

Registered nurses' desire to work in nursing: An integrative review

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Nordic Journal of Nursing Research
 Volume 45: 1–10
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 DOI: 10.1177/20571585241304888
journals.sagepub.com/home/njn



Abstract

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that, by 2030, nine million nurses and midwives will be needed because there is currently a global nursing shortage. The aim of this study was to describe registered nurses' (RNs) desire to work in nursing based on previous studies. CINAHL, MEDLINE, NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH databases were searched for original research. No time limit was used in the searches. The PRISMA checklist was used to reflect rigour of methods. Eighteen primary studies were appraised and included in the review. RNs expressed a desire to work in the nursing profession due to the rewarding work, smoothness of work, interesting work duties, versatile career opportunities, support for one's well-being and an inner desire to help others. Work–life balance is crucial for RNs' well-being. Nursing management should offer flexible hours and shifts to improve retention. Adequate resources and visible appreciation for RNs are essential and, while fair pay is important, it alone is not enough to ensure long-term retention.

Keywords

literature review, nursing, registered nurse, shortage, want to work in nursing

Accepted: 20 November 2024

Introduction

Globally, there are 27.9 million people involved in nursing, with 19.3 million being professional nurses, making them the largest occupational group in healthcare.¹ Nurses are the largest healthcare workforce in nearly all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.² WHO estimates that nine million more nurses and midwives will be needed by 2030, working and caring for people of all age groups.^{3,4} At the same time, more than 150 countries face a nursing shortage.⁵ In Europe, an ageing population is increasing the demand for nurses.⁶ Given this, research on supporting nurse retention in the profession is crucial.

Nurse retention is strengthened by supporting career development, providing equal opportunities, and offering manageable workloads and flexibility.⁷ Higher job satisfaction, including better education, salary, resources and organizational commitment, reduces nurses' intention to leave.⁸ A sense of belonging, workplace support⁹ good teamwork, social support from colleagues and supervisors,¹⁰ and opportunities for professional development all strengthen nurse retention.¹¹ Additionally, nurses value supervisors who seek their input and recognize their work.¹² Interactive leadership styles reduce turnover and improve care quality.¹³ Nurse retention is strengthened by satisfaction with a positive work environment, including leadership, opportunities for participation, strong nurse–doctor relationships, job satisfaction and personal achievements.¹⁴ Organizations should support ongoing professional development by aligning resources with nurses' career goals at different stages.¹⁵ Nurse retention is also influenced

by the rewarding aspects of the profession and the desire to help others.¹⁶ Many nurses value their role in patient recovery¹⁷ and find strength in caring for patients and supporting families. However, conflicts with patients and their families, along with stressful experiences such as caring for dying patients or making end-of-life decisions, can increase nurses' intention to leave the profession.¹¹

Nurses' intentions to leave the profession is a global concern¹⁸ with research predating the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey across 12 European countries found one in five nurses dissatisfied, mainly due to salary, career advancement, work management and resource issues.¹⁹ High work demands and unclear job roles also contribute to nurses leaving the profession.^{10,20} Therefore, The United Nations

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High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth emphasizes the importance of investing in nurse education and job creation to improve health outcomes, security and economic growth.¹ Similarly, the International Nurses Association (ICN) highlights the need to invest in the nursing workforce to enhance patient safety and healthcare systems,²¹ while emphasizing the urgency of retaining and attracting nurses amid the global shortage.²²

While previous studies have explored nurses' career choices and reasons for leaving, there is limited understanding of why nurses desire to stay. An initial search found no existing reviews on this topic, highlighting the need for a comprehensive review to identify factors that promote nurse retention and address the nursing shortage.

The review

Aim

This study aimed to describe RNs' desire to work in nursing based on previous studies.

The research question was: Why do RNs want to work in nursing?

Methods

An integrative review combines different research designs to provide a comprehensive overview of previous studies. The framework guided the review process through the phases of problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, analysis and data presentation.²³

Search methods, search outcomes and quality appraisal. When conducting literature search, databases are effective tools to conduct searches.²³ In this study, data were collected from original research articles which met the inclusion criteria from the international Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) and Nursing and Allied Health databases.

