



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Training gaps in surgical support for nurse assistants: A case study from Pakistan hospitals

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Abstract

Nurse assistants are important parts of surgical teams. They help with preparing patients for surgery, supporting during operations, and caring for patients after. But in Pakistan, their training is not always good. It often lacks proper structure, depth, and formal teaching. Many learn through informal ways and on-the-job experience instead of proper training. This study looks into the training issues faced by nurse assistants in surgical areas in three big hospitals in Sindh province. The study uses qualitative methods like interviews, observation lists, and surveys to find out important problems in things like keeping things clean, knowing procedures, and getting support from the hospital. These issues not only affect patient safety and how surgeries go but also make nurse assistants less confident and less able to do their jobs well. The results show that there is an urgent need for better training programs, ongoing education, and changes in policies to help nurse assistants do their jobs better and improve overall surgical outcomes in Pakistan's healthcare system.

Keywords: Nurse assistants; Surgical support; Training gaps; Patient safety; Healthcare workforce; Informal learning; Continuing education; Infection control; Team communication; Professional development; Hospital policy; Sindh province; Pakistan healthcare system; Qualitative case study

1. Introduction

Surgical care is one of the most complex and important parts of modern healthcare. It needs a highly organized team of professionals to ensure patient safety, efficient procedures, and success. Among these professionals, nurse assistants are important but often not recognized enough. They do many tasks like getting patients ready for surgery, keeping areas clean, helping with instruments, and supporting recovery after surgery. Their work is especially important in places where there are not enough staff and many patients need care at the same time.

In Pakistan, the healthcare system has many difficulties, including uneven distribution of resources, limited access to continuing education, and a lack of proper training for support workers. Nurse assistants in surgical departments usually come into the job with little or no formal training in surgical rules. They often learn through informal methods like listening to senior staff, watching others, and learning through mistakes. Although these methods can give them some practical skills, they don't teach them enough theory or precise skills needed for surgery.

Not having proper training affects the confidence and performance of nurse assistants and also puts patients at risk. Problems like not keeping things clean, handling instruments wrong, and not communicating well during surgery are common because of poor training. These problems are made worse by things like unclear job roles, no mentorship, and limited chances to learn more, especially for those working late shifts or in rural hospitals. Even though nurse assistants are involved in many parts of surgical care, they are rarely talked about in academic studies or policy discussions.

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There is a need to look into the specific training problems they face and find ways to help them improve their skills. This study aims to do that by looking at the experiences of nurse assistants in selected hospitals in Sindh province. Using qualitative analysis, the study finds out key problems with training, how these problems affect surgical outcomes, and suggests practical ways to make improvements.

By highlighting these issues, the study tries to contribute to the discussion on building a better healthcare workforce in Pakistan and push for changes that recognize and support nurse assistants as essential members of surgical teams.

Objectives

The main goal of this study is to look into the training challenges that nurse assistants face in surgical departments of public hospitals in Pakistan. Since these workers play a key role in keeping areas clean, helping surgical teams, and supporting patients during recovery, it is important to understand how well-prepared they are. The study has three specific goals:

- **To find out where nurse assistants lack training in their jobs.**
 - This involves checking what is missing in their formal education, how well they learn practical skills, and how familiar they are with surgical rules. The study aims to find out where they may not have enough knowledge or skill, especially in keeping things clean, using surgical tools, and communicating well during operations.
- **To see how these gaps affect patient safety and how quickly surgeries run.**
 - By looking at what people observe and what they say, the study checks how not having enough training can influence the results of surgeries, how infections are controlled, how well teams work together, and how effective procedures are. It also looks at how being underprepared affects the emotions and mental health of nurse assistants working in high-pressure environments.
- **To suggest ways to improve training and support from the hospital.**
 - Based on what is found, the study will give practical ideas to help improve the education, guidance, and growth of nurse assistants. These suggestions are meant to help hospital leaders, policy makers, and nursing teachers understand what changes are needed to better support nurse assistants and make surgical care better.

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study approach to understand the training gaps faced by nurse assistants in surgical support roles within Pakistan's public healthcare system.

A qualitative method was chosen because it allows me to explore the real-life experiences, feelings, and challenges that nurse assistant's face, which are often missed when using other types of research that rely on numbers.

