

Challenges Facing Nursing Profession in Saudi Arabia

Tagred Abdurahman Aljorisi¹, Khalid Hassan Ali Aati², Majed Abdullah Alshammari³, Maha Nazal Alshammari⁴, Khalaf Ayed Alshammari⁵, Saleh Madallah Nahi Alenazi⁶, Zainab Ali AliAlnweseer⁷, Hana alAbdulla Mishbabal Alasmri⁸, Reem Ahmed Ali Asiri⁹, Balqees Mohammed Mansur Alrifedi¹⁰

¹. Nurse Technician Yanbu General Hospital, Madinah Health Cluster

². Nurse Technician Ministry Of The National Guard , Medical And Evacuation Battalion

³. Nurse Specialist Hail General Hospital ,Ha'il Health Cluster

⁴. Nurse Technician Maternity And Children Hospital ,Ha'il Health Cluster

⁵. Nurse Specialist Hail General Hospital, Ha'il Health Cluster

⁶. Nurse Specialist Taima General Hospital , Tabuk Health Cluster

⁷. Nurse Technician Aljaffari Primary Health Care Center ,Alahsa Health Cluster

⁸. Nurse Specialist Abha Maternity And Children Hospital

⁹. Nurse Specialist Abha Maternity And Children Hospital

¹⁰. Nurse Specialist Abha Maternity And Children Hospital

Abstract

Among all the health care workers, about half of the workforce is made up of nurses, midwives, and other health workers. The foundation of the healthcare system is the nurse. The cell cannot survive without the nucleus. They are a strong force in enacting the reforms necessary to address everyone's health needs. When it comes to providing healthcare, nurses are essential. In addition to providing care and aiding in recovery, nurses also promote health, educate patients and the general public on how to prevent disease and damage, take part in rehabilitation, and offer support. Nurses in Saudi Arabia are facing a lot of issues and challenges in the due course of their jobs. This present study will evaluate the scenario in terms of job profile, working conditions and even social challenges. Study is based on secondary data and the time frame of the study is 2015 to 2024.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, nursing, challenges, social issues, education.

