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WORK ENVIRONMENT, JOB FULFILLMENT, AND NURSE RETENTION: A REVIEW OF THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nurse retention is a major healthcare workforce issue because staff instability can disrupt continuity of care, increase recruitment and training costs, and place additional pressure on remaining nurses. Retaining nurses is therefore essential for maintaining patient safety, organizational efficiency, and sustainable healthcare service delivery.

Aim: This review aimed to examine how work environment and job fulfillment influence nurse retention and to explore how work-life balance may mediate these relationships.

Methods: An integrative review approach was used to synthesize evidence related to work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and nurse retention in hospital and healthcare settings. This approach allowed the inclusion of empirical, theoretical, and review-based evidence addressing organizational, professional, and personal factors associated with nurse retention and staff stability.

Results / Main Discussion Points: The reviewed literature indicates that work environment is a key organizational determinant of nurse retention, particularly through staffing adequacy, workload distribution, leadership support, resource availability, workplace safety, communication, and professional relationships. Job fulfillment also contributes to retention by strengthening nurses' sense of meaningful work, recognition, professional identity, career development, satisfaction, and organizational loyalty. Work-life balance emerged as an important factor linking workplace conditions and job-related fulfillment with nurses' intention to remain. Supportive work environments and fulfilling professional experiences may improve nurses' ability to manage work demands alongside personal and family responsibilities, thereby reducing stress, burnout, work-family conflict, and turnover intention. However, work-life balance appears to function as a partial mediating mechanism because work environment and job fulfillment may also directly influence retention.

Conclusion: Nurse retention is influenced by the interaction of organizational conditions, job-related fulfillment, and nurses' ability to maintain work-life balance. Hospital administrators and policymakers should integrate workplace improvement, job fulfillment strategies, and work-life balance policies into comprehensive retention frameworks to strengthen nursing workforce stability and sustain high-quality healthcare services.

Keywords: Work environment; Job fulfillment; Work-life balance; Nurse retention; Staff stability; Nurses

1 INTRODUCTION

Nurse retention is a major priority for healthcare systems because stable nursing workforces support continuity of care, patient safety, service efficiency, and institutional sustainability (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Staff instability among nurses can disrupt patient care, increase recruitment and training costs, and place additional workload on remaining staff members (Alharbi et al., 2019). Nursing shortages and turnover are especially important in hospital settings because nurses provide continuous bedside care and represent a central component of healthcare service delivery (Flaubert et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the factors that strengthen nurses' intention to remain in their organizations is essential for improving healthcare quality and workforce planning (Gurková et al., 2021).

Nurse turnover is a global workforce challenge, but it has particular relevance in Saudi Arabia because the healthcare system continues to expand while facing challenges related to nurse retention and workforce sustainability (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Hospitals in Saudi Arabia rely heavily on a stable nursing workforce to meet increasing healthcare demands, yet turnover intention remains a persistent concern in different healthcare settings (Alshareef et al., 2020). Studies conducted in Saudi Arabia have shown that nurses' intention to leave may be influenced by workload, management support, salary, working conditions, professional development opportunities, and organizational factors (Alharbi et al., 2019). The problem is also relevant to Riyadh hospitals because Riyadh is a major healthcare center in Saudi Arabia and requires effective strategies to maintain staff stability among nurses (Mariano et al., 2023).

The work environment is one of the most important organizational determinants of nurse retention because it shapes nurses' daily experiences, performance, psychological well-being, and professional commitment (Gurková et al., 2021). A supportive work environment includes adequate staffing, accessible resources, effective leadership, occupational safety, clear communication, and positive professional relationships (Naji et al., 2022). Poor work environments may increase stress, burnout, dissatisfaction, and turnover intention among nurses, particularly when workload is high and administrative support is limited (Alshareef et al., 2020). Evidence from nursing and healthcare research indicates that improving workplace conditions can strengthen job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to remain in the workplace (Brokmeier et al., 2022).

Job fulfillment is another important factor in nurse retention because nurses who find their work meaningful, rewarding, and professionally satisfying are more likely to remain committed to their organizations (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). Job fulfillment is influenced by recognition, professional growth, autonomy, salary fairness, career advancement, supervisor support, and the perceived value of nursing work (Alananzeh et al., 2023). When nurses experience higher fulfillment in their work, they are more likely to demonstrate stronger organizational loyalty and lower intention to leave (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Conversely, poor job fulfillment may weaken nurses' attachment to their workplace and increase their likelihood of seeking alternative employment (Alharbi et al., 2019).

Work-life balance may play a mediating role in the relationship between workplace factors and nurse retention because it connects organizational conditions with nurses' personal well-being and intention to remain in their jobs (Gurková et al., 2021). Nurses frequently experience long working hours, shift work, emotional demands, and family responsibilities, which can make it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life (Alharbi et al., 2019). A supportive work environment may improve work-life balance by reducing unnecessary workload pressures, improving scheduling practices, and increasing managerial support (Alshareef et al., 2020). Job fulfillment may also improve work-life balance by increasing nurses' psychological adjustment, sense of meaning, and satisfaction with their professional roles (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022).

