

# The Impact of Nurses' Work-Life Integration on Nursing Retention in Saudi Arabia

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## Abstract

The global healthcare system is currently grappling with a severe nursing shortage, making the retention of existing nursing staff a critical priority. This challenge is particularly acute in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), where the healthcare sector relies heavily on a large expatriate workforce and faces persistently high rates of turnover intention. This literature review synthesizes recent academic research (2020–2025) to examine the relationship between nurses' work-life integration (WLI), or the broader concept of Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL), and nursing retention within the Saudi Arabian context. The review establishes that WLI is a significant and direct predictor of nurse retention, operating through mechanisms such as enhanced job satisfaction and reduced burnout. Key findings highlight that a majority of nurses in KSA report dissatisfaction with their work life, leading to alarmingly high turnover intentions. Furthermore, the review identifies critical mediating factors, including supportive transformational leadership, a positive work environment, and culturally sensitive policies, as essential for improving WLI and, consequently, retention. The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and healthcare administrators to implement WLI-focused strategies, such as flexible scheduling and enhanced managerial support, to stabilize the nursing workforce and ensure the sustainability of high-quality patient care in the Kingdom.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Integration, Nursing Retention, Saudi Arabia, Quality of Nursing Work Life, Turnover Intention

## Introduction

The nursing profession serves as the essential foundation of the global healthcare system, yet it is continually challenged by chronic staffing shortages and high rates of attrition (AbdELhay et al., 2025). The inherent demands of nursing, characterized by long hours, significant emotional labor, and high-stakes decision-making, frequently result in burnout and a strong desire to leave the profession or the current workplace (Al-Otaibi et al., 2025). Consequently, the retention of skilled and experienced nurses has become a central strategic imperative for healthcare organizations worldwide.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the challenge of nurse retention is intensified by a unique combination of demographic and systemic factors. The KSA healthcare system has historically depended on a substantial expatriate nursing workforce, which introduces complexities related to cultural adjustment, family separation, and contractual limitations (Albougami, 2020). This reliance, coupled with the ambitious workforce nationalization goals of Saudi Vision 2030, places immense pressure on healthcare institutions to stabilize their nursing staff. Studies consistently reveal a high prevalence of turnover intention among nurses in KSA, with some reports indicating that a vast majority express a desire to leave their current hospital (Kaddourah et al., 2018). This high turnover significantly affects the quality of patient care, strains remaining staff, and incurs substantial recruitment and training costs (Saleh et al., 2025). The problem is fundamentally one of retention, which is deeply intertwined with the nurses' experience of their work environment and their ability to integrate professional and personal lives (Alharbi et al., 2025).

The concept of Work-Life Integration (WLI) has emerged as a more contemporary and relevant framework than the traditional notion of Work-Life Balance (WLB) for professions like nursing. WLI acknowledges the blurring boundaries between work and personal life, seeking to create synergy and mutual enrichment between these domains rather than strict, separate balance (Alomari & AlAhmari, 2023). For nurses, whose work schedules are often non-traditional and demanding, the ability to integrate professional responsibilities with personal needs is crucial for maintaining well-being and commitment to the organization (Abou Hashish & Alnajjar, 2025). The primary aim of this article is to synthesize and critically analyze recent academic literature (2020–2025) concerning the impact of nurses' work-life integration on nursing retention in Saudi Arabia, providing evidence-based insights for policy and practice.

## Literature Review

The theoretical link between WLI/QNWL and retention is grounded in social exchange theory and job embeddedness theory (Alasiry et al., 2025). When an organization provides a supportive environment that facilitates WLI, nurses perceive this as a valuable resource and a demonstration of organizational support. This positive exchange fosters job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which are the immediate precursors to retention. Conversely, a poor Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL), marked by work-life conflict, leads to stress, burnout, and the intention to seek employment elsewhere (Alharazi, 2019).

