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## **Nursing Profession: A Promising Route to International Migration**

**Smita Bhutani & Amandeep Kaur**



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## **Abstract**

Migration of healthcare professionals is not a new phenomenon. The history of nurses travelling to colonies has been replaced by migration of nurses from colonial countries to developed regions of the world. Indian nurses by their enhanced knowledge, skill and professional conduct transformed themselves into Global nurses. These global Indian nurses are moving to different parts of the developed regions not only to overcome their shortages but also to provide them with skilled, professionally qualified and well trained human resources. Indian nurses are opting to move overseas not only due to lack of opportunities at home but also due to their desire to live overseas. Punjab, one of the top most states in the country with regard to emigration (particularly led by men), is more recently emerging as an important state witnessing substantial emigration of prospective female nurses. It is in this context that the demand for nursing education, with a resultant dramatic proliferation of nursing institutes in the state, worked as a promising route to emigrate to developed countries including Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and United States of America. The present paper seeks to examine the extent to which internationalization of nursing education in Punjab has taken place so as to make it comparable with high standards of health professionals maintained by the developed countries where the need for such nurses is large and immediate. This may also help in understanding how nursing students are allured by lucrative foreign-based nursing career. Both qualitative and quantitative sets of data have been collected through surveys, interviews and focus groups. The present paper may thus throw light on how migratory options provided by nursing profession are deeply intertwined with aspirations to settle abroad.

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Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).

# Nursing Profession: A Promising Route to International Migration

**Smita Bhutani & Amandeep Kaur**

## **Introduction:**

Migration of health care workers is one of the defining issues of present time. It affects both source and recipient countries. Shortage of nurses in developed world is emerging as one new pull factor in international migration of nurses. A survey conducted by World Health Organisation (WHO) found that 77 per cent of developed countries are facing a nursing staff shortage, with nearly all the developed countries relying on nurses from abroad to ease the situation (Rutter, 2001). Every year thousands of nurses are moving to developed world due to rising proportion of aged population, growing rate of chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity, healthcare reforms, fast paced care etc. The Philippines, is the largest source country for nurse migration followed by other countries including Caribbean, South Africa, Ghana, India, Korea, China etc. (Li Hongyan et.al, 2014). The United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Ireland are major recipient countries of Internationally Educated Nurses. (Kline 2003).

The history of nurses travelling to colonies has been replaced by migration of nurses from colonial countries to developed regions of the world. The crisis level shortage of nurses in developed countries created a permanent global nurse market. Australia experienced a 'dramatic ethnic diversification' in nursing between 1995 and 2000 (Hawthorne, 2001). In 1999, Britain

experienced the worst nursing shortage crisis in 25 years. In 2006, United States senate approved immigration reforms removing restrictions on the number of foreign nurse entering the country (Rosen, 2006). As per projected requirement of United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand along are large enough to deplete the supply of qualified nurses throughout the developing countries (Linda et al. 2004). The serious level nurse shortage in developed nations is likely to continue for at least 10 to 20 years (Kingma, 2006). In order to overcome the shortage the developed countries have become dependent on internationally educated nurses.

Indian nurses by their enhanced knowledge, skill and professional conduct transformed themselves into Global nurses. The first wave of nursing from India to West and to the Middle East from 1940s through to 1990s had a strong effect on professional status (Healey, 2013). The demand of nursing profession overseas helped in reducing the stigma attached to the profession. In 1991, with the introduction of Globalization, Privatization and Liberalisation, the second wave of migration of nurses involves much larger number of emigration of nurses from India. With the second wave of nurse migration, India emerged as a new player in the Global nurses market. Estimates suggested that 25000 trained nurses across India leave every year to foreign destinations for better paying jobs (Times Now, May 2016). These global Indian nurses

are moving to different parts of the developed regions not only to earn money but also to provide them with skilled, professionally qualified and well trained human resources. Indian nurses are opting to move overseas not only due to lack of opportunities at home but also due to their desire to live overseas. Punjab, one of the top most states in the country with regard to emigration (particularly led by men), is more recently emerging as an important state witnessing substantial emigration of prospective female nurses.

### Methodology:

Based on interviews, focus groups and surveys we examined the extent to which internationalization of nursing education in Punjab has taken place so as to make it comparable with high standards of health professionals maintained by the developed countries where the need for such nurses is large and immediate. Surveys and interviews were conducted in 10 government and private nursing schools and institutions situated in Punjab. As many as 736 nursing students were surveyed in January-April 2016 to throw light on how migratory options provided by nursing profession are deeply linked with aspirations to settle overseas.

