

The Crisis Management for Challenge by Nursing and doctors in Saudi Arabia: Bridging the Gap Between Invisible Efforts and Visible Impact in Healthcare

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1. Introduction

Nursing is one of the most fundamental yet overlooked professions in healthcare. Despite globally recognized efforts to improve health outcomes, nursing remains an invisible force in healthcare systems across nations. Saudi Arabia faces a significant crisis affecting nursing, paired with escalating health concerns and a transformative nursing vision. Questions arise about the unnoticed efforts of nursing within the profession, the impact of these efforts on health outcomes, and the ability to adjust or transform these efforts. Fundamental issues surrounding the nursing profession emerged rapidly in Saudi Arabia, a G20 nation striving to improve the integrity of healthcare and health outcomes (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). Acknowledging these issues necessitates analyzing the visible impact of nursing on healthcare while questioning what currently exists to bridge the gap between these two extremes. This introductory discourse aims to frame the healthcare situation, particularly nursing, in Saudi Arabia. An overview of the healthcare landscape, including the demographic, economic, and disease burden profiles, the role of nurses within the visible impact of healthcare, and the values and concerns of nursing outside the visible role, is provided. Targeted stakeholders in the healthcare sector are invited to consider the implications of these challenges on patient care and overall health outcomes. The stage setting offers a roadmap for the entire study, discussing five specific challenges nursing currently faces in Saudi Arabia, along with suggestions for exploration and reconciliation. While these concerns are not unique to Saudi Arabia, most developing nations face similar challenges. However, the discussion is limited to Saudi Arabia, as four key justifications make this nation an interesting scenario. Emerging from the crossroads of cultural, developmental, and economic diversity accompanied by G20 nation efforts, Saudi Arabia possesses a healthcare sector reformed by globalized imperialism (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

1.1. Background and Significance

Nursing in Saudi Arabia has steadily evolved over the past seven decades alongside the nation's advancement. The country's first nursing education program and hospital were established in 1954, and nursing has gone through different phases of development, including the academia and nursing diploma in parallel, the shift to higher education, expanding facilities, and privatization. The current efforts on Saudization are vital to the nursing profession, as they completely reshape and enhance the nursing workforce. Nurses constitute the largest healthcare provider group, crucial to delivering quality healthcare services and patient outcome improvements. In recent years, nurses have been noticeably involved in changing healthcare services and policies at national and global levels. Despite the increase in the visibly impacting roles of nurses, their invisible efforts are often neglected and overlooked, especially in developing countries (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). Therefore, how to rebridge the visible impact and invisible effort in nursing is a significant ongoing challenge. This ever-present challenge is particularly acute in Saudi Arabia after its rapid demographic changes and escalating healthcare demand.

Healthcare is one of the most prioritized developmental fields that drive and support the nation's growth plans. The population in Saudi Arabia is projected to reach 37 million by 2025, with an annual growth rate of 2.3% from 2010-2025. As life expectancies increase, a burgeoning aging population, rapidly urbanized lifestyle changes, and growing youth population will surge the demand for diverse healthcare services, non-communicable disease treatments, and international collaborative research (Alsadaan et al., 2021). The Saudi national vision 2030 calls for enhancing the capacity of the national healthcare system to better accommodate the rapidly and massively growing demand for healthcare services and assure a publicly accessible, high-quality, efficient, and integrated healthcare system. This healthcare system reform directly drives the nursing profession's advancement and proliferation in the country. However, a cumulative progression crisis threatens the nursing profession and hinders its development in parallel with the growing demand and professionalism enhancement efforts. Absently tackling overlooked systemic issues would lead to the nursing profession's declining irreversibility and collapse. Collectively catching up with the ground zero opposite towering demand and paramount efforts is critical to the nursing profession's survival and progression sustainability.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The research purpose is to identify and analyze the crisis and challenge of nursing in Saudi Arabia, based on the visible impact on healthcare and the invisible effort of nursing. With particular focus on nursing in Saudi Arabia, the aim is to provide clarity and direction on the key issues related to the challenge of nursing, as well as insights into the implications of these challenges (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Specifically, the questions guiding this investigation are as follows: What is the challenge of nursing in Saudi Arabia? How has this challenge been and how should it be dealt with? How could the insight regarding the challenge of nursing in Saudi Arabia contribute to the discourse in nursing? In the context of Saudi Arabia, what does the concern about the challenge of nursing imply? These questions are intended to bridge the clearly visible gap between the considerable effort of nursing in healthcare and its insignificant visible impact on healthcare (M. Alsufyani et al., 2020). The research aims to add to the body of

