

Leadership Perspectives on Nurse Retention: A Phenomenological Study of Workforce Sustainability in Private Hospitals of Nueva Ecija

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ABSTRACT

The healthcare sector in the Philippines faces a severe nursing shortage, intensified by high turnover rates—particularly in private hospitals in Nueva Ecija. This qualitative phenomenological research investigates strategies for retaining nurses by delving into the experiences of nurse supervisors and chief nurses within these institutions. Through purposive sampling and in-depth interviews, the study investigates factors influencing staff nurses' decisions to stay or leave, focusing on job satisfaction, burnout, and leadership practices. Findings highlight that nurse retention is shaped by generational differences, financial constraints, and workplace conditions. While many nurses remain committed to their profession, issues such as inadequate compensation, limited advancement opportunities and burnout hinder retention. Effective solutions must be comprehensive, combining competitive pay, structured mentorship, manageable workloads, and inclusive leadership. The study underscores the importance of cultivating supportive work environments, enhancing recognition, and involving nurses in policy development to boost morale and commitment. Recommendations include developing onboarding programs tailored to generational needs, institutionalizing mentorship, improving compensation packages, ensuring adequate staffing and resources, strengthening feedback mechanisms, and promoting continuous professional development. By focusing on nursing leaders' perspectives, this research addresses a notable gap in the literature concerning private hospitals in Nueva Ecija. The insights generated aim to inform evidence-based strategies to reduce nurse turnover, stabilize the workforce, and improve healthcare delivery in the region. Ultimately, the study calls for systemic reforms and responsive leadership as essential steps toward sustaining the nursing workforce amid ongoing challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The healthcare industry is currently facing a global crisis characterized by nurse shortages and high turnover rates. This issue is particularly critical in the Philippines, where many nurses seek better opportunities abroad, exacerbating the local shortage. Private hospitals in Nueva Ecija, are significantly affected by this trend, experiencing high nurse turnover that disrupts continuity of care, lowers staff morale, and increases operational costs due to frequent recruitment and training. This study aims to explore effective nurse retention strategies by examining the factors influencing staff nurses' decisions to remain in or leave their positions within private hospitals in Nueva Ecija. Specifically, it seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the elements contributing to nurse retention, such as job satisfaction, burnout, and the retention decisions made by nursing administration.

A key objective is to examine the perspectives of nursing administration including Chief Nurses and Assistant Chief Nurses as well as staff nurses regarding retention strategies. This leadership point of view is crucial for understanding perceptions of the work environment, current retention efforts, and recommendations for improvement. While existing research addresses nurse retention broadly, there is a notable gap in studies focusing on retention strategies in the context of private hospitals in Nueva Ecija.

This study aims to fill that gap by providing insights grounded in the local context. Ultimately, the findings of this research are expected to inform evidence-based retention strategies that can improve the work environment, enhance job satisfaction, and increase nurse retention rates in private hospitals, thereby contributing to better healthcare delivery in the region.

The Philippines is currently grappling with a severe nursing shortage, estimated at 127,000 as of 2023, with projections reaching 250,000 by 2030 (WHO, 2025). Despite producing 37,098 new registered nurses in 2024, many are expected to work abroad or leave the profession due to low compensation and limited local opportunities. This ongoing exodus exacerbates understaffing in hospitals nationwide (Rillo, 2025; Manila Standard, 2025). Furthermore, a systematic review reports nurse turnover rates vary widely, with a pooled prevalence of about 18%. Contributing factors include demographics (e.g., younger age, single status, limited experience, lower education, and male gender), organizational issues (e.g., low pay, heavy workload, small hospital size, and lack of unions), and job dissatisfaction (Wu et al., 2024). A meta-analysis also found that one in seven nurses leave their jobs, while two in five consider leaving the profession, influenced by factors like shift scheduling, employment status, work setting, and marital status (Mafula et al., 2025).

Addressing nurse turnover requires targeted strategies. Studies highlight the critical role of transformational leadership and work-life balance in enhancing nurse retention, although career growth and work well-being showed less impact in some contexts (AbdELhay et al., 2025). Implementing favorable staffing practices, providing mental health support, and offering professional growth opportunities are essential measures to reduce turnover intention and stabilize the nursing workforce. Moreover, the Department of Health (DOH) in the Philippines recognizes the urgent need to fill approximately 106,000 nursing positions across public and private facilities and is advocating for policies to retain healthcare workers, including maintaining deployment caps and offering incentives to encourage nurses to remain in the country (DOH, 2025).

