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## Determinants of professionalism among nurses in a developing country

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### Abstract

**Background:** Professionalism serves as a means for categorizing the work, controlling the workers and is related to the quality of practice. It holds significant value to every professional, from the entry day into the profession until retirement from active practice; and is imperative for winning the trust of clients and society. This study focused on identifying the influence of determinants on professionalism among nurses using the concept of Social cognitive theory: An agentic perceptive by Bandura.

**Methods:** In this cross-sectional study, data was collected from 749 registered nurses employed across different work settings and selected using proportionate random sampling method. Data was gathered using the Nurse Professionalism Scale, Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, Practice Environment Scale and Porter Nursing Image Scale.

**Results:** Data analysed using Structural Equation Modeling in AMOS version 22 indicate that emotional intelligence (Standard regression weights = 0.339;  $P < 0.001$ ), nurse practice environment (Standard regression weights = 0.227;  $P < 0.001$ ) and nurses' perceived image of a nurse (Standard regression weights = 0.089;  $P < 0.10$ ) has significant positive influence on professionalism among nurses.

**Conclusion:** The study shows a significant influence of emotional intelligence, followed by influence of nurse practice environment and nurses' perceived image of a nurse on professionalism among nurses thus supporting the concept that personal and environmental determinants influence behaviour according to social cognitive theory. In the light of the findings managerial implications and directions for future research have been discussed.

**Keywords:** professionalism, social cognitive theory, perceived image of a nurse, nurse practice environment, emotional intelligence.

## **Introduction**

In the health care industry, the quality of client care is greatly dependent on behaviour of nurses amidst the explosion of medical knowledge, amplified accountability, cost containment, rising demands and establishment of quality improvement research. Code of Professional Conduct and Code of Ethics for nurses serve as leading documents that outline the professional standards for these inevitable health care professionals.<sup>1</sup> An effort to promote professionalism emphasizes the attainment of professional qualities, beyond the requisite knowledge and clinical skills as the beneficiaries of professional standards are not just patients, but all healthcare professionals and the whole society.<sup>2</sup> Also, the behavioural contribution is crucial for the achievements in and for the development of the profession.<sup>3</sup>

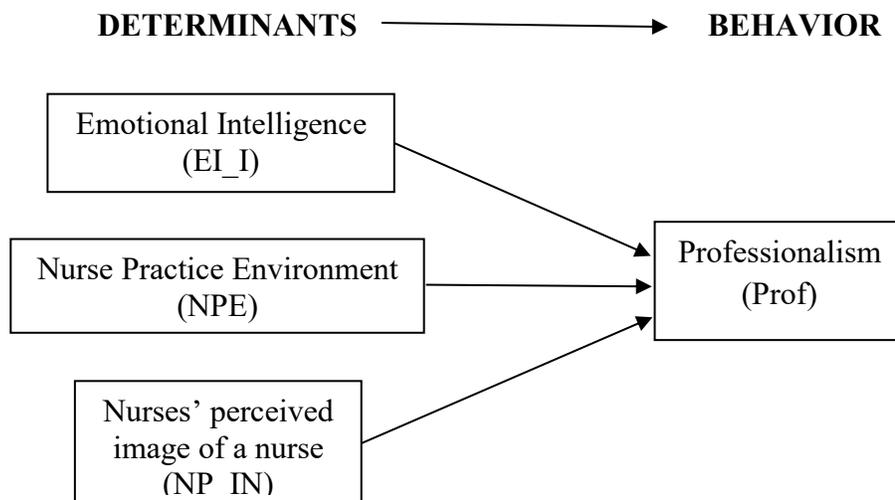
Despite their central role, nurses remain unrecognized in the health care delivery system that poses massive concern regarding the development and career growth of this workforce. Nurses' professionalism centres around the expansion and extension of their roles in the swiftly changing and diverse practice environment.<sup>4</sup> The demand for competent, safe, cost effective and quality

services; and rapid societal advancements predispose them to encounter ethical and moral challenges.<sup>5</sup>

The available literature in the domain of nursing professionalism describes the level of professionalism among nurses across nations and indicates the need to further explore the influence of factors on nurses' professionalism such as workplace, personal background and professional interest and public view of the profession,<sup>6</sup> professional practice or work environment that provides power and opportunities in the form of support, resources, and information,<sup>7,8</sup> multiple internal and external factors,<sup>9</sup> extrinsic professional factors,<sup>10</sup> levels of experience in variety of clinical settings<sup>9</sup> and working conditions.<sup>4</sup> This research aims to explore the influence of personal and environmental determinants on professionalism among nurses.

