



From silence to strength: Mapping the growth of assertiveness among future nursing leaders

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Abstract

Background

Assertiveness and self-esteem have emerged as crucial psychological traits that influence interpersonal effectiveness, professional performance, and emotional well-being—especially among nursing and healthcare students. Several researchers across different cultural and educational contexts have delved into this subject, uncovering insightful patterns and implications. This study explores how assertiveness develops over the course of a Post Graduation Nursing program and compare their levels. Identify associations between assertiveness levels and selected socio-demographic variables.

Methodology

A quantitative, Cross-sectional research design was adopted. The study was conducted in 8 selected nursing colleges of Uttar Pradesh each strata has 16 samples with randomization a total sample size of 126 Post Graduation students (63 from 1st year and 63 from 2nd year), selected through non-probability random sampling. Data was collected using Rathus Assertiveness Scale adaptive version self-administered assertiveness scale consisting of 30 items, with scoring categorized as mildly assertive (30–70), moderately assertive (71–110), and highly assertive (111–150). The tool demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77). Socio-demographic data were also collected through a structured form.

Results

The statistical analysis, performed using SPSS v25.0, revealed a significant difference in assertiveness levels between Ist and IInd year students ($t = +5.66, p < 0.05$). The majority of IInd year students exhibited higher assertiveness scores compared to their 1st year counterparts, suggesting a positive development of assertiveness over time. Additionally, significant associations were observed between assertiveness levels and selected socio-demographic factors such as gender, year of study, place of residence, religion, parental education, family income, and years of experience after Under graduation Nursing.

Conclusion

The study concludes that assertiveness improves with academic progression and experience. Educational interventions and assertiveness training may further strengthen communication competencies in nursing students, ultimately enhancing professional readiness and patient care outcomes.

Keywords: Assertiveness, self-esteem, post graduation students, academic progression

Introduction

Assertiveness is a crucial interpersonal skill, especially in the nursing profession, where effective communication can directly influence patient outcomes and workplace harmony. It reflects a person's ability to express their needs, rights, and opinions confidently and respectfully. Closely linked to self-esteem, assertiveness empowers nursing students and professionals to navigate challenging clinical situations, advocate for patients, and maintain their own mental well-being.

Nursing students often face unique stressors during their academic and clinical training, making it essential for them to develop assertiveness early. A lack of assertive behaviour may result in communication breakdowns, poor teamwork, low confidence, and reduced ability to handle stress—all of which can hinder professional growth and affect patient care quality.

Background of the Study

Several international and Indian studies have explored assertiveness and self-esteem among nursing students. Karagozoglu (2008) ^[13] conducted a descriptive study in Turkey among 372 final-year university students. Nursing students scored the highest on both the Self-Esteem Inventory (80.64±15.83) and Rathus Assertiveness Scale (36.29±25.33), suggesting a positive link between nursing education and these traits.

In contrast, a study by S.P (2018) ^[22] in the USA revealed that older nurses (aged 60–76) were less assertive than their younger counterparts (aged 20–29), indicating a possible decline with age or generational differences in communication styles.

In Korea, Joy (2017) ^[12] implemented an assertiveness training program and found a significant improvement in interpersonal relationships and reduction in conflicts among participants, highlighting the effectiveness of training

interventions. Similarly, Yamagishi 2007) [24] emphasized that assertiveness is not innate but a learned behavior and strongly recommended including assertiveness training in nursing curricula to boost student confidence and reduce stress.

In India, Hakeem (2016) [10] conducted a descriptive study among 100 first-year nursing students and found that 55% were non-assertive, and only 9% were assertive. Nelavala (2015) reported that 57.5% of nursing students had moderate assertiveness, and 21.25% were non-assertive, suggesting a pressing need for structured behavioral training.

Budhathoki (2012) [5] argued that assertiveness is a core component of communication and conflict resolution, essential for all healthcare workers. Furnham (2005) [8], in a cross-cultural study, noted that cultural and environmental factors significantly influence assertiveness and self-esteem levels, with Western countries generally scoring higher in assertiveness.