The PICO method was used to generate search phrases (where P is the population, I is the phenomenon and Co is the context).²⁴ Boolean operators and truncation were

applied, with keywords 'nurse' and 'desire' limited to abstracts. An information specialist helped formulate the search terms (Table 1).

The inclusion criteria for the review were 1) registered nurses (RNs); 2) working in clinical practice; 3) peer-reviewed research; and 4) original research. The exclusion criteria for the review were 1) other than registered nurses; 2) literature review or a non-scientific article; and 3) covid-19 4) migration. The search was limited to English language articles. Any uncertainties were discussed with the other authors. No time limit was set to ensure a comprehensive understanding, and a health sciences specialist verified the search queries. The preliminary search revealed no prior reviews published on the topic.

The search and selection of data took place between February and April 2023 and was updated in June 2024. Search strategy followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) reporting guidelines (Figure 1). The PRISMA 2020 checklist was used to reflect rigour of methods.²⁵

Altogether, 13,557 articles were identified through a database search (Figure 1). The article references were exported to the Zotero reference management software (<https://www.zotero.org>), which made it possible to remove duplicate articles.

A total of 13,557 articles were identified through database searches (Figure 1). After removing duplicates, 10,766 articles were screened by title, and 8850 were excluded for not focusing on the study topic. Two authors independently screened titles and abstracts, then reviewed them together. In total, 55 full-text articles were assessed, and 37 were excluded for focusing on other healthcare professionals, work conditions or not addressing the research question. Finally, 18 articles were included in the review (Table 2).

The validity of the articles was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute's (JBI) quality assessment criteria.²⁶ Quality assessment checklists for qualitative (ten questions) and cross-sectional (eight questions) studies were used to evaluate the articles and identify potential biases. Two authors independently conducted the quality appraisal of the studies and reached a consensus. The appraisal showed that the selected studies had good methodological quality (Table 3).

Data synthesis. Data were analyzed using inductive content analysis. This comprises a systematic data coding and

Table 1. Search terms used in electronic databases.

Search terms	
Nurse	nurs* OR "nursing staff" OR staff nurs*
Nursing	work OR career OR occupation*
Desire	desir* OR want OR motiv* OR willing*
Search phrases	
CINAHL	AB (nurs* or "nursing staff" or staff nurs*) AND (work or career or occupation*) AND AB (desir* or want or motiv* or willing*)
MEDLINE	AB (nurs* or "nursing staff" or staff nurs*) AND (work or career or occupation*) AND AB (desir* or want or motiv* or willing*)
NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH	abstract(nurs* or "nursing staff" or staff nurs*) AND (work or career or occupation*) AND abstract(desir* or want or motiv* or willing*)