understanding regarding the implications of the challenge of nursing by establishing a frame of reference for the discourse regarding the challenge and crisis of nursing. In doing so, it endeavours to make a starting point for bringing the discourse and concern about the challenge and crisis of nursing into a more fruitful direction. Ultimately, the hope is to contribute insights that would be useful for the advancement of healthcare policies and education in relation to nursing, as well as recommendations that would assist efforts to enhance the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia.

Nursing in healthcare is indispensable for the safety and quality of healthcare, or the soul of healthcare. However, nursing is simultaneously a profession in the deepest crisis and grave challenge. These descriptions in nursing are used interchangeably by many nursing scholars, and tend to mean the same thing (e.g., invisibility in healthcare or minimal visible impact on healthcare with large and considerable efforts in nursing). Here, "invisible effort" means visible implications of nursing despite considerable efforts in nursing, and the opposite means visible effort with insignificant implications in nursing. In nursing, the consideration of a crisis tends to mean a prickly concern about the challenge being discourse in nursing. On the other hand, discourse being concerned with a challenge tends to mean implications on nursing standards and policies. As such, bringing nursing efforts and the consideration of nursing impacts into a coherent discourse makes nursing concerned with a crisis.

2. Current State of Nursing in Saudi Arabia

This section is dedicated to addressing the current state of nursing in Saudi Arabia. The purpose here is to paint a clear picture of what nursing looks like now, examining existing conditions and specifying both achievements and challenges. It is important to highlight obvious advances as well as difficulties that are still very much in evidence. In probing the current state, it is necessary to acknowledge complexities and nuances. When carefully delineated, the current state is marked by high demand for nursing services, – good evidence of which can be found in countries documented nursing shortages and gaps in professional practices, – a general need for nursing education, standards, and recognition improvements. All statements are supported with statistical data, analyses, and figures that detail workforce in regard to patient care outcomes, thus exposing system weaknesses. A clear understanding of the current state opens the door for systemic patches to be reform. Critical and probing questions arise throughout an examination of the immediate state that go to questions of sustainability and growth. In short, this section provides essential context for understanding what is currently nursing's challenge and opportunity. In describing the current state, transparency can keep nursing initiatives from coming up against unrecognized obstacles (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). Therefore, rather than only acknowledging the visible efforts of nursing, this section aims to identify the invisible impact of nursing, with a view toward articulating what efforts remain most needed. An improved understanding of the current state should considerably add to the capacity of nursing to keep efforts wisely directed.

As the focus now narrows to nursing, it will be useful to begin with a simple examination of the current state in regard to three fields: demographics, direction, and development. In terms of demographics, Saudi Arabia is a young and rapidly growing country. Consider that in 1974, there were just 1.3 million people in the entire country. By 2023, there are

an estimated 36 million Saudi Arabians, and the population is forecasted to reach 37 million by 2025. Along with workforce recruitment, retention, training, and performance now playing globally inescapable nursing hotspot policy and decision arena, the added pressure of learning to care for rapidly aging populations is looming for Saudi Arabia and other countries. Particularly pressing for Saudi Arabia, however, is that while the need for nursing services is increasing daily, difficulties combating widespread nursing shortages have compounded. A current Republican Healthcare commission report notes that over the past decade, Health Care Organization with a chronic shortage of health care professionals has repeatedly been compelled to dramatically change employment eligibility standards and catechize a good number otherwise not fluent in English. These stateside difficulties echo precisely the Saudi experience with nursing workforce shortages. In 2010, for example, it was reported that Saudi Arabia had only 40 nurses for every 10,000 of its population. And despite efforts to recruit and train Saudi nurses, by 2010 expatriate nurses still constituted 74% of the entire nursing workforce. Exacerbating such shortages are high turnover rates across nursing ranks and refusal of Saudi nationals to enter the profession. With population growth and an escalating number of chronically and critically ill patients, Health Care Organization estimates that by 2025 the need for nurses will have doubled, requiring approximately 100,000 nursing positions to be filled by 2030 (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