These findings underline a common theme: while nursing students may have the potential for high assertiveness and self-esteem, a significant portion lacks these traits without structured guidance and training. Factors such as age, gender, education level, and cultural background play a major role in influencing assertiveness. Therefore, regular assessment and targeted assertiveness training during nursing education are essential to foster confident, competent, and mentally healthy professionals.

Need of the Study

Despite its importance, limited research has explored

assertiveness development during nursing education progression, especially at the postgraduate level. Understanding how assertiveness evolves and the factors affecting it can help design effective educational interventions to enhance nursing students' communication skills, self-esteem, and professional readiness. This study addresses this gap by mapping assertiveness growth among postgraduate nursing students in Uttar Pradesh, aiming to promote confident, competent future nursing leaders.

Methodology

The study used a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive design to assess assertiveness levels among 1st and 2nd year post graduate nursing students in selected nursing colleges of Uttar Pradesh. Data were collected from 126 students (63 from each year) who were available and willing to participate. Participants were selected using random sampling. The sample size was calculated based on pilot result to ensure reliable results. Data collection involved a self-administered 30-item assertiveness scale and a questionnaire on socio-demographic details. Permission was obtained from the institutions, and participants gave written consent after being informed about the study. Data were collected between November 18 and 30, 2024, and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to compare assertiveness levels and explore related factors.

Results

N=126

	Characteristics	Category	Frequency (N=126)	Percentage (%)
1	Age (years)	21-30	114	90.5
		>31	12	9.5
2	Gender	Female	105	83.0
		Male	21	17.0
3	Year of Study	1st Year	63	50.0
		2nd Year	63	50.0
4	Residence	Urban	83	65.9
		Semi-Urban	31	24.6
		Rural	12	9.5
5	Family Type	Nuclear	83	65.9
		Joint	43	34.1
6	Religion	Hindu	96	76.2
		Christian	13	10.3
		Muslim	12	9.5
		Sikh	3	2.4
		Others	2	1.6
7	Marital Status	Unmarried	96	76.2
		Married	28	22.2
		Divorced	2	1.6
8	Monthly Pocket Money (Rs.)	>4000	67	53.2
		2001-4000	47	37.3
		≤2000	12	9.5
9	Father's Education	Graduate & Above	92	73.0
		Higher Secondary	21	16.7
		Secondary	7	5.6
		Primary	6	4.8
10	Mother's Education	Higher Secondary	42	33.3
		Secondary	39	31.0
		No Formal Education	9	7.1
		Primary	6	4.8
11	Father's Occupation	Government Employee	67	53.0
		Business	30	24.0
		Private Employee	26	21.0
		Daily Wager	2	1.6
12	Mother's Occupation	Housewife	79	62.7

		Government Employee	22	17.5
		Private Employee	13	10.3
		Business	8	6.3
		Daily Wager	4	3.2
13	Family Monthly Income (Rs.)	>15,000	103	81.7
		10,001-15,000	13	10.3
		5,001-10,000	8	6.3
		≤5,000	2	1.6
14	Experience after Under graduation Nursing (years)	1-3	104	82.5
		4-6	11	8.7
		≥7	10	7.9

Pattern of Scores

N=126

Variables	Levels	1 st Year	2 nd Year	Frequency	Percentage
Assertiveness Scale	1.Mildly Assertive (30-70)	1	0	1	0%
	2.Moderate Assertive (71-110)	56	31	87	90.0%
	3.Highly Assertive (111-150)	6	32	38	10.0%

The majority of students (90%) demonstrated a moderate level of assertiveness, while 10% were highly assertive. Only one student exhibited a mild level of assertiveness.