Although previous studies have examined work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and nurse retention separately, fewer reviews have integrated these four constructs into one conceptual discussion (Gurková et al., 2021). Existing evidence suggests that work environment and job fulfillment are important predictors of retention, but the pathway through which work-life balance may explain or strengthen these relationships remains less clearly synthesized (Alshareef et al., 2020). This gap is important because hospital administrators need integrated evidence that explains not only whether nurses remain in their jobs, but also how workplace and job-related factors interact with personal-life balance to influence retention (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Therefore, this review aims to examine the relationship between work environment, job fulfillment, and nurse retention, with specific focus on the mediating role of work-life balance (Gurková et al., 2021).

2 METHODS

2.1 Review Design

This paper was designed as an integrative review to synthesize evidence on the relationships among work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and nurse retention in healthcare settings (Alsadaan et al., 2021). An integrative review approach was considered appropriate because the topic includes organizational, psychological, professional, and workforce-related factors that have been examined using quantitative, qualitative, theoretical, and review-based methods (Flaubert et al., 2021). This approach allowed the review to include studies addressing nurse retention, staff stability, turnover intention, job satisfaction, job fulfillment, work environment, and work-life balance across different healthcare contexts (Gurková et al., 2021). The review was structured to identify how work environment and job fulfillment influence nurse retention and how work-life balance may function as a mediating factor within these relationships (Alshareef et al., 2020).

2.2 Search Strategy

A structured literature search was planned to identify relevant peer-reviewed studies addressing work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and nurse retention among nurses and healthcare workers (Gurková et al., 2021). The databases proposed for the search included PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, CINAHL, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar because these databases cover nursing, healthcare management, organizational behavior, and workforce research (Flaubert et al., 2021). The search focused on studies conducted in hospital and healthcare settings because nurse retention is strongly influenced by organizational conditions, workload, leadership, and professional support within clinical environments (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Additional relevant articles were identified through reference-list screening of included studies to ensure that important sources related to nurse turnover, retention, and work-life balance were not missed (Alshareef et al., 2020).

2.3 Search Terms

The search strategy used combinations of keywords and Boolean operators related to the main concepts of the review (Gurková et al., 2021). The first group of search terms included “work environment” OR “practice environment” to identify studies examining workplace conditions, organizational support, workload, leadership, safety, and professional relationships among nurses (Naji et al., 2022). The second group included “job fulfillment” OR “job satisfaction” to identify studies examining nurses’ satisfaction, professional meaning, recognition, achievement, and work-related fulfillment (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). The third group included “work-life balance” OR “work life balance” to identify studies focusing on nurses’ ability to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family life (Alharbi et al., 2019). The fourth group included “nurse retention” OR “staff stability” OR “turnover intention” to identify studies addressing nurses’ intention to remain, actual or perceived stability, and intention to leave (Alshareef et al., 2020). The final group included “nurses” OR “nursing workforce” to ensure that the search remained focused on nursing and healthcare workforce populations (Flaubert et al., 2021).

2.4 Inclusion Criteria

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they focused on nurses, nursing staff, or healthcare workers in hospital or healthcare settings (Flaubert et al., 2021). Studies were included if they examined at least one of the main review variables, including work environment, practice environment, job fulfillment, job satisfaction, work-life balance, nurse retention, staff stability, turnover intention, or intention to leave (Gurková et al., 2021). Studies were also included if they addressed relationships among these variables or provided theoretical, empirical, or contextual evidence relevant to nurse retention and workforce stability (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Eligible studies had to be published in English, available as full-text articles, peer-reviewed, and relevant to healthcare or hospital practice settings (Alshareef et al., 2020). Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, theoretical, and review studies were considered eligible because the integrative review design aimed to synthesize broad evidence across different study designs (Flaubert et al., 2021).

2.5 Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on non-healthcare workers or occupational groups outside nursing and healthcare settings (Flaubert et al., 2021). Studies were also excluded if they did not address any of the main review variables, including work environment, job fulfillment, job satisfaction, work-life balance, retention, staff stability, or turnover intention (Gurková et al., 2021). Editorials, commentaries, letters, and opinion papers were excluded from the main synthesis unless they provided important contextual background for understanding nursing workforce issues (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Studies were excluded if the full text was not accessible, because full-text assessment was required to extract information on study design, sample, variables, and key findings (Alshareef et al., 2020). Non-English studies were excluded to maintain consistency in screening, extraction, and interpretation of the reviewed evidence (Flaubert et al., 2021).

2.6 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data were extracted using a structured extraction approach that included author name, year of publication, country, study design, sample characteristics, healthcare setting, main variables, measurement approach, and key findings (Gurková et al., 2021). For studies examining work environment, extracted data focused on workplace conditions, staffing, workload, leadership, administrative support, resources, safety, and professional relationships (Naji et al., 2022). For studies examining job fulfillment or job satisfaction, extracted data focused on professional meaning, recognition, autonomy, career development, salary, benefits, and satisfaction with work roles (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). For studies examining work-life balance, extracted data focused on working hours, shift work, workload, family responsibilities, psychological well-being, and balance between professional and personal life (Alharbi et al., 2019). For studies examining nurse retention, extracted data focused on staff stability, intention to remain, intention to leave, turnover intention, and factors associated with workforce sustainability (Alshareef et al., 2020). The extracted findings were synthesized thematically according to the main review domains: work environment and nurse retention, job fulfillment and nurse retention, work-life balance and nurse retention, and the mediating role of work-life balance between organizational/job-related factors and retention outcomes (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