2.1. Key Challenges

Nursing represents one of the largest healthcare professions in Saudi Arabia. Despite recent efforts to enhance the nursing workforce, paradigm shift to evidence-based practices, and local nurse educators, patient care is still primarily delivered by expatriate nurses. A chronic shortage of Saudi nurses persists, exacerbated by high turnover. Saudi Arabia currently has 12.10 nurses per 10,000 population (including expatriates), well below the World Health Organization's 25 nurses per 10,000 standard. Despite increasing nursing school outputs, there were still only 387 new Saudi nurses in 2016. The nurse to patient ratio is 1: 36, while the WHO recommendation is 1: 4-8. Currently, 67% of inpatient units are at high risk, negatively impacting patient care quality (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

While many challenges face nurse practitioners, the most prominent include systemic barriers that thwart the good faith efforts of nursing professionals. These challenges include the nursing workforce shortage, high turnover of Saudi nurses, and inadequate educational framework for nurse practitioners. Despite efforts to recruit expatriate nurses, the vast majority of nursing positions went unfilled. Heavy reliance on foreign nurses seems to be exacerbating the problems rather than solving them. Expatriate nurses experience cultural barriers with patient care and face discrimination and abuse from patients and entourage. Similarly, many challenges nurse leaders struggle to retain the expatriate nurses concern cultural differences and discrimination. Unfortunately, to hire Saudi nurses, Health Affairs often needs to disregard or circumvent the very regulations in place to protect them. In fact, many cultural and institutional barriers negatively impact nurse morale, well-being, and retention (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). Other regulations viewed as protecting nurses can restrain their ability to function effectively. This ultimately impacts patient care quality.

Most challenges faced by nurse practitioners in Saudi Arabia would fall under a regulatory or institutional framework. Numerous studies have assessed the state of nursing in Saudi Arabia and efforts to improve it, identifying similar issues including community image, heavy workloads, discrimination, inequitable contracts, limited opportunities for advancement, and workplace abuse. Many of these obstacles result from a failure to adequately address the implications of “nursing” being an imported concept at inception and the culture shock that accompanied its introduction. Several obstacles nurse leaders face when attempting to recruit Saudi nurses are rooted in cultural or social frameworks. Efforts to increase nursing school outputs have proven futile, as broader social norms discourage females from pursuing nursing. Social mobility based on education is slow, and nursing is often viewed as a less desirable career choice compared to teaching or clerical positions. As societal expectations dictate that young women remain single and at home until marriage, nursing’s evening and night shifts further burden family worries regarding their ability to “catch a husband”.

Culturally mandated discretion involving the hiring and placement of female nurses is perceived as a significant impediment to good faith patient care. Additionally, while several cultural and institutional challenges remain problems when recruiting and hiring male nurses, the greater restrictions and sensitivities placed around female nurses only partially explain their underrepresentation. Expatriate nurses remain susceptible to discrimination and abuse from patients and entourage, often failing to receive justice. Some of these grievances or injuries are merely viewed as fallout from an unprepared cultural transition. Cultural barriers also often lead to miscommunication between patients and nurses, precipitating negative outcomes and greater frustration for the nurse. Unfortunately, many cultural and institutional challenges that prospective nurse practitioners must confront prior to employment are simply untenable.

2.2. Opportunities for Improvement

Amidst concerns, there are also opportunities to improve the nursing practice and policies in Saudi Arabia. Suggestions are shared to advance the nursing workforce education, training, and mentorship in the Saudi system. There is significance stressed on the role of technology in education and practice development. Collaboration with the Ministry of Education and government educational organizations, technology-based education training programs can be developed to train nurses on healthcare technology use and telehealth implementation. Besides, nursing practice technology-based development programs can be organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Health which can create an opportunity for nurses to enhance their practice in using technology in daily nursing tasks. Such development programs can be helpful for nurses in realizing professional growth in practice advancement and technology-based innovative nursing care implementation (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Moreover, the potential of public-private partnership efforts is highlighted in enhancing the professional recognition of nursing and institutional support in developing nursing education and practice services. Public-private partnership arrangements can create nursing professional organizations to handle the professional recognition of nursing and support developing nursing education and practice services. These organizations can work with similar organizations in other countries, helping to develop professional standards and establish nursing educational institutions and practice services based on these standards. To mitigate the barriers and

