EFFECTS OF ROLE OVERLOAD, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT ON NURSES' JOB PERFORMANCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Bader Shahwan ALshammari

Hafar Al-Batin Central Hospital, Health Cluster, Nursing

Thamer nawaf ALshammari

Hafar Al-Batin Central Hospita, Health Cluster, Nursing

Ibrahim Yahya Ibrahim Tarshi

Hafar Al-Batin Central Hospital, Health Cluster, Nursing

Mamdouh Saleem Alruwaili

Hafar Al-Batin Central Hospital, Health Cluster, Nursing

Sultan Mardhi Alshammari

Hafar Al-Batin Central Hospital, Health Cluster, Nursing

Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed extraordinary demands on nurses worldwide. This concurrent mixed methods study examined how role overload, work engagement, and perceived organizational support influenced nurse job performance across 170 bedside nurses at 5 hospitals in Saudi Arabia during the pandemic. Quantitative data revealed higher overload and lower engagement related to poorer performance. Qualitative interviews with 18 nurses emphasized how heavy workloads hindered effectiveness, while sufficient staffing, peer support, and management communication facilitated performance. Integrated results provide insights to guide nurse workforce strategies, well-being initiatives, and practice environment improvements through and beyond the pandemic. Findings underline the need to optimize engagement and control demands amidst crisis response to sustain provider performance essential for quality care delivery.

Keywords: COVID-19; nurse job performance; work overload; employee engagement; mixed methods

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed extraordinary strains on healthcare systems and providers globally (Greenberg et al., 2021). As frontline caregivers, nurses have experienced unprecedented demands, risks, and responsibilities during this crisis (Labrague & de los Santos, 2021). Maintaining nurse performance is crucial when needs are surging, yet heavy workloads, moral distress, and insufficient support systems threaten effectiveness and retention (Shechter et al., 2020).

Understanding key influences on nurses' job performance during COVID-19 is vital to inform responsive workforce policies and practice environment improvements (Li et al., 2020). Role overload, work engagement, and perceived organizational support have proven significant factors impacting provider performance and outcomes across crises (Labrague & de los Santos, 2021; Perlo et al., 2017). However, minimal evidence has examined these dynamics among Saudi nurses specifically during the extended pandemic response.

This concurrent embedded mixed methods study analyzed the impacts of role overload, work engagement, and perceived organizational support on bedside nurse job performance across 5 hospitals in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Integrating observational, survey, and qualitative interview data provides a multifaceted assessment of factors influencing nurse performance to guide supportive workforce strategies both during the pandemic and beyond. Findings aim to inform nurse workforce planning, well-being initiatives, and practice environment improvements to sustain provider effectiveness essential for quality care delivery through crisis and stability.

Background

Nurse Job Performance During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted extreme physical, emotional, and organizational strain on healthcare providers, threatening performance (Labrague & de los Santos, 2021; Shechter et al., 2020). Nurses face multiplying care demands, moral dilemmas, infection risks, redeployment, and constantly evolving pressures (Greenberg et al., 2021). Maintaining performance amid heavy workloads, emotional tolls, and system challenges has been crucial for patient outcomes yet intensely difficult (Li et al., 2020).

Evidence underscores the pandemic's negative impacts on nurses' shift effectiveness, productivity, competence, safety compliance, and intent to stay, although effects vary across contexts (Labrague & de los Santos, 2021; Perlo et al., 2017). Identifying influencing factors is imperative to mitigate detrimental performance consequences through supportive workforce policies, resources, and practice environment enhancements. This study examined three key variables documented to impact nurse job performance in past crises but not thoroughly studied among Saudi nurses during COVID-19 specifically.

Role Overload

Role overload occurs when workplace demands exceed an individual's perceived capability to handle them, breeding stress and performance decline (Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2017). High patient ratios, endless tasks, and crisis escalation push nurses toward overload, linked to lower productivity, engagement, safety, and retention (Labrague & de los Santos, 2021). Optimizing staffing and responsibilities to avoid excessive overload is critical for nurse performance.

Work Engagement

Work engagement encompasses positive dedication, energy, and absorption in one's role versus burnout (Li et al., 2020). High engagement boosts job performance across contexts. Intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment sustain engagement amid adversity. However, heavy demands can overwhelm engagement among nurses (Roberts et al., 2021). Maintaining engagement through involvement, support, teamwork, and transparent communication is key for optimal performance (Shechter et al., 2020).

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support reflects employees' beliefs regarding how much the organization values their contributions and cares for their wellbeing (Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2017). Higher perceived support promotes retention, satisfaction, and performance. During crises, clear leadership, responsive policies, supplies, peer bonding, and workplace flexibility signal support (Labrague & de los Santos, 2021). Cultivating nurse perceived support aids effectiveness and resilience.

This study examined associations between these three critical aspects and nurse job performance in Saudi Arabia during pandemic response. The mixed methods design elicited statistical relationships and frontline perceptions to derive actionable guidance.

Methods

Study Design and Sample

This concurrent embedded mixed methods study occurred at 5 hospitals in Saudi Arabia from January to September 2022. Participants included 170 staff nurses.

Quantitative Strand and Analysis

Role overload, work engagement, and perceived organizational support were measured using validated scales (Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020). Nurse manager ratings assessed performance. Correlational analysis examined variable relationships.

Qualitative Strand and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse subsample of 18 nurses. Transcripts underwent inductive thematic analysis to elicit perceptions of influences on their job performance during the pandemic.

Results

Findings demonstrated role overload correlated significantly with lower reported performance ($r=-0.62$, $p<0.001$), while work engagement ($r=0.58$, $p<0.001$) and perceived organizational support ($r=0.53$, $p<0.001$) associated with higher performance.

Interviews highlighted how heavy workloads hindered effectiveness: "I could not safely care for so many critically ill patients." Lower engagement also impacted performance: "It's hard to feel motivated with the relentless demands." However, staff teamwork, supportive supervision, and shared mission facilitated performance: "My coworkers kept me focused when I felt overwhelmed."

Discussion

This mixed methods study provided valuable insights into factors impacting Saudi nurses' job performance while delivering care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Integrated results affirm that high role overload undermined effectiveness, aligning with evidence on overload's detrimental performance impacts during crises globally (Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2017; Labrague & de los Santos, 2021). Qualitative data reinforced narratives of how surging demands outpaced capacity to deliver appropriate care.

Findings also confirm that sustaining work engagement and perceived organizational support can buffer the negative effects of overload and empower performance, congruent with prior research (Li et al., 2020; Shechter et al., 2020). Nurse interviews highlighted how internal motivation along with peer, leadership, and system support helped maintain effectiveness amid adversity.

These results carry important implications for nurse workforce planning through and beyond the pandemic. Health systems must implement overload mitigation strategies like staffing increases, workload balancing, and mental health support. Building engagement through communication, flexibility, involvement, teamwork, self-care, and participatory problem solving is equally crucial. Providing resources, responsive policies, transparent leadership, and workplace community can optimize perceived organizational support. A multidimensional approach addressing interrelated performance factors will remain vital for sustaining provider effectiveness essential for safe care delivery through evolving crises.

Conclusion

This concurrent mixed methods study assessing influences on nurse job performance provides data-driven insights to guide health system pandemic response and future crisis preparations. Findings underline the need to control excessive overload, foster engagement, and promote perceived organizational support to empower nurses delivering care amid continuously challenging conditions. Evidence-based workforce strategies addressing these factors can help safeguard provider effectiveness fundamental for safe, high-quality care delivery through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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