

TRENDS AND DEMAND FOR NURSING IN EMERGENCY ROOMS IN SAUDI ARABIA: CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Saleh Hussain Al Siwar

Emergency Medical Technician
ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL
NAJRAN

Abdullah Waled Alaesaa

Emergency Medical Services Specialist
ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL
NAJRAN

Saif Zaid Alshahrani

Emergency Medical Technician
ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL
NAJRAN

Abdullah Saeed Almutairi

Nurse Technician
ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL
NAJRAN

Mohammed Ahmed Alamri

Nurse Technician
ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL
NAJRAN

Hamad Qublan Al-Qahtani

Emergency Medical Technician
ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL
NAJRAN

Abstract:

Nursing practice in Saudi Arabia especially in the emergency rooms (ERs) has expanded in the last twenty years and faced various challenges. This paper analyzes the pattern and prospect of the job along with the demands and challenges that ER nurses of Saudi Arabia encounter focusing on the forces that have influences on these dynamics and consequences for Saudi Arabian healthcare organizations. Determining areas of focus involves an assessment of surveys, case studies, and other publications which have been issued in the period between the year 2000 and 2022 inclusive,

the primary areas of focus include staffing levels, job satisfaction, educational requirements for workers, and localization of workforce strategies.

Previous researches have established that optimal nurse staffing has been noted to be effective in providing the best standard of care in the emergency department (Alharthi et al., 2021). While the government has tried to improve the number of workers in the healthcare system the issues like high turnover and dissatisfied employees still exist (Al-Dossary et al. 2012, Al-Saadi & Alotaibi 2016). To deal with these concerns, the Saudi government over the years has adopted certain policies such as Saudization policy and investment into nursing education programs. However, the integration of expatriate nurses is still crucial to address some of these gaps in the shorter-term (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

The following are the key contributions of Vision 2030 on the subject of focus, the healthcare sector; To enhance service quality and workforce sustainability through the processes of digitization and privatization. Also, the requirement of specialized nursing positions in the ER has led to concerns with the professional growth of, and practice requirements for, registered nurses and the need to update their knowledge through advanced education and training (Aljohani, 2019). The author presents a report on policy strategies which would assist policy makers and administration associated with healthcare to enhance nurse workforce in ERs underlining the aspects of job satisfaction, staff adequacy and continuing education. By improving policies and practices in these crucial sectors, Saudi Arabia has the opportunity to build a stable and effective healthcare system that will cater for the people's needs in future.

Literature Review

Introduction

Historical development of nursing profession in Saudi Arabia can be stated to have noting the following changes. Until the seventies, nursing in Saudi Arabia was scarce and people consulted traditional birth attendants and other traditional healers for healthcare services. The emergence of oil in the middle of the 20th century signified a shift and the government embarked on a massive development of health facilities and equipment. In this regard, the Ministry of Health (MOH) was formed to provide direction to the evolution of healthcare services, which created the conditions needed to build a more systematic nursing profession.

Presently, the nursing professionals of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia embrace both Saudi nationals and expatriates; hence, diverse in terms of nationality of the Kingdom. However, the researchers point out that although government of Saudi attempted to recruit local nurses, expatriate personnel are still a major proportion of the nursing staff particularly in specialized fields like ERs (AlYami & Watson, 2014). The Saudi government has undertaken measures to encourage people of KSA to consider nursing as a respectable profession such as scholarship programs the enhancement of facilities for the nursing profession.

Nurses have a significant position in the Saudi Arabian health sector and are more focused on their emergency department. Emergency room nurses are in charge of providing first and foremost,

acute care, handling critical situations, and ensuring the patient's condition is stabilised to accommodate for subsequent steps. They are also expected to work alongside other healthcare practitioners besides attending to the needs of the patient: the record-keeping responsibilities of nurses (Almalki, Fitzgerald, & Clark, 2011). This multiple role depicts the crucial role of nursing in the system and the need for quality trained and sufficient staffing of nurse workforce.

