

## Job Satisfaction among Nurses in Saudi Arabia: A Review of the Literature

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**Abstract:** The nursing shortage in Saudi Arabia continues to be significant to the point that over 60% of nurses in private and public hospitals in Saudi Arabia are foreigners. Identifying factors that impact nursing job satisfaction and dissatisfaction is critical to developing strategies to retain and recruit Saudi nurses. Although nurses in Saudi Arabia remain generally satisfied with the nature of nursing work, multiple factors may impact the level of satisfaction among nurses, affecting nursing recruitment and retention efforts. This information can be used to develop strategies for improving nurse satisfaction in the workplace. In addition, perhaps critical to these efforts is the effect of social views of nurses in Saudi Arabia and cultural factors that limit satisfaction, recruitment, and retention. The future of nursing in SA may hinge on a shift in cultural and social views of nursing.

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### Introduction

The study of job satisfaction has a long history in the discipline of nursing as one of the most investigated topics in nursing management globally (Jackson-Malik, 2005). Job satisfaction research started with the famous Hawthorn studies in 1924, conducted by Elton Mayo and his team at the Western Electric Company in Massachusetts. The purpose of the Hawthorn studies was to explore the effects of observation on workers' productivity (Hansen, 2007). Job satisfaction is a topic of great interest for many health organisations. Research supports the importance of examining job satisfaction when developing work policies to determine and assess the attitudes and perceptions of staff, as well as the various elements that can affect job productivity and quality of care, such as environment, pay, workload, leadership style, shortages of nursing staff and nursing staff turnover (Hayes *et al.*, 2010; Lu 2002; Lu *et al.*, 2005).

Job satisfaction is difficult to define as it differs from study to study and from researcher to researcher. Nevertheless, job satisfaction has been generally described as a positive effective attitude towards one's job (Miller, 2007). Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) stated that the definition of job satisfaction is the general feeling an employee has towards their job. Adams and Bond (2000) defined job satisfaction as the degree of positive affect that a job offers. Brooks and Anderson (2004) defined job satisfaction as worker's likes and dislikes. When exploring the phenomenon of job satisfaction, many of the aspects of the job must be considered, such as work satisfaction, supervision, pay, and promotion

opportunities, as well as the practices of the organisation.

### Job Satisfaction among Nurses in Saudi Arabia

Due to the shortage of both female and male Saudi registered nurses, more than half of the nurses working in public hospitals in Saudi Arabia come from overseas; approximately 64.3% of all nurses working in 251 public hospitals are expatriates (Ministry of Health [MoH], 2011). A lack of job satisfaction in the nursing profession may cause an increase in job turnover, exacerbating Saudi Arabia's problems with a shortage of nursing staff. Identifying job dissatisfaction will help inform the development of new policies and provide more support for nurses and the opportunity for workforce improvement plans.

In Saudi Arabia, several research studies have investigated job satisfaction in nursing from the perspective of expatriate nurses of different nationalities as well as Saudi nurses in public hospitals, private hospitals, tertiary care hospitals, and military hospitals. These studies included a variety of related variables, such as quality of life, organisational commitment, recruitment and retention barriers, leadership style, hospital performance, intention to stay, and the work environment (Abo-Znadh, 1999; Al-Aameri, 2000; El-Gilany & Al-Wehady, 2001; Al-Zayyer, 2003; Omer, 2005; Zaghloulet *et al.*, 2008; Al-Ahmadi 2009; Mitchell, 2009; Al-Dossary *et al.*, 2012).

### Factors Affecting Nurses' Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction in Saudi Arabia

Several studies have been conducted in Saudi Arabia on the factors affecting nurse job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Given the unique situation in Saudi Arabia, with a predominance of expatriate

nurses, researchers have examined nationality as a potential factor affecting satisfaction; however, the results have been inconsistent with regard to the relationship between nationality and job satisfaction among these nurses (Abo-Znadh, 1999; Al-Ahmadi, 2009), with recent research failing to show any relationship between these variables (Al-Ahmadi, 2009).

