

Quality of Work Life of Nurses in Emergency Departments: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

The results of this scoping review prove that the quality of nurses' working life in the Emergency Department (ED) is influenced by various emotional, psychological, and structural factors that interact with one another. The levels of burnout and compassion fatigue detected are quite high, indicating significant physical and emotional stress in the ED work environment. However, the presence of compassion satisfaction and effective coping strategies serves as a protective factor that reduces the negative impact of workplace stress. Organizational elements such as management support, availability of resources, and supportive working conditions also play a crucial role in enhancing nurses' well-being. These findings emphasize the importance of structured organizational intervention strategies, training in coping strategies, and strengthening a positive work culture to improve nurses' work life in the ED, which ultimately will have a positive impact on the quality of care and patient safety.

Keywords: *Quality of Work Life, Nurses, Emergency Departments, Burnout, Compassion Fatigue.*



A. INTRODUCTION

Nurses are professionals who play a vital role in providing comprehensive, direct, and complex nursing care to patients in various clinical settings. Nurses carry out complex tasks and responsibilities in delivering holistic care directly to hospitalized patients, which impacts their workload and work-related stress (Ersanti et al., 2018). Providing nursing care requires not only knowledge and skills in healthcare but also the ability to care with compassion. This ability is the core of the nursing profession in healthcare settings, as compassionate care forms the foundation of nursing practice (Peters, 2018).

Nursing services are a major component that significantly contributes to the quality of services in hospitals. This contribution can be hindered by an uncondusive work environment, poor working conditions, and heavy workloads (Fardiana, 2018). The quality of nurses' professional lives is closely linked to the quality of care delivered to patients, which includes safety, empathy, and successful implementation of nursing interventions (Chenoweth et al., 2014).

One of the hospital service units with the heaviest workload is the Emergency Department (ED). Nurses working in the ED face unstable working conditions, tight time constraints, and constant exposure to emergency and trauma situations (Bales et al., 2022). They treat numerous critically ill and life-threatening patients who require immediate attention. Emergency and intensive care nurses are at a higher risk of

experiencing trauma. This is in contrast to inpatient unit nurses, who are more focused on patient recovery. The stressful environment in the ED can lead to various psychological problems such as chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and mental health issues, all of which negatively impact the nurses' quality of work life.

Unsatisfactory working conditions can lead to high turnover rates, increased workplace stress, instability in organizational management, and disrupted nursing workflows. On the other hand, a positive work environment can enhance performance, productivity, and healthcare service efficiency (Salahat & Al-Hamdan, 2022).

One of the most common mental health conditions among nurses in such environments is burnout. According to the World Health Organization (2019) in ICD-11, burnout is a syndrome related to chronic, unmanaged workplace stress, characterized by three key dimensions: emotional exhaustion, increased mental distance or cynicism towards one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. Burnout not only decreases nurses' performance but also increases the likelihood of medical errors and reduces the quality of nursing care (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020; Lopez et al., 2022).

In addition to burnout, emergency nurses are also at risk of experiencing compassion fatigue an emotional state caused by prolonged and intense empathy toward patients' suffering (Borges et al., 2019). Compassion fatigue often co-occurs with secondary traumatic stress, which results from repeated exposure to patients' traumatic experiences. Both conditions can worsen burnout if not managed with proper coping strategies and workplace support (Ma et al., 2022; Hăisan et al., 2023).

On the other hand, there is a protective factor known as compassion satisfaction the sense of fulfillment nurses experience when they believe their work is meaningful and positively impacts patients (Barmawi et al., 2019). Compassion satisfaction has been shown to counteract emotional exhaustion and compassion fatigue, and it plays a key role in improving mental well-being and retaining nursing staff (Javanmardnejad et al., 2021; Sansó et al., 2020).

The challenges faced by nurses in the Emergency Department (ED) highlight the importance of understanding their quality of work life, which includes physical, emotional, and organizational support aspects. Poor quality of work life can reduce motivation and productivity. This study aims to identify the latest scientific evidence regarding the quality of work life of ED nurses, using a Scoping Review approach based on PRISMA-ScR guidelines. The focus of this study includes themes such as burnout, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, coping strategies, and organizational factors.

B. METHOD

This study is a Scoping Review conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines. The purpose of this review is to identify existing scientific evidence regarding the quality of work life of nurses in Emergency

Departments (EDs) and to explore the main themes emerging from the findings of these studies.