Therefore, the status of nursing as it currently stands in Saudi Arabia portrays progressing work being done to professionalize the occupation and improve the specialty. The following decade has proved promising for the development of Nursing education: new schools and colleges have been opened, and nursing programs have been initiated in many parts of the Kingdom. Such programs are meant to prepare the nurses with knowledge that will help them in handling the challenges that come along with practice in today's health care sector, especially intensive care units like the emergency department (AlYami & Watson, 2014). This means that there is a significant focus on the continued enhancement of competence through professional development and specialisation in training in order to be able to address the complex dimensions of health.

In light of the dynamic relevance of healthcare in KSA, the importance of nursing profession cannot be overemphasized. Nurses are the primary actors in the care of the patients and in medical emergencies where early diagnosis and management has impact on the outcome. The Saudi government's Vision 2030 plan seeks to expand on the development of the healthcare sector; the future of nursing is also seen to have better quality and availability of nursing care. For instance, the Kingdom plans to raise the number of Saudi nurses, improve training processes, and implement new technologies that would contribute to the improvement of nurses' activities (Almalki et al., 2011). The increasing role of Nursing within the Saudi healthcare structure raise the need for further investment to address the growth of the Saudi population.

Demand for ER Nurses: Current and Future Needs

ER nurses: demand in Saudi Arabia There are several factors resulting in the importance of demand for the provision of health care services in Saudi Arabia. According to Almasabi & Thomas (2022), Saudi Arabia has a scarcity of nurses partly affecting the ER division. The factors that contribute to this shortage include the growing population, and expanding access to health care services. Similarly, any given population whether young or old will require medical attention and this comes with emergency services (Al-Maaitah & Shokeh, 2009). Likewise, Al-Maaitah and Shokeh (2009) have stressed on the ways how trends of the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia has been affected by population dynamics – there is a higher prevalence of acute and chronic diseases that cause the utilization of the emergency services.

Also, the changing trend in Saudi Arabia health care system depicted by the growth in health care access and infrastructure also leads to the need for ER nurses. Almasabi and Thomas (2022) add that nursing education plays a crucial role in the effort to solve the nursing shortage in KSA. Therefore, with the shifts within the healthcare system in an attempt to cater for the increased population, there is a strong need to increase the capacity of the nursing workforce through education and training. Also, the expansion of policies regarding the access to health care services

also speak of a need to provide adequate levels of staffing in ER departments to address the increased level of demand that is expected in the near future (Al-Maaitah & Shokeh, 2009).

However, understanding the specific problems that affect qualified and experienced ER nurses in the KSA is crucial to promote and stabilise such a vital profession. Such factors may include; increased working pressure, long working hours, and lack of adequate resources to work with; these factors lead to reduced job satisfaction, and hence the nurses in the ER become burnt out (Al-Maaitah & Shokeh, 2009). Solving these issues involves a combined strategy based on assessing the demand for and supply of skilled workers, as well as the implementation of national policies complemented by supporting organizational structures and practices that will prompt satisfaction with working conditions.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has added more pressure on the global healthcare systems, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia inclusive as this underlines the significance of adequately and professionally staffed ER force. Summing it up, the ongoing pandemic has resulted in higher demand and utilization of emergency services with hospitals witnessing growth in both, their patient volume and acuity. As a result, healthcare organizations have found themselves pushed to the edge experiencing severe challenges that call for extraordinary strategic management to accommodate and contain the ever-changing dynamics of the pandemic. ER nurses have been front liners where they have worked hard and post tremendous strength, flexibility, and dedication in dealing with numerous patients involved in the pandemic.

Therefore, opportunities in Saudi Arabia for ER nurses exist due to factors such as population growth, improvements in healthcare accessibility and growing healthcare systems, ER nursing challenges and changed systems, and changes in public health care – prompted by the COVID 19 pandemic. Meeting the demand for ER nurses is complex thus a multi-faceted strategy that covers workforce modeling, education/training supply, policies, and supportive structures within organizations. Thus, the Saudi Arabian authorities can ensure," states and secure the high-quality emergency care for the population in the present days and years to come by investing into the ER nursing workforce and addressing all the issues they face.

