



Effect of Work-Life Balance on Nurse Retention: Evidence from Kenya's National Referral Hospitals Workforce Experience

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Abstract

Retention of nurses is proving to be a critical issue in Kenya's health sector, especially among national referral hospitals, where retaining skilled nurses significantly affects the quality of healthcare delivery. Despite the importance of this issue, limited research has explored the influence of work-life balance on retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. This study sought to determine the effect of work-life balance on retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. The study was underpinned on Herzberg's two-factor theory. To meet these objectives, the study targeted all seven national referral hospitals in Kenya, with a total population of 3830 employees distributed across 3650 nurses and 180 management staff. Using stratified random sampling, a sample size of 263 respondents was determined based on Neyman's formula. The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to explore relationships between variables. Results were presented in tables. The ANOVA results revealed that the model was statistical significant in explaining this relationship work-life balance on retention ($F = 153.564$, $p = 0.000$). Regression coefficients showed that work-life balance ($\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.000$) had positive and statistically significant effect on nurse retention. The study consequently concluded that Work-life balance plays a decisive role in shaping retention outcomes in public hospitals. Flexible scheduling, family-friendly policies, and wellness initiatives help employees harmonize their personal and professional obligations. In light of these findings, the study recommends the establishment of flexible scheduling, wellness programs, childcare support, and supervisory training to create work-life integration will create a more resilient and loyal nursing workforce.

Keywords: *Work-Life Balance, Nurse Retention, National Referral Hospitals, Kenya Health Sector, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory*

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1.0 Introduction

Consistent employee retention is vital for the attainment of strategic objectives and organizational performance, both of which are intimately connected to employee commitment. Venkat et al. (2023) demonstrated that employee retention constitutes a vital element for organizational success, as it guarantees workforce continuity and stability. Gorde (2019) described the term as an organization's ability to keep its employees. Additionally, Sarpong et al. (2021) viewed it as a process where employers intentionally create an environment that motivates employees to stay with the organization. In the health sector, retaining nurses is especially important. This view was supported by Sarumi and Mokodompit (2024), who emphasized nurses' critical role in provision of care, which directly affects the quality of healthcare services and patient outcomes. Kirkland et al. (2024) also highlighted the importance of nurses in ensuring hospitals operate effectively and sustainably. When nurses stay longer in their roles, they gain expertise, build stronger relationships with patients, and develop a thorough understanding of the hospital's systems, protocols, and culture. Additionally, retaining nurses decreases the financial and administrative costs associated with frequent recruitment, onboarding, and training of new staff, enabling hospitals to better allocate resources to other vital areas (Morabia, 2024).

Efficient retention can be achieved through the provision of favorable conditions that suit employee needs, which Hamadamin (2019) determined helped organizations ensure sustained competitive advantage and longevity. Total rewards provide an approach to meeting both the financial and non-financial needs of the workforce (Lavanya & Khizerulla, 2024; Omotayo, Olanipon, Kolade, Akinsade, Akinola & Olarewaju, 2024). They encompass all aspects of what employees receive in exchange for their contributions, including both tangible elements like salary, bonuses, health benefits, and retirement plans, and intangible aspects like career development opportunities, recognition programs, work-life balance initiatives, and a positive organizational culture (Sharma & Sharma, 2024). According to Ayi and Korang (2024), a well-designed total rewards strategy is instrumental in influencing employee retention, as it aligns employee needs and motivations with organizational goals. When employees perceive that their contributions are adequately rewarded and that the organization genuinely cares about their professional and personal needs, they are more likely to remain committed to their roles, according to Sunday (2024).

Globally, a report by the NHS (2020) advocated for the investment in continuing education and career advancement opportunities in order to retain nurses in the United Kingdom. Griffiths et al. (2020) further placed emphasis on the relationship between work-life balance and nurse retention, concluding that improved scheduling practices and adequate support systems significantly lowered turnover intentions among nursing staff. In Australia, McDonald et al. (2020) found out that mentorship programs enhanced job satisfaction and retention rates among newly qualified nurses. In Canada, emphasis was placed on competitive salaries and benefit packages, alongside robust mentorship opportunities for new graduates. There was a focus on addressing burnout and fostering a culture of recognition in nursing workplaces, according to the Canadian Nurses Association (2021). Additionally, a comprehensive study by the Nordic Council of Ministers (2019) revealed that high job autonomy, supportive working conditions, and a collaborative culture within healthcare settings contribute to higher retention rates among nurses in Sweden and Norway.

