

Research Article

Work-Life Balance in Nurses

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Abstract

Objectives: Nursing is one of the most stressful professions, and nurses need to have a work-life balance. This article assesses the job stress of nurses and identifies ways to improve the work-life balance.

Methods: A study was conducted on nurses working in hospitals of Ferozepur, Punjab, with the help of a demographic sheet and a structured questionnaire. All nurses not on long leave and willing to participate in the study were included in the study group.

Results: 50% of the nurses felt more pressurized due to family responsibilities, and their career development had slowed down. Most of them thought that their job left less time for their kids and husbands. 70% of them found it difficult to manage their household and office work if they had small kids. In case of conflict between household work and office work, 40% of nurses gave preference to household work.

Conclusion: Provision of childcare facilities, flexible working hours, adequate childcare leave, establishment of work-life balance cells, and formulation of human resource/leave policies can help achieve an optimum work-life balance amongst nurses, increase productivity at work and reduce attrition rate.

Keywords: Nurses, nursing profession, work-life balance, job stress, flexible working hours

Cite This Article: Singh Sarla G, Sandhu M. Work-Life Balance in Nurses. EJMA 2024;4(4):224–227.

No one on his deathbed has ever said, 'I wish I had spent more time in office'. Work-life balance is the term used to describe how workers distribute their time between their professional and personal obligations. When someone has a good work-life balance, he or she can allocate his or her time in such a way that they don't feel overworked but is able to focus on other equally important aspects of life like family, friends, hobbies and social interaction. It is a state of well-being that an individual wishes to attain that allows him or her to efficiently manage multiple responsibilities at work, home and in the community while maintaining good physical, emotional and family health. Sirgy et al. indicated that a better work-life balance nurtures job satisfaction, job performance, organizational commitment and family satisfaction and reduces stress-related outcomes such as

psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depression.^[1]

Most people think that they have the most stressful job in the world, and no other job is more difficult than theirs. Every job has its share of stress, but some jobs are more stressful than others. The nursing profession is the third most stressful profession after that of military personnel and police officers, as per a survey carried out in Jun 2022 by Joanna Zambas, a career expert working with Career Addict.

Nurses need a work-life balance for several reasons. Firstly, the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the profession need to mark boundaries and accentuate self-care. Secondly, a tenable work-life balance may lead to improved efficiency, innovation and overall health. Thirdly, without a healthy work-life balance, nurses run the risk of burnout,

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Submitted Date: December 13, 2023 **Revision Date:** December 13, 2023 **Accepted Date:** June 25, 2024 **Available Online Date:** December 23, 2024

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depression, and poor patient outcomes. Fourthly, a balanced lifestyle is climacteric by staying motivated and getting going, which can improve patient care and clientele satisfaction. It is often said that the wise rest are at least as complicated as they work.

This article assesses the job stress of nurses working in selected hospitals in the state of Punjab, India and identifies ways to improve the work-life balance.

Methods

Ethical Approval

Approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee Civil Hospital Ferozepur (SMO, District Hospital Ferozepur), and permission to carry out the study was obtained from him (Permission dated 20 Oct 2023).

Subjects

A quantitative research approach and non-experimental descriptive research design were used to assess the work-life balance of 100 nurses working in rural and urban health centers of Ferozepur district, Punjab using a purposive sampling technique. All nurses working in rural and urban health care facilities of Ferozepur, Punjab, who were willing to participate in the study, were included as participants, and nurses on maternity/ long leave of more than 10 days who were unwilling to participate in the study were excluded.

A research tool was developed consisting of a socio-demographic profile sheet and a structured questionnaire for the nurses, and content validity and reliability of the device were determined by the expert's opinion and appropriate statistical analysis, respectively. Data collection was done with effect from 20 Oct to 20 Nov 2023 with socio-demographic variables, nine questions were asked to assess the work life balance. Confidence interval for observed proportions is 95%. The p value is drawn by using chi square test to compare the proportions of socio-demographic variables. Content validity of the tool was established by eight experts from the field of medicine and nursing. Content appropriateness, clarity and relevance were ascertained by language expert and appropriate modifications were made as per his suggestions. The reliability of the tool was established by split half method and the tool was found to be sufficiently reliable.

Results

Demographic data such as age, marital status, type of family, and educational qualifications was analyzed to reveal that 45 per cent of the nurses belonged to the age group of 20 – 30 years. The marital status of 75 per cent of the respondents was married. About 25 per cent of the nurses

had a nuclear family. Most of the nurses fell in the 5 – 10 years working experience category. About 60 per cent of the nurses were undergraduates (Table 1).

The answers to the questionnaire provided to the participants were analyzed to find that 50 % of the nurses were more pressured due to family responsibilities, whereas 55% of nurses felt that their career development had slowed down due to family responsibilities. Most of them were of the view that their job leaves less time for their kids and husbands. 70% of the nurses felt that it was difficult to manage their household and office work if and when they had small kids. In case of conflict between household work and office work, 40% of nurses gave preference to household work. Most nurses were in favor of flexible work arrangements to manage their household and office responsibilities. They also wanted the organization to provide them with child-care facilities and flexible working hours (Table 2).

Chi square goodness of fit test has been used for statistical analysis.