The inclusion criteria for literature in this review are: original articles reporting primary research with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods study designs; the research focuses on nurses working in ED or ICU settings; studies examine aspects of work life (including burnout, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, coping, or job satisfaction); articles are open-access and available in full text; published between 2018 and 2024; and written in either Indonesian or English.

Articles were retrieved from four online databases: PubMed, ScienceDirect, and EBSCOHost. The search strategy involved combining keywords using Boolean operators, such as; (“Emergency Nurse” OR “Emergency Department Nurse”) AND (“Quality of Work Life” OR “Burnout” OR “Compassion Fatigue” OR “Compassion Satisfaction” OR “Work Satisfaction”). The results were imported into the Mendeley Reference Manager application for further selection.

The literature selection was conducted in several stages. First, articles were screened using built-in database tools to filter by publication year, access type, and language. Next, screening was done based on titles and abstracts. Finally, a full-text screening was conducted to assess article accessibility, research variables, study population, and a critical appraisal of each article.

The data extraction phase focused on extracting the research context, study population and sample, data collection and analysis methods, main findings related to quality of work life, and additional findings such as factors associated with work life quality.

The article selection and data extraction process is visualized in the PRISMA-ScR Diagram, as follows:

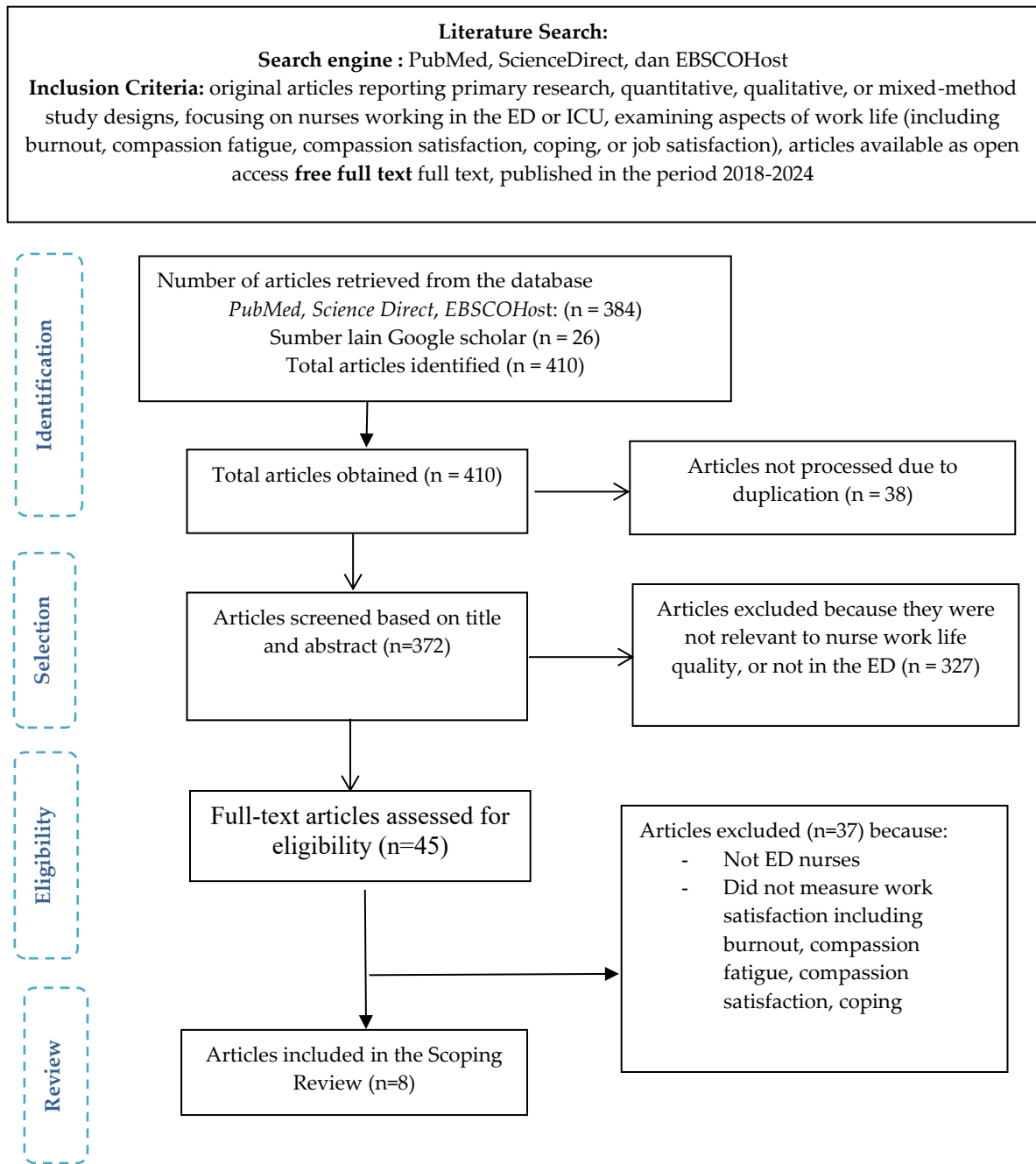


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This scoping review identified 8 relevant articles that met the inclusion criteria, with the main focus on aspects of the quality of work life of nurses working in the emergency department (ED) or critical care units, as summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Extraction Results of 8 Scoping Review Articles on Quality of Work Life of ED Nurses

Author, Year	Purpose	Design	Sample	Main Results
1. (Bales et al., 2022), USA Quantifying Compassion Fatigue in Ancillary and Clinical Staff in an Adult Emergency Department	Measure levels of compassion fatigue, including burnout and secondary traumatic stress, among clinical and non-clinical staff in the emergency department.	Quantitative – cross-sectional survey using ProQOL (Professional Quality of Life Scale)	Clinical and non-clinical staff in adult ED	High compassion fatigue, especially among nurses and staff who directly handle patients. Quality of work life is influenced by repeated acute stress exposure, high workload, and limited resources.
2. (Ma et al., 2022), China Compassion fatigue, burnout, compassion satisfaction and depression among emergency department physicians and nurses: a cross-sectional study	Assess levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, compassion satisfaction, and depression among ED doctors and nurses.	Quantitative – cross-sectional survey using ProQOL and PHQ-9	239 ED doctors and nurses in 15 hospitals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High compassion fatigue and burnout among emergency department staff, especially nurses. - Compassion satisfaction plays a protective role against burnout and depression. - High-pressure work conditions increase the risk of psychological disorders.
3. (Borges et al., 2019), Brazil Compassion fatigue among nurses working on an adult emergency and urgent care unit	Assess compassion fatigue levels among nurses working in emergency and adult urgent care units.	Quantitative – descriptive cross-sectional study using ProQOL	129 nurses in ED and urgent care units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The majority of nurses experience moderate to high levels of compassion fatigue. - Burnout is also found in a significant proportion. - High workload, emotional

