficient breaks, and high stress levels are common, leading to burnout and negatively impacting the quality of care⁽¹³⁾. These working conditions not only affect nurses' well-being but also compromise patient outcomes, underscoring the need for improvements in work environments and support systems for healthcare professionals.

Additionally, the quality of nursing education remains a concern. Despite the increase in baccalaureate-prepared nurses, the overall quality of nursing education and training is often compromised by limited resources and substandard educational facilities⁽¹⁶⁾. Addressing these educational deficits is vital for ensuring that nurses are adequately prepared to meet the demands of modern healthcare.

The complexity of the challenges facing the nursing profession in Ethiopia requires a multifaceted

approach. Solutions must include increasing investments in nursing education, improving working conditions, and addressing salary disparities. Collaborative efforts between the government, healthcare institutions, and the nursing community are essential to develop and implement effective strategies that will enhance the capacity and capabilities of the nursing workforce.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study presents several strengths. Firstly, it utilized a comprehensive search strategy across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, and EMBASE, and reviewed reference lists from relevant studies. Additionally, the focus on nursing in Ethiopia provides a detailed and context-specific analysis, offering valuable insights into the country's unique healthcare challenges and trends. Furthermore, the identification of significant trends, such as the increase in baccalaureate-prepared nurses and growing specialization, alongside critical challenges like nurse shortages and poor working conditions, contributes to a well-rounded understanding of the field.

However, the study also has limitations. By focusing exclusively on peer-reviewed English-language literature, it may have excluded relevant research published in other languages or grey literature, potentially leading to publication bias and an incomplete representation of available evidence. The variability in data sources and the specific focus on Ethiopia may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts with different healthcare systems and nursing practices. Additionally, while the study highlights the increase in nurses with bachelor's degrees, it does not deeply explore the quality of nursing education and training programs. Further investigation into educational standards and their impact on practice would offer a more comprehensive view. Lastly, the study addresses significant challenges but may not fully en-

compass all complexities, such as policy implementation issues, regional disparities, and specific barriers to professional development.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The nursing profession in Ethiopia is facing several challenges. However, there are also several promising trends, such as the increasing number of nurses with bachelor's degrees and the growing specialization of nurses. If these trends continue, the nursing profession in Ethiopia will be well-positioned to meet the needs of the country's growing population. The government and the nursing community need to work together to address these challenges and ensure that Ethiopia has a sufficient number of well-trained nurses to meet the needs of its population.

Abbreviation

WHO: World health organization

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