This study contributes to the growing body of evidence on nurse retention by focusing on the specific challenges and strategies within private hospitals in Nueva Ecija. By understanding the local context and leadership perspectives, it aims to inform effective interventions that improve nurse retention, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately strengthen healthcare delivery in the region.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative phenomenological design aimed at exploring the lived experiences of nurse supervisors and chief nurses in selected private hospitals in Nueva Ecija. Through this design, the study intended to deeply understand the challenges these healthcare leaders face concerning staff nurse retention, and to use these insights as a foundation for developing effective strategies.

The study was conducted in various private hospitals across Nueva Ecija, a location selected due to its relevance to the research focus. The nurse supervisors and chief nurses in these hospitals provided first hand insights into retention-related issues in their specific settings.

Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method. This approach allowed the researchers to intentionally select individuals who possessed direct and relevant experience aligned with the study's objectives. Nine participants were included, each meeting the inclusion criteria and providing informed consent prior to participation.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, designed based on key concepts relevant to nurse retention, job satisfaction, and workplace conditions. The guide consisted of three parts: demographic information, experiences related to job satisfaction and retention, and perceptions of the work environment. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their personal experiences and professional insights in depth, ensuring the flexibility to explore emerging themes.

Interviews were conducted in a hybrid format—either online or face-to-face—depending on participant availability and preference. This format provided a comfortable and secure environment, encouraging participants to express themselves openly. All interviews were audio recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis led to the emergence of three major themes: “Young Blood, Fast Tracks, and Anchored Roots: The Changing Landscape of the Nursing Workforce,” “Between Passion and Paychecks: The Pulse of Nurse Satisfaction and Survival,” and “More Than Just a Shift: The Work Environment Behind Nurse Satisfaction and Retention.” These themes were central in interpreting the participants’ narratives and deriving meaningful conclusions.

Throughout the research process, ethical standards were strictly observed. Participants were fully informed about the study’s purpose, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, with personal identifiers removed from the data. The information collected was used solely for academic and programmatic development purposes, ensuring respect and protection of all participants involved.

This study specifically examines the perspectives of nursing leadership regarding retention efforts, work environment, and job satisfaction. A key inclusion criterion is that the participating chief nurses and nurse supervisors must have held their current positions for at least two years, ensuring that they have sufficient experience and insight into staff retention strategies. However, the study is limited to private healthcare settings within a single geographic area and does not include the perspectives of staff nurses themselves, which may affect the comprehensiveness and generalizability of the findings.

The method for gathering data for this study is a set of interview guide questions based on the concepts of Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL) and Social Exchange Theory (SET), with support from the Socio-Technical Systems (STS) theory.

This tool ensures alignment with the study's research questions by focusing on specific yet flexible themes that allow participants to share their lived experiences comprehensively. The interview guide includes open-ended questions addressing the challenges faced by nurse supervisors and chief nurses and their recommendations to improve the retention rate of the staff nurses.

This study follows strict ethical standards to protect nurse participants. Informed consent will be obtained, ensuring voluntary participation. Confidentiality and anonymity maintained, with data used solely for academic purposes to improve nurse retention. Participants’ privacy, integrity, and autonomy will be fully respected throughout the research.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part shows the data collected from interviews with nurse supervisors and chief nurses. Facts and experiences shared by the participants were refined and classified to create notable themes and sub-themes. Three main themes arose: young blood, fast tracks, and anchored roots: the changing landscape of the nursing workforce; between passion and paychecks: the pulse of nurse satisfaction and survival; and more than just a shift: the work environment behind nurse satisfaction and retention. These were meticulously analyzed and interpreted to satisfy the problems stated in the first chapter regarding their lived experiences that will serve as a basis for developing programs.