### Nursing Education and its Privatization and Market Orientation in Punjab:

A career in nursing in Indian nursing has, since the 1990s, been reshaped into a lucrative route to work overseas. This change has not only reshaped the nursing profession but also revolutionised the status of nursing in India (Healey, 2013). The transformation of nursing profession has brought growth in nursing educational institutes in India. In fact, not only nursing institutes but also emigration agencies, private hospitals etc., are making money by sending nurses abroad. Every nook and corner of the country including newspapers are filled with advertisements by emigration agencies for

IELTS training, CGFNS coaching, NCLEX coaching etc. (Plate 1 & 2). Indian private nursing institutes are becoming a place of large profit as they are charging high fees from the students. Almost all nursing institutes are taking advantage of the low level of investment and high level of return in nursing education sector.



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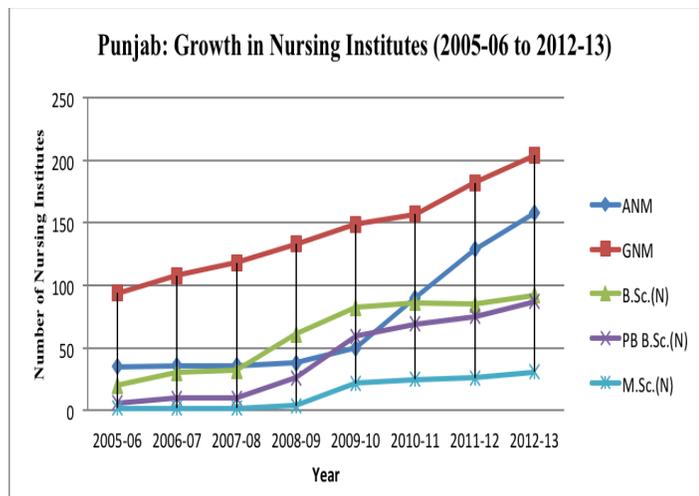
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Plate 1: Source: Field work, 2016

Plate 2: Source: Advertisement

India has witnessed a rapid growth in nursing education. In 2013, across India there were 7357 nursing institutes; these included the institutes in the public sector as well as the government institutes. In north India, Punjab has played an important role in nurse training and international migration. Immigration agencies and travel agents are also guiding their clients to adopt the nursing profession as a swift and sure way to a permanent settlement abroad (data, photos, news advertisements etc). Most recently the trend towards

choosing nursing as a career in Punjab has increased tremendously. A significant increase in the number of nursing colleges with an increase in the number of nursing students is a testimony to such a development in Punjab (Figure 1). As opportunities for nurse emigration have risen, nursing education in the private sector has expanded incredibly. A total transformation in the pattern of provision of nurse education is the consequence of such a development.



**Figure 1:** Source: Indian Nursing Council as on 10th Oct 2013  
<http://nursingandmidwifery.gov.in/statedashboard.jsp#.WBdRNvI97IU>

In Punjab there has been a considerable increase in the number of private nursing institutes which provide nursing education and training to work in foreign destinations. INSCOL Academy, a private health education group in Chandigarh, Punjab for example has a number of international agreements and partnerships in place for postgraduate nurse training programmes with several colleges and universities in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Many other private nursing institutes in the state also negotiate deals with many western nursing institutes and conduct seminars and information sessions for giving an orientation to nursing students to get training and work experience in such associated foreign institutes. For instance: Royal Institute of Nursing, Jaito Sarja (Gurdaspur) in Punjab has a partnership with the School

of Nursing, University of British Columbia, Canada for the purpose of faculty development; student and faculty exchanges; curriculum and program development. International College of Nursing, Tarn-Taran and Kular Academy, Bija (Ludhiana) have started joint partnership programme with Govt. Loyalist College, Ontario, Canada. Moreover, Tarn-Taran International College of Nursing has opened International Academy of Foreign Studies at Amritsar to guide the nursing students for international destinations. Nursing institutes providing transnational education in the state are funded by private organisations with an aim to maximise their profit by sending nursing students to meet the increasing demand of nurses in foreign destinations.

Unfortunately, dramatic proliferation of private nursing institutes in the state has led to serious concerns about the quality of nursing education. These huge profit earning private institutes have an acute shortage of nursing teachers (based on field survey). Students during their clinical training period are forced to live in unhygienic conditions (as told by BSc. Nursing students). Another issue, regarding functioning of transnational nursing institutes is the absence of any organisation to monitor their education system. Not being under any monitoring and regulating authority, these institutes are charging exorbitant fees from students by alluring them with a promise to help them in moving to overseas destinations for work.