						pressure from critical situations, and staff shortages are main factors.
4. (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020), Quality of Life in Nursing Professionals: Burnout, Fatigue, and Compassion Satisfaction	Spain	Analyze relationships between burnout, fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and professional quality of life in nursing.	Quantitative observational cross-sectional study using ProQOL	- 1,521 nurses from various healthcare areas, including ED		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Levels of burnout and fatigue negatively correlate with nurses' quality of life. - Compassion satisfaction positively correlates the higher the job satisfaction, the better the quality of life. - Nurses in high-risk areas like the emergency department experience more emotional exhaustion.
5. (Hăisan et al., 2023), Compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction among Romanian emergency medicine personnel	Romania	Assess levels of compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction among ED medical personnel in Romania.	Quantitative cross-sectional study using ProQOL	- 178 ED medical personnel		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compassion fatigue is quite high, especially among nurses. - Compassion satisfaction tends to be lower among staff with more frequent night shifts and heavy workloads. - Support from coworkers and management helps reduce burnout.
6. (Lopez et al., 2022), Cross-Sectional Analysis of Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Compassion Satisfaction Among Emergency Nurses in Southern California Working	USA (California)	Assess burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion satisfaction among ED nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Quantitative cross-sectional study using ProQOL	- 120 ED nurses		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Burnout and secondary traumatic stress increased significantly during the pandemic. - Compassion satisfaction remained but was not enough to balance work pressure. - High workload, patient deaths, and lack of support worsened

Through the COVID-19 Pandemic						nurses' mental condition.
7.(Barmawi et al., 2019), Coping Strategies as Moderating Factors to Compassion Fatigue among Critical Care Nurses	Jordan	Assess coping strategies as moderating factors for compassion fatigue in critical care nurses.	Quantitative cross-sectional study using ProQOL questionnaire and coping measurement tools	- 206 critical care nurses in 13 hospitals		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High levels of compassion fatigue and burnout. - Nurses using adaptive coping strategies (e.g., social support, planning, acceptance) have lower fatigue levels. - Maladaptive coping (such as denial and substance use) worsens emotional exhaustion.
8.(Javanmardnejad et al., 2021), Happiness, quality of working life, and job satisfaction among nurses working in emergency departments in Iran	Iran	Examine the relationship between happiness, quality of work life, and job satisfaction among ED nurses.	Quantitative cross-sectional study using WHOQOL-BREF and Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS	- 270 ED nurses in 10 hospitals		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness levels of emergency department nurses positively correlate with quality of work life and job satisfaction. - Factors affecting quality of work life include managerial support, workload, shift work, and role conflict. - High stress levels reduce quality of life and job satisfaction.