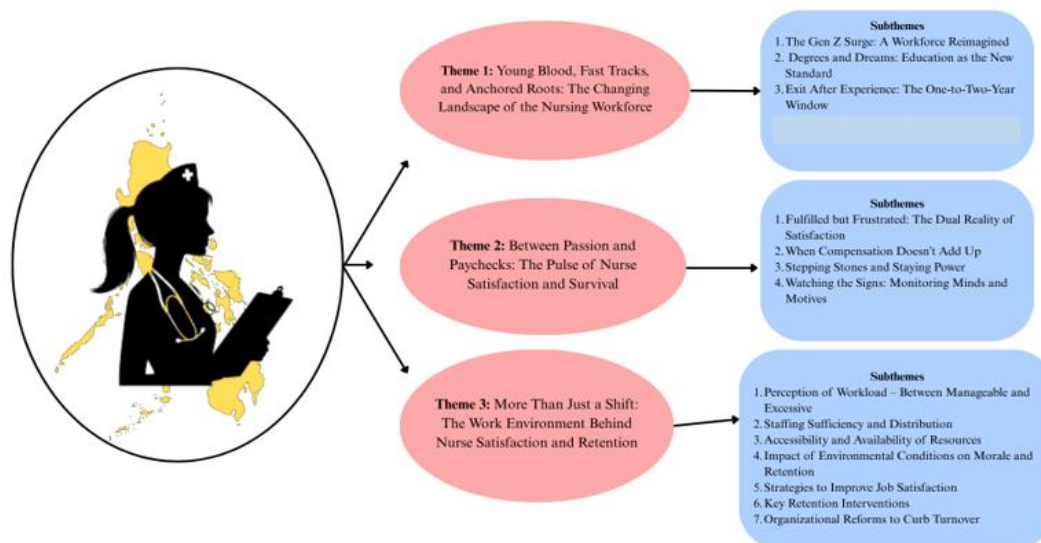
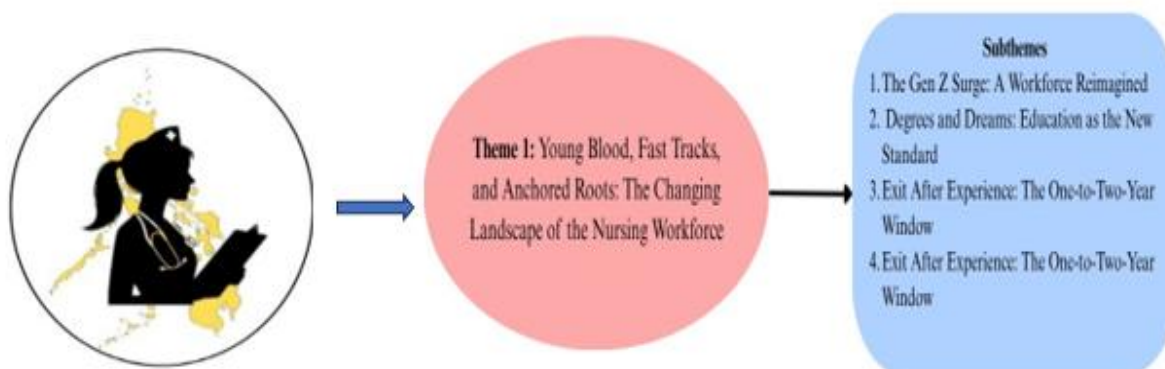


Figure 3. Theme Emerged from the Study

Theme 1: Young Blood, Fast Tracks, and Anchored Roots: The Changing Landscape of the Nursing Workforce



This theme presents how generational shift in nursing, where young, career-driven nurses enter the workforce with energy and innovation but often view local hospital roles as short-term stepping stones to opportunities abroad. This leads to high turnover and challenges in workforce stability. In contrast, experienced nurses provide vital mentorship and help maintain institutional continuity, though their role is often undervalued. The theme underscores the importance of generationally tailored retention strategies, as emphasized by Higgins (2022), and the value of mentorship programs in boosting new nurses' confidence and retention, as shown by Gualarte-Rinaldo et al. (2023).

Subtheme 1: The Gen Z Surge: A Workforce Reimagined

This subtheme illustrates a demographic shift, as hospitals are increasingly staffed by Generation Z and Millennial nurses. These individuals are academically qualified and motivated, often entering the workforce with fresh perspectives and modern training. Hospitals are now home to a younger generation of nurses—primarily Gen Z (ages 23–28) and Millennials—with strong academic credentials and fresh perspectives. Their presence marks a clear generational turnover in nursing.