### **Nursing Profession and International Migration from Punjab:**

Punjabis have well established culture overseas. More recently the nursing profession has attained a noticeable place among professions that offer a golden opportunity to move overseas using regular immigration channels. In the present day scenario, women in the state, who earlier were a part of family migration or were being sponsored by male members (preferably father, brother, husband), are now choosing the nursing profession as a

means to move abroad independently with the ambition not only to settle there permanently, but also to sponsor and support other family members at a later stage.

**Discussion and Results:**

The results are based on surveys and interviews conducted on 736 nursing students studying in 10 nursing institutes located in the districts of Sangrur, Barnala, Bathinda, Faridkot, Ferozpur, Tarn-Taran, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana. The nursing students surveyed from these nursing institutes (Figure 2) were asked questions related to their personal background, place of residence, reasons for choosing nursing profession, friends or relatives' connection abroad, preferences for foreign destination/s etc. Majority of the students were of BSc. (Nursing) immediately followed by GNM. Some faculty members were also consulted to know the relevant information about teaching system in nursing profession.

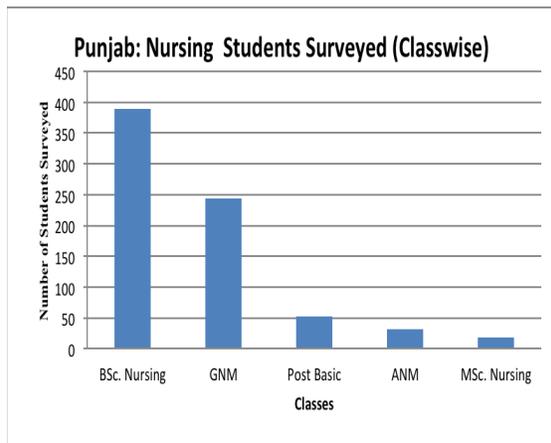


Figure 2: Source: Field Survey, 2016

As far as demographic profile of the surveyed students is concerned mainly students fall in the age group of less than 20 years followed by 20-25 years age group (Figure 3). Nursing as ‘a feminized profession’, was reflected by the fact that during the survey more than 98 per cent were females. Among total surveyed about 724 were females. The analysis of data religion wise revealed that majority of the students belonged to Sikh religion (88 per cent) religion followed by Hindu

religion (67 per cent) (Figure 4 ) as Punjab is a state dominated by Sikh population (63.60 per cent).

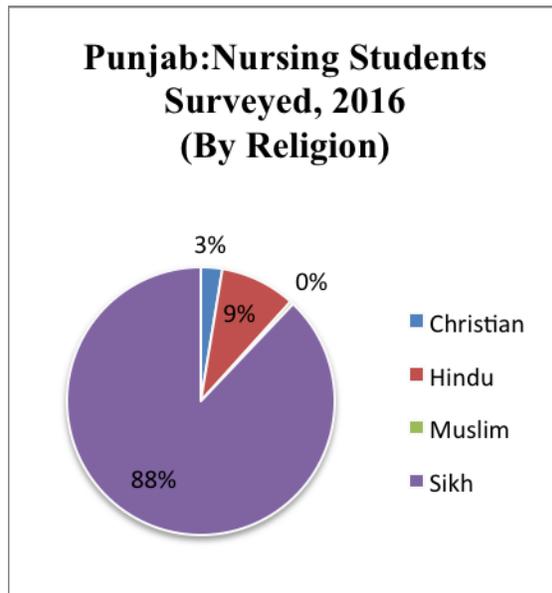
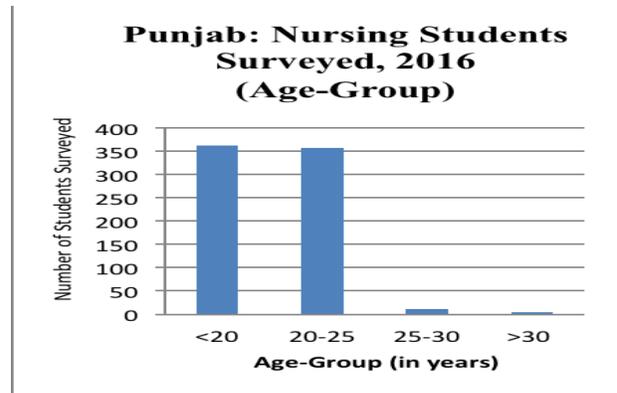