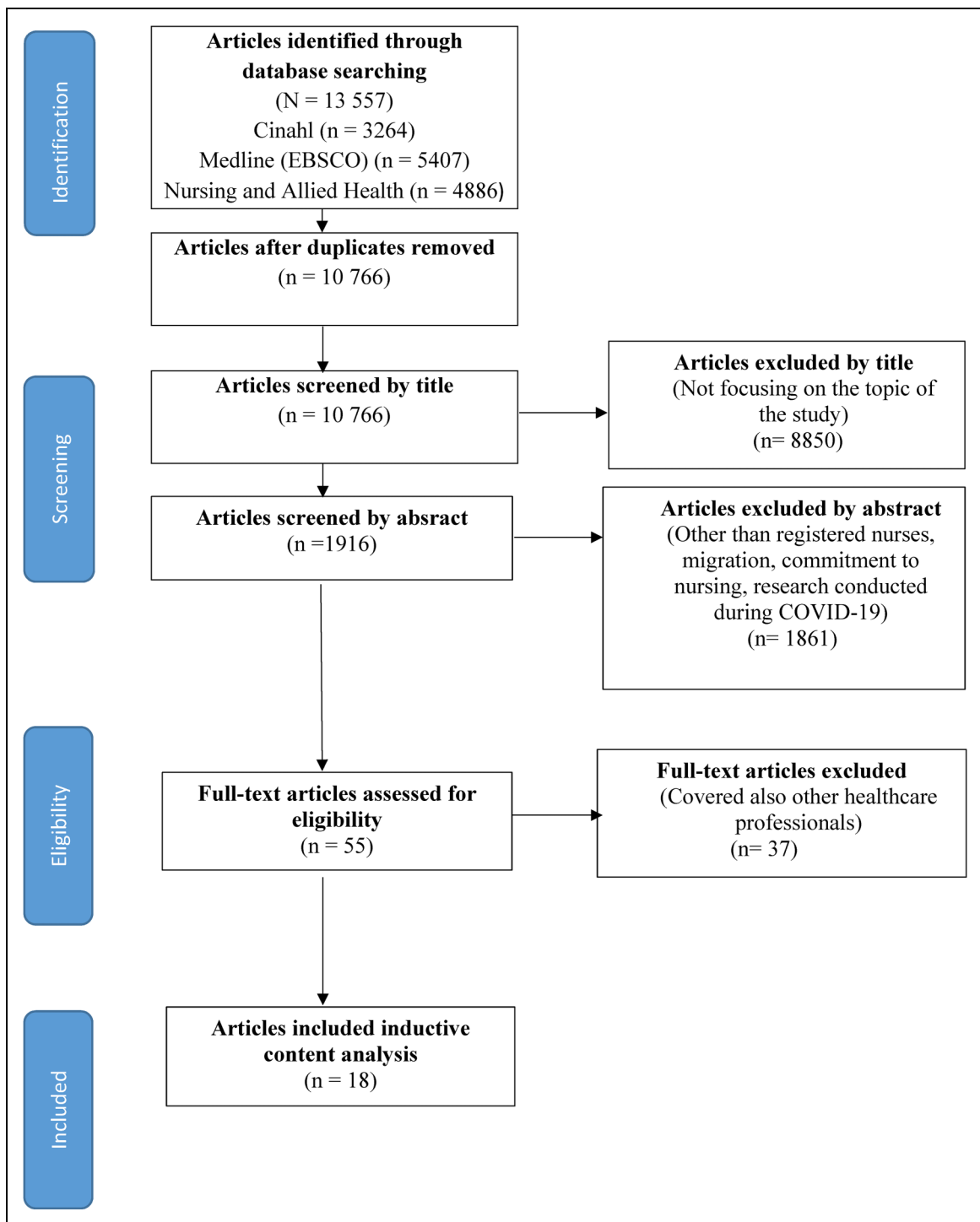


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the literature search adapted from Prisma 2009.²⁵

classification method used to determine the repetition, structure, relationship and communication of words used.²⁷ Data analysis was conducted by two authors. The text was coded according to the objective of the review, which involved extracting any words, expressions and phrases describing the nurses' desire to perform the work of a nurse (units of analysis). The coding of the units of analysis made it possible to return to them as the analysis progressed. All units of analysis were identified from the data. In the condensation phase, the context of the original material was retained.²⁸ Based on the

similarity in content, the condensation ($n = 129$) was grouped into subcategories ($n = 24$) and finally into main categories ($n = 7$) (Table 4). The final analysis and results were discussed by all authors.

Ethical considerations

As this integrative review involved no direct contact with human subjects, ethical approval was not required. The review followed the JBI guidelines.²⁶

Table 2. Included studies.