Participant 2: "As a supervisor, I can tell you that most of the staff nurses in the hospital today are from Generation Z, specifically between the ages of 23 and 28. This change reflects a larger trend where younger generations, including both Millennials and Gen Z, have become the majority in the nursing workforce, gradually replacing older nurses who are retiring or transitioning into different roles."

The influx of Gen Z nurses brings innovation and energy but requires tailored onboarding and retention strategies. They value autonomy, purpose, and mentorship, prompting the need for updated leadership and workplace policies. Effective management must address generational differences to enhance cohesion and performance. Alshammari et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of leadership, mentorship, and bridging generational gaps to improve retention and workforce resilience.

Subtheme 2: Degrees and Dreams: Education as the New Standard

This data shows a significant increase in educational attainment among new nurses, many of whom are BSN holders or even pursuing graduate studies and international licenses. The majority are BSN graduates, with some already holding or pursuing master's degrees or specialized training, highlighting a workforce that is academically equipped for complex healthcare demands.

Participant 3: "Four of them are already licensed U.S. RNs. Ten staff members are experienced nurses, three are newly graduated, and six are early-career nurses. The rise in educational qualifications suggests that today's nurses are better prepared to handle complex clinical roles, but it also indicates a strategic preparation for overseas employment."

Hospitals benefit from a well-educated nursing workforce but face competition from higher-paying international jobs. To retain nurses, they must improve incentives, offer leadership roles, and support local professional growth. More nurses are earning BSN and advanced degrees, preparing them for complex roles and international mobility (Fang & Li, 2021). However, retention remains a challenge, highlighting education as a key factor in nursing career paths.

Subtheme 3: Exit After Experience: The One-to-Two-Year Window

A critical finding is the short duration of employment among young nurses, who often see local jobs as a launching pad for migration. Many younger nurses see local employment as a temporary stage to gain experience before going abroad, creating a cycle of high turnover that challenges workforce stability.

Proceedings homepage: <https://conferenceproceedings.ump.ac.id/pshms/issue/view/47>

Participant 4: “Those younger nurses usually are leaving after a year or two after gaining enough years of experience needed for abroad.”

Participant 7: “Younger nurses often leave to work abroad after just one or two years.”

Interviewed participants noted that many nurses leave for overseas jobs after gaining experience, with new graduates often departing within 1–2 years. This short employment cycle creates workforce instability and strains recruitment and training efforts. To improve retention, local career options must better match international standards in pay, workload, and recognition, while also building loyalty and institutional pride. The National Academies (2020) report supports this by highlighting the shift to degree-based nursing, which boosts skills but also raises global competition. It emphasizes the need for stronger incentives and career development to retain nurses locally.

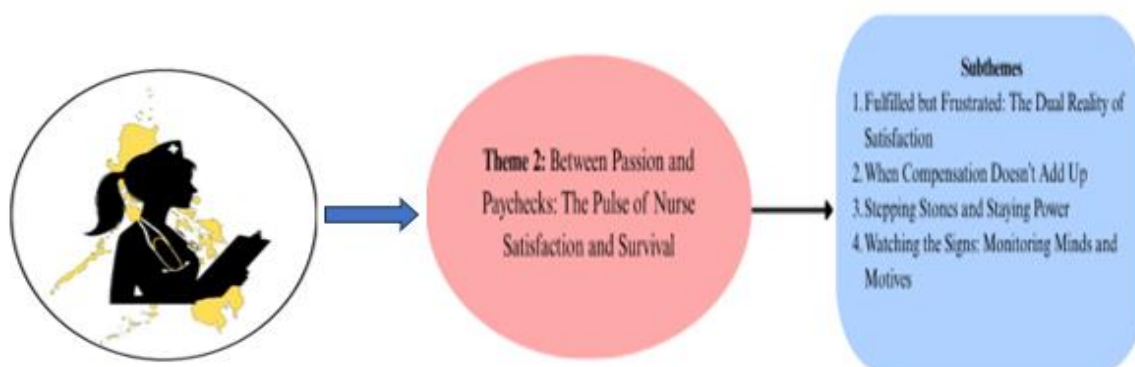
Subtheme 4: Mentors in the Middle: Balancing Youth with Experience

The role of veteran nurses emerges as a critical stabilizing force. They act as mentors, knowledge bearers, and team leaders, helping to bridge the gap between generational skillsets and attitudes, offering clinical guidance, continuity, and leadership that anchor hospital teams amidst ongoing turnover.

