Original Paper

Migration Intention and Its Reasons Among Nursing Students: A Systematic Review

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A B S T R A C T

Introduction: Nursing students are the future nursing workforce, as a crucial part of the healthcare system. Each year, thousands of nurses choose to migrate in search of better opportunities.

Objective: This study aimed to review the studies on migration intention and its reasons among nursing students.

Materials and Methods: This is a systematic review study. Relevant original observational and mixed-methods studies (quantitative part) targeting only nursing students (not including nurses) that were published in English from 2000 to 2023 and had available full-text were identified through databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and EMBASE. The quality of the studies was assessed using the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) checklist.

Results: The initial search yielded 108 studies, of which 14 were finally included. Most of the studies had been conducted in African (n=5) and Asian (n=4) countries. Most of them were cross-sectional (n=8), and used a convenience sampling method (n=6). The results indicated that over 60% of nursing students had an intention to migrate. They reported financial reasons as the main pull factor, while poor working conditions were reported as the main push factor.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the high migration intention of nursing students. Health policymakers in less developed countries should address the challenges faced by nurses to effectively reduce their migration rate.

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Highlights

● Nursing students, as the future nursing workforce, play a key role in providing nursing care in the health system.

● Migration may occur under the influence of various push and pull factors.

● Financial reasons and poor working conditions are the main pull and push factors of migration among nursing students, respectively.

Plain Language Summary

Each year, thousands of nurses choose to migrate from their home countries in search of better opportunities. This study aimed to explore the push and pull factors of migration among nursing students. In this regard, 14 related studies were reviewed. The results showed that more than 60% of nursing students worldwide are willing to migrate, with financial incentives being the primary pull factor, while poor working conditions are the primary push factor. The findings highlight the significant rate of migration intention among nursing students worldwide. Health policymakers in less developed countries should address the challenges faced by nurses to reduce their intention to migrate to developed countries.

Introduction

In today's dynamic world, human resource is a key factor in driving organizational change and achieving its goals [1]. Skilled and well-equipped workers are essential to the success of organizations [2]. Managing an organization requires staffing it with competent personnel [3]. The organization's reliance on human capital for success and survival is growing due to the increasing complexity of the organizational environment in the 21st century [4]. Nurses, as the backbone of the healthcare system, provide essential services, continuity of care, and health promotion. The shortage of nursing staff around the world is affected by several factors, such as poor work environment, job burnout, lack of professional identity, and migration. Nurses need higher wages, a desire for professional experience [5, 6], and better and more specialized education [5].

Migration is expected to be inevitable, leading to a global shortage of nurses and the increasing demand for health care worldwide [7]. Thousands of nurses migrate every year, but there is little information about their reasons for migration [8]. The nurses' migration may be explained by the favorable and attractive living conditions in foreign countries [9]. Favorable perceptions of brain drain among nursing students are likely to shape their post-graduation migration choices [10]. With greater attractions and repulsions from foreign countries, elites are more likely to migrate and perceive the benefits of migration [11]. Thus, various factors play a role in the intention for brain drain [12]. Identifying these factors is crucial for promoting long-term commitment and retention among nurses. By understanding these factors, policymakers can develop effective strategies to recruit and retain nurses in the workforce. Therefore, this study aims to review the reasons for migration in nursing students by examining push and pull factors. This study can help better understand the challenges and opportunities faced by nursing students.

