

Shortage of Nursing Workforce in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

A combination of reasons, such as an aging population, rising healthcare demand, and a dearth of adequate educational and training programs, are contributing to Saudi Arabia's severe nursing manpower deficit. cultural views of Recruitment attempts have been hampered by the nursing profession and competitive pay in other industries. The personnel dilemma is made worse by the current workforce's high turnover rates and burnout, which are frequently caused by overwork.

Additionally, the quality of care and patient safety have been compromised since the quick growth of healthcare facilities—especially in urban areas—has not been accompanied by an increase in the number of skilled nursing staff. Present study evaluates the scenario in terms of secondary data, the studies are taken from 2010 to 2021.

Keywords: Issues, challenges, strategies, shortage, nurses, work force.

INTRODUCTION

The lack of nurses has become one of the most important problems facing Saudi Arabia's healthcare industry. Being a fundamental component of health systems around the globe, nursing is essential to providing high-quality patient care, guaranteeing health promotion, and handling public health issues. **Barnett et al (2010); Amadi (2015)** The need for qualified nursing practitioners has increased as the country's population continues to rise due to urbanization and a rise in chronic illnesses. The imbalance between the supply and demand for nurses persists despite greater investments in healthcare infrastructure and education. This issue calls into question patient safety, care quality, and the general effectiveness of the Kingdom's healthcare delivery system. **Gibson et al (2020); Alreshidi et al (2021)**

The Saudi government has taken a number of actions to improve healthcare services since the start of its Vision 2030 effort, acknowledging the value of having a strong nursing workforce. With steps to improve health care, this comprehensive reform plan seeks to diversify the economy and raise individuals' standards of living. Ongoing nurse staffing shortages, however, continue to impede advancement in these fields. **Aeschbacher et al (2018)** A notable feature of the Saudi nursing workforce is its reliance on foreign nurses, with a sizable portion hailing from nations such as Sudan, India, and the Philippines. Despite the vast experience that foreign nurses offer, this dependence poses questions regarding workforce stability, cultural compatibility, and sustainability. **Aluko et al (2019)**

There are a number of interconnected reasons for Saudi Arabia's nurse staffing shortfall. First, the perception and status difficulties that plague the nursing profession frequently discourage prospective applicants from pursuing careers in the sector. **Alameddine et al (2017)** Young Saudis may become less interested in nursing jobs as a result of the prevalent perception that nursing is a less respected profession than medicine. **Alshmemriet al (2013); Gray et al (2018)** Second, prospective nurses face obstacles due to the rigorous educational requirements and training programs needed to earn nursing certifications. The training infrastructure continues to struggle with inefficiencies and inconsistencies, even in spite of government

initiatives to increase nursing education and promote it as a feasible career choice. The working conditions that nurse encounter inside the healthcare system exacerbate these difficulties. **Chan et al (2013); Batran (2019)** Long work hours, high nurse-to-patient ratios, and low pay all lead to burnout, job discontent, and ultimately high turnover rates among nurses. **Adams et al (2021)** This is especially noticeable in the challenging settings of critical care, emergency, and specialty nursing units. In addition, issues with hiring and retaining nurses are made worse by elements such a lack of possibilities for career progression and insufficient assistance for professional growth. **Drennan et al (2019)** Given the seriousness of these problems, systemic solutions to Saudi Arabia's nursing labor shortfall must be investigated. A broad strategy including policy changes, educational advancements, and cultural transformations is required to address the crisis's underlying causes. Improving the perception of nursing as a recognized and appreciated profession is crucial, first and foremost. **Abhicharttibutra et al (2017)**

Interest among young people can be increased by campaigns that emphasize the vital responsibilities that nurses perform in the healthcare industry. Nursing talent can also be attracted and retained by strengthening the educational framework through the expansion of nursing programs and the development of flexible career growth pathways. **Atefiet al (2017)** To make sure that curriculum address the changing needs and practices in healthcare, this involves forming partnerships between educational institutions and healthcare facilities. Addressing working circumstances is also essential to creating a supportive atmosphere for nurses. This can be accomplished by putting regulations in place that guarantee manageable nurse-to-patient ratios, offer competitive pay and benefits, and provide chances for skill development and ongoing education. By encouraging a culture of cooperation and support among medical staff, organizations can greatly improve nurse retention and job satisfaction. **Appiagyei et al (2018)**

Factors Responsible for nurses Shortage

1. General Population of Higher Age

The aging population is among the most significant demographic variables affecting nursing shortages. The need for healthcare services has significantly increased as members of the baby boomer generation—those born between 1946 and 1964—continue to approach retirement age. By 2060, the number of people 65 and older is expected to nearly double from 52 million in 2018 to over 94 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. **Hasan et al (2017)** Healthcare systems are under unprecedented strain because to this demographic shift, which necessitates the hiring of more nurses to offer care in community health settings, nursing homes, and hospitals. There is a critical need for skilled nursing personnel because chronic illnesses in older persons sometimes necessitate extensive medical treatment. **WHO (2020)**

