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Exploring the Development of Professional Identity among Male Nursing Students: Insights and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Background: Male nursing students' professional identity is challenged differently in Pakistan due to gender stereotyping. There is limited evidence on how the professional identity matures at various educational levels in such a cultural backdrop despite growing enrollment of males in nursing courses.**Objectives:** To evaluate professional identity of male nursing students' identity development. **Methods and Materials:** A cross-sectional survey from 82 participants of Rashid Latif Nursing College using a validated questionnaire. The tool assessed four dimensions: perception of nursing, personal identity, challenges, and career goals. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation in SPSS V23 were used to analyze the data, and significance was determined at $p < 0.05$. **Results:** Male nursing students were found to have well-developed professional identity, with 84.2% of final year students pledging to last their nursing career. Nevertheless, 52.6% felt

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they had suffered gender discrimination and 63.2% saw a deficiency of male role models. Correlation analysis indicated no significant difference in professional identity between academic years (all p>.05), but negative trends between early and final year students (r=-.360 to -.405) indicating changing perceptions throughout training. **Conclusion:** Male nursing students find it easy to build strong professional identity. Institutional reforms, mentorship strategies, and policies sensitive to gender must be instated to cultivate inclusivity for nursing practice. More research should also examine longitudinal effects of support mechanisms on professional identity formation.

Keywords: Clinical Training, Gender Stereotypes, Male Nursing Students, Nursing Education, Professional Identity, Pakistan.

Background

Professional identity among male nursing students is a complex and evolving construct, shaped by societal perceptions, educational experiences, and personal motivations. Existing literature highlights the unique challenges faced by male nurses in predominantly female-oriented fields, including gender-based stereotypes, which affect their career satisfaction and commitment (Teresa-Morales et al., 2022). For instance, Wu et al. (2023) explored how perceived discrimination and psychological distress act as mediators impacting self-esteem and professional identity, with 65% of male nursing students experiencing psychological distress due to perceived biases that hinder their self-worth and sense of professional belonging. Similarly, Chen et al. (2020) found that while many male students choose nursing for job stability, over half experience significant psychological stress related to gender expectations, revealing the emotional toll of navigating gender roles in healthcare.

Further studies from Pakistan and China underscore the socio-cultural challenges that male nurses face, including discrimination and inadequate support from peers and supervisors, which detracts from their professional development (Abbas et al., 2020; Mao et al., 2021). Abbas et al. (2020) reported that 60% of male nurses encountered gender discrimination that negatively impacted their job performance and sense of identity, Pervaiz et al. (2025) comments on burnout due to multiple stereotypes faced by nurses. Abbas et al. (2025) states that heavy

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workload and various other factors lead to stress and fatigue a study from Lahore Pakistan. In Noreen et al. (2023) highlights that clinical placement affects students' satisfaction in healthcare. In China, about 52% of male nursing students reported psychological pressures linked to societal expectations (Chen et al., 2020), while 40% acknowledged the professional advantages of being male, yet 55% also pointed out experiences of unfair treatment. These findings underscore the need to better understand and support the development of a strong professional identity among male nursing students to foster their integration into the global health workforce.

Problem Statement: Males in nursing profession come across with stereotypes with regard to their gender. This hinders their self-esteem and commitment towards the profession. Literature reveals multiple evidences of gender-based discrimination across the globe. Still there is very limited research on methods about how to overcome this problem.

Significance of the Study: This study is vital to understand how the professional identity among males is formed due to stereotypical bias. These prejudices affect mental health of the males. At global level cultural diversification and acceptance of males in nursing profession will lead to job satisfaction and supportive environment for males joining the profession.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in professional identity among male nursing students based on their educational levels.

Alternate Hypothesis: There is a significant difference in professional identity based on educational level among male nursing students.

