Factors Influencing Nursing Attrition: Why Matter?

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Abstract

The nursing profession plays a pivotal role in healthcare delivery, and maintaining a stable nursing workforce is crucial for ensuring patient safety and quality care. This article investigates multifaceted factors contributing to nursing attrition and its implications. Nursing attrition poses significant challenges to healthcare organizations worldwide, leading to staffing shortages, compromised patient care, and increased costs. Understanding the underlying causes and effects of nurse turnover is essential for developing effective strategies to mitigate its impact and promote nurse retention. This article adopts a comprehensive literature review synthesis approach. By synthesizing findings across various studies, a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between nurse personal factors, work environment dynamics, depersonalization, job satisfaction, and their implications for nursing attrition are discussed. Several factors are identified, such as job satisfaction and professional growth, alongside work environment factors, including staffing levels and organizational support, as key determinants of nursing attrition. A positive practice environment, peer support initiatives, and retention-focused strategies emerge as critical interventions for addressing nurse turnover and enhancing nurse retention. Future research endeavors should explore the nuanced interactions between individual nurse characteristics, organizational dynamics, and external factors to gain deeper insights into nursing attrition phenomena. Longitudinal studies assessing the effectiveness of retention interventions and peer support programs in diverse healthcare settings would provide valuable empirical evidence for informing evidence-based practices. Additionally, examining the impact of emerging trends, such as telehealth and remote work arrangements, on nursing attrition warrants attention to adapt strategies accordingly in the evolving healthcare landscape.

Keyword: Nursing, Attrition, Healthcare, Personal Factors, Job Satisfaction

Introduction

Nursing attrition is a complex phenomenon that poses significant challenges to the healthcare industry. The high turnover rates among nurses have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the well-being of the healthcare professionals themselves but also impacting patient

care and the overall functioning of healthcare institutions. In order to address this issue effectively, it is crucial to understand the contributing factors that lead to the prevalence of nursing attrition. One of the primary factors contributing to nursing attrition is the demanding nature of the profession. Nurses often work long hours, including night shifts and weekends, leading to physical and mental exhaustion. The intense workload and constant exposure to high-stress situations can result in burnout, causing nurses to seek alternative career paths or leave the profession altogether. Moreover, the emotional toll of dealing with patient suffering and loss can further contribute to the attrition rates among nursing professionals.

Another significant factor is the inadequate staffing levels in healthcare institutions. Shortages of nursing staff not only increase the workload on existing nurses but also compromise the quality of patient care. The constant pressure to do more with less can lead to job dissatisfaction and increased stress, pushing nurses towards considering alternative career options with better work-life balance and less strain. Additionally, the lack of professional development opportunities is a key contributor to nursing attrition. Nurses, like any other professionals, seek growth and advancement in their careers. When they perceive limited opportunities for skill development, career progression, and specialization, they may feel stagnant and undervalued, prompting them to explore other fields where their potential can be better utilized and rewarded.

The organizational culture and workplace environment also play a crucial role in nursing attrition. A lack of support from management, inadequate recognition for their hard work, and insufficient resources can create a toxic workplace that fosters dissatisfaction among nursing staff. A positive and supportive work environment is essential for retaining skilled nurses who feel valued and appreciated for their contributions. Moreover, the educational pathway to becoming a nurse can contribute to attrition. Rigorous academic programs, coupled with the demanding clinical training, can be overwhelming for aspiring nurses. The stress and pressure during the educational journey may lead some individuals to reconsider their commitment to the profession, contributing to attrition rates.

Nurse Attrition in Healthcare Industry
A shortfall of at least 12.9 million nurses is anticipated by 2035, up from the present estimated global deficit of 7.2 million nurses (WHO, 2020). According to Yusof (2019) Malaysia has a nursing shortage, with one nurse for every 300 patients, as compared to the World Health Organization's recommended ratio of one nurse for every 200 patients. This would result to an increase nursing workload thus effecting the quality of delivering patient care. The workloads of current employees will be significantly increased, which will cause low productivity due to low morale and adverse effects on staff members due to a high turnover rate, which will impair the quality of the care provided and hospital performance (Boudreau & Cascio, 2011). The burden for each nurse grew as a result of the nursing shortage. More staff nurses will eventually leave the profession or organization due to the strain of a severe workload. The problem of the nursing shortage will get worse. Therefore, it is crucial to look at how stress impacts Malaysian nurses' job satisfaction and contributes to nursing attrition. Bell & Sheridan (2020) mentioned that the COVOD-19 pandemic has brought emphasis to the greatest need for enough nurses worldwide and shed focus on the catastrophic impact of nursing shortages throughout health systems in many nations. Highlighted by Sija (2022), After the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, "Malaysian hospitals are understaffed, overcrowded, and underfunded," and the need for medical professionals has escalated, with 7,629 confirmed COVID-19 cases in May 2020, and the number is increasing each day. As a result of