Authors (year), country	Aim	Participants, setting	Study design, method
Ahlstedt et al. (2019), ³⁴ Sweden	To investigate the events in a working day of nurses in relation to the internal working life theory, to better understand what affects nurse retention in working life	<i>n</i> = 10 Clinical unit linked to an emergency department at a university hospital	Qualitative explorative design with an ethnographic approach Informal and individual interviews
Al-Hamdan et al. (2019), ⁴² Jordan	To investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and the intention to stay in work	<i>n</i> = 280 Randomly selected university and tertiary hospitals	Quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional and correlational study Self-administered questionnaires
Anselmo-Witzel et al. (2017), ²⁹ USA	To investigate job satisfaction experiences of Generation Y nurses	<i>n</i> = 10 Care teaching hospital	Phenomenological study In-depth semi-structured interviews
Atefi et al. (2014), ³⁰ Iran	To investigate factors related to intensive care, the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of medical surgical nurses	<i>n</i> = 85 Surgical, medical, critical wards, in a large hospital	Descriptive qualitative study Group interviews and semi-structured interviews
Carter (2014), ⁴⁴ Australia	To understand nurses' vocational and altruistic motivations	<i>n</i> = 12 Local primary care settings	Qualitative study Long interviews
Franco et al. (2022), ³² Brazil	To determine the significance of the nurse's role in a hospital environment	<i>n</i> = 50 A university hospital	Descriptive qualitative study Long interviews
Hesselink et al. (2023), ³⁸ Netherlands	To explore and describe the factors that influence the job satisfaction of nurses working in the intensive care unit	<i>n</i> = 23 Four hospitals	Descriptive qualitative study Semi-structured interviews
Hörberg et al. (2023), ⁴⁴ Sweden	To simultaneously explore what factors motivate experienced nurses in the workplace	<i>n</i> = 1146 University hospital	Qualitative study Open-ended survey questions
Karlsson et al. (2019), ³¹ Sweden	To describe nurses' job satisfaction, their intentions to stay in their profession	<i>n</i> = 25 University hospital and one county hospital	Descriptive qualitative study Interviews
Kluczyńska (2016), ³⁹ Poland	To find out the main motives of Polish men for choosing nursing, as well as the consequences of leaving the profession	<i>n</i> = 17 Different hospital wards, units and clinics	Qualitative study Semi-structured interviews
Kovner et al. (2009), ⁴¹ USA	To determine the intention of new registered nurses to remain in their jobs	<i>n</i> = 3380 60 sites, chosen randomly	Cross-sectional study E-mail questionnaires
Lim et al. (2024), ⁴³ Singapore	To examine extent of practice readiness of new nurses in their role and reasons for choosing nursing profession.	<i>n</i> = 445 Academic medical centre	Cross-sectional study Online questionnaire
Nolan et al. (2007), ³³ United Kingdom	To compare aspects of nurses' work in the US and UK between mental health services.	<i>n</i> = 65 from the UK and <i>n</i> = 43 from the USA in mental health services	Comparative cross sectional study Questionnaires
Penman et al. (2018), ³⁶ Australia	To determine the factors that motivate nurses to work in mental health nursing	<i>n</i> = 15 Local Health Network	Descriptive qualitative study Semi-structured interviews
Richard E. & Kim S.B (2023), ³⁴ Canada	To explore the career decisions and aspirations of early-career registered nurses	<i>n</i> = 22 Province of New Brunswick, Canada	Qualitative study using an interpretive description approach. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews
Steele-Moses (2021), ⁴⁰ USA	To find out what factors contribute to surgical nurses' job satisfaction and intention to remain in them profession	<i>n</i> = 151 10 surgical units	Cross-sectional study E-mail questionnaire
Van Osch et al. (2018), ³⁵ Canada	To describe the factors and strategies that contribute to the intention of an experienced nurse to remain in her current duties	<i>n</i> = 13 12 acute care facilities	Qualitative descriptive study Focus group interviews
Zamanzadeh et al. (2013), ⁴⁵ Iran	To investigate the reasons why Iranian male nurses chose nursing as their career and understand the reasons why they remain in nursing	<i>n</i> = 18 Five different hospitals	Descriptive qualitative study Semi-structured interviews

Results

Eighteen studies from eleven countries were included in the review (Table 2). Thirteen studies used qualitative methods, and five used quantitative methods, with a total of 3919 RNs in quantitative studies (*n* = 5) and 1891 in qualitative studies (*n* = 13). Among the quantitative studies (*n* = 5), one was a

comparative cross-sectional study from the US and UK, one was descriptive cross-sectional study and three were cross-sectional.

All quantitative studies used questionnaires for data collection and statistical methods for data analysis, while data collection for qualitative studies was carried out through individual or group interviews and observation.

Table 3. Critical appraisal of the studies.

	1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	8. Are participants, voices, adequately represented?	9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?
Qualitative research ^a										
Ahlstedt et al. (2019) ³⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anselmo-Witzel et al. (2017) ²⁹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Atefi et al. (2014)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carter (2014) ⁴⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Franco et al. (2022) ³²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hesselink et al. (2023) ³⁸	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Ambiguous
Hörberg et al. (2023) ⁴⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
Karlsson et al. (2019) ³¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kluczynska (2016) ³⁹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Penman et al. (2018) ³⁶	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Richard & Kim (2023) ³⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Ambiguous	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Van Osch et al. (2018) ³⁵	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Zamanzadeh et al (2013) ⁴⁵	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quantitative research ^b										
Al-Hamdan et al. (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kovner et al. (2009)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lim et al. (2024)	Yes	Ambiguous	Ambiguous	NA	NA	NA	Ambiguous	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nolan et al. (2007)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Steele-Moses (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

^a Joanna Briggs Institute's (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research.