Study Relationship

This table represent mean comparison of assertiveness between postgraduate nursing students

N=126

	Students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t-value	Significance at 0.05
Assertiveness	First year	63	98.35	12.50	124	5.66	0.01 S**
	Second year	63	109.53	19.11			

t (124) =1.65, S**=Significant, NS=Not Significant

Comparison of assertiveness between I and II year postgraduate nursing students showed a significant

difference, with a t-value of +5.66 α- 0.05 (SPSS v25.0), indicating higher assertiveness in the II year group.

N=126

	Socio-demographic Variable	Level of Assertiveness			χ ²	df	Significance at 0.05
		Mild	Moderate	High			
1	Age in Years				0.29	2	0.86 NS
	a. 21–30 years	1	78	35			
	b. 31 and above	0	9	3			
2	Gender				6.04	2	0.04 S*
	a. Male	1	12	8			
	b. Female	0	75	30			
3	Course and Year of Study				25.97	2	0.01 S**
	a. 1st Year M.Sc. Nursing	1	56	6			
	b. 2nd Year M.Sc. Nursing	0	31	32			
4	Family Residence				11.64	4	0.02 S**
	a. Rural	1	6	5			
	b. Semi Urban	0	20	11			
	c. Urban	0	61	22			
5	Type of Family				3.70	2	0.15 NS
	a. Joint	1	26	16			
	b. Nuclear	0	61	22			
6	Religion				19.15	8	0.01 S**
	a. Hindu	0	65	31			
	b. Muslim	1	5	6			
	c. Christian	0	13	0			
	d. Sikh	0	2	1			
	e. Others	0	2	0			
7	Marital Status				5.14	4	0.27 NS
	a. Married	0	19	9			
	b. Unmarried	1	68	27			
	c. Divorced	0	0	2			
8	Pocket Money (Monthly)				2.74	4	0.61 NS
	a. Below Rs. 2,000	0	10	2			
	b. Rs. 2,001–4,000	0	34	13			

	c. Rs. 4,001 and above	1	43	23			
9	Father's Educational Status				24.77	6	0.01 S**
	a. Primary school education	1	2	3			
	b. Secondary school education	0	3	4			
	c. Higher secondary education	0	15	6			
	d. Graduate and above	0	67	25			
10	Father occupation				7.87	6	0.24 NS
	a. Government Employee	0	48	19			
	b. Private Employee	0	21	6			
	c. Businessman	1	16	13			
	d. Daily Wager	0	2	0			
11	Mother's Educational Status				26.40	8	0.01 S**
	a. No formal education	0	4	5			
	b. Primary school education	1	3	2			
	c. Secondary school education	0	28	11			
	d. Higher secondary education	0	27	15			
	e. Graduate and above	0	25	5			
12	Mother's Occupation				11.29	8	0.18 NS
	a. Government Employee	0	19	3			
	b. Private Employee	0	9	4			
	c. Businessman	0	3	5			
	d. Daily Wager	0	1	3			
	e. Housewife	1	55	23			
13	Family Income Monthly				17.14	6	0.01 S**
	a. Below Rs. 5,000	0	1	1			
	b. Rs. 5,001–10,000	0	2	6			
	c. Rs. 10,001–15,000	0	5	8			
	d. Rs. 15,001 and above	1	79	23			
14	Years of Experience after Under graduation Nursing				11.45	4	0.02 S**
	a. 1 to 3 years	0	73	32			
	b. 4 to 6 years	1	6	4			
	c. 7 years and above	0	8	2			

S**-Significant, NS-Not Significant when $\alpha=0.05$

Conclusion

The study reveals a significant increase in assertiveness levels among postgraduate nursing students as they progress from the first to the second year. Assertiveness is influenced by socio-demographic factors such as gender, residence, parental education, family income, and work experience. These findings highlight the importance of academic exposure and experience in enhancing nursing student's communication skills and professional confidence.

Future Scope

Future research can explore the effectiveness of structured assertiveness training programs integrated into nursing curricula to further improve communication and leadership skills. Longitudinal studies across diverse cultural and educational settings could deepen understanding of assertiveness development, ultimately contributing to better patient care and nursing leadership.

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