challenges at the system level, stakeholders such as nurses, academic institutions, and practice organizations need to collaborate and address the proposals (M. Alsufyani et al., 2020). Besides, raising awareness about the nurses' role and contribution to the healthcare ecosystem can advocate for the profession and lessen the gap in professional recognition. Scientific-based initiatives can be organized to promote the nursing profession, role, and contribution awareness among stakeholders including the Ministry of Health, community, and high-ranking government officials. Such initiatives could include nursing professional contribution impact research publications, nursing healthcare solution proposals, and collaboration arrangements with similar organizations. These opportunities would not only remedy the current issues in nursing but also enhance the resilience of the overall healthcare system. Although there are above-discussed opportunities to advance nursing in Saudi Arabia, discussions on how to overcome the identified barriers and challenges are limited.

3. Factors Contributing to the Crisis

This investigation unpacks the nursing crisis in Saudi Arabia by detailing systemic and individual levels of obstacles facing nurses. Despite the rapid growth of the population and the need for healthcare (currently at 33.4 per 1000 people, up from 29.7 in 2014), there is a persistent workforce shortage. Similarly, despite a rise in the number of nursing graduates — 1065 in 2015, 1624 in 2018 — turnover rates are high and recruitment ongoing. Of particular note, whilst there are calls for an increase in the recruitment of Saudi nurses, cultural perceptions impact society's view of nursing as an undervalued profession (Alsadaan et al., 2021). As a result, it is difficult to attract and retain young Saudi nurses. On a broader scale, professional recognition is considered to be one of the most important elements related to the quality of patient care, as the lack of professional recognition negatively impacts patients' safety (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). Thus, the questions addressed are what the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia is currently critiqued for, and what the profession is currently pursuing or is hoped to pursue in the future. This is important as nursing concerns and critiques are often locally and contextually embedded, meaning consideration must be given to national and cultural differences. In short, nursing is described as facing difficulties in being recognized as a 'real' profession, and as a knowledge-based profession hampered by its focus on the invisible and taken-for-granted. These challenges limit the effectiveness of nursing as a profession in the healthcare system, highlighting the need for systemic changes in order to tackle these obstacles. Overall, this investigation seeks to unpack the foundations of the questions posed in Saudi Arabia, a country undergoing rapid social change.

3.1. Workforce Shortages

The nursing sector in Saudi Arabia is currently confronting an escalating crisis of workforce shortages. Statistical analyses demonstrate a rapidly growing gap between the demand for nursing services and the available supply (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). By 2023, the demand is projected to reach 129,712 nurses, whereas the supply is forecasted to only amount to 79,451 nurses, leaving a staggering deficit of 50,261 nurses. Similarly, projections for 2030 indicate a shortfall of 55,339 nurses. These estimates encompass nurses working in both public and private facilities. Narratives surrounding workforce shortages cite a myriad of contributing factors, with high turnover rates at the forefront (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Within the past five years, the overall turnover rate for

nurses reaching 25% is considered a crisis. Additionally, inadequate training programs within the nursing colleges exacerbate the situation, as graduates are ill-prepared for the complexities of real-world caregiving. Healthcare system barriers, including mandatory overtime, limited nursing input in policy-making, excessive patient loads, and a lack of resources to manage difficult or aggressive patients, further contribute to this predicament.