Materials and Methods

This is a systematic review study. In order to identify relevant studies from 2000 to 2023, a search was conducted in databases, including PubMed-Medline, Scopus, EMBASE, the Web of Science (WoS), CINHAL, EBSCO, and the Google Scholar search engine. English-language observational or quantitative studies in which the target population was nursing students (not nurses) and whose full text was available were included. The review articles, letters to the editors, short reports, conference abstracts, dissertations, or studies with no available full-texts were excluded. The search strategy is shown in Table 1. Data extraction and assessment of the methodological quality of studies were carried out independently by two researchers. The disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion with the third researcher. The data were reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) checklist [13].
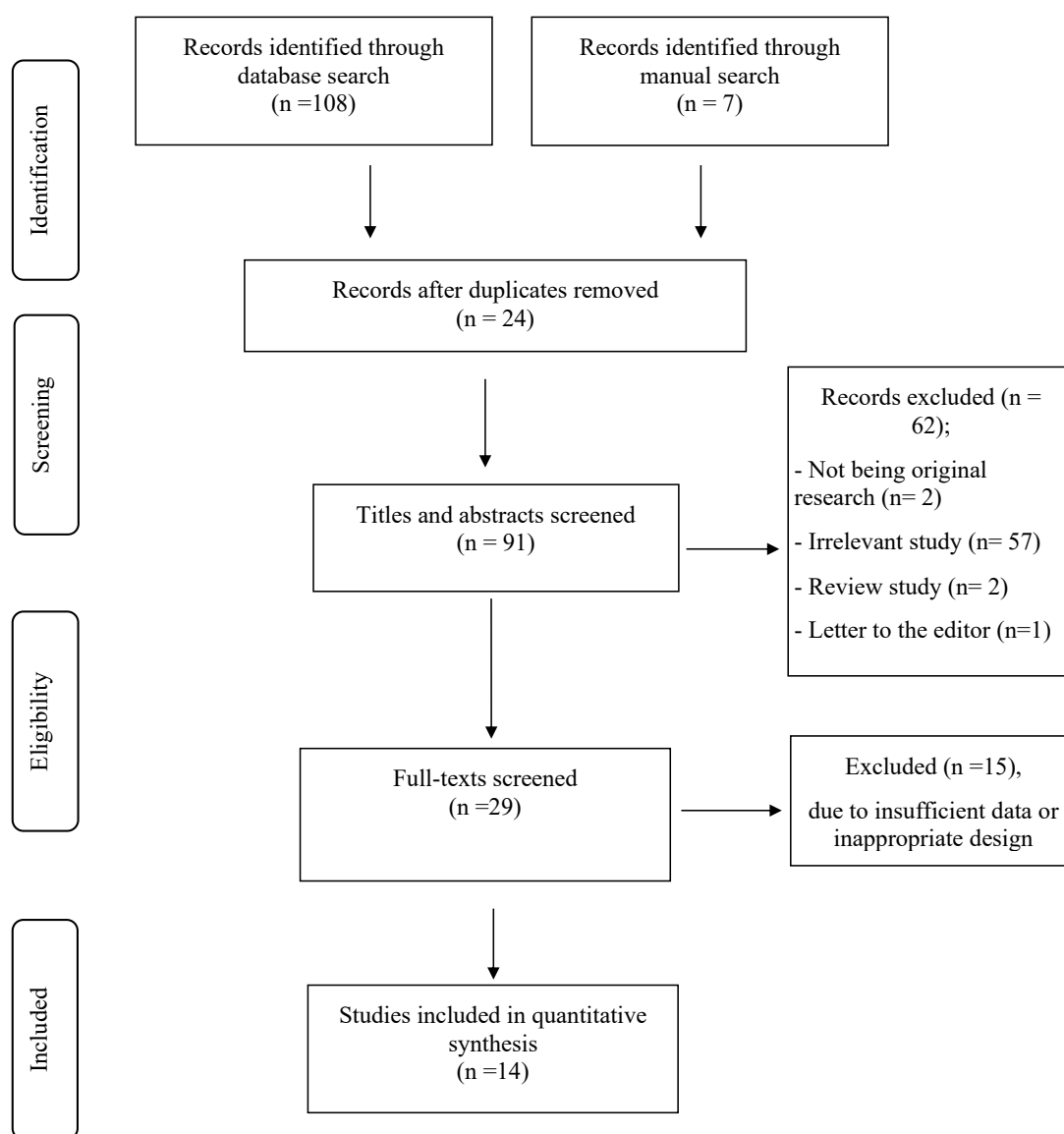
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Figure 1. The flowchart of the study selection process

The initial search yielded 115 documents, of which 24 duplicates were removed; the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles were then screened. Due to not meeting the inclusion criteria, 62 articles were excluded. The full texts of the remaining 29 articles were read, which led to the exclusion of 15 articles due to insufficient data or inappropriate study design. Finally, 14 articles were selected for the review. Figure 1 shows the diagram of the study selection process