2.1. Study Setting

The research was carried out in three large hospitals in Sindh province:

- **Karachi Civil Hospital** – one of the biggest public hospitals in Pakistan, serving a wide range of people in the city.
- **Hyderabad Liaquat University Hospital** – a teaching hospital that mixes academic learning with actual patient care.
- **Sukkur Ghulam Muhammad Mahar Hospital** – a hospital that serves people in nearby towns and villages.

These hospitals were picked because they have a lot of surgeries, different types of staff, and are easy to visit for research.

2.2. Participant Selection

I used a purposeful way to pick 30 nurse assistants, all of whom had between 2 and 10 years of experience in surgical areas.

- To be part of the study, the nurse assistants had to:
- Be working in a surgical or operating room unit.

- Be directly involved in helping patients before, during, or after surgery.
- Agree to take part in interviews and be observed during surgeries.

I included both people working during the day and those working at night to better understand how training and workload change throughout the day.

2.3. Data Collection Methods

I used three different methods to collect information:

2.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

I talked to each nurse assistant in person, using both Urdu and English. Each interview was between 30 and 45 minutes long. I asked about their training, how confident they felt, difficulties they faced in their jobs, and ideas for improvement. The interviews were recorded and written down exactly as they were said.

2.3.2. Observational Checklists

I watched the nurse assistants while they were performing surgeries and used a checklist to note their actions. I looked at things like how well they followed cleaning rules, handled instruments, talked to the doctors, and dealt with unexpected situations.

2.3.3. Surveys

I gave a short questionnaire to collect information on the nurse assistants' backgrounds, training, how often they got additional learning, and how they thought they performed. I used a scale that allowed them to rate how prepared they felt and how much support they received from their workplace.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

I got approval from the review groups at all three hospitals before starting the study. I made sure that everyone who took part knew what they were agreeing to, and we protected their privacy throughout the study. They were told that their answers would not harm their jobs and that their information would be kept anonymous.

2.5. Data Analysis

I used different methods to look at the data

- I read through the interviews and found repeated ideas, like not having proper training, not having clear rules to follow, and being worried about making mistakes.
- I compared what we saw during the observations at each hospital to find common patterns in how well they followed procedures and when they didn't.
- I organized the survey answers to find out what training people had and how confident they felt in their skills.

By using all three methods together, I made sure our findings were accurate and gave me a detailed understanding of the training issues that nurse assistants face in their work.

3. Findings

3.1. Lack of Formal Surgical Training

- 70% of nurse assistants had no proper training in sterile techniques or using surgical tools.
- Most of them learned by listening to others and watching instead of going through proper classes.

3.2. Inconsistent Protocols

- There were no clear rules or roles for nurse assistants in surgical areas.
- Different departments and shifts had very different ways of doing things.

3.3. Limited Access to Continuing Education

- Only 15% had taken training sessions or courses in the last two years.

- Night shift workers had even fewer chances because of their schedules.

3.4. Impact on Patient Safety

- There were many times when sterile techniques were not followed properly.
- Nurse assistants felt worried and scared of making mistakes during difficult surgeries.

4. Discussion

The study shows big problems with how nurse assistants are trained and prepared to work in surgical areas of public hospitals in Pakistan. These problems are not just about individuals but also point to bigger issues in the healthcare system. The lack of formal training in surgery is a major issue.

Most nurse assistants start their jobs without proper lessons on keeping things clean, using tools correctly, or following procedures during operations. They mostly learn by being told what to do or by watching others, which makes their work inconsistent and can lead to mistakes. Similar issues have been seen in other countries with fewer resources, where support staff often don't get enough training before working in high-pressure settings.

The fact that rules and procedures change from one department to another makes things harder. Nurse assistants said they had different rules depending on who the surgeon was, when the shift was, or which part of the hospital they worked in. This causes confusion and makes it hard for them to do their jobs well. It also makes it more likely that mistakes will happen, especially in surgeries where keeping things clean is very important.

Fewer training opportunities were also a big issue, especially for those working at night. Many nurse assistants were upset that there were no classes, workshops, or online lessons that could fit into their busy schedules. This is worrying because surgical techniques and methods change quickly, and everyone no matter their role needs to keep learning. Studies show that ongoing learning is very important in healthcare, and support staff should be included in training programs. The emotional stress of working in a poorly supported environment was also clear.