3 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Work Environment

Work environment refers to the physical, organizational, psychological, and social conditions in which nurses perform their professional duties within healthcare institutions (Naji et al., 2022). In nursing practice, the work environment includes staffing adequacy, workload, availability of resources, administrative support, occupational safety, communication patterns, and professional relationships among healthcare workers (Alshareef et al., 2020). A supportive work environment enables nurses to perform their roles effectively, maintain professional confidence, and provide safe and high-quality patient care (Gurková et al., 2021). Conversely, an unfavorable work environment characterized by inadequate resources, weak managerial support, high workload, and poor communication may increase stress, burnout, dissatisfaction, and turnover intention among nurses (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Therefore, work environment is a central organizational factor in understanding nurse retention and staff stability in hospital settings (Flaubert et al., 2021).

3.2 Job Fulfillment

Job fulfillment refers to nurses' positive professional evaluation of their work and the extent to which their job provides meaning, achievement, recognition, autonomy, satisfaction, and opportunities for career development (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). In healthcare settings, job fulfillment is influenced by both intrinsic factors, such as meaningful patient care, professional identity, achievement, and autonomy, and extrinsic factors, such as salary, benefits, recognition, supervisor support, and career advancement (Alananzeh et al., 2023). Nurses who experience high job fulfillment are more likely to feel committed to their organizations and less likely to consider leaving their jobs (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Job fulfillment also strengthens professional motivation because nurses who value their work and feel appreciated are more likely to engage positively with their clinical responsibilities (Gurková et al., 2021). Thus, job fulfillment is an important job-related predictor of nurse retention and staff stability (Alharbi et al., 2019).

3.3 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to nurses' ability to manage their professional responsibilities while maintaining adequate time, energy, and psychological capacity for personal, family, and social life (Alharbi et al., 2019). In nursing, work-life balance is particularly important because nurses often experience shift work, long working hours, emotional demands, workload pressure, and unpredictable clinical responsibilities (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Poor work-life balance may increase psychological strain, fatigue, burnout, absenteeism, dissatisfaction, and intention to leave among nurses (Gurková et al., 2021). A supportive work environment may improve work-life balance by promoting fair scheduling, adequate staffing, managerial support, and reasonable workload distribution (Alshareef et al., 2020). Work-life balance may also strengthen retention by helping nurses maintain well-being and reducing conflict between professional and personal responsibilities (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022).

3.4 Nurse Retention / Staff Stability

Nurse retention, also referred to as staff stability, describes nurses' intention and ability to remain in their current organization or profession over time (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Staff stability is reflected in nurses' intention to stay, reduced intention to leave, continued employment, organizational commitment, and perceived job security (Alshareef et al., 2020). Stable nursing workforces are essential for continuity of care, patient safety, team performance, organizational efficiency, and the sustainability of healthcare services (Flaubert et al., 2021). Nurse retention is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including work environment, job fulfillment, workload, leadership support,

professional development, recognition, compensation, and work-life balance (Alharbi et al., 2019). Therefore, nurse retention should be understood as a multidimensional outcome shaped by organizational conditions, job-related experiences, and nurses' ability to balance work and personal life (Gurková et al., 2021).

4 WORK ENVIRONMENT AND NURSE RETENTION

The work environment is a major determinant of nurse retention because it shapes nurses' daily workload, professional relationships, psychological well-being, and intention to remain in their current organization (Gurková et al., 2021). In hospital settings, a positive work environment supports nurses through adequate staffing, effective leadership, sufficient resources, safe working conditions, and collaborative communication among healthcare professionals (Naji et al., 2022). When these workplace conditions are weak, nurses may experience stress, dissatisfaction, burnout, and increased intention to leave their jobs (Alshareef et al., 2020). Therefore, improving the work environment is a central strategy for strengthening nurse retention and staff stability in healthcare organizations (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

4.1 Staffing and Workload

Staffing adequacy is one of the most important components of the nursing work environment because insufficient staffing increases workload, time pressure, emotional strain, and dissatisfaction among nurses (Alharbi et al., 2019). High workload may reduce nurses' ability to deliver safe and comprehensive care, which can increase occupational stress and weaken professional commitment (Flaubert et al., 2021). In Saudi healthcare settings, workload and staffing-related challenges have been reported as important factors influencing nurses' intention to leave their current positions (Alshareef et al., 2020). When nurses are required to manage excessive patient-care responsibilities with limited staff support, they may become more vulnerable to burnout and turnover intention (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Conversely, adequate staffing and fair workload distribution may improve nurses' sense of control, reduce stress, and strengthen their willingness to remain in the organization (Gurková et al., 2021).