Health services across all healthcare facilities are severely impacted by workforce shortages, ultimately compromising patient safety and care quality. Shortages result in an inability to provide desired healthcare services, staff stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and disrupted continuity of care. Several studies consistently indicate a direct relationship between staffing shortages and negative patient outcomes. Despite a modest increase in nursing staff and a burgeoning healthcare budget, the problem persists, underscoring the critical need for strategic workforce planning and retention initiatives. Healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, act as the backbone of the healthcare system, and the ongoing crisis poses significant challenges to its advancement. The difficulties faced by existing nurses due to workforce shortages can be characterized as a “vicious cycle.” The lack of sufficient staff increases the workload of existing staff members, resulting in burnout and exhaustion, which causes many nurses to leave their positions. Consequently, the remaining staff struggle to cope with the intensifying workload, thereby diminishing the quality of care provided. Ultimately, the remaining nurses may also be compelled to leave, potentially jeopardizing the viability of the healthcare system itself. It is crucial for stakeholders to recognize this dilemma and proactively invest in recruitment and training efforts to avert the impending crisis.

3.2. Lack of Professional Recognition

Nursing, as a profession, can be considered as a sub-group within a society that shapes its own position and functions through self-determination. Professional recognition is the acknowledgement of professional efforts, abilities, or judgment. Recognition is the foundation for professional existence; on the contrary, a lack of recognition questions professional existence. There is a lack professional recognition experience in nurses, which has a significant impact on nurses’ morale and job satisfaction (Mansour Lamadah & Yehia Sayed, 2014). However, societal perception often overlooks the critical roles that nurses fulfill in successfully delivering the healthcare system. Without acknowledgment from the public and healthcare institution, nurses may feel diminished and unsupported in their profession. Unfortunately, this scenario is not unique to Saudi nurses; it replicates a global norm. Society views the healthcare roles as a hierarchy. Physicians hold the primary and dominant position, while, at the bottom of the hierarchy, other non-medical allied health professionals and nurses deliver supportive services (Alsadaan et al., 2021). Consequently, the status of a profession determines the services it delivers; therefore, with the exalted status of physicians, the most critical and complex services are reserved for them. Other professionals are viewed as ‘assistants’ that provide supportive services to physicians. This is particularly evident in nursing, where the critical and life-saving services are rendered by the invisible hands of trained professionals. Throughout the world, nursing, despite being the largest group of healthcare providers, is often viewed as menial or low-level service. Evidently, not recognizing the professional efforts of nurses and maintaining a suppressed invisibility is

detrimental in regard to professionalism, accountability, and personal growth. Hence, as a high priority, there is need to promote the status of nursing and the essential services provided by nurses across the public and all levels of the healthcare institution. Otherwise, like many other countries, the challenge of publicly viewing nursing as a job rather than a profession will result in unfilled positions, turnover, and recruitment challenges.

4. Strategies for Bridging the Gap

Strategic approaches are presented that could be followed in part or whole to bridge the gap between nursing efforts and visible impact in the healthcare system in Saudi Arabia. Some interventions are essential for the nursing workforce to improve patient care outcomes, such as education and training programs. These programs are needed to ensure nurses are prepared for contemporary healthcare needs, whether new initiatives or ongoing investments. In addition to education and training, policies are needed to uplift nursing standards and recognition as a profession, as opposed to an occupation. All stakeholders, including educators, healthcare organizations, and those who influence policy, will need to work collaboratively to ensure that strategies across sectors are aligned to meet the needs of each sector and achieve sustainable change (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

Community awareness and engagement are also vital in supporting nursing initiatives and ensuring public health needs are met. Enhancing the nursing profession is crucial for the community's involvement in creating a healthier society. Overall, this will provide a blueprint of what needs to be done to strengthen the nursing profession and improve the visibility of impact on health outcomes. The nursing profession in Saudi Arabia faces many challenges in education, professional development, and practice. Considerable effort will need to be invested to ensure that nurses impact community health directly. Some strategies could be followed within the confines of time, funding, and political will, but nursing also needs to advocate for policy changes that will impact the profession nationally (M. Alsufyani et al., 2020).

4.1. Enhancing Education and Training Programs

Enhancing education and training programs is critical to adequately address the needs of nursing in Saudi Arabia. As the healthcare landscape evolves, nursing curricula must align with contemporary demands and best educational practices. This alignment ensures nurses possess essential skills. Therefore, educational and training programs must be enhanced, including accreditation verification for all nursing colleges and the implementation of comprehensive training programs for nurses. Currently, 42% of Saudi nurses are undertrained, and 24% are untrained. This disparity highlights the importance of training initiatives to address competency gaps present in nursing (M. Alsufyani et al., 2020).