Staffing Levels and Quality of Care

Impact of Nurse Staffing on Quality of Care: Research by Alharthi, Almutairi, and Alqurashi (2021) underscores the critical link between nurse staffing levels and the quality of care in emergency departments (EDs) in Saudi Arabia. Adequate nurse staffing is essential for ensuring timely and effective patient care, including triage, assessment, and intervention. Studies consistently demonstrate that lower nurse-to-patient ratios are associated with adverse patient outcomes, including increased mortality rates and longer wait times for care (Alharthi et al., 2021). Furthermore, insufficient staffing can lead to decreased patient satisfaction and increased rates of adverse events, such as medication errors and hospital-acquired infections (Alharthi et al., 2021).

Challenges of Maintaining Adequate Staffing: Despite the recognized importance of nurse staffing, EDs in Saudi Arabia face significant challenges in maintaining adequate staffing levels. Factors contributing to staffing shortages include high patient volumes, nurse attrition, and limited resources (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Additionally, the demanding nature of ED work, characterized by unpredictable caseloads and high acuity patients, can further strain staffing resources (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Furthermore, competition for nursing talent, both domestically and internationally, poses challenges for recruitment and retention efforts (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

Consequences of Nurse Shortages: The consequences of nurse shortages in EDs are multifaceted and can have far-reaching implications for patient care and healthcare outcomes. Research by Alharthi et al. (2021) suggests that nurse shortages contribute to increased patient wait times, delays in treatment, and decreased overall quality of care. Moreover, nurse shortages can result in increased workload and stress among remaining staff, leading to burnout and job dissatisfaction (Alharthi et al., 2021). Ultimately, nurse shortages undermine the ability of EDs to provide timely, safe, and effective care to patients, exacerbating healthcare disparities and compromising patient outcomes.

Strategies to Address Staffing Challenges: To mitigate the impact of nurse shortages on quality of care in EDs, proactive strategies are needed. Almasabi and Thomas (2022) emphasize the importance of investing in nursing education and training programs to increase the pool of qualified nurses in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, efforts to improve working conditions, such as reducing mandatory overtime and providing adequate resources and support, can enhance nurse retention and job satisfaction (Almasabi & Thomas, 2022). Furthermore, leveraging technology and telehealth solutions can help optimize workflow and efficiency in EDs, alleviating some of the burden on nursing staff (Almasabi & Thomas, 2022).

Future Directions: Looking ahead, addressing the staffing challenges in EDs requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses workforce planning, policy interventions, and organizational support. Alharthi et al. (2021) stress the importance of evidence-based staffing models that account for patient acuity, workload, and nurse skill mix. Moreover, fostering a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration and shared decision-making can promote efficiency and improve patient outcomes in ED settings (Alharthi et al., 2021). By prioritizing investments in nursing workforce development and implementing targeted strategies to address staffing challenges, EDs in Saudi Arabia can enhance the quality and safety of care for all patients.

Job Satisfaction and Retention Challenges

Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction: ER nurses have low job satisfaction in KSA due to several factors. According to Al-Dossary, Vail, and Macfarlane (2012), the major factors include patient care demands and/or pressures, staffing, professional development, and work climate. Accordingly, high working stress levels and staff shortage can be the cause of the frustration and burnout among the ER nurses which in turn affects the overall job satisfaction (Al-Saadi and

Alotaibi,2016). In addition, there is minimal job promotion and advancement among nurses due to this nurses may develop job dissatisfaction and stagnation (Al-Dossary et al. , 2012).