To investigate the multi-national population of nurses in Saudi Arabia and factors related to this population, Abo-Znadh (1999) conducted a study focused on nurses' job satisfaction and turnover in two tertiary care hospitals under the MoHE in Riyadh. Surveys were administered to 334 nurses, both Saudi and non-Saudi, from medical and surgical units; the response rate for this study was 92%. This study used an exploratory design to identify the relationship between job characteristics and quality of work life. The findings revealed that six predictor variables (out of 13) were significantly correlated with satisfaction. The predictor variables included nationality, availability of a family member, total years of Saudi Arabian nursing experience, growth needs, critical psychological states, and motivating potential. Only two variables (growth needs and critical psychological states) were significantly correlated with internal motivation.

Three studies addressed factors related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction separately to identify potential differences and ways to contribute to supporting satisfaction, while reducing dissatisfaction (Al-Dossary et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2009; Zaghoul et al., 2008). Satisfaction tended to be related to intrinsic factors, such as salary, motivation, effect of leadership style, achievement, relationships with peers and supervisors and challenging career opportunities (Zaghoul et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2009; Al-Dossary et al., 2012); whereas dissatisfaction was related to hospital policies, work conditions, pay, fringe benefits, lack of recognition for achievement, as well as personal and relationship factors Zaghoul et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2009; Al-Dossary et al., 2012). In general, a general satisfaction was evident among nurses in Saudi Arabia with regard to the nature of the work (Mitchell, 2009; Al-Dossary et al., 2012).

Zaghoul et al. (2008) conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study of nurses at King Fahd Hospital of the University (KFHU) in Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia. This study examined nurses' intentions to stay in their jobs, as well as the dimensions of job satisfaction. The response rate in the study was 55.3% of the 499 nurses that were surveyed. The findings revealed job satisfaction dimensions other than salary and motivation, including leadership styles in the organisation and challenging career opportunities at work. Further, the findings showed that nurses were

dissatisfied with the benefits the hospital offered, the hospital policies implemented, and recognition of their achievements. Zaghoul et al. developed a self-administered survey for the study, but failed to report any details supporting the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, reducing the credibility of the study and highlighting the importance of the discussion of validity and reliability in research.

Mitchell (2009) performed a mixed methods study on expatriate registered nurses who worked in 25 different public and private hospitals in two cities in the Makkah region of Saudi Arabia, Jeddah and Makkah. A survey was administered to 944 foreign-trained nurses, of which, 25 participated in interviews. The response rate for this study was 48%. The study was conducted in two different phases: a qualitative phase using focus group interview data and a quantitative phase involving data collected through surveys. The results indicated significant correlations between work environment and job satisfaction (Mitchell, 2009).

The results of Mitchell's (2009) study showed an increase in job satisfaction when the work environment improved. The participants in the study reported gains in job satisfaction through recognition, the work itself, salary, work conditions, achievement, hospital policies and administration, positive relationships with supervisors, and positive relationships with peers. In addition, job dissatisfaction was reported with hospital policies and administration, work conditions, status, negative relationships with supervisors, security, and personal life. Differentiating between the types of hospitals, the nurses working in the public hospitals were highly satisfied with their recognition and the work itself; however, they were dissatisfied with hospital policies and administration, as well as work conditions. Similarly, the nurses working in the private hospitals were highly satisfied with the recognition and salaries they received, but were dissatisfied with hospital policy, administration, and status. The study was methodologically rigorous, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques in an attempt to provide both inferential data and depth of detail. However, it was noted that nurse managers reported that foreign-trained nurses were sceptical and afraid of repercussions despite assurances that the hospital administration supported the study. This may have had a significant impact on the results of the study. Thus, despite efforts to support validity and reliability of the study, the participants' scepticism was a likely source of bias in the results.

Al-Dossary and colleagues (2012) conducted a quantitative, cross-sectional study of nurses in a Saudi Arabian university teaching hospital. The aim of the study was to measure nurses' job satisfaction and to

determine the factors that influence the job satisfaction among this population of nurses. For this study, 87.5% of the 217 nurses surveyed, including Saudis and non-Saudis, responded to the survey. The findings revealed that the participants were satisfied with certain factors, such as the nature of work, their co-workers, leadership, and supervisors, but remained dissatisfied with other factors, such as pay, operational conditions, fringe benefits, and contingent rewards. The cross-sectional design limited cause and effect inferences, in addition to the small sample size obtained despite the high response rate. In addition, the study was limited to a single university teaching hospital, which limited the generalisability of the results.