The 22-item Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) checklist was for the evaluation of different parts of observational studies, including: Title, abstract, objectives, statement of the problem, type of study, sampling method, study population, sample size, definition of variables, study data collection tool, statistical analysis, findings and discussion. If the item was mentioned in the appropriate section of the article, it received one point, and if not, a zero point was given. The checklist's total score ranges from 0 to 32. A score of 16 or above indicates a high or moderate quality, while a score <16 indicates low quality. All studies that scored 16 or higher were included. The authors' names, study year, study country, sample size, male-to-female ratio (M/F), age of participants, educational level of participants, pull factors, push factors, intentions to migrate, and key findings of selected articles were extracted.

Table 1. The database search strategy used to find the relevant studies

Data Base	Search Syntax
PubMed-Medline	"Migration"[title/abstract] OR "intention to migration"[title/abstract] OR "intent to migrate"[title/abstract] OR "migration intention"[title/abstract] AND ("nursing student"[title/abstract] OR "nursing undergraduate student"[title/abstract] OR "nursing post-graduation student"[title/abstract] AND ("factors"[title/abstract] OR "factors influencing"[title/abstract] OR "causes"[title/abstract]
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(["migration" OR "intention to migrate" OR "intent to migrate" OR "migration intentio"]) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(["nursing student" OR "nursing undergraduate student" OR "nursing post-graduation student"]) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(["factors" OR "factors influencing" OR "causes"])
EMBASE	('Migration':ti,ab OR 'intention to migration':ti,ab OR 'intent to migrate':ti,ab OR 'migration intention':ti,ab) AND ('nursing student':ti,ab OR 'nursing undergraduate student':ti,ab OR 'nursing post-graduation student':ti,ab) AND ('factors':ti,ab OR 'factors influencing':ti,ab OR 'causes':ti,ab)
Web of Science (WoS)	TS=("migration" OR "intention to migrate" OR "intent to migrate" OR "migration intention") AND TS=("nursing student" OR "nursing undergraduate student" OR "nursing post-graduation student") AND TS=("factors" OR "factors influencing" OR "causes")
CINHAL & EBSCO	(TI "migration" OR TI "intention to migrate" OR TI "intent to migrate" OR TI "migration intention" OR) AND (TI "nursing student" OR TI "nursing undergraduate student" OR TI "nursing post-graduation student") AND (TI "factors" OR TI "factors influencing" OR TI "causes") OR respectively searching in the abstract field, ensuring that the defined terms appear in title or abstract.
Google scholar	"Migration" OR "intention to migrate" OR "intent to migrate" OR "migration intention" AND "nursing student" or "nursing undergraduate student" or "nursing post-graduation student" and "factors" OR "factors influencing" OR "causes"

Results

Fourteen articles were reviewed. Their characteristics are presented in Table 2. In 11 study results, over 60 % of nursing students had the intention to migrate (ranging from 15.8% to 93.2%). Most of the studies were conducted in African (n=5) and Asian (n=4) countries. The sample size ranged from 115 to 3,199. Most participants were females and under 30 years old. Most studies (n=8) were cross-sectional [6, 15-24] and used a convenience sampling method (n=6) [16, 18-20, 23, 25]. Salary and financial factors (n=9) [6, 15-19, 23-25], personal and family factors (n=8) [6, 15, 18-20, 24-26], professional development (n=9) [6, 15, 17-20, 23-25], lifestyle and well-being (n=5) [16, 18, 23-25], socio-political factors (n=4) [6, 21, 24, 25], continuation of education and learning (n=5) [6, 15, 18, 19, 26], future work/work conditions (n=3) [16, 17, 23] were the most prevalent pull factors for migration. Also, the most prevalent push factor for intention to migrate was working conditions (n=8) [6, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23-25], followed by socio-political factors (n=5) [16-18, 20, 26], salary and financial factors (n=4) [16, 18, 25, 26], continues education (n=3) [17, 18, 26], professional factors (n=1) and personal factors (n=1) [15].