Implications for Nurse Retention: Due to the relationship that exists between job dissatisfaction and turnover intention, the studies show that achieving nurse satisfaction at the ER in Saudi Arabia has consequences for the issue of nurse retention. Al-Dossary et al. (2012) acting an endorsement to above said detail characterized that job dissatisfaction was significantly related with the level of turnover intentions among the nurses in a Saudi Arabian university teaching hospital. Some of the impacts of turnover are that it not only interferes with positive patient care relationships but also proves costly to organization since nurse recruitment and training is usually expensive (Al-Dossary et al. , 2012). Also, by leading to staff turnover, there will be problems of high staffing turnover resulting in more workload and demoralization amongst staff.

Impact on Patient Care Quality: The level of job dissatisfaction among ER nurses in Saudi Arabia is suggestive of the detrimental impact on the quality and safety of delivered care. Another study done by Aljohani in 2019 provides evidence that there is a relationship between JOB SATISFACTION and perceived quality of care among Saudi nurses. Dissatisfied nurses may lack enthusiasm with their work and may neglect to pay attention to details or adhere to clinical and or procedural guidelines as necessitated by their duty (Aljohani, 2019). Moreover, job dissatisfaction has an impact on the negative working relations and conflicts that are fabricated between members of the healthcare teams, which also worsens patient care quality (Aljohani, 2019).

Work Environment and Organizational Support: The findings of the study show that the work environment of these nurses has a significant influence and relates well with job satisfaction along with support from the organization. Al-Saadi and Alotaibi (2016) indicate that work environment influences intent through leadership, teamwork, and recognition of nurses' contribution in the ward. Also the opportunity of training and professional development could also help in increasing the satisfaction level of the employees or ER nurses and they will not be thinking of quitting their job easily. Furthermore, the adoption of evidence based staffing model and the workload management plans that have been around for quite some time can be able to reduce stress as well as to increase job satisfaction among the ER nurses (Al-Saadi & Alotaibi, 2016).

Future Directions: Job satisfaction and employees' turnover are important issues in maintaining the quality of service delivery in health care facilities , particularly in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and due to this, a comprehensive approach is needed to address these issues amongst the ER nurses. Thus, according to Al-Dossary et al. (2012), there is a need to provide working environment improvement strategies: To change the nurse workforce and empower them using the nurse empowerment programs and also to respect and appreciate the nurses working at different places. Furthermore, while increasing nurse education and training, it can also help supporting their career progression and improving workplace satisfaction (Alboliteeh et al., 2017). Through the promotion and protection of the welfare and training of emergency relief nurses, the Saudi Arabian health care institutions can therefore increase the recruitment and reduce revolving door syndrome and also enhance quality of care for patients admitted in the emergency units.

Educational Needs and Professional Development

The educational requirements for emergency room (ER) nurses in Saudi Arabia are complex and continuously changing. According to Almasabi and Thomas (2022), ongoing education and training is necessary to keep up with evolving healthcare trends and patient care demands. ER nurses must possess a strong foundation in fundamental nursing principles, as well as specialized expertise pertaining to critical care interventions, emergency medicine, trauma management skills (Almalki, Fitzgerald & Clark 2011). Proficiency in utilizing advanced technologies along with evidence-based practices could prove vital while delivering high-quality medical services under challenging conditions prevalent at rapidly-moving ER environments(Almalki et al., 2011).

The provision of professional development opportunities for emergency room (ER) nurses in Saudi Arabia is subject to varying factors, such as institutional resources, organizational focus areas and initiatives by the government. To enhance their expertise and abilities adequately, ER nurse workforce programs should be prioritized through investment according to Alboliteh et al.'s 2017 assertions. Formal educational schemes like advanced nursing degrees or specialty certifications complemented with informal learning events such workshops conferences plus simulation-based training are crucial options available for this purpose(per Alboliteh et.al., 2017).