#### **Leadership style.**

The study by Zaghoul *et al.* (2008) related to the influence of leadership style on levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nurses in Saudi Arabia. The results provided support to the findings reported by Omer (2005), who had previously identified the effects of leadership on nursing job satisfaction, specifically, the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles. Omer used a mixed-method design on nurses from two National Guard Health Affairs hospitals in two cities, Jeddah and Riyadh. He obtained a response rate of 65.3% from among 415 Saudi and non-Saudi nursing staff and managers. Staff nurses and nursing managers participated in two separate stages: quantitative data collection through a questionnaire and qualitative data collection through interviews.

The results of Omer's (2005) study demonstrated that there was a significant correlation between perceived leadership style and job satisfaction. More specifically, a positive correlation was identified between job satisfaction and transactional leadership characteristics, while transformational leadership factors were found to predict job satisfaction. However, the convenience sample used in this study may not have been representative of the population, which represented a sampling issue that was exacerbated by the low response rate. Although the results demonstrated correlations, the study fell short of demonstrating a causative relationship. Finally, with a single male nurse manager participant, the study was unable to evaluate the impact of gender on leadership, which may be a critical factor.

#### **Organisational commitment.**

Organisational commitment has been shown to correlate strongly with job satisfaction among nurses in Saudi Arabia (Al-Aameri, 2000; Al-Ahmadi, 2009). With a focus on the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment, Al-Aameri (2000) used a sample of nurses from public hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Four hundred

nurses from different nationalities, including Arabs, Filipinos, Indians, Americans, and Saudis, completed the surveys, with a response rate of 72.5%. A strong positive correlation was found between organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Al-Aameri, 2000). Further, Al-Aameri also found that age and experience are significantly correlated with satisfaction and commitment. The findings showed that older nurses and those with more experience were more satisfied with and more committed to their jobs than the younger nurses and nurses with less experience (Al-Aameri, 2000).

In addition to this correlation with job satisfaction, organisational commitment also has been found to be positively correlated with job performance (Al-Ahmadi, 2009). In the study by Al-Ahmadi (2009), the author examined the factors that affected the performance of hospital nurses in the Riyadh region of Saudi Arabia. A survey was administered to 1,834 nurses of different nationalities, including Saudis, in 15 randomly selected MoH hospitals in the Riyadh region, with a response rate of 50.3%. The findings showed a positive correlation between job performance, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, as well as personal variables including years of experience, nationality, gender, and marital status. However, there was a negative correlation with level of education. The highest satisfaction indicated was related to work; the lowest satisfaction indication was related to pay.

The findings offered by Al-Ahmadi (2009) showed a higher correlation between job satisfaction and males and married nurses. There were no significant differences between nationalities. The large sample size and use of 15 different hospitals were the strengths of the study. Cultural aspects may have a significant role in the results of the study, as the sample was 94% non-Saudi; however, this was not specifically discussed. Cultural aspects and perspectives can have a critical impact on variables related to job satisfaction and should have been considered as an important aspect of the discussion in Saudi Arabia, where the majority of the nursing population is foreign.

#### **Strategies for Improved Satisfaction and Nurse Retention**

Moving from investigating the factors that support job satisfaction and retention towards strategies for addressing the issues, this review now focuses on research examining strategies for improvement in terms of supporting the recruitment and retention of nursing staff in Saudi Arabia and the barriers to promoting job satisfaction and retention. From the research, strategies focused on improving teamwork and interdepartmental and peer relationships, as well as offering competitive wages,

support for nursing personnel, and a positive work environment, may be successful at achieving higher job satisfaction and retention of nursing staff (Al-Zayyer, 2003). In addition, changes in the social view

of nursing as a career in Saudi Arabia would support greater recruitment and retention in the field (El-Gilany & Al-Wehady, 2001).