In Africa, according to the World Health Organization report (2023), the region has a ratio of 1.55 health workers (physicians, nurses, and midwives) per 1,000 people, which is below the WHO

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threshold of 4.45 per 1,000 needed to achieve universal health coverage. Considerable efforts to combat the already scarce distribution of nurses are reflected in various initiatives. Chireki, Maposa and Chinyoka (2022) determined that non-financial incentives such as recognition and career advancement opportunities increased job satisfaction by 20% enhancing nurse retention rates. In Ghana, Oduro-Mensah and Amankwah (2023) indicated that nearly 50% of nurses expressed intentions to leave the profession, primarily due to perceived lack of support from management and poor workplace conditions. The impact of total rewards was supported by Okeke et al. (2021), who determined that despite pay and benefits being essential motivators, they should be part of a broader strategy that includes opportunities for professional development, recognition, and a supportive work culture to ensure sustained employee motivation and satisfaction.

Locally, Kenya has experienced high levels of emigration of nurses to the United Kingdom, the United States, and various Middle Eastern countries, mainly driven by the pursuit of better pay and working conditions, according to the MoH (2023). This was prompted by the 2021 bilateral agreement between Kenya and the UK, which eased the recruitment of Kenyan nurses into the UK's National Health Service (NHS). By April 2024, 280 nurses had migrated to the UK under this agreement, with an additional 200 awaiting placement (MoH, 2023). This migration was primarily motivated by significant salary disparities, as Kenyan nurses working in the UK can earn up to three times more than their counterparts in Kenya. The result is a significant loss of investment in training medical professionals, which seriously undermines the quality of the health workforce and services provided. In the referral hospital setup, Kiptulon et al. (2025) revealed that 61% of nurses in public referral hospitals considered leaving their jobs due to poor pay and inadequate staffing. This situation has intensified workload pressure on retained nurses, negatively affecting morale and long-term retention.

Work-life balance is essential for motivating employees, enhancing commitment, and improving retention. It represents everything employees value in their employment relationship, as it enables them to harmonize professional responsibilities with personal well-being (Roudposhti, 2024). A balanced approach seeks to provide fair and consistent support that allows individuals to meet both organizational and family obligations effectively. This can be achieved through flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, childcare support, and recognition of employees' personal needs alongside their professional contributions (Cohn et al., 2021). Scholars have extended this view through the concept of "total rewards," which emphasizes that non-monetary benefits such as work-life balance are just as vital as compensation or bonuses in shaping employee satisfaction and commitment (Lanidune & Boampong, 2023). Worldatwork's total rewards model highlights work-life balance as one of the seven key elements of an effective rewards system, alongside compensation, benefits, employee development, career opportunities, performance appraisals, and recognition. When employees perceive that their organization supports a healthy balance between work and personal life, their loyalty and willingness to contribute to strategic goals increases. Conversely, when work demands overwhelm personal well-being, employees are more likely to disengage, which undermines both performance and organizational sustainability.

In today's competitive business environment, organizations often prioritize employee contributions to overall performance at the cost of employee satisfaction. However, employees are valuable assets and can be a significant source of competitive advantage, as supported by Sakthimala and Deepalakshmi (2023). The understanding is prompting more organizations to invest in their trained and skilled employees to decrease turnover rates. A lower turnover rate typically indicates a higher rate of employee retention, which Deery and Jago (2020) describe as "the organization's ability to

maintain its workforce by addressing factors such as employee well-being, job engagement, and career advancement opportunities.” Similarly, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines employee retention as the duration of employees' tenure within an organization (CIPD, 2020). Consequently, it serves as a measure of how effectively an organization can retain its workforce. Labrague (2020) argued that insufficient retention strategies resulted in increased voluntary turnover intention. In turn, effective retention strategies help prevent labor shortages, maintain quality service delivery, and reduce turnover costs.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The health sector in Kenya has experienced notable advancements over the years, notably in extending life expectancy, combating the proliferation of infectious diseases, and decreasing child mortality rates. Nevertheless, despite these developments, Kenya has recurrently faced strikes by healthcare personnel protesting inadequate remuneration and unfavorable working conditions (Ndevu, Mangai, Carrión-Crespo & Kapya, 2024). Further compounding the situation, a worrying trend of nurse attrition due to inadequate total rewards and poor working conditions has been observed especially in national referral hospitals (Bhatia, 2024). Approximately thirty-five percent of Kenyan nurses and clinical officers have migrated to high-income countries, attracted by superior work environments and compensation. This migration is also driven by challenges such as extensive working hours, high emotional stress, and physical demands, as detailed by Permadi et al. (2023). As primary caregivers, these professionals' turnover adversely affects the work experiences of remaining nurses, as increased job pressures and workloads continue to rise.

Numerous studies have been carried out to get a deeper understanding of the matter. Kariuki (2021) investigated the total reward systems and their effect on the performance of employees in Public Hospitals in Nyeri County. Hassan (2021), on the other hand, focused on investigating aspects that contributed to the retention of health care workers in County hospitals of Garissa County. Mule (2020) conducted research in Meru County on the relationship between reward management and retention of county employees. However, all these studies were limited to county and sub-county hospitals bringing out a contextual gap.