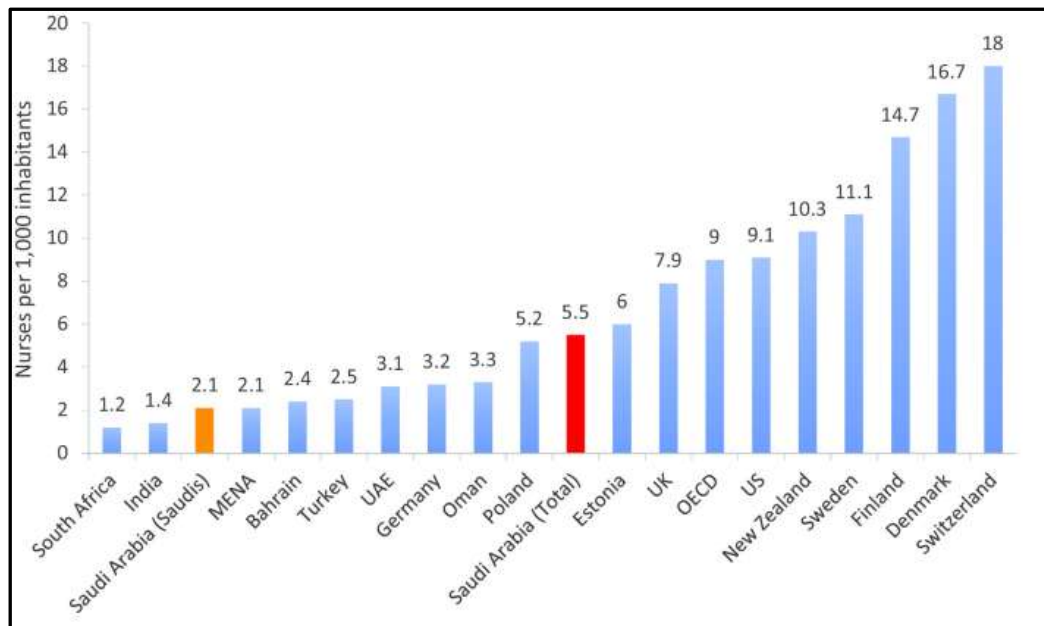
Introduction

The population of Saudi Arabia is expected to reach 37 million by 2025. With the rapid growth of the Saudi population and the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, the recruitment, retention, training, and performance of nurses has become widely recognized as a critical issue in shaping healthcare delivery. Currently, Saudi Arabia is experiencing a tremendous nursing shortage and has such a heavy reliance on expatriate nurses, which causes unique challenges. **Hoeve et al (2014)** From an international context there is also a nursing workforce shortage. So, as well as prevailing trends influencing the global nursing workforce shortage, there are some unique social and cultural considerations which is the aim of this integrative literature review.

To further the Saudization of the nursing workforce, the Saudi Arabian government issued a Royal Decree in 1992. This policy came about as a result of the recognition that a sustained high reliance on an international workforce has dangers and may lead to a significant workforce crisis in the event that a significant proportion of foreign nurses left the nation. Saudization is a policy that aims to gradually replace foreign nurses with Saudi Arabian nurses by increasing the number of Saudi citizens in the profession. **Appiah et al (2021)**

Over half of the workforce is made up of nurses, midwives, and other health workers. The foundation of the healthcare system is the nurse. The cell cannot survive without the nucleus. They are a strong force in enacting the reforms necessary to address everyone's health needs. When it comes to providing healthcare, nurses are essential. In addition to providing care and aiding in recovery, nurses also promote health, educate patients and the general public on how to prevent disease and damage, take part in rehabilitation, and offer support. **Morales et al (2022)** There are no other medical professionals with such a wide-ranging and extensive responsibility. Health care organizations face a severe lack of trained registered nurses, even though they are the largest provider group. Numerous causes, such as increased population growth, life expectancy, the number of critically and chronically ill patients, and

the increased demand for health care brought on by medical technological advancements, have been blamed for this shortfall. **Zamanzadeh et al (2013)** The duties of nurses have also greatly increased to encompass a variety of duties that were formerly handled by doctors. Nursing shortages are a global issue. Saudi Arabia has a long-term scarcity of Saudi nurses, and turnover is considerable. **Banakhar et al (2021)**



Source: <https://human-resources-health.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12960-020-00535-2>

Figure 1: Nurses per 1000 Nurses in KSA and Other Countries

Only 29.1% of the nursing staff at Saudi healthcare facilities are Saudi nationals; the majority of nurses are expatriates. The bulk of foreign workers temporarily seek training and experience in Saudi medical facilities. They then transition to employable talents in wealthy nations like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. **Creswell (2019)** Despite the fact that administrators of healthcare facilities are very concerned about expatriate turnover, there are regrettably no public statistics on this important topic. This percentage is lower in the private health sector, where local nurses make up only 4.1% of the total, even if the proportion of Saudi nurses is quite low overall. A number of social, educational, systemic, and personal reasons contribute to the significant issue of the national nursing shortage. Furthermore, the growing demand for health care services has not been adequately met by the yearly supply of Saudi nursing graduates. Alongside this concern are the high turnover rates among registered nurses, which lead to poor service delivery, severe administrative issues, and disruptions to organizational planning. Many health care delivery systems are seriously challenged in their efficacy and efficiency by these problems. **Salvador et al (2022)**

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this present study is to identify the challenges faced by the nurses in Saudi Arabia and identify the steps taken by different agencies in this respect.

Research Process

Study Design

Researcher has followed the exploratory research design which refers to the exploration of secondary data to identify answers to the point in question. The researcher has presented the perceived secondary data in the form of review study and the answers to the respective questions were identified on the basis of the same. Studies were taken from the journals of national and international repute. Electronic databases accessed were Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest Social Science and Humanities, PsycCRITIQUES (Ovid), Pub Med, CINAHL, Medline, Google Scholar, Electronic Thesis, and Dissertation Systems.

Time Frame

The respective time frame of the study was from 2015 to 2024, this time period was considered because during this period many of the policy decisions were implemented by various government and related

agencies. All the considered studies were presented or published within this time period only, rest of the studies were excluded from the panel.