### *Theoretical base and hypotheses in the study*

Social cognitive theory by Bandura<sup>11</sup> postulates that an individual's behaviour is the outcome of the dynamic interaction between personal, environmental and behavioural determinants. This study considers emotional intelligence (EI) as personal determinant, nurse practice environment (NPE) as physical environmental determinant, nurses' perceived image of a nurse (NP-IN) as social environmental determinant and professionalism (Prof) among nurses as behavioural construct as shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1. Conceptual model in the study**

This study aims at testing the following hypotheses.

H1: Emotional intelligence of nurses significantly influences professionalism among nurses. H2: Nurse practice environment significantly influences professionalism among nurses.

H3: Nurses' perceived image of a nurse significantly influences professionalism among nurses.

## **Methods**

### ***Study Design and setting***

This cross-sectional or one-shot study considered all the registered nurses working for more than six months in health care delivery settings within the state of Goa as the target population. Nurses across sectors; private, government and autonomous and levels of health care were selected using proportionate random sampling technique to obtain a comprehensive understanding of professionalism and the factors affecting their behaviour.

### ***Tools***

The following tools were identified for purpose of data collection through literature review

- Nurse Professionalism Scale<sup>12</sup> to measure professionalism among registered nurses.
- Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale<sup>13</sup> adapted to measure emotional intelligence.
- Practice Environment Scale - Nursing Work Index (PES-NWI):<sup>14</sup> adapted to measure nurse practice environment.
- Porter Nursing Image Scale<sup>15</sup> adapted to measure perceived public image.

Permission from the original authors was sought for adaptation and use of tools. Further, the tools were validated by fifteen experts. Score of one and two was considered as zero and three and four were considered as one for calculating item, dimension and scale content validity indices. Changes suggested by experts were incorporated. The calculated content validity indices for all scales were above 0.86.

Reliability for internal consistency calculated using Cronbach alpha were above 0.7 as shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Reliability of tools****n=749**

No.	Scale	No. of items	Alpha Value
1	Nurse Professionalism Scale (NPS)	38	0.872
2	Nurses' perceived image of a nurse (NP-IN)	14	0.835
3	Nurse Practice Environment (NPE)	26	0.928
4	Emotional Intelligence (EI)	16	0.812

***Ethical considerations***

Ethical approval was sought from the institutional ethical committees and written permission was obtained from management of all public, private and autonomous hospital administrative heads. Informed consent was sought from every respondent.

***Data collection and processing***

The tools were personally administered after clear and complete explanation regarding filling of data to 1057 registered nurse participants. To avoid researcher presence bias or compulsion for favourable responses and considering the demanding work schedule, the participants were given a period of one week to complete their responses. While receiving back each datasheet was checked for completeness. Participants who provided incomplete data and or had misplaced the datasheets were requested to complete the same within another week. A total of 909 self reported responses sheets were received out of which 78 were found to be incomplete. The data collection period was from April 2018 to October 2018.

***Statistical methods***

Following entry of 831 self reports into SPSS version 25, the data were checked for missing responses and outliers and 749 response sheets were used for analysis using Structural Equation Modeling and Chi square test for association. The sample characteristic of registered nurses is presented in table 2.

**Table 2. Sample characteristics****n=749**

No.	Demographic Variable	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	Class1 (20-30 years)	375	50

		Class1 (30-40 years)	217	29
		Class1 (40-50 years)	122	16.3
		Class1 (50-60 years)	35	4.7
2	Gender	Male	53	7.1
		Female	696	92.9
3	Marital Status	Married	458	61.1
		Single	291	38.9
4	Religion	Christian	298	39.8
		Hindu	441	58.9
		Muslim	10	1.3
5	Qualification	GNM	422	56.3
		B.Sc. Nursing	319	42.6
		M.Sc. Nursing	8	1.1
6	Area of work	Medicine (M)	150	20
		Surgery (S)	163	21.8
		Obst – Gynec (OG)	75	10
		Pediatrics (Ped)	89	11.9
		Emergency (E)	164	21.9
		Psychiatry (Psy)	25	3.3
		Community (Com)	83	11.1
7	Level	Tertiary	514	68.6
		Secondary	185	24.7
		Primary	50	6.7
8	Employment	Permanent	486	64.9
		Temporary	263	35.1
9	Experience	Novice	238	31.8
		Competent	262	35
		Expert	249	33.2