Participant 5: “Younger nurses bring energy and adaptability but need support to prevent burnout. Experienced nurses provide stability and mentorship. I think retention and satisfaction improve when there are opportunities for growth, fair workloads, and strong team work.”

Younger nurses bring energy but may burn out and lack crisis experience, while seasoned nurses offer crucial guidance and support. Mentorship is vital. Jang & Kim (2024) show it bridges generational gaps, boosts satisfaction, reduces turnover, and supports growth. Retaining experienced nurses requires balanced workloads, recognition, and leadership opportunities.

Theme 2: Between Passion and Paychecks: The Pulse of Nurse Satisfaction and Survival



This second theme highlights the emotional and practical challenges of nursing job satisfaction. Nurses often balance meaningful work with financial strain, while leaders face systemic limits. He et al. (2025) shows that factors like age, work setting, and policy awareness impact satisfaction and retention. The findings stress that emotional motivation alone isn't enough—structural and financial support are essential for sustaining a committed workforce.

Subtheme 1: Fulfilled but Frustrated: The Dual Reality of Satisfaction

Nurses often feel emotionally connected to their work through teamwork, purpose, and supportive supervisors, leading to moderate to high job satisfaction. However, persistent stressors—like high workloads, poor communication, and lack of recognition—undermine this fulfillment.

Participant 4: “Just enough I think, that is why they are still here with us.”

Zhang and Liu (2022) emphasize that emotional satisfaction is fragile and must be supported by effective leadership, fair recognition, and clear communication. A multidimensional approach is essential to truly improve nurse satisfaction and retention.

Subtheme 2: When Compensation Doesn't Add Up

Many nurses face economic insecurity—low pay, lack of hazard pay, and unstable job status—despite their passion for the work. This subtheme highlights the paradox of loving a job they can't afford.

Participant 9: “Overall, our nurses here are happy and seem satisfied with their work. Only a few choose to leave, usually because they find the salary a bit too low.”

Participant 4: “Salary, understaffed, they want hazard pay but as of now, we do not offer hazard pay.”

Emotional dedication can't offset financial strain, which weakens morale and retention. He et al. (2025) found that fair pay and job security are key to satisfaction and reducing turnover.

Subtheme 3: Stepping Stones and Staying Power

This subtheme highlights the two career paths nurses take: some stay for stability or personal reasons, while others use the job as a step toward working abroad.

Participant 1: "Some of the nurses end up staying here for a long time, probably because they're happy with their work and kind of see this place as their second home. I guess a lot of them don't want to take the risk of leaving a steady job. The ones who do leave usually let you know they're only planning to stick around for two or three years since they mainly want to get some hospital experience. That's pretty normal, lots of them see it as a stepping stone. I try to appreciate both, the ones who stay and make this place feel like home, and the ones who come in with fresh energy and new ideas. It's all about keeping the team balanced and strong."

Retention isn't just about pay—it also involves life circumstances, risk tolerance, and workplace connection. De Guzman & Dela Cruz (2022) found that Filipino nurses are split between "stayers" and "movers," stressing the need for tailored strategies like development opportunities, fair pay, and supportive environments to meet their different needs.

Subtheme 4: Watching the Signs: Monitoring Minds and Motives

Supervisors monitor nurse morale using formal tools (surveys, exit interviews) and informal cues (absenteeism, attitude shifts).

Participant 7: "When someone is often late or absent, you can usually tell they're thinking about resigning. When that happens, we make sure to call their attention to address it."

Proactive listening and open communication help spot issues early. Nguyen and Parker (2021) emphasize that engaged leadership and early intervention are vital for retention, highlighting the need for systems that blend data and relationship-based practices to prevent burnout and turnover.

Theme 3: More Than Just a Shift: The Work Environment Behind Nurse Satisfaction and Retention



The third theme offers a comprehensive view of how structural, logistical, and relational factors within the workplace shape nurses' job satisfaction, professional commitment, and decision to stay or leave. The theme emphasizes that retention is not simply about pay or passion—it is deeply influenced by day-to-day working conditions.