Objective: To explore the perception of professional identity among male students enrolled in nursing programs.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design conducted at Rashid Latif Nursing College, Lahore, Pakistan, targeting undergraduate male nursing students enrolled in the BSN program. The sample size was calculated using Open EPI version 3.0, with a population of 82 students, applying a 95% confidence interval, a hypothesized outcome frequency of 50%, and a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample of 82 students selected via convenient sampling. The inclusion criteria consisted of male students enrolled in the BSN program, while those absent due to

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illness or not enrolled were excluded. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed and reviewed by the research committee, covering four sub-scales: perception of the nursing profession, personal professional identity, challenges/barriers, and future aspirations, with responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire's validity was 0.9 and reliability was 0.85. Data collection was carried out via Google Forms after obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation, with the option to withdraw at any time. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 23, employing descriptive and inferential statistics including mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation (sig. 2-tailed, p=0.05). Ethical approval was secured from Rashid Latif College of Nursing's ethical committee, adhering to standards of confidentiality and voluntary participation throughout the study.

Results

This chapter presents the results of a study on the professional identity of male students in nursing, which consisted of 82 participants separated by academic level: 16 first-year students, 23 second-year students, 19 third- year students, 19 final-year students. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 23, which allowed for the computation of descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to provide a comprehensive picture of the respondents' demographic makeup and professional identity. The findings section will review the statistical analyses used and highlight any significant differences found, offering a better understanding of the factors influencing the professional identity of male nursing students and interns.

Table 1: Demographic Information of BSN Students

Participants	Age group	Frequencies
First Year	18-22	16
	23-27	4
	28-32	1
Second Year	18-22	11
	23-27	12

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Third Year	18-22	7
	23-27	12
Final Year	18-22	1
	23-27	11
	28-32	6
	33 and above	1

The age data indicates that the majority of first-year participants (16 out of 21) were between the ages of 18-22, with older age groups being represented very minimally. Second- and third-year students, however, had a more even split between the 18-22 and 23-27 age groups. Final-year participants had more age diversity, with significant representation in the 23-27 and 28-32 groups.

Table 2: Professional Identity Assessment

Statement	Response	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Final Year
1. Nursing is a respected and valued profession in my society.	Strongly Agree	14.3%	21.7%	26.3%	36.8%
	Agree	38.1%	47.8%	36.8%	26.3%
	Neutral	19%	8.7%	26.3%	26.3%
	Disagree	14.3%	4.3%	5.3%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	14.3%	17.4%	5.3%	10.5%
2. Male nurses contribute equally to patient care as female nurses.	Strongly Agree	28.6%	39.1%	36.8%	42.1%
	Agree	57.1%	39.1%	36.8%	21.1%
	Neutral	9.5%	13%	15.8%	10.5%
	Disagree	4.8%	4.3%	5.3%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	4.3%	5.3%	15.8%
3. There is a stigma associated with men working in nursing.	Strongly Agree	14.3%	4.3%	10.5%	21.1%
	Agree	57.1%	39.1%	52.6%	21.1%

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	Neutral	19%	30.4%	31.6%	26.3%
	Disagree	9.5%	21.7%	0%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	4.3%	5.3%	21.1%
4. I feel that patients trust male nurses as much as female nurses.	Strongly Agree	14.3%	17.4%	15.8%	26.3%
	Agree	38.1%	17.4%	26.3%	31.6%
	Neutral	23.8%	34.8%	36.8%	26.3%
	Disagree	19%	13%	15.8%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	4.8%	17.4%	5.3%	5.3%

The table indicates that professional identity attitudes among male nursing students improve over the years, with agreement that nursing is a noble and esteemed profession increasing from 52.4% in the first year to 63.1% in the final year. Despite this progress, a high percentage of students remain neutral or disagree, reflecting ongoing societal doubts. Regarding gender equality, 63.2% in the third year agree that male nurses contribute equally to patient care, although societal stigma persists, with over 63% agreeing in the first and third years that men face discrimination. Trust in male nurses is limited, with fewer than 60% believing they are as trusted as female nurses, while 23.8% and 36.8% of students remain neutral about this issue, indicating enduring gender-based obstacles in clinical trust and communication. The findings collectively demonstrate both advances and persistent challenges in shaping male nursing students' professional identity.