10	Sector	Private	151	20.2
		Government	586	78.2
		Autonomous	12	1.6

## Results and discussion

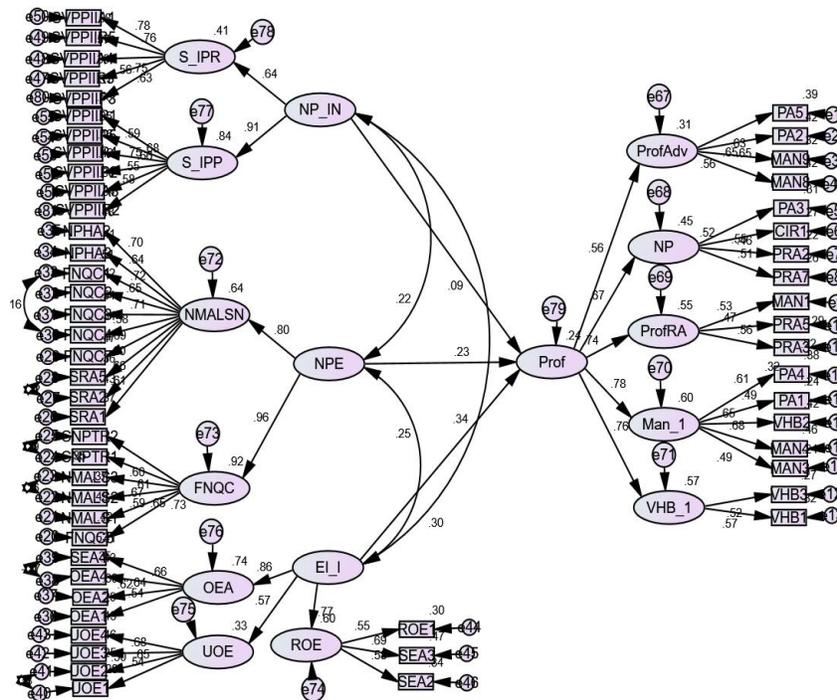


Figure 2. Structural model showing influence of determinants (NP-IN, NPE and EI) on Professionalism

Table 3. Influence of determinants (NP-IN, NPE and EI) on Professionalism: Regression output n=749

Hypothesized Relationship	Standardised Reg. Weights	Estimate	SE	CR	P	Significance
H1 Prof <--- EI	.339	.509	.105	4.829	***	Significant
H2 Prof <--- NPE	.227	.177	.043	4.075	***	Significant
H3 Prof <--- NP_IN	.089	.117	.071	1.641	*	Significant

Note: \* represents 10%, \*\* represent 5% and \*\*\* represent 1% level of significance.

EI: Emotional intelligence; NPE: Nurse practice environment; NP-IN: Nurses' perceived image of a nurse

Figure 1 and table 3 show that emotional intelligence, nurse practice environment and nurses' perceived image of a nurse has significant positive influence on professionalism among nurses and all three hypotheses are supported. The findings indicate that with a unit increase in the emotional intelligence, nurses' professionalism will improve by 0.509 at  $p < 0.001$ . A unit increase in nurse practice environment will result in rise in level of nurses' professionalism by 0.177 at  $p < 0.001$ , and as nurses' perceived image of a nurse goes up by one unit, their professionalism will increase by 0.117 at  $P < 0.10$ . This shows that all three determinants significantly influence nurses' behaviour, thus supporting the Social Cognitive theory.

**Table 4. Fit indices for the structural model indicating relationship between determinants (NP-IN, NPE and EI) and professionalism. n=749**

C/df	RMR	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	P CLOSE
1.890	.052	.880	.869	.887	.893	.035	1.000

C/df=Chi Square/degrees of freedom; RMR=Root Mean Square Residual; GFI=Goodness of fit index;

AGFI=Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index TLI=Tucker Lewis Index; CFI=Comparative Fit Index;

RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; P CLOSE= Closeness of Fit.

The model fit indices shown in the table 4 are found to be within acceptable range and hence the model is used to explain the hypothesized relationship which is in agreement with the explanation of social cognitive theory by Bandura<sup>11</sup>.