Selection Criteria

Researcher has collected about 97 studies from various sources, all these studies were related to the research question in one or the other way. In order to meet the objectives of the study the researcher has identified some of the inclusion and exclusion criteria based on other studies conducted in the same research area or the same geographical domain. It has been decided at an early stage that all the studies should be published or presented in English Language as this is one of the most suited language for the audience of this study. Then on the other hand some of the keywords were identified i.e. s “Saudi Arabia”, “nursing”, “challenges”, and “Social issues” etc. The studies who do not posses such key words were also excluded. Finally 75 studies were finalized for the present study.

Discussion

Major Challenges Faced by Nurses

a. Education

Around the world, nursing programs continue to produce nurses with associate degrees and diplomas. Some scholars contend that the development of nursing professionalism has been hampered by this educational approach. In western countries, many nursing students have claimed that they prioritize higher education and specialization, which are often associated with professionalism. **Alqahtani et al (2022)** Several researchers contended in the employment analysis and retention study of registered nurses that nurses with a BSN are more professional than those with an associate degree, and they proposed a link between BSN education and the societal return on educational investment. Researchers proposed three explanations for nursing's lack of professional status: nurses are not educated, they are trained, and they are primarily under the influence of medicine. Finally, nurses are not held accountable for their actions. Additionally, Watson maintained that a university should be used for character development, accountability preparation, and training. One might argue for a gradual improvement of all nursing education levels to at least a BSN because diploma level education is generally seen as technical and low level. **Salvador et al (2022)**

In Saudi Arabia, nursing education has traditionally been offered through either the Ministry of Higher Education's BSN programs or the Ministry of Health's diploma and associate degree programs. Either upgrading the former programs or integrating them with the latter would necessitate thorough, long-term planning that considers other nations' experiences. Furthermore, the various nursing educational systems result in job descriptions that overlap at different levels. Opportunities for additional training and ongoing education were seen by them as crucial components of their retention, motivation, and sense of fulfillment. **Dikko et al (2016)** They see possibilities to improve their professional knowledge and practices through on-the-job training and education. Nonetheless, there appeared to be significant differences in on-the-job services amongst the various hospitals and industries. When compared to their counterparts in other government sectors, senior nurses and staff nurses in government hospitals expressed greater frustration and disappointment at the limited options to access these services. **Salvador et al (2022)**

b. Working Conditions

These motifs were ascribed to work-related elements that make nursing a socially unacceptable career choice, such as gender mixing, long workdays, and rotating shifts. Hospital nurses typically put in more hours and handle more patients due to the present nursing shortage. **Salvador et al (2020); Salvador et al (2021)** The lengthy hours and rotating shifts that are typical of a nursing job were often mentioned as the main reasons why Saudi female schoolchildren did not choose to pursue nursing.

In addition to a heavier workload, poor compensation, and no financial incentives, nurses' worries about not being recognized and appreciated appear to have led to feelings of frustration, disappointment, and regret, all of which had a negative impact on their job satisfaction and, ultimately, retention. Staff nurses at certain hospitals did, however, agree that nursing and hospital administration do not pay attention to their complaints. **Arif et al (2017)**

In addition, Saudi women are not allowed to drive, and Saudi female nurses have complained that getting to and from work is difficult due to the lack of safe and dependable public transit options. Furthermore, nurses are finding it difficult to locate child care centers that are safe, convenient, and reasonably priced for their young children because they are working mothers. This is not exclusive to Saudi Arabia; nurses from Turkey, other Arab nations (such as Egypt and Jordan), and Western nations have expressed similar concerns. Transportation and childcare issues exacerbate family disputes and put Saudi female nurses under a lot of pressure to balance work and family obligations. **Ross et al (2017)**