Discussion

Nurses are a significant group of healthcare providers with a high rate of migration to foreign countries [27]. A study in Nepal found that 3,461 Nepali nurses migrated for better opportunities from 2002 to 2011 [26]. A study in India indicated a growing global demand for nurses, leading to increased migration [28]. The profession provides nurses with a deeper understanding of the world, enabling them to make decisions based on their own situation and that of others [29]. Given the crucial role of nurses in providing healthcare services, understanding their reasons for migration is essential for the health system. This review study aimed to investigate the pull and push factors of intention to migrate among nursing students.

The results revealed their high intention to migrate. Most nursing students with the intention to migrate were female, likely due to the nursing profession's female-dominated nature. This gender difference should not be interpreted as a factor influencing migration. Financial factors were identified as the most prevalent reason for migration. According to the results of several studies, one of the main reasons for the migration of healthcare professionals is to earn more money [30-33]. Healthcare professionals from developing countries, facing economic, social, and environmental challenges, often migrate to other countries in search of better working conditions and higher pay [34]. In addition, the increased nurse migration in developing countries can be due to the globalization of the nursing workforce [35]. In this study, we also found that nursing students from less developed countries, such as African and Asian countries, were more likely to migrate.

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Table 2. Characteristics of the studies included in systematic review

Authors, Year, Country	Sample Size	Level of Education (%)	Pull Factors	Push Factors	Intention to Migrate (%)	M/F Ratio (%)	Mean Age (y); %	Type of Study/Sampling Method
Öncü et al. 2021, Turkey [21]	1410	Senior students	Socio-political factors	Work conduction	N/R	74.3/25.7	21.88±1.41	Cross-sectional / simple random sampling
Nguyen et al. 2008, Uganda [16]	158	BA students	Financial satisfaction, well-being, future work intentions	Country instability, obligation, financial reasons, Not enough jobs in public sector for nurses, Inadequate equipment and supplies, poor working conditions	70	18/82	31.6	Descriptive / convenience sampling
Efendi et al. 2021, Indonesia [22]	1407	BA students	N/R	N/R	91.3	30.1/69.9	20.83±1.92	Cross-sectional / non-probability sampling
Silvestri et al. 2014, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania Zambia [42]	3199	BA students	N/R	N/R	36	51/49	N/R	N/R
Hendel et al. 2011, Israel [17]	132	RN-to-BA, BA, and MA Students	Better salary, working conditions-professional development	Socio-cultural factors, Job burn-out	55	8.4/91.6	26 years for BA students, 35 years for MA students, and 33 years for RN-to-BA students	Cross-sectional study / N/R
Lee et al. 2013, South Korea [18]	717	BA students	Professional development, child nurturing and education, better salary, stable living conditions, continuation of the study	Economic reasons, Working conditions, Educational development, political/economic/Social instability	69.8	6/94	23.6	Descriptive / convenience sampling
Lee, 2016, South Korea [20]	886	BA students	Personal factors	Environmental factors	50.74	12.1/87.9	20.56±2.2	Cross-sectional/ convenience sampling
Poudel et al. 2018, Nepal [26]	799	BA students	Continuation of the study, nursing is not the 1st career choice, sense of belongingness	Low salaries, unemployment, poor working conditions, insufficient postgraduate education, lack of professional autonomy, political reasons	92.5	N/R	19.7±2.1	Embedded mixed-method / through interview in the qualitative phase (N/A for the quantitative phase)