Nurse assistants shared feelings of worry, fear of making mistakes, and being undervalued in the team. These feelings match what has been found in studies around the world, showing how stressful it is for healthcare workers who aren't well trained. Overall, the study shows how important it is to change policies, invest in training, and make new learning programs for nurse assistants in surgical care.

Fixing these problems isn't just about improving work conditions it's also about making sure patients get safer, better care in Pakistan.

5. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, here are some specific suggestions to help nurse assistants in surgical support roles in Pakistan improve their skills and work better. These ideas are meant to make training more consistent, help nurses become more skilled, and keep patients safer through changes at the hospital, education, and policy levels.

5.1. Creating Standardized Training Modules

There is a big need to create and use training programs that are recognized across the country, especially for nurse assistants who are part of surgical teams.

- These training programs should include:
 - Learning how to keep things clean and prevent infections.
 - Knowing how to handle surgical tools correctly.
 - Following steps for taking care of patients before and after surgery.
 - Knowing what to do in case of emergencies during surgery.

Training should be based on what people can actually do, not just theory, and should follow good practices from around the world, like those from the World Health Organization and local nursing groups.

5.2. Using Simulations and Hands-On Workshops

To help bridge the gap between learning and doing, hospitals and training centres should set up simulation labs.

Nurse assistants can

- Practice clean techniques in fake operating rooms.
- Act out situations where things go wrong during surgery.
- Get feedback from skilled nurses and teachers.
- Using simulations helps nurses learn better, feel more confident, and do procedures more accurately.

5.3. Continuing Education Programs

Hospitals should create programs where nurse assistants can keep learning, even if they work nights.

These programs should include

- Monthly sessions on new surgical techniques and safety rules.
- Online lessons that can be taken anytime and in different languages.
- Certificates to show they completed the training, which can help with career growth.
- These programs should be part of hospital policies and tied to performance reviews and promotions.

5.4. Mentorship and Peer Support

Mentorship can help new nurses learn better and feel supported.

Hospitals should

- Match new nurse assistants with experienced surgical nurses.
- Create groups where nurses can talk about problems and share solutions.
- Use team-based learning and group feedback sessions.
- Having mentors helps nurses learn skills better and builds a safer, more respectful work environment.

5.5. Changing Policies and Rules

The Pakistan Nursing Council and health departments in each province should

- Set a minimum number of training hours needed for nurse assistants to get certified.
- Check that hospitals follow the rules through regular checks and approvals.
- Give money or rewards to hospitals that set up good training programs.

Changing the rules is important to make sure training is set up properly and that all hospitals, whether in cities or rural areas, can provide the same good training.

5.6. Using Digital Tools and Online Learning

With more digital tools available, hospitals should use online platforms that let nurse assistants:

- Learn about surgical rules and patient safety through interactive lessons.
- Access lessons on their phones, which is helpful for those working far from cities or in busy places.
- Track their progress and follow personal learning plans.
- Digital tools can make learning more accessible and allow nurses to keep learning without missing work.

If these suggestions are taken up by hospitals, regulatory bodies, and training organizations, they can greatly improve how prepared and effective nurse assistants are in surgical settings. They also support global efforts to strengthen the healthcare system and improve surgery results in countries with fewer resources.

6. Conclusion

Nurse assistants are very important in surgical teams, but in Pakistan, they often don't get enough training, which affects how well they do their jobs and can put patients at risk.

A study based on interviews from three big hospitals in Sindh shows that most nurse assistants don't have proper surgical training, don't follow clear guidelines, and don't have regular chances to learn new things. These issues lead to mistakes during procedures, stress, and problems with how well surgical care is provided. To fix these problems, hospitals and government officials need to focus on creating clear training programs, using simulation-based learning, and offering flexible ways for nurse assistants to keep improving. Also, having mentorship programs and new rules that set basic skills requirements for nurse assistants are important.

By giving nurse assistants better education and support from their workplaces, their confidence and performance can improve. This will also help make surgical care safer, more efficient, and fairer in Pakistan. As the healthcare system grows, it's important to recognize and support the key roles of support staff to ensure better surgical services for everyone.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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