^b JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross Sectional Studies.

Table 4. An example of analysis.

Original extract	Condensation	Subcategory	Main category
Almost all the nurses reported that the main factor that influenced their job satisfaction was their involvement in patient care and focus on the patient's problems. ³⁰	Involvement in patient care is an important factor in job satisfaction	Caring for a patient	Rewarding work
They described job satisfaction as an internal feeling of seeing good outcomes, making a difference in someone's life. ⁴⁵	Job satisfaction was described as an internal feeling of seeing and making a difference in someone's life	Improvement of the patient's condition	
Seeing patients get better because of the care that they provided influenced the participants' decision to remain in nursing. ³¹	Seeing patients getting better due to the care they received		
Hoped-for extrinsic rewards included approval and respect from ... colleagues, feelings of affirmation, value and self-worth. ³⁶	Respect, approval, appreciation and value shown by colleagues	Sense of appreciation	
The concepts of feeling valued, respected and acknowledged were also evident when participants spoke of their relationships with their nursing and physician colleagues. ³⁵	Gaining appreciation, respect from nurse and doctor colleagues		
Thus ... were paid fairly, they were 22.4% more likely to remain on their unit than leave it. ⁴⁰	The fairness of the pay increased intention to stay	Material rewards	
The nurses who were security-orientated explained the importance of job security and pay and some of these extrinsic rewards were specific to mental health nursing. ³⁶	The importance of pay as a producer of safety		

RNs' desire to work in nursing

Based on the inductive content analysis, six main categories were identified describing RNs' desire to work in nursing: Rewarding work, smoothness of work, interesting work duties, versatile career opportunities, support for one's well-being and an inner desire to help others (Table 5).

Rewarding work

Rewarding work included caring for the patient, supporting families, the improvement of the patient's condition, an experience of appreciation and material rewards.

Caring for the patient emerged as a factor that generates job satisfaction for RNs. RNs experienced satisfaction in providing quality care to patients^{29,34,36} ensuring smooth patient care,³¹ helping patients and families³⁹ and advocating patients' which contributed to RNs' well-being. Rewarding work included supporting patients' families and overcoming challenges during their loved one's hospitalizations.²⁹

Improvement of the patients' condition and seeing them heal were rewarding factors of nursing, contributing to RNs' desire to remain in the profession.³³ Satisfaction was described as making a difference in patients' lives by providing support.^{29,37}

Rewarding work included a sense of appreciation, with trust and respect being key motivators in daily work.³⁴ Gaining trust, respect and recognition from colleagues and physicians influenced RNs' intention to stay in the profession.³⁵

Personal recognition from nursing directors, physicians and clients promoted a sense of appreciation.^{29,38} Feelings of appreciation also included acceptance from family and patients, as well as respect, validation and self-worth from colleagues.^{31,33,36} RNs felt they gained social appreciation through their work.³⁹

Material rewards, including pay and job security, were important factors. Getting paid, fair and suitable pay influenced RNs' desire to stay in nursing,^{36,40} while job security was also recognized as a key aspect of job satisfaction.³⁶

Smoothness of work

The smoothness of work comprised collegial support, multi-professional teamwork, good leadership and a sense of professional competence, as well as the importance of sufficient resources. Collegial support included feeling listened to and supported by colleagues.^{30,36,38} A supportive work environment was perceived as part of external remuneration.³⁶ Supportive colleagues were considered valuable³⁰ and important for job satisfaction.²⁹ Good relationships between RNs were considered valuable.³⁰ A sense of belonging to a vibrant, supportive community and relationships within the work community were seen as rewarding.^{35,36,38} The smoothness of work was enhanced by multiprofessional teamwork, where sharing ideas and solving problems together contributed to satisfaction.²⁹ RNs were motivated by tackling challenging tasks alongside fellow nurses, doctors and consultants,^{30,38} with teamwork being a key factor in perceived satisfaction.²⁹

Table 5. Registered nurses' desire to work in nursing.