Table 1: Summary of Nursing Job Satisfaction Studies in Saudi Arabia

Job Satisfaction Studies	Methods	Sample	Statistical Approach	Key Findings
Abo-Znadh (1999): An exploration of selected staff and job characteristics and their relationship to quality of work life among staff nurses in medical/surgical units in two tertiary care hospitals in Saudi Arabia	Mixed methods non-experimental and exploratory design	329 Saudi and non-Saudi nurses participated from two tertiary care hospitals under the MoHE in Riyadh	Descriptive, comparison, correlational and regression analysis	Six predictor variables (nationality, availability of a family member, total years of Saudi Arabian experience, growth needs, critical psychological states and motivating potential) were significantly correlated with the prediction of satisfaction
Al-Aameri (2000): Job satisfaction and organisational commitment for nurses	Descriptive quantitative design	290 Saudi and non-Saudi nurses from public hospitals in Riyadh region	Descriptive, Scheffee test and one-way ANOVA	A strong positive correlation was found between organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Older nurses were more satisfied and more committed to their jobs than younger ones. It also revealed that nurses with more experience tended to be more committed to their organisations than those with less experience
Al-Zayyer (2003): The effectiveness of recruitment and retention strategies and the severity of recruitment and retention barriers in a group of staff nurses in selected tertiary care hospitals in Saudi Arabia	Mixed methods descriptive design	119 Saudi and non-Saudi administration nurses participated from nine tertiary care hospitals in Saudi Arabia	Descriptive analysis and Correlational coefficient	Hospitals that worked on the job satisfaction plan reported a decrease in vacancies. The job satisfaction efforts in hospitals included teamwork and improved working relationships between departments, competitive wages, a happy work environment and adequate support for nursing personnel
El-Gilany and Al-Wehady (2001): Job satisfaction of female Saudi nurses	Descriptive quantitative design	233 female Saudi nurses participated from government healthcare facilities in the Al-Hassa region	Descriptive analysis and Fisher's exact test	The female Saudi nurses were satisfied with their jobs and the main factor that could increase their satisfaction was to improve the social view of the nursing as a profession and to provide a comfortable working environment
Omer (2005): Leadership style of nurse managers at the Saudi National Guard hospitals	Mixed methods descriptive, non-experimental and comparative design	271 Saudi and non-Saudi nurses and managers from two National Guard hospitals in Riyadh and Jeddah	Descriptive analysis, correlation, one-way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis	There was a significant correlation between perceived leadership style and three organisational outcomes: job satisfaction, effectiveness and extra effort
Al-Ahmadi (2009): Factors that affect the performance of hospital nurses in the Riyadh region of Saudi Arabia	Descriptive quantitative design	923 Saudi and non-Saudi nurses from 15 randomly selected MoH hospitals in the Riyadh region	Descriptive analysis, correlation, t-test and regression analysis	The highest satisfaction indicated was related to work; the lowest satisfaction indication was related to pay. There was a higher correlation between job satisfaction and male and married nurses
Zaghloul et al. (2008): Intention to stay and nurses' satisfaction dimensions	A cross-sectional descriptive quantitative design	276 Saudi and non-Saudi nurses participated from KFHU in Al-Khobar	Descriptive analysis and ordinal regression analysis	Nurses were dissatisfied with the hospital benefits offered, implemented hospital policies and recognition of their achievements
Mitchell (2009): Job satisfaction and burnout among foreign-trained nurses in Saudi Arabia	Triangulated mixed methods	453 foreign-trained nurses from 25 different public and private hospitals in two cities in the Makkah region	Descriptive analysis, one-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation, t-test and multiple regression analysis	Job satisfaction via recognition, work itself, salary, work conditions, achievements, company policy and administration, relationships with supervisors and relationships with peers. Job dissatisfaction via company policy and administration, work conditions, status, relationships with supervisors, security and personal life
Al-Dossary <i>et al.</i> (2012): Job satisfaction of nurses in a Saudi Arabian university teaching hospital	A quantitative cross-sectional method	189 Saudi and non-Saudi nurses participated from a university teaching hospital in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia	Descriptive analysis, one-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation and t-test	Nurses were satisfied with supervision, co-workers and the nature of their work. However, they were dissatisfied with pay, fringe benefits, contingent rewards and operating conditions

Al-Zayyer's (2003) descriptive study of nurses who worked in nine different tertiary hospitals had a response rate of 46% of 259 nursing administrators. Al-Zayyer examined their recruitment and retention strategies, as well as the barriers to these strategies, over a three-year period. The author discovered that 40.3% of the nursing administrators reported that the numbers of vacancies remained the same during this three-year period; 34.5% of the responding administrators reported increased vacancies; and 21.8% reported a decrease in vacancies. The nursing administrators in this study provided several reasons for an increase in vacancies, which included salaries, competitive job markets, increased workload, expansion of services, the political situation in Saudi Arabia, financial instability, lack of support for nursing personnel, the living conditions in Saudi Arabia, and personal reasons. However, Al-Zayyer found that hospitals that had actively worked on the job satisfaction plan reported a decrease in vacancies. Further, the job satisfaction efforts in the hospitals included teamwork and improved working relationships between departments, competitive wages, a happy work environment and adequate support for nursing personnel.