The nursing workforce's potential is thwarted by systematic gaps between theory and practice in nursing's education. While the theoretical foundation of nursing programs is, to a degree, adequately covered, disparities exist in key areas needing reform. Clinical/field training is insufficient, as student nurses spend only 31.4% of program time in clinical settings, with limited exposure to adult intensive care, rehabilitation, or psychiatry units. Nurses trained overseas lack formal induction training. Continuing

professional development for nurses focuses solely on compliance training and has a minimal effect on enhancing skills. To address these inefficiencies, simulation-based learning should be used to complement clinical learning experiences as a core learning strategy. Clinical training, whether at regional hospitals or in other states, should be mandated. Induction training for overseas-trained nurses should be compulsory, coupled with a thorough review of nursing continuing professional development (CPD) activities to ensure relevance and adequacy. (Chang et al., 2022)(Martin et al.2023)(Schroers et al., 2023)

Continuous professional development (CPD) is essential to the ongoing, systematic, and lifelong learning of nursing professionals. A well-educated and practiced nursing workforce is critical to research translation and improved patient care. Therefore, it is essential to develop a culture of excellence in nursing education that incorporates best practices with the prevailing standards of education to improve the quality of nursing care. Enhancements proposed in this section will build a stronger, more competent nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia.

4.2. Advocating for Policy Changes

Nursing leadership should advocate for relevant policy changes that are necessary for the advancement of nursing in the country. A policy is a formal statement of principles that guides decisions and activities. It can be legislative or institutional. Policy shapes the recognition and practice of nursing and influences the nature of its growth within the healthcare system. Although nurses have a unique set of skills needed for quality health care, legislative and institutional barriers have prevented nursing from exercising its full potential (M. Alsufyani et al., 2020). Bridging the gap between nursing's invisible efforts and visible impact requires policies that create an environment conducive for nursing to flourish. Therefore, nursing leaders, organizations, and associations should come together to advocate for policy change.

Collective advocacy efforts should focus on national and local policies or strategic healthcare plans. National policies should encourage evidence-based reforms to the nursing workforce, training, practice, and recognition. Local policies should translate national goals into actions by healthcare providers. Health leaders should also be advocates for the nursing profession by shaping institutional policies and promoting a culture of nursing innovation and acceptance. Lastly, public policy advocacy is necessary to increase awareness of nursing's essential contributions to health and wellbeing and the importance of societal support to enact policy initiatives. This involves disseminating success stories of nursing impacts on healthcare systems and outcomes, aligning nursing priorities with public interests, and building coalitions with influential supporters. It is hoped that by addressing these three areas, healthcare organizations will be encouraged to take the lead in policy change efforts at the local and national levels. The ultimate goal is for nursing to be included in the design, discussion, and decision-making processes of healthcare strategies and policies. (Chiu et al.2021)(Anders, 2021)(Wilson et al.2022)(Hajizadeh et al.2021)(Bekemeier et al.2021)

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study presents a comprehensive overview of the current state of nursing in Saudi Arabia, highlighting both the visible challenges and the often-invisible efforts to address

them. In recent years, nursing has been more visible in policy discussion, the media, and public awareness. However, despite this increased visibility, the profession still faces significant challenges. The insights shared by Saudi nursing leaders and educators shed light on the complicated situation, emphasizing the crucial need for transformative action in the profession. Revisiting the crisis and challenges, the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia is at a crossroads. While there are numerous opportunities on the horizon, there is also potential for stagnation or regression if the barriers are not adequately addressed.

The key challenges affecting nursing standards include a lack of clear nursing leadership, professional visibility, advocacy, and understanding of the profession's efforts by health system leaders and decision-makers. In addition, national nursing and midwifery strategic planning frameworks are not fully aligned with national health strategic frameworks. On the other hand, there are numerous opportunities to enhance nursing standards. However, nursing leaders and advocates need to take the initiative to proactively bridge the gaps rather than passively waiting for change or progress to happen. To bridge the gaps, four key recommendations are directed toward the audience: nursing advocates, leaders, and educators in Saudi Arabia. First, visible leadership needs to be established at the national level to advocate and actively promote the nursing profession to health system leaders, decision-makers, and the public. Second, nursing needs to actively advocate for professional visibility and accountability at all healthcare settings. Third, professional understanding needs to be actively lobbied for and considered a priority by health system leaders and decision-makers in all developmental efforts. Finally, national nursing and midwifery strategic planning frameworks need to be developed as a priority to ensure the alignment of planning with the national agenda. Through these recommendations, it is hoped that the profession will be motivated to take action that will result in significant improvements. The future of nursing in Saudi Arabia depends on the profession and its leaders, advocates, and educators (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