Discussion

Education, health, leisure, friendships, romantic relationships, family, household management and community involvement are a few factors which influence work-life balance, as brought out by Keeney et al.^[1]

Table 1. Demographic variables of Nurses

S. No.	Category	n, %	p
1.	Age		<0.001
	21-30 years	45	
	31-40 years	25	
	41-50 years	15	
	51 years and above	15	
2.	Marital Status		0.001
	Married	75	
	Unmarried	25	
3.	Type of Family		<0.001
	Joint family	42	
	Nuclear family	58	
4.	Work Experience		0.110
	21 years and above	12	
	16-20 years	18	
	11-15 years	30	
	5-10 years	30	
	Less than 5 years	10	
5.	Education		<0.001
	Diploma	20	
	Undergraduate	60	
	Postgraduate	20	

Table 2. Work-life balance analysis as per the answers provided for the questionnaire

S. No	Statements	Yes (N%)	No (N%)
1.	During working hours, feel more pressurized due to family responsibilities	50	40
2.	Career development has slowed down due to family responsibilities	55	45
3.	Job leaves less time for kids	70	30
4.	Job leaves less time for husband	60	40
5.	Nurses with small kids find it difficult to manage their house and office work	70	30
6.	In case of conflict between household work and office work, preference is given to household work	40	60
7.	Provision of childcare facilities at workplace will help nurses to do their work properly	80	20
8.	Flexible work arrangements should be provided to manage their household and office responsibilities	90	10

Most studies on work-life balance have concentrated only on work and family roles, namely the work-family balance.

^[2] When the work-family balance is optimum, it has a positive effect in the form of family-to-work enrichment, and if negative, it is called family-to-work conflict.^[3] This study studies the impact of responsibilities, obligations and well-being promoted by one's family on the professional work of nurses.

The mammoth presence of women in the labor market has fostered the literature about work-family balance. Moreover, the nursing profession has been dominated by females since time immemorial. Women are likely to evaluate family as more central in their lives than men because of widespread cultural norms and gender-differentiated values.^[4] This is another reason the hospital administration should be supportive of the nursing staff so that there is a fine balance between their work life and family life.

A happy, contented, self-satisfied, and healthy nurse will be a better healthcare provider and will be an asset to the healthcare facility where she is working. Job satisfaction is defined as the extent to which workers like or dislike their job and is an indicator of the psychological well-being of the employee.^[5] Work-family conflict adversely affects job satisfaction, and the Hospital Administrator has a key role in supporting the nursing staff by formulating human resource policies in such a way that nurses with additional responsibilities of looking after their children at home are able to play their dual role well.

Nurses face job challenges in the form of work overload, staff shortages, low salaries and burnout, which may lead to poor patient outcomes.^[6] Most nursing professionals the world over report low-to-moderate quality of work life.^[7] Kaddourah et al. reported that more than half the nurses employed in healthcare institutions in Riyadh were dissatisfied with their work lives, and about 94% of them wanted to resign from their current roles.^[8] Our study also revealed discontentment and indication of inability to have an optimum work-life balance of about 40 to 70%.

The literature review revealed that education and awareness activities, opportunities to enhance inter-personnel relationships, improving workplace environment and facilities, supportive supervisory staff and increases in salary contributed to improving the quality of work life among nurses in Canada and the USA.^[9] Our study also recommends the provision of breast-feeding rooms and childcare facilities in the form of the creche, flexible working hours and adequate childcare leave, the establishment of work-life balance cells to help in spreading awareness about stress at work, time management, interpersonal relationships and the concept of work-life balance.

A study by Lee-Peng et al. indicated that flexible work practices and team-based management reduce job demand and improve job engagement among nurses, thereby promoting better work-life balance.^[10] Our study also recommends flexible working hours and lenient and considerate leave policies and duty rosters for nurses to retain nurses in this noble profession. Women contribute significantly to the nursing profession, and a major reason for nurses leaving the workforce is the difficulty of balancing work and family life.^[11] Life events such as marriage or the birth of a child, shift duties, and being continuously exposed to suffering, sorrow, and grief while providing health care make balancing work and home life difficult, thereby increasing their desire to leave their job.

In conclusion, the following suggestions can be given to improve work-life balance: The hospitals may establish a work-life balance cell to advise about the expectations and perceptions of the work-life balance concept. These cells may educate the nurses about time management and interpersonal relationships. These cells may play a vital role in suggesting ways and means of increasing productivity and raising the morale of the employee, thereby maintaining a fine work-life balance. The hospital may provide facilities like a breastfeeding room or a creche to look after the baby while the lady is at work. A buddy pair system is established, and the buddies are encouraged to discuss their

issues to arrive at a solution. A psychological counsellor, a yoga trainer or a reiki healer may be hired to create awareness about stress at work and ways to combat stress. Duty rosters and leave policies should be framed in such a way as to enable working women to help achieve a fine work-life balance.

Conclusion

A nurse will be a miraculous healer if she is assured that her child is secure and comfortable while she is at work. Small facilities in the form of provision of breast-feeding room and childcare facilities in the form of creche go a long way in encouraging working women to prove their competence and perform better. Flexible working hours and adequate childcare leave would help the nurse play the dual role at work and home with efficiency and enthusiasm. Work-life balance cells can help in spreading awareness about stress at work, time management, interpersonal relationships, and the concept of work-life balance. Hospital Administrators and Principal Matrons, while making duty rosters and formulating leave policies, should be considerate to married nurses who have small children so that they can have an optimum work-life balance. This study could also act as a guide for Human Resource practitioners in redesigning their policies in relation to work-life balance, thereby ensuring the well-being of all nurses.

Disclosures

Acknowledgment: SMO District Hospital Ferozepur.

Ethics Committee Approval: Approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee Civil Hospital Ferozepur (SMO, District Hospital Ferozepur), and permission to carry out the study was obtained from him (Permission dated 20 Oct 2023).

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Financial Support: Nil.

Authorship Contributions: Concept – G.S.S.; Supervision – G.S.S.; Materials – G.S.S., M.S.; Data Collection and/or Processing – M.S.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – G.S.S., M.S.; Writing – G.S.S.

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