severe competition among rivals seeking skilled and experienced personnel, it is obvious that employee retention is a critical problem (Sija, 2022). As concerned by KPJ Healthcare Berhad, Employee turnover costs up to 2.5 times the employee's compensation, and much more if experienced employees are involved, as well as significant training expenditures with low productivity for new hires who may be independents (Sija, 2022). It will also result in a loss of expertise, due to significant attrition among experienced workers. As mentioned by Hunt (2009) cited in Choong et al (2012) the global issue of nurse attrition has a significant negative influence on the performance and profitability of healthcare organizations, making it difficult for healthcare organizations to maintain highly qualified and highly devoted nursing personnel in order to deliver good patient care knowledge. This is due to the fact that increased nursing turnover is likely to result in a shortage of skilled and experienced nurses.

Nurses personal factors

Personal factors of health status have been identified as significant contributors to nursing attrition rate (Bae, 2023). Bae (2023) divided the personal elements into 19 different categories, including demographics, the presence of dependents, education, work position, and health. Turnover was significantly influenced by characteristics related to health status, such as sleep and healthy lifestyles (Bae, 2023). In addition, elements of the workplace as higher workloads and a lack of leadership support have been linked to nurse burnout (Shah et al., 2021).

Job satisfaction was found to be a significant factor in Hayes et al.'s (2012) evaluation of the literature on factors influencing nurse retention (Camarena, 2018). Therefore, healthcare organizations should focus on improving job satisfaction by providing a supportive work environment, adequate resources, and opportunities for professional development. Healthcare organizations should also consider personal factors such as health status when developing retention strategies. For example, providing opportunities for healthy lifestyles and promoting work-life balance can help retain nurses and reduce nursing attrition rate.

There is limited information on specific health conditions or illnesses that are associated with higher nursing attrition rates. However, some studies have identified health status, including sleep and healthy lifestyles, as significant factors affecting turnover (Bae, 2023). Additionally, healthcare organizations should consider personal factors such as health status when developing retention strategies. For example, providing opportunities for healthy lifestyles and promoting work-life balance can help retain nurses and reduce nursing attrition rate (Bae, 2022).

The COVID-19 epidemic should be noted since it has raised the need for nursing care, making nurse retention even more crucial (Bae, 2023). However, the pandemic has also had a significant impact on the nursing workforce, including increased stress and burnout, which may contribute to higher nursing attrition rates (Bae, 2023).

Work Environment Factors

Work environment factors of physical and emotional exhaustion have been identified as significant contributors to nursing attrition rate (Kelly et al., 2021)]. Long hours, lack of sleep, a stressful environment, a lack of leadership support, the emotional strain of patient care, turnover, and poorer quality of treatment are a few examples of the specific work environment issues that can cause physical and emotional exhaustion. Nurses and other medical professionals face a greater risk of burnout due to their high-stress work environment. One of the most rewarding aspects of nursing is caring for patients, yet working

in critical or end-of-life care can be emotionally draining due to coping with higher mortality and worse recovery rates (Petersen et al., 2023).

In addition, increased workloads, lack of support from leadership, and understaffing of nurses have been associated with nurse burnout (Shah, et al., 2021). Healthcare organizations should focus on improving the work environment by providing adequate staffing, resources, and support from leadership to reduce physical and emotional exhaustion and prevent nursing attrition rate. Emotional exhaustion in nursing refers to a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that results from excessive job demands, continuous stress, and personal demands (Choi, et al., 2018). It is a key element of burnout syndrome, along with depersonalization and low personal accomplishment (Petersen et al., 2023).

The demanding nature of nursing can eventually lead to physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, commonly known as burnout. Nurses may experience emotional exhaustion due to the cumulative stress and strain of their work responsibilities. Studies have reported high rates of emotional exhaustion among nurses. For example, one study found that 91.1% of registered nurses experienced moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion (Poku et al., 2020). This highlights the significant impact of emotional exhaustion on the nursing workforce.

Emotional exhaustion can have adverse effects on patient care. According to Poku et.al (2020), nurses experiencing emotional exhaustion may struggle to provide the same level of care and attention, leading to potential negative outcomes such as increased work-related infections and medication errors. It is important for healthcare organizations to address the work environment factors that contribute to emotional exhaustion, such as excessive workloads and lack of support from leadership. By implementing strategies to promote work-life balance, provide adequate staffing, and support nurses' well-being, organizations can help mitigate emotional exhaustion and reduce nursing attrition rates (Mudallal et al., 2017).