Figure 3: Source: Field Survey, 2016

Figure 4:

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Punjabis are one of the largest ethnic groups of Indian Diaspora. They have a strong desire to live and work overseas. During the survey, it was found that about 60 per cent of the surveyed students had family members or relatives staying abroad. It was also observed that 46 per cent chose nursing profession on the recommendation of the family members or relatives staying abroad, as it offers opportunities for the overseas migration and in many places nursing profession may be the most effective mean of acquiring passport (Walton-Roberts, 2015). About 88 per cent of the total surveyed nursing students adopted nursing profession as it might help

them in moving aboard.

About 30.4 per cent chose nursing due to a heavy demand of nursing profession overseas (Figure 5). This clearly indicates that students are allured by the lucrative career offered by nursing profession overseas. The remaining about 30 per cent have taken nursing due to their personal interest. The advice of relatives, friends and parents; to serve humanity; failure in seeking admission in other medical profession; better matrimonial prospects; and a strong desire to go abroad etc. motivated these students to adopt nursing profession. Thus the core motive of the profession i.e. care is losing its importance as only 11.6 per cent sample wanted to serve humanity through nursing profession and majority wanted to use it as a mode to move overseas due to shortage and greater demand of nurses there.

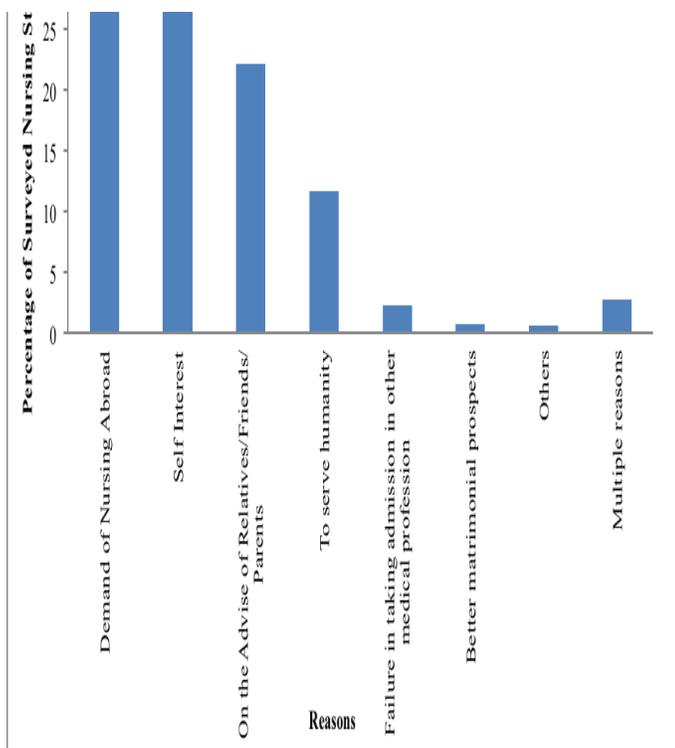


Figure 5: Source: Field Survey, 2016

More than 80 per cent of the total respondents expressed their strong desire to go abroad after the completion of the program. Sampled students gave various reasons regarding moving overseas (Figure 6).