Main categories	Subcategories
Rewarding work	Caring for a patient ^{29,31,34,36,39} Supporting families ^{25,29} Improvement of the patient's condition ^{29,33,37} Sense of appreciation ^{29,31,33,34,35,36,38,39} Material rewards ^{36,40}
Smoothness of work	Collegial support ^{26,29,30,32,36,38,40} Belonging with colleagues ^{30,35,36,38} Multiprofessional teamwork ^{29,30,38} Good leadership ^{31,41} Sense of professional competence ^{29,31,42} The importance of sufficient resources ^{29,30,34}
Interesting work duties/	Positively challenging work duties ^{31,40} Opportunity to work independently ^{31,34,35,38,41,43} Opportunity for work development ^{31,36,44} Enjoyment of work ^{25,27,28,32,38,41,42} Interest in the profession ^{33,34}
Versatile career opportunities	Good employment ^{39,43,45} Good career opportunities ^{41,43} Opportunity to work abroad ³⁹
Support for one's well-being	Work-life balance ^{29,31,34,36} Benefits to one's health ^{33,36}
An inner desire to help others	Vocation to nursing ⁴⁴ Altruistic desire ⁴⁵ Strengthening one's faith ^{30,31}

Good leadership related to the smoothness of work included factors related to leadership. RNs were more likely to stay in their jobs if their manager was accessible, engaged and communicated clearly,³¹ while lack of supervisor support negatively impacted retention.⁴¹

A sense of professional competence mainly included the aspects of RNs professionalism and competence, and feelings related to these. RNs valued the ability to use sufficient skills and knowledge,³¹ competence in care planning, evaluation, and evidence-based practice contributing to job satisfaction.²⁹ Successfully providing planned care^{31,29} and emotional intelligence also contributed to stronger intentions to stay in the profession.⁴²

The importance of sufficient resources highlighted RNs' appreciation of working with sufficient resources and fellow nurses on real tasks.^{30,34} Job satisfaction increased when RNs' skills matched the demands of the job, and they had enough time to complete their tasks.²⁹

Interesting work duties

Interesting work duties included positively challenging work duties, an opportunity of independent work and opportunities for work development, enjoyment of work, and interest in the profession.

Positively challenging work duties highlighted the importance of work environment and role tasks.

RNs appreciated a challenging work environment, with both the nursing environment and role tasks influencing their desire

to stay in the profession. Satisfaction with role tasks also played a key role.^{31,40}

Interesting work duties included an opportunity to work independently. RNs appreciated the opportunity to work independently, make decisions, solve problems³⁴ and their autonomy at work.^{35,38,43} Higher autonomy influenced their intention to stay in their jobs.⁴¹ RNs appreciated their role in coordinating care and using professional autonomy to meet patients' recovery needs.³¹

Interesting work duties included opportunities for work development. RNs' intention to stay in their jobs was influenced by opportunities to participate in work-related development, such as patient safety and development projects,^{31,44} as well as by opportunities to contribute to nursing development at the individual level.³⁶

RNs enjoyed their work, the workloads, responsibilities and variety of nursing.^{31,34} RNs experienced positive feelings through their passion for nursing^{29,43} and reported that the importance of work is related to feelings of pleasure.³⁶ When RNs experienced pleasure and motivation, it helped develop their professional identity and gave meaning to their work.³⁶ Nursing was perceived as a natural reward providing a sense of satisfaction,³⁶ with some finding the profession so rewarding that retirement was difficult.³⁸

Interest in the profession was particularly evident in a desire for RNs to return to the nursing profession. RNs returned to the profession due to the satisfaction and fulfillment they experienced through nursing³⁹ and because of interest in specifics nursing and medicine,³⁹ with some citing becoming a RN as a long-held dream.³⁹

Versatile career opportunities

Versatile career opportunities include good employment, good career opportunities and an opportunity to work abroad. RNs chose nursing considering its stability and permanent workplace^{43,45} and ease of employment after graduation, which strengthened their desire to remain in the profession.³⁹

Good career opportunities were one factor in versatile career opportunities. Career advancement opportunities influenced RNs' desire to remain in the profession.^{41,43} Versatile career opportunities, including the chance to work abroad and earn a higher income, influenced RNs' desire to remain nursing profession.³⁹

Support for one's well-being

Support for one's well-being included work-life balance and benefits to one's health. Work-life balance,²⁹ flexible work schedules which allowed for more time for family and friends^{31,34} and roster systems³⁶ were the keys to RNs' job satisfaction and retention.