4.2 Leadership and Administrative Support

Leadership and administrative support are essential aspects of the work environment because nurse managers influence motivation, communication, fairness, recognition, and staff commitment (Alshareef et al., 2020). Supportive leadership can reduce turnover intention by helping nurses feel valued, respected, and professionally supported in their clinical roles (Gurková et al., 2021). Administrative support is also important because nurses depend on hospital management for staffing decisions, resource allocation, conflict resolution, professional development, and policy implementation (Naji et al., 2022). In Saudi Arabia, social support from immediate supervisors has been identified as an important factor that may reduce nurses' turnover and improve retention (Alshareef et al., 2020). Therefore, leadership practices that promote fairness, participation, recognition, and open communication may strengthen organizational commitment and improve nurse retention (Alananzeh et al., 2023).

4.3 Resources and Safety

Adequate resources and safe working conditions are important for nurse retention because they influence nurses' ability to perform their duties effectively and confidently (Naji et al., 2022). Nurses who work in environments with sufficient equipment, supplies, staffing support, and safe practice conditions are more likely to perceive their workplace as supportive and stable (Flaubert et al., 2021). In contrast, resource shortages may create frustration, increase workload pressure, reduce care quality, and contribute to dissatisfaction among nurses (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Workplace safety is also important because nurses who feel physically and psychologically safe are more likely to remain committed to their organization (Gurková et al., 2021). Thus, hospitals that invest in adequate resources, occupational safety, and supportive infrastructure may improve staff stability and reduce nurses' intention to leave (Alharbi et al., 2019).

4.4 Professional Relationships and Communication

Professional relationships and communication are key social dimensions of the work environment that influence nurse retention and workplace stability (Naji et al., 2022). Effective teamwork among nurses, physicians, managers, and other healthcare professionals can improve collaboration, reduce conflict, and increase nurses' sense of belonging within the organization (Alsufyani et al., 2021). Poor communication and weak collaboration may increase workplace tension, reduce job satisfaction, and contribute to turnover intention among nurses (Alshareef et al., 2020). Nurse–physician collaboration is particularly important in hospital settings because safe patient care requires coordinated decision-making, mutual respect, and clear communication between healthcare professionals (Flaubert et al., 2021). Therefore, strengthening teamwork, interdisciplinary communication, and respectful professional relationships may improve nurses' work experiences and enhance retention in hospital settings (Gurková et al., 2021).

5 JOB FULFILLMENT AND NURSE RETENTION

Job fulfillment is an important determinant of nurse retention because nurses who experience satisfaction, meaning, and professional value in their work are more likely to remain committed to their organizations (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). In healthcare settings, job fulfillment reflects nurses' positive evaluation of their professional role, including meaningful work, recognition, autonomy, professional development, fair rewards, and supportive relationships with managers and colleagues (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). When nurses feel fulfilled in their jobs, they are more likely to demonstrate organizational loyalty, stronger engagement, and lower intention to leave (Alananzeh et al., 2023). Conversely, low job fulfillment may increase dissatisfaction, weaken organizational attachment, and contribute to turnover intention among nurses (Alharbi et al., 2019). Therefore, job fulfillment should be considered a central job-related factor in strategies aimed at improving nurse retention and staff stability (Gurková et al., 2021).

5.1 Meaningful Work and Professional Identity

Meaningful work is a key component of job fulfillment because nurses are more likely to remain in their profession when they perceive their work as valuable, purposeful, and connected to patient care outcomes (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). Nursing is a profession strongly shaped by service, responsibility, and patient-centered care, and these elements can strengthen nurses' professional identity and commitment to their roles (Flaubert et al., 2021). When nurses feel that their work contributes to patient safety, recovery, and quality of care, they may develop a stronger sense of achievement and belonging within the healthcare organization (Gurková et al., 2021). Professional identity also supports retention because nurses who value their role are more likely to tolerate work pressures and remain committed to their organization (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Therefore, hospitals should strengthen nurses' sense of meaning by promoting role clarity, clinical autonomy, ethical practice, and recognition of nurses' contribution to patient care (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

5.2 Recognition and Appreciation

Recognition and appreciation are important contributors to job fulfillment because they help nurses feel valued by their managers, colleagues, and organizations (Alananzeh et al., 2023). Managerial recognition may strengthen nurses' motivation and organizational loyalty by confirming that their work is noticed, respected, and important to hospital performance (Alshareef et al., 2020). Appreciation from colleagues can also improve workplace morale because supportive peer relationships contribute to a positive work climate and stronger professional belonging (Naji et al., 2022). In contrast, lack of recognition may reduce job satisfaction, increase emotional exhaustion, and weaken nurses' intention to remain in their current workplace (Gurková et al., 2021). Therefore, retention strategies should include formal and informal recognition systems that acknowledge nurses' clinical effort, professional commitment, and contribution to patient care quality (Flaubert et al., 2021).

5.3 Career Development and Advancement

Career development and advancement opportunities are important for nurse retention because they provide nurses with a sense of growth, progress, and future stability within their organizations (Alharbi et al., 2019). Training, continuing education, professional-development programs, and promotion pathways can improve job fulfillment by helping nurses develop competence and confidence in their clinical roles (Flaubert et al., 2021). When hospitals provide opportunities for professional growth, nurses may perceive the organization as supportive of their long-term career goals, which can strengthen organizational commitment and reduce intention to leave (Alshareef et al., 2020). Limited advancement opportunities, in contrast, may lead to frustration, stagnation, and reduced motivation among nurses (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Therefore, structured career-development systems should be integrated into nurse-retention strategies to enhance fulfillment, professional identity, and long-term staff stability (Gurková et al., 2021).