Researchers found that the same social and occupational factors that lead to poor nursing program enrollment also cause the Ministry of Health (MoH) to lose married Saudi female nurses on a regular basis. According to an evaluation of the Ministry of Health's nursing service, Saudi female nurses believe that working in ambulatory clinics or primary healthcare aligns better with their families' expectations than the round-the-clock responsibilities at hospitals. **Smallheer et al (2020)**

c. Employee Turnover

One significant problem affecting the effectiveness and financial success of healthcare institutions is nursing turnover. Healthcare institutions need a nursing staff that is reliable, well-trained, and totally committed. However, a persistent rise in nurse turnover has been caused by an increasing shortage of skilled nurses. Over the upcoming years, this turnover rate is probably going to get worse because the healthcare industry's growth is outpacing the supply of nurses. By 2025, it is estimated that the United States would have a shortfall of about one million nurses. The organization's remaining nurses face more work because of staffing shortages brought on by nurse turnover. This increases the possibility that the remaining nurses will leave because of their overwhelming workload. The end effect is a "vicious cycle" in which an organization's nurse turnover rate keeps rising. A rise in accident rates and absenteeism among the remaining nurses may also result from staffing shortages brought on by nurse turnover. **Zahourek et al (2015)**

Financially speaking, nurse turnover is expensive for healthcare organizations since it takes resources away from essential operations like staff development, quality improvement initiatives, and nurse retention initiatives. To replace nurses who leave, significant resources are needed for recruitment, hiring, and training. **Zahourek et al (2016)**

d. Policy Related Issues

Future Saudi research should continue to examine the effects of support systems for example, nursing policies and organizational characteristics. There were many different kinds of support networks, from the family's encouragement and inspiration to the employers' gratitude, acknowledgment, and helpful policies. Research has shown that support systems improve retention and satisfaction while lowering stress and burnout. For a variety of reasons, such as elevated stress, low morale, or dissatisfaction with their jobs, qualified nurses may depart. According to researchers, job satisfaction is a measure of how much employees enjoy their jobs. Reports of a direct correlation between nurses' intention to stay in their current position and their level of job satisfaction are common. Nurse intention to stay in their position rises in tandem with general job satisfaction, and vice versa. **Grinberg et al (2022)** It follows that the most important predictor of RNs' intention to leave their jobs is job discontent. They might also depart for family-related reasons like child care and pregnancy. Numerous studies, both Arabic and Western, have emphasized the importance of national rules and organizational policies that address nurses' concerns as a means of overcoming the obstacles that face nursing recruitment and retention. **Budu et al (2019)**

e. Social Issues

The public perception of nurses seems to be unfavorable in nations where women's participation in paid jobs outside the house is severely restricted by strong cultural traditions. Women from the lowest social classes thus carry out nursing duties in these nations. According to an analysis of the interviews conducted with the female participants, they were under social pressure to operate in mixed-gender environments that are socially unacceptable and to cover lengthy hours of unpleasant night and weekend tasks. Nurses are seen with distrust and disdain by society, which makes girls reluctant to pursue nursing even if they enjoy it. Some girls' spouses and families do not embrace nursing as a vocation, thus they had to stop their studies to marry. Certain families dislike it when women work late, on the weekends, or at night. They consider nurses to be doctors' helpers. **McAllister et al (2020); Adeyemi-Adelanwa et al (2016)**

Researchers discovered that the study's qualified female nurses were supported by their friends and family. In a similar vein, a few researchers also noted that family members were crucial in helping and motivating first-year nursing students to pursue becoming nurses. It was also discovered that the decision to pursue a career in nursing was influenced by encouraging comments from friends, family, and counselors.

Conclusion

In order to make nursing a desirable career in Saudi Arabia, its standing should be improved. The education sector ought to reevaluate the duration of nursing education, which is currently five years, as opposed to three years in many industrialized nations, while ensuring safe and competent practice. Giving nursing students extra financial aid would ease their financial burden and inspire more students to pursue nursing. As is the case with medical students, nurses in particular ought to get their entire income during their internship year. The media need to contribute to the advancement of a favorable perception of the nursing profession. In order to have more objective data on how the public views

nurses, professionals should conduct more research on this crucial topic, but the media must also help educate the public on the value of national nurses. To retain the current expatriate workforce and attract more local nurses, long-term health and nursing plans are required. Since Saudi nurses are familiar with the language, culture, and customs of the area and are knowledgeable about the prevalent socioeconomic issues, they are actually better qualified to work with patients from that area.

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