Depersonalization

Depersonalization causes a sense of detachment, indifference, and unconcern for the work being done and/or the individuals who are receiving it, which contributes to nursing burnout (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022). According to Edu-Valsania et al (2002), it is characterized by negative or inappropriate attitudes and behaviors, irritation, loss of idealistic fervor, and interpersonal avoidance, typically toward service users, patients, and/or clients.

Nurses experiencing depersonalization may develop a sense of detachment and indifference towards their patients or clients. This can lead to a decrease in empathy and a more transactional approach to care, which can negatively impact the nurse-patient relationship and the quality of care provided. Depersonalization can manifest as negative attitudes and behaviours towards patients or clients. Nurses may become cynical, dismissive, or develop a lack of interest in their well-being. This can create a negative work environment and hinder effective communication and collaboration within the healthcare team.

Depersonalization is often considered one of the dimensions of burnout, along with emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022). It is important for healthcare organizations to address depersonalization and its underlying causes, such as high workload, lack of support, and chronic stress, to prevent and mitigate nursing burnout. Strategies may include promoting a positive work environment, providing support and resources for nurses, and fostering a culture of empathy and compassion in healthcare settings (Mudallal et al., 2017).

Job satisfaction

According to Hu et al (2022), their study showed job satisfaction completely mediates the associations of hope and career identity with turnover intention. Therefore, it is possible to take proactive measures to raise nurses' career goals and sense of purpose, which will increase their job satisfaction and reduce their risk of leaving the field (Hu et al., 2022). Giving nurses extra support, assisting them in creating a spiritual foundation, and organizing meaningful activities that elicit good sentiments are all useful. Additionally, universities should focus more on fostering in nursing students a sense of professional identity and nursing ideals.

The most essential factors influencing workforce productivity is the occupational stress and job satisfaction. Sustaining a high level of job satisfaction among healthcare employees, particularly nurses, is crucial for providing adequate high-quality medical treatment as mentioned by Kabbash et al (2020); Semachew et al (2017) cited in (Said & El-Shafei, 2021). Work-related stress has a wide range of direct and indirect consequences on the desire to quit the present company and the profession in the future. Said & El-Shafei (2021) stressed that occupational stress mostly has an indirect influence on job satisfaction, sad mood, and stress adaption, and that desire to quit the current organisation frequently comes before intention to leave the profession. However, Lo et al (2018) mentioned in Said & El-Shafei (2021), policymakers should intend to implement leave reduction strategies among nurses that focus on establishing a less stressful work environment, enhancing job satisfaction and stress adaption, and concurrently lowering depressed mood.

In the research of Choong et. al (2012), in most nations' healthcare industries, work satisfaction has been found to be a strong predictor of desire to stay or reduce turnover. Employees that are unsatisfied with their job will try to find another job in another company, transition to different roles within an organisation, or change to a different profession. In their study, understanding the causes of job satisfaction is critical to improving morale in the nursing profession and reducing turnover intentions. It has been discovered that there are a number of determinants of job satisfaction that are related to turnover intention, such as leadership style or supervision, pay, interpersonal relationships with supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates, heavy workload or work stress, working conditions, intrinsic factors such as work itself, achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunity for promotion or career advancement, psychological empowerment, individual factors, alternative factors, and alternative factors (Choong et. al., 2012).

Discussion

In the study of Laschinger et al (2003); Upenieks (2003) cited in Twigg & McCullough (2014) the importance of a healthy practice environment on nurses' capacity to practice professionally and hence offer safe quality care was underlined. Research has shown that administrative initiatives aimed at enhancing the practice environment have a greater influence on employee retention and maintaining the proper staffing levels than increasing hiring or compensation (Twigg & McCullough, 2014). Variables contributing to a beneficial hospital work environment were constant across nations, and hospitals with more well trained registered nurses, enough staffing, and positive practice settings were stated to have more contented nurses and displayed better patient outcomes (Twigg & McCullough, 2014). According to one study, optimizing nurse staffing, nursing education, and the practice environment give three choices for reducing the likelihood of bad outcomes for patients and improving nurse retention (Twigg & McCullough, 2014). A further study by Kutney-Lee et al.,

(2009) When the interpretation of nursing work environments was examined in relation to patient happiness, it was discovered that patients reported more satisfaction and noticed higher quality of care in settings with a good practice environment (Twigg & McCullough, 2014). A positive practice atmosphere demonstrates a focus on excellent care, which increases work satisfaction and contributes to employee retention.

Aiken et al (2011) cited in Twigg & McCullough (2014) highlighted that The nursing practice environment has a direct influence on nurse retention and patient care quality. Nurse engagement in hospital affairs; developing nursing foundations for excellent care; nurse management competency, leadership, and support of nurses; staffing and resource sufficiency; and collegial nurse-physician connections are critical components of positive practice environments. A shared governance framework also gives nurses the ability to influence choices that affect their work environment. Autonomy and professional growth need organizational assistance in assuring the appropriate amount of personnel with the appropriate skills and resources, as well as limiting job expectations to increase quality of care and job satisfaction (Twigg & McCullough, 2014).