5.4 Rewards, Salary, and Benefits

Rewards, salary, and benefits are important extrinsic elements of job fulfillment, although they should be understood as part of a broader retention framework rather than the only determinants of nurse stability (Alananzeh et al., 2023). Fair compensation can influence nurses' perceptions of organizational justice and may strengthen their satisfaction with the employment relationship (Alharbi et al., 2019). Benefits such as leave policies, healthcare coverage, incentives, and professional-development support may also contribute to nurses' sense of security and organizational commitment (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). However, compensation alone may not be sufficient to retain nurses if the work environment is poor, workload is excessive, or recognition and professional growth are limited (Alshareef et al., 2020). Therefore, hospitals should combine fair rewards with supportive leadership, safe working conditions, career development, and recognition practices to enhance job fulfillment and nurse retention (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

6 WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND NURSE RETENTION

Work-life balance is a central factor in nurse retention because it links nurses' working conditions with their personal well-being, family responsibilities, psychological health, and intention to remain in their jobs (Gurková et al., 2021). In hospital settings, nurses often experience demanding schedules, emotional pressure, high workload, and continuous patient-care responsibilities, all of which may affect their ability to maintain balance between professional and personal life (Alsadaan et al., 2021). When nurses are unable to achieve work-life balance, they may experience stress, dissatisfaction, burnout, absenteeism, and increased turnover intention (Alharbi et al., 2019). Therefore, work-life balance should be viewed not only as an individual concern but also as an organizational and workforce-retention issue (Flaubert et al., 2021).

6.1 Shift Work and Long Working Hours

Shift work and long working hours are major challenges for nurses because hospital care requires continuous service delivery across day, evening, night, weekend, and holiday shifts (Flaubert et al., 2021). Irregular schedules may disrupt sleep, family routines, social participation, and recovery time, which can reduce nurses' ability to maintain personal well-being outside work (Alharbi et al., 2019). Long shifts may also increase fatigue and reduce nurses' capacity to manage family and social responsibilities effectively (Alsadaan et al., 2021). In Saudi hospital settings, workload, staffing patterns, and work schedules have been identified as factors that may influence nurses' intention to leave or remain in their organizations (Alshareef et al., 2020). Therefore, hospitals that aim to strengthen nurse retention should pay careful attention to shift design, workload distribution, and the cumulative effects of long working hours on nurses' personal lives (Gurková et al., 2021).

6.2 Burnout and Psychological Strain

Poor work-life balance contributes to burnout and psychological strain because nurses may have insufficient time and emotional capacity to recover from demanding clinical work (Gurková et al., 2021). Burnout may develop when nurses are repeatedly exposed to high workload, emotional demands, insufficient rest, and limited organizational support (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Psychological strain can weaken job satisfaction and professional commitment, which may increase nurses' intention to leave their current workplace (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). In nursing, burnout and stress are particularly important because they affect both workforce stability and quality of care (Flaubert et al., 2021). Therefore, protecting nurses' work-life balance may reduce burnout, improve well-being, and strengthen retention in hospital settings (Alshareef et al., 2020).

6.3 Family and Social Responsibilities

Family and social responsibilities are important dimensions of work-life balance because nurses often need to coordinate professional duties with household, caregiving, parenting, and social obligations (Alharbi et al., 2019). This issue is particularly relevant in Middle Eastern and Saudi contexts, where family commitments and social expectations may strongly shape employees' experiences of work-life balance (Alsadaan et al., 2021). When work schedules conflict with family responsibilities, nurses may experience work-family conflict, dissatisfaction, and reduced intention to remain in their current position (Gurková et al., 2021). Supportive workplace policies may help nurses manage family and social responsibilities by offering fair scheduling, reasonable workload, leave flexibility, and managerial understanding (Alshareef et al., 2020). Therefore, retention strategies in Saudi hospitals should consider the cultural and family context of nurses rather than treating work-life balance as a purely individual issue (Flaubert et al., 2021).

6.4 Work-Life Balance as a Retention Strategy

Work-life balance can function as a practical retention strategy when hospitals design policies that reduce work-family conflict and support nurses' well-being (Gurková et al., 2021). Flexible scheduling, adequate rest periods, fair shift rotation, reasonable workload distribution, and staffing adequacy may improve nurses' ability to maintain personal and professional balance (Alshareef et al., 2020). Supportive management is also essential because nurse managers influence scheduling decisions, workload allocation, recognition, communication, and access to support during stressful periods (Naji et al., 2022). Work-life balance initiatives may strengthen job satisfaction and organizational commitment by helping nurses feel that their hospital values both their professional contribution and personal well-being (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Therefore, hospitals that integrate work-life balance policies into workforce planning may reduce turnover intention and improve staff stability among nurses (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

7 MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance may serve as an important mediating mechanism that explains how workplace and job-related factors influence nurse retention (Gurková et al., 2021). In this review, mediation refers to the pathway through which work environment and job fulfillment affect nurses' ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities, which

subsequently influences their intention to remain in their current organization or profession (Alshareef et al., 2020). This perspective is important because nurse retention is not shaped only by direct workplace factors, but also by how these factors affect nurses' well-being, family life, psychological adjustment, and capacity to sustain long-term employment (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Therefore, work-life balance provides a useful conceptual bridge between organizational conditions, job-related fulfillment, and staff stability among nurses (Flaubert et al., 2021).