The work environment is a dynamic system where staffing, resources, leadership, scheduling, and culture interact to impact nurse resilience and retention. When these elements align, satisfaction and loyalty increase; when they fall short, burnout and turnover rise. Studies by Kurniati & Wulandari (2025), Smith & Jones (2024), and Kutney-Lee et al. (2021) highlight the critical role of improved working conditions, leadership, staffing, emotional support, and professional growth in fostering nurse retention.

Subtheme 1: Perception of Workload – Between Manageable and Excessive

Supervisors in private hospitals report balanced workloads with nurse-patient ratios of 1:3 to 1:4, helping reduce burnout. However, they face short-term strain during peak times or absences. In contrast, emergency rooms and public hospitals suffer chronic understaffing, causing high workloads that harm staff well-being and patient care.

Participant 1: "It's pretty manageable since this is a private hospital, and we usually maintain a ratio of one nurse to every three to four patients. We focus not only on providing excellent service but also on preventing nurse burnout. When nurses aren't overwhelmed, their performance naturally improves. We also make sure they're comfortable and have everything

they need to do their jobs well. Regular check-ins help us stay connected and address any concerns early on."

Participant 6: "There are times when the patient load becomes overwhelming, and there's simply no one from other areas who can be pulled in to help."

Galanis et al. (2025) link heavy workloads to burnout and turnover, stressing the need for flexible workload management and surge plans.

Subtheme 2: Staffing Sufficiency and Distribution

Several supervisors report staffing usually meets DOH and PhilHealth standards through effective shift planning and float nurses. However, absences can temporarily increase workloads. To manage this, supervisors use flexible, supportive leadership with real-time adjustments to maintain safe patient care.

Participant 9: "We make it a point to follow DOH and PhilHealth staffing standards, because without enough nurses, we simply can't give our patients the quality care they truly deserve."

Duffield et al. (2023) emphasize flexible scheduling, adaptable leadership, and float pools as key to handling absenteeism and ensuring quality care.

Subtheme 3: Accessibility and Availability of Resources

Private hospitals generally maintain adequate medical supplies through careful inventory control, but still face issues like delays in lab results, limited equipment, and lack of night support staff. Supervisors stress proactive communication and efficient reporting to quickly resolve supply problems.

Participant 1: "Even though this is a private hospital, we've got access to all the resources we need. We just have to keep an eye on things and make sure we're using stuff wisely. We keep a pretty tight inventory, but everything's always ready when the nurses or patients need it. It's all about not wasting anything but still having what's needed right there. Having the right supplies makes everything run a lot smoother. We also tell the team to speak up if they notice anything missing or if they need extra help. That way, we can sort things out before it becomes a problem."

Recent studies show that having enough supplies and equipment, along with good communication and teamwork—greatly improves how nurses work and how satisfied they feel with their jobs. A study by He et al. (2025) found that well-managed resources and proactive communication systems help prevent shortages and reduce nurse stress, thereby fostering better morale and improving care quality. These findings align with the subtheme emphasizing the importance of well-resourced work environments and open communication channels in supporting nurse well-being and performance.

Subtheme 4: Impact of Environmental Conditions on Morale and Retention

Supervisors link poor workplace conditions—like high workload, low staffing, and limited resources—to nurse burnout and turnover, often driving nurses to seek better jobs abroad. However, strong teamwork and positive culture help sustain morale during stress.

Participant 1: "Workload, staffing, and having the right resources really impact how happy staff feel and if they want to stay. When nurses are overloaded or there aren't enough people, it gets stressful and makes them want to leave. But when the nurse to patient ratio is balanced, it helps prevent burnout and makes the job more doable. Having the tools and supplies they need also makes a big difference when staff feel supported, they're more motivated. A comfortable and safe work environment, plus good teamwork and supportive managers, helps people feel valued. When all that's in place, staff are happier and more likely to stick around. If not, they might start looking for other options."

There is a clear link between environmental conditions (e.g., staffing, supplies, workload) and nurses' emotional well-being. Poor environments push nurses toward resignation or migration. Investing in environmental improvements is a retention strategy, not just a logistical one. Supportive teamwork and good leadership can buffer negative conditions, but only temporarily.