Bhatia (2024) on the other hand aimed to understand the social, personal, and professional factors contributing to the poor mental well-being of providers in sub-Saharan Africa and particularly wound nurses in Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. The study was limited to one referral hospital limiting the generalizability of the study. Kironji (2020) on the other hand investigated the effect of staff motivation on the retention of nurses at Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) with specific focus on financial incentives, career development, working conditions and personal factors bringing about an empirical gap. Moreover, Onyango et al. (2025) focused on the effect of Reward System on Employee Retention of Non-Teaching Staff in public secondary schools within Mumias East Sub-County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design, which led to a methodological gap that this study aimed to fill. Despite the information from existing studies, much of the empirical research on retention has focused on institutions outside national referral hospitals, limiting the generalizability of their findings. Therefore, this study sought to determine the effect of work-life balance on retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To determine the effect of work-life balance on retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀: Work-life balance has a significant effect on retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the Kenyan health system, specifically examining the national referral hospitals organized within the six-tiered healthcare structure. The national referral hospitals include Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), Moi Teaching and referral hospital (MTRH), National Spinal Injury Referral Hospital (NSIRH), Mathari National Teaching and referral Hospital (MNTRH), Kenyatta University Teaching, referral & Research Hospital (KUTRRH), Kisii Teaching and referral hospital (KTRH), and Nakuru Teaching and referral hospital (NTRH). The research was limited to work-life balance. An explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was employed, utilizing a population sample of nurses drawn from medical professionals across the selected national referral hospitals and management staff. In Kenya, the health system heavily relies on Nurses as they play a critical first role in health care delivery.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, first developed by Herzberg in 1959. The theory states that workplace satisfaction and motivation are influenced by two distinct factors: motivators and hygiene factors. Hygiene factors are all tangible outcomes that may contribute to an employee's physical well-being. These factors lead to employee motivation, and employee absences result in employee dissatisfaction. Johnson et al. (2018) outlined that extrinsic factors such as company policies, supervision relationship with supervisor and peers, work conditions, salary, status, and security created a favorable working environment where employees feel comfortable.

Motivation factors, on the other hand, are intrinsic factors that increase employees' job satisfaction. The factors, also referred to as satisfiers, are involved in the completion of tasks. Workers find fulfillment of tasks inherently motivating. Hertzberg found factors such as achievement recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth to be very effective in creating and maintaining positive and long-lasting attitudes toward individual jobs. The realization that hygiene factors influence employees' willingness to work while motivational factors determine their quality of work helps organizations motivate employees accordingly. Organizations that work to create environments that fulfill both hygiene and motivational factors can reduce high absenteeism and staff turnover. The theory was used in the study to determine factors organizations can employ to attract, motivate, and retain qualified nurses who value their work and quality of output. Motivated and satisfied health professionals tend to perform better and create positive environments for their clients.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework, summarized in Figure 1, explicates the connection between the dependent variable and the independent variable.

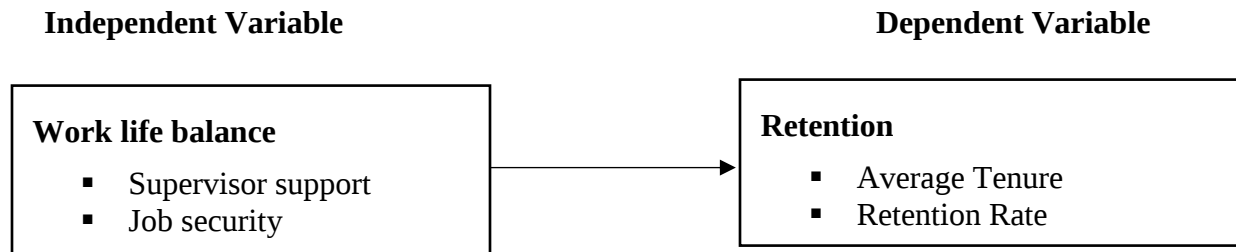


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

According to Kumari (2012) work life balance is the act of an employee maintaining stability between professional duties and other responsibilities that one may be having that are personal, or related to family and the society. When work obligations overpower life responsibilities, employees may lose motivation and encourage turnover. Organizations can encourage retention through leave policies, maternity policies, education tuition waiver, hospital insurance covers among others. In a study done in a selected health region in Norway, Haaland et al., (2021) aimed to examine the association between supervisor support and ethical dilemmas on nurses' intention to leave health care organizations, both directly and through the mediating role of the meaning of work. A cross-sectional study was utilized with a sample size of 2,946 registered nurses from a selected health region in Norway. Structural equation modelling was used to test a hypothesized model. It was determined that lack of Social support from the supervisor and ethical dilemmas is associated with nurses' intention to leave, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of the meaning of work.