7.1 Work Environment → Work-Life Balance → Nurse Retention

A supportive work environment may improve work-life balance by reducing unnecessary workload pressure, improving staffing adequacy, supporting fair scheduling, and strengthening managerial support (Alshareef et al., 2020). When nurses work in environments characterized by adequate resources, safe conditions, clear communication, and supportive leadership, they may experience lower stress and greater ability to manage both work and personal responsibilities (Naji et al., 2022). Improved work-life balance may then strengthen nurse retention by reducing fatigue, burnout, work-family conflict, and intention to leave (Gurková et al., 2021). This pathway suggests that the work environment influences retention not only by improving nurses' direct workplace experience, but also by shaping their capacity to maintain personal well-being outside work (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Accordingly, hospitals seeking to improve nurse retention should consider work-life balance as one of the practical outcomes of workplace improvement strategies (Flaubert et al., 2021).

7.2 Job Fulfillment → Work-Life Balance → Nurse Retention

Job fulfillment may also influence nurse retention through work-life balance because fulfilled nurses are more likely to experience positive psychological adjustment, professional meaning, and satisfaction with their work roles (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). Nurses who feel recognized, supported, professionally valued, and able to grow in their careers may experience less emotional conflict between work demands and personal life (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Higher job fulfillment may also increase nurses' resilience and motivation, which can help them manage demanding schedules and workplace pressures more effectively (Gurková et al., 2021). When job fulfillment contributes to better work-life balance, nurses may become more willing to remain in their current organization because their professional role becomes more compatible with their personal well-being and family responsibilities (Alharbi et al., 2019). Therefore, job fulfillment can support retention indirectly by improving nurses' ability to sustain balance between work and life domains (Alananzeh et al., 2023).

7.3 Partial versus Full Mediation

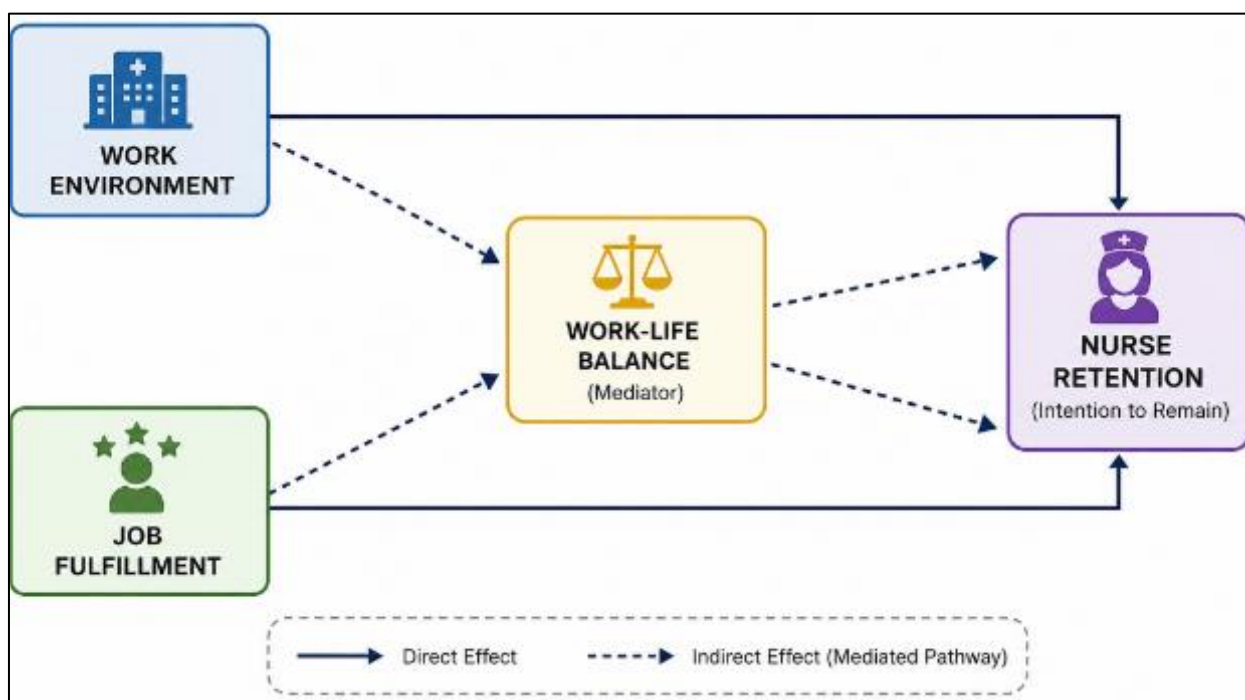


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework showing the mediating role of work-life balance in the relationships between work environment, job fulfillment, and nurse retention