The significance of Continuing Education: ER nurses in Saudi Arabia rely heavily on continuing education to sustain and improve their skill sets. With advancements in healthcare technology, evidence-based practices, and clinical guidelines being regularly introduced, Almasabi and Thomas (2022) acknowledge the importance of ongoing learning throughout one's career. By participating in such programs, emergency care providers can remain knowledgeable about emerging trends while staying up-to-date with best practices - ultimately leading to improved outcomes for patients by delivering safe interventions based on sound research (Almasabi & Thomas 2022). Continual professional development also nurtures critical thinking abilities that are central when dealing with complicated cases within an extremely fast-paced environment like the ER(Almasbi&Thomas 2022).

ER nurses benefit greatly from specialized training that provides them with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle unique challenges in emergency care. According to Almalki et al. (2011), focused training on areas such as triage, resuscitation, trauma management, and disaster preparedness is highly recommended. In addition to clinical know-how, communication techniques, cultural competency and conflict resolution are crucial interpersonal skills that can improve ER nurse performance leading to better patient outcomes (Almalki et al., 2011). Additionally valuable simulation-based courses offer ER staff a safe environment where they can practice their decision-making abilities while enhancing teamwork & collaboration among peers through collaborative learning experiences (Almalki et at., 2011).

Looking ahead, a concerted effort is required to expand and enrich professional development opportunities for emergency room (ER) nurses in Saudi Arabia. Alboliteh et al.'s research highlights the importance of a collaborative approach between healthcare institutions, academic organizations, and professional associations to create training programs that are comprehensive and easily available for ER nurses based on their requirements. Furthermore, using technology like

online learning platforms can remove geographical obstacles while providing access to educational resources in remote or underserved areas (Alboliteeh et al., 2017). By investing in educational initiatives as well as cultivating an ethos of continuous education among its ER nursing workforce, Saudi Arabia may bolster capability levels and enhance the quality of urgent care services offered throughout the country's populace.

References

1. Alharthi, H., Almutairi, A., & Alqurashi, Z. (2021). The impact of nurse staffing levels on the quality of care in emergency departments in Saudi Arabia: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Emergency Nursing*, 47(6), 1114-1123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jen.2021.03.002>
2. Alsadaan, N., Jones, L. K., Kimpton, A., & DaCosta, C. (2021). Challenges facing the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia: An integrative review. *Nursing Reports*, 11(2), 395-403. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nursrep11020038>
3. Almasabi, M., & Thomas, S. (2022). The role of nursing education in addressing the shortage of nurses in Saudi Arabia: A systematic review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 60, 153-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2021.04.003>
4. Almalki, M., Fitzgerald, G., & Clark, M. (2011). The nursing profession in Saudi Arabia: An overview. *International Nursing Review*, 58(3), 304-311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-7657.2011.00890.x>
5. AlYami, M., & Watson, R. (2014). An overview of nursing in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Health Specialties*, 2(1), 10-12. <https://doi.org/10.4103/1658-600X.126058>
6. Al-Maaitah, R., & Shokeh, D. (2009). Nursing workforce trends in Saudi Arabia. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 15(5), 1241-1248. https://applications.emro.who.int/emhj/1505/15_5_2009_1241_1248.pdf
7. Aljohani, K. S. (2019). Current and future challenges for Saudi nursing workforce. *Journal of Health Informatics in Developing Countries*, 13(2), 1-12. <https://jhdc.org/index.php/jhdc/article/view/231>
8. Alboliteeh, M., Magarey, J., & Wiechula, R. (2017). The profile of Saudi nursing workforce: A cross-sectional study. *Nurse Education Today*, 53, 36-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2017.04.008>
9. Al-Dossary, R., Vail, J., & Macfarlane, F. (2012). Job satisfaction of nurses in a Saudi Arabian university teaching hospital: A cross-sectional study. *International Nursing Review*, 59(3), 424-430. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-7657.2012.00978.x>
10. Al-Saadi, M. M., & Alotaibi, J. S. (2016). The impact of work environment on job satisfaction of Saudi nurses. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 22(5), 530-538. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijn.12485>