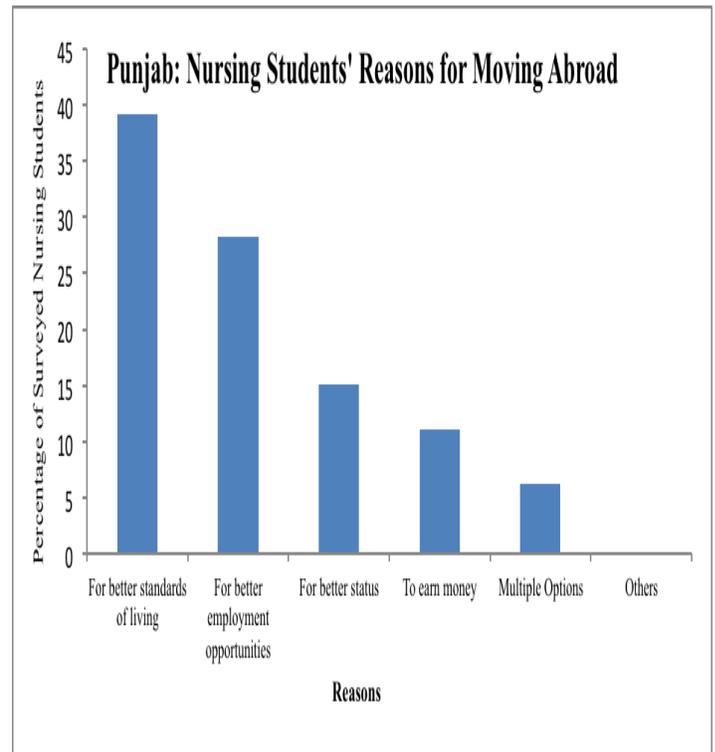


Figure 6: Source: Field Survey, 2016

From amongst 82.2 per cent of the surveyed students who were willing to go overseas, 53.38 per cent opted Canada as their preferred destination for moving abroad followed by Australia (20.49 per cent), United States of America (17.68 per cent), New Zealand (2.47 per cent), United Kingdom (1.65 per cent) and Middle East (0.16 per cent) (Figure 7). Australia was chosen as the second most preferred destination by nursing respondents as Australia government has recently announced liberal immigration policies to attract workforce from different parts of the world. Out of total sample about 16.84 per cent wanted to move to Australia. The choice of particular destination is due to pre-established social networks at the desired destination. In comparison to other states of India, Punjabis are much interested in going to English speaking countries due to their prolonged history of living and working in English speaking destinations. Moreover, the problems faced by Indian nurses in the Gulf countries provoke Punjabi trained nurses to look for employment in developed countries that offer forms

of permanent residence (Percot, 2006).

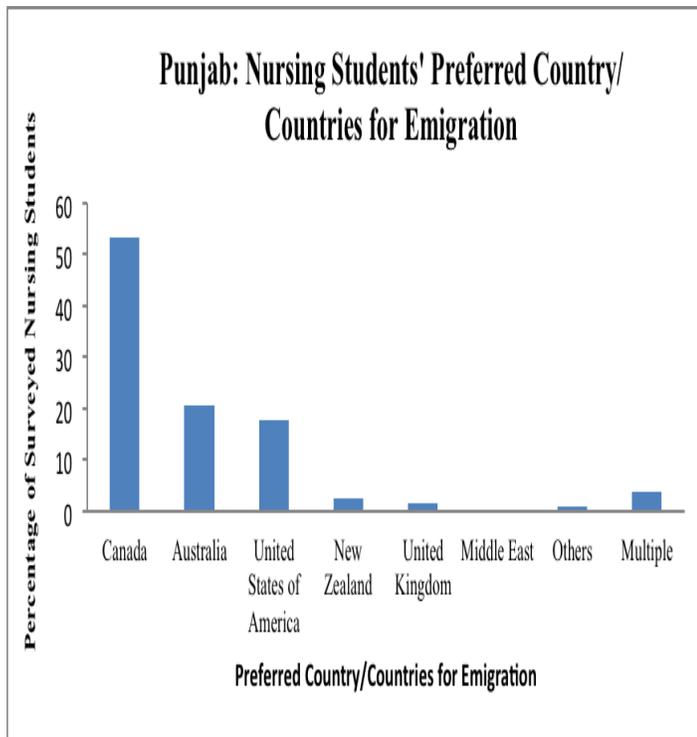


Figure 7: Source: Field Survey, 2016

### Conclusion:

The present study thus provides some interesting observation. Firstly, the core of the profession i.e. ‘care’ is a diminishing process as majority of the respondents wanted to use it as a mean to acquire visa on the passport. Secondly, the mushrooming of private nursing institutes in the state have resulted in deterioration of quality of the educational standards in the nursing profession. Thirdly, the rising transnational institutes in the state are becoming centres of huge profit with little investment. These transnational institutes are alluring students by providing education and training overseas and in return charging huge amount of money from the students due to absence of any organisation to monitor them. The choice of nursing profession in the state is thus determined by the ample opportunities offered by it to live and settle overseas. The demand of nursing profession abroad has therefore reshaped the profession into a promising route to move overseas.

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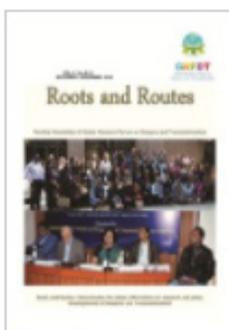
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*Roots and Routes* is a monthly newsletter of the Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT). It is inclusive of articles, book reviews and news analysis, which help in disseminating latest information on research and policy development in Diaspora and Transnationalism. The newsletter enjoys readership of academicians, policy experts, diaspora think tanks etc.

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