The mediating role of work-life balance may be partial rather than full because work environment and job fulfillment can also directly influence nurse retention (Gurková et al., 2021). A supportive work environment may directly strengthen retention by increasing nurses' sense of safety, organizational support, professional belonging, and

confidence in their workplace (Alshareef et al., 2020). Similarly, job fulfillment may directly enhance retention by increasing nurses' satisfaction, professional identity, organizational loyalty, and intention to remain (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). At the same time, both work environment and job fulfillment may also operate indirectly by improving work-life balance, which then reduces stress and turnover intention (Alsadaan et al., 2021). This means that work-life balance may explain part of the relationship between workplace factors and retention, but it may not completely replace the direct effects of organizational support and professional fulfillment (Flaubert et al., 2021). Therefore, an integrated model should include both direct pathways from work environment and job fulfillment to nurse retention and indirect pathways through work-life balance (Gurková et al., 2021) (Figure 1).

7.4 Conceptual Interpretation

The reviewed evidence supports a conceptual model in which work environment and job fulfillment act as key antecedents of nurse retention, while work-life balance functions as an intermediate mechanism that helps explain how these antecedents affect staff stability (Alshareef et al., 2020). In this model, supportive workplace conditions may reduce workload pressure and work-family conflict, while job fulfillment may increase professional satisfaction and psychological adjustment (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). These improvements may enhance work-life balance, which then strengthens nurses' intention to remain in their organizations (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). However, because work environment and job fulfillment may also influence retention directly, work-life balance should be considered a complementary mediating factor rather than the only explanatory pathway (Gurková et al., 2021). This integrated interpretation highlights the need for retention strategies that combine workplace improvement, job fulfillment enhancement, and work-life balance support rather than addressing these factors separately (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

8 IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING MANAGEMENT AND POLICY

The reviewed evidence has several implications for nursing management and healthcare policy because nurse retention is influenced by organizational conditions, job fulfillment, and work-life balance (Alsadaan et al., 2021). First, hospital administrators should improve staffing adequacy and workload distribution because excessive workload and insufficient staffing may increase stress, burnout, dissatisfaction, and turnover intention among nurses (Alshareef et al., 2020). Staffing plans should consider patient acuity, shift demands, department-specific workload, and nurses' recovery needs rather than relying only on fixed staff numbers (Flaubert et al., 2021). Fair workload distribution may improve nurses' work experiences and strengthen their intention to remain in the organization (Gurková et al., 2021).

Second, nurse manager support should be strengthened because immediate supervisors play a central role in communication, recognition, conflict management, scheduling, and professional support (Alshareef et al., 2020). Supportive leadership may improve nurses' organizational commitment by helping them feel valued, respected, and involved in workplace decision-making (Gurková et al., 2021). Nurse managers should be trained in transformational leadership, communication, staff engagement, and retention-focused management practices (Flaubert et al., 2021). Management support is especially important in high-pressure hospital units where nurses face heavy workload, emotional strain, and complex patient-care responsibilities (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

Third, hospitals should provide clear professional-development and promotion pathways because career growth contributes to job fulfillment and long-term staff stability (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Continuing education, clinical training, mentorship, specialty certification, and promotion opportunities may increase nurses' sense of achievement and organizational loyalty (Pandey & Chauhan, 2021). When nurses perceive that their organization supports their professional future, they may become less likely to seek employment elsewhere (Alharbi et al., 2019). Therefore, professional development should be treated as a retention strategy rather than only as a competency requirement (Flaubert et al., 2021).

Fourth, scheduling flexibility should be improved because rigid shifts, long working hours, and unpredictable schedules may negatively affect nurses' work-life balance and intention to remain (Alharbi et al., 2019). Flexible scheduling approaches may include fair shift rotation, advance scheduling, protected rest periods, reduced excessive overtime, and consideration of family responsibilities where possible (Alshareef et al., 2020). Scheduling policies should aim to balance service needs with nurses' physical, psychological, and family well-being (Gurková et al., 2021). Improving scheduling flexibility may reduce work-family conflict and support retention among nurses in hospital settings (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

Fifth, healthcare organizations should create explicit work-life balance policies because work-life balance may mediate the relationship between workplace factors and nurse retention (Gurková et al., 2021). These policies may include workload monitoring, family-friendly leave arrangements, psychological support, rest-break protection, fatigue management, and access to counseling or employee-support services (Flaubert et al., 2021). Work-life balance policies are particularly important in nursing because clinical work often involves emotional demands, shift work, and continuous patient-care responsibilities (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Such policies may strengthen nurses' well-being and

reduce turnover intention by making professional responsibilities more compatible with personal and family life (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022).

Sixth, hospitals should monitor retention indicators regularly to identify early signs of workforce instability (Alshareef et al., 2020). Relevant indicators may include turnover rates, turnover intention, absenteeism, sick leave, overtime hours, workload indicators, staff satisfaction, burnout levels, internal transfer requests, and vacancy duration (Flaubert et al., 2021). Regular monitoring can help nursing leaders identify high-risk departments and implement targeted interventions before staff instability becomes severe (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Retention data should be used for workforce planning, quality improvement, and policy evaluation rather than being treated only as administrative statistics (Gurková et al., 2021).