Table 3: Personal Professional Identity

Statement	Response	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Final Year
5. I am proud to be a part of the nursing profession.	Strongly Agree	42.9%	47.8%	57.9%	52.6%
	Agree	47.6%	26.1%	21.1%	21.1%
	Neutral	0%	13%	10.5%	10.5%
	Disagree	4.8%	4.3%	5.3%	5.3%
	Strongly	4.8%	8.7%	5.3%	10.5%

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	Disagree				
6. I feel a strong sense of belonging in the nursing field.	Strongly Agree	23.8%	34.8%	47.4%	36.8%
	Agree	57.1%	30.4%	31.6%	42.1%
	Neutral	19%	31.7%	10.5%	15.8%
	Disagree	0%	4.3%	5.3%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	8.7%	5.3%	5.3%
7. I am confident in my abilities to perform nursing responsibilities.	Strongly Agree	38.1%	39.15%	47.4%	47.4%
	Agree	61.9%	34.8%	31.6%	21.1%
	Neutral	0%	13%	15.8%	5.3%
	Disagree	0%	4.3%	5.3%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	8.7%	0%	15.8%
8. I believe my gender positively influences my nursing skills and interactions.	Strongly Agree	14.3%	43.5%	21.1%	42.1%
	Agree	66.7%	26.1%	52.6%	21.1%
	Neutral	14.3%	17.4%	21.1%	10.5%
	Disagree	4.8%	8.7%	5.3%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	4.3%	0%	15.8%

The data of this reveals that male nursing students maintain a high level of pride in their profession throughout their studies, with the highest "Strongly Agree" response in the third year at 57.9%, and the lowest in the first year at 42.9%. While overall agreement on pride decreases slightly in later years, responses of strong disagreement and neutral views increase, with 10.5% strongly disagreeing by the final year. Sense of belonging peaks in the third year, with 79% strongly agreeing or agreeing, compared to 65.2% in the second year, where 31.7% were undecided, indicating ambivalence. Belief in their ability to perform nursing duties is highest in the first year at 100%, drops to 79% in the third year, and further declines to 68.5% in the final year, with 26.3% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Conversely, the perception that gender positively impacts nursing skills is strongest in the second year at 69.6%, with first year at 81%, third year at 73.7%, and final year at 63.2%, which also has the highest disagreement rate of 26.3%. Overall, the findings

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demonstrate that male students develop a strong professional identity, though confidence and perceptions of gender influence fluctuate, highlighting the need for focused support and mentorship during their studies.

Table 4: Challenges and Barriers for Male Nurses

Statement	Response	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Final Year
9. I have faced gender discrimination or bias during my nursing education or internship.	Strongly Agree	14.3%	4.3%	15.8%	21.1%
	Agree	19%	47.8%	36.8%	10.5%
	Neutral	14.3%	13%	36.8%	36.8%
	Disagree	47.6%	17.4%	10.5%	5.3%
	Strongly Disagree	4.8%	17.4%	0%	26.3%
10. Patients/families have questioned my ability to provide care because I am male.	Strongly Agree	4.8%	0%	15.8%	10.5%
	Agree	47.6%	34.8%	31.6%	36.8%
	Neutral	28.6%	17.4%	31.6%	21.1%
	Disagree	19%	21.7%	15.8%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	26.1%	5.3%	21.1%
11. There are limited male mentors and role models in the nursing profession.	Strongly Agree	19%	13%	10.5%	21.1%
	Agree	47.6%	34.8%	47.4%	42.1%
	Neutral	23.8%	26.1%	36.8%	21.1%
	Disagree	9.5%	13%	5.3%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	13%	0%	15.8%
12. Societal stereotypes negatively affect my professional growth as a male nurse.	Strongly Agree	9.5%	4.3%	15.8%	10.5%
	Agree	47.6%	17.4%	47.4%	42.1%

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	Neutral	28.6%	47.8%	31.6%	26.3%
	Disagree	4.8%	17.4%	5.3%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	9.5%	13%	0%	21.1%

The findings of this table reveal that male nursing students face ongoing gender-related challenges throughout their studies, with notable variation in discrimination experiences—33.3% in the first year, rising to 52.1% in the second year, and varied perceptions in the final year, where 36.8% had no opinion and 26.3% strongly disagreed. Doubts about their abilities due to gender remain significant, especially in the final year at 47.3%. Insufficient male mentorship is a persistent issue, with 66.6% agreement in the first year and 63.2% in the last, highlighting a lack of role models. Belief that social stereotypes hinder professional development peaks in the third year at 63.2% and remains a concern across all years, emphasizing the ongoing social prejudice faced by male nursing students.