2. More Senior Nurses

The fact that a large percentage of today's nursing workforce is approaching retirement adds to the increasing demands of an aging population. A startling number of registered nurses (RNs) are expected to retire within the next ten years, with the median age of RNs in the US being about 52. By 2030, around one million nurses will retire, according to the American Nurses Association. **Al-Yami et al (2015)** There is a major void left by this workforce exodus, which makes it more difficult for current nurses to handle increased patient loads and increases competition for nursing jobs. **Gazzaz et al (2009)**

3. Diversity

In order to effectively serve the requirements of all patient populations, the nursing workforce must adapt to the demographic shifts in society. However, disadvantaged minorities who want to become nurses are disproportionately impacted by obstacles including restricted access to resources for education and training. **Aboshaiqah et al (2017)** Although there are efforts to increase diversity in nursing, inequities still remain and progress has been sluggish. With insufficient support systems, this lack of cultural competency can exacerbate already-existing shortages by causing miscommunications and lower-quality healthcare delivery across different populations. **Alharbi et al (2019); Sadi et al (2009)**

4. Remuneration Related Issues

Labor markets are significantly shaped by economics, and the nursing profession is no exception. Nurses have important duties and talents, but their pay does not always match the demands of the position. Even though the median yearly salary for registered nurses was roughly \$75,000 in 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many nurses believe that their pay does not sufficiently offset the high levels of stress, long hours, and physical and mental demands of their jobs. Potential candidates may be discouraged from pursuing nursing as a career due to low job satisfaction brought on by low pay, which would exacerbate shortages. **Alboliteh et al (2017); Miller-Rosser (2006)**

5. High Cost of Nursing Education

Another obstacle to entering the field is the growing expense of nursing school. The cost of school, textbooks, and clinical supplies is high for aspiring nurses. According to the National Student Nurses' Association, a large number of nursing students graduate with substantial debt, which frequently causes them to reevaluate their career decisions. Potential nursing candidates can choose occupations that involve less financial investment or

offer greater starting earnings in an environment where the cost of higher education is still rising. **Al Hosis et al (2012)**

3. Increasing Competition for Jobs

Healthcare providers' competitiveness for workers is also influenced by the state of the economy. There is more competition for skilled nursing professionals as healthcare facilities proliferate. A talent bidding war between hospitals, clinics, and private practices has resulted in pay increases and better benefits in some places while creating personnel shortages in others. Furthermore, the need for trained nurses is growing as telehealth and other technology developments change the way that care is delivered. This problem is more severe in underserved urban and rural areas with insufficient funding, making it more difficult to recruit and retain nursing staff. **Alluhidan et al (2020); Almalki et al (2012)**

Some Relevant Strategies

- a. In order to close the workforce gap, funding nursing education initiatives and expanding the number of nursing school spots available are crucial first measures. Financial aid programs that support nursing students, such as grant programs, student loan forgiveness, and scholarships, can lessen the financial burden of tuition. Partnerships between educational institutions and healthcare facilities can also open doors for clinical placements, giving nursing students more possibilities for hands-on training. **Almutairi et al (2015)** Retention of current nurses depends on improving their job happiness. Improved staffing ratios, frequent professional development opportunities, and mentorship programs are among tactics that healthcare firms can use to foster a more encouraging work atmosphere. Initiatives that support mental health and work-life balance can also increase retention rates. **Falatah et al (2019)**
- b. Focused outreach and support initiatives for marginalized groups can help address diversity in nursing. Community colleges and vocational training programs offer other routes to degree completion and can be essential entrance points into nursing careers. Additionally, minority-focused mentorship programs and scholarships can aid in closing the gap.
- c. Over the decades, the nursing profession has experienced substantial changes that have impacted how it is viewed socially and culturally in many groups and geographical areas. The nursing profession has become a vital and esteemed one in healthcare systems across the globe, despite its historical gender-specific duties and lack of acknowledgment. Examining nursing's historical roots is essential to comprehending how it is seen now. The profession of nursing has historically largely connected with women and is frequently perceived through the prism of domesticity and caregiving. For example, nursing was portrayed in the early 20th century as an extension of a woman's domestic duties, which served to further the social norms of feminine subservience and morally upright caregiving.
- d. While nursing has gained a great deal of respect and significance in the twenty-first century, historical biases still exist. In cultural conceptions, nurses are still frequently seen as primarily caregivers rather than competent healthcare professionals, which oversimplifies a complex career that calls for a great deal of education and experience. The change from a workforce that was primarily female to one that was more gender diverse, including male nurses and nurses from other cultural origins, has also brought up new dynamics in how society views nurses. Cultural views on nursing differ greatly based on a person's geography, social mores, and preconceived notions. Some nations honor nurses as vital frontline workers, particularly in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- e. On the other hand, social perceptions may diminish the nursing profession in other settings. Nurses may be seen as inferior to doctors in societies where authority and hierarchy are highly prized in the healthcare industry. These viewpoints can hinder nurses' ability to advance professionally and exercise agency in clinical decision-making, diminishing their rightful recognition for their knowledge and skills in patient care. Furthermore, nurses frequently find it difficult to get the same respect as doctors or experts in societies where there is fierce competition for professional reputation.
- f. Nursing is frequently portrayed in television programs, movies, and news reports as either overworked and underappreciated support workers or as dedicated caretakers who are really concerned about their patients' well-being. These contradictory representations have the potential to reinforce public attitudes and recruitment attempts by fostering misconceptions about the profession. Positive portrayals of nurses in the media can improve their perception as capable professionals rather than as secondary caretakers. The media can successfully convey the value of the nursing profession by highlighting their critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership in emergency situations. To dispel misconceptions and promote a more sophisticated understanding of the field, a more complex and balanced portrayal is required.
- g. The recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction of the workforce are all greatly impacted by social perceptions regarding nursing. A culture that values nursing as a noble vocation is more likely to draw in future medical professionals, which will increase the number of nurses in the workforce. Recruitment and job satisfaction are intimately correlated with programs and policies that improve the standing of the nursing profession, such as competitive pay, chances for professional growth, and supportive working