Finally, hospital leaders should build supportive and safe work environments because safety, resources, communication, and professional relationships are core elements of nurse retention (Naji et al., 2022). A supportive hospital environment should include adequate supplies, safe staffing, respectful communication, interdisciplinary collaboration, psychological safety, and mechanisms for reporting concerns without fear (Flaubert et al., 2021). Safe and supportive environments may improve job fulfillment, reduce stress, and strengthen nurses' sense of belonging within the organization (Gurková et al., 2021). Therefore, nurse-retention policy should integrate work environment improvement, job fulfillment enhancement, and work-life balance support into one comprehensive workforce strategy (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

9 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several gaps remain in the literature on work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and nurse retention, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Although nurse turnover and retention have been studied internationally, evidence from Saudi Arabia remains relatively limited compared with evidence from Western healthcare systems (Alshareef et al., 2020). This regional gap is important because Saudi hospitals operate within a unique healthcare, cultural, workforce, and policy context that may influence nurses' experiences of work environment, work-life balance, job fulfillment, and retention (Alharbi et al., 2019). Future studies should therefore examine nurse retention in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to generate context-specific evidence for nursing management and workforce policy (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

Another important gap is the limited use of longitudinal research designs in studies examining nurse retention and turnover intention (Gurková et al., 2021). Many available studies use cross-sectional designs, which are useful for identifying associations but cannot clearly determine causal direction among work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and retention outcomes (Alshareef et al., 2020). Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how changes in workplace conditions, job fulfillment, and work-life balance influence nurses' intention to remain over time (Flaubert et al., 2021). Such studies would help determine whether improvements in work environment and job fulfillment produce sustained improvements in nurse retention and actual staff stability (Gurková et al., 2021).

There is also limited testing of mediation models that examine work-life balance as a mechanism linking organizational and job-related factors with nurse retention (Gurková et al., 2021). Most studies examine direct relationships between work environment, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, but fewer studies assess whether work-life balance explains part of these relationships (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Future research should use advanced statistical approaches, such as structural equation modeling, to test direct and indirect pathways among work environment, job fulfillment, work-life balance, and nurse retention (Alshareef et al., 2020). Mediation studies may help hospital leaders understand not only which factors affect retention, but also how these factors operate through nurses' well-being and work-family balance (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

Another limitation in the literature is the overreliance on turnover intention rather than actual retention or objective turnover outcomes (Alharbi et al., 2019). Turnover intention is an important early indicator of workforce instability, but it does not always translate into actual resignation or long-term retention patterns (Alshareef et al., 2020). Future studies should combine self-reported intention-to-leave measures with institutional data, such as resignation records, retention duration, absenteeism, internal transfer requests, and staff vacancy rates (Flaubert et al., 2021). Using both subjective and objective indicators would provide a more accurate understanding of nurse stability and workforce sustainability (Gurková et al., 2021).

There is also a need for intervention studies that evaluate whether specific organizational strategies improve work-life balance, job fulfillment, and nurse retention (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Existing evidence identifies many factors associated with retention, but fewer studies test practical interventions such as flexible scheduling, staffing improvements, manager-support programs, recognition systems, professional-development pathways, and workload-reduction initiatives (Alshareef et al., 2020). Intervention studies would help determine which strategies are most effective,

feasible, and sustainable in hospital settings (Flaubert et al., 2021). Future research should also examine whether retention interventions have different effects across clinical units, hospital types, and nurse demographic groups (Gurková et al., 2021).

Future studies should further examine differences in nurse retention by gender, nationality, department, shift type, years of experience, and hospital sector (Alharbi et al., 2019). These subgroup differences are important because nurses' experiences of workload, work-life balance, career development, family responsibilities, and organizational support may vary across professional and demographic groups (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). In Saudi and Gulf contexts, nationality and gender may be particularly relevant because nursing workforces often include both local and expatriate nurses with different expectations, family situations, and career plans (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Future research should therefore use comparative and subgroup analyses to identify which nurses are at greatest risk of turnover and which retention strategies are most appropriate for each group (Alshareef et al., 2020).

10 CONCLUSION

Nurse retention is a multidimensional workforce outcome influenced by both organizational conditions and individual job-related experiences (Alsadaan et al., 2021). The reviewed evidence indicates that the work environment plays a central role in nurses' intention to remain because staffing adequacy, workload distribution, leadership support, resource availability, safety, communication, and professional relationships shape nurses' daily work experiences and organizational commitment (Gurková et al., 2021). Job fulfillment is also an important predictor of retention because nurses who experience meaningful work, recognition, professional growth, fair rewards, and a sense of achievement are more likely to remain committed to their organizations (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022). Work-life balance may explain part of the relationship between work environment, job fulfillment, and nurse retention because supportive workplace conditions and fulfilling work experiences can improve nurses' ability to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family life (Alshareef et al., 2020). However, work-life balance should be understood as a complementary mediating mechanism rather than the only pathway, because work environment and job fulfillment may also directly influence nurses' intention to stay (Gurková et al., 2021). Therefore, hospitals should integrate workplace improvement, job fulfillment strategies, and work-life balance policies into a comprehensive retention framework to strengthen nursing workforce stability and sustain high-quality healthcare services (Flaubert et al., 2021).

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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