Work Environment and Workload as Correlates of Intent to Leave Among Nurses

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ABSTRACT

The healthcare system is facing challenges it has never seen before: more complex patients and fewer workers. This study examined the relationships among nurses' work environment, workload, and intention to leave. Using a descriptive-correlational approach, 419 nurses from government hospitals in the northern Philippines were surveyed using the Practice Environment Scale of the Nursing Work Index (PES-NWI), the NASA Task Load Index (NASA-TLX), and a three-item intent-to-leave scale. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationships between the different variables. There was a significant negative correlation (r = .252) between nurses' intention to leave and the overall work environment. The strongest correlation (r =- .261) was found between turnover intentions and staffing and resource adequacy. Recently, a statistically insignificant direct correlation was found between high perceived workload and the intention to leave (r =- .074), suggesting a more complex relationship than is generally believed. The findings suggest that better work environments tend to make nurses stay. Furthermore, workplace factors, specifically staffing and resource levels, play a significant role in nurse retention. The non-significant result for workload implies that its influence may be indirectly mediated by factors such as burnout. This study is significant because it identifies specific, achievable areas that hospital administration could focus on to improve retention. Future research should examine the mediating factors of workload and expand the study to different healthcare settings to validate these findings.

Keywords: *Work Environment, Workload, Intent to Leave, Nurse Retention, Resource Adequacy*

INTRODUCTION

The global nursing profession is facing challenges it has never faced before. Healthcare systems are dealing with more complex patients and fewer workers. The fast turnover of nurses might have caused this. This is thought to be closely linked to the workplace environment, the amount of work, and the desire to leave. Existing literature shows that nurses are more likely to leave their jobs when their working environment is unfavorable (Wei et al., 2023). In addition, heavy workloads may increase nurses' likelihood of quitting, especially in high-stress clinical settings such as intensive care units (Rotenstein et al., 2023).

There is growing evidence linking the work environment, workload, and nurses' intent to leave. Evidence shows that poor working conditions and excessive workload are associated with nurses' desire to quit (Poghosyan et al., 2022). These

findings suggest that developing a supportive environment can enhance retention. Although there exists a substantial literature on this subject, a significant percentage of the empirical data originates from high-income countries with abundant resources (Montgomery & Patrician, 2022). This prompted examination regarding the applicability of such findings to low- and middle-income countries, where multiple factors may exert a more pronounced impact on nurses' turnover intentions.

Countries in Southeast Asia facing challenges in the nursing workforce may be influenced by regional and national context; however, the literature remains insufficient. As more people need healthcare due to a growing population, nurses are leaving the country in search of better opportunities. The Philippines is a very important example; it is known as a major exporter of nurses (Smith & Gillin, 2021). This has led to trained nurses leaving, affecting its own healthcare system. According to Robredo (2022), low salary, limited career advancement opportunities, and poor working conditions influence nurses' decision to leave and migrate overseas.

According to national statistics, only one-fifth of the 900,000 registered nurses are working in the country (Robredo et al., 2022). In 2019 alone, more than 17,000 nurses left the country, with thousands more waiting to be deployed (Smith & Gillin, 2021). This has created a situation in which, as more nurses leave, those who stay have to do more work, which may make them more likely to quit.

Although global literature validates the relationships among work environment, workload, and turnover intention, there is limited local evidence clarifying how these variables operate in the Philippine context. This gap highlights the need to understand nurse turnover within the context of the Philippines' healthcare system. This study examined how the work environment and workload correlate with the intention to leave among Filipino nurses. The findings of this study may serve as a basis for developing policies to improve nurse retention, ultimately enhancing the quality of patient care in the country. This study directly supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