According to Connors et al (2019), peer support can provide an opportunity for nurses to experience emotional and psychological healing, which can lead to enhanced personal resilience, restored job satisfaction, and reduced professional burnout. Studies have found that peer support programs, such as Resilience in Stressful Events (RISE), can increase awareness and utilization of support programs among nurses, leading to improved job satisfaction and reduced burnout (Connors et al., 2019). Peer support can provide opportunities for professional development and growth, which can increase job satisfaction and enhance nurses' sense of fulfilment in their work (Kim & Cho, 2022). Healthcare organizations should focus on creating supportive work environments that promote teamwork, collaboration, and mutual support among nurses. By addressing these factors, organizations can increase nurses' job satisfaction, enhance their intent to stay, and reduce attrition rates (Connors et al., 2019).

In the study of Choong et. al (2012), indicates that past studies have exposed two approaches: i. focus on recruitment and selection activities and ii. focus on retention to address the issues of turnover intention in order to prevent shortage of nursing staff. The first method, which suggests focusing on recruiting and selection efforts as well as establishing new nursing schools and colleges to generate more nursing graduates, is significant since it helps to balance the nurse deficit in the near run (Choong et. al., 2012). As a result, the healthcare industry must maintain a dynamic role in recruiting and hiring operations through a sponsorship and bonding programme. This strategy will incur significant unpredictability replacement costs such as recruiting and selection expenses, training costs, and advertising costs, as well as diminish efficiency (Choong et. al., 2012).

The second approach in the study of Choong et. al (2012) is to concentrate on retention, which is to recruit and retain more devoted and quality professional nursing personnel by providing nurses with meaningful experiences and long-term careers. This approach in reality relates to job satisfaction. To ensure a retain of an employee in any organization, job satisfaction is one of a vital element to be considered. As a consequence, human resource employees and managers in healthcare organizations must guarantee that nurses are happy with their jobs. For all, one of the most important predictors of turnover intention and retention in the healthcare business is job satisfaction (Choong et. al., 2012). Leiter and Maslach (2009) stated in Choonget.al (2012), the second approach may be a better strategy than the first since

retaining nurses will assist to reduce the global nursing shortage in the long term, which will benefit maintaining the quality of patient care at the lowest possible cost.

The following framework shows the cause, effect, intervention strategies and its impact in addressing nurses attrition through the literature review synthesis

CAUSE	EFFECT	IMPACT	INTERVENTION STRATEGY
• Nurse personal factors • Work environment factors • Depersonalization • Job satisfaction	**NURSE ATTIRION**	**NURSE RETENTION**	• Healthy work environment • Optimize staffing • Professional development

Conclusion

The nursing shortage has significant implications for the healthcare industry, including increased nursing workload, lower productivity, low morale, and adverse effects on staff members due to a high turnover rate. The literature review highlights the importance of addressing personal factors of health status and work environment factors of physical and emotional exhaustion in reducing nursing attrition rate. Healthcare organizations should focus on creating supportive work environments, providing opportunities for professional growth, and addressing factors that contribute to job dissatisfaction to enhance nurses' job satisfaction and reduce attrition rates. By addressing these factors, organizations can increase nurses' intent to stay, improve patient care, and reduce healthcare costs.

The literature review found that job satisfaction, work environment, and personal factors are significant contributors to nursing attrition rate. Nurses who are satisfied with their jobs are less likely to leave their positions. Therefore, healthcare organizations should focus on improving job satisfaction by providing a supportive work environment, adequate resources, and opportunities for professional development. Additionally, aspects of the work environment, such as increased workloads and lack of support from leadership, are associated with nurse burnout. Therefore, healthcare organizations should focus on improving the work environment by providing adequate staffing, resources, and support from leadership.

The literature review also highlights the importance of a healthy practice environment, organizational support, peer support and job satisfaction in nurse retention. These factors play a significant role in enhancing the well-being of nurse, reducing burnout and improving patient care outcomes. Healthcare organization should focus on implementing strategies that create supportive work environments and address job satisfaction to mitigate nursing attrition and ensure a sustainable nursing workforce.

Nursing attrition rate is a significant issue in the healthcare industry. The review identified job satisfaction, work environment, and personal factors as significant contributors to nursing attrition rate. Healthcare organizations should focus on improving job satisfaction, providing a supportive work environment, and considering personal factors when developing retention strategies. By addressing these factors, healthcare organizations can reduce nursing attrition rate, improve patient care, and reduce healthcare costs.

Acknowledgement

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