Results of this scoping review highlight five key themes influencing the professional quality of life of nurses in the Emergency Department (ED), namely: burnout, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, coping strategies, and organizational factors. These findings show that the emotional and social well-being of ED nurses is heavily impacted by complex work situations, high-pressure environments, and systemic support from the institutions where nurses work.

Burnout as a Major Barrier

Burnout is a common problem experienced by nurses in emergency units across various countries. Characteristics of burnout include emotional exhaustion, a tendency to treat patients impersonally, and decreased personal accomplishment due to heavy workloads and prolonged stress. Studies by (Ma et al., 2022) and (Borges et al., 2019) found that burnout can reduce job satisfaction and increase turnover intentions. These results align with global research revealing that emergency departments have the highest levels of work fatigue among nursing fields, with about 43% of ED healthcare workers experiencing burnout and 35% at high risk (Alanazy & Alruwaili, 2023). Burnout consistently emerges as a key indicator of poor quality of work life. Major contributing factors include high workload, night shifts and irregular shift rotations, and high emotional demands of caring for critically ill patients (Ma et al., 2022; Borges et al., 2019; Lopez et al., 2022; (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020).

Compassion Fatigue and Its Impact

Compassion fatigue, or fatigue due to empathy, is notably high among nurses in emergency care settings (Bales et al., 2022; Hăisan et al., 2023). This occurs when nurses are exposed to patient suffering continuously over long periods, often linked with secondary traumatic stress. Compassion fatigue is higher in nurses compared to other healthcare workers. If not addressed promptly, it can reduce service quality, increase absenteeism, and worsen nurses' mental health. It is crucial for hospital management to implement preventive measures such as debriefing sessions to reduce stress and psychological trauma, psychological therapy, or recovery leave (Bales et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2022; Bales et al., 2022; Barmawi et al., 2019).

The Importance of Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction (CS) refers to the fulfillment derived from finding meaning in work and has a protective effect against burnout and fatigue. Several studies indicate that higher levels of compassion satisfaction empathy that gives work meaning protect against fatigue and burnout (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020). Nurses with high compassion satisfaction tend to have better quality of work life, show greater resilience, and feel proud of their responsibilities. Conversely, low compassion satisfaction is associated with emotional exhaustion and withdrawal. Organizations can enhance CS by fostering supportive work environments, recognizing employee achievements, and offering training to strengthen emotional skills (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020); (Hăisan et al., 2023).

The Influence of Coping Strategies

Coping strategies play a vital role in reducing work stress. Nurses who use adaptive coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support or positive thinking, tend to be more resilient to ED pressures (Barmawi et al., 2019), which helps reduce emotional exhaustion and boosts work resilience. In contrast, maladaptive coping, such as avoidance or self-blame, worsens emotional fatigue and diminishes quality of life. Therefore, coping skills training is a promising intervention strategy in managing quality of work life.

Organizational Factors and Systemic Support

Quality of work life cannot be separated from institutional support. Organizational support, human resource management, and conflict resolution greatly affect quality of life. Role ambiguity, lack of supervisor support, and workload imbalance have negative impacts. Happiness and job satisfaction have been proven to improve overall quality of life. Research by (Javanmardnejad et al., 2021) emphasizes that happiness and job satisfaction are significantly influenced by conflict management, shift patterns, and role clarity. Organizations that prioritize work-life balance, provide recognition, and develop fair work systems can enhance nurse retention and improve service quality.

D. CONCLUSION

The results of this Scoping Review emphasize that the Emergency Department (ED) is one of the work areas with the highest levels of fatigue in nursing. The analysis demonstrates that high workload, case complexity, and continuous exposure to emergency situations significantly contribute to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among ED nurses. This situation underscores the importance of developing comprehensive strategies, including enhancing organizational support, managing workload, and providing training for adaptive coping, to reduce the risk of burnout and maintain the quality of work life for ED nurses.

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