This study is anchored on the Practice Environment Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. The Practice Environment Theory suggests that organizational factors such as adequate staffing directly influence nurses' retention (Lake, 2002; Wang et al., 2024). On the other hand, the JD-R Model theorizes that elevated job demands can lead to turnover (Wang et al., 2024). These frameworks serve as a basis for examining the relationship between work environment, workload, and intent to leave.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the work environment and workload as correlates of intent to leave among nurses. Specifically, it sought to determine the (1) perceived work environment of the staff nurses, (2) perceived workload of the staff nurses, (3) extent of the nurses' intent to leave, (4) significant relationship between work environment and intent to leave among staff nurses, and (5) significant relationship between workload and intent to leave among staff nurses.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study used a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationships among the work environment, workload, and intent to leave among nurses. The descriptive method was used to describe the work environment, workload, job satisfaction, and intent to leave. The correlation was used to determine the relationship between work environment, workload, and intent to leave. This design was appropriate because it allows researchers to describe existing conditions and explore associations without manipulating variables, making it widely used in nursing workforce studies (Siedlecki, 2020).

Participants of the Study. The participants in the study were 419 staff nurses from different government hospitals in northern Philippines. Staff nurses who had been in the institution for less than six months were excluded from the study at the time of data collection. To ensure a sufficient dataset, population sampling was employed. A total of 437 questionnaires were distributed; however, because some nurses declined participation, only 419 were retrieved, resulting in a retrieval rate of 95.8%.

Research Instrument. A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect data. The work environment was evaluated using the Practice Environment Scale of the Nursing Work Index (PES-NWI) (Lake, 2002), which evaluates five key domains: nurse participation in hospital affairs, nursing foundations for quality of care, nurse manager leadership and support, staffing and resource adequacy, and collegial nurse–physician relations. This instrument has 31 items rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with higher scores reflecting a more favorable practice environment.

Workload was measured using the NASA Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) (Tubbs-Cooley et al., 2018). It has five items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from very low (1) to very high (4), with higher scores reflecting higher workloads. Intent to leave was also measured using three items on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with higher scores reflecting a greater intention to leave. The instrument underwent pilot testing to ensure reliability and validity in the local context. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a

measure of internal consistency, was computed and yielded a value of 0.86 for work environment, 0.85 for workload, and 0.86 for intent to leave, indicating strong reliability.

Data Gathering Procedure. Ethical clearance was secured before data collection. Permission letters were then forwarded to medical directors and chief nurses of different government hospitals in northern Philippines. The researcher personally distributed and collected the questionnaires. While many nurses expressed willingness to participate, some were unable to complete the survey due to patient care demands, resulting in 18 questionnaires not being returned.

Data Analysis. Weighted Mean was used to describe the work environment, workload, and intent to leave. Pearson's r correlation was used to determine the relationship between work environment, workload, and intention to leave. All analyses were performed using SPSS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Perceived work environment of the staff nurses

Table 1 shows that the respondents' work environment is generally favorable, with a grand mean of 3.02 (SD = 0.75). This suggests that respondents view their work environment positively.

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Work Environment Components of Staff Nurses

Work Environment	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Nurse manager, ability, leadership, and support	3.14	0.74	Favorable
2. Nurse participation in the workplace	3.02	0.79	Favorable
3. Staffing and resource adequacy	2.58	0.93	Favorable
4. Nursing foundations for quality care	3.11	0.66	Favorable
5. Collegial nurse-physician relations	3.26	0.62	Very Favorable
Grand Weighted Mean	3.02	0.75	Favorable

Legend: 3.26-4.00 Very Favorable; 2.51-3.25 Favorable; 1.76-2.50 Unfavorable; 1.00-1.75 Very Unfavorable

When taken individually, collegial nurse-physician relations received the highest rating, with a mean score of 3.26 (SD = 0.62), indicating very favorable. This suggests that respondents perceive strong professional relationships between nurses and physicians, which is essential in promoting collaborative decision-making in patient care (Gasparino et al., 2021). Furthermore, this finding resonates with the culturally rooted values of Ilocano nurses described by Nero (2017), who

emphasized "*manangipateg,*" or valuing interpersonal relationships as central to the Filipino concept of nursing.