5.1. Summary of Findings

This section provides a brief overview of the main findings from the research, summarizing the key points discussed throughout. It revisits the core challenges and possible solutions that were identified in connection with the nursing crisis in Saudi Arabia. Generally, the findings underscore the complexity of the challenges at hand: a critical shortage in the nursing workforce, compounded by a high turnover rate and reliance on expatriates; a lack of professional recognition, and a wide disparity between thought and action, or policy and practice. The findings also highlight how policy, education, and practice are interconnected when it comes to formulating effective resolutions. As the research outcomes are distilled here, the intention is to clarify what was set out to investigate and why it is important (Alsadaan et al., 2021).

With this summary, the groundwork is laid for the recommendations that will follow in the next section. The aim is not to simply list the proposed actions, but rather to emphasize the need for a coherent approach that takes into account the multi-faceted nature of nursing in the healthcare system. It is argued that nursing cannot be fixed in isolation, and that any effort to address a deficiency in one aspect, such as staffing levels or better salaries, will not succeed unless the overall system is considered. In short, the findings serve as a foundation on which the recommendations are built. The findings

themselves present an overview of the outcomes, following a brief outline of the research conducted. The healthcare system in Saudi Arabia is undergoing a major reform, with Vision 2030 seeking to diversify the economy and improve public services. As part of this vision, the healthcare system is looking to increase the emphasis on preventive care, and privatize a significant portion of services currently provided by the government.

While many of the changes are welcomed, there are also significant challenges that must be addressed. Now and in the foreseeable future, the most critical challenge is the nursing profession. As Saudi Arabia strives to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare services, it finds itself facing a nursing crisis. In fact, many of the issues currently plaguing Saudi Arabia's healthcare system had already been present for years prior to the pandemic, yet they had gone unnoticed by the general public. Foremost among these is the struggle to find and retain nurses. Without this essential workforce, plans for the future are rendered meaningless. Matters are further complicated by the fact that many of the issues confronting nursing are invisible or go unnoticed in everyday care.

5.2. Policy Recommendations

This section provides policy recommendations that address the identified barriers confronting the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia. While acknowledging the ineffectiveness of some previous recommendations, this endeavor for new policies is deemed worthwhile. Policy recommendations are aimed at relevant stakeholders in Saudi Arabia and are outlined as follows: (1) Governmental bodies should minimize the structural barriers nurses face by ensuring the appropriate representation of nursing leaders in decision-making committees, providing direct accountability for nursing and healthcare system structural support, and conducting regular independent audits on the development of nursing and healthcare systems; (2) Educational institutions should develop legislation that mandates the implementation of continuous professional development initiatives tailored for nurses, ensuring the growth of nursing leaders in research, practice, and education; (3) Healthcare organizations should advocate community engagement in policy awareness for nursing and recommend policy planning for nursing visibility within the healthcare policy framework. Collectively, these recommendations create an initial opportunity for a more supportive environment for nursing and hence healthcare in Saudi Arabia.

Specifically, barriers confronting the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia were illuminated by an exposure to the nursing and healthcare policy triad. Although nursing policy arrangements and the resultant actions were generally in line with the international recommendations, there were notable weaknesses, particularly invisibility in policy planning. Nursing efforts to embrace a desirable future were acknowledged but were often rendered ineffective by the lack visibility in policy planning and arrangements. In addition to considerations on the wider implications of invisibility, recommendations were proposed that specifically focused on creating an opportunity for nursing visibility in policy planning, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of nursing efforts (Alsadaan et al., 2021). To realize these recommendations, awareness of the community, especially members in relevant professional associations, is imperative and essential to conduct cooperative actions with a commitment to progress nursing in Saudi Arabia.

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