The primary focus of this study was to identify the influence of the determinants on professionalism among nurses. Social cognitive theory which focuses on the dynamic relationship between the personal, environmental and behavioural determinants resulting in behavioural outcomes served as the ground for the overall endeavour in this research. Nurses' emotional intelligence is considered as personal determinant, nurse practice environment as physical environmental determinant, nurses' perceived image of a nurse as a social environmental determinant and professionalism among nurses as behavioural outcome.

The researcher was not able to identify any study which has evaluated the influence of emotional intelligence on professionalism among nurses. Emotional intelligence is identified as a chief predictor of organizational outcomes<sup>16,17</sup> Kaur, Sambasivan. & Kumar<sup>18</sup> identified impact of EI on nurses' caring behavior and the respectful deference towards others. Deshpande & Joseph<sup>19</sup>

revealed significant impact of emotional intelligence of peers on the ethical behaviour of nurses. Carmeli<sup>20</sup> identified that emotional intelligence boosts altruistic behaviour and work outcomes and moderates the relation between work-family conflicts among hospital nurses.

A limited number of studies explored the influence of nurse practice environment on professionalism. Solomon<sup>5</sup> and Manojlovich & Ketefian<sup>21</sup> identified organizational culture as a predictor of professionalism in nursing. Fantahun et. al<sup>22</sup> through focus group discussion, identified workload and lack of support as some among the key factors affecting professionalism. Aron<sup>23</sup> reported staff scheduling and work-load as significant factors affecting delivery of quality nursing care.

There is limited research on the influence of perceived public image on professionalism among nurses. Takase, Maude, & Manias<sup>24</sup> found that nurse leaders' self-image positively influences their organizational job performance. Mostafa<sup>25</sup> reported correlation between students' and nurses' perception of self-image and task performance. Fantahun et al.,<sup>22</sup> in a focus group discussion, reported that nurses' account society's view of nursing profession as one among the key factors affecting professionalism. Solomon, Beker, & Belachew<sup>5</sup> found self image as one among the predictors of level of professionalism. Kim & Kim<sup>26</sup> identified positive correlation between students' perceived image of a nurse and professionalism.

Emotional intelligence (0.339,  $P < 0.001$ ), nurse practice environment (0.227,  $P < 0.001$ ) and nurses' perceived image of a nurse (.089,  $P < 0.10$ ) have significant positive influence on professionalism among registered nurses in this study.

The findings indicated by the standardised regression weights explain that nurses' professionalism is greatly influenced by their emotional intelligence followed by the nurse practice environment, and their perceived image of a nurse. These findings can be substantiated with explanation that emotional intelligence is an important talent, especially in nursing profession which necessitates the ability to appraise, regulate and manage own and others' emotions and stressors in day to day functioning and dealing with human lives. Emotional intelligent nurses are better able to exploit their critical thought processes, manage spontaneous situation based decision making and deal with stressful situations shrewdly. Hence this critical aptitude among nurses greatly influences their professionalism.

To be able to function efficiently, supply of adequate resources, supervisors' and administrative support, staffing, collegial team relations and foundations for quality nursing practice are vital, even for emotionally intelligent professionals. This explains the influence of nurse practice environment on professionalism among nurses.

Nurses need to carry out their professional responsibilities in any given environment, situation and patients' health condition. However their perception of themselves as nurses as well as other nurses can be a significant facilitator or barrier in their day to day practice. This study finding has supported that favourable perceptions, adequate level of nurse practice environment and higher levels of emotional intelligence facilitate greater professional behaviour among nurses.

## **Conclusion**

Nursing profession is threatened by several factors. For improvement of the status of nurses and the profession, nurses need to understand and fulfil the commitments required to uphold professionalism in their practice. This research used the theoretical base of social cognitive theory to understand the influence of personal and environmental determinants on professionalism among nurses. Emotional intelligence; the personal determinant, nurse practice environment; the physical environmental determinant and nurses' perceived image of a nurse; the social environmental determinant are identified as significantly influencing nurses' professionalism behaviour. It may be interesting to track the influence of determinants on professionalism as well as the changes in influence and the level of professionalism among nurses in the different phases of career.

Practical implications which can be of interest to the nurse educators, nurse clinicians, nurse managers as well as hospital administrators can be drawn from the findings of this study. This study provides suggestions for the managers to implement policies that will promote emotional health and favourable practice environment these essential professionals which will result in improvement of the image of nurses as well as the profession.

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