On the other hand, staffing and resource adequacy received the lowest rating, with a mean score of 2.58 (SD = 0.93). This aligns with findings by Tabudlo et al. (2022), who highlighted how environmental stressors can shape individual psychological responses. Furthermore, adequate staffing levels and sufficient resources are critical for ensuring patient safety, reducing nurse workload, and minimizing burnout (Almadani, 2023).

2. Perceived workload of the staff nurses

Table 2 shows that nurses perceive their workload as very high (M = 3.30, SD = 0.47), with both mental and physical demands receiving the highest ratings (M = 3.36, SD = 0.62; M = 3.36, SD = 0.60, respectively).

Table 2

Perceived Workload Score of Staff Nurses

Workload	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Mental activity required to perform my job (thinking, deciding, calculating, remembering, looking, searching, etc.)	3.36	0.62	Very High
2. Physical activity required to perform my job (e.g., pushing, pulling, turning, controlling, activating, etc.)	3.36	0.60	Very High
3. Time pressure I feel due to the rate or pace at which the tasks or task elements occur.	3.29	0.58	Very High
4. The effort and work (mentally and physically) I need to accomplish my level of performance.	3.35	0.56	Very High
5. The amount of insecurity, irritation, stress, and annoyance with my job.	3.13	0.75	High
Overall	3.30	0.47	Very High

Legend: 3.26-4.00 Very High; 2.51-3.25 High; 1.76-2.50 Low; 1.00-1.75 Very Low

In contrast, job-related stress, irritation, and insecurity were rated the lowest (M=3.13, SD=0.75), though they still fall within the "high" category. The very high physical and mental demands may be attributed to a growing population needing healthcare and rapid technological advancement, which, in turn, makes healthcare delivery more complex. This is often aggravated by a disproportionate nurse-to-patient ratio in government hospitals.

Multiple studies have shown that nurses in high-risk settings experience high levels of mental strain (Wu et al., 2020; Surendran et al., 2024). As nurses manage both mental and physical demands of their daily tasks, an elevated

workload has been shown to affect both their physical and mental health. (Fikri et al., 2023). Other literature also points to coworkers as a source of pressure rather than relief (Kokoroko & Sanda, 2019).

3. Extent of the nurses' intent to leave

Table 3
Mean Scores on Nurses' Intent to Leave

Intention to Leave	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I intend to leave the current hospital in one year.	2.41	0.96	Disagree
2. It is likely that I will actively look for a new job next year	2.45	0.96	Disagree
3. I often think about quitting my current job.	2.40	0.90	Disagree
Overall	2.42	0.88	Low Extent

Legend:	Range	Item Descriptive	Overall
	3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree	Very Great Extent
	2.51 – 3.25	Agree	Great Extent
	1.76 – 2.50	Disagree	Low Extent
	1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Extent

A review of the data in Table 3 indicates that the overall mean score for intent to leave was 2.42 (SD = 0.88), suggesting that nurses generally have a low extent of intention to leave their current hospital positions. When taken the item singly, "It is likely that I will actively look for a new job next year" had the highest mean score (M = 2.45, SD = 0.92), while "I often think about quitting my current job" had the lowest (M = 2.40, SD = 0.90), both interpreted as "Disagree." This can be related to the respondents' demographics. The majority of them are young and still early in their careers; at this stage, they are focused on gaining clinical experience, which is often a requirement for opportunities overseas. Remaining in their current roles may not reflect long-term commitment; rather, it may be a strategic career move to find better opportunities abroad.

4. Significant relationship between work environment and intent to leave among staff nurses.

Table 4 reveals a significant inverse relationship between the overall work environment (r =- .252) and nurses' intent to leave, indicating that a better workplace is strongly linked to higher retention. The most critical factor driving this is staffing and resource adequacy (r =- .261), which has the strongest association with a nurse's desire to stay.