El-Gilany and Al-Wehady (2001) studied job satisfaction in female Saudi nurses in a descriptive study of 243 female Saudi nurses working in government healthcare facilities at Al-Hassain the northern region of Saudi Arabia. This study assessed the degree of job satisfaction of Saudi female nurses and identified the factors that could positively influence their satisfaction. With a response rate of 95.9%, the findings of the study revealed that most nurses were generally satisfied with their job, and that the main factors that could increase their satisfaction were to improve the public image of nursing as a profession and to provide a comfortable working environment. The authors did not identify a validated and standardised measure of job satisfaction for nurses in Arabic and therefore, this was measured as a subjective feeling of the nurse on a self-rated scale. The relatively small sample in this study revealed the need for a larger scale study using a standardised, validated, and culturally appropriate instrument for assessing job satisfaction among the diverse nursing population in Saudi Arabia.

The table below summarises all the above studies of Saudi Arabian nurses by Saudi and non-Saudi researchers. The studies investigated a variety of Saudi geographical areas and healthcare sectors, and employed a range of methods, samples, aims, and data analysis techniques (Abo-Znadh, 1999; Al-Aameri, 2000; Al-Zayyer, 2003; Omer, 2005; Mitchell, 2009; Zaghoul *et al.*, 2008; Al-Ahmadi 2009;

Al-Dossary *et al.*, 2012; El-Gilany & Al-Wehady, 2001).

### Conclusions

Given the dramatic shortage of Saudi registered nurses and the resulting need for over half of all nurses in SA to be recruited from outside the country (MoH, 2011), identifying factors that support nursing job satisfaction and developing strategies to retain and recruit Saudi nurses is critical. In addition, the identification of factors supporting job dissatisfaction can help to inform the development of new policies and support services for nurses and possible workforce improvement. From this review of the existing literature, nurses in SA were generally satisfied with the nature of the work (Al-Dossary *et al.*, 2012; Mitchell, 2009), but satisfaction levels were impacted by variables such as salary, leadership, peer and supervisor relationships, hospital policies and benefits, work environment, age, years of experience, and organizational commitment (Al-Aameri, 2000; Omer, 2005; Zaghoul *et al.*, 2008; Al-Ahmadi, 2009; Al-Dossary *et al.*, 2012; Mitchell, 2009).

Using this information gained related to the factors that support or reduce job satisfaction among this particular population of nurses, strategies can be developed to support job satisfaction, which will, in turn, likely promote retention and recruitment of nurses. The literature supports strategic efforts to boost job satisfaction among nurses in SA through an emphasis on teamwork, peer relationships, providing competitive wages, providing support for nursing personnel, and efforts to improve the work environment (Al-Zayyer, 2003). Another critical factor that would support job satisfaction and increased recruitment and retention of nurses was noted to be a shift in social views of nursing in SA (El-Gilany & Al-Wehady, 2001). Thus, new efforts to support nursing recruitment and retention, as well as satisfaction, may be through a focus on the public image of nursing and efforts at improving the work environment in terms of recognition, benefits and salary, working relationships with peers, and transformational leadership, to provide a comfortable and positive work environment. Additional research is needed in these areas to support effective strategies for improvement.

Given the importance of cultural aspects and perspectives related to social views of nursing on job satisfaction, nursing retention, and recruitment, cultural perspective is an important aspect of the discussion of nursing in Saudi Arabia, where, at present, the majority of the nursing population is foreign. Future research toward supporting nursing in SA may hinge on cultural and social views of nursing. Additional research will be essential to solutions.

### Summary

The main goal of the current literature review is to identify and explore the factors that influence job satisfaction among female and male Saudi nurses working in public and private hospitals in Saudi Arabia. This review began by defining job satisfaction, presenting the research history and contextual background of job satisfaction, leading to a discussion of job satisfaction specific to nurses in Saudi Arabia. This review has provided an exploration of the existing literature and has identified and described nursing job satisfaction and the factors that influence Saudi and non-Saudi nurses' job satisfaction in many areas in Saudi Arabia. In addition, in reviewing the literature related to the relationship between nurse job satisfaction and organisational commitment, the strategies for improved satisfaction and nurse retention in Saudi Arabia were discussed.

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