Authors, Year, Country	Sample Size	Level of Education (%)	Pull Factors	Push Factors	Intention to Migrate (%)	M/F Ratio (%)	Mean Age (y); %	Type of Study/Sampling Method
Deasy et al. 2020, Ireland [15]	376	BA students	Pay, career, education opportunities, family, lifestyle, independence, friends	Obligation, work conditions	85	9/91	25±6	Cross-sectional / census
Abuosi et al. 2015, Ghana [19]	747	BA students	Education of children, higher salaries, career progression, further education	N/R	93.2	N/R	18–25: 74.8 26–30: 10.6 31–40: 6.2 >41: 8.4	Descriptive cross-sectional / convenience sampling
Santric-Milicevic et al. 2015, Serbia [23]	719	BA students	Better working conditions, higher salary, better quality of life, professional advancement	No job vacancy in home country	70	18/82	22.19±0.73 for college graduates, 33.23±8.19 for graduates	Descriptive / convenience sampling
Freeman et al. 2012, Canada [25]	115	BA students	Healthy work environment, economic rewards, professional development, autonomy, personal safety, support of ethical practice, support network, adventure, clinical experiences	Financial pressures job opportunities staffing levels Clinical instructors hospitals or health systems	N/R	19.6/ 80.4	25.7	An explanatory sequential mixed methods design / nonprobability convenience sampling
George & Reardon 2013, South Africa [24]	298 (260 medical students, 38 nursing students)	BA students	Higher salaries, quality and variety of specialty training offered, availability of jobs earning more money, standards of living abroad, economic situation, better opportunities for the family, Stability of the national government, transferability of qualification, sooner provision of study loans or other financial helps, similarities in health care training	Poor working conditions (such as long work hours, high workloads, inadequate resources, and occupational hazards)	77.4	42/58	N/R (ranged 19-24)	Cross-sectional / purposive sampling

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Authors, Year, Country	Sample Size	Level of Education (%)	Pull Factors	Push Factors	Intention to Migrate (%)	M/F Ratio (%)	Mean Age (y); %	Type of Study/Sampling Method
Palese et al. 2017, Italy [6]	923	BA students	Working in a supportive context, professionally satisfied, increasing knowledge, personal safety, financial stability	Poor inter professional working relationships, Economic crisis-	15.8	27.3/72.7	23.6	Cross-sectional / convenience sampling

N/R: Not reported; M/F ratio: Male/female ratio.

Other factors that caused nursing students to migrate included family and economic factors. The main goal of migration is to improve living conditions [21]. The results of a study in South Korea indicated that nurses migrated for a variety of reasons, including quality of life and professional development [18]. The desire for migration arises when the home country is unable to meet the social and political expectations of immigrants, while the destination country has attractive characteristics and a higher level of welfare [36]. Nurse migration is pushed by poor living conditions, political instability, obligation, safety issues, limited employment, weak health care management, and an uncertain future [22, 37].

Personal growth, more education opportunities, and the possibility of further study were other reasons for nursing students' interest in moving to another country. The opportunities available for study and work in different countries can affect the intention to migrate [38]. In less developed countries, high pressure is put on nurses to follow the doctor's orders, while in developed countries, nurses are allowed to think critically and make independent decisions, and there are inter-professional and intra-professional equality relationships, patient support, and comprehensive care [39]. According to Smith et al., one of the primary reasons for the migration of healthcare workers is the motivation for personal and professional growth [40]. The poor working conditions in the home country were reported as another push factor for migration among nursing students [41, 42]. A key factor influencing nurses' workplace choice and thus migration is the lack of job opportunities [37, 38]. Adoption of supportive policies for nurses may seem necessary to retain the nursing workforce.

A key limitation of this study was the inability to conduct a meta-analysis due to the heterogeneity of the data, the lack of a global standard tool for identifying push and pull factors of migration in nursing students, the diversity of tools and scoring methods used, and the insufficient data reporting in the included studies. Variations in study methods, sample sizes, and cultural contexts made data pooling challenging. The lack of access to the full texts of all articles and books was another limitation of that study. More qualitative and longitudinal studies are recommended to further explore nurses' reasons for migration.

The study highlights the high migration intention of nursing students worldwide, driven by financial, political, social, and work-related reasons. Addressing the push and pull factors of migration in less developed countries is needed to retain the nursing workforce. An efficient international cooperation is required in order to understand and manage nurses' migration effectively.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

There were no ethical considerations to be considered in this research.

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Authors' contributions

Data collection, statistical analysis, and writing the initial draft: Khadijeh Nasiri and Hanieh Hasankhani; Supervision, review & editing: Nazila Javadi-Pashaki and Atefeh Ghanbari Khanghah; Final approval: All authors.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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