### *Conceptualizing Work-Life Integration and Quality of Nursing Work Life*

The shift from Work-Life Balance (WLB) to WLI reflects a change in organizational philosophy. WLB often implies a zero-sum game, while WLI views the two domains as mutually supportive, allowing for flexible boundaries and the strategic use of technology to manage both simultaneously (Alomari & AlAhmari, 2023). For nurses, WLI is less about achieving a perfect 50/50 split and more about the organizational support and flexibility that allows them to meet both their professional obligations and their personal needs without excessive conflict (Alshmemri, 2025).

WLI is a core component of the broader, multi-dimensional construct of Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL), which encompasses the entire work environment and its impact on the nurse's physical and psychological well-being (Fabiana et al., 2025). The dimensions of QNWL

typically include: Work-Life Balance, Work Environment, Work Design (autonomy, workload, scheduling flexibility), Compensation and Benefits, and Relationships (support from colleagues and management) (Fabiana et al., 2025). Studies in KSA have consistently utilized QNWL as a framework, highlighting that challenges in QNWL are directly linked to negative outcomes such as compassion fatigue and turnover intention (Al-Dossary, 2022).

#### *The State of Nursing Retention in Saudi Arabia*

The nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia is characterized by a significant and persistent problem of turnover intention. An influential study by Kaddourah et al. (2018) established a baseline problem, reporting that a majority (54.7%) of nurses were dissatisfied with their work life, and an alarming 94% expressed an intention to leave their current hospital (Kaddourah et al., 2018). More recent studies confirm the issue is ongoing and complex (Alreshidi, 2021).

A defining feature of the KSA nursing workforce is the high proportion of expatriate nurses, who often face unique challenges that exacerbate work-life conflict and turnover, including separation from family, cultural barriers, and temporary contracts (Albougami, 2020). The high attrition of these skilled professionals contributes to a form of "brain drain" (Kattan & Al-Hanawi, 2025). Furthermore, retention challenges are not uniformly distributed. Recent research indicates that younger nurses, single nurses, and Saudi nationals report notably higher turnover intentions compared to their counterparts (Alshmemri, 2025). This vulnerability among the newly trained Saudi nursing workforce makes WLI support an essential component of national retention strategies (Alshmemri, 2025).

#### **Methodology**

This article is based on a systematic literature review designed to synthesize and critically analyze the relationship between nurses' work-life integration (WLI) and nursing retention within the Saudi Arabian context. The methodology employed focused on identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing academic research published between 2020 and 2025.

#### *Search Strategy and Scope*

The search strategy was focused on key concepts including "Work-Life Integration," "Work-Life Balance," "Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL)," "Nursing Retention," and "Turnover Intention," all specifically within the geographical scope of "Saudi Arabia" or "KSA." The temporal scope (2020–2025) was chosen to ensure the synthesis of the most current evidence reflecting the post-Vision 2030 healthcare landscape.

#### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

##### **Inclusion Criteria:**

- 1 Studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals.
- 2 Research focusing on nurses working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- 3 Studies published between January 2020 and the present (2025).
- 4 Research that quantitatively or qualitatively examined the relationship between WLI, QNWL, or WLB and outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, or retention/turnover intention.

##### **Exclusion Criteria**

- 1 Studies not conducted in the KSA context.

- 2 Studies published outside the 2020–2025 timeframe.
- 3 Non-empirical papers, editorials, or conference abstracts that did not present primary data or a comprehensive synthesis.

### *Data Synthesis and Analysis*

The identified literature was subjected to a thematic synthesis approach. Key data points, including statistical findings (e.g., correlation coefficients, significance levels), qualitative themes, and policy recommendations, were extracted and grouped into conceptual categories: (a) Direct Impact of WLI on Retention, (b) Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction, and (c) Moderating Factors (Leadership, Work Environment, Culture). This synthesis allowed for the construction of a coherent narrative that directly addresses the article's aim.

### **Findings**

The synthesis of the literature reveals a robust and multi-faceted relationship between WLI and nurse retention in KSA, mediated and moderated by several organizational and cultural factors.