circumstances. Burnout, a lack of support, and high-stakes work situations are some of the reasons why nursing is commonly viewed negatively in some areas. The widespread perception that nurses are overworked and underappreciated, for example, may discourage prospective nurses from choosing nursing as their career.

- h. As the foundation of patient care and public health, the nursing workforce is an essential component of the healthcare system. The relationship between educational institutions and the supply of nurses is a complex matter that takes into account a number of socioeconomic, political, and health-related elements. By giving prospective nurses the instruction and training they need to acquire the abilities, know-how, and competences needed for the job, educational institutions have a significant impact on the nursing workforce. An important factor in determining the availability of trained nurses is the kinds of nursing programs that are provided, such as advanced practice degrees, Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), and Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN).
- i. Graduating students' readiness for the workforce is directly impacted by the caliber of nursing education that institutions offer. A number of criteria are used to gauge quality, such as the accreditation status, clinical training opportunities, faculty qualifications, and curriculum design.
1. The production of competent nursing graduates depends on an evidence-based, current curriculum. Curriculums must be updated frequently by educational institutions to reflect new medical procedures, technological advancements, and changing healthcare norms. Through ongoing development, nursing graduates are guaranteed to possess the most up-to-date information and abilities necessary to deliver superior patient care.
2. It is essential to have access to quality clinical training experiences. Through collaborations with medical facilities, students can take part in practical experiences that improve their education. Students' confidence and competency when they enter the workforce are frequently impacted by the caliber of these clinical experiences. Schools can better educate their students for the reality of nursing practice by keeping close contacts with nearby clinics and hospitals.

Present Working Scenario

As a vital component of the healthcare system, nurses offer patients vital support and care in a variety of situations. The COVID-19 pandemic, staffing shortages, and changing healthcare legislation have all presented continuous issues, but in recent years, nurses' working conditions and job satisfaction have received a lot of attention. Administrative regulations, the healthcare setting, and the mental and physical strain of the job are only a few of the many variables that affect nurses' working circumstances. High patient-to-nurse ratios, lengthy hours, and insufficient staffing levels are characteristics of high-stress job situations for many nurses.

A study conducted by the American Nurses Association (ANA) found that almost 60% of nurses felt overburdened and overworked, which exacerbated burnout and job discontent. Today, staffing shortages are one of the most important problems facing nursing. The aging population and rising rates of chronic illnesses are contributing factors to the United States' need for 1.1 million more nurses by 2030, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. As a result of this scarcity, nurses are frequently asked to take on more patients than are safe or manageable. greater patient-to-nurse ratios have been linked to greater rates of nurse burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intentions, according to a study published in the Journal of Nursing Administration. Furthermore, nurses usually face a lack of resources and assistance in their workplaces. Due to financial limitations, many healthcare facilities reduce staffing, training, and necessary supplies. Nurses frequently express that management does not support them, which can make them feel even more frustrated and powerless. Nearly 70% of nurses, according to a National Nurses United study, believed that their employers did not put their safety and wellbeing first, especially during the disease.

Patient outcomes and the provision of healthcare are significantly impacted by the working environment and job satisfaction of nurses. Higher levels of job satisfaction and support in the workplace increase the likelihood that nurses will deliver high-quality care, which improves patient outcomes. Better patient satisfaction, fewer medical errors, and lower hospital readmission rates are all correlated with nurses' job happiness, according to a wealth of research. On the other hand, the standard of care may decline if nurses are overly burned out and unhappy with their jobs. Research has indicated a correlation between nursing burnout and greater death rates, longer hospital stays, and higher incidence of patient problems.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Saudi Arabia's nursing shortage is a serious issue that compromises patient safety and the standard of healthcare services. The various reasons for these shortages have been emphasized in this study, including changes in the population, cultural attitudes, a lack of access to quality education, and terrible working circumstances. A thorough and well-coordinated strategy involving important stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, medical facilities, and educational establishments, is needed to address these problems. Attracting fresh talent and keeping current nurses can be greatly aided by putting specific techniques into

practice, such as strengthening nursing education, boosting recruitment efforts, and establishing supportive work cultures. By giving priority to these projects, Saudi Arabia can develop a strong nursing workforce that can adapt to the changing healthcare demands of its people, which will ultimately improve health outcomes and create a more sustainable healthcare system.

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