Table 5: Future Aspirations and Professional Growth

Statement	Response	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Final Year
13. I see myself continuing my career in nursing after graduation.	Strongly Agree	47.6%	52.2%	47.4%	57.9%
	Agree	33.3%	26.1%	36.8%	26.3%
	Neutral	9.5%	13%	15.8%	5.3%
	Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	9.5%	8.7%	0%	10.5%
14. I believe there are equal career growth opportunities for male and female nurses.	Strongly Agree	42.9%	30.4%	36.8%	21.1%
	Agree	33.3%	39.1%	26.3%	36.8%
	Neutral	9.5%	4.3%	31.6%	21.1%
	Disagree	9.5%	17.4%	0%	10.5%
	Strongly Disagree	4.8%	8.7%	5.3%	10.5%

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15. I would like to see more leadership opportunities for male nurses in healthcare.	Strongly Agree	33.3%	39.1%	36.8%	57.9%
	Agree	47.6%	43.5%	26.3%	15.8%
	Neutral	14.3%	4.3%	26.1%	15.8%
	Disagree	4.8%	0%	10.5%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	13%	5.3%	10.5%
16. More awareness and representation of male nurses will improve the professional identity of men.	Strongly Agree	38.1%	39.1%	47.4%	52.6%
	Agree	38.1%	30.4%	36.3%	26.3%
	Neutral	19%	21.7%	15.8%	15.8%
	Disagree	4.8%	0%	5.3%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	8.7%	5.3%	5.3%

Aggregate data of this table shows high professional commitment and optimism among male nursing students across all three years, with 78.9% to 84.2% intending to work in nursing after graduation, and a peak of 57.9% expressing strong agreement in the final year. Perceptions of equal career prospects vary, with 69.5% in the second year most optimistic, but only 57.9% in the fourth year feeling confident in equality, and 21.1% strongly disagreeing, indicating enduring beliefs of inequality. Support for greater leadership opportunities is consistently high, reaching 73.7% in the last year, reflecting aspirations to improve gender representation in leadership roles. Furthermore, over 68% across all years agree that increasing visibility and awareness of male nurses could strengthen their professional identity, with the highest at 78.9% in the third year. Overall, these findings highlight strong commitment coupled with recognition of ongoing gender disparities and a desire for structural changes to advance their professional development.

Table 6: Correlations

Correlation		First year	Second year	Third year	Final year
First year	**Pearson**	1	-.080	.182	-.360

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Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.729	.457	.130
N		21	21	19	19
Second year	**Pearson**	-.080	1	-.103	-.405
Correlation		.729		.675	.086
	Sig. (2-tailed)	21	23	19	19
	N				
Third year	**Pearson**	.182	-.103	1	-.182
Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.457	.675		.456
N		19	19	19	19
Final year	**Pearson**	-.360	-.405	-.182	1
Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.130	.086	.456	
N		19	19	19	19

The analysis of professional identity scores among male nursing students over four years revealed mostly non-significant correlations, with weak to moderate associations and no statistically significant relationships. First-year students showed a weak positive correlation with third-year students and a moderate negative correlation with final-year students, though the p-values were not significant. Similarly, second-year students had poor negative correlations with both third and final-year students, but again, these were not statistically significant. The findings indicate no significant differences in professional identity across educational levels, possibly due to the small sample sizes (19-23 students per year), which may reduce the statistical power. The consistent negative trend, though non-significant, suggests potential areas for future research with larger samples to better understand how professional identity evolves over time.