Table 4

Correlation between Work Environment and Intent to Leave Among Staff Nurses

Work Environment	Intent To Leave	
	r-value	p-value
Nurse Manager, Ability Leadership and Support	-.187[**]	<0.001
Nurse Participation in the Workplace	-.235[**]	<0.001
Staffing and Resource Adequacy	-.261[**]	<0.001
Nursing Foundations for Quality Care	-.203[**]	<0.001
Collegial Nurse-Physician Pelations	-.102[**]	<0.001
Overall Work Environment	-252[**]	<0.001

Legend: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Following in importance are opportunities for Nurse Participation in the Workplace (r =- .235), the presence of strong Nursing Foundations for Quality Care (r=-.203), and supportive Nurse Manager Leadership (r=-.187). While positive Collegial Nurse-Physician Relations (r =- .102) are beneficial, they have the weakest correlation compared to the more pressing issues of adequate staffing, resources, and empowerment.

Wei et al. (2018) confirmed that the work environment is positively associated with nurses' intent to stay. Moreover, Van Kraaij et al. (2025) found that adequate staffing and resources directly reduce nurses' desire to leave. Nurse participation also promotes a sense of ownership, which can also lead to intent to stay (Yahyaei et al., 2022). Furthermore, supportive nurse managers and leaders directly influence job satisfaction, which may also lead to retention (AbdElhay et al., 2025). A strong foundation for quality care has also been linked to positive retention, although its effect is minimal (Twigg & McCullough, 2014). Finally, collegial nurse-physician relationships tend to have the least decisive effect on retention compared to the other factors (Numminen et al., 2016). This means that different components of the work environment influence nurses' intent to leave differently.

5. Significant relationship between workload and intent to leave among staff nurses

Table 5

Correlation Between Workload and Intent to Leave Among Staff Nurses

	Intent To Leave		
	r-value	p-value	
Workload	-.074	.128	NS

Legend: NS = Not Significant

The data in Table 5 shows that there is no significant relationship between a nurse's workload and their intent to leave.

The correlation coefficient (r =- .074) is statistically insignificant, in contrast to what is generally expected and the existing literature. It is often assumed that a higher workload would increase nurses' intent to leave (Seki & Özlük, 2024). However, the result, which shows no significant relationship between workload and intent to leave, is in congruence with a subset of studies suggesting that the relationship may be more complex than assumed (Shin et al., 2020).

Workload's importance should not be dismissed due to this non-significant finding. It may suggest other mechanisms by which workload correlates with nurses' intent to leave. Bruyneel et al. (2025) found that the effect of workload is often mediated by burnout and job satisfaction, which are more direct predictors of intent to leave. Therefore, this study contributes a nuanced perspective, underscoring the importance of examining these indirect pathways to fully comprehend the interplay between work conditions and nurse retention.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that better working conditions reduce the intent to leave. Findings also highlight the importance of staffing and resource adequacy, as these are crucial to retaining our nurses. Although the workload is very high, a link to intent to leave was not established. However, this should not be dismissed as existing literature has pointed to its indirect effect. Surprisingly, nurses generally have a low intention to leave their jobs; however, most respondents are young, which may help explain the result. This stability may not last without making improvements in work environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following measures are highly recommended. For hospital administrators and nursing leaders, the old nurse-to-patient ratio may be revisited and reduced to better meet patients' more complex needs. To further strengthen the work environment, management might consider appointing nurses to hospital governance positions, such as a seat on the board of trustees, to increase nurse participation. On a broader scale, these findings may be valuable for policymakers considering approval of the proposed Philippine Nursing Law, as this would address nurses' compensation and career advancement opportunities. Finally, future research could usefully investigate the indirect pathways through which workload affects intent to leave by examining mediating variables such as burnout and job satisfaction. Expanding the scope of this research to private hospitals and other regions could also enhance the generalizability of the

findings and provide a more complete understanding of nurse retention across the Philippines.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Before data collection, the manuscript was submitted to the Ethics Review Committee for approval. Participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the study's objectives, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing collected information.

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