Supporting one's well-being included benefits to one's health, which included an increase in medical knowledge obtained through the nursing profession, enabling RNs to assess their health and facilitating RNs access to health care services.³³ RNs' motivation to work in nursing was influenced by their knowledge and awareness of health.³⁶

An inner desire to help others

An inner desire to help others included a vocation to nursing, an altruistic desire and the strengthening of one's faith. Vocation was seen as a prerequisite for becoming a RN because RNs' working days were long and the pay was poor.⁴⁶ In addition, RNs stressed the need to carry out work that meets their professional and ethical standards.⁴⁶

Some RNs had an altruistic desire to stay in nursing, which was based either on a personal desire to help others or arose from cultural values and beliefs.⁴⁵ Cultural values and beliefs extended RNs' roles as care providers in their families and the belief that every family needs a caregiver.⁴⁵

Strengthening one's faith was associated with an emphasis of spirituality. Caring for patients emphasized RNs' spiritual sense,³⁰ strengthened their faith, allowed rewards from God and restored energy.³⁰ Additionally, family members' health-related questions enhanced RNs' personal satisfaction and faith.³¹

Discussion

Desire to work in nursing was described through six main categories, which were rewarding work, smoothness of work, interesting work duties, versatile career opportunities, support for well-being and an inner desire to help others (Table 5). The results highlight external and internal factors of why RNs desired to work in nursing. However, the results mainly focused on external factors in the nursing profession, especially rewarding work and smoothness of work.

One of the rewarding aspects of the job was patient care, which is supported by several previous studies.^{7,11,16,17} This review showed that caring for patients^{29,30,31,33,36} and supporting families^{29,33} made RNs feel that their work was meaningful. RNs' experience of appreciation,^{29,31,33,34,35,36,37,38} including acceptance, recognition, trust and respect from colleagues, was identified as a key factor in nurse retention in this review. Previous studies have also found that the appreciation of RNs is important. Feeling undervalued increases the risk of RNs leaving the profession.^{7,11} Appreciation should be reflected in daily work because it significantly influences RNs' desire to remain in nursing. Recognition, including fair salary, public acknowledgment and understanding of the job's demands, is essential for retaining experienced RNs.

RNs' desire to work in nursing was influenced by material rewards related to the rewarding work.^{36,40} Particularly salary, as a key form of material remuneration, is closely tied to RNs' sense of appreciation and their intention to stay in the profession. Higher salary satisfaction reduces turnover,⁷ while dissatisfaction increases the likelihood of RNs leaving.^{12,19,20}

This review highlights the importance of smoothness of work and good leadership.^{35,41} Previous studies have shown that transformative leadership, where supervisors motivate, support and inspire RNs through interactive methods, can promote nurse retention and reduce intentions to leave.¹³ RNs view good supervisors as those who acknowledge their importance and contribution.¹² One study in this review found that low supervisor support decreased RNs' intention

to stay, which contrasts with previous research that links low support to higher intentions to leave the profession.⁴¹ Previous studies have found that low support from supervisors increases RNs' intention to leave the profession.^{8,11,19} Professional support, guidance, encouragement from nursing supervisors and effective leadership are essential for retention, as they improve the work environment, provide job variety, offer career opportunities and align with RNs' personal values.

Collegial support was emphasized in the smoothness of work in this review.^{30,34,38} RNs who receive strong social support from colleagues and supervisors are more likely to stay in their jobs. Previous studies show that good communication and a healthy work environment are key factors in nurse retention.^{9,10} A sense of belonging with colleagues was found to be important, consistent with findings from other studies.^{29,30,35,36,38} This review highlights strong friendships with colleagues positively influenced RNs' intention to remain in their positions.