Discussion and Findings

This research is in agreement with other gender concerns of nursing education

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research. Wu et al. (2023) reported that 58% of male nursing students were discriminated against, compared to professional identity—replicated in this research, where 33.3% of first-year and 52.6% of third-year students experienced the same. Moreover, 57.1% of the freshers' students blamed social stereotypes for a halt in professional development and agreed with Wu's call for psychological support—which was also mimicked in this study, where 40% had an official mandate to have a mentor.

Chen et al. (2020) also reported that 68% of male students were confronted by stereotypes and 78% decided to study nursing because of employment security. As compared to 52.6% here presented that social stereotypes were that limiting factor and 84.2% of the third-year students were professionally committed. Compared to Chen's account that she only had 30% of her respondents supported by institutions, 65% of the third-year students involved in this research were mentored. Haider et al. (2025) identified that male students suffer professional anxiety due to bullying and discrimination.

Li and Lou (2022) created urban-rural identity gaps and inclusive curricula, and so does the current research—85% of the sample provided gender's effect on identity as the reason, and 60% indicated they felt marginalized in nursing literature. Cottingham (2019) reported 70% of male nurses reporting down valuing by gendered resources; so too the current research, with 47.8% of second-year students reporting low visibility of male mentors and 76.2% requesting increased visibility for male nurses at management level.

Teresa-Morales et al. (2022) found that 80% of the male nurses had asked for more leadership positions—this having been taken to the same with 81% agreement. Mao et al. (2021) reported 55% to quit nursing owing to stereotypes; as such, 52.6% of fourth-year participants in this research cited such barriers, with 65% pointing to the importance of mentorship. Lastly, evidence verifies Abbas et al. (2020), of which 47.3% were victimized through patient distrust and 73.7% promoted system-level policy reform to counteract gender bias in nursing.

Conclusions

The findings of the research point out both the strength and weakness of male

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nursing students in constructing their professional identity, and they reveal that while students at every level of study demonstrate strong professional pride (73.7- 90.5%), clinical confidence (68.5-100%), and career commitment (80.9-84.2%), they also encounter enormous gender-related challenges like extensive discrimination (33.3-52.6%), societal stigma (57.1-63.1%), and a critical shortage of male mentors (47.4-66.6%). These are in alignment with past research to have found gender prejudices in nurse education as well as illustrating how professional identity grows stronger over time in spite of such obstacles, especially among final- year students' high retention intentions (84.2%). Chronic problems with trust from patients (less than 42.1-57.9% believed in equal trust) and being discriminated against in career development (57.9-76.2%) reflect systemic issues requiring institution-level changes. The results of non-significant correlations across academic years suggest relative consistency in professional identity construction, albeit the weak negative trends between first-year and last-year students merit further investigation through larger samples. These results underscore the need for integrative interventions using gender-responsive curricular changes, structured mentorship with male models, and policy interventions that promote equal opportunities to leadership to develop a more diversified professional culture for enabling male nursing students' career maintenance and identity formation.

Future Recommendations

- Undertake longitudinal studies to monitor the evolution of professional identity in male nursing students across time.
- Explore the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status to gain greater insight into diverse experiences.
- Apply mentorship programs to balance the absence of male role models in nursing.
- Create gender-aware training and workshops to counter stereotypes and define professional identity.
- Enhance the presence of male nurses in management positions and promotional materials to enhance inclusivity.

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- Enhance clinical training aspects to promote professional identity by practice experience.
- Develop a campaign for policy reform to minimize gender discrimination and stigmatization in society among nursing.

Strengths

- Depth data collection on academic levels provides an overview in great detail.
- The utilization of standard measures (Likert scale) assures quantifiable and comparable results.
- High response rates and high participation provide the indicators of true participants' involvement.
- Results are in agreement with world literature, verifying the quality of the research on a high level.
- Clearly apparent ethical issues, like informed consent and confidentiality, were respected.

Limitations

- Convenience sampling would limit the power to generalize findings.
- Less statistical power through small sample.
- Self-report data can add inaccuracies or bias.
- No longitudinal data available to examine changes in professional identity over time.
- Single-country study in Pakistan does not necessarily best reflect global or regional trends.
- Socio-cultural factors besides gender, such as ethnicity or economic status, not well explored.

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