This study examines how workplace factors such as staffing adequacy, workload, and resource availability directly influence nurse emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. It finds that poor work environments increase burnout and the desire to leave, while positive team support and leadership can buffer these effects but only temporarily. The research highlights the critical role of investing in better work conditions as a key retention strategy, echoing your subtheme's emphasis on environmental conditions shaping nurse well-being and decisions to stay or leave (Duffield, et al., 2024).

Subtheme 5: Strategies to Improve Job Satisfaction

Supervisors implement a range of strategies to enhance nurse job satisfaction, beginning with recognition and incentive programs such as monthly awards, "Best Nurse" titles, and social events like summer

outings and Nurses' Week celebrations that uplift team morale. In addition, providing access to training and professional development opportunities—such as pursuing a Master of Arts in Nursing (MAN) or attending seminars—helps nurses feel empowered and fosters long-term commitment to the organization. Flexible scheduling arrangements and an open-door leadership style further contribute to a positive work environment by promoting trust, emotional safety, and mutual respect between staff and supervisors.

Participant 5: "We've implemented regular skills training and professional development programs to help nurses grow. Recognition initiatives like 'Nurse of the Month' awards and open communication forums also boost morale. Additionally, we focus on maintaining fair workloads and providing support through mentorship."

Participant 3: "Strategies like flexible scheduling, recognition programs, and professional development opportunities—such as attending trainings and seminars—have been really effective in boosting job satisfaction among my staff nurses. Giving nurses the chance to grow and feel appreciated makes a big difference in how motivated and engaged they are. Flexible schedules also help them balance work and personal life, which is so important in this demanding field."

This study of Roche, et al., (2025) highlights how flexible, transparent, and equitable scheduling practices significantly improve nurse job satisfaction, work-life balance, and retention.

In addition, the study of Wang & Zhang (2022) demonstrates that flexible working hours combined with strong supervisor support reduce nurse burnout and increase job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Subtheme 6: Key Retention Interventions

Supervisors stress that supportive, trust-based leadership and fair workloads are vital for long-term nurse retention. Clear career growth, involvement in decisions, and recognition foster belonging and commitment. Mentorship builds confidence and support.

Participant 1: "The best way to keep nurses around is by creating a positive and supportive workplace where they feel truly valued. Recognizing their hard work with awards and regular shout-outs goes a long way in boosting motivation. Giving them chances to grow through trainings and leadership opportunities helps them see a future here. Making sure workloads are manageable and staffing is balanced helps prevent burnout and keeps them confident in their care. And when management stays open and listens, it builds trust and makes nurses feel heard and supported."

Studies show that such leadership, equitable workloads, and inclusive cultures reduce burnout and turnover (Bell et al., 2025; Kelly et al., 2024; Manley et al., 2024).

Subtheme 7: Organizational Reforms to Curb Turnover

Supervisors emphasize that while competitive pay is key to reducing nurse turnover, non-monetary rewards like recognition and supportive leadership also boost satisfaction, especially when budgets are tight. Involving nurses in decisions fosters engagement and retention.

Participant 2: Things like salary, incentives, training opportunities, and the vibe at work really affect how happy people feel on the job. If the hospital can make some positive changes in these areas, I believe it would go a long way in cutting down turnover and making staff feel more satisfied. When nurses feel they're paid fairly, supported, and given chances to grow, they're much more likely to stick around. It's not just about the money it's about feeling respected and part of a team that cares. Even small improvements in workplace attitude and support can make a big difference in how connected and valued everyone feels.

Shields & Ward (2025) and the International Council of Nurses (2025) agree that pay alone isn't enough—relational factors and empowerment matter. The National Healthcare Retention Report (2025) highlights that combining fair pay, recognition, leadership, and flexible scheduling effectively lowers turnover.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that keeping nurses in private hospitals depends on a mix of factors like different generational needs, pay, and work conditions. Although nurses still care deeply about their work, passion and emotional fulfillment aren't enough to overcome low salaries, limited career growth, and burnout caused by problems in the system. To keep nurses, hospitals need a broad approach that includes fair pay, recognition, mentorship, balanced workloads, and inclusive leadership. The findings highlight the urgent need for changes in the system and strong, responsive leadership to keep the nursing workforce stable and the organization strong.

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