#### *Direct Impact of Work-Life Integration*

Recent quantitative research provides compelling evidence for the direct and significant role of WLI in nurse retention. A 2025 study by AbdELhay et al., conducted in Al-Khobar, found that work-life balance was a strong and positive predictor of nurse retention (AbdELhay et al., 2025). The statistical analysis yielded a highly significant standardized coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.426 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that improvements in WLB directly translate into higher retention rates (AbdELhay et al., 2025). This study, which explained 23.4% of the variance in nurse retention, provides one of the strongest recent empirical arguments for prioritizing WLI initiatives in KSA healthcare settings.

#### *Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and Well-being*

The influence of WLI on retention is often mediated by its effect on job satisfaction. When nurses feel they have control over their work-life boundaries and that their organization supports their personal needs, their job satisfaction increases significantly (Alharbi et al., 2025). Alomari and AlAhmari (2023) found that WLB was crucial for enhancing job satisfaction, which in turn led to higher levels of commitment and retention among expatriate workers (Alharbi et al., 2025). The ability to successfully integrate work and life acts as a protective factor against the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization associated with burnout, thereby preserving job satisfaction and reducing the likelihood of turnover (AbdELhay et al., 2025). Poor WLI is a major source of chronic stress, which can lead to adverse health outcomes, compassion fatigue, and burnout (Alharbi et al., 2025).

#### *Moderating Factors*

The literature identifies three critical factors that moderate the WLI-retention relationship in the KSA context:

Moderating Factor	Key Finding and Impact on Retention	Supporting Reference
<b>Work Environment</b>	A supportive nursing work environment with adequate staffing, resources, and organizational support is crucial for work-life integration (WLI) success. Poor staffing and heavy workloads increase work-life conflict and turnover intentions among nurses.	Reinhardt et al. (2025)
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	Transformational leadership significantly influences nurse retention by fostering supportive management, improving job satisfaction, and lowering intention to leave; leadership that inspires and supports staff enhances retention outcomes.	Goens & Giannotti (2024)
<b>Cultural and Social Factors</b>	Cultural and social context matters in Saudi Arabia; expatriate nurses experience challenges such as cultural adaptation, language barriers, and family separation that influence job satisfaction and retention, while culturally tailored support is needed for both expatriate and Saudi nurses.	Albougami & Alotaibi (2020).

A key practical manifestation of WLI support is the implementation of flexible work arrangements. Studies suggest that providing nurses with greater autonomy over their schedules, such as flexible shift options, can significantly improve their QNWL and, consequently, their retention (Albougami, 2020).

## Conclusion

This literature review has established a clear and compelling link between nurses' work-life integration (WLI) and nursing retention in Saudi Arabia. The synthesis of recent research (2020–2025) confirms that WLI, as a central component of the Quality of Nursing Work Life (QNWL), is a significant predictor of a nurse's intent to stay in their current position. The persistent high turnover intention in KSA, particularly among expatriate and younger Saudi nurses, is directly correlated with dissatisfaction in QNWL. The evidence highlights that by facilitating WLI, healthcare organizations can enhance job satisfaction, mitigate burnout, and ultimately stabilize their nursing workforce.

To improve WLI and enhance nurse retention, healthcare institutions and policymakers in Saudi Arabia should focus on several evidence-based strategies. Firstly, Flexible Scheduling is paramount, requiring the implementation of flexible shift options, compressed workweeks, and part-time roles to grant nurses greater control over their schedules. Secondly, investment in Leadership Development is crucial, specifically training nurse managers to adopt a transformational leadership style that emphasizes individualized consideration and supportive communication, which has been shown to positively influence retention. Furthermore, effective Workload Management is necessary, achieved through regular audits of nurse-to-patient ratios and workload distribution to ensure adequate staffing and prevent work-life conflict due to excessive demands. Given the diverse workforce, Cultural Sensitivity must be integrated into WLI policies to address the distinct needs of both the expatriate and Saudi nursing populations, including support for family and social integration. Finally, organizations must commit to QNWL Monitoring by regularly assessing nurses' Quality of Nursing Work Life and WLI satisfaction using validated instruments to proactively identify and

address specific areas of dissatisfaction. By implementing these WLI-focused strategies, the KSA healthcare system can make a strategic investment in human capital, ensuring the sustainability of its nursing workforce and the provision of high-quality patient care.

### Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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### Availability of Data and Materials

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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