In a similar study, Al Mutair et al. (2022) examined the quality of nursing work life among nurses in Saudi Arabia. The study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design and collected data through a self-administered questionnaire from nurses in Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire focused on aspects such as workload, work schedule, job control, work-life balance, and organizational support. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, revealing challenges faced by nurses in Saudi Arabia, including high workload, demanding work schedules, limited job control, and difficulties in achieving work life balance. The study emphasized the importance of organizational support in improving the quality of nursing work life.

During and after the pandemic, many organizations experienced high turnover rates. Grigoryan (2024) conducted a quantitative study to identify factors contributing to labor shortages in the hospitality industry during the period. The study specifically examined the effects of work-life balance, employee compensation, government-issued unemployment benefits, and job insecurity on employees' turnover intentions. Using a survey method, data were collected from 385 participants across the hotel, restaurant, bar, and food service sectors. The findings revealed that work-life balance, employee compensation, and job insecurity significantly influenced turnover intentions. However, government-issued unemployment benefits did not show a significant impact, suggesting the need for further investigation into their potential effects. The study concluded that addressing work-life balance, improving compensation, and reducing job insecurity are crucial for mitigating employee turnover in the hospitality industry.

Similarly, Afsar et al. (2021) found that healthcare professionals in tertiary hospitals who felt adequately compensated not only in salary but also in terms of work-life balance, career

progression, and recognition were 50% less likely to leave compared to those who felt under-rewarded in non-monetary aspects. Work life balance has especially gained prominence after the COVID-19 pandemic that caused a strain on health care professionals. Kerdpitak and Jernsittiparsert (2020) on the other hand determined that lack of work life balance and workplace stress increased turnover intention in the pharmaceutical industry of Thailand. Although prominence is placed on monetary rewards, Armstrong et al (2020) highlighted that the inclusion of non-financial benefits like mental health support, flexible work schedules, and opportunities for professional development significantly improves retention in tertiary care hospitals, particularly as burnout continues to affect healthcare workers globally.

In the education sector, Gundi, Tumwet and Bowen (2024) conducted a study to examine the effect of work-life balance on employee retention among academic staff at Egerton University in Nakuru County, Kenya, focusing specifically on the impact of flexible working arrangements. Employing a causal research design, the study sampled 202 academic staff members using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between flexible working arrangements and employee retention, with flexible working arrangements accounting for 74.5% of the variance in retention. Factors such as flexible teaching schedules, work setups that promote job satisfaction, and reduced job stress significantly enhanced retention, although the lack of flexibility in granting time off for personal matters was identified as a challenge. The study concluded that implementing flexible working policies is essential for improving employee retention among academic staff and contributes valuable insights into work-life balance and retention strategies in higher education institutions within Kenya.

Different generations and genders also have different perceptions when it comes work life balance. Syal, Rosnani, Daud, Kalis and Hendri (2024) conducted a study to analyze the influence of rewards and work-life balance on employee retention, with job satisfaction as a mediating factor among Generation Z employees in private trade organizations in West Kalimantan. Recognizing the low loyalty and retention tendencies of Generation Z, the study employed explanatory quantitative research, utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) and AMOS 24 for data analysis. The sample consisted of 219 employees aged 18-26 years, with a working period of over six months, selected through purposive sampling. The findings confirmed that rewards and work-life balance had a positive and significant impact on both employee retention and job satisfaction. Additionally, job satisfaction was found to significantly mediate the relationship between rewards or work-life balance and employee retention. The study concluded that enhancing rewards and promoting work-life balance are critical strategies for retaining Generation Z employees, with job satisfaction playing a pivotal role in strengthening these effects. This was supported by Oloyede and Soyemi (2022) whose focus on influence of work-life balance on turnover intentions of librarians in universities in south-west, Nigeria determined that Generation X and Y valued organizations that give them time to pursue other dreams. On the other hand, the traditionalists and the baby boomers preferred to be loyal and committed to the organizations. Hence, many organizations will prefer to have the older generations in higher positions while placing the Gen X and Y in lower levels.

On the other hand, Mogeni (2020) studied the influence of women-work life balance practices on employee performance at tier one commercial banks in Nairobi, Kenya. A correlational research design was used while the target population constituted of 338 women employees in the human resource department. Through stratified random sampling, a sample size of 101 respondents

obtained. A questionnaire was used to collect data. The study found that flexible work arrangements, leave policies, telecommuting and child care centers positively influenced performance. Overworked employees opt to leave due to burnout, mental strain and stressful conditions. He encouraged organizations to invest in better working conditions that would make employees feel more comfortable as investing in employees is cheaper than rehiring and training new employees. Environments that factor proper work life balance increase employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment and increased retention.

