

## Addressing The Nursing Workforce Shortage In Saudi Arabia: A Multi-Faceted Approach

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### Abstract

*The nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia has become a growing concern in recent years. This qualitative review paper aims to analyse the issue and suggest a multi-faceted approach to address it. The paper identifies the underlying factors contributing to the shortage, including an aging workforce, high turnover rates, and limited educational opportunities. The findings of this paper suggest that the nursing shortage in Saudi Arabia is a complex problem that requires a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, there is a need to address the retention of existing nurses by providing better working conditions, competitive salaries, and opportunities for professional growth. Additionally, efforts should be made to attract and recruit more nurses, both locally and internationally, through targeted marketing strategies and competitive compensation packages. Another important aspect of addressing the nursing workforce shortage is the development of a strong and sustainable education system. This includes increasing the number of nursing schools, establishing specialized training programs, and promoting continuous education and professional development for nurses. Furthermore, addressing cultural and social barriers, such as gender stereotypes and lack of support for female employment, can also play a crucial role in attracting and retaining nurses. Finally, involving nurses in policy-making and decision-making processes can lead to better job satisfaction and retention rates. Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment, where nurses feel valued and respected, can also contribute to addressing the shortage. This paper aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, healthcare organizations, and nursing professionals in developing effective solutions to combat this pressing issue.*

**Keywords:** *Nursing Workforce Shortage, Saudi Arabia, Multi-Faceted Approach, Solutions.*

### Introduction

The nursing workforce plays a vital role in the delivery of healthcare services, both globally and in Saudi Arabia. Nurses are the primary caregivers who work closely with patients and are responsible for providing high-quality care, promoting health and wellness, and preventing and treating diseases and injuries (AlYami & Watson, 2014). However, in recent years, there has been a growing concern over the shortage of nurses worldwide, and Saudi Arabia is no

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exception. The nursing workforce shortage is a complex and multi-faceted issue that has significant implications for the healthcare system and the population's overall health and well-being.

Saudi Arabia is a country that has experienced significant changes and advancements in its healthcare system in recent years. The country has invested heavily in its healthcare infrastructure, leading to improved health outcomes and increased demand for healthcare services (Almalki, et al., 2011). According to the Almalki, et al. (2011), Saudi Arabia has achieved universal health coverage with a high life expectancy and low infant mortality rate. However, the country faces several challenges, such as an aging population, high prevalence of chronic diseases, and an increasing demand for healthcare services, all of which have put a strain on the healthcare system, particularly the nursing workforce.

The nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia has been a recurring issue for the past few decades. Various reports from the Ministry of Health, the Saudi Health Council, and other healthcare organizations have highlighted the shortage and its potential consequences on the quality of healthcare services (Aboshaiqah, 2016). This is a significant concern as the demand for healthcare services increases due to the growing population and prevalence of chronic diseases, particularly among the elderly. Therefore, addressing the nursing workforce shortage has become a top priority for the Saudi government and healthcare organizations.

Several factors contribute to the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia, including inadequate workforce planning, limited recruitment and retention strategies, and challenges in attracting Saudi nationals to the profession (Alsubaie & Isouard, 2019). These factors have resulted in a low nurse-to-population ratio. The shortage has also led to increased workloads, burnout, and job dissatisfaction among nurses, negatively impacting the quality of care they provide.

Addressing the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the diverse and interconnected factors contributing to the problem. Traditional solutions, such as increasing the number of nursing students and recruiting foreign nurses, have been ineffective in addressing the shortage's root causes. Therefore, there is a need for a more comprehensive and evidence-based approach to address the nursing workforce shortage and ensure a sustainable healthcare system in Saudi Arabia.

This qualitative review paper aims to explore and critically analyse the various approaches that healthcare organizations and the Saudi government have adopted to address the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. This will include an in-depth analysis of the existing literature on workforce planning, recruitment and retention strategies, and initiatives to attract more Saudi nationals to the nursing profession. Moreover, this paper will also discuss the challenges and potential barriers that may hinder the successful implementation of these approaches.

## **Methods & Results**

### **Methods**

This qualitative review paper aims to explore the current state of the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia and propose a multi-faceted approach to address this issue. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to gather data and information regarding the current nursing workforce situation in Saudi Arabia, as well as the various strategies implemented to address the shortage. The review was conducted using online databases such as PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar. Articles were selected based on their relevance to the topic, with a focus on those published in the last 10 years.

Inclusion criteria for the articles were:

1. Articles published in English language
2. Articles focused on nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia
3. Articles discussing strategies and approaches to address the nursing workforce shortage
4. Articles published in the last 10 years

Exclusion criteria were:

1. Articles not relevant to the topic
2. Articles that focused on other countries
3. Articles published before 2010

The shortlisted articles were read thoroughly and analysed to identify common themes and patterns related to the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. The themes identified were used to develop the proposed multi-faceted approach to address the issue.

## **Results**

The nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia has been a pressing issue for several years, leading to concerns about the quality of healthcare and the ability of the healthcare system to meet the growing demands of the population. Despite efforts by the government and healthcare organizations to recruit and retain nurses, the shortage persists, posing significant challenges to the delivery of healthcare services.

The first approach identified in our review was the recruitment of international nurses. Over the past decade, Saudi Arabia has relied heavily on foreign healthcare workers to address its nursing workforce shortage. This strategy has resulted in an increase in the number of nurses in the country, but it has not been without challenges. Many international nurses face language and cultural barriers, which affect their ability to provide quality care. Moreover, the high turnover rate among international nurses has made it difficult to sustain a stable nursing workforce in the country. (Alsadaan, et al., 2021).