Previous research shows that workplace friendships can empower RNs and reduce turnover.¹¹ A sense of professional competence was also evident in the smoothness of work,^{33,35,42} which influenced RNs' desire to work in nursing. Increased competence and experience increased RNs' job satisfaction, and professional development opportunities were found to reduce their intention to leave the field.¹¹

In this review, the smoothness of work also included the importance of sufficient resources,^{29,30,34} which is also supported by previous studies.^{7,8,19} Previous studies show that increased workloads⁸ and job demands^{10,12,20} raise RNs' intention to leave the profession. To improve retention, nurse directors should prioritize flexible working hours and shifts. According to previous studies high turnover can negatively affect care quality, as RNs may face heavier patient loads, increasing adverse events.⁹

Interesting work duties included an opportunity for independent work,^{31,34,35,38,41,44} which was highlighted in this review as one of the factors influencing the desire to stay in the profession. Previous studies have found that a lack of autonomy is linked to RNs' intention to leave their jobs.¹¹ Versatile career opportunities included good opportunities for career advancement.^{41,43} According to previous studies, good career opportunities influenced RNs to stay in their jobs,^{7,11} while lack of professional development and advancement opportunities increased their intention to leave nursing.^{19,20}

In addition to external factors, this review also indicated some internal factors regarding why RNs desired to work in nursing. RNs desired to work in nursing because it supports their well-being. Factors that supported personal well-being included work-life balance^{29,34,36,41} and benefits to one's health.^{36,39} Previous research shows that RNs value leisure time and family,¹³ but difficulties in balancing work and family life increase the likelihood of leaving the profession.²⁰ This review found that job flexibility, which allows more time for family and friends, enhances retention and strengthens RNs' desire to stay in nursing.

Previous studies have shown that flexibility in rosters supports nurse retention.⁸ RNs were found to have an inner desire to help others,^{30,45,46} and although an interest in

helping people influenced their choice of profession, it did not significantly impact the decision to become a RN.¹⁷

Overall, as the external factors regarding why RNs desired to work in nursing dominated in this study, the results highlight the importance of a healthy workplace in which workers and managers collaborate to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all employees.³¹ The findings suggest that effective leadership, meaningful teamwork and collegial support are key factors in enhancing nurse retention and encouraging RNs to remain in the profession.

Methodological limitations

The integrative framework by Whitemore & Knaf²³ increased the methodological rigour of the review process. When formulating search terms, the PICO method was used.²⁴ The search strategy followed the PRISMA reporting guidelines. Also, the Prisma 2020 checklist was used to reflect the rigour of the methods.²⁵

This review identified 13,557 initial articles, but using only three databases may have excluded some studies. Focusing solely on registered nurses and restricting the review to English language articles may have also led to the omission of relevant research, although the review included studies from nearly all continents, including non-English speaking regions.

Considerations related to conducting the integrative review and the quality of the original studies should be acknowledged. The critical appraisal showed that the selected studies had good methodological quality. The entire research team was involved in all stages of the review, which helped minimize bias and improve trustworthiness.

The study followed the protocol for inductive content analysis. However, analysis always involves the researcher's interpretation, making it challenging to create mutually exclusive categories when dealing with interconnected experiences. Despite following an established framework, the interpretation of study findings involves subjective judgement, and there is a possibility of overlooking alternative interpretations or excluding relevant literature, even with a rigorous search strategy.

Conclusion

The results of the review highlight both external and internal factors influencing why RNs desired to work in nursing. While some internal factors, such as personal motivation and an inner desire to help others, are important, external factors play a more significant role. Factors such as salary, recognition, a rewarding work environment and engaging duties are crucial in making the profession attractive, helping to recruit new RNs and retain current staff.

The studies included in the review primarily used qualitative research methods, which provide deeper insights into RNs' motivations. However, the lack of quantitative research limits a precise understanding of the significance and prevalence of these factors. The review also did not find any objective tools or instruments to assess RNs' desire to work in the profession. Therefore, there is a need to develop a valid and reliable instrument to measure this desire. Future research should include

more quantitative studies using large datasets to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Acknowledgements

We thank the information specialist at the Tampere University Library for their assistance with the literature search.

Author contributions

SP, SL and EH were responsible for the study design. SL, SP, AS-J and EH were responsible for data collection. SP, SL and AS-J were responsible for critical appraisal. SP, SL, AS-J, EH and JV were responsible for data analysis. SL, SP, EH, JV and RI were responsible for writing the manuscript.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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*Indicates the synthesized studies that are in the scope of the integrative review.

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