3.0 Research Methodology

The research adopted an explanatory sequential mixed method research design. This aligns well with the study's aim to evaluate how various reward practices influence nurses' retention as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the current state of these practices among National referrals in Kenya. The purpose of an explanatory sequential design is often to use narrative data to explain or interpret numeric findings, especially those that are unexpected (Creswell et al., 2003)

The study targeted all the seven (7) national referral hospitals in Kenya including Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (MTRH), Mathare Mental Hospital, National Spinal Injury Referral Hospital, Kenyatta University Teaching, Referral and Research Hospital, Nakuru Referral Hospital and Kisii Teaching and Referral Hospital. The target population for this study was made up of top level management (heads of departments) and nurses. These two cadres are selected because they are directly involved in policy implementation and service delivery, making them key informants on reward systems and retention dynamics.

This study employed a structured self-administered questionnaire to collect primary data related to total rewards and their influence on the retention of nurses in National Referral Hospitals in Kenya. The questionnaire was directed to nurses and captured both quantitative and qualitative aspects relevant to the research objectives. It was designed to align with the variables under investigation and provided a reliable means of capturing the perspectives of frontline healthcare workers. In addition to the questionnaire, the study used Key Informant Interviews (KII) to obtain in-depth perspectives from individuals holding strategic roles within the healthcare system.

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the respondent for this study. Employees in the selected national referral hospitals will be clustered in two strata. The strata were based on two categories, management staff and nurses. The sample size for this study was determined by using Neyman's formula. To apply Neyman Allocation for stratified random sampling, the study allocated the total sample size ($n = 263$) proportionally to each stratum based on both the size and variability of each stratum. Since the study has two strata; management and nurses and focuses on proportional allocation based on size (assuming equal variability), the study simplified Neyman's formula for proportional allocation as follows:

$$n_i = \left(\frac{N_i}{N} \right) \times n$$

Where:

n_i = sample size for stratum i

N_i = population of stratum i

N = total population

n = total sample size (263)

Sum of all management and nurse populations:

$N = 4 + 100 + 3 + 60 + 1 + 30 + 1 + 12 + 2 + 27 + 1 + 10 + 1 + 11 = 250$ nurses + 13 management staff = 263

Total population (N) = 3830

Total sample size (n) = 263

Each hospital's combined staff population should be known to apply Neyman accurately. Since nurses and management are the focus of the study (i.e., the study population is $250 + 13 = 263$), then Neyman's formula is applied over this target group.

The information gathered via surveys was coded and reviewed for accuracy and coherence. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods (frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviation) were used to assess quantitative data. Qualitative data collected using interviews was analysed thematically using content analysis. The study used simple linear regression analysis. The regression models that was used is presented below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta X + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y-Dependent variable

X-Work-life balance

ϵ = Error Term

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The study administered 263 questionnaires to the sampled respondents out of which 236 were completed and returned giving a response rate of 89.7%, which is considered excellent for survey-based studies. The demographic results revealed that the majority of respondents were female (64.6%), reflecting the gender composition of the nursing profession in Kenya. Most participants were in the 41–50 years age bracket (36.0%), indicating a predominance of mid-career professionals, while smaller proportions represented younger and older cohorts. In terms of work experience, 40.6% had served up to 5 years, 38.5% had 6–10 years, and 20.9% had over 10 years, showing a balanced mix of early, mid, and long-tenure staff. Educationally, most respondents held diploma qualifications (57.8%), with others possessing degrees (20.9%), master's (19.1%), and a small proportion doctorates (2.2%). Collectively, these characteristics demonstrate that the study engaged a professionally diverse and experienced sample, capable of providing informed perspectives on retention and work-life balance.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The respondents were requested to rate their agreement or otherwise on statements relating to work life balance. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Work Life Balance

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
My supervisor supports my need to balance work and personal life.	17.20%	39.10%	14.80%	15.70%	13.20%	2.69	1.29
I feel secure in my job, allowing me to plan my personal life with confidence.	17.50%	34.80%	8.90%	26.80%	12.00%	2.81	1.33
I am satisfied with the hospital's leave policies (e.g., annual, sick, parental leave).	18.50%	27.10%	12.60%	24.30%	17.50%	2.95	1.4
The hospital allows flexible work hours or shifts.	10.50%	36.00%	7.70%	25.80%	20.00%	3.09	1.35
The hospital provides stress management or wellness support programs.	24.60%	20.00%	15.10%	23.10%	17.20%	2.88	1.45
The hospital supports my family responsibilities (e.g., childcare or related benefits).	3.10%	30.80%	16.90%	25.80%	23.40%	3.36	1.23
The hospital culture values my personal time and well-being.	30.20%	32.30%	19.40%	10.80%	7.40%	2.33	1.22
Overall Mean						2.873	

The findings presented in Table 1 illustrate nurses' perceptions of how work-life balance affects their retention in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. The results show that more than a half (56.3%) of the respondents disagreed that their supervisor supports their need to balance work and personal life, while only 28.9% agreed with the statement. This item recorded a mean score of 2.69 and a standard deviation of 1.29, indicating general dissatisfaction with supervisory support and moderately varied responses. The results suggest that lack of managerial support for work-life balance may negatively influence retention.