Another approach that can be taken to address the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia is the implementation of educational and training programs. The government has invested in increasing the number of nursing schools and providing scholarships and other incentives to encourage Saudi nationals to pursue a career in nursing. The aim of this strategy is to reduce the country's reliance on international nurses and create a sustainable nursing workforce. Our review found that while there has been an increase in the number of Saudi nationals entering nursing education programs, there is still a significant shortage of experienced, qualified nurses in the country. Moreover, the implementation of these programs has faced challenges such as a lack of experienced faculty, inadequate resources, and limited clinical placement opportunities. These issues have hindered the development of a competent nursing workforce and have made it difficult for the country to achieve its goal of self-sufficiency in nursing. (Aljohani, 2020).

Additionally, our review found that the retention of nurses is a critical aspect of addressing the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. Nurses in the country face several challenges, including heavy workloads, long working hours, and limited career development opportunities. High turnover rates among nurses have exacerbated the workforce shortage and have resulted in a constant struggle to maintain the required nurse-to-patient ratio. (Falatah & Salem, 2018).

To address this issue, healthcare organizations have implemented various strategies, such as improving working conditions, offering career advancement opportunities, and providing

competitive salaries and benefits. However, a common theme among these strategies is the lack of sustainability, as these initiatives are often not financially feasible in the long term. (Almansour, et al., 2020).

Moreover, our review also identified the critical role of leadership and management in addressing the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. Effective leadership is crucial to creating and maintaining a positive work environment that promotes job satisfaction and encourages nurses to stay in their positions. However, our review found that there is a lack of effective leadership and management practices in many healthcare organizations in the country. The scarcity of leadership and management training programs for nurses has also contributed to this issue. (Al-Yami, et al., 2020).

Finally, our review highlights the importance of addressing the social and cultural factors that contribute to the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. The traditional societal norms and cultural values placed on certain professions have led to nursing being perceived as a less desirable career option for Saudis. Moreover, the lack of support and recognition from society and family members can discourage individuals from pursuing a career in nursing. The implementation of cultural competency training programs for healthcare providers, as well as campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of nursing, are crucial steps in addressing these social and cultural issues. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at changing societal attitudes towards nursing and promoting nursing as a valuable and respected profession could also help mitigate the nursing workforce shortage in the country. (Almutairi, et al., 2015).

In conclusion, our review of the various approaches taken to address the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach. The findings of our review indicate that a combination of international recruitment, educational and training programs, retention strategies, leadership and management support, and efforts to address social and cultural barriers is necessary to successfully address the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. However, it is crucial that these strategies are sustainable and continuously evaluated to ensure their effectiveness in meeting the country's healthcare needs.

## **Discussion & Conclusion**

### **Discussion**

The nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia has been a persistent issue that has affected the healthcare system of the country in numerous ways. Previous studies have highlighted the reasons for this shortage, such as low retention rates, lack of adequate educational opportunities, and an aging workforce. This qualitative review paper aimed to explore potential solutions to address the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. Through the analysis of various studies and reports, a multi-faceted approach has been proposed.

One of the major factors contributing to the nursing workforce shortage is the low retention rates in the profession. Nurses in Saudi Arabia face various challenges such as long working hours, inadequate salaries, and a lack of career growth opportunities. These issues can lead to burnout and low job satisfaction, ultimately resulting in nurses leaving the profession. To address this, the multi-faceted approach proposed in this paper includes increasing the salaries and benefits of nurses, improving their working conditions, and providing better career advancement opportunities. These measures can improve the retention rates of nurses by promoting job satisfaction and reducing burnout.

Moreover, the shortage of nursing faculty is another key factor contributing to the workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia. The country faces a limited number of nursing educational institutions and a low enrollment rate in nursing programs. This results in a shortage of

qualified nurses entering the workforce each year. To address this issue, the multi-faceted approach proposed in this paper includes increasing the number of nursing educational institutions, promoting the nursing profession among young students, and providing scholarships and financial aid for nursing students. These measures can attract more students to the nursing profession and increase the number of qualified nurses entering the workforce.

Another important aspect to consider in addressing the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia is the aging workforce. As the current nursing workforce in the country is aging, it is essential to take steps to retain the experienced nurses in the workforce. The proposed multi-faceted approach includes implementing flexible work arrangements, providing opportunities for skill enhancement and career development, and creating a supportive work environment for older nurses. These measures can help in retaining the experienced nurses and reducing the impact of the aging workforce on the shortage.

The shortage of nursing staff in remote areas of Saudi Arabia is another challenge that needs to be addressed. Many nurses prefer to work in urban areas due to better facilities and career opportunities, leaving the healthcare system in rural areas understaffed. To attract nurses to work in remote areas, the multi-faceted approach includes providing incentives and benefits, such as housing and transportation facilities, and creating opportunities for career advancement and skill enhancement. This can encourage nurses to work in these areas and help to address the regional imbalance in the nursing workforce.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia requires a multi-faceted approach to address the various challenges faced by the healthcare system. The proposed approach includes measures to improve retention rates, increase the number of nursing educational institutions and enrolment rates, retain experienced nurses, and address the regional imbalance in the nursing workforce. These strategies, if implemented effectively, can contribute to addressing the shortage and improving the quality of healthcare in Saudi Arabia. However, it is essential to note that these solutions require the collaboration and efforts of various stakeholders, including the government, healthcare organizations, and nursing associations. Sustained efforts and continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of these strategies are crucial in successfully addressing the nursing workforce shortage in Saudi Arabia.

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