On job security and its role in enabling personal planning, 52.3% of respondents disagreed that they feel secure in their job, while 38.8% agreed. The item had a mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation of 1.33. These results show that job insecurity is a concern among nurses and could be a barrier to long-term retention. Regarding satisfaction with the hospital's leave policies, 45.6% of respondents disagreed, while 41.8% agreed. The mean was 2.95 with a standard deviation of 1.40, reflecting fairly mixed opinions. This implies that while some nurses appreciate existing leave policies, a significant number are not fully satisfied, potentially affecting their commitment to the hospital.

On the flexibility of work hours or shifts, 46.5% of respondents agreed that the hospital provides flexible working options, while 46.5% disagreed. The item yielded a mean of 3.09 and a standard deviation of 1.35, representing the highest mean score among all items in this section and an evenly split perception. The findings suggest that flexibility is present in some departments but may not be consistently implemented across the board. For stress management or wellness support programs, 44.6% of respondents disagreed with their availability, while 40.3% agreed. The item recorded a mean of 2.88 and the highest standard deviation of 1.45, reflecting mixed and widely dispersed opinions. This suggests inconsistent access to wellness initiatives, which may affect morale and retention.

On whether the hospital supports family responsibilities such as childcare, 54.2% of respondents agreed, while only 33.9% disagreed. This item had a mean score of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 1.23 the most favorable score in this set. The findings indicate that family-supportive policies are more effective and well-perceived, which could positively influence retention. Furthermore, 62.5% of respondents disagreed that the hospital culture values personal time and well-being, while only 18.2% agreed. This item recorded the lowest mean of 2.33 and a standard deviation of 1.22, pointing to strong dissatisfaction and relatively consistent responses. This reflects a critical gap in institutional culture that may lead to disengagement and attrition.

The overall mean score across all items was 2.873, suggesting a moderately low perception of the hospital's support for work-life balance. Standard deviations ranged from 1.22 to 1.45, showing varying degrees of agreement and consistency across items. These results indicate that although certain initiatives like family support and flexible shifts exist, broader work-life balance mechanisms including supportive leadership, stress management, and a culture that values personal time remain underdeveloped and may significantly hinder nurse retention in National Referral hospitals in Kenya.

Thematic Analysis

The interview responses revealed that hospitals have taken deliberate yet uneven steps to help nurses maintain a healthy work-life balance. Several senior managers reported that flexible shift arrangements had been rolled out in critical care units and maternal wings. One respondent explained, *"We introduced staggered shifts to allow nurses with young children or family obligations to plan their personal time better."* However, such arrangements were not uniformly available across all departments, suggesting a selective implementation that limits broader impact. Another manager added that *"While we strive to accommodate personal schedules, the shortage of staff often undermines our flexibility goals."*

Support programs targeting wellness and stress management have also emerged in recent years, albeit in limited scope. For instance, some hospitals have established informal peer support systems and sporadic wellness clinics. A nursing manager stated, *"We try to conduct debriefing sessions after high-intensity shifts and provide optional counseling services, but uptake is still low due to stigma and workload."* These findings highlight institutional awareness of the need for emotional support, though actual service delivery appears fragmented and under-resourced.

When asked about supervisor support and job security as factors influencing retention, responses were mixed. While some hospitals conduct performance reviews and offer commendations for high-performing staff, others reported gaps in managerial engagement. One hospital executive shared: *"There's been an effort to train supervisors on emotional intelligence and work-life sensitivity, but many still struggle to apply these in day-to-day interactions."* On job security,

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several managers noted that most nurses are on permanent contracts, but frequent policy shifts and funding uncertainties contribute to a lingering sense of instability among staff.

Efforts to institutionalize family-friendly policies are still evolving. Although parental leave is granted in accordance with public service guidelines, additional support such as onsite childcare is largely absent. As one respondent emphasized, *“We recognize the need to support family life, but budget constraints mean we can only offer the bare minimum.”* Another echoed this view, saying, *“Without structured institutional programs to support family roles, nurses are left to juggle demanding shifts with little relief, which affects morale and ultimately leads to attrition.”* These insights suggest that while policies on paper exist, practical implementation and cultural alignment remain key challenges in promoting work-life balance for nurse retention.

The dependent variable of the study was retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. The respondents were requested to rate their agreement or otherwise on statements relating to retention. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Retention

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Most nurses have stayed in this hospital for several years.	8.30%	43.10%	9.20%	25.80%	13.50%	2.93	1.25
The hospital has a high nurse retention rate.	10.20%	31.10%	10.20%	26.80%	21.80%	3.19	1.35
I am satisfied with my job at this hospital.	17.80%	31.10%	18.80%	25.20%	7.10%	2.73	1.22
The hospital recognizes and appreciates staff contributions.	14.50%	35.10%	15.40%	24.30%	10.80%	2.82	1.25
The hospital is known for supporting its employees.	24.00%	28.30%	9.20%	26.50%	12.00%	2.74	1.39
I feel involved in decision-making processes.	16.60%	26.80%	11.40%	26.50%	18.80%	3.04	1.4
The work environment encourages teamwork and collaboration.	30.20%	32.90%	19.70%	9.50%	7.70%	2.32	1.22
Overall Mean						2.824	

The results in Table 2 reflect respondents’ perceptions of nurse retention in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. Slightly more than a half (51.4%) of the respondents disagreed that most nurses had stayed in the hospital for several years, while 39.3% agreed. This statement had a mean of 2.93 and a standard deviation of 1.25, indicating general disagreement with moderately varied responses. The findings suggest that staff longevity is not widely perceived, which may point to high turnover rates. Regarding the hospital’s overall nurse retention rate, 41.3% of respondents agreed, while 41.3% disagreed. The item yielded a mean score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 1.35 the highest mean in this section reflecting evenly split views and moderate variability. This

indicates that perceptions of retention rates vary significantly across departments or staff experiences.

On job satisfaction, 48.9% of respondents disagreed that they are satisfied with their job, compared to 32.3% who agreed. The mean score was 2.73 with a standard deviation of 1.22, suggesting general dissatisfaction with relatively consistent responses. This finding implies that a significant number of nurses are unhappy with their current work conditions, which could contribute to attrition. In terms of recognition and appreciation, 49.6% of respondents disagreed that the hospital recognizes staff contributions, while only 35.1% agreed. This item scored a mean of 2.82 and a standard deviation of 1.25, indicating modest disagreement with moderately clustered responses. The result points to inadequate staff acknowledgment, which may negatively impact motivation and retention.

When asked whether the hospital supports its employees, 52.3% of respondents disagreed, while 38.5% agreed. The item recorded a mean of 2.74 and the highest standard deviation of 1.39 in the set, suggesting overall dissatisfaction and a wide range of views. These findings indicate that institutional support is perceived as lacking and inconsistent across the hospital system. On involvement in decision-making processes, 45.8% of respondents agreed, while 43.4% disagreed. This item had a mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.40, reflecting divided perspectives and relatively high variability. These results imply that participation in decisions may be present in some settings but not universally applied.

Concerning teamwork and collaboration, 63.1% of respondents disagreed that the work environment encourages such practices, while only 17.2% agreed. This item recorded the lowest mean of 2.32 and a standard deviation of 1.22, indicating strong dissatisfaction and relatively consistent responses. This highlights a critical gap in organizational culture that may contribute to low morale and reduced staff cohesion. The overall mean score across all items was 2.824, suggesting that nurses generally hold a low to moderate view of retention-related factors within National Referral hospitals. The standard deviations ranged from 1.22 to 1.40, pointing to moderate variability in perceptions. These findings imply that limited job satisfaction, inadequate recognition, insufficient employee support, and a weak teamwork culture are likely contributing to poor retention outcomes.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between work life balance and the retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Results

		Retention	Work life Balance
Retention	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Work life Balance	Pearson Correlation	.626**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, Work-life balance demonstrated a strong and significant positive relationship with retention ($r = 0.626$, $p < 0.01$). This means that flexible work arrangements, supportive supervisors, and wellness programs contribute to a more sustainable work experience for nurses. These results are consistent with the work of Kumari (2012) who noted that work life balance is the act of an employee maintaining stability between professional duties and other responsibilities that one may be having that are personal, or related to family and the society. When work obligations overpower life responsibilities, employees may lose motivation and encourage turnover. Organizations can encourage retention through leave policies, maternity policies, education tuition waiver, hospital insurance covers among others. In a study done in a selected health region in Norway, Haaland et al., (2021) also found that lack of Social support from the supervisor and ethical dilemmas is associated with nurses' intention to leave, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of the meaning of work.

4.3 Regression Analysis

In addition to the correlation analysis, this study conducted simple linear regression analysis to examine the effect of work-life balance on the retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. The regression model was applied to determine the extent to which these independent variables collectively predict the dependent variable nurse retention. Table 4 presents the model summary results.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.701	0.492	0.488	0.517

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work life Balance

The model summary results in Table 4 shows that work-life balance is a strong predictor of nurse retention, with an R of 0.701 indicating a high positive relationship. The R Square value of 0.492 reveals that work-life balance explains 49.2% of the variation in nurse retention. The Adjusted R Square of 0.488 confirms the model's reliability, accounting for sample size. The standard error of 0.517 suggests the model's predictions are reasonably accurate, supporting its suitability for explaining retention outcomes. Table 5 shows analysis of variance results.

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.913	1	40.913	82.36	0.000 ^b
	Residual	42.241	234	0.181		
	Total	83.154	235			

a. Dependent Variable: Retention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work life Balance

The results in Table 5 indicate that the regression model was statistically significant in explaining the effect of work-life balance on the retention of nurses in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. This is evidenced by a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance threshold ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), confirming that work-life balance is a meaningful predictor of nurse retention. The

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model further yielded an F-statistic of 82.36, demonstrating that the regression provides a strong overall fit for the data. These findings imply that improvements in work-life balance initiatives such as flexible scheduling, wellness programs, and supervisor support significantly contribute to retaining nurses. This aligns with Al Mutair et al. (2022), who observed that organizational support and work-life harmony enhance nurses' commitment and reduce turnover. Similarly, Kerdpitak and Jermstittiparsert (2020) emphasized that poor work-life balance and workplace stress increase turnover intentions, underscoring the importance of supportive institutional practices in healthcare settings. Table 6 presents the regression coefficients for each predictor and their individual contribution to the model.

Table 6: Regression of Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized T Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	0.078	0.144		0.541
	Work life Balance	0.32	0.035	0.316	9.075

a. Dependent Variable: Retention

The regression results in Table 6 show that work-life balance had a positive and statistically significant effect on nurse retention in National Referral hospitals in Kenya. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.32$) indicates that a one-unit increase in work-life balance practices leads to a 0.32-unit increase in nurse retention. The standardized beta value ($\beta = 0.316$) further confirms that work-life balance is an important predictor of retention. The effect is statistically significant at $p = 0.000$, which is below the 0.05 threshold, supported by a high t-statistic of 9.075. This demonstrates that improvements in flexible scheduling, wellness programs, and supervisor support directly enhance nurse retention. The constant term was not significant ($p = 0.589$), suggesting that without work-life balance, the model does not strongly predict retention, underscoring the critical role of supportive work-life policies. As such, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. These results agree with the findings of Al Mutair et al. (2022) which emphasized the importance of organizational support in improving the quality of nursing work life.

5.0 Conclusions

Work-life balance plays a decisive role in shaping retention outcomes in public hospitals. Flexible scheduling, family-friendly policies, and wellness initiatives help employees harmonize their personal and professional obligations, ultimately leading to better well-being and reduced attrition. The ability to support family responsibilities and safeguard personal time fosters a healthier, more productive workforce. Through integration of work-life balance strategies into institutional culture, healthcare providers can minimize stress and increase long-term employee engagement. The sustainability of the nursing workforce is contingent not only on financial incentives but on the holistic structuring of employment conditions. Retention is strengthened when healthcare institutions adopt a multidimensional approach that combines equitable remuneration, responsive welfare systems, growth opportunities, supportive environments, and a balanced lifestyle framework. Embedding these practices into organizational systems means that the hospitals can be able to ensure continuity in service delivery, reduce staffing gaps, and build a resilient and motivated nursing workforce that aligns with national healthcare goals.

6.0 Recommendations

The study affirms the relevance of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory in understanding the influence of total rewards on nurse retention. The clear distinction between hygiene factors such as remuneration and working conditions and motivators like career development and work-life balance reinforces the dual necessity of both categories for ensuring staff satisfaction and stability. In particular, the findings validate that financial and non-financial rewards are fundamental drivers of long-term commitment in high-pressure health environments such as national referral hospitals.

The establishment of flexible scheduling, wellness programs, childcare support, and supervisory training to foster work-life integration will create a more resilient and loyal nursing workforce. Policymakers, especially within the Ministry of Health and the Public Service Commission, should consider establishing a national framework for total reward systems in public health facilities. Such frameworks should outline minimum standards for nurse remuneration, career advancement, work environment quality, and work-life balance. These standards should be anchored in regulatory compliance mechanisms and reviewed periodically. Further, the government should implement national subsidies or conditional grants to support health facilities in developing professional development programs. A performance-based funding model could be introduced to incentivize institutions that demonstrate progress in improving nurse retention metrics. This would also ensure equity in resource allocation across counties and referral centers.

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